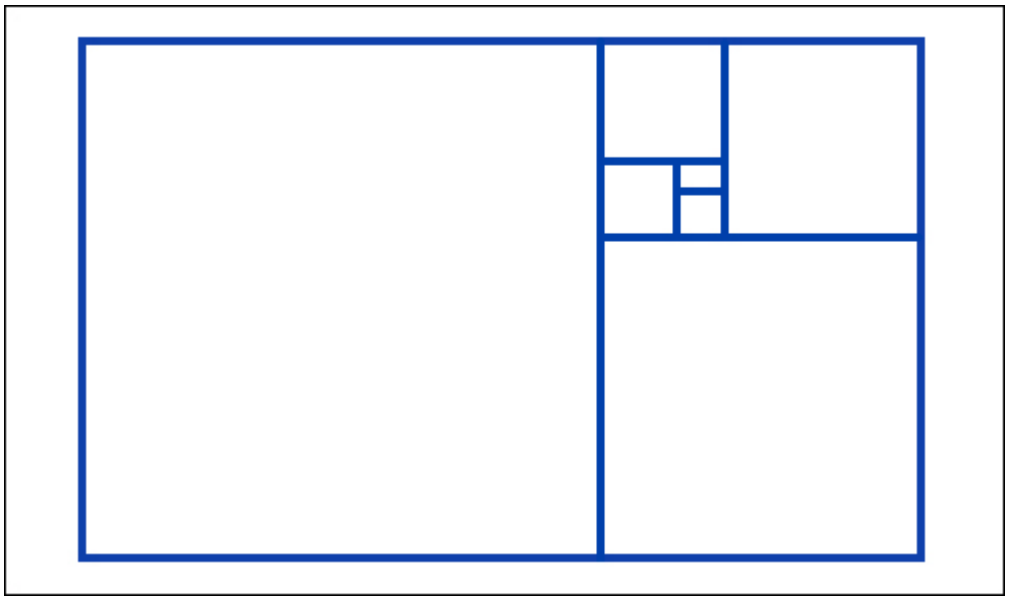
Conventional Wisdom says to put the focus of your painting in one of the sweet spots of the "Golden Section". Here's an explanation from "Compose" website: http://emptyeasel.com/2009/01/20/a-guide-to-the-golden-ratio-aka-golden-section-or-golden-mean-for-artists/

The Golden Mean Explained

There's a mathematical ratio commonly found in nature—the ratio of 1 to 1.618—that has many names. Most often we call it the *Golden Section*, *Golden Ratio*, or *Golden Mean*, but it's also occasionally referred to as the Golden Number, Divine Proportion, Golden Proportion, Fibonacci Number, and Phi.

You'll usually find the golden ratio depicted as a single large rectangle formed by a square and another rectangle. What's unique about this is that you can repeat the sequence infinitely and perfectly within each section.



If you take away the big square on the left, what remains is yet another golden rectangle. . . and so on.

The golden ratio in art and architecture

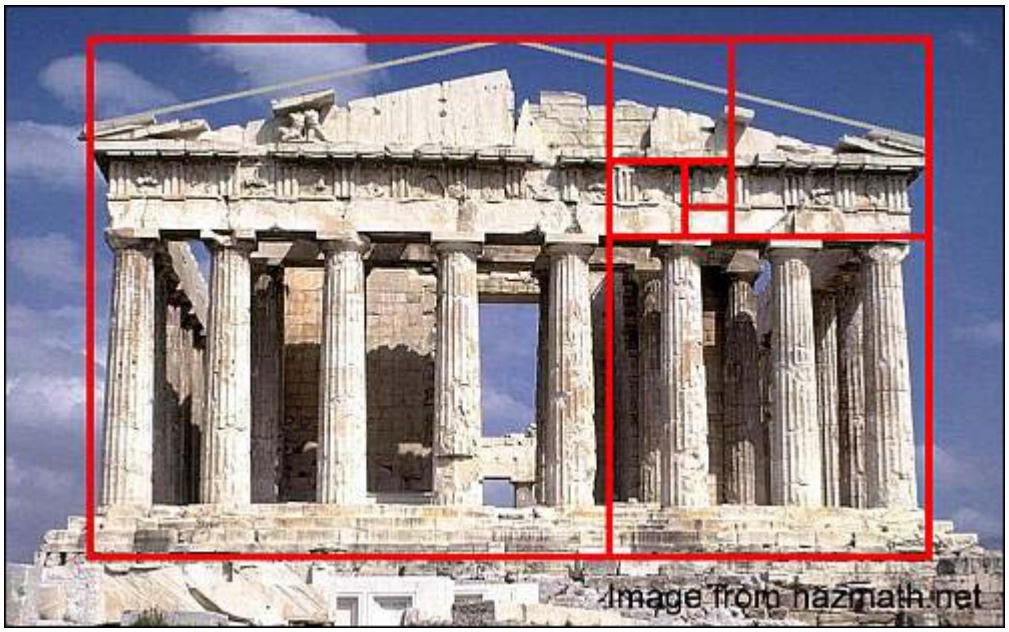
The appearance of this ratio in music, in patterns of human behavior, even in the proportion of the human body, all point to its universality as a principle of good structure and design.

Used in art, the golden ratio is the most mysterious of all compositional strategies. We know that by creating images based on this rectangle our art will be more likely to appeal to the human eye, but we don't know why.

Some scholars argue that the Egyptians applied the golden ratio when building the great pyramids, as far back as 3000 B.C.

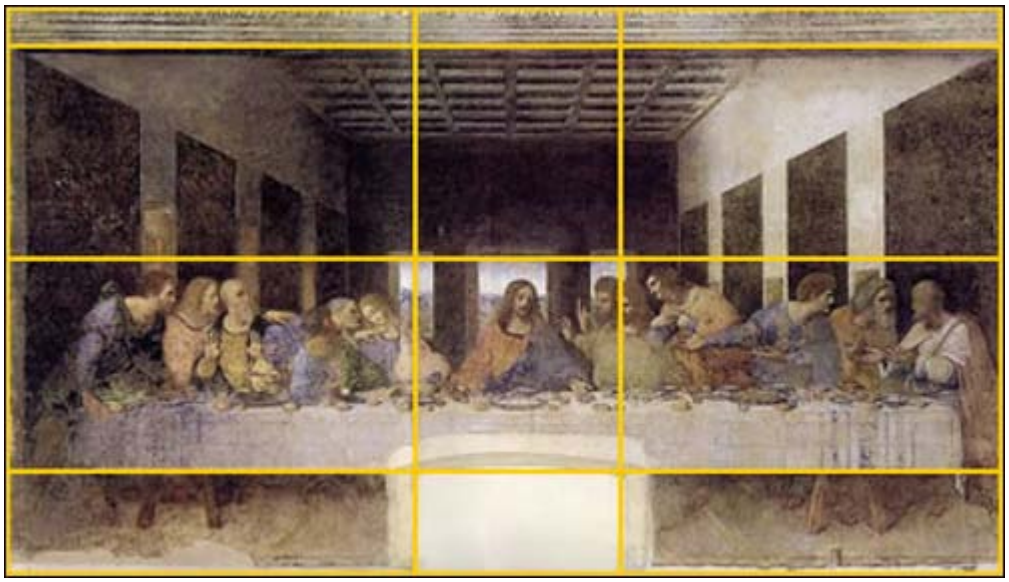
In 300 B.C. Euclid described the golden section in his writing of Euclid's Elements, and before that, around 500 B.C., Pythagoras claimed that the golden ratio is the basis for the proportions of the human figure.

The ancient Greeks also used the golden ratio when building the Parthenon.



Artists throughout history, like Botticelli and Leonardo daVinci, have used the golden rectangle, or variations of it, as the basis for their compositions.

Here's da Vinci's painting, *The Last Supper*, with golden sections highlighted.



Golden rectangles are still the most visually pleasing rectangles known, and although they're based on a mathematical ratio, you won't need an iota of math to create one.

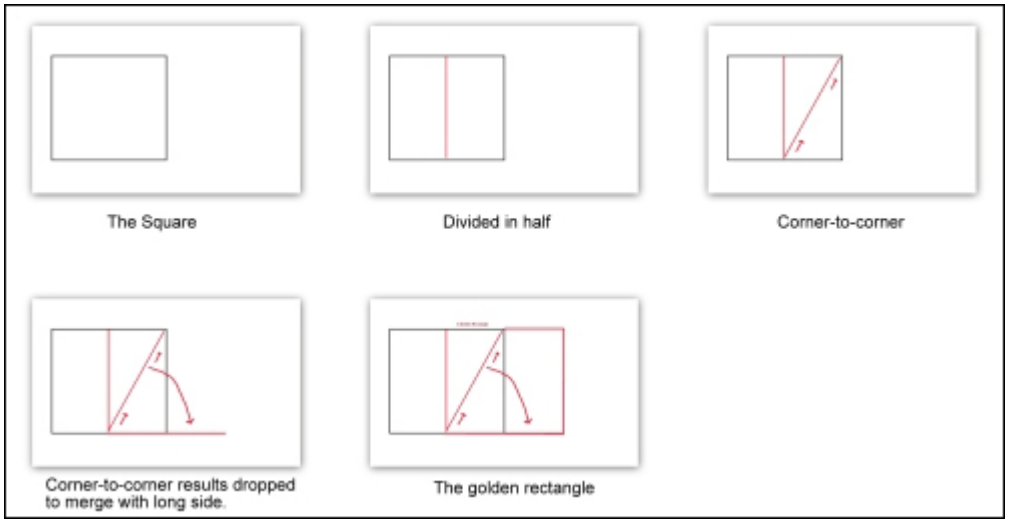
How to make a rectangle based on the golden ratio

If you want to use a golden rectangle in your own compositions, here's how you can make that happen without any special tools or mathematical formulas.

1. Begin with a square, which will be the length of the short side of the rectangle.

2. Then draw a line that divides it in half (forming two rectangles).

3. Draw a line going from corner to opposing corner of one of those halves.



4. Rotate the top point of that diagonal line downward until it extends your square.

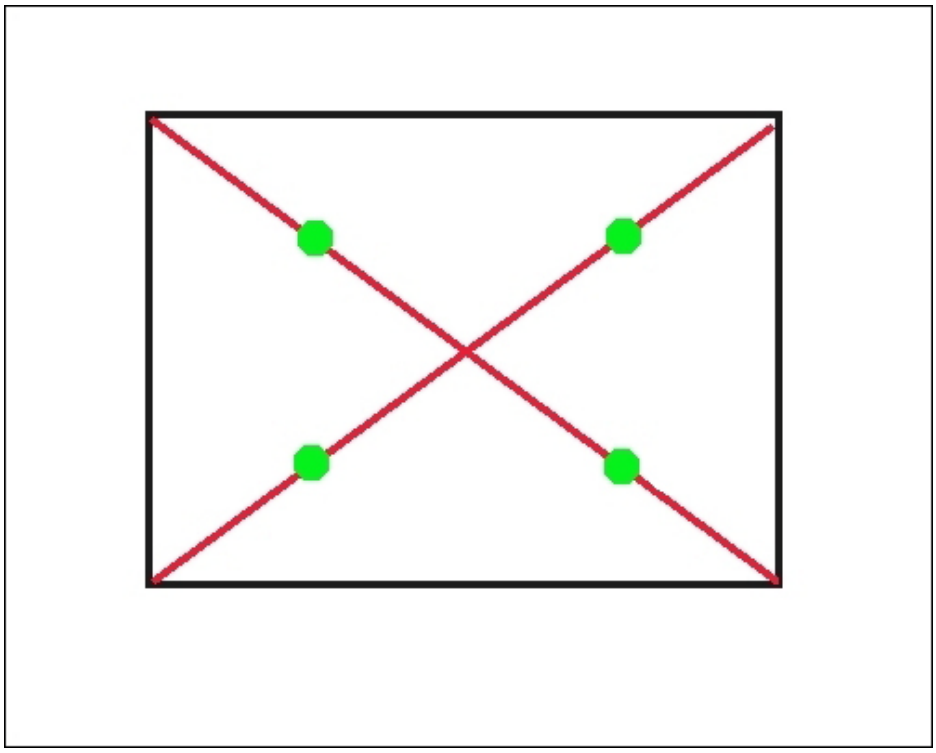
5. Finish off the rectangle using that diagonal length as a guide for the long side of your golden rectangle. It's that simple.

Visual points of interest inside a golden rectangle

Any square or rectangle (but especially those based on the golden ratio) contain areas inside it that appeal to us visually as well. Here's how you find those points:

1. Draw a straight from each bottom corner to its opposite top corner on either side. They will cross in the exact center of the format.

2. From the center to each corner, locate the midway point to each opposing corner.



These points—represented by the green dots in the diagram above—are called the “eyes of the rectangle.”

How to use the “eyes” of a golden rectangle

One strategy often used by artists is to locate focal points or areas of emphasis around and within these eyes, creating a strong visual path in their compositions.

Edward Hopper’s composition, below, sets the sailboat right on the lower right eye (with the tip of the sails extending nearly to the upper right eye).

In this painting, Carolyn Anderson places her subject’s hands around that spot too.

J.M.W. Turner uses the angle of his waves to create an arch that circles through the lower right and lower left eyes.

Notice that the focus of the scene is then captured within all four eyes, too.

Here is an easier way

This is from “Explore Art”: http://www.explore-drawing-and-painting.com/golden-mean.html

Use the Golden Mean to Create a Pleasing Visual Balance

You also can use the principle of the golden mean if you have always have used a viewfinder. The ancient Greeks developed the golden mean to help them build their temples.

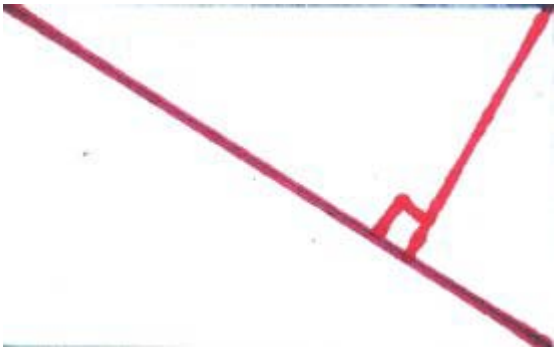
You probably have heard of this term once or before, but what is it?

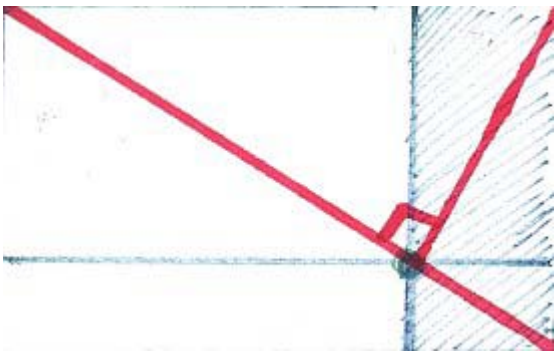
In a nutshell, it is a ratio of two different numbers. A ratio is “golden” if the relationship of the larger to the smaller number is the same as the ratio between the two numbers added together and the larger number. Numerically, the golden ratio is roughly 1.618 to 1.

But for your art, you don't need to worry about the exact number. With a ruler and a pencil, you can quickly divide the entire canvas to create a workable basis for your composition designed around the golden ratio.

Here then, is how you create your own format.

1. Start with a rectangular canvas or drawing paper, and connect two opposing corners with a diagonal.
2. From the diagonal, connect one of the remaining corners to the diagonal by a line that is perpendicular to the diagonal.





3. Through the point on the diagonal where the perpendicular line meets it, draw two lines, one horizontal and one vertical that divide the canvas into four unequal sections. The ratio of the largest of these sections to the overall canvas is a golden ratio.

Ever since the Renaissance, artists have found that placing the focal point of their paintings near the intersection of the lines you have drawn gives the final work a pleasing balance. You can even subdivide the spaces further using the same approach..

You can see the principle played out obviously in the “The Houses of Parliament” by Claude Monet...

One principle of composition in art is “rabatment”. A rabatment is used in paintings with rectangular formats. This technique helps you place your most important compositional elements. By consciously applying this approach, your compositions will be stronger.

You may be puzzled about the term. I was, and I have yet to find a formal definition for it—either in a dictionary or online. Leaving aside the question of the word's origins, however, let's find out how rabatment can help you quickly place the major elements of your composition.

How do you create a rabatment?

On a rectangular canvas, if you create a perfect square starting with one of the two short sides, this square is rabatment. In a horizontally oriented rectangle, you have either left or right rabatment. In a vertical rectangle, you have either top or bottom rabatment.

When you place the most important compositional elements within either of these squares, you are likely to produce a stronger composition. By that I mean that the drawing or painting will have more unity and balance. The elements in the rest of the rectangle should be subordinate to the rabatment subject.

I think that the reason for this is that in a rectangular painting, rabatment tips the balance of dominance. This way, you will only have a single focal region and you will not have both ends of the painting crying out to you for equal attention.

Take a look at Claude Monet's field of poppies (if you explore my site, you'll quickly realize that I like his work). The concept of rabatment is obvious here.

Take a look at Claude Monet's field of poppies (if you explore my site, you'll quickly realize that I like his work). The concept of rabatment is obvious here.

In the western world, one typically reads from left to right, so Monet carefully composed the tallest tree where the rabatment square ends. Because of this, your attention tends to stay inside the rabatment, where the main focal point is found. It is a very pleasing effect.

So when you compose a drawing, you can adopt the same principle by enclosing your focal point in a square inside the canvas. You can user either upper or lower rabatment on a vertically oriented rectangle, or left or right rabatment on a horizontally oriented canvas.

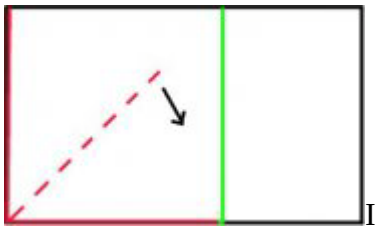
And here's another way to find the Sweet Spots

This is from "Art School at Home":
http://artschoolathome.wordpress.com/2008/08/18/golden-ratio-and-rabatment/

Rabatment

August 18, 2008 by Jill

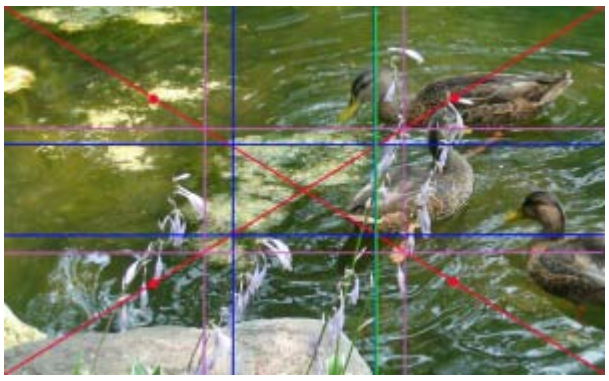
A few weeks ago I spent quite a bit of time looking at composition, especially the use of the Golden Ratio to position the centre of interest in a painting.

 I just discovered a wonderful new blog, Compose, by Dianne Mize, which introduced me to another interesting option for placing the centre of interest – rabatment. The rabatment is the square that results when the short side of a rectangle is rotated onto its long side, as shown by the green line at the right.

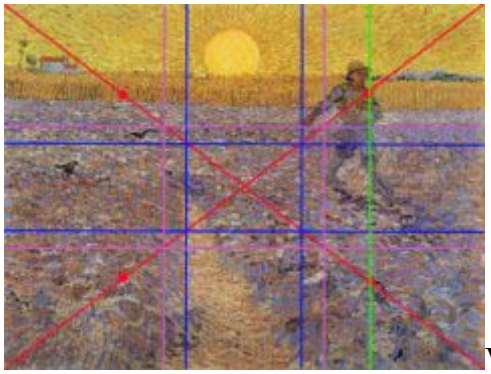
In a subsequent post, Placing Our Images: Golden Section and Thirds, Dianne compares rabatment with several other methods, including the golden section, the rule of thirds, and the "eyes" of the rectangle.

The rabatment interested me so much, I wanted to experiment with it a bit. So in each of the examples below, I've marked the various methods as follows:

red = diagonals, with the "eyes of the rectangle" (halfway points) as dots
green = rabatment
purple = rule of thirds
blue = golden sections



This photo is the composition for the project I'm working on. It's exactly a golden rectangle, so the length is 1.618 times the height. Not surprisingly, given the way the golden rectangle is constructed, the rabatment falls exactly on the golden section. The rule of thirds "sweet spots" are nearby (again, not surprisingly, since 0.667 is close to 0.618), and the eyes of the rectangle are just a bit further out, since they are based on quarters rather than thirds.

 Van Gogh's *Sower with Setting Sun* has a more standard length/width ratio of 1.26 (80.5 x 64 cm). In this case, the golden and rule of thirds "sweet

spots are again close together and the “eyes” are a bit further out; this will always be the case since these methods are based on constant proportions. This time, though, the rabatment falls almost exactly on the eyes of the rectangle – again, not surprising, since they fall at the quarter marks of the canvas, and the height of the canvas is 0.79 times the length (very close to ¾). The figure of the sower falls on the rabatment. (He’s breaking another of the traditional composition “rules” by walking out of the picture, but rules are meant to be broken – or at least bent a bit!)

Finally, Degas’ *Les Repasseuses* is an almost square format (76 x 81 cm), with a length/width ratio of only 1.09. In this case, the rabatment is way off by itself near the edge of the canvas, pretty well useless for composition planning. But look where the heads and hands fall – 3 out of 4 are right on the “eyes”!

So overall, what I found is that rabatment is an easy and effective method of planning a composition. It works very well for rectangles that are closer to golden proportions than square, and most standard canvas shapes tend to fall in this range, with length/width ratios between 1.25 and 1.4. And because it’s so easy, I will probably use it often.