

Visual Exercises for Photographers

A practical training document by

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Topic 1 Unleashing Your Creative Eye with a Pocket-Sized Tool

In today's world, your smartphone isn't just a communication device; it's a powerful creative tool that can revolutionize the way you see the world. When it comes to visual exercises, your phone is the perfect companion for exploring your surroundings and honing your photographic eye.

Why Your Phone?

- **Convenience:** Your phone is always with you, ready to capture fleeting moments of inspiration.
- **Accessibility:** Its simple interface and intuitive controls make it easy for anyone to use.
- **Flexibility:** You can experiment with different apps and editing tools to enhance your photos.
- **Low Pressure:** Unlike a professional camera, your phone allows you to experiment freely without the pressure of perfection.

What to Keep in Mind When Exploring

1. **Be Present:** Put away distractions and immerse yourself in your surroundings. Pay attention to the light, the colors, the textures, and the patterns around you.
2. **Look for the Unusual:** Seek out details that others might overlook. An interesting shadow, a vibrant reflection, a unique texture – these can all become compelling subjects.
3. **Experiment with Angles:** Don't just shoot from eye level. Crouch down, climb up, get close, or step back to find unique perspectives.
4. **Play with Light:** Notice how the light interacts with different surfaces and shapes. Use the sun, artificial lighting, or even reflections to create interesting effects.
5. **Challenge Yourself:** Set specific goals for your exploration. For example, try to capture a certain number of photos with a specific theme or color palette.

Practical Examples

- **Texture Hunt:** Go on a walk and focus on capturing different textures – the rough bark of a tree, the smooth surface of a pebble, the intricate pattern of a leaf.
- **Color Story:** Choose a specific color palette (e.g., complementary colors, monochromatic) and try to find scenes that fit within that palette.
- **Leading Lines:** Look for lines that draw the viewer's eye into the photo – roads, fences, shadows, or even cracks in the pavement.
- **Negative Space:** Experiment with compositions where the main subject occupies a small portion of the frame, with the rest being "negative space" (empty areas).
- **Reflections:** Find puddles, windows, or other reflective surfaces to capture interesting and abstract images.

- **Patterns:** Look for repeating elements in nature or architecture, such as brickwork, ripples in water, or rows of trees.

Tips for Effective Phone Photography

- **Clean Your Lens:** A smudged lens can ruin an otherwise great photo.
- **Use Natural Light:** Whenever possible, avoid using the flash, which can flatten your images.
- **Experiment with Apps:** There are countless apps available that can help you edit and enhance your photos.
- **Don't Overthink It:** Have fun and let your creativity flow. The goal is to explore and see the world through a new lens.
- **Share Your Work:** Share your photos with friends, family, or online communities for feedback and inspiration.

Beyond the Phone

Remember, these exercises are just a starting point. As you become more comfortable with your phone, you can gradually incorporate more advanced techniques, such as manual focus, exposure control, and even shooting in RAW format.

The most important thing is to make visual exploration a regular part of your routine. By consistently challenging yourself to see the world in new ways, you'll develop a stronger artistic eye and a deeper appreciation for the beauty that surrounds you.

Topic 2 Mastering the Art of Composition through Intentional Framing

Framing is the foundation of any great photograph. It determines what's included in the image, what's left out, and how the elements within the frame interact with each other. By actively practicing focused framing, you'll transform the way you see the world and create more compelling images.

Why Focus on Framing?

- **Directing the Viewer's Eye:** Framing guides the viewer's gaze, leading them through the image and emphasizing the most important elements.
- **Creating Visual Balance:** Thoughtful framing helps to achieve a harmonious balance between different elements, creating a sense of order and stability.
- **Telling a Story:** The way you frame a scene can convey a narrative, evoke emotions, or create a sense of mystery.
- **Emphasizing the Subject:** By carefully choosing what to include and exclude, you can make your subject stand out and capture the viewer's attention.
- **Adding Depth and Dimension:** Framing can create a sense of depth and dimension, making your images more visually interesting.

Practical Exercises for Focused Framing

1. **Rule of Thirds:** Divide your frame into nine equal sections using two horizontal and two vertical lines. Place your subject or key elements along these lines or at their intersections to create a more dynamic composition.
2. **Leading Lines:** Look for lines that draw the viewer's eye into the photo – roads, fences, shadows, or even cracks in the pavement. Use these lines to guide the viewer towards your main subject.
3. **Natural Frames:** Utilize elements in the environment to frame your subject. This could be a window, a doorway, a tree branch, or even a person's silhouette.
4. **Negative Space:** Don't be afraid to leave empty areas in your frame. Negative space can create a sense of balance, emphasize the subject, and give the viewer's eye a place to rest.
5. **Foreground Interest:** Include elements in the foreground to add depth and dimension to your photos. This could be flowers, rocks, or even a person's hand.
6. **Fill the Frame:** Get close to your subject and fill the entire frame with it. This can create a sense of intimacy and impact, especially with portraits or close-ups.
7. **Change Your Perspective:** Don't just shoot from eye level. Crouch down, climb up, or tilt your camera to find new and interesting angles.
8. **Experiment with Cropping:** Take a photo and then experiment with different crops to see how they affect the composition. You might be surprised at how a simple crop can dramatically improve a photo.

Tips for Effective Framing

- **Simplify:** Don't overcrowd your frame with too many elements. Focus on the most important elements and let the rest fade into the background.
- **Balance:** Aim for a sense of balance in your composition. This doesn't necessarily mean perfect symmetry, but rather a harmonious distribution of visual weight.
- **Contrast:** Look for contrasting elements to create visual interest – light vs. dark, smooth vs. rough, warm vs. cool colors.
- **Experiment:** Don't be afraid to break the rules and try new things. The best way to learn about framing is to experiment and see what works for you.
- **Critique Your Work:** Analyze your own photos and those of other photographers. Ask yourself why certain compositions work and others don't.

By consciously practicing these techniques and tips, you'll develop a stronger sense of composition and be able to create more visually impactful images. Remember, framing is not just a technical aspect of photography; it's a creative tool that allows you to express your unique vision and tell compelling stories through your images.

Topic 3 Unlocking Your Photographic Potential Through Visual Training

Visual exercises are more than just fun activities; they are a powerful tool for personal and artistic growth. By regularly engaging in these exercises, photographers can reap a wealth of benefits that extend far beyond the technical aspects of their craft.

Elevating Your Observational Skills

The world is a visual feast, but often we move through it on autopilot, missing the subtle details and hidden beauty that surrounds us. Visual exercises force us to slow down, pay attention, and truly see the world around us.

Through these exercises, you'll develop a heightened awareness of:

- **Light:** You'll learn to notice how light interacts with different surfaces, creating shadows, highlights, and textures. You'll understand how to use light to your advantage, to shape your subject and create a mood.
- **Color:** You'll become more attuned to the nuances of color, noticing subtle variations in hue, saturation, and tone. You'll learn to use color to create harmony, contrast, and visual interest.
- **Shapes and Lines:** You'll begin to see the world as a composition of shapes and lines. You'll learn to identify strong lines that lead the eye, geometric shapes that create balance, and organic forms that add visual interest.
- **Patterns and Textures:** You'll discover patterns in nature, architecture, and everyday objects. You'll learn to use textures to add depth and tactile appeal to your images.

Enhancing Your Compositional Skills

Composition is the backbone of a strong photograph. It's the arrangement of elements within the frame that creates visual harmony, guides the viewer's eye, and tells a story. Visual exercises provide a playground for experimenting with different compositional techniques.

By practicing these exercises, you'll gain a deeper understanding of:

- **The Rule of Thirds:** You'll learn how to divide your frame into nine equal sections and place key elements along these lines or at their intersections to create a more dynamic and balanced composition.
- **Leading Lines:** You'll master the use of lines to lead the viewer's eye into the photograph, creating a sense of depth and movement.
- **Foreground Interest:** You'll learn how to use elements in the foreground to add depth and dimension to your images.
- **Negative Space:** You'll understand how to use empty space effectively to create balance, emphasize your subject, and give the viewer's eye a place to rest.

Igniting Your Creativity

Visual exercises push you out of your comfort zone and encourage you to explore new ways of seeing and capturing the world. By experimenting with different techniques and approaches, you'll tap into your creative potential and discover new possibilities for your photography.

These exercises can help you:

- **Break free from creative ruts:** If you find yourself taking the same types of photos over and over again, visual exercises can help you break out of your routine and try something new.

- **See the world in new ways:** By challenging yourself to look for different perspectives and subjects, you'll start to see the world with fresh eyes.
- **Develop your own unique style:** As you experiment with different techniques and approaches, you'll start to develop your own personal style and vision.

Building Confidence in Your Artistic Vision

As you practice visual exercises and see the results of your efforts, you'll gain confidence in your abilities as a photographer. You'll trust your instincts, make bolder choices, and develop a stronger sense of your own artistic voice.

This newfound confidence will empower you to:

- **Take more risks:** You'll be more willing to experiment with new techniques and approaches, knowing that you have the skills to pull them off.
 - **Share your work with others:** You'll be proud to show off your photos, knowing that they represent your unique vision and creativity.
 - **Pursue your photographic goals:** You'll have the confidence to tackle new challenges and pursue your dreams, whether it's starting a photography business or simply taking better photos for yourself.
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Topic 4 Embracing Diversity in Visual Exploration

Visual exercises are not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. To truly maximize their benefits and keep your creative spark ignited, it's essential to embrace a wide array of approaches and techniques. By diversifying your visual workout routine, you'll continually challenge yourself, discover new perspectives, and expand your photographic repertoire.

Thematic Exercises: Discovering the Extraordinary in the Ordinary

By focusing on a specific theme, you train your eye to seek out particular elements within a scene. This not only sharpens your observational skills but also helps you develop a more nuanced understanding of visual language. Some thematic exercise ideas include:

- **Texture:** Explore the tactile world through your lens. Capture the roughness of bark, the smoothness of glass, the intricate patterns of fabric, or the delicate veins of a leaf.
- **Color:** Dive into the vibrant spectrum of hues and shades. Experiment with complementary, analogous, or monochromatic color palettes to create visually striking images.
- **Shape:** Focus on geometric and organic forms. Look for circles, squares, triangles, spirals, and other shapes that create structure and interest within your frame.
- **Light and Shadow:** Observe how light interacts with objects, creating dramatic shadows and highlights. Use light and shadow to emphasize form, create depth, and evoke emotion.
- **Movement:** Capture the dynamic energy of motion. Experiment with slow shutter speeds to blur moving objects or freeze action with a fast shutter.

Time-Based Exercises: Embracing the Constraints of Time

Setting time limits for your visual exercises can be surprisingly liberating. By working within constraints, you're forced to make quick decisions, trust your instincts, and prioritize the most compelling compositions.

Try these time-based variations:

- **The 10-Minute Challenge:** Set a timer for 10 minutes and see how many interesting photos you can capture within that timeframe.
- **One Hour, One Location:** Spend an hour exploring a single location, such as a park, a street corner, or your own backyard. Challenge yourself to find as many unique perspectives and subjects as possible.
- **Photo a Day:** Commit to taking at least one photo every day for a month or a year. This helps you develop a consistent practice and discover beauty in the everyday.
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Equipment-Based Exercises: Expanding Your Creative Vision

Changing up your gear can open up new creative possibilities. By experimenting with different lenses or focal lengths, you'll be forced to see the world through a different lens (quite literally).

Consider these equipment-based challenges:

- **Prime Lens Challenge:** Choose a prime lens (a lens with a fixed focal length) and spend a day shooting exclusively with it. This will force you to move your feet and find creative ways to compose your shots.
- **Wide-Angle Perspective:** Use a wide-angle lens to capture expansive landscapes or create dramatic perspectives in close-up shots.

- **Telephoto Zoom:** Explore the world of telephoto photography. Isolate distant subjects, compress the scene, and experiment with shallow depth of field.

Location-Based Exercises: Finding Inspiration in Unexpected Places

Don't limit yourself to familiar surroundings. Stepping outside your comfort zone and exploring new environments can be a powerful catalyst for creativity.

Consider these location-based variations:

- **Urban Exploration:** Discover the hidden gems of your city or town. Look for interesting architecture, street art, or everyday scenes that reveal the character of the place.
 - **Nature Photography:** Immerse yourself in the natural world. Capture the beauty of landscapes, plants, animals, and the changing seasons.
 - **Indoor Exploration:** Look for interesting compositions within your own home or other indoor spaces. Experiment with still life, portraiture, or abstract photography.
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Topic 5 Bridging the Gap Between Practice and Mastery

Visual exercises are not just isolated drills; they are the building blocks for a more intuitive and effective approach to real-world photography. The skills and insights you gain through these exercises will seamlessly integrate into your photographic practice, elevating your work to new heights.

Pre-visualization: Seeing Beyond the Viewfinder

One of the most powerful benefits of visual exercises is the development of pre-visualization – the ability to envision a potential photograph before you even raise your camera to your eye. This skill allows you to anticipate how different elements will interact within the frame, how light will fall on your subject, and how to best compose the scene to convey your intended message.

By practicing visualization, you'll:

- **Save time and energy:** You'll be able to quickly assess a scene and identify the most promising compositions, rather than wasting time and energy on trial-and-error shooting.
- **Make more deliberate choices:** You'll be able to consciously choose the best settings, angles, and framing options to achieve your desired results.
- **Create more impactful images:** Your photos will be more intentional and well-composed, as you'll have already worked out the details in your mind's eye.

Faster Decision-Making: Responding to the Moment

Photography often requires quick thinking and decisive action, especially when capturing fleeting moments or working in dynamic environments. Visual exercises train your eye to rapidly assess a scene and identify the key elements that will make a compelling image.

Through regular practice, you'll:

- **Become more intuitive:** You'll develop a gut feeling for what works and what doesn't, allowing you to make confident choices on the fly.
- **React quickly to changing conditions:** You'll be able to adapt to changing light, unpredictable subjects, and unexpected opportunities.
- **Capture the decisive moment:** You'll be more likely to capture those fleeting moments of magic that make a photograph truly special.

More Impactful Images: Crafting Visual Narratives

Ultimately, the goal of photography is to create images that resonate with viewers, tell stories, evoke emotions, and spark curiosity. Visual exercises equip you with the tools to craft more impactful images that go beyond mere documentation.

By applying the skills you've honed, you'll:

- **Compose with purpose:** Your photos will have a clear sense of structure and flow, guiding the viewer's eye and emphasizing your intended message.
- **Use light and color effectively:** You'll be able to harness the power of light and color to create mood, depth, and visual interest.

- **Tell compelling stories:** Your images will capture the essence of a moment, a place, or a person, leaving a lasting impression on the viewer.

The Journey Continues

The beauty of visual exercises is that they are an ongoing process of learning and growth. As you continue to practice and experiment, you'll discover new ways to apply these skills to your photography. You'll see the world with fresh eyes, find inspiration in unexpected places, and create images that truly reflect your unique vision.

Remember, the ultimate goal is not just to take better photos but to deepen your connection with the world around you. By slowing down, paying attention, and actively engaging with your surroundings, you'll not only become a better photographer but also a more mindful and creative individual.

Practical examples

Applying Visual Exercises to a Landscape Scene

Imagine you're standing at the edge of a breathtaking vista – a sprawling valley bathed in the golden light of sunrise, with rolling hills, a winding river, and a quaint village nestled in the distance. Here's how you could apply the five visual exercises to this landscape scene:

1. **Exploring with a Phone:** You pull out your phone and start wandering along the ridge, letting your eye be drawn to interesting details. You notice the intricate patterns of the rock formations, the delicate textures of the wildflowers, and the dramatic contrast between the light and shadow on the hillsides. You capture these details with your phone, experimenting with different angles and perspectives.
2. **Focused Framing:** You identify a few potential compositions and begin to refine them. You use the rule of thirds to place the village at a point of interest, and you incorporate a leading line in the form of the winding river to draw the viewer's eye into the scene. You also experiment with using a natural frame, such as a cluster of trees, to focus attention on a specific element of the landscape.
3. **Benefits of Visual Exercises:** As you work, you consciously apply the skills you've developed through visual exercises. You notice the subtle gradations of color in the sky, the interplay of geometric and organic shapes in the landscape, and the way the light casts long shadows that accentuate the contours of the terrain. You also feel a growing sense of confidence in your ability to compose a compelling image.
4. **Variations on Visual Exercises:** To challenge yourself further, you decide to try a few variations. You set a timer for 10 minutes and try

to capture as many interesting compositions as possible. You also switch to a wide-angle lens to emphasize the vastness of the landscape and experiment with a telephoto lens to isolate specific details, like a lone tree on a distant hilltop.

5. **Applying Visual Exercises to Real Photography:** Now that you've explored and refined your compositions, you're ready to capture the scene with your DSLR camera. You carefully set up your tripod, choose the appropriate settings, and visualize the final image in your mind's eye. As you release the shutter, you know that you've created a photograph that goes beyond mere documentation; it's a visual story that captures the essence of this breathtaking landscape.

By combining all five visual exercises, you've not only captured stunning images, but you've also deepened your understanding of composition, light, and visual storytelling. You've trained your eye to see the world in new ways, and you've gained the confidence to express your unique vision through your photography.

Applying Visual Exercises to an Urban City Scene

Imagine yourself standing in the bustling heart of a vibrant city – skyscrapers pierce the sky, street vendors hawk their wares, and pedestrians weave a tapestry of movement and color. Here's how you can apply the five visual exercises to this dynamic urban environment:

1. **Exploring with a Phone:** You pull out your phone and embark on a visual scavenger hunt. Your eye is drawn to a graffiti-covered wall, a reflection in a puddle, a street musician's expressive face, the geometric patterns of a fire escape, and the warm glow of a cafe window. You capture these fleeting moments with your phone, experimenting with angles, close-ups, and different camera modes.
2. **Focused Framing:** You identify a few promising compositions and begin to refine them. You use the rule of thirds to position a lone cyclist against the backdrop of a towering building. You frame a street vendor within the natural frame of their market stall. You capture the leading lines of a crosswalk, guiding the viewer's eye through the scene. You also experiment with negative space, using the vastness of the sky to balance the busyness of the street below.
3. **Benefits of Visual Exercises:** As you work, you consciously apply the skills you've honed through visual exercises. You notice the vibrant colors of the street art, the interplay of light and shadow on the buildings, the diverse textures of brick, concrete, and glass, and the rhythmic patterns of the urban landscape. You feel a heightened sense of awareness and a renewed appreciation for the beauty that can be found in even the most mundane surroundings.
4. **Variations on Visual Exercises:** To keep things fresh and challenging, you introduce some variations. You limit yourself to a specific theme, such as street signs or reflections. You set a timer for 30 minutes and challenge yourself to capture as many unique

compositions as possible. You also switch to a black and white mode to emphasize the geometric shapes and textures of the city.

5. **Applying Visual Exercises to Real Photography:** Now armed with a collection of potential compositions and a heightened sense of visual awareness, you're ready to capture the urban scene with your DSLR camera. You carefully choose your settings, adjust your composition, and visualize the final image. With each click of the shutter, you're not just taking a photo; you're creating a visual narrative that captures the energy, diversity, and beauty of urban life.

By integrating all five visual exercises into your urban exploration, you've transformed a simple walk through the city into a creative adventure. You've trained your eye to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, and you've gained the skills and confidence to capture the essence of urban life through your photography.

Applying Visual Exercises to a Forest Scene

Imagine yourself standing amidst the towering trees of a lush forest, sunlight dappling through the leaves, birdsong filling the air. Here's how you can apply the five visual exercises to this tranquil natural setting:

1. **Exploring with a Phone:** You wander along the forest path, phone in hand, letting your senses guide you. You capture the intricate patterns of the bark on a fallen log, the delicate curve of a fern frond unfurling, the vibrant green moss carpeting the forest floor, the sunbeams piercing through the canopy, and the intricate network of roots intertwining beneath your feet. You experiment with close-ups, capturing the intricate details of mushrooms, dew drops on leaves, and insects crawling on the bark.
2. **Focused Framing:** You identify a few promising compositions and refine them. You use the rule of thirds to position a majestic tree at a point of interest, framing it with the contrasting vertical lines of the surrounding trunks. You find a natural frame in the form of a fallen log, drawing the viewer's eye into the heart of the forest. You experiment with negative space, using the clear sky as a backdrop to highlight the silhouette of a tree. You also get low to the ground, capturing the forest floor from a unique perspective.
3. **Benefits of Visual Exercises:** As you work, you consciously apply the skills honed through visual exercises. You notice the subtle variations in the shades of green, the interplay of light and shadow on the forest floor, the textures of rough bark and smooth leaves, and the rhythmic patterns of the trees. You feel a deep sense of connection to the natural world and a renewed appreciation for its beauty.
4. **Variations on Visual Exercises:** To keep things fresh and engaging, you introduce some variations. You limit yourself to photographing

only green elements, challenging yourself to find a variety of shades and textures. You set a timer for 20 minutes and explore a specific section of the forest, seeking out hidden compositions. You also switch to a macro lens to capture the intricate details of the flora and fauna.

5. **Applying Visual Exercises to Real Photography:** Now equipped with a collection of potential compositions and a heightened sense of visual awareness, you're ready to capture the forest scene with your DSLR camera. You carefully choose your settings, adjust your composition to highlight the desired elements, and visualize the final image in your mind's eye. With each click of the shutter, you're not just taking a photo; you're creating a visual poem that celebrates the tranquility, mystery, and beauty of the forest.

By incorporating all five visual exercises into your forest exploration, you've turned a simple walk in the woods into a profound creative experience. You've trained your eye to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, and you've gained the skills and confidence to capture the essence of nature through your photography.



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