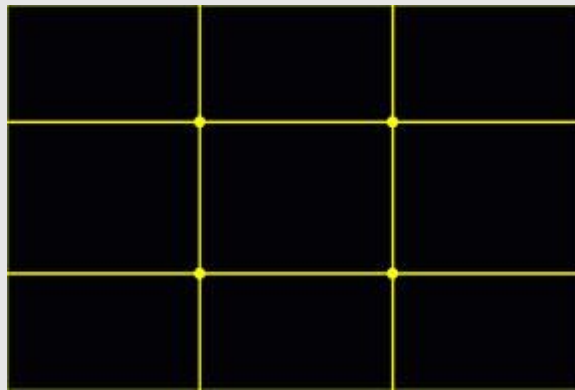


Photography Rule of Thirds

You want to break the rules? Well, you need to master them first. Here we explain the famous photography rule of thirds.

The rule of thirds is probably the most often referenced photography rule of composition. It is all about subject placement within the frame.

First of all, imagine that your picture space is divided into thirds both horizontally and vertically, like a tic tac toe grid.

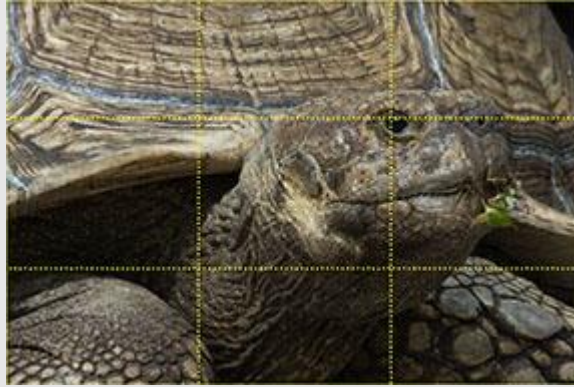


Grid for the rule of thirds.
© Julie Waterhouse Photography

The photography rule of thirds tells us to align our subject with one of the points where those lines cross. That means our subject is one third of the way “into” the picture space – from either the top or bottom, and from either the left or right. And *that* means it’s not in the middle.

It is interesting to note that we refer to the most significant element of our image as the “*center of interest*.” The word “*central*” is a synonym for “*important*.” It comes as no surprise, then, that we instinctively place the subject of our image in the center of the frame. Bullseye! It’s only natural to line up the camera with what we are paying most attention to.

It takes some conscious thought and careful composition to place your center of interest *off-center*. However, the result is much more pleasing to the eye. Placing it at the intersection of the tic tac toe lines (also known as the *thirds position*) produces a nicely balanced image.



**The turtle's eye is in the thirds position.
© Julie Waterhouse Photography**

Central placement of objects is static. If an object is an equal distance from all sides, there is no implied need to move. The object is balanced, and therefore at rest. There's no tension, no tug in either direction. Now, this is where the photography *rule* of thirds becomes a *guideline*. If balance is what you are trying to express, then central placement of your subject may be just the way to go!



**Many amateurs place flowers right in the middle.
© Peter Ainley**



**An off-center composition with a diagonal element is more pleasing.
© Peter Ainley**



Central placement of the flower is predictable and static.
© Julie Waterhouse Photography



Off-center placement is more appealing.
© Julie Waterhouse Photography

In general, the idea is to divide up the picture space into areas in a 1:2 ratio (one third and two thirds), rather than equal halves. The imbalance results in a more dynamic image. Following is another example where the picture space is divided horizontally into a one-third and two-thirds ratio:



Two thirds green trees, one third sequoia.
© Julie Waterhouse Photography

Counterpoint

You can enhance the picture composition even more by creating a *counterpoint*. If you place your primary focal point at the thirds position, you can place a secondary focal point at the diagonally opposite thirds position, as in the following images.



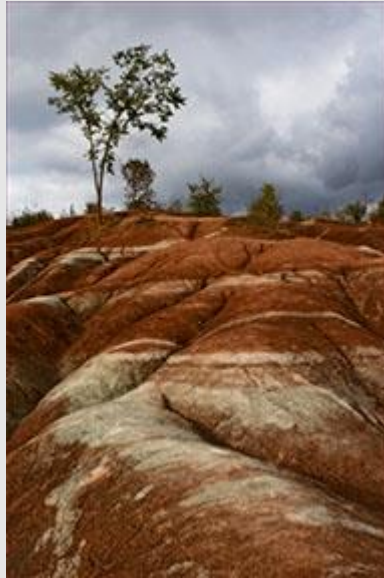
Main and secondary focal points at diagonally-opposite thirds positions.
© Peter Ainley



Main and secondary focal points at diagonally-opposite thirds positions.
© Peter Ainley

Horizons

A natural extension to the photography rule of thirds is to place your horizon line along the one-third or two-third line of the tic tac toe grid, rather than in the middle. Once again, fight your natural tendency! Without being taught otherwise, most amateur photographers will place their horizon in the middle. This ends up looking dull and uninteresting.



Two thirds land, one third sky.
© Julie Waterhouse Photography

Whether you place the horizon closer to the top or closer to the bottom of the picture space depends on which you want to emphasize more: the land or the sky. If you have a dramatic sky, by all means, give it two thirds of the picture space!



One third land, two thirds sky.
© Julie Waterhouse Photography

You can “stretch” the photography rule of thirds for a more dramatic effect by placing your horizon (or your main subject) even closer to the edge of the frame, as in the above example.

Excerpt from Ultimate Photo Tips -

<http://www.ultimate-photo-tips.com/photography-rule-of-thirds.html>