



iPHONE PHOTOGRAPHY – Week 3 Black & White

## **Timelessness**

One of the most common reasons people want to shoot in black and white today is because it lends a certain timeless quality to the images.



Grand Central Station, NY

Black and White Photography is deceptively difficult. Although you don't have as many variables to juggle when you remove color, you're creating a new challenge instead: taking powerful photos without an important tool at your disposal!

If you shoot regular photos in color, you might be able to rely upon vivid clouds at sunset in order to capture a striking image. Or, for portrait photography, you can make your subject more lifelike by depicting the color of their eyes, hair, and skin with a greater sense of realism.

With black and white photography, you need to work with light, shadow, and the elements of composition to tell a story and capture the emotions you have in mind. Although that takes practice, it is worth the effort. Some messages are simply meant to be conveyed in monochrome.

Many times black and white helps you develop a different perspective from what you are used to seeing, which nurtures your photographic eye

Color is very powerful and tends to dominate a photograph so much that it's difficult to see other elements such as tone, contrast, texture, shape, form and quality of light. Experienced photographers instinctively see these things, regardless of whether they work predominantly in color or black and white. But you're just starting out, you may need some assistance to do so, and working in black and white photography will help you. Black and white helps to narrow your focus to the elements of the image.



Henri Cartier-Bresson



Michael Kenna

When you remove color, you not only isolate the different elements, you are compelled to find how they relate to each other. This helps you explore and create different ways to tell your story.

When you take away color, you remove what your viewer is used to seeing. Now you are responsible with finding the other elements in the scene and figuring out how to use them to convey what you want to depict.

Black-and-white photography doesn't have the luxury of relying on color create separation between elements within a frame. Instead, consider contrasting light, negative spaces, textures, lines and shapes. Focusing on these elements helps to further our understanding of what we're shooting and what we're seeing.



## Reasons for shooting in Black & White

Color is the most obvious element of composition- but shape, line and texture can separate a nice picture from something that's truly special. Thinking in black-and-white will train your eye to spot the full potential of the scene or portrait

Removing color Helps Focus On Composition – black and white compositional elements do away with the distraction of color. Elements within the frame can relate in a way that might otherwise have been throw off because of color

B&W Eliminates distractions

This can contribute to other elements or details being lost or taken for granted in photography.

When you shoot in black and white, you challenge yourself to remove the distraction of color.

These include color cast and differences in color temperature (ambient light sources), as well as specific colorful elements that are strong, which may reside in the background or take away from your story.

With black and white, distracting colors are now translated into shades of gray that add to your image.



Robert Doisneau

Black and white photography is often used for storytelling in travel and street photography. Monochrome in some genres connects, enhances and strengthens emotions and moods.

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# Elements of the Black and White Photos

Contrast

Tone

Shadow

Shape

Texture

Pattern

Form

Composition

Emotion

Light



Bill Brandt

## Contrast

Many people think that contrast is just the difference between the brightest and darkest portions of a photograph.

Instead, contrast also includes a component of proximity. The difference in brightness between two objects is exaggerated when they appear side by side.

A photo with high contrast gives a sense of dynamic intensity – because of the dark shadows. Photographers like adding contrast to black and white photos because it helps the images stand out.

Low contrast photos don't attract as much attention, but their softer, muted quality can work equally well. Some photos have just a few silver mid-tones, and their subtlety is what makes them work so well.



Brassai

## Tones (Dark and Light)

Contrast and tone are very similar concerns for the monochrome photographer.

However, there is one "tone related" concept that is super important and has little to do with contrast.

Lighting plays a huge factor in black and white tone, because it raises and lowers the brightness values of the original colors in the scene.

Bright light on a deep red dress is going to produce a lighter gray tone conversion. A lower intensity light on a deep red dress is going to produce a darker gray tone conversion. The lighting creates the highlights, shadows, and everything in-between. If there is a poor tonal range- try adjusting the lighting by moving the camera, subject, light source, or all three!



Brassai

You must train yourself to “see” in tone (ignore the colors in front of your camera) if you want to become a pro at creating better black and white photos. One of the simplest black and white photography tips for learning to “see in tone” is turn your iPhone into black and white.

Not all photographers use the word “tone” in the same way. Here, tone means the underlying brightness, darkness, and shades of gray that appear in an image.

Tones are the cornerstone of every black and white image. If you have ever heard the phrase “high-key” or “low-key” in photography, you’ve probably seen examples of tones taken to the extreme.

Although most photos are neither especially bright nor especially dark – they’re somewhere in between – you still need to pay attention to tones when you take a photo. That’s because, just like contrast, tones can send a powerful message about your photo’s mood.



## Shadow

One of the first things to remember when shooting black and white is that shadows have an out-sized impact. They are no longer just darker regions of a photograph – they are major elements of composition, and sometimes your subject itself.

Your treatment of shadows in black and white photography affects every other aspect of how a photo appears. Are the shadows black without any details? That signals a feeling of intensity and emptiness. Or, on the other hand, if your shadows are subtle and detailed, it may make for a more complex photograph overall



Alan Schaller

As much as you should be aware of light, you should also be aware of shadows.

When you create a black and white image, you've taken away a key element that creates interest in the human brain- color. You now have to find other ways to attract the brain's attention. One of the ways that you can accomplish that is the use of shadows. Shadows attract attention, and they are visually attractive. Points of contrast always attract a person's eyes.

The shape of shadows can be changed. Maybe, a change in the shadow will strengthen your black and white composition. Maybe positioning the shadow differently inside the frame will benefit the contrast and tonal range?

Resist the temptation to make all of your shadows absolute black. When our eyes see a shadow, we generally see "into" the shadow. It's rare that a shadow appears absolute black to our eyes. Sometimes, a very little bit, of absolute black is fine in a full tonal range and balanced contrast photograph. But shadowed areas should reveal some ..... By contrasting the mid-tones, lights and darks within an image it helps to creates visual interest.



Bill Brandt

## Shape

Shape is definitely a part of shadows. However, shadows aren't always about shape! Shape can become a defining element of a highly successful black and white photograph- anywhere in the tonal range. While shadows are tied to shape... Shape is often tied to contrast. It's contrast that makes shape useful.

Without contrast, in black and white photography, a shape can virtually disappear next to its tonal neighbor. People are drawn to shapes automatically. If there is no color to an object, the only way we recognize it is by its shape.

This isn't true for color photography; shape can be defined by color. This is a necessary skill for you as a B&W photographer- learning to see "shape" because of contrast and tone.



Michael Kenna

One of the reasons that shape works so well in photography, or any art form, is because it is a core survival and training instinct in our brain. We evaluate everything by shape. Think about how important the use of shape is to road signs!

It takes practice to become proficient at seeing shape. You don't want to just see the shapes that everybody sees. You want to see the shapes that everyone else misses. That will make your black and white photographs stand out from the crowd!

Learn to evaluate the value of a shape based on contrast and tone – not color. This also takes practice.

Shapes, geometric or organic, add interest. They are defined by boundaries, such as a lines or color, and they are often used to emphasis. With black and white photography, there is no color to make an image more familiar (or more abstract, if that's your goal). So, shapes are especially important – they're one of the primary ways for a viewer to make sense of a photograph

Everything is ultimately a shape, so you must always think in terms of how the various elements of your photo are creating shapes, and how those shapes are interacting.



## Texture

Alan Schaller

Black and white photography strips away the distractions and really focuses a viewer on what you have left behind. If you leave something that looks out of the ordinary (and not purposeful), or unrealistic- it will get noticed!

Remember how shadows are tied to shape, and shape is tied to contrast. Texture is tied to light and shadow. We don't need light and shadow to "physically feel" textures with our fingers. But, to convey texture visually, we absolutely must have light and shadow! It's those two elements that "define" texture in a photograph (or any 2-dimensional artwork).

How do you create texture in black & white photography? Texture is revealed when a light source "skims" across a textured surface. The lower the angle- from the light source to subject- the more that the light will create highlights and shadows across the textured surface- visually revealing it.

Physical surface texture must be present for the light source to reveal it. A low angled light source will reveal very little texture on a smooth surfaced wooden table. That (same) angled light source will reveal much texture when shined across a piece of shag rug carpeting.



Alan Schaller

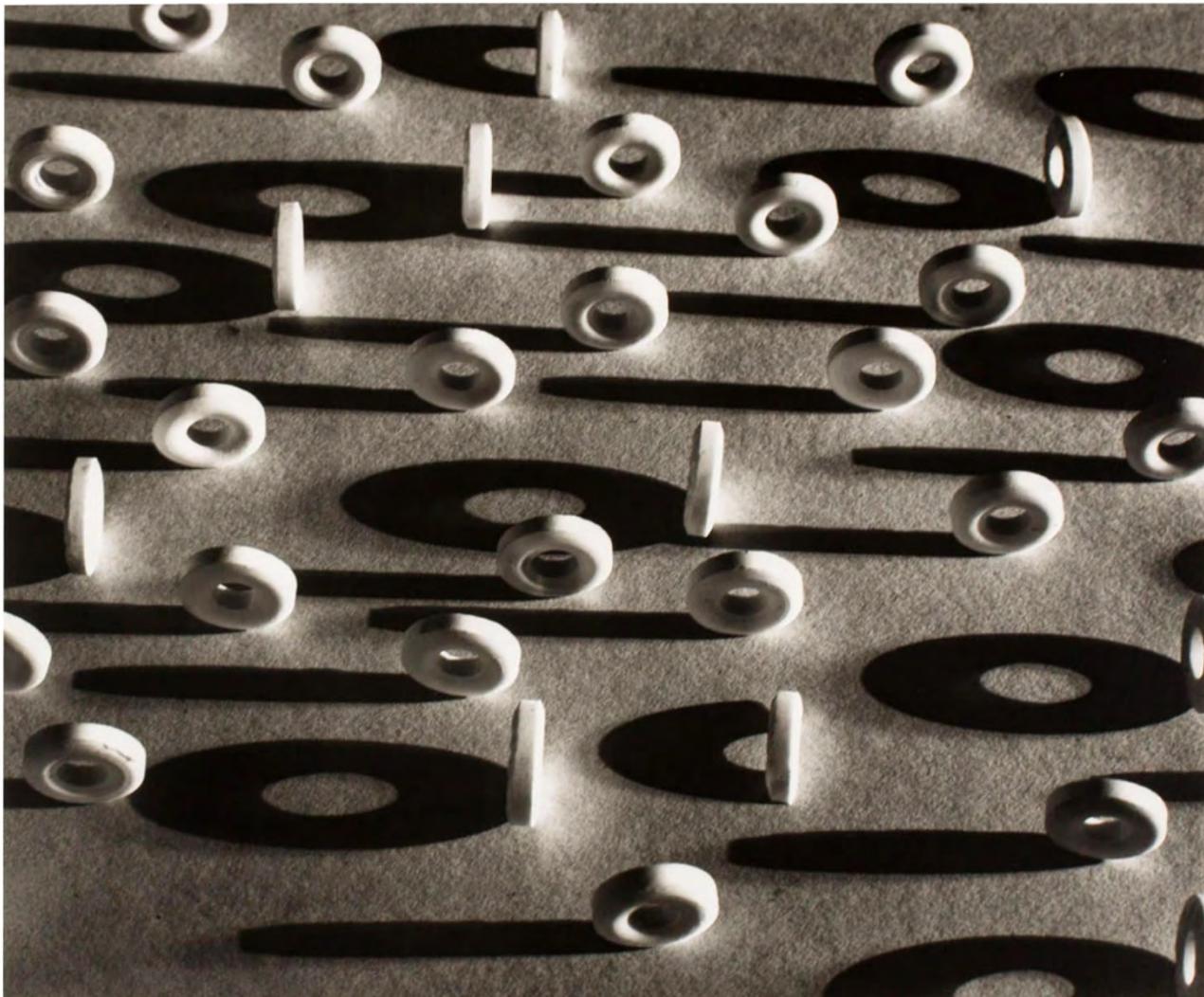
Texture refers to the visual quality of the surface of an object, revealed through differences in shape, tone, color, and depth

Textures and patterns brings life and vibrance to images that would otherwise appear flat and uninspiring

Even the most beautiful textures will look unflattering in the wrong kind of light

While shapes create the “big picture” of an image, texture fills in the rest. And, like all the elements of black and white photography we have covered so far, the textures you capture have the power to affect a photo's mood and emotions.

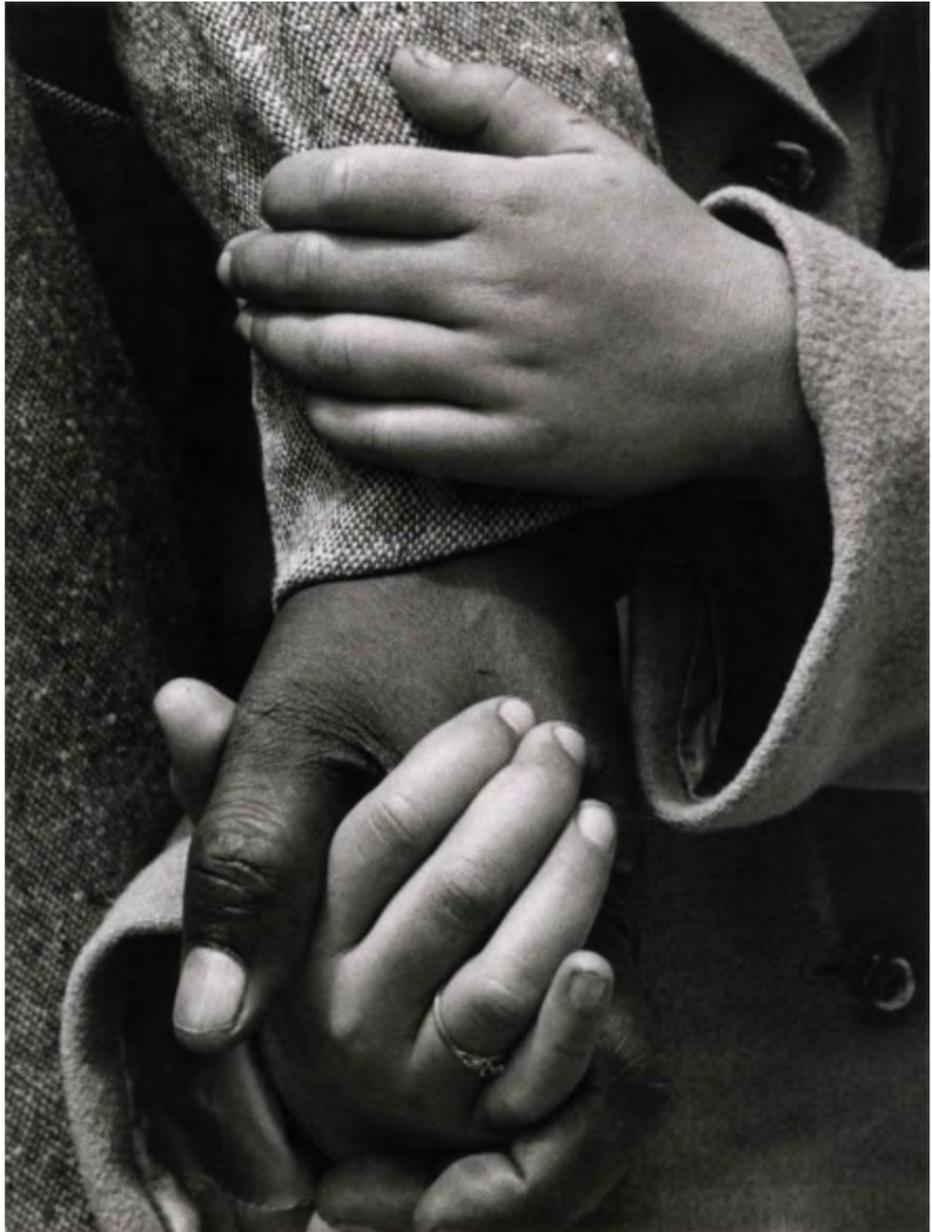
When you can't rely on color to form the emotional backbone of an image, texture is even more crucial. It simply has a major impact on the way your black and white photos feel



Ruth Berhard

## Patterns

Look for patterns, A good photo typically has some pattern to it. Something that makes the viewers' eyes follow the pattern and look for more patterns. Patterns can be rocks on the ground, blades of grass, cars going from left to right, and any other repeating object, texture, or design. For example, capturing patterns in black and white street photography can make your images distinct and make the main subject really grab attention. Patterns work really well in black and white photography because there are no colors to distract you.



## Form

Ruth Bernard

Form refers to when shape takes on three dimensions. Form is created by shadows and highlights on an object in the photograph an image that looks three dimensional evokes feelings of presence. If you can make a viewer believe that she can reach into the photo and touch the subject, then you have effectively captured the form of that subject.



Henri Cartier-Bresson

## Composition

Composition is important no matter if the image is black & white or color. It's the "tools" of composition that can vary based on which medium (color or B&W) that you're choosing. A good tool of composition for a color photograph may not apply to a monochrome photograph of the same scene. This can be very important, especially if your plan is to convert the color image to a black and white image in post-production.



Henri Cartier-Bresson

The best photos tend to have an underlying sense of purpose – a hint that the photographer deliberately captured the scene in this particular way, rather than another. It is deliberate and well thought out. The image has structure and order. It isn't just a snapshot. In other words, it has a strong composition. --- elements of your photo will change in black and white versus color

It is crucial to compose your photos well no matter what, color or black and white. This isn't something that changes when you convert a photo. Still, when you take pictures in black and white, it helps to think about the scene from a monochrome mindset. When you do, you'll often find yourself making different decisions about your composition – and that can turn a decent shot into a portfolio piece. A lack of colors adds to the sensation, making viewers spend a moment longer looking at the photo to recognize what's going on.



Alan Schaller

## Light

You can use light intensity to draw your audience's eye to important areas of your frame, so whatever it is you want them to look at, make sure it's the brightest lit object, area, or person in the shot.

Use shadows to create texture, since there isn't color there to break up the visuals and make things look interesting in your shot, shadow becomes a huge asset. Use shadows to add texture and depth otherwise, your frame is going to look rather flat. Shadows are dependent on the direction of light in your scene.

Light quality refers to how the light "behaves," how it affects and interacts with your subject and its surroundings. "Hard" and "soft" light are key concepts of light quality. So, since you're shooting in black and white, light quality becomes extremely important to your visual storytelling.

You can forget all about color temperature. You're not shooting in color, so don't worry about the color temperature of your bulbs and fixtures, because it's not going to register anyway.

## Tips to Remember

Creating beautiful black and white photography is both fun and rewarding. It does take practice learning to see in tone versus color. The black and white filter function on your phone , will really help speed up that process. In addition, don't forget your contrast, tone, shadow, shape, and texture, pattern and light and composition.

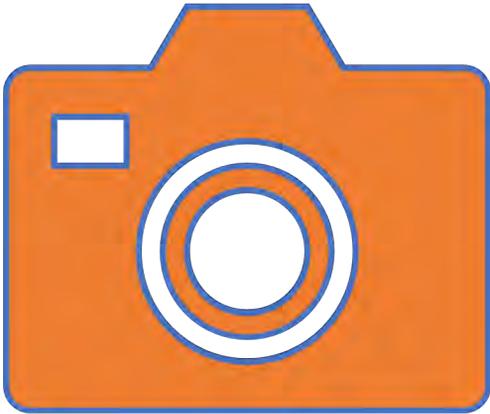
Since color is no longer an element, light becomes more dramatic and can produce dark shadows and intriguing silhouettes. Use this to your advantage. Create drama by framing your viewer's eye, look for lines that draw attention to a captivating focal point. Focus on contrasting elements in your shot. Play with light to add depth to forms and shapes; practice shooting architectural subjects, people, landscapes and details. Black and white photography is the practice of mindfulness. It challenges you to see your subjects in a way that color could never do.

Your mind has to switch to look at highlights and shadows, tonal ranges, textures, and contrast. This is how you get that wow factor and the best out of your images.

Naturally, there are certain subjects that tend to work better than others in black and white; two in particular are landscapes and portraits. If this is your first time shooting in black and white, then these are great subjects to try out.

Black and white photography needs a little shifting of your focus and attention. With color, you looked at different ways to use color to tell your story. Now, contrast, highlights and things like texture become more important.

You still have the ability to shoot in color and edit the image for black and white plus with the I feature you can shoot in black & white to revert to color but for this exercise I want you to only shoot in black and white.



# Project

For this week's project you can only shoot in black and white – any subject but it has to be in black and white.

Do not shoot in color and convert to black in white.

Your goal is to use all of the compositional tools and elements to take beautiful black and white images.

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Ruth Bernhard <https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/constituents/ruth-bernhard?all/all/all/all/0>

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A great resource for discovering other amazing photographers is  
Magnum Photos <https://www.magnumphotos.com/>