

12 Tips for better Street Photography

by Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer

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Street photography, to me, can happen anywhere, anytime. It's about people interacting with each other or with their environment. It can be something as simple as a well-composed image of someone lost in thought, or the way a person occupies a space—all while chasing those elusive decisive moments and striving to find aesthetic balance in the chaos of daily life.

1. Start with “the one thing.”

Make sure people immediately know *why* you made the photo. Always ask yourself: “What was it that first grabbed my attention?” That has to be your main subject—your visual anchor, your *raison d'être*. Everything else in the frame should support that one idea, not compete with it.



2. Single individuals moving through space.

A lone person walking, running, or moving through a scene is a classic street setup. Use their movement to create direction and energy in the frame—watch their body language, wait for a decisive gesture, and position yourself so the background stays clean and supportive.



3. Multiple people interacting.

More than one individual interacting with each other or their environment instantly adds story. Look for gestures, glances, body language, and small details that show relationships—conflict, joy, tension, humor. Street photography thrives on human interaction.



4. Use layers of composition.

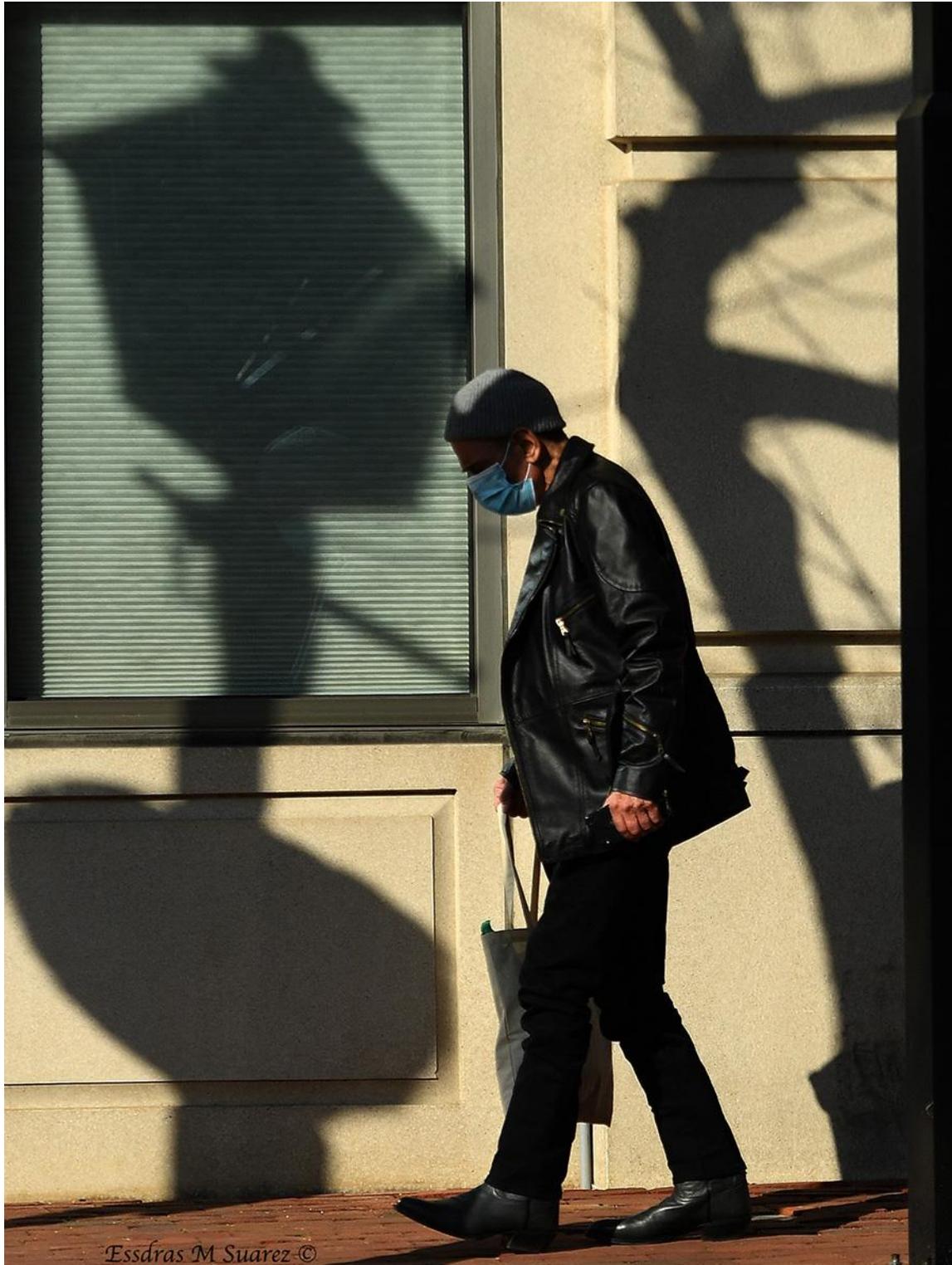
Build your frame in layers: foreground, middle ground, background. Lead with a strong first line of entry—like a shape, a person, a shadow, or a graphic element—and use it to guide the viewer toward your main subject. Layers add depth, complexity, and a richer sense of place.



5. Use the Rule of Thirds—and give people room to move. Place your subjects off-center and give them space in the direction they're moving or looking. This creates tension and flow inside the frame. Learn the Rule of Thirds first, use it with intention, and later you can break it—*but not by accident*.



6. Pay attention to light and shadow.
Light is your raw material. Notice its direction, quality, and intensity. Use shadows, highlights, and tonal contrast in dramatic, engaging ways—sometimes the shadow is more interesting than the subject itself. Great light can turn an ordinary moment into a powerful photograph.



7. Use silhouettes to capture the essence of a moment. Silhouettes are perfect for hinting at who is in the frame without fully revealing them. Make sure your silhouetted subjects are clearly separated (no heads or limbs merging),

and that their shapes are easily recognizable. Strong silhouettes simplify the scene and amplify mood.



8. Find interesting characters—and study them.
Look for people with presence: their face, clothing, posture, or behavior tells you there's a story there. Watch them for a bit until you get a sense of who they are or how they move, then try to capture *that* essence in a single frame. Respect, patience, and curiosity are key.



9. Use your surroundings—fill the frame with meaning.
Don't just focus on your subject; pay attention to the environment. Use walls, signs,

reflections, architecture, and details to create “wraparound compositions,” where there’s useful information on every side of the frame. The surroundings help tell the full story of the moment.



10. Stay nimble: keep shooting, keep moving, keep adjusting. Once you’ve identified your subject, don’t become rooted in one spot. Move your feet, change angles, adjust distance, and keep shooting through the moment. Street photography rewards agility and persistence—your first frame is rarely your best frame.



11. Anticipate human behavior and patterns.

Try to predict what people will do next. If you're on the sidelines of a game and one team is about to win, position yourself where the celebration will likely explode—then also turn around and watch the body language of the losing team. Anticipation is how you catch peak emotion.



12. Decisive moments are king.

In the hierarchy of what makes a great photo, many things matter—composition, exposure, focus—but decisive moments sit at the top. You can survive small technical imperfections if the moment is strong. If the decisive moment is missing, the photo feels empty, no matter how “perfect” it is.



Bonus 13: Hunt for humor—the unicorn of street photography. Humor in the street is rare, unpredictable, and usually born from pure serendipity. It appears in odd juxtapositions, gestures, expressions, and timing. This only happens if you're in place, alert, your gear ready, and your mind open. When humor shows up, be ready to pounce.



