

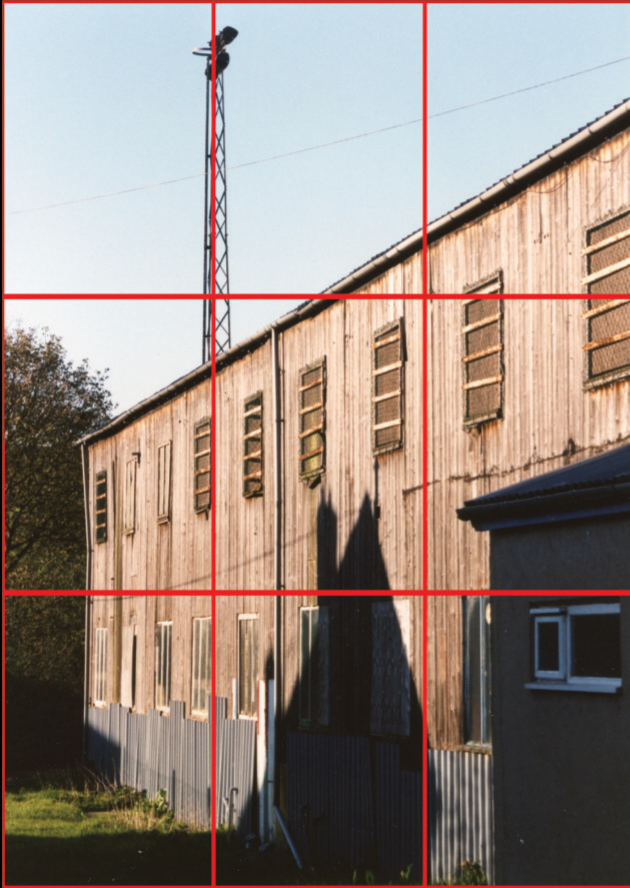
Cropped

Mike Floate



Rossendale United

1998



Intro

1995 - 2025

The Rule of Thirds is a concept which I am sure most people have at least heard of and many will have used. A compositional aid in the form of a noughts and crosses grid, it is so well known that many cameras or smart phones have it installed as an option for display on the screen.

For many years I had aimed to compose shots so that key features would line up on one of the two vertical lines a third of the way in from the sides of the image. I suppose that serious photographers just work this way almost without thinking.

The image, left, of the rear of the stand at Rossendale United in 1998 has the rule of thirds grid overlaid and the floodlight lies on one of the vertical lines, but the image is otherwise unremarkable.

I recall talking about using the Rule of Thirds with my colleague Carlos Scaranci. He previously worked for the BBC creating programme introductions and he had used a different grid system in his work.

The GCSE project we both taught was creating cd covers and Carlos overlaid his grid on a couple of then-current cds, including *The Fat Of The Land* by The Prodigy. The outcome was spectacular with the cliffs, the crab's claws and stance all lining up with key intersections and lines within the grid.

I was sold on his concept.



1995 - 2025

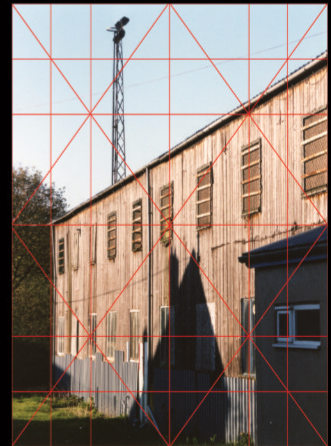
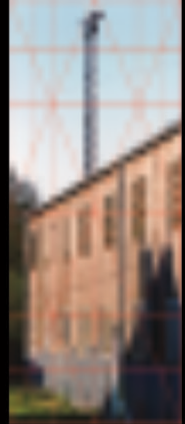
Intro



The image to the left has been cropped to 53% of the original image to make the composition more interesting, and for it engage the viewer with the most important areas within the shot. As can be seen in the image right, as I first overlaid the grid no key line or intersection sits on any important part of the photo.

With a re-sizing of the grid, seen in the image above right, the floodlight is now centred and the eye is drawn up to the lamps. The modern extension on the lower right is no longer visible and the angled shadow now becomes an important feature, sitting exactly on the angled lines in the grid. All distractions have been removed.

The visual record of the back of the stand is equally worthwhile but the shot is now far more artistically presented.



1998 ————— Ryhope Colliery Welfare

71%



1997

Erith & Belvedere

46%



2001

Bugle

53%



1998

Hurlingham Stadium



69%



1998

Letchworth



80%



2002

Robin Hood Athletic



69%



1997

Eastbourne United

76%



2002

Gravesend & Northfleet

75%



1999

Billingham Synthonia

59%



2001

Clutton



70%



1998

Rossendale Utd



59%



2002

Lower Hopton

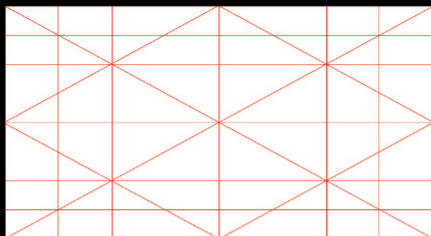


54%

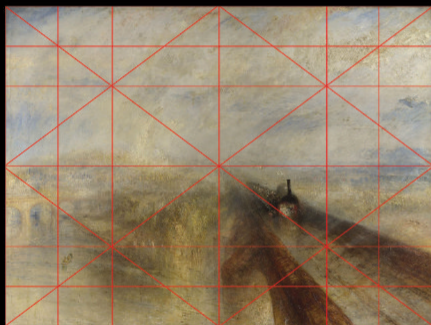


Outro

1995 - 2025



As mentioned in the Intro, every image in this book has been carefully cropped using a grid, shown left. It is constructed by drawing corner to corner through the centre, then across each quarter to give five key intersections. Lines are then drawn an eighth in from the sides, top and bottom.



Before using the grid it is worth checking how artists and designers may have had the system in their mind, even if the grid did not physically guide their work.

Who doesn't like Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed*? The use of perspective is noted in descriptions and the rails do follow a diagonal of the grid to the centre, the vanishing point. Now see how the horizon lies on the mid line and the shadow of the viaduct ends at the vertical mid line. The clouds sit on the top quarter line and all of a sudden I notice a building to the left which I'd not seen before.



Still with Turner, I then took a look at *The Fighting Temeraire* and was interested to see details I'd previously missed. It was no surprise to see the horizon on the bottom quarter line or the towed hulk on the left

vertical quarter line. The top of the masts sit as if they are the floodlight lamps in one of my cropped images. The blue sky appears in a top left triangle and the cloud under the sun in an inverted triangle from the centre horizontal. The shadow of the tug follows a diagonal and a buoy or something floats at an intersection with the right eighth vertical. You may now see a further white ship behind the tug, set along the centre vertical. New to me.

I'm no art expert and a third painting almost exhausts the number of works I can name. I always like the look of Gustav Courbet's *The Meeting*, also known as *Bonjour M. Courbet*. Having a rebellious nature I approved of the way the artist's patron is seen showing respect while Courbet gives off an air of superiority.

Now look at the intersections, the crosses, the horizon, and let your eye wander around the painting.



Interesting eh?!

1995 - 2025

The grid system fits equally well with historic posters too. I'm keen on railways (as if I really need another hobby) and the poster of the child looking up at the engine driver, being a Southern man, is an all-time favourite of mine.



Now living near Whitby I find it fascinating that these two posters, created by competing railway companies a hundred years or so ago, both have key features which fit in with the grid. These emphasise the conversation going on across the generations, and also influence the composition of the background.



In my own photography the grid is used in a different way. I overlay the grid onto an image then move, adjust and transform it so that important features cross intersections or lie on lines on the grid. The image is then cropped to the edges of the grid.

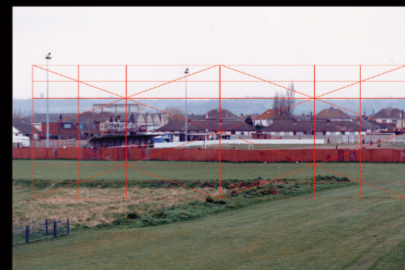
There are very rare occasions when the grid fits over an image so well that I decide not to crop at all.

The example below, of the Vetch Field from *Football Grounds Frenzy Wales*, has the North Bank roof on a horizontal and the two lower intersections sat on two of the key celebrating spectators.



It's all the more surprising as I had taken just this one shot, camera held above my head!

Sometimes very different options present themselves, such as the different cropped images, right, from a photo of Canvey Island taken from the sea wall. Although the horizon stays on the same horizontal, and the cover on the same vertical, the floodlight, trees and foreground are all noticed more in the top crop.



Outro ————— 1995 - 2025

I have searched online for use of the quarters grid used here but have found just one post on *dpreview.com*, in a thread entitled *Using an LCD composition overlay, which one to start with?*

The question was posted anonymously so although I can reply to the post I cannot message the author. This is unfortunate as I am the only person to agree with his suggestion of using a grid broadly similar to the quarters grid, and he is the only person who seems to be thinking in the same way as me. One very recent reply says: *'Thirds may work on a simple image with one main object. But you really want something organic and human, not mathematical.'* I think that for our use with football grounds and structures, which are very often geometrically shaped and especially so when skewed by perspective, that a mathematical guide is exactly what works.

Other replies mention Dynamic Symmetry and the Fibonacci Spiral Golden Ratio as aids in composition. These are interesting to investigate and do seem to work for some artists and designers but I could not get any worthwhile results with my images.

67%



Westland Sports ————— 2001



2001

Hereford United



1995 - 2025

Outro

I have found that images in portrait format work well with the grid concept, especially photos of floodlights. The first book including a specific section on floodlights was David Bauckham's *The Non-League Football Grounds of Sussex*, the seventh in my series covering grounds in specific counties, and published in 2002. My own *Football Grounds Frenzy Floodlights* was published in 2016, and many of the images look much more imposing when heavily cropped to best present these tall, thin structures.

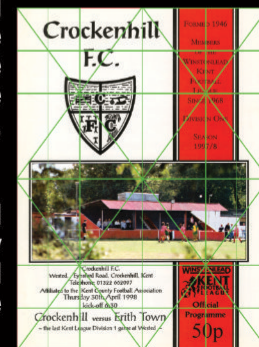
The image alongside includes a second floodlight. The smaller image shows the original with the grid overlaid. The resulting crop allows the smaller pylon to be seen rising from the bottom corner pointing upwards, while the main pylon runs up the right quarter line with the cluster of lamps centred on the top right eighth line. Cropping to the grid gives a new image that is just 79% of the original.

79%



The programme cover I created for Crockenhill FC in 1997, before I had heard of the grid, has the vertical stripe and image positioned on key lines. Chance, judgement or beginner's luck?

Mathematical or not, the grid concept seems to be a better way of editing, reworking and cropping images than the simple Rule of Thirds.



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1996

**Tooting &
 Mitcham
 United**

87%

