

Visual Elements of Photography

Light Quality

Light quality describes the source, amount, and direction of lighting in a photograph. Light can come from natural sources, like the sun. It can be altered or created by humans, by using such things as flash bulbs or lamps. It can also be diffused by clouds or by humans putting a veil of cloth over a lamp. The direction of light is also important when looking at photographs: it can come from above, behind, or from one side. *Bright, dim, cloudy, directional, diffused, and flash* are some terms used to describe lighting.

Questions to Consider

- Determine the source of light (sun, lamp, flash?). What is it?
- From which direction does the light come? Does the light come from above the subject? Below it? From the side?
- What kind of light do you think this is? Is the light harsh with strong shadows, or is it diffused with soft, light shadows?

Texture

Texture is how the surface of an object appears to feel or actually feels to the touch. Texture can be described as rough, smooth, soft, etc. Texture is shown in photographs by the way the light falls on an object and through value changes. The paper on which the photograph is made also determines texture.

Questions to Consider

- What objects in the photograph show textures? Describe those textures.
 - Is the texture of objects something you noticed right away, or do you notice it after looking for a while? Why?
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Focus

Focus is the sharpness or clarity of subjects in the photographic image. Soft focus is created when a photographer manipulates the camera to achieve blurry, gentle edges. Photographers use the aperture (lens opening) and limitations of the lens to create sharp detail, soft edges, or both; this is called selective focus.

Questions to Consider

- What is in sharp focus? Has the photographer kept *everything* in sharp focus? Has the photographer kept only a few things in focus? Explain.
- Has the artist made this image in soft focus? What mood or feeling has the photographer created by choosing soft focus or sharp focus?

Angle of View

Angle of view is the position from where the photographer took the picture. A photographer can point the camera from below, above, or straight at an object. In other artistic media, this is often called point of view. When looking for subjects, especially in nature, a photographer often shifts the angle of view to make interesting images. Angle of view can also express emotion or mood. It can give the viewer a sense of being small if looking up, or a sense of being big if looking down.

Questions to Consider

- What is the angle of view for this image?
 - Is the camera angle in the photograph at eye level, lower than eye level (a bug's eye view), or above eye level (a bird's eye view)? Is the viewer looking straight on or from one side or another?
 - How does the artist's angle of view make you feel about the subject?
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Framing/Composition

Framing is how a photographer carefully presents a subject. Unlike painters, who usually begin with a blank canvas, photographers begin with everything in front of them. Once a subject is found, a photographer decides what to include in the picture frame. The photographer then composes the image to draw a viewer's attention to the subject in a way that best expresses the artist's idea of it.

Questions to Consider

- What do you think the photographer chose to include or exclude from this scene in order to draw your attention to the center of interest?
- In what ways did the artist use framing in this image? What in the photograph helps frame the center of interest?

Color

Artists use color to achieve many effects. Color gives viewers a sense of mood, place, and time of year. Color can also move your eye around a composition and create a sense of space on a flat surface. Some artists achieve very saturated (strong, intense) color in their images, while others intentionally use subdued or muted colors in their subject matter.

Questions to Consider

- Are color photographs more "real" looking than black-and-white photographs? Why or why not?
- What can a photographer achieve with color that she or he cannot with black-and-white pictures?
- How would this scene be different if it were in black and white or in color?
- How do you think the artist has captured either saturated or muted color?