



# Four Steps to the Perfect Photograph

## Introduction

Throughout my photographic experience, I have developed a small acronym "CEFF" that I place on the back of my camera body. I place it here so every time I set up to take a photo, I am reminded of my 4-steps that help me focus on obtaining the perfect picture. C stands for Composition, E for Exposure, F for Focus and F for Fire! Each is discussed in a little more detail below.

## Step 1-Composition

The very first thing when setting up for a picture is to ask yourself what the composition is. Composition is an artsy term that defines "what the picture is."

There are many different ways to compose an image. Some of these ways are based on mathematics, others on specific art styles, and others are so scientifically determined it is almost embarrassing. In my photographic world, I click the shutter when I like what I see in through the viewfinder, regardless of science or "proper" artistic style.

There are a few small tricks to composition that will help you produce great images. When you look through the lens, ask yourself this question: "What is the subject?" If this is not a one or two-word answer, then YOU don't know what the subject is. If you do not know, the people looking at it won't either, and generally they won't take a second look. Thoreau writes "Simplify, Simplify, Simplify."

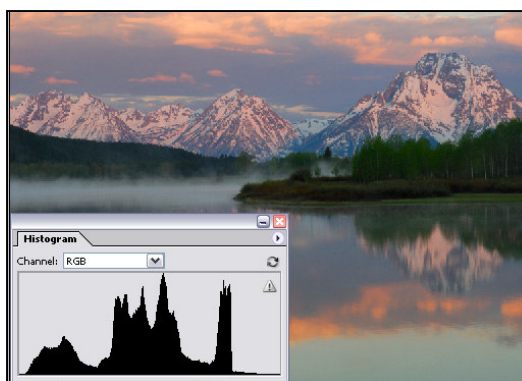
Although he was writing about the clutter in life, this is great advice for photography. Simplify your pictures to capture a small part of the vast landscape. In general, when you sit in front of a grand landscape, don't try to capture the whole thing, but rather focus on one detail of it. By doing this, your images will tell a story deeper than the entire landscape together. Simplify, or your subject will get lost in the clutter.



## Step 2-Exposure

Now that you have decided on a composition, and the subject is well defined, it is time to figure out how to get the proper exposure. The key to this step is to step back and ask yourself: "In my composition, what part do I want to be middle tone?" The best way to determine this is to pretend everything is black and white. If your subjects were black and white, what part would be gray? When you point your camera and tell it to figure out the exposure it just makes whatever you point it at middle tone, or gray. If your subject is not gray, the exposure will be wrong! Find a middle tone somewhere in the landscape and meter this, and make adjustments to get the proper exposure you need.

If you are shooting white clouds, or white snow, meter the clouds/snow and open up 2-stops





to make sure they are white, instead of gray. If this discussion so far does not make much sense please read Exposure Basics to become acquainted with this concept.

Now that you have determined the proper exposure to capture the image you have composed, you are ready to move on to Step 3.

### Step 3-Focus

This may seem like a strange step, but is extremely vital. With your camera sitting on your tripod, with the composition desired, the exposure defined, it is time to make sure you have the image in focus. If you bobble this step, you might as well throw the picture away! This is the time to make sure that everything you want in focus is indeed in focus. This concept is called "depth-of-field." If you remember we discussed f-stops in the lens basics. This is where these little numbers come in to play. The smaller the number, the bigger the hole, and the smaller the depth of field. The bigger the number, the smaller the hole, the greater the depth of field. The best way to describe depth of field is with an example. Lets pretend you are photographing a mountain, and in the foreground right in front of your camera is a rock. If you set your lens to an f-stop with a small number (large hole) and focus on the rock, the rock will be in focus but the mountain will be a big blur. If you set your lens to an f-stop



with a large number (small hole) and focus on the rock, both will be crystal clear. You may say to yourself, why don't I always shoot with an f-stop that makes everything in focus. There is one draw back to setting your lens to this type of f-stop; it requires MUCH longer shutter speeds to get proper exposure. Sometimes you do not want long shutter speeds such as when photographing wildlife, or subjects blowing in the wind. Once you have determined the depth of field you want, be sure to adjust your exposure (shutter speed) to accommodate for any changes you may have made in your aperture setting (f-stop). Once again check to make sure the image is focused and move on to the next step.

### Step 4-Fire

Now the moment of truth! Time to click the shutter and capture the perfect image. When tripping the shutter, try using a shutter release cable, or the timer on your camera. This will help eliminate the small inevitable shake that occurs when your finger pushes the shutter button. I hope these 4 simple steps help you capture the images of your dreams.