

PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS 5

BASIC & QUICK PHOTOSHOP EDITS TO ADD “ZING” TO YOUR PHOTOS

There are many wonderful and wacky things that you can do with Photoshop, involving layers, masks, selections etc. but if you just want to add a bit of impact to your images, you can do so with only three or four quickly applied edits. All digital photos benefit from a bit of work (just as all photos from negatives do as well – only in that case it is the person working at the lab who did it on your behalf). These edits are as follows:-

ENHANCE > ADJUST LIGHTING > LEVELS

This adjustment should be made first. When you click on this you will see a graph with a black “mountain” shown on it. This mountain is a visual representation of the range of tones in your image. The far left hand side shows tones that are pure black and the far right side shows tones that are detail-less pure white and the span between them is tones from dark through midtones to light. If your graph show all the tones squashed up against the right hand side, your image will be very light, probably too light. If all your tones are squashed up against the left-hand side, your image will probably be too dark.

All is not lost as we can darken an image that is too light or lighten an image which is too dark using the levels control. You will see that at the bottom of the graph are three small triangles representing, respectively, black point, mid-tone and white point. With an image that is too dark, using the mouse, drag the white point triangle to the left until it runs into the “toe” of the tone mountain. Conversely, if the image is too light, drag the black point triangle, in the right hand direction, to the toe of the tonal mountain. If the resulting effect is still too dark or light, you can move the centre mid-tone triangle one way or the other until you are happy with the look of the image.

ENHANCE > ADJUST LIGHTING > BRIGHTNESS/CONTRAST

Not all images need a contrast adjustment and many consumer cameras are set up to provide a high contrast image straight out of the camera. What contrast increases do is to make the dark tones darker and the light tones lighter. If there is too much contrast you will lose details in the shadows (as dark tones block up to featureless black) and in the highlights (as light tones can become pure burnt out white). I usually set my cameras to a lower contrast setting as you can always add contrast but, if the contrast is too high in the image capture, overly dark tones are hard to bring back without increasing grain and burnt out tones can be totally irrecoverable.

Photos taken in lower light or on overcast days often benefit from an increase in contrast. I usually add only 5% and hardly ever more than 10% but you need to experiment using greater or lesser amounts until you get the image how you like it. Don't use the brightness part of the “brightness/contrast” control, it's rubbish.

ENHANCE > ADJUST COLOUR > HUE/SATURATION

Once again, not all images need a boost to saturation as many consumer cameras already produce highly saturated images. This of course is a matter of personal taste and most cameras are adjustable for saturation. Again, photos taken in low light or on overcast days often do need a colour boost. You probably wont notice much of an effect with less than 10% added but don't go much over 25% as you can get some distortion of the colours. Keep an eye on already vivid reds as these can start to posterise if you try to boost their colour any further.

ENHANCE > UNSHARP MASK

This adjustment should always be done last. There are a great number of possible permutations of the three “unsharp mask” control sliders but the settings that I find work well are “**Amount**” 60 – 150 %, “**Radius**” 1 pixel “**Threshold**” 3 levels. Be careful not to oversharpen an image as they don't look good that way.

All of these adjustments need only take a minute or so per image and the improvements justify taking the time.

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