

CREATING SCALE AND PERSPECTIVE IN LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

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Here's the thing with landscape photography. Do you like Image 001?

It's not bad, for sure. It depicts pretty scenery with nice lighting and the color scheme helps to give it that cold wintery feeling.

However, it really lacks a wow factor – that special something that sets one landscape picture apart from another.

There are many nice landscape photographs out there in the world, but only a few photographers have mastered a critical skill in landscape photography.

That crucial skill is establishing scale and depth perspective. Image 001 lacks both.



Image 001



Image 002

This photograph does a much better job of giving a viewer a sense of distance and size.

Critical Learning Skills: Two ways to add scale and depth perception to your landscape photographs are leading lines and including an object of known size. This shot uses both of those tools.

Firstly, leading lines add depth to a two-dimensional picture because of the mathematical concept known as 'converging lines.'

Here is a definition of converging lines: Converging lines are lines which get closer together as they approach a given place, such as the horizon. They appear to approach or are going to end at a single point. Artists often use converging lines to show perspective in their art works.

Secondly, including an object of known size visually establishes scale. This is what's missing

from Image 001. We have no idea how big those mountains are or how distant they are from the camera's point of view (POV).

The concept of including an object of known size holds its origins in art, architecture, and math.

Here are a few points relating to this idea of scale through knowledge and perception:

- An abstract idea or concept of measurement formed in a person's mind
- A combination of two or more variables that can be measured
- These variables are related and are intended to measure the same construct
- It works using the idea of ratio scales

- A scale that demonstrates absolute differences between each scale point

Those five bullet points are fancy words that mean this to you as a photographer.

Important point: From birth, we learn that the further an object is from us, the smaller it appears. Our mind recognizes objects and establishes size from memory, and then assigns a relative distance.

Let's go back to Image 002.

While we don't know the exact size of the building depicted, we do know, from a lifetime of learning, that the building was intended to house humans, animals, or both. We know that we could easily walk inside that building.

When the building appears so small within the framework of this photo our minds say, "That building must be far away because it appears small." We recognize the vastness of the landscape and the photograph that captures it.



Assignment:

On your next landscape photography expedition, include converging leading lines and objects of known size to establish scale and depth. You don't need to travel to Tibet for this. You can practice these concepts in a park right in your area.



Image 003

Be careful.



Pro Tip:

When including objects to establish scale and perspective, don't squash the idea that your image is a landscape photo. Image 003 crosses this boundary. There are so many people included in the picture that the photo is no longer about the landscape, but about the people standing around in the landscape.



Image 004

This is a much better example of including the human element to establish the scale of the landscape scenery.

In Image 004, the subject is the forest. What is the person? The person is a focal point, or to use landscape photography composition terminology, the person is the anchor. If you're unsure about segmenting and anchoring in landscape photography composition, refer to Creativity Prompt #4 – The Landscape as Shape.

For this shot, we get an excellent sense for distance and size of the reproduced scenery due to the person.

Look at this shot from another perspective. Does it have a good sense of distance? It doesn't. The image is quite flat in its portrayal of the front to back perspective. That's not always a bad thing, but it's something you should consider when creating your landscape photos. In this case, I think it works pretty well.

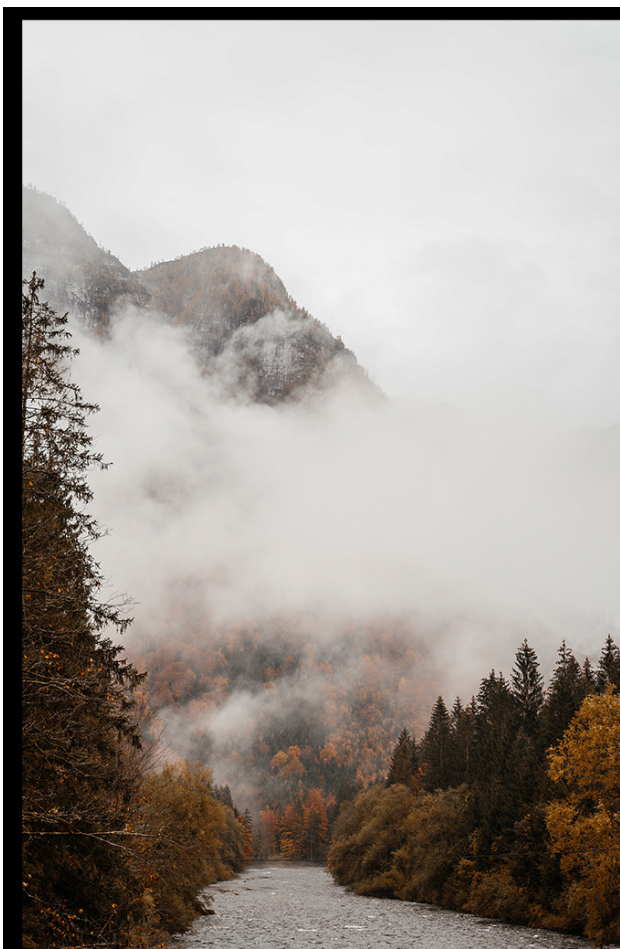
Terminology: When a photo lacks front to back scaling perspective, this is known as 'compression.' Landscape photographers will use long telephoto lenses to 'compress' a scene.



Assignment:

Practice using people and man-made objects to establish scale and distance. Pay special attention to how much visual weight you are giving to these objects. Remember, they are included in your landscape shot only for the purpose of creating depth perspective. Carefully organize your compositions so that your included objects are viable but subliminal. Also, take this opportunity to play around with compression if you have a telephoto lens.

Let's Review



- Converging Lines, Yes
- Scale by size, Minimal



- Converging Lines, Yes
- Scale by size, Yes

Image 005

Both photos display converging lines adequately. But both shots have an issue with establishing scale. On the left, while we know the approximate size of trees, the comparison to the landscape isn't developed enough to create a strong sense of size. On the right, we have the car in the distance to create the depth perception. However, the car is so small within the frame that it is almost non-existent.

**Pro Tip:**

When establishing distance and scale using size comparison, take into account the ratio of the size comparison. For example, the photo on the right of Image 005 would create a better perspective had the photographer let the car advance a bit more toward the foreground. It would have created a better ratio of size comparison.

What About the Camera POV?



Image 006

These two drone photographs drive home the importance of establishing scale. The left picture is so flat in perspective that we could be looking at a macro shot of mold and not know the difference. The simple inclusion of the car (an object of known size) makes the right picture superior in establishing scale and distance.

**Assignment:**

Create a portfolio of landscape images where you are looking up or down. Include either converging lines or an object of known size to establish scale. Remember, you must be looking upward or downward. This is going to be more difficult than your standard landscape shots. Work for interesting angles.

Critical Point: Scale and depth perception are integrally tied to the placement of objects within the space of the frame.



Image 007

*Remember that all tips and tutorials are open to interpretation. Art has no boundaries.
However, that being said, some compositions simply work better than others!*

In Image 007 on the left, we have a lone tree in a barren winter landscape. This picture has no converging lines, and while we do know the approximate size of a tree, it's not compared to anything else for perspective of scale.

Yet, that shot works really well for the intended message of the photographer.

The picture on the right includes several objects of a known size, which should create a good sense of space and distance. However, it doesn't. The reason is the arrangement of the objects within the framework of the space.



Assignment:

Follow the guidelines in this creativity prompt and then break them down while photographing the same scene. Share each attempt with friends and family. Discover what they like and dislike about each of your efforts. Make notes and try again!



Image 008

Study this example. It nails the concepts of scale and depth perception. Can you identify all of the tools used in this composition to create that effect?