

# How to Use Radial Composition in Photography to Create Amazing Images!

Radial composition (also known as radial balance) is a tool used to influence balance and impact within a photograph. In this article, we'll look at some of the ins and outs of radial composition in photography.



## What is radial composition?

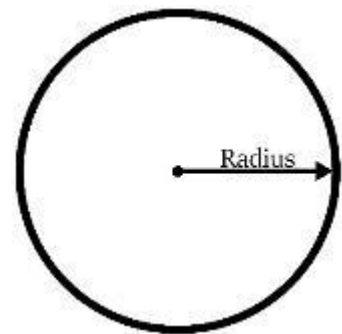
The term *radius* refers to the distance between the centre of a circle and its outer edge. Therefore, radial composition means imagery that radiates outward from a particular point.

One common example of this is the wheel, with spokes radiating away from the central hub.

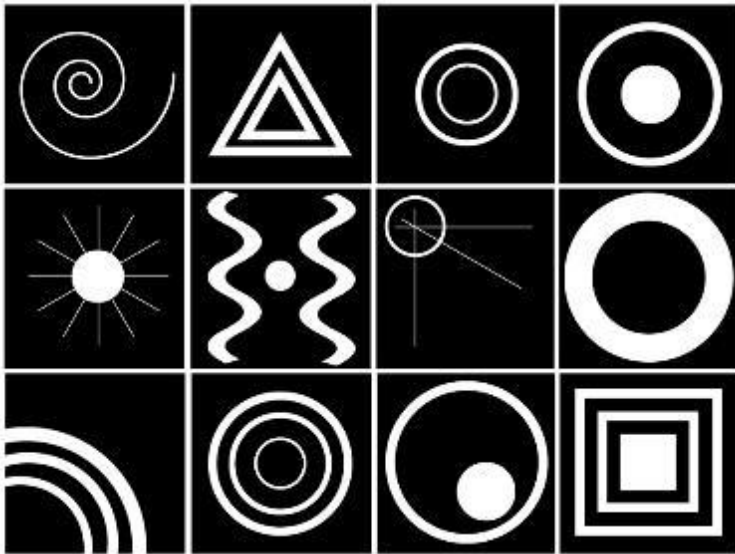
Another example would be flowers, with petals fanning out from the flower head.

By using radially orientated lines, shapes and forms, the eye is attracted to a central point within an image, creating emphasis. In this way, radial composition can appeal to our sense of momentum, generating visual movement. Some radial compositions even trick the eye into perceiving actual movement within a fixed image.

In addition, lines that diverge into a central point also cultivate a greater sense of depth within a photograph. However, keep in mind that not all radial compositions need to be constructed of circles!



In the right context, you can use rectangles, triangles, waves, lines, spirals, or other forms to cultivate radial composition.



**The history of radial composition**

Because of its visual energy, radial compositions have been an enduring presence in visual art and culture. For example, ancient petroglyphs carved into rocks depict spirals and labyrinths as well as lines radiating out from a central focal point.

Rich with symbolism and sacred meaning, the *mandala* features

in numerous religions and beliefs. In Greek mythology, the Sun god Helios was often depicted with a crown of radiating lines. These lines were understood to indicate radiant light, signifying the rays of the sun.

During the Renaissance, radial composition was used to emphasize important figures within a scene. In *Assumption of the Virgin* by Titian, subjects are seen to radiate away from the main figure (Mary) and a circle of radiant light frames her upper body. In Raphael's *School of Athens*, famous philosophers are emphasized by the radial properties of the surrounding architecture.



Modern art

Inevitably, radial composition has been a strong compositional feature in modern visual art. A famous example is Kandinsky's circle paintings that radiate pulses of colour. Dada artist Marcel Duchamp's Bicycle Wheel also takes advantage of the radial structure of the wheel to evoke both a sense of motion and stasis.

In photography, there are countless variations on the use of radial composition. Taken in 1920, Edward Steichen's *Isadora Duncan at the Portal of the Parthenon* makes use of radial composition to emphasize the subject within the ancient Parthenon. In Henri Cartier-Bresson's *Children Playing in Ruins*, the child subjects are framed by a hole in a wall within the ruins of a city.



### How to cultivate radial compositions

Radial composition relates to visual elements that expand from or centre around a central point in an image. Eyes, flowers, snail shells, doorways, fireworks, tree rings...there is an abundance of opportunities to capture radial subject matter.

Fluid radial elements create a harmonious flow throughout the image, whereas sharp, erratic lines generate a scene of energetic movement.

Archways, staircases, reflections, plants...you can find radial features in all genres of photography. You can even create radial imagery through camera movement or abstraction.



You can also use radial composition as a tool to emphasize a given subject. Framing an aircraft aligned with the halo of the sun's rays, or photographing a portrait with the sitter positioned within a window or door frame can seem easy enough. However, incorporating simple radial elements into your composition can add much more depth and impact to your image.



## Conclusion

From landscapes to architecture and everything in between, radial composition can add impact and depth to your photography.

Keeping an eye out for radial compositional opportunities can lead to engaging material that guides the viewer's eye around the image more effectively.