



Using the Shadows / Highlights Command in Photoshop to add Contrast to an image

Description

Adding contrast to an image is a great way to boost the impact of the image, especially African images shot in full sun and those where the animal is camouflaged.

Between the Development tools in Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop, there are many ways to achieve increased contrast. Here I will employ the Shadows/Highlights Adjustment in Photoshop and compare it to results using the Curves Tool and to using a combination of Development Tools in Lightroom.



My starting point is this image of a male lion who has just fought for his pride females: he is clearly injured, but still has a regal air. I start with a small white balance adjustment in Lightroom (I used the eyedropper on the white fur of his chin to set the balance). Using the right-click to get the menu, I select Edit In Photoshop to open the image and Photoshop. If promoted, choose to edit the image with the Lightroom adjustments. When I am all finished and saved the results, Lightroom will display the two images together “like a before and after. I can then stack them or otherwise keep the two files related.

Use Photoshop for more sophisticated tools and the ability to limit adjustments to certain areas of your image using layers and masks.

For comparison, This image is processed for contrast and sharpness entirely in Lightroom. I started with a Medium Contrast Curve which I tweaked slightly. I added Clarity of +22 and Vibrance of +18 then

sharpened with an amount of 56, radius 1.1, Detail of 17, and a high masking value of 85 to limit sharpening to the subject and foreground. This is a great quick result that is good for social media, but if I want to print this or display on a large monitor, I want more specific control.



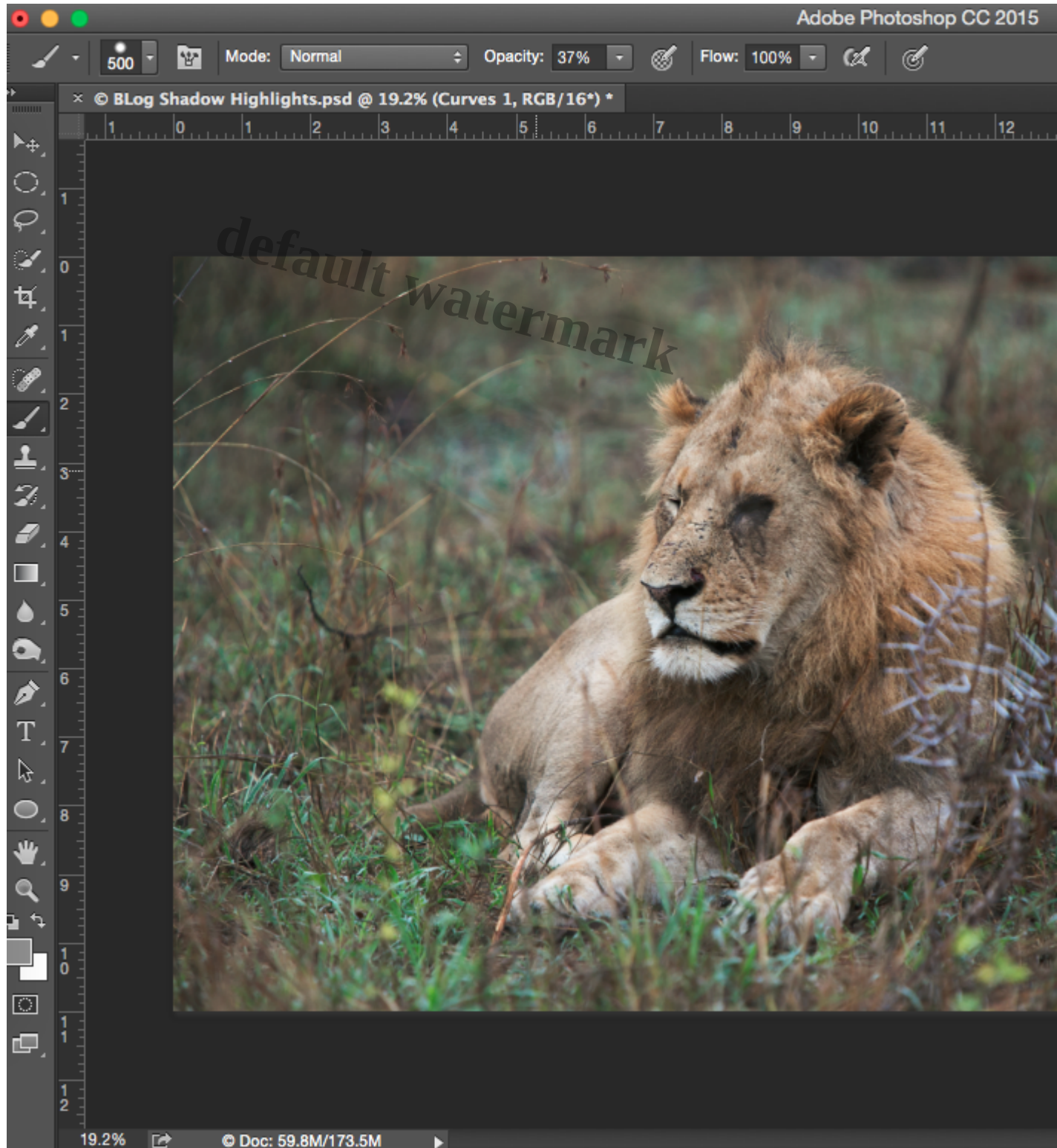
Lightroom Development Tools results



Lightroom results details

While the Lightroom tools are very good, Photoshop's layers and masks give you so much more ability to control where the adjustments happen.

I also liked the control and results I achieved with the Shadows/Highlights command better than those I got from Lightroom and the Curves command in PS.



Photoshop Curves contrast adjustment



Photoshop Curves detail

The Shadows / Highlights Adjustment â€œ Found under the Image â€œ Adjustments Menu

This tool has multiple uses including improving images with too much contrast, those with subjects shot against bright backgrounds, and images in need of more contrast (such as this one)

Inside the dialogue box are separate controls for working with the Shadows and in the Highlights.

Each Tonal area has 3 options:

Amount: The amount of adjustment you wish to make

Tone: This asks â€œhow much of the image comprises Shadows (or Highlights)

Here you are setting the definition of Shadows and Highlights based on this specific image and its needs

Radius: Sharpening is achieved by adding a â€œhaloâ€• of light around areas where dark and light meet enhancing the transition. The Radius is how large or how distributed the halo is. If you set the value high, the halo is large and spread and the effect is not as noticeable on smaller areas of change.

Overall you can control the following factors:

Color: This is equivalent to controlling saturation and boosting color saturation along with the exposure contrast changes. Setting this to zero would limit the effect to contrast only: no boost to color contrast.

.Black clip / White Clip Here you are setting what will clip at each end of the light to dark gamut. Clipping is when a value that is not pure white (or black) is now increased to become all white. This is a loss of detail unless the clipping occurs in unimportant areas such as sky or shadow where there was no detail anyway.

When I use the Shadow / Highlight adjustment, I like the distribution of the contrast and the boost to color in just the places I needed it.

Of course you can also boost color when using Curves or any of the other tools to add contrast, but this would involve other tools and adjustment layers. For this image, I can achieve my desired results with just the one command.

Add a final Punch of Sharpness



Shadow/Highlights tool results

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With the contrast increased to a level I am happy with, I can add a final touch of sharpness. Photoshop has the tools that allow me to add the sharpness to just the areas I want it and to provide it in lesser or not at all to other areas by way of Layers and Layer Masks. Lightroom has an adjustment brush that adds Sharpness and Clarity to where you apply it, but this tool is nowhere near as refined or precise as what you can do in Photoshop.

There are many tools for adding Sharpness in Photoshop – including all the tools under the Filter – Sharpen menu. I will use a High Pass Filter Layer and a Blend Mode to bring out details on the lion's face and some of the foreground .

High Pass (under the Filter Menu: Other – High pass) makes a monochrome version of your image. The higher the setting the more the edges of items in your images will be highlighted. When combined with a blend mode from the contrasting group (Overlay, Soft Light, etc) it will sharpen and pop details.

Create a copy of your background layer and place it above the layer with your Shadows and Highlights adjustments. Go to Filter – Other – High Pass and adjust the amount until. A setting of 5.0 makes some good edge detail. I can set this tool high because later I can temper the results with layer opacity and the blend mode. I like the effect of Soft Light as the blend mode – Overlay is a stronger effect that also works.

Now to limit the sharpness to just the subject. Add a layer mask and use a soft edged brush at 100% to paint black in the mask at the top of the image then taper the brush opacity down below 100% as you move down the image then work in detail around the lion and select specific grass on which to mask out the sharpness. You can even choose to mute down the sharpening on specific features of the lion and leave other areas at 100% (pure white on the mask). Using a mask, and layer opacity gives you very specific control.



Curves and High Pass filter

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A final touch on the image would be a further color balance adjustment. You can even mask out some of the contrast effect in the Shadows / Highlights layer; for example in the background.



Final Image

Now save the image as a PSD , layered Tiff, flat Tiff, or jpg and the adjusted file will appear next to the raw (original) image in Lightroom.

Lightroom tools are very good, but you can gain more artistic control with a few of the very smart tools in Photoshop. Combined with layers and masks, you can achieve precise and professional results in a very short time.

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