

Total time:
2-5 hours



Skill Points:

- Learning what negative space is
- Discovering why negative space is so effective
- A tip for judging the effectiveness of negative space in a photograph

LEARN THE POSITIVE OF THE NEGATIVE



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Negative space is the empty, or unoccupied, space surrounding the subject in a photo that helps to define it. It is one of the least understood art concepts with photographers. Simple empty space does not signify the proper use of negative space.

KEY LESSON: The true use of negative space should support and add content value to the subject. This content value can be compositional, storytelling, or mood setting. Negative space can also be thought of as 'breathing room'. When composing with negative space ask yourself, "Is this empty space contributing to my shot, or is it simply just there?"



Negative storytelling: - *Man on mountaintop*

This is about as wonderful an example of 'negative space' used in a photo as you will ever come across. The man is the subject. However, the negative space tells the story of the man. We see the tops of the clouds in the negative space, and we then realize that the man is up high and a large expanse exists below him. The negative space tells us- he is on top of the world.

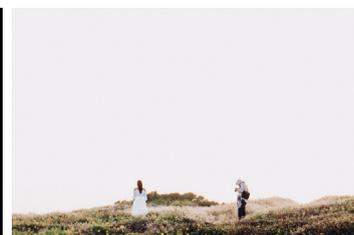


Isolating the positive: - *Girl and landscape*

Painters, Illustrators, & Graphic Designers often use negative space to separate a subject from its surroundings. This gives the subject breathing room. When a viewer 'feels' this breathing room, it causes them to relax, and they then tend to spend more time staring at the composition. This is a well-documented trick, and you should use it.

The thin line between excellent and poor use:

The flower photo creates a graphic isolation of the subject; it provides a compositional *boost*. The second photo doesn't provide any compositional, storytelling, or mood setting advantages. Here is a trick to judge the value of negative space. Look at the image through squinted eyes. Does the subject, and the negative space, stand out separately and yet together? If so, it's a good use of negative space. The 'Couple' shot (on the right) doesn't pass the test.



ACTION ASSIGNMENT!

- 1- Go out on a photo shoot and search for interesting locations with negative space- typical places to look would be landscapes and architecture. Try to compose some photographs where the negative space is essential to the subject's story. (Think of man on mountaintop.)
- 2- Go out on a photo shoot and located a strong negative space frame. Use it to create some interesting photos. (Think of girl and landscape.)
- 3- Create a strong graphic shot using a simple subject and a white, black, or solid colored background as negative space. (Think of the flower.) Don't let the negative space overwhelm the subject!

HOW DID YOU DO?

- Did you create some solid storytelling shots using negative space as a key component?
- Did you try the squint test with your results?
- Do you now have a better understanding of negative space and how it works?

READY! SET! GO! **ACTION CARDS - COMPOSITION: NEGATIVE SPACE**



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