

Lightroom Tips and Tricks

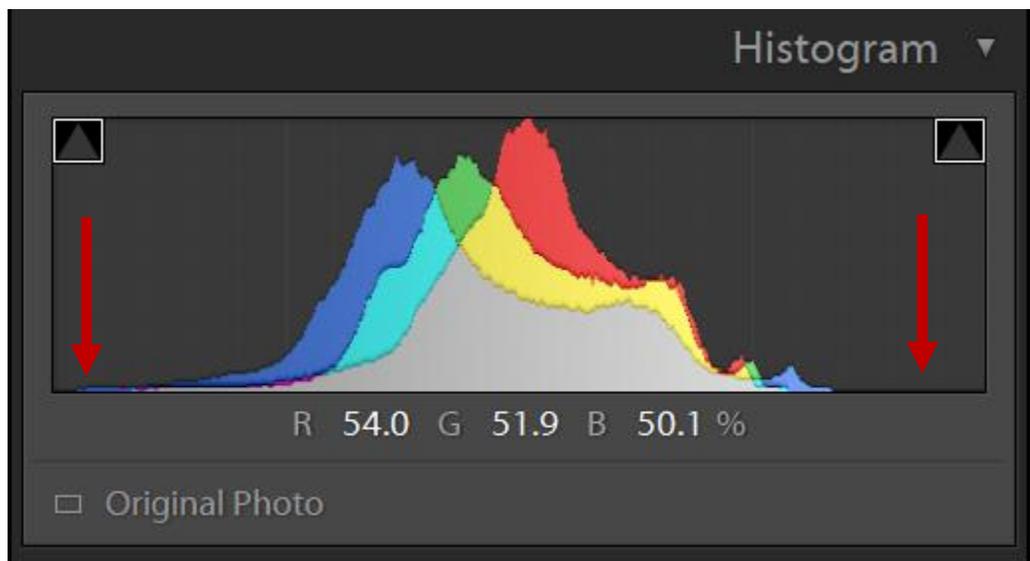
Improving Tonality – Setting White and Black Points

By Chuck Palmer

Note to Photoshop users. . . Adobe Camera Raw has similar tools and functions as Adobe Lightroom. You can use many Lightroom tips and tricks in Camera Raw too!

Without question, editing photos in the “Digital Darkroom” is not a fixed or objective process. Artists edit their digital negatives (images) depending on what they want to communicate to the viewer, often setting the mood with tones, colors, and contrast. However, many professional photo editors suggest setting the White and Black Points are among the first steps in the editing process. While not every image needs an absolute White or Black point, their absence could be why the contrast of an image appears flat or dull. Let’s look at how we can easily set the White and Black Points in Lightroom’s Develop Module.

Step 1 – Evaluate the Histogram – Look at the Histogram at the top of Lightroom’s Develop Module. Are there empty areas on the left and right side of the histogram (see example below)? If so, then there are no true black or white pixels in the photo. Setting the Black and White Points can certainly add contrast to your image.



Step 2 – Set the Whites and Blacks Sliders – In the Basic Panel, turn on the Histogram clipping warning indicators by clicking on the little arrows at the top right and left of the histogram window. Then slide the Whites slider to the right, and the Blacks slider to the left. The objective is to establish a definitive White and Black Point without clipping the image tones where they are forced to White or Black. The Clipping Triangles will light up if there is white or black clipping. You will also see red and/or blue clipping warnings appear within your image if you have gone too far. If you see this, just back off the slider until the clipping disappears. Hint: I rarely find the need to set the sliders beyond 50.

Optional Methods – You can set the white and black points by alternative methods. I list them below but I prefer looking at the image as I establish the White and Black Points so I can make my own decisions on the overall tonality of the image since not every image needs an absolute White or Black point.

- Optional Method 1 – Hold down the Alt Key (Option/Mac) while you move the Whites and Blacks sliders. Your screen will turn blank until you begin clipping Whites or Blacks. Again, avoid clipping by backing off the slider until the colors (clipping) disappear.
- Optional Method 2 – Hold down the Shift Key while double clicking the word “Whites” or “Blacks” next to the Whites or Blacks sliders. Lightroom will automatically set the white and black points for you.

Setting the White and Black Points should make a dramatic improvement in your photo, especially if Contrast is lacking. Making these adjustments before you move on to Exposure, Shadows, and Highlights helps you to quickly establish the desired tonality of your photo.



Keep Shooting! And may the Remarkable Photos always be yours...

Chuck