

13

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Week

COMPOSE LIKE AN EXPERT

Deciding what to include in the frame requires thought. If you allow unnecessary details to creep in, your message may be diluted; but if the picture contains too little information, the viewer may struggle to make sense of it.

In this module, you will:

- ▶ **judge what should be included and excluded** from the frame;
- ▶ **study how the theory of visual contrast** works in composition;
- ▶ **try to apply the theory** by using reflections to create symmetrical pictures;
- ▶ **experiment and explore** using unusual viewpoints, shadows, and patterns;
- ▶ **review your photos** and see how you can remove distracting highlights, allow extra space for moving subjects, and fill the frame;
- ▶ **improve your photographs** using the Targeted Adjustment tool as an intelligent shortcut;
- ▶ **go over your understanding** of composition to see if you're ready to move on.

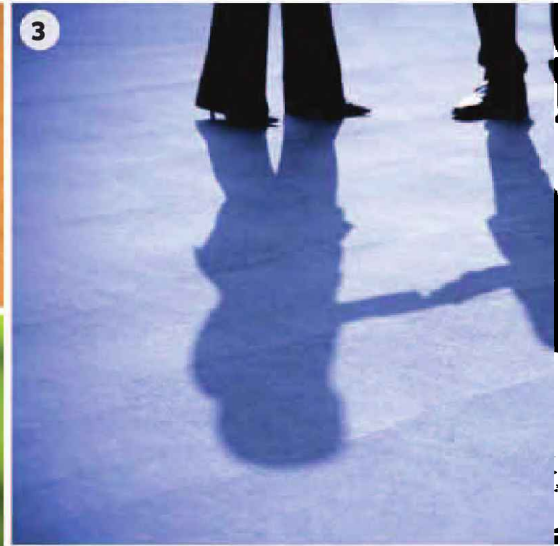
Let's begin...





▶ TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Assessing composition



To produce pictures with long-lasting appeal, you need to consider exactly what should be included in the frame. Look at these photos and see if you can match the image number with the right description.

A Fill the frame: Get close to exclude all unnecessary elements.

B Allow “traveling” space: Give fast-moving objects negative space to move into.

C Use shade effectively: Let shadows play a starring role.

D Play with texture: Position rough and smooth objects together for striking contrast.

E Explore symmetry: If one side of a picture mirrors the other, the result can be very satisfying.

F Exploit size differences: Small objects placed next to large ones can create comedic effects.

G Convey emotion: Cropping the top of a subject's head draws attention to their emotional state.

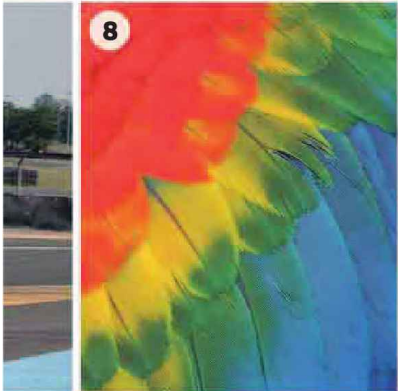
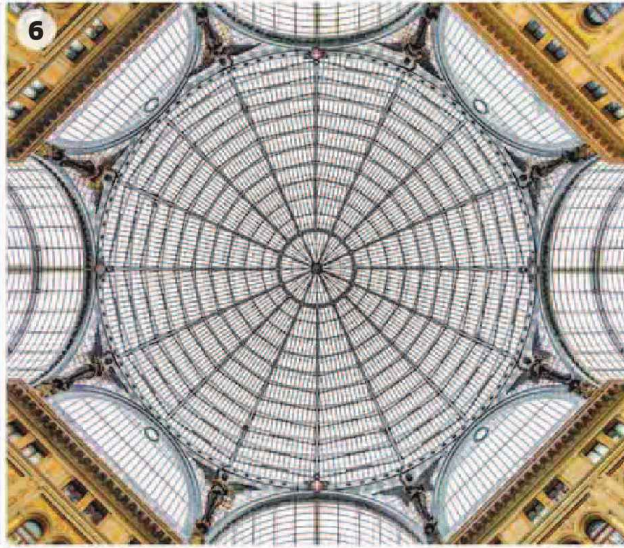
H Keep it simple: Sometimes just one or two elements are needed.

I Consider color: Bear in mind the aesthetic and emotional impact of bright hues.

J Try a fresh angle: Adopt a bird's- or worm's-eye view.

ANSWERS

- A/4: Close-up of romanesco broccoli
- B/5: Race car on a track
- C/3: Silhouettes of businesspeople
- D/9: Leaves arranged on white wood
- E/6: Glass roof in Naples, Italy
- F/2: Big shoes to fill
- G/7: Boy looking out of a window
- H/10: Red lighthouse, Holland
- I/8: Parrot feathers
- J/1: Skyscrapers in São Paulo, Brazil



NEED TO KNOW

- In order to “see” pictures, carry two L-shaped pieces of cardboard with you. Put them together to create a frame around any potential subjects and move them closer together or farther apart to adjust the size of the frame.
- Deciding when to release the shutter becomes instinctive, but to hone your skills, shoot a sequence and analyze why certain pictures succeed and others fail.

- Developing a photographic style comes with time, and requires you to think about your past, your cultural preferences, and how your style might develop in the future.
- You can find inspiration from artists working in a variety of mediums, from music and dance to painting and poetry.



Review these points and see how they relate to the photos in this module



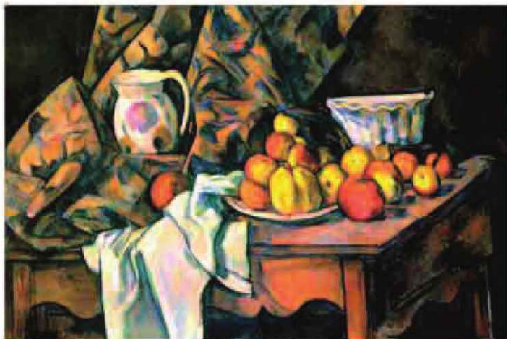
► UNDERSTAND THE THEORY

Contrast and composition

When two objects with opposing qualities—such as rough/smooth, dark/light, or large/small—are placed next to each other, the resulting disparities create visual appeal. Such differences can be used to direct the viewer's eye, provide a sense of height, size, or value, or simply add interest to a composition. Generally speaking, contrast can be provided by two main elements: visual contrast (such as color, shape, size, position, and space), and subject matter contrast (such as day and night).

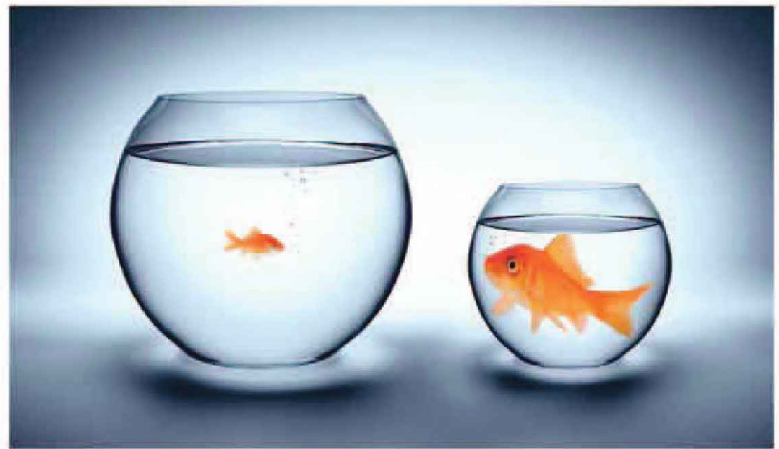
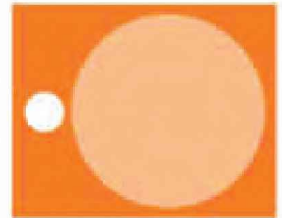
i CONTRAST AND FINE ART

Painters have long understood the effect of using visual contrast in their work. In his painting *Still Life with Apples and Peaches*, c. 1905, French artist Paul Cézanne arranged props and objects in his studio until a great number of opposing elements sat happily together. In this one work we see plain fabric resting against patterned, the hard edges of plates and bowls set against soft fruit, and cool colors clashing with warm ones.



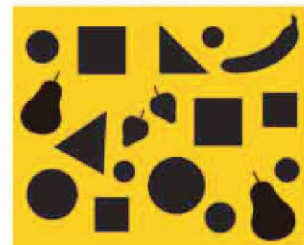
i SIZE

When objects of the same size are placed side by side, the eye looks for points of difference—if none can be found, we quickly lose interest. But if one object is larger than the other, the brain busies itself making constant comparisons. If you can position large objects next to small ones, the viewer will invest time attempting to interpret the relationship.



i SHAPE

Shapes can be described as either geometric or organic. Geometric shapes have clear, well-defined edges, while organic shapes have softer, more natural boundaries. Geometric shapes are regular and precise, and can often be seen in human-made objects; examples include circles, triangles, squares, and rectangles. Organic shapes can be seen in nature, and are irregular and imprecise. When the two are combined, the contrast can be powerful.



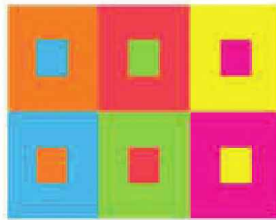
“ In my photography, **color** and **composition** are **inseparable**. ”

WILLIAM ALBERT ALLARD



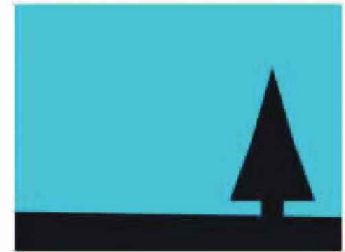
COLOR

Colors that sit opposite each other on the color wheel (see pp.236-237) are known as complementary. For strong, vibrant images that convey energy and stability, make use of the contrasts between red and green, orange and blue, or purple and yellow.



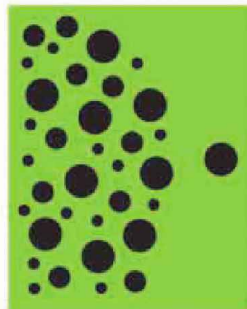
SPACE

The part of the frame containing your subject is called positive space; the unoccupied part is negative space. Negative space helps to define your subject, offers the eye a place to rest, and provides moving subjects with a place to travel to. Shifting the balance between these areas can dramatically change the meaning of your image.



POSITION

Placing a single, standalone object next to a group of objects causes great tension. More often than not, the isolated object becomes the main focal point—humans are social animals, so to be set apart from the rest can be seen as punishment. When we understand what the viewer may feel when we position a solo object against a group, we can plan our compositions accordingly.





▶ LEARN THE SKILLS

Capturing reflections



Reflections can be found in puddles, lakes, paintwork, mirrors, windows, and many other places, but capturing them takes patience and perseverance. Water, for example, is easily disturbed. In this instance, you will aim to shoot a perfectly still, symmetrical reflection of a stunning landscape.



1 Do your research

Wait for a still day and use a sunrise/sunset app to work out when the sun will hit your chosen subject. You don't want direct sun on the water because it can cause glare, though it is nice to have the subject bathed in light.

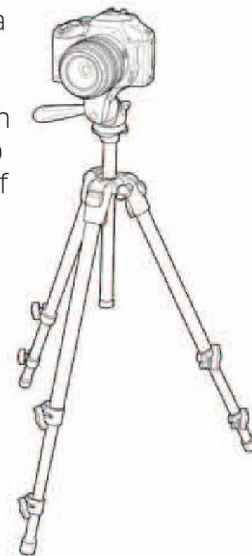


A sunrise/sunset app will tell you the sun's exact position.



2 Attach a wide-angle lens

Put your camera on a tripod and attach a wide-angle lens, which will allow you to include plenty of the surrounding landscape.



The tripod will let you frame the subject while you set the exposure.

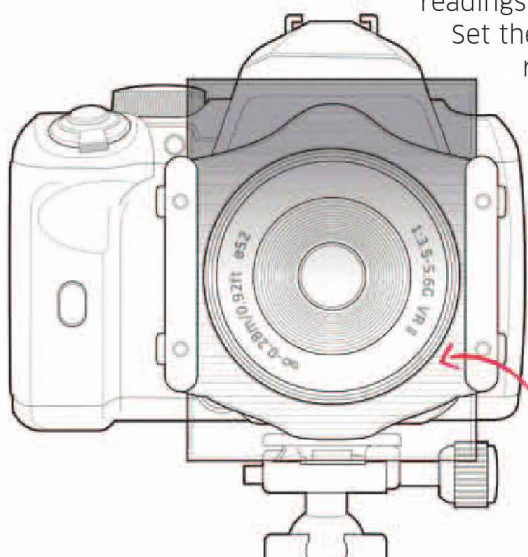


6 Attach an ND graduated filter

Neutral density (ND) graduated filters are used to balance exposure between two halves of a scene. They're available in different strengths: 0.3 (1 stop), 0.6 (2 stops), and 0.9 (3 stops). Use one that matches the difference between the two

readings at Step 5.

Set the exposure reading for the reflection.



Filter attached to the front of the lens



7 Shoot and review the results

Take a few pictures and play them back. If the reflection looks slightly darker than the subject, don't worry—your eyes naturally perceive reflections as darker.



Where to start: Check the weather forecast and wait for a still day. If planning to shoot a body of water, choose one that is protected from the wind by natural or artificial features.

You will learn: How to balance the exposure of a subject and its reflection using an ND graduated filter, how to break the rules by placing the horizon in the middle, and how cameras struggle to focus in low-light and low-contrast conditions.



3 Break the rules

Forget everything you've learned about placing the horizon off-center, and put it directly in the middle of the frame.

Place the horizon in the center of the frame



4 Select small aperture, focus on reflection

To ensure that the subject and its reflection are sharp, select a small aperture such as f/11 or f/16. Your camera may struggle to focus on the reflection, so switch to manual focus.



Small aperture will create a large depth of field

Meter here

Meter here



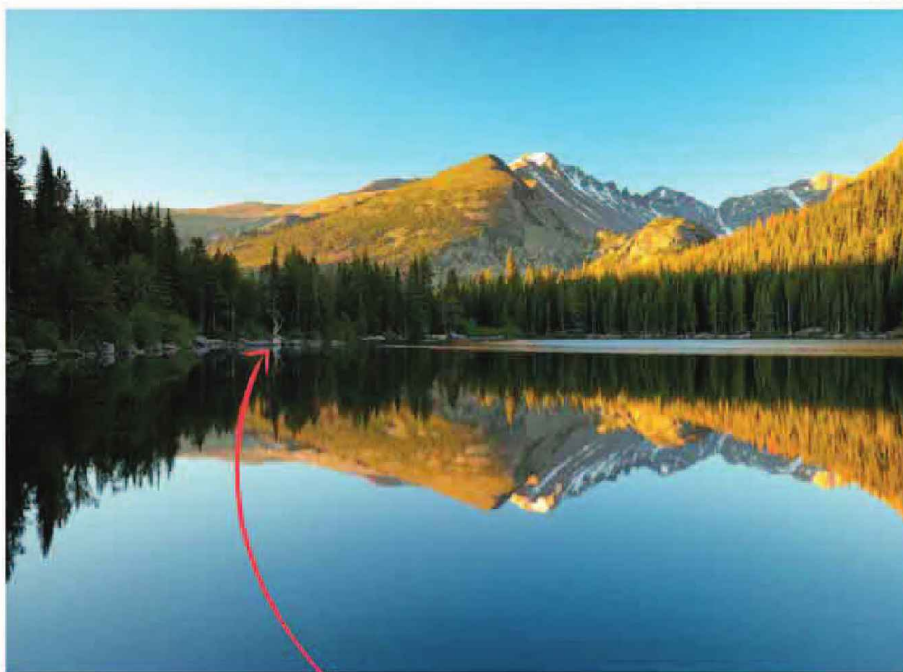
5 Take meter readings

Record one exposure reading from a midtone area of the subject and another from the reflection. The latter will be darker, with a difference of around 1.5 to 2 stops. Make a note of the two readings.



WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

- In order to shoot a perfect reflection you need a calm day with no wind. Use a sunrise/sunset app on your smartphone and check the weather forecast to make sure conditions will be perfect.
- You need to use manual focus, since your camera may have difficulty focusing on a reflection.
- Reflections are usually darker than the object being reflected, so you'll need an ND graduated filter to balance things out.



Positioning the horizon in the center creates perfect symmetry



▶ PRACTICE AND EXPERIMENT

Mastering composition

Successful compositions have one thing in common: they contain only what's strictly necessary to tell the story. The assignments here cover different topics, but each can be used to practice visual distillation.



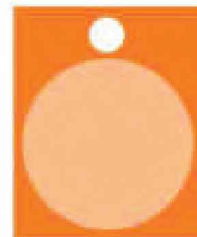
- EASY**
- INDOORS OR OUTDOORS**
- 45 MINUTES**
- CONTRASTING SUBJECTS**
- BASIC + tripod**

Shooting subjects with opposite attributes, such as tall/short or rough/smooth, can create emotional, and sometimes even amusing, photographs.

- **Choose** two of the following themes: small/large, happy/sad, fast/slow, or new/old.
- **Decide** on the optimum way to show the differences between your subjects—try placing them side by side or one on top of the other.
- **Keep** your composition simple, and exclude anything that doesn't reinforce your message.



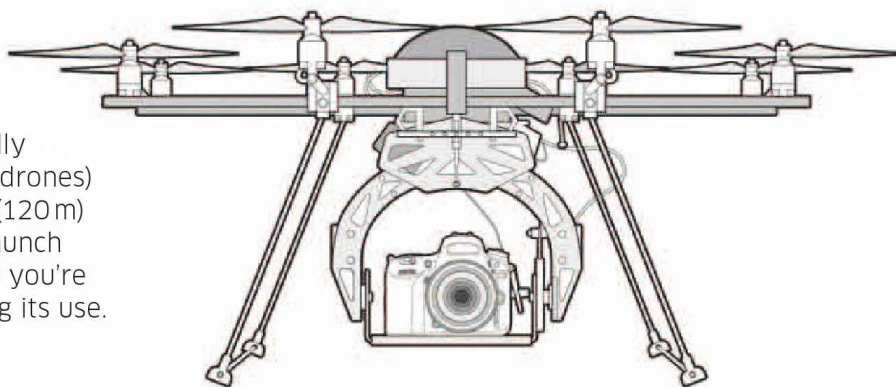
Old hands and young feet show contrasting size and texture



GEAR: PHOTOGRAPHY DRONES

Finding unusual viewpoints is pretty much guaranteed when using low-altitude aerial photography.

Depending on the model, specially designed unmanned aircraft (or drones) allow you to shoot up to 400ft (120m) above the ground. Before you launch your drone, however, make sure you're familiar with local laws regarding its use.



Pro tip: Always think about what's behind your subject. Do you want the background to be in focus or should it be blurred? And, if so, by how much?



UNUSUAL ANGLES

MEDIUM

OUTDOORS

1 HOUR

A LOCAL LANDMARK

BASIC + tripod, stepladder, or groundsheet



Unusual viewpoint of the Eiffel Tower, France.

When you spot an attractive subject, it's tempting to just start shooting from where you stand, but in order to find the best viewpoint you need to put your equipment away and move your feet.

- **Head** to a local landmark (it doesn't have to be as grand as the Eiffel Tower).
- **Look** at postcards, or carry out some online research, to see how your subject has been photographed in the past.
- **Try** to create a new composition using a fresh viewpoint.



LOOK FOR SHAPES

MEDIUM

INDOORS OR OUTDOORS

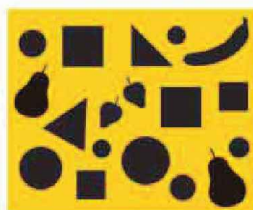
1 HOUR

SUBJECTS THAT FORM GEOMETRIC SHAPES

BASIC + tripod

Geometric forms such as circles and squares direct the eye around the frame and strengthen associations between elements. These satisfying shapes can be real or implied.

- **Arrange** the elements in your composition to make the most of any naturally occurring shapes.
- **Create** shapes not just with solid objects, but with shadows, colors, and textures too.



Triangle created using two sides of a cake box and the photo frame



WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

- To make the most of visual contrast, you need to keep compositions simple and find ways to reinforce any differences in the frame.
- More often than not, you can find the best viewpoints by changing your position.



LEAVE SPACE TO TRAVEL

MEDIUM

OUTDOORS

1 HOUR

**A MOVING SUBJECT
IN PLENTY OF SPACE**

BASIC + tripod

When positioning fast-moving objects in a frame, there is one piece of advice you'd be foolish to ignore: leave space for them to travel into.

- **Use** panning to keep the subject sharp while recording the background as a blur. Select a relatively slow shutter speed (such as 1/30sec), set the autofocus mode to continuous, follow the subject with your camera, and release the shutter gently.
- **Remember** to leave some "traveling" space in front of your subject to keep it from butting into the edge of the frame.

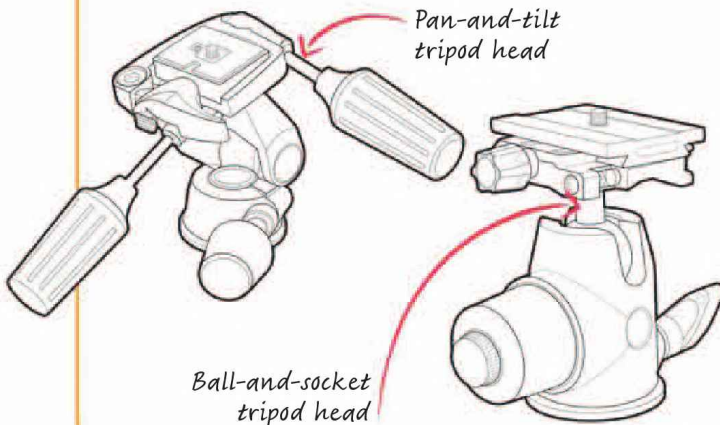


Negative space in front of your subject suggests motion



GEAR: TRIPOD HEADS

Investing in a solid, well-engineered head for your tripod will allow you to pan with confidence. There are two types available: pan-and-tilt or ball-and-socket. Pan-and-tilt heads offer movement through two or three axes: tilting forward and backward, panning, and moving from left to right. Ball-and-socket heads move in all directions, offering greater versatility.



EASY

INDOORS OR OUTDOORS

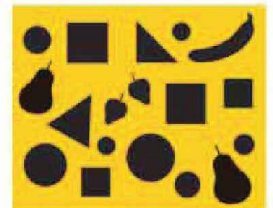
45 MINUTES

**SUBJECTS WITH
CLEAR OUTLINES**

BASIC + tripod

Deep black shadows are often avoided in photos because they lack detail, but for this assignment, the darker the better.

- **You need** harsh shadows, so wait for a clear, sunny day and locate a subject with a clear outline.
- **Use** Manual mode, as an auto or semi-auto exposure mode will overexpose the image, and check the histogram to be sure most of the peaks are on the left-hand side.



Simple shapes can make powerful images.



BREAK A PATTERN

MEDIUM

1 HOUR

BASIC + tripod

INDOORS OR OUTDOORS

A PATTERN THAT CAN BE BROKEN

Repeating patterns can be observed everywhere, but some of the most beautiful are found in nature. Predictable patterns can be calming, but they can also become monotonous, so for this exercise you will be looking to introduce variation.

- **Locate** a natural or artificial pattern—this can be anything from a row of fence posts to the markings on a butterfly's wing.
- **Pick** an angle that will emphasize the pattern, making it appear infinite. Make sure that any unnecessary elements have been excluded.
- **Find** a way to break the pattern to stop it from being monotonous.



Silhouettes become the focal point of this picture.



The row of fence posts is broken up by the horse's head

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

- Shadows don't need to play a supporting role in your photographs; they can become subjects in themselves.
- Patterns are pleasing to the eye, but they often have more impact if they are broken up in some way.
- You can use negative space in front of a moving subject to indicate motion and speed.



▶ ASSESS YOUR RESULTS

Reviewing your shots

Having learned how to use color, shape, position, size, and space to create clear, balanced compositions, it's time to choose some of your favorite pictures and run through this checklist. Look at each composition and ask yourself why you have arranged the elements in a certain way.

▶ Do all of the elements reinforce your story?

Placing a subject in its natural environment provides extra information about its life. What does this photo tell you about the kingfisher?



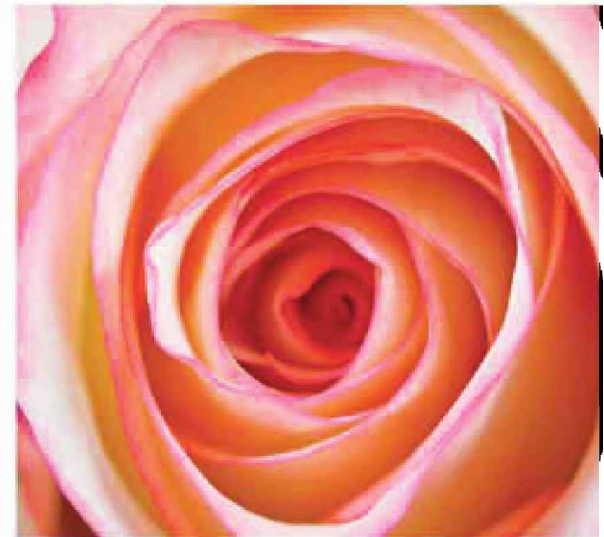
▶ Do highlights and shadows serve a purpose?

Shadows and highlights can be distracting, but don't avoid them altogether. The highlights on this woman's arm suggest a field bathed in sunlight.



▶ Does your subject fill the frame?

Filling the frame with your subject transports the viewer into the center of the composition. This image is focused on the center of a rose, revealing the intricate structure of its petals.



▶ Could your composition be simplified?

Cluttered, chaotic pictures are unsettling to look at, so reduce your composition to its crucial elements. The colors of this church in Santorini, Greece, are enough to convey the warm sun.

“ In photography, the **smallest thing** can be a **great subject.** ”

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON

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WEEK



◀ Have you allowed extra space for moving objects?

This reinforces the impression of speed, as the eye moves to where the subject will appear next.

◀ Has color been used well?

Pure hues tend to dominate the frame, while neutral colors are more recessive. Here, the strong blue directs the viewer along the row of sailors.



▲ Have you made the most of any visual contrast?

If your image contains opposites, make the most of any visual contrast they provide. This block of ice has been set against a fiery Icelandic sunrise, creating an ideal contrast between heat and water.



▲ Are there any dominant tones in your image?

The complementary tones here encourage a calm, restful feeling. If one element in a photo, whether it be a shape, a tone, or a shadow, is allowed to overpower the others, it can introduce a sense of tension.

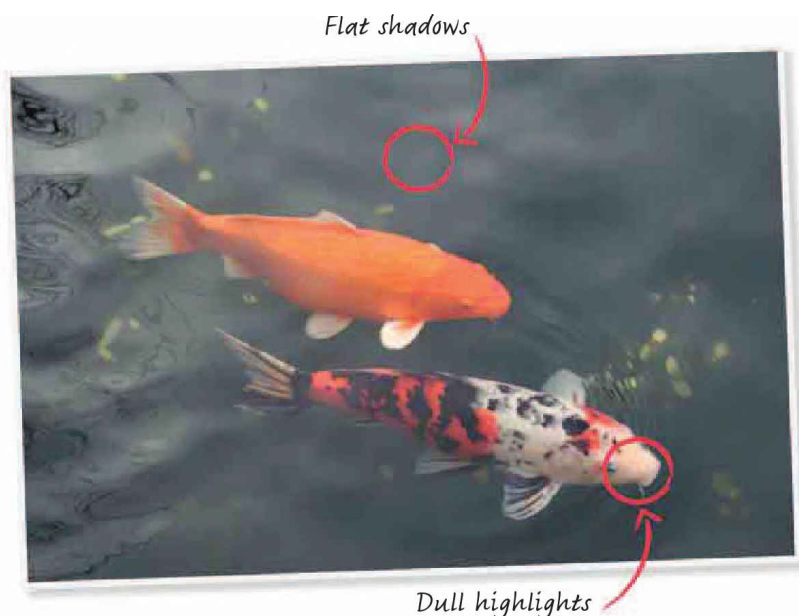


▶ ENHANCE YOUR IMAGES

Targeted adjustment



Although it can seem daunting at first, the Adobe Photoshop Curves tool is one of the most useful ways to adjust a photo's tonal range. It features a simple shortcut known as the Targeted Adjustment tool (TAT), which makes these adjustments more intuitive. It allows you to click and drag within an image to make a change. The Targeted Adjustment tool can also be found in Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Camera Raw.



4 Darken and lighten

To lighten the pixels under the tool, click and hold down your mouse, then drag upward. To darken the pixels, drag downward. All the pixels of a similar tonal value will also be altered.



Dragging the mouse down darkens the chosen area.



5 Further changes

If you need to change another range of tones, click in the relevant area of your photo and repeat Step 4. Click OK once you're satisfied with your adjustments.

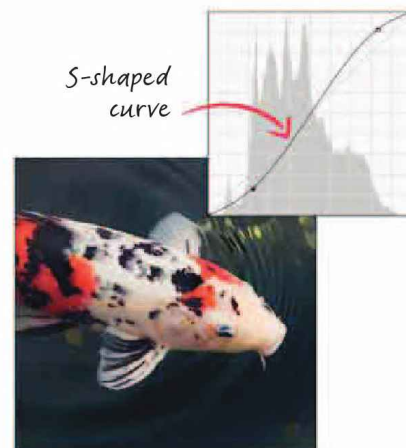


Dragging the mouse up lightens the chosen area.



6 Adding contrast

For a simple way to add contrast, lighten the highlights and darken the shadows. This produces a distinctive "S" shape in the curve.

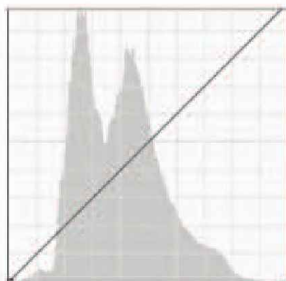


Pro tip: With the Targeted Adjustment tool selected, as you move the mouse cursor over the photo, a small circle will move up and down the histogram, displaying the tonal value of the pixel currently under the cursor.



1 Adjusting Curves

To start, open Curves by going to the Image menu, then Adjustments, then Curves, which shows a histogram of your photo.



The histogram shows the tonal range of the photo.

The hand icon is located in the bottom left-hand corner of the dialog box



2 Use targeted adjustment

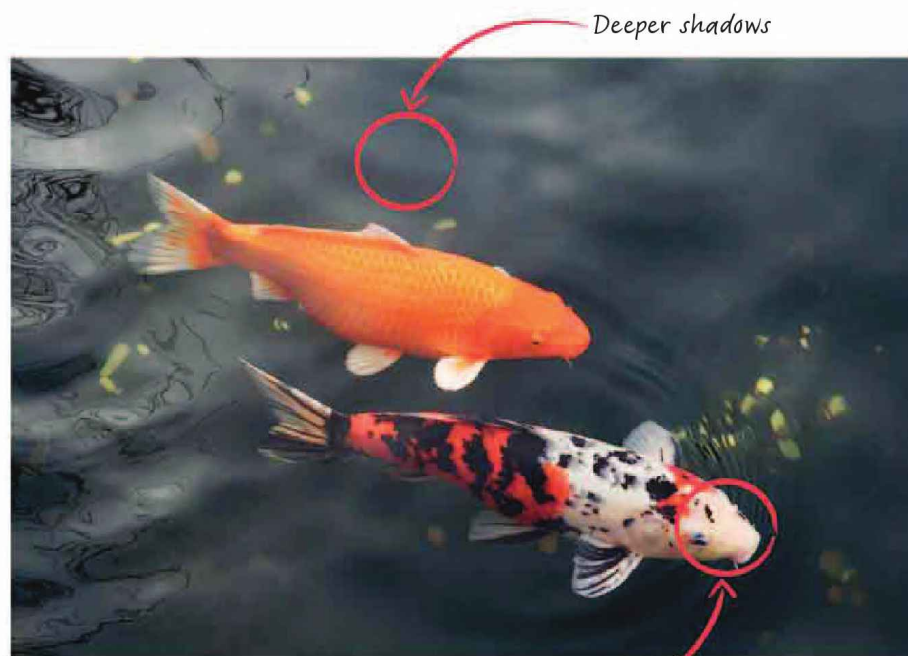
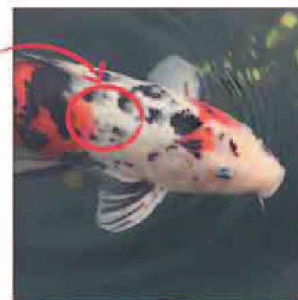
To begin using the Targeted Adjustment tool, click on the hand icon in the Curves dialog box. The cursor should now turn into a color picker.



3 Select first adjustment area

Move the cursor over your photo to decide what part of the photo's tonal range—shadows, midtones, or highlights—you want to adjust first. Move the cursor to an area that falls roughly in that range.

Choose a representative patch of pixels, such as the pattern on this fish



Brightened highlights

i MORE PRECISION

Both Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Camera Raw let you use targeted adjustment on the HSL palette to change colors as well as the tonal range. You can precisely alter a color (changing anything red in a photo to blue, for example), the saturation of a color, or a color's luminance.



Move the sliders to alter the saturation.