



PHOTO MASTERY CLUB

# **The Triangle Method:** A Simple Guide to Better Landscape Compositions

By Steve Arnold

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## Why Composition Feels So Hard

Have you ever stood in front of a stunning landscape scene, knowing the conditions are perfect, but frozen because you can't figure out how to compose the shot?

Or worse - have you come home from a photoshoot, opened your images, and felt that sinking disappointment because something about the composition just feels... *off*?

You're not alone.

For years, I struggled with this exact problem.

I knew about the Rule of Thirds. The Golden Ratio. The Golden Spiral. Diagonal triangles. Leading lines. All of it.

But here's the thing: when you're standing there with fleeting light and the pressure's on, trying to remember which "rule" to apply is like trying to remember a phone number by scrolling through every number you've ever dialed.

### **There's a better way.**

Over the past decade of teaching thousands of photographers, I've developed what I call the **Triangle Method** - a simple, intuitive approach to composition that helps you create balanced, dynamic images without memorizing rigid formulas.

In this guide, I'll show you:

- What the Triangle Method is and why it works
- How to identify the right points of interest in any scene
- The step-by-step process to apply it in the field

Let's dive in.

## Part 1: What Is The Triangle Method?

### The Core Idea

The Triangle Method is a way to visualize whether your composition is balanced by connecting your three key points of interest with imaginary lines to form a triangle.

Here's how it works:

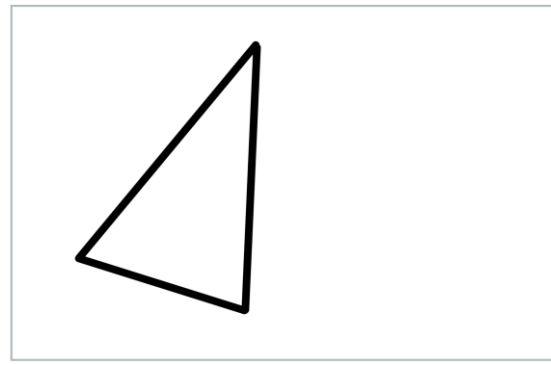
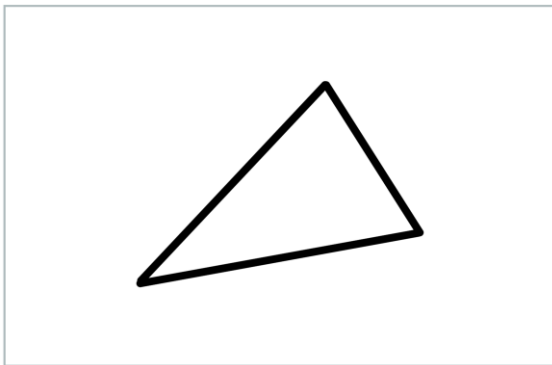
**Identify 3 focal points in your scene, then draw imaginary lines connecting them to create a triangle.**

Then ask yourself: *Does this triangle feel balanced within my frame?*

That's it. Seriously.

Take a look at these two example triangles. Which one is balanced better within its frame than the other?

See how easy it is to tell?



### Why It Works Better Than Traditional Rules

The Rule of Thirds and similar compositional guides are essentially *templates*. They tell you where to place things.

The Triangle Method is different - it's a *visualisation tool* that helps you **see balance** rather than follow a formula.

Think about it this way:

If all you had to do to create a great composition was follow the Rule of Thirds, then every photo that followed it would be equally great, right?

But they're not.

That's because **composition isn't great BECAUSE it follows a rule - it's great because it does something extra.**

The Triangle Method helps you find that "something extra" by:

1. **Forcing you to identify what actually matters** in your scene
2. **Making balance visible** so you can adjust intuitively
3. **Working for any scene type** - not just those that fit a template
4. **Being impossible to forget** once you understand it

## Part 2: Finding Your Three Points of Interest

Before you can draw your triangle, you need to know what your three focal points are.

This sounds obvious, but it's where most photographers stumble. They think they know what the subject is, but they haven't consciously identified the **specific elements** that create visual interest.

### What Qualifies as a Point of Interest?

A point of interest is anything that naturally draws the eye. Here are the main categories:

#### 1. Distinctive Shapes, Textures, and Objects

These are the *things* in your photograph - the nouns of your visual sentence.

- A lone tree
- A distinctive rock formation
- A building or structure
- A pattern or texture that stands out

#### 2. Areas of High Contrast

We're automatically drawn to contrast - dark against light, or vice versa.

- A dark mountain ridgeline against a bright sky
- The sun itself
- A silhouetted subject
- Shadow patterns on a lighter surface

#### 3. Areas of Interesting Light

Sometimes light itself creates a focal point, even when there's no physical object.

- A shaft of light breaking through clouds
- Reflected light on water
- A spotlight effect on a specific area

- Rim lighting on a distant hill

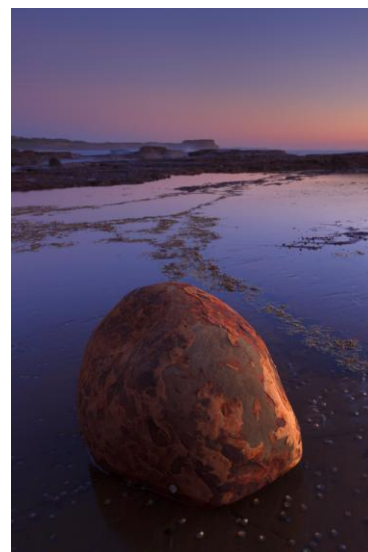


The image above is an example that contains points 1, 2, and 3 in a single shot.

#### 4. Contrasting Colours

Objects or areas with colours that stand out from their surroundings become instant focal points.

- A red object in a sea of green
- Warm colours against cool
- Saturated colours in muted scenes



In the example above, notice how the boulder stands out far less when colour is removed from the equation.

### 5. Implied Points of Interest

Even when there's no physical object, converging lines or visual flow can create a focal point.

- Where leading lines converge
- The endpoint of a road or path
- Where the viewer's eye naturally travels to



There is no physical object or element that stands out at the vanishing point of this road, but it is a focal point because that's where the leading lines are leading the eye to.

## The Two-Minute Test: "What Am I Looking At?"

Here's a quick way to identify your three points of interest:

**Look at your scene and ask:** *"If someone asked me what this photo is OF, what are the three things I would point to?"*

Not "what's the general scene" (that's too vague), but the specific 3 things you want the viewer to notice.

If you can't quickly identify 3 clear answers, your scene might be:

- **Too busy** (too many competing elements - we'll cover this in Part 4)
- **Too empty** (not enough points of interest - also covered in Part 4)

Keep in mind – I'm saying "too busy" and "too empty" only in the context of using the Triangle Method!

## Part 3: The Triangle Method Step-by-Step

Now that you can identify points of interest, let's put the Triangle Method into practice.

### Step 1: Compose Your Initial Shot

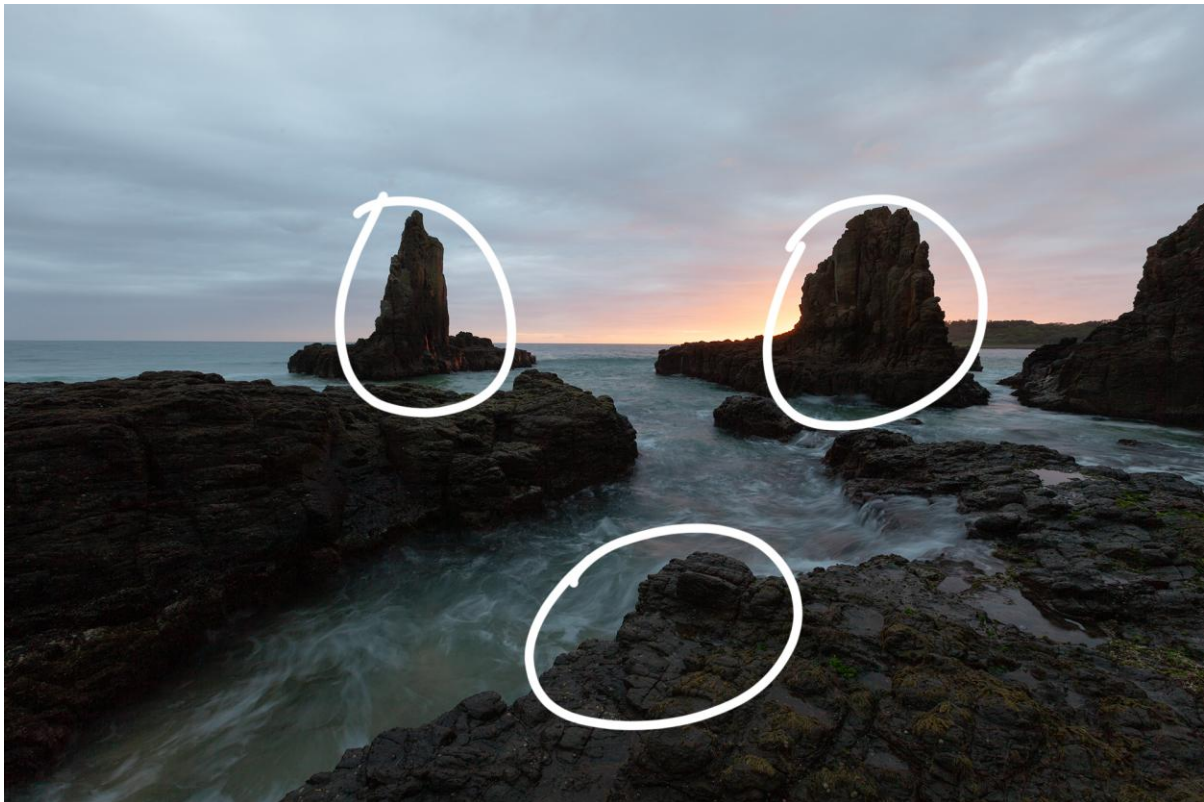
Start with your instinctive composition. Don't overthink it yet - just point your camera toward the scene and include the elements you think are important.

### Step 2: Identify Your 3 Key Focal Points

Look through your viewfinder (or at your LCD screen) and identify the 3 most important elements.

#### Ask yourself:

- What do I want the viewer to look at first?
- What supports that main subject?
- What else adds to the story or sense of place?



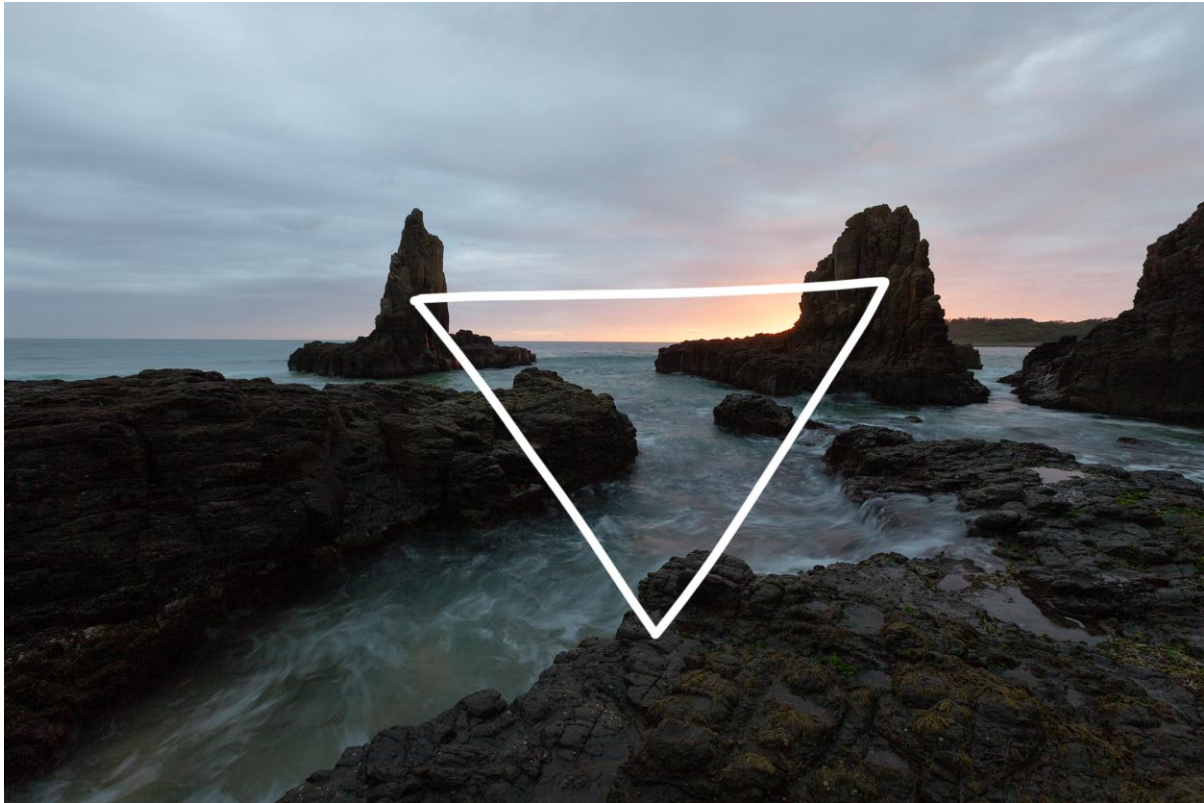
Above: This example image has three main points of interest. For the POI in the foreground, I picked the area where my eye is drawn to the most because of the rocks/water texture contrast and the dark/light contrast combined.

### Step 3: Draw Your Imaginary Triangle

This is where the magic happens.

Imagine lines connecting all three points to form a triangle.

You're not actually drawing anything - you're just visualizing the triangular shape these three points create within your frame.

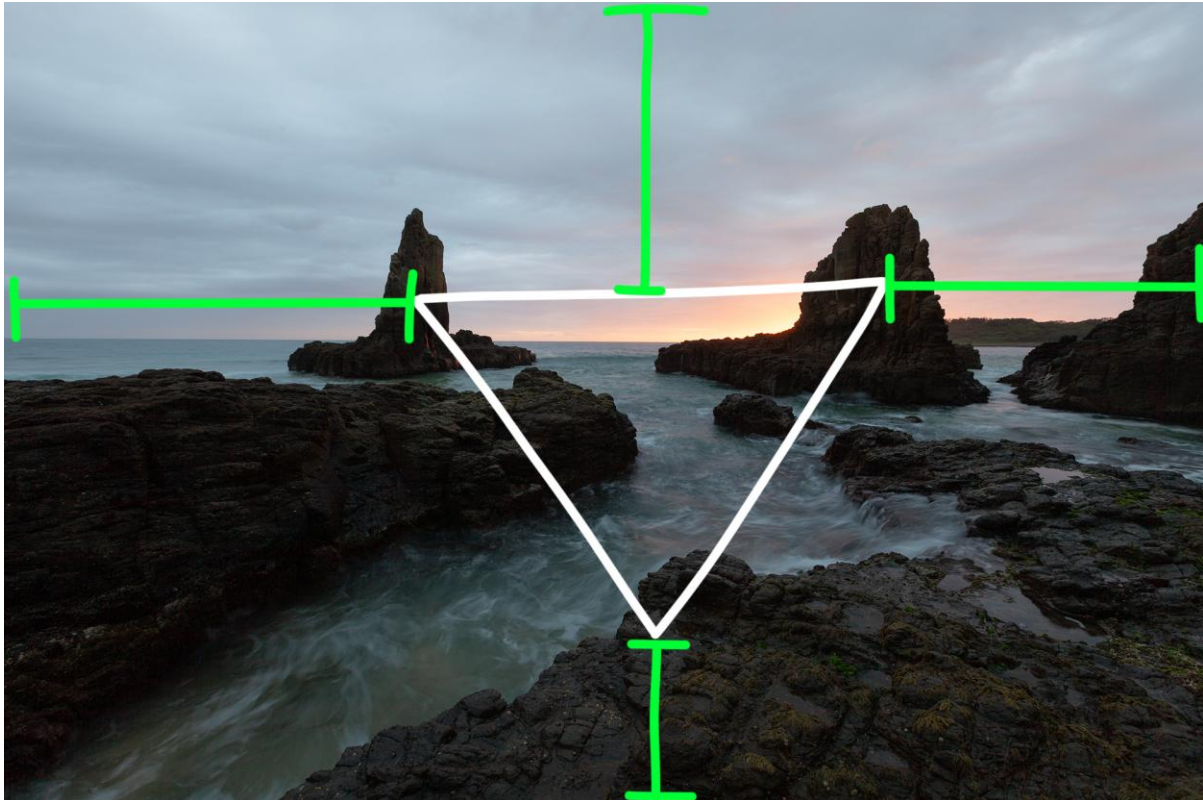


### Step 4: Judge the Balance

Now look at the triangle you've created and ask:

- **Is it evenly distributed across the frame?**
- **Are any points too close to the edge?**
- **Are the points too clustered together?**
- **Does one side of the frame feel heavier than the other?**
- **Does the triangle spread nicely across the frame?**

You'll instinctively *feel* whether it's balanced or not. Trust that feeling.



After some practice, you will be able to visualise this in camera but for demonstration purposes (and practice purposes) we can analyse it accurately by drawing lines to mark the positioning of the triangle within the frame.

From this we can see the triangle is slightly unbalanced, being a bit low and to the right.

### **Step 5: Adjust Your Composition**

If the triangle feels unbalanced, you have several options:

#### **Option A: Move yourself**

- Step left, right, forward, or back
- Change your shooting height

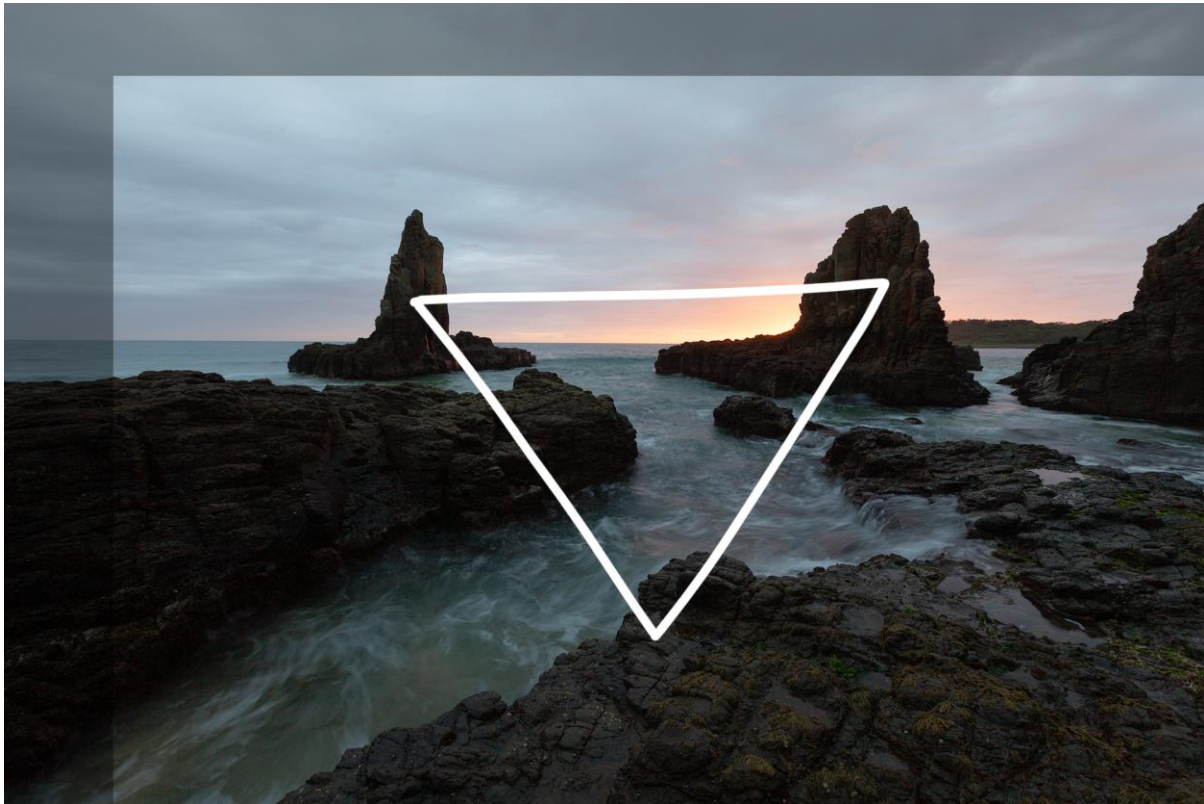
#### **Option B: Change your framing**

- Zoom in or out
- Switch between landscape and portrait orientation
- Adjust how much space you're giving each element

#### **Option C: Change via editing**

- Crop the frame to re-balance the triangle

Returning to the previous example, see how a simple crop improves the balance and therefore overall feel of the composition:



## Part 4: What If There Aren't Exactly 3 Points of Interest?

You've probably been wondering: *"What if my scene doesn't have exactly three points of interest?"*

Great question. Let me show you how to adapt the Triangle Method for different scenarios.

### When You Only Have 2 Points of Interest

This is actually one of the most common situations in landscape photography - and one of the most useful applications of the method.

Think about classic landscape compositions:

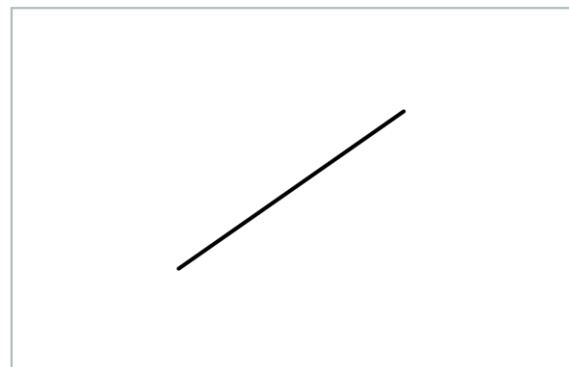
- Rock in foreground, mountain in background
- Flower in foreground, sunset in background
- Architectural element in foreground, cityscape in background

### The Two-Point Version: The Counterbalance Principle

When you only have two points, you're not creating a triangle - you're creating a **line**. But the principle is the same: visualize that line and judge whether it creates balance.



**Unbalanced**



**Balanced**

The rule for two points is simple:

**One point should counterbalance the other.**

This means:

- If one point is low in the frame, the other should be high
- If one point is left, the other should be right
- The distance from each point to its nearest frame edge should feel proportional



**Good example** - foreground element bottom left, background element top right with line between them showing diagonal balance



**Bad example** - both elements on same side/level of frame

## When Two Points Work Best

The two-point approach is ideal when:

- You have one strong foreground subject and one strong background subject
- The scene is relatively simple and adding a third point would complicate it
- You want to emphasize the relationship between two specific elements
- You're shooting tighter compositions with longer focal lengths

## When You Have 4 or More Points of Interest

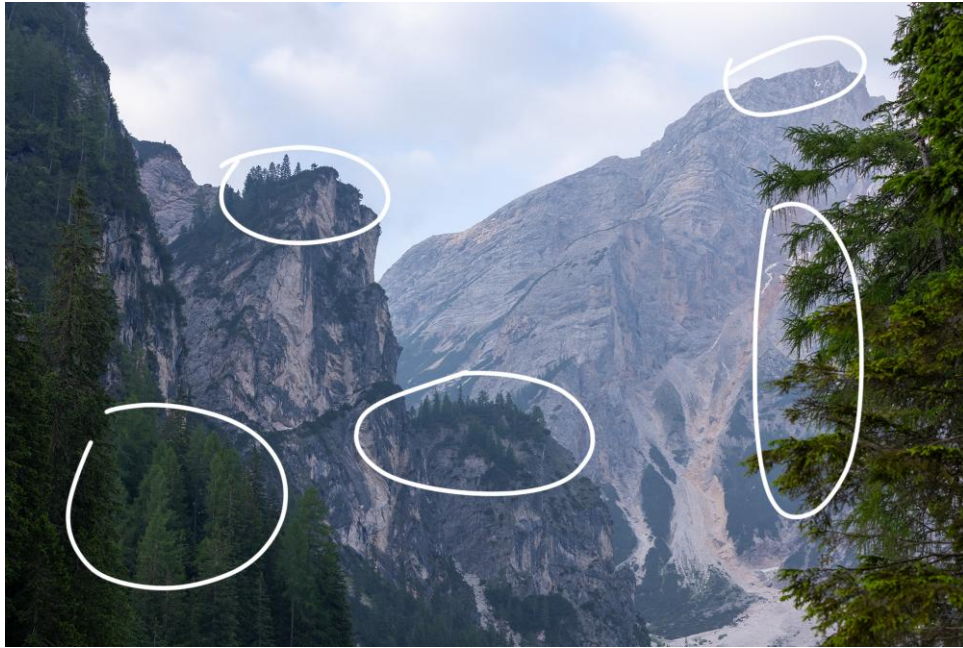
Sometimes scenes are more complex, with 4, 5, or even more elements competing for attention.

One way to approach this is to draw connecting lines between them, but instead of creating a triangle it's whatever shape that encompasses all points. Then you can judge the balance of that shape in the same way you would with a triangle.

However, if the points of interest are placed such that they don't create an easy-to-read shape, then you can consider what shape can be drawn by excluding one or two "problem" points...

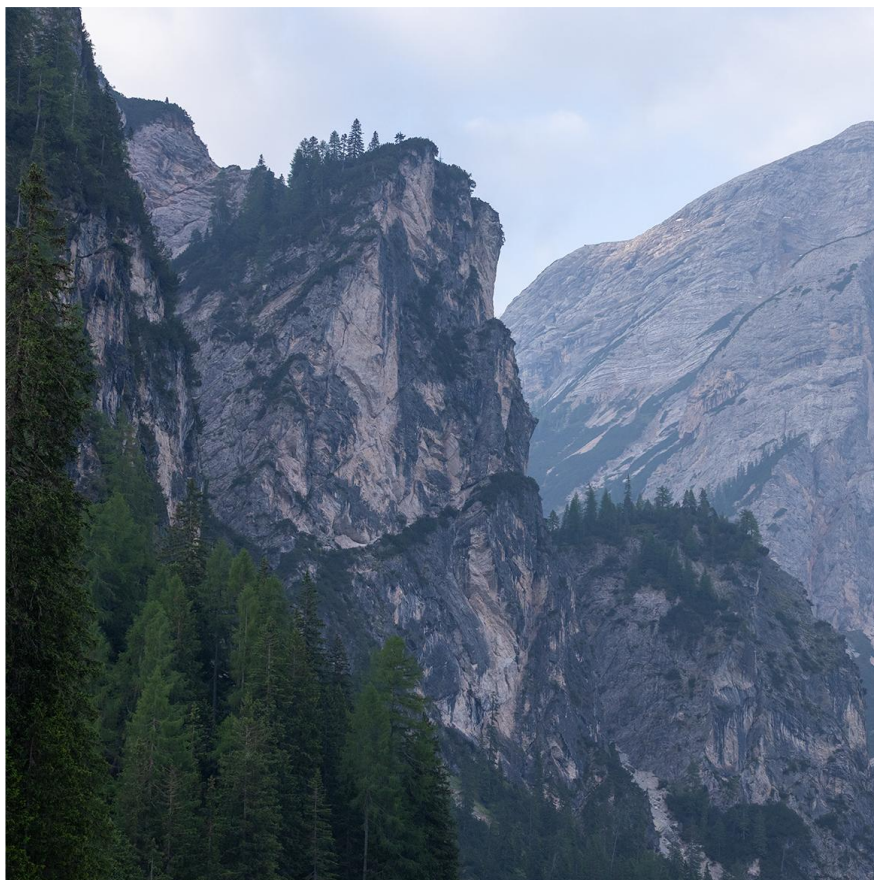
If the shape you've draw after excluding some points works and is balanced, then you have some options:

- **Simplify by zooming in** to exclude those excluded elements from the frame
- **Consider if distracting elements can be edited out** either with cloning or reducing their visual impact (darkening / lowering contrast / reducing saturation etc)
- **Change position** to eliminate distracting elements
- **Shoot multiple compositions** focusing on different sets of compositional elements (you don't always have to shoot wide open)
- **Try a different compositional formula or method.** The Triangle Method works a lot of the time, but no rule or guideline is guaranteed to suit every scene.



The above scene is far too busy and disjointed with many points of interest (circled).

A crop to eliminate two of the five works wonders for the balance (remember, there's no rule to say you must always stick to the original aspect ratio when cropping!)



Cropped, this scene becomes so much cleaner and more balanced.

## When You Can't Find 2 Points of Interest

On the flip side, sometimes you're looking at a scene and struggling to identify even two clear focal points. This usually happens when:

- You have a beautiful sky but empty foreground
- You have an expansive landscape but nothing specific to anchor on
- The light is beautiful but there are no distinctive features

### The "Portrait Approach" Solution

When you can't find multiple points of interest, **pick one subject and create a portrait of it.**

Compose as you would a portrait of a person:

- Fill more of the frame with your single subject
- Consider its "posture" and orientation
- Give it space to "breathe" in the direction it's "facing"

This is especially effective when:

- Shooting with longer focal lengths (50mm+)
- Light is illuminating one specific thing beautifully
- The wider scene is too busy or bland



In this case, you're not using the Triangle Method at all - and that's perfectly fine. Not every photo needs multiple focal points. Sometimes simplicity wins.

## When the Triangle Method Doesn't Apply

The Triangle Method is powerful, but it's not for every photo:

### Skip it when:

- Shooting abstract patterns or textures
- Creating intentionally minimalist compositions
- Photographing symmetrical subjects where balance is inherent
- You have one perfect subject and nothing else matters

### Use it when:

- You have multiple elements to arrange
- You're feeling uncertain about composition
- Something feels "off" but you can't pinpoint why
- You're shooting classic landscapes with multiple points of interest

## Trust the Triangle

Composition doesn't have to be complicated.

You don't need to memorize a dozen different rules or wonder which one applies to your current scene.

The Triangle Method gives you a simple, visual way to see what's working and what's not - and adjust accordingly.

Here's what I want you to take away:

**1. Balance is visual, not mathematical.** You don't need to measure distances or calculate ratios. If it *feels* balanced when you look at your triangle, it probably is.

**2. The triangle is a tool, not a rule.** Some scenes will naturally form perfect triangles. Others work better with two points or even one. That's fine. The method still helps you see what's working.

**3. Three points is the foundation, but stay flexible.** Master the classic three-point triangle first, but don't force it on every scene. Some of your best compositions might use just two points in a simple foreground-background arrangement.

**4. Speed comes with practice.** The first few times, you'll consciously work through the steps. Within a few tries, you'll be seeing triangles (and lines, and single subjects) automatically.

**5. It works with everything else.** The Triangle Method doesn't replace leading lines, the rule of thirds, or any other compositional concept. It enhances them by giving you a way to check your overall balance.

Most importantly: **this method gives you confidence.**

No more standing there paralyzed, hoping you've got the shot. No more getting home and being disappointed.

You'll *know* when you've nailed it - because you'll see the balanced triangle in your viewfinder. Or you'll see two perfectly counterbalanced points. Or you'll recognize that this scene calls for a single-subject approach.

## Next Steps:

If you found this guide helpful, you'll love the full set which includes 9 more to give you the ultimate compositional toolkit.

The full set includes:

- The Flow Method
- The Weight & Balance Method
- The Depth Method
- The Energy Method
- The Edge Control Method
- The Minimalist Method
- The Scale & Perspective Method
- The Colour Contrast Method
- The Triangle Method (this guide)

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