

The Core Triad of Photography

A Practical Student Field Reference for Light, Subject, and Composition

Source: The Photo Academy Guide

Level: Beginner to Intermediate

Technical gear and exposure settings (aperture, ISO, shutter speed) are merely tools. The core visual impact and artistic success of any image depend on three fundamental pillars: **Light**, **Subject**, and **Composition**.

1. LIGHT — THE SOUL & MOOD OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Light is the fundamental medium of photography. Beyond revealing your subject, light conveys emotion, atmosphere, and dramatic character.

Golden Hour & Warm Glow

Occurs shortly after sunrise/before sunset. Filters light into soft, warm, golden tones with gentle shadows—ideal for portraits and landscapes.

Soft / Diffused Light & Fog

Overcast or foggy weather acts as a natural softbox, eliminating harsh shadows and reducing contrast for a serene, moody feel.

Hard Light & High Contrast

Direct midday sun or sharp spot lights create bold contrast and crisp shadows—perfect for graphic black-and-white or architectural shots.

Blue Hour & Night Ambience

Occurs when the sun is well below the horizon. The sky assumes deep blue tones, offering a mysterious backdrop for lit elements.

Light Drill: Camera Control & Muscle Memory

Fleeting lighting conditions require immediate adjustments. Practice changing shutter speed, aperture, and focus points without looking at your camera controls until it becomes second nature.

2. SUBJECT — PURPOSE & CREATIVE INTENT

Your subject is the main focal point—the "what" of your image. Great photography requires deciding *how* to represent your subject through intentional camera choices.

Depth of Field Isolation

Use a wide aperture (e.g., f/1.8–f/2.8) to blur the background (bokeh) and isolate your subject, or narrow aperture (f/8–f/11) for edge-to-edge sharpness.

Shutter Speed & Motion

Freeze fast action with 1/1000s for crisp detail, or use a slow shutter speed (1/4s) to introduce artistic motion blur.

Subject Drill: Everyday Desk & Macro Practice

Pick 3 small items at home. Use desk lamps or flashlights to experiment with close-up macro focusing, handheld stability, and highlighting textures.

3. COMPOSITION — FRAMING & STORYTELLING

Composition is the deliberate arrangement of visual elements within your frame. It guides the viewer's eye straight to what matters most.

Simplicity & Exclusion

Excluding clutter is paramount. Frame tightly or shift your angle to remove background distractions that weaken the emotional message.

Visual Weight & Balance

Bright colors, high contrast, sharp focus, and human faces carry high visual weight. Balance them across the frame for harmony or unbalance for tension.

Composition Drill: Moving Subjects

Photograph unpredictable moving subjects (pets, kids, outdoors). Rapid movement forces you to constantly re-evaluate framing, balance, and edge clutter in real time.

Assignment & Assessment Guide

Demonstrating Mastery of The Core Triad: Light, Subject, and Composition

PROJECT: "Trio Narrative Project"

Objective: Create a mini-portfolio demonstrating your individual mastery of Light, Subject, and Composition. Each photograph must explicitly emphasize one pillar while maintaining high overall technical quality across all three.

Google Slides Submission Requirements:

Students must submit a **Google Slide Show** formatted as follows:

1. **Slide 1 (Title Slide):** Student Name and Title of Project ("Trio Narrative Project").
2. **Slide 2 (Photo 1 - LIGHT):** Image capturing a scene where lighting defines the mood and atmosphere (e.g., Golden Hour glow, sharp high-contrast shadow, soft fog, or Blue Hour).
3. **Slide 3 (Photo 2 - SUBJECT):** Image featuring a subject clearly isolated or emphasized through deliberate creative camera settings (e.g., shallow depth of field or close-up macro detail).
4. **Slide 4 (Photo 3 - COMPOSITION):** Image demonstrating intentional framing and visual organization (e.g., rule of thirds, leading lines, framing, or extreme simplicity).
5. **Slide 5 (Last Slide - Written Reflection & Metadata):** Include a 2–3 sentence description for each of the three photographs stating your exact camera settings (ISO, Aperture, Shutter Speed) and artistic intent.

STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT & SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

Complete this checklist before submitting your Google Slide Show to ensure all technical and visual criteria have been fulfilled.

✓	Category	Checklist Item / Verification Standard
☐	SLIDE 1: TITLE	Title Slide: Title slide includes student name and project title ("Trio Narrative Project").
☐	SLIDE 2: LIGHT	Photo 1 (Light): Placed on its own separate slide. Light source is clearly identified and drives mood/atmosphere with controlled exposure.
☐	SLIDE 3: SUBJECT	Photo 2 (Subject): Placed on its own separate slide. Focal clarity is sharp with deliberate depth of field or motion control.
☐	SLIDE 4: COMPOSITION	Photo 3 (Composition): Placed on its own separate slide. Clean framing and balanced visual weight without clutter.
☐	SLIDE 5: REFLECTION	Written Reflection & Metadata: Placed on the last slide. Contains a 2–3 sentence description for each photo stating exact ISO, Aperture, Shutter Speed, and artistic intent.