

Minimalism

By Shelly Perry

The power of photography is to document the world around us, to tell visual stories, evoke emotion and response. There are often many elements involved in our story or documentary-style shots, but there is something magical about paring it all down to the simplistic bare minimum.

In stock, and in photography in general, often "less is more." You can say a lot with simple lines, shapes, patters, colors or lone subjects. There is something so special about these kinds of shots, and for stock photography they can be gold. So our theme this month is minimalism.

Minimalism is a style that uses pared-down design elements, so you'll want to keep your images as un-cluttered as possible. This style can be used with a wide variety of subjects, even people and pets.

Here are a couple of my own on the right:

Now it's your turn.

You can pick any subject you'd like for this theme. This style of photography



lends itself to many varied subjects: people, pets, landscapes, architecture, table top, food... if you can think of it I am sure there is a way to create it in a minimalist way. It's much more about how you compose the image than what you shoot.

“Minimalism” as Stock Images

There are no hard-and-fast rules as to what “minimalism” looks like with photography, but these types of photos do have some things in common. If you look at a wide variety of minimalistic photos you will certainly notice the sparseness of the compositions, which is one tell-tale sign.

Designers love simple, sparse images, since these photos tend to be very focused on a particular subject, form or texture. This makes a designer’s job easier, and as a stock photographer, any time you can do that you have upped the value of your shot.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Think Sparse: These shots should be extremely simple. When you compose your shot, include nothing but the essentials.

Be Creative: Think of unique angles and shooting perspectives; watch for colors that pop or contrast as this will really draw the viewer’s eye.

Find Lines & Shapes: Minimalism often features geometric shapes, lines or textures. Paired with pops of color, this can add up to some very dynamic images.

Go for Unique: Try to make the shots as unique as possible, which will help yours stand out from the rest. Try to think of unusual or overlooked subjects so your photo won’t have as much competition in stock image libraries.

Add People: Any time you can include people in your shots, you increase their saleability. Not all shots require people, but it’s good to keep this in mind, even for minimalistic images.

To get a feel for this style of photography, let’s look at a few examples of minimalist images found in stock:



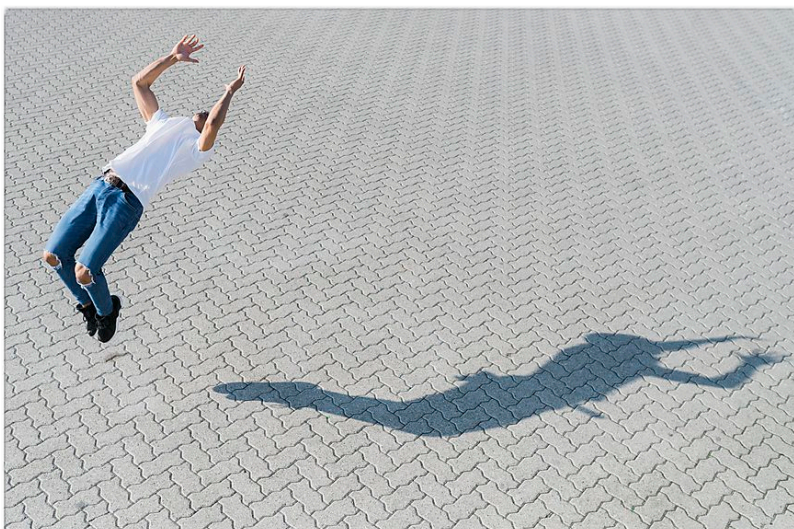
The architectural lines and symmetry of this shot make it a quintessential minimalist shot. Photos like this can be achieved with the architecture itself as well as with reflections. This photo has a wonderful sense of symmetry and lines leading through the photo and into the distance.



Here is a simple solo subject of the ferris wheel etched onto a blue sky. The rainbow colors enhance the shot, giving it a fun, playful feeling.. You'll notice there is a lot of room for copy (text) and a shot like this is not difficult to achieve.



White horse on a white sky... no it's not a black and white. This is a great minimalist shot of a horse... see how since there is absolutely nothing but the horse, our focus and attention stays right on the subject, taking in all the fine details. Shots like these can work well on overcast days.



Here is an example of using strong harsh shadows in your overall composition. Prioritize to shoot for proper exposure of your highlights in a case like this (if you shoot for the shadow exposure your highlights could be blown out). This photo is clean and simple, and about the most complex shot we will look at today. Notice how both the subject and the subject's shadow are carefully composed within the frame,

with NOTHING distracting coming into the background.

Amazing how you can turn inanimate objects into a character full of expression. The simplicity here, on the right, still carries a message, it's not just a bowl of cereal. I like this photographer's use of color, shape and space. I could see this shot being used by designers with pleasure, it's just so clean and simple, yet with loads of personality.

Colors, colors, colors... the subject is simple enough, but working with



colors like this is a really great exercise in minimalism. This photographer is having a lot of fun playing with color, lines, and the placement of the subject within the frame. Contrasting colors would also be amazing for this theme. Keep your eyes out or create your own set up for these kinds of "color block" shots. If you're going to try this particular technique, start out with just one or two colors to help keep it simple.

A stock worthy “Minimalism” photo should have these qualities:

Simple Impact: When it comes to the most powerful shots, it’s really all about what is IN the frame and what you leave OUT. This theme will help you get super clear on that.

Good Lighting: Remember as you’re out looking for these shots that natural light fluctuates. Be on the lookout for subjects that are already in good natural light. You’re usually going to have the best luck if your subject is evenly lit under soft, diffused light. Shade from a tree or overcast days work well. Early morning and evening light often has a lovely warm glow. If you are shooting under harsh lighting, try to use the shadows as part of your composition.

Good Composition: As you’re shooting, remember to watch your edges and exclude anything that could distract the viewer from your subject.



Eliminating distractions is particularly important for this theme.

Be Theme Worthy: For this one we are not just looking for pretty shots with perfect composition, we are looking for shots that consist of only the bare essentials. Stunning shots with a minimum of “stuff” in them.

Use Negative Space: Having one subject with blank space in the rest of the shot is a great technique for this theme. As mentioned before, the empty space will draw strong attention to your subject, while also providing useful copy space for designers.

Consider the “Rule of Thirds”: This is a compositional technique that works especially well for minimalistic shots and it’s easy to do. Simply draw an imaginary tic-tac-toe board across your frame, and place your subject, a dominant line, shape, or point of focus somewhere along one of the thirds lines in your shot.

Watch for Leading Lines: Carefully place any lines in your scene in a way that will draw the viewer into your shot and possibly lead the viewer to your subject. See the first example image, of buildings, above for an idea of how this can work.

Where to Find Good Minimalist Stock Shots

For this Challenge, you can likely find acceptable subject matter pretty much anywhere — at home, in the yard, in your community, as you travel, out in nature... the possibilities are wide open. If you are doing these shots in your home you can take all the time you need to set up and wait for the perfect light, or create the perfect light. Take your time, plan it out, and

then enjoy the process while executing it. If you head out to explore in natural light, pay close attention to the time of day, weather conditions and so on. I recommend trying to get nice diffused or indirect daylight illuminating your scene. Or take it in the opposite direction, and look for direct harsh shadows that you can use in your composition.

Shooting Tips

How to get good lighting:

When it comes to lighting, think about where you can find or create the best lighting for your subject in your location. For example, if you're using window light, what time of day is going to be best to shoot your subject? If you need to add light, be sure to diffuse and/or bounce your flash if possible to avoid harsh on-camera light.

Use a reflector, white poster board or even a white sheet to bounce light back onto your subject. Use your tripod if you need longer exposure times or just want to get your camera all set up and ready. If you are heading outside, keep in mind you typically want to stay away from direct harsh sunlight, although for this particular theme, strong shadows could play a role in your image.

Lighting really depends on subject and location, but is a critical component to your shots.

Work the shot:

As always "work the shot." Be sure to try a variety of perspectives to get the best possible image. Try to stretch yourself and challenge yourself to see a scene in different ways. If you do this, you'll definitely come away with a whole range and variety of photos to choose from.

Keep it simple:

Pick a subject and figure out how to simplify the composition down to the absolute barest minimum. Once you've gotten rid of all distractions in your frame, carefully decide where you want to place your subject so that the viewer's eye will naturally go there.

Keywording Tips for "Minimalism"

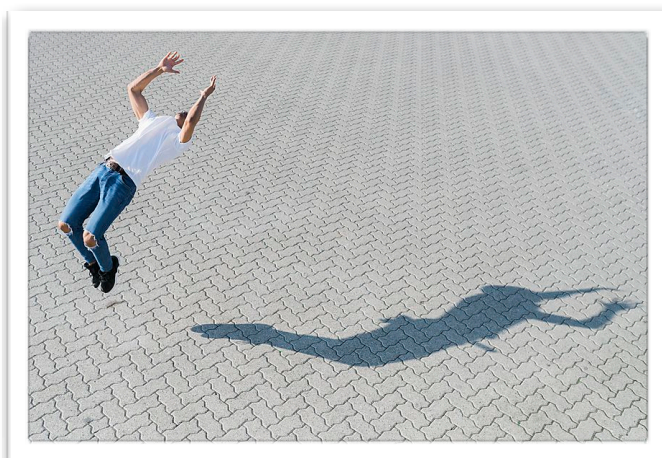
All your shots should include the who (if there is one), what, where, when, and why as keywords. Words that describe the actions taking place, and the general mood or feeling of the image are all important descriptors as well. And of course, it's also a good idea to throw in a few concept or idea words. For instance, all of your photos for this theme should be able to use "minimalism", "minimalist", and "simple" as concept keywords. As always, don't include things that aren't there or are not specifically expressed.

Let's look at the "back flipper" shot again. Here is how I would keyword it:

acrobat	dancing	male	street style
acrobatic	escapism	man	strength
action	free	minimalism	stunt
attitude	freedom	one	style
back flip	fun	outdoors	sunny
casual	ground	outside	urban
city	hip	parkour	wanderlust
confidence	hip hop	people	wild
copy space	individuality	shadow	young
day	jump	somersault	youth
dance	jumping	sport	
dancer	lifestyle	street	

If you want to see more minimalist shots to whet your appetite and provide inspiration, you can see a small gallery of images I've pulled together here:

<https://www.stocksy.com/user/consumergallery?id=131829>



I hope you enjoy this Challenge. I feel like someone is going to find a real passion and niche for this type of photography.

Remember, less is more this month!

I look forward to seeing all your great minimalism shots!!