

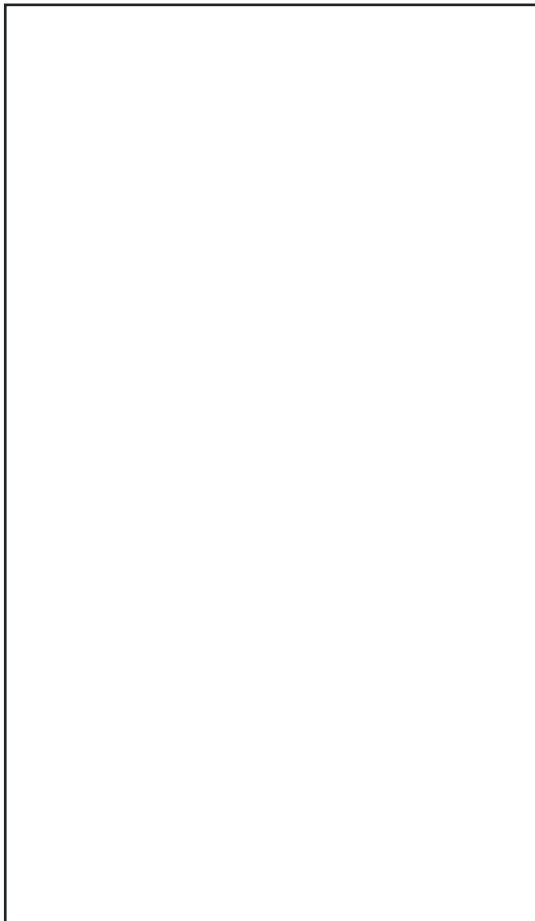
Hard & Soft

Below is a list of some concepts. By yourself, write those you associate with being soft in the "soft" box. Write those you associate with being hard in the "hard" box.

When you're done, elect a leader to write things on the board, and reach group consensus on the placement of the terms in the correct boxes.

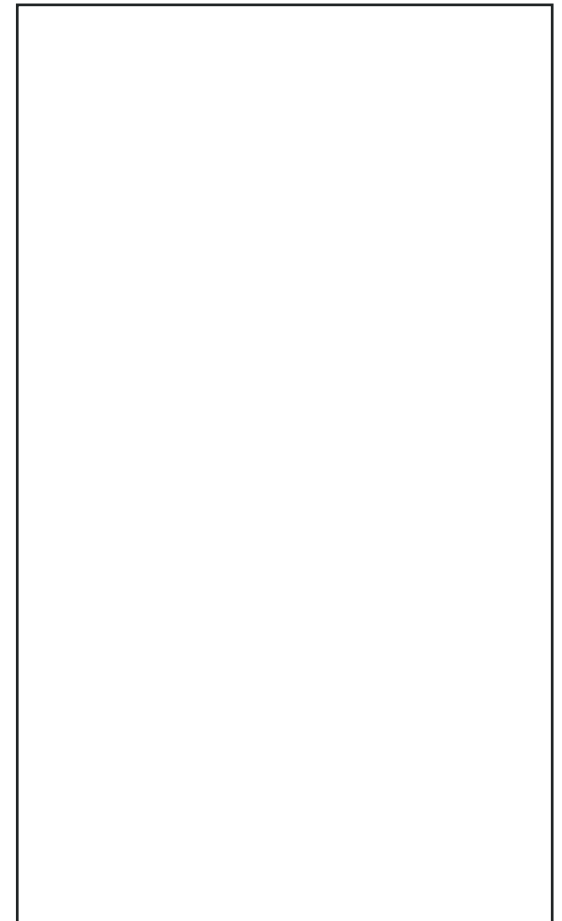
Once you're done with that, go to the next page for an interpretation of the exercise.

Hard



- Logic
- Metaphor
- Dream
- Reason
- Precision
- Humor
- Consistency
- Ambiguity
- Play
- Work
- Exact
- Approximate
- Direct
- Focused
- Fantasy
- Reality
- Paradox
- Diffuse
- Analysis
- Hunch
- Generalization
- Specifics
- Child
- Adult

Soft



Hard & Soft

There are two kinds of people in this world: those who divide everything into two groups and those who don't.

This sheet will help you interpret the Hard & Soft exercise.

Take a moment to think about this question:

How would you compare the "Hard" list with the "Soft" one? Objective versus subjective? Quantitative versus qualitative? Masculine versus feminine?

When you look at the final list you came up with, you'll see that the items on the hard side have a definite right and wrong answer. On the soft side, there may be many right answers. On the hard side, things are black and white; on the soft side, there are many shades of gray. A few of you might say that you can pick up the things on the hard side – like a bar of metal; the soft things are a bit harder to grab onto – like a handful of water.

Now, add the word "Thinking" behind the words in both boxes (diffuse thinking, precise thinking, etc.), and you may see some of those terms in a slightly different light.

Soft Thinking has many of the characteristics on the soft list: it is metaphorical, approximate, diffuse, humorous, playful and capable of dealing with contradiction. Hard Thinking, on the other hand, tends to be more logical, precise, exact, specific and consistent. We might say that hard thinking is like a spotlight. It is bright, clear and intense, but the focus is narrow. Soft thinking is like a floodlight. It is more diffuse, not as intense, but covers a wider area.

Where soft thinking tries to find similarities and connections among things, hard thinking focuses on their differences. For example, a soft thinker might say that a cat and a refrigerator have a lot in common ("they both have a place to put fish"; "they both have 'tails'"; "they both come in a variety of colors"). The hard thinker would establish the cat and the refrigerator as being members of two different sets.

What the heck does all of this have to do with being a creative photographer? To understand that, we have to look at the two main phases in the development of new ideas: the germinal phase and the practical phase.

In the germinal phase, ideas are generated and manipulated; in the practical phase, they are evaluated and executed. To use a biological metaphor, the germinal phase sprouts the new ideas and the practical phase harvests them.

Both types of thinking play an important role in the creative process, but usually during different phases. Soft thinking is very useful in the germinal phase, when you are hunting for new ideas, thinking about and manipulating problems. Hard thinking, on the other hand, is best used in the practical phase, when you are evaluating ideas, narrowing in on practical solutions and preparing to carry an idea into action.

The problem is that our educational system is strong on teaching people all about the hard or practical side of thinking ($2+2 = 4$, "i" before "e" except after "c", etc.) but not very good about teaching people about soft or germinal thinking. We are not all that adept at soft thinking, so it takes some practice to do it well. It also takes some practice to recognize when you're doing hard thinking (which is good and necessary in many ways) too much or at the wrong time.

Now, think about the way you decide on what you're going to photograph, or what you'll do with those photographs once you've made them or how you'll transform your photography into something new. Think about how your thought process works. Begin to recognize when you're using hard thinking concepts and try to replace the germinal phase of idea generation with soft thinking concepts.