

The Rule of Thirds

Art & Design

A useful default for placing a subject, and an honest account of its limits.

Divide the frame in thirds each way and place the subject on a line or an intersection. It is a heuristic for avoiding dead-centre placement, not a law of perception.

LINES

two each way

STATUS

heuristic, not law

- Off-centre placement leaves the subject room to act.
- A horizon on a third avoids halving the frame.
- It roughly approximates the golden section.
- There is no evidence the eye prefers those points.
- Centred symmetry is a strong choice, not an error.
- Every compositional rule has famous exceptions.

LOOK FOR IT

A portrait with the eyes on the upper third line, looking into the wider half of the frame.

The rule is a way of not deciding. Work out what the picture is about, then place it where that reading is clearest.