

Breaking the Rules

Some thoughts on where *breaking the rules* can create a successful image. The set subject for prints for the 2021/22 season

and some brief thoughts on negative space -
the set subject for Pis

Breaking the Rules

- We're talking about photography rules here....
- If you want to photograph misdemeanours, yours, or someone else's, you're on your own (and its probably a simpler option!)



Are there any rules in Photography?

There are no rules for good photographs, there are only good photographs.... The so-called rules of photographic composition are, in my opinion, invalid, irrelevant, immaterial

Ansel Adams

Photography has no rules, it is not a sport. It is the result which counts, no matter how it is achieved.

Bill Brandt

“Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes and having fun”-

Mary Lou Cook

But

- There are some perceived wisdoms which tend to be used in successful photos, so for the purposes of this session we'll treat them as “rules”
- We might break these:
 - deliberately for artistic intent
 - through no choice – eg restriction on the photographers point of view
 - by accident
- *If we break the rules subtly and its not noticeable by the viewer have we met the brief?*

Why can a photo “still” work

- The rule is so broken it no longer matters (a very wonky horizon)
- The rest of the image is so compelling
- The following images all scored at least 18 in SCC club competitions but might be considered to have broken at least one photographic rule.
- *For each do you think:*
 - a) No rule was broken?*
 - b) A rule was broken and the photo would have worked even better if the rule was followed?*
 - c) The image was enhanced by breaking the rule?*
 - d) The rule was irrelevant – image would have worked either way?*

Place the subject (or horizon) on the thirds

Possibly the easiest rule to break as demonstrated by these images



©Nigel Cherry



©David Seddon



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If this one is “easy” to break – I think we can ignore all the comparable rules - golden ratio, golden spiral etc

Use Leading Lines

- Have your major lines lead the viewer to the subject rather than away from the point of interest
- Hard to find a successful photo where this was broken (the photo below was the best example I could find and here the steps leading the viewer out of the photo are subtle)
- *Are there circumstances where leading the viewer out of a photo could add to an image?*

© Janet Brown



Travel into the Photo

- If the subject is travelling, make sure it is in the direction towards the centre of the image.
- An often heard comment from judges
- *When does it not matter?*



©Norman Kirby



©Kevin Harwood



©Kevin Harwood

Keep things straight that should be straight eg horizons, buildings

- a little off is usually bad, but way off can be effective – I couldn't find a horizon example! (*has anyone used this successfully?*)
- (diagonals and unusual points of view are a powerful compositional tool)



©Martin Tomes



©Janet Brown



©David Seddon

Rule of Odds

- An odd number works best (not just in photography also in gardening).
- 3 objects in a photo can prevent the viewer dividing the image into halves – *is this true?*
- *Do these photos work because they are on a diagonal?*



©Sarah Beard



©Janet Brown

Avoid Colour Casts & Unrealistic colours

- Avoid colour casts – retain realistic colours – use the correct white balance
- *Do these photos look realistic?*
- *Does the colour palette used enhance the image?*



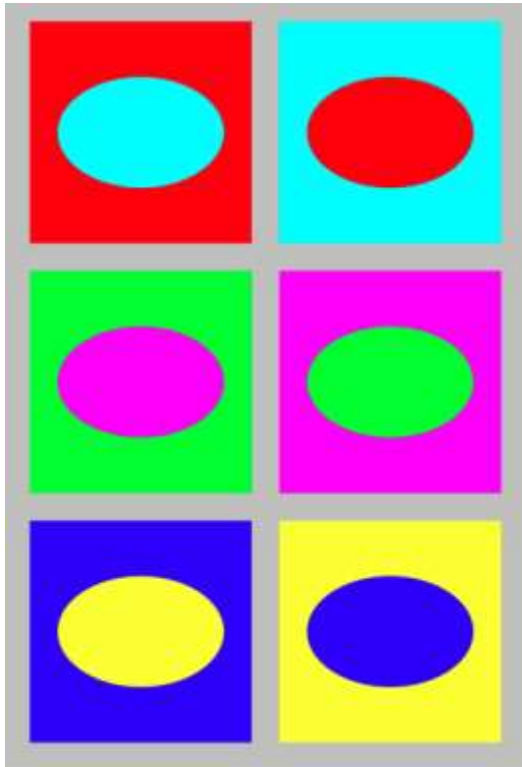
© Martin Baker



© Dean Sephton

Use Harmonious/Complementary Colours

- I could only find one example of a successful photo where colours jumped out as being “jarring”
- *Could colour work by adding tension in a photo?*



© Martin Tomes

RGB complementary colours

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=65923804>

Avoid “over” processing

- Possibly the most contentious/subjective “rule”
- “Over processing” is common on social media. Flickr groups like *Sliders Sunday Post processed to the Max!* champion it use a high degree of processing - *is this the same as over processing or is overprocessing only where artifacts are introduced?*
- “Photoshop effects” split opinion - judges usually ask: does the processing improve the image? ☞
- The right level of sharpening and mid tone contrast (clarity) can equally be subjective ☞
- *What kind of processing would meet the set subject brief? Would these examples qualify?*



©David Perks



© Daisy Kane

© Dean Sephton

The subject the photographer wants me to focus on should be obvious

- by having something for the eye to settle on eg by utilizing depth of field or exposure density. ☞
- avoiding competing backgrounds
“The purpose of the background is to complement & draw attention to the subject.”
- Avoid out of place highlights – where the brightest part of the image is not the subject



© Andy Jones
In the top 2 images there is no subject for the eye to settle on does this matter as the subject is the chaos in a group?



© Dean Sephton



© Janet Brown
Note 4 leaves and bright areas in the background



© Janet Brown
One judge though the area at the left added context another found it distracting!

Don't chop off part of the subject

- **Hands and Feet** Whether animal or human, if you show knees or elbows, you better show feet and hands.
- **Border Patrol:** As you finish post-processing, survey around the border of your photo. Are there any distractions there? Content Aware them away.



©Audrey Gray



©David Perks
Would these photos
work better if we
could see the hands?



©Janet Brown
One judge rated this image very highly as it does effectively show the chaos at the bird feeder another didn't like the cut off birds!

Fill the Frame (v Negative space)

- All areas of the image should complement or enhance the subject. With photos that involve an off-centred subject, place something in the vacant section of the photo to enhance or balance the photo.
- Sometimes a lot of negative space is included in a photo where the subject (positive space) no longer fills the frame. Definitions of Negative space say it is anything that is not the subject ie it does not have to be empty.
- Minimalist photography usually contains a lot of negative space and can be eye-catching, because the negative space moves the eye straight toward the subject. Minimalism tends to give an atmospheric, airy feel, because the image includes so little something, and so much nothing.
- Snow, sky, grass and plain walls can all be used to generate negative space
- *Do both of these images contain negative space?*



©Dean Sephton



©Andrew Caswell

Avoid Selective Color

- Scott Kelby says, “Nothing says 1980 like selective color.” Just because Photoshop allows one to use selective color does not mean it is a good idea to do so. It is simply dated and cheesy.
- *This example really works anyway , why?*



Photographs should be sharp and free from blur

- Early Pictorialists favoured the artistic look of soft photographs
- Intentional camera movement, soft or historic lenses and pinhole cameras are all now artistic tools as demonstrated by these images.



© Norman Kirby



©Liz Barber

“Correct Exposure”

- Images should contain a full range of tones - avoid blown highlights or blocked shadows
- Hi-Key and Low key images are a long established photographic technique (we don't seem to have too many examples – a future challenge?)



Keep the Sun Behind You

- In the early days of film photography, when all one had was uncoated or single coated lenses and slow films this was perhaps the golden rule. However, now side or back lighting is often preferable.
- *Can flare ever add to an image?*



3 closing thoughts

- **Avoid processing artefacts** – *can halos ever be beneficial?*
- **Point of View:** Normally directed straight at the subject but altering can create added interest. Shooting down at children is usually bad unless it is exaggerated.
- **Symmetry:** Often makes breaking of another rule (like thirds) ok – BUT avoiding symmetry may beneficially add tension.