

USING THE RELATIONSHIP OF SIZE AND SPACE

By Kent DuFault



Photograph by Kent DuFault

Canon 20D, 105mm lens, f/9.5, 1/500th, ISO 100

When it comes to using the relationship of size and space as a focal point, this is likely one of my most successful photos.

It consistently garners attention, and over the years, it has sold many times and brought a lot of money into my studio.

There are so many concepts that this shot can effectively illustrate.

After we are born into this world, much of our visual perception and sense of balance comes from judging size and space. We develop these senses throughout childhood.

Here is a secret: When you capture virtually anything in a photograph that distorts size and perspective, it will get noticed immediately. These types of photos also tend to excite

viewers because it creates an uncommon point-of-view.

The person walking in the photo (above) is a size and space focal point.

If you remove the person from the image, the resulting photo goes from powerful to lackluster. The walking individual as a focal point is mega-important to the end result.

Crucial: When you use a smaller object as a focal point, make sure they stand out and are easily found and recognized within the frame.

What is the subject of this beach photograph? Is it the person, or perhaps the shoreline? I think the subject is the mood and story created by the combination of negative space (the beach) and the tiny person's clearly defined shape and activity.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/of7YMA9HpAw>

Casey Horner – Nikon D750, 35mm lens, f/5, 1/320th, ISO 400

Your focal point must stand out; ideally, it should be the first thing noticed when someone looks at the photo. This example shot is a case of a failing focal point. The person walking simply doesn't have enough visual power to perform the task.



Assignment:

Create at least ten photos that you're proud of - where you will use a tiny object within the space of the frame to create a focal point - while also adding a story element to the picture. Make sure that the small thing is **clearly** visible. It can be a focal point to the subject, or it can be the subject. Think about the person on the beach versus the person at Yosemite.



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/different-dry-pine-cones-on-green-background-6101979/>

Laura James - Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, 70mm setting on a zoom lens, f/9, 1/16th, ISO 400

This photo attempts to create drama through the use of size comparison. Does anything within this shot work as a focal point? No, it doesn't. The size difference is not accentuated enough within the space of the frame to create that kind of tension.

Tension is what drives a viewer's eyes to a focal point.



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/cheerful-diverse-friends-in-colorful-wear-5325835/>

Anna Shvets - Fujifilm X-T3, 18mm lens, f/3.6, 1/125th, ISO 320

Does this shot effectively use size and space to create a focal point? Absolutely! In fact, this is a very clever photograph.

The placement of the different children and the color coordination of the clothing forces you to first look at the small child on the right. That child seems out of place in size, shape, color, expression, and space. That, my friends, creates tension!

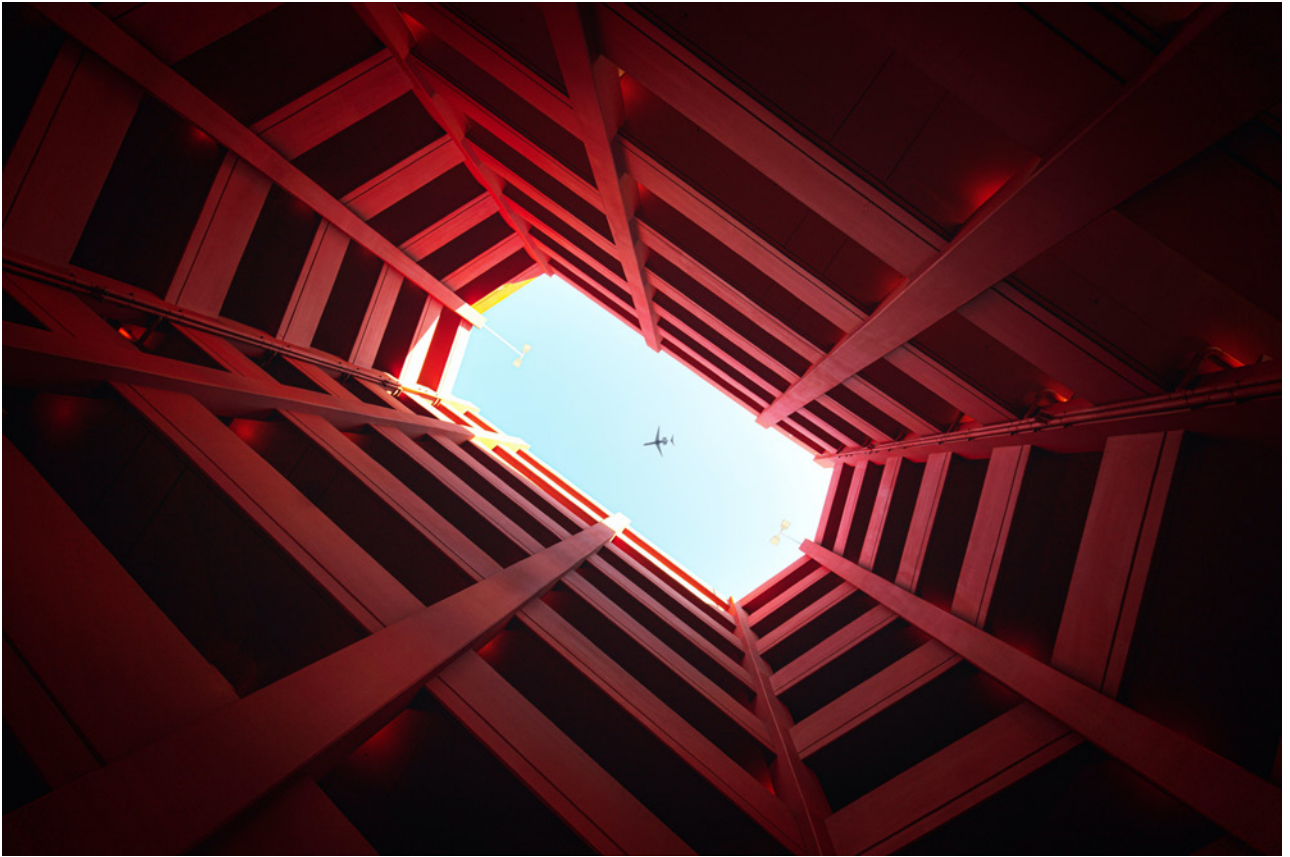
Did you notice how the three children on the left are grouped tightly together? And as the eyes move toward the right, careful use of space has been incorporated. This spacing gives the right side of the picture more visual weight than the left!

Critical Thought: When working with focal points, always consider **the space around them**.



Assignment:

Create a body of work with multiple focal points and or subjects. Play with the spacing between them. Try as many different options as you can to help you learn how spacing can affect visual weight. Be sure to share your photos with others to see if they pick up on your planned composition, especially the focal points and the spacing.



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/low-angle-photography-of-building-showing-airplane-on-skies-2397650/>

Jeremy Bishop - No EXIF

While working through these Creativity Prompts, you've likely realized that a focal point combined with a frame is a powerful visual tool.

In the example photo (above), the building frames the airplane, which is both a focal point and the image's subject. Would you agree that the aircraft is the subject of the photo?

Critical Consideration: When combining a frame and a focal point- make sure that it is clear to a viewer what the photo's subject is!



Assignment:

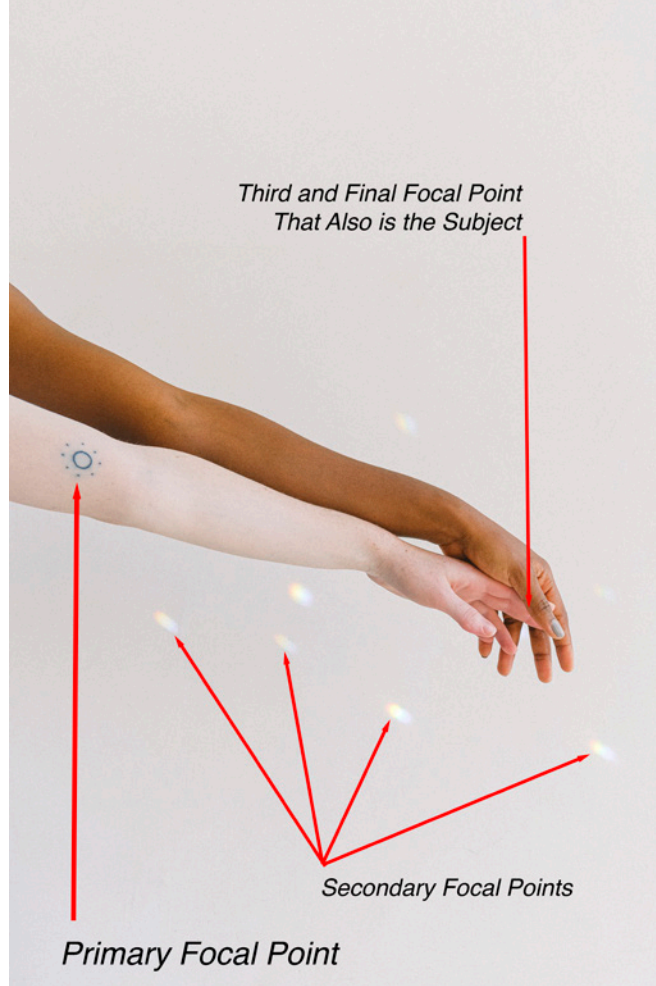
Create a body of work that utilizes small and large focal points that rely on a frame within the space of each shot. This is an advanced composition technique. Don't be discouraged if it doesn't work out right away. Play around with how each element is used within the space of the frame. For example, in the airplane photo- what if the airplane was closer to the building? Or, what if the aircraft was positioned on the far left of the frame created by the building? Would that change the dynamic of the intended subject? Placement of the plane within the space was crucial to success!



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/arms-extended-on-white-background-4557454/>

Anna Shvets – No EXIF

There are several focal points in this photo. What focal point is the dominant one? Other than the primary focal point, there are two others. Can you name them?



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/arms-extended-on-white-background-4557454/>

Anna Shvets and graphics by Kent DuFault – No Camera EXIF

- The primary focal point holds that position because of the contrast between the tattoo and the skin. It also is a demonstrably unusual shape. Does the positioning at the edge of the frame weaken it? I don't think so because the arms attach the focal point directly to the subject, creating balance within the space.
- Why are the dots of light secondary? Usually, a bright spot of light is an extreme focal point with heavy visual weight. However, that's not the case in this shot. Do you know why? They appear against a white wall, so they lack contrast. If the wall were dark, it would completely change the outcome of the focal points and this photo!
- Why are the fingers touching a focal point? Interaction between people, or people and animals, especially the sense of feeling, is a standard and

often used focal point (remember localized movement from prompt #2). People are attracted to things touching; it creates emotion. Want to add emotion and story to your photos? Have anyone in the shot touching something or someone!



Assignment:

Set up a photo shoot or two where you will photograph two people, one person, or a person and a pet- or do all three! Photograph against a light-colored wall and a dark-colored wall. Create focal points with lighting and or props. However, also include the sense of touch as the final focal point and subject. Use the example photo to get your creative juices flowing!

Let's look at some final inspiration.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/6tGANJJC7lg>

Hari Nandakumar – Nikon D850, 120mm setting on a zoom lens, f/8, 1/800th, ISO 100

Crucial Tip: Repetition of shape is a solid visual element in photo composition. Break the repetition within the frame, and that breakpoint becomes an enormously successful focal point of space and size.



Assignment:

Practice creating a focal point by photographing a break in a repetitive pattern. The subject matter is open. Keep in mind the use of space and size within the entire framework of the photos.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/FLg3KFIOGoA>

Claude Piche - Fujifilm X-T2, 56mm setting on a zoom lens, f/1.2, 1/6400th, ISO 200

I like this photograph very much! It says a lot with so little!

The focal point here cements this shot in the extraordinary category.

Before we discuss the focal point. What is the subject?

This photo leaves a lot to the imagination. I suspect that many of us would interpret the subject differently. That's part of what makes this image so clever.

My interpretation of the subject is the feeling of vast open rural space. The birds, the barn, and the negative space provided by the sky all add to that implied story (for me).

Let's break down the composition.

- The red portion of the barn, along with the 'arrow' created by the angular roof, attracts immediate attention. It also provides context. Without it, we wouldn't realize that this was a barn. What is this portion of the frame? It's the focal point and a leading line.
- The repeating shapes of the birds create tension along the contrasting

line of roof and sky. This repetition holds the most visual strength, and this is where the viewing experience comes to rest. Due to size and space, they provide context and create a feeling of vastness and a large area.

- The sky... the sky! This is such a beautiful example of negative space. Without the sky taking up half of the frame, the story behind this shot would be lost. It balances out the other elements in the frame.



Assignment:

Select a structure in your area. It can be a city building, a sculpture, a rural building, a bridge, any architecture that you find very interesting. Explore your chosen subject by selecting different portions of it as the subject, and then position focal points that support that subject. Take some time with this prompt. It can be a real learning experience for you regarding fully exploring a subject with your camera.