



FIRST STEPS IN PHOTOSHOP

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Photoshop is a daunting software program. For the average photographer with modest requirements its sophistication and complexity is really overkill. Just where does one start? Our natural first tendency is to try out every filter and effect, and boggle over the weird and wonderful results achievable with a bit of indiscriminate button pushing. Then, in an effort to figure out what is happening, you go out and buy a couple of expensive and very incomprehensible books on the subject.

Nevertheless, if you are ever going to make sense of this imaging software you will have to start with the basics ... then practice these until you master them thoroughly. So rather than talking about some of the exotic effects available let us look at the half dozen procedures that you might use to improve your original picture. It must be said here that the original photograph must be a potentially good image.

Not all the digital imaging in the world will create a masterpiece from a poor photograph.

So let us look at some faults your average picture might have and address each of these in order:

1. A crooked horizon and a need for cropping.
2. Exposure problem or lack of tonal range.
3. Colour and contrast faults
4. Distracting unwanted material..
5. Areas requiring burning-in or lightening.
6. Picture not quite sharp.

1. In the top tool-bar click Image then rotate canvas then arbitrary. Type in angle the degree of rotation needed to correct the angle. Then click CCW or CW (clockwise). Your picture now tilts to the chosen degree. If too much or too little click edit to undo.

The picture now needs to be cropped so click the crop tool in the left hand tool-bar The cursor becomes the crop symbol. Click and drag it (holding left mouse button down) diagonally from top left of the picture and release at lower right. You can now see the cropped area and can adjust this by dragging on the small squares around the edge. Click the inner area and you can move the cropped portion around the picture area. Double click to OK.

2. Click Image in the top tool-bar and then adjust. There is a wonderful array of tools here.

Click the top one, levels. An odd mountain-shaped chart appears. This reflects the tonal range of the image and adjustments are made by clicking on and moving the little sliders at either end or the middle one. Have the preview box ticked and you can see the changes being made.

The shape of this curve varies with each image. A regular curve that rises from each corner is usually the sign of an acceptable image. If the curve begins some way into the square, drag the

outside sliders to where it begins. Then move the centre slider left or right until the picture looks acceptable. This is a magical tool and most images can stand tweaking with it.

3. Click image then adjust again and you will find the contrast and brightness and colour balance controls. Both have sliders to move to make your adjustments. A simple example is moving the yellow / blue slider to the left to increase the yellow and reduce the blue to warm up a picture. You can also play with the hue / saturation controls and here you can move the saturation slider right over to the left to achieve a monochrome image.

4. Now to get rid of unwanted material and we go to the rubber stamp (sometimes called the clone tool). Click on the rubber stamp symbol in the left tool-bar. The cursor becomes a circular brush. The size of the brush can be altered using the squared bracket keys on the keyboard. This can be a difficult tool but it is well worth the time spent mastering. It is probably the most useful of all Photoshop tools

Position the brush over an area you want to replicate elsewhere. If you wish to remove a pole that intrudes into the sky, move the brush to a sky area. Click the ALT key. As you do this, the brush circle briefly shows as a rubber stamp. Now move the brush over the pole. When you left click with the mouse, you deposit the piece of sky over the pole, which will then effectively disappear. That might sound a bit simple but it will take many hours to become adept using the rubber stamp. The brush edges can be soft or hard and the degree of opacity can be varied. As with the other tools, a single mistake can be rectified immediately by pressing ALT and Z on the keyboard.

5. Darkroom workers will be very familiar with the need to dodge and burn. This effectively lightens or darkens selected portions of a picture. The symbol for this looks a bit like a lollypop in the left tool-bar. Click on it and then adjust the size of the brush that appears. Clicking this brush on the picture will lighten that portion of the image. Now hold down the ALT key while using this brush and it will darken the area you move across. Ideal for 'burning in' the edges of a picture. You will note the opacity box in the top tool bar and this can be adjusted to suit. It is easier to lower the opacity for many tools to 50% or less and go over the area several times.

6. Finally we have a look at sharpening our picture. Often scanned images are slightly soft and can be improved by using the unsharp mask. In the top tool-bar, click filter and select sharpen. Chose unsharp mask and a menu with sliders appears. Make sure the preview box is checked and you can watch the effect achieved by moving the amount slider. Experience will tell how much sharpening is needed but use this tool with discretion, as too much sharpening will produce an artificial effect.

There are many software programmes in which you can achieve the above results without going to the full Photoshop package. Photoshop Elements and Picture Publisher are both reasonably priced and many more come bundled with scanners. In my experience, no single one is easier to master than another is and there is no substitute to sitting at the computer and practice, practice, practice.

Believe me, all the frustrations are worthwhile in the end. ...best of luck.

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