

# Analyzing Digital Photography



## An Introduction for Beginners

By learning how to analyze digital photographs, you can become a better photographer! This lesson is for beginners who have basic experience in using digital cameras.

### Table of Contents

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Page Number</u>
Basic Vocabulary	2
Let's Analyze!	5
More Information	9
About the Author	10

**<http://homepages.nyu.edu/~sah236/photography>**

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## Basic Vocabulary

In this section, you will learn nine common words that photographers use to describe photographs. These words will be important when discussing visual elements and composition in the next section.



### **Abstract**

An image that emphasizes formal elements (e.g. line, shape, etc.) rather than specific, recognizable objects.



### **Content**

This is the subject, topic, or information captured in a photograph.

In this case, the blue heron is the main content.



### **Direct Approach**

Confronting a scene in a straight-forward manner, without using unusual angles or distortion.

Notice that no special angles were used to distort the picture.



### **Expressive**

Images concerned with communicating a particular emotion.

In this image, a young lady is expressing what emotion?



### **Intention**

Reasons why the photographer chose to take the photograph.

The photographer took this picture for CNN in 1998 to show the famine still occurring in Sudan.

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### **Landscape**

An image that portrays the natural environment.

The landscape in this case is the Japanese Exhibit of the Botanical Gardens in Montreal.



### **Objective**

A point of view free from personal bias, which attempts to consider all available information with equal regard and fairness.

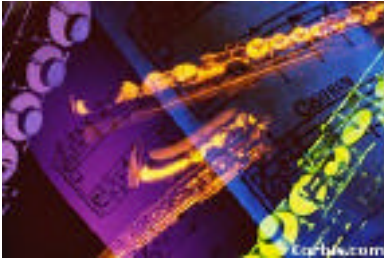
Does the photographer appear to be objective in portraying this sailboat?



### **Subject**

The main object or person(s) in a photograph.

The subject of this photograph is a white polar bear.



### **Theme**

A unifying or dominant idea in one work of art or in a collection of works.

There is a musical theme in this digital photograph.

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Let's Analyze!

Now that you have the basic vocabulary under your belt, you are ready to begin analyzing photographs. The first things you must learn are visual elements.

The words in the composition section will allow you to think about how visual elements combine within a photograph to create a composition.

## Visual Elements



### **Focus**

What areas appear clearest or sharpest in the photograph? That is your focus.



### **Light**

What areas of the photograph are most highlighted? Are there any shadows? Does the photograph allow you to guess the time of day? Is the light harsh or soft?

These are the questions to think about when describing light.



## **Repetition**

Repetition of visual elements can create unity--a sense of order or wholeness that holds the work together visually.

What elements are repeated? Do they contribute to a sense of unity?



## **Space**

Is there depth to the photograph or does it seem shallow? What creates this appearance?



## **Texture**

If you could touch the surface of the photograph, how would it feel?

This digital image is a close-up of frozen water from a swimming pool.

## **Composition**



### **Angle**

This is the vantage point from which the photograph was taken. It is used when discussing an image taken from an unusual or exaggerated vantage point.

This image of the Basilique Notre Dame was taken from a low angle. Does the church appear larger or smaller than usual?

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## Background

The part of a photograph that is or seems to be toward the back.

The background in this picture contains trees, rocks, and a mini-waterfall.

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## Balance

The distribution of visual elements in a photograph.

- Symmetrical balance means that visual elements are evenly spread in an image.
- Asymmetrical balance means that visual elements are not evenly spread in an image.

Does this picture have symmetrical or asymmetrical balance?



## Central Focus



Close your eyes. When you open them and look at the photograph, what is the first thing you notice? This is your central focus.

Why is your attention drawn there? Are there other centers of interest? How do the focal points help move your eye throughout the photograph?



### **Contrast**

Strong visual differences between light and dark, varying textures, sizes, etc.

Do you see any contrast between elements in this photograph?

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### **Framing**

This is what the photographer places within the boundaries of the photograph.

Describe the edges of the image. What is included? What does the framing draw your attention to in the photograph?

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### **Setting**

The actual physical surroundings of the photograph, whether real or artificial.

The setting of this photograph is a tenement apartment in Little Italy of Manhattan, New York City.

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### **Vantage Point**

The place from which a photographer takes the picture.

Take a guess about the vantage point in this image. Perhaps the vantage point is a cliff overlooking this paradise?

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## Additional Links

Check out these great resources related to digital photography for more information:

### **Digital Photography Review**

<http://www.dpreview.com>

This web site contains articles for beginners who wish to learn specific techniques when taking a picture (see the Learn section.) You will also find news, reviews, galleries, tips and hints related to digital photography.

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### **Digital Photo Basics**

<http://www.digitalphotobasics.com>

This is a nice resource for people wishing to learn more about digital cameras. You will find an array of articles, including information on advantages of using a digital camera over the traditional 35 mm camera as well as tips on purchasing a camera.

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### **Corbis/Yahoo! Picture Gallery**

<http://gallery.yahoo.com>

A great collection of pictures on virtually any topic. Just type in what you are looking for in the picture search engine and be amazed at the results!

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Contact the Author

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