

DEEP DIVE

Focal Points & Eye Flow

Every composition needs a clear hierarchy — one primary focal point the eye lands on first, supported by secondary points that keep the viewer engaged.

A focal point is the area of greatest visual interest -- where you want the eye to land first. Eye flow is the path the eye travels after arriving. Controlling both separates a composed image from a collection of objects. Every professional image has a deliberate hierarchy of attention.

WHAT CREATES A FOCAL POINT

Contrast creates focal points. Brightest light against dark, sharpest edge against soft, most complex detail against simple, most saturated color against neutral -- any of these pulls the eye. Use one primary contrast type at your focal point and suppress the others elsewhere. A common mistake is having high contrast, high detail, and high saturation spread equally -- the eye has nowhere to land.

LEADING LINES

Lines in a composition can direct the eye toward or away from the focal point. Roads, rivers, architectural edges, a pointing arm, a row of trees -- these create vectors of attention. Lines pointing toward the focal point reinforce its importance. Diagonal lines move the eye faster than horizontals or verticals, which is why diagonals are associated with energy and action.

EYE FLOW PATTERNS

After arriving at the focal point, the eye typically follows a path through the composition. Classic Western eye flow follows a Z pattern. Others follow an S-curve, a triangle, or a circular path. Designing secondary elements to continue the journey after the focal point keeps the viewer engaged longer.

EXERCISES

Day 1: Draw a simple composition with a single clear focal point using only value contrast. Day 2: Add a leading line pointing toward the focal point. Day 3: Draw the same composition three ways using different contrast types: value, edge, detail. Day 4: Study a painting by a master and trace the eye path you follow. Day 5: Draw a two-character scene and make it unambiguous which character is the focal point.