

Adjustment Layers

We said we'd cover these layers in more detail, so we'll start with the standard five steps of adjustment.

1. Levels

Above the histogram is the 'channel' dialogue box. The monitor channel colours can be adjusted individually, or RGB combined. In this case we'll be using the RGB channel.

On the bottom of the histogram there are three triangles. The far left controls the shadows, the far right the highlights and the middle the mid-tones. We use these as sliders to get the desired light intensity.

Don't worry about the 'output levels control – we won't be using that.

The OK and Cancel buttons speak for themselves. These are the only two you'll need. I've never used the following buttons:

The 'Load' button is used if you've got a lot of images needing exactly the same treatment – use this to save the settings you've made – The 'Save' button is used to recover these settings.

'Auto' lets Photoshop make the corrections it thinks necessary.

'Options' gives the settings for using the 'auto' function.

The preview checkbox should be ticked.

So how does it work?

With the image in selected on the layers palette, open a levels adjustment layer – it'll be positioned above the selected layer. Change its blending mode to 'luminosity' – we're only going to work on the lightness of the image.

Click on the adjustment symbol of the layer to open the control section.

Move the shadows slider until the desired 'blackness' has been achieved. You see the effect on the main image.

OR: hold down the Alt key and adjust the slider until the first black appears in the control view.

Now do the same with the highlights slider, until the desired 'whiteness' has been achieved. The Alt key works in the same way for the whites.

You've now set the black and white points for the image.

Click 'OK' to accept the changes.

2. Mid-tone Contrast

We're going to use two 'curves' adjustment layers. This is the first.

With the previous layer selected, open a new 'curves' adjustment layer. The blending mode again needs to be 'luminosity'. The channel drop down box stays on RGB. The preview box should be checked.

The vertical axis of the graph gives the light intensity output and the horizontal shows the area affected by the light intensity (shadows through to highlights). We move the curve to adjust the

steepness (and contrast) of the area we wish to amend – the flatter the curve, the flatter the image.

When a point is selected on the curve a moveable anchor is created. Several of these can be made, to enable the curve to be manipulated exactly as you want it. To remove an anchor, just drag it off the graph.

Typically, we first of all move the bottom of the curve vertically up, which brings out detail in the darkest areas of the image (also makes the blacks lighter), then we move the top of the curve vertically down to reduce any ‘glare’ in the image (also darkens the whites).

You’ll see that we now have a flatter curve and a corresponding ‘flat’ image, but don’t despair! Select a point about 25% of the way along the curve and move the line vertically down – not too far or you’ll start losing the detail you’ve brought out in the shadows. Now select a point about 75% along the curve and move the line vertically up – not too far, or you’ll start getting ‘burn out’. You’ll see that the line is now steeper and the mid-tones have a higher contrast.

Click ‘OK’ to accept the changes.

3. Global Colour

This is the second ‘curves’ adjustment layer, but this time we’re going to use it to adjust the overall colour balance of the image.

Open another curves adjustment layer. This layer, and the next two, stay in the ‘normal’ blending mode.

This time we’re going to adjust the individual colour channels, to get the balance we want. On the channel drop down menu, select ‘Red’. The preview box should be checked.

The curve can now be adjusted as required, by clicking and dragging it in the required direction – vertically up (towards the word red) increases the redness, while vertically down reduces the red and increases the cyan. As with the contrast curve, several anchor points can be used, to alter the balance in selected areas (shadows to highlights) of the image.

Select the ‘Green’ channel, to alter the green / magenta of the image and the ‘Blue’ channel for the blue / yellow.

When you’re satisfied with the result, click OK

4. Selective Colour

This layer allows us to adjust the individual CMYK (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, Black) channels of individual colours.

Open a selective colour adjustment layer and open the control panel. The preview box should be checked and ‘relative’ method selected.

The first colour selected is Reds. To see if there is a significant amount of red in the image, move the black slider fully to the right and / or left, to see if any changes are seen on the image. If there is little or no difference, then there is no point in adjusting the tone of the red. If changes have

been seen, move the slider back to its mid position and adjust the other sliders to give the tone of reds you want:

- Adjusting the ‘Cyan’ slider to the right (+%), increases the cyan and to the left (-%) decreases the cyan and increases the red.
- Adjusting the ‘Magenta’ slider to the right (+%), increases the magenta and to the left (-%) decreases the magenta and increases the green.
- Adjusting the ‘Yellow’ slider to the right (+%), increases the yellow and to the left (-%) decreases the yellow and increases the blue.

Similarly, the other colours in the drop down list can be adjusted (Yellows, Greens, Cyans, Blues, Magentas, Whites, Neutrals and Blacks), until the required adjustments have been made.

Click the OK button, to commit the changes.

5. Hue / Saturation

In this case, we’ll only be using the layer, to increase the saturation slightly (to give the image a bit of zing). The hue and lightness have already been adjusted in the preceding adjustment layers.

Click OK to commit the changes.

I often take the opportunity to see what the image looks like in monochrome at this stage, by moving the saturation slider fully to the left (de-saturated).

The colorize checkbox enables a sepia (or other tone) to be used in monochrome. The monochrome can be changed using the ‘hue’ slider and the colour intensity by using the ‘saturation’ slider.

If you decide to use it in monochrome, try adjusting the global colour settings to alter the contrast.

The standard adjustments are now complete, so I’d merge up the layers and if no more is to be done, prior to printing, flatten the image, as we’ve already discussed.

Other Adjustment / Fill Layers

Not all these options may be available to you – it depends on what version you're running.

Fill Layers

Solid Color – creates a layer of solid colour. Useful if you want to create effects by reducing the opacity of a layer above, or create a coloured border.

Gradient Fill – Used to make controlled adjustments in various types of colour, transparency etc. We'll be looking at gradients in future sessions.

Pattern Fill – creates a pattern across the layer, which can be used to texturise the image (using the opacity slider).

Adjustment Layers

Apart from the ones we've looked at, the following are available:

Colour Balance – an easy way of making the adjustments we did on the 'global colour' adjustment layer. It's not as versatile as the curves method.

Brightness / Contrast – another easy way of making the adjustments we did on the 'mid-tone contrast' adjustment layer. Again, it's not as versatile as the curves method.

Personally, I'd scrap both of the preceding layers.

If you've got CS3,

Channel Mixer – an easy way to produce monochrome images with or without a tint, which gives good control over the RGB colour channels. There's still nothing that hasn't been done in the standard 5 adjustments, but good if you're after special effects (Infrared etc.) – Maybe another one for a future session.

Gradient Map – gives some spectacular effects, by changing the colour range (from Black through to White, to say Purple through to Yellow). Again it's one we'll cover in the Gradient session – it's a big section.

CS3 has extras –

- Black and white adjustment layer, which gives excellent control of the individual colours in the image, but still only replaces what we've done in the standard 5 adjustment layers.
- Photo filter which simulates the use of standard filters which have been in use for years.
- Exposure which allows simulated exposure compensation of -20 to + 20 stops, offset and gamma corrections.

Invert – gives the opposite colours in the colour wheel. Interesting effects, if used with different blending modes

Threshold – converts the image to a two colour option – black and white with no tones in between.

Posterise – gives interesting effects and works well with some images.