

One of the most popular features on NYI's monthly e-zine at [www.nyip.com](http://www.nyip.com) is our Picture of the Month Review. At NYI we teach all our students in every Course a Three-Step Method for setting up every photograph before they shoot. The Three-Step Method is based on NYI's Three Guidelines for Great Photographs.

Guideline 1. Know your *subject*.

Guideline 2. Focus *attention* on your subject.

Guideline 3. *Simplify*.

This simple Three-Step Method is the secret for every successful photograph ever taken. We teach you to consider these three steps every time you look into the viewfinder. To consider them before you press the shutter button.

When you mail in your photographs for analysis by your instructor, the instructor starts by commenting on those *Three Guidelines*. Of course, the instructor analyzes other elements of the picture too - focus, exposure, filters, etc. But the key to every good photo —and the essential element of every *great* photo — is adherence to these Three Guidelines.

How do they work? How can you apply them? You'll find examples of how to use this Three-Step Method in Lesson One and on your Unit One audiotapes. In addition, you'll find these reprints of the Picture of the Month articles NYI's website helpful in understanding the Three Guidelines.



**Review 8**

"Horse and Buggy"  
by NYI Student Robert D. Cowie



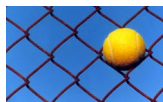
**Review 12**

"Fireman"  
by NYI Student Arthur Hermiz



**Review 9**

"Water Basketball"  
by NYI Student Tom Schafer



**Review 13**

"Caught in Fence"  
by NYI Student James Barbieri



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"Buddha Strikes a Pose"  
by NYI Student Robert Anderson



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"Operation"  
by NYI Student John Martel



*“Horse & Buggy”  
NYI Student  
Robert D. Cowie*

## Review 8

This picture was submitted by NYI Student Robert D. Cowie of Waterford, Michigan, for the first Picture Assignment in his NYI Course. This Assignment asks the student to submit a picture that shows a sense of speed and motion. Robert submitted this picture he took at the County Fairgrounds.

We think it succeeds!

In the NYI Course we teach our students three different techniques they can use to impart to a still picture a clear sense of the speed and motion of the subject. The trick is to know, not only the techniques, but also which technique to apply to which subject.

The first technique we teach is to use a very fast shutter speed - say, 1/1000th-second or faster - to “freeze” the action. Would that have been the best technique to apply in this situation? We think not.

The horse and rider would be frozen, making the picture ambiguous as to whether they were in motion or standing still. The only tip-off might be the legs of the horse. If the legs were clearly in motion - perhaps, in mid-air - we would assume that the subject was in motion. And that’s the point: The technique of freezing the action with a fast shutter speed only works when we catch the subject in an unimaginable pose – for example, a pole vaulter soaring 18 feet above the ground.

Since we know that people don’t ordinarily fly without wings, we would assume that the frozen image of the pole vaulter caught him at the height of his motion.

The second technique we teach to capture a sense of motion is to use a very slow shutter speed - say, 1/15th of a second or slower - while holding the camera in a fixed position. The resultant image shows the moving subject as a blur. This can be very effective...with the right subject! Would it work here? Not really. If Robert had used this technique here, the horse, rider, and sulky would be blurred, while the track and stands would appear relatively sharp. The problem in this case will be the amount of blurring of the subject. The slower the shutter speed, the more the blur.

This technique works best with subjects that don’t require sharpness - for example, water cascading over a fall. We usually don’t care to look at the individual atoms of water. In this picture at the horse

show, however, we probably want to be able to see and identify our subject, not just see it as a blur. So this second technique is not really best here either.

The third technique covered in this very first lesson in the NYI Course is to use a very slow shutter speed and to pan the camera as you take the picture. In this case, you achieve the best of all possible worlds in a situation like this: You keep the subject in fairly sharp focus by following the subject in your viewfinder while the exposure is being made. Because of this “panning” motion, you also create a sense of speed and motion by blurring the stationary parts of the image - in this case, the track and the stands. In addition, the slow shutter speed still blurs those parts of your subject that are moving too fast to be frozen by your panning motion - in this case the legs of the horse and the spokes of the wheels.

Result: A still picture in which the fact that the subject is in motion is apparent, yet we are able to see and define the subject clearly. We agree with Robert’s choice of technique here!



*“Water Basketball”*  
NYI Student  
Tom Schafer

## Review 9

Nowadays, we all shoot in color. Well, almost all. Ansel Adams resisted the color fad for most of his life. And photojournalists often shoot in black-and-white, especially if the newspapers they're working for print mainly black-and-white pictures. This black-and-white shot by NYI student Tom Schafer is in the realm of photojournalism. It's a sports grab shot. And we think it's pretty good.

What's the subject here? It's not just the boy framed by the hoop. It's that boy with the ball! This is one of the key elements in most good ball-sport shots: Try to get the ball in the picture. And aim for one more element: Try to capture the facial expression of the players. Schafer has captured both elements in this picture - we see the ball and we see the intense expressions of the players.

How did Schafer draw the viewer's eye to his subject? Pretty obvious here - he circled the face of the shooter with the hoop and he made both the shooter and the ball big and upfront. To add to this effect, he got in close using a wide-angle (28mm) lens. Result: Everything close to the camera is distortedly large - for example, the ball, the shooter's arms, the hoop. Everything farther from the camera is distortedly smaller - for example, the shooter's body and the other player.

How could he have simplified? Well, we would have liked to see more of the player on the left.

He's part of the information about the game - he shows that it's not just two guys shooting hoops. From his crouched position we get the feeling he's on the opposing team, and we suspect his expression will show the agony of defeat as opposed to the smile of victory we see on the right-hand player who is probably the shooter's teammate.

The first point here is that simplifying doesn't just mean omitting elements that distract. It sometimes means adding elements that contribute to the viewer's understanding of the subject. The second point is that, when you're photographing live action on the sports field - or any other real-life venue - you can't always get the perfect shot. For the news or sports photographer, it's usually more important to get the shot of the critical moment. Perfect or not.

Sure, if the shot is posed you can aim for perfection. (Remember the classic Pulitzer Prize winning

“news” shot of the Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima? It was perfect. But it was actually a reenactment staged by veteran photojournalist Joe Rosenthal a few hours after the battle. While Joe couldn’t control every single element during the reenactment, he had a lot more control than if he were dodging bullets at the same time.) In any event, when you’re “under fire,” whether on the battlefield or the playing field, you don’t have the luxury of getting perfection every time. You can aim for it, but you often have to settle for less because real-life can’t be controlled down to the smallest detail. And attention to detail is what makes perfection!



*“Buddha Strikes a Pose”*  
NYI Student  
Robert Anderson

## Review 10

We hope this Photo of the Month, originally submitted as part of a Photo Project, taken by NYI Student Robert Anderson of Michigan will soothe you, dear photographer. It reminds us that every now and then we need to take it easy—breathe, inhale, exhale! If you need to decompress after a hard day’s work, it doesn’t hurt to relax by a swirling stream.

Guideline 1: What’s the *subject*? The subject of this photograph is the peaceful Buddha statue that appears to be meditating in the cosmos, somewhere far away from Michigan.

Guideline 2: How did the photographer *focus attention* on the subject? Statues make perfect models because they don’t twitch or sneeze. Oh, if only all models could be so obedient! As beautiful and awe-inspiring as your statue is, without an interesting background or foreground it could run the risk of being a “so-what” image.

Robert is, not surprisingly, a student of Zen and has mastered the Zen of photography in this image. He saw the Buddha taking a sunbath by the stream and slowed his camera’s shutter speed to create the “clouds in the heavens” effect. The theme of peace and tranquility, spirituality in everyday life is heightened by the serene expression on the Buddha’s face. In this photo, proper exposure while using a slow shutter speed is put to perfect use!

Guideline 3: How can I *simplify* my subject? Is there anything that distracts us from the subject? We think the photograph of the buoyant Buddha represents the essence of simplicity...so no, we wouldn’t change a thing. There is nothing that distracts us from the subject. The shadow on the Buddha’s back is natural and seeing the entire statue—every fold in the Buddha’s robe—would not have added anything. This gorgeous photo has won the hearts of the NYI staff and is sure to be admired by cyber Zen masters around the world. This is an example of how you can find inspiration and thematic ideas for your photographs just by keeping being extra aware during your everyday habits—be it meditating by a river or going to the super-market. Never leave home without your camera and when you see a good photo—don’t hesitate!



*“Operation”  
NYI Student  
John Martel*

## Review 11

What’s the *subject* here: The drama of the operating room? The concentration of the surgeons? The concern of the assistant in the background? We think it’s all of the above. And probably a few more you can think of.

How did Martel *draw attention* to his subject? He started with the most basic technique of all - he made his subject-figures big and up front. And he added the secondary technique of framing the figure in the background. Actually, this is a very clever use of the framing technique. We often use something extraneous like a foreground tree to frame the subject and draw the viewer’s eye toward it. Here, Martel has gone further. He has used two of his subject-figures to frame the third. And it works!

*Simplification?* Remember, for a picture to succeed you don’t want to show anything that will distract the viewer’s eye from the subject.

But you do want to show those things that will strengthen the subject. What could have been omitted here? The arc of the operating light on top? We think it strengthens the picture by helping to establish the operating room atmosphere.

What about the electric outlets on the wall? What do you think? Cover them up with two fingers. Is the picture stronger with them or without them? We could argue either way. If your judgment was to eliminate them when you took this picture, how could you do it? Easy. Just move the camera a little to the left so the body of the surgeon on the left covers the electric outlet.

That’s what we mean by *simplifying*. Before you snap the shutter, look carefully at the image in your viewfinder and question every single item you see. If you decide an item distracts from the subject, try to eliminate it *before* you shoot. Simplifying this way will result in a stronger image every time!



*“Fireman”  
NYI Student  
Arthur Hermiz*

## Review 12

We think this is a great photojournalistic picture. A good photojournalistic picture (a “news” picture, if you prefer) should give us lots of information about what’s going on. Just as a good opening paragraph in a news article should tell us *who, what, where, when, and how*, a good news photo should give us as much of this information as possible.

In the NYI lessons on *Photojournalism*, we point out that it’s difficult to cram all this information into one picture, but a good news picture should at least answer a few of these questions. Let’s see how many of these questions this photo answers:

*Who?* Clearly, a fireman!

*What?* He’s getting ready to put on his mask...or has he just taken it off? Not exactly clear.

*Where?* At the scene of a fire.

*When?* We don’t know from this picture.

*How?* We don’t know from this picture.

So this picture doesn’t answer *all* the questions. But it does answer some of them, and that’s the best we should expect. This photograph definitely passes the “news photo” test!

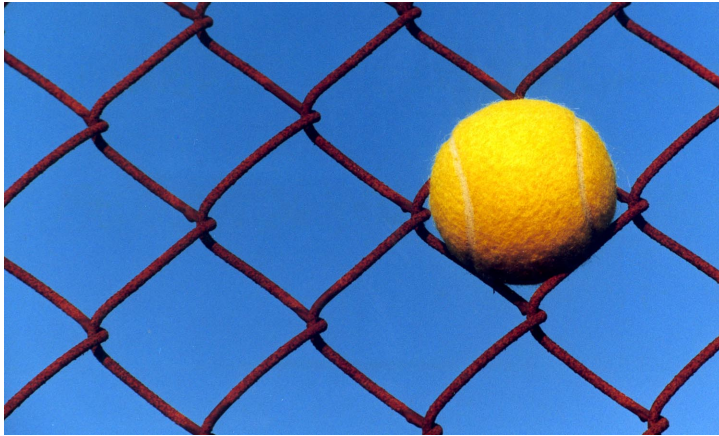
What about the “pure photography” test? In other words, how does it rate as a picture? We think it’s great!

If we subject it to the NYI Three Guidelines, it comes out with flying colors. The *subject* - this fire fighter in front of this blazing fire - is up front and unambiguous. Our *attention* is drawn to him by the sharp focus and perfect lighting that is only on him. And when it comes to *simplification*, there’s absolutely nothing we would leave out. The junk in the bottom left implies the devastation wrought by the fire, so it’s part of the story.

There's one other thing we like about this picture. That's the *placement* of the firefighter. We've written previously about the *rule-of-thirds*. We teach our students to follow this "rule" which says that a picture will usually be stronger if the main subject is placed a little off-center. This picture is a great example.

Do you think it would have been as strong if the fire fighter were dead center? Let's say we show the fire on the left of him. What would we be left with on the right? A large uninteresting dark mass.

How much better this is, with him up front examining his gear, with the fire blazing behind him. In this off-center position he looks positively heroic - the Arnold Schwarzenegger of fire fighters. In real life, this particular fire fighter may be a real hero. Or, possibly, he's just a guy doing his job. All we know is that, in this picture, he's ten feet tall! And that's one test of a good photograph. That it creates a fantasy that's even bigger than real-life.



*“Caught in Fence”*  
NYI Student  
Robert Anderson

### **Review 13**

This picture is a departure from the storytelling images we usually show here. While it’s clearly a picture of a tennis ball stuck in a wire fence, the real subject here is a simple abstract of color, composition, and shape.

But for the picture to work as an abstract, you still must be able to clearly and unambiguously see the elements that make up the image, with no elements that distract the viewer’s eye.

What did Barbieri do to draw the viewer’s eye to his subject? He made the elements he wanted to show large and up front. There’s nothing to else to look at.

Could he have *simplified*? Not that we can see. There’s nothing here that doesn’t contribute to the image.

What really makes this image work is the sharp focus and the stark colors. The sharp focus brings out the texture of the ball and the rusted fence. And the colors of the ball, the fence, and the sky are clear and intense.

How did Barbieri achieve this? First, he used his eyes. If you play tennis, you’ve probably seen a ball get stuck in the fence hundreds of times. But did you ever photograph it close up, like this? Barbieri saw it, and saw its potential. He photographed it! Second, he set his camera on a tripod so that he could achieve exquisite repeatable focus, and totally eliminate the risk of camera shake.

Third, what about exposure? Here’s an instance where using a camera’s built-in exposure meter is tricky. What do you read? The ball? The sky? The fence? If you use your meter to read any of them you’ll probably end up way off in your colors.

The better approach is to use your meter to read a “gray card” or take an incident-meter reading. Either will give you pretty good exposure under the lighting condition. Of course, “pretty good” is not good enough. But it is a starting point. Using the gray-card or incident reading, you can now bracket your shots to produce a series of slides or prints from which to select the one that achieves the most vibrant colors. That’s what Barbieri did here.

There's one other element we should note. The composition. In placing the ball off to one side, Barbieri followed the "rule of thirds" that we have discussed elsewhere. Briefly, the idea is that if you place your subject dead center, you often end up with a static image. You can usually produce more tension in your picture if you place the subject about one-third off to one side or the other. That's what Barbieri did here.



*“The Shrimp Fisherman”*  
NYI Student  
Paul Stanneck

## Review 14

The picture we’ve chosen this month is a *portrait* - a wonderful portrait.

We generally think of a “portrait” as a picture of a person, particularly of the person’s face. But there’s another aspect of portraiture that we want to discuss here.

A good portrait should tell us *more than* just how the person looks. It should also tell us *something about* the person. A good portrait should enable us (the viewer’s) to learn who the person is, what makes him or her tick. Perhaps, what type of job the person has. What type of person he or she is.

And a *really* great portrait takes on a “universality.” You know, it says: This is not just a picture of this person; it’s a picture of that captures the essence of *everyone* who is similar. For example, this is not just a picture of “Jenny Smith - a bride”...it’s a picture of *every* bride. Or...this is not just a picture of John and Junior Jones...it’s a picture of every loving father with his son. That’s what we mean by “universality.”

With that in mind, let’s look at this “portrait” submitted for an NYI Photo Project by Paul Stanneck. Paul has entitled this picture “The Shrimp Fisherman,” and we think this title is important. He didn’t title this “A Shrimp Fisherman.” Paul was trying to capture the “essence” of shrimp fisherman. Of course, the photographer’s image doesn’t always match the lofty goals of his intent. Usually, portraits do not reach the goal of “universality.” They can still be good portraits, but they lack that one extra quality that can lift them above the ordinary and endow them with a special glow.

We think that Paul has *attained* his intended goal here. This portrait gives us an insight not only into the appearance and personality of this one shrimp fisherman, but also goes a little beyond and tells us something about the lives and personalities of all shrimp fishermen.

What does it tell us?

It tells us about the world he inhabits - the world of the sea...out-of-sight of shore, yet pursued by shore birds.

It tells us about the sun and the sky in which he basks.

It tells us about the quiet - perhaps, boring - hours that are part of his life. And it tells us - at least, in this case - of the serene satisfaction that these fishermen enjoy.

As to the photograph itself, let's look at it in terms of the three NYI Guidelines that we train our students to try to achieve in every picture they shoot:

**Guideline One:** Decide upon the subject of your picture before you shoot. In this case, the subject is clearly this fisherman at the wheel.

**Guideline Two:** Make the subject clear and unambiguous in the frame. That is, position your subject and the other elements in the picture so that the viewer's eye is drawn directly to the subject.

How did Paul accomplish that here? He uses a number of the techniques taught in his NYI lessons. First, he made his subject large and up front. You can't mistake who this picture is about. Second, he focused sharply on his subject. Third, he set his exposure to capture the skin tones and colors of his subject most clearly. Fourth, he framed the subject inside the two rope-cables attached to the boom. Fifth, he points toward the subject with the boom itself.

**Guideline Three - *Simplify*.** In other words, eliminate any elements that might distract the viewer's eye from the subject. Are there any distracting elements in this picture? Very few. The subject's face and ample figure stand out clearly against the sky.

A minor quibble: What's that "seaweed" below his left hand? An even less-significant quibble: This picture would have been even better if the wings of two of the gulls weren't cut off by the boom. But gulls are gulls. They're free spirits. Unfortunately, we can't command them to fly in formation the way we want.

Is this quibble about the gulls really serious or are we just joking? We're serious. We know that Paul couldn't control the gulls. But he could take a series of shots, and then select the best of the lot. All we're saying is that, if he had the luxury of this option, he certainly would have to consider the precise location of the birds as one of the criteria in selecting the best shot. Quibbles aside: We love this picture, and commend Paul for it. Clearly, it's deserving of the NYI "*Award of Merit*" that it was granted by the Dean.