

Colour Correction in PhotoShop

It may be found necessary to make colour corrections to an image. This might be to correct a general colour cast or where you feel the colour is too dark or too light in some areas of the image. You may also wish to change an existing colour or to correct image colours that are 'out of gamut' and will not print correctly. The following are some basic methods that can be used to make colour corrections. It is assumed you are familiar with making basic tonal adjustment changes using Levels.

General Colour Casts:

Correcting using the levels: Image > Adjustments > Levels or Ctrl+L

1. Always set the image tonal balance using levels or curves before checking for colour casts, as this will generally eliminate or minimise most colour cast problems.
2. So Ctrl+L or Image > Adjustments > Levels and then do a quick check by using the Levels Auto button. Undo this by holding down the Alt key and clicking the Cancel/Reset button.
3. It's worth doing a quick Auto check, as it's simple to undo but gives a good indication as to the work ahead.
4. Select the Levels Channel drop down arrow and select the Red Channel. Make any necessary corrections to the Red Channel using the Black / White sliders only. **Do not click OK yet.**
5. Now select the Green Channel. Make any necessary corrections to the Green Channel using the Black / White sliders only. **Do not click OK yet.**
6. Now select the Blue Channel. Make any necessary corrections to the Blue Channel using the Black / White sliders only. **Do not click OK yet.**
7. Reselect the RGB channel and assess the collective results of any changes. If necessary adjust the middle slider on the RGB composite channel only to lighten/darken image midtones.
8. Colour casts are often difficult to spot, so use the Info palette to help you do this. Open the Info palette and check the RGB read-out numbers, as you move the mouse cursor over any white area of the image. Use image white because a colour cast will show up more easily against white because white is not a colour and therefore any colour cast will be revealed.
9. Look for the RGB number that is different from the other two. That will give a guide as to which channel contains the colour cast. Remember Cyan/Red, Magenta/Green and Yellow/Blue. So if the Red channel indicates a colour cast open the Red channel and move the middle slider either left or right to add/remove Cyan or Red. Do the same for the Green and Blue channels as required.
10. In most cases this will remove or minimise a colour cast and is often all that's necessary.

Correcting using the Colour Balance: Image > Adjustments > Colour balance or Ctrl+B

1. Always set the image tonal balance using levels or curves before checking for colour casts, as this will generally eliminate or minimise most colour cast problems.
2. You can then do the same as the levels individual channel colour correction method above (Step 9), using the Colour balance dialogue and appropriate channel slider instead.
3. Identify the colour cast and then Image > Adjustments > Colour balance.
4. Drag the appropriate slider left or right to remove the colour cast.
5. If you have a red cast drag the Cyan/Red slider towards Cyan. If you have a Cyan cast drag the slider towards Red.
6. If you have a Green cast drag the Magenta/Green slider towards Magenta. If you have a Magenta cast drag the slider towards Green.
7. If you have a Blue cast drag the Yellow/Blue slider towards Yellow. If you have a Yellow cast drag the slider towards Blue.
8. To provide extra control do this on either the Midtones, Shadows or Highlights by selecting the appropriate radio button option at the bottom of the Colour balance dialogue box.
9. Be guided by the changes to the image on screen. Try to make use of the keyboard arrow keys to make fine adjustments. You must first click the triangle before using the arrow keys.

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Correcting using the Hue/Saturation: Image > Adjustments > Hue/Saturation or Ctrl+U

The Hue/Saturation dialogue offers good colour controls.

1. Always set the image tonal balance using levels or curves before checking for colour casts, as there use will eliminate most problems.
2. If you wish to correct or change a particular colour you can do this using the Hue/Saturation dialogue.
3. If a selection has been made, dragging the Hue slider will change the colour within the selection.
4. You can also use the Saturation slider to good affect to saturate or desaturate colours.
5. If for example you have a colour portrait and the skin tones are to red, select Red from the Edit drop down list and drag the saturation slider to the left to desaturate the red tones only.
6. Use the cursor arrow keys for finer control. Stop when the colour looks good on screen.
7. By choosing a particular colour from the Hue/Saturation Edit menu the Hue (colour), Saturation and Lightness of any colour can be changed.
8. Selecting the Customise box at the bottom of the dialogue box provides a method to add a tone to the image. For example a sepia tone. Simple drag the Hue slider and the Saturation slider as necessary.

Correcting using the Variations: Image > Adjustments > Variations (no short-cut)

Using Variations provides a simple method of correcting colour casts. However, you need to be able to choose the correct options from the colour ring-a-round.

1. Always set the image tonal balance using levels or curves before checking for colour casts, as there use will eliminate most problems.
2. From the Image menu select Image > Adjustments > Variations.
3. Note that the top left thumbnail represents the original image. The one next to it and the centre thumbnails in both the main ring-a-round and the Lighter/Darker Thumbnails match the original until you make changes.
4. The basic idea is that you simply choose the thumbnail on outer edge of the ring-a-round that looks the best. Each time you click the centre thumbnails will change to reflect the colour corrections.
5. Note the Cyan/Red, Magenta/Green and Yellow/Blue combinations still apply. They appear opposite each other and operate just like the other methods.
6. The Lighter/Darker thumbnails are used to lighten or darken the image.
7. There is also a Fine/Course slider at the top of the Variations box. Dragging to the left will provide smaller or finer control changes.
8. You can also make changes to the Shadows, Midtones or Highlights separately. In most cases working with the Midtones only often gives good results.
9. The Saturation option is not often used.

Correcting using the Replace Colour: Image > Adjustments > Replace Colour

Replace Colour is very useful as it allows you to both select and replace a colour very easily. Use the eyedropper tools to select or deselect a colour you want to change and then use the Hue slider. Also use the Saturation and Lightness slider as required to make further colour changes. The Fuzziness slider at the top of the Replace Colour dialogue allows more or less of an image to be considered for change. If the Selection button is chosen a negative (black and white) view of the image is seen and more or less black or white will show as the Fuzziness slider is moved.

Correcting using the Colour Range: Select > Colour range

Similar to Replace Colour but without the Hue, Saturation or Lightness options. Click either on the main image or in the small window then drag the Fuzziness slider. As you do so more of the same colour is selected and shows as black or white. When you click OK the colour you have selected shows as a 'marching ants selection'. Alternatively use the Select option to choose different colours directly.