

GENERAL HINTS & TIPS

by Lee Agnew

I've been working on the first of what I hope to be a series of instructional lessons on still photography and it occurs to me that many of the guidelines for photographers should be followed by video makers. Such as the "Rule of Thirds" which simply means that a subject that is the center of interest in a shot would look better if they were not in the center of the picture. Picture a "Tic-Tac-Toe" layout in your viewfinder. Your subject should be near one of the sets of intersecting lines. If your picture has a horizon in it, it should be on either of the two horizontal lines of the Tic Tac Toe layout, never in the middle of the screen. If you are shooting a person walking across the screen, (or a car, or boat), allow more room in front of the subject than in back of the subject. Ideally, the subject should be somewhere near one of the intersecting lines of the Tic-Tac-Toe layout.

Leading lines are also effective. If you are shooting a boat heading out to sea, the wake makes a perfect leading line to the center of interest, the boat. A winding river leading to a distant snowcapped mountain steers the viewer's eyes to the mountain.

If you are shooting a person talking into the camera make sure there are no tree limbs, sign posts, or clothes lines growing out of their heads. Also, when you are shooting a talking head, there is lots of time for the viewer to look around in the frame, so if you haven't cleaned up the "set" by removing cigarette butts, candy wrappers and beer cans, the viewer will automatically begin obsessing about the debris instead of listening to the dialogue.

For more dramatic scenes, side lighting is always better than when the sun is behind you. Images are made up of light and dark areas, so if the sun is behind you there are no shadows (except your own) and therefore there is no dimension to the scene. It is what we call a "Flat Lighting".

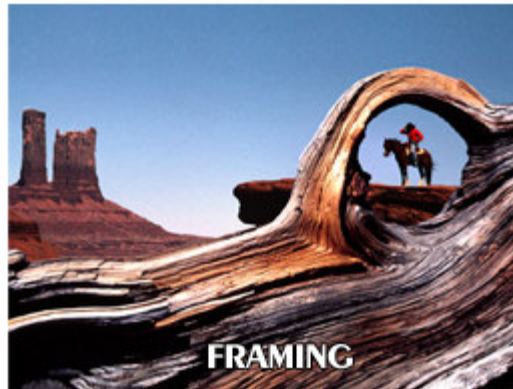
Back lighting can be very dramatic, but you have to watch for two things, lens flare and silhouettes. Lens flare usually occurs if you have any dust or water spots on your lens, but it can also happen if the sun hits your lens and creates a "fogged" look to the picture. You can use a deeper lens shade, or have someone hold a piece of cardboard to prevent the sun from entering the camera. As far as silhouettes are concerned, that's the time to use the manual controls. Most of

the newer cameras have a setting for back lighting, but it doesn't always do what you want it to do, so experiment first to know what to expect.

Then there is framing. Try to position your subject so that it (or they) is framed by a tree trunk and branch, or a tunnel, or bridge, anything that will make the viewer focus on the subject. When shooting a "talking head" you can close in really tight, or back off to show more of the person and subsequently, the background. When you close in, try to put the eyes on the upper (imaginary) Tic-Tac-Toe line. In photographs or videos it's OK to cut off the top of a person's head, but you should never show an arm with the hand cut off. Show a tight shot of a head, or a long shot showing a complete torso. It's OK to cut somebody off at the waist, but not so good to cut them off at the hips.

When shooting big scenes, get down low and include some foreground in the frame. A bush or a rock or a small tree will give the scene depth by providing the viewer with a reference to the scope of the scene. Branches hanging down in the top of the scene are always good.

All these things are suggestions rather than rules, but if you want to make better pictures or movies, start thinking about them and how much they will improve your work. The following images are from a still camera, but they illustrate the effects you want to achieve.



Note that side lighting or backlighting are used in most of these samples