Critiquing Images

A Basic Guide

- Many people may not know where to start when performing a critique.

- Some may even feel that they are not knowledgeable to critique another's work.

- It doesn't matter whether you are just starting out or are a seasoned professional; there are many aspects of an image that you can comment on.

- If you don't feel that you can comment on the technical aspects of an image, then just comment on the composition, or the emotional feeling behind the image,

- Critiquing is beneficial, not only for the photographer whose work you are critiquing, but it is also helpful to you.

- By thinking about all the different aspects of what makes an image "good" or "poor", you are adding to your own knowledge when it is you taking the image!

The technical aspects

- Exposure.
- Is any area overexposed or underexposed? Over exposed or blown out, the highlights lack detail.
- Underexposed, the shadows lack detail.
- How could the problem be prevented in the future?
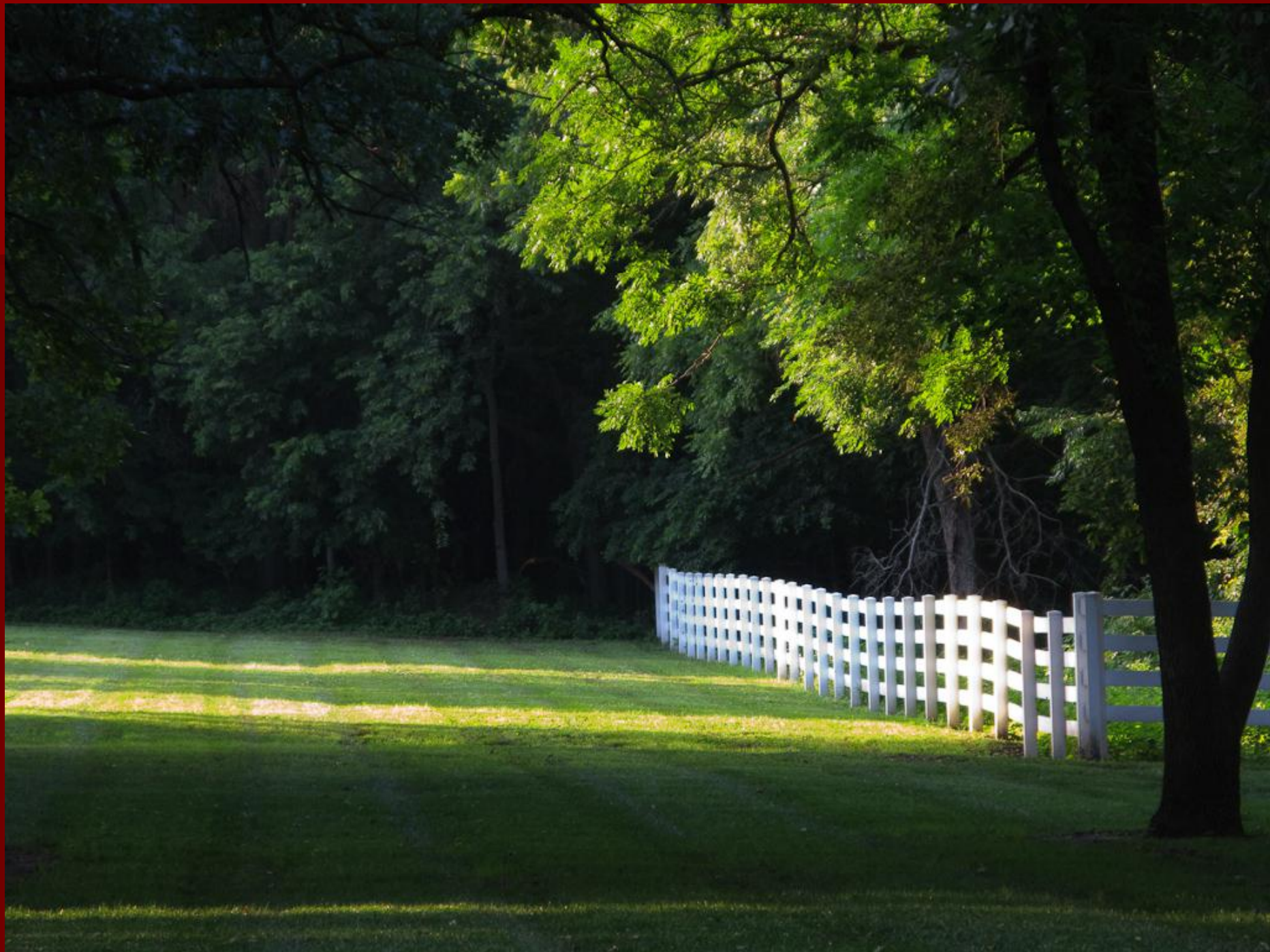
- Focus.
- Is the main subject in focus?
- Is the focus appropriate for the situation?
- Does the image have sufficient detail?
- Does the image seem fuzzy or slightly out of focus?

- Depth of Field (DOF).

- Is the DOF shallow or deep?

- Does the DOF work in this shot, or should more or less of the image be in focus?

- Lighting.

- Is the light soft or harsh?

- Does the type of lighting enhance or detract from the things in the image?

- Is the white balance set correctly; is there a color cast to the photo?

The composition:

- Balanced.
- Is the main subject in the center of the frame?
- Is it on a third? Somewhere else?
- Does the composition work, or would you have done something differently?
- Does the composition seem to be weighted on the wrong element or is it well balanced?
- Is there too much bright sky in the image, maybe more foreground would help balance it. For example divide the image into 1/3 sky and 2/3rds foreground or vice/versa, never split in half.

- Cropping! Framing.
- Is there excessive space is the image?
- Should the crop have been tighter?
- Is it cropped too tightly that important parts of the photo have been cutoff?
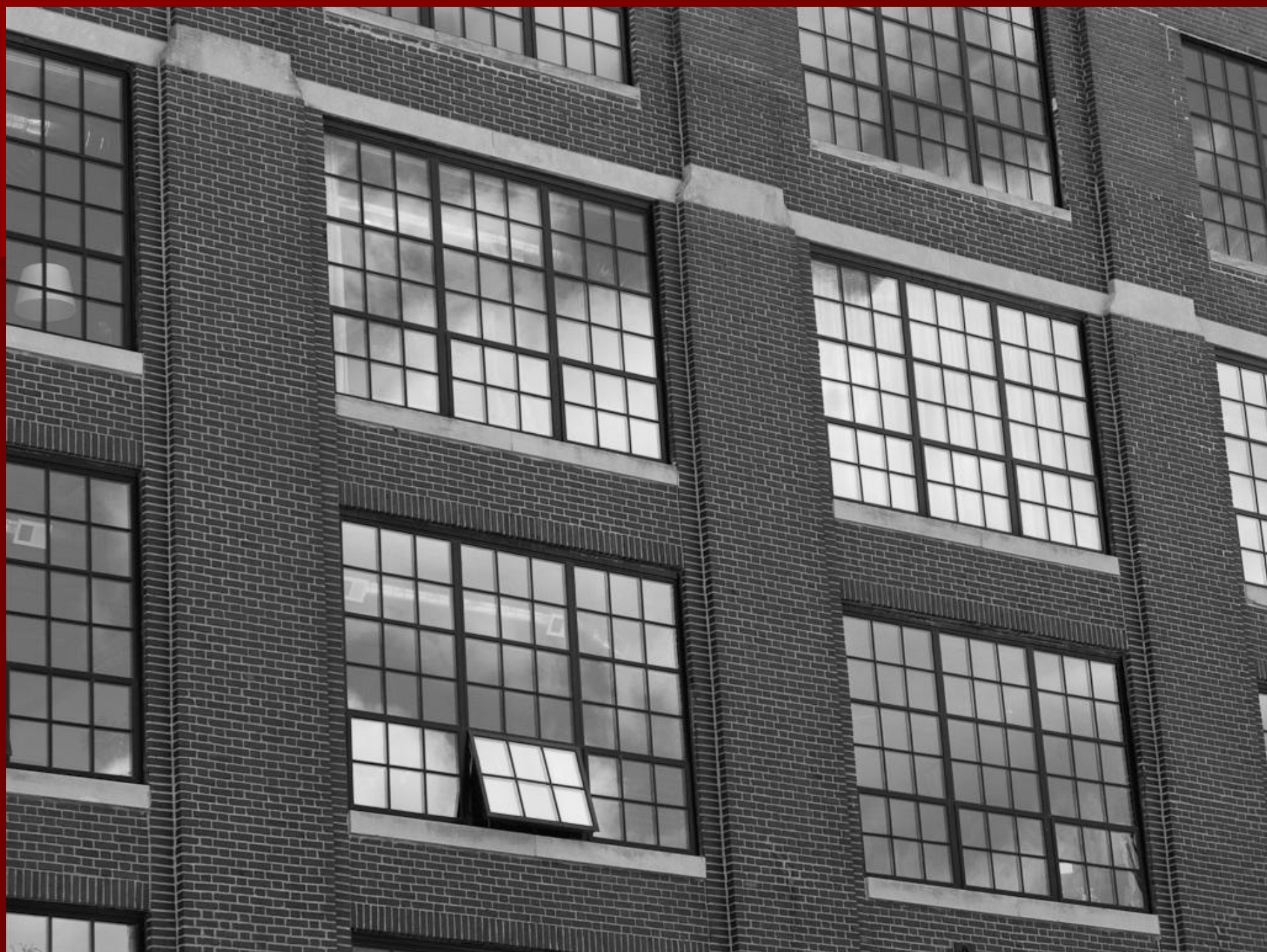- Are elements of the image enhancing the framing of the subject?

- Color tones.
- What types of colors are evident?
- Did the photographer use a lot of complementary colors?
- Are the colors too vivid? Not vivid enough?
- If you are looking at a B&W photo, is there a true black, true white, with a large tonal range in between, or is the photo too "muddy"?
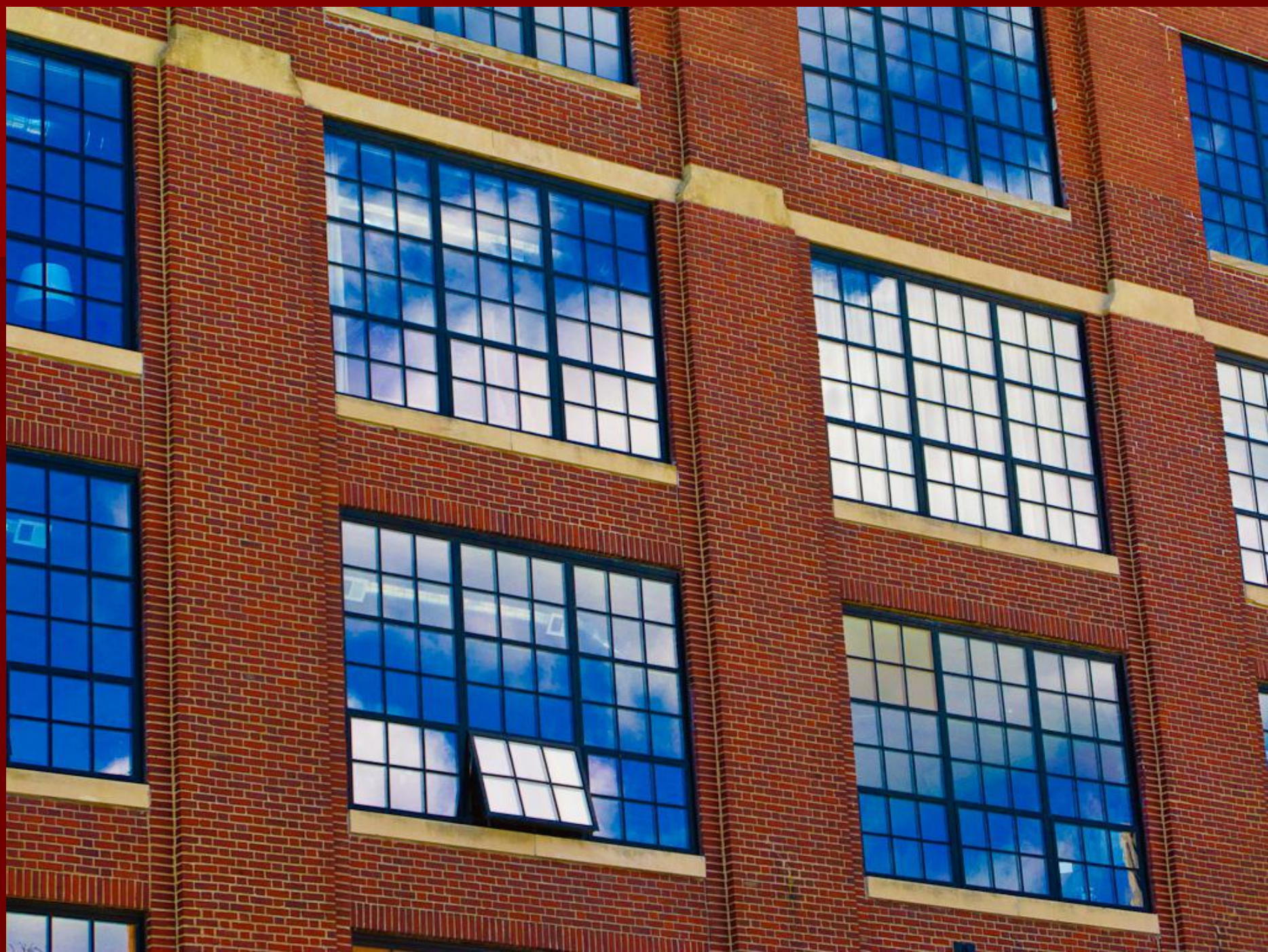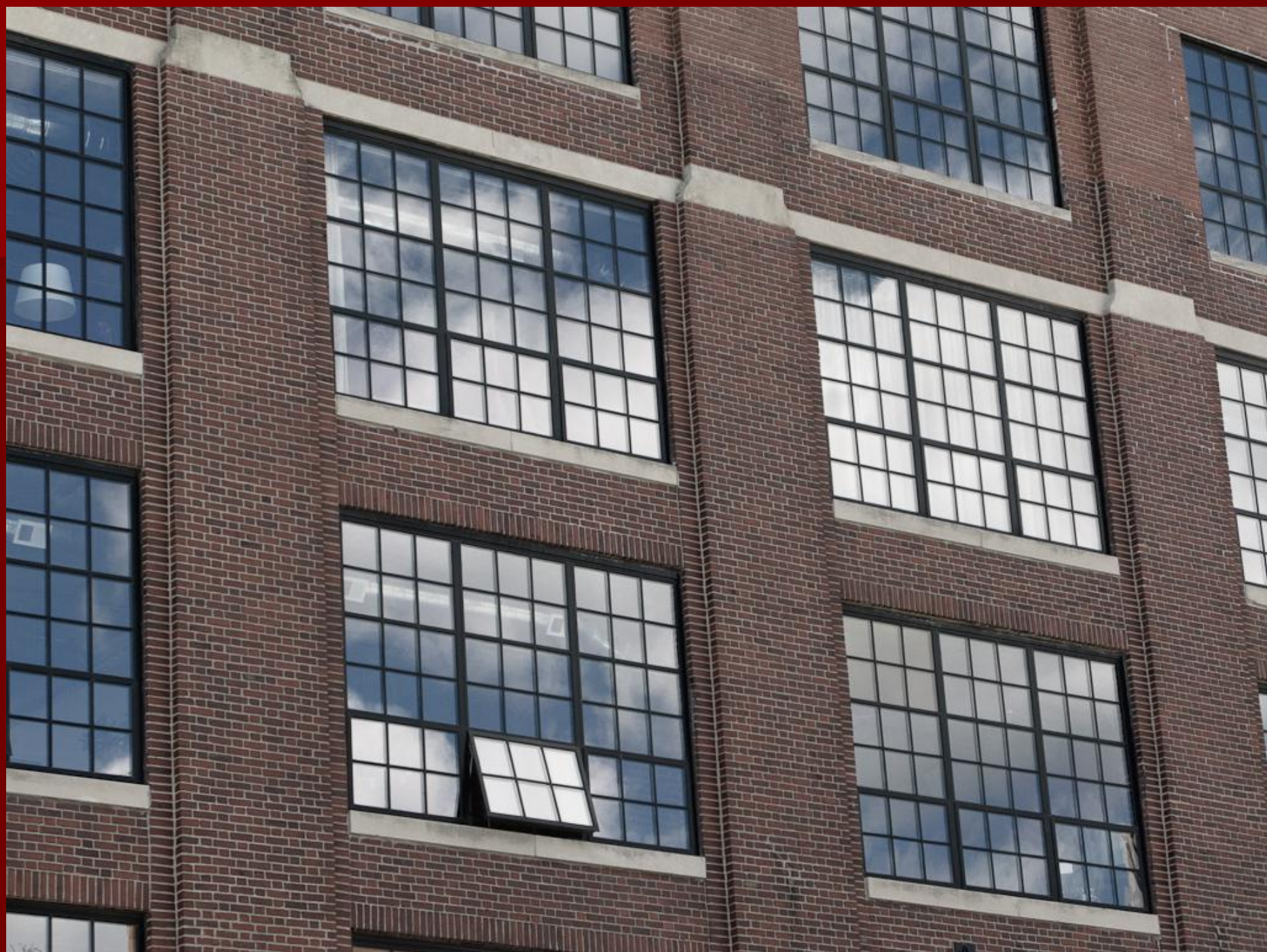
- Diagonals, Curves, Lines
- Did the photographer make use of any visually interesting elements, such as diagonals, lines or curves?

- Leading lines.
- Do the lines and overall composition make you want to look deeper into the photo?
- Is your eye drawn into the photo, or out of it?
- Has the photographer led the viewer into their image and directed the way they are seeing it.
- The image is busy and is difficult to follow. Busy images are confusing and tend to lack a clear meaning. For example a path leading to a structure, a fence leading you down a road.
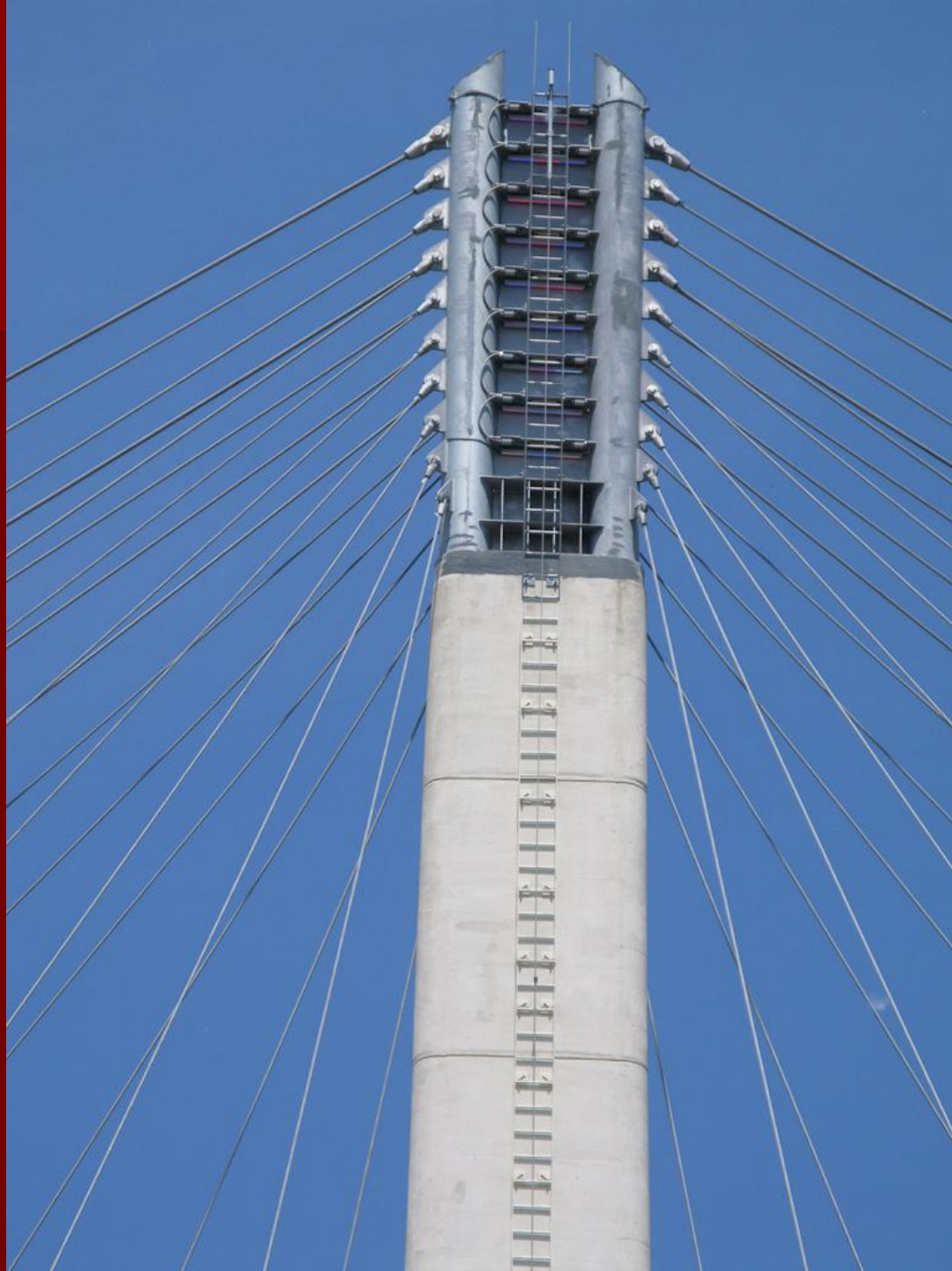
- Light intensity.

- Are there too many bright areas? Very light areas are the first thing that catches the eye of the viewer.
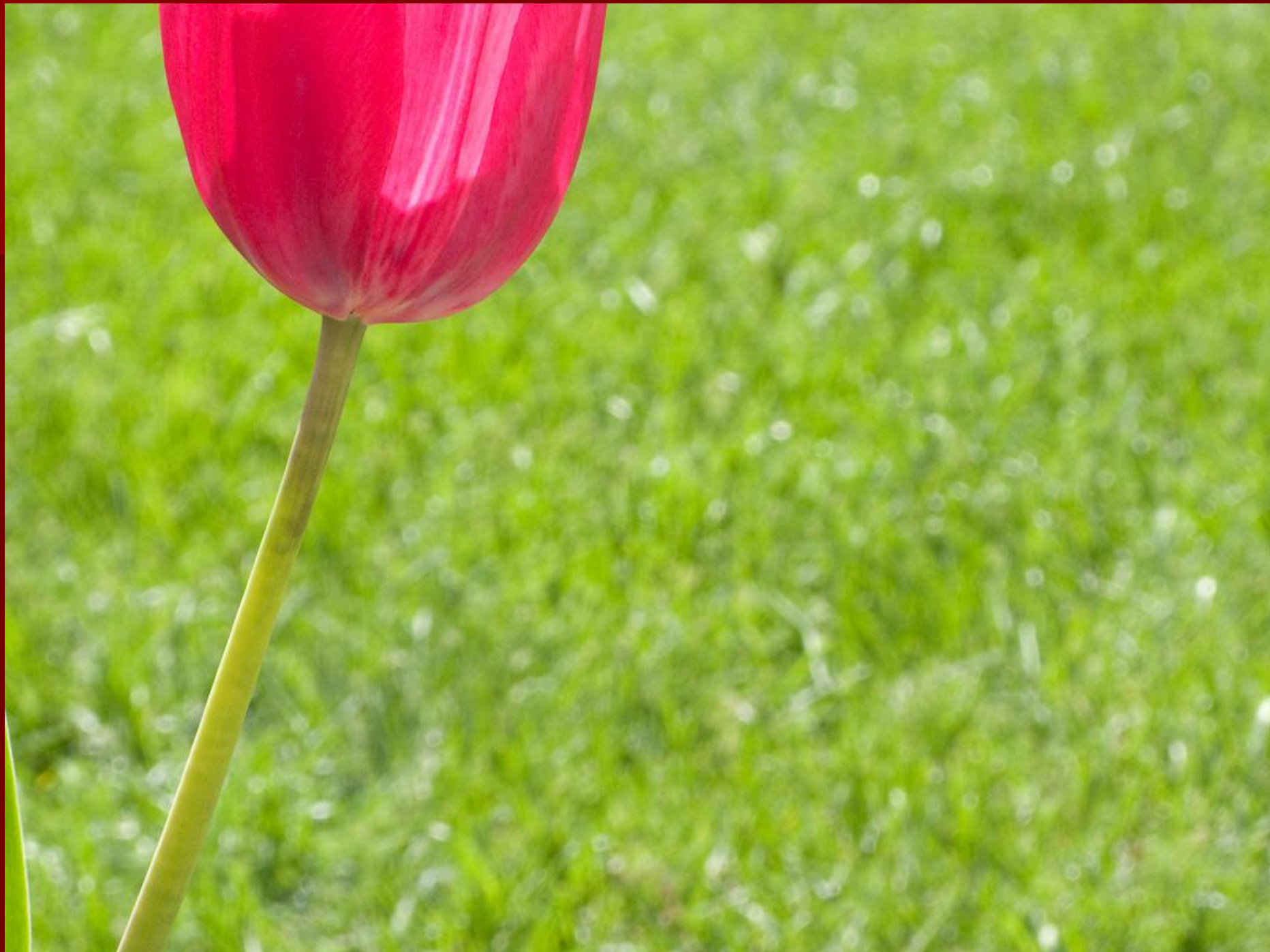
- Too many dark areas?

- Balance.
- Is the photo "balanced"?
- Would it be better if there were other objects or other light/dark areas in the frame to improve the balance?
- If the photo is off balance, is there a reason for it?

- Depth.
- Is there a sense of depth in your image?
- Does the image appear flat; perhaps some shadowing to the elements will help build depth.

- Texture.

- Does your image contain texture? The image may find additional depth with some texture in the background. This is especially true in close ups.

- How does the image make you feel?
- Even if you are a beginner, you are certainly qualified to critique based on these questions:
- What mood do you see in the photo? Did the photographer capture an emotional moment with their image or does the image lack a clear subject.
- Do you think this mood is what the photographer intended?
- Did the photographer succeed in telling his/her story with the photograph? Your image reminds me of or I am having trouble finding what you're trying to say with your image.

- Do you like the image?
- More importantly, say WHY you like the image, or WHY you don't.

- There seems to be a general perception that "to critique" means "to find fault with?.

- It doesn't mean that at all. It means to analyze and respond to something, either positively or negatively, or both.

- The success of an image in someone else's eyes is how it works for them

- Critiquing info was found on Porter's Board.

- Presentation put together by Gary Prill 2009.