

OVERCOMING A SMARTPHONE LIMITATION BY USING LEADING LINES IN NEW AND INNOVATIVE WAYS

By Kent DuFault

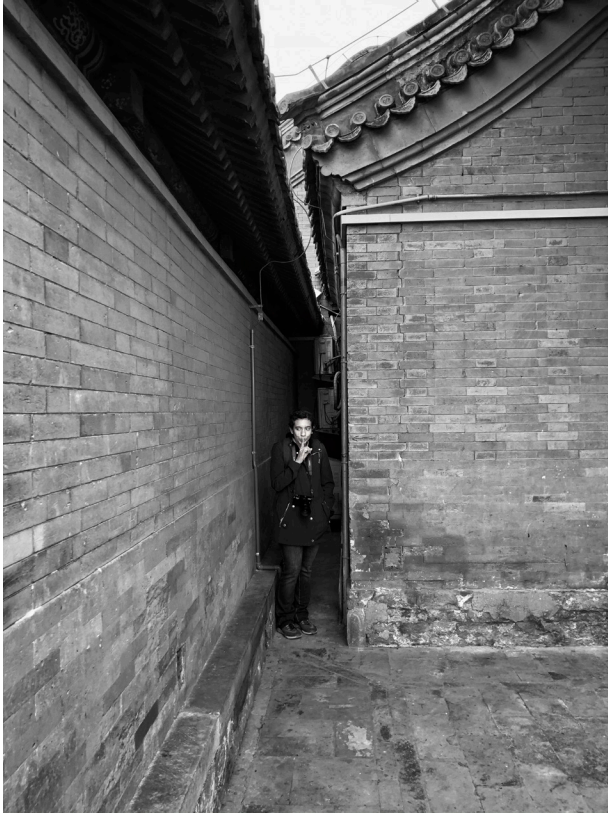


Image 001 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

This was taken with the iPhone 6 Plus and processed in Snapseed.

I'm a smartphone photographer. My tool of choice currently is the iPhone 11Pro.

I acquired my first iPhone camera back in 2009, and I've been addicted to smartphone photography ever since.

There are many things that I love about creating images with a smartphone camera. One for sure is the immediacy. The camera is always with you and ready to go.

However, there are limitations and challenges to be overcome with a smartphone camera.

In this creativity prompt, we will talk about one way to work through a limitation. That limitation is a lack of different focal lengths with the optical lens.

Critical Thought: I recommend that **you never use** the digital zoom on your smartphone camera, at least with the current technology. I like **sharp** pictures, and the digital zoom just isn't there – not yet anyway. I always stick with optical lensing. It's my preference to crop an image or change my camera position versus using the digital zoom.

With my iPhone 11Pro, I now have a choice of three fixed (prime) optical lenses: wide, normal, and short telephoto. With my previous iPhone 6Plus, I had two lenses, and the iPhones before that only had a single lens.

I tried clip-on lenses; however, I found them cumbersome and self-defeating to my main joy of smartphone photography, which is the immediacy.

Think About This: I believe that smartphone photography has made me an even better photographer because I have to use my noggin, my brain, to think through my shooting process. I have to get around the camera's shortcomings, most notably a finite choice of optical lenses. I regularly sell and publish professionally produced smartphone photos. I am a contributor to several stock photo agencies, and they now openly welcome smartphone images, but with one caveat: the submitted photos need a keen eye toward overcoming the limitations of the camera.

In this creativity prompt, we will examine the composition tool of **leading lines** to create professional-level photos with a smartphone camera.



Image 002 - Photograph by Kent DuFault

I could have composed Image 001 like Image 002, which may strike you better because the model is closer and more visible. However, Image 001 presents a more professional and versatile photograph. Part of that is due to the leading lines and use of space.

Crucial Thought: With the limitations of optical lensing, it may be tempting to get as close as you can to the subject. Sometimes, that is a very reasonable assumption. However, at other times it will severely limit the creative options for your photo later on when in the post-production or marketing process.

Current smartphone models create raw image files that have a large enough resolution for virtually any publication use. Image 002 represents about 5% of the original image file size, and yet it has enough resolution for publication.

However, Image 002 lacks the emotional context and versatility of Image 001.

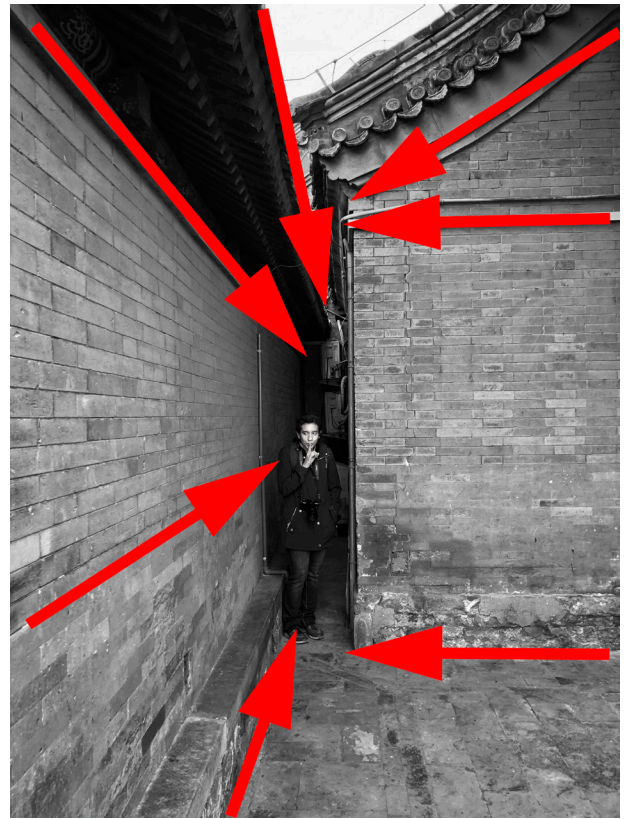


Image 003 - Photograph by Kent DuFault

Image 001 incorporated leading lines as indicated by the red arrows. It creates the same feel as Image 002. The viewer is directed toward the woman, but we also have a much better sense of place and story that is lacking in Image 002. The framing gives purpose to her pose.



Assignment:

Create at least ten images using only the optical lens on your smartphone. Look for leading lines that directly push a viewer toward the subject but could also be cropped to a much tighter shot while still leaving enough resolution for a useful photo. Versatility is the name of the game!



Image 004 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

I saw this man sitting by himself, looking out at the ocean. I waited for the waves to create a perfect leading line right toward him! It was shot on an iPhone 6 Plus and processed in Snapseed and Instagram.

Key Point: It is easy to get caught up in the standard leading lines – you know things like fences, roads, or pathways through the woods. However, leading lines are everywhere, and they don't have to be blatant to be effective.

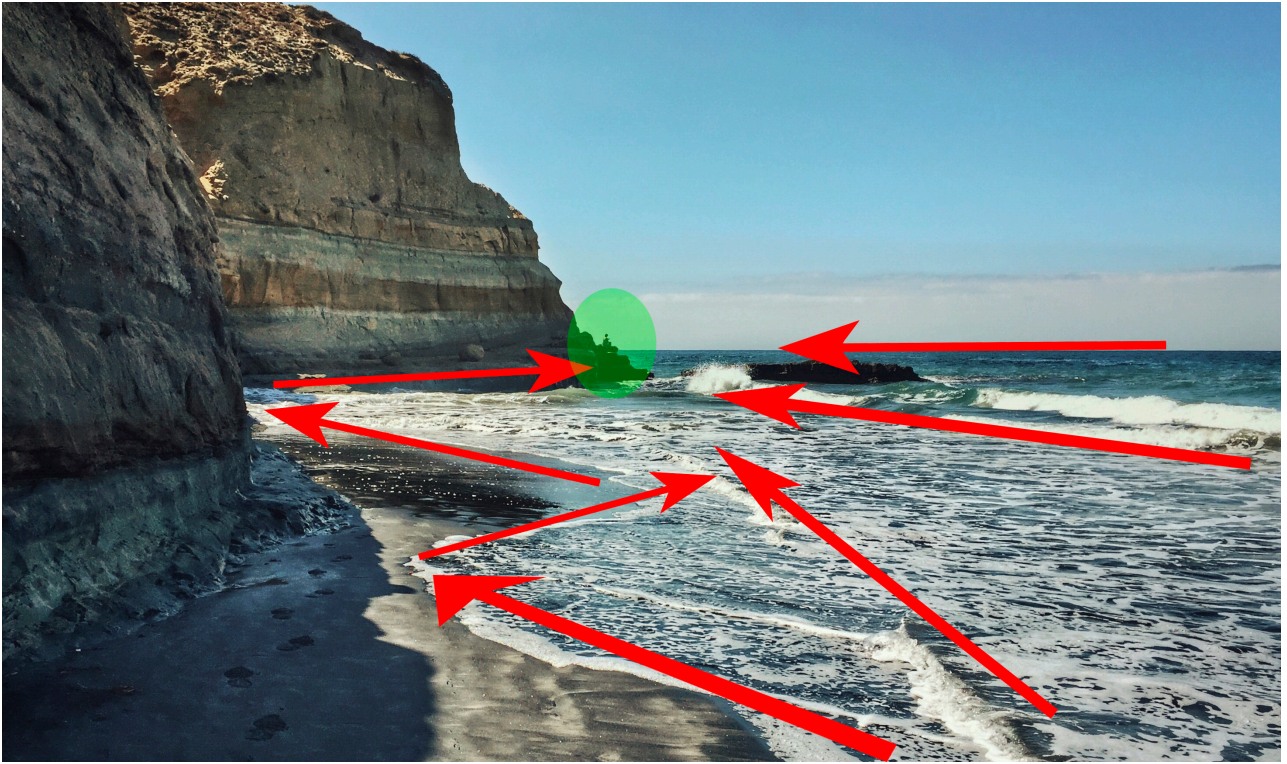


Image 005 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

Image 005 has numerous leading lines that direct a viewer right toward the tiny figure sitting out on the point. Without those lines, he would have become entirely lost in the surrounding environment.

Critical Point: Images 004 and 005 reveal that leading lines are not necessarily stagnant. They can come and go, waning with the environment. A great smartphone photographer looks for potential leading lines and clicks the shutter at just the right moment. Timing is everything!



Assignment:

Go and explore the idea of evolving leading lines. These should be lines that are created as the environment changes, just like Images 004 and 005. Let's talk about several visual cues that make leading lines.

- When light and shadow meet to form a line of contrast
- Clouds moving across the sky
- People forming a line as they walk
- Moving water
- Cars in traffic



Image 006 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

I often identify stagnant, leading lines along with moving leading lines. Patience and anticipation are valuable skills for the smartphone photographer. This was shot on an iPhone 6 Plus and processed in Snapseed.

Image 006 has some identifiable leading lines. However, an additional leading line is quite strong in its function but less identifiable to those that don't openly practice composition.

That more esoteric leading line is the repeating pattern of the steps guiding the eyes upward.



Image 007 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

This photo is a graphic representation of this smartphone composition. Note: there are stagnant prominent leading lines, an esoteric leading line, plus three other elements of composition that we will discuss as a bonus.

- The green arrows are the stagnant leading lines. They are quite apparent in this scene.
- The red arrow is the esoteric leading line created by the repeating pattern of the steps moving upward.

Bonus Discussion!

- The thin blue lines indicate a triangle formed by the subjects. An evident triangular pattern in a photograph, which supports the subject, will generate increased viewer interest.
- This photograph also follows the Rule of Odds. This rule states that an odd number of subjects in a photo garners greater attention than an even number, with the number three being the most effective.
- The red question mark points to the brightest point within the frame. A viewer's eyes will almost always migrate toward the most radiant point in a picture. You can use this to create 'direction' in your compositions.
- The thick blue line depicts how the roof of the stairwell acts as a frame stop. It keeps a viewer's eyes from drifting upward past the subject.



Assignment:

Spend some time creating smartphone pictures that use the repetition of a shape or line to help lead a viewer's eyes toward the subject. While doing this, be mindful of other composition tools that can strengthen your ideas.

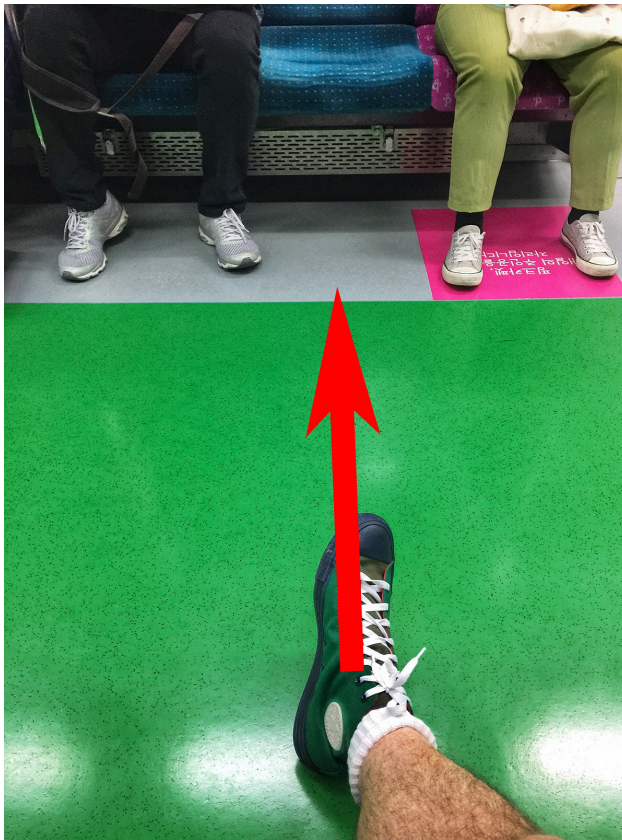


Image 008 – Photographs (l) and (r) by Kent DuFault

By being aware of your surroundings, you can manipulate a moment to include a leading line! These were shot on an iPhone 6 Plus and processed in Snapseed.

On the left of image 008, I was on a train in Korea. I became interested in the blocks of color that were 'broken up' by the shoes. However, the bottom half of my frame was too visually heavy; it overwhelmed the top half, which is where I wanted a viewer's experience to end.

So, I stuck my foot out. It became a strong leading line that pushed the eyes upward and broke up the field of green!

On the right, I noticed the mural on the ceiling. I asked my wife to smile in a humorous pose overtly. The waitress happened to pass through the scene at just the right moment, which was a bonus. I manipulated the location to utilize the mural as a leading line while at the same time added a comedic story element to the final picture.



Assignment:

Create a body of work – let's say at least ten images that you're proud of – where you manipulate the scene or the moment to create a leading line that adds interest, story, composition, or all three. Use Image 008 as the inspiration for the type of manipulations you might try.



Image 009 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

*One of the most potent leading lines that many smartphone photographers overlook is a 'sightline.'
This was shot on an iPhone 6 Plus and processed in Snapseed and Topaz DeNoise.*

We've all had this moment. We see someone staring intently at something, and we feel compelled to turn our head and try to see what they're looking at.

In photography composition, this is called a sightline or line of sight. Sightlines are extremely powerful in a smartphone composition.



Image 010 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

A lot is going on in Images 009 and 010.

While the hand holding the beer bottle is front and center, it would get lost in all of the surrounding elements except for one thing.

The woman in the background provides a sightline that overwhelms virtually everything else in the picture. If you close your eyes and open them while looking at Image 009, your eyes will immediately be drawn to the woman. It's only then that you follow her line of sight and realize the juxtaposition of a holiday gingerbread character drinking beer!



Assignment:

Spend some time with your smartphone camera and hunt for creative line-of-sight pictures. Don't be afraid to bring someone with you to act as your line-of-sight model. Try to set your shots up in the same manner as Image 009, where the eyes go to the person first and then follow their line of sight (a leading line) toward the subject!

Let's conclude by identifying some unusual leading lines that helped create exciting pictures with a smartphone camera.



Image 011 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

This was shot on an iPhone 6 plus and processed in Snapseed.



Assignment:

Before reading on, can you determine where the leading lines are in Image 011? Write down your thoughts.



Image 012 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

This was shot on an iPhone 8 Plus and processed in Snapseed.



Assignment:

Before reading on, can you determine where the leading lines are in Image 012? Write down your thoughts.



Image 013 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

This was shot on an iPhone 6 Plus and processed in Snapseed, Instagram, and TouchRetouch.



Assignment:

Before reading on, can you determine where the leading lines are in Image 013? Write down your thoughts.



Image 014 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

The repetition of artwork on the wall creates a stepped leading line to the left toward the subject. The flooring also creates a subliminal leading line horizontally, especially the gray strip, which is a color contrast.



Image 015 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

The tube acts as a leading line that connects the two cats. The cat in the bag is the subject, as she holds more visual weight due to the use of a frame, positioning within the space, and color contrast. The other cat was included as a secondary subject to add a story element to the picture.

Critical Thought: Lines used in photographs can lead to a position within the space of the frame. However, they can also be used to connect different elements in the frame.

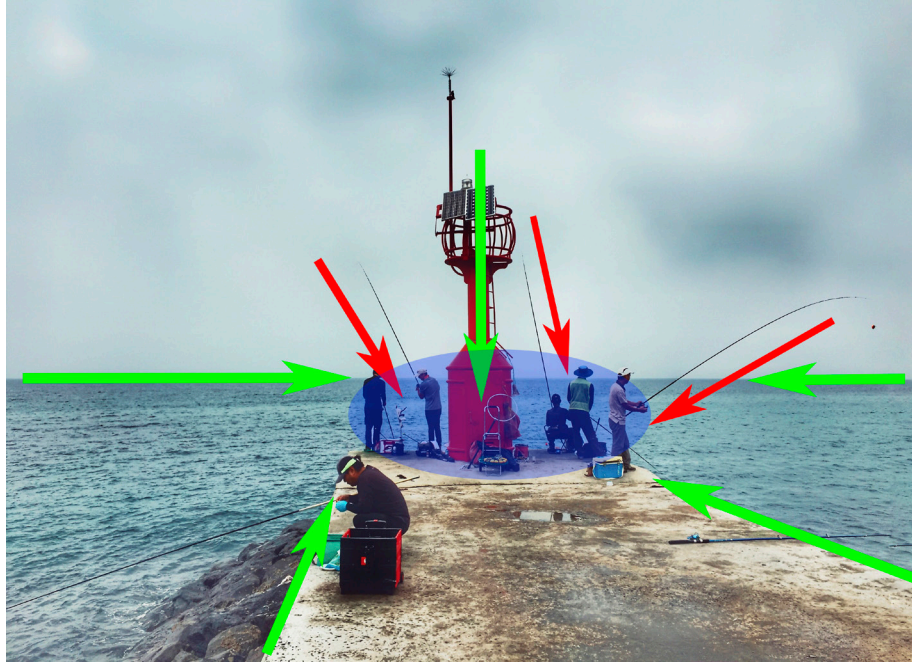


Image 016 – Photograph by Kent DuFault

The repetition of the fishing poles acts as leading lines toward the fishermen. The lighthouse is a subliminal leading line through color contrast that pushes the eyes downward. The horizon acts as a leading line helping to drive the eyes inward from left and right. The contrast along the edges of the pier serves as a leading line to help push past the foreground fisherman to the subject fishermen at the end of the pier.



Assignment:

It's time to pull together everything we've discussed in this creativity prompt and take our smartphones and create pictures with leading lines.

Make sure to include the following:

- Use only the optical lens – no digital zoom.
- Allow enough room to let your leading lines work, but also get close enough that you could crop tightly for another version of the same picture (Image 001).
- Use environmental elements that are leading but also moving and changing – practice your timing, patience, and anticipation.
- Capture some leading lines using repetition.
- Create some leading lines by changing or manipulating the environment.
- Use one of the most potent leading lines – line of sight!
- Tie two subjects together by using a leading line between them.

All photographs in this creativity prompt (created by Kent DuFault) were shot with either an iPhone 3Gs, an iPhone 6 Plus, an iPhone 8 Plus, or an iPhone 11 Pro.

Kent DuFault's post-processing toolbox includes Snapseed, Instaflash Pro, TouchRetouch, Polarr, Focos, Light Distortions, Instagram, Hipstamatic, and LensLight.