

Composition, Colour & Creativity

By Simon Q. Walden

A quick introduction to the key elements that will let you create better images as an artist or photographer.



Composition, Colour & Creativity - An Introduction



Good Design Lives A Long Time

Design, Composition, call it what you will, while we all like to think that great art comes from Inspirational Muses, the truth is that simple technique can go a long way to making good pictures great.

Composition and creativity didn't come naturally to me, so I did a bit of research on the topic to see if I could nail down some basic principles. What I found was quite interesting, that simple "tricks" of composition are quite key in our perception of pictures.

Simply placing my subject to one side of a picture frame can enliven the picture. Re-inforcing patterns in my pictures builds strength into them. Altering the spacing between the picture and the frame goes from boring to aggressive!

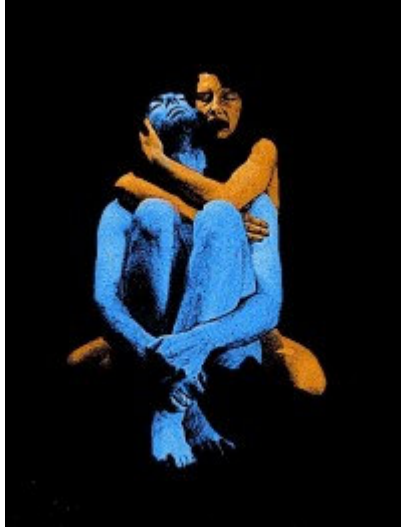
The thing is, although these tricks are purely mechanical, they do not interfere with my creativity at all. Simple decisions at the start (or end) of my creative processes just help me make a better image.

If you are interested in pursuing this theme yourself, I found that photography books were more useful than art books. Maybe it is that photography which has to capture only what is there, also has to focus on how best to compose it.

So, our simple introduction on composition, colour and creativity goes like this:

- [Contrasts](#) - the basic principles of composition.
- [Space and Frames](#) - How to use them: The Golden Square and other useful ratios, pre-planning for screen or print.
- [Design and Position](#) - How to create dynamic or peaceful images, make your viewer focus on the key items, avoiding confusion.
- [Colour Theory](#) - from good to bad, the symbols of colour versus the practice, how to use colour in expression.
- [Creativity](#) - bringing on the muse - building your creative talent - even if you think you haven't got one.

Composition, Colour & Creativity - Contrasts



Our basic starting point for composition and design is going to be contrast. Often the aspect that makes an image especially interesting is the contrast inherent within the image. This contrast maybe purely visual - that of colour contrast, light and dark, or it maybe a more symbolic contrast - poverty and riches, good and evil.

Point/Line	Plane/Volume	Large/Small
High/Low	Long/Short	Broad/Narrow
Thick/Thin	Light/Dark	Black/White
Much/Little	Straight/Curved	Pointed/Blunt
Horizontal/Diagonal	Diagonal/Circular	Area/Line
Area/Body	Line/Body	Smooth/Rough
Hard/Soft	Still/Moving	Light/Heavy
Transparent/Opaque	Continuous/Intermittent	Liquid/Solid
Sweet/Sour	Strong/Weak	Loud/Soft

In the example on this page, we clearly have a colour contrast: blue/gold, but those colours also have a symbolic contrast warm/cold. When the colours are reversed this image did not work so well because the colour contrast was at odds with the symbolic contrast.

- In the following pages we will obliquely refer to contrast again and again, of itself contrast is not necessarily the key, but the more the plan to which the composition comes alive.

Composition, Colour & Creativity - Frames

Firstly, the frame determines the basic shape of our image. Secondly the frame can have affect upon our image - making it stronger or weaker. Finally, the subjects within our image have a position relative to the frame which is as important.

Firstly, let us look at our first decisions, what size should the frame be? Assuming a basic rectangle then we could start with the "Golden Ratio" - a principle derived by the ancient Greeks. Basically it says that the the long edge should be 1.62 times the length of the short edge (or nearly 2/3rds again). So if it's 10 inches high, it should be 16.2 inches across.

I know this sounds bizarrely mechanical, but in fact this is a natural ratio, it does occur very frequently in nature and we humans respond to it, as a kind of well proportioned, but also neutral rectangle.

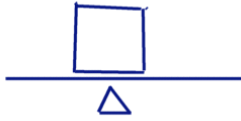
However, our medium might dictate our image, in that if intend to go to computer screen on printed photo or poster sizes we might need to adopt slightly different ratios. The standard PC small screen ratio for example is 640 by 480 pixels (ratio of 1.5:1 or 3/2), but if we go to any of the larger screen resolutions, i.e. 800 x 600 pixels we have a ratio of 4/3 or 1.3:1. If we go to paper sizes, the "A" series (i.e. A4, A5 etc) dictate a ratio of 1.42:1. And if we went to photo, then you find that the standard 35mm size is another 1.5:1 ratio.

Pixel Size	Screen 9/12 - 1.3	"A"paper 10/14 - 1.42	Photo 9/15 - 1.5	Golden 8/13 - 1.6
100	130	142	150	160
200	260	284	300	320
400	520	568	600	640
500	550	710	750	800
800	1040	1136	1200	1280
1000	1300	1420	1500	1610

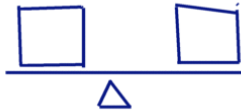
Switching to a purely square frame, which might sound an obvious start point but isn't, creates a very rigid, over format - strangely uncomfortable. Just look around at the objects around you, surprisingly few are square.

The alternative is to stretch the format so one side is especially long, usually used for panorama's, especially now with new film formats, but note that once the image gets to beyond 1:3 ratios the eye will only see in sections, the viewer will have to look and move on across the image.

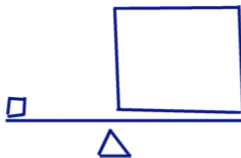
From here, we must look to how the picture sits within the frame: Cropping the subject close to the edge of the frame is usually uncomfortable. Placing the subject dead centre produces a stable image, placing images off-centre adds dynamic.



Placing the subject dead centre creates a static balance, a sense of calm and stability



Similarly, placing two equal subjects also creates a static balance



But, placing two equivalent, but different subjects creates a dynamic balance. The picture holds up and there is a new tension to the image



And if the image is unbalanced, then the eye will try and create a balance by looking for something in the empty space - this can be useful.

All of which leads us to questions about *how* we divide out the space within our frame. Fundamentally, you need to decide if you are going to go for a symmetrical or asymmetrical view. (Note, you can be asymmetric and balanced though).

Starting with symmetry, divide your image down the middle, you can of course go further, and divide *across* the middle too. There is both a left/right and up/down symmetry. And don't forget "circular" symmetry - as you would see in a kaleidoscope.

To go to asymmetry, then you would normally apply the "Rule of thirds" basically this says that you should be able to visually focus on divisions at the 1/3rd intervals across and up the page.



In this image the subject is central and stable



In this version, by placing the subject within the left third, we have created a sense of dynamic and tension.

But we might also apply the rule of thirds to landscapes as well - especially useful when the sky is uninteresting, run the horizon through the line 1/3rd from the top. Essentially, push the horizon high to emphasize the foreground, drop it low to emphasize the sky (interesting clouds maybe?)

Indeed, this would apply to any Figure/Ground relationship. So, in our example above, really we are using the division between figure and ground on the 1/3rd line.

Black and white presents a special issue, in that then you are moving away from colour and form to present subjects, instead then you are using non-colour properties such as texture, shape and line to create the symmetry and balance.

And what of size within the frame? Reducing the boundary, the space around the frame, is typically uncomfortable, so don't overcrop your image. Particularly if images are to be viewed on screen or in a large display format close-cropping can be quite aggressive.

Conversely, too much boundary around the subject just makes the subject too small; normally backgrounds are not interesting and not the purpose of an image. Don't make backgrounds compete with subject unless you have a reason to.

Then, there are Frames Within Frames, a common trick to use say a doorway to frame a person. Frames within frames draw the viewer in to the subject within. Note: the inner frame needs to be close to the actual image boundary; otherwise it will become part of the picture itself.

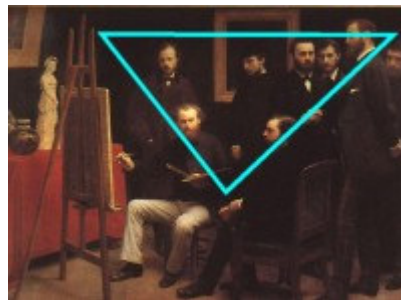
Composition, Colour & Creativity - Design



The focus of design in the context of composition is how different points, lines or areas within the image relate to each other. The most common area based on full frame, triangular or circular designs. That is to say that different elements within the picture lie on lines or points within those basic shapes.

Notice how in this image all the figures are concentrated onto the face of Jesus and the core structure of the image is a triangular design, with the central pivot point on Jesus' face. Indeed in many religious paintings it was seen as symbolic that Christ should appear at the apex of the triangle.

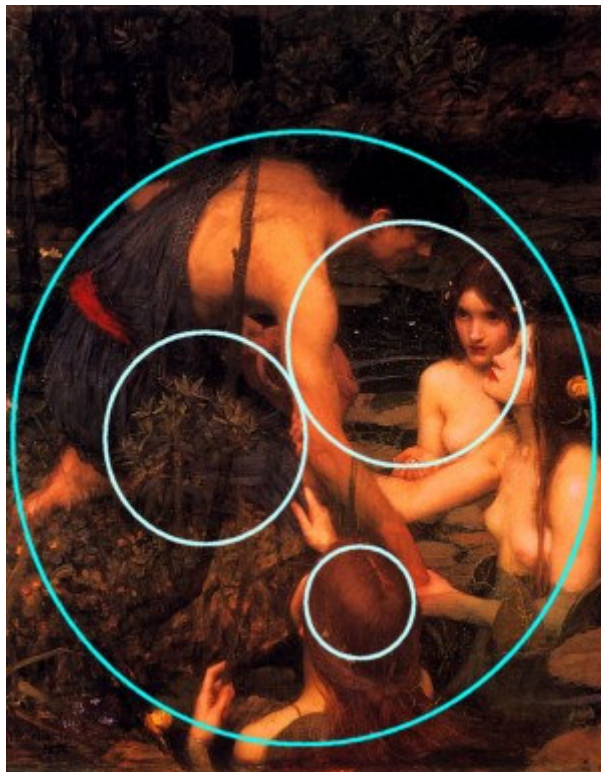
In the following two examples we can see the triangular element still remains and does not need to be so clearly centred to the frame. It is also interesting that in the second picture the triangle leads the eye *away* from its apex.

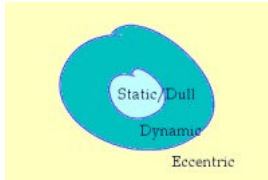


Notice the triangle may be made by points at the corners of the angles, or by points along the lines of the triangle. The lines may be shaped by specific picture points, eyes, heads, hands etc or it might be whole changes in area of colour or light. You could imagine having "fuzzy felt" dots, lines and squares and laying them out to make different triangles.

The second common formed composition is the circular, or strictly curvi-linear composition. Notice how the various points and lines, areas of light and dark go together to form the circle. This picture also clearly shows how the circle leads to a very intimate image, drawing the viewer and the subjects together.

But if we look more closely, we can see that there is more than the one circle within the image, I've picked out just three more below, but in fact there are many more. This echoing of form is very common. In this example we are dealing with circles, but more common is the use of curving arcs only, just parts of the circle. In that case the arcs would cross at key points in the image, or sweep together like formation aircraft to lead the eye to a crucial point.





Single Point: dead centre is static and dull, moving to the middle edge becomes more interesting and dynamic, moving to the very edge becomes odd and eccentric - only do so with purpose.



Two Points: If placed close together then pull the eye away from background. Two lovers faces would be close together



Two points: placed far apart create an attention on the space between the points. Two trees on either side would focus on a landscape in centre.



Two points: of different sizes give a direction, from large to small, the eye will sweep across from the larger to the smaller.



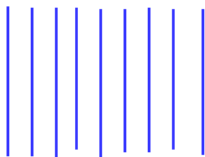
Two points: which dominate the picture in a balanced way give an unstable equilibrium. The eye wants to keep tracking back and forth between the two pupils.



Receding lines: imply horizons and distance



Strong flat line: shows a sturdy base and stability



Verticals in rows: become horizontal, either in line or plane



Vertical on its own: is a moving image, there is an inherent dynamic



Vertical on base: becomes stable, it is grounded and supported



Discontinuous and Straight Lines form a contrast and add interest



Intersections: divide the image and also bring a focus to the point of intersection.



Diagonal Lines: Diagonals always add a dynamic to a picture. The dynamic is increased when they form a stronger angle with the longer side.



Many Diagonal Lines: add greater energy to an image (but can conflict)



Parallel Diagonals: reinforce each other and add a strong sense of direction



Zig-Zag Diagonals: bring the attention to the space(s) pointed at by the diagonals.

Remember, your lines may be *implied* - created by two points, or by the edge of a plane. It is often hard to think that way and personally I still find it rare for this aspect of composition to come naturally to me.

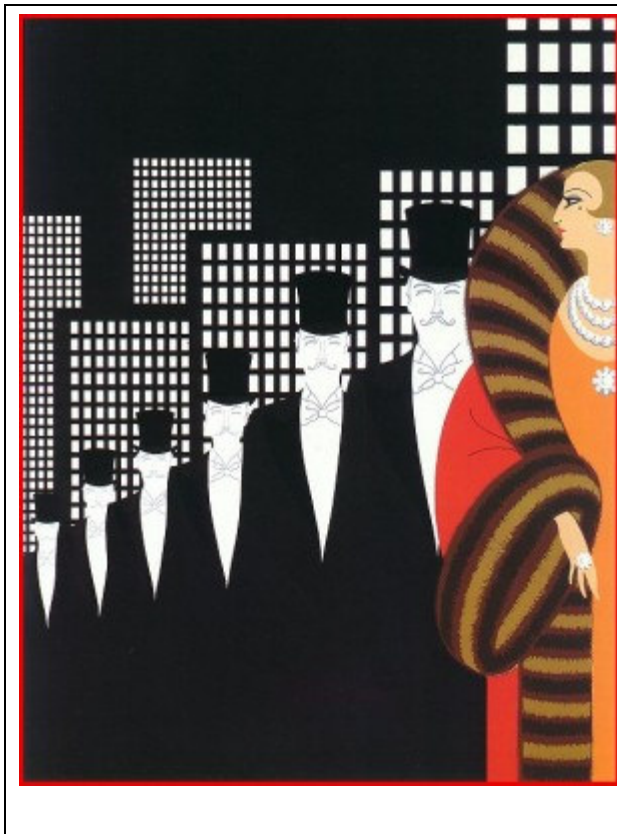
To conclude, I just want to focus on the qualities of other shapes and forms you might use.

Curves: are inherently attractive, their character is smooth, flowing and natural. They usually imply a strong sense of movement. Where curves are more complete (more than 1/3rd of a circle) they imply circles. Circles are enclosing, intimate, draw the viewer in.

Rectangles: not surprisingly present solidity, gravity, precision. Building blocks is right!

Triangles: in shape as well as in composition give a movement and direction. They can also give perspective and distance - either implied or explicitly. A triangle on its base with point at the top is stable, with point downwards is unstable. Note: three people always make a triangle, make the most of it. Especially if taking photo's try and break the three in a line mould.

Rhythm and pattern: in placing our lines, shapes etc we can also give a rhythm, especially when dealing with repetitive shapes. This can be interesting - or dull... Often breaking the rhythm is what it takes to be really interesting. Just one note about patterns, if they run over the edge of the image they are assumed to continue beyond.



Look at this wonderful picture by Erte. A classic in composition, design and contrast. Strong powerful lines and triangles given by the gentlemen's heads are contrasted against the curvy shapes of the woman. The irregular positioning of the blocks of flats adds interest against the straight lines implied. Contrast of course is focussed in the colour, but all these other elements go toward making the picture.

And this leads me nicely to the closing point when dealing with people. Notice how all the men are looking straight forward at you? Eye Contact Is Vital! Which is to say that for a portrait of any sort to really engage it is ideal that there is an eye to eye contact from the picture to the viewer.

Composition, Colour & Creativity - Colour

There are many books written on colour harmony, theory, symbology and so on, I'm going to attempt the impossible, without a safety net, give you colour theory in two pages!

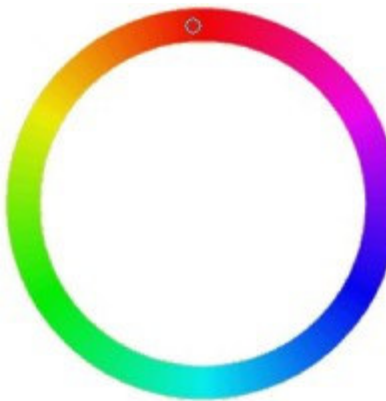


1) There are three primary colours: Yellow, Red and Blue.

2) There are three secondary colours, formed by mixing primaries: Orange, Violet and Green.

If you lay these out in a circle you have a colour circle and everything flows from here!

Follow the sequence and fill on the other colours in between and you end up with a familiar sight.



Often you will see the terms RGB, CYMK and HSL used when discussing colour on computers, try and ignore them - they are only there to confuse us non-computer literate artists! For your information this is what they mean RGB = Red, Green, Blue the light sources used in your monitor. CYMK is Cyan, Yellow, Magenta and Black, the four colours used for printed materials and finally HSL = Hue, Saturation and Light where Hue is the base colour (from the wheel), Saturation is the purity, in fact how much grey is mixed with the colour, and Lightness is how much black or white is in the colour.

In computer terms the colour wheel is the Hue, the centre block allows you to select Saturation (from left to right) and Lightness (from top to bottom).

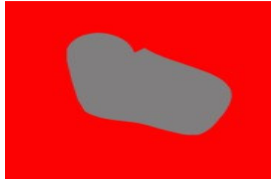


Colour Contrasts

You can contrast colours by Hue, Saturation or Lightness. To contrast by Hue, you would take two colours on opposing sides of the colour wheel. To contrast by Saturation you would take the same Hue, but in heavily and lightly saturated, and of course in Lightness it is a comparison of light and dark.



Colour Contrast: Red to Light Blue (opposite on Colour Wheel)



Saturation Contrast: Grey to Pure Red (opposite Saturations)

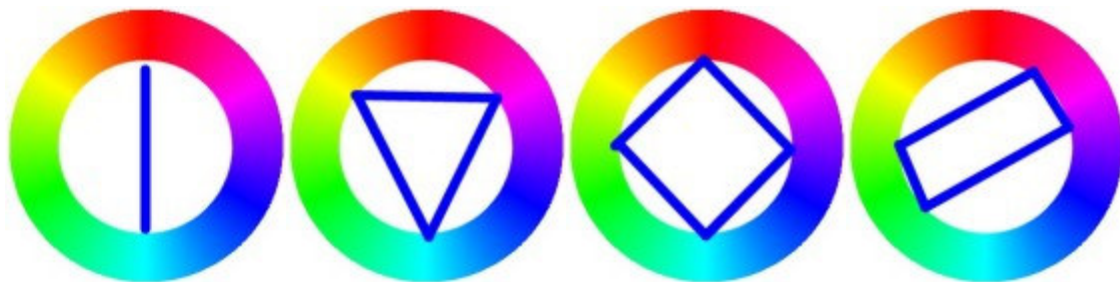


Lightness Contrast: Dark Red to Pink (opposite Lightness)

Colour Harmony

Harmony is not the proximity of colours, but rather the balance of opposites. This is powered by the eye/brain combination trying to make a neutral, un-evocative grey. If colours are truly in harmony then you will likely create a picture of harmony, but also neutrality.

Specifically, a harmonious selection would involve taking colours from two *or more* opposite points on the colour wheel.



Don't forget: the opposite of a primary is always a secondary.

Harmonious Proportions

But colours also have relative strengths, for example Yellow is a strong colour and Violet is quite weak. If you put equal amounts of these two colours they would be unbalanced, there is a near numerical method of calculating this.

3	Yellow - Strong
4	Orange
6	Red / Green
8	Blue
9	Violet - Weak

The numbers in this table show the relative strengths of the colours. For example, 3 squares of Yellow would be balanced by 9 squares of Violet. 4 squares of Orange would be balanced by 8 squares of blue.

Putting this information into practice, this actual photo (colours un-retouched) would be balanced if we had 6 squares of red to 8 squares of blue. But we haven't, this is maybe only two blue squares so the picture has a dynamic, rather than stable impression. (Positioning the subject off-centre in the "dynamic" to "eccentric" zone helps that dynamic too).



OK, we are going to take a little side-track to round off some of our information about colour, then we will return to colour harmonies.

So just sticking with colour now. Colour works on three levels:

- Visual and objective
- Expressive, emotive and subjective
- Symbolic or cultural

So, I'm going to firstly talk through the core colours and their relative characteristics, then move on to discussing how they work with each other.

RED: Insistent and powerful, it immediately attracts attention and advances against cooler colours. Red radiates energy and is vital, earthy, strong and hot. With blood means war and destruction, can mean passion or damnation. It is also symbolically seen as Warning, Hot, War and Stop.

BLUE: Recedes visually, it is quiet and less active. Cool, passive, withdrawn and reflective. It is symbolically linked to sky and water.

YELLOW: can be intense (against a black background) or insipid (against white) but is usually seen as a strong, sharp and vigorous colour. Yellow is symbolic of sun and light. When used in gold remember it reflects and will contain other ranges from orange to grey.

BLACK: Obviously needs a contrast to show anything, black is generally seen as neutral but it can be heavy and oppressive, can represent both dense and empty space.

WHITE: Slight hints of colour are very obvious in white. White is generally neutral, but can be symbolic of purity.

GREY: Not surprisingly is just neutral.

Now, adding what we now know about colour we can return to colour harmony and start making some comparisons between colour comparisons:

Red/Green Harmony

Red and Green are similar strengths (see the table above) so balance well. They are an energetic combination, as is blue on red, blue-green on orange-red.

Orange/Blue Harmony

Orange is twice as luminous as blue, so best balance is 1/3rd Orange to 2/3rds Blue. This gives a strong cool/warm relationship, also pushes the orange forward.

Yellow/Violet Harmony

These are extremes of brightest and darkest, yellow should be 1/4 or less of the picture.

Three Way Balance

Red, Yellow, Blue - the three primaries - are the strongest of the possible triads, but any three opposites will tend to be lively.

Colour Contrasts

Loaded with our information about the characteristics of colours we can now discuss some different contrasts; based on the "warmth" of colours where orange/red is the warmest and green/blue the coolest.

Warm colours advance, they suggest opacity, earthiness, dryness. Cool colours recede; blue-green is often associated with backgrounds. Cool colours suggest transparency, airiness and wetness.

Perspective and colour

I don't want to discuss vanishing points and all that stuff, but just a quick note on how colours relate to perspective:

- Perspective is driven by shape, size and line
- Haze lightens far objects (lighten and desaturate)
- But bright objects (light and saturate) visually advance, dark ones recede
- Warm colours advance, cool colours recede
- Sharp objects appear in the foreground, far ones are blurred

Help I've read the theory but I don't understand how to use it!!!



I know what you mean, what does all this colour guff mean in practice? You must think in terms of an artist's palette, selecting from a small choice of complimentary colours. Let us say you want to show a nice calm picture of a lady bathing by the seaside. What palette would you use?

In this painting the artist started with core blues and some greens (6 o'clock on the colour wheel) which are cool, calm colours, by keeping the painting quite light and un-saturated it maintains a sense of calm.

The two central figures and the sand are then done in warmer colours, (taken from a triangular point on the colour wheel at 10 o'clock). We now have a nice warm/cool comparison. By keeping the colours unsaturated the calmest prevails.

But wait, surely this is unbalanced, not really a triangular selection at all? Well at 2 o'clock on the wheel we pick up the violets, and in fact these can be seen on the shoreline as well as the picnic basket and in the shadows of the grasses.

The result? A well balanced calm and quiet, harmonious picture. Now, how about the reverse, a picture full of dynamic?



Claude Theberge's "Lovers of Normandy" positively screams dynamic, you can feel the wind whipping and buffeting. Clearly, there is clever use of the curved lines to present a strong part of the dynamic, but look also at the contrasts, the big almost neutral colour taking over most of the centre and bottom balanced dynamically by the brighter colours of the top third. Note also that the curved lines bring you to a focus point on the edge of the picture, right in the "dynamic" zone.

And as for colours, here is the basic colour wheel and triangulation. You have the strong blue/purple of the cloak, balanced by the strong golden yellow of the blonde hair. But notice, these are relatively small areas, the bulk of the picture is in a very desaturated, grey/green from the bottom of the colour triangle.



Notice also, how the same colours have been used, desaturated and darkened and blurred to create the background sky behind the lovers to create perspective. And also note that we go from strong detailed, crisp flows in the scarf and hair to large colour sweeps of minimal detail in the cloak.

The bursting dynamism of this picture comes from the many contrasts Theberge has been able to make within the image.

Composition Checklist

No Mergers	Check for mergers. Are all subjects clearly separated from each other
Subject Clear?	Is the dominant feature clear and have clarity?
Visual Lines	Where are the visual lines?
Possible Lines	Are there any possible diagonals/S curves/repeats?
Portrait/Landscape	Is it correct format portrait/landscape/square?
Place In Frame	Is the angle and position in the frame ok? Could there be a diagonal slant, a line on thirds?
Size In Frame	Correct size in frame/picture? Not too much/too little border
Burn/Block	Anything burnt in or blocked out? Any distracting points to light or dark where they shouldn't be?
Contrast/Tone	What about contrast and tone?
Horizontal/Vertical	Horizontals and Verticals true?
Gaze Space	"Gaze" space for subject to look into?
Left To Right	Action proceeds from left to right
Circles At Edge	Round forms/circles must not touch the edge of the frame
Diagonals At Corners	Diagonal lines should not exit at the corners
Static/Dynamic	Is the composition static or dynamic?
Colour Harmony	Is there a coherent colour selection, are the colours harmonic/contrasting?
Colour Dominance	Are there any particularly dominant colours?

About Creativity



Ever had the moment when you are looking at a blank page and things just won't happen? This short text is about ways of triggering your creativity.

Back in the days of Internet news groups, alt.binaries.comp-graphics, ran a weekly WET, a Week End Theme. One member posted a picture of some kind, anybody else could take the picture and modify it in any way they saw fit. Personally, I found it daunting knowing my work was going to be compared with others, some of whose talent I really respected.

Worse, once I'd started seeing other people's ideas I couldn't think of any of my own at all!

So, I worked out a strategy for enjoying the WET fun, but also an excuse for documenting some approaches to creativity I have used. And these are presented for you below:

- 1) About creativity
- 2) What to do with a blank page
- 3) How to kick start yourself
- 4) Keep Moving
- 5) Analysis
- 6) Re-creating

ABOUT CREATIVITY:

There are those who say that you cannot *make* yourself be creative, it is a muse given thing beyond your control.

To them I say "Rubbish!"

Without getting into some pedantic definitions of creativity, I figure if you are making something new, then you are being creative.

Furthermore, the mood or mind-set you need to get into to be creative can be triggered by your own actions - you don't have to wait for the "muse to descend".

And finally, by practicing those creative triggers you can start to turn your creativity on at will.

Now there are so many things to do, make, paint, write, photograph, play, draw, compose, sculpt, talk about, cast, forge, hammer etc... I'm going to talk about graphic art, particular computerised graphic art here, but frankly you can turn these techniques to almost any media.

Many of the things I'm going to talk about here are for FAST creative techniques, things to get you kick started, but some are more slow are leisurely.

WHAT TO DO WITH A BLANK PAGE

Okay, there's the blank sheet in front of you, where do you start?

I reckon the vital part is to get started, doesn't matter if you are going to throw it away, you just have to start.

So, if we are talking graphics here, take that brush, pen, mouse. *Get some nice bright colour and start spreading...*

If it is a typewriter, just write the first few words that come into your head, and then make something out of them...

If it is a piano, then fix a handshape and play it...

Or use one of the assorted techniques I'm going to list below, either singly or in combination.

HOW TO KICK START YOURSELF

One of the first, and paradoxical, aspects of creativity is fixing boundaries can help you be creative. That is one reason why the WET's are enjoyed by so many, the original image provides an initial boundary.

So, here are some ways to make some boundaries:

- Start with a pre-determined picture
- Re-create or re-interpret a famous picture
- Select a theme, idea or purpose
- If painting, choose some important words
- If writing, choose an important picture
- Paint a scene from a movie or book

or

- Select only three colours to work in
- Use only one (big) brush size
- Only use one single tool, a palette knife say
- Work left-handed (or vice-versa)
- Only draw in rectangles
- Only draw in diagonal lines
- Only work in black and white, or another monochrome

or

- Draw three lines and then make something from it
- Take a golden rule and make something from it
- Blur an image and make something from it
- Filter or distort or damage an image, start from there
- Take two things (chair / tree) and make them work together

or

- If you could see instead of hear, paint your vision
- Musicians do it the other way and play your sight
- Paint your touch, your taste, your smell
- Paint from the eyes of a cat, a fly, a bird
- How about painting from the ears of bat?

or

- Focus in tight on a really small piece of your work
- Or pull back, put the work into a large context
- Reverse it, play the melody backwards,
- Or narrate the story in reverse,
- Or paint sad paintings happy
- What happened just before, or just after?
- Do it cool where it was hot, hot where cool
- Do it soft where harsh, loud where quiet

Now, if you've just sat there and looked at all those and a blank piece of paper, you are probably ready for a cup of coffee and a trip to the shops!

Without looking, just pick one at random, then do it, don't think about it!

KEEP MOVING

Now this isn't always the case, but sometimes it is just important to keep moving.

The thing is, when you are kick-starting yourself, not everything you do will be good, and certainly not everything will be worth keeping.

Also, we are practising creativity here, which is all about starting. When you are ready to practise finishing then that is another stage.

So, to boost creativity I think you need to keep starting.

So as I sit blasting out computer graphics, then it is save the file, move on, save the file, restart, open a different file and move on.

I know some folks sit with an egg-timer. At the end of 5 minutes they have to stop and move on. It is a good discipline. Now if you are wood-carving or novel writing you might need more than 5 minutes but...

Also, I would recommend not analysing what you've done, don't critique (or criticise) now, this is ideas stuff. Instead you need to look for the element that catches, the strokes that fix the eye, the words that hit the heart. If you can't find any, don't worry, move on.

Remember two things: (1) we are trying to be creative here, not be outstanding, not create a finished work, not instantly make a masterpiece, so we need to keep moving on. (2) there are no rules - if you've started something you want to see through - then do it, finish it now!

ANALYSIS

Now analysis and critiquing is a different stage altogether in my book. Analysis is the opposite of creativity - right brain / left brain sort of thing.

Go back over your sketches, don't look at the thing as whole, remember its unfinished, rough edges, all that stuff.

Don't critic-i-s-e. You are looking for the good, not the bad, you don't need to judge what you've done negatively.

What you are looking for is the pearl, the gem of an idea, an image, a sequence, a set of strokes, a colour match, a melody fragment, a tone poem, a phrase, a line, a rhyme, you are looking for the heart and soul of a really great piece of work.

For this you need to look two ways, you need to look very closely, examine each part, each fragment, is it there? Could I make this go further? What does it say to me? Why do I like it? How could this small bit, fit into a larger whole?

You need to stand back, squint even! Is there a feel, a colour? Is there a flow or sequence? Is there an idea to concentrate on?

RE-CREATING

For me this is the hardest part of all. When painting and when playing music I can go back over some improvisation and see a glimpse of something. Worse, is when you've nearly got the whole, but the starts wrong, the size is too small, the whatever...

There are tricks you can use though:

- Record what you are doing, if you are painting talk to a tape recorder as you go.
- If you are playing music, try midi to capture it and work from there.
- If sketching, just a couple of words may be sufficient.
- When working on the computer, saving the steps may help you.
- Have someone else watch while you work, get them to note it down. (They can also encourage you as go too).

Finally, patience and practise. Your ability to recreate is to a great extent a reflection of your practised skill (rather than your inherent vision). It's what musicians call their "chops". You practise doing something until (a) you do it well every time, (b) you can apply it without thinking.

Just look at any famous painter, they will have done numerous sketches, paint-outs, re-paints, trial runs, repeated themes, until finally their masterpiece is complete.

Re-creating can often be a rehearsal, a job or task. If you feel like you are getting into that mode, turn your back on the feeling and turn towards the feelings you will have about the finished item.

As the old proverb has it - "The first 90% of the job takes 90% of the time, the last 10% takes the other 90% of the time!"

Finally, if you wander off-track while re-creating, don't worry about it, there is always another day... Heck if you do this often enough, you'll end up with a themed set of works!

IN CONCLUSION

Creativity is a special thing, and you can make that special thing happen any time you want it to.

You can work at it, practice and build it up like a muscle.

Every time you are creative, no matter how small, you are adding something to the world.

www.FilmPhotoAcademy.com

Simon Walden has published many books, fiction and non-fiction – all with a view to either being creative or inspiring creativity. He also produced several programs for photographers with a special focus on creativity:

Non Fiction	Fiction
The Pose Book	Dangerous Liasons
Creative Nude Photography – DVD	(a photographic novel)
Creative Glamour Photography – DVD	
The Fashion Book	Twisted Tales
Image Processing with Corel PSP	(Photographic Literature)

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