

Simple Ways to Make your Photos Look Better by Heather Watson

(Note: This tutorial is for PS but some steps will work in Elements)

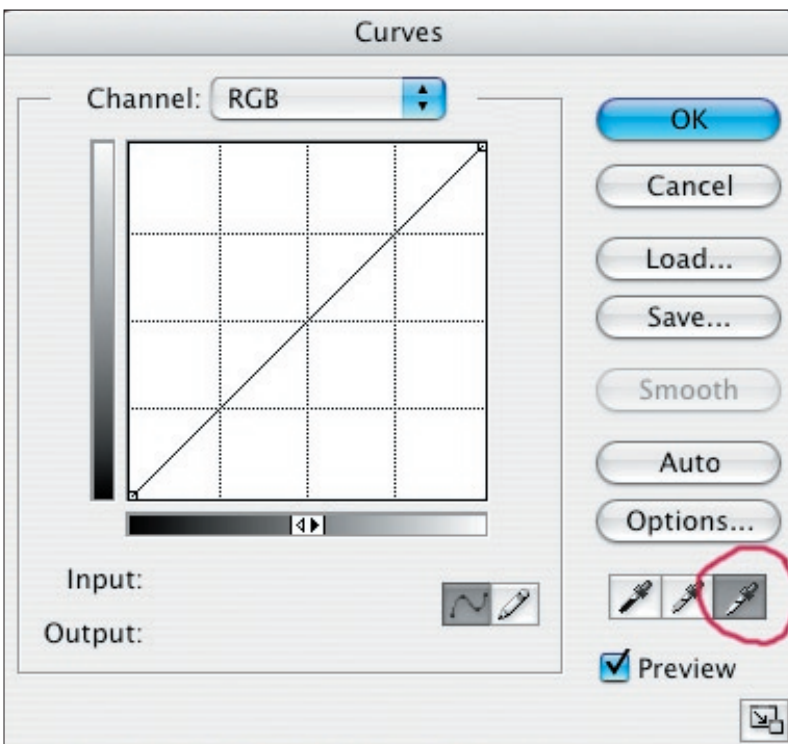
Fixing photos can be a tricky business. Below are a few things you can try to fix your photos. Sometimes you will have to try different combinations of the filters to get the photo right. Since each photo is different there is no secret formula, but as you fix more and more photos, you will become better at deciding which filters to choose.

#1 - Auto Levels - for dark or strangely colored photos (ie, too red or too blue)

The first thing to try when color correcting your photos is Auto Levels. (In PSCS Image - Adjustments - Auto Levels. In Elements Enhance - Auto Levels) Sometimes this will change the photo too harshly, to tone down the effect of Auto Levels, go to Edit - Fade Auto Levels.

#2 - Curves

If Auto Levels doesn't give you the results you want, go to Image - Adjustments - Curves. Click on the Set White Point dropper (circled below) then click on a part of your photo that should be pure white.



#3 - Color Balance

If your image appears to have too much of a color in it (ie, looks too red or too blue) try going to Image - Adjustments - Color Balance. Make sure Midtone is selected. Use the sliders to produce the desired coloration.

#4 - Shadow & Highlights

If you have a photo that is too dark or the highlights are too bright or the photo is very dark in some areas & too bright in others, try the Shadow/Highlight filter (Image - Adjustments - Shadow/Highlight) For a dark photo, just use the Shadow slider & keep Highlights at zero. For a too bright photo do the opposite. If the photo is both very dark in some areas and very bright in others you can use both. It's usually best to leave the other options as they are.

#5 - Contrast

Sometimes all you need to do to fix a picture is adjust the contrast. (Image - Adjustments - Contrast) If after you run Contrast on the photo the whites are too bright go back to #4 and adjust the Highlights.

#6 - Noise Reduction

Noise is usually caused by low light situations. The best way I have found to remove it is by using Dust & Scratches (Filter - Noise - Dust & Scratches) and keep Radius at 1 & threshold at 0. It will soften your pictures a little, but you can try to compensate by adjusting the contrast a little (#5).

#7 - Blurriness

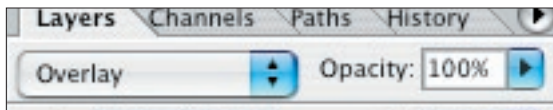
One way to sharpen up your image is to use Unsharp Mask (Filter - Sharpen - Unsharp Mask). Of all the Sharpen filters, Unsharp Mask produces the best results.

Another way to sharpen your photos is by using the High Pass filter. This one takes a few steps.

A) Duplicate your layer by dragging it to the Create New Layer icon in the Layer Palette



B) Change the top layer Blend Mode to Overlay.



C) Apply a Gaussian Blur (Filter - Blur - Gaussian Blur) of 1-3 pixels to the top layer.

D) Go to Filter - Other - High Pass and bring the slider all the way to the left. Work the slider to the right until the desired sharpness is achieved.

Another way to sharpen an area of a photo is by blurring the background.

Make your selection that you want to "sharpen" Select - Inverse and blur the background using either Filter - Blur - Gaussian Blur or Lens Blur (my choice).

This is also a great method to use if there is stuff in your background you don't want to be able to see well, like a messy house for instance.

#8 If All Else Fails

If you've tried everything and it still looks bad, but you really want to use the photo, try one of the Artistic (Filter - Artistic) filters like Paint Daubs, Colored Pencil or Watercolor. It will cover up the imperfections in your photo and give it a different look.