

CRITIQUE GUIDE

CRITIQUE BASICS

When critiquing someone's art, there are no set rules. But there are a few things that you can keep in mind to help you along the way. A critique should be helpful and polite to be appreciated.

Interpretation – Everyone has a reaction to what they see. Express to the artist how the image makes you feel...the first impression that you get when you view the image.

Compliment – Let the artist know what you like about the image...build up their self confidence.

Critique – Express something that may help the artist improve in the future. Point out technical issues or things that can be changed easily.

Question – Learn from the artist...ask questions about their technique, their subject, their intention.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN GIVING A HELPFUL CRITIQUE

To give an informed critique, it helps to understand some specific concepts and technical aspects of photography. The remainder of this guide will identify those elements and how they relate to giving an in depth critique. We will first focus on the on the intangibles; concept and creativity. Followed by the technical components; composition, lighting, contrast, depth of field and perspective.

CONCEPT

Most images will evoke some kind of reaction from the viewer. A memory will come forth or a feeling of newness for something never experienced. You will feel warmth and security for something you like and coldness from something that makes you feel uncomfortable.

So, what is the message or theme the photographer is trying to convey? Is the message overt or hidden? What moved them to compose the shot? Do you feel any emotion towards the subject matter? An artist loves to make their viewers think about their art and will enjoy hearing your interpretation.

Things to ask yourself when critiquing an image:

- What am I feeling when I view this image?
- Is there an idea that is being conveyed?
- Do I form a connection to the artist or relate to the image?
- Is there a story that is being told?
- Is the story or emotion being conveyed well by the artist?

CREATIVITY

Creativity (or "creativity") is a mental process involving the generation of new ideas or concepts, or new associations between existing ideas or concepts. (Wikipedia)

When you see a creative image, it stimulates your mind by being both imaginative and original. When you view something that you have never seen before or it is something familiar but seen in a new way...it captures your attention.

Things to ask yourself when critiquing an image:

- What makes this image original or different?
- What about this image makes it stand out from other similar types of images?
- Is there something about this image that makes you wonder "how'd they do that?"
- What about this image caught your eye?

COMPOSITION

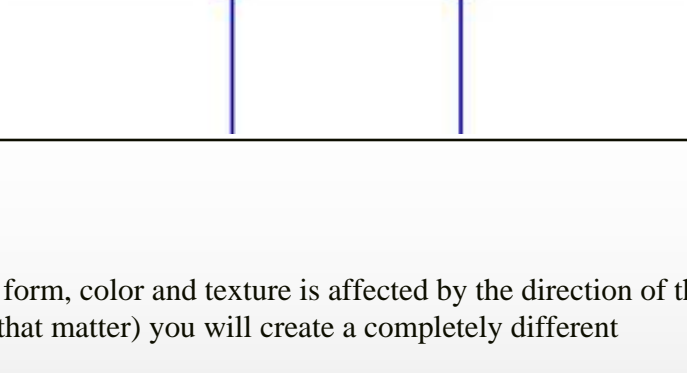
Finding ways to emphasize the subject is all too important in composing an image. Creating a center of interest not only provides a focal point, but it forms the overall theme of the image and its structure.

Another component to composition is organization. What elements the artist decides to leave out is just as important as what is left in. It is necessary to edit even before opening the shutter. The elements in the image are there to strengthen the overall theme, if not they will only serve to diminish it.

Things to ask yourself when critiquing an image:

- Should the artist have gotten closer? Farther away?
- Should they have used a simpler background?
- Would selective focus enhance the subject?
- Does the horizon placement improve the image?
- Do you feel a sense of balance?
- Are all the elements in the image working together?
- Are there elements that should have been edited out?
- Has the artist used the rule of thirds?

The rule of thirds is a simple composition technique to help create a balanced division of space within the frame. Imaginary lines are drawn dividing the image into thirds both horizontally and vertically. You place important elements of your composition where these lines intersect.



LIGHT

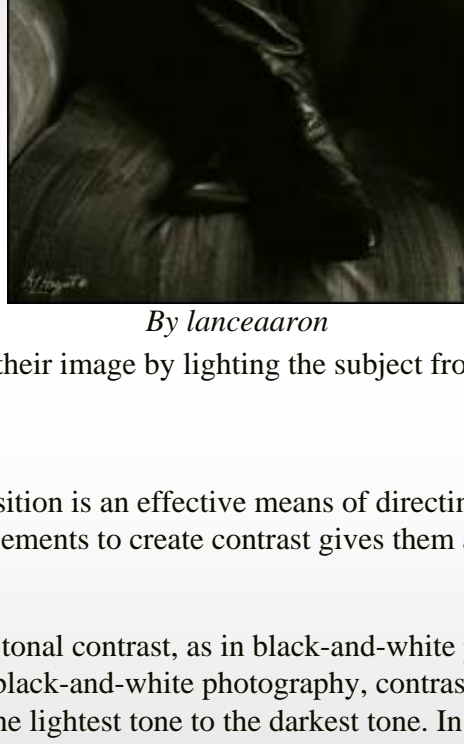
Amazingly, almost every aspect of a subject's shape, form, color and texture is affected by the direction of the light striking it. If you move the subject (or light for that matter) you will create a completely different appearance of your subject.

- Front lighting, generally, does not provide any shadows and can make an image appear quite flat.
- Backlighting can be very dramatic, it allows the artist to create silhouettes from opaque subjects and translucent subjects, tree leaves and people's hair, will take on a glow.
- Lighting from the side will highlight texture, providing shadow and depth to the image.
- Light from above tends to be rather harsh and unforgiving...it's why photographers tend to shy away from shooting when the sun is high in the sky.

There are two types of light.

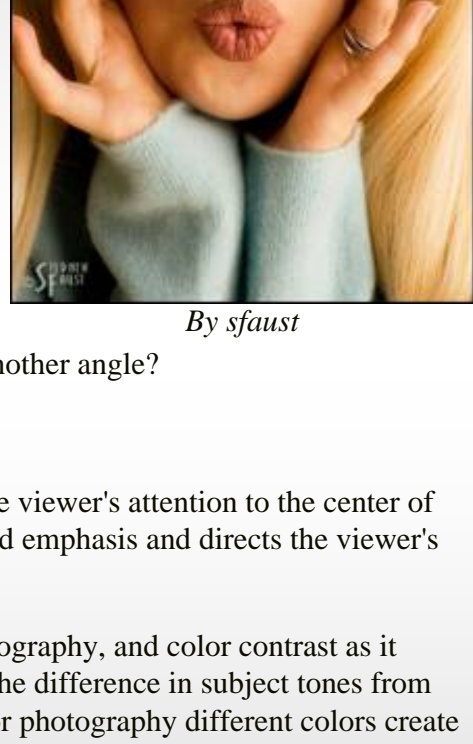
Ambient light is the available or natural lighting which surrounds the subject. Natural light is usually very flattering. The other type of light is artificial lighting, which covers a wide variety of sources, ranging from the continuous photoflood to studio strobes. Artificial light gives the artist a lot of control in which to experiment and find the most favorable look for their subject.

Ambient Light



By lanceaaron

Studio Lighting



By sfaust

Things to ask yourself when critiquing an image:

- Does the lighting enhance the subject? Is it too soft or too harsh?
- Would the artist improve their image by lighting the subject from another angle?

CONTRAST

Contrast in photographic composition is an effective means of directing the viewer's attention to the center of interest. Positioning of subject elements to create contrast gives them added emphasis and directs the viewer's attention.

There are two types of contrast...tonal contrast, as in black-and-white photography, and color contrast as it relates to color photography. In black-and-white photography, contrast is the difference in subject tones from white-to-gray-to-black or from the lightest tone to the darkest tone. In color photography different colors create contrast.

TONAL CONTRAST

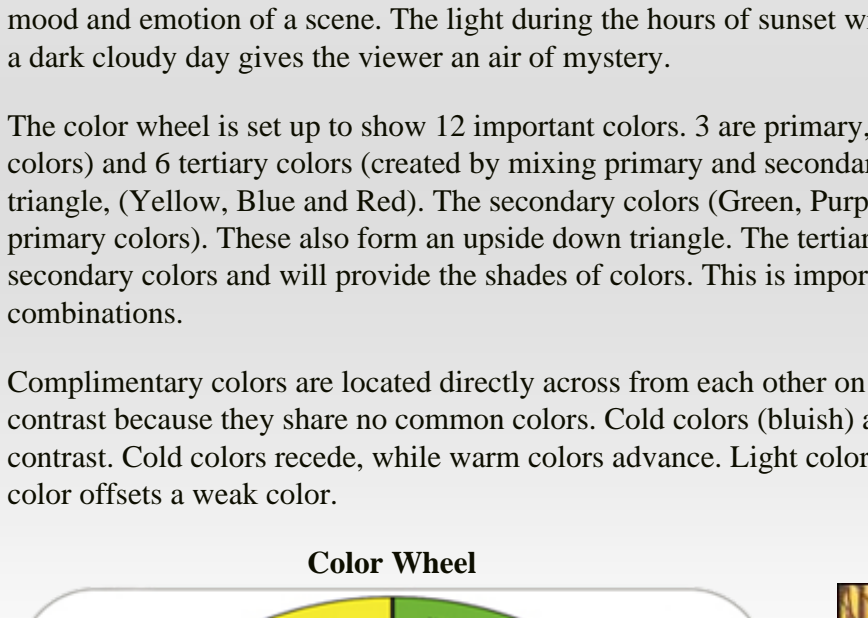
Contrast is the difference between the light and dark areas in a photo. There are three levels of contrast:

High contrast means striking white and black tones, with minimal gray. It can heighten tension or add drama to photos. Look for bright light and shadows for high contrast.

Normal contrast provides the most "realistic" presentation of an image, where some things in the photo are light or white, some are dark or black, and some are in-between, or gray. Contrasts that are strong in color, such as red against green, look about equal in black and white, making for normal contrast.

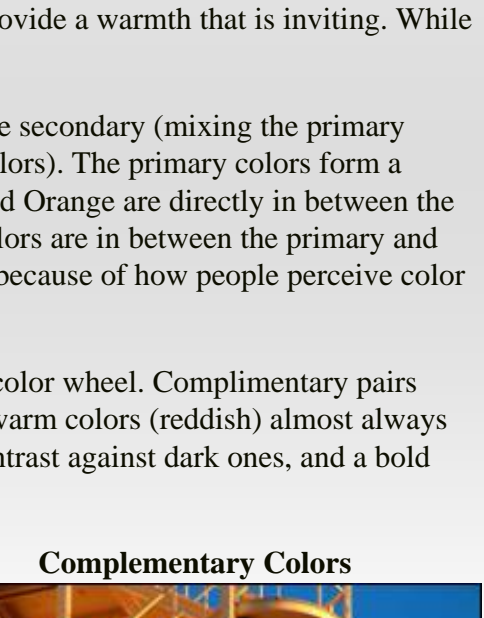
Low contrast keeps tones mostly in the mid-range, so there are lots of grays. Atmospheric weather, such as fog, is perfect for shooting low contrast black-and-white photos.

High Contrast



By imagesbytlp

Low Contrast



By mickeybb

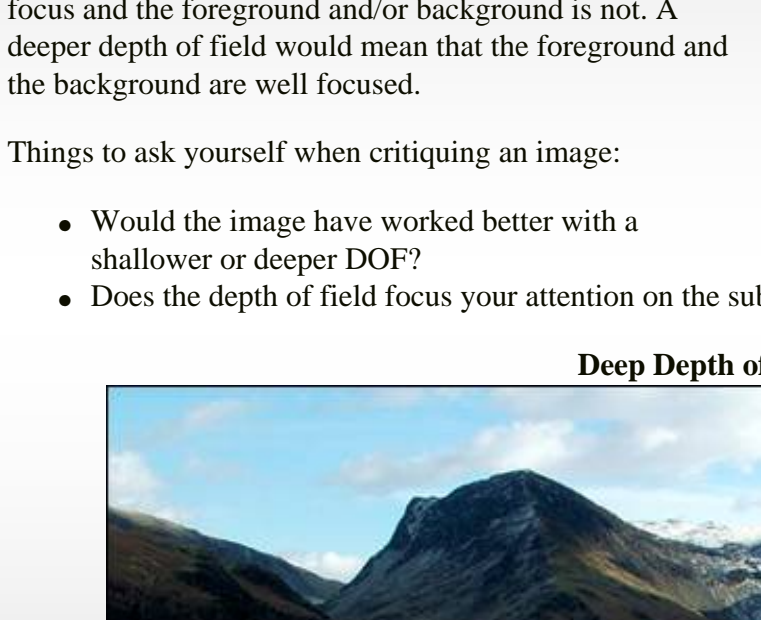
COLOR CONTRAST

Color contrast is an effective compositional element in color photography, just as tone is in black-and-white photography. Colors with opposite characteristics contrast strongly when placed together. Each color accentuates the qualities of the other and makes the color images stand out dramatically. Color also affects the mood and emotion of a scene. The light during the hours of sunset will provide a warmth that is inviting. While a dark cloudy day gives the viewer an air of mystery.

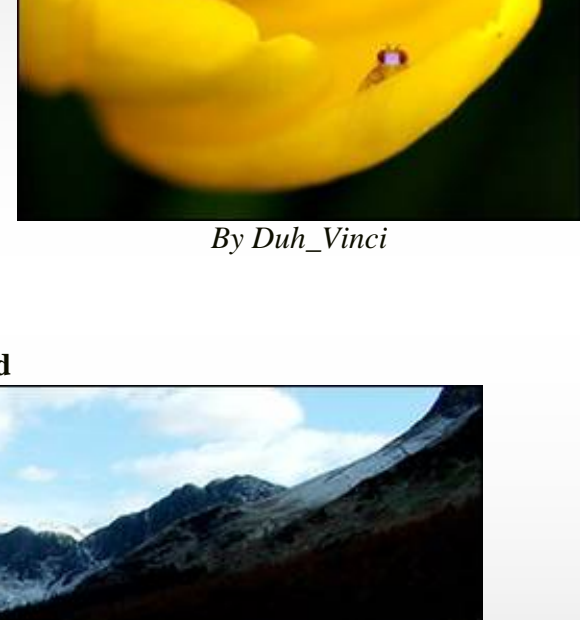
The color wheel is set up to show 12 important colors. 3 are primary, 3 are secondary (mixing the primary colors) and 6 tertiary colors (created by mixing primary and secondary colors). The primary colors form a triangle, (Yellow, Blue and Red). The secondary colors (Green, Purple and Orange) are directly in between the primary colors). These also form an upside down triangle. The tertiary colors are in between the primary and secondary colors and will provide the shades of colors. This is important because of how people perceive color combinations.

Complimentary colors are located directly across from each other on the color wheel. Complimentary pairs contrast because they share no common colors. Cold colors (bluish) and warm colors (reddish) almost always contrast. Cold colors recede, while warm colors advance. Light colors contrast against dark ones, and a bold color offsets a weak color.

Color Wheel



Complementary Colors



By keithbales

Things to ask yourself when critiquing an image:

- Do the colors work with or compete with each other?
- Does the contrast help you to focus on the subject? Or detract from it?
- Do the colors compliment one another?
- Do the colors help to convey the ideas and emotions offered by the artist?

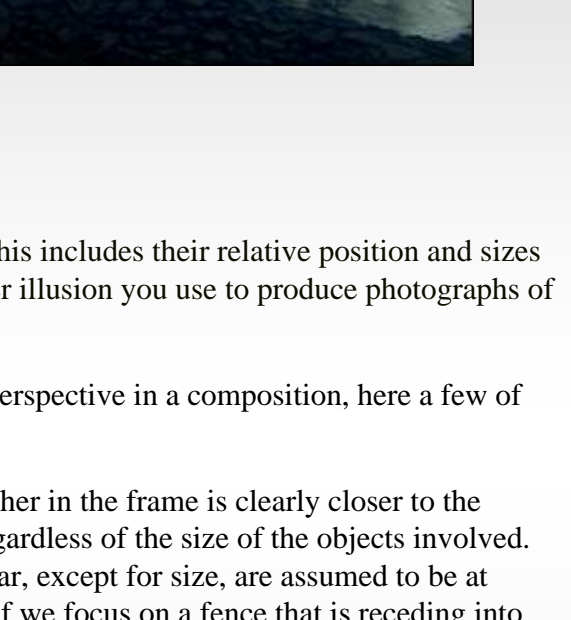
DEPTH OF FIELD

The depth of field is the amount of distance between the nearest and furthest objects that appear in acceptably sharp focus in a photograph. Depth of field (DOF) is the range of distance that is acceptably sharp in an image can be quite subjective. In basic terms, a shallow depth of field would mean that the subject is in focus and the foreground and/or background is not. A deeper depth of field would mean that the foreground and the background are well focused.

Things to ask yourself when critiquing an image:

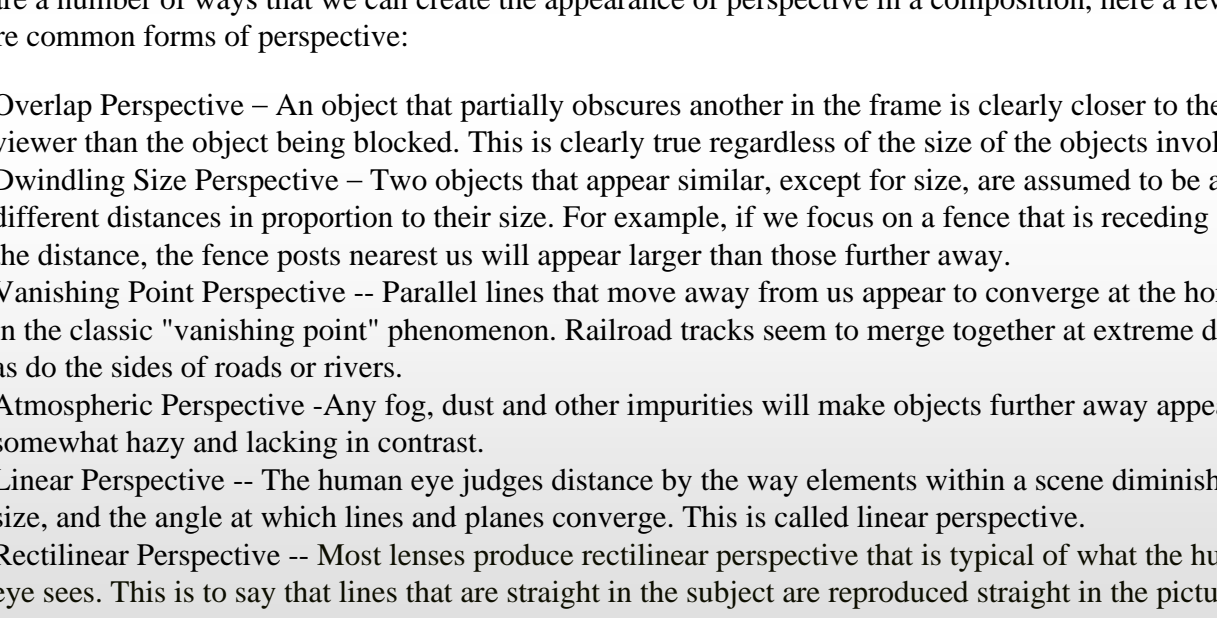
- Would the image have worked better with a shallower or deeper DOF?
- Does the depth of field focus your attention on the subject?

Shallow Depth of Field



By Duh_Vinci

Deep Depth of Field



By Bazza

PERSPECTIVE

Perspective refers to the relationship of objects within an image. This includes their relative position and sizes and the space between them. In photography, perspective is another illusion you use to produce photographs of quality composition.

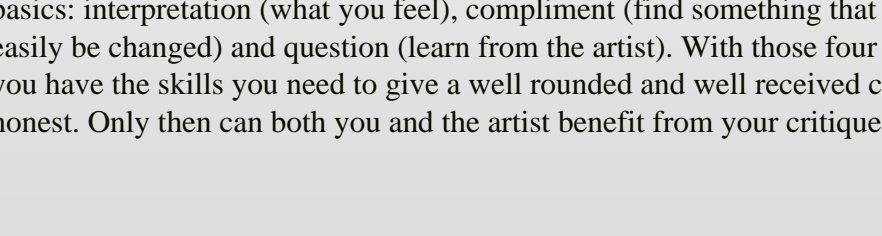
There are a number of ways that we can create the appearance of perspective in a composition, here are a few of the more common forms of perspective:

- **Overlap Perspective** – An object that partially obscures another in the frame is clearly closer to the viewer than the object being blocked. This is clearly true regardless of the size of the objects involved.
- **Dwinding Size Perspective** – Two objects that appear similar, except for size, are assumed to be at different distances in proportion to their size. For example, if we focus on a fence that is receding into the distance, the fence posts nearest us will appear larger than those further away.
- **Vanishing Point Perspective** -- Parallel lines that move away from us appear to converge at the horizon in the classic "vanishing point" phenomenon. Railroad tracks seem to merge together at extreme distance as do the sides of roads or rivers.
- **Atmospheric Perspective** –Any fog, dust and other impurities will make objects further away appear somewhat hazy and lacking in contrast.
- **Linear Perspective** -- The human eye judges distance by the way elements within a scene diminish in size, and the angle at which lines and planes converge. This is called linear perspective.
- **Rectilinear Perspective** -- Most lenses produce rectilinear perspective that is typical of what the human eye sees. This is to say that lines that are straight in the subject are reproduced straight in the picture. Most pictures are made with rectilinear lenses.
- **Height Perspective** -- The place where the base of an object is located on the ground in a picture is a clue to its distance from the camera viewpoint; for example, in a landscape scene, the ground or ground plane rises toward the horizon. The higher up in the ground area of the picture (up to the horizon) that the base of an object is located, the further away it seems from the viewpoint and the greater its height perspective.

Things to ask yourself when critiquing an image:

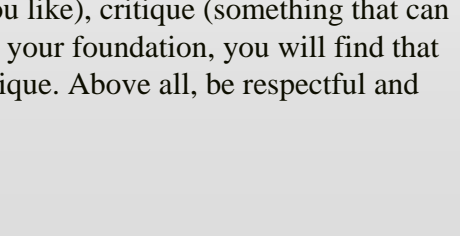
- Does the perspective help with the spatial relations of the subject and the other elements in the image?
- Would changing the perspective make the image stronger?
- Does the perspective distort the subject? If so, does it work?

Height Perspective



By imagesbytlp

Linear Perspective



By JMAC

IN THE END

This guide should be a starting point in how to see an image and give a meaningful critique. (Remember the basics: interpretation (what you feel), compliment (find something that you like), critique (something that can easily be changed) and question (learn from the artist). With those four as your foundation, you will find that you have the skills you need to give a well rounded and well received critique. Above all, be respectful and honest. Only then can both you and the artist benefit from your critique.