

PHOTOGRAPHY: COMPOSITIONAL ASPECTS VS. TECHNICAL ASPECTS

To analyze photographs in this course, you will need to cover two different categories: compositional aspects and technical aspects. The lists below show the types of things that fall into each category. (For visual examples and more explanation of these aspects, you will need to review your study guide and textbook.)

Compositional aspects

(details about how mood, meaning and balance are created)

- dominant lines and/or shapes
- vertical framing, horizontal framing
- asymmetrical balance; symmetrical balance
- subject placement (centering; rule of thirds)
- repetition of lines or shapes
- frame within a frame
- subject and background contrast*

Technical aspects

(details about how the picture was made)

- large depth of field; small depth of field
- focus (out of focus; in focus)
- lighting qualities: harsh, diffused
- lighting sources: artificial, natural, flash; multiple or single source, etc.
- direction of lighting
- exposure contrast*: contrasty, high contrast, low contrast, or flat

*NOTE: You've probably noticed that some terms like *contrast* can be used in different ways. You must fully explain what you mean when you use terms like *contrast* or *focus*.

For example, if you write, "the subject stands out due to contrast with the background" you are discussing composition, but you still need to explain why the subject stands out. The subject might stand out because of several things: the difference in colors between the subject and background (in a color photograph); the use of a small depth of field; or even because of a high contrast exposure caused by harsh lighting. In the first two, you are pointing out compositional aspects. In that last one, you are pointing out a technical aspect because you are saying a *high contrast exposure* was made due to the lighting conditions.

Focus is another term that can be confusing if it's not fully explained. For example, if you write, "the picture has good focus," you are not being clear. Are you using focus as a technical term or not? Do you mean that everything is *in focus* because a large depth of field was used? (In that case, focus is a technical term.) Or do you mean that attention is "focused" on the main subject because of some aspect of composition such as dominant lines? (In this last case, you are using *focus* as you would in everyday speech, not as a technical term.)

So, when you analyze any photograph, remember to:

- choose your words carefully
- use words as a photographer would use them
- point out specific parts of the photograph to help explain exactly what you mean