

Visualization

Introduction

Most of us snap pictures when we see a nice or interesting subject or want to record a moment in an event, a place, or with people.

A good photograph should not simply document and record what we saw, but also convey what we found special and how we felt when we looked at the subject.

Visualization Stages

As you develop your pre-visualization skills you move from stage 1-beginner to stage 4-advanced. Most casual picture takers only get to stage 2.

1. You shoot something nice when you see it. There is no pre-visualization; you hope that the subject will look as nice in the picture as in reality. In most cases, it doesn't.
2. You see something nice, and you can visualize how it will look in the picture. You know when to take the picture and get good results. The ratio of good pictures vs. rejects increases from stage 1.
3. You can visualize how a known subject will look under certain conditions. You plan to shoot it when the conditions occur (light, weather, angle, season).
4. You create an image in your mind. Then, you set it up and create it with your camera or in your lab (shoot from a specific angle, arrange the subject, composite).

Key Considerations for Creative Images

1. *The Thing*

- The subject is only the start. The photographer has to make the image unique and different from the way others will make it.
- Make sure you capture and reflect your own experience, point of view, and impression.
- Consider personal feelings such as conflict, contrast, humor, beauty, etc.

2. *The Detail*

- Pay attention to fine detail that is not very obvious to the untrained eye.
- Look for special texture, colors, patterns, lines, curves.
- Also think of visual elements that the eye cannot see such as motion blur, selective focus, B&W, reflections.

3. The Vantage Point

- Choose unique vantage points that are not from the standard eye level.
- Show the subject from unusual angles and perspectives.
- Capture it in ways that others don't see (above, below, very close).
- Animal, birds, and people should be captured from their eye level for a natural look.

4. The Time

- Many subjects are not interesting unless captured at the right moment.
- The moment should be right for:
 - Light- quality, color, angle
 - Motion
 - Action
 - Composition of moving elements in the picture
 - Inclusion/exclusion of elements
 - Weather conditions- fog, clouds, sun, etc.

5. The Frame

- In reality there are no frames. The picture's borders create the frame.
- Composition is the arrangement of objects within the frame.
- Composition affects dynamics, impact, and mood.
- Think about what to include in or leave out.
- Think about the best orientation (vertical or horizontal).
- Keep the borders clean.
- Consider the placement of the horizon. High in the frame- gives feeling of depth and distance; low- feeling of space and volume.
- Use leading lines, diagonals, triangles, curves.
- Bright areas get the attention.
- Consider the placement of the main subject. The center may not be the best place.

Judging Photographs

Purpose

- What is the intended use of the picture?
 - Decoration
 - Greeting card
 - Fine art
 - Documentary
 - Contest (type? venue?)

Subject Matter

- Is the picture aesthetically pleasant to look at? Does it tell a story?
- Can you clearly identify the message in the picture?
- Does the picture evoke an emotion?
- Do the light, angle, exposure, tones, and composition enhance the story?

Center of Interest

- What are your eyes drawn to when you look at the picture?
- Do you see a main subject? Do you see multiple subjects that compete with each other?
- Do technical aspects (lighting, exposure, focus) add to or detract from the subject?

Composition

- Do the subject and supporting elements fill the frame?
- Does the composition lead you to the subject? Does the arrangement of the key elements enhance the image? Did the photographer break the rules creatively to add impact to the image?
- Is the background controlled to bring attention to the subject and eliminate distracting background elements? Elements should contribute to the subject.
- Did the photographer use depth of field, focal length, lighting, angle, and perspective to enhance the composition?

Technical Aspects

- Is the sharpest object the main subject?
- Does the image have the appropriate contrast and tonal range?
- Is the picture exposed correctly to set the appropriate mood and show the necessary details?
- Are the colors correct and do they fit the style or mood?
- Is the light too harsh, too soft, or too flat?
- Could a fill flash or a reflector correct lighting issues?
- Does the light support the presentation and story?
- Is the white balance corrected for the light?

Creativity

- Does the picture show details that are often missed or surprise the viewer?
- Are the elements in the picture arranged in a way that will make a strong statement or make it interesting and/or attractive?
- Is the picture interesting? Does it show some new ideas?

Common Post Processing Problems

- Leaving dust spots
- Over saturation
- Over sharpening
- Unrealistic HDR
- Grungy sky
- Bad sky replacement
 - Inconsistent lighting, perspective, and angle
 - Halos
- Bad content replacement (cloning, healing...)
- Poorly-converted B&W images

Summary

Evaluate the picture to see that it is technically good and has some of the following characteristics. Usually, the picture needs to have at least three of them to get a high score:

- Clear subject and center of interest
- Tells a story
- Special lighting
- Strong graphics
- Element of surprise
- Emotive
- Strong composition
- Unique and creative presentation

Beware of the Illusion of Reality - the viewer can only see what's in the picture. The viewer doesn't know or care about the effort that it took you to get the picture or about any emotional connection that you have with the subject that is not reflected in the picture. Here are a few examples:

- A portrait of a rare bird in the wild, after sitting a few days in a blind, may not score better than a portrait of the bird in a zoo.
- A picture of a building that has some interesting history will not be judged based on the history.
- A standard portrait of your grandson that you love so much is unlikely to impress the viewer.
- A landscape picture will not score well just because you hiked for three days to get to the location or paid a lot of money to travel to it.

Criteria	Agree	Disagree
Creativity and Appeal		
Clearly identified subject		
Interesting subject / story		
Creative technique		
Artistic expression		
Unique way of seeing		
Use of color, texture, pattern, detail, timing to make a strong presentation		
Composition		
Strong center of interest		
Foreground/background support subject		
Good composition/placement of subject		
Strong perspective		
Use of rule of thirds, negative space, leading lines, curves, or diagonals to make a strong presentation		
Creative placement of horizon		
Image leveled properly		
Clean borders		
Best camera position (portrait/landscape)		
Technical Quality		
Sharp focus where needed		
Proper exposure		
Proper light/used correctly		
Appropriate use of flash		
Good color/tone quality		
Creative use of lighting		
Clean presentation		