



LIGHTROOM CLASSIC OVERVIEW: Part 1 (October 2021 Update)

This overview includes the major October 2021 update where masking was introduced, which changed the tools panel quite a bit but using these tools are included in Part 2.

This is a fairly standard overview / workflow but everyone will do things slightly differently and often not all tools are required to be used. The actual workflow will depend on the photo being processed. For example, if you had exposed for the highlights when taking the photo, it will appear quite dark when viewed in Lightroom, so the shadow recovery slider may be the first slider used.

Lightroom Classic is non-destructive as it doesn't affect the actual photo it only adds commands to how the photo is viewed. You can therefore hit Ctrl Z to step back one item at a time or just click on any part of the history panel to go back to that point. If you click on the history panel and then make another change all previous amendments above the point clicked on will be gone.

Histogram; Look at the histogram when making adjustments as this gives a visual guide to what's happening with the whites, blacks and colour range of the image.

A couple of useful key commands; Press I to scroll through the information on the photo in top left corner. Press F to see the photo in full screen (Lightroom panels etc will be gone), press F again to go back (This is a toggle key).

To open a panel, click on its triangle button to the side of it.

If the whole side panel is not visible click on the very small triangle at the extreme edge of the screen to open it.

There are two basic views in Library Mode; Grid View represented by the square with a grid at the bottom left of the central viewing panel and this then shows thumbnails of the images in the main window and Loupe View represented by the rectangle within a rectangle next to it to see the full image in the central window. If you jump to Develop Mode the image selected in Library Mode is displayed in the central window.

To zoom in click on the options at the top left next to the word Navigator. I generally use Fit and 1:1 but the last option is on a menu so you can click on the two little triangles to select a zoom amount. This works in both Library and Develop Modes.

The small Navigator image to the top right is very useful so when zooming in you can see where you are on the image. If the image is not visible click on the triangle to open this panel. You can drag the image around either on the image itself or on the Navigator or just click a spot on the Navigator to jump to.

To change the size of the thumbnails in Library Grid Mode move the slider left or right on the bottom right of the viewing panel to the left to reduce and to the right to increase.

In the Library Module the X/Y button shows two images side by side for comparison purposes. Click to select or use arrow keys to move along.

In the develop module the Y/Y button shows before (original) and after (Current) in various options, just keep clicking to see them. Click on Loupe View to go back when finished.

In main view mode there are two flags, the first is to pick a photo the second (with the x on it) is to mark photos for deletion. To then delete the x flagged photos go to “Photo Menu” on top menu list and click on “Delete Rejected Photos” (the bottom item) and follow the options.

Next are the * so you can rate your photo 1 – 5 *. If a photo is selected you can just hit the number you want on the keyboard.

Then the two Rotation arrows and finally the Draw Face Region to draw around a face and name the person.

You can carry out some basic adjustments and sync these with other images by selecting the various images and then the sync buttons will become active.

To get started on processing from the Library tab, click on the Develop tab on the top right list of items to start the development / post processing of your image.

Basic panel

Auto: If you want a quick result just hit the Auto button and this will adjust the sliders for you and often gives a reasonable result but sometimes looks oversaturated / too bright. You can then move all the sliders etc in the normal way to adjust the image further. A quick fast method.

Profiles: Click onto the Profile menu button and this opens up some styles to choose from. The default will be Adobe Color, but under this there are lots to select from.

Click on Browse to open up even more profile options shown as thumbnails, If you hover the mouse over the thumbnail you can see the effect on the main image.

This means, using the Camera matching set you could quickly get your jpeg style from a Raw file but then still have the option to change things by moving all the manual sliders etc in the normal way.

The Profiles can also be accessed by clicking on the four small squares on the right of the Profile menu and just above the WB section. In older versions of Lightroom these four squares may not be there so click on the Profile menu as noted above.

There is also an amount slider, however on the Adobe Raw or Camera Matching profiles this is greyed out so doesn't work but it does on the remainder of the profiles.

Click close to go back.

MANUAL ADJUSTMENT

To carry out the processing manually or adjust things after the auto or pre-sets process then you use the following.

General point: Double click on any handle within a slider to reset to zero.

White Balance & Tint

If you think the White balance is incorrect or doesn't reflect what you saw when taking the photo use the slider to correct the temperature. This can be useful but using Auto White balance on the camera normally gives a good result so doesn't need adjustment but it can still not quite match what you saw or the look you want to achieve.

Obviously if the photo is very dark it's no use starting with White Balance as you probably can't see the colours so you would probably use highlights and shadows first.

The white balance can provide the right mood for an image as a blue tint can convey a cooler or moodier scene and a red tint a warmer happy scene.

White Balance can correct errors made during taking a photo. If for example you had changed this on your camera to say shade then forgot to put it back to auto and started shooting on a bright sunny day it may give odd results so you can correct it here provided you are editing a RAW file.

Remember you can't adjust the white balance on JPEGs as it is fixed in this format. However, you can adjust the calibration to give a similar effect as explained later in this overview.

WB: To select a pre-set white balance similar to that within your camera go to the menu to the right of the WB: and scroll down the list and if you click say Cloudy the slider handles on both White Balance and Tint will move to this position.

Temp: Move the slider left or right to get the white balance you require. If you want to go back to the as shot position double click on the handle.

Tint: You can adjust the colour tints manually here as well using the tints slider.

Complimentary Colours: Look at the image and see what is the dominant colour then on a colour wheel you can pick the complimentary colour and adjust to provide this. For example, orange works well with blue.

Tone

It's said "Expose for the highlights and process for the shadows" and this where we do this.

Highlights: Reduce highlights by moving the slider to the left by as much as necessary. Some videos say you can go all the way to 100% but I normally don't go further than say -50% to -75% or so.

Its ok to let specular highlights such as the sun or a bright light clip (i.e. show no detail) as we expect this to be the case with our eyes naturally. However some judges may still pick up on this but I personally don't think this an issue as long as it's a reasonable amount.

Shadows: Increase shadows by as much as necessary. Again, some videos say go to 100% but I usually use no more than +50 to +75%.

Negative shadows adjustment can be useful to darken a background to remove distractions in portraits or some landscape images provided the subject is correctly lit.

The reason I try not to go too far is this when combined with Contrast and/or Clarity can cause halos to appear. If halos do appear just back off on the sliders until they go.

Whites: Then increase the whites a little by moving the slider to the right (Press Alt when doing this and the screen will go black so you can see when the areas start to blow out as they go white and coloured then pull back a little).

As noted above its ok to let specular highlights such as the sun or a bright light clip (i.e. show no detail).

If the whites are already blown out, then you may need to reduce them a little. Watch the Histogram on the top of the adjustment panel and you will see how the whites move to the right. The little triangle at the top right of the Histogram is a toggle that if you click it, it shows the blown areas in red.

Blacks: Then increase the blacks a little by moving the slider to the left (Press Alt when doing this and the screen will go white so you can see when the areas start to become too black (Clipping so they are out of gamut) and black and colours appear then pull back a little).

Its ok to let voids (empty spaces) clip to absolute black if required. Say a dark room behind a person in a street portrait. Again Judges may pick you up on this but most Pro's do this.

Sometimes you may have to reduce the blacks by moving the slider to the right if they are already out of gamut. Watch the Histogram on the top of the adjustment panel and you will see how the blacks move to the left. The little triangle at the top left of the Histogram is a toggle that if you click it is showing the out of gamut areas in blue.

Vibrance: Then add a little Vibrance. Not too much say up to +10 to +20 max.

Saturation: Then add a little Saturation. Again, not much say +5 to +10 max.

One of the things that can make images look unnatural is too much vibrance and saturation so be subtle with these two sliders. I have found that when exporting as a JPEG the saturation can increase due to the gamut limit of JPEG's. If you see this reduce the saturation a little before exporting. The same can apply to exposure so you may need to increase this very slightly (say +0.4) before export.

Clarity: Then depending on the image, I may add a little Clarity. This boosts the mid-tones. I prefer this to contrast which can be a bit heavy. Again, not too much. This may darken the image a little so you may need to add a touch of exposure to balance.

Contrast: You can try adding some Contrast and sometimes this works but again, it will darken the image, so will need exposure recovery, either by reducing the negative highlights or adding some exposure.

Watch out for halos as the clarity slider and also the Contrast sliders are the worst for this.

Look at the histogram when working on these sliders to check you don't blow out the highlights or go out of gamut with the blacks but you normally want to have a reasonably wide histogram.

Using negative contrast and negative clarity can soften the background but obviously this would soften the subject as well but the new masking tools can deal with this.

Tone Curve panel

Some videos describe this panel as a bit of a hangover from the early days of digital processing and say it has largely been superseded by the tone panel but left in Lightroom for people who used the earlier versions and who feel more comfortable with it. This is partially true as it was normally used with luminosity masks in Photoshop where the brightness of parts of the photos could be separated by their level of brightness.

However, it still works quite well but takes more care than the Tone Panel.

You can use the curves adjustment feature where you can move the grid line directly by clicking on it and moving up and down or adjust the sliders on the right. These target specific brightness levels as noted against the sliders.

If you click on the little icon at the top left of the curves box you can move onto the photo, place cursor on an area then drag up or down to increase or decrease the brightness. Click on icon again to turn it off. You can do this on multiple areas of the photo.

There are two different curves grids the first the Basic Curves adjustment has the four sliders below it and the other the Point Curve adjustment doesn't. To toggle between then click on the little square to the bottom right corner of this panel. You can't have any odd jagged waves on the Basic Curves line as it automatically smooths these out but you can on the Point Curve. Jagged waves will cause the image to look odd.

These two curves adjustments work independently of each other so you can make different changes in each.

You can only have one point on the Basic Curves grid line and multiple points on the Point Curve line. The points curve has three pre-set settings Linear, Medium contrast and Strong contrast.

In the Point Curve adjustment, you can pull the top point down or across (keeping close to the outside) and move the bottom point across or up, when the cursor becomes an up/down arrow.

The faint grey area under the grid is a representation of the number and brightness of the pixels in the image and if you go outside of this it can look very odd.

When using Point Curve, the normal default status is RGB (so all colours are affected) but if you click on the RGB text you can select Red, Green or Blue to affect only that colour channel. This won't just affect the reds as remember the image colours are a mixture of all three colours.

This can be useful but is more difficult to use than the Tone Panel, HSL / Color Panel or Calibration.

HSL / Color panel

Here you have sliders for each of the colours for Hue, Saturation and Luminance.

You can select the colour and move the slider to enhance or reduce the selected colour.

Can be useful to enhance autumn colours or the blue of the sky or water.

If in a portrait there is a distracting bright red necklace or brooch then you could select red and using the three sliders reduce the impact / distraction.

One odd thing is that grass is often more effectively adjusted by the yellow slider rather than the green and water / sky by aqua rather than blue. Try both to check the results.

Moving the sliders all the way to the left will remove the colour from the image.

If you are using B&W and say you want the sky to become black move the blue and aqua sliders fully to the left with Luminance set.

Color Grading Panel (Was the Split toning panel)

This panel separates the colour effects between highlights, midtones and shadows. It works very differently than the previous Split Toning Panel but can provide the same results, but the controls do this in a more pictorial way.

There are three colour circles shown, one for highlights, one for midtones and one for shadows. The fourth to the right in the list is not visible. To see the fourth move to the right circle on the "Adjust" top line of small circles and click on it and a Global circle will appear.

You can select each of the highlights, midtones and shadows separately to get a larger circle by clicking on them in the top list of small circles. Then move the handle around to the colour you want and then to change the colour and move the centre pin towards the colour you want. Holding shift will draw a line between the outer handle and the central pin.

The balance slider means how much of the highlights, midtones or shadows receive the colour. As its highlights (not whites / true brightness) the colour won't affect the pure white end of the spectrum and because its shadows (not true blacks / absolute darkness) the true black end of the spectrum won't be affected.

There is a Hue square visible when the larger circles are selected. If you click on the square it opens a sub menu with custom colours that you can select with the dropper. Also you can take the dropper onto the photo and select a colour.

Also, with the larger circles open, a Luminance slider appears (this is not visible when the three smaller circles are shown) allowing you to darken or lighten the colour effect.

This panel is very useful for example if you have photographed a foggy scene with a hint of sunlight and when you look at the photo the fog is very white with no atmosphere. Adding a touch of yellow / orange to the highlights can transform the image.

Similarly, to a river where the water may be too white, when you remember a hint of sun on the water. Add a touch of yellow / orange to the highlights and the water will have a subtle hint of sunlight.

If you then added a touch of blue / light blue (a complimentary colour balance to the yellow / orange) to the shadows it can give a bit of contrast.

The balance slider will dictate which has the most effect. Play around with this to see the results on the image.

As with all these effects, less is more, so don't overdo the saturation or colour choice.

Detail panel

Sharpening

Amount: You can add a little sharpening if required. Click on the little square with handles on the top left of the sharpening sliders and you can then select the area of the image that you want to view (i.e. a bird's eye for example). The slider will already be at 40% by default and you can add a bit more but be very careful not to go too far. I stop at a max of 55 – 60%. If the image needs more than this, I probably won't be using it in the first place. Sharpening is another thing that can create the dreaded halos.

If you are going to take your photo into Photoshop and want to do the sharpening there don't forget to reduce the sharpening to zero in Lightroom as sharpening on top of sharpening often doesn't work well.

Radius: This adjusts the amount of sharpening and I usually leave this at the default of 1.0

Detail: I usually leave this at the default of 25

Masking: This is not the mask tool and only applies to the sharpening panel. To only sharpen the subject, move the Masking slider to the right. Holding down Alt whilst doing this shows a white screen and you can see what the sharpening is being applied to. The white is being sharpened the black isn't.

Noise Reduction

Luminance: You can then reduce the general noise by moving the Luminance slider to the right. I generally leave the other sliders at their default settings.

Color: This will be already at 25 and to reduce colour noise further move the slider to the right. Again, I generally leave the other sliders at their default settings.

Remember any noise reduction will soften the image so be careful to get the right balance. I usually only use this very sparingly.

If I need a lot of noise reduction then its best to do this by copying the photo then reduce the noise in one image and then take them both into Photoshop and work on them there in layers, brushing or selections. Alternatively use the Photoshop noise reduction tools or something like Topaz AI Denoise, which is a very useful piece of software.

Lens Correction panel

Then go down and tick both Remove Chromatic Aberration (to remove coloured edges to things) and Enable Profile Correction (to correct your lens distortion)

If you are using a well-known camera brand and lens then the details will appear in the boxes.

If you have a lens that causes distortion and vignettes then these can be adjusted where. I have never needed to use these.

Transform panel

This is the Level Adjustment Panel: Of the six automatic options here I only use Auto, Level and Vertical.

These are not surprisingly to level the image if required using the. Auto can work well but if not try the Level button, the Vertical button or use the rotation slider.

Vertical: You can also tilt the image forward or backwards with the vertical slider so for example if taking a photo from low level of a tall building the top will be leaning away and using these tools you can pull the top forwards.

Horizontal: This does the same thing but horizontally

By using these sliders, you can correct the angular distortion in architectural photos.

Rotate: This is to manually level the image if auto doesn't work very well

I don't use the other four sliders but play with them to see what they do.

If when using the Transform sliders, you see a hatched piece on the edge you can crop in slightly to remove these by ticking the Constrain Crop box.

When taking the photo, you must take this into account and leave quite a bit of space for the building to move into otherwise the top will be cut off.

Effects panel

Post Crop Vignetting

Style: There are three options in the menu of the right of the work Style: Highlight priority, Color Priority and Paint Overlay.

Amount: With one of these three set you can add a vignette to the corners of the photo. either in black by moving the slider to the left or white by moving to the right. This can direct the focus of the image to the subject.

Don't go too far with this as a more subtle look is better. A too strong amount gives a tunnel view.

The other four sliders will become active once you move the amount slider and you can play around with the effects.

Grain

Amount: You can also add some grain if you want that look and add change the size and roughness of the grain. This can help achieve the old film or newspaper print look.

Calibration panel

The quick way to see various basic calibration effects is to go to the Profile menu on the basic panel (towards the top left) and change it from Adobe Color to say Adobe Landscape as noted in the section on the Basic Panel.

If you go to the bottom of the menu and click on Browse various thumbnails will appear showing you the various looks. The first few will be Adobe options but this is followed by Camera Matching options and will match the profiles in your camera. There may be a few further down depending on your version of Lightroom and if you have downloaded any profiles.

For people with the later version of Lightroom you can just click on the four small squares to the right of this and this jumps straight to the profile Thumbnails.

You can adjust this manually with the Calibration sliders. Its worth playing with the sliders to see the effect you get as remember everything in Lightroom is non-destructive so you can always go back.

This is not the same as HSL where each colour is adjusted independently. Here the blend of colours is changed. For example, in the RGB system red and green make yellow so if you change the saturation of the green it will also affect the yellows. Red and blue make purple and so on.

For example, in a portrait on grass at say a wedding the skin can take on a slight green tone. If you push the green saturation up and pull the red and blue down this green tint can be removed. You may need to play with the hue sliders as well. Again, it's just playing with the sliders to see what looks best.

In landscapes this works well for coloured ground cover such as gorse or heather. Push the green saturation to the right quite a lot, the red to the right a little and pull the blue back a little, possibly add a little shadows saturation and then tweak the hue sliders to taste, probably push the red slider to the left and hopefully the purple colours will increase in a better blended way than just adding purple in HSL.

Soft Proofing

This is a check box in the Develop Module towards the bottom left which when clicked shows the image against a white background and attempts to show how the image will look when printed.

I find it can desaturate the image a bit too much tempting you to add some more saturation when its not required. Use this or yourself and see how the prints turn out to get a feel for the accuracy of this preview.

Conclusions

This was just a quick trip through the Lightroom features / workflow.

The best way to discover what everything does is to take a photo, go to the Develop Module and play around with the sliders to see their effect.

The tools under the histogram are covered in Part 2

Recommended YouTube Videos on Lightroom Classic and general photography

Matt Kloskowski: He has lots of short videos on various aspects of Lightroom Classic & CC and teaches at a nice pace that's easy to follow.

Mark Denney; Lots of helpful short videos, which are clearly explained.

Mark Galer: Excellent videos on Lightroom Classic and CC. The "Lightroom Classic: 2 Hour Post Processing Masterclass" is very good and easy to follow and he has similar ones on Lightroom CC.

Scott Kelby: Again, lots of excellent videos on Lightroom Classic and Photoshop; KelbyOne is a very good tutorial / training platform but is a paid subscription. However the lessons are excellent and cover a wide range of topics.

Serge Ramelli: Some very good videos but can overdo the saturation so as long as you don't go as far as he shows its ok. This was the oversaturated Instagram look to grab attention but fortunately he has moved back from this recently.

PiXimperfect: Lots of very informative videos with lots of details. A very good free information and teaching platform.

Nick Page; Landscape photography videos plus some teaching videos on Lightroom & Photoshop

Tom Heaton; Landscape photography videos plus some teaching videos on Lightroom & Photoshop. This is more about how to take the photos in the first place.

Ross Hoddinott; Wildlife & Macro photography. Some good books as well.

Mark Smith; Wildlife photography. Excellent YouTube channel on wildlife photography.

Steve Perry; Wildlife photography. Another excellent YouTube channel on wildlife photography.

Fototripper; Gavin Hardcastle landscape photography madness (very funny at least I think so)

Adam Gibbs; Landscape Photographer of the year 2018. Obviously, a great photographer to win such a major award but also very good at explaining what he does. He also joins with Gavin Hardcastle, Tom Heaton and Nick Page for some photography madness.