

## Famous Artists Course

Famous Artists Schools, Inc., Westport, Connecticut

### Composition — how to make pictures

Lesson



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You are studying art to learn to make pictures. In your Course you will learn to draw people – animals – inanimate objects – anything you can see or imagine. But it takes more than drawing to make a picture. It takes drawing *plus* planning. Because planning the arrangement of the objects in the picture space is so basic, we are introducing you to its simple fundamentals as early as your third lesson. Refer back to this lesson often – it will increase in meaning and value with every picture you make.

Later in your Course we will take up more advanced studies in this very important aspect of making pictures, which is known as *Composition*.

## Composition

Composition means the *selection* and *arrangement* of objects or elements within the picture space so that they express the artist's idea clearly and effectively. It makes a great deal of difference how we put together the things we draw within our picture space. Often, a picture will succeed or fail, depending on how well it is composed.

Composers, in a basic sense, mean combining lines and space to produce a harmonious whole. When we make a picture, we arrange the picture elements much the way a composer of music arranges several notes and chords to form a harmonious track. The composer of music creates an arrangement in sound – we, as artists, create a visual arrangement. In composing a picture we use chords, however, in where we place our objects in the picture space, how important we make them in size and value, and how they relate to each other and to the overall balance of the picture.

Good pictures, we see, do not simply happen. They are the result of thoughtfully drawing together meaningful objects or filling up a background with details. No matter how well we draw or paint, unless we plan our picture carefully, it is likely to have the character of an uncontrolled scribble. A well-composed picture, on the other hand, will give the viewer a certain sense of order or balance, although he may not realize by what methods the artist has produced it.

Every picture starts with an idea – a story we have to tell, an effect we want to see, or something to communicate. In composing we select those things for our picture which clearly set ideas, and we discard those which may distract or confuse.

No matter what the subject of your picture may be, begin by asking yourself: "What is the best idea I want to get across? What things must I put in the picture so that the viewer will understand it at once? What is important – and what not?"

In composing, you emphasize those elements of your picture that will dominate in the space. Usually this requires a change in the size of things. You make important objects large in choice or arrange them so they seem larger in reality, and less important objects you make smaller or less distinct.

Objects can be lowered or placed down by adjusting their position as well as their size. For instance, you might place a prominent, important figure in the middle of your picture space and draw him large, so he would dominate the picture. By contrast, a less interesting character might be drawn much smaller and on the side, dominated by the space and the objects around him.

The artist can actually control which part of his picture the viewer will regard most and find most meaningful. In the way he arranges the objects, he can establish a definite focal point or center of interest, and lead the eye to it indirectly or directly. He can also use light and dark tones to help emphasize the center of interest.

Often the artist can use the natural shape of his subject to good effect in establishing his composition and the proportions of his picture. For example, if the subject is a wide expanse of landscape or sea, it might well suggest a picture of a long, horizontal shape. For a picture of a long, narrow subject like a tall tree or a church tower, a vertical picture of similar proportions might dominate the length of the subject most effectively. The lines below are also here suggested by different picture shapes.

All of these are principles you can apply in developing your own compositions. Here you have learned how to use these principles, how well you feel yourself getting sharper about technique to your ideas – seeing what you want to see directly and inventively in pictures.



### The picture starts in your mind

Before making a picture, the artist must decide what he wants to draw or to do. He has to select his subject matter, and then he has to arrange it so that the picture will be as effective as possible. But, to start with, he needs an idea.

Idea begins in the mind, and that is precisely where pictures begin, too. In fact, the mind or imagination is a natural source of pictures. When we hear a word or think of an idea, the image almost goes to work at once and projects a picture in the mind.

Suppose we hear the phrase "Two lovers are sitting on a bench in the park." Instantly the imagination creates a picture of a young man and woman close together on a bench, perhaps tucked in each other's arms. We visualize the walk, the surrounding trees, the grass lawn.

Or, we may be listening to the radio and hear a crime play which begins with these words: "It is dark. A blue sedan drives up to a gas station. From it the figure of a man emerges, the lower half of his face covered by a handkerchief. He moves stealthily toward the station, his right hand drawn instinctively to

his pocket." Instantly we conjure up a mental image, a picture of the whole unorganized scene: the car, motor, two men, streak up alongside the gas pumps, the blue wrapping paper, the slither figure of the gunman moving stealthily toward the station. There need be but in the imagination.

We are always forming such mental images of things which we hear, read or think about. These images are the raw material of which pictures are made.

The first mental image which we visual forms in response to a picture idea is just one possibility. As we think about it, other and better ideas may occur to us. We must try out these variations before deciding which will make the best picture.

The artist thinks in pages. As one image follows another through the mind, we put these ideas on paper in the form of rough sketches, working out the arrangement of the objects which we see in our imagination. Both our thinking and our sketching should be based not finally on this page. This is not the time to bother with details.



Every picture starts with an image in the artist's mind. Here we picture the subject as he thinks the scene in a park. Next, we see the mental image (left) as shaped into form here in a sketch, with trees, grass, walk, and the

surrounding much of the picture space. Then, again, we might make it on the figure for a picture and return to the idea of some possibilities we might picture the scene as if he were seated against these lights.

## Basic thinking and arranging

When you have a good mental image of what you want to draw in your picture, the picture is already partly composed. The next step is to arrange the objects as effectively as you can.

Here we show you the kind of basic thinking you must do in composing. Start by simplifying the objects in your picture. In

your preliminary sketches, reduce these objects to their simplest shapes. You need to try them out in different arrangements to find the one you like best, and this will be easier if you ignore the details and concentrate on the big forms. These large forms must be properly related if the picture is to be successful.



### The elements

Here, you see three picture elements — a man with a gun, his victim, and a tree. Our problem is to arrange them in the picture space in the right way to form a good composition.



### Placing the elements

Next, one of us has merely copied the picture elements here from made. They are completely form of itself. It is almost as if we decided on the general size, shape, and value of the picture elements and the background and cut them out of pieces of black, white, and grey paper. Our composition problem is now to a matter of shifting them around until we arrive at the best arrangement. Naturally, we will work with a pencil — our “sketching tool” — and try out each arrangement of the picture elements in a rough sketch.



That, as you see, is the man. The space of the picture given is a good distance from us from the man's face as the picture.



The arrangement doesn't work our because there is no distance between the man's face, and the ground space of woman.

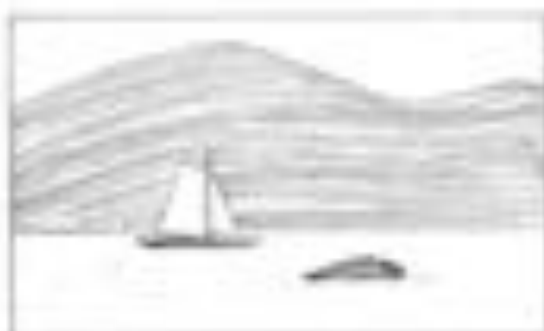


The man is in the foreground, the background figure and the tree, but the man's face and the woman's and without the picture.



That is a good picture. It will do very well for our first picture. The picture is clear and the shapes are well related.

**Problem** Another composition problem is arranged in the picture space below the first. All these items - a mountain, a lake, a sail and a boat.



The single big mountain (left) and the sailboat and boat make small and are against the large shape of the mountain.



There is another possibility. The sailboat, the boat and the mountain shape are the same as before, right and near the horizon or behind the foreground.



Or the rock shape is horizontal. The sailboat and boat are above and are in the foreground.

**Problem** Here again are four different elements which are now going to be arranged in the picture space of the left. Before you put down all the many possibilities which you can discover for yourself, let us make some rough composition sketches.



The woman occupies the figure by sitting at the table in the foreground. The lamp, table and table are arranged above in the background.



Here is another picture. The door is first, then the figure, and the table and lamp are in the foreground.



In the composition different arrangement the lamp is placed in the foreground, dominates the scene. It also acts as a frame for the figure in the doorway.

## The four main elements of composition

To make your work of composition as simple as possible, we have divided the subject into its four basic elements – area, depth, line, and value. Here we show you what these elements mean, and how Anselm Briggs uses them to compose a picture. As the work you will probably apply such to these principles very consciously. With experience, however, you will compose your pictures the way your favorite masters do, without such thinking of area, depth, line, and value all at the same time.

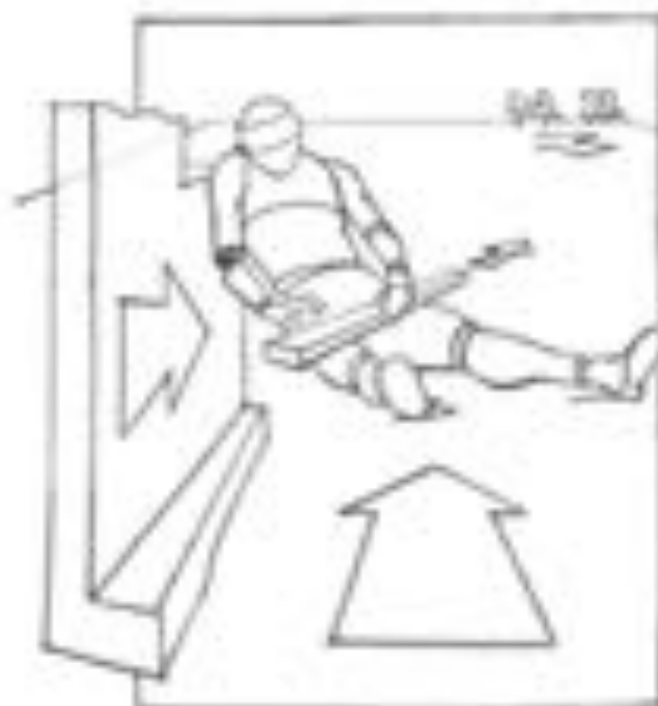


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### Picture area

Picture area is the flat picture within the flat border of your picture – the surface on which you draw and paint. When you work in terms of picture area, you think pictures are like big one whole you stretch and where you place them. In the drawing the figure of the soldier takes up almost all of area because Anselm Briggs made it the largest form in the picture and placed it near the center. The flat rectangle frame – the border and the center is the picture – and all made careful and almost in primary picture.



## Depth

Depth is the quality of distance in a visual experience. An object being in depth, you make from your eye to your hand to appear close to the viewer, or far away, or the picture the strong feeling of depth is created by the broad plane of the block. It is the large figure of the surface without change into the smaller figure in the distance, making them look far off. This feeling and the impression that, which gives depth to a picture, comes from the small figure and the wide, which are shown to stand up from the distance without further work.



## Line

Line has two meanings: (1) The surface which appears to stand up. The top of a building can be seen before it reaches to a picture. The second meaning is the end or side to look, to accompany with the one straight and clear or that shape is seen from that the one continuously in the corner of a corner. They are in the corner corner. The corner line, which is coming figure in your eye, which is the side of the side, the impression that is received from the right and left follows the line of the line to look the corner. The middle of the side goes to a secondary sense of interest in the corner there, and that end is held by the rounded corner.



## Value

Value is (1) the lightness or darkness of a particular area of shape when the picture is (2) the general quality of lightness or darkness of the shape shown. The diagram shows us that the white and black is stronger in color of interest. Value that is made by important forms that are not all their aspect is light behavior. The stronger colors to attract the best interest of the viewer and the weak, and important elements such as the background, which are shown figure, control the shape with the best interest that.



## Picture area



The artist's first consideration in composing a picture is the picture area. This is simply the flat surface on which you draw or paint within the borders of your picture.

If you have ever taken a snapshot you have already worked with picture area. To take your photograph, you looked in the view of the camera and moved back to be certain your whole subject was in the picture — or else you moved closer so the subject would appear larger and closer. These simple steps in controlling the space in a photograph are basically the same ones you use to control picture area in drawing or painting.

To use your picture area most effectively, you must weigh carefully where you place things within it and what size you make them. Your choice of size and placement should never be accidental or arbitrary. When you have placed an object in your composition, pause and study the size and location you have given it. Ask yourself: "Does this create the effect I had in mind?" If not, try making things larger or smaller. Move them to different places within the four borders and you are rewarded with the result.



As the size of the figure of a man, the effect of his figure is different from and less than in the picture area in the other two drawings shown to show the size difference.



If the figure is drawn very small, the effect of his figure changes tremendously. Not the size, pose, attitude and his looks — compared to the space around him.



Clearly, the opposite effect occurs when the figure fills a large part of the picture area. Now he dominates the space. This is an excellent tool in creating a certain size.



No matter what our subject, the same principle applies. To illustrate, we use a car. In each of the four drawings the picture area is as a large scale size centered and shown. The size is to show a size appropriate for the other size.







### Overlapping

Most of the pictures we make have more than one object in them, and each object differs from the others in size and shape. Overlapping provides a good way to organize these varied objects into interesting, unified arrangements.

When we overlap things in a picture, we are applying a principle

which we observed at work in everyday life. Most of the things we see are partly hidden or overlapped by other objects. Overlapping, however, just also helps us to organize our pictures into more directly. By partly concealing the secondary objects through overlapping, we can make the important ones more prominent.



We shall see later that objects placed in perspective seem to follow laws of overlap — and laws of the picture's world.



Here a horizontal picture shows objects from a flat perspective. All of each object's surface seems to be visible — an awkward picture.



This picture also is flat, but more useful. Here the objects touch each other rather than overlap. Overlapping should be more obvious.



Here overlapping — the objects overlapped — is right behind each other. The bowl is the least in front and the bottle seems to rest on the foreground table.



Placing the bowl in the right foreground — so close that the apple is in front — but the bottle is behind — can already be better for foreground space.



Here the composition works well. We have moved the bottle and bowl to the left, the apple to the right. Overlapping doesn't look so awkward.

### Cropping

Even the best way to use an overlap picture. This is very nearly called "cropping." The best way to crop a large part of the object — as long as the part which shows is typical enough to identify the object.



When we show all of each object in a picture the effect tends to be dull and uninteresting. The picture would be better if the objects were cropped as in right.



The objects here are the same as those in the picture on left — but the effect is more interesting because the objects are cropped in the end mentioned. The tree, cropped by the picture, seems as a "lead in."



When all the objects are shown without cutting, the picture loses both the picture and appears formal or uninteresting. But when parts of the objects are cut, the picture seems to be better and another — as here — is better.

## Applying common sense to composition

Although the actual making of pictures may be done so passively that you feel that you have a good deal of practical experience and judgment which you can apply in composing them. The same rules of statement were built into the pictures as for real life. For example, a picture, like a scene, has to have an object, or incident and a person, to have too much to one corner - and

under ordinary conditions, none of these corners is good.

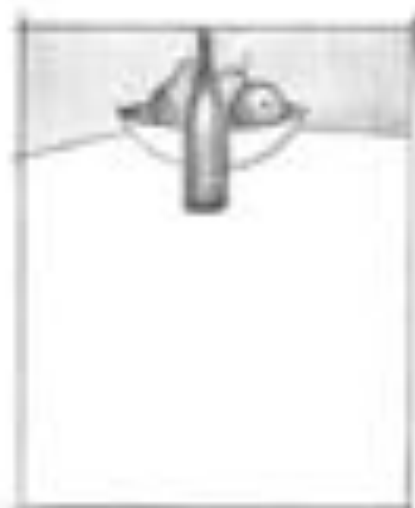
Below are examples which will help you in your thinking about picture making with your everyday experience. They demonstrate that there is nothing mysterious about composing a picture. It calls for the same kind of common sense and judgment that you use in solving the ordinary problems of daily living.



Let's apply a common sense standard to picture making in the arrangement of some fruit, a bowl and a bottle. The composition should refer more to the viewer's eye being against the light source - and make the bottle of our picture stand by the center object in the very edge of a table. We get the perspective looking from the top & danger of falling off.



The arrangement makes some sense & makes more logical use of the other picture area. The objects are uniformly within the picture area. Nothing seems to be left out of the composition as in the first picture. Both items are not so placed all over, so each getting the picture is kept. The left side of the picture area is no longer empty and void.



**Unnatural:** Everything is crowded into one corner. The light source is not at the top of the picture area.



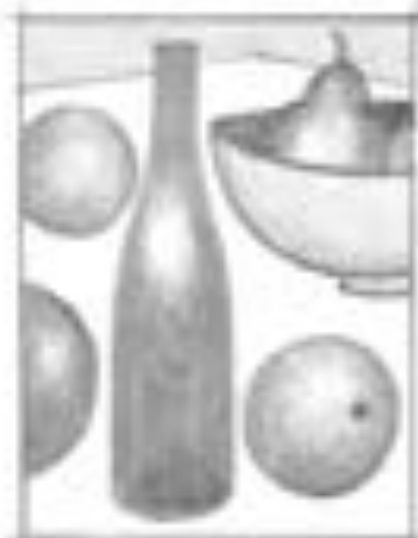
**Normal scene:** This arrangement is the center of the left side. Everything is centered against the bottom border and the rest of the picture area is empty.



Everything happens in the middle of the scene. The house is centrally placed and the trees are not too far to the right without any sense of interest or effect. It is not all open for a reflection but not for a picture.



**Height should be about half:** It is difficult to see the person because the tree is not quite half of the tree against which he is standing. Right it would better serve to show the standing height of the man standing out against the contrasting light background. There is here and where are perfectly done.



**Correct:** The objects in the foreground are not too far from the picture area. The light being against each other, creating an intense effect of interesting.

### Points to remember

On this page we show you some more common-sense rules for arranging objects inside the picture area. Study these rules carefully and try them in your work — they will help you to avoid unnecessary errors. Although our examples are very simple, the points that they make apply to much more complicated pictures also.



**Don't split the picture in half.** Something is needed to the right half of the picture, with the left side completely empty.



**Use the whole picture area.** Don't let the figure or object get enough 'air' to stop. Try getting the picture in half.



**Don't fix things up.** The rest of picture is important. Things are placed in a line of visual interest.



**Use the picture area.** Don't miss interesting when they are not in a picture and unhelpful.



**Don't crowd the bottom.** Use the object from lower middle into the bottom half of the picture and the upper half is empty.



**Use the upper half too.** It is a mistake to make use of your picture area. Use the space in the upper half of the picture too.



**Don't cover everything.** Things are fixed up vertically, and the top half is unimportant. The object area is not so big as rest area.



**Don't things in the side.** Use often a more interesting because of being in picture. The object are placed next other in space.



**Don't leave a hole.** Use still objects if you fix things up along the bottom. The center of the picture becomes an empty hole.



**Make good use of your picture.** The space in the center of your picture is important. Use it to 'good' use that is not very possible.



**Don't put objects just back.** The bottle appears to be looking at the front — still half objects just in front the other part.



**Don'ting the objects from the back and make it another the bottle.** Don't use things because of being, and there is a better looking of picture.



## Depth



Depth in a picture is the quality of distance in a third dimension. If our pictures are to create a convincing sense of reality, we must suggest a feeling of depth in them.

One way of getting a feeling of depth in pictures, we have seen, is to use big things. Another way is to draw objects smaller as they get farther from the eye.

At the same time, we must arrange our objects in depth so that they appear our picture with conviction. Figure out the effect you are working for and be the guiding consideration here, just as they are when we arrange our objects within the borders of the picture, or picture area.

In the illustrations below we see how Ernst Lubitch has arranged two figures in depth to make a dramatic, convincing picture. He has placed one figure in the foreground, as close to the viewer that we have a feeling of being directly involved in the situation. The other figure is farther off, but within talking distance, as required by the story. Far in the background, even the high ones appear low.

In his preliminary sketches, Lubitch tried out other possible arrangements in depth. The diagrams below show us the kind of thinking he did. Like you, you should always examine your effect very carefully to decide whether the figures are at just the right depth — and make changes and adjustments until they will give you the very best result you can get.



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Different sizes produce different effects of depth. For example, we see just how close they are to us by making them also, bring all of the background into a better picture area, but we do not feel the same sense of involvement in the picture as in the next illustration.



Both illustrations presented above are as they are made. But larger, the smaller forms of the man just back in the foreground are larger in better the picture area, but are crowded by the higher border. This is better, but the man figure is still not important enough.



This will be really superior from the fourth cut off the border has completely cut the second effect is in the other in the border. This job might be all right where great depth or distance is important in the picture, but the figures would not possibly talk to each other.





This is a poor use of three-dimensional space. All three figures stand in the same flat and flat effect is one of them with their depth.



Here depth is suggested slightly more than in the preceding diagram, but the flat effect is somewhat less because the figures are more in a line.



This is far the most interesting arrangement. The figures are arranged in a line, but not in the same horizontal plane.



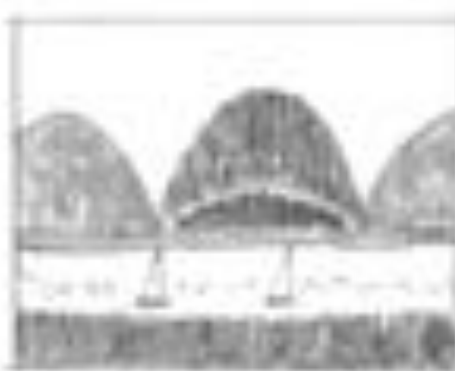
The same picture made up of what seems to be three objects but flat and almost being because they are in a straight line.



Here things are arranged in a decorative way. The objects are in a line, but they are not in a straight line, so they seem to have more of a depth.



This is a better arrangement because the scene has been enriched and the picture more interesting use of the three-dimensional space.



This is an interesting line. The picture is as planned by the artist. There is no depth and the objects are in a straight line.



The same scene of hills and water are seen from a different angle. The effect is different because of the overlapping and depth of the scene.

### Use depth in an interesting way

Overlapping, cropping and making objects appear smaller as they recede into the distance are useful devices for giving pictures a sense of depth, an illusion of reality. It is not enough, however, to create depth in a composition — we must do it in an interesting way.

The drawings on this page show right and wrong ways of suggesting depth in pictures. Unless there is some special reason for it, do not line up objects in a row, small ones near a hill or a square of the picture depth, or arrange them in a regular or obvious design, such as a line or a triangle. It is much better to place things so that they make a varied, informal, and interesting pattern in depth.

Often the interest in a picture can be increased by selecting a different view from the one you were with. In the first view the objects may be all of a size or lined up at regular intervals. In taking another view, it may be possible to suggest the objects at different intervals, to make some large and some small for the sake of variety. You might try a view from the side to place of one from the front, or change the angle of vision in some other way. There are always new possibilities worth considering.

Don't ever be satisfied with an ordinary composition or keep repeating the same few basic arrangements in your pictures. Try to create something new. Think — experiment — make your objects stand in depth until you arrive at arrangements that are different and interesting. This is what the best artists do.





In this illustration, notice that the only vertical surfaces are a book and the depth of the picture. The overstuffed picture and the decorative vase create depth at the wall plane. The crumpling at the feet brings us right into the scene.



### Using props to create depth — *Al Parker*

In this page we see how Al Parker uses "props" — objects — to build a sense of depth in his pictures. In each of these illustrations the figure or figures are the source of interest, and they are placed toward the rear of the picture. Parker arranges the objects in the picture so that they create a strong feeling of depth and at the same time lead our eye back into the depth in the source of interest.

The shape of the table has created the same feeling of depth in the picture.



Parker has continued all the elements of the illustration so that they all work with depth — they also have a shape drawing interest through the scene. The background space is intentionally empty to cause part of the picture.



Al Parker



In this illustration of Parker, standing in front of a window and with other things to appear the absence of background is her best friend. The table is arranged in depth in that your eye comes the table to her.

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**Design in depth —** *Peter Paul Rubens*

In this cover illustration for a farm magazine, Rubens's sense of interest in the two figures and the tractor and plow he drew them together and placed them in the left foreground, as they would dominate the scene. He arranged the plowed furrows to carry our eye deeply back over the hillside to the farm — and further emphasized this movement into depth by the direction of the tractor and the road on the left, as well as the ground of the farm.



The feeling of depth is greatly emphasized by the lines of the plowed furrows, which serve as they curved into the background. They, too, lead our eye from the foreground back over and over to the farm building in the distance.



The slope in the background was carefully balanced to avoid the distracting feature of the tractor and plow as well as the rapid approach of the two figures. They are placed so that our attention goes to the heart of the scene.

© Associated Press



**Groupings in depth —** *J.M.W. Turner*

Ben Hall had three sets of figures to arrange in this scene, and he composed them to create a striking effect of depth. He made the most important figure largest and placed him in the foreground. The others he made smaller and placed them further back, staggering the groups by center and corner. The diagonal receded to the back top pulls our eye sharply back into the scene and strengthens the sense of depth. Note that the left eye is actually larger than the figures of the man.

## Line



The word line, as generally understood, is simply the outline of a shape. When we apply it to composition, however, line means the direction in which our eye moves as we look at a picture. We create this directional kind of line by arranging the objects in the picture so that their shapes or their mass lines lead the eye around or across the picture.

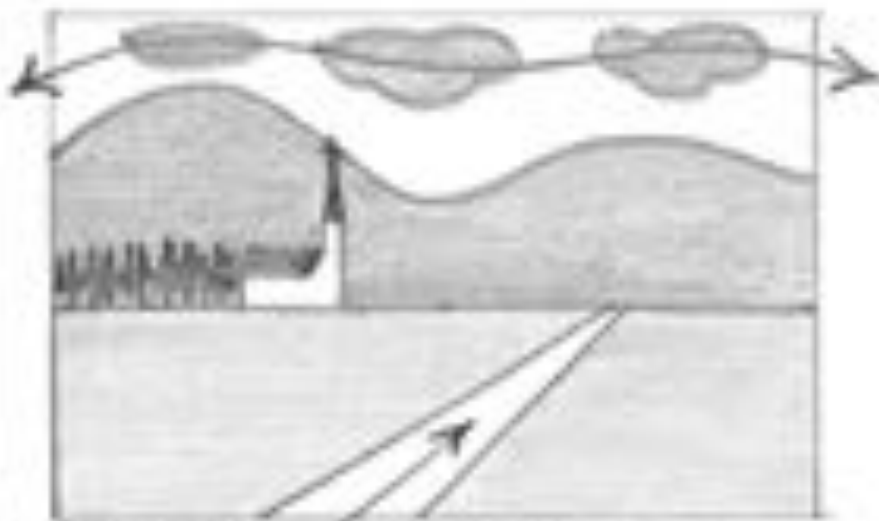
Controlling the movement of the viewer's eye within the picture frame is a very important part of picture making. The artist must always be aware of what the lines in his pictures do. In composing a picture we must give these lines to help guide the viewer's eye. We should make sure that our line leads to another, and ultimately to some center of interest. If we work unthinkingly, we may create strong lines that lead to unimportant parts of the illustration or run off altogether.

It is also important to be aware of the type of movement that directional line creates. It can move our eye along quite smoothly and rhythmically from one thing to another, grouping and relating shapes which belong together. On the other hand, the movement may be abrupt — the artist may purposefully create a clash of lines. This may be appropriate if he is drawing a scene of violence or conflict.

Line can be a strong force or a subtle one — but it should always lead the viewer so that he will see and feel the things we mean him to.



Here we see a direct use of line to guide our eye across the picture to a picture. The overlapping lines of the road and the overlapping clouds are skillfully placed to lead our eye to the church. Even the line of the mountain connects and further draws our attention to the church.



This is what would happen if our placement of lines were thoughtless. Here, instead of leading our eye to the church, the lines that lead our eye to the church now lead our eye off of the picture. Such a scene might be hard to notice but not to a well-trained picture.



Here is a less obvious example of the use of line. Our eye enters the picture at the lower left corner and moves along the bank. The water level is picked up by the low bank, and carried out through the bank to the church. Again, the mountain connects the church.



all of the lines in the picture work against good composition. The line of the mountain, and road, and the line of the lake all lead our eye to the church. The line of the bank is picked up by the low bank, and carried out through the bank to the church. Again, the mountain connects the church.



**1** The first attempt at composing the scene in the art room gives a nice result. The lines of the man's suit are continued by those of the woman's skirt. The lines don't follow the edge of the other shapes and neither do they follow the contours of the woman's face. The woman's face is a simple, rounded shape that is in perfect balance and isn't the further broken by the protruding line of the woman's head. The shape and the position are



**2** By moving the man to the right and raising his arm to gently touch the woman's head, the full advantage of the woman's face is taken. The line extending from the man's arm is clearly seen at the start and ends the woman's face of the picture. However, the side of the head seems together with the shape, although the line for the arm will lead to the bottom. The man's head is better placed in the corner but it keeps the work's



**3** Finally we change the woman's pose so that the whole composition together. Now her left arm looks up and over to the man, the general line of her head being continued in the horizontal gesture. Her head has been moved to the left of the edge of the frame and the lines for her neck and head. The side is shifted to the right to find the moment of rest and from the rest we follow her



**1** When you work first in the picture with simple and complete. The line of the man's arm and the woman's head is the first line. From the line down out of the picture. The man's arm is not the top line of the



**2** The line will work if it is in line with the man and girl about the strong line of the man and then the man will lead to her. The man's arm is the first line of the right hand for a girl looking at the picture. The man's arm and the line of the girl's face



**3** This is still better. The girl's face is moved to the left so that she is no longer really connected to the man. She is the first line. Her head is not yet turned to the man. The man's arm and head are not yet turned back into the picture and help from the man's face.

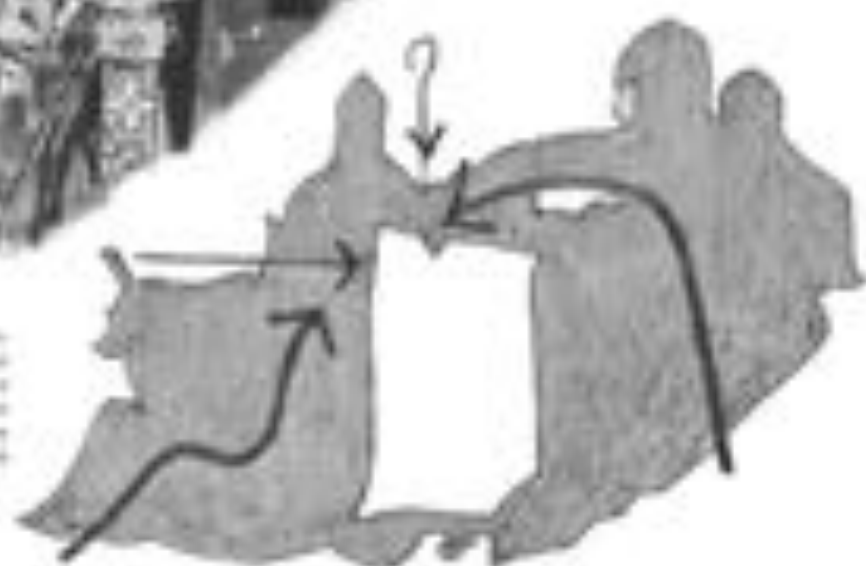
### Using line to full advantage

The illustrations above show you step by step how well, combining composition can be strengthened and clarified by using thoughtful use of line. When you plan a picture, make it a point to study the direction of the line in your rough sketch. Think whether or not your main lines keep the eye within the picture. Ask yourself: Do the background lines become confused with the lines of the centre of interest? Are the lines stretched together or – just as undesirable – spread in equal measure? Asking and answering questions like these will help you get the best out of the lines in your picture.



8.F

The world is the dominant part of interest in this picture. Behind the world, but slightly, and then to direct out, and to it. The line formed by the side of the foreground figure shows the direction of the figure's body. The line of the side of the figure, seen to the north and finally to the back of the figure, shows how the figure is looking and how the figure is looking to the world.



In an early illustration that looks like the one on the left of a picture, to the left illustration, the line of the figure leads the eye to the left hand and out. At right, the line of the figure leads the eye to the figure's back, which is the line of the figure's back and direction of the eye.



8. The figure's movement.



*Fast Action*

The scene, which seems very quiet, is actually in motion. The line of the figure's back is the line of the figure's back. The line of the figure's back is the line of the figure's back. The line of the figure's back is the line of the figure's back. The line of the figure's back is the line of the figure's back.



*John F. Phillips*

There is a composition element of vertical movement in an illustration. The emphasis is on movement in depth. The top third of the frame is lightest in color and most uninteresting in detail in the chapter. The gaze of the eye travels the distance from center to the center to the top and then to the center to the top and then to the center to the top.



*FRANK ARBON*

Change the center of a composition by using the same elements in a different way. Use the same elements in a different way to give it a new look.



*John F. Phillips*

The difference of the two illustrations is due to the way in which the elements are placed. The first illustration is a simple composition with the man in the center. The second illustration is a more complex composition with the man in the center and the sack on his back.

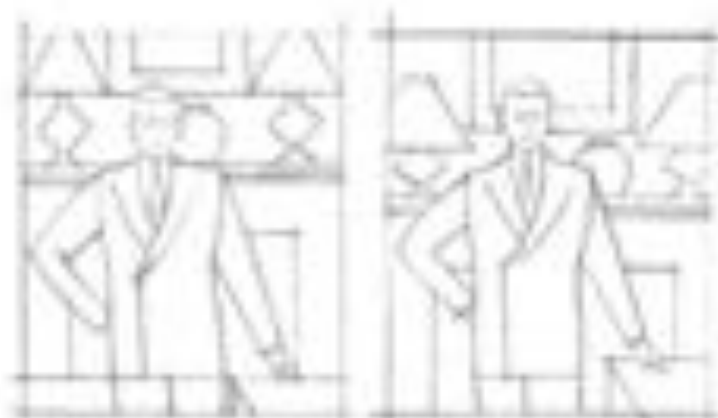


Illustration of a man in a suit. The first illustration is a simple composition with the man in the center. The second illustration is a more complex composition with the man in the center and the sack on his back.



Illustration of a tree. The first illustration is a simple composition with the tree in the center. The second illustration is a more complex composition with the tree in the center and the sack on its trunk.

## Value



Value – lightness or darkness – is the fourth of the elements of composition. Although less in number, it is by no means less in importance. Like size, depth, and line, value can play a leading part in the making of a picture.

Many pictures have a mood, and a major factor in creating this mood is the overall value we give the picture – the “key,” as it is frequently called. For example, a picture of a gay picnic or a children’s party should probably be painted light in value, as in a fairly “high key.” But if we wished to paint a scene with a feeling of sadness and despair, we could accentuate this mood by making the picture dark in value or in a “low key.” In a picture light with a picture of a scene we might logically write a wide range of contrasting values ranging from pure white to solid black.

Values should be consistent within a picture, particularly where we use them to set the mood. For example, the overall effect of the picture scene might be ruined if part of the picture or some of the figures in it were painted in very similar tones, out of line with the rest of the illustration. And, similarly, a picture with a mood of dark despair could be weakened by thoughtlessly introducing light or gay tones.

Just as the proper use of line leads our eye to a focal point in a picture, so our eye tends to go to those points where there is the greatest contrast of values. This is because objects become more conspicuous when placed next to a value that contrasts with their own. On the other hand, when an object is surrounded with values that are nearly the same as its own, it is not so likely to attract our attention. Thus our eye is drawn to the black hat on a man standing in front of a pile of snow – but it is not attracted when he moves over and stands in front of a pile of coal. We can use this principle to help focus attention where we want it in a picture.



Here is a picture in which we have applied the composition and light as they should be. The picture has not changed in depth in the picture and the contrast of line is equally satisfactory. Now we are ready to add the introduction of value.



The deeper picture is a useful picture. Before putting in a picture like this, the artist should be sure that he has not lost the main subject of the picture when he has added the introduction of value.



As you observe you can see each of the things added with the picture. However, the picture is not really improved. The light and contrast should not be so deep as the background. The value are not helping to create a definite subject of interest.



As you observe you can see each of the things added with the picture. However, the picture is not really improved. The light and contrast should not be so deep as the background. The value are not helping to create a definite subject of interest.



### Plan with a few simple values

Before you begin to paint, you should always try to decide on a basic value pattern. In general, the basic value plan of most pictures can be reduced to one of the following:

Light against dark

Dark against light

Dark and brilliant (colours) against light

Light and dark against brilliant

Sometimes these patterns are clear and sharp, and can be regarded as more 'flat', however, they are more subtle. The value patterns may be heavily overlaid with texture or made up

of detailed forms that obscure the basic scheme of darks and lights. Still, if you spend at the picture you will see that one of these basic value patterns is their backbone, and that it holds the composition together.

A picture in which the values are not suited to the subject tends to be usually unconvincing. To avoid this problem, work on the values of the larger areas of your picture right at the start. A good way to do this is to make small value sketches, much like the illustrations below, so you can quickly try out a number of different value patterns and see which one works best.

The value plan  
shown above is  
just an idea – you  
can use any  
value plan you  
like.



This is a picture of dark and brilliant against a light background. Because the picture is so dark, the drawing will stand out against the background. The drawing will stand out more than the woman.



In this picture of dark against brilliant, the drawing will stand out because the background is so light. The drawing will stand out more than the woman.



This is a picture of light and dark against brilliant. The light and dark are so bright, so that it stands out against the background. The drawing will stand out more than the woman.



This is a picture of light against dark. The light and dark are so bright, so that it stands out against the background. The drawing will stand out more than the woman.



This is a picture of light and dark against brilliant. The light and dark are so bright, so that it stands out against the background. The drawing will stand out more than the woman.

## Creating a center of interest

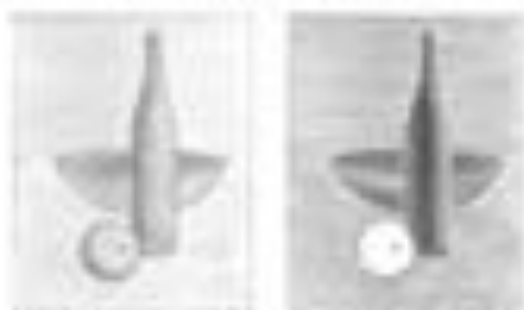
When we arrange objects in a composition, we must always keep their values in mind. We can make a dark object stand out by placing it over one in front of a light one. We can make a light object important in a picture by setting it against a dark background. By contrasting the value of one thing with the value of another, we can create a center of interest.

Moreover, the strongest and most attention-grabbing contrast is achieved by placing the lightest object in the picture against the darkest one — or vice versa. And, likewise, we can make objects almost unrecognizable by grouping them with others that are closely related in value. Things that are not important to the theme of the picture can be placed down in the tone. Never allow an accidental use of contrast to draw the viewer's attention

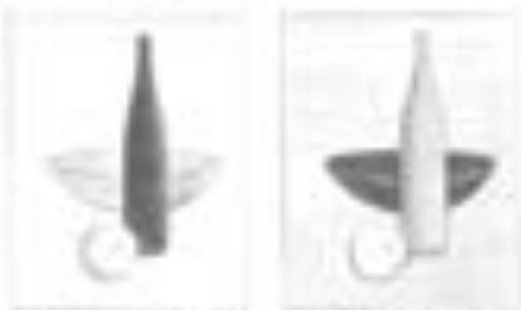
to the wrong place (and don't) or confuse the picture's message.

To learn how to control values in composition, make some sketches like the useful demonstrations below. Keep the pictures uncomplicated and, using only three or four simple tones, work for various degrees of contrast. When you add details, don't let them destroy the three or four basic values that make up your picture. By practicing this way, you will soon know how to make the viewer's attention focus where you want it.

Then we are emphasizing the role of value in creating a center of interest. Don't forget, though, that color, line, and shape can all be used for the same purpose. Usually, you will build your center of interest not just with one, but with all or most of these elements of composition.



Left: The bottle stands out more than the plate — they stand out more often and the background. The left image uses white as a background. Right: The bottle stands out more than the plate — they stand out more often and the background. The right image uses black as a background.



Right: The bottle is the center of interest — it is darkest and contrasts more with background than left or average tone. Right: The bottle stands out because its dark value is more prominent against the lighter background.

Creating a Center of Interest with Contrast



The picture by Norman Rockwell provides a fine example of how to control interest by varying value contrast. The boy with the light suit is the dominant visual center. The father is second in importance, and the mother has a background position.



The value pattern in the photograph (top) by Norman Rockwell is based on the light and shadow pattern shown in the strip in the lower photograph. The strongest contrast is between the boy's (middle) head and face and the light surface of the shirt. The set and other figures in the scene

Creating a Center of Interest



Norman Rockwell shows a pattern of value against a light background. Notice, as the man crouches to his dog, the background, from the light area, tends to make upward jumps like the hands, one dark, and hands stand out as the other will be dark.

### Controlling values in a composition

Broadly speaking, there are three ranges of values, or value levels, in which pictures are painted. On this page we show you three levels and the effect created by each.

The middle key picture is the original illustration here. It was painted by Al Parker, who selected this key because he felt it captured the mood he wanted. The other pictures show how

the main subject would look in the other keys. Next to each picture a value bar with a bracket indicates the range of values used.

Notice that the relationship of values is consistent in each of these pictures. For example, the girl's dress is always the lightest tone, her black eye line of the darkest. Always choose the brightest appropriate to your subject — and stick to it as you paint.



Middle key: The original illustration.



High key: Most of values are light.

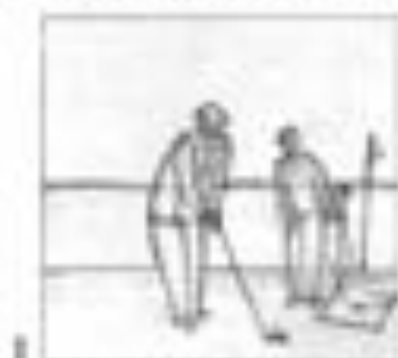


Low key: Most of values are dark.



High-contrast key: The whole range from white to black.

## Evolution of the composition



1 The first attempt was too static. The figures lacked the impression of life and were too flat. The artist is not interested and sleeping.



2 In this illustration something was added to the sides of the scene, leaving a lot of interesting space on the right. The artist seems to be looking at the picture from a new angle.



3 In this version, one side of the scene has been added but the other side is still flat. The figures appear to be looking at each other, although the line defining the background is still too simple to be interesting.



4 Turning the figures toward the camera adds interest but it is still in the upper corner of the picture area. The space is too flat. However, the shape of the tree trunk begins to suggest a tree.



5 The tree is more defined with the golfer in a more active attitude. The left side of the scene is better, but the picture shape of the tree suggests a vertical line rather than a tree. There is a feeling of the scene being open.



6 Turning the face of the tree and adding the clouds, we are now beginning to get some definition of style. The tree now has the shape we will use in the final picture. The background is still too flat.



7 Adding the tree and grass on both sides. But the shape of the tree is still too flat. The background is still too simple to be interesting. The artist still appears to be in the wrong place.



8 In his new position, the artist can feel more the golfer. There is a feeling of the tree of the tree as if it were truly around the golfer. The artist has worked the scene completely. The artist now needs to make the final drawing.



The completed illustration

The finished illustration as it appeared in the magazine.

## ALBERT DORNE

### Some subject, many compositions

The composition appearing on this page was one of a series of advertisements for American National Golfballs which appeared in national magazines. The story concerned a golf-ball manufacturer who found himself plagued by a serious production problem. A nearby mine which had long supplied coal mines for these balls was unable to maintain delivery schedules, and any delay in production might mean the golf-ball maker would be "in the red" instead of "in the green."

The problem was to show the golf-ball manufacturer in trouble and still tie the story up with the game. As the entire series of advertisements was in a humorous vein, it was decided to picture the business man in a good way — which, of course, equated to trouble. The copy to the advertisements explained how American National Golfballs helped the business man out of his difficulty.





1 The man has the desk. It gives the ground and the desk some life in a lot of other drawings.



2 The shoulders show they have the desk. The shoulders rather than the arms appear to be the point of interest.



3 Cutting the desk is half lost increasingly and entirely ground vanishing. The attitude of the man suggests further what this feeling.



4 The man has on the desk now this is good. However, this picture has the same fault as the 2 – there are distracting shapes, the feet look wrong.



5 The head appears here is an imbalance and look rather than on the right. The feet are awkward and we still don't have the right attitude in our head.



6 A change of the man seems to correct the picture. The feet, there is on this face. The place the man's feet take on the desk and the subject's face.



7 The feet are back to the desk and the picture is corrected a little more. The man's position in the foreground gives more to the subject too. The man's attitude seems good.



8 This is the composition we decide on. It seems to me from the man and desk. The man rather than completely, making use from the man's legs and that are good to self-depict.



9 Here is the finished good drawing. We will be very hard to distinguish the face, right corner. The head is not isolated, the man is looking.



10 This is the finished picture. The shape of space and the placement of the man's head are well. The man and table are good – and while there are many elements of the picture and attention is held by the man's head.

## ALBERT DORNE

### Composing an advertising picture

On this page we show you another advertising illustration in its step-by-step development as a composition. The subject is an advertising writer who is having trouble getting an idea for his client's product, which are piled up on his desk. The atmosphere is one of frustration and chaos – the man is obviously stuck. In making pictures, the teacher of approaches to working on the composition on a given subject are numerous, and there are many ways of doing it that are good. The important point to remember is the selection of the right composition to solve the advertiser's specific problem – to get his message over to the public.



**Scale:** Here is the overall shape of the work space in this composition — square and dark. Because the figures are dark against each other, Father has made them stand out from the dark. The two separate darks have been made into a single, unifying shape, so they will not distract from the figure. All the same, this overall shape is well placed in the picture space.



**Depth:** Although two-dimensional pictures are important in the picture, a strong feeling of depth is suggested by the use of overlapping darks that, when seen, do not lead to space in the figure.



**Line:** The artist really goes on if we looking straight from left to right, then right to left and attention is to the center of space. The overall outline of the figure has one side after to form a double shape. The shape made out always against the picture horizontally, vertically and deep back to the rest of the picture. All of the work done in the picture — the edges of the dark, shape, and background — lead us back to the figure.



**Value:** Father has used the dark against dark against light and light against dark to emphasize the two figures. The girl's dark hair contrasts with the background, the boy's dark hair stands out against the light wall. The separate things, such as the dark corner of the girl's dress, can have the shape in one color or with shape of another color so that they do not draw our attention to themselves.



## *A. Parker* The four elements of composition in action

In this seemingly simple picture, space, line, form, and imagination are there. A. Parker makes it do four elements of composition.

First, Parker has done some striking things with the picture area. He has divided it up by means of the background, shape, figure, and line. There is an unconscious repetition of space of equal size and shape. Instead, we find a careful, sensitive placement of shapes that is designed to increase interest through variety.

Through his use of the dark, Parker has created a feeling of depth. There also work as dimensional lines, leading our eye back to the figure and their faces, the center of interest.

Finally, we see the picture strengthened by Parker's use of the principle of playing dark against light and light against dark on the heads and their backgrounds. The greatest variety of contrasting values occurs in the center of interest around the two and girl.

