

Composition Case Study #04

ADVANCED COMPOSITION

No other genre of photography seems to display such chronic poor decision-making in regard to composition as portraiture.

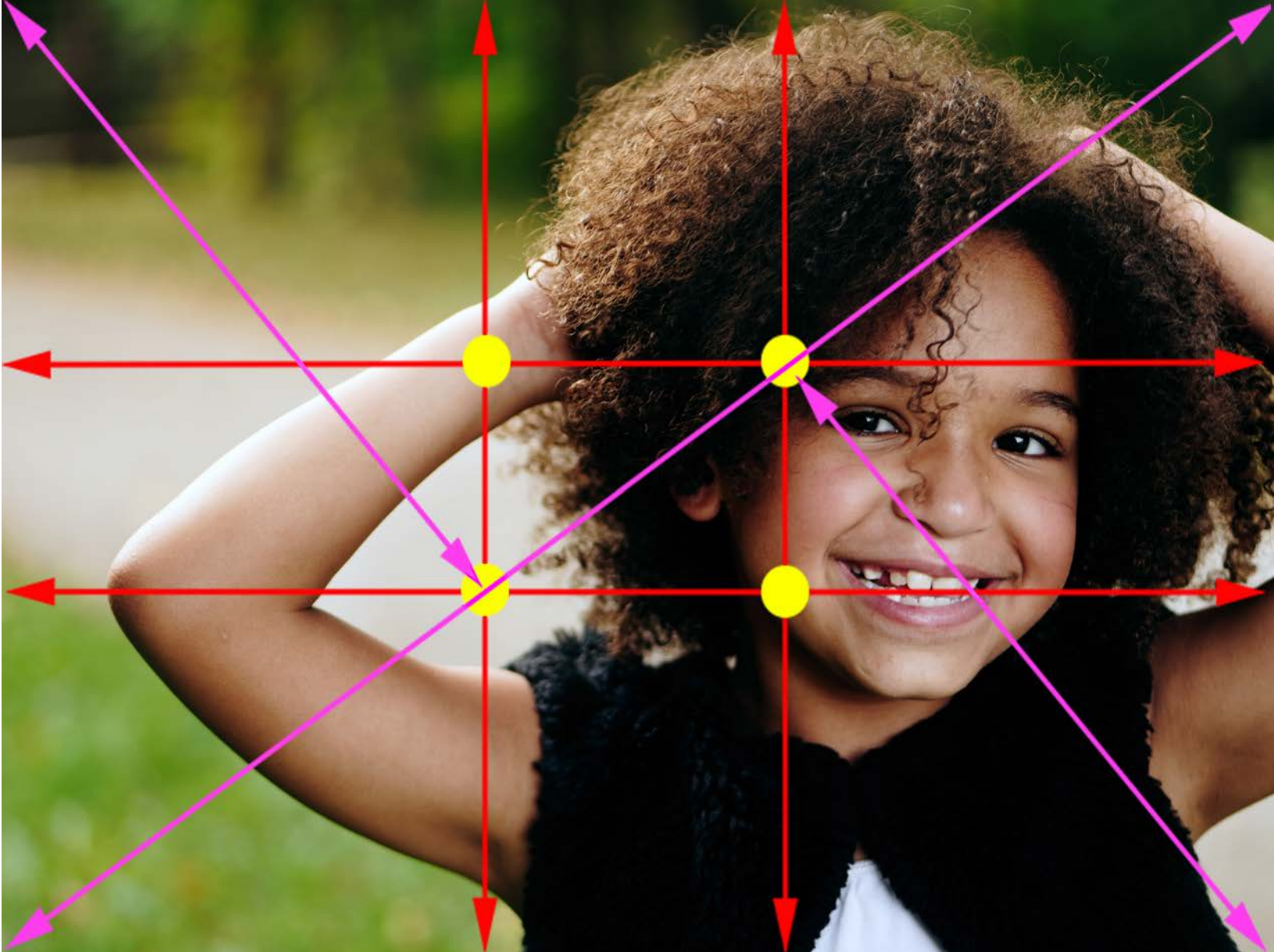
If I look at the composition cheat sheet included with the Advanced Composition premium guide,

one of the first questions asked is, "What's the subject?"

There is no debate over what the subject is in this image. The subject is the little girl.

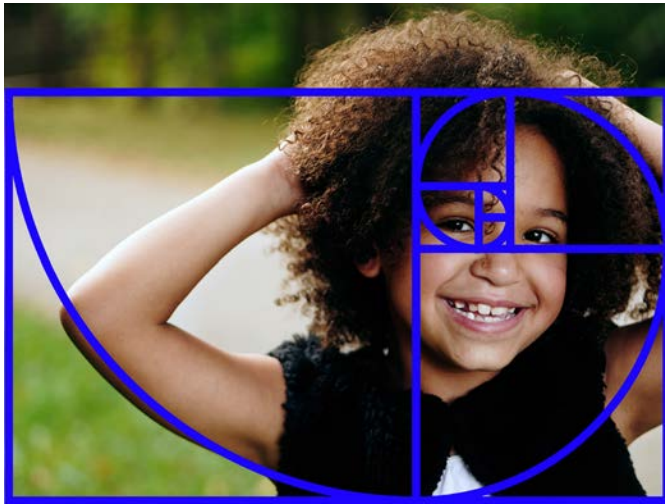
This is a portrait of her.





Looking at this photograph while using the included Golden Ratio/Golden Triangle template, it is clear that the use of space is not perfect.

However, it's also not 'off of the charts' bad.



After transferring my view to the Golden Spiral overlay, I can see that with an image crop this photograph would make pretty good use of the Golden Spiral formula.

It's when I get to question #5 on the cheat sheet that I begin to realize that there is an issue with my case study image.

Does the image feel balanced? If not, why does it feel unbalanced? Was the imbalance purposeful?

In this image, I drew an arrow right down the middle of the frame. The arrow separates the space into equal left and right halves.

Looking at it now...

The image seems very unbalanced.

Everything of importance occurs in the right half!

Is there anything of importance in the left half?

Does the left half provide enough visual weight to help balance out the right half?



To my eye, there is nothing of importance in the left half.

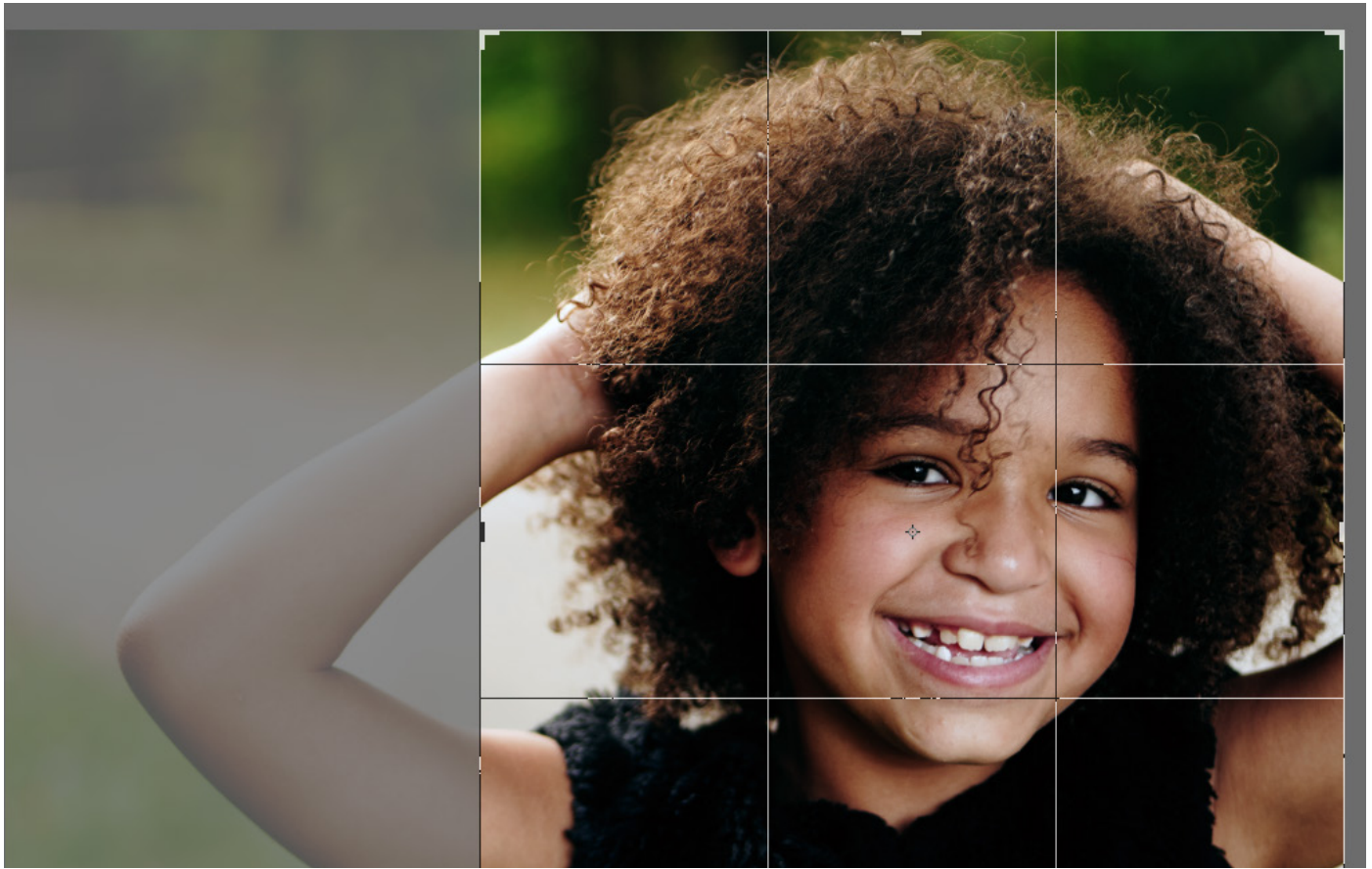
That makes this image an asymmetrical photograph, as discussed in the Advanced Composition premium guide.

The question is, does an asymmetrical use of space work well here?

When trying to sort out a question of balance, playing around with the crop tool is very effective for learning.

Truthfully, the balance of a photograph should be determined at the point of creation when taking the picture.

However, if you're new to Advanced Composition, or even simple composition, using the Crop Tool after the fact can provide a great learning experience.



My first thought was to move the image area completely to the right in a symmetrical vertical format, as seen in this image.

However, the result felt quite pinched, and the story was altered. It became far from the photographer's original intent.

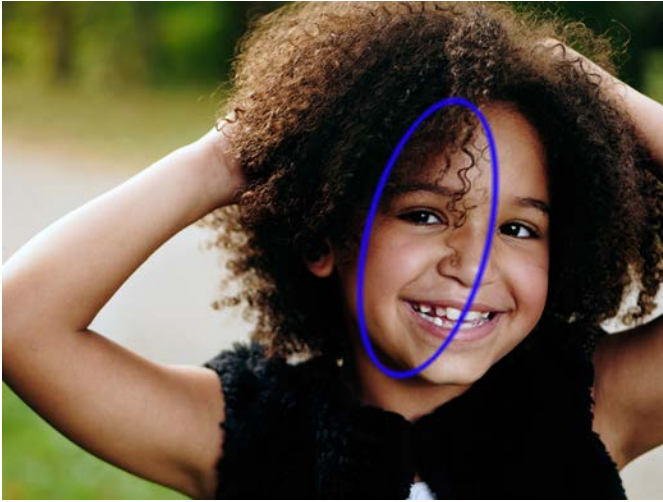
In the original version, the story clearly has a 'freewheeling,' fun, at play vibe. Cropping it, as in this image, took away that storytelling element, and the image reverted to a simple headshot.

It was at this point that I asked myself, "What elements of space and composition are at work here?"

Even though the subject is clearly defined, and the subject fills the frame, we still need to give the viewer some place to stop while on their visual journey throughout the photograph.

In the case of portraiture, that stopping point is typically the eyes.

A most valuable tool in determining where the stopping point will reside within a picture is identifying where the photographer places the critical focus.

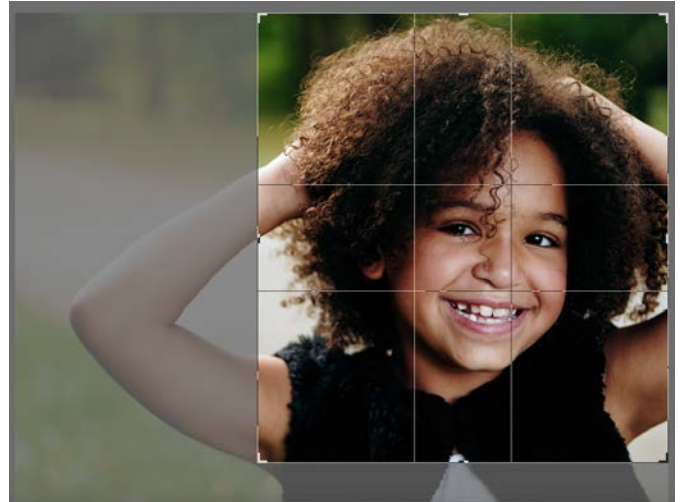


In this case, the critical focus is on the child's right eye (camera left, in the blue circle).

Now that I've identified the stopping point, what other compositional elements are at work here?

By identifying the stopping point, it helps us to see and isolate other elements of composition.

Making a list of those tools of composition can help us to decide what crop works best for the final image.



The additional tools of composition that I see are as follows:

- The hair **frames** the face.
- **Contrast** helps move the eyes inward toward the face.
- The curly strand of hair is a **focal point**.
- The **line of sight** is direct.
- The arms provide a **secondary frame** to the face.

Let's play with some potential crops and see what works best.

The image above is almost a square crop. It has the same issues as the image on page 4. It's too tight and destroys the intended story and mood.



Before looking at the crop in the image above, I switched my Photoshop Crop Tool template to the Golden Spiral.

This crop fits the Golden Spiral formula. However, it still feels unbalanced.



Before looking at the crop in this image, I switched my Photoshop Crop Tool template to the Rule of Thirds.

This crop places the focused eye in the sweet spot for the Rule of Thirds. With this crop, I feel that I'm getting close to the best composition for this portrait.

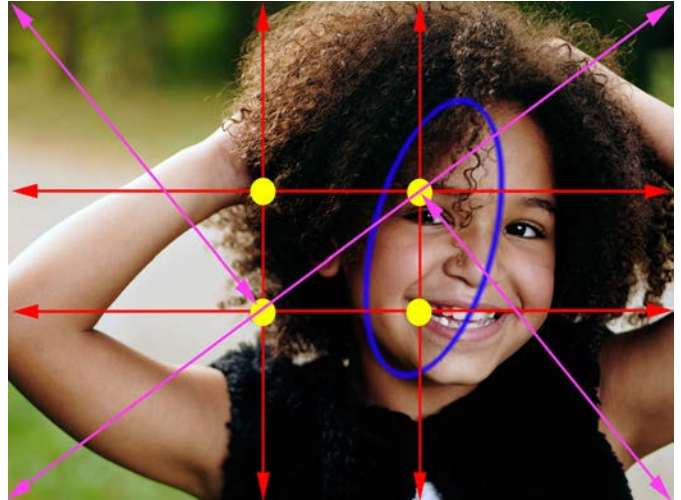


Before looking at the crop in this image, I switched my Photoshop Crop Tool template to the Golden Triangle.

For the crop exhibited in this image, I included a bit more surrounding area than I had in the previous image.

Examine this image carefully.

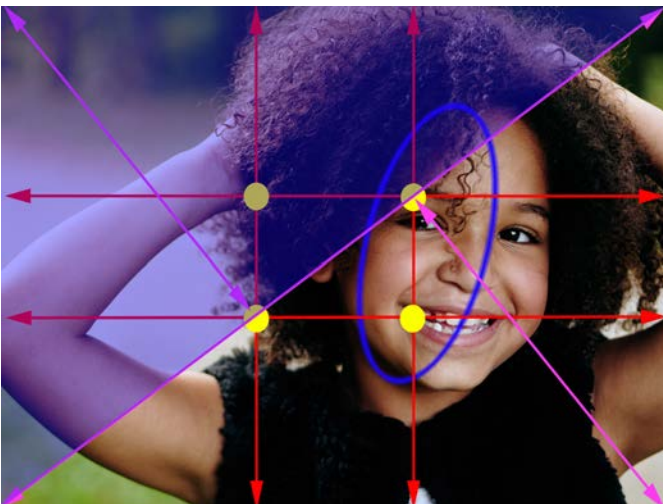
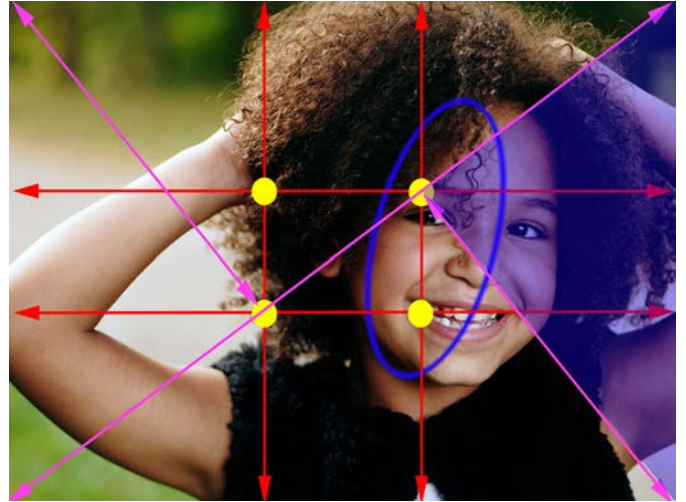
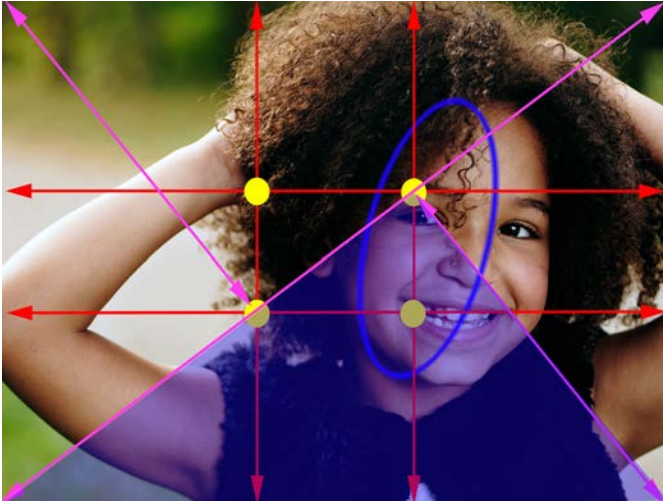
While the mood and intent of the original photograph has been maintained in this image, the visual weight has been balanced between left and right.



The image above is cropped as illustrated in the previous image. The Golden Ratio/Golden Spiral template has been placed over the image.

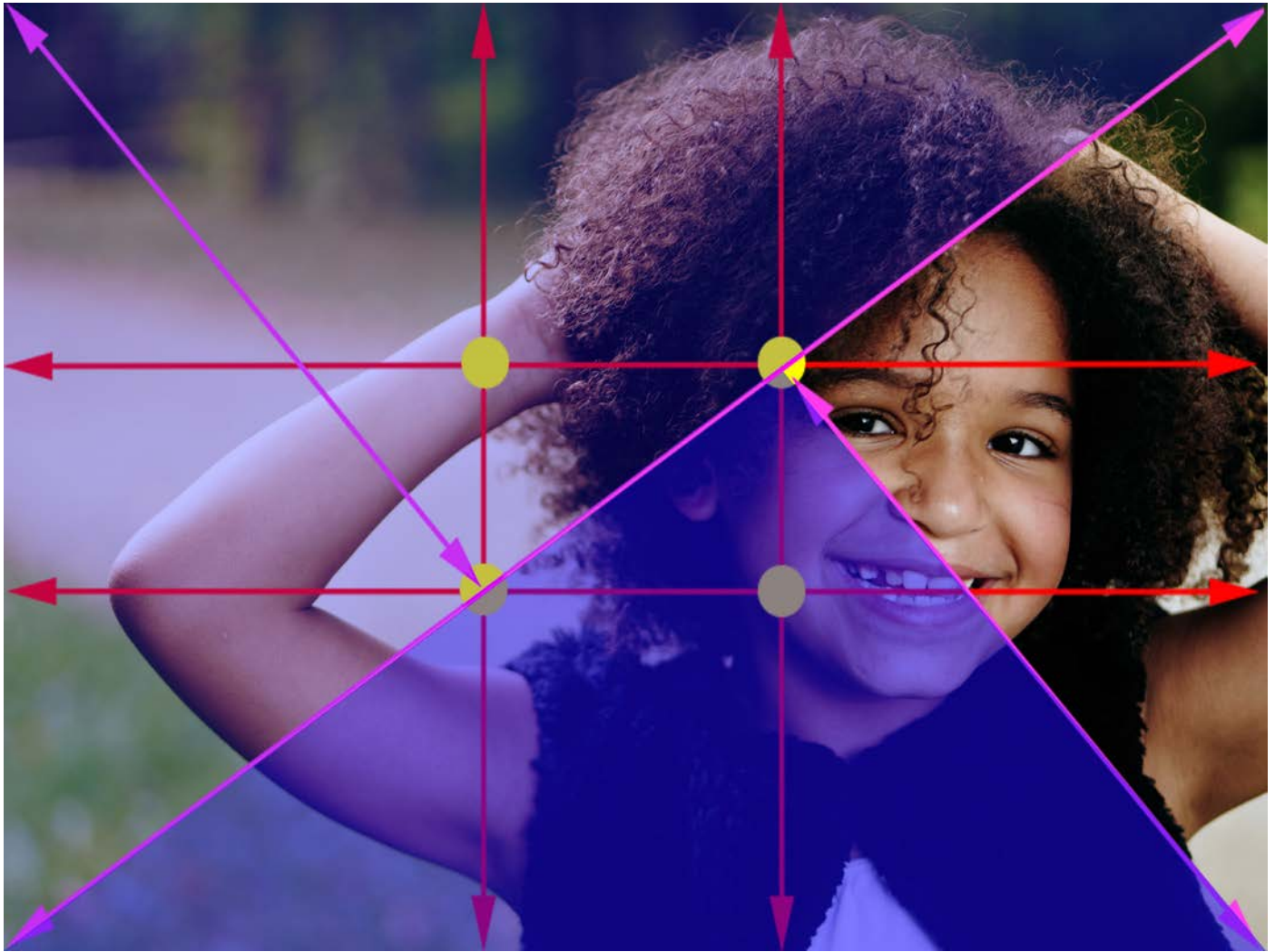
You can see that the critical focus of the eye has good placement within the space of the frame.

However, here is something else that is really important.



The composition now works within the formula of the Golden Triangle. Check out these three images.

- One section of the Golden Triangle contains the final stopping point of the subject's eye.
- A second section contains the focal point of the curly strand of hair and one side of the two frames.
- The third section, which occupies half of the space, only contains the two left-side frames.



This image (the original shot) should be a real eye-opener for you. What do you see?

This image is the original photograph displaying the same Golden Triangle shapes as the images on page 8.

Virtually **ALL** of the visual weight is in the far right triangle! It contains the sharp eye, the curly

hair focal point, and the two far right sides of the frames!

It's no wonder this photograph felt unbalanced!

It should be apparent to you how even small changes can have a huge impact on a composition and, ultimately, the viewer's experience of a photograph.