

## Photography Club - Tips by John - Basic adjustments to your files

1. Do not work on originals, if your images are on your camera card or on your phone then copy them to your computer. You can always go back to these if required. If you have copied images across and then reformat your card (good practice) then make sure you duplicate these (save a copy) before you make changes.
2. Open up your software e.g. Affinity (AF) Lightroom (LR) Photoshop (PS) or camera supplied software (CAM). Don't get bogged down with all the menus and tools, you are looking to make a few adjustments. In AF you can use the *Develop Persona* (easiest and must use this for RAW) or *Photo Persona* (do use this as layers, I will demo next time). In LR use the *Develop* tab for all files jpg or RAW. In PS a processing tab opens if it is RAW otherwise use the adjustments in layers (to be demo next time). In CAM you are looking for the *Tool Palette*.
3. Know the basic computer shortcuts which often apply to most programmes. Apple use the Command + and PC use the Control + so we shall abbreviate both to Co+.
  - Co+ Z = Undo last operation
  - Co+ X = Cut whatever is selected
  - Co+ C = Copy whatever is selected
  - Co+ V = Pasted whatever you have copied
  - Co+ N = Start new file
  - Co+ O = Open (you will need to select what)
  - Co+ 0 (zero) = fit to screen , handy when you have scrolled in on the image and are a bit lost where you are.
  - Co+ ' = show rulers as an overlay to assist with perspective.
  - Co+ W = close whatever window that is open.
  - Co+ A = select all

*Other useful shortcuts without the Co+ which you can try which work in AF and PS:*  
V = move tool, C = crop tool, E = eraser, G = Gradient (useful in layers at next session)
4. Now open an image, ignore 90% of the tools and menus, you are looking for the *navigator* tab and the *histogram* tab to open for starters. These two allow you to move about the image easily and also to visually see how the densities of the image are being effected with your adjustments. Only by observing the histograms frequently you get to understand how it is helpful.
5. The main adjustments you are going to apply and are roughly done in this order:
  - a. Colour Balance
  - b. Exposure
  - c. Contrast
  - d. Shadows and Highlights
  - e. Levels (also knowns as *Blackpoint* and *Brightness* in AF; Blacks & Whites in LR)
  - f. Saturation / Vibrance
6. So lets take these in order:
  - a. Colour Balance. 2 sliders *blue / yellow* and *green / magenta*. Aim for the mood you want and if you have people in the shot aim to get a nice skin colour. Often the camera auto setting will be close to what you want. Shots in deep shadows and interiors are most often in need of adjusting.
  - b. Exposure. Overall you are looking for the main part of the image to look right for its density, keep an eye on the *histogram* to see how it is changing. For instance you may have taken a shot with something bright in the background that has given you underexposure and quite a dark image, here you can lift it up.
  - c. The Contrast alters the middle part of your image and not affects the Blacks and Whites so good if the image is a bit flat to give it a bit of 'sparkle'.
  - d. If you want more detail in the *Shadows* or *Highlights* then these sliders are next, you may need to readjust with next step as these work in tandem. Shadow slider is good

for dark areas in interiors and the highlight slider is for back lit shots or for example bringing in detail to window areas in interiors.

- e. Levels. Clipping the *Black* point and *White* point either using Levels or sliders to get the *histogram* on the left and right nicely cropped at the tails and not leave a flat strip at either end. You are generally looking for a nice up and down profile like a silhouette of a mountain range.
  - f. Saturation alters the colours by effecting those that are the most colourful whereas the Vibrance changes colour in all areas especially boosting the pastel tones.
7. You may have to go back to the previous adjustments now to tweak, this is normal and not an indication you have got it wrong. We also looked at *Clarity* and *Unsharp Mask* USM, I suggest you use these with caution for now.
  8. You may have to process the file now especially if it is RAW or you are if in the *Develop Persona* AF. You may be asked what to save it as - use a jpeg at fairly high setting.
  9. It is time to use the *Crop* tool to trim off definitely what you don't need, if the image is 'on the bonk' then once activated you can go to a corner (the cursor changes to a double arrow curve) and this will allow you to twist the frame. You are aiming for the horizon to be straight across or to get the centre of the image upright. By activating the *Rulers / Grid* (Co+ ') this gives you a visual assist, to clear the rulers just repeat same shortcut or choose deselect.
  10. Distorted or angled edges of the image that you may wish to straighten are your last action. Called *Perspective* AF (little grid symbol last on the side tool bar) or *Transform* in PS (Co+T then select the *distort* option) and in LR it is under *Lens Correction*. You can do this in an overall perspective mode however I prefer to do each edge separately for more control. Activate the tool or 'select all' (Co+A) to bring an outline round the image. Then on one side drag one of the corners in one direction (left or right accordingly to straighten but just part way) and then drag other corner in the opposite direction so that the slant on the image crosses the frame roughly midway in the centre. Do this also on the other side. This gives a more natural correction and does not stretch the image too much. If you have to do a lot of correction it is more natural to do only 90% and leave a little perspective. Hit the return key to activate what you have done.
  11. Finally remember that at any stage if you are not happy with what you have just done you can reset the box or undo the last action. It is now time to properly crop your image and to save it as another file. So 'Save As' or 'Export' is what you are looking for, that way you can always go back to the original to compare as before and after or to do it again. You can also add a suffix like a letter 'a' or 'Vs1' to make it different from the original. Now I often create 2 folders on my desktop - one says 'test' and the other says 'done' so I can work with my images safely in these folders and if happy move them to a permanent place.
  12. It's worth noting that nearly all images you take would benefit with some or all of the above adjustments. I try to do them as I go along if possible (especially on a mobile). If you want to check how certain adjustments work in more detail then the internet will have plenty of tutorials, (all confessing to be masters of their craft haha) but really the 6 adjustments plus perspective and cropping do me for the majority, try to get to grips with these and it will massively improve your images, more tips will follow.

