

Changing the default Auto Color and Levels and Curves Eyedropper Settings

Changing the Default Settings used by Levels or Curves Auto and Eyedroppers: (Curves unavailable to Elements users)

The Auto Options:

The Auto options in earlier versions of Photoshop were rather hit and miss. Auto Levels and Auto Contrast should be used with caution or preferably not at all. However, the Auto Color option, new in Photoshop 7.0 and later, is a very competent tool and can be successfully used in Photoshop version 7.0, CS (via **Image>Adjustments>Auto Color** or **Shift+Ctrl+B**) or Elements (via **Enhance>Auto Color Corrections** or **Shift+Ctrl+B**) and can be used very successfully in a lot of cases practically if a few minor changes are made to the auto settings.

This first section is for Photoshop users only.

The **Auto Color** button on the levels and Curves dialogue box can be used with reasonable success in Photoshop 7.0 or CS/CS2. The function is less accurate in earlier versions of Photoshop. The changes to the default settings are actually made under the Options button in either Levels or Curves dialog box.

Automated Colour Correction:

It needs to be remembered that by choosing the Auto Color option from the Image > Adjustments > Auto Color it will make the necessary changes directly. To improve this, the Auto Color settings need to be tweaked. This will provide much better control over the end result and usefulness of this particular feature. It is pretty good at the default settings but these minor tweaks make it even better and more reliable.

1. Open an image that needs colour correcting, most do. Or just open any image so it can be used to make the necessary setting change to the Auto Color settings.
2. To change the Auto Color default settings make the following changes to the Options settings under either the levels or Curves dialogue boxes. You only need do this on one or the other.
3. Lets do it using the levels dialogue box. The settings made will apply to Curves as well.
4. Choose Levels from the Image > Adjustments > Levels or Ctrl+ L shortcut.
5. With the levels dialogue box on screen click the Options button.
6. The Auto Color Correction Options dialogue box is displayed.
7. Under the Algorithms section click the Find Dark & Light Colors radio button.
8. Then click the Snap to Neutral Midtones radio button to select it.
9. Under the Target & Clipping section you now need to make changes to the Shadows, Midtones and Highlights
10. To do this click in turn the **Shadows, Midtones, Highlights** target swatches (the rectangular colour boxes) and type in the following settings when the Color Picker dialogue is displayed for each separate option. Enter the settings below in the RGB boxes on the respective Colour Picker
 - a. Shadows: R 20 G 20 B 20 or R 10 G 10 B 10
 - b. Midtones: R 128 G 128 B 128 or R 128 G 128 B 128
 - c. Highlights: R 240 G 240 B 240 or R 243 G 243 B 243

11. **Important:** To make these new settings your new default settings you must click the small box at the bottom left of this dialogue box called **Save as defaults**.

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12. From now on whenever you use the Auto button within the Levels or Curves dialogue boxes the settings just made will provide better colour correction and worth trying.
13. However, remember to use any auto feature with caution, although it's worth trying on each image when you first open Levels or Curves because the new Auto Color settings you have just entered as default settings work remarkably well in most cases. If nothing else will be a great indicator to help determine how much colour correction work may be required.
14. And also because it is easy to change or Undo actions by pressing down the **Alt** key and clicking the **Reset** button in both levels and Curves, it is very quick to test the Auto feature and undo changes if unsatisfactory results are seen.
15. It's surprising how good this function is with the amended settings above made, so give it a try. You may be pleased with the results.

Levels and Curves Eyedropper Settings:

The Eyedroppers in both Photoshop and Elements are useful tools. Elements do not have Curves so the following only applies to Levels in Elements. You can use the eyedroppers in either Levels or Curves to set the Black and White point and if you are able to accurately identify a true midtone you can use the middle eyedropper with the added benefit of reducing or eliminating a colour cast at the same time. It may be difficult, and time consuming trying to find the ideal midtone in an image, so most tend to use the Black and White eyedroppers only.

To make setting changes to the Levels and Curves Eyedroppers carry out the following changes.

You will only need to make the changes using either Levels or Curves dialogue boxes so will use the levels dialogue box so Elements users can follow the procedure.

1. Open any image and select Levels using the shortcut Ctrl+ L.
2. With the Levels (or Curves) dialogue box on screen **double-click** the Shadow Eyedropper which is found bottom right of the dialogue box and is the first eyedropper of the three.
3. Under the RGB section type in R 10 G 10 B 10 and click OK.
4. The Levels dialogue box will still be on screen so Double-click the Midtone Eyedropper and enter under the RGB section R128 G128 B128 and click OK. This should already be set at the default R 128, G 128, B128 but check.
5. The Levels dialogue box will still be on screen so Double-click the Highlights Eyedropper and enter under the RGB section R245 G245 B245 and click OK.
6. Now click the Levels (Curves) OK button.
7. A new message box is displayed '**Save the new target colors as defaults?**' click **OK**.
8. From now on when you use the Eyedroppers in Levels or Curves (PhotoShop only) your new target settings will be applied.

Please note that the number settings above for **R** and **G** and **B** are tried and tested settings and work well for my photography but you can vary the numbers to suit your own preference. So experiment if the above suggested set of numbers do not deliver the results you like. You may arrive at the perfect set for your own use. An alternative range might be R 15, G 15, B 15 (Shadows) and R 243, G 243, B 243 (Highlights). Generally any Shadow tone below 10 will not print with detail and any Highlight tone above 250 will be burnt out when printed. Also changing these settings will help improve the Auto Levels, Auto Contrast and Auto Color and the Levels and Curves dialog box Auto buttons use.