



**Project Skills:**

- Using basic rules of photo composition

**Life Skills:**

- Decision making

**Academic Standards:**

- Art and Design Education: E.12.2. Communicate ideas by producing advanced design art forms, such as photography. H.4.6. Know how artists make photographs.

**Grade Levels:** 3-12

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Supplies Needed:**

- List of five composition rules
- Four photo-judging stations
- Pencils and paper for youth to record notes

**Do Ahead:**

- Write composition rules on large paper
- Make four photo-judging stations

**Sources:**

- Created by Wayne Brabender, Wisconsin 4-H Photography Specialist, from ideas generated by many other 4-H photo project leaders and specialists over the years.

**BACKGROUND**

Judging is an excellent way to introduce or reinforce basic photo composition rules. In this fun group activity, youth will judge groups of photos based on the basic rules of composition. The activity encourages youth to make and defend their decisions, while working within a group. It will help youth understand and appreciate the hard decisions that judges must make at photo shows, county fairs, and throughout life.

**WHAT TO DO**

On a flip chart or large piece of paper, prepare a list of the five basic composition rules: 1) Get close, 2) Simplify the background, 3) Use rule of thirds, 4) Frame the subject, and 5) Use leading lines. Locate one good photo example for each rule, or use the handout “5 Tips for Composing a Photo.” These and other composition tips also are covered in the 4-H photography project curriculum.



Make four photo-judging stations, lettered A through D. Each station should have at least four photos. Use your personal photos or pictures cut out of magazines. Mount the photos on poster board or cardboard. Try to include at least one weak photo, two average photos, and one “best” photo on each station (i.e., one that clearly follows one or more basic rule of composition). Assign each photo a number. Pictures at Station A would be A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, etc. Pictures at Station B would be B-1, B-2, etc. You can write these numbers directly on the poster board or on small Post-It notes placed next to the photos. This part of the preparation makes an excellent project for a youth leader.

When you start the activity, show Station A to the total group. Ask: “Which is the best photo and why?” “Which is the weakest photo and why?” Allow five minutes for group discussion. Then point out that it’s hard to come to a consensus unless there are clear standards or criteria on which to base a judgment.

Then show and discuss the list of five composition rules. Show sample photos to reinforce the rules, or give the handout, “5 Tips for Composing a Photo.” Indicate that following these rules will improve their photography.

Now place judging Stations B-D around the room. Divide the group into three smaller groups. Each subgroup should select someone to take notes. Point out that they are to “place” or rank the photos at each station, i.e., indicate the best photo, second best, third best and fourth best. They should also note the reasons (rules of composition) for their placings. The best photo should be the one that best follows the five rules of composition.

Start the activity. Send each subgroup to a different station. Give them several minutes to judge their first station. If your time is tight you can limit judging to five minutes per station. Remind the recorders to take notes. Visit the subgroups during the judging. Make sure that all youth are involved, that discussion is not dominated by a few. Encourage everyone to express their opinions.

When subgroups have finished their first station, have them rotate to judge the next station, until all three stations have been judged. If you have more time you can add more judging stations. When subgroups have judged all the stations, you can call everyone together again. Ask reporters to give their subgroups' placings and reasons. Discuss.

## **TALK IT OVER**

### **Reflect:**

- How did it go? What happened if everyone didn't agree? How did your group handle the disagreements?
- Why was it important to give your reasons out loud?
- What did you learn about judging? How did it feel to be "the judge"?
- What did you learn about making decisions? What did you learn about your own decision making skills?

### **Apply:**

- What other times do you make decisions in a group? What would you do if you didn't agree with the others?
- What are some other types of decisions you make every day?
- Why is it important to have enough information or time before making decisions, especially important decisions?
- Why is it okay to have an opinion that's different from others in your group? When is it okay to change your mind after you've made a decision?
- How will you use what you learned to make better decisions in the future?

## **ENHANCE/SIMPLIFY**

### **Enhance for Older Children:**

- Have youth do this judging activity at home with family members using photos from the family photo album. Ask youth to share their results with the group at your next meeting.
- Attend a county fair to observe a photo judge in action. Listen to the judge's comments. If possible, talk to the judge about the criteria he or she used to place the photos.

### **Simplify for Younger Children:**

- By using photos that younger members will especially enjoy (pets, holidays) this activity can be enjoyed by youth of any age.
- Have youth bring in two to five of their personal photos. Run the judging exercise using their photos.

## **HELPFUL HINTS**

Every time someone asks "What do you think of my photo?" you're a photo "judge." Be sensitive. Who likes to be criticized? Here are some positive questions to ask when critiquing someone's photos:

- How did you take this photo?
- What problems did you have?
- What worked well?
- What didn't work?
- What would you do differently next time?
- What did you learn in taking this photo?
- How do you feel about your efforts?

Some comments or advice to give when a photo needs improvement:

- You've tried hard. You may want to try . . .
- You've just about mastered that. What if . . .
- That's coming along nicely and with a little more work on . . .
- Your photos are getting better and better. Keep working on . . .
- You're really improving on . . .
- One more time and I bet you'll have it!

#### **ADDITIONAL WEB LINKS**

- BetterPhoto.com, [www.betterphoto.com/home.asp](http://www.betterphoto.com/home.asp): Site with great tips, informative articles and lots of photos to enjoy. Excellent for beginners, intermediate and advanced photographers. Check out the monthly contest entries, because looking at quality photos taken by others is a sure way to improve your own photography.
- Wisconsin 4-H Photo Project Page, [www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/onlinpro/photography.cfm](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/onlinpro/photography.cfm): Source for information on the 4-H photography project in Wisconsin, including project curriculum, county fairs, events and activities, photo-related web sites and people to contact.

***Reviewed by Wisconsin 4-H Curriculum Team on: June 2006***

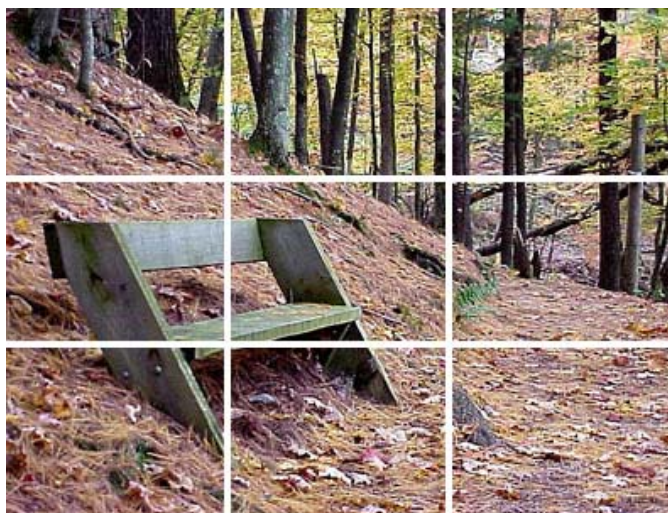
## *5 Tips for Composing a Photo*



1. Get close



2. Take subject against simple background



3. Use rule of thirds



4. Frame your subject



5. Use lines to lead eye into photo

*Photos by Wayne Brabender, Wisconsin 4-H Photography Specialist, 608-262-1067*