

USE OF SPACE

By Kent DuFault

In this Creativity Prompt, we are going to discuss the 'use of space'. What exactly does the use of space mean? When you create a photograph, it has a top and bottom boundary. It also has a left and right boundary. These four boundaries create a space, also referred to as 'the frame'. It's similar to a painter beginning with a blank canvas. The canvas being the space on which the painting will be created.

In composition the placement and arrangement of the elements within the frame is called the 'use of space'. **One cannot underestimate the importance in the use of space.** It is quite literally the foundation on which all other rules and tools of composition are based.

In the opening example photograph, a clever use of space was attempted.

It doesn't work out very well.

Making a clever use of space is an awesome technique.

However, it should always have meaning, either on its own; or as part of the overall composition; or as part of a story being told.

A clever use of space without one of these three meanings simply reads as a mistake to a viewer that is not privy to the photographer's thoughts.





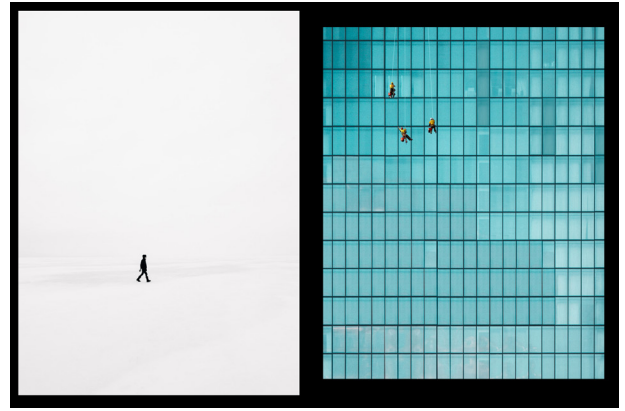
Here, we have a similar photograph, but with better execution. Both photographs depict a plant placed close to the edge of the frame with a large amount of negative space.

Why do I say this version works and the first one doesn't?

My reasoning is a concept in art composition known as a 'frame break'.

The first example creates a frame break, because it crosses the boundary of the frame.

The second version includes all the powerful use of space that was attempted in the first version, but without the frame break!



One of the easier techniques to learn, when exploring the use of space, is place a small subject within a large frame. Both of the above photographs are excellent examples of this technique. Let's take it a step further!



Assignment:

Create a Minimalist composition using a single plant against a plain background. Experiment with placing the plant in various parts of the frame. Create frame breaks. Try introducing secondary elements, such as the white table.

Let's take a look at some different ways to define the space of a photograph.



For this example, I created additional space around the original frame of the original image. Adding additional space can be done in post-production, or you can do it in the physical framing step of displaying the photograph. Many photographers don't give much consideration to how they might physically frame their artwork. Framing can be a powerful additional step in creating your art.

Study the second version compared to the first version; the additional sense of isolation and perhaps loneliness is uncanny!



Assignment:

Spend some time photographing small subjects in large spaces. Do this assignment in two different ways. First, simply find scenes that meet the criteria and photograph them. Secondly, create scenes that meet the criteria. When you've completed both steps, lay out all of your images from this assignment. Pick one that stands out from the rest. Now, print this exquisite example of your artwork and have it framed. In the framing stage, look at adding more space around the small subject to enhance your story.



Another fun way to experiment with the separation of space within the frame is what is known as a 'dynamic angle'.

Dynamic angles are a proven eye-catcher in the use of space within artwork, because they create visual tension.



Assignment:

Spend some time working on the creation of a mini portfolio that contains at least ten photographs that display an awesome dynamic angle. Avoid tipping your camera to create the angle. Put some work into it, and force yourself to 'see' the dynamic angle within its natural environment. Happy hunting!



Space can also be divided by color or the lack of color. This example (Image 006) makes use of color to direct the viewer's eyes to particular location within the room.

The color creates a division of space that is approximately 1/3 – 2/3.



Assignment:

Create a mini portfolio of at least five images that rely on a single color to divide up the use of space. Try using different subject matter to make it even more challenging.



For your last Creativity Prompt in the use of space, think about camera position. By carefully arranging the camera POV of this stairwell (example photo above) within the framework of the photograph- an abstract view has been created!



Assignment:

Photograph at least ten different locations from a unique camera point of view (think about the image above). Find a camera POV that presents the subject space in a new and fresh way, so that a viewer must study the photograph to fully recognize what they are looking at. Think of the above photograph as an excellent example.



Can you identify the use of space at work here in the image above?

I wonder how many of you thought of the Rule of Thirds? The Rule of Thirds actually has no presence in this image. The Rule of Thirds is about subject placement. By placing a subject on the 'crosshairs' of the Rule of Thirds grid you create more visual weight and strength.

The image above makes use of the 1/3 – 2/3 concept (1/3 landscape and 2/3 sky), but that isn't truly what makes this use of space special.

Your final Creativity Prompt on the use of space is color contrast. Color contrast will always draw a viewer's eyes toward the point of demarcation (where one color switches to the other).

In this landscape photograph, the color contrast has divided the frame into a 1/3 – 2/3 use of space.

What lies along the line of demarcation between colors? The subject is positioned exactly there! This use of space is what brings a viewer's eyes directly toward the subject!

Imagine this same photograph with no color contrast. The farm buildings would virtually disappear.



Assignment:

Create five photographs for your portfolio that rely on color contrast for the division of space and draw the viewer's eyes directly toward the subject.