workshop BEGINNING PHOTO EDITING taught by Lynn Weber

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CLASS # 3: Correcting under- and over-exposed photos

- Correcting an under-exposed (dark) photo
- Correcting an over-exposed (dark) photo
- Correcting a photo with some parts that are too light or too dark
- Homework

Incorrectly exposed photos are one of the biggest problems that photographers face. While we always try to get the lighting right in our photography, sometimes the photograph doesn't come out looking as we hoped it would. If your photos are too light (overexposed) or too dark (underexposed), there are a couple of fixes that will greatly—and easily—improve these problems.

CORRECTING AN UNDER-EXPOSED (DARK) PHOTO

Here's an example of what the technique we will learn here can do:

1. Open Photoshop Elements and select >Edit from the top menubar. Be sure you have the "Full Edit" option selected in the top right of your screen.

2. For these fixes we are going to use the Photoshop "Layers Palette." If you look at the right side of your screen, you should see a box that says "Layers." If you don't see this box, go to the top menubar and select >Window >Layers. The "Layers Palette" will open.
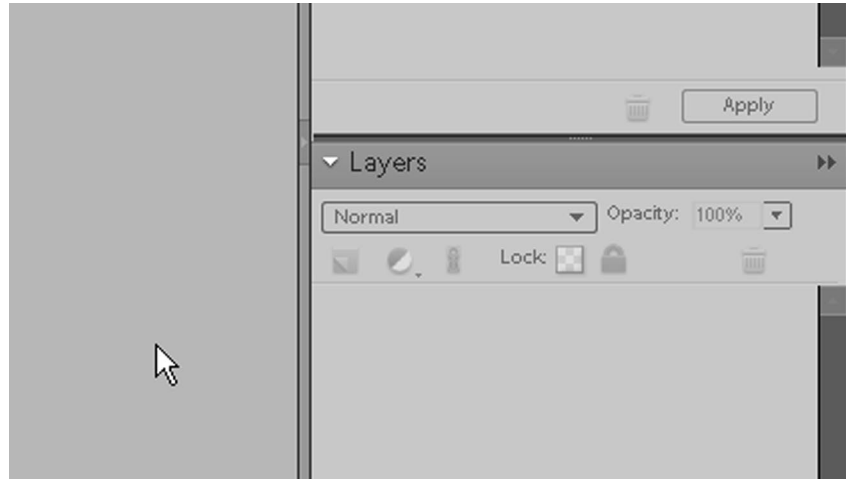
Carter at the Fire Station
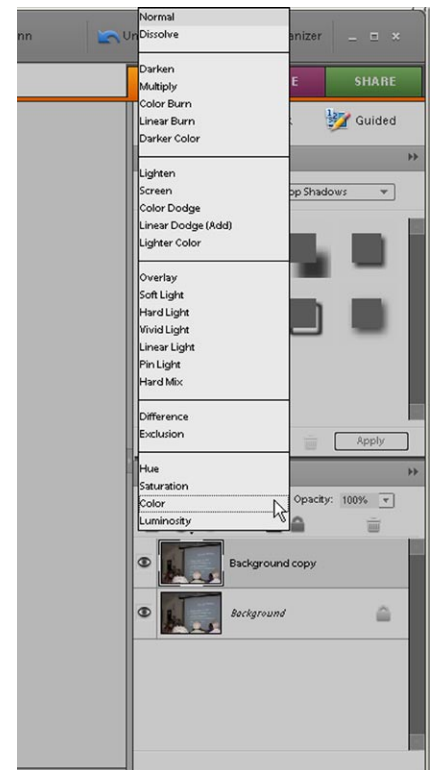
As it came from the camera

After a little Photoshop magic!

3. There is a small white triangle in the bar to the left of the word "Layers." This triangle should be pointing down. If it is pointing at the word "Layers" click on it and it will point down. When the triangle is pointing down, the words "Normal" and "Opacity" will be visible below the Layers box. It should look like this:

4. Open the photo you'd like to lighten. Duplicate it. You should now see your photo in the Layers Palette, with the word "Background" beside it.

5. Position your cursor in the gray area by the word "Background" and right click. From the menu that pops up, choose "Duplicate Layer." The Duplicate Layer box will pop up. Click OK. You should now have two layers-the background layer and the background copy layer.

6. Click in the gray area of the background copy layer to select this layer. It will be slightly darker gray when it is selected.

7. Do you see the word "Normal" slightly below the word "Layers" and slightly above your background copy layer? This is the "Blending Modes" menu box. Click on the little triangle and a menu of the available blending modes should appear, like this:

8. Click on the "Screen" blending mode to select it. This should really lighten up your photo and make you go "Wow!" If your photo looks perfect you are done. However, perhaps your photo is still too dark or even way too light! If this is the case, don't despair! We can fix these problems!

   • If your photo becomes too light when you apply the "Screen" blending mode, go to the "Opacity" box, to the right of the blending modes box. Click on the little arrow by the word "Opacity" to see a slider. Move the slider gradually to the left—to lower opacity—until your photo looks good to you.

   • If your photo is still too dark after you apply the "Screen" blending mode, press SHIFT and click on the background layer. Now both layers are selected (darker gray.) Position your cursor in the gray area in one of the layers and right click. In the box that pops up, choose "Merge Layers." Now your two layers have become one layer and you can repeat Steps 5 through 8 above.

9. When your photo looks just the way you want it to look, press SHIFT and click on the background layer in the Layers Palette. Now both layers are selected (darker gray). Position your cursor in the gray area in one of the layers and right click. In the box that pops up, choose "Merge Layers." Now your perfect photo is ready to save!

CORRECTING AN OVER-EXPOSED (TOO LIGHT) PHOTO

1. This fix is just slightly different than the fix for an underexposed photo. Open your overexposed photo. Duplicate it. You should now see your photo in the layers palette, with the word "Background" beside it.

2. Position your cursor in the gray area of the Layers Palette next to the word "Background," and right click. From the menu that pops up, choose "Duplicate Layer." The Duplicate Layer box will pop up. Click OK. You should now have two layers-the background layer and the background copy layer.

3. With the duplicate layer highlighted, go to the blending modes dropdown menu. This time, click on the "Multiply" blending mode. This should bring some of the detail back to your photo and darken it up a little.

4. If your photo looks perfect you are done. However, perhaps your photo is still too light. If this is the case, don't despair! We can fix these problems too!

- If your photo is too dark after you applied the "Multiply" blending mode, go to the "Opacity" box, to the right of the blending modes box. Click on the little arrow by the word Opacity to access the slider. Move the slider gradually to the left until your photo looks good to you.

- If your photo is still too light, press SHIFT and click on the background layer. Now both layers are selected (darker gray). Position your cursor in the gray area in one of the layers and right click. In the box that pops up, choose "Merge Layers." Now your two layers have become one layer and you can repeat Steps 2 and 3 above.

5. When your photo looks just the way you want it to look, press SHIFT and click on the background layer. Now both layers are selected (darker gray.) Position your cursor in the gray area in one of the layers and right click. In the box that pops up, choose "Merge Layers." Now your perfect photo is ready to save!
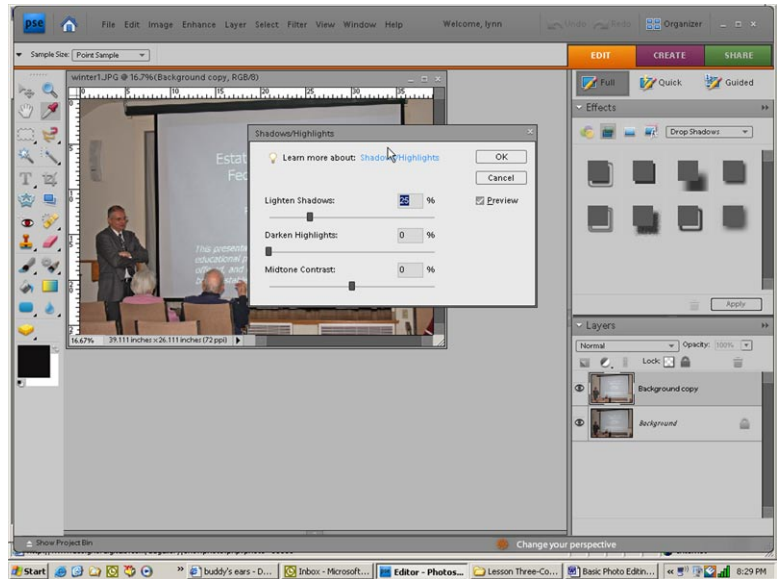
Correcting an Overexposed Photo

I took this photo of Emma in the sunroom. Oops! Too much sun! The details are bleached out.

I adjusted the lighting here so that I could see all the details of her cute little face.

CORRECTING A PHOTO WITH SOME PARTS THAT ARE TOO LIGHT AND/OR TOO DARK

1. Open your photo. Duplicate it.

2. Right click on the "background layer" in the Layers palette to duplicate the layer. Click OK.

3. From the menubar at top, select >Enhance >Adjust lighting >Shadows/Highlights. A box containing three sliders will pop up.

4. Your photo will immediately become a lot lighter because the "lighten shadows" slider is set to 25%. Move the slider slowly to the left and the photo will gradually become darker.

5. There are three sliders here: "lighten shadows," "darken highlights," and "midtone contrast." Move the sliders around until you like what you see and click OK! Your perfect photo is ready to save!

There are many other ways to correct lighting in Photoshop and Photoshop Elements but these are the easiest. As you become more proficient with the software, you might want to explore some other techniques.

Lightening Dark Areas

Lacey was standing in the shadow of a tree and her face is quite dark.

Here I've lightened the shadow and we can see her cute smile!

HOMEWORK

It would be fun to see some of your before and after photos from this lesson. If you'd like to prepare a "Before and After" to post, you would basically follow the homework instructions from Class #1, repeated here for convenience.
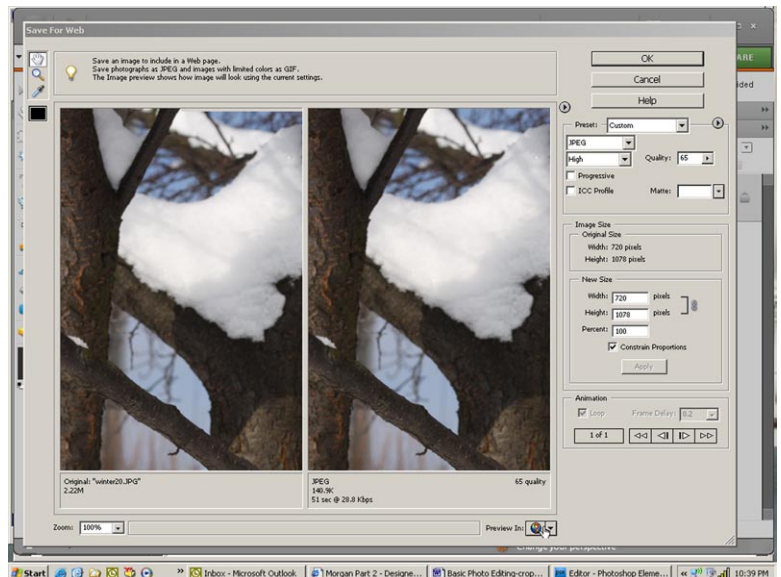
1. Resize your photos to 4" x 6" with a resolution of 72 ppi because this will be posted on the web. (you may need to refer to Lesson 2 to do this!)

2. From the top menubar, choose >File >New >Blank File

3. A new window will open. In the Name box, type in "Class 3 assignment."

4. Set the preset to "Custom."

5. For vertical photos, set the width to 10" and the height to 8." If your photos are horizontal set width to 8" and height to 10."

6. Resolution should be "72;" color mode should be "RGB color" and background contents should be "white."

7. On this new document, you will place both your original photo and your corrected photo. Here's how to do this:

   • Go to the top menubar, and select >Window >Images >Cascade. This will allow us to put the box and both photos on the screen at the same time and see them all. While we are putting this document together, you may move either of your photos or the new document by placing your cursor at the top (next to the file name), holding down the mouse button, and dragging it.

   • Open your "Before" photo by selecting >File >Open and navigating to your "Before" photo

   • Make sure the Move tool ( ) from the side toolbar is selected. You can then drag your "Before" photo onto your new canvas/document by positioning your cursor on the photo, holding down the mouse button and dragging the photo onto the canvas. You can move it around on the canvas by holding down your mouse button, clicking anywhere inside the photo and dragging the photo around until it is positioned where you want it.

- Follow the same directions as above for your "After" photo. Now you should have both photos on the new canvas/document.

preparing your homework to post on "get it scrapped"

When both photos are on your document, you will want to prepare it for posting. Here's how you will do this:

1. Select >Layer from the top menubar. Go all the way to the bottom of the dropdown menu and select >Flatten Image.

2. Select >Image >Resize >Image size. In the Pixel Dimensions boxes at the top, set whichever aspect (height or width) is bigger on your white box as 600 pixels. The other aspect should automatically become the right size. Click OK.

3. Select >File >Save for Web. Two copies of your white box will appear side by side like this.

4. In the menu box on the right side of the screen, choose:
   - Preset: "Custom"
   - Under Preset, choose "JPEG" from the dropdown menu
   - Under JPEG, choose "High"
   - When you click on the Quality box, it will become a slider. As you move the Quality slider to the right, watch the size under the white box on the right. It should be as large as possible without going over 150K.
   - Click OK.

5. A box will pop up to "Save Optimized As:" Click the dropdown menu and choose "My Documents."

6. Click on the Photo Editing Homework folder.

7. Click inside the "File Name" box at the bottom, type in "Class Three" and click on "Save."

8. Your file is now ready to upload.

getting ready for class #3

In our next lesson, we will be working on correcting the color in our photos. In preparation, choose some photos which need a little color help!