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VIEWFINDER INDEX

Understanding the Importance of the Line of Sight in Photography

11 Sure-Fire Ways to Get out of a Creative Rut

How To Get Started With Off-Camera Flash Photography

Mentors Can Make All the Difference

How to Use Leading Lines for Exceptional Composition

[DIY] Making a String Tripod

Adobe Photoshop CC: Your Complete Beginner's Guide FREE

iWesoft Free Image Resizer

Cartoon of the month

Website of the Month

Not only does he take top photos but he can cook too.



Understanding the Importance of the Line of Sight in Photography

by Marc Schenker

The line of sight is a compositional element that's often the unsung hero of images. It's also underutilized, which is a pity since it can offer any picture a lot of compositional strength. Also called a sightline, this technique is a typically uninterrupted line of sight from the observer or viewer to the object of the gaze.

What makes this line of sight so powerful is its centering on the human face. Genetically, we're already hardwired to pay special attention to a person's face because that's how we naturally interact with each other.

Plus, we naturally follow a person's eyes because we're curious to find out what they're looking at and if we have the same interest in what they're observing. **The line of sight is important to your images in various ways.**

Eyes Looking at the Lens vs. Looking Away



This comparison will illustrate the power of the line of sight. Think of any photograph where the subject is looking straight at you, in essence making eye contact with the viewer. Again, just due to the nature of things, you'll find yourself locked in the gaze of the subject because we're hardwired to look at people in the eyes. This is especially the case when the subject's eyes and facial expression are very emotional.

On the other end of the spectrum is when the subject is looking elsewhere in the frame or off-camera. In these situations, you'll generally not spend nearly as much time looking at the subject's face or his eyes. That's because you're likely more interested in where your subject is gazing at instead of looking at the subject.

After all, **this is a directional cue**: You generally follow a person's line of sight to determine what's so interesting that they're looking in that direction!

Therefore, by using where a subject's eyes look in the shot, you can greatly influence how and where your viewers will spend their time looking at your photograph.

Another take on this that can be quite interesting is if your subject doesn't even look at a visible object in the frame. In other words, where they're gazing isn't shown. This leaves viewers with an unresolved feeling of mystery and curiosity, which is a nifty technique to use, too!



Selective Focus



Selective focus is a term that refers to a situation where you have different people in the same shot looking at different parts of the frame. With these conflicting lines of sight, there's naturally going to be a priority in which the viewers' attention is directed. How do you cue your viewers to look at which line of sight first, second, etc.?

This is an interesting case, but it can be solved easily enough by having your subjects use strong facial expressions and glances.

Whenever you see someone in a photograph with a more animated expression – just some examples are shocked expressions, stern looks, or bemused glances – your eyes will naturally drift to them first... and then follow their gazes to see what's causing them to react like this. This is also exactly how it is in person.

Therefore, if you want to have your audience look at a certain person in the shot (who's also looking in a specific direction), have another person look at them with an emotional expression. This cue will do the work for you, and there you have selective focus.

When Your Subjects Are Looking at Each Other

Many pictures have competing subjects. Sometimes, their lines of sight will be exchanged, as when they're looking at one another.

In these cases, you've created a linear exchange.

Again, unsurprisingly, it's how your subjects wear their facial expressions that will make all the difference in the world to your audience.



When two people are looking at each other, their expressions are going to dictate which one is the more interesting subject and which, therefore, viewers will spend more time examining.



This balances things out between the subjects, so it's in your best interest to have your subjects make interesting facial expressions when shooting them.

You can play around with that balance, too, of course, by having one subject be expressive and the other wearing a poker face. In terms of upsetting this balance, you can also alter other elements in the frame to give more importance to



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one subject at the expense of the other. These techniques include:

- Lighting
- Clarity

Position of face relative to the rule of thirds

Bonus Case: When the Eyes Are Covered

This is a trickier one. Let's say your subject's eyes are covered. He's wearing some cool shades, or maybe it's a child who's playing peekaboo, and his hands are covering his eyes.

In both situations, the line of sight can still be a factor, though naturally to a lesser degree.

Your imagination will make up any missing information in the frame, yet you can also glean information about the subject's line of sight by examining his body language. If he's sitting at a table with his



forearms folded on the table, looking across the table, and talking, then it's a good bet that his line of sight is going to another person at the other end of the table (whom you can't see because they're out of the frame).

Having Fun With the Line of Sight

As these examples illustrate, the line of sight is something that you can have a good amount of fun and experimentation with. Depending on how you use this technique, it will give your viewers a lot of information about different elements in the frame. Also depending on how you use it, you can establish the hierarchy of how your viewers take in various

pieces of information in your shots.

The line of sight can be used as subtly or obviously as you want. Just remember to be creative with it and provide your viewers with good information to help understand your shots better.

<https://contrastly.com/understanding-the-importance-of-the-line-of-sight-in-photography/>

11 Sure-Fire Ways to Get out of a Creative Rut

by Christina Harman

No matter how much you enjoy photography, eventually, you may find your creativity waning. It's happened to the best of us, and it can leave your photographs looking less than inspired, and often downright dismal!

Often, creative ruts are caused by familiarity. Too often we spend all of our time in the same areas, with the same camera and lens combo, capturing the same type of images. After a while things get, well, boring, and our creativity begins to suffer as well.

If you've found yourself in a rut, and are looking for ideas to reignite your creativity, here's a look at some ideas to help get you fired up once again.

1. Try a New Style

Often, creative ruts are the result of us becoming complacent. We tend to get good at what we're doing, and then – we plateau. If this sounds like you, consider taking some time to branch out and

explore different styles of photography. Challenge yourself to try something completely different, that's outside your typical comfort zone. If you do landscapes, consider doing portraits, street photography, or even macro. You could try capturing water droplets, experimenting with long exposures, or photographing the moon. Attempting something new will challenge you once again, helping to boost your creativity.

2. Shoot Everything

If you're finding it difficult to channel your creativity, then you might want to consider just shooting everything. Don't worry about making perfect pictures, just start shooting. You might be surprised at what catches your eye.

Experience Other Art Forms

If you're feeling stuck, why not experiment with different art forms? Sometimes switching gears and allowing your mind some *'time off'* from your typical pursuits is what it takes to inspire you. Consider watching a play, listening to music, visiting museums, reading poetry, or even drawing and sketching. Often, inspiration comes when you're least expecting it.



3. Look at Inspirational Images

What better way to get inspiration than by learning from the best? Study the work of skilled photographers, have a look at photography on 500px, or check out a photography book to help get your creative juices flowing. National Geographic and Outdoor Photographer are also great places to find inspiration.

4. Join a Group

Surrounding yourself with others who are passionate about the same thing as you can help to spur you on. Joining a group – if there's one locally, or taking a photography class can also help you to learn new techniques, or encourage you to see things differently. In most cases, it can also provide you with some constructive feedback that can help inspire your creative spirit.

5. Rent Some New Gear

Playing with some new gear can spark all sorts of creative ideas. Consider renting a new piece of equipment from websites like BorrowLenses or LensRentals.com. Get yourself a telephoto, or a wide-angle, or something else that you've had your eye on for a while. Learn everything you can about the new piece of gear, how it works and handles, then get out there and have fun using it.

6. Buy Some New Gear

Of course, you could also invest in some new gear as well. This doesn't have to be a whole new camera or lens; it could even be something relatively inexpensive like a polarizer, ND filter, reflector, or off-camera flash.



7. Take a Trip

When we're around the same sights day in and day out, it's only a matter of time until our creativity will start to suffer. Traveling can help you view the world with a completely new perspective. New faces, new sites, and being in an unfamiliar place can help to inspire you like almost nothing else.

8. Take a Break

If you are struggling to get out of a rut, consider leaving your camera behind for a day. You might just be surprised at how much more detail you notice when you're not looking through a viewfinder, and how inspired you will be the next day.

9. Look for Exceptional Lighting

If your photos are looking a bit drab lately, try to capture some images with amazing natural light. Few things will transform your images more dramatically than exceptional lighting. Consider getting up early and hiking to a scenic location to capture a sunrise, or – be on-location during golden hour, that short but beautiful time during morning and evening where everything's covered with a golden glow. Learn to work with the light, keeping it to the side or behind you in order to illuminate your composition properly, and watch as your images improve.

10. Experiment With Post-Processing

Don't rule out post-processing! This can be a fun way to take your images to the next level. Lightroom Classic and Photoshop offer free trials, allowing you to experiment to see what the programs are capable of. Get started with plug-ins, like Silver Efex Pro and Color Efex, that can give your images an entirely new look. It's a fun way to get inspired.

11. Join a Challenge

Finally, joining a photo challenge can be another good way to get out of a rut. Challenges can range

from taking a picture each day to shooting a new style each week. Some center around a different theme each time. Regardless of what you choose, make sure you give it your best shot in order to get the most out of it.

When it comes to creative ruts, sometimes it's our own hesitation and sense of familiarity that can cause the most trouble. Instead of ignoring the rut and attempting to power through it, recognize it for what it is: an indication that something needs to change. Then find yourself a new location, a new challenge, or some different gear – and watch as your creativity returns.

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How To Get Started With Off-Camera Flash Photography

by Christina Harman

Off-camera flash (OCF) photography, in a nutshell, is using a flash that isn't attached to your camera.

There are a number of reasons that you may want to get started with off-camera flash photography. If you enjoy capturing portraits, or photos of friends and family, or even doing still life photography – taking pictures of flowers, fruit, and objects – being able to use an off-camera flash will prove to be invaluable.

Instead of being held hostage to the lighting and time of day, you'll be able to use your flash to fill in or add special effects, to create some truly remarkable images.



An off-camera flash will also give you flexibility and freedom to move the flash easily, and make adjustments as you see fit. With your on-camera flash, you can still dial your flash down, or bounce it; but you're be a lot more limited when it comes to the direction of the light and usually you'll be limited to front lighting.

While using a flash can be daunting, it's not as complicated as you might think. Once you learn how to use it, it will prove to be a tremendously valuable piece of kit! Let's take a look at what you should know if you're thinking of getting started with off-camera flash photography.

Get the Right Gear

Before you get started, make sure you have the right gear. While you don't have to start out with top of the line equipment, it's important to have the basics.

A Camera With a Hot Shoe First, you'll need a camera that works in manual, and includes a hot shoe mount; the piece of metal on top of your camera that an external flash or wireless trigger fits into.

A Flashgun An off-camera flashgun can cost anywhere from \$30-\$600. With so many options, finding the right one might seem like a daunting task, but there are a few things you'll want to look for. First, ensure that the flash has a rotating head, to make it easier to adjust your angle and direction. You should also consider whether the flash is ETTL (i-TTL) compatible or just manual. Cheaper wireless systems usually are not compatible with your camera's TTL flash-metering system, and you'll have to use manual and dial in the flash's power output settings yourself. You may want to look for a flashgun that will allow you to switch back and forth from manual to TTL. Finally, make sure the flashgun is compatible with your camera. You'll also want to look for a wireless flash unit, to save you from tripping over wires or being limited in terms of where you can place your flash.

Remote Trigger and Receiver Unless you're using a wired flash, you'll need a remote trigger that allows you to fire your flash.

Additional Accessories

There are a few additional accessories that aren't strictly necessary, but they can make a difference in terms of your resulting images. Here's a look at a few.

Light Diffuser While it isn't essential, having a way to soften the light can improve the quality of your images. A diffused or softer light will make your images more natural looking. Diffusers are relatively inexpensive.

Light Stand A light stand that holds your flash will make set up and adjustments easier. There are plenty of different options available, so find one that will perfectly suit your needs.

Direction of Light

Once you are set up and ready to go, you'll want to consider where you place your flashgun. Here's a look at different directions of light, and using them to enhance your images.

- **Sidelight** Sidelight is typically one of the preferred types of lighting for portraits. While front-lighting often runs the risk of causing portrait images to appear *'flat'* and one dimensional, side lighting preserves some of the shadows that help to add a sense of dimension.
- **Backlight** Backlighting is often used to make a subject *'glow'* from behind, and is achieved by positioning the flash directly behind your subject. You can see the results of backlighting as a faint glow on a subject's hair or clothing.

Front Light Front lighting can be used to fill in some of the dark shadows on the front of your subject's face. While a bit of fill light can be flattering, in most cases, you'll want to ensure that the fill light is subtle, and doesn't wash your subject out.

Often a combination of different directions of lighting is used for the best results.

Off-Camera Flash Settings

Next, it's time to master your flash settings. You could use ETTL (i-TTL) flash metering, or go all out and use manual. Think of ETTL flash as auto mode for your flash. It will sync with your camera and choose the flash settings that it deems best. However, if you're looking for absolute control over your images, you'll want to manual mode.

Modifying the Light

Modifying the quality of your light will let you control the exact mood that you're hoping to create. You can adjust the direction of light, its harshness, direction, color, and amount of the light as well. Here's a look at some tips for using your flash settings and accessories to create perfect lighting.

- **Adjust the Direction** First, the simplest adjustment: direction. As we've seen, different directions of light can create completely different effects. Try using a combination of different directions to see the effects.

Adjust the Harshness Moving the light source closer to your subject will result in a stronger, more concentrated beam of light, while moving it farther away will make it softer. You can also use flash modifiers like diffusers, softboxes, or an umbrella to soften the light.

Adjust the Color: Modify The Color Temperature With Gels If you would like to get creative, or want to match the existing light, consider modifying the color temperature with a colored gel.

Adjust the Amount of Light: Dial In Appropriate Flash Power Settings Ask yourself what type of look you're going for. If you'd like a natural looking image, lower your flash power. If you want something more dramatic, dial it up.

In the end, the best way to perfect your off-camera flash photography is by practicing. Start by reading your flash manual, practice with different settings and features, and then combine them for a mock photoshoot. Don't forget to take advantage of helpful online resources as well. There's a lot to learn, but with a bit of practice –and by experimenting with manual mode, you'll soon become adept at using your off-camera flash.

<https://contrastly.com/how-to-get-started-with-off-camera-flash-photography/>

Mentors Can Make All the Difference

[Part of an article by [Marc Schenker](#)]

Mentorship is a long-storied tradition in any industry, field or **career**. It's a two-way street that can be rewarding for both student and mentor. As someone looking to be mentored, you can definitely benefit from the relationship no matter what stage your photography career is at. There's always bigger and better, and mentors understand this to a tee.

So if you want to take your photography game to the next level, getting a good mentor is one of the best ways of achieving this. If at first you don't succeed at getting any positive responses from those you're considering as mentor material, don't get discouraged. Building a relationship with the right mentor is a time-intensive process that will develop over time and involve lots of experimentation.



<https://contrastly.com/can-a-photography-mentor-help-you-increase-your-performance/>

How to Use Leading Lines for Exceptional Composition

by Christina Harman

Leading lines are a powerful tool that experienced photographers use to improve the balance, and overall composition of their images.

Lines are often used to lead the viewer's eye through the photograph, towards points of interest. Our eyes are trained to "read through" images, just like we read through the words on a page.

Lines can help to facilitate this, making it easy to "*visually read*" an image. Because of this leading effect, lines are also used to convey a sense of depth and distance in a photo.

While most well-composed photographs have lines that help to lead viewers through the photo, lines have another somewhat surprising effect. Lines can also be used to affect the overall mood and feel of a composition, and can be used to add a sense of drama, excitement, stability, or even harshness to an image. Lines really are a powerful, and versatile, compositional tool!

Leading lines can be found just about everywhere, in both natural and manmade settings. Everything from jagged coastal shorelines and winding rivers, to roads and architecture contain lines.

While they aren't always immediately obvious, even implied lines can be surprisingly effective – and by intentionally looking out for leading lines in your compositions you'll soon become adept at spotting them.



photo by Antoine Beauvillain

In order to get the most out of this compositional tool, it's important to know where to place them, and how to use them effectively.

Let's explore the three main purposes of leading lines in a photograph, and see how lines can help

to add depth, draw attention, and change the overall mood of a photo. Find out how you can use leading lines to enhance your compositions!

Create Depth

Lines are often used to add a sense of depth to a composition. Despite the fact that photography is very much a two dimensional medium; leading lines help to create a real sense of distance and depth in a photo.

Converging lines – lines that reach the disappearing point at the horizon, are a great way to convey depth and distance. The further away the lines are, the smaller they get, drawing the viewer through the scene and adding a sense of perspective to the photo, helping the viewer to feel as though they are there.

Draw Attention

Leading lines essentially form a visual path, and are often used to help draw attention to various aspects of a composition. Because of their attention-grabbing capabilities, lines are often used to draw the viewer through the image, to varying points of visual interest, or to a main focal point looming in the distance.

Change the Image's Dynamic

While lines are most commonly used to draw the eye through the photo, lines have another hidden talent. That is, they are sometimes able to affect the overall dynamic of an image. Our minds tend to associate different lines with different moods – jagged often means harsh or ominous, while horizontal tends to convey a feeling of restfulness, or calm. While this isn't always the case, and

there are other factors that play into a composition's overall mood, it's worth paying attention to the effect that leading lines can have on the overall feel of an image. Let's look at a few characteristics that are often associated with different types of lines.

Horizontal

Horizontal lines are the most common lines in photography. They tend to convey a sense of calm, rest, and stability in a composition. Think of the peaceful feeling that the stability of a horizon line adds to the overall feel of the image.



Diagonal

Diagonal lines can add a sense of energy and motion to your photo. They spark interest and convey action or drama. Tilting the camera slightly to capture a car that's heading around a corner adds to a composition's visual dynamic. Composing an image with a bridge, trail, or other element that spans across the frame diagonally will help the image to come alive – adding a certain visual energy to the composition.

Vertical

Vertical lines convey a sense of height and strength. A classic example of this would be photographing a building from the ground up, highlighting just how tall and imposing the building is.

Curved or Jagged

Curved lines, most often found in windy rivers or roads add a sense of relaxed, natural beauty to an image – while jagged lines like rugged mountain peaks tend to convey a harsh mood.

When incorporating lines into your photos, it's a good idea to pay attention to the mood that the overall composition conveys, and to make sure that the lines are helping to further your compositional goals, rather than distracting from them.

Tying It All Together

One of the first things to do when composing your photograph is to survey the scene, look for leading lines – or any compositional elements that can help to add balance and direction to your image. Then, determine how the lines can help you to tie everything together. Ask yourself how you could use the lines to direct attention to the subject, or to lead the viewer through the image and into the background. Also keep in mind the dynamics and the overall feel that you want to convey.

If you're trying to capture a dramatic storm, look out for lines that are consistent with the overall feel. Incorporate jagged mountain peaks, streaky dark clouds, or a spooky looking tree as lines that will reflect the mood that you're trying to capture.

For a smooth, relaxing sunset image, include the horizon line, or a meandering coastline to add to the calm, relaxing feel that you're trying to convey.

Making the Lines Work for You: Adjust Your Angle

It's amazing how a simple adjustment can have a big impact on the resulting image. Simply angling the camera a bit higher or lower, or moving to a different place can dramatically alter the shape of the lines, and help your composition to take a completely different turn.

Learning to Spot Leading Lines

While lines aren't always obvious, it's important to be on the lookout for leading lines that you can use to further your compositions. While some lines – like waterfalls or roads are easy to spot, it's worth looking a bit closer. Some of the most effective lines are more subtle, but lines don't have to be obvious to be powerful. In fact, some of the best images have leading lines that are less-than-obvious!

There are lines all around, and with a little practice, you'll soon start to notice linear opportunities as they jump out at you when you're composing your images.

Remember to adjust your perspective to change the direction or angle of the line to achieve your desired result. Have fun,

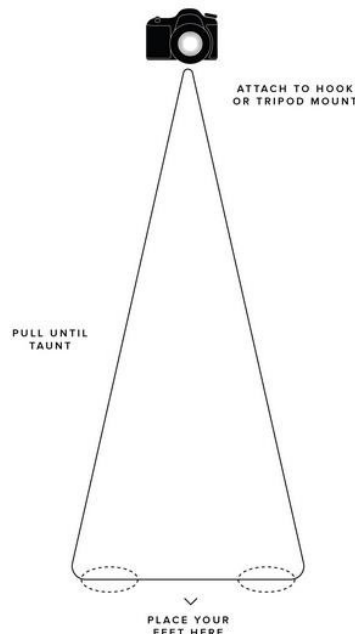
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[DIY] Making a String Tripod

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Use it single or double.



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What makes me qualified to teach you?

My name is Phil and I've been editing photos and graphics with Adobe Photoshop for over a decade. Plus I'm the creator of some of the world's most popular online courses - with over 150,000 students and thousands of 5-star reviews like these ones:

My Promise to You

I'll be here for you every step of the way. If you have any questions about the course content or anything related to this topic, you can always post a question in the course or send me a direct message.

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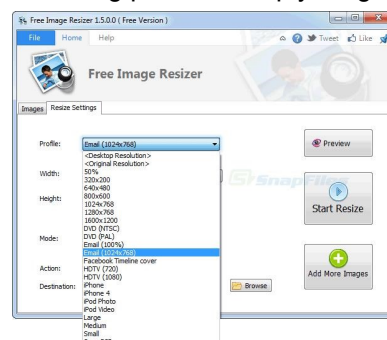
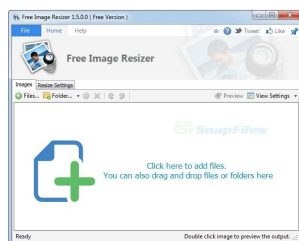
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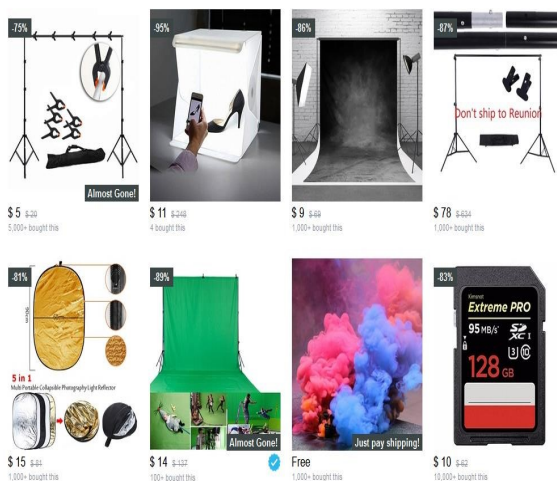
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