

Nova Scotia
Learning Interchange



The Canada-Nova Scotia
Information Economy Initiative
Nova Scotia Department of Education,
Mount Saint Vincent University and the
Nova Scotia Teachers Union



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Discovering How

Images Communicate





“Discovering How Images Communicate” is a backgrounder for those who make images but haven’t spent much time thinking about how an image communicates our emotions and thoughts - how an image tells its story.

This guide contains practical, hands on experiences which classroom teachers at upper elementary and middle school/junior high school levels, and in science, social studies and language arts can use to support students’ developing visual literacy. Outcomes which involve observation, primary investigation, and visual and alternate forms of representation of student learning are found in all curriculum programs of Nova Scotia. You are encouraged to identify curriculum outcomes for which visual approaches to learning experiences will be profitable.

Activities within the guide include strategies for paired and small group learning, whole class sharing, student collaboration, and student self and peer assessment of products and work processes.

You are encouraged to find a colleague to work with if these kinds of learning experiences are new to your students. It helps to have another person with whom to problem solve and to celebrate success!

*Nancy C. Mac Donald
Consultant for Curriculum and Technology Integration
Nova Scotia Department of Education, CANADA
Learning, Resources and Technology Division
macdonnc@gov.ns.ca*

When framing a subject in the viewfinder of a camera, we are making decisions about what to attend to within that larger context. We are framing and constructing a particular reality or meaning from the subjects in the environment. We create and capture this meaning through the choices we make as we photograph the subject. In making an image, we are communicating to an audience of at least oneself, how we interpret an environment.

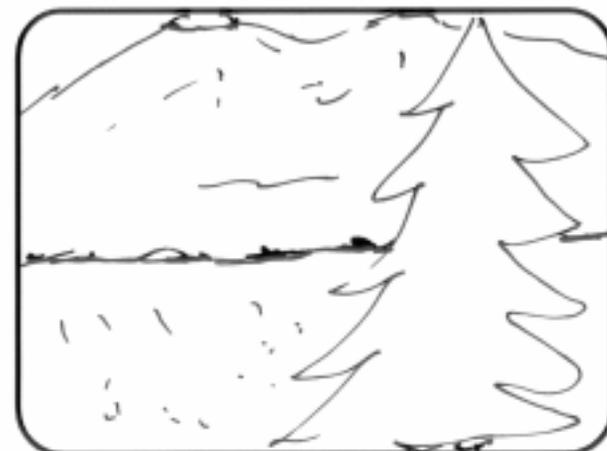
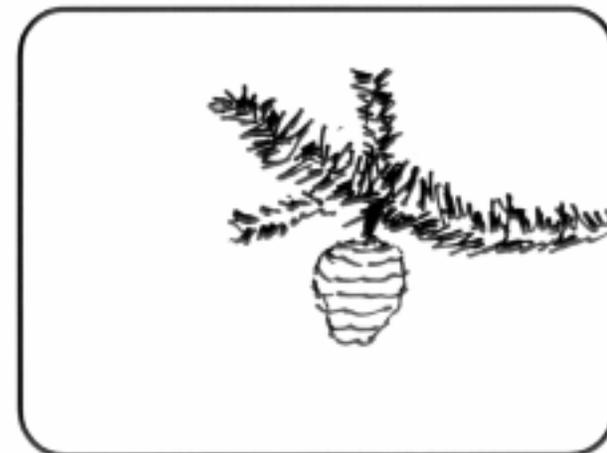
The act of framing is a form of editing. Rather than attending to an entire landscape of mountains, plain, grass and trees, we might

frame a pine cone hanging from a tree,

place a tree in a vertical third of the image and reveal the grass and distant mountains as the context for the tree,

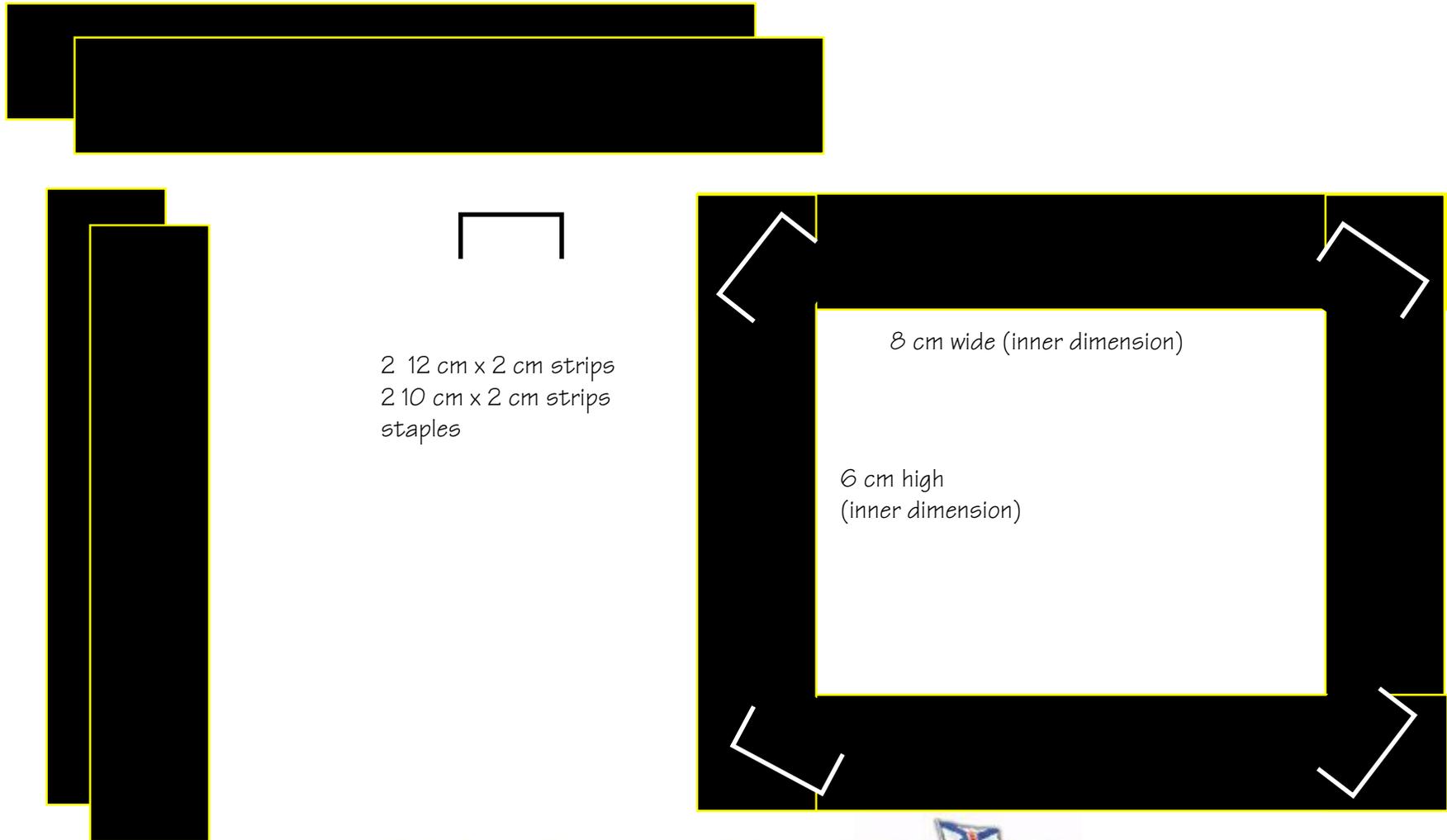
photograph a child standing next to the tree with the mountains looming in the background to give a sense of the scale and grandeur of the environment.

On the next two pages you will discover two easy ways to make a viewfinder. Have fun framing subjects in a variety of ways to communicate different ideas and feelings about photographic subjects.



Make a Viewfinder

Cut 2 ply or 4 ply, dark coloured card stock, black preferred, into 2 cm wide strips. One half of the strips should be 12 cm long, the remainder should be 10 cm long. Create a rectangle and secure the corners with staples so that the inner dimensions of the rectangle are 8 cm wide by 6 cm high. This creates an Aspect Ratio of 4:3.



Make an Organic Viewfinder

Hold out your hands with the palms facing your body. With each hand, make an “L” lying on its side. Turn your left hand over so that the long part of the “L” remains horizontal and the short part faces the floor (thumbs down). Move your hands together to form a rectangle which is wider than it is high. This rectangle is an organic viewfinder through which you may compose images.

1



With each hand, make an “L” lying on its side.

2



Turn your left hand over so that the long part of the “L” remains horizontal and the short part is thumbs down.

3



Move your hands together to form a rectangle which is wider than it is high.

4



This rectangle is an organic viewfinder through which you may compose images.

Elements of Photographic Composition

Now that you have made a viewfinder, it's time to put it to work. We will use the viewfinder, and later the camera, to compose images. The act of placing a subject inside the rectangle of your viewfinder is called framing. To make an image, you must frame a subject. Once the subject is within the frame of your viewfinder you will need to decide how to compose the image so that it is pleasing and communicates your thoughts, feelings, understanding or questions about the subject. To compose the image, you have a number of decisions to make. Each composition decision causes the viewer to see the image differently, and effects the message and mood communicated.

Selecting a composition that will communicate to a viewer what you thought, felt, understood, or questioned about the subject, is your photographic and communications goal.

Let's use a deliberate planning process to make pictures which communicate your message.

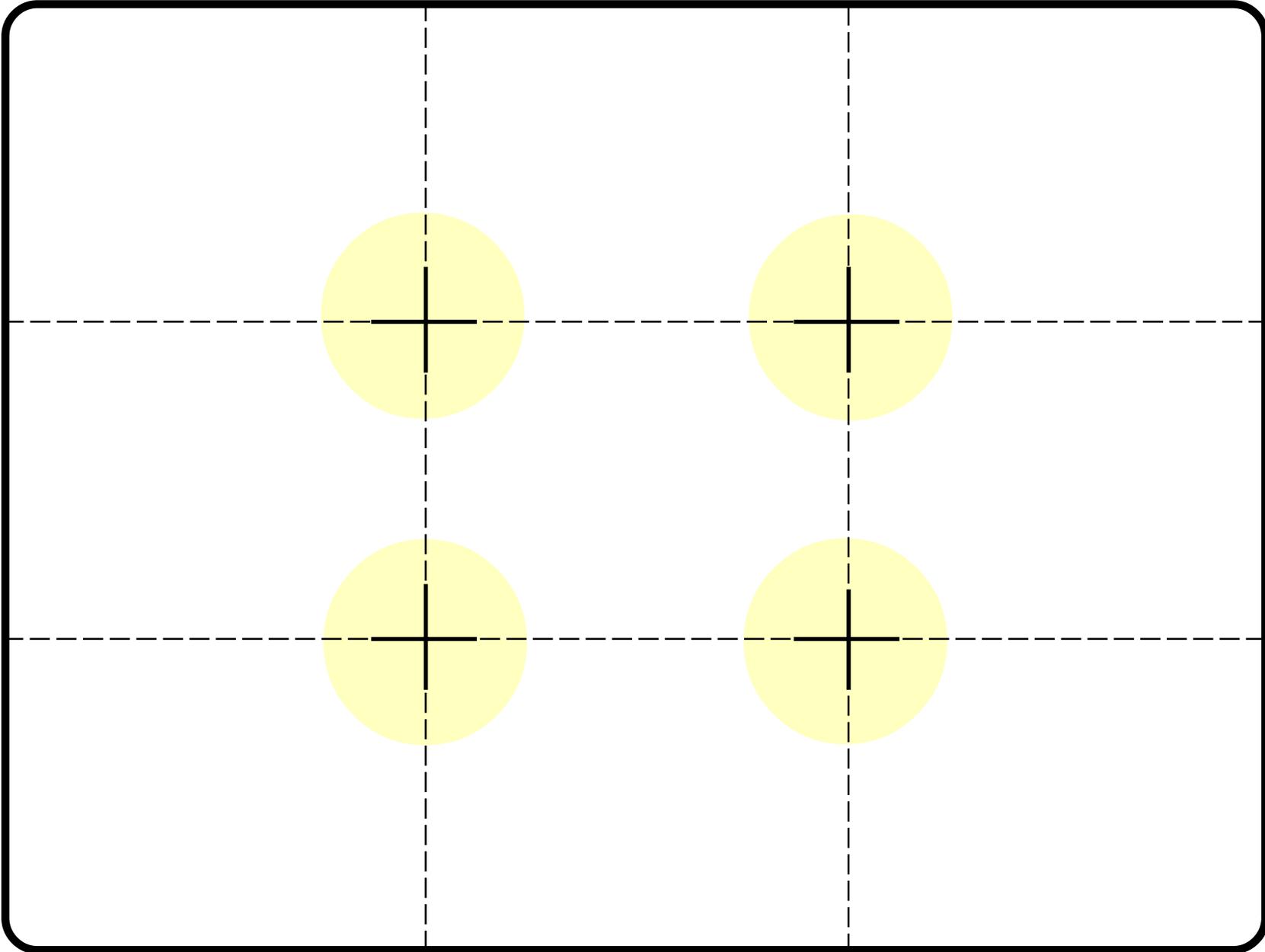
Rule of Thirds

Where will you place the subject of your photograph within the frame?

Across cultures and time, people have found particular image compositions and views of the environment pleasing. The human eye and brain seek to locate the most important information in an image first and fill in our understanding of the image through its details later. This all happens within a few seconds of seeing the image.

Consider the space inside your viewfinder. Divide it into thirds from left to right, and then from top to bottom. A standard and basic composition which pleases the eye usually can be obtained by locating an important piece of visual information at a point where the thirds intersect. See the illustration on the next page.

RULE OF THIRDS



Rule of Thirds

Select five images from a picture file, magazines, newspapers or from a projected internet resource. Visually divide the image into thirds from top to bottom, and from left to right.

The Rule of Thirds would tell you that the human eye tends to like the most powerful information in the image to be located where the lines cross. The weakest areas of the image tend to be “dead centre” and at the periphery (the edges) of the image.

Which of your five selected images follows the Rule of Thirds?
Which of your five selected images breaks the Rule of Thirds?

Examine each image closely.

Close your eyes.

Open them and pay attention to how your eye moves through each image. (You’ll want to try closing and opening your eyes several times to learn the “visual flow” of each image.)

What part of the image drew your eye first, second, third, etc. ?
How did your eye move through the image to give you a first understanding of the image?
How does your eye continue to move through the image - filling in any details to support your first understanding of the image?
To what extent does each image use or break the Rule of Thirds?

When you make images, consider the use of the Rule of Thirds as a guide as you compose. It is a helpful “Rule” as you visualize to create a pleasing effect.

However, like any rule of photography, the Rule of Thirds was made to be broken! The important thing is to know **why** you are breaking the Rule of Thirds.

In each of the images you examined, what was the communications advantage of following or breaking the Rule of Thirds?
How did breaking the rule allow the image maker to better communicate his/her ideas and feelings about the subject?

Using the Viewfinder and Camera to Compose Images

Select a partner. Practice framing each other and become comfortable making each shot type described below and in the next three pages.

In this activity you will become familiar with types of shots and how those shots control what your audience understands about the subject you are photographing. Remember to apply or deliberately break the Rule of Thirds as you compose your pictures. Note that the very centre of the image is *usually* a visual dead zone. (Again, a rule which can be broken to create a particular meaning or mood/feeling in an image.)

Basic Shot Compositions

Shot types include:

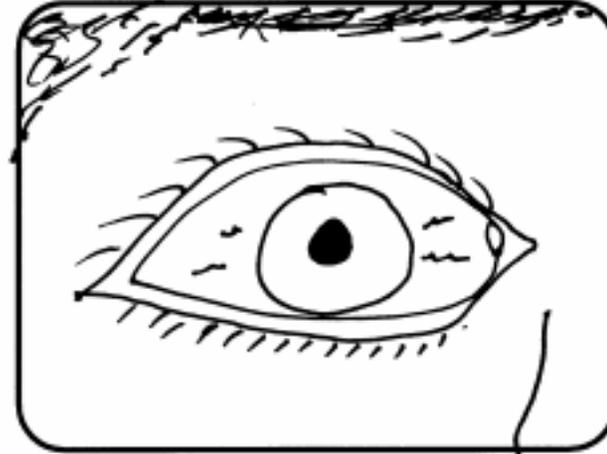
Extreme Close Up	XCU
Close Up	CU
Medium Shot	MS
Long Shot	LS
Extreme Long Shot	XL

Basic Shot Compositions

STUDENT NAME _____



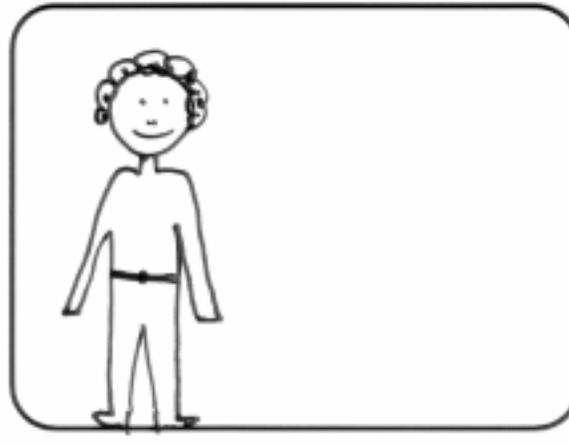
Compose a picture of your partner which shows the head and shoulders. This shot is called a



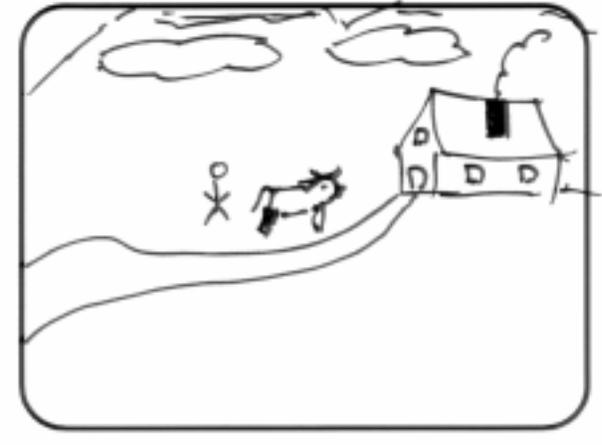
Standing in the same position, move the viewfinder so that the frame is filled by your partner's eye. (XCU)



Move yourself and frame your partner so that you can see him head to waist. This is called a Medium Shot (MS).

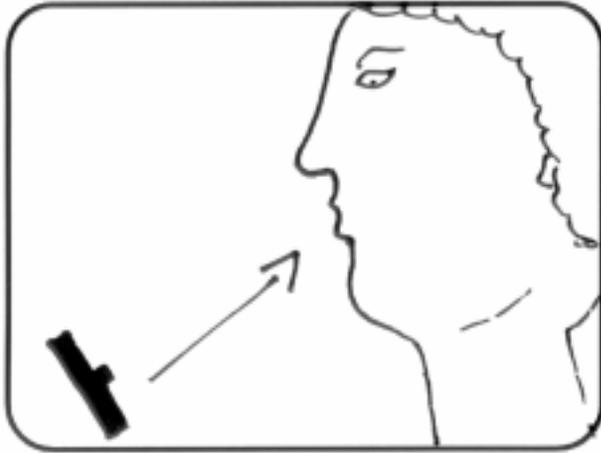


Move yourself and frame your partner so that you can see her head to toe. This is called a Long Shot (LS).



Move to the window and frame a tree, animal, house or person that is far away. This is an Extreme Long Shot (XL).

CAMERA ANGLES

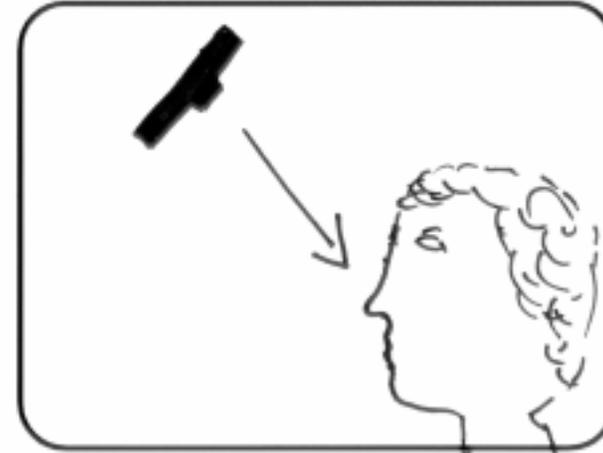


Tilt UP

The angle and position of the camera in relation to your subject affects the meaning of the image and how we feel about the subject.

With your partner, move the viewfinder so that you Tilt UP or shoot slightly UPWARD into the face.

What feeling about the subject does this tilt up create?



Tilt DOWN

With your partner, move the viewfinder so that you Tilt DOWN or shoot slightly DOWNWARD into the face. **What feeling about the subject does this tilt down create?**



VISUAL FRAME

STUDENT NAME _____

Frame a pollutant such as a can lying on the ground next to a tree. What message will you communicate?

Draw a picture of your composition.

Describe how you would compose the image and why? (Remember to consider the rule of thirds, the shot type and camera angle.)



Image Elements Create Meaning

In addition to

selecting the type of shot (XCU, CU, MS, LS, XL)

*being deliberate about the placement of the subject within the frame
(Make or Break the Rule of Thirds)*

selecting the camera angle (Straight Shot, Tilt Up, Tilt Down)

you can manipulate the following elements to create the meaning of the image for your audience.

Line

Shape

Colour

Texture

Direction and Characteristics of Light

Contrast of light and dark areas of an image

Focus

Movement.

Photographing 10 Subjects

Name _____

Date _____

Select 10 different subjects to photograph. Some might be people; others might be landscapes or objects. What do you want to communicate about each subject? How will you compose each image so that it communicates your message?

Subject # _____	What I want to communicate about this subject.	Description of how I will compose the shot (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Subject # _____	What I want to communicate about this subject.	Description of how I will compose the shot (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Subject # _____	What I want to communicate about this subject.	Description of how I will compose the shot (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Subject # _____	What I want to communicate about this subject.	Description of how I will compose the shot (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)
_____	_____	_____
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_____	_____	_____

Subject # _____	What I want to communicate about this subject.	Description of how I will compose the shot (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Photographing 10 Subjects

Name _____

Date _____

Visualize in your mind's eye and sketch the images you will make with the camera.

Image #1

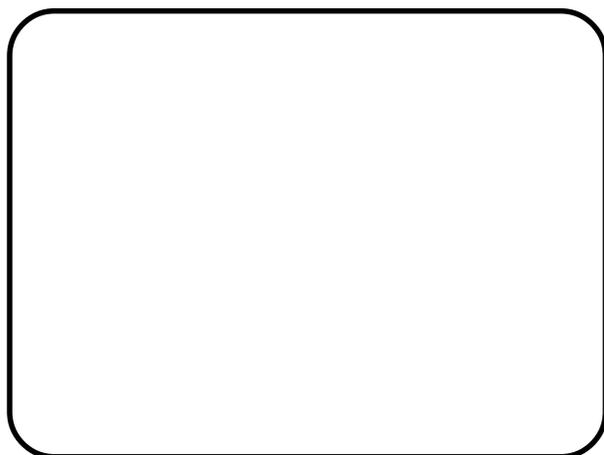


Image #2

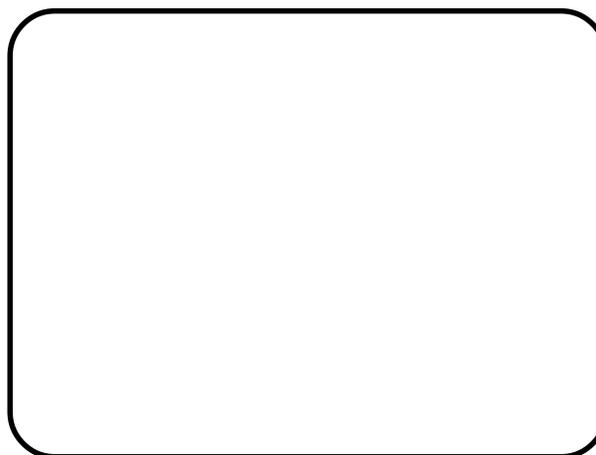


Image #3

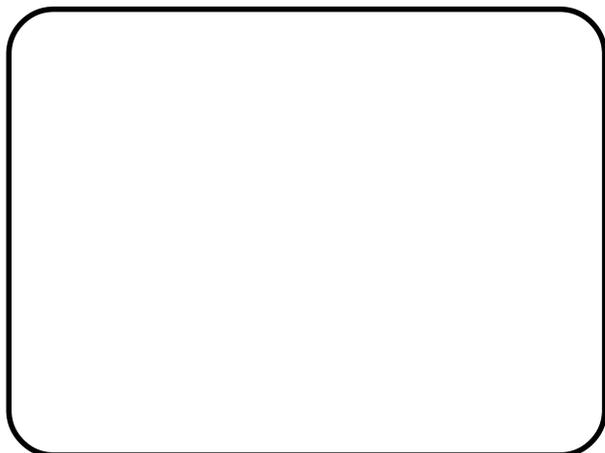


Image #4

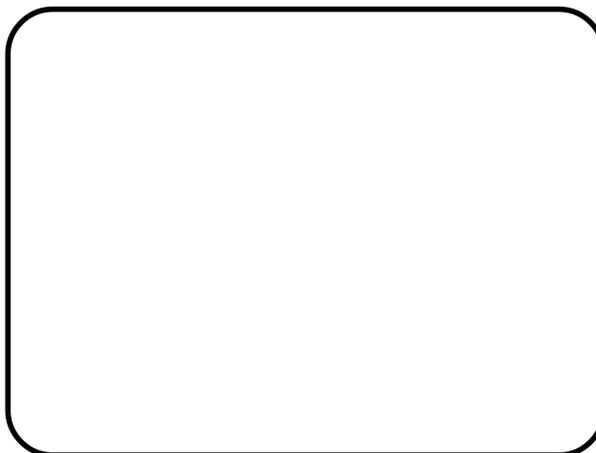
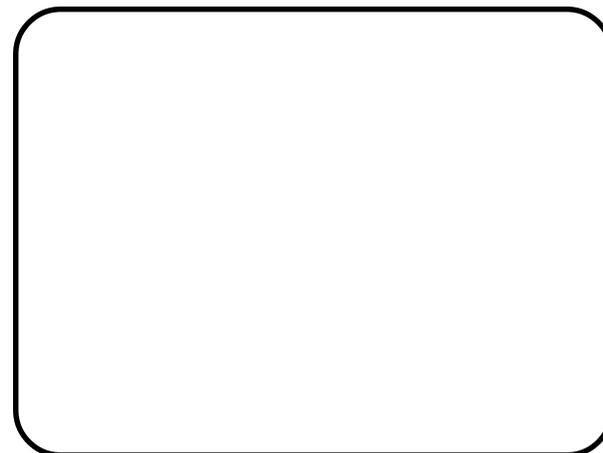


Image #5



Subject # ___	What I want to communicate about this subject.	Description of how I will compose the shot (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Subject # ___	What I want to communicate about this subject.	Description of how I will compose the shot (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Subject # ___	What I want to communicate about this subject.	Description of how I will compose the shot (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Subject # ___	What I want to communicate about this subject.	Description of how I will compose the shot (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Subject # ___	What I want to communicate about this subject.	Description of how I will compose the shot (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Photographing 10 Subjects

Visualize in your mind's eye and sketch the images you will make with the camera.

Name _____

Date _____

Image #6



Image #7



Image #8



Image #9



Image #10



Self - Analysis Photographing **10** Subjects

Student Name _____

Consult sheets 14 - 17. Examine the images you made. How well did you carry out your plan? How would you reshoot the image differently to improve the effectiveness of your intended communication.

Subject #	How well did I carry out my plan?	Composition Changes for a Reshoot? (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)
	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Subject #	How well did I carry out my plan?	Composition Changes for a Reshoot? (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)
	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

<p>Subject #</p> <hr/>	<p>How well did I carry out my plan?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Composition Changes for a Reshoot? (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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<p>Subject #</p> <hr/>	<p>How well did I carry out my plan?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Composition Changes for a Reshoot? (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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<p>Subject #</p> <hr/>	<p>How well did I carry out my plan?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Composition Changes for a Reshoot? (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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<p>Subject #</p> <hr/>	<p>How well did I carry out my plan?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Composition Changes for a Reshoot? (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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<p>Subject #</p> <hr/>	<p>How well did I carry out my plan?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Composition Changes for a Reshoot? (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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<p>Subject #</p> <hr/>	<p>How well did I carry out my plan?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Composition Changes for a Reshoot? (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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<p>Subject #</p> <hr/>	<p>How well did I carry out my plan?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Composition Changes for a Reshoot? (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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<p>Subject #</p> <hr/>	<p>How well did I carry out my plan?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Composition Changes for a Reshoot? (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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<p>Subject #</p> <hr/>	<p>How well did I carry out my plan?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Composition Changes for a Reshoot? (Shot Type, Camera Angle, Rule of Thirds, Image Elements)</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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Photographing 10 Subjects

Think-Pair-Share - Responding to Images

Select 6-10 of your images to discuss with a partner.

Rules for Responding to Images

Context: The purpose of sharing your work is to learn from each others' experiences and efforts. In order to learn from each other, friendly criticism must be given in a form which supports each person's improvement of the image. Comments such as "I don't like that image." or "That's stupid!" are not helpful as they provide no specific information that the image maker can use to improve the image. The comments shut down conversation. People get justifiably defensive. Collaboration declines or stops.

Remember: Each person took time and thought when crafting the images. We're not experts! We're learners who are trying to improve by helping each other! A comment such as "If you place your subject against the wall rather than against the window, the image would not be as dark and details would show better." is gentle, honest, helpful and direct. It supports your partner in a possible re-shoot to improve the image. Learning how to provide helpful, honest, friendly critique is a life skill you can apply in many situations with other people.

Be Nice to Each Other!

State what you like about the image. (How does it make you feel? What does it make you think about?)

What photographic elements does your partner use well?

State at least one suggestion for improving the image in a reshoot.

Avoid Shut Down Comments!

In this activity you will be assessed for a number of things:

You provided relevant and positive comments about the effective use of photographic elements in each image, including telling your partner what the image made you think about and feel.

You provided supportive comments for improving the images of your partner.

Your comments, if used during a re-shoot, would allow the photographer to better communicate his or her original and intended message.

You avoided comments which shut down conversation, made the photographer defensive, or which reduced the partner's willingness to collaborate with you again.

- In pairs and in turn, assume the roles of photographer and responder.
- Exchange your 6-10 images and take 10 minutes to examine your partner's images.
- As a responder, make notes on scrap paper to explain how the images made you feel and think. State how the photographer's arrangement of the subject and selection of shot type, camera angle; and use of image elements such as line, shape, colour, texture, direction and characteristics of light, contrast of light and dark areas, focus, and movement helped each image to communicate its message.
- As a responder, make written notes and suggestions of how you will suggest the photographer could make improvements in each image if it was to be re-shot.

Photographing 10 Subjects

- As a responder, consider how you will conduct your side of the conversation about the images so that you are honest, friendly, gentle, and direct in your comments.
- Consult the rubric on the next two pages and predict how well you think your comments will be received.
- In turn, as a responder, lead your partner through a discussion of his or her images. The scrap paper notes are for your reference only. The purpose is to have a discussion.

Photographing 10 Subjects

Think - Pair - Share

As a result of the Think - Pair - Share activity which you have just completed, select a total of 6 images which you and your partner like most.

Small Group Sharing

Form small groups of 6 students (3 sets of partners from the previous activity).

Find a quiet corner or cluster of desks where you can work together.

Each set of partners, in turn, is to provide 8 minutes for the group to examine your 6 images. Follow the Rules for Responding to Images on page 22.

Lead your small group through a discussion of your six images and how they communicate.

Select 6 images (1 from each photographer) from the small group's collection of images for whole class sharing.

Whole Class Sharing

Maintain a positive and constructive focus. In turn, each student is to lead the class through a discussion of one of the group's images which she or her partner did not create. What new observations or suggestions do you hear? As your image is discussed, and at the end of the discussion of your image, indicate which suggestions you would accept to improve your image in a re-shoot, and why?

Reshoot two images. Post the Before and After images on the bulletin board with a short summary of discussion of your Before images. Create a space for friendly critique of the After images.

NOVA SCOTIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



I hope that you enjoyed “Discovering How Images Work”.

Suggestions for improving this resource are welcomed!

Nancy C. Mac Donald
Consultant for Curriculum and Technology Integration
Nova Scotia Department of Education, CANADA
Learning Resources and Technology Division
macdonnc@gov.ns.ca