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- 37 Video presentations
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LESSON GUIDE #4

IMAGE ADJUSTMENTS, PART 1: TONE, COLOR, & CROPPING

THE DEVELOP MODULE

Ah, yes, we finally made it to the fun stuff—the Develop module. In this module you’ll find every image adjustment available in Lightroom for tweaking, correcting, and enhancing your photos. Time to get creative.

When you’re in the Develop module, you’ll notice that the Folders panel on the left disappears but the Collections panel stays. This is one of the biggest advantages to organizing by collections rather than folders. If you organize by folders, you’ll have to click back to the Library module whenever you want to select a different set of photos.

On the left side here, Folders has been replaced with the Presets panel, the Snapshots panel, and the History panel. We’re going to look at the History panel this week because you’ll want to make use of that pretty early on, but we’re going to save Presets and Snapshots for another week—we need to get the basics down first to make full use of those panels.

To the right side of Lightroom, the Keywording and Metadata panels have been replaced by all your image adjustment panels. And, boy, there are a ton of them! We’re going to start at the top and work our way down through all the image adjustments one at a time. But before we dive into the image adjustments, let’s look at a few tips that’ll make your life in the Develop module a lot easier.

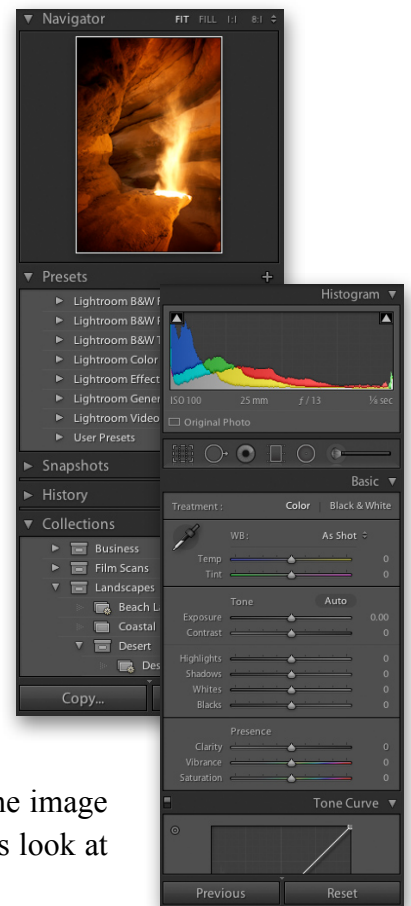


IMAGE ADJUSTMENT HISTORY

So let’s start with that History panel on the left. Remember that Lightroom doesn’t permanently apply any adjustments to your photos because of the “non-destructive editing.” The adjustments you make simply act as commands (stored in the Lightroom catalog file) that tell Lightroom what’s been done to the photo. This History panel keeps a record of every single one of these commands so that you can go back through the image’s adjustment history at any time. The most recent adjustments made are at the top, the oldest at the bottom.

This History panel is a godsend. If you ever make an adjustment you wish you hadn't, simply click on an earlier step in the History panel to go back. You'll notice, too, that as you hover your mouse over a given step in the History panel, the Navigator panel at the top shows you a preview of how the image looked at that particular step. To remove all adjustments ever applied and return the image to its original state, just click the very first step in the History panel.



The History panel keeps track of every single adjustment and action you make on an image with the most recent action at the top. You can “go back in time” on any image by simply scrolling through the history and clicking on any step to revert the image to that state. If you click the “X” in the upper right, the History will be completely cleared.

The really cool part is that this recorded history does not clear itself when you exit Lightroom. When you close and re-open Lightroom, the image's history is still intact. The only way you can completely clear an image's adjustment history is by clicking the “X” button in the upper right. **Only do this if you're prepared to lose the entire image adjustment history.** So never worry about applying an adjustment you're unsure of, because you can easily undo it in the History panel.

USEFUL TIPS FOR THE DEVELOP MODULE

Here are some useful tips and tricks to help you make the most out of the Develop module:

Undo

The shortcut for “undo” is “Control+Z” (PC) or “Command+Z” (Mac). You can use undo multiple times to go “back in time” on the adjustments you made. This may be your new best friend.

Resetting Adjustments

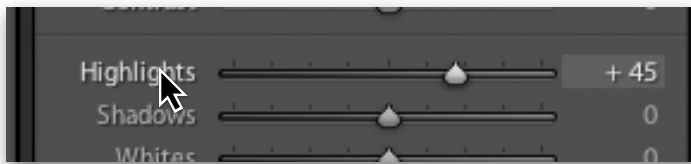
Any adjustment slider can be easily reset to its default setting (usually zero) by double-clicking the slider or the tool name.

Entering Exact Adjustment Values

Every adjustment slider in Lightroom has a number to the right of it indicating the selected value for that adjustment. If you'd like to type in a value directly, just click on this number and type on your keyboard.

Fine-Tuning Adjustments

Sometimes dragging these sliders doesn't give you enough precision. You want to move one little notch at a time but the slider is making you jump 5 or 10 at a time. So to fine-tune adjustments one notch at a time, click on the number value to the right of the slider, then use the up and down arrow keys on your keyboard to move in small increments.



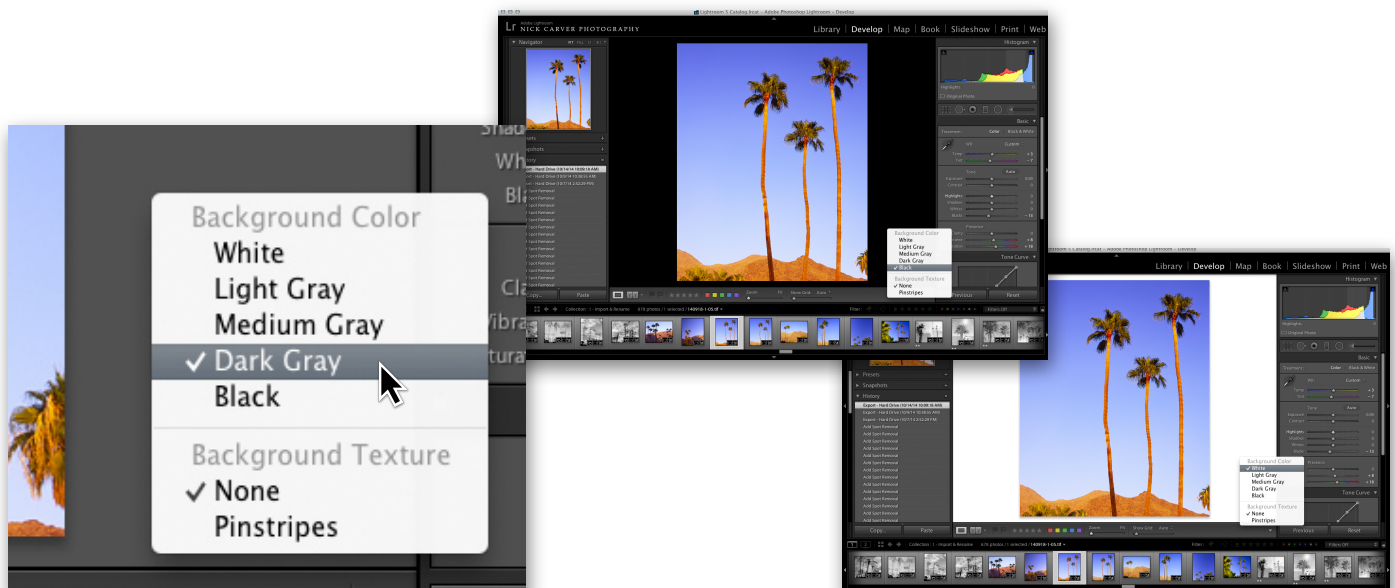
To reset any adjustment slider, double-click the adjustment name to the left or double-click the adjustment slider nob.



To input a specific adjustment value, click the number to the right of the slider and type in the value you choose. You can also press the up/down arrows on your keyboard to incrementally raise or lower this value.

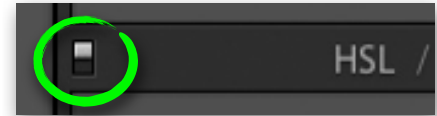
Change the Background Color

You can change the color of the background behind your image by right-clicking in the viewing window and selecting White, Light Gray, Medium Gray, Dark Gray, or Black.



Disabling Adjustments

You can easily disable any adjustment by clicking the toggle switch at the top of its panel.

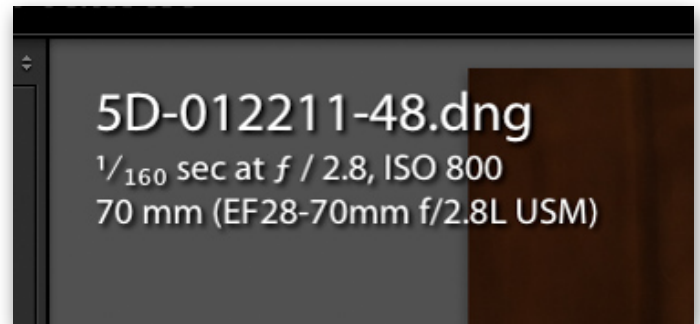
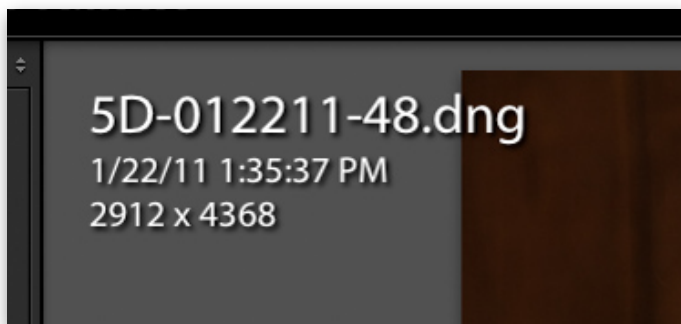


View Before and After

Press the backslash “\” on your keyboard to view the image with and without edits (before and after).

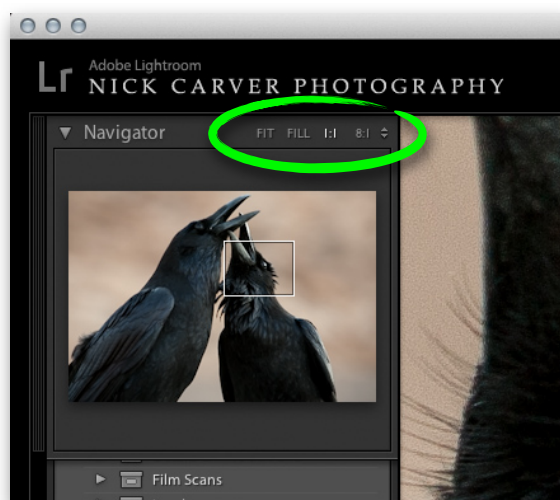
Image Info & Filename

Press the “I” key on your keyboard to display image information, press again to see different information, press again to hide all image info.

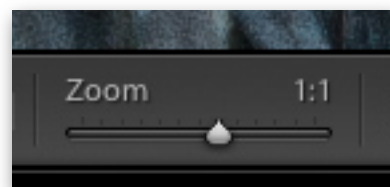


Zoom In

You can zoom into an image using the “Zoom” slider in the bottom toolbar or with the zoom options in the Navigator panel to the upper left. Also, pressing “Z” on your keyboard will toggle between zoomed in and zoomed out, or simply clicking on the picture will toggle between zoomed in and zoomed out.



Adjust the zoom using the Navigator panel in the upper left or the zoom slider in the Toolbar. “1:1” means 100% magnification, “2:1” means 200%, “1:2” means 50%, etc.

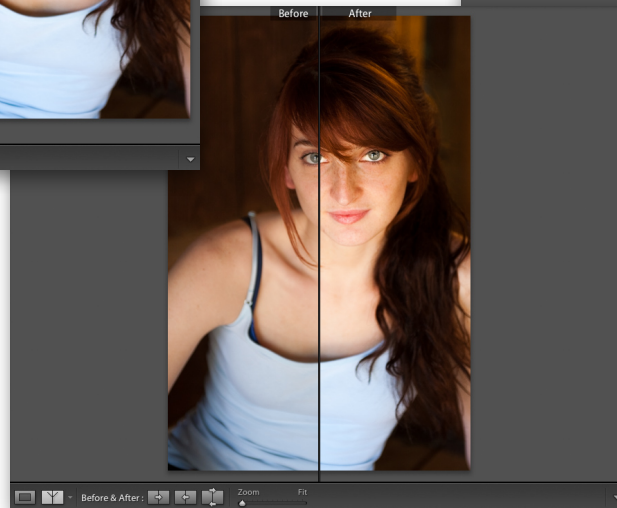
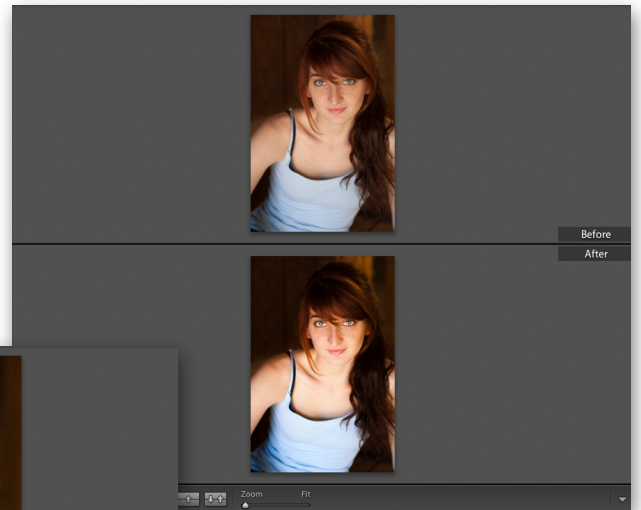
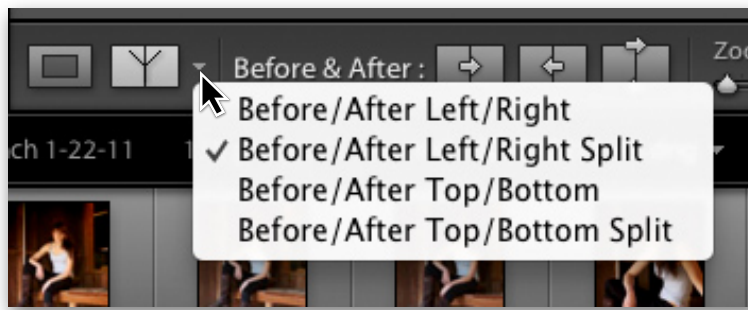


Scrolling Around a Zoomed-in Photo

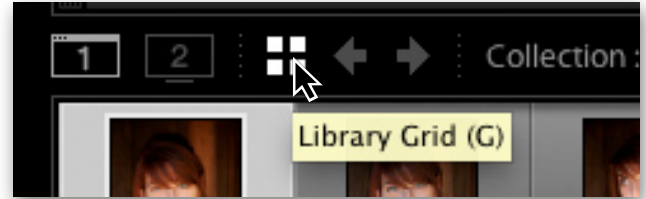
Once you have a picture zoomed in, you can scroll around the photo by clicking and dragging on the photo or using the scroll wheel on your mouse or trackpad.

Compare View

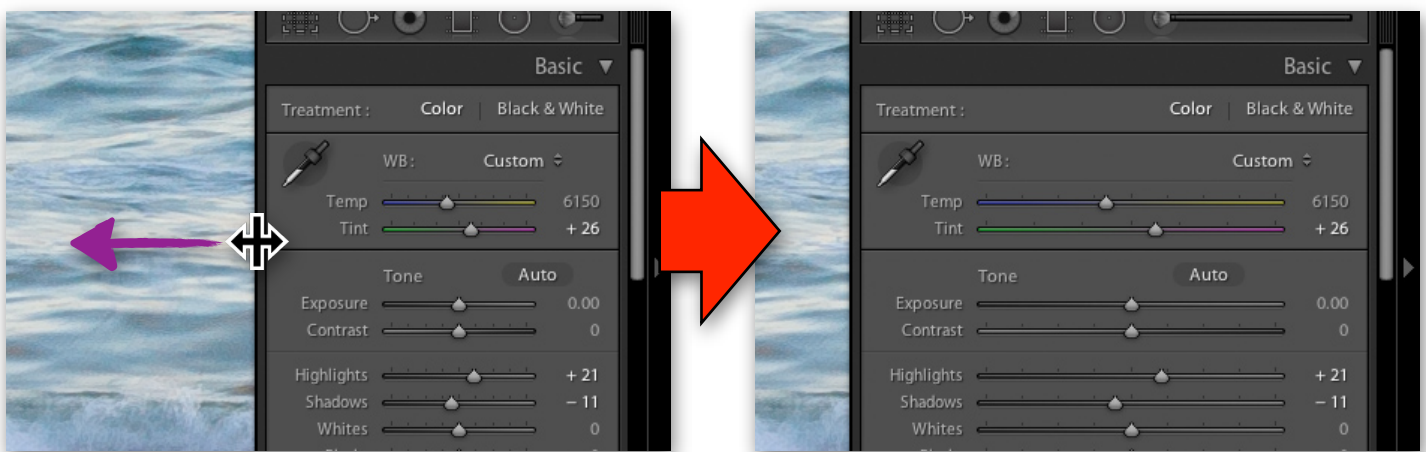
On the bottom Toolbar is an option for “Compare View” (next to Loupe View). In Compare View, Lightroom will display the selected picture before adjustments and after adjustments. If you press the Compare View button multiple times, it will cycle through the different variations on this view mode. When you have an image in Compare View, you can use the “Before & After” buttons to the right to swap the before and after versions, copy the “After” edits to the “Before” version, or copy the “Before” edits to the “After” version.



Grid View is not available in the Develop module unless it's on a second computer monitor. To quickly jump back to Grid View in the Library Module, click the Grid View shortcut button at the top of the Film Strip or press "G" on your keyboard.



Pro Tip: You can widen the right-hand adjustments panel by dragging its edge out to the left. This is a great way to give you more precise control of the adjustment sliders because by widening the adjustments panels you also widen the adjustment sliders, and the wider the adjustments sliders are, the more precision you have when using them.



With the right-hand panel widened, I can make finer adjustments with each slider.

VIDEO #14

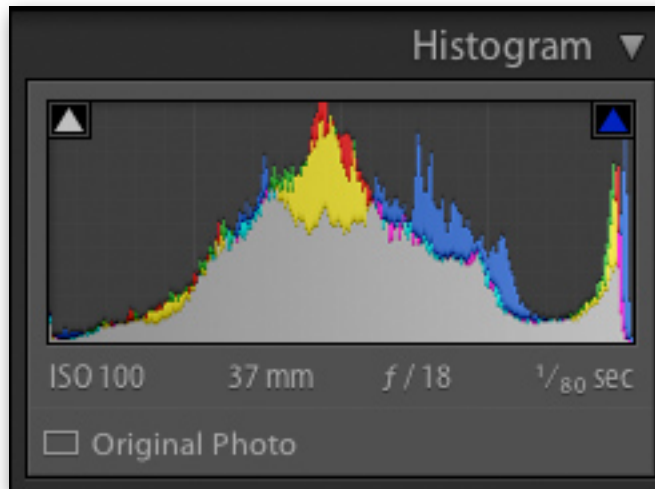
Go to the Curriculum Homepage where you got this lesson guide and watch Video #14 entitled "Develop Module Fundamentals & Tips"

MAKING IMAGE ADJUSTMENTS

The image adjustments panels on the right are laid out more or less in the order you should work through them. In other words, the adjustments towards the top of the screen are where you should start before working your way down through the remaining adjustments. But, of course, this isn't a rule, it's just a suggestion by Lightroom. We will be going out of order quite often. That being said, let's start at the very top and work our way down.

THE HISTOGRAM PANEL

Way up top is your Histogram panel. The histogram is simply a graphic representation of the range of tones in an image from dark to light. It's like this: The histogram looks at every single pixel in your image, analyzes it, measures how bright that pixel is and then plots it on a graph. Histograms go from completely dark (black) on the left to completely bright (white) on the right with a gradient scale in between.



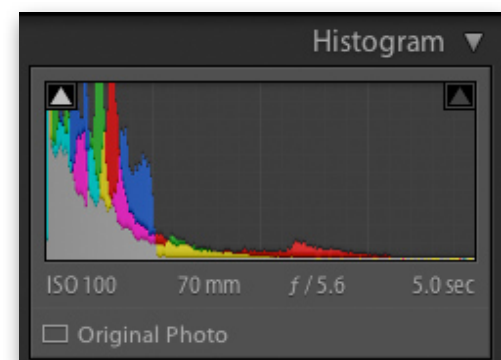
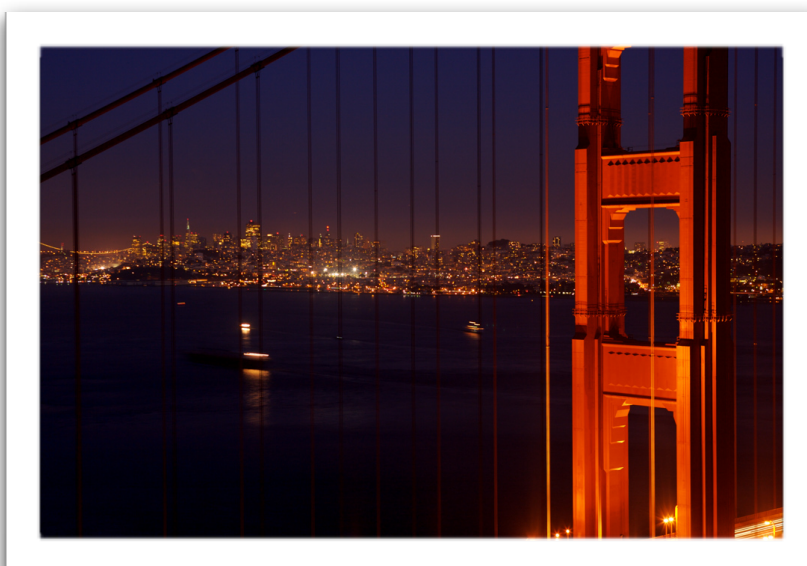
This histogram indicates that the photo has a lot of middle tones because the bulk of the graph is in the center. There must also be some very bright sections of the photo, as indicated by the peak in the right-hand side of the graph.

▲
Darks

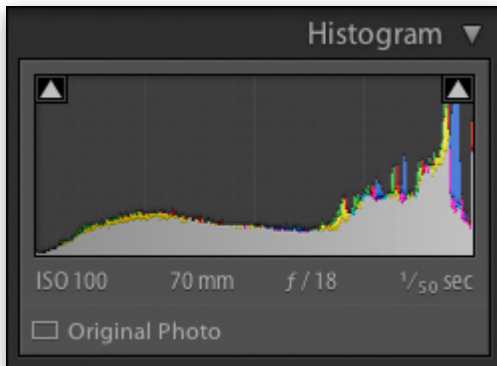
▲
Middle Tones

▲
Lights

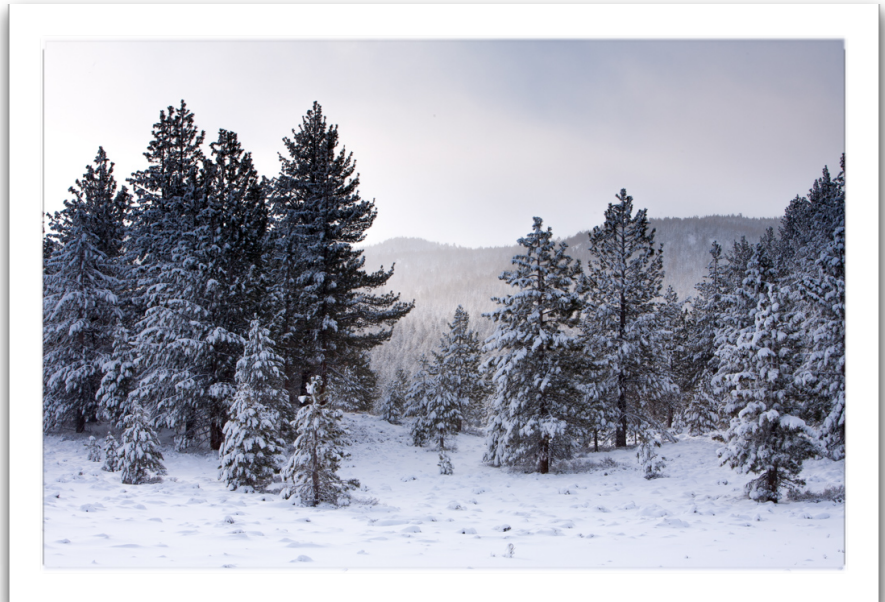
Lightroom also breaks up the pixels into their individual colors when plotting them on this graph. If you have a tall peak of blue in the “lights” side of the histogram (the right side), that means you have a lot of light-blue pixels in this picture. If there is a tall peak of red in the dark side of the graph (the left), then you have a lot of dark-red tones in this picture. The gray areas of this histogram indicate that all color channels are represented in that area.



This photo has a lot of dark tones and almost no bright tones, so the histogram is bunched up on the left side.



This photo has a lot of light tones on account of the snow, so the histogram is bunched up on the right side.



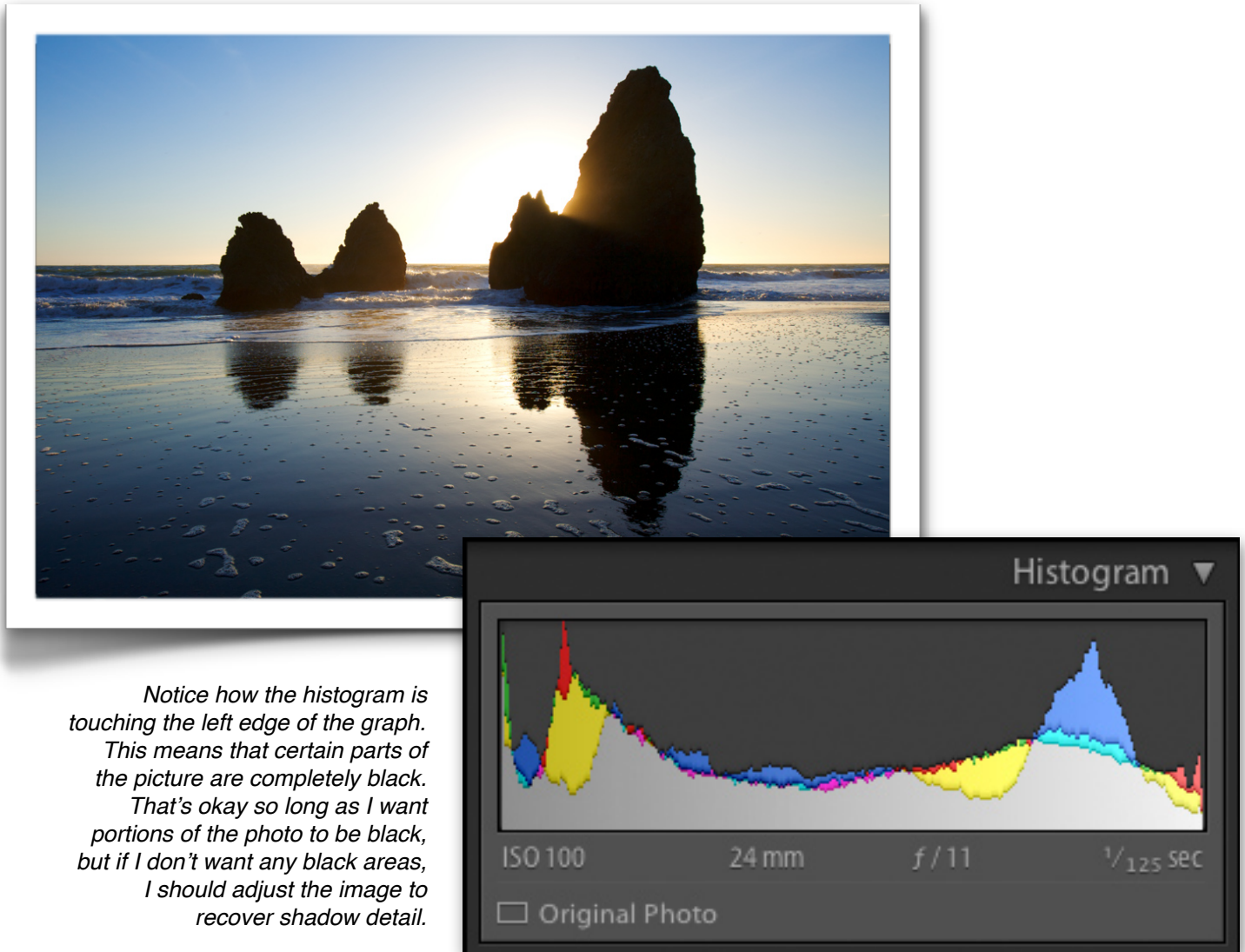
The full use of the histogram to check exposure is explained in my online course “How to Shoot in Full Manual” ([click here](#) to learn more about that course). It’s a useful tool for checking the brightness of your shot in the field because your camera’s LCD screen often can’t be trusted to display the image properly. But I’ll be honest with you, the histogram in Lightroom isn’t quite as useful unless you’re a power user doing some meticulous work on your photos. You can see what your picture looks like accurately on your computer screen, so you don’t really need this graphic representation of tones as you do on your camera’s screen out in the field.

As a quick side note to any of the really serious photo geeks out there: Yes, this histogram in Lightroom can be very useful for intricate analysis of tonal relations to someone who is comfortable and confident in analyzing it. I refer to it quite often. But most people aren’t and don’t need to be that nit-picky with their images. Computer screens can, by and large, display images pretty accurately, so graphing the pixels so as to gauge how bright the image is just isn’t that important when you can see with your own eyes how bright the image is.

So again, the histogram on your camera in the field is very useful to just about everyone (see the “How to Shoot in Full Manual” course to learn how to use it), but the histogram in Lightroom is primarily for photo geeks, nit-pickers, and professionals—most people don’t fall into those categories.

But there is one very useful aspect to this histogram that even the most beginner could find helpful. The histogram can be used to check where shadows have gone completely black and lost all detail and where highlights have gone completely white and lost all detail. This aspect of the histogram is likely all you’ll be using the histogram for.

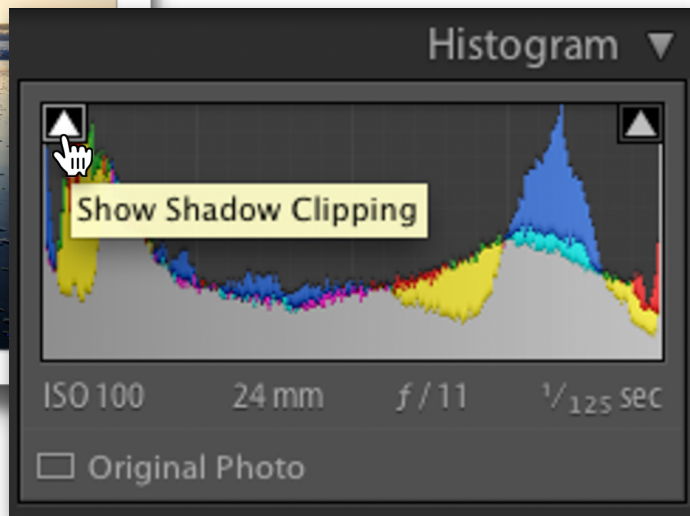
For instance, let's say you're working on a landscape and you're making image adjustments to darken the shadows a little bit. You want them darker, but not completely devoid of detail (black). The histogram can warn you when this happens. You'll know the shadows have gone completely black when the histogram is bumped up along the left side, like this:



And it gets even better. Lightroom actually has a built-in “Shadow Clipping” alert that will indicate when shadows have been “clipped,” meaning they’ve turned completely black. To activate the Shadow Clipping function, click the triangle in the upper left of the histogram. When Shadow Clipping is turned on, the image will display blue marks in the areas that have turned completely black. Like this:



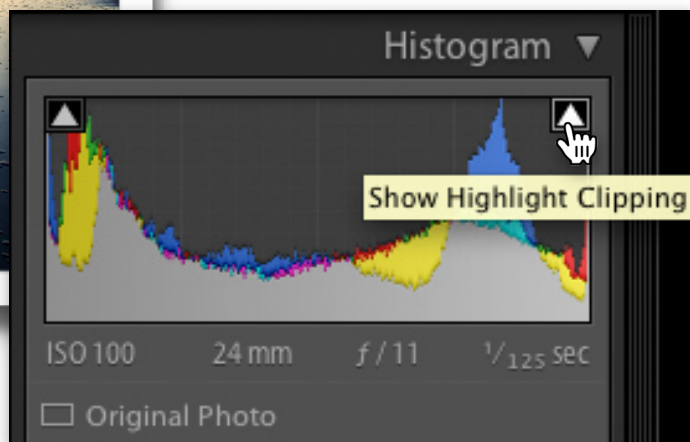
I can hover my mouse over the “Show Shadow Clipping” tool to briefly display shadow clipping in blue, or I can click the “Show Shadow Clipping” button to leave shadow clipping on all the time.



In the upper right of the histogram, you’ll see a similar triangle for “Highlight Clipping.” Same concept here. When Highlight Clipping is turned on, the image will display red marks in the areas that have turned completely white. Like this:



I can hover my mouse over the “Show Highlight Clipping” tool to briefly display highlight clipping in red, or I can click the “Show Highlight Clipping” button to leave highlight clipping on all the time.



But wait, there's more! Rather than having to click these triangles on and off every time you want to see the clipping markers, just press "J" on your keyboard. That toggles both clipping alerts on and off.

So I'd say that's the real power of the Lightroom histogram, to display shadow and highlight clipping so that you know when you've lost shadow detail or highlight detail.



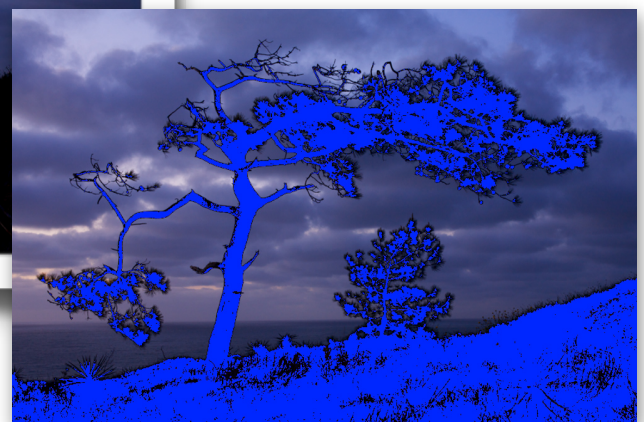
Important Note:

It's okay to clip shadows or highlights, so long as that's the look you want. This is an art form, not a science (no matter how much the folks on the internet try to make it so). You don't have to avoid black shadows or blown-out highlights. Many great pictures have very definite shadow clipping and/or highlight clipping. Take a look at the shadow and highlight clipping in the beach picture shown above. Just because those highlights and shadows are clipped, that doesn't mean the picture is worse for it.

Pro Tip: *When working on a photo with a silhouetted subject, you actually want the shadows to be clipped on the subject. After all, that's the point of the silhouette—to be completely black. So when you're adjusting an image like this, turn on shadow clipping to make sure the silhouette is actually black.*

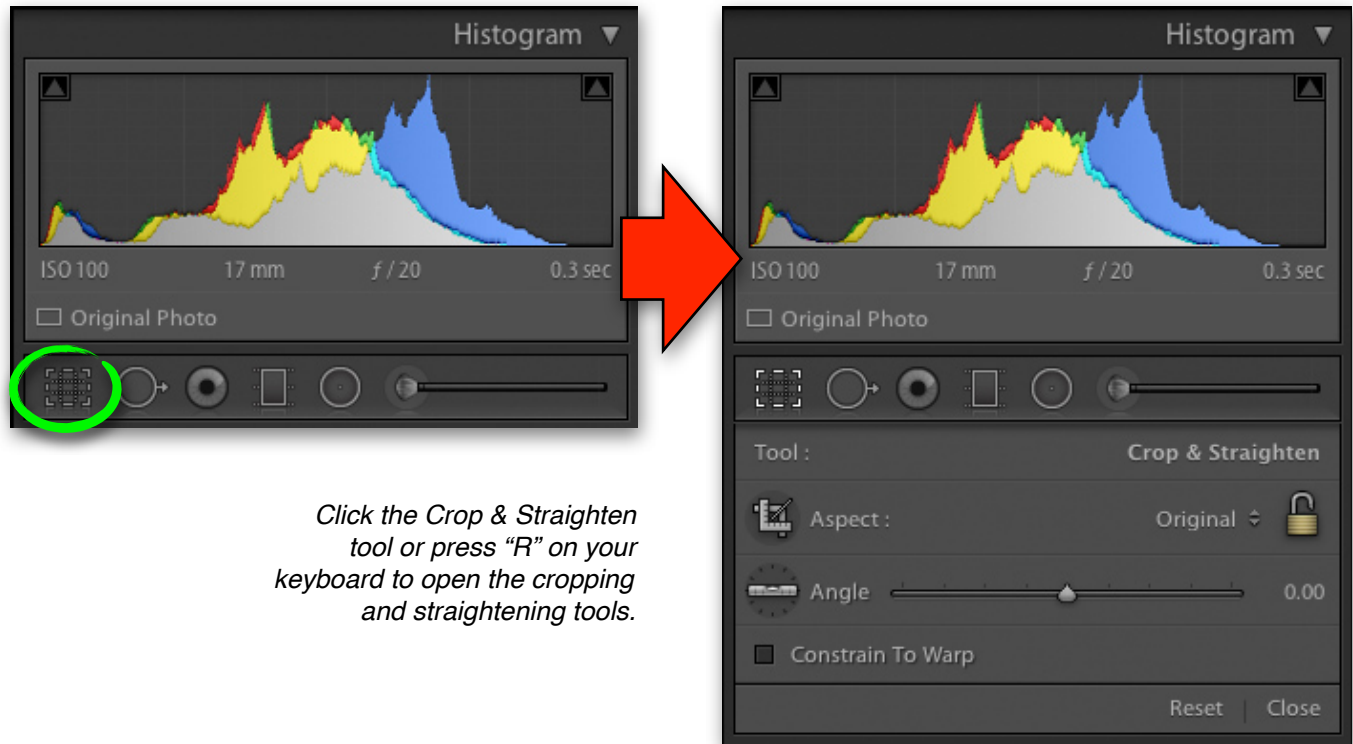


To ensure this tree went into silhouette like I wanted, I turned on "Show Shadow Clipping" when adjusting it to make sure I didn't have any detail in the silhouette.



PROPER CROPPING & STRAIGHTENING TECHNIQUES

The cropping tool in Lightroom can take a little getting used to, but it's a simple concept with a lot of options. It's literally the first tool listed in the Develop module, but don't feel like you have to crop your images as the very first step. The cropping tool is also where you'll find the image straightening tool.



The shortcut to enter the cropping tool is "R" for "crrrrcropping." Okay, that's a stretch. But Adobe chose "R" as the shortcut for cropping because I suppose "C" would have been too logical (and it was already taken by "Compare View").

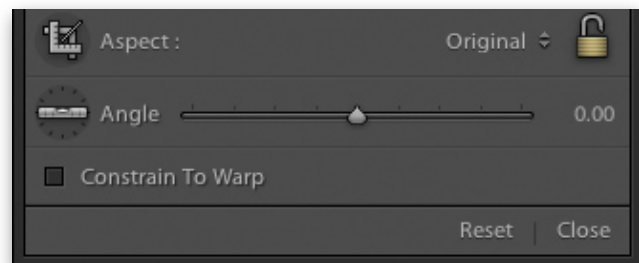
When you enter the cropping tool you'll see options for "Aspect" and "Angle." Let's start with Angle because that's pretty straightforward (I love a good pun). This is your straightening tool. Simply drag the slider left or right to rotate the image. A grid will automatically appear on your photo to help you line up horizontal or vertical lines. There's another way to straighten your photos, too. Bring your mouse out to the picture and put it just outside the crop box. Now you can click and drag up or down to rotate the picture directly. This is my favorite way to straighten a photo.

But this is Lightroom. Two ways to straighten your picture isn't enough. There needs to be a third! You can also click the "Level" button next to the Angle slider. With the Level tool selected, take your mouse out to the photo and drag a line across something that is supposed to be horizontal or vertical. For

instance, drag the level across the horizon and Lightroom will automatically straighten the picture to make that horizon level. Pretty neat!

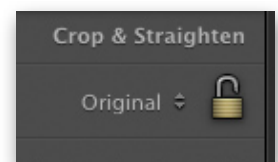


There are a total of 3 ways to straighten a photo using the Crop & Straighten tool. You can drag the Angle slider left or right; you can click outside the crop box on the image itself and drag up or down; or you can click the level tool and drag along a vertical or horizontal line in the photo (like a horizon).



So that brings us back to “Aspect.” The “Aspect Ratio” of a picture indicates how long the width of a photo is compared to the height. For instance, an aspect ratio of 1:2 would indicate that one edge is twice as long as the other edge. 1:3 would indicate that one edge is 3 times longer than the other edge. It’s all just fractions. If a picture measures 4 inches by 6 inches, then that’s an aspect ratio of 4:6, which is reduced to 2:3.

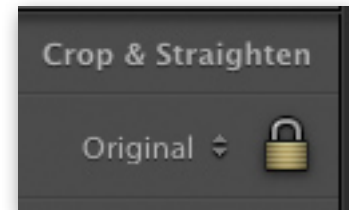
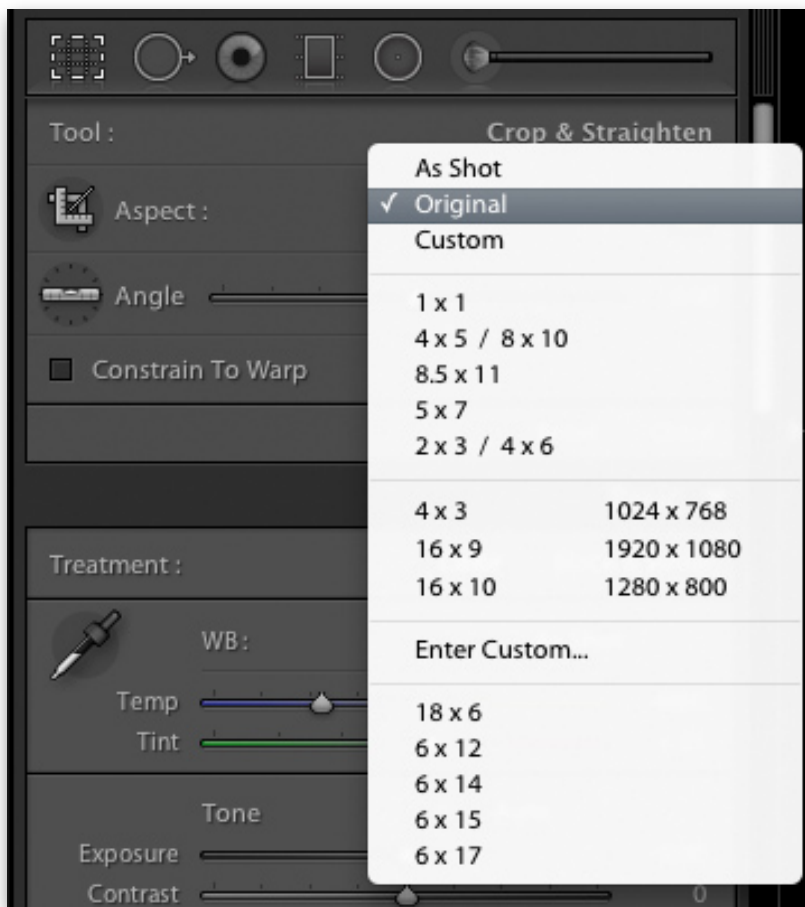
If you want to crop your picture freehand, meaning you are not bound to any specific aspect ratio, then make sure the padlock to the right is “unlocked.” This will give you complete freedom to crop the picture however you please. But beware of freehand cropping! Cropping freehand is fine for email and web display, but it



isn't ideal for printing. For instance if you freehand crop a picture to just whatever looks good but bound by no aspect ratio, the image is unlikely to fit in any common frame. Plus, when you go to get this freehand cropped picture printed at a lab, they'll probably have to re-crop it to the proper paper size, further cutting out parts of the picture.

Helpful Link: Head back to the Curriculum Homepage and check out the helpful link “Photography Tips: How to Crop Photos Correctly” for more tips on aspect ratio.

Cropping with a preset aspect ratio is a smarter way to go. To set an aspect ratio, choose one from the dropdown menu next to the padlock and make sure the padlock is in the “lock” position. There are some common aspect ratios already built in for 8x10, 4x6, 5x7, etc., but you can also enter your own custom aspect ratios if you like.



When the padlock is “locked,” the cropping rectangle will stay locked to whatever aspect ratio you choose from the dropdown menu. You can also enter your own aspect ratio with “Enter Custom...”

Once an aspect ratio is selected, you'll notice the crop box sticks to a certain shape no matter what.

If you want to switch from a horizontal cropping to a vertical or vice versa, grab a corner of the crop box and pull it diagonally as if you're trying to force it into the other orientation. The crop box will “snap” into place.

The weird part about the cropping tool in Lightroom is that you don't move the crop box over the picture to reposition it, you move the picture *behind* the crop box. It feels backwards at first, but you'll get used to it.

Pro Tip: *When cropping a photo, you can use the arrows on your keyboard to nudge the photo up, down, left, or right. But, unfortunately, the jumps are pretty big with each click of an arrow. To make smaller, incremental nudges of the photo, hold down "Alt" (PC) or "Option" (Mac) on your keyboard while pressing the up, down, left, and right arrows.*

To apply the cropping, either press "Enter" on your keyboard, click the "Done" button in the lower toolbar, or click the "Close" button within the cropping tool panel. And don't worry, your cropping isn't permanent. Whenever you return to the cropping tool for this picture you'll have the rest of the picture back in view. You can also completely reset the crop and straighten tools by clicking the "Reset" button within the cropping panel. And don't worry about the "Constrain to Warp" option—just leave it unchecked.

There are several other tools alongside the crop tool including Spot Removal, Red Eye Correction, and Brushes, but we're going to save those for another lesson.

VIDEO #15

Go to the Curriculum Homepage where you got this lesson guide and watch Video #15 entitled "Getting The Most Out of the Crop & Straighten Tool"

THE BASIC ADJUSTMENTS PANEL

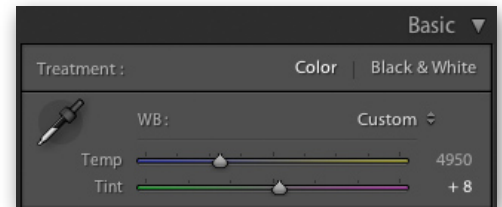
That brings us to the "Basic" panel. This panel contains some of the most important and fundamental adjustments available. At the very top of it, there is a button for "Color" and one for "Black & White." Click "Black & White" to quickly convert your photo to monochrome, click "Color" to revert back to color. Most, but not all, of the adjustments to follow will apply to the image whether you choose color or black & white. So let's look at the first adjustment in the Basic panel, White Balance.

ADJUSTING WHITE BALANCE

I won't get into a lengthy discussion of what white balance is on this course because it's already covered in my Introduction to DSLR Photography online course ([info here](#)) and my Filters for Nature

Photography online course ([info here](#)). But to summarize it in a single sentence: White balance is a setting that alters the color balance of a photo so as to render colors how you want them.

White balance is composed of two sliders. “Temperature” adjusts color from blue to yellow, “Tint” adjusts color from green to magenta. Using these four colors—blue, yellow, green, and magenta—you can eliminate virtually any unwanted color cast in your photos or add any color cast you like.

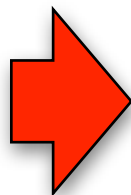


Whether you’re working on a JPEG file or a RAW file, the white balance adjustment will still be available, but **adjusting the white balance on a RAW file vs. a JPEG file does not achieve the same results**. As discussed in a previous lesson, image files can be either 8-bit or 16-bit. RAW files (whether they are DNG, CR2, NEF...) are 16-bit files, JPEGs are 8-bit files. 16-bit files contain far more digital information in each pixel than 8-bit files. That means you can make much more drastic adjustments to color and brightness on a 16-bit file than you can on an 8-bit file.

To adjust white balance in Lightroom without degrading the quality of the image, the file *must* be a RAW file (or a 16-bit TIFF or PSD). Do not make drastic adjustments to the white balance on a JPEG file. Adjusting the white balance too much on a JPEG will start to noticeably degrade the image. The colors will not balance correctly and the contrast will get thrown out of whack. Below is an example showing the white balance corrected on a RAW file vs. a JPEG file. Both were originally shot with a Tungsten white balance setting when they should have been shot on Daylight. With the RAW file, it’s no problem and no degradation to the image when I change the WB to the proper setting in Lightroom. But the JPEG, as you can see, doesn’t look quite right.



This is the original photo taken on the incorrect Tungsten WB setting.

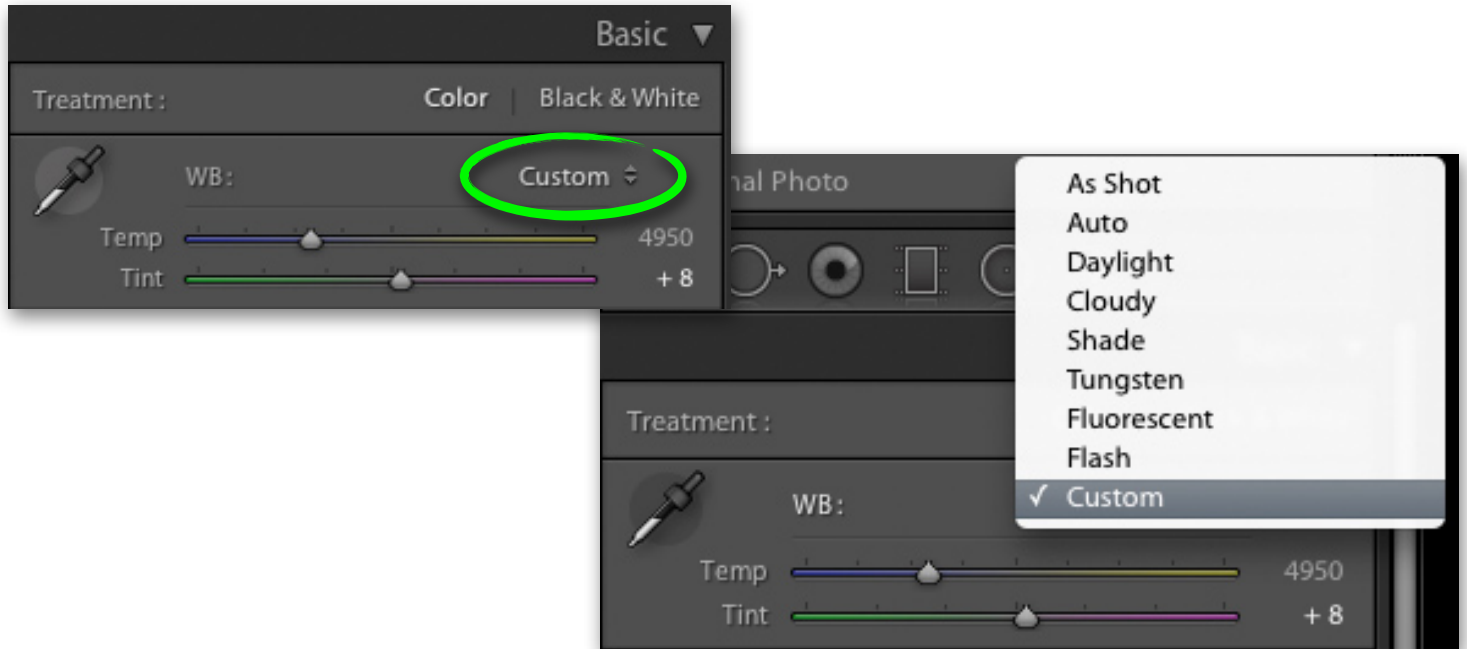


This is the best the WB sliders in Lightroom could do on the JPEG version of the image.

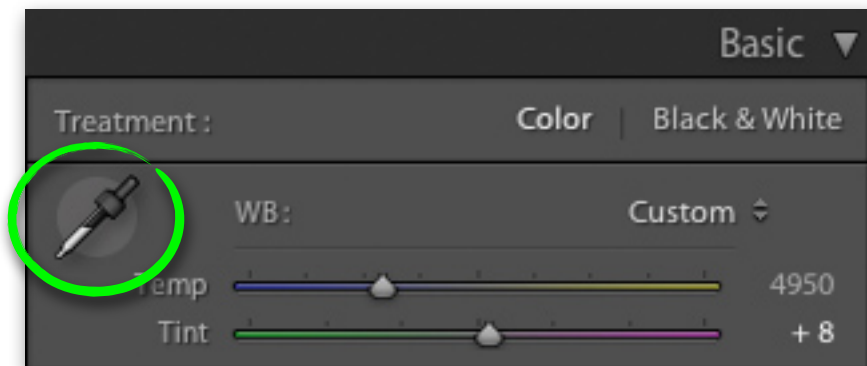


On this RAW version of the image, the WB adjustments in LR look natural and accurate.

The white balance tool in Lightroom, in addition to the sliders, has a dropdown menu where you can select any of the standard WB presets, same as you'll find on your camera. If you're editing a RAW file, all standard camera presets will be there—Daylight, Cloudy, Shade, Tungsten, etc. If you're editing a JPEG, the only three options are “As Shot,” “Auto,” and “Custom.”



To the left side of the WB panel, you'll see the White Balance Selector tool (shortcut “W”). With this tool, you can click on a neutral tone in the picture—that is, something that is gray, black, or white—and Lightroom will automatically adjust the WB sliders to neutralize any detected color cast. This tool, of course, is only useful if there is something in your photo that is truly neutral.



Pro Tip #1: *The White Balance Selector tool, when clicked on a true neutral gray, will give you a technically perfect white balance setting. But realize that a technically perfect white balance is not necessarily a “correct” WB setting. I often like my photos to have a little extra warmth by increasing the*

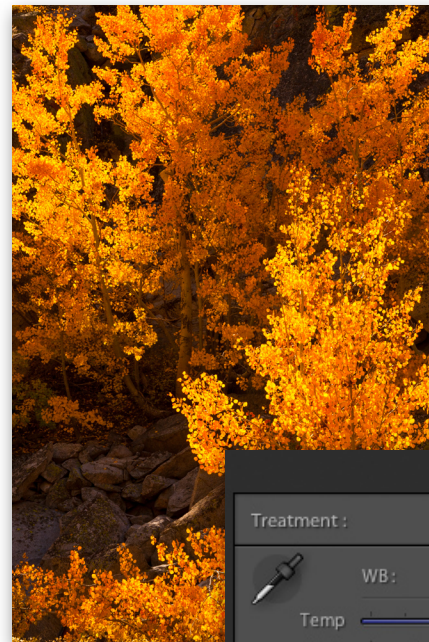
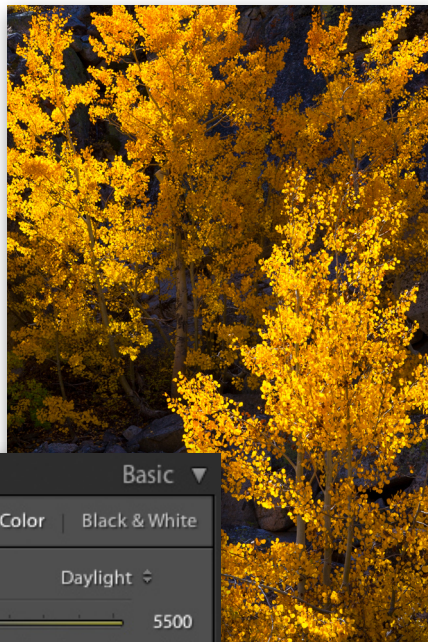
yellow just a tad. This is technically an incorrect WB setting per the White Balance Selector tool, but it's correct to me. Go for what you like—it doesn't have to be “technically” correct.

Pro Tip #2: What if what you're photographing has no true neutral grays in it but you'd like the ability to use this White Balance Selector tool once the photos are in Lightroom? Perhaps you're doing a portrait session but no one is wearing any true neutral grays and the background is all colorful. You can prep for this ahead of time quite easily. Bring a white piece of paper or a gray card with you to the shoot and take just one picture **with the paper or card in the image**. When you return to Lightroom and import all the photos, you can use the White Balance Selector tool on the white piece of paper or gray card to get a perfect WB setting. Then you can apply that same white balance setting to the remaining photos using the Copy/Paste or Synchronize Settings tool we'll discuss in a later lesson.

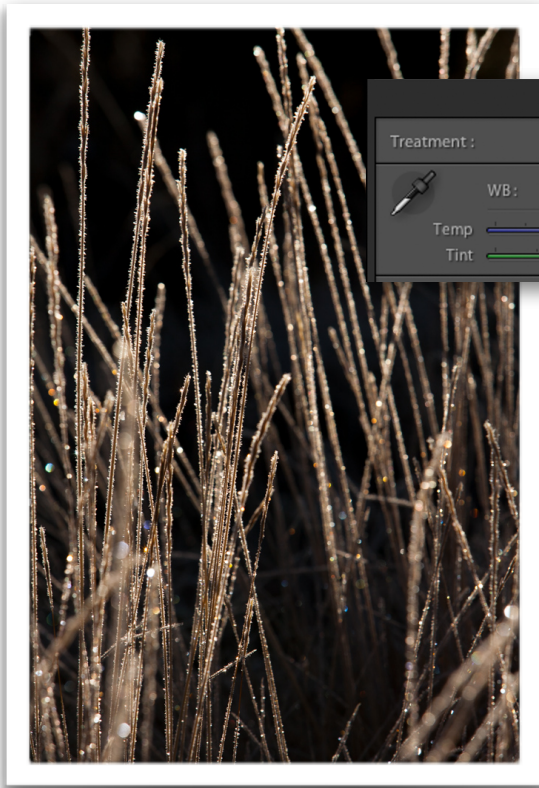
SOME TIPS ON WHITE BALANCE

White Balance, in my opinion, is an often undervalued adjustment. I think it's one of the most important tools to getting vibrant photos. White Balance was invented to eliminate unwanted color casts like the natural blue color of shade or the natural yellowish tone of tungsten lighting, but it can be used to actually add color casts to a photo and, thus, enhance the image.

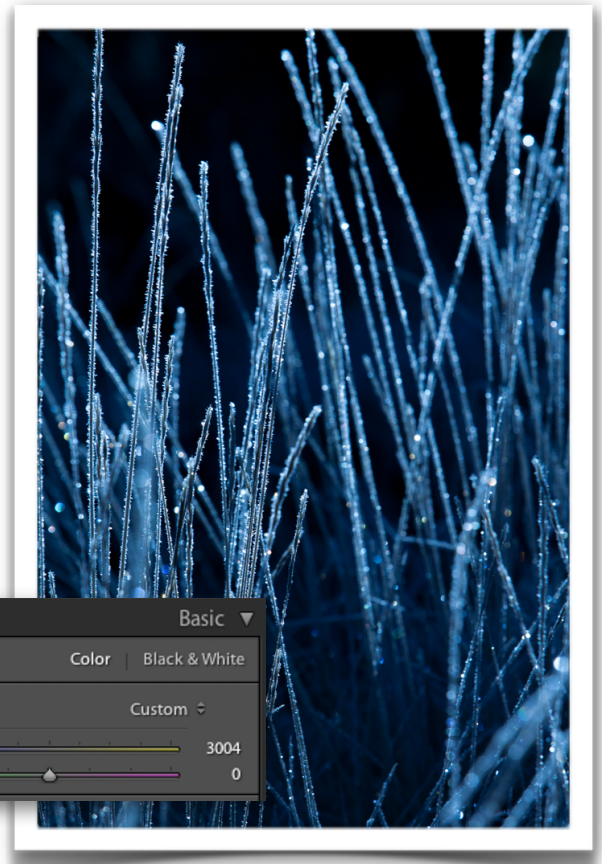
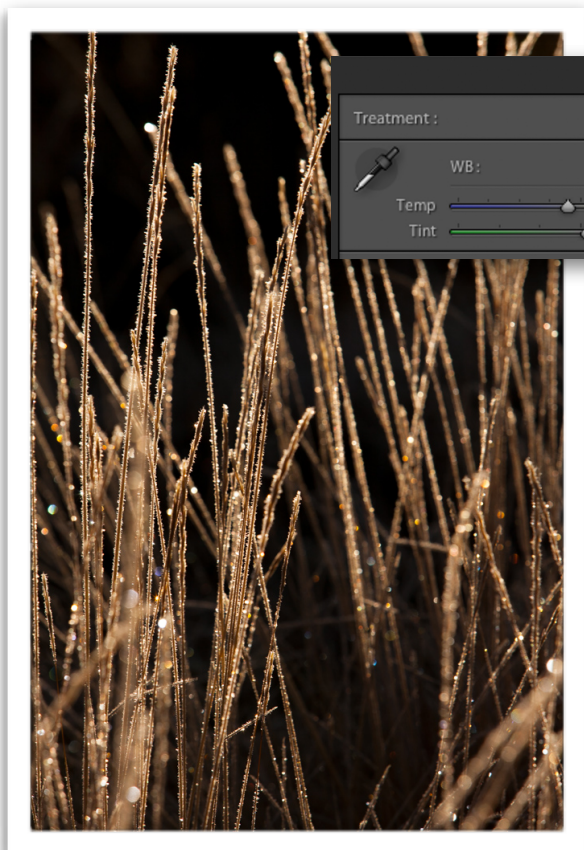
For instance, let's take this photo of some fall color. I photographed this image in daylight, so the technically correct WB setting is Daylight. If I choose that from the dropdown menu, I get pretty accurate colors. But what if I were to add a little bit more yellow by dragging the Temperature slider to the yellow side? If I did that, the image would get a little boost of yellow tones. Of course, this will be at the expense of the blues—those will get toned down just a bit—but by adjusting these sliders to an “incorrect” setting, I can actually enhance the photo by creating a warming effect.

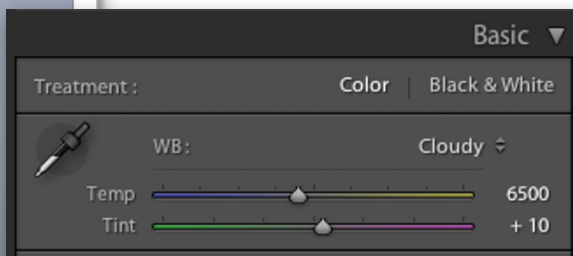
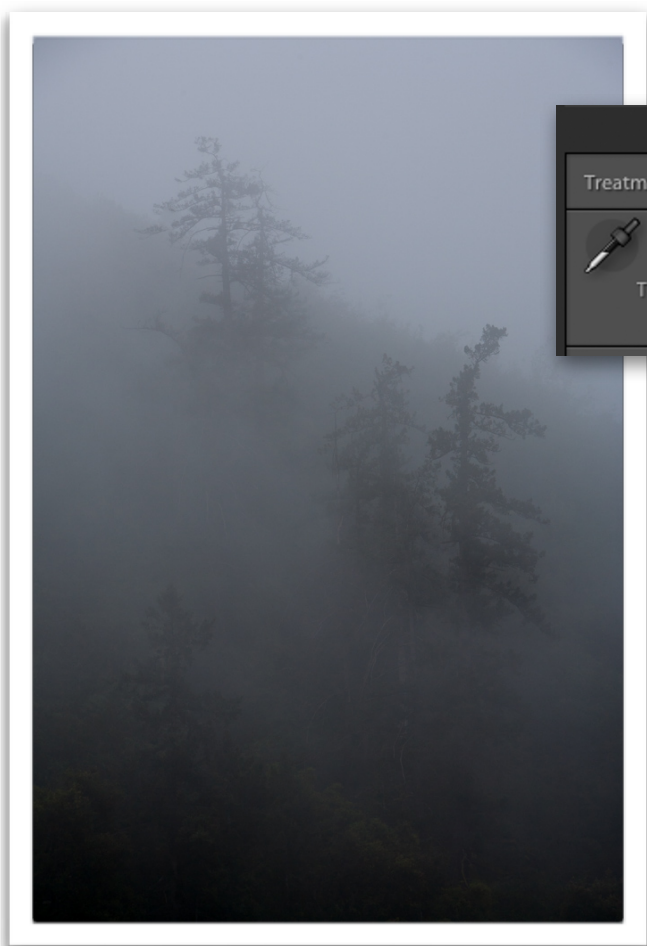


Here are some examples of pictures utilizing a clearly “incorrect” WB setting, but one that makes for a more interesting photo.

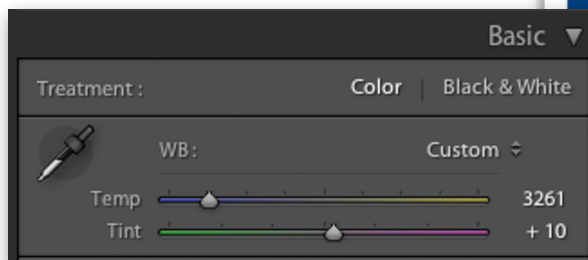
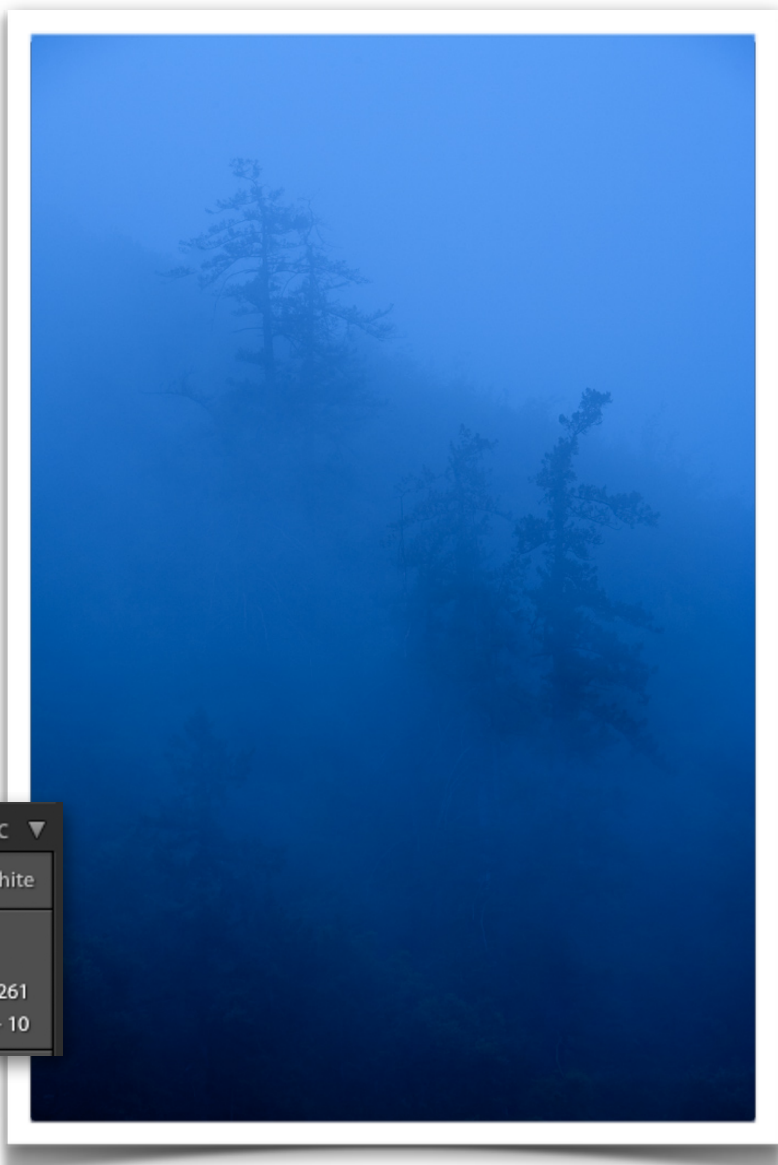


The correct WB setting of “Daylight” creates accurate colors (top, left). A “Cloudy” setting increases the yellow a bit to create a warming effect on the image (below, left). I can also create a strong cooling effect by dragging the temperature slider to blue (below, right). Whichever one here is “correct” is defined only by your taste. Each has their merits.





The correct “Cloudy” setting (above) results in a somewhat drab photo. Using the WB sliders in Lightroom, I increased the blue to add a little more mood to this shot (right).





Here I adjusted the accurate “Daylight” WB setting (left) to be a little more yellow, thus subtly warming up the colors in the photo (below).



One of the first things I do to my pictures is tweak the white balance with the Temperature and Tint sliders. And I typically adjust them freehand rather than use the dropdown menu presets so that I can get a very precise effect. I may return to the white balance later on and tweak it further once I’ve adjusted contrast and saturation, but it’s a good idea to get the WB at least roughly set from the start.

To use the Temperature and Tint sliders, simply look at your picture and try to determine if the picture is a little too blue, a little too yellow, a little too green, or a little too magenta. Based on what you determine, adjust the sliders accordingly. It takes a lot of practice to be able to recognize unwanted color casts and to know where to adjust the sliders to, but the more you adjust it, the better you'll get.

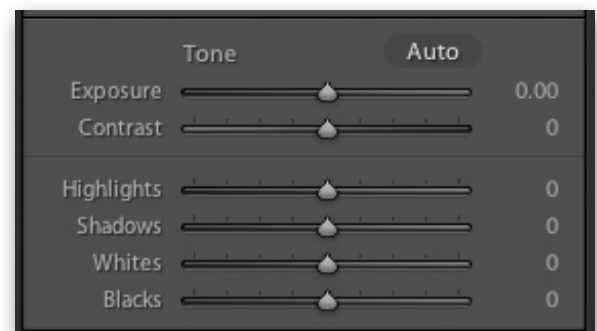
Bonus Video: When you use Auto White Balance either on the camera or in Lightroom, desirable colors can sometimes be diminished as the “Auto” function struggles to determine which colors you want and which colors you don't want. To learn more about this and to see how to avoid this problem, head back to the Curriculum Homepage and watch the bonus video “Photography Tips: Auto White Balance.”

FINE-TUNING TONES TO IMPROVE YOUR PHOTOS

Now that we've got the WB all adjusted, let's take a look at the “Tone” options. This is where you can tweak the brightness of the various tones throughout your photo to optimize shadow and highlight detail. This is a very important concept for virtually every photo you adjust because the secret to getting rich, vibrant photos relies heavily on tonal adjustment.

First off, there's an option for “Auto.” Don't use it. You're learning Lightroom so that you can take control of your shots. We're not going to let Lightroom make the important decisions.

You're going to work with the six sliders in this panel to fine tune the highlights and darks in your photos. Let's look at each slider:

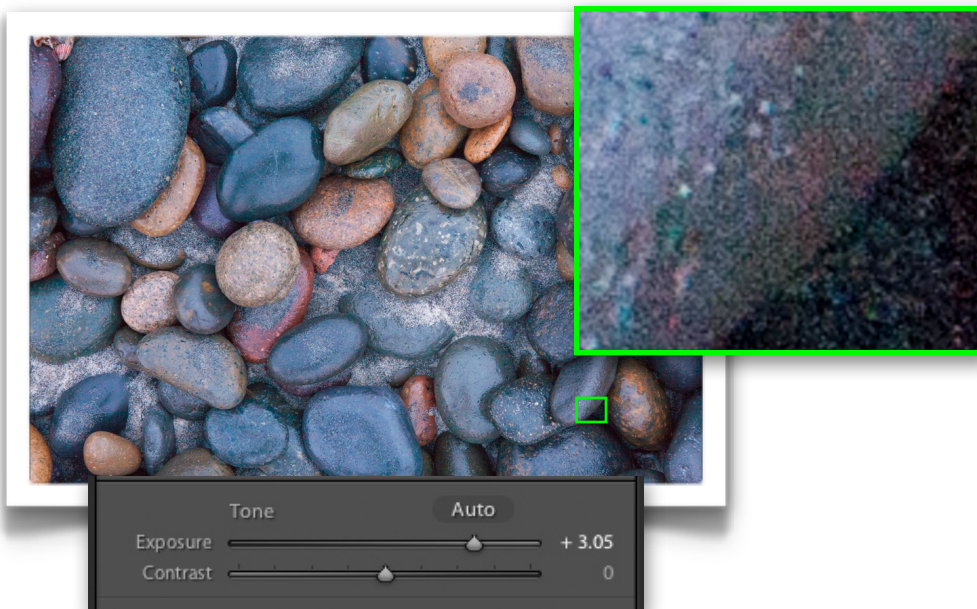
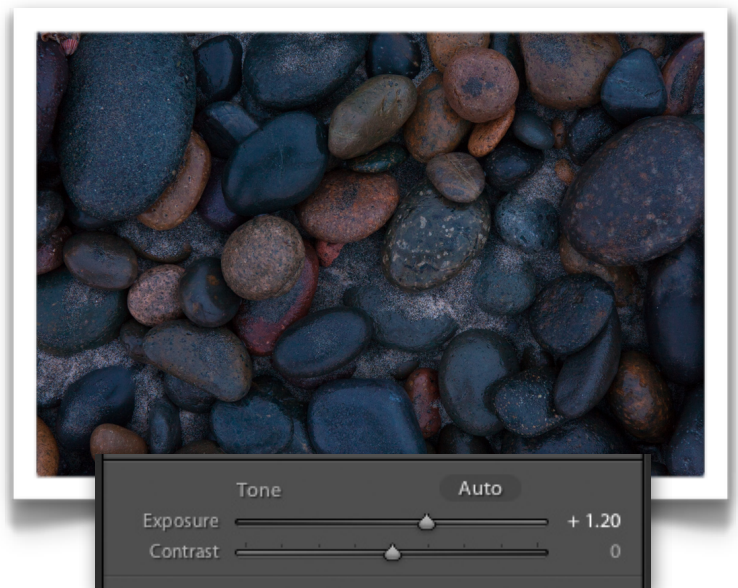
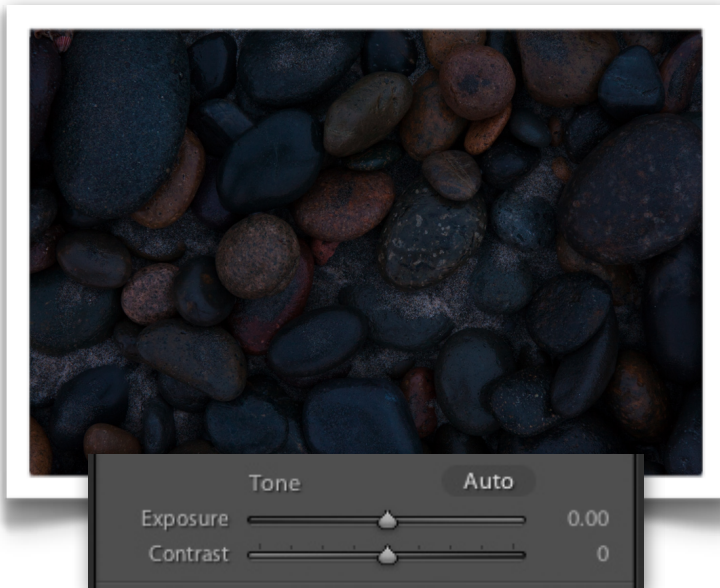


Exposure

This slider will lighten or darken the picture by sliding left (darker) or right (lighter). You can use this to correct and tweak minor errors in exposure made at the time of the shot.

- **IMPORTANT:** Adjusting the exposure slider in Lightroom is **not** the same as adjusting exposure in the camera—even on a RAW file. Adjusting the exposure correctly in the camera will always yield better results than trying to mimic it with this exposure slider. Making the exposure lighter or darker in-camera (with exposure compensation or with the light meter in manual mode) causes the camera to actually record more or less light. Adjusting it in Lightroom just tells Lightroom to lighten or darken the pixels already recorded. Recording the proper amount of light from the get-go means shadows and highlights are recorded correctly with the right level of detail and texture—this results in maximum quality with minimal image noise. Adjusting it in Lightroom cannot miraculously create detail where no detail was recorded to begin with. Plus, dramatically lightening the exposure in Lightroom will

introduce image noise, especially in the shadows. So expose the image correctly from the start and make sure you use a light touch with this exposure slider.



The original photo (above, left) was underexposed. By bringing up the Exposure slider up a bit, I get an exposure closer to what I wanted (above, right). But be careful about raising this slider too high. The higher you go, the greater chance for increased image noise, as you can see at left.

Contrast

Contrast dictates how wide the gap is between the highlights and the darks. A “high contrast” photo means the darks are much darker than the highlights. A “low contrast” photo means the darks aren’t that much darker than the highlights. Drag this contrast slider to the left to reduce contrast or drag it to the right to increase contrast. Increasing contrast too much makes the image look harsh and causes a loss of detail in shadows and highlights. Decreasing the contrast too far

makes the image look flat and unsharp. There's no right answer to adjusting the contrast slider—do it until the image looks how you want. But my own advice is to almost always boost contrast on a RAW file unless you specifically want a lower-contrast look or if the photo is naturally high in contrast. RAW files are inherently low in contrast because the files are unprocessed, so boosting contrast just a bit will give the photo a little extra “pop.” Especially when it comes to colorful landscapes, photos of flowers, wildlife, cityscapes, or any other type of shot where you want a rich, vivid look, boosting the contrast a bit can really enhance the shot.



Highlights, Shadows, Whites, & Blacks

The following four sliders—Highlights, Shadows, Whites, & Blacks—you can think of like splitting hairs on contrast. With these four tools, you can selectively lighten or darken the highlights or shadows without touching any of the other tones.

- **Highlights:** Drag to the right to lighten the highlights (the bright stuff). Drag left to darken the highlights and perhaps pull more detail from those highlights
- **Shadows:** Drag to the right to lighten the shadows and perhaps pull more detail from those shadows. Drag left to darken the shadows.
- **Whites:** Drag right to lighten the super bright portions of the photo, drag left to darken.
- **Blacks:** You know the drill by now. Drag right to lighten the super dark portions of the photo, drag left to darken.

I prefer using the Highlights, Shadows, Whites, & Blacks sliders over using the Contrast slider. With these tools I can get more specific with my tonal control and selectively adjust the brights separate from the darks.

Like all adjustments, there are no rules to using these. Just adjust them until the photo looks good. That being said, let me give you a few tips and good ideas.

For landscapes, cityscapes, and other photos where you want rich tones and colors, try bringing the blacks and shadows down a little bit darker. This adds some richness to the shot. Then bring the highlights and whites up a tad to add some glow. This is basically the same as boosting contrast, but with more precision and control.



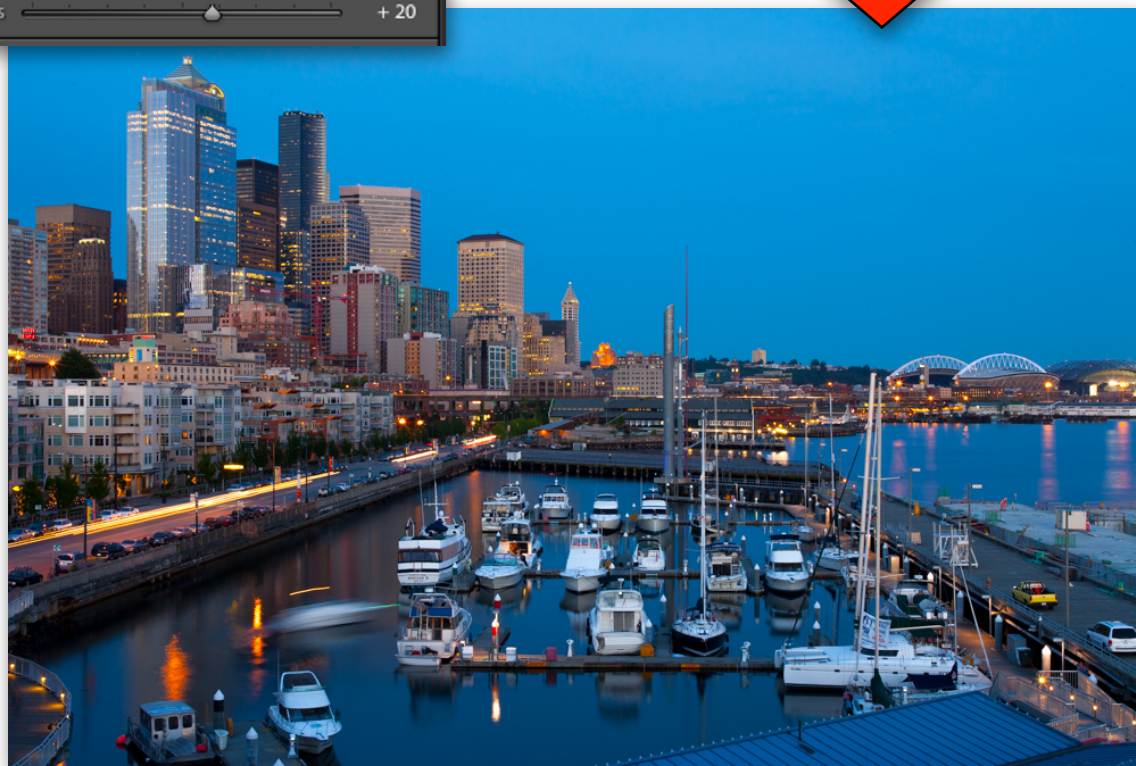
Lightening the Highlights and Whites while darkening the Shadows and Blacks gave some richness to this photo (below). It also helped exaggerate the texture in the sand.

	Tone	Auto	
Exposure			0.00
Contrast			0
Highlights			+ 39
Shadows			- 52
Whites			+ 27
Blacks			- 30



Lightening the Highlights and Whites while darkening the Shadows and Blacks gave some richness to this photo (below). It also helped bring out some of the subtle lights in this cityscape.

	Tone	Auto	
Exposure			0.00
Contrast			0
Highlights			- 10
Shadows			+ 21
Whites			- 14
Blacks			+ 20

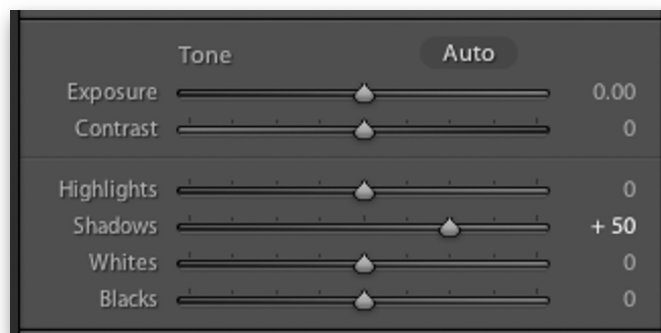


If the shadows are too dark in your shot but the highlights look fine, drag the Shadows slider to the right to reveal detail in those shadows. When you do this, it might be wise to bring the blacks down a tad to bring back some of the richness in the super dark areas. If you bring blacks and shadows too far to the right, the image will start to look flat and grainy, so maintain a light touch.

If the highlights are blown out in your photo, you may be able to recover some of the detail by dragging the highlights slider to the left (darker). On a RAW file, you may be surprised just how much detail you can recover, but realize that it can't work miracles.



By dragging the Shadows slider to the right, I can lighten the shadows, pulling more detail out of the shadowed cliff along the right edge of this photo. But be careful not to get too crazy with this effect. Lightening the shadows too much can introduce image noise and make the photo look flat and over-processed.





	Tone	Auto	
Exposure			0.00
Contrast			0
Highlights			-100
Shadows			0
Whites			-29
Blacks			0

By lowering the Highlights and Whites sliders I can recover some detail from the bright sky in this photo. But these sliders can't work miracles, even on a RAW file. Some blown-out areas can never be fully recovered. Also, don't assume that more detail is better. I personally think the highlight recovery here diminished some of the drama in this photo.

On portraits, it's not a bad idea to raise the highlights and whites to add some vibrancy to the shot and give skin, teeth, and eyes a brighter glow. You may want to drop the shadows and blacks a little bit, but be careful of overdoing it. Portraits don't benefit from high contrast the same way landscapes and cityscapes do.



A subtle lightening of the Highlights and Whites in this photo gave a little extra glow to the model's skin, shirt, and eyes.

ENHANCING COLORS WITH "PRESENCE"

Towards the bottom of the Basic panel is a section called "Presence." Here you have sliders for "Clarity," "Vibrance," and "Saturation." There seems to be much confusion about these sliders on the web, so let's take a minute to really clear them up.

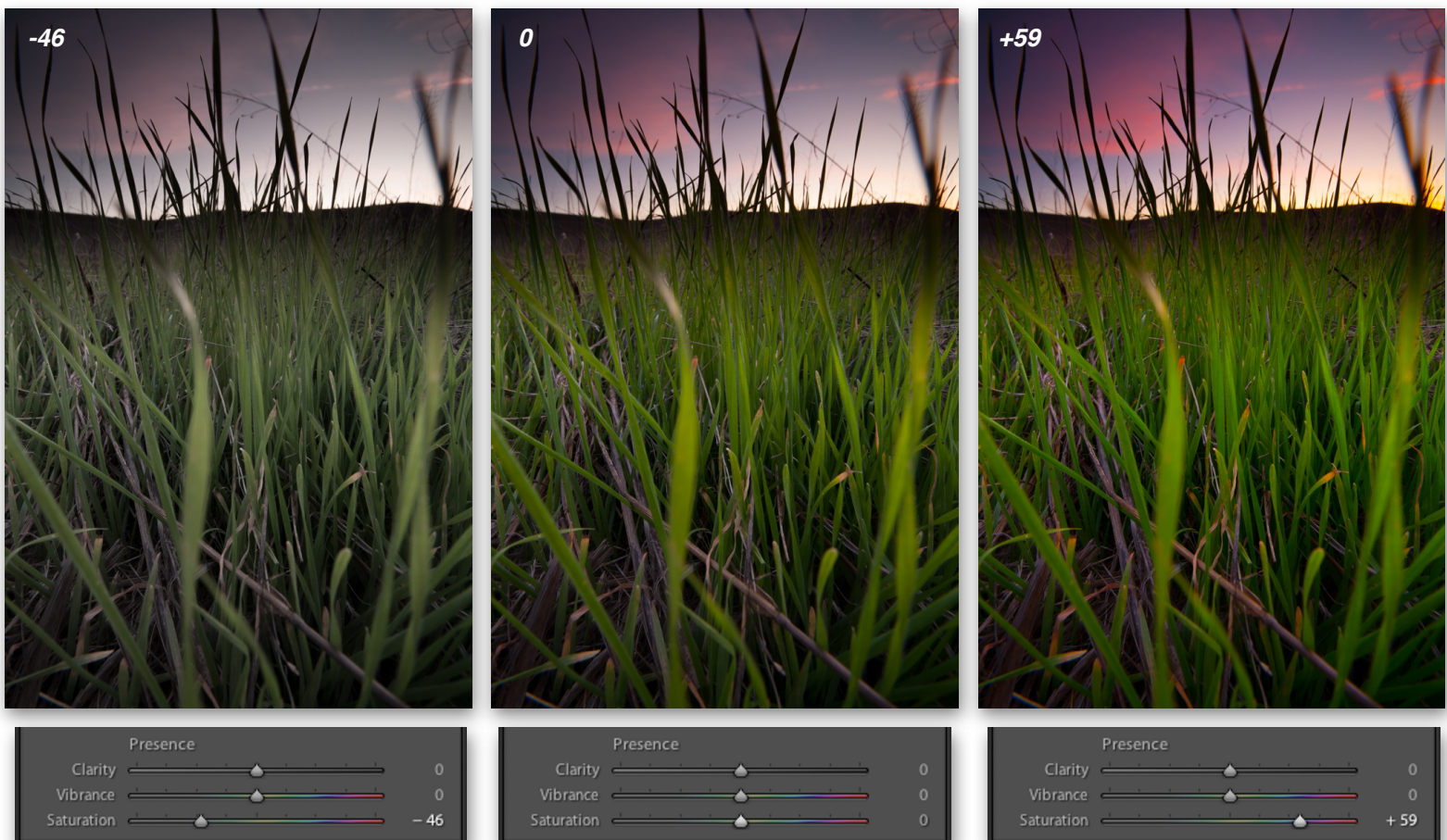
Starting with Clarity, this tool is often described as “contrast that only affects the mid-tones.” You raise Clarity and the mid-tones (not the highlights or darks), will get a boost in contrast. But I’ll be honest, that explanation is incredibly unsatisfying and I don’t believe it fully explains what Clarity does. This slider is actually quite difficult to explain in words. The best way to see what it does is to just see it in action. Here are some pictures with 0, +100, and -100 Clarity:



You'll notice that the pictures with boosted Clarity have more defined edges with exaggerated texture. The images with lowered Clarity look fuzzy and flat. If you use a light touch on Clarity, it can intensify details and textures. Boost it too high and you get a weird digitized look that just screams "I edited this in Lightroom!"

Don't get too crazy with the Clarity slider. I so often see photographers boost this way too high. In fact, there should be an entire section of Flickr titled "Too Much Clarity." I know it's tempting to bring it really high up when you see those details starting to pop out, but be careful. It looks good at first, but it'll look overly "Lightroomed" before long. Like the soft-focus diffusion filters of the 1980's, time will not be kind to overuse of this feature. It's like everything in photo editing (and in life)—always in moderation.

Below Clarity we have Vibrance and Saturation. Saturation is simple: Slide it to the right and all the colors in your photo get a boost. Reds become redder, blues become bluer...you get the idea. Slide it to the left and colors start to desaturate (lose their color). So whenever you want to pump up the colors in your shot, you can just drag this slider to the right. It's a really great way to give your landscapes, flowers, cityscapes, and travel shots a little extra color. I know I sound like a broken record, but don't get crazy with this. Everything in moderation. Pull it too far to the right and your photo will start to look like a cartoon.

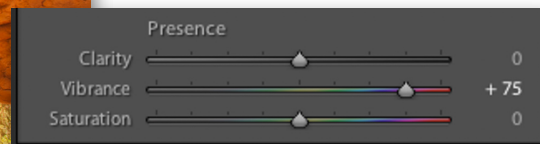


The Vibrance slider is like Saturation with better judgement. The way Vibrance works is it only affects colors that aren't already colorful. So if you pull Vibrance to the right, colors will be boosted, but only the colors that aren't already boosted. Colors that are already quite vibrant will not be affected as much.

Here's an example:

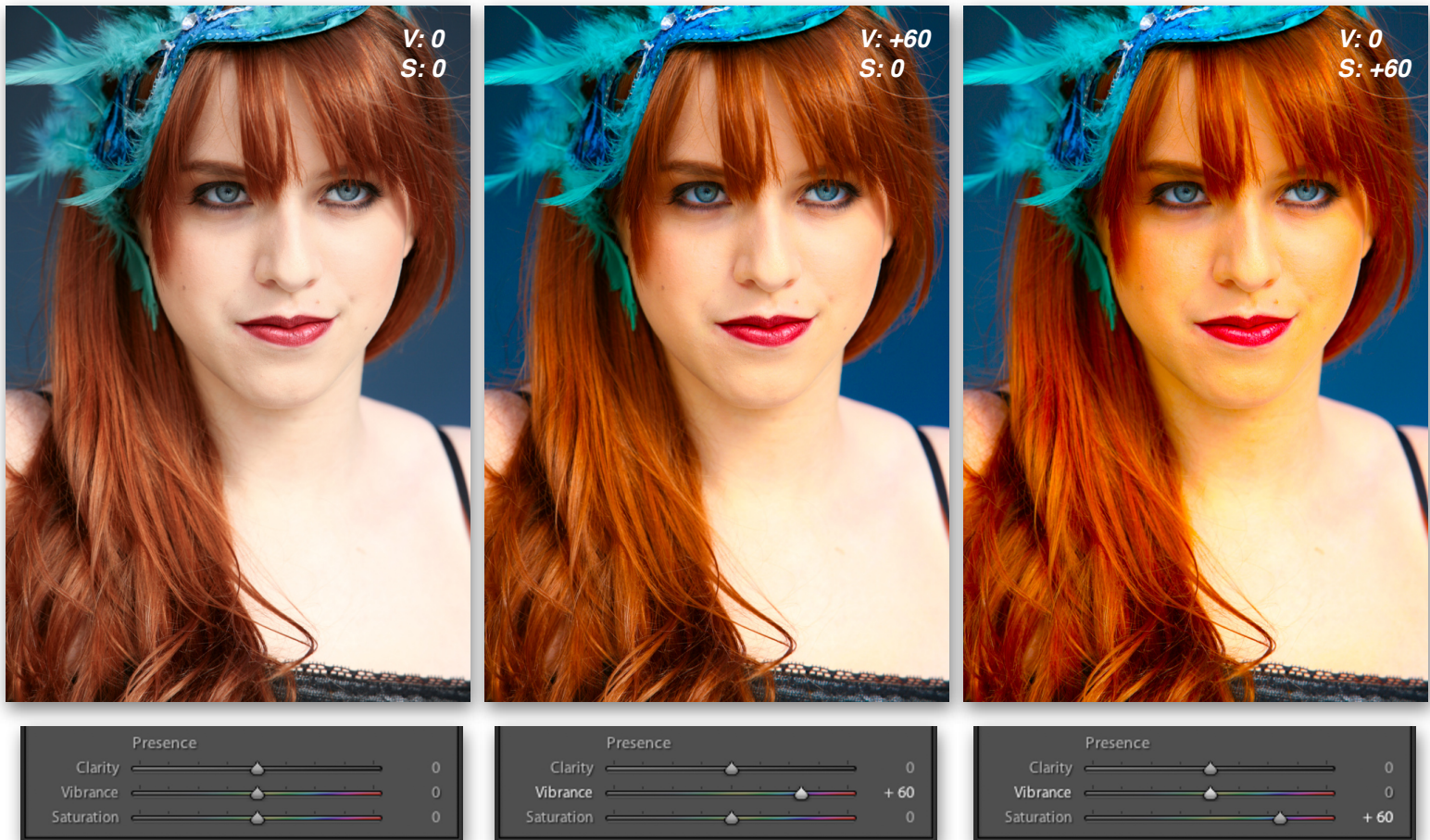


At left is the photo with no Vibrance or Saturation adjustments applied. In the photo with +75 Saturation (below), all colors are boosted equally. The oranges were already more colorful than the blues, so as a result of boosting Saturation, the orange colors become too intense. In the bottom-most photo, the Vibrance is set to +75 while the Saturation is left at 0. Notice that the blue tones of the sky are boosted just like with Saturation, but the orange tones are not nearly as amplified. The Vibrance slider didn't impact the orange tones as heavily as the blue tones because the orange tones were already quite colorful compared to the muted blues.



Vibrance has another nice little bonus to it that Saturation doesn't. Vibrance doesn't touch skin tones. So when you're working on a portrait, you don't have to worry about over-saturating the skin tones, turning them red or yellow.

For instance, let's look at the following portrait. Here we have a girl with red hair and red lips that are already pretty colorful on their own, but the blue background and blue of her eyes are not as vibrant. If I boost Saturation, all colors will be intensified equally. As a result, the reds are boosted too much and her skin shifts to an unflattering color. But if I boost Vibrance instead, the blues are intensified a lot, the reds are intensified a little, and the skin is left basically untouched:



When it comes to Vibrance and Saturation, it doesn't have to be one or the other—you can use them together. Often times on my photos I'll boost Vibrance first to get the more muted tones up to the level of the more colorful tones, then I'll boost the Saturation slider to bring them all up equally. It's almost like I'm using Vibrance to equalize the colors then Saturation to boost them all together.

On portraits, I tend to use the Vibrance slider much more than Saturation so as to protect the skin tones from over-saturation. But even with portraits, I may first increase Vibrance to bring up the muted tones

while protecting the skin tones, but then bring the Saturation up just a smidge to boost all colors together. I just won't get too crazy with Saturation so the skin tones don't shift to weird colors.

Important Note: If you're shooting RAW files, remember that RAW files are inherently low in saturation. Colors are quite muted on RAW files because the files themselves are unprocessed (i.e. the camera didn't boost colors for you). So you may find yourself having to boost Vibrance and/or Saturation quite high on a RAW file, especially if it's a landscape. This isn't cheating, this is just the nature of shooting RAW. I boost Vibrance and/or Saturation on nearly every single one of my RAW files. Without it, the files look bland and muted. But with JPEG files, make sure to use a light touch on these sliders (if at all) because JPEG files are 8-bit files, not 16-bit files. If you start boosting the colors too much on an 8-bit file, colors will get a little whacky and start to look blotchy.

VIDEO #16

Go to the Curriculum Homepage where you got this lesson guide and watch Video #16 entitled "Working With the Basic Adjustments Panel"

ASSIGNMENT

Use the Basic adjustments panel to fine tune exposure, contrast, and color on at least one image. Try lightening and darkening the shadows, highlights, whites, and darks to see how it affects the shot. Practice adjusting White Balance on a RAW file and work with Clarity, Vibrance, and Presence until you are comfortable using each. Adjust one photo using the Basic panel until you are pleased with the results, then crop it to 8x10, and email me this one photo for review at info@nickcarverphotography.com. In the export settings, resize the photo so that the long edge measures 800 pixels.

THINGS TO REMEMBER FROM THIS LESSON:

- Be careful about doing strong edits to JPEG files. Heavy edits are best done on 16-bit RAW, TIFF, or PSD files. Editing a JPEG too heavily will result in noticeable image quality problems.
- Lightening up the shadows in a photo too much will introduce image noise.
- Keep a light touch on the Clarity slider to avoid a harsh, over-edited look.

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