




HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH IN THE MINIMALIST STYLE

Quick Guide
Written by Karthika Gupta



Minimalism seems to be a hot topic of discussion these days in almost every facet of life. Minimalism has made its way into a lifestyle that is often associated with a way of living, a way of creating, and even a way of traveling. Even though the interpretation is subjective, the Webster dictionary defines minimalism as follows: A style or technique that is characterized by extreme sparseness and simplicity.

Many of us are drawn to the 'less is more' concept with simple lines, geometric patterns, clear shadows, colors, isolated subjects, etc. Sometimes these elements occur automatically in our surroundings; other times, some manipulation is needed in terms of decluttering and removing elements from the frame. The key is to train your eye to assess what is required to create a strong story. Here are a few tips and examples to get you started in your quest for minimalist imagery.

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




Photograph by Karthika Gupta

The beautiful bougainvillea tree frames the shepherd and his flock as they walk away from the camera. The rest of the frame is clean and clear, eliminating any other distractions.

COMPOSITION TECHNIQUES

One of the key elements of minimalism is the concept of less is more. Keep it simple, keep it light, keep it concise. However, 'keep it simple' does not mean 'keep it boring.' Contrary to popular belief, a minimalist approach requires a lot of creativity. Well-placed subjects and key elements that help communicate a story are all challenging to get right all the time. These concepts often require a lot of practice until it becomes the way you see. Start asking yourself these questions even before you bring the camera to your face to take the shot. Sometimes if it is not obvious, look through the viewfinder and "see" the shot instead of cropping out unwanted distractions in post-processing.

 **Key Lesson:** In situations where it is not possible to remove distracting objects from the frame, use depth of field to isolate your subject from the background by shooting with an aperture as wide (smallest number) as your lens will allow.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

*The distracting background of hikers
along the trail almost faded away
by shooting low and wide open,
creating that beautiful bokeh.*



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

*This is one of my favorite frames.
The empty Ferris wheel cars in
all these colors against the blue
of the sky speaks about summer
fun without saying much.*

COLORS AND TEXTURES

Bright colors, or even contrasting colors, help with the minimalistic approach by adding the right amount of contrast. The key is to not go extreme but to pick one or two colors that work well with each other and use them prominently in the image. Sometimes even adding a little texture in the image can assist in improving the visual appeal of the image.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

Here the red of the flowers complements the brown of the wooden fence. It's a testament to the fact that minimalism does not have to be devoid of color and texture for it to work.




Photograph by Karthika Gupta

Here, the use of the road signs along with the curve in the road showcase the path to the mountains in the distance.

LEADING LINES AND PATTERNS

Lines and patterns – if done correctly – can also assist in the minimalistic approach. But aim to keep it simple. Leading lines, and other geometric shapes, can make great backdrops for minimalist pictures. But if there are too many elements in the frame, it can make the image appear chaotic and busy, which is not the minimalistic, clean way.

Sometimes all it takes is to find a creative angle to photograph. Experiment with different angles (straight on, higher up, low down, etc.) until you get a shot that showcases your vision for the image.

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NEGATIVE SPACE

Learning to use negative space is a huge advantage to embracing the minimalistic movement. Negative space allows the main subject matter to breathe freely and conveys a sense of lightness in place and space. Negative space is a great way to isolate your subject so that the viewer can easily interpret the story you are trying to convey. Remember, negative space does not always mean a single subject and nor does it mean always photographing in the rule of thirds. It quite simply means allowing less clutter in the frame.

Photograph by Karthika Gupta

Negative space along with the posing added a lot of drama to an otherwise simple portrait.



CONCISE STORYTELLING

One of the best ways to practice and perfect minimalistic photography is to tell a story. Ask yourself if the elements in the frame help move the story forward or are hindering the story. Sometimes a human element is needed to tell the story, and other times it is not needed. Symmetry, lines, patterns, and shadows take on the role of telling the story.

Photograph by Karthika Gupta

Here, lack of a human subject is overcome by using the yellow median as well as the curve in the road to communicate the feeling of going off the beaten path. There really was not a single car for miles on end and we had all this magnificent landscape all to ourselves.





Photograph by Karthika Gupta

This image makes me want to put on my running shoes and hit the trails. The camel pack, her stance, and the surroundings all showcase the story of being outdoors!

Sometimes the story and the environment come together spontaneously and it's the photographer's job to see it and respond quickly. Other times it requires a bit of patience for the right subject to walk through the frame.

The good thing is that a minimalist approach to photography can be applied in nature as well as in an urban environment. You can practice anywhere, so get out there and open yourself up to a different way of seeing with your camera, no matter the genre.




Photograph by Karthika Gupta

A simple lifestyle editorial that focused on solitude and idleness was the epitome of minimalism.

The post-processing here supported the story with a very light and airy look and feel.

POST-PROCESSING

Minimalistic photography does not just end once you take the shot. You can extend this concept into post-processing as well. The easiest way to approach minimalistic photography in post-processing is to keep the image treatment simple. Avoid highly saturated images, a lot of contrast, and intense color corrections. With portraits, don't correct all the skin and tone imperfections. Let the subject's natural beauty show without too much retouching.

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Photograph by Karthika Gupta



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

CONCLUSION

In photography, minimalism is a visual statement where the story of the photograph is simplified, elements are reduced, and clean space is added. Not only has minimalist photography become its own genre, but photographers specializing in the discipline have come into their own, creating an attractive space of art for us all to enjoy. As industry professionals, it behooves us to pay attention to this trend and see how we can apply this in our own body of work.

Self-Check Quiz:

1. What is the Webster definition of minimalism?
2. True or False: A great tool to assist in composing a minimalist composition is to ask yourself questions.
3. What tool, involving the use of your lens, can be used to help remove distracting objects from a minimalist composition?
4. For a minimalism photograph, is it better to work with one or two colors, or cram in as many different colors as you possibly can into the composition?
5. What type of shapes can make a great background for minimalist photography?
6. What type of space works well in minimalism?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Karthika Gupta is a wedding, lifestyle, portrait, and editorial photographer based in Chicago. Her style of photography is fun, fresh, and organic. She strives to capture authentic emotions and interactions among her clients and emotive imagery in her commercial work.

She loves connecting with other creatives and photographers and is always ready for an engaging conversation about photography and the art of storytelling.

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