

Street Photography Composition Tips: My Personal Approach

What's poppin, people? It's Dante.

Today I'm going to be teaching you my **top three street photography composition tips**. Ultimately, over the past decade of traveling the world and practicing my photography, I've mastered the art of composition.

In this post, I'll be sharing:

- Contact sheets
- Behind-the-scenes videos
- Frame breakdowns from around the world and right here in Philly

Hopefully by the end, you'll have a better understanding of how to create *stronger compositions* out there on the streets.

Composition Is Simple

A photographer is **responsible for where they position their physical body** in relationship to the subject and the background. Meaning...

Photography is a visual game and a physical pleasure.

We're not just looking with our eyes—we're moving our *bodies*. You've got to be quick on your toes and **react instinctively**.

Intuition Over Rules

You're not out there looking at life like a bunch of leading lines or rule-of-thirds grids.

You're out there **responding**.

Composition comes from your intuition. It's not something you're consciously seeking.

You respond to life *as it unfolds*, prepared with your camera and two feet, ready to *move your body in relationship to the moment and the background*.

Case Study: Palestinian Boy and the Wall

Location: West Bank

Moment: A Palestinian boy throwing a baby stroller across the wall separating Israel and Palestine.

At first, I was photographing flat on, relating people directly to the wall. But it was too flat. So what did I do?

I worked the scene.

I didn't leave until the moment left me.

I moved my body around and created a new angle. By doing this, the **leading lines appeared**, the **shadow was revealed**, and the image became **more mysterious and impactful**.

Photography is both a visual game and a physical pleasure.

Case Study: Watermelon Scene in Napoli

In Napoli, I saw men gathered by the Mediterranean, slicing open a watermelon. The colors, the light, the backdrop—it was all there.

But here's the trick:

- I **set my stage** using the water as a clean background.
- I chose a **top-down angle** to anchor the swimmer in the middle of the frame.
- I related the moment of slicing the watermelon *to that swimmer* for depth.

A visual feast should guide the eye from foreground to background and back again.

The red of the watermelon created a *simple triangular flow* through the image. It might look complex, but it's all just **physical movement** and **intentional framing**.

Case Study: The Wheelie Kid in Philly

A boy does a wheelie through the frame. It happens fast. You either get it, or you don't.

I noticed the **skyscrapers in the background**, so I **dropped low** to separate his outstretched legs from the skyline.

- Two main elements: the boy and the buildings.
- One simple action: get low and shoot.

Composition doesn't come from your eyes—it comes through your gut.



Case Study: Bus Stop Layering

Location: Philadelphia

Stage: The bus stop.

This place is perfect:

- People come and go.
- You've got static and moving subjects.
- There's structure, background, and flow.

I noticed the **light** on the bus and the **circular sign** in the sky. That was my starting point.

Then I:

1. Positioned myself with that background.
2. Plugged in the silhouette in the middle ground.
3. Waited for the third subject to walk into the light.

Set your stage. Let the photo come to you.

You'll see it clearly in the contact sheet: **micro-adjustments** of my body over and over again until the frame came together.



My Three Tips for Stronger Composition

1. Respond Quickly and Intuitively

Life is *chaotic*. You can't control it. But you *can* put order into your frame.

- Don't overthink.
- Trust your gut.
- Move fast.

To put order to the chaos, you must respond intuitively to fleeting moments.

2. Observe and Be Patient

Great frames come to those who wait. Especially at bus stops, markets, street corners—places where stories unfold.

- Set your stage.
- Lock in your background.
- Wait for your foreground to fall into place.

Look at the world like a visual puzzle, and solve it one piece at a time.

3. Hunt with Speed and Precision

Sometimes you set the stage, other times you're in full **hunter mode**.

- Be light on your feet.
- Be fast with your shutter.
- Recognize background-foreground relationships instantly.

Street photography is the art of responding with your whole body, not just your eyes.

Bonus Tip: Stick to One Camera and One Lens

Seriously. This is *huge*.

Switching gear all the time only slows you down. If you want to build muscle memory, develop instinct, and improve your composition:

Use one camera, one lens.

Eventually, the camera becomes an extension of your **mind**, **eye**, and **body**. That's when the magic starts.

Final Thoughts

- Work the scene.
- Move your body.
- Trust your gut.
- Set your stage.
- Solve the visual puzzle.

These are the building blocks of strong composition. It's not complicated. It's not theoretical. It's physical, instinctual, and deeply satisfying.

If this helped you, check out my site:

👉 [**dantesisofo.com**](https://dantesisofo.com)

I also have a growing [**YouTube playlist**](#) with more lectures like this one.

Thank you for reading. See you in the next one. Peace 🕊️