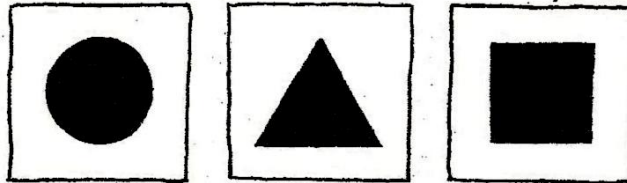


creating interesting shapes

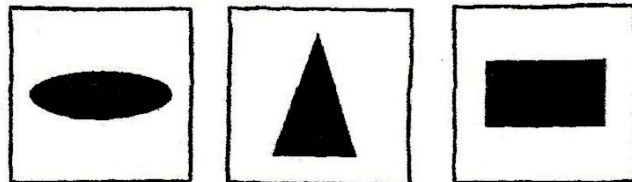
Every shape in your paintings should be an interesting shape. In general, complex shapes are more interesting than simple shapes; a shape with varying dimensions is more interesting than one without. A shape with an oblique diagonal thrust is more interesting and dynamic than one that parallels the edges of the surrounding

frame. A shape with projections and indentations is more interesting than one that is convex. The more a shape complies with the **One Rule: Never make any two intervals the same** the more interesting it becomes.



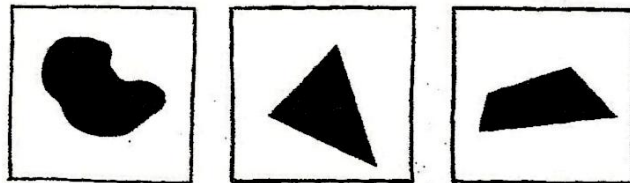
Boring

These shapes are boring. A square has equal sides and angles, as does an equilateral triangle. The intervals from the center of a circle to the circumference are by definition equal.



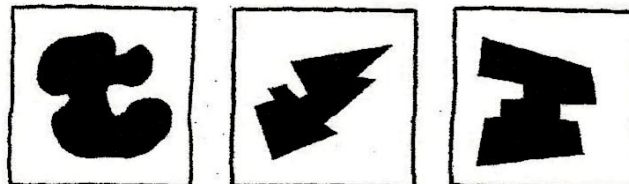
Better

By varying one dimension, a boring geometric shape becomes more interesting. An oval or rectangle is longer than it is wide. An isosceles triangle is taller than its width.



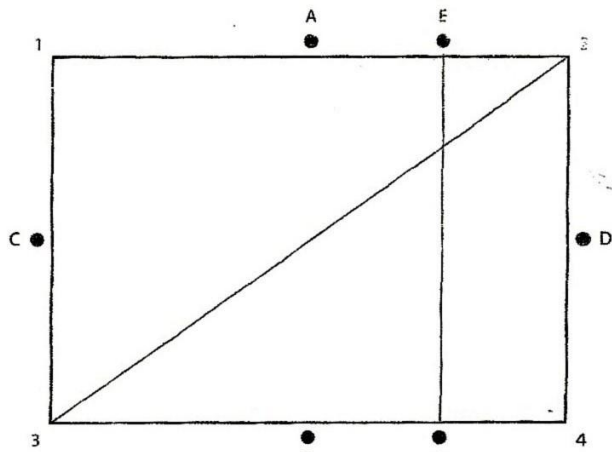
Best

By varying more intervals or dimensions, shapes become increasingly more interesting. Orienting shapes so they are not parallel to the horizon adds even more interest.



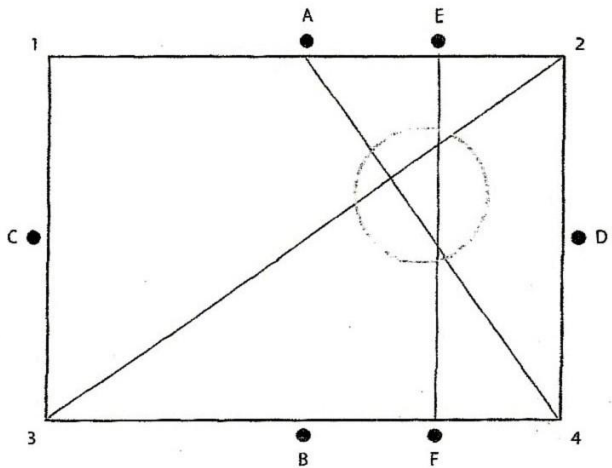
Increase visual energy

Adding "innies and outies" to a shape adds visual energy. A shape with projections and indentations is more interesting than one that is convex.



Draw a Diagonal

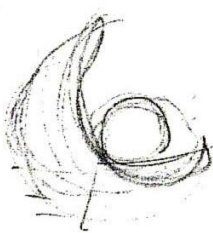
Remember which corner you want your center of interest to be in. In this example, the center of interest will be in the upper right-hand portion of the picture plan. You will always begin in the corner nearest to where your center of interest will be. Draw a diagonal line from the upper right-hand corner (2) diagonally to the bottom left corner (3). Now the picture space is divided into four unequal spaces.



The Center of Interest

Start on the same side as your center of interest but at the opposite (bottom) corner. Draw a diagonal line from the lower right-hand corner (4) to the top center dot (A). Now count the spaces. There are seven unequal spaces. This formula visually breaks the large rectangular space into seven unequal smaller spaces, which is interesting and pleasing—never boring.

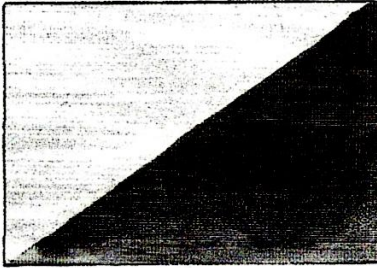
The golden section is where the two lines drawn from the corners cross each other to form an X. Draw a circle around this X as shown to create the golden section. The center of interest can take up all of that circle or just some of it. The bigger the paper, the bigger the area for the focal point becomes.



Enhance visual interest

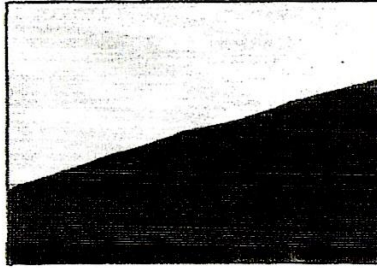
Almost any equal division of your picture will be boring; for example, dividing a picture with a line that goes from corner to corner on the diagonal. Although one side is

not the mirror image of the other, it still creates regular intervals and is therefore boring. Any division of space is an opportunity to enhance visual interest.



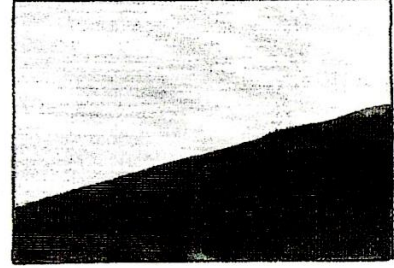
Boring

Don't divide a picture into equal halves, as does a diagonal from corner to corner.



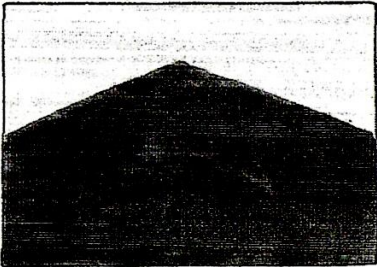
Better

Although not corner to corner, this oblique divides the picture into equal halves. The line divides each side into lengths of the same proportion.



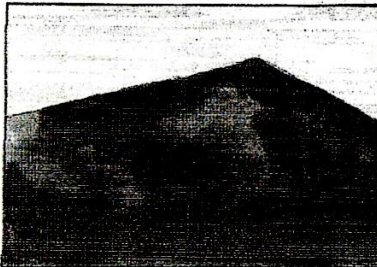
Best

This oblique divides the rectangle into unequal portions. The distance from the top to the line on the right is not equal to the distance from the bottom to the line on the left.



Boring

Placing a mountain peak in the exact center with sides of equal length violates the **ONE RULE OF COMPOSITION: Never make any two intervals the same.**



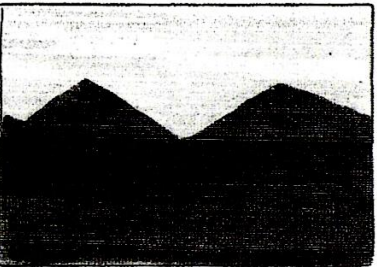
Better

Placing the peak off-center makes it more interesting. However, the sides of the rectangle are divided into the same intervals.



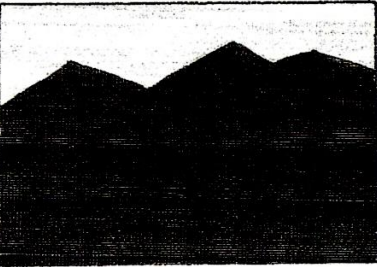
Best

In this arrangement, no two intervals are the same. The sides of the mountain are different lengths, the peak is off-center, and the sides of the rectangles are divided into four different lengths.



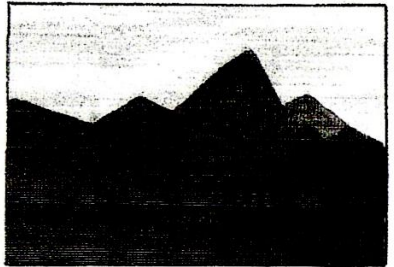
Boring

The sides and angles are equal and they divide the rectangle in half in this example. It is monotonous and boring.



Better

This mountain skyline is nearly as boring because the peaks are spaced equally, are of the same angle, and have sides of the same length.



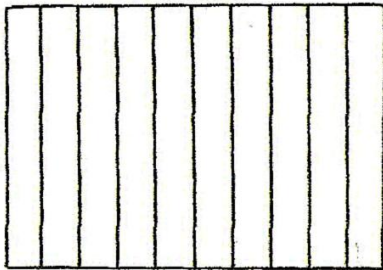
Best

This skyline is more interesting because the angles and the lengths of the sides are varied.

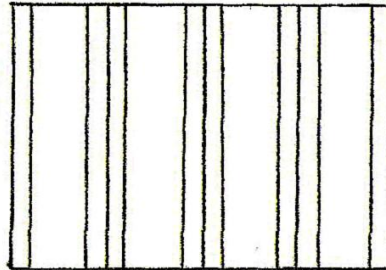
dividing the space between objects

Let's look at how the *intervals* or spaces between objects makes the objects more attractive to the eye. How things are arranged relative to each other determines the degree of interest generated for the viewer.

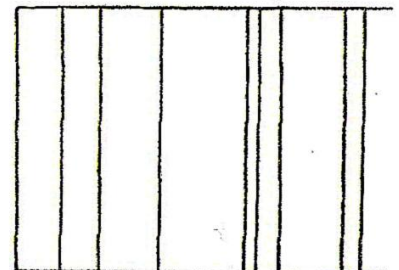
In the examples on this page, the spacing is increasingly irregular. The visual interest increases with added variation.



Boring
Even spacing is the least interesting arrangement.



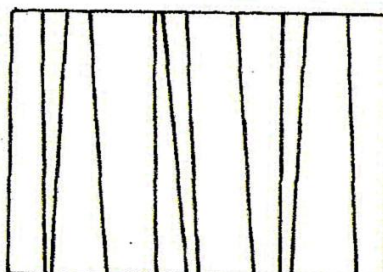
Better
Adding some variation to the spacing adds interest, but there is still a regular pattern.



Best
No intervals are the same, slowing the eye's ability to detect a pattern when scanning.



Vary width
Varying the width of the lines adds more variety and interest.



Vary orientation
Varying the orientation disrupts the monotonous parallel arrangement and increases interest.



Vary all the intervals
Varying the intervals between the lines, their alignments and their widths generates much more visual activity.

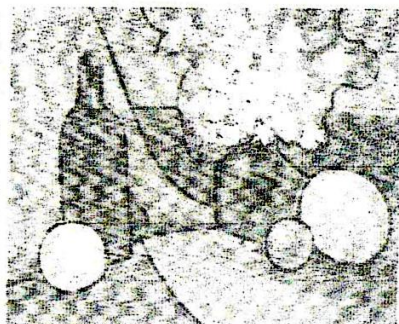
why the ONE RULE OF COMPOSITION works

the science behind a good composition

The rule *Never make any two intervals the same* may even have a physiological basis. When a nerve is stimulated, a complex chemical reaction takes place that sends messages to the brain. If the stimulus is repeated or is of long duration, the nerve depletes itself of certain chemicals and can no longer send messages to the brain. The sensation ceases and we say the nerve has gone numb. In short, repetitive stimuli deaden the nerves. To prevent numbing over-stimulation, we need a variety of stimuli that excite but don't deaden our brains.

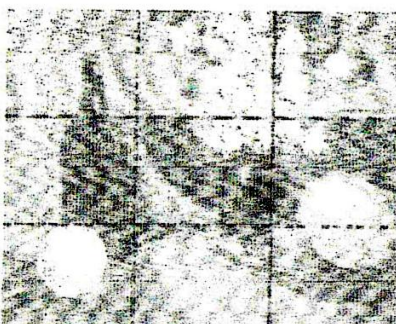
Create interest with variety

This painting is a quick study in the conscious, deliberate application of the **ONE RULE OF COMPOSITION: *Never make any two intervals the same*** to an imaginary still life. All the dimensions were intentionally made different. There is enough variety to create interest, but not so much as to disrupt the overall unity of the picture. (The compositional principles applied here will be examined in detail in the following chapters.)



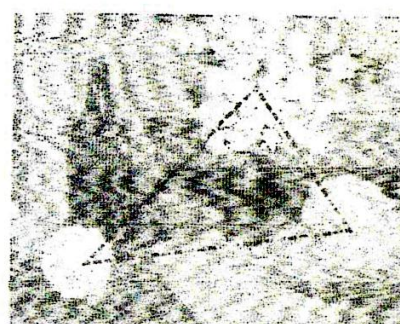
Vary the shapes

The shapes of the objects vary in size and complexity (although in retrospect, it appears that there may be too many boring circular shapes—perhaps a lemon and a pumpkin could have replaced the generic yellow and orange shapes).



Concentrate on placement

The center of interest—the flowers—is located at the intersection of vertical and horizontal thirds. The flowers form a focal point (an eye magnet) because they are the lightest, brightest objects, have greater detail and complexity, and are visually more active than other parts of the picture.



Lead the eye

The lines lead the eye into the picture, not out. Any lines or shapes that might direct the viewer's attention to an outside edge or corner of the picture have been avoided.

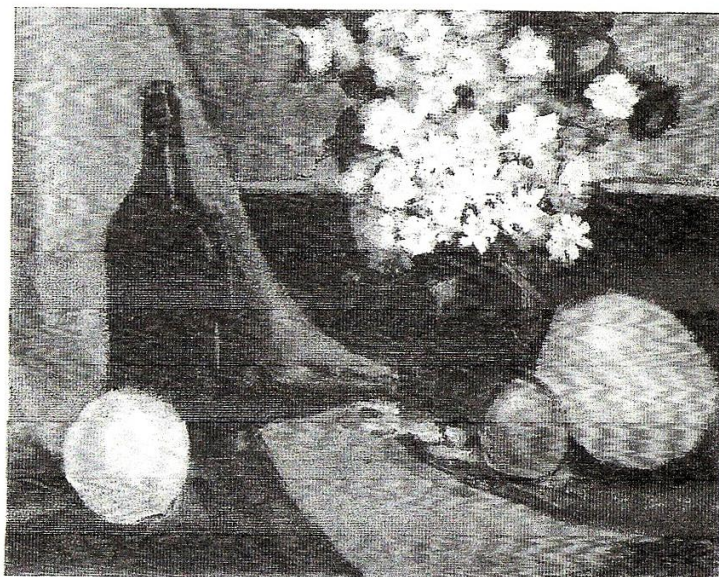
The three lightest focal areas, the flowers, the yellow shape and the orange shape, form three points of interest that keep the eye circulating within the rectangle. Notice too, how they form a triangular path, no side of which is parallel to the frame.

The rule *Never make any two intervals the same* is based on human nature. We seek change to add variety in our lives. By varying the intervals as we compose our paintings, we introduce variety. Successful composition is based on this human need.

This book focuses on how to make a pleasing design, because that is what most artists want

most of the time. However, all the rules for making a design pleasing also can be used to make an unpleasant design—either unpleasantly boring or unpleasantly chaotic—if that is your artistic intention.

Since we are all unique individuals with different experiences, beliefs and associations, no two people will read the same message into the marks that we make. The marks we make are open to unlimited interpretation; they are symbols with no exact, universal meaning.



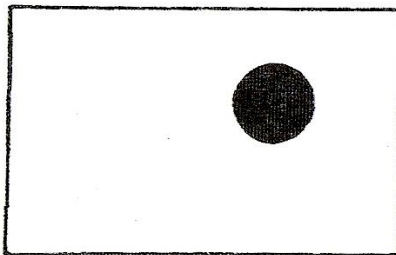
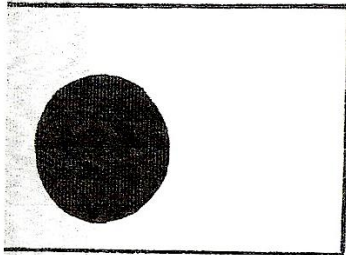
visual weight

Another concept that we can use to describe certain marks is that of *visual weight*. Just as some designs appear more active, some appear to be heavier. They have an apparent weight or heft that suggests they are more massive, ponderous or inert than others. Other designs just seem to be less heavy, capable of floating or being easily lifted or set into motion.

Often, but not necessarily always, weight and energy are exclusive. Many designs with more apparent visual

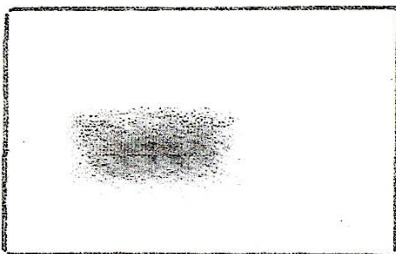
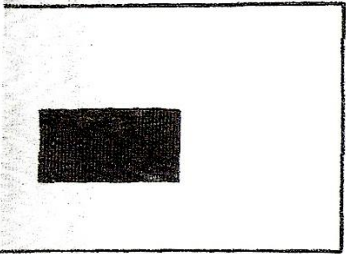
energy do not have a quality of weightiness, and inactive designs do not have a quality of lightness.

Nevertheless, the terms *visual energy* and *visual weight* are useful—if not exactly scientific—ways to discuss the impression certain designs, marks or patterns have on most people.



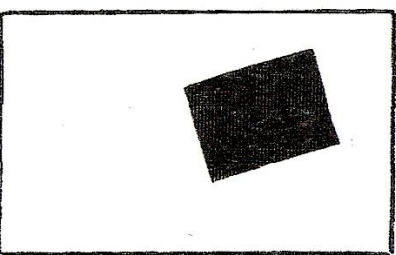
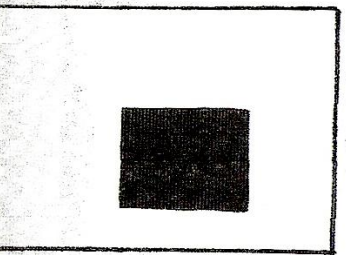
Size and placement

The circle on the left is larger and closer to the bottom of the rectangle, so it appears heavier than the smaller circle on the right.



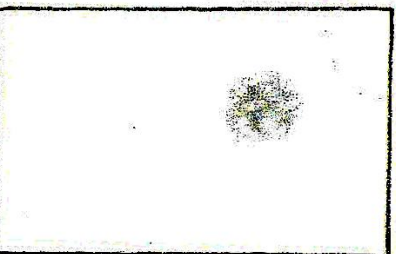
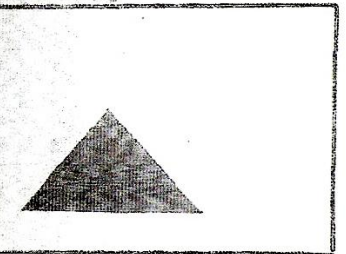
Edges and weight

Solid coloring and hard edges give the slab on the left an apparent density that makes it appear heavier than the soft-edged one on the right.



Placement

The black rectangle on the left is parallel to the frame around it and close to the bottom edge, so it appears stable. The one on the right appears to be floating because it is not parallel to the frame or close to the edge.



Shape, placement and color

The triangle on the left looks heavier than the yellow circle on the right because it is a stable shape with its base parallel to the bottom edge, and it has a dark, cool color.

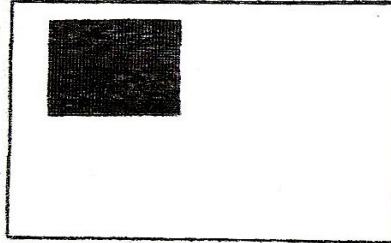
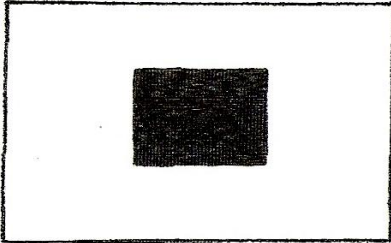
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dynamics of the frame

Any mark, shape or pattern on a surface creates a relationship with the edges of that surface, be it a piece of drawing paper, a pad of watercolor paper, a canvas or any other surface we can decorate or embellish. The mark interacts with the edges of the surface, creating a dynamic relationship that is affected by our sense of visual tension, weight or energy as discussed earlier.

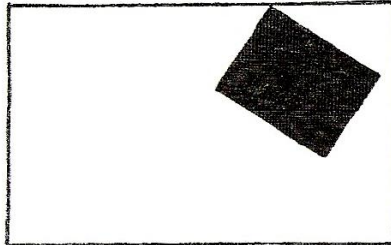
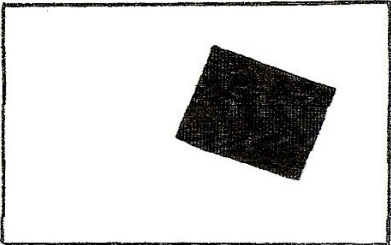
Since most painting and drawing are done on a rectangular surface, the dynamics of that format are an important part of composition.

Movement, thrust and conflict can be suggested by a mark's orientation and proximity to the edges of its rectangular frame. In the examples on this page, position, distance, weight and energy affect our interpretation.



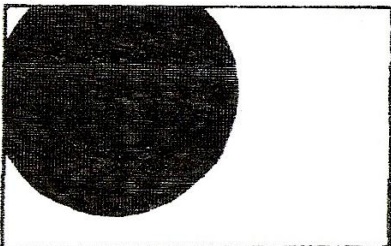
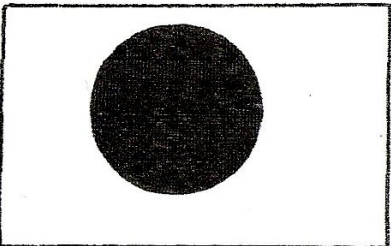
Distance from the frame

The closer a figure is placed to the edge or boundary of the rectangular frame, the greater the visual tension produced. The shape on the right has greater visual energy and less weight than the one on the left because it appears to be approaching, or perhaps trapped by, the corner of the frame.



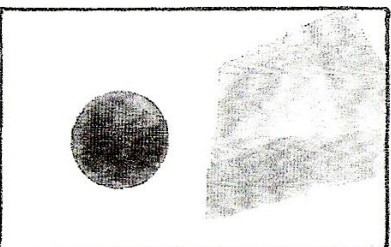
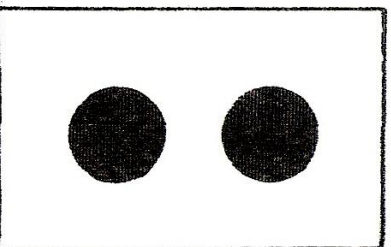
Orientation within the frame

Both of these shapes have greater energy than the ones above because they have an oblique orientation. The shape on the right produces greater visual tension because one corner impinges on the frame. Its sharp corner is in contact with the edge and creates several angular shapes.



Movement through the frame

The black circle on the right generates greater visual tension or energy because it appears to have broken through the frame. Visual tension is created by the ambiguity of its movement either in or out of the frame and by its large size relative to that of the rectangular frame.

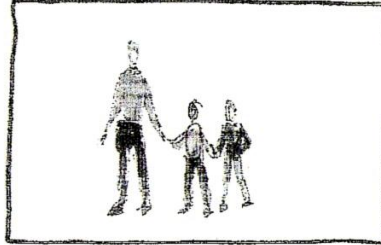
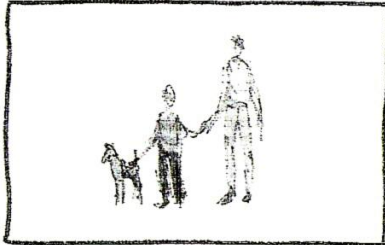


Relationships within the frame

The two circles on the left have a static relationship with the frame: they are equidistant from the edges and from each other and therefore exhibit little visual tension or energy. On the right, the circle contrasts with the shape next to it. They vary in size, color, shape, texture, orientation and contact with the edges of the frame, generating much more visual tension.

Boring: even steps down in size

The figures are all different in height so there is some variety, but the step-down pattern is boring.

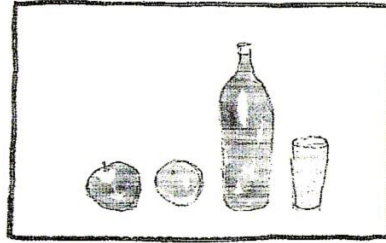


Better: more dynamic arrangement

Putting the taller figure to one side in an asymmetrical arrangement is more dynamic.

Boring: symmetrical arrangement

Shape, color and texture add interest, but this symmetrical arrangement is still static.

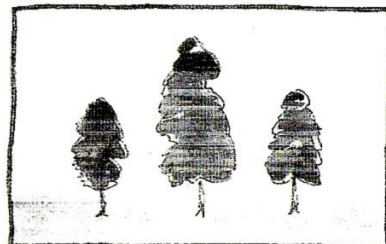
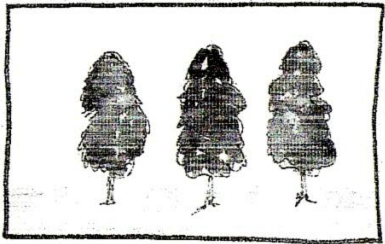


Better: asymmetrical arrangement

Placing the taller object to one side creates a more dynamic, asymmetrical arrangement.

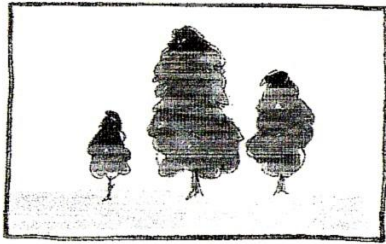
Boring: trees are the same height

Odd numbers are more interesting than even. Three is the smallest odd number that is inherently interesting. However, the trees are all the same height, a boring arrangement.



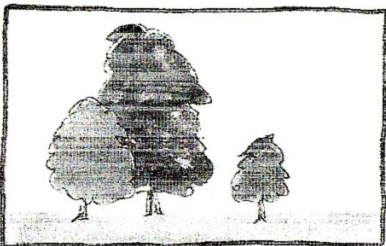
Better: tree height varies

This is better: the middle tree is now taller, but it is still a static, symmetrical arrangement.



Even better: mama, papa, baby

These three trees correspond to Mama Bear, Papa Bear and Baby Bear. This is a pleasing grouping and complies with the **ONE RULE: Never make any two intervals the same.**



Best: different heights and spacing

This is a variation of the three bears. Not only are the three trees of different heights, they are no longer equidistant.

the importance of balance

Balance is a key part of creating a pleasing composition. Imbalance is disconcerting or distracting, so an unbalanced composition can make the viewer feel uncomfortable. There is a reason for the expression "mentally unbalanced": the psychological feeling of being out of balance is as unpleasant as the physical one. Lack of balance suggests incompleteness, irresolution and unpredictability.

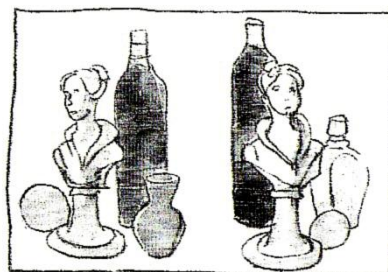
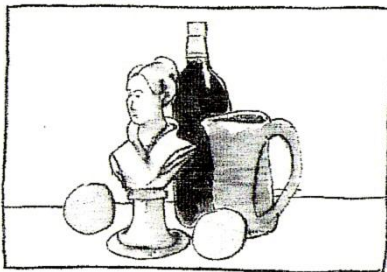
A composition lacks balance if its components do not require the viewer's eye to cross over a central axis. If all the visual activity is concentrated on one side of the composition, the viewer has no reason to look from one side to the other. The sense of incompleteness this creates upsets our equilibrium.

If the visual activity is equal or identical on either side



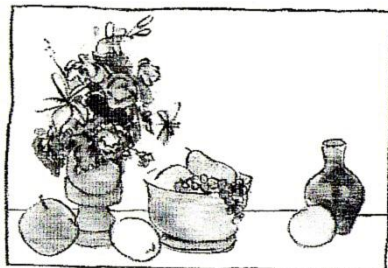
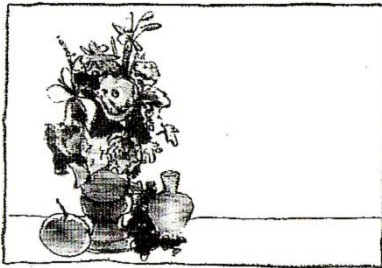
Unbalanced

If all the visual activity is on one side of a central axis, the viewer's eye is not required to cross over, and a sense of imbalance is created.



Static balance

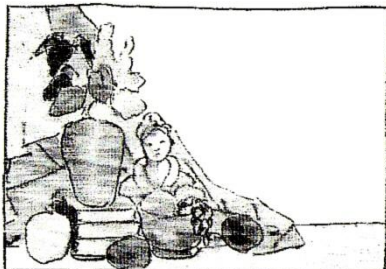
If all the visual activity is situated on the central axis (*far left*), or if the visual activity is identical on both sides of the axis (*near left*), a static balance is created.



Cross over the central axis

When all the visual energy is concentrated in only half of the picture (*far left*), the **ONE RULE OF COMPOSITION** is violated. The viewer's eye does not cross over the central dividing line and an unbalanced, unattractive composition results.

By locating an element with visual energy on the other side of the central axis, the viewer's eye crosses over it and a dynamic balance is achieved (*near left*).



Diagonal axis

The central axis is not always vertical. Locating all the visual activity on one side of a diagonal dividing line creates an unbalanced composition (*far left*).

This painting (*near left*) shows how locating an element with visual energy on the other side of the diagonal axis creates a dynamic balance.

static versus dynamic balance

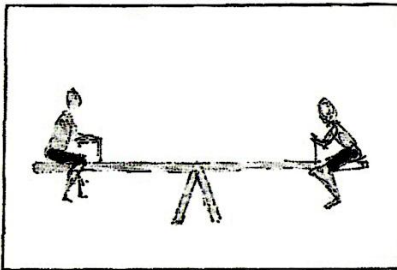
Achieving balance is a matter of adjusting visual weight and visual energy. If balance is created with visual elements identical in both weight and energy on either side of a central axis, a static balance is achieved. Static balance does not follow the **ONE RULE OF COMPOSITION**: *Never make any two intervals the same.*

If the balance is created with two visual elements that are not identical in weight and energy, a dynamic bal-

ance is achieved. Intervals are not the same and the **ONE RULE OF COMPOSITION** applies.

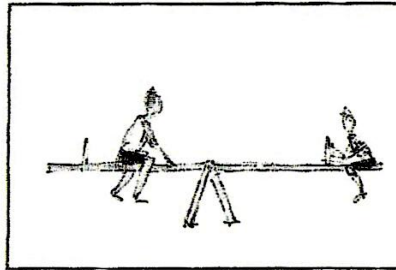
Static balance is also called *formal, classical* or *symmetrical* balance because it is based on an equal or even (symmetrical) arrangement along a central axis.

Dynamic balance is also called *informal* or *asymmetrical* balance and is based on an uneven arrangement.



Static balance

When children of the same weight are equidistant from the center, they balance perfectly and the seesaw remains level.



Dynamic balance

If one child is bigger and both are equidistant from the center, the seesaw doesn't remain level. To keep the seesaw level, the bigger child must move closer to the center, or the smaller child farther from the center.



Symmetrical arrangement

Avoid centering things. The center is the most boring part of the painting. Symmetrical compositions are naturally static.



Asymmetrical arrangement

Although the image is still centralized, the tree and house are asymmetrically arranged and visual interest is increased.



Static balance

The tree and the house have identical visual weight and energy. A static balance is created.



Dynamic balance

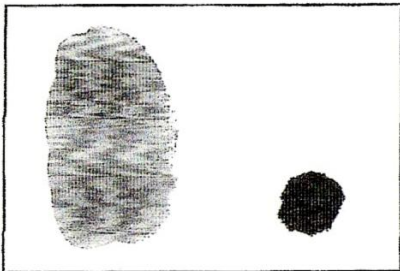
The house and tree on the left have greater visual weight, but the house and tree on the right counter-balance the weight, creating a dynamic balance.

balancing visual weight and energy

Dynamic balance is achieved by adjusting the visual weight and energy of a painting's components so there is enough variation to be interesting, but not so much that the picture loses coherence. If the components are equal in terms of visual weight and energy, a boring static balance occurs. If the components are too dissimilar or unequal, an imbalance will occur.

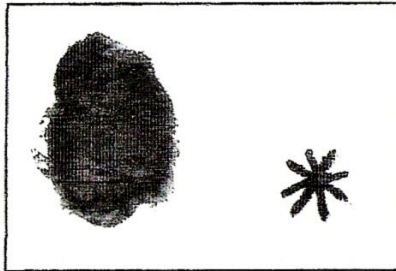
Two components can be dynamically balanced by adjusting their visual weight or visual energy. A visually

heavy element can be countered by a sufficiently energetic element. Size, color, complexity and many other characteristics can be adjusted to create a visually exciting balance. For example, a brightly colored or strongly textured object can balance a larger, but dull-colored or untextured shape.



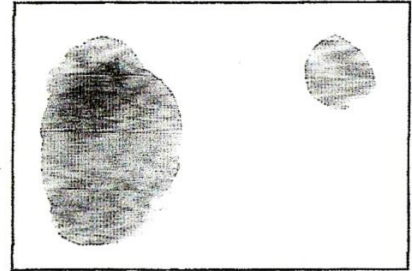
Weight

The larger shape on the left is balanced by the heavier, smaller, darker shape on the right.



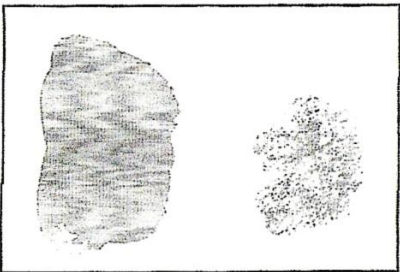
Energy

The larger shape on the left is balanced by the smaller shape with greater visual energy on the right.



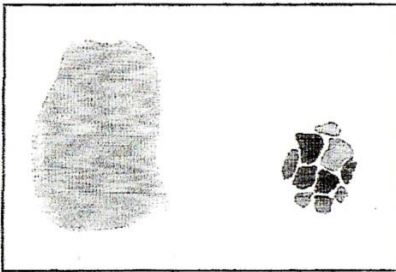
Color

The larger, cooler shape is balanced by the smaller, warmer red shape on the right.



Texture

The larger flat shape is balanced by the smaller shape with greater texture on the right.



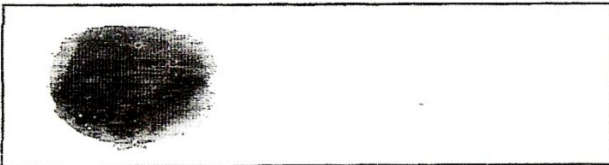
Complexity

The more complex pattern on the right counterbalances the simpler shape on the left.



Gradation

The solid shape on the left is counterbalanced by the gradation in the opposite corner.



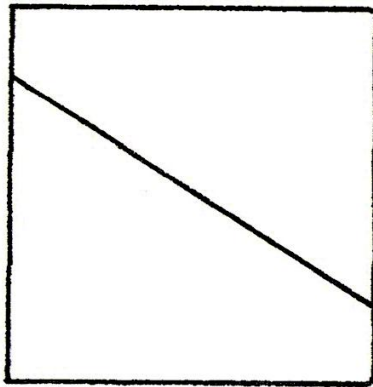
Distance

The sheer expanse of space on the right of this elongated frame counterbalances the weight of the shape on the left.

path of the eye

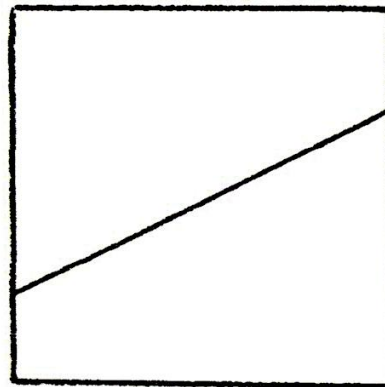
The viewer's eye follows a definite path through the painting as it is scanned. The artist can use strategies to deliberately control this path. Our job as artists is to make the path as interesting and as enduring as possible. We don't want to create an easy exit for the viewer's eye; we want to invite a long and pleasantly entertaining stay within the boundaries of the painting. We also want to create in the viewer the desire to return for another look.

When a child learns to read, he learns to start at the upper left of the page and moves down toward the right. After twelve years of schooling and a lifetime of reading, starting in the upper left becomes an ingrained habit. Because this is such a strong tendency, we usually look at a painting by scanning it the same way. The upper-left corner then is a good entry point for the viewer.



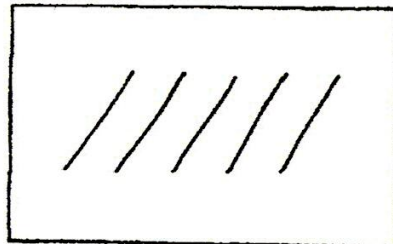
Going from upper left to lower right

Most people would describe this line as going from the upper left down to the right. Why? Because it aligns with the visual path we usually follow as we read, from upper left to lower right.



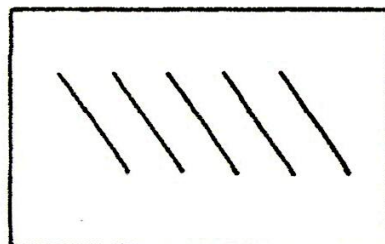
Going from lower left to upper right

Most people see this line as going up from the lower left to the upper right because reading from the right to the left contradicts the normal path of the eye.



Left to right

These lines "go with the grain," that is, they seem to follow the eye's tendency to scan from left to right.



Countering the norm

These lines counter the normal path of the eye and therefore look more energetic.

compositional “magnets”

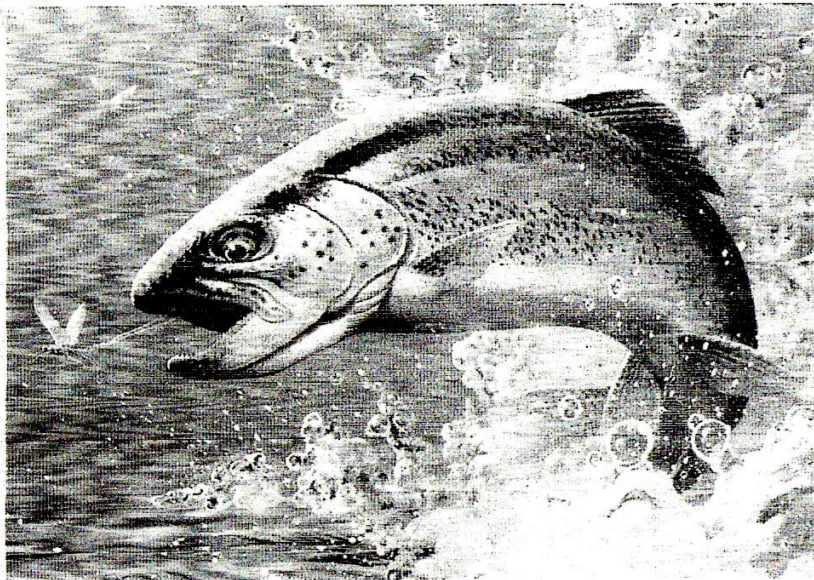
A good painting has to be about something. It must have a specific subject that attracts and holds the viewer's attention. Without a subject, a painting appears empty or incomplete, quickly boring the viewer.

Every painting needs to have one main area of interest, the reason the painting was created in the first place. The painting can evoke a mood, express emotion or inspire some reaction in the viewer, but it does that by making a statement about its subject. Even a nonrepresentational painting needs a main area of interest to avoid being glorified wallpaper.

In other words, every picture needs a dominant feature that acts as both a magnet and an anchor. As a *magnet*, it must be an almost irresistible attraction that

pulls the viewer in. As an *anchor*, the dominant feature keeps the eye from drifting away once it has been captured. A painting does this by being both visually and psychologically compelling.

Magnets for the viewer are of two types: a *focal point* and a *center of interest*. The focal point of a painting is the spot that attracts the *eye* of the viewer because it is visually appealing. The center of interest is the spot that attracts the *mind* of the viewer because it is intellectually appealing.



Rainbow Trout * Rod Lawrence * 7" x 10" (18cm x 25cm) * Acrylic on panel * Private collection

Lead the eye

In this painting, the viewer is first attracted to the strongest eye magnet, the fish's mouth, which is the main center of interest. Once it has gathered information about that area of the picture, the eye quickly moves on to another eye magnet, the fly. Then it will go to the next most interesting point, the splash of water to the right. From there it will follow the curve of the fish's bottom back to its mouth, from which the circulatory path through the picture originated.



center of interest

The center of interest is a magnet for the mind. It is where the viewer wants to look to find information. Two elements may be visually identical in terms of contrast or energy, but if one offers more meaning, that is where the viewer looks first.

The best example of something in a picture that attracts the mind is a figure. We can't resist the human presence in a scene.

A landscape without a figure often appears oddly and, perhaps, disturbingly vacant. Even if the subject from which you are working doesn't include people, consider adding them. Remember, they will become the picture's center of interest, so use the devices mentioned on page 45 to make the figures an eye-arresting focal point.

Also, be careful about including words or numbers in your picture. They can unintentionally become a competing center of interest, stealing attention from where you want the viewer's eye to go.

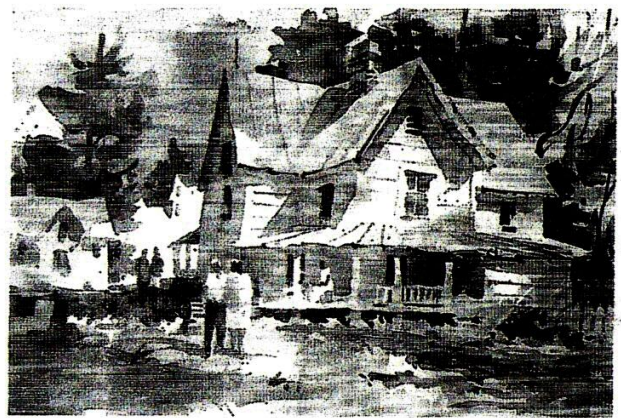
subjects that attract the mind

- Faces
- People
- Words & numbers
- Directional symbols
- Things in motion (runner, airplane)

Demand closer study

The eye is naturally attracted to the figures in front of the house. Visually, other points of the picture are as attractive to the eye, but the mind naturally picks out the figures for closer study.

Pocono Impressions ✧ Tony Van Hasselt ✧ 15" x 22" (38cm x 56cm) ✧ Watercolor on paper



Lead the eye

The eye naturally follows the strong blue path of the water right to the figures on the beach, making them a powerful center of interest.

Tidepool ✧ Louise DeMore ✧ 30" x 40" (76cm x 102 cm) ✧ Oil on canvas



Give life to a landscape

Although reduced to almost unidentifiable spots of color, the eye is drawn to the figurative shapes in the landscape.

Shepherd and Flock ✧ Greg Albert ✧ 9" x 17" (23cm x 43 cm) ✧ Acrylic on watercolor paper

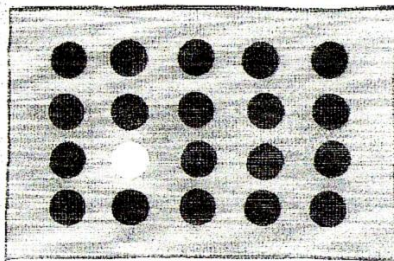
focal point

A focal point is a magnet for the eye. It is a feature in a composition that draws the viewer's eye to it. The viewer will look first at any part of a painting that has these characteristics:

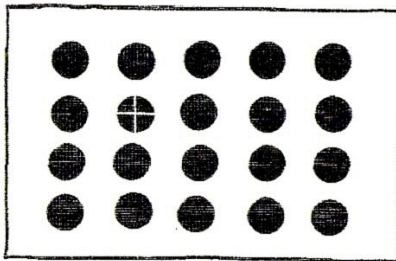
- Contrast in tonal value
- Concentration of visual energy or detail
- Bright or intense color
- Hard edges
- Gap in a pattern
- Anomalies in a pattern
- Tangents
- Intersections or convergence

All of these are really different types of contrast. What attracts the eye is some sort of contrasting characteristic that makes an element stand out because it is unlike any other. In the examples on this page, notice how the eye is attracted to the contrasting element.

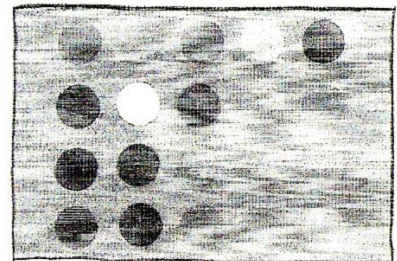
You can use any of these characteristics to make a particular feature in your painting a magnet for the eye, but there should only be one dominant feature, one "star." The focal point and the center of interest should be one and the same. In other words, the eye and the mind should be attracted to the same spot. If there are competing features, such as two focal points or two centers of interest attracting the mind, the viewer doesn't know where to look.



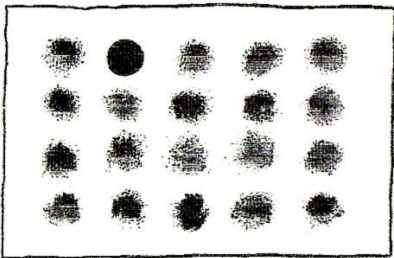
Contrast in tonal value



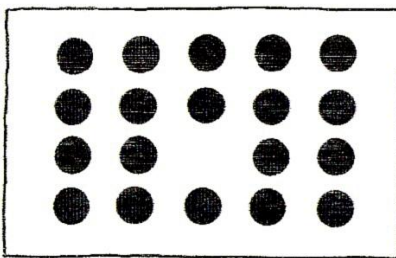
Concentration of visual energy or detail



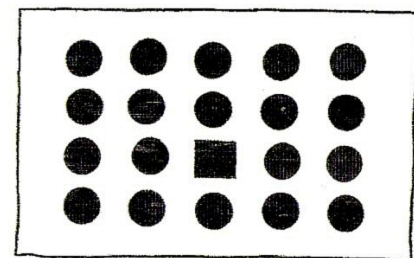
Bright or intense color



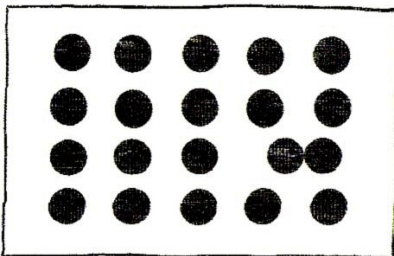
Hard edges



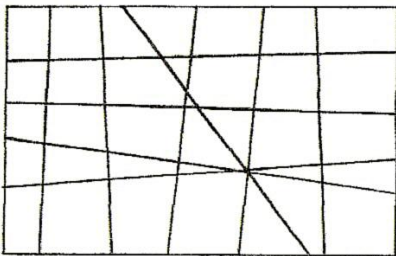
Gap in a pattern



Anomalies in a pattern



Tangents



Intersections or convergence

placing the focal point

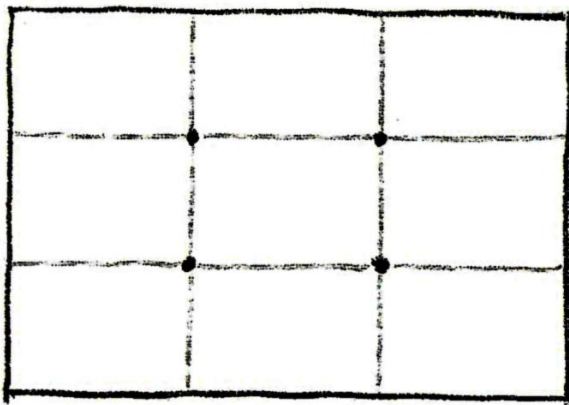
The overall effectiveness of a painting's design will be a function of the location of its focal point and center of interest. Luckily, the **ONE RULE OF COMPOSITION: Never make any two intervals the same** can be used to find the right place every time. The focal point should be located in a place that is at a different distance from all four sides of the picture.

The Rule of Thirds

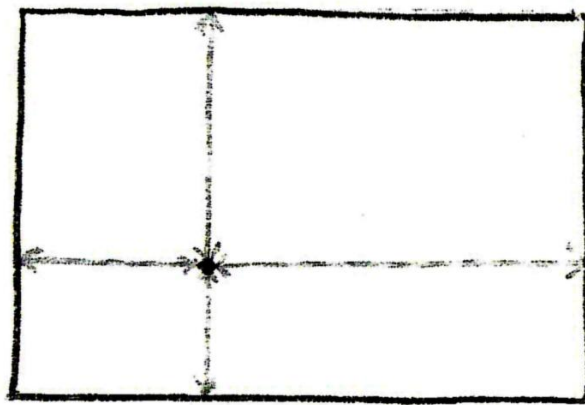
The **Rule of Thirds** says to divide your picture into thirds vertically and horizontally. (Think tic-tac-toe).

The intersections of the two horizontal dividing lines and the two vertical lines create what I call the four *sweet spots*. Any one of these intersections is a good location for the center of interest because each location is unequally distant from the four sides.

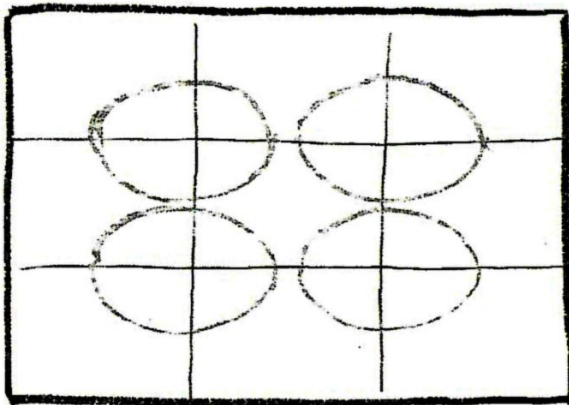
An alternate way to locate the center of interest is to divide the format into four equal quadrants. The center of each would be a good position for your *primary subject*. Either method will give you an interestingly off-center place to put the focal point.



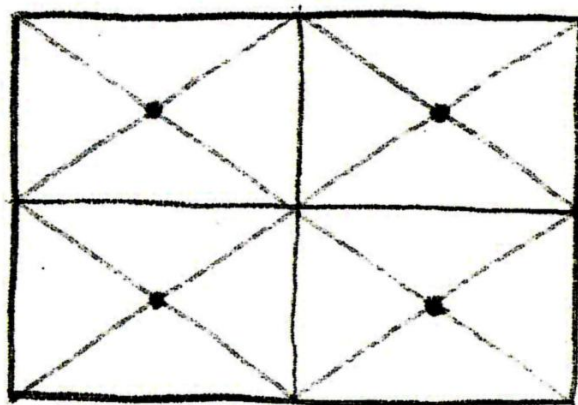
Divide the picture area as for tic-tac-toe
Divide the picture into thirds vertically and horizontally. The intersections of these divisions form the best locations for your picture's center of interest.



Find the intersection of thirds
Each point determined by the **Rule of Thirds** is a spot at different intervals from all four sides, complying with our **ONE RULE OF COMPOSITION: Never make any two intervals the same**.



Use sweet spots as guides
The center of interest does not have to be at the exact point the Rule of Thirds indicates. Close is good enough.



Divide the picture area into quadrants
An alternate way to locate good positions for the center of interest is to divide the format into four equal quadrants and find the center of each.

blocks and exits

As obvious as it sounds, you want to direct lines into the painting, toward the interior and not toward the periphery. However, any line has the potential to lead out as well as lead in. As important as knowing what to do to keep the eye within the frame, is knowing what to avoid

center of the picture
direct attention into the

- Don't do anything that attracts attention to the frame or border.
- Don't crowd things into a corner.
- Don't let shapes touch the edge of the frame.
- Don't have faces or figures looking out of the frame.

in order to keep the eye from drifting out.

Avoid leaks and drains

A line from edge to edge will pull the eye right through a painting. In fact, any line that touches the edge of the painting's format is a potential eye leak. A line touching the edge provides a ready exit for the eye right out of the picture by drawing attention to the edge.

A line that touches a corner of a painting is like a drain. Because the corner is where two

edges (both places where the eye can drop out of the painting) meet, the outward pull is strong. Any line that directs the eye to a corner is an invitation to leave the picture entirely.

Create blocks and eye magnets

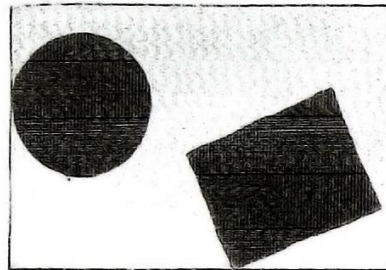
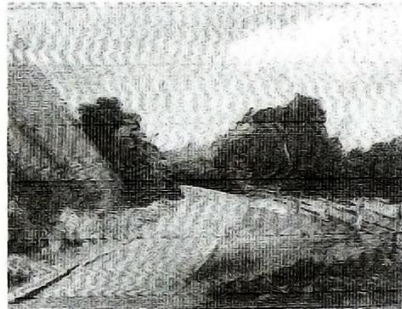
To keep the eye from following a line out of a picture, you need to use *view blocks* as well as eye magnets. A view block can be a line, shape or some other graphic element that stops the eye on its way toward the edge of the picture. It blocks the eye from following the path out of the picture and redirects it back in.

View blocks are usually placed close to the edge or in the corners of a picture. In a horizontal format, the blocks would normally be placed on the right or left edge, since the eye naturally follows the horizontal orientation to those edges. The eye is less likely to fall out the top or bottom. View blocks are more often placed in the lower corners than the upper ones.

By using a combination of blocks and eye magnets, you can keep the viewer's attention inside the picture.

Don't run lines into corners

Corners are natural drains for the eye. Every corner of this painting has a diagonal leading the eye out of the composition.

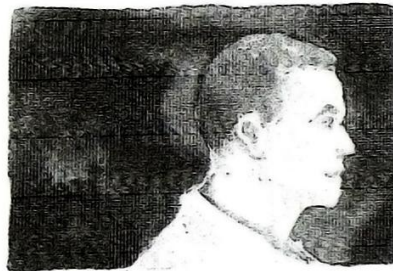


Don't place shapes tangent to the edge

These tangents become unwanted focal points that lead the eye right out of the picture.

Don't place figures facing out

Don't play "made you look" with the viewer by placing a figure looking toward a nearby edge of the painting. This naturally attracts attention outside the composition.



Don't place lines leaning out

Don't direct the eye to the edge of the format with lines that thrust away from the center of the painting.

the importance of value contrast

The success of your painting depends on value more than any other element. Good tonal value contrast attracts the viewer's attention and creates clarity.

Compare the examples on this page. The picture with a wide range of tonal values, from light to dark, and

strong contrast is the most appealing. Notice that the words in the examples (*left*) strongly contrast with the background, making them easy to read. More paintings are weakened by the lack of value contrast than in any other compositional failing.

**CONTRAST
CREATES
CLARITY**

**NO CONTRAST
CREATES
CONFUSION**



Strong contrast
Strong tonal value contrast increases the clarity of your paintings and attracts and retains the viewer's attention.



Weak contrast
Lack of value contrast can weaken your painting. It is important to provide at least one element of strong contrast.