

# SHAPES WITH TONAL CONTRAST ARE A WINNER

By Kent DuFault

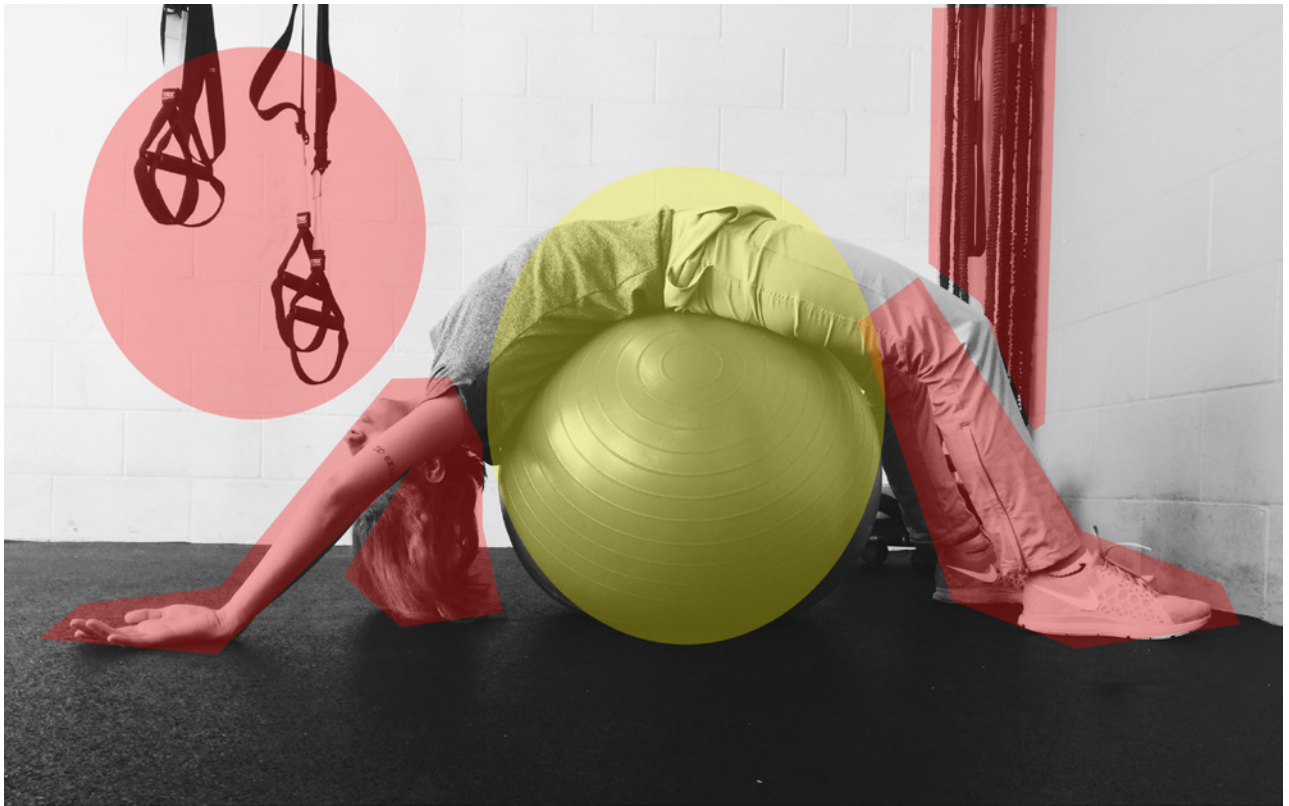


Photograph by Kent DuFault

*iPhone 6Plus, 4.15mm lens, f/2.2, 1/50<sup>th</sup>, ISO 200*

Shape is the secret weapon of great photographers. They recognize the visual power of shape and how it attracts the human mind. When you combine a robust shape with snappy tonal contrast, you have a winning combination.

**Important:** You need to understand the difference between color contrast and tonal contrast. We discussed color contrast in Creativity Prompt #1. Tonal contrast refers to light and dark. Imagine the above photo with all colors removed. You would then be looking at tonal contrast.



Photograph and Graphics by Kent DuFault

*iPhone 6Plus, 4.15mm lens, f/2.2, 1/50<sup>th</sup>, ISO 200*

In this version, I removed the color to illustrate to you the tonal contrast. The yellow oval is where I wanted the eyes to come to rest. Each area highlighted in red creates a focal point and or leading line through shape and contrast.

Now, I will admit that color contrast also adds to this image. However, I wanted you to begin to see the difference so that you can apply this technique in your own work.

Let's look at another example.

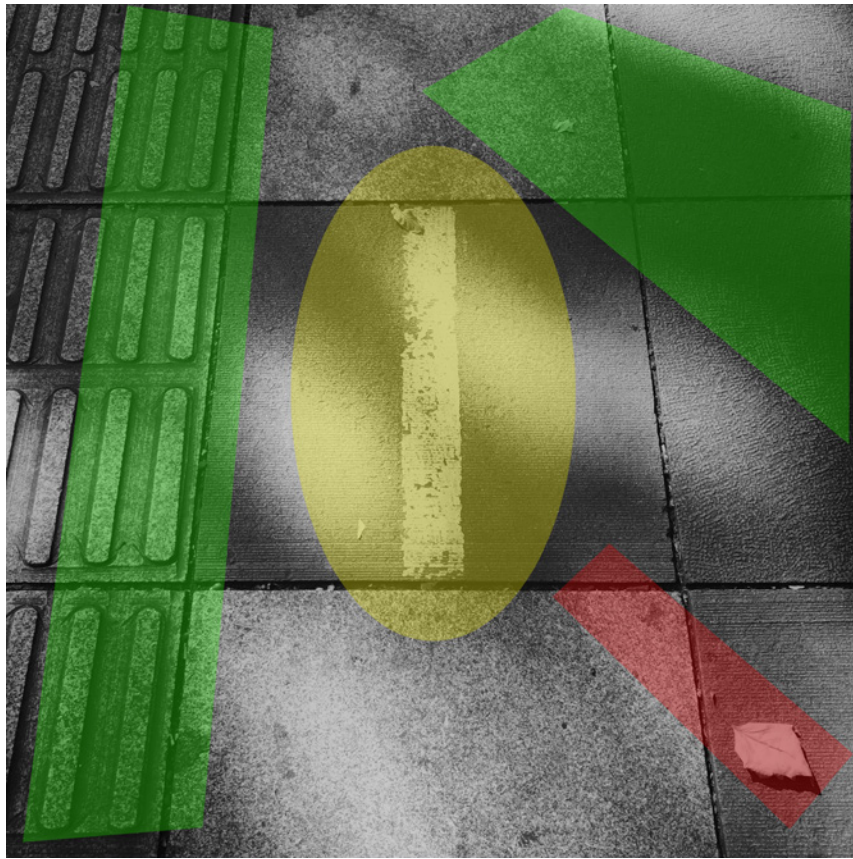


Photograph by Kent DuFault

*Apple iPhone 8 Plus, 4mm lens, f/1.8, 1/142<sup>nd</sup>, ISO 20*

Many photographers would mistakenly say that this photo has color contrast. However, that's not the case. Color contrast to yellow would be blue (RGB color wheel) or violet (RYB color wheel).

What you're seeing is a spot color that is emphasized by tonal contrast. The shapes and contrast (not color) create the focal points to the subject (except for the leaf, which is a repetition of color)!



Photograph by Kent DuFault

*Apple iPhone 8 Plus, 4mm lens, f/1.8, 1/142<sup>nd</sup>, ISO 20*

The yellow oval is the subject, and the subject is a strong, well-defined shape. It also contrasts in tone to virtually every other element surrounding it. The red rectangle acts as a focal point and a leading line due to the repetition of color. It is also a strong shape that is clearly defined through contrast, and it works perfectly with the subject.

The green rectangle to the left acts as a focal point and a frame by repeating similar shapes and tonal contrast to the subject.

Finally, the green area in the upper right acts as a focal point and a frame through tonal contrast.

All the elements are pushing the eyes toward the yellow, centered line, which is the subject.

**Make a note:** Now that we've clearly established the difference between color contrast and tonal contrast. And we've practiced identifying it and capturing it with our cameras; the rest of this prompt will focus on black and white imaging.



### Assignment:

This creativity prompt will test your skills and push your boundaries. Create a portfolio of work that relies entirely on shape and tonal contrast to create focal points. However, no black and white imaging here. Shoot only in color and train your mind to see past the presence of colors to only seeing the tonal range. Make sure to include at least one dominant shape, and two or more is better!



Photograph by Kent DuFault

*iPhone 8 Plus, 3.99mm lens, f/1.8, 1/4<sup>th</sup>, ISO 125*

Does this image have a focal point, a frame, or perhaps both? If you close your eyes and wait a few seconds before opening them - while looking at this photo, what do you see first, second, and third?

Undoubtedly, the large black rug dominates on an initial viewing. However, just as quickly, the eyes move to the cat's face, and then finally, they take in the cat's body and the rest of the frame.

- The black rug acts as both a focal point and a frame. Remember, the definition of a focal point is that it attracts immediate attention toward the subject- or it is the subject. The rug is also a frame and an intense shape; it provides tonal contrast to the cat's face, creating a secondary focal point.

- The cat in its entirety is the subject.
- Everything in the scene is organized to move a viewer's eyes toward the cat as the subject, using shape and tonal contrast.



### Assignment:

Create a portfolio of shots (at least ten) that use a strong, robust shape that dominates the frame but isn't the subject. Practice using multiple contrasts and shaped focal points as a road map through your images.



Photograph by Kent DuFault

*Apple iPhone 11 Pro, 6mm lens, f/2, 1/24<sup>th</sup>, ISO 400*

This photograph started out with my wife doing a skin treatment on her face and hands. When I saw her, I asked her to pose for me. There was something tribal about her appearance, and I wanted to accentuate that.



Photograph and graphics by Kent DuFault

*Apple iPhone 11 Pro, 6mm lens, f/2, 1/24<sup>th</sup>, ISO 400*

I wanted a viewer's eyes to come to rest on the yellow circle. The red rectangle depicts the attracting focal point of shape and tonal contrast. The thumb area has the highest tonal contrast and the most clearly defined shape. The rest of the hand creates a frame.



#### Assignment:

Create a portfolio of work of at least twenty finished images. I want you to photograph friends, family, or models. Use only black and white imaging for your final product. (You can shoot in color and convert to black and white in post-production. However, make sure you are concentrating on shape and tonal contrast.) You can photograph any part of the body. I recommend that you experiment and try to create a mood or a specific feel (story) for the photos. (For example, I wanted to say 'tribal' in this portrait of my wife - even though the actual moment was far from that!)



<https://unsplash.com/photos/XTXrfCVmb8c>

*Gabriel – Canon EOS Rebel T5, 50mm lens, f/5.6, 1/500<sup>th</sup>, ISO 800*

This example is for all the nature lover photographers out there. I have witnessed so many nature photographers who don't seem to have a good grasp of contrast and shape.

I think we become so engaged with everything that surrounds us when we are out in natural surroundings and its beauty, that we tend to forget about composing. The result is a photo that someone who wasn't with us cannot understand context-wise. That is, they don't know our motive for taking the picture.

The nature photo (above) makes dynamite use of a robust shape and tonal contrast to create a focal point that also happens to be the subject.



### Assignment:

Create a portfolio of at least ten nature photos that rely 'strictly' on tonal contrast and shape. The focal point(s) can support the subject or be the subject. No color for this prompt. You can shoot in color, but you must convert to black and white for your final product. This type of nature photography is best when the composition is simple. Keep this sample shot in mind, and make sure that your subject is clearly defined.

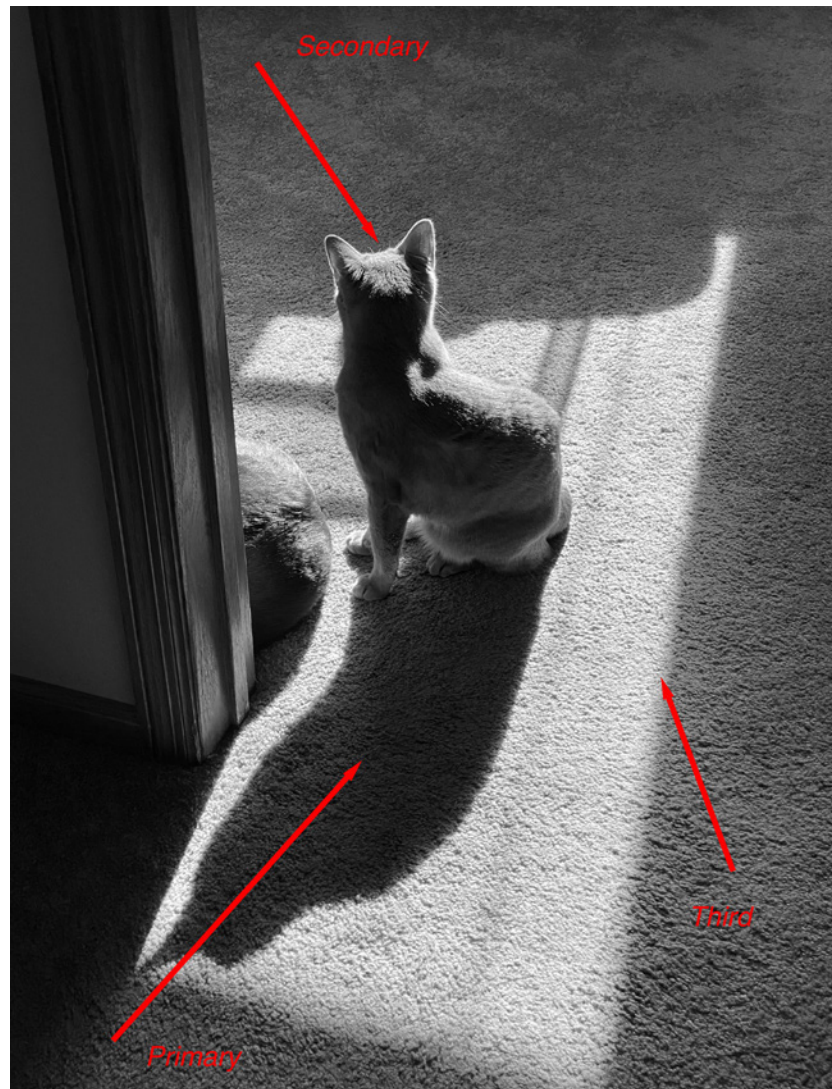


Photograph by Kent DuFault

*Apple iPhone 11 Pro, 6mm lens, f/2, 1/147<sup>th</sup>, ISO 20*

The shape and tonal contrast of the focal points almost jump off the page in this picture!

**How many focal points can you identify?**



Photograph and graphics by Kent DuFault

Apple iPhone 11 Pro, 6mm lens, f/2, 1/147<sup>th</sup>, ISO 20

- The cat's shadow is the primary focal point – Strong shape and tonal contrast – It attracts immediate attention
- The secondary focal point is the cat's ears – a defined shape with tonal contrast, but smaller and slightly less visual weight within the composition
- The highlighted carpeting is a third focal point – an unusual shape but less tonal contrast helps to define the cat's shadow as the primary focal point
- The cat enjoying the sunshine is the subject



### Assignment:

Create at least ten pictures around your home that rely on clearly defined shapes and contrast. The subject matter is open. A single focal point can be the subject or support the subject. All secondary focal points must be submissive to the primary one. This assignment will test your skills in seeing and composing with focal points of shape and tonal contrast.