

HILL-STEAD MUSEUM

Aim, Focus, Click!

A photography lesson for all ages

Enjoy the beautiful grounds of Hill-Stead Museum while discovering new perspectives using your camera. Follow the steps below, then consider participating in our NEW photography contest *Budding Photographers*! Or, share your photos with us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or email to: photocontest.org.

Step #1: Aim

Whatever it is that interests you at Hill-Stead, focus your attention and aim your camera. Reflect on what makes the subject so intriguing to you. Here are some suggested themes...

- architecture
- landscapes and horizons
- foliage and/or flowers
- sheep and other animals
- stone walls
- color
- light and/or shadow
- the seasons
- the senses; sight, hear, smell, feel

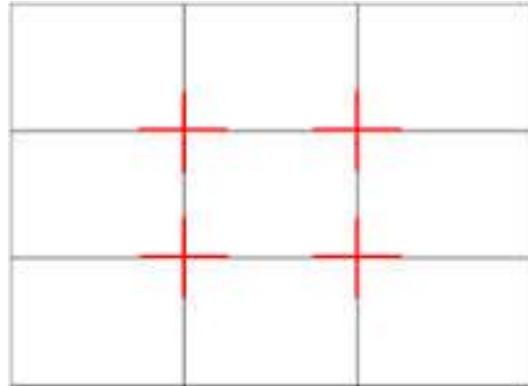
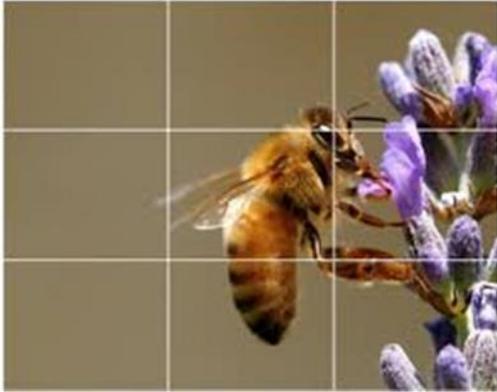
Step #2: Focus

The “Rule of Thirds” is the basic principle of photographic composition. When taking your pictures, keep in mind the Rule of Thirds.

The Rule of Thirds is one of the first things that budding photographers learn and rightly so, as it is the basis for a well-balanced and interesting photograph.

I will say right up front, however, that rules are meant to be broken and ignoring this one does not mean that your images will be unbalanced or uninteresting. However, a wise person one told me that if you intend to break a rule, you should always **learn it first** to make sure that breaking the rule is all the more effective.

What is the Rule of Thirds? The basic principle behind the rule of thirds is to imagine breaking an image down into thirds (both horizontally and vertically) so that you have 9 parts as follows:



With this grid in mind the 'rule of thirds' now identifies four important parts of the image to consider when placing points of interest in the image. This grid also gives you four 'lines' that are useful positions for other elements in your photograph.

If you place points of interest in the intersections or along the lines, the photo becomes more balanced and will enable a viewer to interact more naturally. Studies have shown that when viewing the images, people's eyes usually go to one of the intersection points most naturally rather than the center of the shot. Using the rule of thirds promotes a natural way of viewing an image, rather than working against it and imposing focal points.

In addition to the above picture of the bee where the bee's eye become the point of focus here are some other examples.



In this image I have purposely placed the figure in the lower right corner, balancing with another square of interest in the upper left as a secondary point of interest.



In this photo, I have placed the subject along a whole line which means she is considerably off center, and therefore creates an additional point of interest. Placing the subject in the center of the frame could have resulted in an 'awkward' shot. In a similar way, a good technique for landscape shots is to position horizons along one of the horizontal lines.



Using the Rule of Thirds comes naturally to some photographers but for many of us it takes a little time and practice. In learning how to use the rule of thirds (and then to break it) the most important questions to be asking of yourself are:

- what are the points of interest in this shot?**
- where am I intentionally placing them?**

Remember that breaking the rule can result in some striking shots, so once you have learned the rule, experiment with purposefully breaking it to see what you can discover.



Practice the Rule of Thirds on this photo, taken by Theodate Pope Riddle of her beloved dog Jim-Jam.

Lastly, keep the rule of thirds in mind as you edit your photos. Post production editing tools today have good tools for cropping and reframing images that fit within the rules. Experiment with some of your old shots to see what impact it might have on your photos.

Step #3: Click!

Once you have established your theme, learned the Rule of Thirds, start taking pictures! After you have several compositions and themes to work with, try using some trick photography techniques. Here are more pictures for inspiration. Have fun!

[Adapted from lesson plan, courtesy of **Keith Giard, Art Teacher, Vernon Center Middle School**]



Photographs by **Alison Pascale, Hill-Stead Museum Intern/Educator, Summer 2014**