

## Day 18: Add Balance

The last thing you will do before hitting the shutter button is make sure everything balances.

### Two types of balance:

**Formal balance** - Equal weight on each side. This is also called symmetry. It is common in man-made structures.

**Informal balance** - Different sized objects used to create balance. Asymmetrical. More common outdoors and in nature.

### A Fulcrum in Your Picture:

Think about your scene as if there is a fulcrum in the center of your picture

- Equal size and distance from the fulcrum creates balance.
- But smaller objects that are further from the fulcrum can balance against larger objects.

You can also use implied features and lines (e.g., there are implied lines created by people looking into the picture or a light shining out to sea).

### How to Create Balance:

**When Shooting** - Take a brief moment to ensure picture balances after you have composed it.

**At Your Computer** - Take your time with your Crop tool and make it perfect.

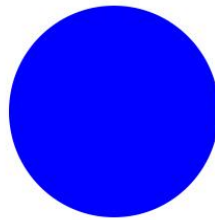
## Additional Commentary

The last thing you will want to do before pressing the shutter button is to make sure that your picture is balanced. While you may occasionally intentionally put a photograph off balance, almost always you will want to support a sense of balance in the picture. But what does “balanced” mean? We'll take a look at that in a variety of contexts today, and show you how to apply it to your photography.

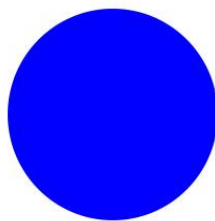
### Balance Explained

Objects within photographs maintain a sense of weight. How you place them within the frame will therefore impact whether the photograph feels balanced or not.

Let's start off very simply. Let's say you have a subject. You place it right in the middle of the picture like this:



That feels balanced, doesn't it? The subject is in the middle so the weight is not shifted to either side. But now what happens if we move the subject to one side?



Now it looks unbalanced, doesn't it?

Of course, this is the simplest example imaginable. Let's look at the situation where you have multiple items in your picture. In doing so, the thing to keep in mind is that your mind

subconsciously looks at the center of the picture as a sort of fulcrum (the center of a balance beam). Objects of the same size will balance if they are equidistant to the center of the frame. Let's look at that, and keep things simple for the moment. Here is a balanced photo of two objects:

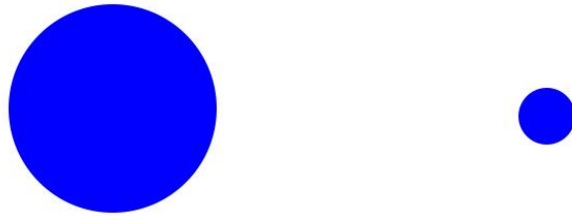


The objects are the same size and are the same distance from the center of the photo. The photo balances. But if we move one of the objects further away from the center of the photo, the photo no longer feels balanced:



The object to the right takes on more weight because it is further from the center of the frame. It makes things appear tilted to the right.

We can keep the objects in the same place, but change the size of one of the objects and our photo will once again go out of balance. Look at what happens if I put the object on the right back to its original position but make it smaller:



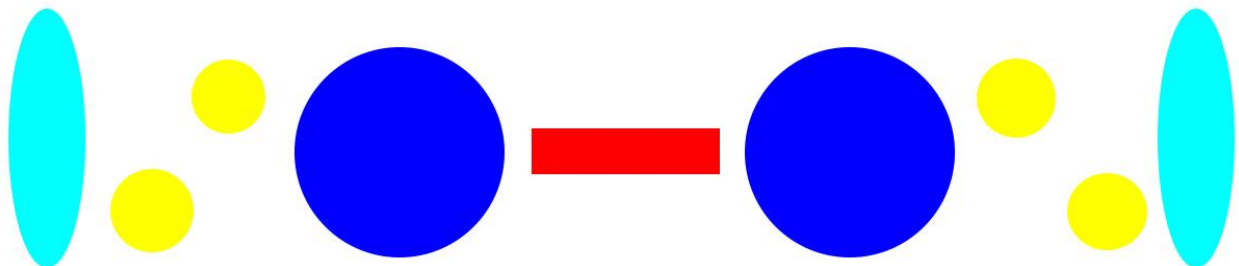
The photo now seems weighted to the left. The objects are the same distance away from the center but the greater area of the object to the left makes things seem weighted that way.

### Formal Balance

The concept we have been talking about is called "*formal balance*." It is also called "*symmetry*," which is a name you may be more familiar with. Everything balances out exactly equally. When we had our two objects of equal size and distance from the center, they were formally balanced.



Even if we add a bunch of other objects of different shapes and sizes, the concept still holds. As long as the objects are of equal size and distance from the center, you can have as many objects as you want. Consider this example where I have added several other shapes to our original two objects:



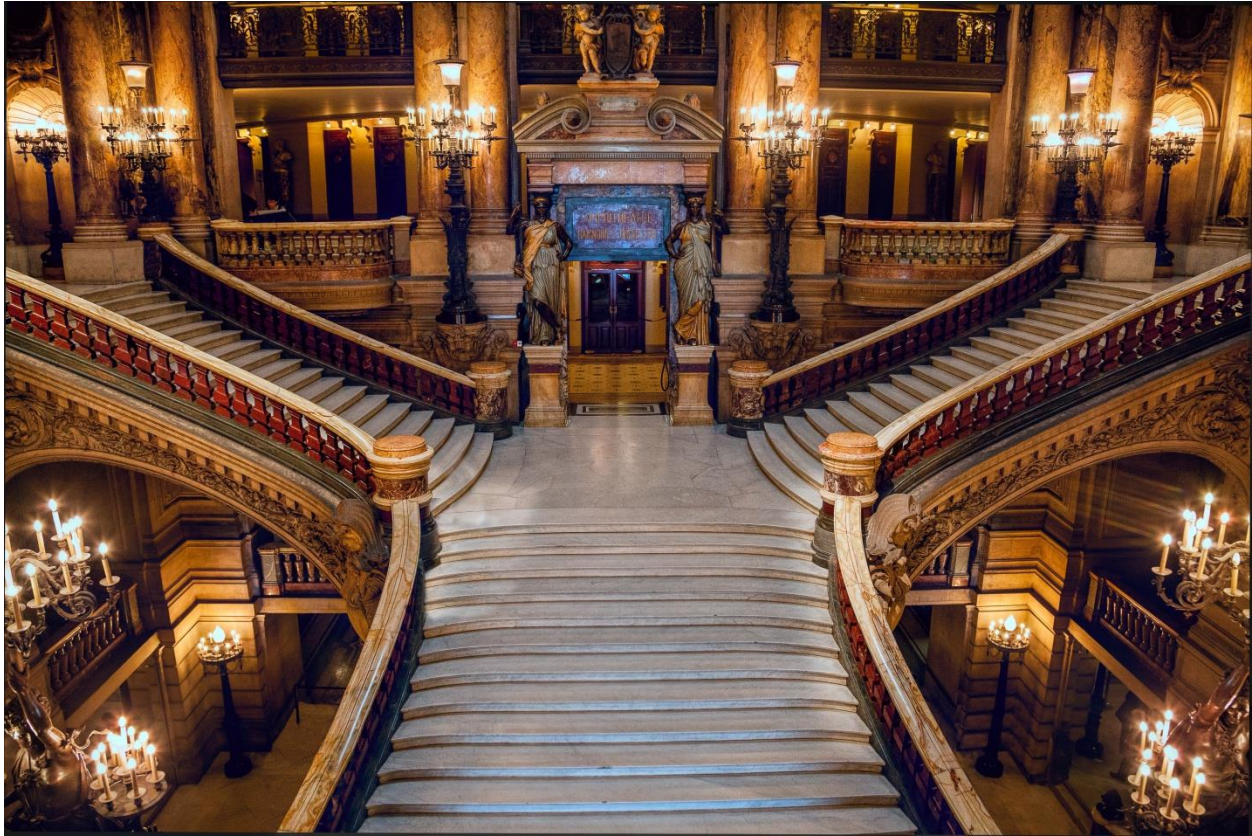
Now let's take this discussion out of the realm of the abstract, and into actual photos. The first thing you can and should do with this concept is look for objects that balance. Here is an example photo of sailboats I took:



The balance is a key component of the photo. If one of the sailboats had been significantly pushed to one side, the photo would not have worked.

A key point to understand is that you typically do not just stumble into a balanced photo. You will need to make slight adjustments by moving around a little bit. Very slight changes in camera position can have a big impact on your view. By shifting right or left you change the amount of relative space between objects.

When it comes to formal balance or symmetry, it often isn't just a matter of balancing objects. It is often a matter of taking discrete elements of a scene and making them balance out against each other. Consider this example taken in Opera Garnier in Paris:



Here the center stairway and landing obviously act as the fulcrum of the picture. From there, it is just a matter of making the left and right stairways balance against each other. There is also the matter of the lights. However hard I tried, I could not make the lights match up exactly. Fortunately they are a minor enough part of the picture that it really isn't noticeable unless I draw your attention to that (which I just did).

Incidentally, you'll find that man-made structures give you the best opportunities for using formal balance or symmetry. Places like cathedrals, museums, and government buildings are often built using symmetry as their foundation. For example, most churches or cathedrals will have a center aisle with seating of equal amounts on either side, looking forward to a symmetrical display in the front. Museums and other buildings follow a similar pattern.



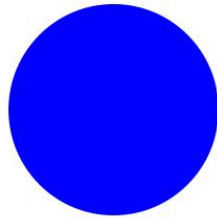
Symmetry can be a useful technique to achieve balance in some cases, but it is definitely not the only way. As mentioned, symmetry is commonly used when photographing man-made subjects. Nature is messier and does not support the idea of symmetry as often.

Further, balance does not always mean centering your subject. In fact, centering the subject is often a bad idea and it runs afoul of the Rule of Thirds, which we addressed in a prior lesson. How do you reconcile the idea of using symmetry with the Rule of Thirds? Basically, in most cases, avoid direct centering of your subject. However, where you are making a conscious decision to center your subject, that is just fine. The idea is to avoid centering things without thinking about it.

### **Informal Balance**

Most of the time, you'll be attempting to balance your pictures with something called informal balance. This is where you are using objects of different sizes, shapes, and distances from the center to create a sense of balance in your photos.

Let's start with this concept by looking at the same dots we looked at previously. Whereas we had been looking at objects of the same size and distance from center to create balance, now let's see what happens when you use different sized dots:



What I did here was put a large dot slightly to the left of center, and then put a small dot pretty far to the right. Does that balance? I think so. If anything, it is perhaps weighted to the right. But how does that happen? Shouldn't the large dot to the left make the entire picture tilt to the left? It should, until you remember the idea of the picture being on a fulcrum in the center of the picture. The dot to the right, even though it is smaller, is able to balance out the larger dot because it is so far to the right.

Let's take a look at this in action. We'll start with this picture taken of Panama City, Panama:



Does the picture appear balanced to you? It does to me. But take a look at everything to the right of the picture. There are a lot of buildings over there. All the land is over there, as is all the traffic. The only thing that keeps the picture from feeling lopsided is that one tall building to the right of the frame. I actually cropped the picture slightly and brightened that building to help

that along. Without that building featuring pretty prominently in the picture the whole thing would appear tilted to the right.

That's the whole idea here. You are going to be using different objects in your frame and playing them off against one another to try to create balance. Let's take a look at a landscape scene.



This one is more subtle, but it shows something you will deal with a lot. Look at the mountain in the background. It is to the right of the picture. If left unchecked, that would make the picture feel heavy to the right. To offset that, I moved around and placed the island in the foreground just a tiny bit to the left of the frame. Actually, the island will appear pretty much centered when you first look at the picture, but you can see by comparing the left and right sides of the island to

the perimeter of the picture that it extends further to the left. That creates some balance. Again, it is subtle, but it is important.

The concept of informal balance manifests itself in other ways as well. For example, implied lines can create a sense of balance. A good specific example of that is that a person looking into the picture appears balanced. That means if the person is on the left side of the frame but looking to the right (into the frame), the implied line creates balance. If the person is on the left side of the frame but facing left (out of the frame), the picture appears unbalanced.

You can do the same thing with lighthouses and other implied lines. Take a look at this shot for an example of that:



Everything in the shot is bunched to the left side. But there is a sense of looking out to sea that balances things a bit. Notice that there isn't even an actual beam coming from the lighthouse. If there was, it would add to the effect even more. As it is, your mind just implies one.

## Balance in the Field

Balance is not something you should take a long time thinking about. Just take a final beat before you press the shutter button to make sure that your picture is balanced. When it is, at long last, go ahead and press the shutter button.

It may seem as you read this that you have to stand there with the camera to your face for a minute and a half contemplating these things. But that's not the intent or the reality. These items will often just be considered momentarily, and then you move on. When you are first starting, you might spend a little time with each, but in time they will become so ingrained that you won't even know you are considering them as part of the setup of your picture.

## Day 18 Assignment Clouds

### Description:

Create a compelling photograph of clouds. Set your horizon line on the bottom third line of the picture, so that at least the top 2/3 of the frame is the sky. Find interesting cloud formations and arrange them in your frame in whatever way make the most sense to you. Make sure the picture balances.

### Keys to Success:

- Use either formal or informal balance.
- Although the foreground isn't the focus of the picture, it is still important. Make sure your location works for this shot.
- Use the Crop tool in Lightroom or Photoshop when you are done. Spend some time with the picture here and get it just right.

### Upon Completion of this Assignment:

Cloud shots are very popular on Instagram and other online galleries. In addition, Alfred Stieglitz spent many years photographing cloud formations. Therefore, you ought to be able to create something compelling. One of the keys to success will be how the picture balances, so it will drive home today's lesson.