

# Foundations of Good Composition

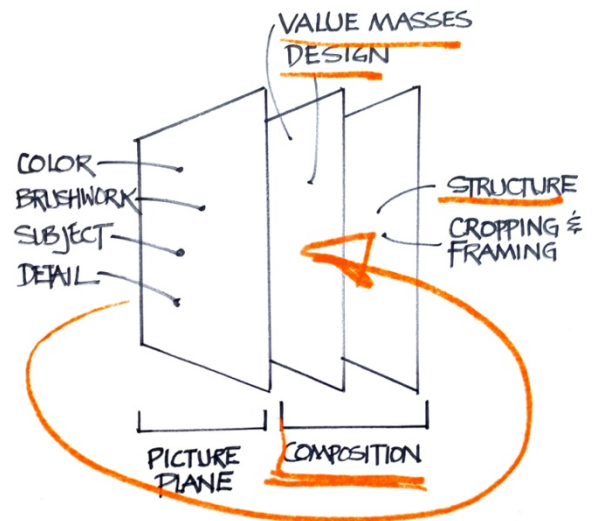
Ian Roberts

Welcome to the foundations of composition course. There are six themes, four videos in each, 24 lessons in all. And each lesson has the video and an assignment. Focusing like this on compositional structure will always serve you in your artistic practice and growth. Like Robert Henri who wrote the art spirit said, "All good art is composition."

## Theme One

### What is Good Composition?

This course is about the foundational structure that exists *behind* where most people are normally thinking in terms of color, subject, brushwork and detail—where we think in terms of structure and design of the value masses first.



### Lesson 1. Engage the Vertical

In this video, I discuss probably the single most foundationally important principle in strong composition.

Lots of people have mentioned this idea of different compositional structures, or armatures, like an O or an S or an L. But to my mind, that thinking can cause more problems than it solves. This one idea of the horizontal and vertical actually includes everything engaged in those armatures and makes it a much simpler concept to put into practice.

Here, I give you a simplified strategy for engaging the entire picture plane.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnTsxMd\\_2dE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnTsxMd_2dE)

### Assignment

Find 5 paintings by your favorite masters - historical or living.

1. For each one, find the main horizontal and the main vertical.
2. Notice where the horizontal and vertical intersect. That is the 'center of interest'.
3. Notice whether there is some 'thing' there as well to draw your eye.

(There doesn't have to be, just notice.)



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## Theme 1

### Lesson2. Be Design Driven

Value masses [large light/dark shapes] are very important to a design-driven composition.

Often people ask me to expand on this idea of **subject-driven vs design-driven** paintings. It is one of several foundational ideas, we could call them leverage points, that can help to dramatically improve your paintings.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MH0cE6avAQ4&t=390s>

There are 2 assignments for this lesson

### Assignment 1

Identify the large value masses in these photos. Squint your eyes to help you stop seeing the details and 'objects' in the scene. Focus only on the light shapes, medium shapes, dark shapes.

Sketch out the shapes for each one. (These are my photos and sketches. --Diane)





## Assignment 2

Look through your own work and pull out a few pieces you're not sure about. Ask yourself these questions for each piece:

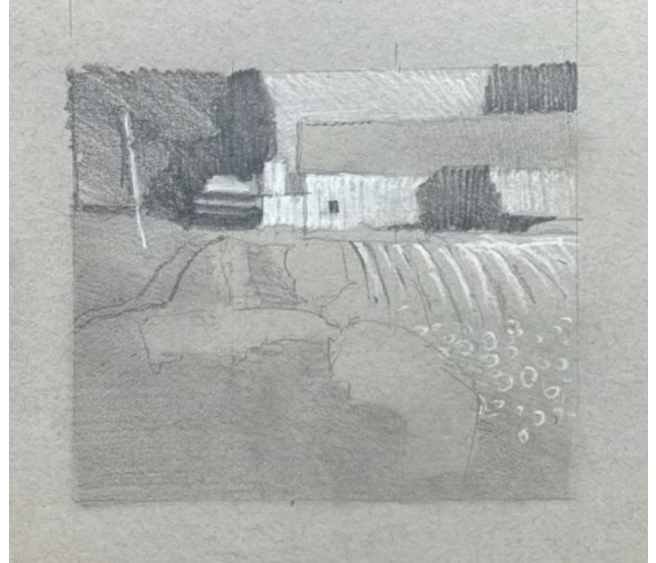
- Does the piece have strong value masses that guide your eye?
- Does the piece have a large subject [barn, person, tree, structure, etc.] Is that is the focus of the piece? Is the piece a 'portrait' of that subject?

## For More Information

Here is one of Ian Roberts' YouTube videos about sketches:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJfONGBOfDs>

These are the images from that video that relate to this lesson:



## Recommended Supplies for the course:

Blackwing Matte Black pencil

General's White 558 Charcoal Pencil

Strathmore 400 Series Recycled Toned Sketch Pad, Cool Gray

And I recommend a kneaded eraser