

Your Rule of Thirds Window on the World

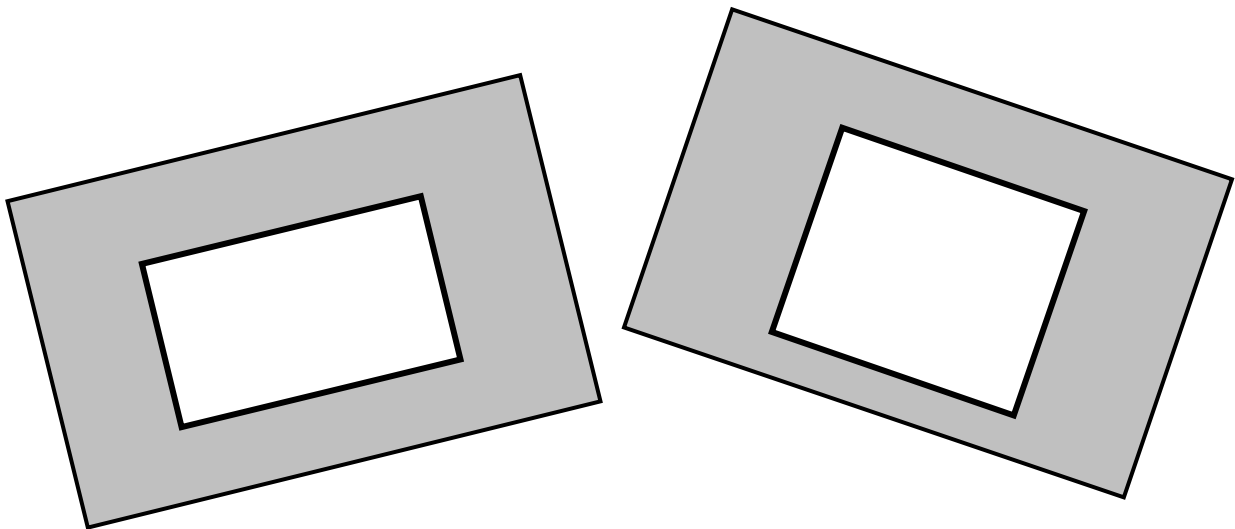
You can help yourself be a better photographer...before you pick up your camera!!

Composition is a major factor that gives a photo IMPACT...that special something that makes people stop and look at your photo. A photo with effective **composition** features a pleasing combination of point of interest, background, and foreground.

Here's how to make your own "rule of thirds" window to help you practice better photo composition without your camera.

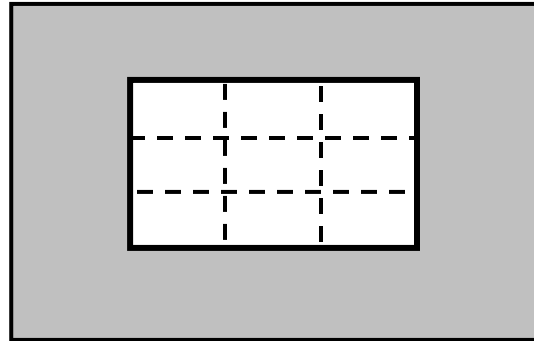
1. Cut a rectangle or square in a piece of cardboard. The hole or window you cut should match the shape of your camera viewfinder. If you are using a 35mm camera, the rectangular "hole" should be in a 2 x 3 proportion. For example, 4 x 6 inches or 3 x 4 1/2 inches. Those shapes will match that of your camera viewfinder.

If you have a camera with a square viewfinder, you can make the "window" any size that you want.



2. Tape a piece of clear plastic to one side of your cardboard frame so that the plastic at least covers the window.

3. Use a felt marker to divide the area of your window into thirds...vertically and horizontally. It's like making dividers for the panes in your "window".



4. Now you have a rules of thirds guide that you can use to view any scene or subject to practice your composition skills. You can use the guides to decide where to place horizon lines and where to locate your main point of interest.

Your camera doesn't have the lines marked on the viewfinder, but after you practice with your window, your *imagination* will show you where they would be. Have fun!

Prepared by Don Wishart
Extension Communication Services
Iowa State University

(Adapted from original material
by Sue Weinbrecht, Polk County 4-H Leader

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
University Extension

... and justice for all

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Many materials can be made available in alternative formats for ADA clients. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jack M. Payne, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.

Composition

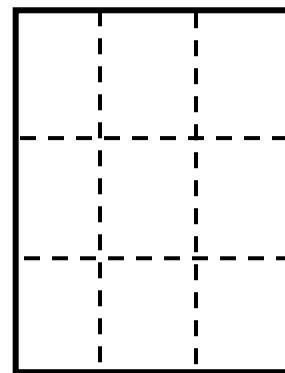
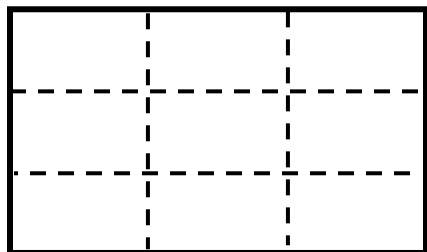
1. **Composition** is a major factor that gives a photo *impact*...that special power that makes people stop and say, "Oh, I like that!" A photo with effective composition features a pleasing combination of point of interest, background, and foreground.

2. **When you shoot or evaluate a photo, ask yourself:**

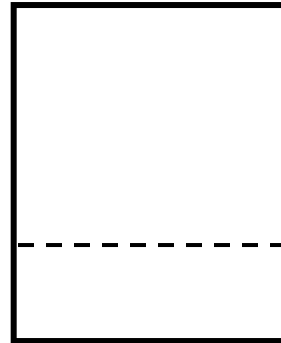
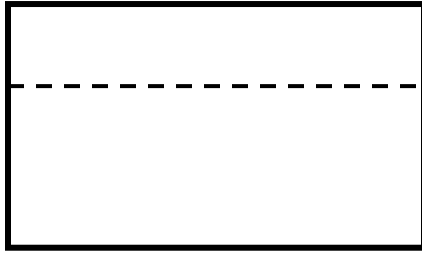
- is the subject basically horizontal...or vertical?
- did you shoot or crop your photo to emphasize a dominant horizontal or vertical line?
- where is the horizon line if your photo is a landscape?
- do lines and shapes hold your interest or direct your attention to a particular point in the photo? If your photo has a strong point of interest, where is it?

3. **Point of interest and *rule of thirds*:**

Mentally divide your photo into thirds...vertically and horizontally. Note that there are four points where the imaginary lines intersect. A photo is *usually* more interesting to look at (has more *impact*) if the point of interest falls near one of the intersections. The *rule of thirds* is useful when you are shooting or cropping your photo.



If your photo is a landscape, it is usually best to place the horizon line one-third from the bottom or top of your picture.



4. Think of composition rules as *guides*. Never say “always” or “never”.
5. When you shoot or evaluate a photograph, concentrate on those factors that *you* control:
 - choice of subject
 - focus
 - cropping and composition
 - choice of lighting situation (time of day, cloudy or sunny)
 - camera position in relation to the subject and the light source

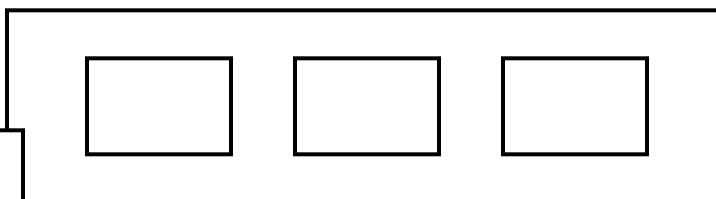
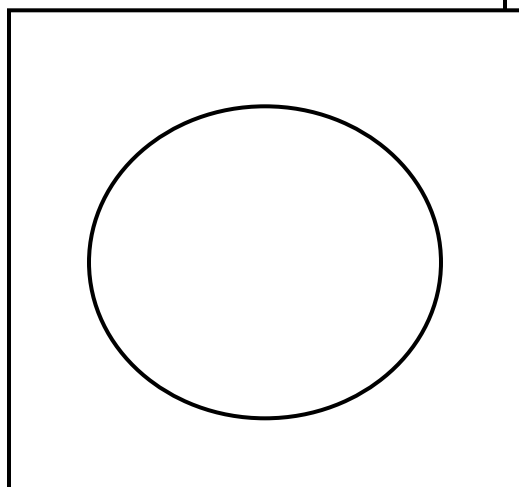
Prepared by Don Wishart
Extension Communication Services
Iowa State University
August 1988

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
University Extension

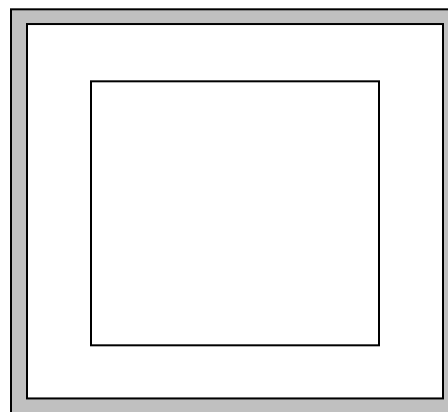
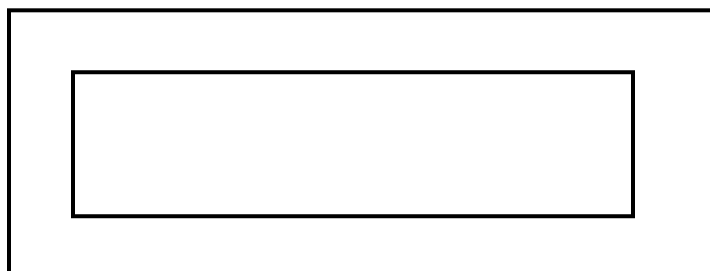
... and justice for all
The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Many materials can be made available in alternative formats for ADA clients. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jack M. Payne, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.

Mounting



*Photography involves lots of creativity—
in finding the subject,
in telling a story
and in getting expression,
lighting and many other details just right.
Yet most pictures end up in a box, or
maybe in an album.
A good picture deserves more than that.
It needs to be displayed where
it can be seen and enjoyed.*



*To prepare a photo for display,
it needs to be mounted.
The many choices are part of
the creative process.
Thoughtful choices and
careful mounting will
enhance any photo on display.*

Why Mat?

A common part of the mounting process is matting the photo. Matting means putting a boarder around the photo, and there are several reasons for doing this.

- For long-term protection—If the photo is to be framed under glass, a mat acts as a spacer. A mat traps a layer of air between the glass and the photo. CAUTION: If you place glass directly against a color photo, the soft emulsion of the color photo may eventually stick to the glass and damage the photo.
- For short term protection where cost is a factor—It may be impractical to fram a photo if it is to be exhibited or displayed for a short time. A short-term solution is to mat the photo with a hinged window mat (see next page). A hinged window mat protects the photo with semi-rigid support and allows you to handle the photo without touching it.
- For aesthetics—A mat creates a visual border and helps the viewer separate the work from the space around it. A mat helps focus the viewer's attention and places emphasis on the photo.

Matting Choices

Color

If a photo is to be matted, a decision has to be made about the color of the mat. It is usually best to avoid extremely bright colors. People will be attracted to the mat instead of your photo. Look for greys, charcoals, and some browns for most color or black and white photos. The best way to choose a mat color is to take your photo with you when you select the mat. If you are entering your photo in a competition, show rules may specify a mat color for all photos.

Size

The precise measurements of the mat are a matter of individual judgment. Some general guidelines are:



5x7 inch photo
borders should extend
1 1/2 to 2 inches beyond
the edge of the photo.



8x10 or 11x14 inch photo
borders should extend
2 - 2 1/2 inches beyond
the edge of the photo.

The width of the mat at the top and the two sides should be equal and the bottom border just a little larger (1/4 to 1/2 inch). The wider bottom border provides a “base” for the whole picture.

Shape

There are also different shapes to consider for a window mat. Window mats are usually cut as rectangles, ovals, or squares. It is possible to cut mats to emphasize some shape in the photo (a star, an animal, a balloon). However, unusual shapes are often gimmicky, difficult to cut, and tend to detract from the photo.

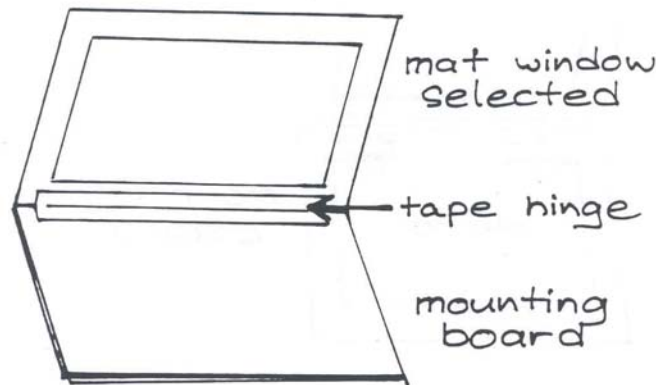
Check photo contest rules if you are entering your picture in competition. Show rules may specify mat size and border widths.

Window Mat (Float)

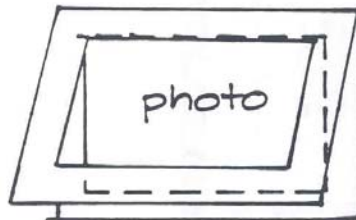
Because the window mat holds the photo in place, it is not necessary to glue the photo to the mounting board. Instead, you can use cloth tape. Masking tape will work for temporary use, but it may discolor photos. You can purchase window mats ready-made or mats can be cut to your specifications by a frame shop.

Procedure:

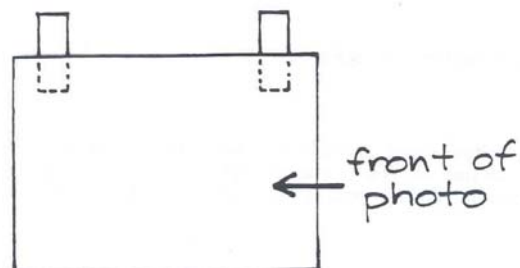
1. Hinge the two pieces of the window mat together with tape.



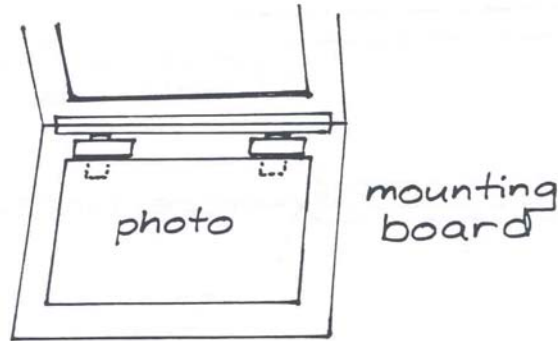
2. Place your photo on the mounting board section, fold the window mat section over, and adjust the photo for proper alignment. Use a pencil to lightly mark the photo corners on the mounting board so that you may attach the photo accurately.



3. Cut four pieces of tape, each about two inches long. Attach one piece of tape to the pack of each of the TOP corners of your picture.



4. Place your photo on the mounting board (use your corner marks from step 2 to position the photo accurately). Use the remaining two pieces of tape to attach the photo to the mounting board.



5. Fold the window over your photo and enjoy it!



To Mat or Not to Mat

There are times when it is aesthetically appropriate **not** to mat a photo:

- if a photo is very large and takes on the feeling of a mural rather than a photo
- if the subject matter is very contemporary and the photo will be framed in a chrome or metal frame
- if a mat appears to restrict or contain the image, and the picture's impact is greater when it is unrestricted
- if the photo is to be placed in a very contemporary, streamlined space where a frame and mat would appear visually too heavy

There are several ways to protect and display photos if you decide not to mat them.

1. Mount the photo flush with the edge of a mat board. Back the mat board with foam board to make it more rigid.
2. Display the photo in a clear plastic box frame.
3. Mount the photo mat board on foam board and place it in a picture frame.**

**Anodized aluminum picture frames come in silver, black, and pewter and are available at most frame/art stores and art/supply catalogs. Buy one pair for the length and one pair for the width of the picture.

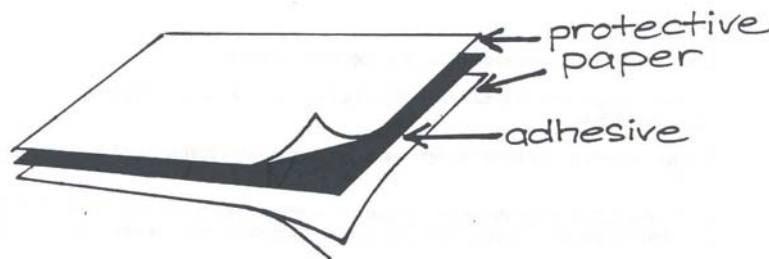
A photographer must make design decisions about how to present a photo, with or without a mat. There is no one correct answer. A photographer must consider each photo individually and select a mounting that will enhance the picture.

More Mounting Options

With the window mat option, the picture is not permanently attached to the backing board. But you might want to display photos that are mounted directly onto a mat board. Once you have decided on the size, color, and shape of the mat board, there are several ways to attach the photo with adhesives.

Pressure sensitive adhesive paper (self-adhesive mounting sheets)

You can purchase these products through art/photo supply stores and art/craft supply catalogs. Most products consist of two sheets of paper with glue in the middle.



Procedure:

1. Use _____ scissors to cut the mounting paper to about the size of your uncropped photo...better if just a little smaller. This prevents the glue from getting on the front of your photo and on your hands.
2. Peel off one sheet. The glue will remain on the other sheet.
3. Place the glue surface on the back of your photo and rub it with a rubber squeegee or something similar. The pressure transfers the glue to the back of the photo.
4. Use a metal straight-edge and razor knife to crop your photo. Place the metal straight-edge on the picture side of the cutting line. If the razor knife slips, your photo won't be damaged.
5. Decide where you will position the photo on the mounting board. Mark lightly with a pencil at the corners.
6. Peel the paper from the back of your photo and place the photo on the mounting board. (You may need help doing this if it's a large photo.) Place a sheet of clean protective paper over the top of the photo and use your rubber squeegee to smooth it down on the mounting board. Avoid getting air bubbles trapped between the photo and the board.

IMPORTANT: align your print carefully because the glue bond is immediate. The photo cannot be repositioned!

Spray Adhesive

Art/photo supply stores and art/craft catalogs sell different brands of spray adhesive. Directions will be on the can. **CAUTION:** spray adhesive is extremely flammable. Vapors are harmful. Follow label precautions. If you are working with children or groups, it is probably best to use another mounting method.

Procedure:

1. Crop your photo with a steel straight-edge and a razor knife.

2. Decide where you will position the photo on your mounting board. If your mount has a border, mark lightly with a pencil at the corners of your photo.
3. Place your photo face down on a clean paper and spray the back of the photo with adhesive.
4. Position the photo on the mounting board. Place a clean paper over the photo and using your rubber squeegee smooth the photo down on the mounting board. Avoid getting air bubbles trapped between the photo and the board.

Rubber Cement

Procedure:

1. Crop your photo with a steel straight-edge and a razor knife.
2. Decide where you will position the photo on your mounting board. Mark lightly with a pencil at the photo corners.
3. Place the photo face down on clean paper and apply a thin coat of rubber cement to the back of the photo.
4. Position the photo on the mounting board. Place a clean paper over the photo and using your rubber squeegee smooth the photo down on the mounting board. Avoid getting air bubbles trapped between the photo and the board.

Whatever method of mounting you select for your photo, spending some time on the different choices and taking care to do a neat job will pay off as your mounted photo is displayed for you and others to enjoy. Good mounting will strengthen the impact of your picture and allow viewers to concentrate on the story you wanted the picture to tell in the first place.

Prepared by:
Don Wishart, Extension Communication Specialist
Claes Jonasson, Extension Photographer
JaneAnn Stout, Art and Design Extension Specialist

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
University Extension

. . . and justice for all

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Many materials can be made available in alternative formats for ADA clients. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jack M. Payne, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.