



PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS

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The Most Important Adjustments

After uploading your photos onto your computer there are some basic operations that one does to improve them. First of all CROP. Most photographers like to crop their images. Had you taken the perfect photo in the first place you would not have needed to do it, but most of us will want to crop the image.

Then we will most likely want to change the exposure a little, we use LEVELS for this first, and if still unhappy we might try *Brightness and Contrast* changes if still not happy with the exposure. You might like to use the black or white paint brush to rub out the adjustment layer for some areas of your photo. Of course ideally the photo was correctly exposed in the first place!

Most compact cameras get 'noise' in the photo when the photo is taken at less than daylight conditions. The NOISE filter is ideal to reduce this effect.

And finally most images do well with a USM treatment. An *UnSharpen Mask*. This in fact 'sharpens' the picture. Again, some cameras do this automatically, but mostly this improves the average photo.

As for the settings, or where to find these tools, you will need to experiment and play! They are not hard to find and there is always the F1 key to get Photoshop HELP up. Also, remember the Ctrl.Z key combination to undo your work, or the History window where you can click on any history level you see there.

Lets look at how people go about some of these above tasks:

Levels

Adjusting *levels* can make a large difference to your photos. It affects the bright and dark spots of the image. When taking photos you sometimes see a little graph on your screen. That graph represent the 'levels'. It means the light levels. If you can see the levels while taking the photo with your camera you will find the best exposure of your photo is when you see a nice *bell curve* on the graph.

Following now some tutorials borrowed from <http://www.photoxels.com>

Adjusting levels is a 3-step process:

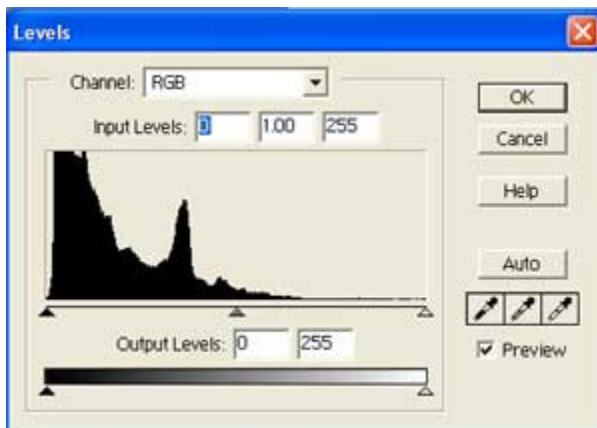
1. Adjust for the shadows;
2. Adjust for the highlights; and,
3. Adjust for the midtones.

Let's look at a picture that is under exposed, i.e. too dark:

Photoshop Elements



We will recover this picture using a 3-step levels adjustment process. In Photoshop Elements, select Enhance - Brightness/Contrast - Levels... A histogram pops up on your screen and looks like this (notice it is not a nice bell-curve):

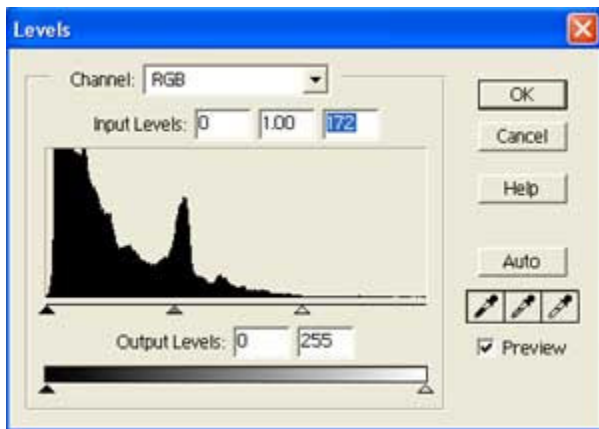


Don't panic! The histogram is simply a representation of all the pixels in the picture. A quick glance at it tells us that most of our pixels are toward the shadows (to the left). Along the horizontal axis, there are 3 triangular markers. Use the black one at the left to indicate where the darkest group of pixels start in your picture; use the white one at the right to indicate where the brightest group of pixels start in your picture; and use the shaded one in the middle to indicate the midtones. It's that simple!

Photoshop Elements

Let's apply our 3 steps:

1. Adjust for the shadows. We want to move the black marker to the first group of dark pixels. In this case, since the black marker is already pointing to the first group of dark pixels, we will leave it where it is, i.e. at the 0 mark.
2. Adjust for the highlights. We want to move the white marker to the first group of bright pixels. In this case, we move the white marker to the left to a point where we feel the first bright group of pixels start, around the 172 mark:

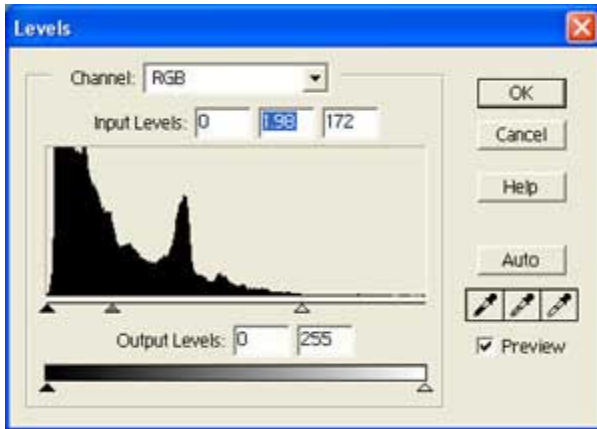


By doing this, notice how the picture has changed already for the better, with 'true' highlights:



Photoshop Elements

4. Adjust for the midtones. Click on the shaded marker and drag it to the left or right until you are satisfied with the result, in our case to somewhere around 1.98 (adjust to your own personal preference):



Click OK and save your 'restored' picture. Nothing wrong with this picture now -- expect for the clutter on my desk, that is!



There, that was easy, eh? Get into the habit of bringing your picture into levels and adjusting it for shadows, highlights, and midtones before you apply [sharpening](#) to it (another easy process):



Sharpening

Most cameras -- especially in the 'pro' category -- will capture an image without applying any sharpening to it, resulting in an image that appears 'soft' or even slightly 'out of focus.' Others will apply a certain degree of sharpening to the images and output crisp looking images. Most beginners prefer the latter type, while most advanced photographers prefer the former. Here's why.

When a camera processes your images, it is in effect deciding the amount of sharpening to give your images without your input. Some cameras do a good job at it, others do too much of it. Of course, if you have to do that for every single picture you take, it is really not worth it.

Sharpening for screen display and sharpening for prints are also two different things. So, let's understand what sharpening is and how to do it for screen display.

What Is Sharpening?

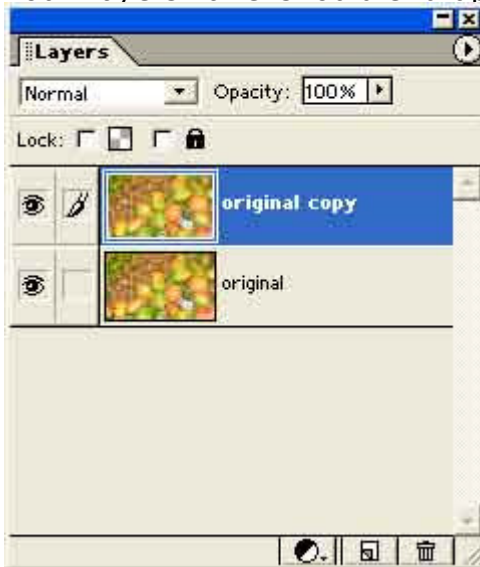
Sharpening is enhancing the edges of an image. This edge enhancement technique is called *unsharp masking* and involves isolating the edges in an image, amplifying them, and then adding them back into the image. In Photoshop, amplifying the edges is accomplished by locating pixels of greatest contrast, lightening one side and darkening the other. Once sharpening is appropriately applied, people's reactions is usually, 'Wow! It jumps right out at you.'

The easiest and most direct way of doing it is by clicking Filters in the first drop-down box of the Styles and Effects window. Select Sharpen in the second drop-down box and double click on UnsharpMask. Play with the settings and press OK.

A more precise way of doing it is as follows. Open an image, and double click on that layer and rename it as original. (You could leave it as 'Background' but renaming it is a good habit, since you may want to add a real background in some cases.)

Now, drag it to the new layer icon to create a new layer, original copy.

Your Layers Panel should end up looking like this:

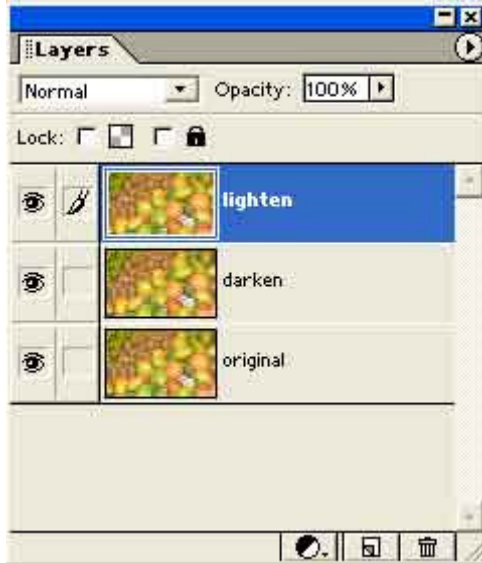


If not already selected, click the original copy layer to select it.

From the menu bar, select: Filter - Sharpen - Unsharp Mask... and type in Amount = 200%, Radius = 1.2, Threshold = 4. Click on Preview to view the original and sharpened version. Yeah!, I hear you say already. You may select different values, though the above values are a good starting point.

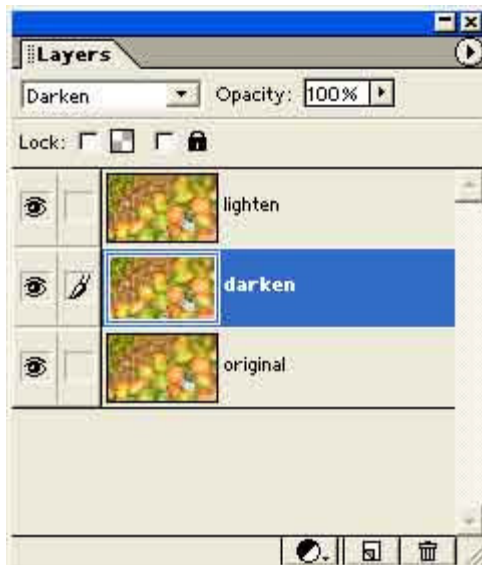
Photoshop Elements

Now, copy the sharpened original copy layer by dragging it to the new layer icon. You'll end up with original copy 2. Double click on original copy and rename it darken. Double click on original copy 2 and rename it lighten.



Select the darken layer by clicking on that layer.

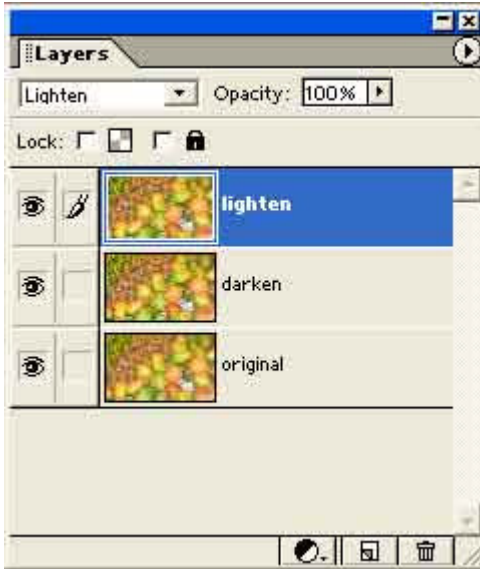
Set the blending mode to darken: See where it says, Normal in a drop down box at the top of the Layers Panel? Click on the down arrow and select 'Darken':



Select the lighten layer by clicking on that layer.

Photoshop Elements

Set the blending mode to lighten: Click on the down arrow and select 'Lighten':



What we have done is separate the darken and lighten pixels into two layers. Now, we can control each layer separately.

Adjust Sharpness

Click on the lighten layer to select it and adjust the Opacity until you are satisfied (ensure Preview is ON). In my case, I select 26%. Likewise, select the darken layer and adjust the Opacity until the darken pixels (the dark edges) just 'jump out.' I select 90%.

Each picture you sharpen will require different values, so if you are using your own image, adjust to your own liking.

Here is the original (unsharpened) version:



And here is the final (sharpened) result:



There, you have it. Pretty simple, huh?

Two more techniques

Sepia

First let's understand the sepia process so you'll have some grounding in the artistic aspects of this photographic process. Contrary to popular belief, sepia toning is actually not a digitally induced photo modification; nor is it the 'aging' of a photograph as some of today's web sites would lead you to believe. The coloration of 'old' photos is quite a different thing all together. It's become a *catch phrase* for any photo with a brownish tint to look old fashioned.

Photoshop Elements

In the early years of photography all photos were black and white, or monochromatic -- meaning composed of a single color range. It is most frequently applied to black and white photographs, but can also describe sepia and other toned images.. At some point someone realized that photographs would look better if somehow the stark black and white could be given a warmer tone. Light grays would more closely replicate skin tones, and the overall appearance would be more visually appealing. So photographers began replacing the silver in the black and white photographic print with silver sulphide, which is brown.

One of the reasons people have come to equate sepia prints with old prints is because the sepia prints are probably the only ones to survive the test of time. Silver sulphide is at least 50% more stable than silver. Most black and white photos have not survived, and color processing, chemicals and papers have a very short life. Traditional sulphide toning (sepia) prints will last the longest -- in excess of 150 years, and when properly fixed and protected, probably over 200 years. So sepia toning is an excellent archival technique.

Grayscale

Convert your image to grayscale: Choose: Enhance > Adjust Color > Adjust Hue/Saturation and in the resulting dialog click and drag the Saturation slider all the way to the left. This removes all color. My favorite method is with a Hue/Saturation Adjustment Layer. It's the same as above, except you create an adjustment layer by using the Create Adjustment Layer pop-up menu at the top of the Layers Palette. You get the same dialog, but with an adjustment layer you can control it as a separate layer rather than changing the original image.

Fine Tune Contrast with Levels

Now we'll modify the levels of our black and white until we see the image we're looking for. This will use yet another adjustment layer -- again because of it's flexibility and non-destructive nature. Once again create an adjustment layer by using the Create Adjustment Layer pop-up menu at the top of the Layers Palette -- this time select Levels.

By compressing the color levels we help partially *flatten* the image somewhat. In this case we slide the left slider (Shadows) toward the right until it hits measurable pixels, and slice the right slider (Highlights) to the left until it enters the ramp. Now, slide the middle slider until you achieve a visually pleasing black and white photo -- and then slide a few more points toward the left. The image will decrease density and visually lighten the image slightly. Remember, we'll be adding color later, which will put that density back into the image.

Add Sepia Toning

I know this is beginning to sound redundant, but you just can't beat those adjustment layers for the best working condition. So, one last time we're going to create a new adjustment layer by using the Create Adjustment Layer pop-up menu at the top of the Layers Palette -- this time select *Solid Color*. (Color Fill Layer)

In the resulting dialog, select the color you hope to use as your sepia. (May I suggest R = 91, G = 56, B = 17 for a good sepia.) Click OK to dismiss that dialog and you'll see a solid color layer.

Now adjust that layer's blending mode to SOFT LIGHT or COLOR by pulling down the layer menu. I give these two choices so you can experiment with the effect it will have on your photo. If the color is too intense, just lower the layer's opacity using the Layer Palette Opacity slider, or key in 50% to 30% or less.

At this point you should have a lovely sepia tone photo just like granny's. Now you can enjoy the benefits of making all your changes in Adjustment Layers by independently adjusting each layer until you've arrived at your favorite end result.

Making a border

Making a border in Photoshop Elements is nice and simple. Ensure Styles and Effects is ticked in the Windows menu. Look in the Styles and Effects window. In the first drop-down box you choose Effects. In the second drop-down box, choose Frames. Double Click a frame you like and press OK when it asks to flatten layers. Voila!