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5 tips for photographing pre-dawn landscapes

By Steve Arnold, postprocessingmastery.com



There was a time when I'd come home from most sunrise shoots disappointed.

Why?

Because I didn't like cloudless skies.

And by the time I'd realise the sunrise was going to be a "boring" one, I'd already be out of bed and on the way, so I might as well go through with the shoot. (*Breakfast at a nearby cafe afterwards would be the highlight on these mornings*).

That was until I learned to appreciate shooting pre-dawn.

There's a certain glow that even a cloudless landscape takes on in the half an hour before the sun actually comes up, that I really like.

Like in the photo at the top of this message.

Here are some tips you can follow to get great pre-dawn shots of any landscape:

1: Start shooting 30 minutes before sunrise

Once the sun rises in a cloudless sky, it will be so bright and harshly lit that it loses most of the colour. Your best shots of a cloudless sky will happen between 30 and 10 minutes before sunrise.

2: Shoot slightly away from where the sun is coming up

To capture the nice deep yellows and blues in the sky, keep the brightest part of the sky just out of frame. (*Also for the reason mentioned in tip 4*)

3: Shoot multiple exposures

Even before sunrise, it will still be a high-contrast scene that will probably require bracketed exposures to capture detail in the darkest shadows and the brightest highlights.

4: Create a three-dimensional foreground

Even with the sun below the horizon, the light will still reflect off of objects in the scene. If you're shooting away from where the sun will rise, then see a great three-dimensionality to the objects in your foreground by creating interesting light and shadows. *(Note the bottom-left corner of my shot above as a great example of this)*

5: Process to the darker end of the histogram

Let shadows be shadows. The deep colourful pre-dawn glow will get lost if you process the image to appear bright and vibrant.

It might be tempting to process the foreground brighter (for the detail), whilst keeping the sky darker (for the colour). But try to resist, else it will create an imbalance between foreground and sky and make things look a bit weird.

That said, you can still show lots of detail in the shadows (especially if you've bracketed exposures), just keep them in proportion.

In other words, keep what should be dark, dark and what should be bright, bright.

On that note, to learn the Photoshop techniques that will set you up for success with the multiple exposure blending and processing,

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How to Arrange a Photographic Composition With the Rule of Thirds

by Marc Schenker

Any photographer worth his salt knows about the rule of thirds. Using it to one's advantage to ensure that you get the best possible composition in your frame is another story altogether. The rule of thirds is the tried, tested and true method for making your photographs as visually appealing as they can possibly be. Of course, pictures that visually stand out are going to attract more attention and raise your profile as a photographer. When you think, in compositional terms, about the **rule of thirds**, you can't go wrong. Here's how to make it work for your photos.



Understanding the Rule of Thirds

Let's wrap our photographic heads around the rule of thirds in the first place. Essentially, this rule is based on an imaginary grid that you'll visualize in your mind over any frame. Confused? Don't be. It's really straightforward.

In any frame in your viewfinder, just image the scene being divided into nine, equal parts. Imagine that there are two horizontal and two vertical lines dissecting the frame, thus creating the equal parts. Along these lines is where you want to arrange the compositional elements of your shot to get the most visually appealing results, such as your subjects, objects in the background, etc.

This technique can take some time getting used to, as you'll have to mentally train yourself to visualize this grid in each frame.

Welcome to any new members for this month.



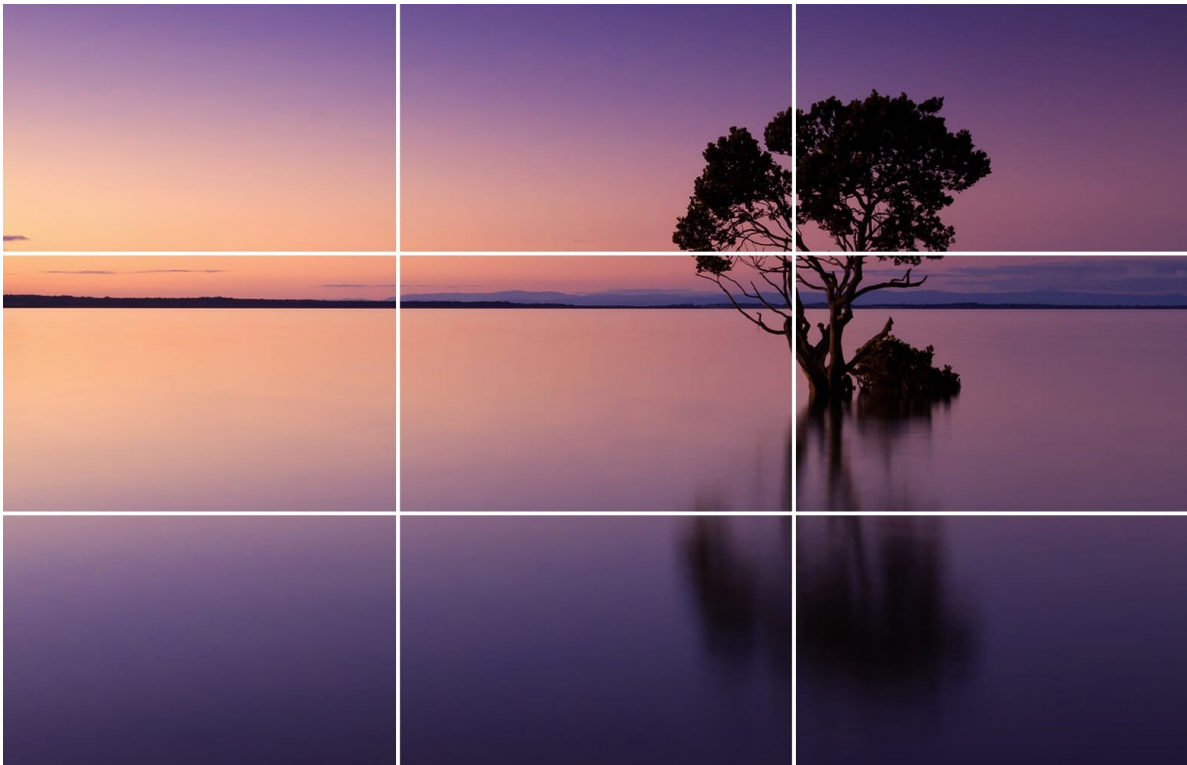
An alternative to doing this all in your head is using a camera that has Live View or grid lines. This feature lets you display the rule of thirds grid right on the LCD monitor of the camera when composing a shot, making it unnecessary to do it all in your head. Some cameras, like the Sony cameras, even have the option to show the grid lines right in the viewfinder.

The Theory Behind the Rule of Thirds

The thinking behind the rule of thirds is simple and straightforward: Objects in your frame that are placed on any of these vertical or horizontal lines (as well as at their intersections) will garner the most visual attention from your viewers. In other words, objects placed at these points will jump out at your viewers more easily, so be sure to place the most important elements in your frame (or the ones you really, really want your audience to notice) at these points.

The reason behind this thinking goes back to design theory. The rule of thirds encourages you to place important elements off-center, and off-center composition immediately creates imbalance and a sense of asymmetry in any frame. As a result, the viewer's eyes more quickly notice this lack of balance than they would if the frame was neatly aligned, and everything was 100% “*perfect*” in the center.

If you've ever taken a long, hard look at images that you've found yourself drawn to, you may've noticed that their subjects and other elements are never, ever right in the middle of the frame! This is not some coincidence; this is done for a reason. It's the rule of thirds at work.



Putting the Rule of Thirds Into Action

Everything you've learnt so far is no good unless you can make it work for you. Applying this rule is actually more intuitive than you may believe, even if you've never done it before. Here's how to proceed.

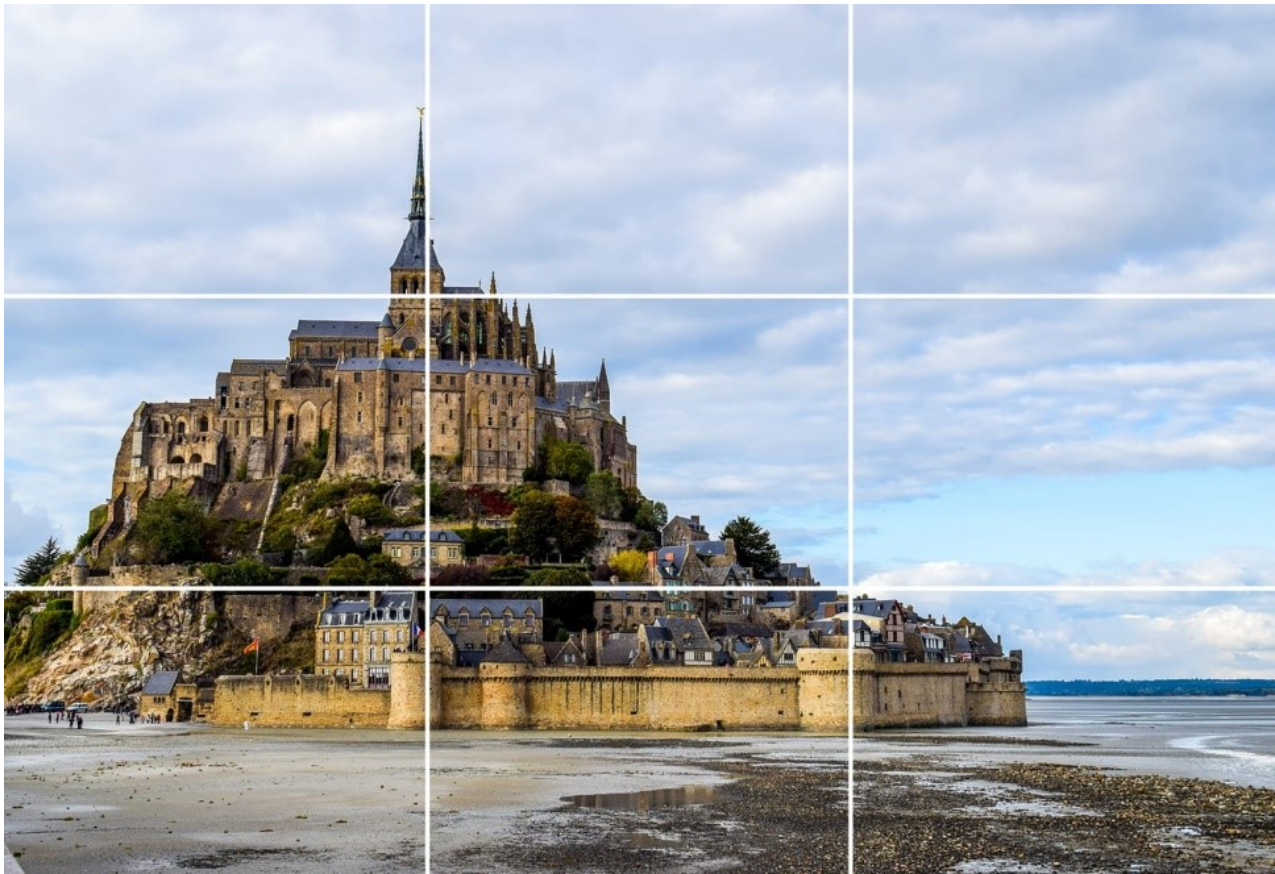
First, you want to analyze your frame. Look for what you consider are going to be the points of interest within the frame. Is it the vibrant fall colors you're shooting? Is it going to be the eyes of a person or people, hinting at the viewers what to look at? Once you have this figured out, you can go on to the next step.

Now, you have to determine what the most important element within the actual shot is going to be. Maybe it's the subject itself if it's a majestic lion, soaring eagle, or other form of impressive wildlife. Maybe it's the horizon line in the background, if your landscape shot just happens to capture a gorgeous sunset over the water. **You're getting the idea:** the most important element can be very subjective and can vary.

You're on a roll. **Here's the finishing touch to your rule of thirds composition:** You have to purposefully position these points of interest and the most important element according to the rule of thirds grid.

If it's a lion, then perhaps put him at one of the grid's intersection points...with a beautiful lake from which he's going to drink maybe placed on the bottom of the two, horizontal lines. If you're ever in a situation in real life where you have the actual opportunity to take a shot like this, then you're already doing something right!

If you're shooting a soaring bald eagle in flight, then try to photograph it when the eagle is at one of the intersection points or along one of the four horizontal and vertical lines on the grid! Trust that the results will be so much better.



Final Takeaways

Be prepared to do a lot of moving around when trying to arrange your frame's elements according to the rule of thirds. Don't be afraid to experiment with different arrangements and placement along the imaginary grid. The more you try things out, the more you'll discover what looks appealing. While it may seem like too much pressure at first to think in this chronology of steps, you'll find that you'll get better at it with practice. Yes, this means taking more things into consideration before pressing down on the shutter button, yet this'll just make you a better photographer. Before long, composing a shot based on the rule of thirds will be as natural to you as taking off the lens cover before shooting.

Better Photos, Better Arrangement

It's simple: You want better photos? Then arrange your compositional elements based on this rule. The go-to rule for photographers and other visual artists for many decades now, the rule of thirds takes advantage of off-center composition to deliver interesting visual treats to your audience. So the next time, instead of just clicking down the shutter button, approach your scene's composition more methodically. When you do, you'll be pleasantly surprised at how your photographs start turning out.

<https://contrastly.com/how-to-arrange-a-photographic-composition-with-the-rule-of-thirds/>

Shutter Speed 101: The Ultimate Beginners Guide!



What exactly is Shutter Speed and how does it affect your images?

Let's start with the very basics. Shutter speed is one of the components of the exposure triangle that ensures your image has great exposure and sharpness or blur. Shutter speed is essentially the length of time that your shutter is open. This can range from a long 30 seconds all the way to a quick 1/1000th of a second. With a DSLR, this is the length of time the sensor in your camera captures the scene. Let's break down the basics of shutter speed, and how different scenarios affect your speed.

Shutter Speed 101: The Basics

The dictionary definition is, "the nominal time for which a shutter is open at a given setting." Still a tad confusing, right? Shutter speed, for all practical purposes, is measured in seconds. You



can set your camera's shutter to be open for a full 30 seconds, all the way to 1/8000th of a second (which is REALLY fast). A higher denomination (say 1/1000th) will freeze your subject in motion, while a slower shutter (2 seconds) may be used to capture the movement of light! The lower shutter speeds will appear as 30" which translates into 30 seconds. The slower the shutter speed, the more light you'll allow into your camera's sensor. Conversely, the faster the shutter speed, the less light will be allowed in, so make sure your aperture and ISO are set to balance this out. Example Shutter Speeds: 1/4000, 1/2000, 1/1000, 1/500, 1/250, 1/125, 1/60, 1/30, 1/15, 1/8, 1/4, 1/2...

How shutter speed affects the sharpness of a photo.



This all depends on what you want to achieve in your image. Do you want crisp sharpness, or do you want to capture movement in your photo (capturing that famous motion blur, like those dreamy waterfall images we've all seen)? For sharp photos, you want to increase your speed, but still maintain balance in your exposure. You can't JUST change your shutter speed and expect your image to maintain exposure. You'll notice that if you JUST increase your shutter from say 1/100th to 1/400th, your image will simply get darker.

Shutter speed and low light conditions.

In the case of low lighting you'll definitely need a longer shutter speed. For example, if you're taking photos of a beautiful cityscape AT NIGHT, you'll need a longer exposure so your camera can accurately capture all the light of the city. Essentially, the longer your shutter is open, the more data it is recording!

Some Quick Tips When Facing Low Light conditions:

- Increase your ISO. This is the easiest way to allow more light into your camera without compromising your shutter speed.
- Use a wider aperture. Using a wider aperture is another way to let more light in. This however, will affect your depth of field, so be sure you are aware of the change!
- Slow down your shutter speed. Slowing your shutter speed (for example, from 1/500th to 1/200th) will allow you to capture more light.

Remember that flash WILL change things. Keep in mind that an on-camera flash will change your exposure. You will need to take some test shots and adjust your settings as necessary to obtain optimal exposure!

You'll also want to take into account camera shake. Camera shake includes the movement of

holding your camera and can even be seen while you have your camera on a tripod and simply push the shutter button. That's while you'll see a lot of night photographers using a tripod AND using a remote shutter trigger. This eliminates that camera shake, giving you more crisp and in-focus images. While many cameras and new lenses are made with internal stabilization, a tripod is still a great tool for anything less than 1/50th of a second. Keep in mind that the longer the lens focal length, the more camera shake you'll likely encounter. You can combat this shake by simply increasing your shutter speed. For tips on how to photograph in low light, like capturing fireworks.



Shutter speed and portraiture.



In most cases related to taking photos of people, you'll want to dial in a shutter speed that's double your lens focal length. That means if you're using a 50mm lens, you'll want your shutter at a minimum of 1/100th of a second. That ensures you'll avoid soft images. For more on portrait camera settings, In the photo above, the shutter was actually slowed down to capture the moving metro, while the woman remained still. That's why she is in crisp focus while the tram shows motion blur! Pretty cool!

Bulb Mode



Some DSLR's give you the option of choosing "bulb mode," sometimes shown on your camera mode dial as the letter "B." This mode will actually allow you to hold the shutter button down for as long as you'd like, and the shutter will stay open as long as your finger is holding it down!

Pretty neat. That means you can leave it open for longer than 30 seconds! Bulb mode is most often used for long exposures at night, fireworks, light trailing (also known as light painting), or if you're lucky, capturing a shooting star. It is typically used in conjunction with a cable release, to avoid having to press the shutter button with your figure for a long 60 seconds!

Whether you're new to photography or a long time professional, understanding shutter speed is one of the most important concepts you can understand. When one element of the exposure triangle is altered, it will affect the other two! Remember that shutter speed is going to change based on the effect you'd like to achieve in your photo. Do you want a crisp image of a athlete (i.e. a fast speed, like 1/1000th), or do you want to capture the motion blur of the ocean, in which case you may want to use bulb mode. Whatever the necessity, practicing is going to be key in getting the perfectly focused image and balanced exposure. Just that is an art in itself! Keep going, friends! It will become second nature soon enough!

<https://www.colesclassroom.com/shutter-speed/>

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Can't-Miss Tips and Tricks to Know Your Subject Better

by Michael Gabriel

There are a lot of things that you can do to make sure that your photos come out exceptionally well.

Most of the time, however, there is one essential aspect that a lot of photographers – especially the new ones – easily forget or take for granted: the subject. To create good images, a photographer should build a connection with the subject. There should be a (working) relationship guided by mutual understanding



Why Is It Important to Know Your Subject

Knowing your subject gives you the opportunity to plan your shots. While it's true that you cannot predict the weather, how much natural light is available, or what your 8-year-old subject would like to do or plan to do, if you know your subject well, you will have an idea of what to expect.

For example, your 8-year-old model loves to play on the swing. If you spent time to get to know the little boy better before the shoot, you'll know this and will try to find a way to shoot where there are swings. Once you are on location, you can prepare yourself for whatever will happen: the little boy can unexpectedly run to the swing upon seeing it and you'll be able to capture this beautifully because **you already expected it from your subject**. In other words, the more you are familiar with your subject, the more chances you have of capturing the best shot and the best moment.

Subject here does not only mean humans. It can also be objects, places, and even events or activities. A good example would be photographing the sunset. If you find time to study the sunset in your area, you'll know which location and time it is best to shoot. In the same manner, if you are shooting swimmers in a swim meet or competition, it would be best to get to know the swimmers/competitors before the event. If this cannot be done personally, there are other ways to do so like watching video clips of their previous competitions and interviews. This will give you an idea how they move in the pool and you can then anticipate your shots.

The best reason why it is important for a photographer to get to know their subject better is to establish a connection, one that will allow them to be comfortable with and around each other. As such, the photographer will be able to exercise photographic creativity well because of the trust afforded by the subject.

When a photographer and subject understand each other, everything will flow well – work becomes more fun and photos come out stunning, as the best moments are easy to capture.

The Tips and Tricks

Here are some simple tips and tricks that can help you get to know your photography subject better.

1. **Do not forget to smile.** A smile is a good icebreaker. Most of the time, people you meet for the first time form their initial impressions about you by observing whether you smile or not. So, please, smile your sweetest smile and let your subject know that you are friendly and can be trusted.
2. **Find a common interest.** If your subject is a celebrity or important personality, find time to research and gather information about the person. Let's say you're photographing a local TV show host. Find essential information about the subject's TV hosting history, endorsements, charities or advocacies supported, interests other than hosting, and future plans. Doing this will help you find details that you can relate with and use for the photoshoot. Looking for a common interest is a good way of establishing a connection.



3. **If you are shooting an inanimate subject, put down your camera and observe your subject.** If your subject is the sunset or a winding trail in a secluded area, find time to be away from your gear. Put down that camera, find an area where you can sit (or stand) comfortably, and observe your subject. Seeing the sunset or the winding trail with your eyes (not through camera lens) will give you an entirely different view. You'll be able to spot little things and discover important details that you can use for the images you are planning to create. Once you've completely absorbed your subject's details, find time to describe it. This will help you find aspects that you can use in telling the story through your photos.
4. **Talk to your subject.** And when you do, do not forget to look at your subject and establish eye contact. Since you already have an idea of what your subject's interests and background are, it will be quite easy to strike up a conversation. You can start by asking, "*How are you feeling today?*" It's a very simple question that can break a lot of barriers. If your subject knows how comfortable you are to talk to, establishing a connection and earning trust points will be easy. **Go out of your comfort zone.** Even if you are not into socializing or you're not comfortable around people you do not know, push yourself to go out of your comfort zone and find the courage to get to know your subjects. It can be two days before the shoot or five minutes before the event. It will be uncomfortable at first, but you'll soon get used to it, especially when you realize how much your subject has come to trust you.



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