

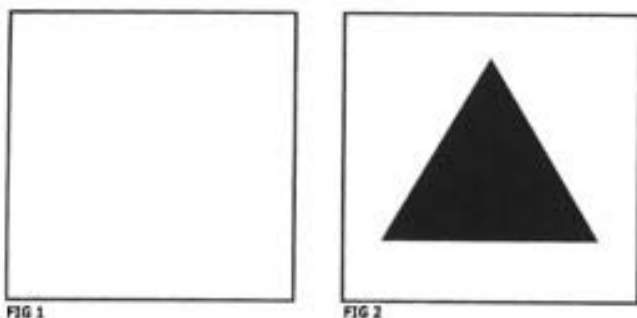
FEEDBACK?

A lens with a view to view View 1

"The soul never thinks without an image" - Aristotle

When we look through the viewfinder; if we like it - we shoot it don't we? How can we train our eye to do this in such a way to make our images with more impact? What we see in reality, compared to what ends up on our negatives at times can be totally different. It takes some training to look for the possible problems and eliminate them before we take the photograph. So how can we train our eye and know what to look for? Imagine you were looking in dense fog straight ahead of you; you would not be able to distinguish any features or anything that you recognize. It is all grey before your eyes. See square on left, fig.1. (below). You would be quite disorientated because you cannot recognise any features, like a whiteout. The moment we can recognise a feature separated from its surroundings, we feel more in balance.

Compare figure 1 to figure 2.



In figure 2 the black area we can call the figure. The surrounding area, the white area, we can call the ground. We can now see the relationship between the figure and the ground. Although they both appear within the same square on the same level, the black area seems closer to us. In most cases we will see the shape of the black area first, if you look again and look at the white area again. At first you'll see a white area with a hole in it. When we take photographs we will always have a figure and ground area. The stronger the difference between the figure and the ground, the easier it is for us to see the image. In photography we can use contrasts, fine grain and similar effects to separate the figure from the ground. If our image is very grainy and low in contrast, we will not see easily what we have photographed. But first we have to go back to what we see through the viewfinder.

We have a variety of possibilities to assist us:

- **Focus.**

When we focus we can get our figure sharp and the ground out of focus so we can separate the two. When we are looking around ourselves we will focus subconsciously on what we like to see. For instance, you are walking in a busy street and you could easily select one single person without walking into a lamppost, because everything else has suddenly gone out of focus. Although some people might focus too severely on one single person, and ouch, this could happen ... but you know what I'm trying to say. I am trying to tell you to focus on our black area in the square, not on the square including the white ground. Depth of field will control our figure that we will see easily.

- **Lens position or camera viewpoint.**

Our camera position will dictate what we see and what is behind or in front of our figure.

Too often we are mesmerised with what we see in front of us and instantaneously bring

that camera to our eye and take the photograph. Do not. Move around in order to obtain

the best possible position of your figure and ground. How often have you photographed

something that later appeared to be glued against something in the back, objects sticking out from it, or something has come in front of it that we did not "notice" before?

- **Light.**

Use the light to separate the figure from the ground. Like in profiles, with backlighting we can easily distinguish between the figure and the ground. Light can highlight the texture and detail of the figure as opposed to that of the ground.

- *Filters and printing techniques are additional tools we can use, but not to correct the mistakes if you forgot any of the three must do's above.*

When we look at the whole image as a whole, it is build up from various components. It is those components that will make your image. The way these components are placed inside our image shape will control the effect they will have, the whole is different, it then becomes the sum of its components. How we work our eyes and see the different components in an image is dealt with in the Gestalt School of Psychology. Gestalt has developed principles that were primarily concerned with the figure and ground relationships to help us see objects as a pattern or a good figure. This is psychologist speak – engineer speak of signal to noise ratio and image maker often refered to it as negative and positive space. When we can utilize these principles it will make it easier to create stronger images.

Four of the main principles are:

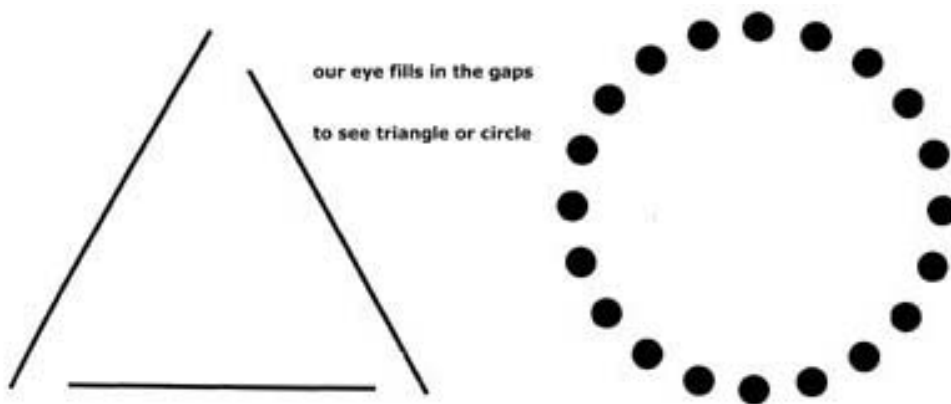
- proximity
- similarity
- continuity
- closure

A sample of proximity is, for instance, a photo of “the planting of young pine trees”. When these are close enough to each other and all the trunks are straight and upright, they will form a line, or give the impression of a line of trees. The closer the trees are together, the greater is the probability that you will see them as a group, or a pattern or a line. Two trees separated from each other for some distance will not create that impression.

A sample of similarity occurs when you photograph two or more items of similar shape within the frame. Because you use similar shapes you view or see that work easier, it creates more impact because of the repetition of the shape. It does not necessarily have to be the similar shapes, you can also use similarity as a symbol. For instance; if some lines in a photograph look very similar to a crucifix, you have a similarity.

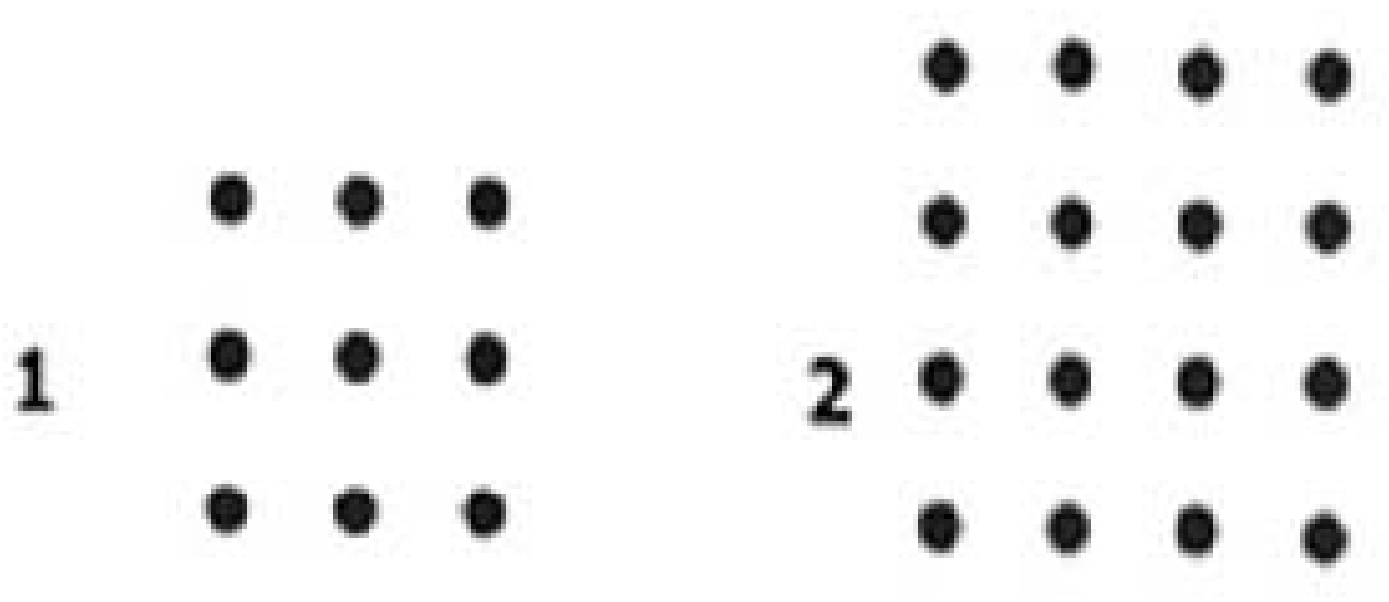
A sample of continuity occurs when the visual elements have very few interruptions so they seem to create a curve or a line, like a river flowing through the image. If you can visualize your visual components to create a line, your composition improves. Imagine you photograph some products in such a way that they create a strong compositional line, then your image may have more impact than if the products were scattered around in your image. Proximity is important in this case...

A sample of closure is when the visual lines that we have created almost form a unit; like a pyramid, circle or oblong box, or any other easily recognizable shape that we can identify with by association. To leave a little space just short of closing the shape of the pyramid or box will create a dynamic and our eye will fill in the gap to complete the shape. See figure 2.



Or, imagine a close up of two pairs of lips kissing, nothing else in sight, the critical space between the two pairs is the most important dynamic, too close and too far apart are not good, you have to find that magical closure ... that magic tension before passion breaks loose ...

To kill some time and practice your visual thinking and physical movement, try to connect the nine dots with only four straight lines. If that is too easy try, to connect the 16 dots, with only 6 straight lines.



PS do you see a square or separate lines? (Image 2)
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