

## Composition Case Study #01

# ADVANCED COMPOSITION

### The Use of Space

When studying photographs to increase your advanced composition skills the key to success lies in your ability to dissect how the photographer used the space within the frame.

This is even more important than identifying the tools of composition, or even the rules of composition.

Advanced photographers are experts at the division of space within a frame.

Indeed, these advanced photographers are aware of the composition tools and rules, but those concepts now operate in the background and are guided more by the subconscious.

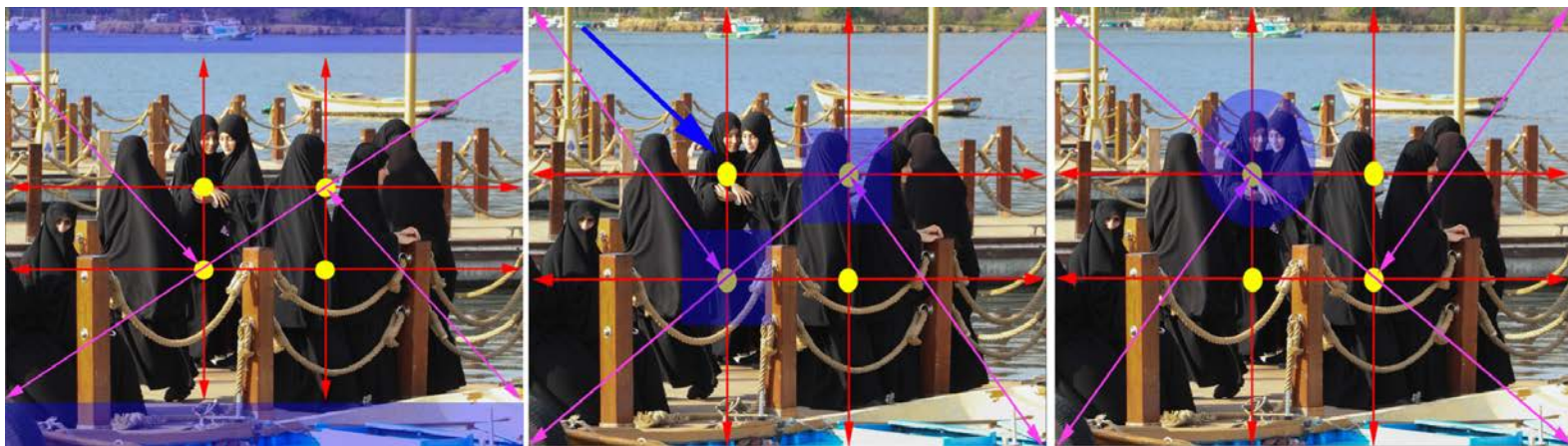
This is my initial analysis of the use of space for the image below.





In this image, the blue oval is the subject. The red triangle represents the positive space. Everything outside of the red triangle represents negative space.





Using the Golden Ratio and Golden Triangle .png file that is located in the Bonus Folder, I copied it as described in the Bonus video.

I resized the file to match my test image on the longest dimension, and then I pasted it onto a new layer over the image that I'm studying.

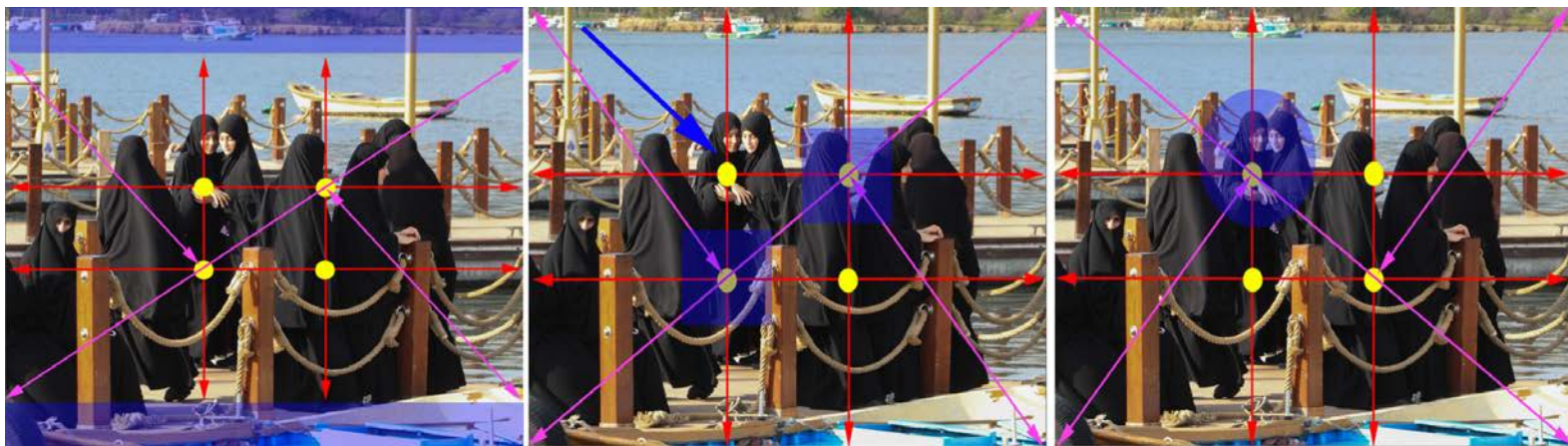
**I made sure to 'undo' my changes before closing the Golden Ratio/Golden Triangle .png file.**

Notice that the file didn't exactly fit the aspect ratio of the image that I'm studying (look at leftmost image above). The blue boxes (top and bottom) indicate the areas that my bonus .png file didn't cover.

I could have left it that way.

However, to show you an alternative option, I did the following, as you will see in the middle photo of the image above:

I made sure that the second layer in the Photoshop layers palette was selected (this is my Golden Ratio/Golden Triangle overlay layer). I went to 'Edit: Transform: Scale' and then adjusted my Golden Ratio/Golden Triangle file to "fit" the aspect ratio of this image. I did this by dragging the box up and down (as viewed in the center of the image above).



Look at the center photo in this image. You can see how I've resized the grid.

One of the yellow dots from the Golden Ratio now falls right upon the subjects, and that is good.

However, I want to take my evaluation one step further and see how the space is used when the subject falls onto one of the intersection points for the Golden Triangle.

In order to accomplish that, I need to 'flip' the overlay horizontally.

In the far right photo you can see how I flipped my grid so that both a yellow dot AND a point of intersection now fall upon the subject.

At this point, I can now determine that the use of space is somewhat flawed.

In the second image, I pointed out what I believed the subjects were and how the photographer integrated the subjects into a triangular pattern with their surroundings. However, that triangular pattern does not fit into the Golden Triangle.

Is this a disaster? No, of course not. Could it have been better composed, with a better use of space? Absolutely.



Using the same procedure as described with the Golden Ratio and Golden Triangle file, I pasted a Golden Spiral over the image and resized it to fit the aspect ratio. As you can see, it's not perfect, but close.

So far, the use of space is... okay.

Where are the composition problems within this photograph?

There are several large problems with this composition.



## The Focal Points

---



The hands of our subjects provide a focal point toward their faces. (See the red arrow pointing downward in this image.)

In the Advanced Composition premium guide, there were several images discussed where the hands, or the indicated relationship between two people, were the subject.

Why is that not the case here? Why are the hands not the subject, but instead the faces of the two women?

In my mind, the visual strength falls to the faces, and the hands are a focal point to that end.

The faces provide meaning, relationship, mood, and story, which are important to the subject.

If the hands were separated and down at their sides, not in the position that they are, the women would still be the subjects.

However, if the faces of the subjects were fully or partially hidden, then that would completely change everything in the photograph.

Remember our discussion on focal points?

The hands are not the subjects. However, they immediately draw the eyes toward the subjects through contrast, shape, and positioning. They then support the subjects, which is a requirement for a focal point.

The hands form a good focal point.

Here is where two problems lie.

Look at the other two red arrows in the image above. Each depicts a strong visual element that could be a focal point, or an eye snag!

**Eye snags are visually strong elements that draw a viewer's eyes away from the intended subject).**

The woman to the left is the real problem due to contrast, brightness, and a direct line of sight toward the camera. She is pulling significant visual weight away from the subjects.

The woman to the right is as well, but she could be dealt with in post-production. I'll say more on that in a minute.



The last big problem with this shot is the negative space above and below the subjects, as indicated by the red arrows in this image.

These negative space areas are so bright, so colorful, and in extreme contrast to the subjects that they carry far too much visual weight. They are really dominating, especially in the background.

The photographer may have included these areas to help add a story element to the final image.

However, I think the shot could have been composed better, in a manner that highlighted the subjects and still kept that story element.

I'm going to improve this composition in post-production.



Study this image as compared to the first image. The story is the same. Only now, the subjects carry the amount of visual weight that they should.

Here is what I did:

- I cropped out the negative space that didn't provide anything essential to the composition, mood, and story. This included the woman to the left that created an eye snag. It also included the boat in the foreground and everything except the closest boat in the background. That boat was essential to establishing a sense of place, story, and visual depth.
- I darkened the face of the woman on the right to reduce her visual weight as an eye snag. Does she still create a frame break through the line of sight? Yes, but I've done my best to reduce it. Could she be cropped out? Yes, but I think that would hurt the image more than help it.
- I lowered the exposure on the background a tiny bit. I couldn't do much there, as it was so overexposed.

- I increased the tonal contrast slightly and made some minor adjustments to the color balance.
- I cloned out several small bright areas that were 'almost' eye snags and were unnecessary.

With these changes, what do the wooden pylons and ropes become in the final shot?

They now perform two compositional elements quite nicely. They are a repeating pattern that acts as a frame to the subjects.

How come I didn't call that out in the original version?

I think the photographer did intend for those dock elements to be a repeating pattern and a frame. However, that was lost in the composition. The new composition gives them more visual weight and brings them back into the picture.





This image shows the Golden Spiral placed over the image after my changes to the original image file.