

Albright Art Supply

Composition for Drawing or Painting

What is Composition?

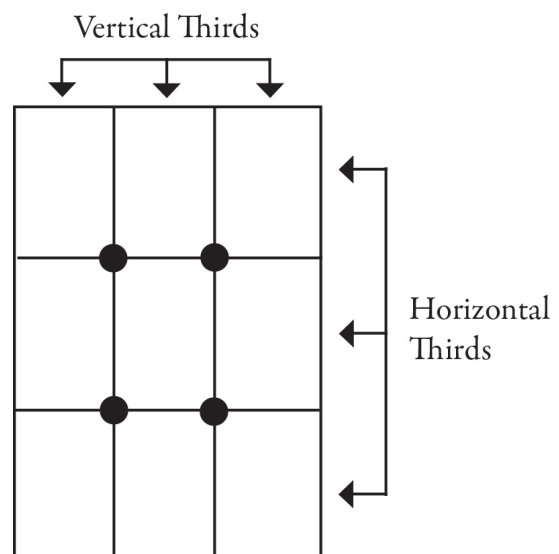
Whether a person's work is abstract or representational, a good composition is needed to be successful. Composition describes the arrangement of visual elements of art and design leading the viewer into the artwork and moving the viewer's eye across the entire drawing or painting. The elements of art and design are line, shape, color, value, texture, form and space. These elements are organized by using the basic principles of art and design—balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, pattern, rhythm, and unity.

- **Balance:** A drawing or painting that feels just right; it is not heavy on one side. A symmetrical arrangement can be used to give a sense of calm while an asymmetrical arrangement creates a dynamic feeling.
- **Contrast:** Differences in light and dark is one example of contrast. Another way to illustrate contrast is differences in shape, color, size and texture.
- **Emphasis:** A focal point where the viewer's eye ultimately wants to rest.
- **Movement:** Objects, figures and leading lines create movement in an artwork. A leading line can be an actual line like a road or a fence. Implied lines can be illustrated by using a row of trees for example.
- **Pattern:** Repetition of lines, shapes, colors and/or values are used in an artwork.
- **Rhythm:** Repetition of color and shapes can lead the viewer's eye to a specific place.
- **Unity:** Do the parts in the composition feel like they belong together?

The Rule of Thirds

Typically, a viewer's attention surveys the area one-third from the edge. The Rule of Thirds is created at the four points where the horizontal and vertical thirds intersect.

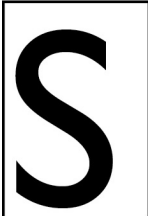

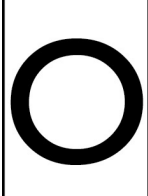
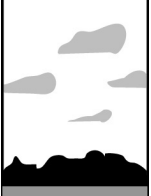


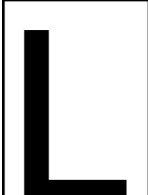

An artwork is strengthened when the focal point is placed at one of these points.



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Examples of Composition

When considering ways to strengthen your painting remember the word SOUL (S=s-shaped, O=o-shaped, U=u-shaped and L=l-shaped composition).

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|--|---|---|
| <p><i>S-shaped Composition</i> The S-shaped composition gives an artwork an open feeling. It can also be used when a scene lacks a strong vertical (e.g., a tree or building). This composition shape can be obvious like a road or river. It could be subtle when using field edges, different areas of color, and shadows creating a pattern leading the viewers from the foreground to the background.</p> |  |  |
| <p><i>O-shaped Composition</i> The O-shaped composition is also referred to as a circle composition where the focal point is roughly within the circle area. It is best to imply the shape where subjects, objects, values and lines create the circle.</p> |  |  |
| <p><i>U-shaped Composition</i> The U-shaped composition is like the L-shaped composition using two strong vertical elements on both sides with the strong horizontal forming the u-shape.</p> |  |  |
| <p><i>L-shaped Composition</i> The L-shaped composition is formed when a strong upright element placed is on either side of the vertical third while the strong horizontal is positioned on or near the horizontal third.</p> |  |  |

Classes:

Interested in instructional or online classes? Remember to check out Concord Art and The Umbrella Arts Center.

References for Extra Reading

Hyde, David. *Landscapes in Acrylics*. Search Press Limited. 2006.

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<https://www.muddycolors.com/2021/04/15-types-of-composition/>

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