COMPOSING A PHOTOGRAPH

This resource was developed to support the Detroit Institute of Arts exhibition, 

Candid Photographs
Candid photographs are pictures of people unposed or of objects in places as you find them. Compose the photo in advance or try not looking through your viewfinder by shooting from hip level. Wait until the right moment to capture the scene and take the photograph quickly when you think something interesting has happened.

Keep in mind that sometimes subjects who do not know they are being photographed may get upset when you photograph them without their permission. Always be respectful of the privacy of individuals who may not want to be photographed and mindful of how you use the images on social media and elsewhere.

Artificial or Natural (Available) Light
Russ Marshall used mostly natural light (also referred to available light) in his photographs, as opposed to artificial light from a light bulb or camera flash. What type of lighting will you use and how will that impact the mood of your picture?

Look at the source of the lighting where you are photographing. The time of day or evening, even the weather (sunny or overcast) will produce very different results. Notice how the light falls on your subject – from above, from behind or directly in front of them?
Black and White or Color
Will you choose to photograph in black and white or color? How will this decision affect the feel of your work?

Black-and-white photographs often give a sense of timelessness or of things, people, and places of the past. In a color photograph, color can either add to or distract from the subject or story you are trying to convey.

Cropping Images
Cropping is the removal of unwanted areas of a photograph. After you take a photograph try cropping it to create a more interesting composition or to eliminate extra space around your subjects.

You can also crop your image as you look through your camera viewfinder or at your smartphone screen. Be careful not to unintentionally crop your subjects. Look at where the subjects are placed. Are you cropping out or cutting off something or someone important? Are you looking at the edges of the frame and thinking carefully about how you will arrange or capture the objects, people, or things in your photograph?

Camera Angles
The angle from which the photograph is taken can add emotion or visual interest to your composition.

Will you use a view from up high (bird’s eye), eye level, or a view from ground level (worm’s eye)? Or will you try something different, like moving in very close up to your subject or tilting your camera to alter the natural horizon line?
Captions (top to bottom)


