

A collage of nature scenes including a waterfall, autumn trees, a rocky coastline, and a horse in a field. The text is overlaid on a central black and yellow banner.

ELEMENTS

OF COMPOSITION &
IMAGE DESIGN

Intro

Composition is defined as: the act or process of **composing** specifically : arrangement into specific proportion or relation and especially into artistic form. the way that things are **arranged** in a **photograph**. That being said there is way more to the constructing of an image than just this general definition.

Composition is NOT about following rules! It is about how to evaluate a scene and use what you have vs what fits the scene. "Its about using your tools" which includes the big tool between your ears. It is a way to invite my viewer into what you saw, felt, and want to show, or to show/tell your subjects story.

Composition is a convergence in the most ideal sense of emotional mood, light and "non obvious" shapes. Most importantly good composition is about visual flow in an image. How you use everything together in a way to guide the viewers eye through your image in a pleasing manner and to encourage them to stay and explore your image longer.

This informational material will help you to understand what is being communicated emotionally within the field by the conscious and unconscious lines we see.



Active Lines



ACTIVE



JAGGED, BRUTAL HARD
VIGOROUS



DYNAMIC



Images with jagged lines are often defined as punishingly hard or uncomfortable. Correctly arranged these types of lines in our images are also hard, solid, firm, or rigid, things that are not easily broken, bent, or pierced.

They can be Vigorous that is strong, healthy, and full of energy

Images like this use the inherent geology of the landscape to tell a story of activity, energy, firmness. Beginning to tell a story of the landscape and start to tell the tale about what we start to feel in images.

In real life the mountains are dynamic, endless, multi-dimensional. But in a photograph, we lose that 3rd dimension, and we are left with 2d lines. Lines that are defined by less idealist terms of length and width.

Follow the ups and downs of the peaks, the valleys intersecting with the rock, and you will start to see all sorts of lines. You might call them masculine lines and view them as strong. But maybe another set of lines is more feminine, more Picturesque that is visually attractive, especially in a quaint or pretty style.

But with the masculine lines and picturesque creation you get the combination of something that is Dynamic a process characterized by constant change, activity, or progress.

Mountains are extremely dynamic. They are ever changing and shifting. They bring forth ruggedness and beauty while maintaining strength.

Horizontal Lines



Passive lines in the sand ripples on the beach are accepting or allowing of what happens to them without active response or resistance. People could walk on these lines. Waves could crash in and wash them away. The water could drain away drying them out. These lines are open and allowing. Not showing force.

Look at the positive and forceful lines in the waves crashing. Lines that are confident with no possibility of doubt. They have traveled a long way to crash forcefully on this beach. Sometimes even described as Bold and having a strong or vivid appearance while also possessing an assertive presence.

Then we have the parallel lines of the 2nd level of waves after the energy had been dispersed. These lines are free to exist at the same time or in a similar way to each other. Some of their power has been removed but they are still regal.

Not all the horizontal lines in this image are in the water as we look to the horizon line of the clouds and see calmer lines not showing or projecting a feeling nervousness, anger, or other strong emotions.

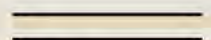
Finally we see the pier. With its very direct lines extending or moving from one place to another by the shortest route without changing direction or stopping.



PASSIVE



POSTIVE BOLD, FORCEFUL



PARALLEL OPPOSING WITH
HARMONY



THE HORIZONTAL EARTHLY,
CALM, MUNDANE, SATISFIED



DIRECT, SURE FORCEFUL, WITH
PURPOSE

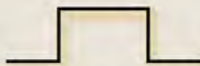
Stable Lines



Have you ever looked at a waterfall and thought “I wonder if it will turn over?” Not like a tree waterfalls bring about stability as something not likely to give way or overturn that which is firmly fixed.

Any idea what draws you to waterfalls? Any of you that have ever stood close to a raging torrent and tried to carry on a conversation would be hard pressed to say peace and calm. I say it is strength and stability that draws us to waterfalls.

Strength is the capacity of an object to withstand great force or pressure. Waterfalls feel like they are powerful but in that power you also see and feel stability. What is more powerful than a soft substance like water that cuts through rock.



STRUCTURAL SOLID, STRONG



STABLE



STABLE

Vertical Lines

The most common element in most images is the vertical line. They are almost everywhere. But when was the last time you stopped and thought looked at those great vertical lines vs exclaiming, look at that tree!

Feeling inspiration is one of the most impactful things we can have in our images or feel in nature.

This is the invitation nature extends to us to be mentally stimulated to do or feel something. If we can build upon the nobility of vertical lines and imposing or magnificent appearance, we start to also bring forth the dramatic, exciting, and impressive.



Beyond the nobility you might notice lines in opposition. We have life and death. Both having vertical lines in their trunks. Sometimes vertical lines can cancel each other out but in this case they create conflict or competition between life and death. It also can encourage us to rise. This regal tree stands tall. It still attains something even in death.



**THE VERTICAL,
NOBLE, DRAMATIC,
INSPIRATIONAL,
ASPIRING**



OPPOSING



**RISE ATTAINMENT
WITH EFFORT
IMPROVEMENT**



**CONNECTING
CROSSING**

Curved Lines



FLOWING, ROLLING



SMOOTH SWELLING, SLIDING



NONSTRUCTURAL FLUID, SOFT

The smooth flow of sand which most of the time does not have abrupt stops and starts is calming. The swelling nature of the dunes and how they ebb and flow gives the brain peace and calm WHILE the sliding nature allows your eye to move, flow, and roll in gentle undulations. Images like this can evoke feelings of currents or streams where your eye flows down over the dunes and out into the distance.

But there is a little more. The way the angles flowed in a downward way is not structured and evokes elegance and grace. The human mind is a meaning making machine. Any place it can go for elegance, smoothness and grace it will like to spend time there.

Most photographers like photographing sand dunes it is the flowing and rolling aspects. How they feel smooth and look smooth. But you know there is more.



Rising Lines



REFINED



RISING, OPTIMISTIC
SUCCESSFUL, HAPPY



PRIMITIVE SIMPLE, BOLD



IN MOTION



But what is the opposite of falling . Rising!

Yup. When we rise. We can also still find refinement (click) improvements done in a precise or subtle manner like the small refined dune in the background.

(click) But we also find optimism and feeling hopeful and confident about the future like in the middle portion of the dune as we aim for success or purpose or maybe even some happiness as we rise.

Or maybe like in the foreground dune where we seek to find a more primitive or simple experience. One with a basic level of comfort but one that is easily understood. It did not take immense strength for this smaller dune to rise and there is a subtle confidence as this smaller dune shares the space with the bigger dunes.

Regardless of size. There is a feeling of motion as these dune lines rise and take you in a different direction from where you started.

Growing – Branching
Tree branches bring forth the feeling of growing of developing.

The mix of lines in a tree bring forth a more complex, mature, or advanced structure. This structure is not limited to tree branches. We will also this same type of growth and evolution in rivers or in this case estuaries

Meandering Lines



GROWING DEVELOPING

Not all lines are emotionally packed. They might be more whimsical.

Or in the case of flowers bring forth human characteristics in their casual and relaxed way of moving.



Or they can take on more humanistic forms like the Toadstool hoodoos in Grand Staircase Escalante.

Progressive – Expanding



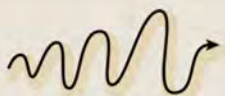
MANDERING, CASUAL RELAXED,
INTERESTING HUMAN

Lines can also form to carry visual weight. Coming together they show something that is increasing or expanding and indicating things that are larger or more extensive.

Lines that meander and progress at their own pace can leave the impression of graduality. Developing or changing in stages, not rapidly, not rushed. What can you think of that is more gradual than a meandering line of water cutting through rock.



Concentrating Limes



PROGRESSIVE

The last thing we will say on lines is to keep in mind that while they are leading and lead you into the image.

They also can be used in tandem to concentrate which is to focus attention on a particular object.



INCREASING EXPANDING



Concentrating



CONCENTRATING,
ASSEMBLING



In Summary

Hopefully this material has helped you to see your lines as part of the ways we can start to convey more complex emotions.

Understanding how lines work together helps us to communicate in more effective ways in our images.

My photography has grown by leaps and bounds since I made the choice to connect emotionally with what I am feeling and seeing in the field.

This connection has allowed me to progress to see things differently. Rather than seeing a tree and a sky as separate objects I start to see the interweaving of the lines and shapes, textures, highlights, and shadows and how they work together.

I have become more connected to my work and in being more connected I have seen dramatic improvements in my satisfaction, feeling the uniqueness of what I am producing, and understanding more of how things work together in cohesive ways.

