Teaching Photography: Creating Photos

You've learned the basics of composition. Now how are you going to take pictures?

1. **People pictures.** There are 2 main kinds, but you can take any of these suggestions and make your photos as formal or informal as you please.
   a. **Portraits.** There are a few things to remember about posed photos.
      ➢ The eyes have it. When people see a picture of a person, we are immediately drawn to the eyes.   Just as in other rules regarding composition, we do not want to create a flat picture. The eyes should never be perfectly level. Having your subject's head tilted just *slightly* to one side will make the photo more intriguing.
      ➢ Get close. Is there more than one person in the picture? Then they likely know each other. Sitting side-by-side on two chairs isn't particularly inviting. Niether is standing side-by-side like soldiers. Create some intimacy by having them get near each other.
      ➢ No mug shots! Offensive straight-on pictures are best saved for the offenders. Just like the eyes, you want to have bodies angled slightly toward the center of the photo to create interest. If you have multiple subjects, this is especially important. It can be very difficult to get a large group in the frame if everyone is directly facing the camera.
      ➢ Use levels. Again, this is to create interest, but it also helps with large groups. A pair of people in a picture can use levels. Let grandma sit in the chair (always on the edge, NEVER sunk back in) while the grandson stands slightly behind her near the corner of the chair with his hand lightly resting on her shoulder. Have a *gigantic* group? Line them up by height. Have the taller ones stand on the ground level. The shorter ones stand in front of them. Then all the middlers can sit in chairs in front or line up on the steps behind them.
   b. **Casual shots or candids.** This is the type of photo where you catch people just being people, taking a picture of them doing whatever it is they're doing. Since these are usually just for fun, you can pretty much just throw all of the above rules out the window.
2. **Scavenger hunts.** There are many varieties of scavenger hunts. They all involve locating an object and photographing it. You could:
   a. Give hunters a list of things to photograph. (Ex: Something blue, something that makes you happy, a church steeple, things that create a square, the letter "s".)
   b. Give them photographs of things nearby that they need to locate by looking at the picture, then they need to take a photo of the actual object to prove that they've found it. (This one is especially fun if you give them photos of extreme close-ups. The curve of the letter "s" on a stop sign for example.)
3. **Trick photography.** The secret to trick photography is all about perception. The eye sees the most obvious thing, even if it doesn't make sense at first. Try these:
   a. **The human pretzel.** The illusion is that your subject is so flexible that he/she can lay on their stomach and have their feet on the ground on either side of their head. This is a 2-person trick. One subject must lay on their stomach on the ground. The second must lay on their back on top of the first person with their knees bent so they're on either side of the under-person's head. The photo is taken at ground level to complete the deception.

b. **Tiny people.** This series is all about perception created by distance. One subject stands far away from the camera while another subject stands near. The person in the foreground will appear to be a giant that is toying with a doll-sized person. The interactions can be endless:
   ➢ Giant holding out hand palm up with little person standing, dancing, sitting on it.
   ➢ Giant holding person by head as if to drop him into a glass, eat him, or dangle him over a cliff.
   ➢ Close-up of giant's profile with mouth open to take a bite of person or have person standing on giant's tongue.
   ➢ Giant with foot raised as if to stomp on cowering person underfoot (again take photo at ground level).
   ➢ Mental floss- have two tiny people doing tug-of-war with a rope that is positioned on either side of the giant's head so that it runs through his ears.
   ➢ Use your imagination!
c. **Splat!** Create the image that a skier has just slammed into a tree by having them sit on a stool behind a tree with their arms and legs splayed out to the side.
d. **Wall Climber.** Use a rocky path or brick sidewalk to give the illusion that someone is climbing it. Position hands and feet like they're gripping the edges of the stone, and take the photo from straight above shooting down.
e. **Headless!** 1 person sits on a ledge/ table with their back to the camera and their head tilted all the way down so they appear headless. Another person squats down behind the table and faces the camera with their chin resting on the table next to their "headless body". The "body" (person #1) then rests their hand on top of their disembodied head (presumably to keep it from rolling away).

4. **Night photos.** It's fun to play with light. Try any of these (some can be done inside in the dark):
a. Paint with light. With your shutter held open, use a flashlight to "paint". You can make words, squiggles, shapes, anything you please.
b. Outline a person. Use your flashlight to outline them, and they'll be slightly illuminated in the process.
c. After painting with light, you could use the flash at the last moment to have the whole photo illuminated.
d. Twins. Use the flash several times on a moving object to create more than one image of the same subject.
e. Ghost house. Use a timed exposure to photograph a house. The result will be a glowing effect, making it look haunted.

5. **Be different.** Give a group of people a list of subjects to photograph. Tell them to be creative, and later compare the images. How are they different? Why did you do it from that angle? What made you see it that way? For example: 5 people can photograph the same taxidermied fish. You could get results like:
   • a close up of a fin
   • straight on
   • just the head
   • straight into the mouth
   • close up of the tail

Anne Rosenau   Foto Follies 2009