

Using Negative Space in Photography to Create Stunning Images



“I’m filling in all the negative spaces with positively everything.”
– Edie Brickell

Negative space may tend to suggest something that is not good. But negative space in photography is also often referred to as white space or minimalism photography. There’s nothing bad about it. It’s truly a unique technique to try out in your photography practice.

We sometimes tend to fill our compositions with lots of objects and color. When we talk about negative space, it’s the opposite that rules. The final image is mostly composed of blank or neutral space, and a small portion of the composition has an actual object in it.

This type of composition emphasizes the subject in the photo and also adds a unique value to it. This type of composition is powerful and, when done correctly, can take your photography from ordinary to truly impressive.

It can be a little daunting at first when you begin to do negative space photography. Not all attempts will be successful. There are opportunities to create negative space photography practically everywhere around you. You have to know how to observe and apply a few techniques to achieve amazing negative space masterpieces.

Positive and negative space explained

Positive space

This is the area in the photo that attracts the viewer's eye. It's the main subject that commands attention in the composition. This is usually where the eye goes first.



Negative space

This is the space in the composition that is typically the background. It usually doesn't attract very much attention and is, in most cases, the intention of the photographer. It is used to define or contour the positive space.

In negative space photography, the photographer uses the space that is usually not the primary focus and uses it to fill in most of the composition. The negative space commands more attention than the positive space and creates a unique perspective. It also adds definition and can create strong emotions.



Negative space and emotions

Negative space photography can evoke a sense of wonder, mysteriousness, and peacefulness. The viewer will have a greater connection to the object if the photo has no clutter, visual distractions, and a multitude of colors.



You may be presented with opportunities to create negative space photography more times than you think. It's all in how you visualize or train your eye to look at things.

For example, a few years ago, I stood at a popular lookout overlooking an iconic rock sitting in the Atlantic Ocean in Eastern Canada. It was early morning, and some fog had rolled in, covering most of the impressive structure. The woman standing next to me at the lookout observing the same landscape turned to me and said, "It's so sad, we're driving by today, and I wanted to get a photo of the Percé Rock, but it seems like it won't be possible."

She left disappointed that she didn't get her shot.

I stood there for a long time afterward examining the fog and the way it draped the rock like a heavy blanket. I thought that this was one of the most amazing things to happen that day. I felt so lucky to be there at that exact moment to capture the wonder unfolding.



Sometimes a small shift in perspective can make a huge difference.

Balancing the shot

Negative space is absolutely not blank space. If you think of it this way, you will have difficulty seeing the opportunities that you will be presented with. You want the negative space to be the main focus of your photograph, and it will hopefully evoke strong feelings.

We are trained to follow some basic composition rules, like the rule of thirds, for example. However, with negative space photography, these rules mostly don't apply. Your imagination is what rules the composition in negative space photography.



However, there are a few things to remember and consider if you want to achieve this type of photography.

Less is more

Fill your composition with the negative space. Try to put minimal distracting objects in your composition. Texture or solid colors are great elements to use in negative space photography. Use the texture or color to fill in most of the composition.



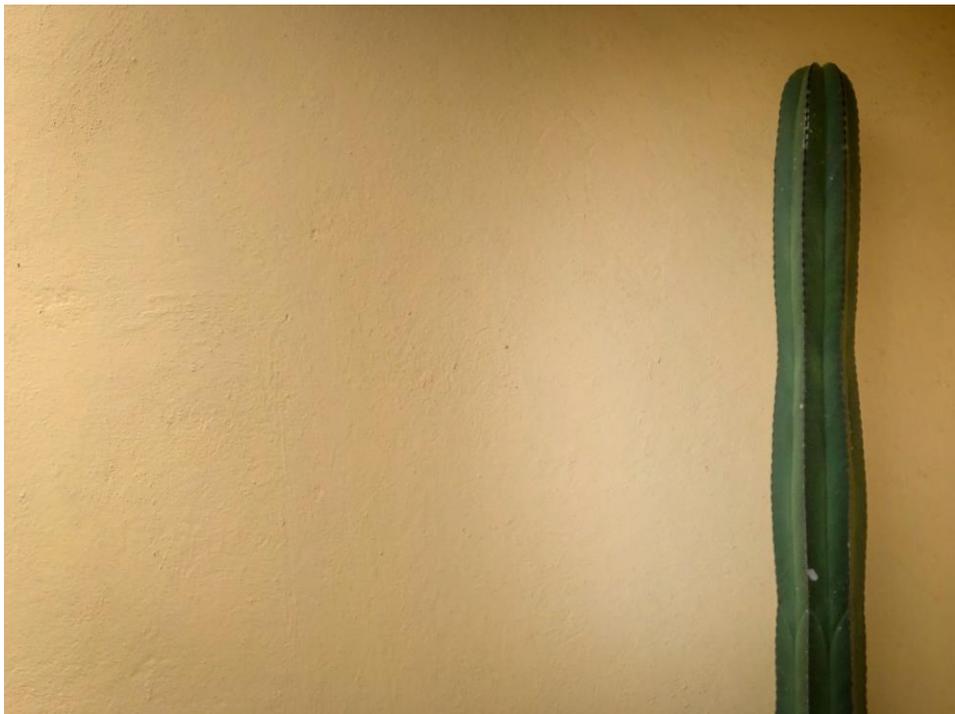
Position

The object should be secondary and placed somewhere that is usually not primarily capturing the eye of the viewer. Placing the subject somewhere in the corner of your frame will frequently provide you with a good result. Try to balance the negative space with the white space so that it flows.



Twice the amount

A good rule of thumb is to put twice as much negative space than positive space in the composition.



Aperture

Try to avoid shallow depth of field when doing negative space photography. This is so that neither the object nor the negative space in the photograph is blurry.

Go out and explore the possibilities

When you look at things differently and step outside of the traditional rules, you will find many great opportunities to create some unique shots. Look at a scene and try to create your own story.



Negative space photography is an excellent way to expand your skills and your photographic eye. So remember, less is sometimes more.