Tim’s Tips for composing compelling images

1. Always have your camera with you. The “picture” often happens at unplanned moments.
2. Move the subject from the middle of the frame. Imagine a tic-tac-toe board over the lens. iPhones already have such a grid as an option. If you think of it like the Hollywood Squares, you don’t want your subject in the Paul Lynde or Whoopi Goldberg square.
3. Be aware of your focus. Critical or sharp focus should be where you want the viewer to look.
4. Shoot tight. The best shots are simple so move closer and remove any clutter from the background. “If your picture isn’t good enough, you’re not close enough.” - Robert Capa. Give your shot impact.
5. Shoot vertical and horizontal. Don’t get stuck holding the camera in one position... look at your shot, compose it in the lens. Is the subject arranged horizontally or vertically? Is an interesting detail in the overall scene horizontal or vertical?
6. Change your perspective. Shoot from different heights and levels. Don’t just shoot from adult eye level. Get down low and see how the perspective changes the character of the shot. Raising someone in the lens can convey a message of power and strength.
7. Be aware of your background. Don’t have trees and telephone poles growing out of people’s heads. Also be aware of things moving in the background. Will those things enhance or destroy your shot as they move into frame behind the subject? Be patient.
8. Be aware of lighting. Best times of day for outdoor photography is always sunrise and sunset. Mid-day light is harsh and often gives people “raccoon eyes.” Shadows under the eyes are not attractive. Indoor light can be a struggle against artificial light and the color shifts they produce -- fluorescent lighting lives a yellowish cast making people look jaundiced.
9. Compose creatively. Don’t always put the horizon in the middle of the frame. Place the horizon low to emphasize the sky, place it high to emphasize the land.
10. Shoot photos that “say” something or tell a story.
11. Be comfortable shooting with a wide angle or telephoto lens. Wide angle means you get REAL close to your subject.
12. Frame subject with foreground elements. An environmentalist framed by trees or a race car driver in the window of their car achieves the framing and tells something about the subject.
13. Shoot your subject doing something whenever possible. Instead of just staring at the camera. What do they normally do? Go with them and find an interesting shot as they do what they do.
14. Steal a picture. Don’t always shoot the person when they are expecting to be shot. Sneak a picture that shows the REAL person.
15. Have an eye for detail. Your photo needs to stand out to attract attention. Find some aspect of the scene you’re shooting that is compelling.
16. Add variety. Don’t always shoot what’s expected. Look around you. Don’t use the same photographic techniques over and over. If you shoot a lot of silhouettes, then line up a nice perspective shot.
17. Hold the camera steady to eliminate any shake or blur. Use a tripod or monopod if you need it.
18. Take chances and don’t settle for the safe shot. Reach out a bit and you’ll surprise yourself!
19. When shooting portraits, look for something that visually reveals the subject’s personality.
20. Remember, the camera doesn’t take good pictures, the photographer does!

ED WHEELER TECHNIQUE: “EDFFAT” > Entire, Detail, Focus, Framing, Action, Timing. If you shoot that, you’ll come back with plenty of options.