

Back to Basics

Holy cow! It's early October and I'm already seeing on Facebook a few videos and lots of pictures of 2023 Christmas village displays. I feel so far behind... and I don't do Halloween – that's a whole another villaging world. On YouTube there are videos of massive store displays and what is in stock. Very soon we will see the first YouTube 2023 Christmas village videos.

Because it appears that villagers are gearing up to "Show Your Village to the World," I'm going to revisit some basics of photo and video composition.

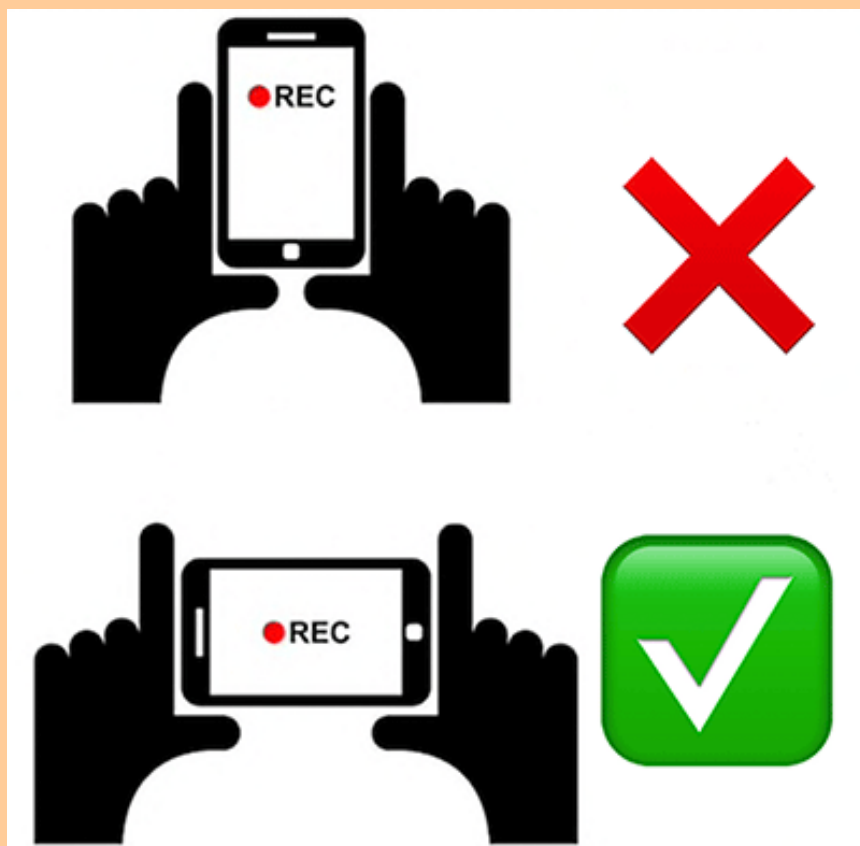
Be sure to check out all the other topnotch and timely columns on TheVillageCollector.com – the always interesting "*Just So You Know (JSYK)*" by David Spears, Larry Treadwell's "*A Dickens Christmas*" and "*Hauntsville*," Thea Heyink's "*The Creation Station*" (watch and learn), "*Phil & Sue's Village*" (from England!), "*From Italy: Villaging in Europe*" by Peppe Apuleo (fascinating!), and much more by webmaster Bill Channell. **Please keep visiting the Village Videos page and watch, watch, watch.** There will be a new batch of village videos starting on the 1st of each month! So many ideas, so little time... and not enough money.

The modern smartphone has become the *de facto* camera for most villagers to show off their creations. It's so convenient and an incredibly powerful piece of technology!

Most Facebook and YouTube videos are presented in wide screen format, or 16x9 aspect ratio. The typical landscape photo shot on a smartphone is presented in a 4x3 aspect ratio.

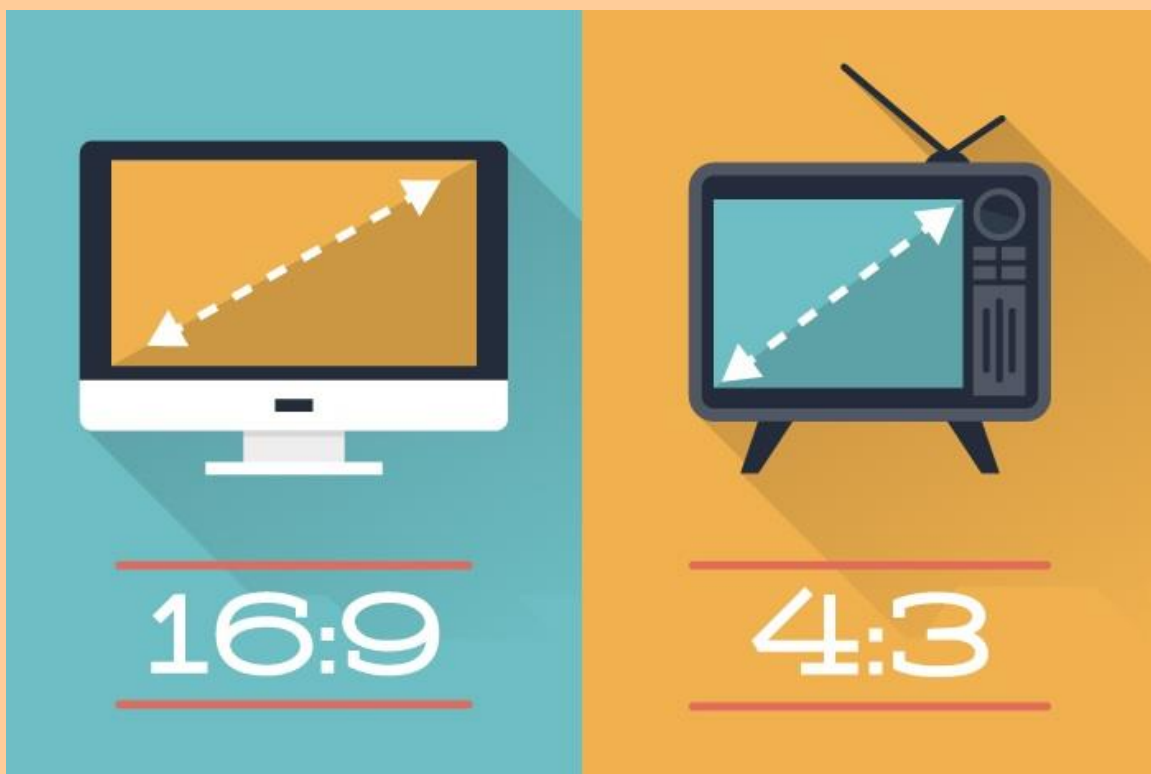


While you may not have realized it before, widescreen is how we see the world. Don't believe me? Give this a try. Take your hands and place one at the very highest and one at the very lowest point that is still within your field of view without moving your head or eyes. Now do the same thing on the sides. Your peripheral vision allows you to see much more to the sides than you can see vertically – ***essentially you see in widescreen!***



While widescreen in the home is relatively new, films have been produced this way for 70+ years. The goal of a great movie is to immerse you in the film so well that you feel like you are there with the performers. Widescreen movies are better at this by nature because they allow the picture to fill nearly your entire field of vision. This is why films have been shot this way – to draw you in and make you feel like you are part of the action.

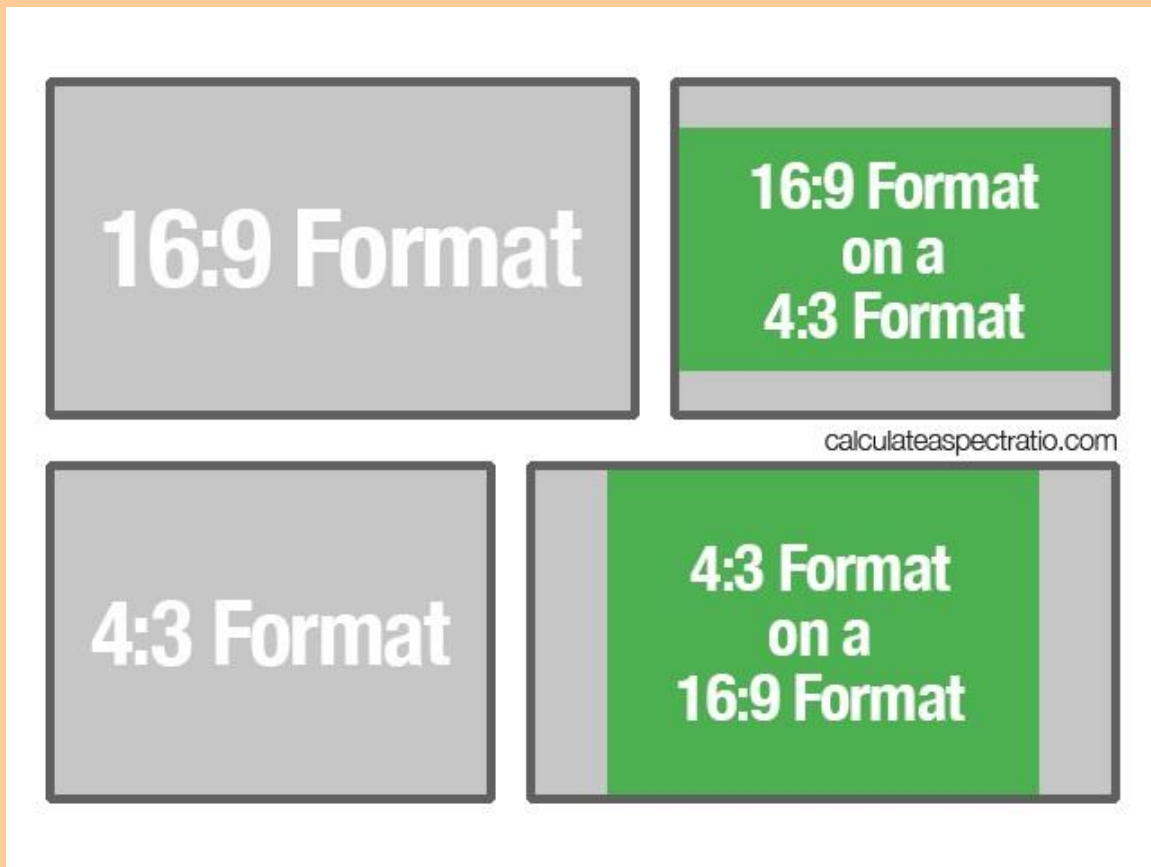
Widescreen or a 16x9 aspect ratio is the screen size for a modern TV or computer monitor. Standard or 4x3 aspect ratio is the most common format for old-fashioned cathode ray tube TVs and printed pictures.



You have two easy-peasy ways to end up with a 16x9 widescreen photo. In your smartphone, go to Settings, go to Camera, and choose to take landscape photos in 16x9. Confused? Google how to do this for your specific smartphone.

Alternatively, take your photos in standard 4x3 aspect ratio, and then with each good photo, click on Edit and then crop the photo to a desired 16x9 size. Confused? Again, Google how to do this for your specific smartphone. If all this fails, ask your children, grandchildren, or other young person to help you.

The whole idea is to get rid of **black bars** in your finished video.



There is another great feature that professional cameras and smartphone cameras have – the ability to turn on a grid!

Check your camera or smartphone manual to see how to turn on this feature. In the iPhone, go to the Settings app, scroll down to Camera, and click on the Grid switch to activate it. That will turn on the grid for both photos and video.

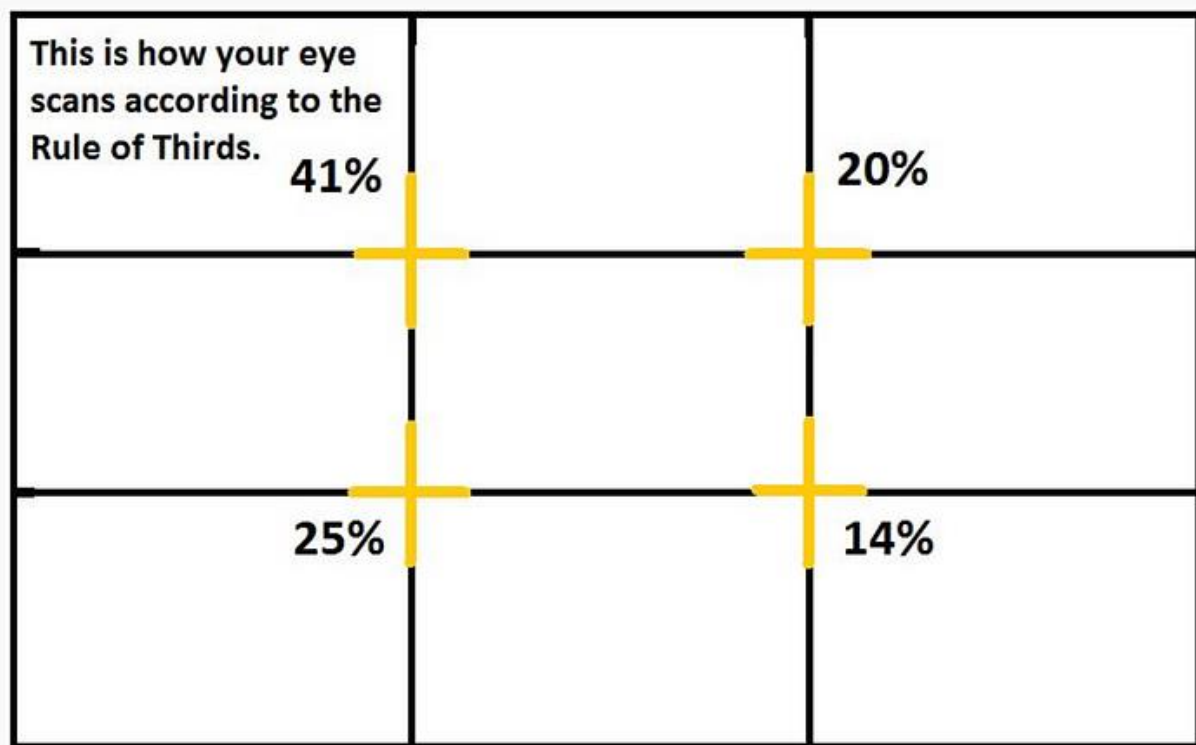
We have a natural tendency to want to place the main subject in the middle. Placing it out of the center using the **Rule of Thirds** will often lead to a more attractive composition. Probably the most important takeaway from the rule of thirds is that subjects generally do not belong centered in the frame.

Oftentimes, you can take a centered photo and then crop it so that you take advantage of the Rule of Thirds.



The engraver, John Thomas Smith coined the term “Rule of Thirds” in 1797 in his work “Remarks on Rural Scenery”, wherein he acknowledged the power of dividing paintings up using this grid technique to maximize the effect on the beholder’s eye.

Look at the work of famous photographers — the subject of a photo is rarely centered because photographers will incorporate the rule of thirds when framing their shots. That’s why using the grid is so helpful when you can compose a photo or video with this rule in mind. The most important part of the grid is where the lines cross. These are ***focal points*** (or “***sweet spots*”**, as those in the industry call them).



Research has shown that the eye tends to scan images in such a way that, with our four sweet spots, over two-fifths of the user's attention will be drawn to the top-left sweet spot. The eye will then drop to the bottom-left sweet spot, where it generally gives a quarter of its attention. From there, it travels up to the top-right sweet spot, which draws a fifth of its attention, before falling to the final sweet spot in the bottom right.

From this, we notice that users tend to read in a style that's comparable to a capital "F" (giving priority to the top left, then down, then up and across to the top right, and, lastly, with not so much emphasis on the bottom right). Consequently, the top-left sweet spot is your prime chance to "grab" your user!



In showing our village we usually want to feature the arrangement of pieces (buildings, structures, animated pieces), or a vignette scene (the figures and small pieces within a scene), or the motion of an animated piece. By using the Rule of Thirds in our composition we can connect better with the user or viewer.



Photo by Toshifumi Ogasawara

If we use a figure in a scene, try to place it where the “sweet spots” are located for maximum effect.

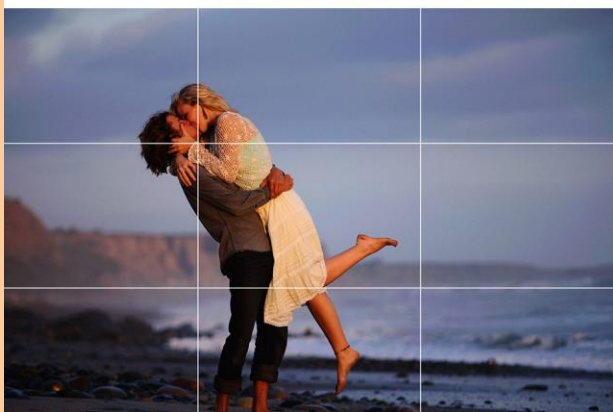




Photo by Carl Wilson



Photo by Joanna Villegas

In my next column on The Village Collector, I don't know what I'm going to write about. I'm out of words for today and I'll try to do better next time.

Questions, comments and/or suggestions are always welcome. You can contact me at: jpetersgolfpro@gmail.com, 419 Washington Avenue, Newport, KY 41071.