

WHAT IS AN ASYMMETRICAL PHOTO COMPOSITION AND HOW IS IT USED?

Quick Guide
Written by Jo Plumridge



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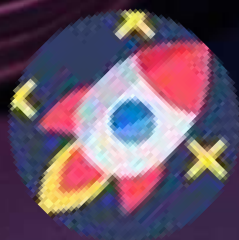
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Composition rules in photography are guidelines that help you to shoot images that are balanced and visually appealing. Asymmetrical balance is one of those composition techniques, and one that you may have already used without realizing.

In this guide I'll tell you all about asymmetrical balance and how to use it to improve your image composition.

Here's what we'll cover:

- What is asymmetrical balance?
- What's the difference between asymmetrical, symmetrical, and radial balance?
- Tips for achieving asymmetrical balance in your images.

 **Recommended Reading:** If you'd like to improve your composition skills for better images, grab a copy of Photzy's best-selling premium guide: [Understanding Composition](#).

WHAT IS ASYMMETRICAL BALANCE?

An asymmetrical photo composition has unequal visual weight on either side. This means that each object, tone, and shape in an image attracts more or less attention from a viewer (visual weight).

Asymmetrical balance may have unequal visual weight, but those visual elements still balance each other out and the resulting photo will still follow the rules of composition.



Photograph by Jazmin Quaynor

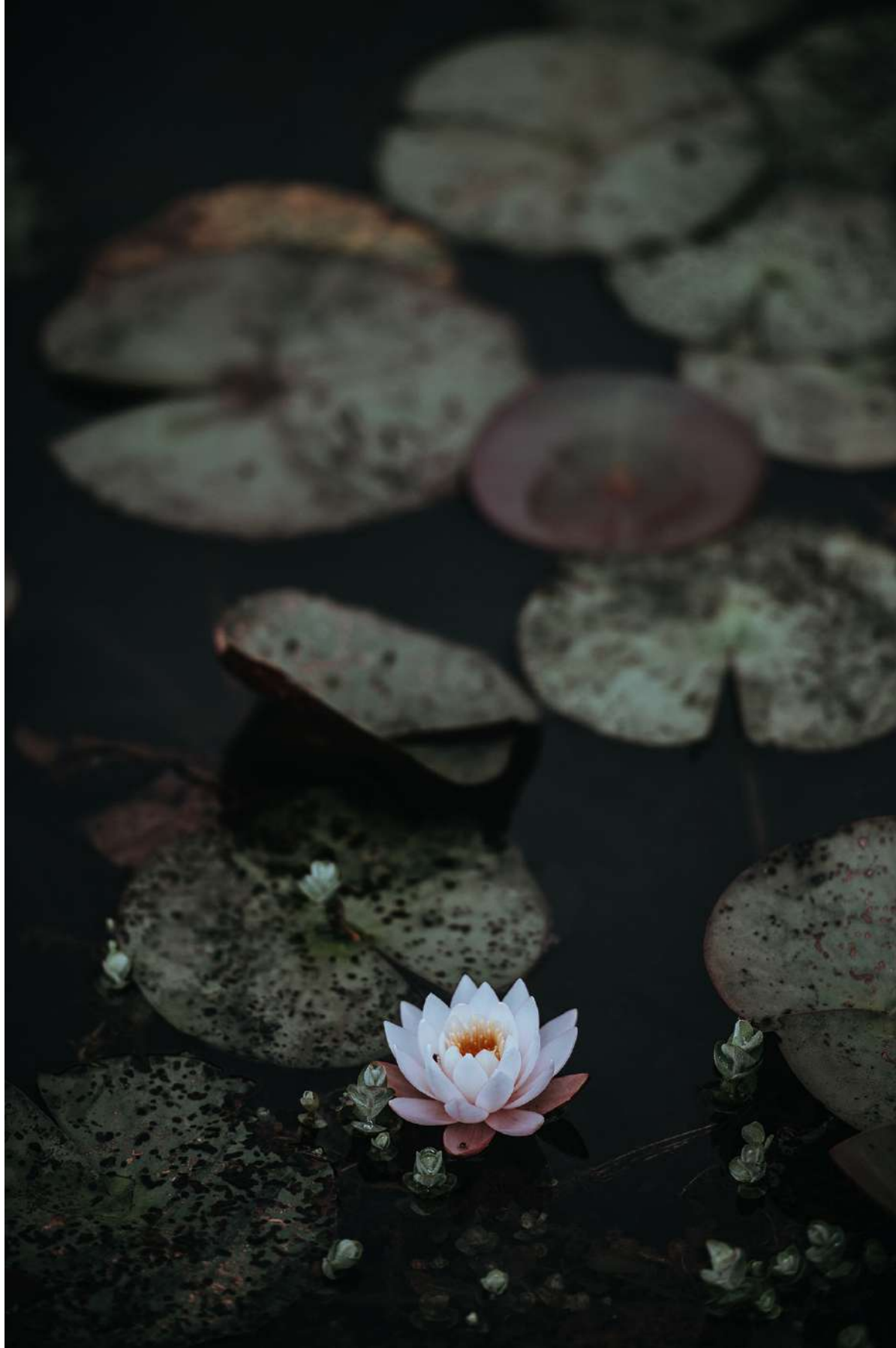
Negative space is a simple and clean way to create an asymmetrically balanced image.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ASYMMETRICAL, SYMMETRICAL, AND RADIAL BALANCE?

As I've already explained, asymmetrical balance in photography has two sides where the visual weight is unequal, but these elements still balance each other out.

💎 Key Lesson: Symmetrical balance in photography is where the two sides of the image mirror each other, such as reflections in a lake. Photographing a face could also be considered symmetrical photography as, although the two sides of a face are not identical, they're considered close enough to be symmetrical. Symmetry occurs when both sides of your photo are similar enough to be considered symmetrically balanced.

Radial balance in photography is where there are elements in an image that radiate out from a central point in a circle.



Photograph by Annie Spratt

Use color to help draw attention to different elements in your image.

TIPS FOR ACHIEVING ASYMMETRICAL BALANCE IN YOUR IMAGES

THE RULE OF THIRDS

The most basic idea of the Rule of Thirds is to break down a photograph into thirds both horizontally and vertically. Important elements of an image are placed along a three-by-three grid which, in turn, equally divides the photograph into nine rectangular sections. There are also four intersecting points where the vertical and horizontal lines cross and the idea is that you should use these as your points of interest. These are where you place the important elements of your photograph.

Because this means that your subject won't be in the center, you're automatically creating an asymmetrical composition. Your main focal point will be to the right or the left and at the top or the bottom of your image.

CHANGE THE CAMERA ANGLE

Sometimes, creating asymmetrical balance is as simple as just changing your camera angle. If you have two equal elements and place them in front of each other, you'd be creating symmetrical balance. But move to the right or left and the perspective and depth of field change. Now you're creating a simple asymmetrical balance, but your photo has added depth and dynamism.



Photograph by Rhanna

Use depth of field to create an asymmetrical balance in your image. You can combine it with leading lines to direct your viewer's attention around the photo.

NEGATIVE SPACE

Negative space is the area around your image's subject matter, with the subject also being known as the positive space. However, this space can only truly be called negative when referring to areas of a composition that are empty, bland, or fairly uninteresting. Negative space is made up of elements that fade into the background and don't draw a viewer's eye towards them. So, you'll often find negative space made up of elements such as water, sand, overcast clouds, or plain walls (to give a few examples).

You can use negative space to isolate your main subject and achieve asymmetrical balance by again placing the subject off-center.

USE DEPTH OF FIELD

Shooting with a large aperture gives you a smaller depth of field. This is often used to blur out distracting details in the background and is widely used by portrait photographers to help isolate their subject and make them 'pop' out of the image.

Using a small depth of field can help to create asymmetrical balance. Place your main subject in the front and then place the rest of your elements behind. The elements behind will be blurred, which moves a viewer's attention to the front and gives you asymmetrical balance.

BREAK REFLECTION SYMMETRY

When people think of reflections, they usually associate them with symmetrical balance, whereby the reflection is exactly the same as the scene in front of them. You can make a reflection asymmetrical by placing the reflection to one side. Or add an element in the foreground that breaks the reflectional symmetry, such as a fallen branch or even a person.



Photograph by Mark Harpur

Shooting low to the ground makes the lavender look larger and this, combined with the jetty out into the water, helps to create asymmetrical balance.

COLORS

Different colors have different visual weights. Some colors grab a viewer's attention more than others and you can use those to create an asymmetrical balance in a shot. For instance, red always grabs attention as it's bright and vibrant. You can put this amongst softer colors, such as blue, and a viewer's eye will be drawn to the red first, creating an asymmetrical image.

MANIPULATE YOUR FRAMING

In a similar way to changing the angle of a photograph, manipulating the framing of an object can change a symmetrical subject into one that's asymmetrical. Let's take a simple leaf. It's easy to photograph it to show symmetry by photographing it along its axis to show the symmetry of its veins on either side. Zoom in and move the leaf to one side of your image at an angle and you've immediately created an asymmetrical shot.

MORE OBJECTS FOR MORE VISUAL WEIGHT

If you're shooting a landscape, then larger objects at the back of a shot often grab attention – think buildings, trees, mountains etc. But shoot your photographs so that there are multiples objects in the foreground, such as more trees or rocks, and their visual weight will outweigh the background. No objects available? You can use people to help gain visual weight and balance out the larger objects in the background.

USE FORCED PERSPECTIVE

Forced perspective is a technique that creates an optical illusion which makes objects appear smaller, larger, closer, or further away than they actually are. You can create asymmetrical balance in this way by using forced perspective. For example, say you're photographing a mountain with a lake in front of it. A large mountain has a lot of visual weight, and if you leave the lake in the foreground with the reflection of the lake in it, you'd be creating a symmetrical image. By adding something in the foreground to hide the reflection and putting this object close to the camera,


you can shift the visual weight to it and therefore create asymmetrical balance.

LEADING LINES

Leading lines give visual direction to your viewer and help move their eye through an image. They're also a great way to create an asymmetrical balance in your shots as they help draw the eye to your main subject. Leading lines can be physical, such as roads, paths, or electric cables, or even imaginary such as a finger pointing in a particular direction.

DARK TONES VS. LIGHT TONES

Compositions with a range of tones can give balance according to their placement. Dark tones have a greater visual weight than light tones, meaning that if you want to achieve balance using tonal contrast, you need to make sure that you have a larger highlight area in comparison to a shadowy one.

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Photograph by Katsuma Tanaka

CONCLUSION

Asymmetry doesn't mean that your photograph is unbalanced. Instead, it means that you attribute different visual weight to objects in an image, but in a way that still keeps balance and allows the objects in the frame to grab equal attention from a viewer. Symmetrical balance might be the most well-known approach, but asymmetrical images are interesting and provide a different outlook.

Self-Check Quiz:

- 1) What is visual weight?
- 2) What is radial balance?
- 3) What is the rule of thirds?
- 4) What is negative space?
- 5) How can you use depth of field to create asymmetrical balance?



Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (and *FREE!*) photography resources:



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jo Plumridge is a UK based freelance writer and photographer. She writes photography, travel, and opinion pieces for magazines, websites, and books, and specializes in portrait and corporate photography. You can view some of her work on her website, www.joplumridge.co.uk, and follow her on Twitter at JoPlumridge.

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