

INTEREST COMPOSITION TECHNICAL QUALITY

Technical Quality is the easiest to describe. It has to do with qualities such as tonality, color balance, image sharpness, over or under exposure, blown out highlights or blocked out shadows, or anything else related to image capture and after processing and presentation, other than composition.

Composition is the tricky one. There are many rules or caveats relating to composition. Here are some:

- Have a single center of interest, something the eye wants to go to.
- Don't place the center of interest dead center. Place at a 1/3 position in the image.
- Don't place bright objects at the edges of an image, drawing attention away from the main subject.
- In landscape images, sharp throughout is better, unless there are elements such as fog or atmospheric haze. Try to have a foreground, middle ground and a background. Use atmospheric haze to give depth when appropriate. Use objects we are familiar with to show size and scale.
- In any image, the main subject must be in focus.
- In seascapes, the horizon usually should not be dead center. A 1/3 position is often preferable. Never have a water horizon going downhill.
- Buildings should not be tipping over, unless they are really tipped.
- Watch where background elements appear in the image so they do not distort or affect the main subject. Classic example is the telephone pole coming out of a persons head. Watch for wires.
- Some objects lend themselves to isolation by way of selective focus, but the main subject must be in focus.
- Have leading lines that draw your vision into the photo, coming to rest on the main subject.
- Fill the image frame with subject matter. Large voids usually don't work well. So called negative space.
- Don't try to get too much into an image. Keep it simple. Less is more. If it doesn't help the image, get rid of it.
- Give the subject a little room. Don't merge with borders of the image.
- Watch for unwanted mergers in an image that will confuse or distract.
- Give moving objects a little space to move into.
- Experiment with a subject from many angles and perspectives.
- The above list is not exhaustive, there is still more to it.

No image can incorporate all of the above suggestions, but a few wouldn't hurt. The next thing we need to know is that rules were made to be broken, sometimes it works well.

You need to experiment. It is unlikely that all of the rules can be broken at the same time with the expectation of a good result.

Now we come to “Impact” or “Subject Interest”. This one has to be a little subjective, because it involves an emotional response to an image. Scott Kelby, the Photoshop guru, has described it as the “WOW” factor. It is one of those things that is hard to describe but you know it when you see it. The problem is that we all don’t see it the same way. Because each judge has only a few seconds to evaluate an image, the WOW or Impact factor may be the most important, but it is influenced by Composition and Technical Quality.

Hank Lewis