

# All Things Visual

## Just Divide by Three For Better Landscape Pictures

by David L. Brown

If you are a beginning artist or photographer interested in making great outdoor scenic pictures, you should know about the Rule of Thirds. It is a simple composition technique to add visual interest to any scene.

Simply put, the Rule of Thirds suggests that the image field should be divided into three parts, both vertically and horizontally. This creates nine equal squares as shown in the accompanying diagram. Then, instead of placing important image elements in the center of the picture as many beginners tend to do, place them along the one-third lines or in the case of compact elements at one of the spots where two lines cross.

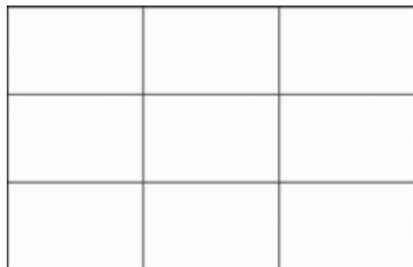


This photograph of Fisher Towers, taken just as the setting sun was bathing the scene with red light, illustrates the principle of the Rule of Thirds.

For example, place the horizon at the bottom third line to emphasize the sky, or the top third line to highlight foreground areas. If you are using an object such as a bush or rock as a foreground object, place it at the lower intersection of the left or right vertical lines.

The picture of Fisher Towers and the La Sal Mountains taken just as the sun was setting is an example of the Rule of Thirds. First and most prominent, the Towers are placed near the lower left junction of the horizontal and vertical grid lines.

There is also a horizontal orientation of elements in the composition. The band of shadow and brilliantly lit foreground takes the lower third, the La Sal Mountains



The Rule of Thirds consists of dividing the image into thirds and placing key elements at the one-third lines or crossing points.

are near the middle third, and the sky with dramatic clouds rests in the upper one-third across the top.

Note that the Rule of Thirds is not a hard and fast rule but only a

general guide to composition. In fact, very strict use of the rule can result in images where the placement of elements is forced, making it too obvious which can appear awkward.

Also, be aware that not every scene will benefit from the use of the rule – while of paramount value, it is only one of many techniques of composition.

Another example is the picture of Kelli Price, a visiting photographer who I photographed in a field of blooming mule's ears near Warner Lake. Kelli is placed at the right one-third grid line. The meadow and distant trees take up the bottom two-thirds of the frame and mountains and sky rest in the top one-third.

Note that I positioned Kelli so that she is turned slightly into the frame. This illustrates a corollary to the rule of thirds that applies when including people or animals in the picture. When placed to one side, they should not face out of the composition but inward.

Another related rule is used in portrait photography and even the framing of characters in movies and TV. This is called the "headroom" principle, calling for the eyes of the subject to be aligned at one-third from the top of the frame. The Rule of Thirds is also related to the famous Golden Ratio used by artists and architects as far back as in Ancient Egypt and Athens.

The Rule of Thirds was given its name in 1797 by the English painter and engraver John Thomas Smith in his book Remarks on Rural Scenery. Whether you are creating art or making photographs, adding this simple technique to your creative toolbox will help you make your images more interesting and pleasing to the eye.



David L. Brown is a Moab photographer who leads photo tours and workshops and offers fine art prints, print-making and picture framing services through Moab Printworks. You can call him at 435-210-8158. To make an appointment at Moab Printworks call 435-355-0121.



Here is an example of the Rule of Thirds when photographing human figures in a landscape. The subject is placed at the right one-third line in the frame.



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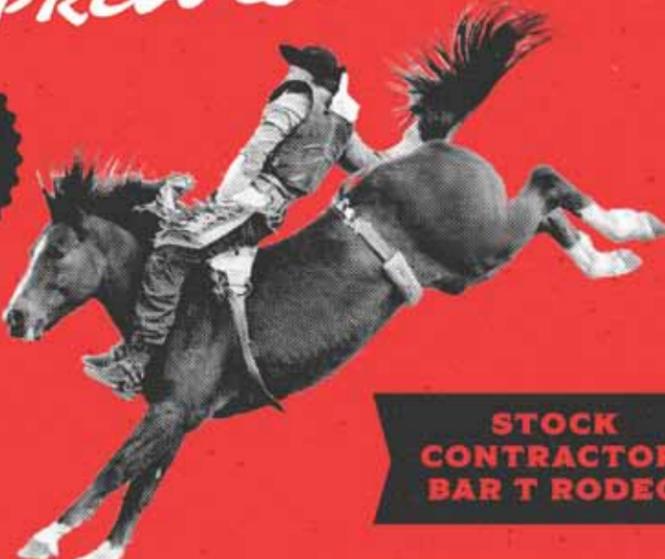
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