

GET COMFORTABLE WITH VISUAL AIDS

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Three Elements of a Great Photograph

Mr./Madame Toastmaster, fellow Toastmasters, and esteemed guests:

Everyone here takes pictures all the time. For me, the most common subject recently has been my almost-three-month-old son Simon. Everyone takes pictures – but not all pictures turn out great. What can you do to take better pictures? Today you are going to hear about three things that you can do to improve the quality of your photographs. Those three things are composition, lighting, and subject.

Let us talk about composition first. For the sake of time, I am only going to give you a handful of composition tips right now. The first and most important is the Rule of Thirds. Divide each image into a tic-tac-toe board, and the most important element of your image should be not in the center, but at one of the four intersection points. It is much more interesting for your eyes to move to these locations than smack dab in the middle. The next is to use Symmetry. Pay attention to how your eyes move when you look at this photograph. Do they bounce up and down? After this comes the principle of Leading Lines and Patterns. These elements serve to guide eye movement and draw a viewer into a picture. Do you find yourself gazing down the canal? Lastly, allow for Negative Space. The dancer is on the right side of this picture according to the Rule of Thirds, but the black space on the left balances out her presence. Look for the Rule of Thirds, Symmetry, Leading Lines and Patterns, and Negative Space in the rest of the pictures you see in this talk.

A well-composed photograph needs to be well lit as well. Lighting is key to any great picture. An object that seems ordinary at noon may be compelling in the shadows of sunset. The location of the light is also important. Sometimes what is not seen in a photograph – around the edges in this one – is as interesting as what is well illuminated. Also, dim, obscure, or foggy lighting can introduce mysterious elements to an image.

Any picture and have good composition and lighting, but ultimately what makes a photograph most interesting is that it has a good subject. Some pictures remind of you of people that you love. Others show strangers engrossed in an activity – playing with shadows. Still more capture a decisive moment, like jumping up on a seesaw. There are those photographs that show a juxtaposition of random things that deserve a second look. Instead of showing the entirety of an object, consider just doing a detail view that others might miss. And then there are photographs that are compelling because they show power and grandeur, like this cascade in Yosemite National Park.

Overall, I hope you have seen today that there are three simple elements you can pay attention to in your photography that will help you achieve great pictures. Be mindful of your image's composition. Establish or wait for the right lighting. And be sure to choose a subject that catches your viewer's attention. Take these three simple guidelines into account and you will be well on your way to taking great photographs!

Mr./Madame Toastmaster.