

# Basic Color Correction in Photoshop CS4 and CS5

In this tutorial, I'll explain how to do basic, but professional looking color correction in Photoshop CS5. Photoshop isn't that hard if you get the first step inside. And that is what I'll try to help you with.

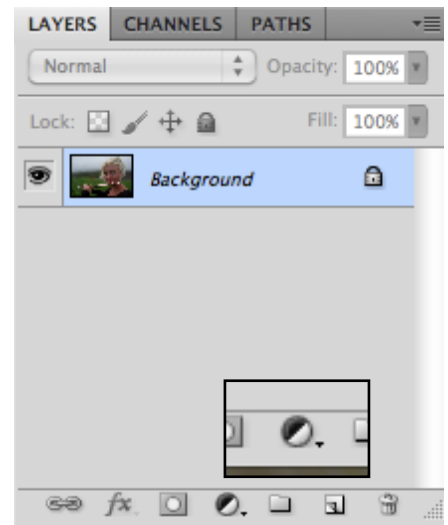
There is mainly two ways to work with a photo (either in photoshop or elsewhere); destructive and non-destructive. What is destructive and non-destructive, you ask? Well, the easiest way to understand this, is to think a real life situation. You got a picture in front of you and you want to paint a tree on it. The destructive way to make that tree happen, is to pain right on the photo. The non-destructive way is to lay a transparent paper on top of the photo and paint on that one, so if you make a mistake, the original picture is not destroyed. This is really how we want to work in photoshop too. We'll apply «filters» on top of the photo, instead of just working directly with the original photo. Adobe have made this quite easy with their newest version of Photoshop, CS5.

I'll use a .jpg in this tutorial, as an example, but I recommend you use a raw image (16-bits)if you can.

I'll start off using a picture of my friend Kine. The original photo is not really interesting, but with a few easy touches, this image will be a totally new experience.

What I'll focus on in this tutorial, is adding adjustment layers (filters) to the image. I will not use any tools, retouching or other things for now. That'll be another tutorial. So ok, lets open the picture and get started!

Open photoshop, and choose *File > Open*. Choose «Kine\_Original» Now, in the layers window there is a button for adding different adjustment layers. Press this button, and a box will appear. These are the different adjustment layers we can use. I'll cover the most used ones.

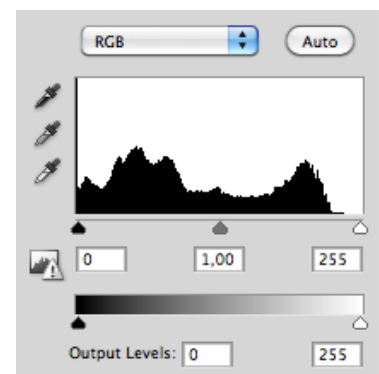
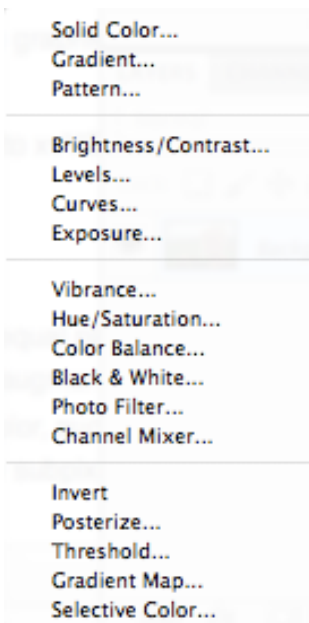


## **Brightness/Contrast**

*The brightness and contrast is quite self explainable. You adjust the brightness and contrast in the image. Usually, I don't use this feature, because I think «Levels» and «Curves» do a better job, but sometimes the Brightness/Contrast is the best way to achieve the desired result.*

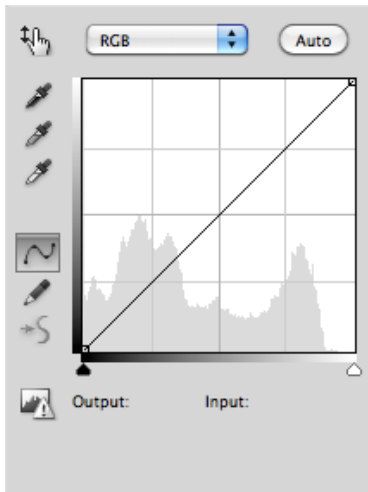
## **Levels**

*The levels adjustment is a great way to work with the contrast and/or seperate colors in the image. You can work either with the blacks, the middle tone or the whites. If you take one slider and drag it, you see the contrast changes, and your chosen parameter starts to increase. This is a perfect way to for example remove grey areas.*



At the bottom in the levels box, you'll see the output colors. These are the main colors as a starting point. If you adjust these, the black will become lighter or the whites will become darker.

On top of the levels-box you can see a drop down box that says «RGB». If this is correct, you're working with all colors at the same time. In other words, you're working with the contrasts. If you want to, you can choose either red, green or blue in stead, and now you can adjust only one color separately. This gives you enormous power, and is a feature we'll use a lot in other adjustments layers too.



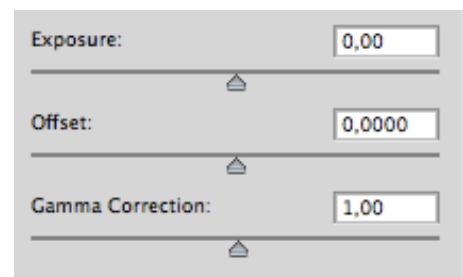
### Curves

This is maybe my favourite adjustment layer. The possibilities is almost endless if you know how to handle it. The curves works a bit like the levels adjustment layer, but instead of just a line, you got both x and y to work with. To make this easy; down to the left is where the shadow (blacks) information lies, and on the top right the highlight (whites) lies. So if you make a point on the line by clicking on it, you may drag the point up or down to make the selected color range either darker or brighter. In example; if we make two points on the line, one a bit above the middle, and one under it. We drag the above upwards a bit, and the one below a bit down, the picture suddenly got a lot more contrast. The coolest thing about curves, is the ability to choose the different colors (Red, Green,

Blue) and manipulate those separately. Try open the drop down menu that says «RGB» and choose either red, green or blue. If you now make a point and drag it up or down, you can see that the whole image is changing its colors. This is a great way to adjust your image. The Curves adjustment layer doesn't add any color to the image, it simply adjusts the ones that's already there.

### Exposure

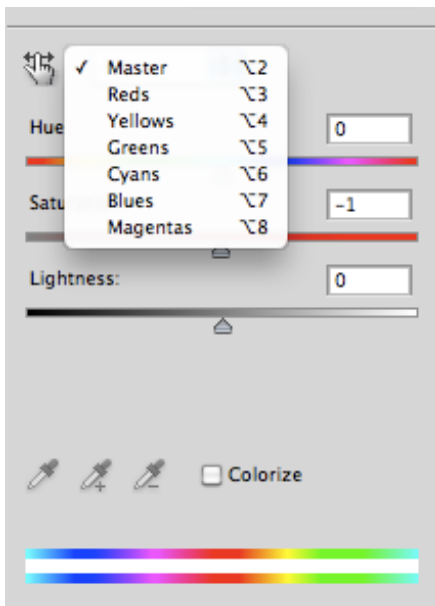
The exposure is how much light there is in your picture. It's the same parameter that you adjust directly on your camera before you take a picture. This is good if the picture is too dark or too bright. Try play with the exposure, offset and gamma together to get the best result.



### Vibrance

Vibrance is almost the same as saturation, but Vibrance only uses the colors closeby, and does not affect the whole image all at once. If you turn the Vibration all the way down, the image won't become totally black & white. You'll still see some tones in your image. A great way to tone down the colors in your image without

crushing them too much (either way, up or down). The saturation doesn't calculate the neary colors, so it affect the whole image all the way from original to black & white, or up to strong oversaturated colors.

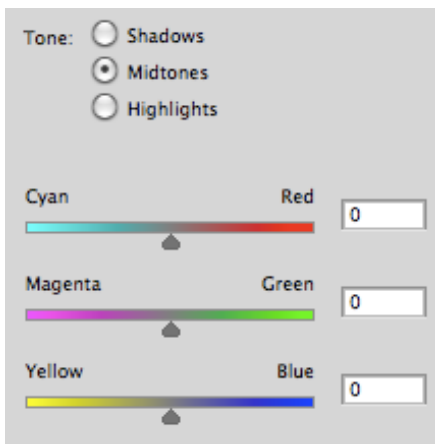


## Hue/Saturation

There is a distinct difference between hue and saturation. Hue is the version of the colors. If you drag the hue slider, the whole image will start to change colors into something that looks quite surrealistic. The saturation adjustment is the strength of the colors. On the negative site, you got totally weak and black & white colors, and on the positive site you got strong almost crushed colors. And of course you got the lightness slider that adjust the blacks and whites in your image.

The awesome thing about hue, is the ability to change the values of the colors separately. On default, the settings is set to «Master», but if you open the drop down menu, you can see there is many separate colors to choose from. Try choosing a separate color and adjust the hue... The perfect way to change colors for spesific objects. If you want to change the color of your jacket from yellow to green, just select yellow in the hue drop down menu and adjust the hue!

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## Color Balance

Color balance is the only adjustment layer that actually ads colors to the image. If you got a black & white image, and add a color balance to it, the image changes from black & white to the color you choose. This is a good way to for example add some yellow hilgits to your picture, or some blue shadow tones.

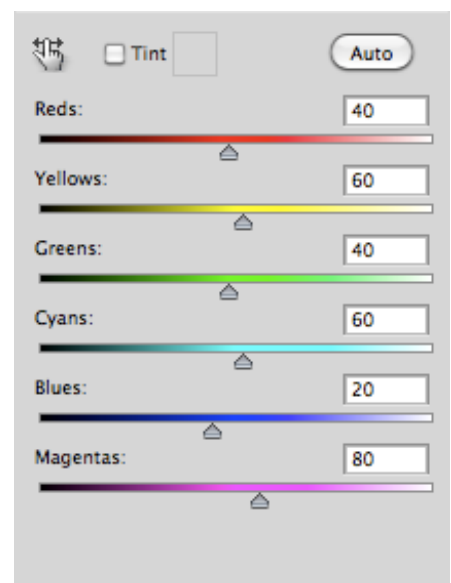
You can choose between shadow, midtones and hilights. Those represents the types of colors you choose to adjust. If you select tha shadow tones, only the dark places in the image get affected, but if you choose the highlights, only the bright colors changes.

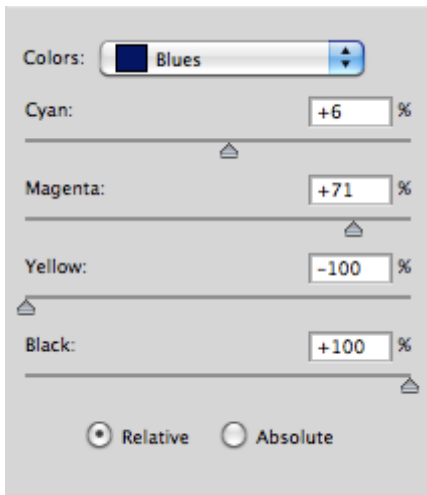
## Black & White

The best way to make your image black & white. Of course you could adjust the saturation all the way down, and play with the contrasts in the curves or levels adjustments, but in this adjustment layer, you got so much more control over each color. Just try it, and you'll know what I talk about.

## Selective Color

Selective color is the concept from the separate color tones in hue/saturation taken a step further. You can choose a main color and tweak it endlessly until you get the one you like. The relative button works almost like



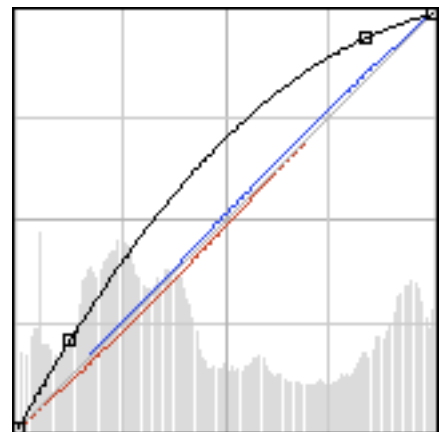


*vibrance with nearby colors and the absolute button uses all colors in the image.*

And these are actually the main adjustments you use for color correction! So now that you know a bit about each adjustment layer, let's get to work!

Now, the image is a bit dark, so I'll brighten it up with some **exposure**. Add a «exposure adjustment layer» and tweak the image to your liking. Remember that you really don't have to make big changes for the picture to turn out great, so I'll only turn the exposure up to +0,52, and I'll leave the other parameters alone.

Now, I want a bit more contrast in the image, so I'll add a «**Curves**», and start adjusting it to something like this (see illustration). And when I first work with the curves, why not adjust the colors a bit. Click the RGB dropdown menu, choose the colors and adjust to your liking. You may be able to see on my curve almost what I did with the different curves. The main tweak is the red channel that I've darkened a bit.



And actually finally I'll just play around in the **selective colors**. There are so many parameters that I won't bother you with all the numbers. But just play around and see what fit your picture the best!

I've only used some few of the adjustment layers for this picture, but often you won't need more than two or three layers to make your picture look awesome. And it really doesn't need to be so hard. The things I've done today is fairly easy steps, and if you start to play around, you'll see how easy it is to lift your picture to the next level.

So good luck, and I hope you have learned a little bit from this tutorial. If not, you can always go back and read about the different adjustment layers.

*A big thank you to my wife who actually took this image, and helped me with this tutorial.*

**-Torgeir Bull**  
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