

VISUAL DESIGN OF AN IMAGE



In this video you will learn basic principles of how to plan the composition of your images or moving images. Consideration of visual design qualities of your images make for a more professional and thoughtful execution.

A good image can communicate with the audience in a very effective way, a good photo is able to tell a story through its composition, frame and detail. Here, you will learn some tips in regards to taking or choosing better images.

Things to consider for your image's visual design

Composition
Frame
Ratio



When thinking about the visual design of an image, you need to consider the composition, frame, and ratio factors and how they can help you to convey an intended message to your audience.

Composition & Frame

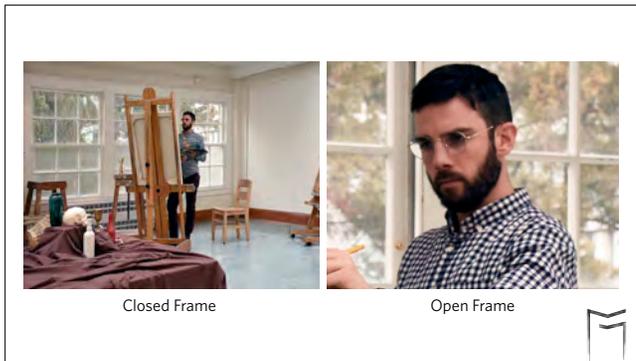
Closed Frame vs. Open Frame

Deep Frame vs. Flat Frame

Balanced vs. Dynamic



The frame is your canvas, the rectangular space where you determine the parameters of the viewers perspective, and where you develop a composition in the arrangements of the subjects and objects within it. It essentially crops the real-world environment and frames it in a specific way and determines what information the audience does and does not see. Making the decision of how you frame your shot will influence how one interprets the content.



A Closed frame is when all the essential information in the shot is neatly in the parameters of the frame to give context to the audience about what is going on. An open frame means that the composition leads the audience to be aware of the area beyond the image, such as where the gentleman's eyes are looking for the image on the right, the audience starts to guess about what he might be doing outside the frame.

You can transfer between the two in a timeline when you edit.



The image on the left is a deep frame, as it accentuates the illusion of depth that happens in an image, this can be reached by playing with lines moving through your image and their diminishing perspective. You can see how the road, side walk and tree line carry your eye deep into space, and objects get smaller as you keep going back. As well, in deep frames perspectival space can be seen through objects overlapping, a deep frame draws attention to a broader area of space your object lives within, where as in a flat frame this might not be evident. It is nice to use a variety, but depends on the mood you want for your work. A flat frame (the image on the right) exaggerates the two dimensionality of an image by ending the image perspective to be almost as flat as the paper or the screen it is on. This gives a character less choice and places them in a display like environment where the frame controls them.



For balanced or dynamic frames, the visual weight of objects, shape, size, brightness and shadow, can provide or distort balance in your composition. How you distribute your composition of objects and light can influence the frame, equally or unevenly, symmetrically or asymmetrically, and can give or take away a sense of stability to your shot. Looking at these two images, how does the image on the left view the subject's relationship to the building differently in the balanced more symmetrical frame where the subject first perfectly into the view of the building, giving the viewer the sense they know what is going on and are in a stable situation. Whereas the dynamic shot on the right has a more complex and unbalanced relationship of dynamic and unstable lines and dimension.

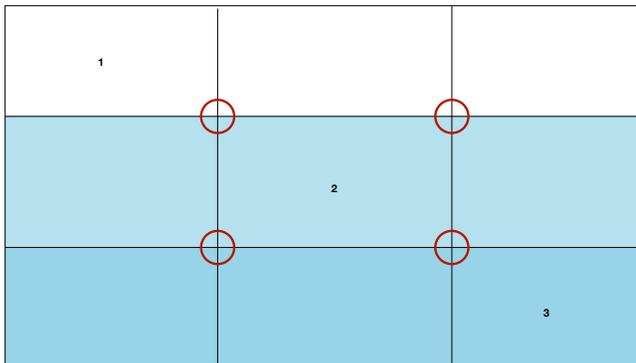
Composition



Rule of Thirds



When considering your image's composition a helpful tool employed by photographers and cinematographers is the rule of thirds, it is one of the basic compositional tools at your disposal.



To employ the rule of thirds, you are breaking your photograph into thirds, both vertically and horizontally. This will leave you with nine equal rectangles, as you can see in this image, 3 rows and 3 columns. The grid provides you with four intersection points at 1/3 of the way horizontally and vertically into the frame. It is helpful to put main subjects or points of interest in this area as our eye rests towards the third area of a frame, and is led into other parts of the composition, traveling around for further information. The centre point of an image, while very direct and stable, is not usually the area where your mind will rest the eye when in the midst of a story. When it comes to landscapes, this grid helps you place the horizon on the two-thirds line. Either two-thirds landscape and one-third sky, or two-thirds sky and one-third landscape.



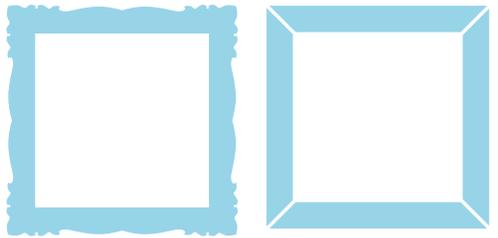
Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance) (2014)
Director, Alejandro G. Iñárritu
Cinematographer, Emmanuel Lubezki

As an example, the rule of thirds creates a sense of tension and dynamism to this frantic scene from "Birdman". The human eye is drawn to the subject unconsciously because of the placement in the image, and the other side of the image contextualizes the story. This is a great way to frame your shot without being stuck on symmetry, and making a viewers eye travel around the image to gather information.



Another example is “Her” which brings your eye into the character’s intimate moment, wandering with him through his emotions.

Framing



When we talk about the frame of an image, we are not talking about the frame a printed image lives within, but rather how the photographer or cinematographer determines what the viewer can and can not see. In a moving image, a typical sequence would start with an establishing shot or a long shot to orient the audience and continue with medium shots or close ups to deliver a story or meaning. Each shot is created and selected for specific purpose and to draw the eye to a clear centre of interest.



Establishing Shot

An establishing shot in filmmaking establishes the context for a scene by showing the relationship between its important figures and objects. It is generally a long or extreme-long shot at the beginning of a scene indicating where, and sometimes when, the remainder of the scene takes place. Establishing shots may use famous landmarks to indicate the city where an action is taking place. An establishing shot may also establish a concept, rather than a location. An establishing shot introduces a general environment of the video.



Long Shot



A long shot (sometimes referred to as a full shot or wide shot) typically shows the entire object or human figure and is usually intended to place it in some relation to its surroundings. These are typically shot now using wide-angle lenses. However, due to sheer distance, establishing shots and extremely wide shots can use almost any camera type.



Medium Long Shot



A medium long shot also known as a three-quarters shot includes a character or characters from approximately the knees up in the frame; they are wider than medium shots, but tighter than long shots. It shows the subject in relation to the surroundings. It may be used when you have 2 or 3 persons in the frame.



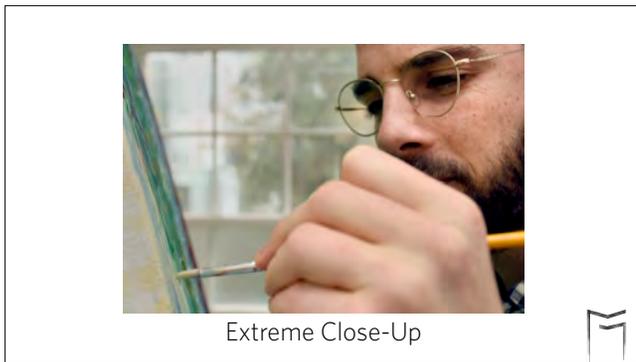
Medium Shot



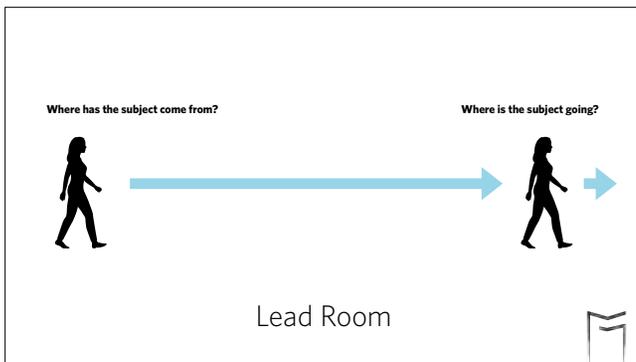
Medium shots are used for dialogue sequences, and they allow the viewer to pick up on character's movements and gestures. Body language is important to conveying emotion, and the medium shot remains close enough to capture that emotion.



A close up shot is a head shot, just above the shoulders. This shot is used to provide a more intimate view of a character or show expression. The close-up can also be used as a listening or reaction shot.



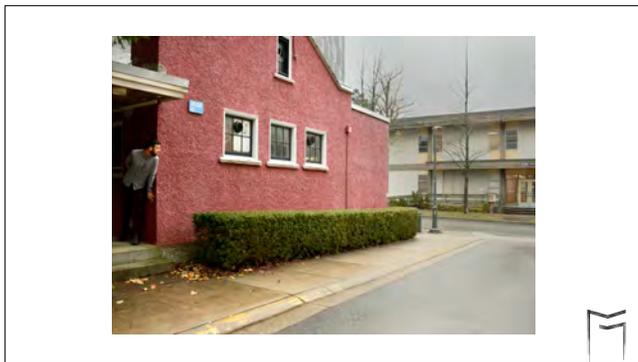
The extreme close-up frame is a head shot from the tip of the chin to the middle of the forehead, or any other equivalent space on an object or animal (and etc). This shot allows the viewer to see specific details on a subject or object and provides the viewer an even more intimate view of the subject.



Another important thing to consider when planning the composition of your image is lead room. In the case of moving objects, this will be in front of your subject or the direction the object is looking or moving. The message changes drastically depending on where you place your subject, in one instance you may ask "where is the subject going?" Whereas in the other, you may ask "where has the subject come from?" Lead room is mostly applied to living subjects, such as humans and animals, and objects in motion, such as cars. Inanimate objects cannot really benefit from this lead room principle, as they don't face towards anything.



Sometimes you will find that including lead room might add unwanted attention to the background or exterior information. In this case, you might want to make sure the space in front of the person is still bigger than the space behind or direct your viewers gaze out of the frame, this causes your view to wonder about actions happening out of their view.



For instance, the character in this image is peeking around the edge of a building but we cannot see what he is looking at because there is no lead room from his gaze, only the other side of his body. In the second image of the same scene we can see where the character is looking and what he is looking at. Lead room helps the composition of the shot immensely, without it, you have the potential to frustrate viewers by filling them with tension, on purpose -like a horror movie- or even subconsciously. Lead space is a way to control how much information you give a viewer or reveal clues about your scene or image that you need to carry certain elements of the narrative.

Moving Frame

Static Shot/Fixed Frame

Stationary Camera Moves

Dynamic Moves

In film, a cinematographer has the ability to play with frame movement to direct the viewers attention.

There are three simple types of frames when referring to motion:

- Static or Fixed Frame
- Stationary Camera Moves
- And Dynamic Camera Moves

Moving Frame

Static Shot/Fixed Frame



Stationary Camera Moves



Dynamic Moves



Static or fixed frame shot is a shot in which the frame remains steady on the subject, without moving or perspective shift, usually using a tripod, this creates a stable feel of the situation for the viewer. This is usually how a president is recorded delivering an important speech. You can also have a stationary camera move, your camera is in the same spot and usually on a tripod, but you pivot, pan, zoom or tilt the camera to change the scene. This shifts a viewer's perspective in one continuous motion, changes the relationship of objects in the scene, changes the amount of information revealed in the scene, and can change the relationship of the viewer to the people in the scene. Shots filmed with dynamic movement enable you to use a tracking shot, which would use the camera in order to follow or track a subject. This can happen right, forward, backward, etc. To get these shots you would use a crane, broom or dolly to moves the camera smoothly in or through a scene. In this example, an unstable feeling of two feet running on the ground are mimicked in the shooting style to give a sense of urgency to the content depicted.

Edge of Frame

NAKED IMAGE



Especially in a still image, you want to consider edge of your frame. In this image, in the current way it is framed, the sky is so light it bleeds into the white background. Border bleeds usually happen with white edges on white background on things such in a print or web-site. This can leave your image feeling disorienting and unbalanced because we can't get a clear detection of where the image ends.



ORIGINAL



DARKER



There are a few ways to fix this issue. You can make the image darker until you find the edge (as long as it doesn't effect legibility of the image) or make the certain area of the border bleed image darker.



You can add a border to the image to ground it in the frame even though it has a bleeding edge.



The third option is to crop the image in an area where there is information in the white, that way it creates a frame because it has detail or is slightly darker than the white background.



But, be careful when editing your images, make sure you don't squish, warp or change the proportions of your image when adjusting their size!

Ratio

Aspect Ratio is the difference between the **width** and the **height** of your frame.



Aspect Ratio is the difference between the width and the height of your frame. Most movies are viewed in a widescreen ratio or 16:9. In the movie theaters a cinematic ratio is 21:9. If you were to have a square frame, the ratio then would be 1:1. In photography, we commonly talk about portrait vs landscape orientation. It is important to consider your subject matter when deciding the orientation of your image, what do you want your viewer to see? Or do you want something to be excluded from the frame? Another important consideration is a cell phone portrait. Because everyone with a phone has access to photographically render an image, the cellphone frame has become a sign for a more democratic sensibility. It is transported along with us, and so using this frame will reference it to the domestic or democratic usability of cell phone cameras which can then be inserted into how one deals with the content of the image.

TIPS



A few more tips when considering your framing and design strategies when making images.

Distracting Objects



An important reminder when planning your images frame and composition is always be conscious of the environment around your subject and how it may unintentionally interfere with your composition. For example, in this image on the left there is a fan right behind the subject, making an unintended metal 'halo' above his head. The subject is not an angel, so if you see objects behind your subject sticking out of funny places or anything like this happening, you should make sure you make the effort to move the fan.

Cut-off Limbs or Decapitation



As well, when you are deciding on your frame of a human subject, be careful that you are not cutting off a person at a particular joint, for example a wrist, waist, elbow, shoulder, ankles, knees, or even worse, their neck! This makes it look like their limbs are missing or they are just a head. Try and move their hands (such as the image to the right) so that the cut off limb is in the picture. If you need to crop a body for a certain frame of an image, cut it off mid-thigh or mid-torso, and try not to cut any particular limb out of the frame.

Vertical Lines



Finally, another great tip is to be aware of the vertical and horizontal lines in your image and to make sure they are at the right angle. This is especially relevant to vertical lines. In both of these images our subject is on a slight hill so there will be an angle to the horizontal line of the curve he is standing on, but it is difficult to know how much that angle should be. To correct this, find the most vertical line in your image. In this case, the white building in the background should be a straight vertical structure otherwise it would fall over. Make sure the line of the vertical structure is the same straight edge of the frame of your image in your camera. For example, the poles or windows of the white building in the background should be straight vertical lines. This is how you know you have the right angle to your image.

Be careful not to line up vertical lines to things like a sloped tree, or the Leaning Tower of



MULTIMODAL PROJECTS



Video created by
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Actor:
Daniel Ward



This Multimodal Project video was created by Holly Clarke and Christine D'Onofrio, with the support of the Art History Visual Art and Theory department, Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund, funded by the students of University of British Columbia Vancouver.