



5 AWESOME WAYS TO ADD EMOTION TO YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS!

Short Guide

Written by Kent DuFault



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CONTENTS

01	Lighting!	p.5	04	Composition	p.28
02	POV – Point-Of-View	p.11	05	Decisive Moment	p.33
03	Color ...	p.21			

When we create a photograph, what is the primary outcome that we all seek?

We want people to see, and remember, our images!

When we post our photos to Flickr, 500px, Instagram or Facebook, we don't want people glancing at our photos in passing and then moving on. We want our viewers to really stop, and closely examine our work.

One of the main attributes that contribute to a photograph getting noticed is the infusion of emotional content.

When a viewer is emoted, that "feeling" is embedded in their memory and it causes them to pause. Even if that pause is only for a second, the infused emotional aspect of your photograph has done its job.

It doesn't have to be a positive emotion.

It can be anything from happiness to sadness, or amazement to anger.

Infusing emotion is a key element to a successful photograph.



Stig Nygaard
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/stignygaard/2151056741/>

Now, if you've just climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, and you've created a panoramic photograph from on top of the world, it's pretty easy to stir an emotional response in your viewers.

But, what about the rest of us, who maybe don't have an opportunity like that?

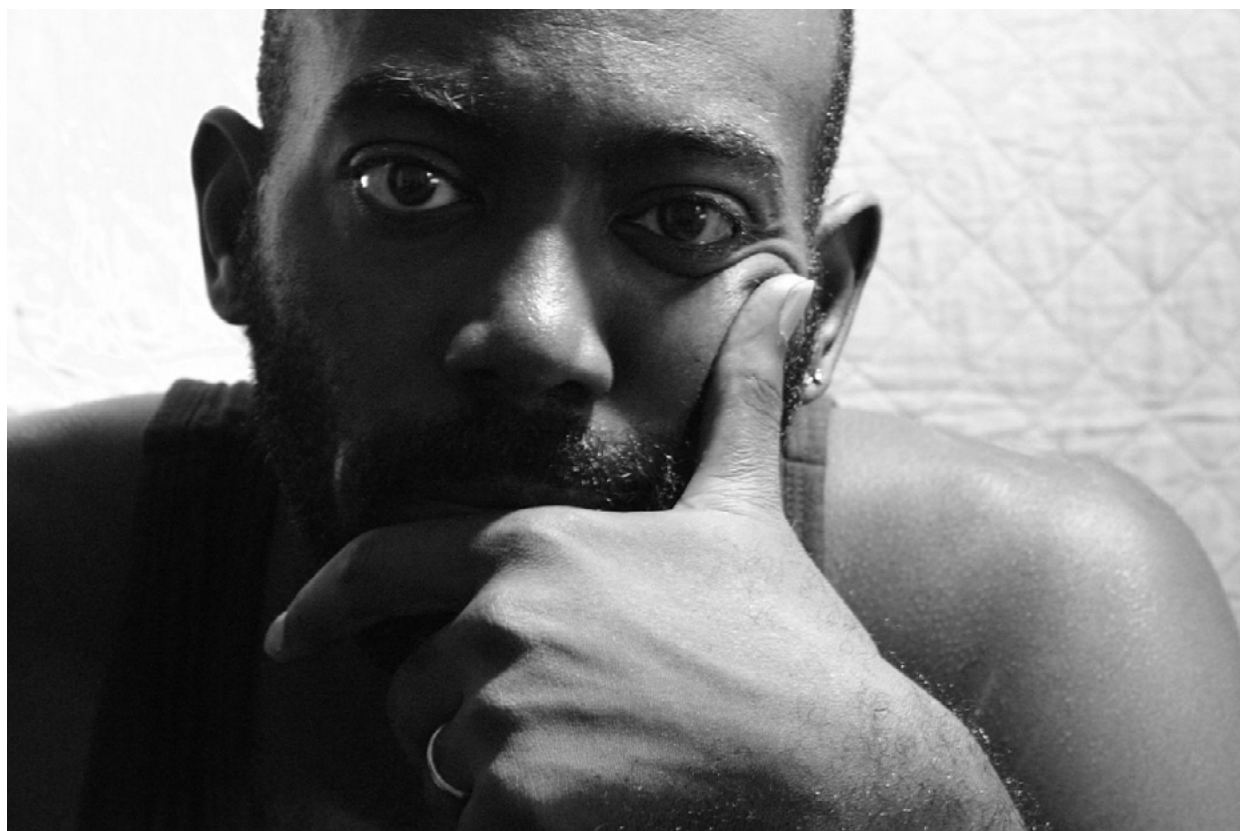
How do we incorporate emotion when we are taking pictures of our kids swinging at the local park?

Today, we're going to discuss 5 ways to add emotion to your images: to get them noticed!

Whenever you're out shooting, keep these techniques in mind, and you're bound to crank up the emotional response to your images!

01

LIGHTING!



Vox Efx
https://www.flickr.com/photos/vox_efx/141745770/in/photostream/

You may be thinking... "What is so special about that? I could have thought of lighting!"

And that may be true. But now we need you to start thinking about how lighting can create an emotional response.

In the above photos, we have the same man exhibiting the same expression toward the camera. He is simply looking straight at the camera expressionless. Yet in figure on the left, there is a sense of foreboding, possibly pain, something doesn't seem right. In figure on the right he looks healthy, positive, and strong.



Vox Efx
https://www.flickr.com/photos/vox_efx/142107627/in/photostream/

The main difference between these two images is the lighting.

In general, broad, open, even lighting presents a positive mood. In reverse, direct, contrasting, pinpoint, shadowed lighting creates suspense, drama or concern.

Let's look at a couple of examples and determine how the lighting created the mood.



xxx
xxx

These two photographs of the young boy playing at the local park are a perfect example of how lighting can completely change the emotional context of a photograph. The photographs were taken on the same day, and literally within an hour of each other. Yet, each one conveys a much different mood.

My point being, that you should study the light that's available to you when you're ready to shoot a photograph, and use it to enhance the mood that you wish to convey.

Let's look at a different type of photography, and see how the light affects the mood.



Jean-Daniel Echenard
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/34804353@N02/8124224972/>

When dealing with large unmovable subjects, such as landscapes or architecture, you have several ways to use the “light” as an emotional tool.

1. By making a careful selection as to the time of day that you will create your photograph.
2. By choosing an appropriate angle to the sun.
3. Through the use of filters, or post-production techniques, to alter the existing light.

For example, in the photograph above, the light was fairly bland and even. The photographer created the warm, comforting light using post-production techniques.

With the warm light added to the landscape in figure 5, what kinds of emotions are evoked from the viewer?



Jean-Daniel Echenard
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/34804353@N02/8124224972/>

Here is what the same scene looked like to the naked eye. The mood is quite different, isn't it? The post-production version creates a feeling of warmth, nostalgia, beauty, and comfort, whereas the second version looks nice...and that's about it.

When attempting to use light as your emotional grabbing tool, bear in mind the following:

- You can attempt to manipulate the angle of the light to the subject to create drama
- You can choose a time of day to attain a certain type of light
- You can use filters on your camera to alter what the existing light looks like
- You can manipulate the lighting in post-production software to create a mood




These two photographs of the Eiffel Tower were taken using similar angles and under similar lighting. However, the bottom photograph receives a much higher emotional reaction because the photographer used filters and post-production techniques to enhance the lighting that was presented to him.



Hernán Piñera
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/hernanpc/11741382354/>

02

POV – POINT-OF-VIEW



Your POV is
uniquely yours.

Point-of-view is probably the simplest method available to you when trying to establish emotion.

Why is that?

Because, you control it completely - your POV is uniquely yours.

Photographers often don't explore this unique tool as thoroughly as they should.

So, how do you establish a point-of-view? And how does that point-of-view determine an emotional reaction?

First, let's look at "how you establish a point of view".

- Your choice of lenses vastly affects the POV of a scene.
- Your choice of positioning the camera affects the POV.
- Your choice of positioning the subject also affects the POV.

Let's study some examples of these three choices.



Roger
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/24736216@N07/2506164891/>



slyu
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/siyublog/1982035178/>

These two photographs in figure 8 are of the same subject: the Berlin Wall. The top photograph was captured with a telephoto lens, and the bottom photograph was created with a wide-angle lens. Each image creates an emotional response, but it's due to each photographer's choice of POV; the emotional response is very different. The top photograph evokes an emotion of danger, warning, and fear. The bottom photograph depicts isolation, loneliness, and separation.

If you haven't studied lenses yet, keep these points in mind.

- A telephoto lens compresses distance and spatial relationships
- A wide-angle lens expands distance and pushes elements apart



the Clocktower
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/the-clocktower/6281199231/>

Many photographers, myself included, tend to photograph subjects from eye level. Unfortunately, that is rarely the best angle to infuse an emotional reaction into a photograph.



GoRun26
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/joshsamson/3703683172/>

This photograph of some leaf lettuce growing in a garden has a much stronger emotional impact than the previous example in figure 9. The reason for this is the camera angle. The camera was literally sitting on the ground. This POV makes the lettuce look as large as a tree. The emotional response is “surprise” when one actually figures out what it is.

When choosing an unusual angle for the camera, it can be extreme, like in figure 10.

Often times, however, even a slight movement on the part of camera placement can add emotion and drama.



What could be more emotionally driven, or awe-inspiring, than mountain climbing? Yet, this photograph has zero impact. Why? The photographer did not think through their point-of-view.

Osamu Ichida
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/13975275@N00/4812766482/>



*saipai
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/saipal/200431071/>

The photographer in figure 12 chose a point-of-view that is looking down. One cannot help but feel an emotional gulp when viewing this picture. The immensity of the view versus the small person touching the rocks creates high drama. Now, for all we know, that woman might be standing on a perfectly safe platform with a railing around it: doesn't matter. The POV dictates the emotional response.

Choosing an emotional POV doesn't necessarily have to be ultra-dramatic. You don't have to hang off of a cliff or wade chest deep into a pond, sometimes it's just about eliminating unnecessary details until you have focused in on the true story being told in the photograph.



MJNeung
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/muaer/16032219281/>

The photograph in figure 13 could have been taken from many different points-of-view. But, by eliminating everything except the floor, shoes, clothes, and hands, we the viewer are forced into an emotional context that we must grapple with. What is this woman doing? Why is she dressed like that? Why do her hands hang as if she is sad? This is the type of well thought-out POV that viewers respond to and remember!

One last word on POV – CLOSE-UP. Remember to get close. People love seeing details in a photograph. Details can create strong emotions. Sure, there is a place for the wide-angle image. But most photographers have more of a problem going too wide, rather than too close.

The following photographs are great examples of the impact you can expect from a close shot. Neither of these images would be nearly as dramatic (and emotional) if they had been framed wider.



A tight crop leads to a dramatic and emotional portrait, as seen in figure 14.

Lies Thru a Lens
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/danrocha/15835043845/in/photostream/>



Had this photograph been framed with a POV of just a few more inches around the face, the emotional impact would have been significantly weakened, if not completely lost.

Remember- Frame your POV tight!

LMAP
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/megyarsh/2366447913/>

03

COLOR ...



Humans have an emotional attachment to color.

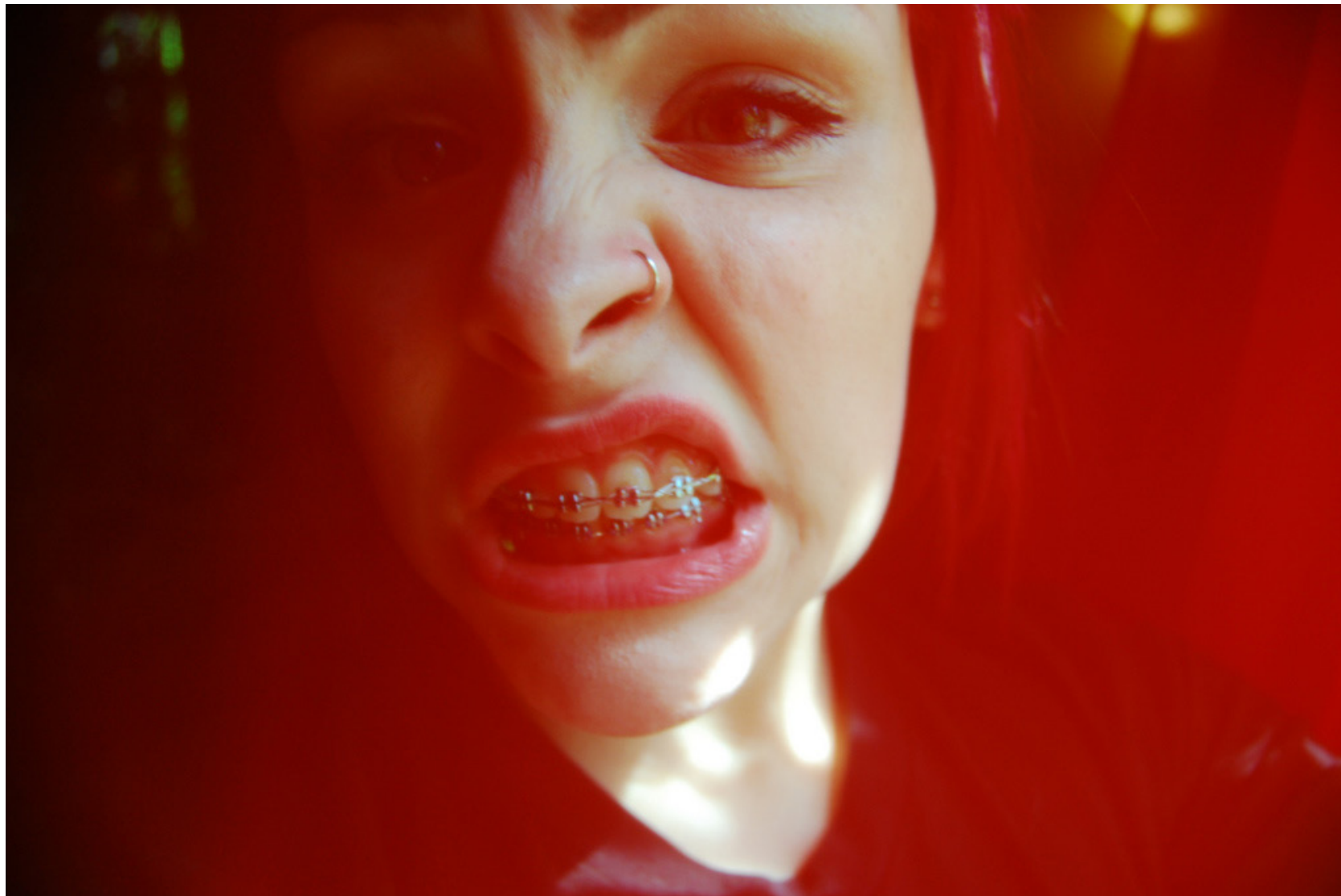
Blue tends to make us think of cold or night.

Red indicates danger, heat, or love.

Every color of the spectrum generates a reaction inside our head.

How can you put that knowledge to use?

1. You can keep your eyes open for colors that convey a certain mood.
2. You can introduce props of a certain color to influence emotions.
3. You can manipulate color in-camera through the use of filters or color balance settings.
4. You can manipulate color in post-production.



This photographer placed a red sheer curtain between her subject and the camera. The red curtain created an out of focus color wash that definitely “amped up” the emotional context of the subject and her expression.

Zoe
https://www.flickr.com/photos/_lovenothing/2788407564/



In this example, the photographer made a decision to change the camera color balance from daylight to incandescent. This in-camera technique gave the image a color balance that shifted toward the blue-cyan color spectrum. When a viewer looks at this photograph they practically shudder from the cold. Here, we have used the color blue to create an emotional response.

Kent DuFault
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/11810708155/in/dateposted-public/>



Luke Baldaschino
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/lukebaldacchino/6085394711/>

This photographer introduced a prop to establish a sense of warning and danger. Imagine this photograph, with everything being the same, except for the red and white striped tape. It would lose its entire emotional context. The color red helps create the emotional response.

If you're interested in learning more about the context of color and psychology in photography, you should check out the Photzy.com Premium Guide titled "Light! The Fundamental Building Block of Photography." This guide covers the subject fairly extensively, and it comes with a free bonus card that you can print and keep in your camera bag. The card displays colors and their emotional context.



Yellow creates a feeling of happiness. Did you know that this is why the Smiley Face icon is yellow? The above photograph is framed so tight that you literally cannot see where this boy's location is. Yet, it is almost impossible not to smile while looking at this image. The color yellow plays a major role in that emotional response.

Kent DuFault

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/35449761@N04/8746923165/in/dateposted-public/>



maf04
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/maf04/12526435063/>

Finally, we will look at color (used to create an emotional response) that was created in post-production. The editing here is fairly obvious. You might wonder, "Does the color red really matter that much?"

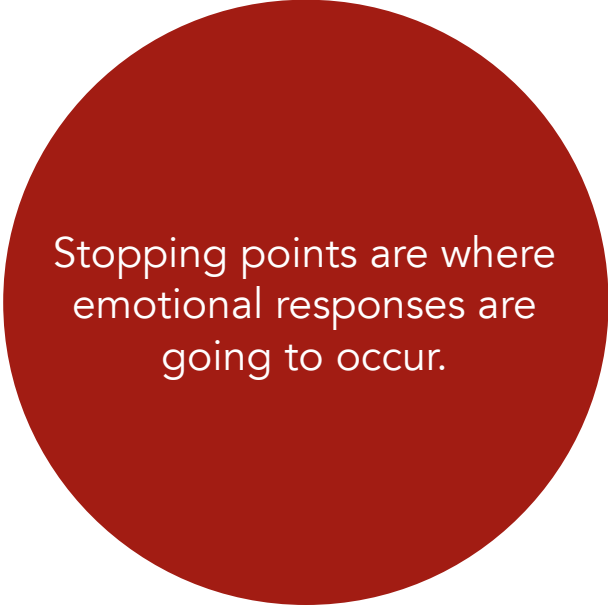


maf 04
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/maf04/12526435063/>

Answer the question yourself. Does this version elicit the same emotions? I don't think so.

04

COMPOSITION



Stopping points are where
emotional responses are
going to occur.

As you probably know, composition is the road map to your image. It tells your viewer where to travel within the photograph, and where to stop. Stopping points are where emotional responses are going to occur. You want these stopping points to literally hit your point home!

There are many rules and tools of composition that accomplish the same thing: guide your viewer.

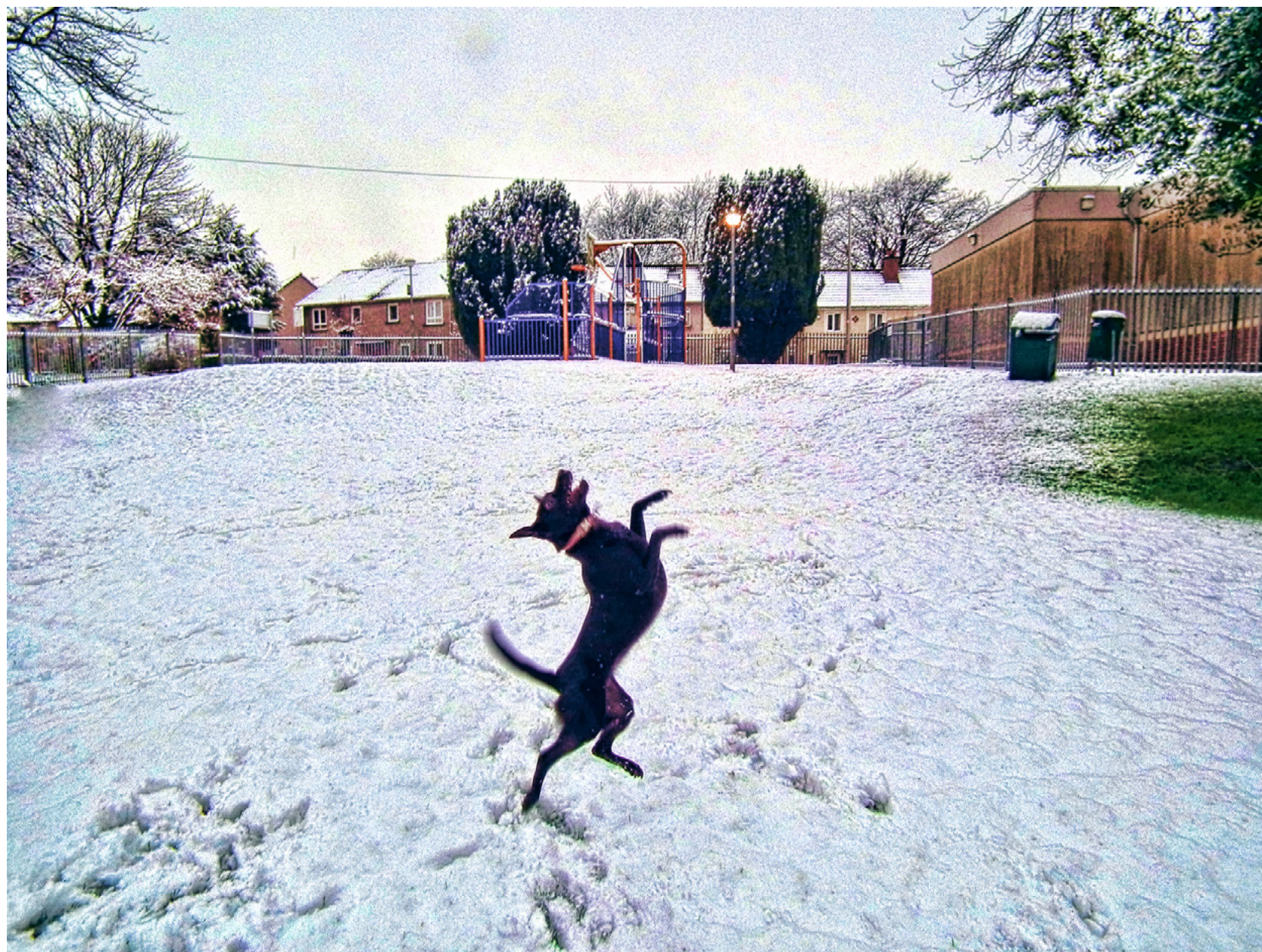
So, rather than attempt to list them all and how you might use them, let's dissect a few pictures and see how those photographers used composition to create an emotional response.



Benjamin Balázs
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/brenkee/16878977350/>

Using composition to create emotion will often utilize other techniques as well as to help boost the message. This photograph was created and composed to help create the emotions of sadness, loneliness, and isolation. The composition created this feeling by making the boy small within the frame. Everything else in the frame points right toward him as leading lines.

This makes him the subject and the center of attention. What other techniques have been employed to increase the emotional level? The color has been skewed toward the blue spectrum to give a feeling of cold and isolation. Also, the choice of the location was important. A waterfall would normally be a comforting icon, but in this case, the waterfall is surrounded by graffiti which adds to a feeling of urban blight and despair.



Stuart Mckigan
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/94066540@N08/8553588420/>

Shape and contrast are important tools of composition that are often overlooked. In this example, they play a key role in creating an emotional response. The dog literally jumps off of the page due to his shape and contrast. The viewer is then forced to study the dog. It's impossible not to feel joy and happiness when looking at this dancing animal.

Always keep your eyes open for ways to instill emotion - without being overly obvious.




John Ragal
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/johnragal/10583646544/>

Composition has played a key role in adding an emotional context to this powerful street photograph. Every element in the photograph forces the viewer's eyes toward the woman. Despite the fact that we can't see her face, we know something is wrong, and we can feel her discomfort.

The composition that the photographer made adds emotional impact to this image through the following choices: he lowered the camera down to the woman's height rather than shoot down on her; he placed her almost dead center in the image; he framed her with the tables and the van; he kept the image fairly dark so that the subject's arms, legs, and hands become "unusual" shapes within the frame.

05

DECISIVE MOMENT



The Decisive Moment
is really about timing
and anticipation.

The term “Decisive Moment” was coined by some of the original street photographers. The term means two things: clicking the shutter at the moment of peak action, which in turn creates maximum emotional impact.

So, the Decisive Moment is really about timing and anticipation.

This is one of those aspects of photography that you can read about and study, but you will never master unless you’re out shooting.

Let’s look at some examples, and then talk about how the photographer could have anticipated the moment for peak action.



Andy
https://www.flickr.com/browser/upgrade/?continue=/photos/andy_bernay-roman/312526080/

I once learned a very valuable lesson from a top rated professional photographer from New York City. I was taking a workshop with him on the subject of annual report photography. He had shared some of his work. On the cover of an annual report for a major New York City Medical Center was a blurry black and white photograph of a nurse clutching an infant as she walked through the emergency room. I told him that I was surprised that they chose this photograph because it was blurry.

This is what he said to me: "The technical quality of a photograph is always secondary to the emotional quality. Get your shot first, and then worry about the details."

I never forgot that advice throughout the rest of my career. Get the shot first. This is key to the Decisive Moment because in order to get the shot at all, you must anticipate and be ready.

The example photograph in figure 25 is blurry. But it doesn't matter because the emotional quality is high.



Thomas Leuthard
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/thomasleuthard/16970933850/in/dateposted/>

The Decisive Moment is about capturing peak action. That doesn't necessarily mean that something fast is happening. This photographer created a compelling, emotionally driven, photograph because the man on the left looked straight at the camera. He may have looked at the camera for only a second, but the photographer was ready for peak action. Imagine this photograph if the man on the left was looking off. It wouldn't have near the same emotional impact.

When you set about trying to use the Decisive Moment to instill emotion into your photography, train yourself to think about "what could happen" not just "what is happening".

I want to finish up by sharing two Decisive Moment photographs that completely rely on head positioning for their emotional impact.

My point being - the simple twist of your subject's head can completely change the emotional meaning and impact of your photograph.

Let's take a look...



The emotional message here is, tired.

John Ragal
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/johnragai/13612797145/>



plofiz
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/plofiz/14920322504/>

The emotional message here is, hot.

Make yourself aware of body language.
Become an expert on heads, hands, arms,
legs, and feet.

I hope that these 5 suggestions will help
you begin to create emotionally charged
photographs!

All my best,

Kent



Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (*and FREE!*) photography resources:



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