An Excellent Photo is "Not About Gear"

Learn how to mix creative skills with camera skills, then add the fundaments of composition, lighting, technique and center of interest to produce more impressive results

All photos © Chane Cullens

Agenda

➢ Creating a photo – vision, prepare, execute

➢ Technique – focusing on focus

➢ Composition – handful of concepts

➢ Center of interest – where to rest your eyes

➢ Lighting – in-camera and post-processing

Chane Cullens – Chane@CCullens.com
Simsbury Camera Club
Feb 2, 2022

Your gear

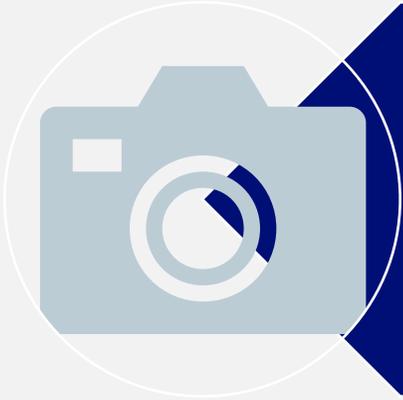Does not – haul itself out of bed before dawn to get a sunrise photo

Does not – climb, hike, crawl, run or drive to the ideal viewpoint

Does not – provide a vision for what is possible

Does not – decide what the composition will be

Does not – understand what is the center of interest
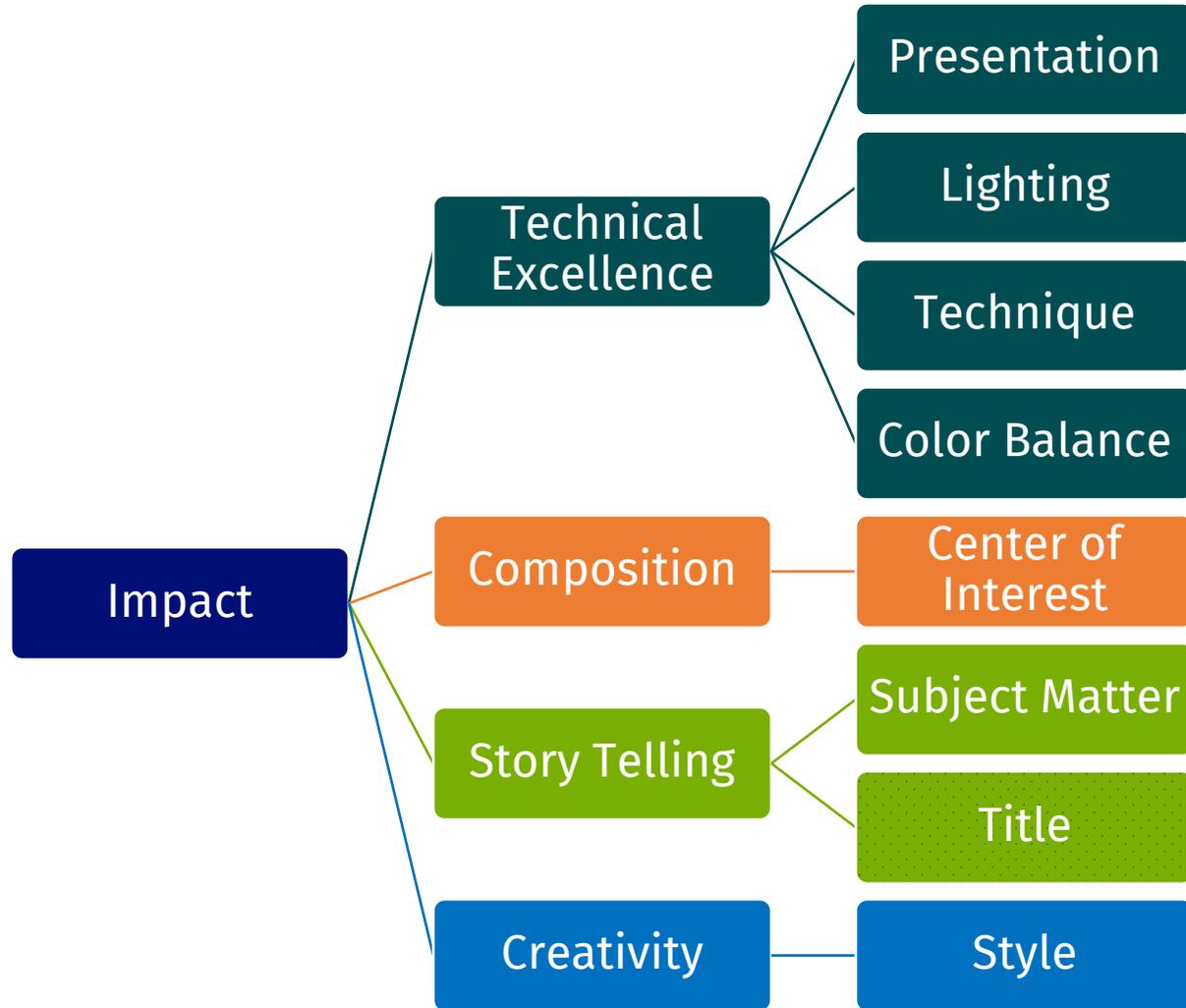
Viewpoint – "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder"

The photographer directs the eye of the beholder to the beauty.

Today we are going discuss how to help everyone see the beauty in the photos you create.

Background – The Elements of an Excellent Photo

```
                          ┌─────────────────┐
                          │  Presentation   │
                          └─────────────────┘
                          ┌─────────────────┐
    ┌──────────────┐      │    Lighting     │
    │  Technical   │──────└─────────────────┘
    │  Excellence  │      ┌─────────────────┐
    └──────────────┘      │    Technique    │
                          └─────────────────┘
                          ┌─────────────────┐
                          │  Color Balance  │
                          └─────────────────┘

    ┌──────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐
    │ Composition  │──────│   Center of     │
    └──────────────┘      │   Interest      │
                          └─────────────────┘
┌─────────┐
│ Impact  │
└─────────┘               ┌─────────────────┐
    ┌──────────────┐      │ Subject Matter  │
    │Story Telling │──────└─────────────────┘
    └──────────────┘      ┌─────────────────┐
                          │     Title       │
                          └─────────────────┘

    ┌──────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐
    │  Creativity  │──────│     Style       │
    └──────────────┘      └─────────────────┘
```
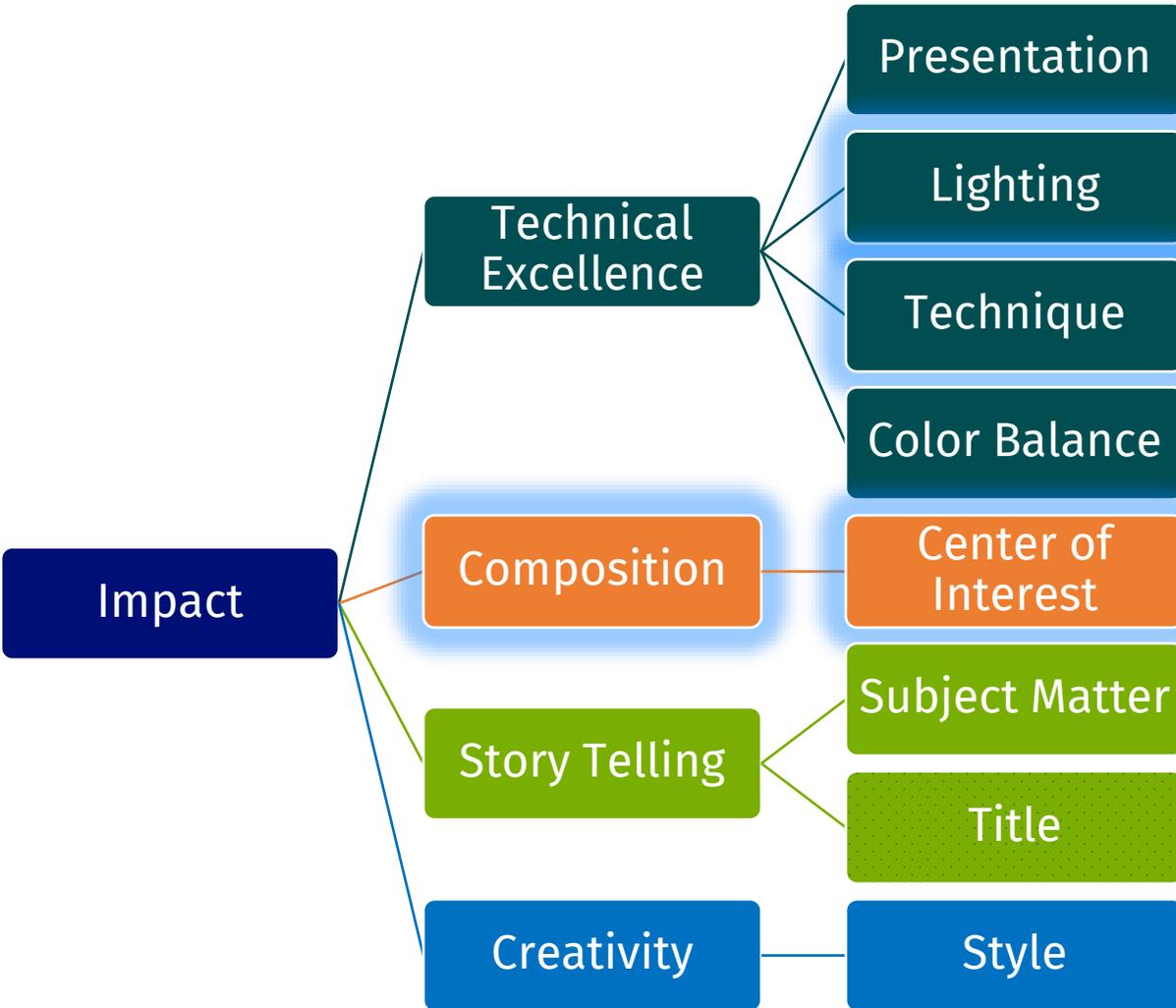
"Any art piece or photograph will reveal some measure of all elements, while a visually superior example will reveal obvious consideration of each one."

Professional Photographer Association - PPA.com
Based on work by the Photographic Exhibition Committee of the Professional Photographer Association on The 12 Elements of a Merit photo.

"Impact is what you get when all the other elements are working together in concert."

Background – The Elements of an Excellent Photo

Impact

Technical Excellence
- Presentation
- Lighting
- Technique
- Color Balance

Composition
- Center of Interest

Story Telling
- Subject Matter
- Title

Creativity
- Style

"Any art piece or photograph will reveal some measure of all elements, while a visually superior example will reveal obvious consideration of each one."

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"Impact is what you get when all the other elements are working together in concert."

Please ask questions at any time!

It's an opportunity for everyone to learn.

?

Grab your camera

It will help to have a camera during this presentation.
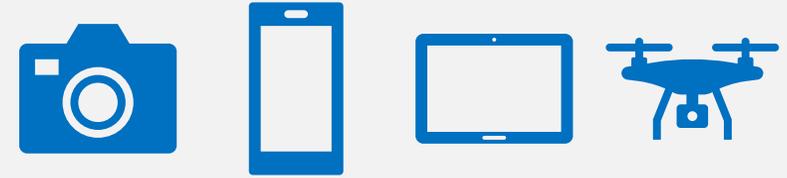
Quick survey

Familiarity with Adjusting Camera Settings

Camera =

If you know how to change the mode on the camera. That is, you know how to change between Auto, or Shutter Speed priority or Aperture number priority?

Raise you hand

For those that know how to change the camera mode, raise your hand if the majority of your photos **do not use** Auto?

Raise you hand

Activities – an opportunity to practice

Hold up your camera?

- How many pieces of gear is that?
- What can go wrong?
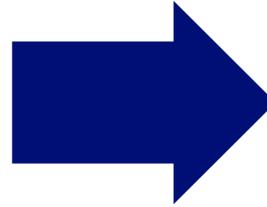
What other gear do you often use?

- Light?
- Tripod?
- Backgrounds?
- A helper?

How many times has your gear outnumbered your ideas?

Gear is a double-edged sword.

Agenda

1. Creating a photo – vision, prepare, achieve

2. Technique – focusing on focus

3. Composition – comfort the mind

4. Center of interest – where to rest your eyes

5. Lighting – in-camera and post-processing

Chane's Rules for Photography

1

Crafting a great photo is not simply math or science

It's art, it's subjective, it's self-expression

2

All photos will benefit from some guidelines

No photo will benefit from every guideline

3

There are no required rules

There are lots of guidelines and an unbounded set of ideas

Ideas for Creating a Photo

Sometimes you're at the at the right place at the right time

However, even then you need think to "**create**" a great photo

Here is a 3-step method to help in creating a photo
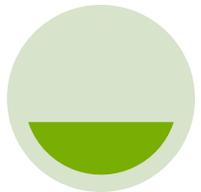
Vision
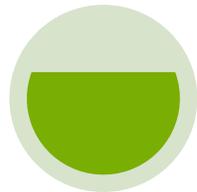
Prepare
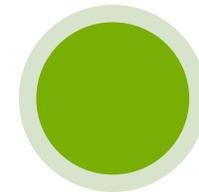
Achieve

Creating a Vision

DEFINE

> ## UNDERSTAND

> ## VERIFY

DEFINE

- "Wow, it's beautiful" is not a vision
- Strive for the clearest possible vision in your mind
- Simple, but clear
- With emotional impact
- What are the top three guidelines to use

UNDERSTAND

- Possible subjects - flowers, water, moon, tree, people?
- What subjects work, what subjects don't work?
- What is the main subject?
- What is the foreground?
- What is the background?
- Audience?
- Why? Why? Why?

VERIFY

- Say it
- Pretend you are explaining your result to an audience
- Evaluate the vision on relevancy to your primary audience
- Get feedback from another person
- Iterate – Try, Learn, Improve

A "Simple Things in Life" Starter Vision

An enjoyable evening watching Netflix

- Feet up relaxing, some candy
- **Composition** – use feet as a leading line
- **Lighting** – dark, the TV, not the room
- **Center of interest** – is not the TV screen

- Then for the next week I tried to
  - Understand details
  - Verify if it makes sense with Rhonda
  - Finding ways to make it better

Vision Discussion

Assignment "Simple Things in Life"

How would you improve this vision?

DEFINE

What impact on the viewer

UNDERSTAND

Subject, Foreground, Background, Focus, Light

VERIFY

How to explain it over the phone

Prepare

Figure out how to create it, in the camera and in post-processing

What weather? What time of year? What equipment?

Cost? Time? Effort? Probability of success?

Knowledge – especially digital darkroom skills required

Honesty – leverage consideration of reality to drive creativity

Achieve

Time is always a limiting factor

Nature may be a limiting factor

Check & recheck equipment list

Plan alternatives

JUST DO IT.

The more times you try the more times you'll like the result

Assignment Knife

Vision: Knife on a cutting board

Prepare: Standing up the knife

Achieve: Boring

Vision: Knife with things you cut

Prepare: Run out and buy some vegetables. Change lighting and surface

Achieve: OK

Vision: Finally realize that adding action is important

Prepare: Move the light over and over

Achieve: ☺

Better vision would have reduced time to finish and stress!

Ideas for Creating Excellent Photos – Summary

Envision the best photo possible from the scene, then figure out how to create it!
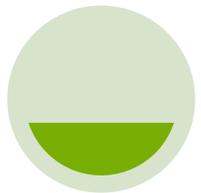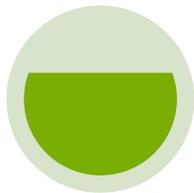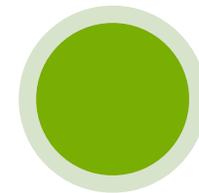
Vision   Prepare   Achieve

Agenda

1. Creating a photo
2. Technique
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5. Lighting

Technique

The approach or perspective used to create the photo

- Focus, posing, angle, capture, posing, expression, skin tones are part of technique applied to a photo
- Including lens, choice of paper, digital noise, mono conversion, texture, sharpening
- Move, change your perspective, learn new ways to control what you capture

Using focus to direct the eye of the viewer

- Camera motion – shake, rattle & roll or steady
- Exposure duration – shutter speed
- Exposure depth of focus (field) – aperture size
- Focus point – choosing what in the scene to focus on
- Post-processing – focus stacking, blurring

Demo – Auto Exposure

Shutter Speed

Aperture

ISO

Av   F4.5   ISO AUTO

‾3..2..1..0..1..2..⁺3

S AWB   ((·)) 1 RAW

AF   SERVO

Q OFF   [9266]

Exposure

Camera Smarts (AI) maintains exposure by auto-adjusting Shutter Speed, Aperture and ISO

Generally, use the Camera Smarts with 1 or 2 of the 3 fixed.

Exposure Compensation adjustment is better than "Manual"

What is the role of the exposure triangle today?

- Leverage the very smart computer inside your camera!

- Mathematical knowledge is greatly diminished with modern cameras

f/22   6400

Decrease focus depth

Brighter exposure

Aperture

ISO

Increase grain

Brighter exposure

Exposure Triangle

Goal

Exposure
- 3. .2. .1. 0 .1. .2. .3 +

f/2.8

Shutter Speed

Brighter exposure

1/2000   1/10

Increase blur from motion or shake

100
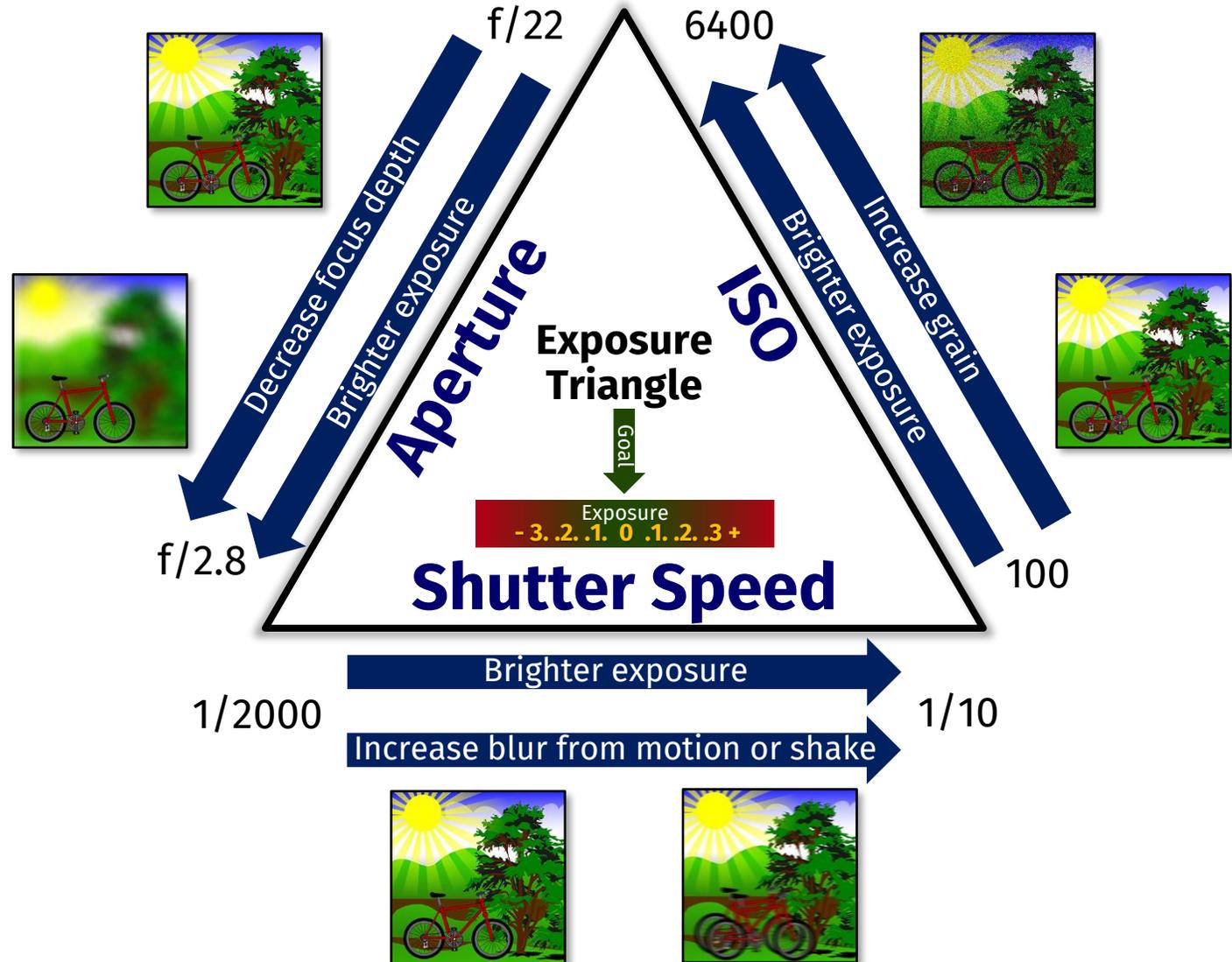
Using focus techniques with Shutter Speed

The freezing of movement or showing blur has a big effect on what and how the photo communicates. Humans are poor a "seeing" motion.

1/640 of a second, f/2.8, ISO 400, 70mm

1/1000 of a second, f/4, ISO 500, 50mm

Activity - Setting the camera mode to "Shutter Priority"

- Choosing a fixed shutter speed and letting the camera automatically adjust aperture & ISO

- Set your camera priority to Shutter Speed

Nikon – "S"
Canon – "Tv"

Android
ProCam X Lite
(free)

Fujifilm – "S"

Creative Zone
These modes give you more control for shooting various subjects.

P : Program AE (p.86)
Tv : Shutter-priority AE (p.110)
Av : Aperture-priority AE (p.112)
M : Manual exposure (p.115)
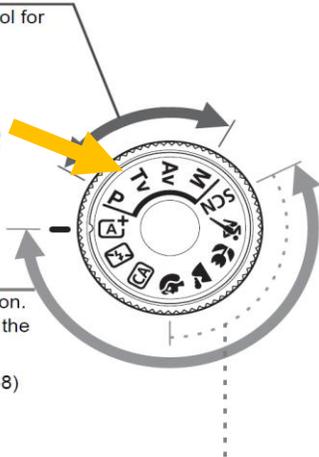
Basic Zone
All you do is press the shutter button. The camera sets everything to suit the subject or scene.

A⁺ : Scene Intelligent Auto (p.58)
⚡ : Flash Off (p.63)
CA : Creative Auto (p.64)
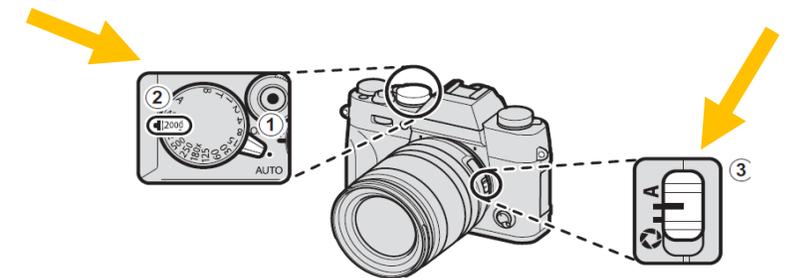
Auto | shutter 1/718.2s

WB auto | F Auto | EV | ISO 1600 | S 1/718.2s

Adjust settings as follows:
① **Auto mode selector lever:** ●
② **Shutter speed:** Choose a shutter speed
③ **Aperture:** A (auto)

Activity – In "Shutter Priority" mode change shutter speed

Leave your flash turned off.

1. Take a photo around 1/125 of a second
2. Then take a photo at 1/8
3. Then take a photo at 1/1000 (if possible)
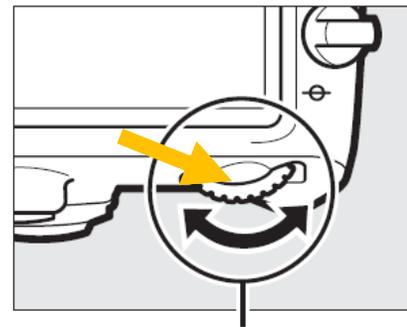4. Review the photos. What visually has changed?

Fun fact

A 60 mph car travels 1 inch in 1/1000 of a second

Canon – "Tv"

● Turning the < > dial to the right sets a faster shutter speed, and turning it to the left sets a slower one.
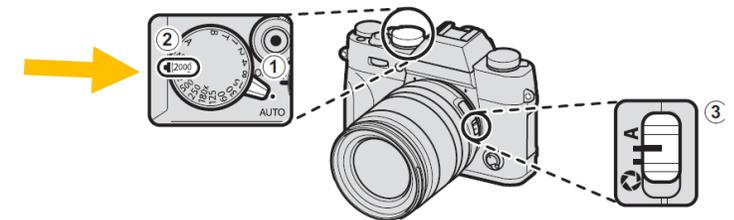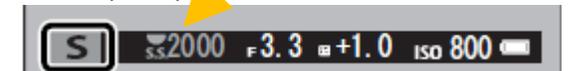
Tv ◄ 1/125 ►

-3..2..1..◌..1..2.
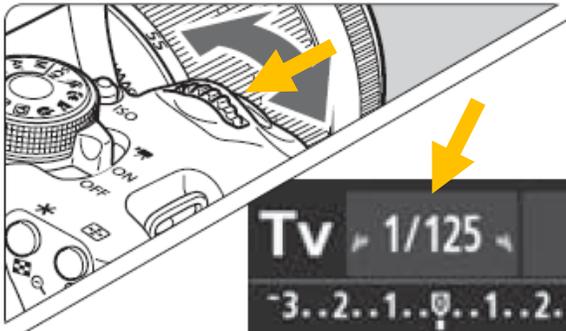
Nikon – "S"

Main command dial

1/250 F4   ISO 100   [1.8]k

Fujifilm – "S"

Adjust settings as follows:
① Auto mode selector lever: ●
② Shutter speed: Choose a shutter speed
③ Aperture: A (auto)

S   ss2000 F3.3 +1.0 ISO 800

Using focus techniques with Shutter Speed – Part 2

- What freezes movement?

Hummingbird wings	1/4000	Soccer, horses	1/500
Birds in flight	1/2000	Walkers	1/250
Trains, autos, bikes	1/1000	Landscapes	1/125

- How do you freeze a moving subject and "motion blur" the background?

  - Panning – move the camera sync'd to ⓘ subject

- What if you want the water to be blurred to look silky, but everything else in focus? ⓘ

  - Slow shutter speed (1 sec)

© Rhonda Cullens

1/1000 of a second, f/4.5, ISO 1000, 70mm

Using focus techniques with Aperture

Your eyes skip right past blurred areas to the sharply focused areas

What aperture creates the best focus for your photo?

- It depends on your vision for the photo There is no magic aperture value
- Rule of thumb – a little in focus, a little aperture number, a lot in focus, a large aperture number

What if you want subject, foreground and background all in focus?

- In-camera, Rule of thumb is about 1/3 past the foreground ("hyperfocal distance") ⓘ
- Post-processing, use "focus stacking" – take multiple photos at difference focus points ⓘ

1/500 of a second, f/6.3, ISO 800, 400mm

Activity – Setting the camera mode to "Aperture Priority"

- Choosing a fixed aperture opening and letting the camera automatically adjust shutter speed & ISO

- Set your camera to use Aperture size as the top priority (see photos below, ask for help)

Canon – "Av"

Nikon – "A"
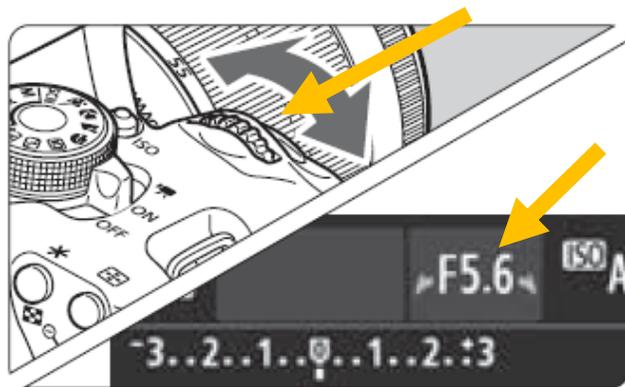

Fujifilm – "A"

Adjust settings as follows:
1. **Auto mode selector lever:** ●
2. **Shutter speed:** A (auto)

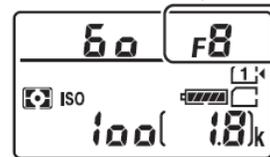**Aperture:** Select ⟳ and rotate the lens aperture ring to adjust aperture
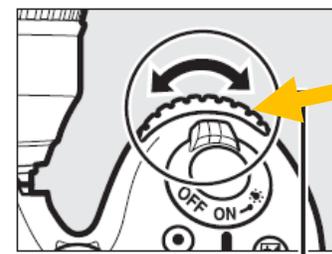
Activity - In "Aperture Priority" mode change aperture

1. Take a photo around f/4 (whatever is the smallest number for your lens)
2. Then take a photo at f/8
3. Then take a photo at f/22 (whatever is the largest number for your lens)
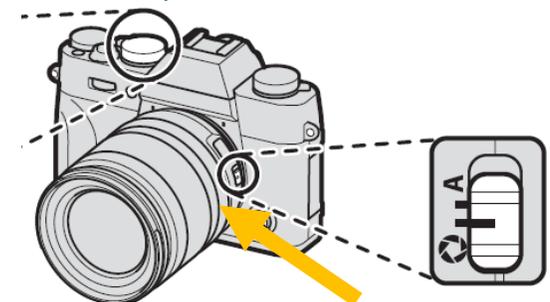4. Review the photos. What visually has changed?

Canon – "Av"

Nikon – "A"

Sub-command dial

Control panel

Fujifilm – "A"

Aperture: Select ◐ and rotate the lens aperture ring to adjust aperture

Agenda

1. Creating a photo
2. Technique
3. Composition
4. Center of interest
5. Lighting

5

Minutes Left

Agenda

1. Creating a photo

2. Technique

3. Composition

4. Center of interest

5. Lighting

4

Minutes Left

Agenda

1. Creating a photo

2. Technique

3. Composition

4. Center of interest

5. Lighting

3

Minutes Left

Agenda

1. Creating a photo

2. Technique

3. Composition

4. Center of interest

5. Lighting

2

Minutes Left

Agenda

1. Creating a photo
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5. Lighting

1
Minutes Left

Agenda

1. Creating a photo

2. Technique

3. Composition

4. Center of interest

5. Lighting

30

Seconds Left

Agenda

1. Creating a photo

2. Technique

3. Composition

4. Center of interest

5. Lighting

Composition

Bringing all the visual elements together to express the purpose

- Holds the viewer in the photo and prompts the viewer to look where the creator intends
- Do you follow the standard rules of composition? When do you break them to enhance the photo?
- Don't break the rules just to be cool, only use it if it enhances the photo

Let me count the many "guidelines"

Balance
Centered/Symmetry
Color combinations
Depth
Distance
Fill the Frame
Framing
Isolate the Subject
Juxtaposition
Leading Lines
Left to Right
Patterns & Texture
Points
Rule of Odds
Rule of Thirds
Shapes – diagonals, triangles, golden ratio
Simplicity & Minimalism
Space – positive, negative, breathing
Tone
…
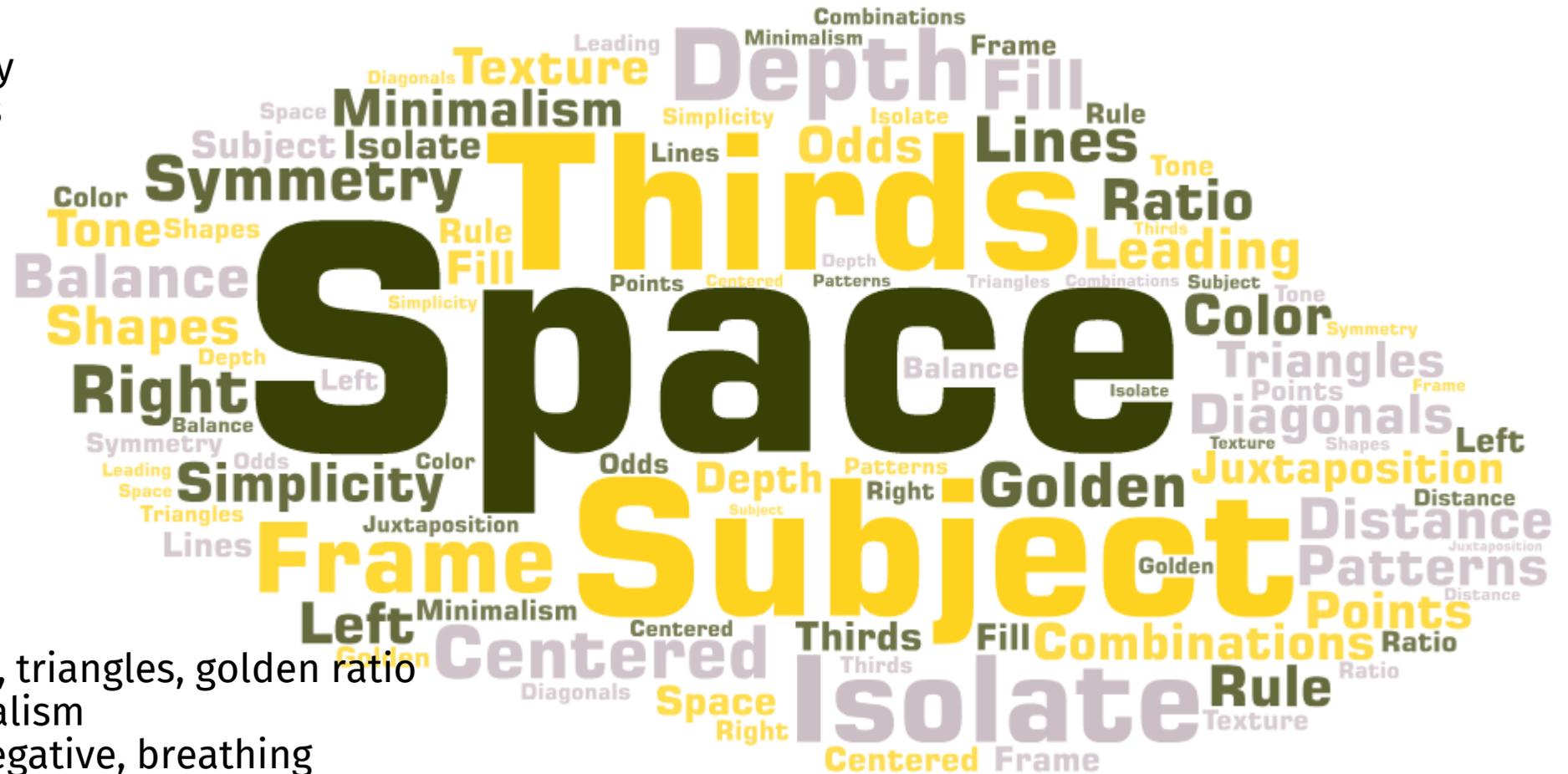
Composition – Leading Lines

Leading Lines
Use a line to lead the viewer to the most interesting item
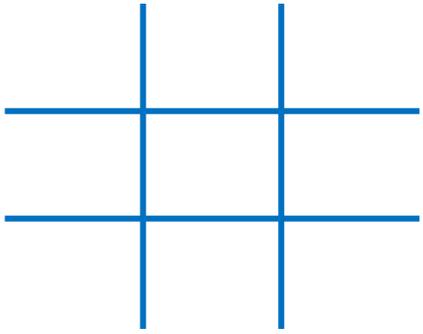

10 seconds, f/9, ISO 400, 24mm

Composition – Rule of Odds

Rule of Odds
For visual balance and harmony use 1, 3 or 5 items

1/1600 of a second, f/2.8, ISO 400, 400mm

Composition – Rule of Thirds

Rule of Thirds
Place the most interesting item on the lines or intersection

1/500 of a second, f/7.1, ISO 100, 300mm

Composition – Motion space and negative space

Motion space for the hawk to move into

Leaving Space
Breathing room and implied motion

Negative space can provide balance or context to the subject

© Rhonda Cullens

1/640 of a second, f/4.0, ISO 400, 300mm

Composition – Summary
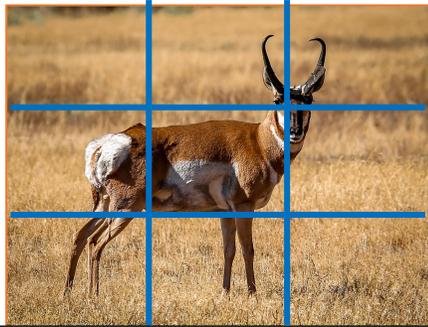
Rule of Thirds
Place the most interesting item on the lines or intersection

Leading Lines
Use a line to lead the viewer to the most interesting item

Rule of Odds
For visual balance and harmony use 1, 3 or 5 items

Leaving Space
Breathing room and implied motion

Is composition an in-camera or post-processing activity?

- Answer = Both

- Leave room when you frame a photo for post-process cropping and straightening

Cropping tools often display Rule of Thirds

Windows 10 Photo app
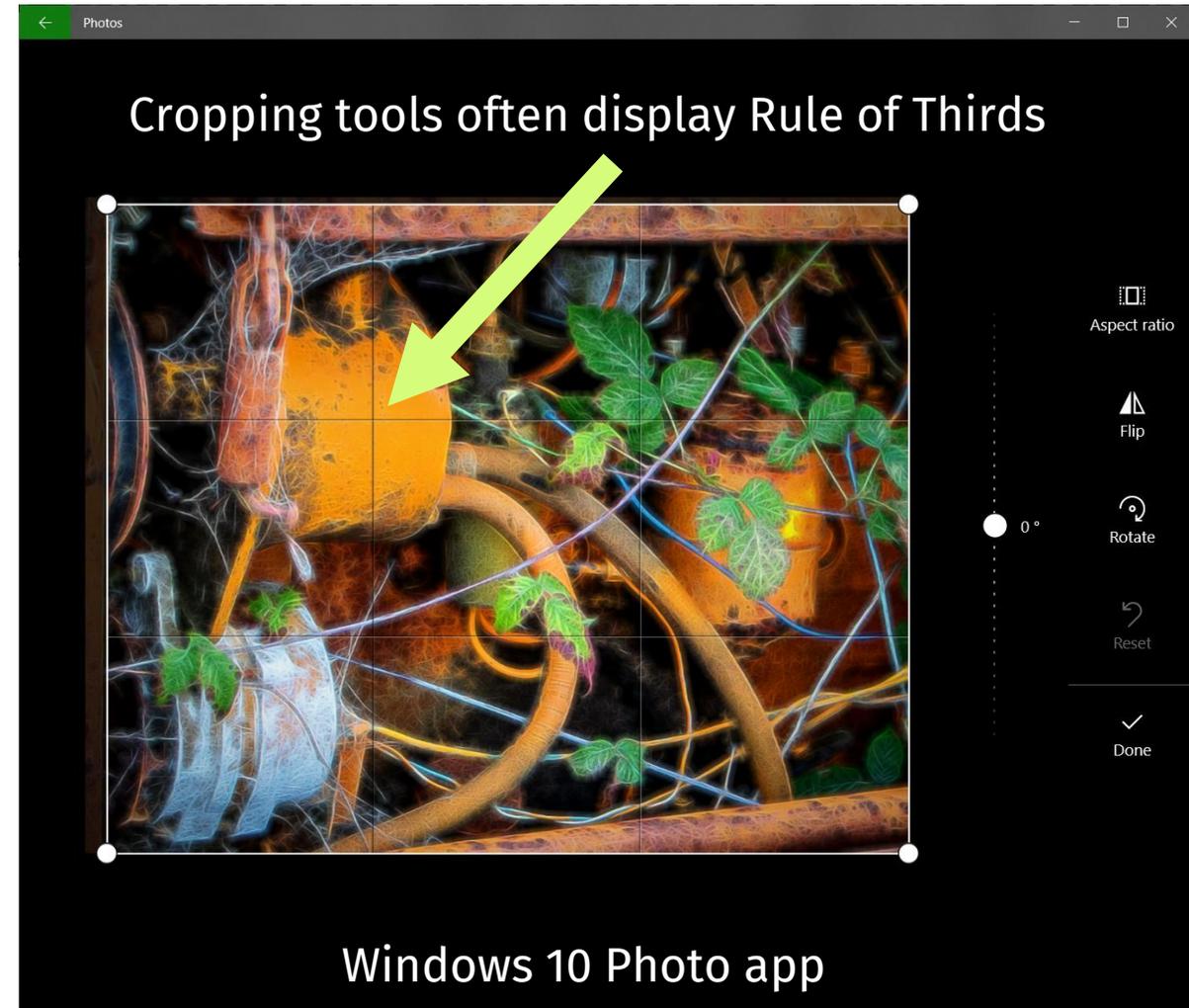
What composition guidelines are used in this photo?

Space?
Rule of thirds?
Rule of odds?
Leading lines?

Any composition guidelines in this photo?

Space

Large factor in layout

Any composition guidelines in this photo?

Thirds

No

Any composition guidelines in this photo?

Any composition guidelines in this photo?

Two routes to the action

Agenda

1. Creating a photo
2. Technique
3. Composition
4. Center of interest
5. Lighting

Center of Interest

The point or points where the viewer should stop as they view photo

- Can be subtle or strong, regardless, they allow the eyes to pause in preconceived areas
- Occasionally there will be no specific center of interest (scene is the center, beautiful forest)
- Or there may be two, primary and secondary. Two primary centers of interests may confuse people.

Center of Interest – a natural place for your eyes to rest

- Does not need to be a spectacular subject

- Does not need to be huge, only large enough for the viewers eyes to rest on

- Play with the background, eliminate areas that draw the eye away from the center of interest

- Multiple points of interest may lead to the center of interest
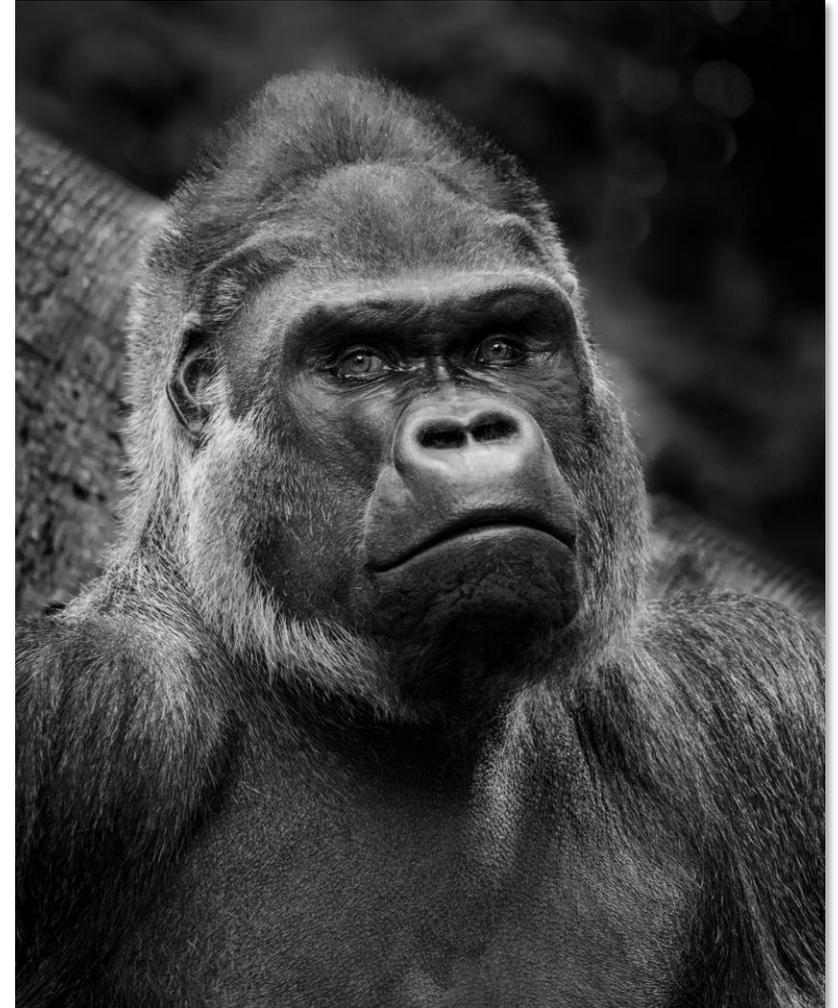
1/125 of a second, f/5.6, ISO 3200, 371mm

Activity – Focus Point Control

- "Autofocus" single, continuous, manual, tracking, zone, wide, AI Servo … 30 pages for your 400 page manual ☹

- Single topic here is move the single point of focus to a different location

- Usage case: Rule of Thirds + Center of Interest may not be the center of the frame

- Chane tip – set default autofocus point to high center to keep feet in the photo when focusing on the eyes

Fujifilm

Generally, a tap on the camera screen works

SINGLE POINT

Select focus point
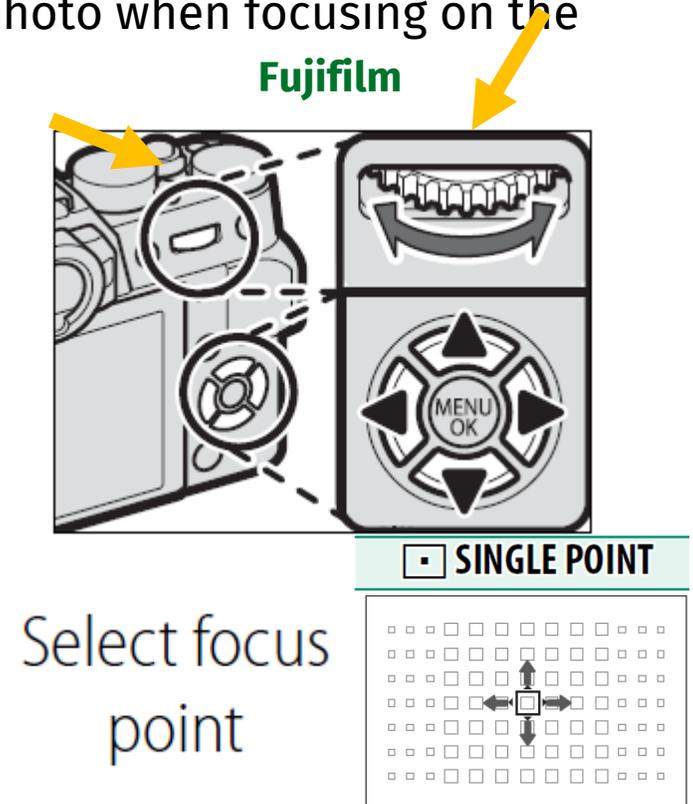
Agenda

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Lighting

Defines dimension, shape and roundness in a photo

- The strength of your subjects should be portrayed by the strong lighting choices you utilize
- Light from artificial, natural or added in post-processing, proper use enhances a photo
- Light also impacts the color of a photo because in low light human perception is monochrome

Lighting the cookies

This is not needed!

This was used,
headlamp over chair
with a piece of tape
to create a tiny light

Using light to direct the eye of the beholder

- Brightness draws the eye of the beholder

- Natural – ever changing, golden hour (30 minutes), ideal, hard to control

- Artificial – configurable, DIY options (lamp, white sheet over a window, holiday lights)

- Post-processing – easy to adjust overall light, harder to light specific items

Natural

Artificial

Post-processing

After dark can be magical!

Where is the light coming from in relation to your scene and to your camera?

How strong is the light? Is it diffused (sun behind a cloud), are there many sources (multiple windows)

What color is the light? Bright white from snow, more yellow at sunset, more blue right after sunset

How to change the light? Wait, change the scene angle, move to a new location (under a tree), artificial light ...

Rule of thumb – start with the light at your back, then move and evaluate other angles
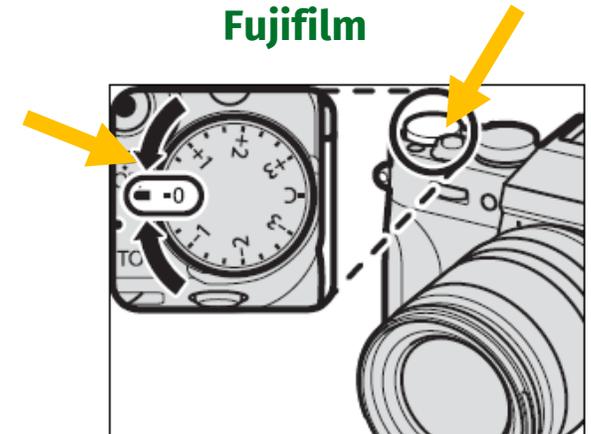
Ask yourself:
Would different lighting work better?

30 sec, f/9, ISO 100, 34 mm

Last Activity – Under and Over Exposing in-camera

- Take a photo underexposed by 2. Underexpose is to the left of center.

- Now a photo overexposed by 2

- Review the photos

- When might you under or over expose a photo? Snow – try under or over exposing by 1

Canon

Nikon

Fujifilm
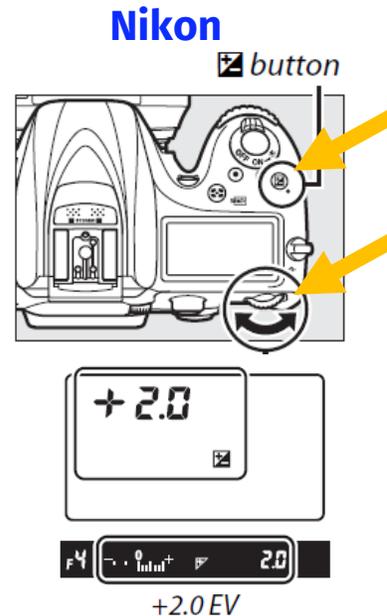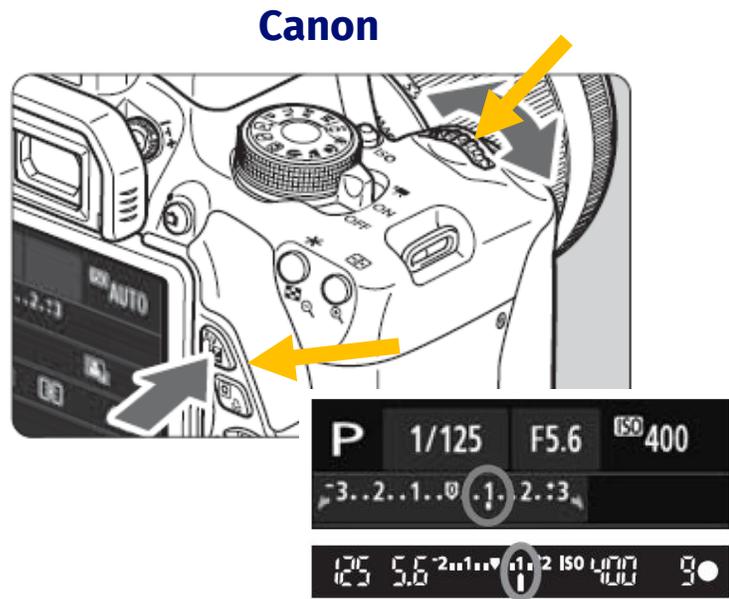
Rotate the dial to choose an exposure compensation amount.

Using a Vignette to light center of int

- If the edges have bright areas distract from the Center of Interest, use a dark vignette to remove the bright outside area
- Most post-processing apps have a vignette tool
- Example using the Windows 10 Photos app

Windows 10 Photos app
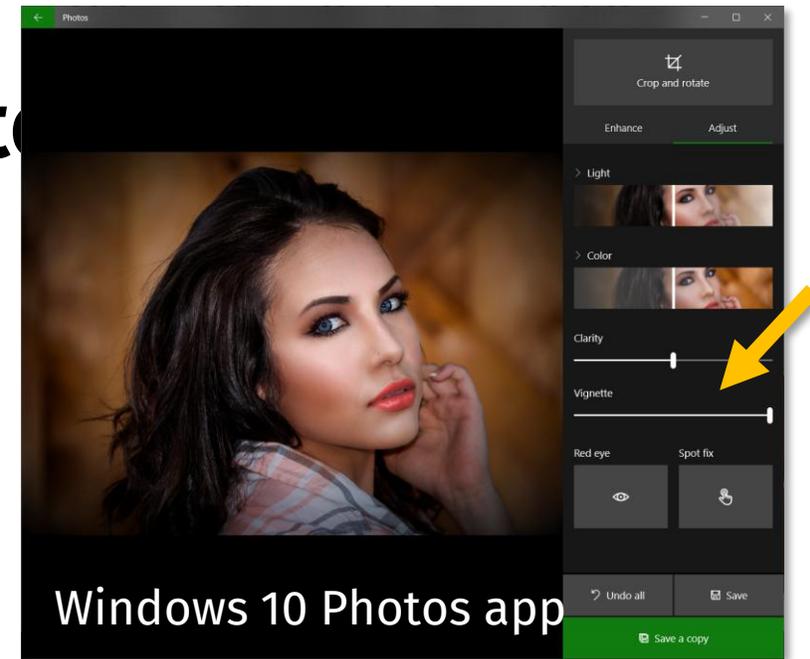
With no vignette

A light vignette

A heavy vignette

Use vision and camera skills with the fundaments of composition, lighting, technique and center of interest produce more amazing results.

Questions?

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Presentation – CCullens.com/gear

Professional Photographer Association, The 12 Elements of a Merit photo – First 6

Impact – The sense one gets upon viewing a photo for the first time

- Impactful photos evoke laughter, sadness, anger, pride, wonder or another intense emotion
- There can be impact in any of these 12 elements
- This is the eye candy, the wow factor. It is the reason we love the photo. It moves us. We look inwards.

Technical Excellence - The quality of the photo itself as it is presented for viewing

- Lighting, focus, exposure, camera motion, printing, mounting, color, retouching, manipulation …
- The nuts and bolts of photography. Be wary of going too far with adjustments
- It's what makes you a pro. Lack of it can ruin a great scene.

Creativity - Fresh expression of imagination to convey an idea, message or thought

- It's looking at an ordinary subject and finding an extraordinary way to portray it
- In photographic competitions, you may get bonus points for creativity and originality
- There are classic photos we have all seen, use creativity to differentiate yourself

Style - A specific genre or recognizable characteristic to showcase an artist

- Has a positive impact when the subject matter and the style are appropriate for each other
- Your work can be anything from traditional to surreal, candid to abstract, hard or soft light
- Use light or color in a distinct way, a blue tone in monochrome, high saturation, consistent angle

Composition - Bringing all the visual elements together to express the photo's purpose

- Holds the viewer in the photo and prompts the viewer to look where the creator intends
- Do you follow the standard rules of composition? When do you break them to enhance the photo?
- Don't break the rules just to be cool, only use it if it enhances the photo

Presentation - Affects a photo by giving it a finished look

- The mats and borders used should support and enhance the photo, not distract from it
- Applying digital borders, customized for each photo, can either make or break your photo
- Making sure there is no dust (digital or analog) or scratches showing on the photo

Professional Photographer Association, The 12 Elements of a Merit photo – Last 6

Color Harmony - Color tones working together enhance the emotional appeal

- Color harmony is not always harmonious and can be used to evoke diverse feelings for effect
- Are your colors and corrections pleasing to the eye? Do they look like they belong together?
- Color harmony can be used to supply a structure to a photo

Center of Interest - The point or points where the viewer should stop as they view the photo

- Can be subtle or strong, regardless, they allow the eyes to pause in preconceived areas
- Occasionally there will be no specific center of interest (scene is the center)
- Or there may be two, primary and secondary. Two primary centers of interests may confuse the viewer.

Lighting - Defines dimension, shape and roundness in a photo

- The strength of your subjects should be portrayed by the strong lighting choices you utilize
- Whether the light applied is artificial, natural or added in post-processing, proper use enhances a photo
- Light also impacts the color of a photo because in low light human perception switches to monochrome

Subject Matter – Should always be appropriate to the story being told in a photo

- Keep it interesting and appropriate. Pretty doesn't mean it's right.
- Subject matter is sometimes linked to the competition category or photo title
- Not everyone will inherently understand your subject, use additional elements to help the viewer

Technique - The approach or perspective used to create the photo

- Focus, posing, angle, capture ... are part of the technique applied to a photo
- Including filters, lens choice, a certain style such as forced perspective
- Move, change your perspective, learn new ways to control what you capture

Storytelling - The photo's ability to evoke imagination

- Take a step back to see what kind of stories your photos can create
- One beautiful thing about art is that each viewer might create their own message or story
- Take a step back and look at the photo as if it is your first time, find the story and make it noticeable