

# Creating mood in your images

Bob Breach

## A note about software

- There are now many different types of photo-editing software available
- The principles behind them are often the same, but the tools and how they work often vary between them
- I mainly use (*and will show tonight*):
  - Capture One: Main raw processing software
  - Adobe PS CS3: Only for things that cannot be done in C.One
- Many of the approaches described tonight can only be done effectively on raw images (e.g. colour temp)
- Check what tools are available, and how they work, in order to apply the techniques described using your software

# WHAT IS MOOD?

“Mood is ultimately what sucks the viewer in and separates a good photo from a great photos - it’s what takes us from sitting at our desk, standing in a gallery, or browsing through a magazine rack and places us firmly within the frame. We’re there. We’re feeling what their feeling, we’re seeing what they are seeing.

# HOW DO YOU CAPTURE OR CREATE MOOD IN YOUR PICTURES?

- Understand what creates mood in your images and train yourself to “see moody opportunities” whenever you are out with the camera
- Identify the best weather/time of day/location for your external images
- What are you trying to show in the picture? What is the main point of interest?
  - A mood or emotion
  - A story that you can buy into
  - Something that makes you look twice
  - People in their environment or in a dramatic situation – the right lighting helps
  - An animal in a dramatic environment or showing a striking behaviour
- Look for *different* images, *unusual angles*, *striking poses*, or *dramatic lighting*
- Avoid clichés, “chocolate box” or “record shot” pictures
- If you cannot capture in camera can you potentially create or enhance the right mood in post processing

Will the viewer be able to see what you saw in the picture?



# WEATHER AND TIME OF DAY

# WEATHER

- Weather conditions can often add greatly to the mood of an image
  - Fogs and mists
  - Rain and storm



Raw file



Final image

# WEATHER

- Weather conditions can often add greatly to the mood of an image
  - Interesting skies (grey and even blue is boring)



# OUTDOOR LIGHTING CONDITIONS

- The lighting and time of day have a substantial impact on the image mood and quality
- Usually best in early morning or evening which provides a more interesting light and better definition on subject
- Midday lighting is often flat and uninteresting
- Try to avoid harsh direct lighting which creates difficult to handle highlight/shadows
- Many shots, particularly portrait or nature, often better in diffuse or shady light
- Can use “fill in flash” to minimise harsh lighting effects

# THE GOLDEN HOUR

- Particularly for outdoor shots the “golden hour” can create very moody shots
- Roughly the first hour of light after sunrise, and the last hour of light before sunset
- The sun is low in the sky, producing a soft, diffused light which is much more flattering than the harsh midday sun

[Lots of websites to check out more details](#)



Two shots in Yellowstone around dawn



The same location around an hour later

# HOW TO CHEAT THE TIME OF DAY

- You often cannot recreate the misty soft effect of the golden hour but changing the colour tone of the image may help
- Only applies to raw files but several software packages have the ability to change the whole colour balance of the image to enhance the mood
- Or simply try changing the colour temperature



Original file



Cool image



Warm image

# NIGHT SHOTS

For “night” shots often better just before complete darkness since provides some colour and definition in the sky



# HOW TO CHEAT WITH FOG/CLOUDS

- Tricky to do well in PS but various on-line tutorials
  - Use diffuse white layer and adjust using reveal/conceal brushes on layer mask
  - Use filter/render/clouds layer and adjust

<https://design.tutsplus.com/tutorials/how-to-create-your-own-fog-brushes-in-adobe-photoshop--cms-24792>

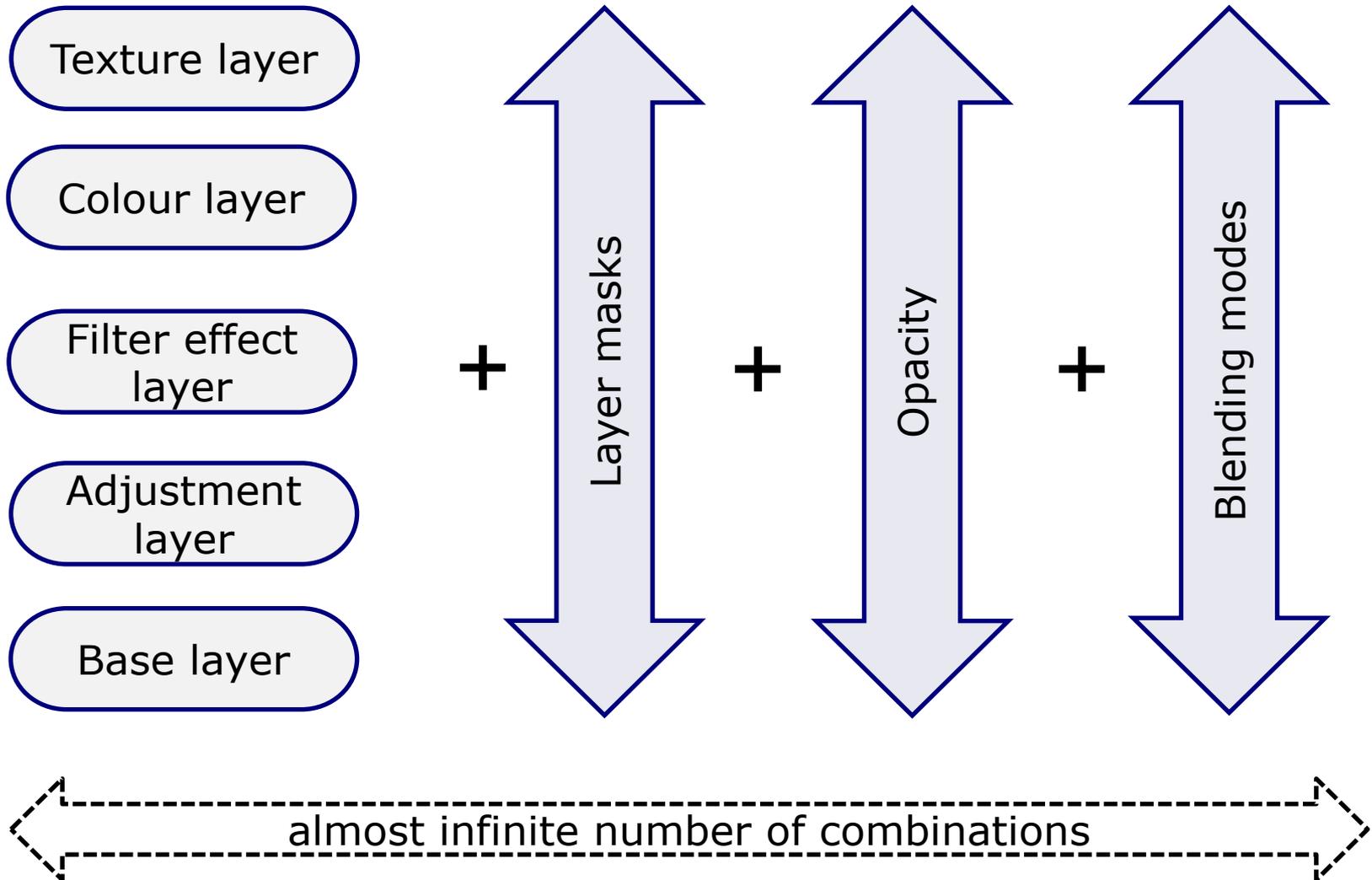
<http://www.techradar.com/how-to/photography-video-capture/cameras/how-to-create-mist-photoshop-effects-for-atmospheric-landscapes-1320997>

<http://www.weichertcreative.com/tutorials/smoke/>



**USING PS  
OVERLAYS TO  
ENHANCE MOOD**

# LAYER COMBINATIONS



# TEXTURED OVERLAYS



- Can sometimes create interesting effect by adding a textured layer
- Copy texture layer on top of main image
- Use opacity slider to vary the extent of the texture effect
- Can also add layer mask to the texture effect and vary the way the texture impacts on the main image

# LOTS OF DIFFERENT LAYER TYPES



Can take suitable background yourself or loads of free texture layers can be downloaded from web

# WHAT DO BLEND MODES DO

- The blending mode controls how the pixels in the different layers interact with each other
- Normal default – no interaction between layers (top layer dominates)
- There are then five other groups within which each mode broadly has the same effect
- However, the maths behind this is complex and the effects are often unpredictable to the average user
- Often best to experiment and see what happens

# PS BLENDING MODES

Commonly  
used modes



Normal
Dissolve
Darken
Multiply
Color Burn
Linear Burn
Lighten
Screen
Color Dodge
Linear Dodge
Overlay
Soft Light
Hard Light
Vivid Light
Linear Light
Pin Light
Hard Mix
Difference
Exclusion
Hue
Saturation
Color
Luminosity

Darken Modes

Lighten Modes

Contrast Modes

Comparative Modes

Composite Modes  
(Hue, Saturation, Luminosity)

# MAKING SOFT PASTEL IMAGES

- This type of image has been particularly developed by Irene Froy in the UK
- And some of our members!
- Typified by soft pastel images covering a range of people, landscape and other subjects



# BASIC APPROACH IN PS

- Duplicate the background layer
- Apply 'Gaussian Blur' to copy layer
- Reduce opacity, or use 'Multiply' blend mode and adjustment layer to lighten overall tones
- Create top empty layer and fill with white. Use 'Soft Light' blend mode. Adjust opacity to suit.

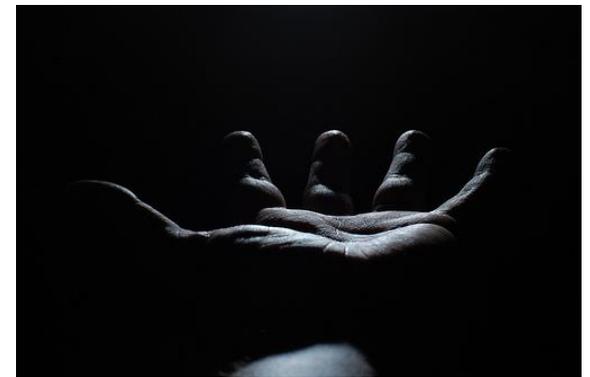
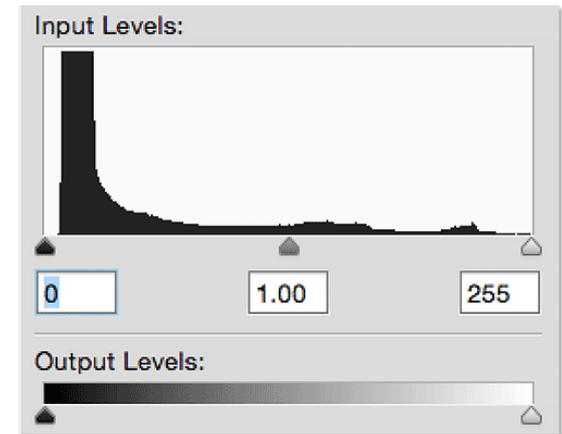




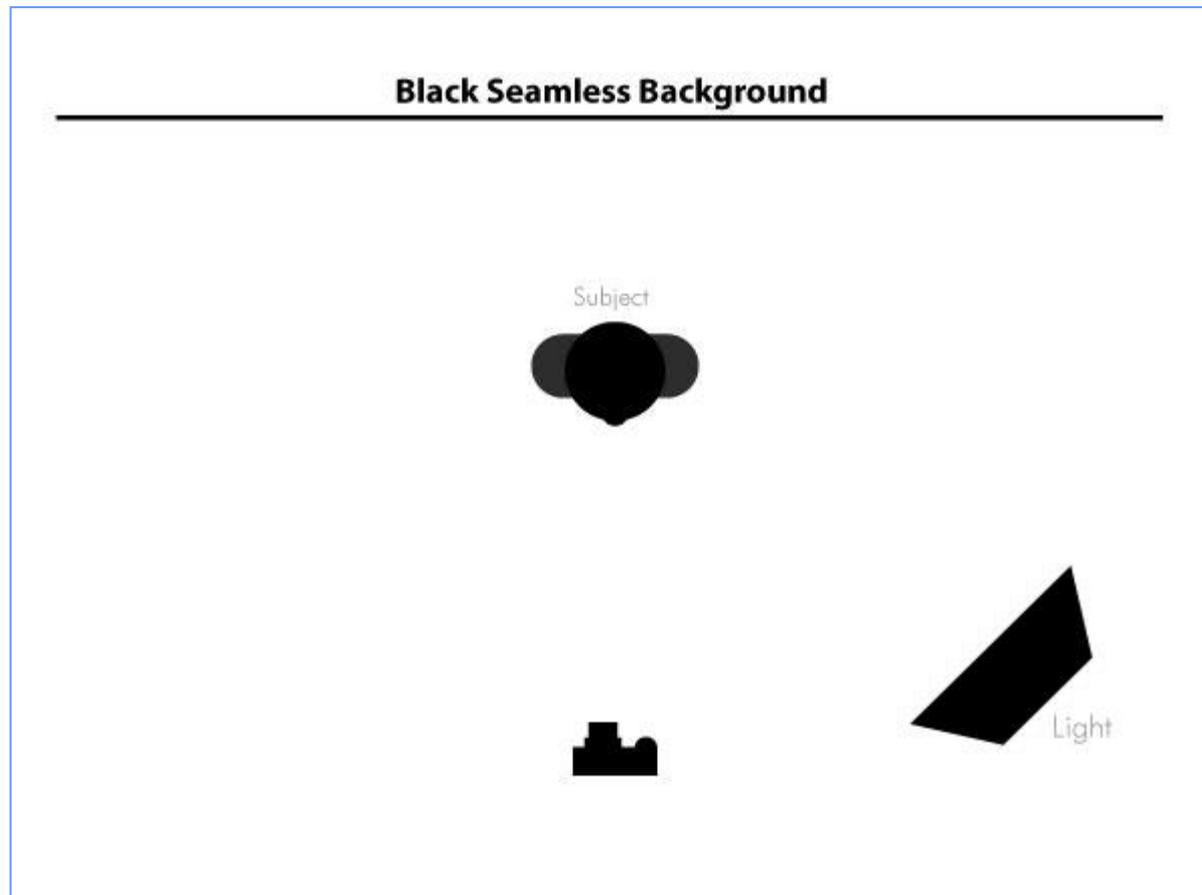
# LIGHTING AND CONTRAST

# LOW KEY LIGHTING

- A low-key image is one that contains predominantly dark tones and colours
- Conveys atmosphere and mood which is usually dramatic and full of mystery
- Creates striking contrasts through reduced lighting where shadows are now the primary element of the composition
- Can work with colour but often better with mono

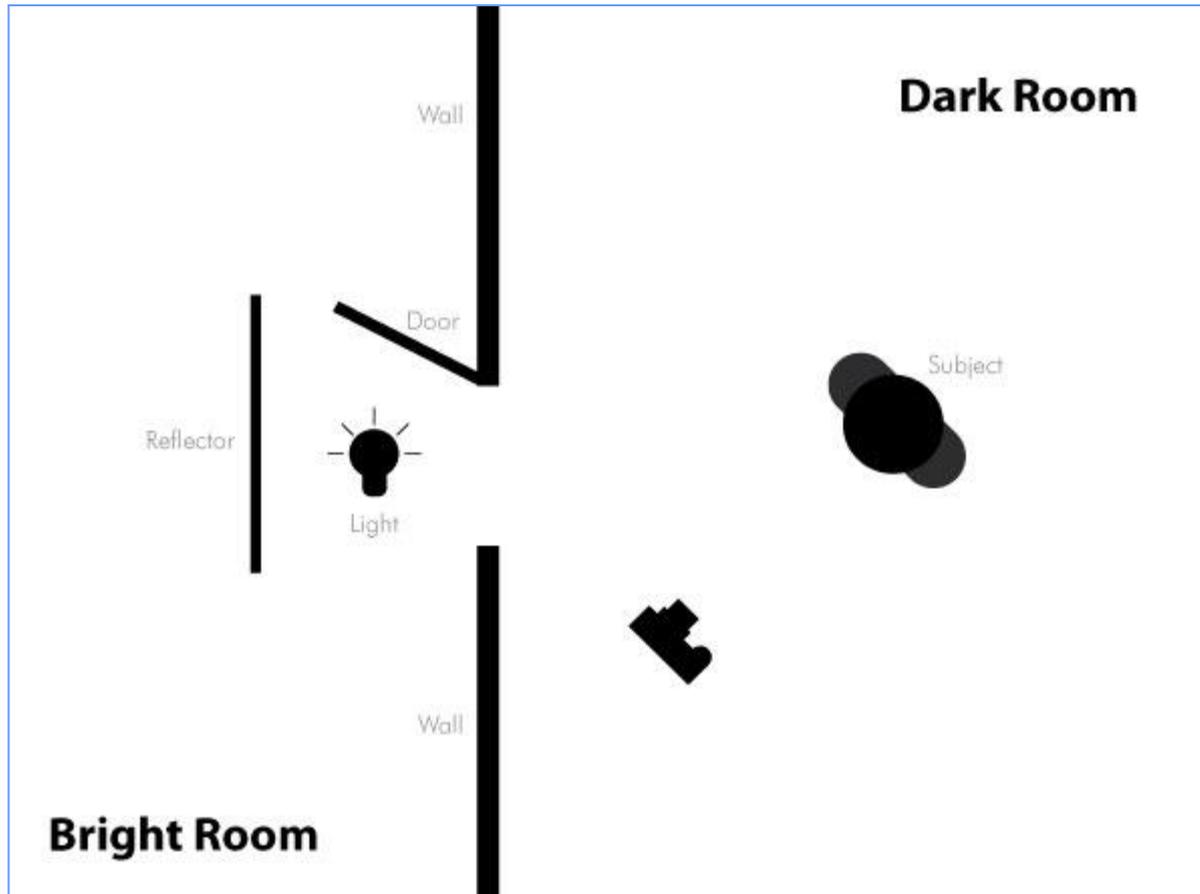


# SIMPLE STUDIO SET UP



Could use flash instead – see fun with flash notes

# CHEAP APPROACH



AND CAN ALSO USE FOR OUTDOOR  
SHOTS AT NIGHT



# CREATING LOW KEY SHOTS IN POST PROCESSING



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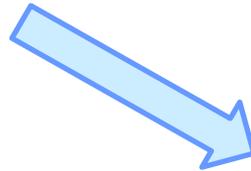
© Linsey Wilt Photography for iHeartFaces.com

- Different ways
  - Convert to mono
    - Use levels with layer masks to adjust tonal values and contrast
    - Clone out light areas where necessary
  - Copy main image onto black background and paint back relevant areas

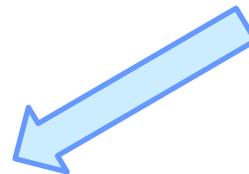
# AN EXAMPLE



Original



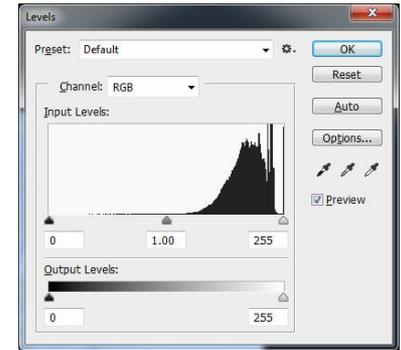
Processed in raw  
converter



Final image created in PS

# HIGH KEY LIGHTING

- A high key image is one that is mostly bright, with a range of light tones and whites and not very many blacks or mid-tones
- A high key image tends to be upbeat, optimistic or youthful
- Often also used with an added diffuse layer or less saturation to create a soft mood



- Can create in studio
- Or in post processing
  - Convert to mono or desaturate
  - Use levels and curves (where necessary in layers)
  - Add light Gaussian blur and/or reduce clarity/vibrance

# CAN ALSO USE HIGH KEY FOR EXTERNAL IMAGES





**COLOUR BALANCE  
OR MONO**

# COLOUR CAN GIVE MOOD TO AN IMAGE

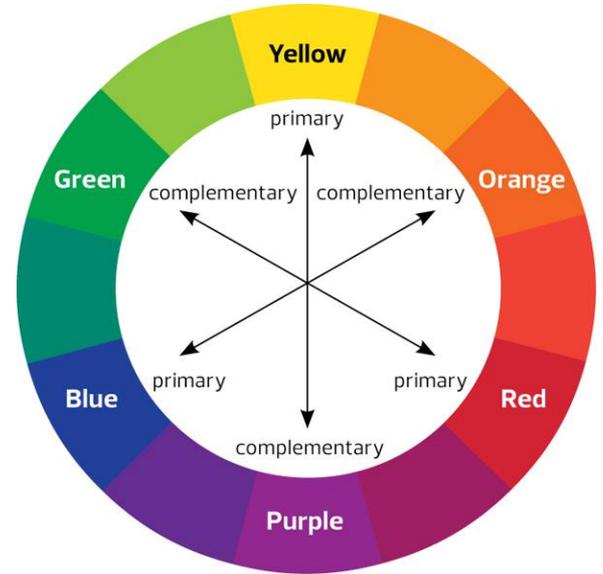
- Think about what mood you want to convey with your image
  - Bold and dramatic
  - Soft and subdued
  - Harmonious or vibrant
- Some of this can be best created at the time of image capture
  - Train yourself to see the “right colour balance” when looking for shots
  - Use colour as a compositional tool
- But can also change to some extent in post production

# COLOUR BALANCE

- Understand the colour wheel
- Complementary colours provide strong contrast
  - Do not have to be the same dominance in the picture
  - If equal amounts then can create tension
  - Often better if you make one of the colours less prominent than the other



- Adjacent colours are harmonious
  - Use to provide soft and restful pictures
  - Can keep the eye of the viewer looking within the picture



# WOULD MONO CREATE A BETTER MOOD

- Sometimes colour can distract from the image
- Mono often works better to:
  - Emphasise form, contrast and texture
  - Particularly for people or images with strong graphic shapes
  - Usually best with full tonal range - pure blacks and whites to create drama
- But remember previous section on high key options – sometimes lighter less contrasty images can create a softer mood



Raw file



Final image

# IF YOU WANT TO ADD PUNCH OR DRAMA

Check the histogram to see how the image can be enhanced through

- Levels to:
  - Use whole range of tones from black to white
  - Modify mid tones
- Curves or layers/layer masks to:
  - Add contrast with S curve
  - Selectively brighten or darken certain tones within image
- Saturation/Vibrance/Clarity
  - To boost whole image or at micro level
- Shadows and highlights

# AN EXAMPLE





# COMPOSITION

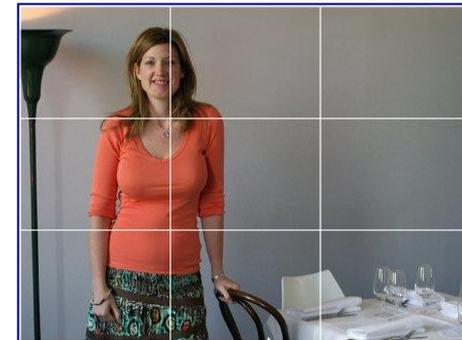
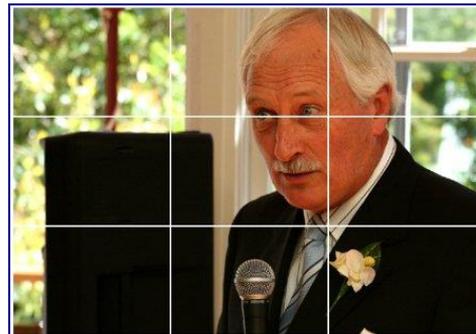
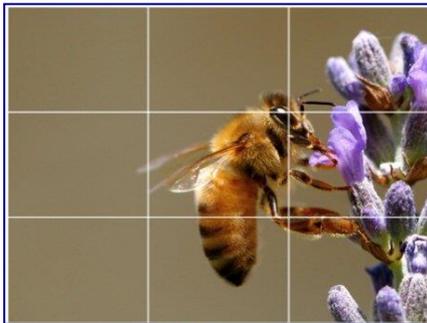
Good composition is a critical part of creating mood in an image

# COMPOSITION - THE BASICS

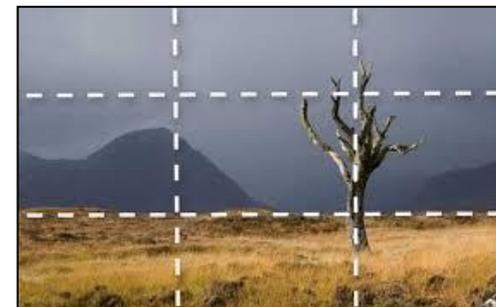
- Distractions
  - What is the main point of interest?
  - Does the subject clearly stand out from the other elements in the picture?
  - Are there elements in the picture which detract from the main focus of the picture?
  - Watch out for bright spots, particularly towards the edge of the picture, which can draw the eye out of the frame and away from the subject?
- Confusing - Will the eye of the viewer be able to properly "read the picture"
  - Is there an obvious point of focus for the eye to come back to?
  - Does the composition naturally lead the viewer's eye around the picture?
  - Or - does the composition tend to lead the viewer out of the picture?
  - Do you need figures in a landscape to provide a sense of scale?
- Wasted space
  - Are there large areas of wasted or boring space?
  - Is there a lack of foreground interest in a landscape?
  - Exception when "negative space" is used creatively to enhance the picture
- Avoid sloping horizons – get right in camera or adjust post
- Basic compositional "rules"
  - There are classical compositional arrangements which have been known by artists for many years, which work equally well in photographs – **get to know and use them**

# ARRANGEMENT OF THE SUBJECT

- The classical way to arrange subjects within the image – “Rule of thirds”
- Position the main subject at the intersection point on a 3x3 grid

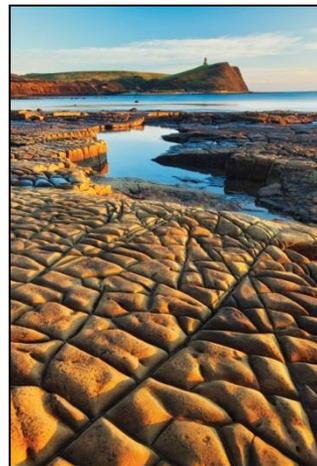


- Similarly for landscapes always place the horizon on one of the thirds



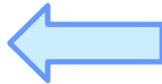
# LEAD-IN LINES

- S shaped curves, diagonals or similar compositions can lead the viewer's eye into the picture or to the point of focus
- Look out for these when looking for a viewpoint



# MESSY OR DISTRACTING BACKGROUNDS

- Messy backgrounds distract the viewer from the main subject
- At capture stage:
  - Get in closer
  - Move to a different location (sometimes just a short distance)
  - Use zoom lens to minimise problem
  - Use differential depth of field to isolate subject
  - Avoid nasty juxtapositions - “poles growing out of heads”
- At post processing stage:
  - Crop or clone out distractions
  - Use differential blur or dodging/burning to isolate subject
  - Cut and paste main subject onto new background





# Questions and discussion