

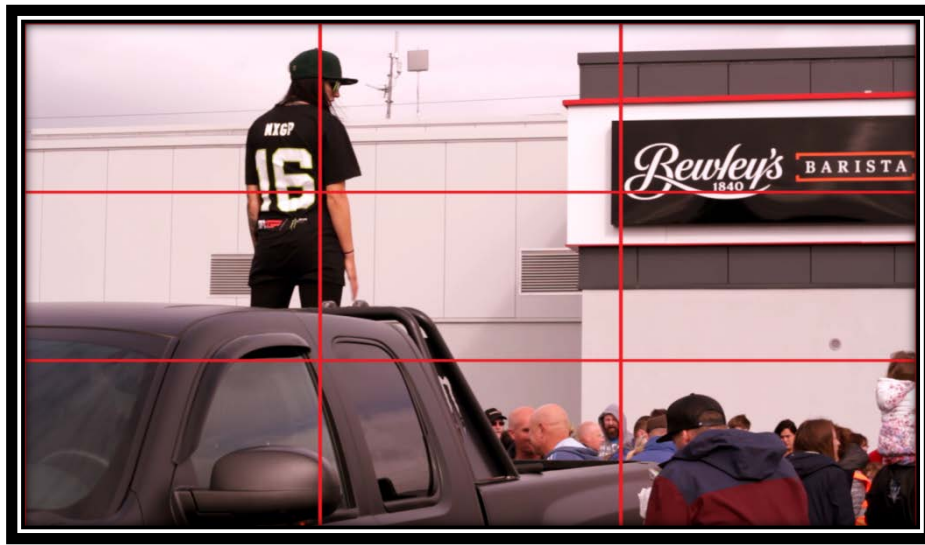
Topic 3 - The Rule of Thirds

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, you will have a good grounding in how to compose your photograph by following the rule known as the rule of thirds.

Of course, like all rules, it is there to be broken but always make sure that you have a very good reason for doing so. The great thing about this rule is that it is a simple way to improve the composition of your shot and it is generally a safe bet if you are unsure of how you want to frame your subject or the landscape in your scene.

Let us take a look at the basic composition of a photograph I took in late Autumn at a race car event.

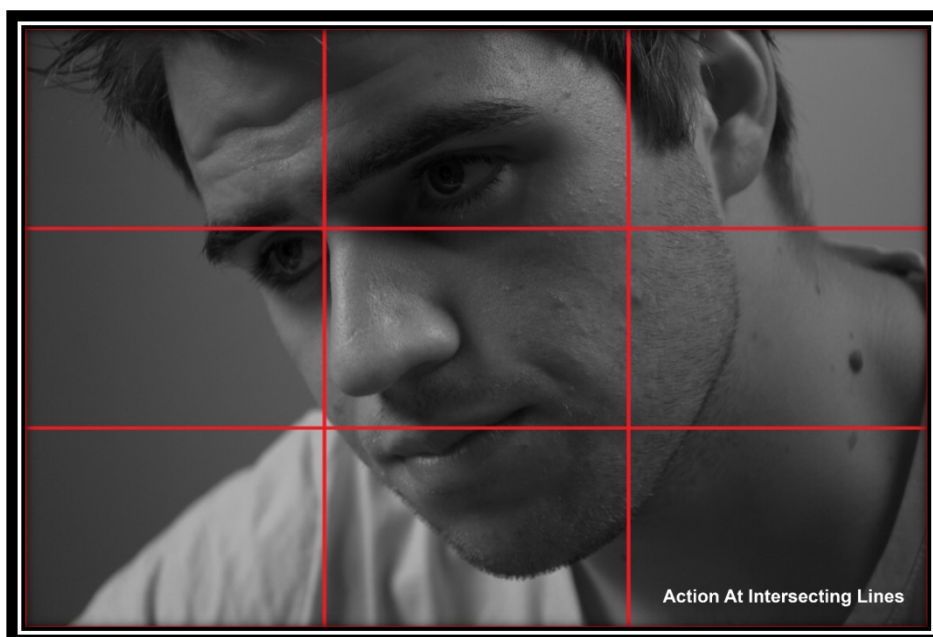


You will immediately notice that there is a grid of nine squares evenly distributed over the photograph. There are two horizontal lines going across the image and two vertical lines running from top to bottom. The key goal here is to ensure that your point of interest occurs at these intersecting lines. At a very basic level, you might say that I succeeded with what I intended to do in that I captured the young woman standing on the back of the truck.

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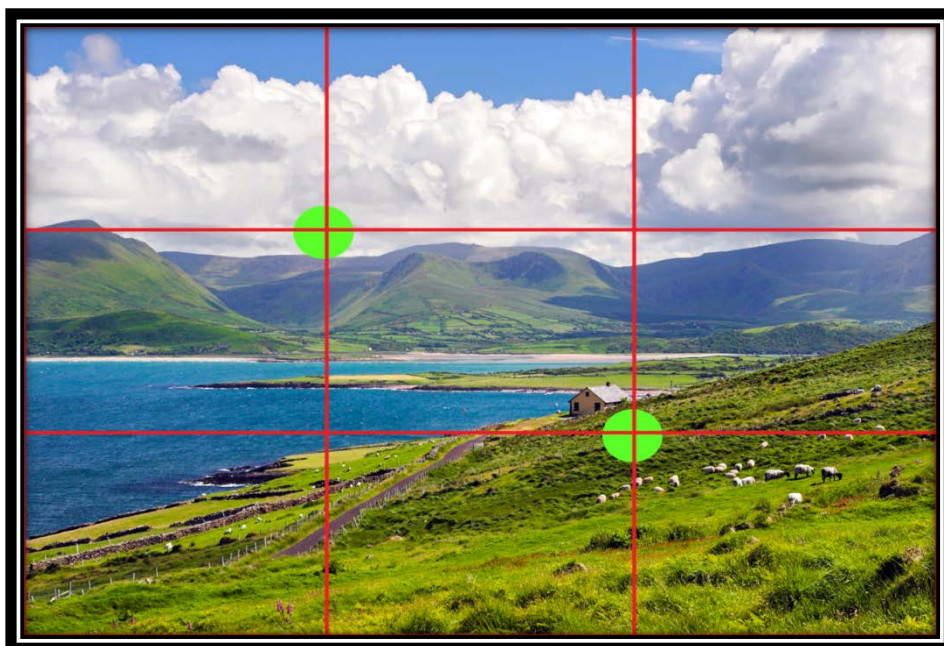
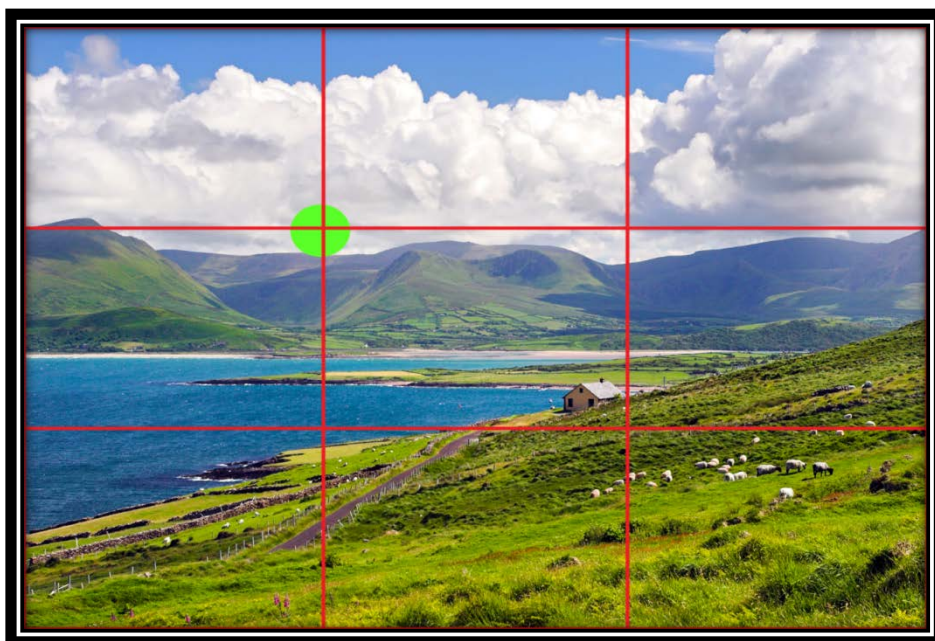
It's not perfect, by any means, but it is a good starting example of how to get the right balance in your photography. With this technique, your main interest will often be thrown slightly left or right off the centre of the image. In this case, the lady photographed is off to the left of the photograph. I could have improved the compositional balance of the photograph if I had positioned the line of the crowd to meet the lower right hand side line. This is why I mentioned in earlier videos that it is always good to take as many photographs as you can. Then, you can pick which one suits best.

With portraiture photography, the line of interest is generally in line with the eyes so that the horizontal line meets the vertical line. This portrait photograph of a friend of mine, Ryan, should give you all great hope if you're new to portraiture photography. It was the first time I worked on staged photography and it was also my first attempt at following this compositional guideline. You are immediately drawn to Ryan's eyes, as they are the main point of interest in this photograph. In a sense, the eyes are the story. We are curious to know what he is looking at and what he is reflecting on as he is obviously deep in thought.



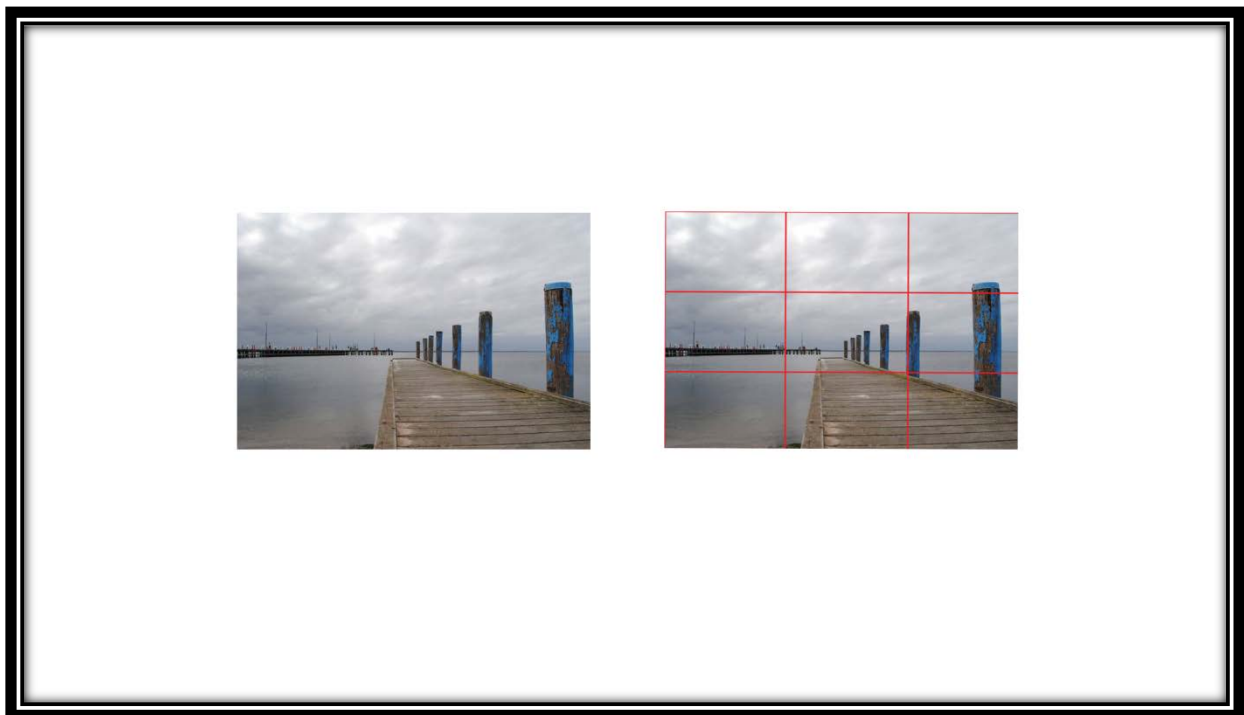
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This technique is very useful when taking landscape photography. Again, we have action along the periphery of each line. It may not be perfect, but there is nice balance in this photograph. The first horizontal line threads the border of the mountain tops and the skyline clouds. The lower line intersects with the right sided vertical line drawing your attention to the little cottage at the bottom of the valley. These lines are subtly telling us where to look and, unbeknownst to ourselves, our eyes are being directed to certain sections in the scene, namely the cottage and the skyline.



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The great thing about the thirds technique refers to the potential to create lines from objects or lines that occur naturally within the frame. This can come in the shape of a tree, a wall or even a stop sign on the side of the road. The important thing is having the creative vision to see these opportunities within your frame and utilising them as you see fit. As you can see from this comparison sequence of the same image, the photograph is lined using the objects within the scene, particularly that second pole that runs along the right-hand side vertical line. The photograph maintains balance by running the skyline of the nearby town almost on that lower line, filling up the otherwise blank left hand side of the photograph. Here, the photographer just does enough to keep us interested, primarily due to the clever lining of the second closest pole on the deck. This pole acts as the anchor for the entire scene and our eyes move from this point downwards and left of the frame. A strong photograph will know where it wants you to look, giving you very little option on where you should set your gaze.



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What have we learned today? A Summary

We've learned that the 'Rule of Thirds' is composed of a grid of nine squares and the goal is to ensure that your point of interest occurs at these intersecting lines. We've also learned that you can create lines yourself from objects or lines that occur naturally within the frame, especially when shooting architectural or landscape photography. A strong photograph will know where it wants you to look and it will force your eyes to a certain part of the scene.

