



Due Date: _____

EXERCISE 2.1 THE GOLDEN MEAN: A BASIC APPROACH TO GOOD COMPOSITION

Objective

To concentrate more fully on the frames and its edges, we are going to take on an assignment developed by Graham Revell at Cavendish College, London, and Betsy Schneider of Arizona State University. This exercise sets aside usual subject matter and instead concentrates on detritus. Detritus, from Latin *detritus*, from *deterere* “wear away,” is any matter produced by erosion, such as gravel, sand, silt, or rock. It also refers to debris or waste of any kind; rubbish, litter, scrap, flotsam and jetsam, rubble; remains, remnants, fragments, scraps, dregs, leavings, sweepings, dross, scum, trash, and garbage; plus organic matter produced by the decomposition of organisms. For this assignment, you are to interpret the word *detritus* and make photographs following the steps below. You can be literal or metaphorical in your interpretation.

Procedure and Requirements

1. Build an image using the principle of the Golden Mean, a rectangle whose dimensions are 1 unit \times 1.62 units. If your camera permits, set its framing aspect ratio to 1 \times 1.5. The aspect ratio is the relationship of the frame’s width to its height. The traditional 35 mm aspect ratio is about 3 units wide \times 2 units high.
2. Use the grid pattern in your camera’s viewfinder to divide your frame into thirds, which will aid in locating the

“sweet spots” in which to place your center of interest. Do not divide the frame into four equal quarters as this tends to produce static compositions. Steer clear of placing your principal point of interest in the dead center of the frame.

3. Intentionally lead your viewer’s eye through the frame by supplying a visual path that leads a viewer to your center of interest. Use a shape such as a diamond, oval, or pentagon to make your path. Make your path link the top, bottom, and sides of your composition, and provide an entrance to and an exit from the picture space.

Traditionally, the entrance is at the bottom of the picture.

The exit is usually an area that is less visually important.

A door, window, or patch of sky can give a viewer’s eye a place to stop and rest, providing a subtle exit. If your path begins to lead your eye out of the frame, adjust it, using other design elements to lead the viewer’s eye back to your path.

4. Simplify. Eliminate details that complicate your composition. Delete anything that does not express your message clearly and concisely. Keep modifying, combining, and deleting until you are satisfied.
5. Pay attention to the figure-ground relationships by bringing the positive and negative space into balance. Keep in mind that Western societies read from left to right, which tends to make the left side of the frame more prominent than the right. We also read from top to bottom, making the top of the frame more noticeable than the bottom. The corners of a rectangle act as visual anchors, which is why book page numbers are traditionally found in the lower left and right

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corners. The center of the frame does not necessarily have the importance that many take for granted, especially in a printed format where the center is the gutter.

6. Do the opposite. Now that you have tried this exercise, reverse all the instructions and compare and contrast the results. Apply your findings to your next picture-making opportunity.

Educator Joseph Labate of the University of Arizona takes this exercise a step further by having his students intentionally make “bad” and “good” photographs that are technically the same, and then he has the class analyze the differences.

Submit

Produce one 8 × 10-inch or larger image using the rules of the Golden Rectangle. Produce one 8 × 10-inch or larger image breaking all the rules of the Golden Rectangle.

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