Lightroom Bitesize

by
John Hallett Photography

Lightroom Bitesize: Straightening & Cropping

This shows a simple tool in Lightroom that can straighten an image but also crop it at the same time to improve composition.
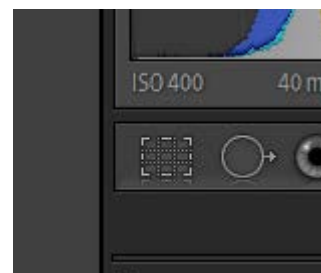
Here is a photograph of Talacre lighthouse in North Wales. The wind was blowing and I could feel that rain was on the way. I took this opportune shot whilst walking and you can see that the horizon visibly tilts and the overall composition looks a little boring. With a slight anti-clockwise rotation and a crop we should be able to salvage something from it.

Highlight the chosen photograph in the filmstrip at the bottom of the screen and go into 'Develop' module by clicking on the 'Develop' tab.

Straightening the image

Click on the Crop Overlay button. You will see a grid appear on the image (we will discuss the grid in more detail a little later on).
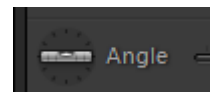
1

There are two ways of straightening:

Method 1: Hover the cursor OUTSIDE the outer edge of the image. You will see the cursor takes the shape of a two headed arrow.

Left-click on the mouse and hold. You will now see a more detailed grid appear over the image to assist alignment. With the left button still depressed move the mouse and you will see the image start to rotate. Use the alignment grid as a guide to achieve a level horizon.

Method 2: Alternatively, click on the little Spirit Level icon then click-and-hold on one end of the horizon and drag to the other end (a line will appear for guidance). Just release and the image will rotate to match.

You could also use the slider bar to rotate the image - but I find this far too inaccurate for minor rotational tweaks.
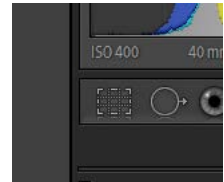
When you are happy that the image is straight then either double-click on the image or press the 'Done' button.

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Cropping the image

Now that the image is straight we can try and crop it to improve composition.

Click on the Crop Overlay button.

You will notice that as soon as the Crop Overlay tool opens the original rotation is visible on each corner. This shows the true non-destructive nature of Lightroom - whatever you do to the image is never permanent
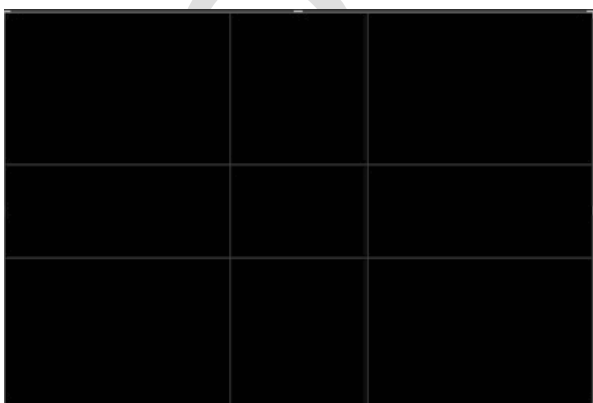
By default, the Crop Overlay grid that appears over the image has lines at each third.

This grid is used because of the well-known photographic 'law' called the '**Rule of Thirds**'. This states that if you place points of interest on the lines - or even better where two lines cross - that your image becomes more balanced to the eye. This grid helps you to crop the image taking that into account.

There are those that believe that the Rule of Thirds was devised as a simplistic way of introducing new photographers to the concept of the 'Golden Ratio' and we will look at this in a moment.

If you press the key for the letter O (**not** the zero key) you will find there are five other overlay options. We will now look at these in turn:
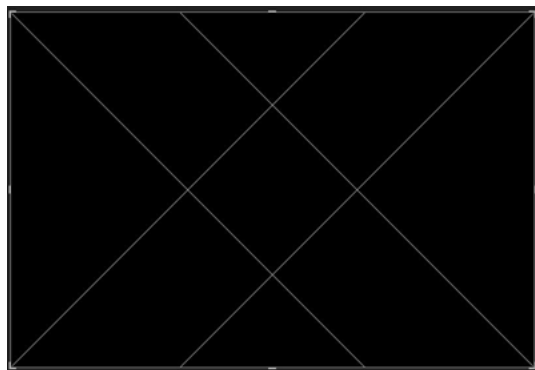

You will see that this is very similar to the Rule of Thirds overlay above but the lines are closer to the middle of the image.

This overlay is based on the Golden Ratio - which is a ratio of 1 : 1.618 (otherwise known as Phi) and is derived from something called the **Fibonacci Sequence:** 1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34, etc (*can you see the pattern?*).
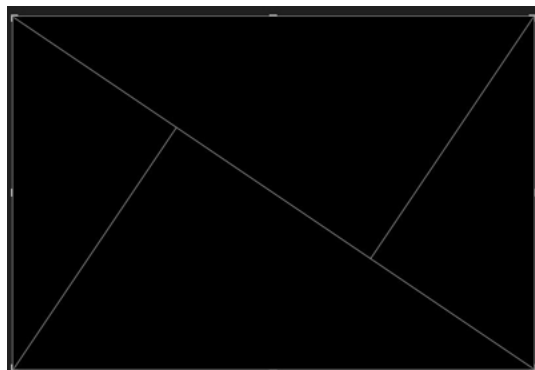
No-one knows exactly why a composition following the Golden Ratio is so aesthetically pleasing to the eye but it has been used back at least as far as the Renaissance (14th - 17th Century) by artists, sculptors , architects....... and (much later) photographers.
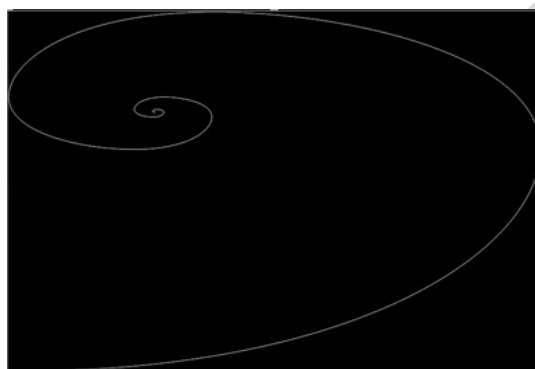
Another overlay based on the **Golden Ratio** but this time as a diagonal. Useful if a main feature of the composition lies from one corner of the image to an opposing corner.

Yet another overlay based on the **Golden Ratio** (*are you starting to see a trend here and thinking there's more to this ratio than you first thought?*).

"Hold on" I hear you saying "what if my image needs a mirror-image of this overlay?"

Just press Shift-O when you are using any non-symmetrical crop overlay and it will toggle through all the other options.
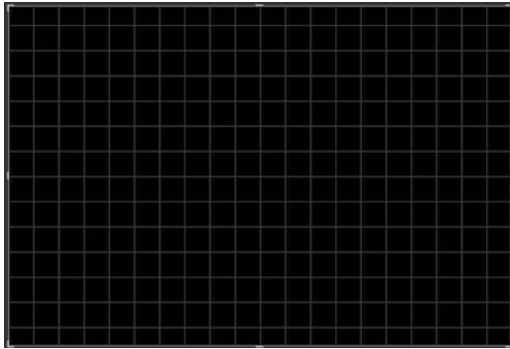
Remember I mentioned something called the **Fibonacci Sequence** above? Well this is the **Fibonacci Spiral** and is derived from the same principle.

It is interesting to note that it appears naturally in such things as flowers, seed heads, pine cones and shells.

Top Tip !

Press the 'Shift' key and the letter O (not zero) at the same time when you are using any non-symmetrical crop overlay and it will toggle through all the other options.

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Any finally.....oh, this looks a bit boring after all those fancy ratios.... the basic grid. You may remember this from the Straightening exercise and it is very useful for checking straightness and if you think you have some converging verticals.
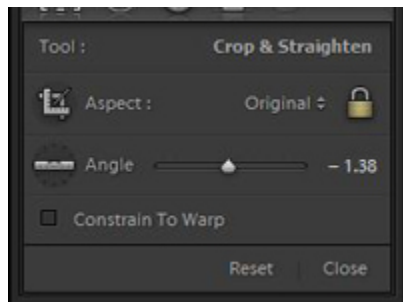
So, now it's time to crop that photograph to try and improve its composition. I expect that now you know that the Rule of Thirds is probably just for photography beginners that you'll want to use one of the other Crop Overlays instead. Good.

Take a look at the image. Look at the basic composition to decide which overlay is going to be of most use. Notice the lighthouse is the main feature - but then see how the footprints spiral around into the bottom left-hand corner? Remind you of something?
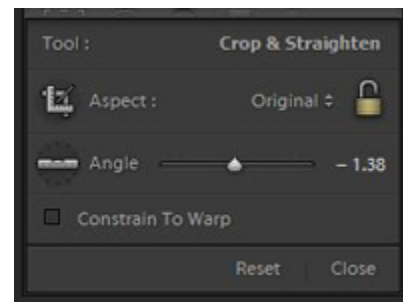
Change the overlay to the Fibonacci Spiral crop overlay.

You now have to decide if you want to keep the original proportions (or aspect ratio) of the image when you do the crop (i.e. the ratio of the width to the height). You will see a little padlock symbol in the Crop & Straighten toolbox, leave it locked if you want to retain the proportions or click on it to unlock it if you want to change the proportions free-hand.
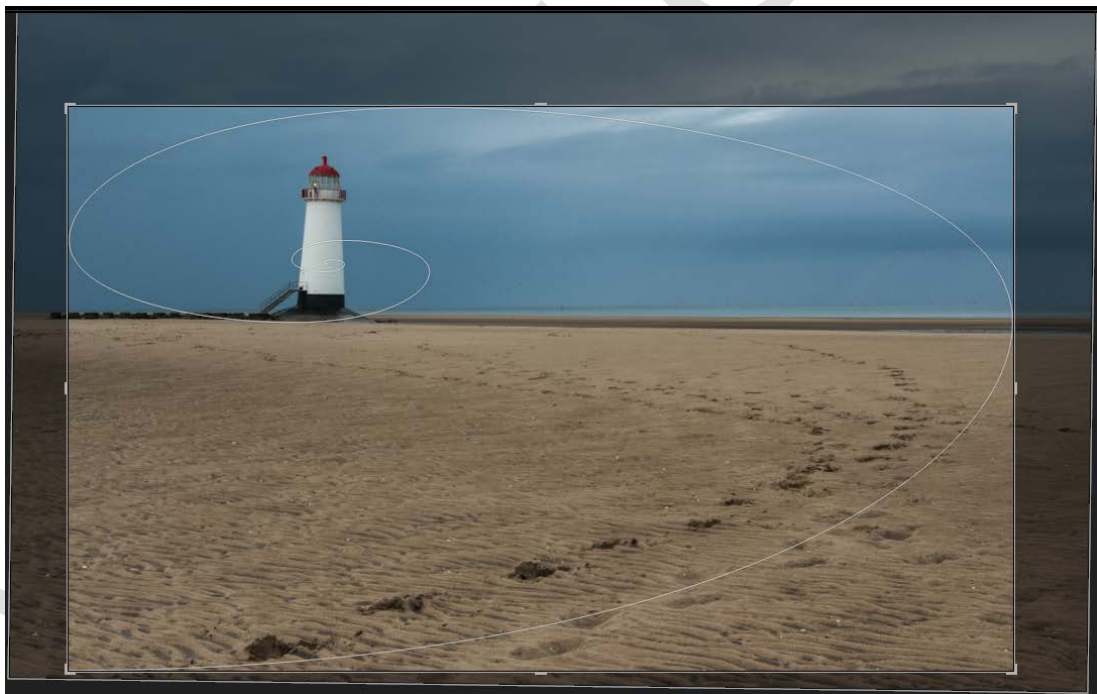
Proportions (aspect ratio) locked

Proportions (aspect ratio) unlocked

I want to keep as much of the foreground as possible because that's where the footprints start and also the centre of the Fibonacci Spiral is a little high and to the left of the middle of the lighthouse. So I'll move the top right-hand corner diagonally inwards.

Click-and-hold on the corner and move the mouse to drag the crop overlay inwards until the centre of the spiral is as close to the centre of the lighthouse as possible and the 'tail' of the spiral is as close to the arc of footprints as possible. Remember there will always be a compromise.

As before, either double-click on the image or press the 'Done' button to complete the crop.

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So now we have our final picture. The horizon is straight and the composition is more aesthetically pleasing. Notice also that the line of the horizon is now away from the centre - in fact it's now in a position that aligns roughly with the Golden Ratio. Coincidence?

And don't forget, just press the big 'Reset' button on the lower right-hand side of Lightroom and you will go straight back to the original version.

If you found this tutorial useful please let me know by leaving a comment on my Facebook page (or just 'Like' it) at   https://www.facebook.com/johnhallettphotographs/ . Thanks