



B&W in Lightroom/ACR

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In this lesson, we're going to learn about different methods of converting images to black and white using Lightroom or ACR (Adobe Camera Raw). What's nice about using these programs to convert to black and white is that if we have a series of images that look similar, we can easily copy and paste the settings so the same black and white treatment is applied to the entire series.

When and why to convert to black and white

Some images are more suited to black and white treatment than others. Before making the conversion, ask yourself why you are doing so.

When would I choose to keep an image in color:

- I will choose to leave an image in color when I can see that color plays a big role and directs the eye toward the important parts of the image.

When I will convert to black and white:

- If the color is really not contributing anything extra to the image, I will then consider converting it to black and white.
- I will convert to black and white if the color is actually drawing attention away from the subject. If the background of the image has color and the subject does not, it could cause the eye to wander in a direction that I don't want it to go.



In this image, the color helps to direct the eye toward the important parts of the image: The person and the foreign sign.

- If there is highlight detail that is blown out to white, it could potentially make a color image look unnatural. When converted to black and white, however, it does look natural.
- We don't see the world in black and white. We see it in color, so presenting a scene in black and white gives us a different, unnatural and artistic view of the world. This can be another reason I might make the conversion.



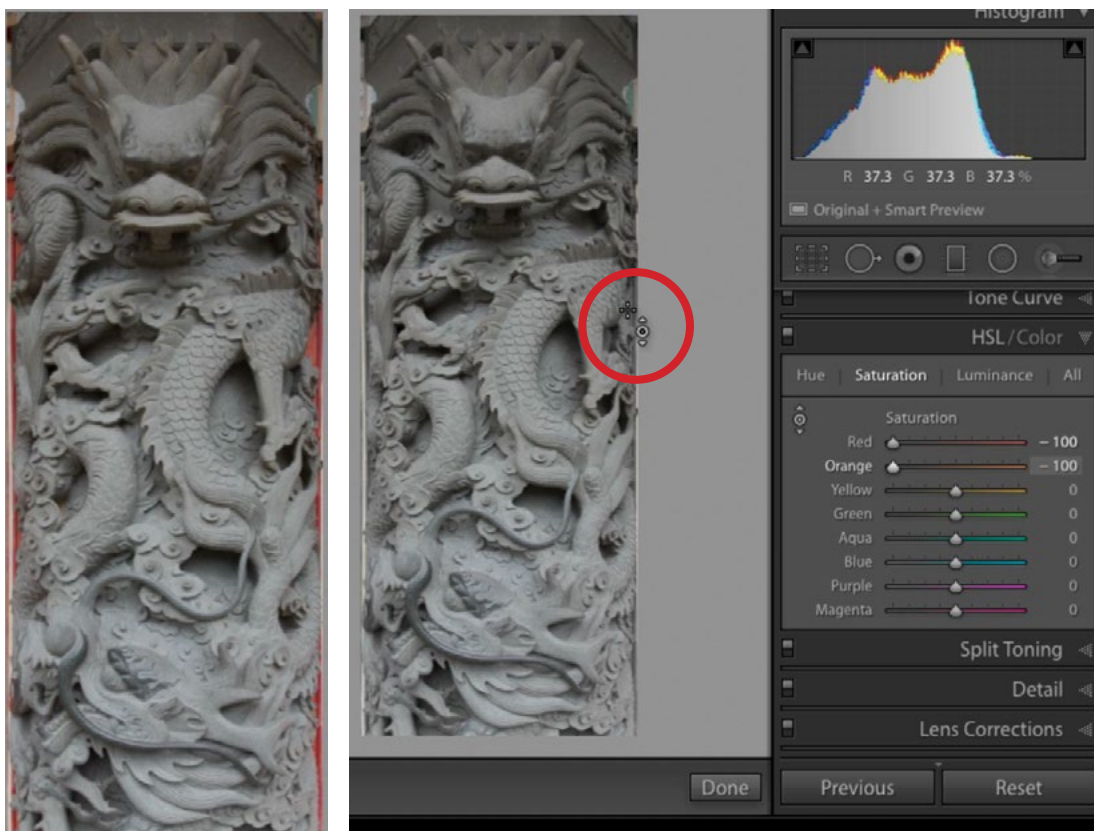
Color doesn't play an important role in this image, so it's more suited to black and white treatment.



In the photo on the left, I felt the sky looked unnatural because it was blown out to solid white. After converting to black and white, however, it felt more natural.

Partial black & white

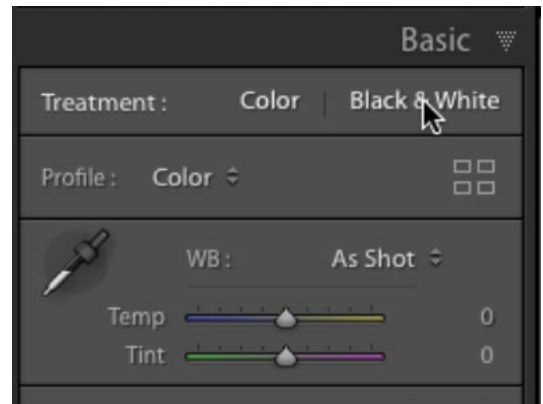
There are some instances where you might want to create a partial black and white image. This could be useful when there is a colorful element that is detracting from the scene. You could take just the distracting colored areas and convert those to black and white while leaving the rest of the image as is. In the example image, we have a dragon sculpture as the subject of the image. The background, however, is a distracting red color and we want to remove the color just in that area. To do this, we will use the sliders within the Saturation tab of the HSL panel, which can be found on the right side of Lightroom's Develop Module or on the right side of the ACR interface. We'll click on the little "donut" icon in the top left corner of the panel and use it to target the color in the background area. We'll click on the color in the image and drag down. This will tell the tool to look at what color (or colors) is under the cursor and make it less and less saturated, depending on how far down we drag. We're going to drag down until the area has no color.



At far left, you can see the red color in the background can be distracting. Directly left, we are using the targeted adjustment tool to lower the saturation in the colors that are in the background.

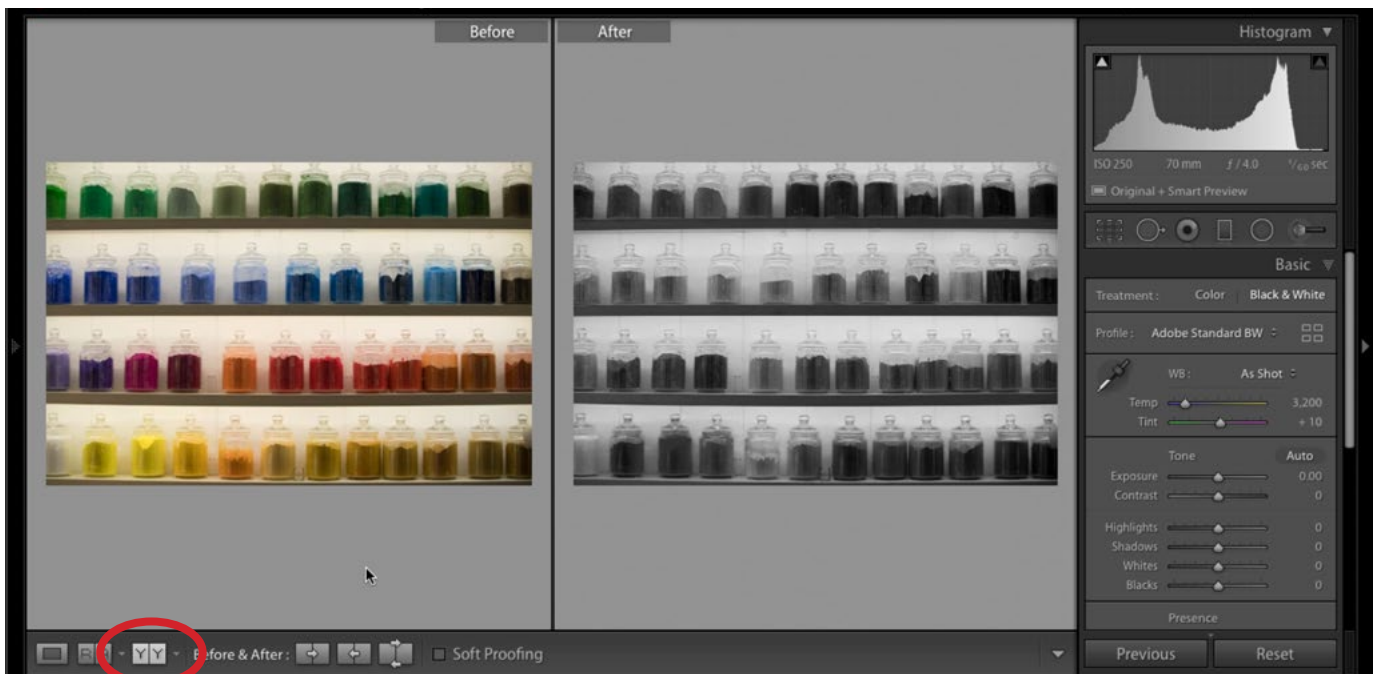
Full black & white

To completely convert an image to black and white, we'll go to the Basic panel and click on "Black & White" next to the treatment option at the very top of the panel. When we do this, the panel that used to be called HSL will now be called B&W. This panel will contain sliders for each of the individual colors and will control the brightness of the areas containing those colors (or the areas that *used* to contain the colors.) For example, if we drag the blue slider to the left, it will darken all of the areas in the image that used to be blue.




Click on the Black & White Treatment option to convert an image to black and white.

You can get a side-by-side view of the color and B&W versions of your image by clicking the icon that looks like two Y's (Y|Y) in the Toolbar at the bottom of the image window. (If the Toolbar is not visible in your interface, you can go to the

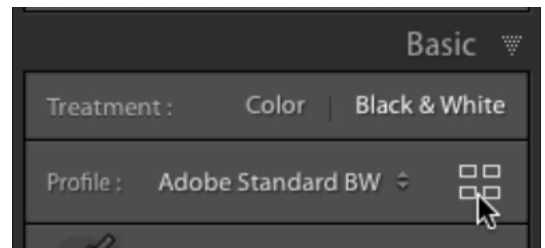


The Before & After view can be nice when working on the individual colors in a black and white image because it allows you to see what colors used to be in the various areas. Access this view by clicking the Before & After icon in the Toolbar (circled).

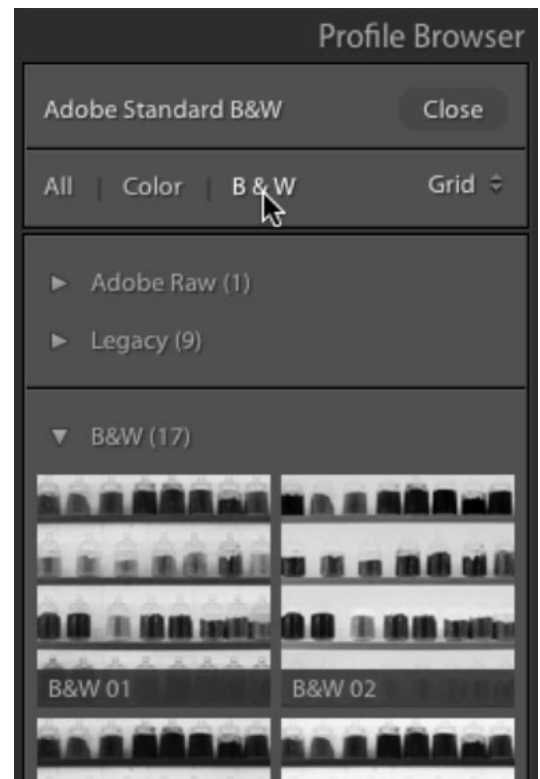
View menu and choose Show Toolbar.) This can be useful because you're able to see what colors used to be in the various areas in your image and it will give you a better idea of how the color sliders are going to affect the image. To get out of this before-and-after view, click on the icon in the far left corner of the Toolbar (the rectangular icon). 

Black & white profile settings

In the most recent update to Lightroom, Adobe added new feature that can be very helpful when converting to black and white. At the top of the Basic panel, there is now a Profile setting. (This setting isn't new. It used to be located somewhere else. But it now has lots more functionality.) If you already clicked the Black & White button to convert your image, then the Profile menu will be set to one of Adobe's B&W profiles. You can access a list of more profiles by clicking the icon that looks like four rectangles (to the right of the Profile menu). The Profile Browser will expand and if you click on the B&W option at the top of the panel, it will limit the choices you see to only the black and white profiles. The category we'll want to focus on is the B&W category. This contains the newest, higher quality black and white profiles. Hover your cursor over the various profiles and Lightroom will show you what your image would look like if you chose that particular setting. If you find a profile you like, click on it to apply it to the image. You can tell which profile has been applied because it will have a white border around the thumbnail. After you've applied a profile, you can use the Amount



The Profile settings can be found at the top of the Basic panel. Click this icon to access the Profile Browser.

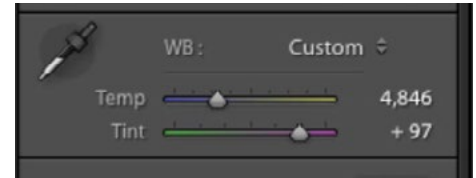


We're viewing the B&W Profiles in the browser.

slider at the top of the panel to either tone down the effect created by the profile or make it more pronounced. Click the Close button in the top right to make the Profile Browser go away.

White balance for black & white

White Balance is designed to perform color correction, so you might not think that it would have much of an effect on black and white images, but it actually does. After converting to B&W and choosing a profile, I would then turn to the Temp and Tint sliders. I like to move these sliders back and forth, trying to find the sweet spot where there is the most separation between the individual tones.



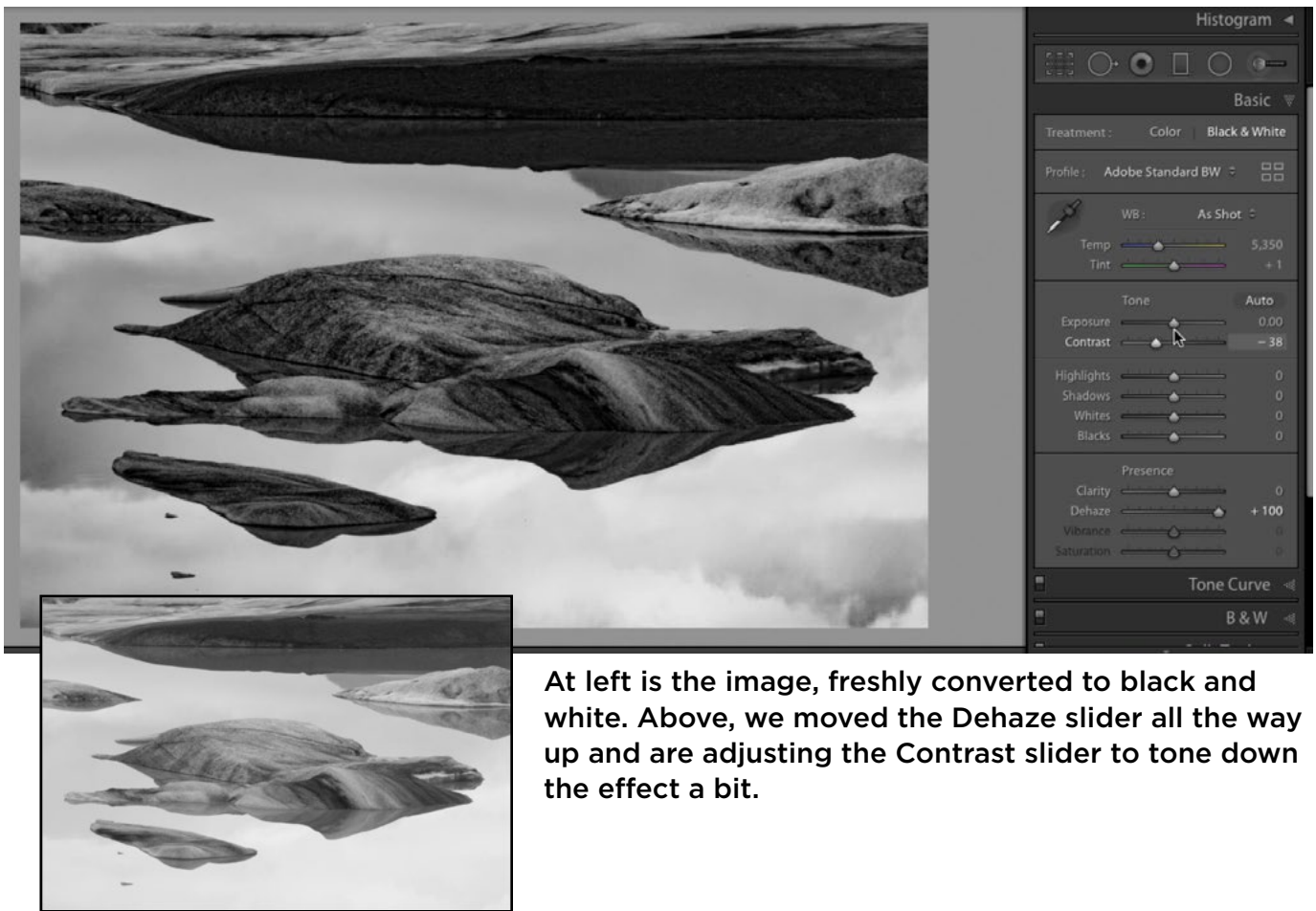
The Temp and Tint sliders will affect the separation between the different tones in a black and white image.

Tonal adjustments

In adjusting a black and white image, I will use the tonal sliders in the Basic panel in the same way that I would if I were adjusting a color image because they'll work the same way. Before finishing the tonal adjustments, I usually like to make sure that there is a little hint of black in the image. Having an area of pure black will usually help the image and prevent it from looking dull. There are two ways you can make sure there is solid black in the image. You can hold down the Shift key and double-click on the Blacks slider and this will tell Lightroom to apply the Auto settings just on this slider. It will automatically move the slider to ensure there are blacks in the image. You can also hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) while dragging the Blacks slider and this will give you a view of the image that shows where the blacks are. The more you drag the slider to the left, the more blacks you will see appearing in the image.

Extreme contrast

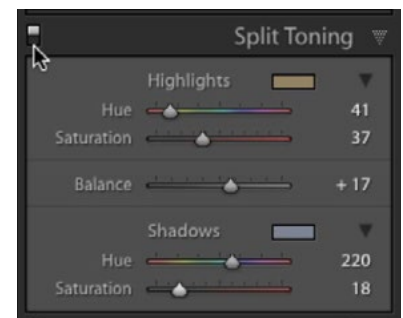
When working in black and white, we can get away with having extreme contrast in our images, more so than when we're working in color. One way of achieving high contrast is by using the Dehaze slider, which can be found under the Presence section in the Basic panel. The Dehaze slider is designed to break through fog-like haze in an image. When you turn up the Dehaze slider, the darkest part of the picture will get closer and closer to black. Once that darkest area becomes black, it will no longer adjust it any further. It will move on to the next darkest area and then darken that, and so on. If I want an extremely dramatic look in the image, I'll drag the Dehaze slider all the way up. If this proves to be too extreme of an adjustment, I'll move to the Contrast slider and drag it down until the image looks acceptable.



At left is the image, freshly converted to black and white. Above, we moved the Dehaze slider all the way up and are adjusting the Contrast slider to tone down the effect a bit.



Split toning

The split toning technique allows you to add color into the highlights and/or the shadows of your image. This can be a good way to add a hint of color to an image you've converted to black and white. The settings for this technique can be found within the Split Toning panel, which is located on the right side of Lightroom's Develop Module. Within the Split Toning panel, there are a set of sliders for the Highlights and a set of sliders for the Shadows. We'll use the Hue slider under the Highlights section to determine what color should be added into the highlight areas of the image. It's important to know, however, that you will not see a change in the image by moving the Hue slider alone. The Saturation slider determines how strongly the chosen hue will be applied, and if this slider is set to zero (as it is by default), the Hue slider will show no change. Here's a trick for setting the Hue: if you hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) while dragging the Hue slider, it will temporarily act as if the Saturation slider is set to 100. This will be an extreme view, but it will give you a good idea of what color you'll be adding into the highlights. When you release the Option key, the view will change to reflect the actual position of the Saturation slider. In the video example, we're adding a warm tone into the highlights. We'll then adjust the Saturation slider to introduce just a hint of the chosen color.





The Split Toning sliders are being used to introduce a warm tone into the highlights and a cool tone into the shadows.

We'll do the same thing for the Shadows settings, holding down the Option key while adjusting the Hue slider and then slowly bumping up the Saturation slider until there is the right amount of color in the shadows. In the video example, we chose a cool hue to add to the shadows. Finally, we'll adjust the Balance slider. The Balance setting determines where the highlights end and the shadows begin. When moving the Balance slider, we can hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and the image will temporarily look as if the Saturation sliders for both the highlights and the shadows have been set to 100. This will be overly colorful but will give us a good idea of where the balance point is. When we release the Option key, the view will reflect the actual saturation settings.

After creating a split-toned effect, it may be difficult to determine whether you like the effect or if you should further modify the colors. If this is the case, you can utilize the Before & After view. With the initial split-tone effect complete, click on the little icon that looks like two Y's  in the bar below the image window. This will give you side-by-side view of the image, with and without the split-toned effect. The version without the effect will appear in the Before window on the left and the version with the effect will appear in the After view on the right. Click on the middle icon  next to the Before & After setting in the Toolbar beneath the image window and the After version (with the split-toned effect) will move to the left into the Before position. The two versions will now look identical. Now you can continue to work with the split toning sliders and the changes will only be reflected on the right (After) version of the image.

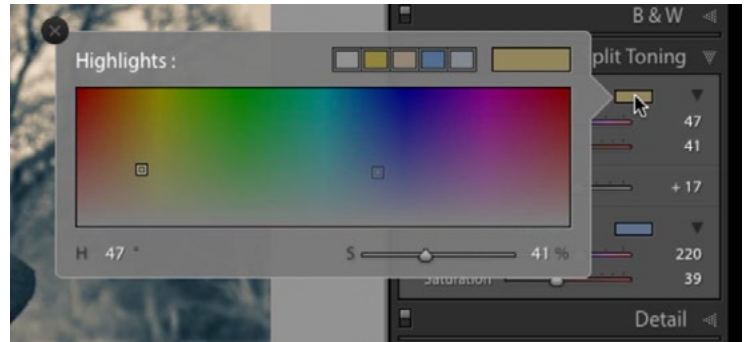


The Before & After View is being used to compare two different versions with the split-toned effect.

Now you will have two different versions of the effect. If you like the version on the right better (the After version), then simply click on the Loupe view icon  on the left side of the Toolbar to return to viewing one image. If you like the version on the left better (the Before version), you'll first have to click on the right arrow icon  in order to push that version to the right, into the "After" slot, before returning to Loupe view.

We talked about working with the Split Toning sliders, but there is another way of setting the hue for the highlights and the shadows. To the right of the Highlights and Shadows headers, there is a little color rectangle. Clicking on it will cause a color picker to appear and you can use this feature to specify the hue as well. If you'd like to only see the color picker rectangles and not the Hue/Saturation sliders, click on the little triangle to the right of the color rectangle. This will toggle the visibility of the sliders.

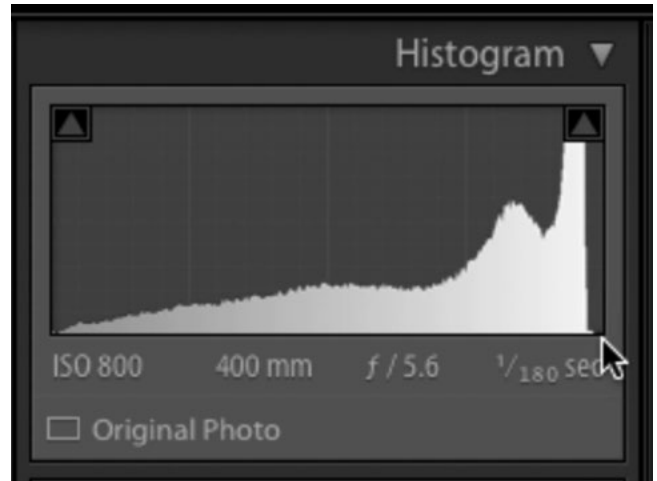
This color picker can be used to copy the tones from another image on your screen. It could be an image that's open in your web browser or any other program. Just make sure that it's open in the background and that Lightroom isn't taking up your entire computer screen. You'll need to be able to see the image behind the Lightroom interface. To sample a color from the image, click somewhere in the color picker and, without releasing the mouse button, drag your cursor over to the image, hover over the color you want to sample and THEN release the mouse button.



Click on the color rectangles within the Split Toning panel to access the Color Picker.

Use the Histogram to evaluate the whites

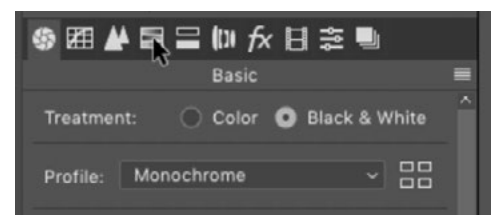
If you plan to leave a white border around your image when printing, it's important to pay attention to whether the image includes areas of white that extend out to the edge of the picture. If there is a sky area that is supposed to be white, you'll need to decide whether you would like to have a visual separation between that white sky and the white paper border. If you would like a separation, you'll want to make sure that the sky area isn't perfectly white (because then it would blend in with the paper). If you don't want that separation, you'll want to make sure that the sky IS pure white. You can tell if there are whites in your image by looking at the histogram. If there is a gap on the right side of the chart, it means that there are no areas of pure white in the picture. If the histogram bars extend all the way to the right side, it means that there are whites in the image. Use this as an indicator as to whether you will need to adjust the Exposure or Whites sliders to achieve the look you're after.



The gap on the right side of the above histogram shows that there are no areas of solid white in the image.

Adobe Camera Raw


In the above demonstration, we were using Lightroom in the video example. Let's look at where the same features can be found in ACR (Adobe Camera Raw). Under the Basic tab on the right side of the interface, the Treatment settings can be found at the very top and this is where you can choose between Color and Black & White. The Profile Browser can be found directly beneath those Treatment set-

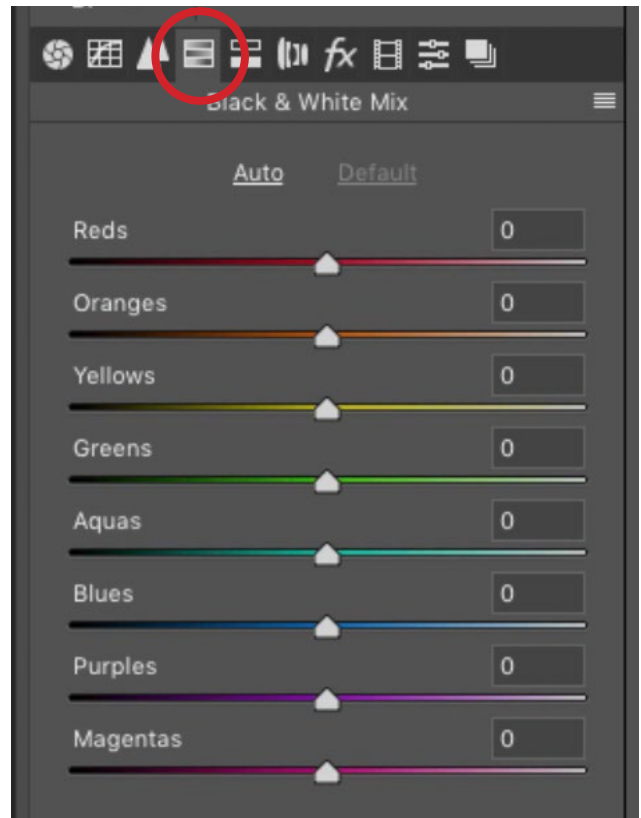


In ACR, convert an image to black and white by choosing the Black & White Treatment option in the Basic panel.

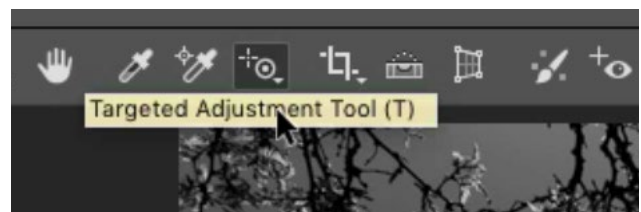
tings in the Basic tab. The Basic tab also contains all of the same tonal sliders as the Basic panel in Lightroom. You can still hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) while dragging the Blacks and Whites sliders in order to get an alternative view of your picture that shows where the blacks or whites are.

In ACR, the tabs representing the different settings categories run across the top of the adjustment panel on the right side of the interface. The icon that looks like three gradient bars represents either the HSL tab or the Black & White Mix tab, depending on whether you have the image in color or black & white. The color sliders will be the same as they are in Lightroom, but you will not find the little targeted adjustment tool in the upper left corner of the panel. Instead, this tool (the one that looks like a little donut) can be found in the Toolbar above the main image window.

The split toning settings can be accessed by clicking on the icon that looks like two horizontal bars.  This is the Split Toning panel and the settings work in the same way that they do in Lightroom.



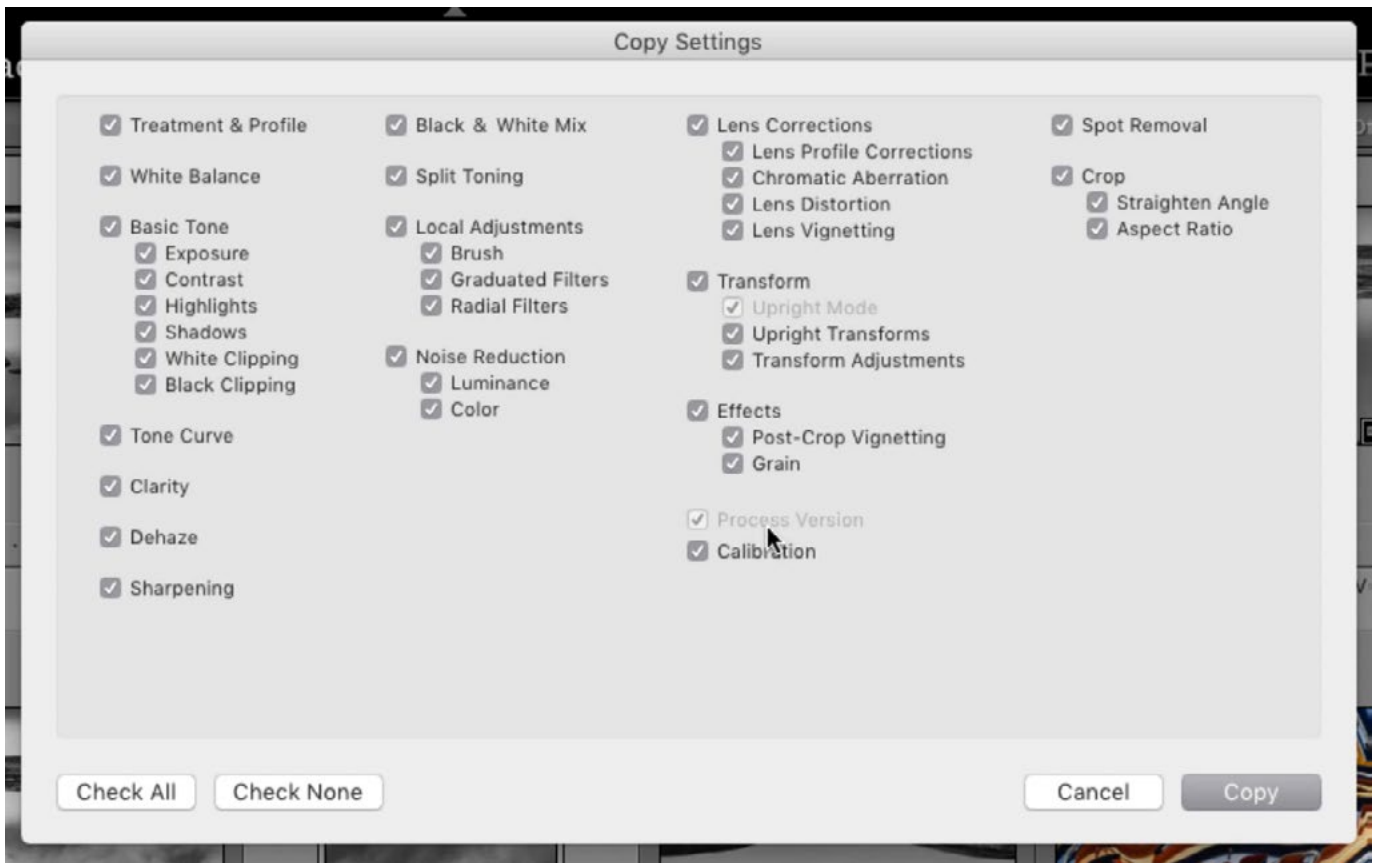
The Black & White Mix panel will be available if you chose the Black & White Treatment for your image.



When using the color sliders, the Targeted Adjustment Tool can be found in the Toolbar above the image window.

Copy an effect from one image to apply to others

After creating an effect that you like, you can easily apply the effect to other images, giving them the same look, or style. This can be a good way of creating a cohesive series out of a set of images. Right-click on the image that has the desired effect applied and choose Develop Settings > Copy Settings from the menu that pops up. A dialog will appear where you can use the various check boxes to determine exactly which develop settings should be copied and then click the Copy button. Then, right click on the image (or images) you want to apply the effect to and choose Develop Settings > Paste Settings from the menu that appears.



When copying the develop settings for an image, you will be presented with this dialog, which allows you to choose exactly which settings should be copied.