PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION
For Beginners
**INTRODUCTION**

Materials

- Student booklets
- Teacher’s guide
- Photographic Composition CD (Instructor’s copy)
- Photographic Composition CD (Student’s copy)

Preparations

- Duplicate student booklets
- Copy the folder, Photographic Composition from the CD (Student’s copy) onto the students’ computers.
- Copy the folder, Photographic Composition from the CD (instructor’s copy) into instructor’s computer.

Procedures

A. Gain student attention

- Show the three photographs from the folder labeled as Introduction from the CD (Instructor’s copy).
- Ask the students what they like or dislike about each of the photographs. Do not discuss the content. Focus on the layout and characteristics like color, lines, shape or pattern.
Some discussion points:

Photo 1: Road leads the eye into the photograph; color; contrast between the sky and road.

Photo 2: Color of the landform against the blue sky; graphic shape of the landform.

Photo 3: Lines leading into the sky; dramatic and accentuate the building.

Tell students that the photographs feature some of the principles and design elements that are taught in this unit.

B. Introduce the topic on photographic composition

- Tell students that this unit is on photographic composition for beginner photographers. They will learn the basic principles of design, three design elements and the use of color that will help them compose a better photograph.
- Hand out the student booklets.
- Tell students that the booklet consists of text, examples and practice exercises.

C. Get students to read the student booklet

- Tell students to read the Table of Contents and the Introduction on page 1 of the student booklet.
- Have the students to read the objectives. Page 2 of booklet.
- Tell students that at the end of this unit they will be able to apply the principles and design elements to their photography.
LESSON 1  PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN IN PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION

Objective  Given a series of photographs, learners will identify and apply the three golden principles (rule of thirds, golden triangle and golden spiral).

Materials

- Teacher’s guide
- Student booklets
- Photographic Composition CD (Instructor’s copy)
- Photographic Composition CD (Student’s copy)

Procedures

A. Introduce the lesson – Principles of Design

- Tell students the lesson is on principles of design in photographic composition. The principles are the golden section / mean, the rule of thirds, the golden triangle and the golden spiral.

B. Present the principle of golden section / mean

- Have students read the golden section / mean on page 3 of the student booklet.
- Show the golden section, Figure 1

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Figure 1  Golden Section

Figure 2  Parthenon, Athens
- Mention that artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and George Seuret used the *golden mean* principle to construct their art works. The Parthenon in Athens and Keops in Egypt are examples of the golden section used in architecture. The *golden section* is regarded as the most perfect form – a divine proportion. Show Figure 2.

- Show the *golden section* / *mean* and demonstrate how it is derived. Draw the *golden mean*.

![Figure 3 Constructing the Golden Section](image)

1) Draw a perfect square (marked blue in diagram)
2) Divide the base of the square into two equal parts, shown as point x.
3) Take point x as the middle of a circle with a radius of the distance between point x and y.
4) Extend the base of the square till it hits the circle at point z.
5) The square can be transformed to a rectangle with a proportion ratio of 5:8. The ratio of A to C is the same as the one from B to A.

- Tell students about the proportion ratio of 5:8 and B : A = A : C
- Tell students how the *golden mean* can be applied to photography. Explain and show that the 35 mm frame approximates the *golden rectangle*.

![Figure 4 The 35mm Frame](image)
C. Present the *rule of thirds* principle  
- Have the student read the *rule of thirds* principle from pages 5-6 of the student booklet.  
- Show the *rule of thirds* diagram. Figure 5

![Figure 5 Rule of Thirds](image1)

- Tell students that the subject in the photograph is usually placed on the intersection of the lines, never at the center. A centrally-placed subject disrupts the proportion. Highlight the disproportionate triangle in Figure 6 on page 5 of the student booklet.  
- Tell students to look at Figure 6 on page 5 of the student booklet.

![Figure 6 Centrally-placed subjects](image2)
• Show and tell students about the placement of the horizon line. The horizon line is placed one third from the bottom or one third from the top of the frame. This follows the rule of thirds. Explain that if the horizon line is in the centre, it divides the frame equally into two which does not give a strong composition.

Figure 7a
Horizon line placed in the middle of the frame where all the elements are evenly placed.

Figure 7b
Horizon placed at one third from the bottom of the frame draws attention to the clouds resulting in a stronger composition.
D. Present golden triangle principle

- Have students read the *golden triangle* principle on page 7 of the student booklet.
- Show the *golden triangle* and the placement points for the subject. Highlight that the *golden triangle* is an extension of the golden rectangle - the four dots in Figure 8. Show examples of photographs using the *golden triangle* principle.

![Figure 8 Golden Triangle](image)

![Figure 9 Examples of Application of Golden Triangle](image)
E. Present the golden spiral principle

- Show the golden spiral diagram (Figure 11) and ask the students how many golden sections they can see. (Answer: 6)

![Figure 11 The Golden Spiral](image)

- Tell students the golden spiral is also an extension of the golden mean.
- Ask students if they can give examples of golden spiral.

F. Assign Exercise 1

- Demonstrate to students how to use the photo adjuster.
- Go to the photo adjuster website:
- Tell the students to begin by clicking on browse. Go to desktop and look for the folder Photographic Composition.
- Open the folder and look for the folder Practice 1: Golden Principles.
- Tell students to select one photograph from the folder and click open. The photograph will appear in the photo-adjuster viewer.
- Choose one of the golden principles - the golden mean, golden spiral or golden triangles. Click on the appropriate circle on the photo-adjuster. Show how you can orientate the lines by using the horizontal / vertical flip and rotation options.
- Show how to crop the photograph by adjusting the left, right, top and bottom of the frame. The point of interest or subject should be placed according to the selected design principle.
• Once they have completed, ask students to print screen and save in a word document.
• Tell students that they have to do three photographs, one on each design principle.
• Discuss the exercise. Call on individual students to explain their cropped photograph and the principle they have chosen.

G. Review
• Ask students to read the summary and photo tip on page 10 of student booklet.
• Ask students if they have any questions.
• Tell students that the golden principles are guidelines to help them compose their photographs, Sometimes there are exceptions to the rules.
• Tell students if they want to know more about the golden principles they can refer to the additional resources.
LESSON 2 ELEMENTS OF DESIGN IN PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION

Objective

Given photographs, learners will explain how the three design elements (line, shape, pattern) contribute to a good photographic composition.

Materials

- Teacher’s guide
- Student booklets
- Photographic Composition CD (Instructor’s copy)
- Photographic Composition CD (Student’s copy)
- A leaf with a defined vein pattern, a checkered cloth and a packet of colored straws

Procedures

A. Gain student attention

- Draw a horizontal, vertical and diagonal line, a circle, a square, a rectangle, a triangle on the white board. Tell students that these are examples of design elements and they are all around us.
- Ask students to identify lines, shapes and patterns they see around the room or on their way to class.

B. Introduce this lesson: Elements of Design

- Tell students that the 3 elements of design covered in this unit are line, shape and pattern.
- Explain that the line, shape and pattern are more than just visual elements. They direct the viewer to the point of interest in the photograph.
- Besides being directional cues, they also possess strong symbolism and can evoke certain feelings and emotions.

C. Present information on design element: Line

- Have students read student booklet pages 11-15 on Line.
- Show examples of horizontal lines. Figure 12
- Ask the students what they feel when they see the photographs.
• Tell students that horizontal lines give a sense of stability, calmness and sense of space.

![Figure 12 Horizontal Lines](image)

• Ask students to give examples of verticals forms. Tell them buildings, trees, towers, flag poles are examples of verticals.

• Show photographs of vertical lines, Figure 13. Tell students that vertical lines add height to the picture. Verticals also denote strength and power.

![Figure 13 Verticals](image)
• Show students examples of diagonals. Tell students that diagonals are strong composition elements. Figure 14.

• Verticals give movement, energy and are dramatic.

![Figure 14 Diagonal Lines](image1)

• Ask students if they can give examples of curved lines.

• Ask students what do curved lines represent. Tell them curved lines are graceful and give a sense of movement.

![Figure 15 Curved Lines](image2)
D. Practice on Line

- Have students do Exercise 2 on page 16.

E. Present information on design element: Shape

- Tell students that shape is the basic form of all things.
- Ask students to read pages 18 to 21 of the student booklet on shape.
- Show students the photographs of circles. Figure 17
- Ask them if they can give other examples of circles.
- Tell them circles give an impression of continuity, wholeness and completeness.

Figure 17 Circle
• Show of photograph using rectangles and squares in composition. Figure 18.
• Tell students that squares and rectangles give stability and structure to the composition.

![Figure 18 Squares & Rectangles](image18)

• Show examples of photographs with triangular shapes in them. Figure 19.
• Tell students that triangular shapes denote strength, stability and endurance like the pyramids of Egypt.

![Figure 19 Triangles](image19)
F. Practice on Shape

- Have students do Exercise 3 on page 22.
- Review the Exercises 2 & 3 with the students.

G. Present the design element: Pattern

- Take some of the colored straws and arrange them in a square alternating the colors. Show the leaf and the checkered cloth to the class.
- Ask students what the three things have in common.
- Tell students that they are all patterns.
- Tell students, patterns are formed when colors, shapes or lines are repeated.
- Show photograph of patterns. Ask students if they can name the design elements that formed the pattern in the six photographs.
- Tell students that patterns have a strong visual impact. They denote regularity and repetition.

![Figure 20 Patterns](image-url)
H. Review

• Have students read the summary and photo tip in the student booklet on page 25.
• Answer questions if any.

I. Activity (Optional)

• Tell students to take their digital cameras and go out of class and shoot 1 photograph incorporating at least one of the elements of design. Give students about 15-20 minutes.
• After the shoot, students can form small groups and share and discuss their photographs.
LESSON 3  COLOR

Objective   Learners will identify the use of complementary colors.

Materials

- Teacher’s guide
- Student booklets
- Photographic Composition CD (Instructor’s copy)
- Photographic Composition CD (Student’s copy)
- Posttest

Procedures

A. Introduce this lesson: Color

- Tell students to log on the website http://www.poynterextra.org,cp/index.html
- Ask students to go through the first three sections of the program: The Power of Color, The Physiology and Theory of Color and Color Contrast and Dimensions. Give them about 5 minutes.

B. Present primary and secondary colors

- Show and explain the primary colors. Tell students that primary colors cannot be created by mixing other colors. The primary colors are red, yellow and blue. Show Figure 21.

![Primary Colors](image1)

![Secondary colors](image2)

Figure 21
Primary Colors
Red, yellow and blue

Figure 22
Secondary colors
Orange, green and violet
Tell students that secondary colors are the result of mixing 2 primary colors. The secondary colors are orange, green and violet.

Secondary color orange is the result of mixing red and yellow; green is the result of yellow and blue; and violet is the result of blue and red. Show Figure 22.

Show the color wheel. Figure 23.

Ask the students to name the colors opposite the primary colors, red, yellow and blue. For example orange is opposite blue, violet is opposite yellow, and red is opposite green. Tell them they have named pairs of complementary colors.

Highlight that each primary color is directly opposite a secondary color.

Highlight that each secondary color falls between two primary colors.

Figure 23  Color Wheel
C. Present color harmony
- Show the photographs and ask students to name the complementary colors.

D. Practice on Color
- Ask students to do Exercise 4 on page 29 of the student booklet.
- Discuss the answers of Exercise 4 with students.

E. Review
- Have students read the Summary and Photo Tip of Lesson 3 on page 30 of the student booklet.
- Answer questions if any.

F. Activity (Optional)
- Tell students to take their digital cameras and go out of class and shoot 1 photograph using complementary colors. Give the students about 20-30 minutes.
- After the shoot, students can form small groups and share and discuss their photographs.
G. Posttest

- Hand out the Posttest to the students.
- Tell students that the test is about 20 minutes.
- Be prepared to assist students in using the photo-adjuster.
- Remind the students to print screen and save in a word document with their name.
- Answer questions if any.
- When the time is up, collect the posttest.