

Photoshop For Dummies

by Phil Russell, CMUG Board Member

As I have often told CMUG members, I only know about two percent of Photoshop. But that two percent is amazingly valuable when I want to “fix” digital photos on my Macintosh. The true experts in Photoshop among you will sneer or laugh at my amateurish use of Photoshop. Never mind them. Use my suggestions until you want to attack the learning curve to be a Photoshop expert.

If you have any version of Photoshop or Photoshop LE, most of the steps I will show here are available. If you use Photoshop Elements, PhotoDeluxe or some other photo editing application, you will need to hunt for similar tools, which may have different names or locations. I am using Photoshop 6 for this tutorial.

Most of what I will be suggesting you do will be located in two menus. They are the Image menu and the Filters menu. In the Image menu you will be concentrating on the tools in the submenu under Adjust (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Adjust submenu items

So open one of your digital images in Photoshop. If you are a complete novice in Photoshop, you might now want to try Brightness/Contrast... Since your image is often too dark or too light. Until I read Robin Williams’ “Beyond the Little Mac Book,” that is what I always tried to do. Selecting Brightness/Contrast... first is wrong!

Select Levels... From the Adjust menu instead (Command + L). What you will do here is pull in the left and right cursors until they meet the pixels representing picture content. In Fig. 2 you see both right and left cursors need to be brought inward. Always leave the Preview button selected in any of these submenu items you use.

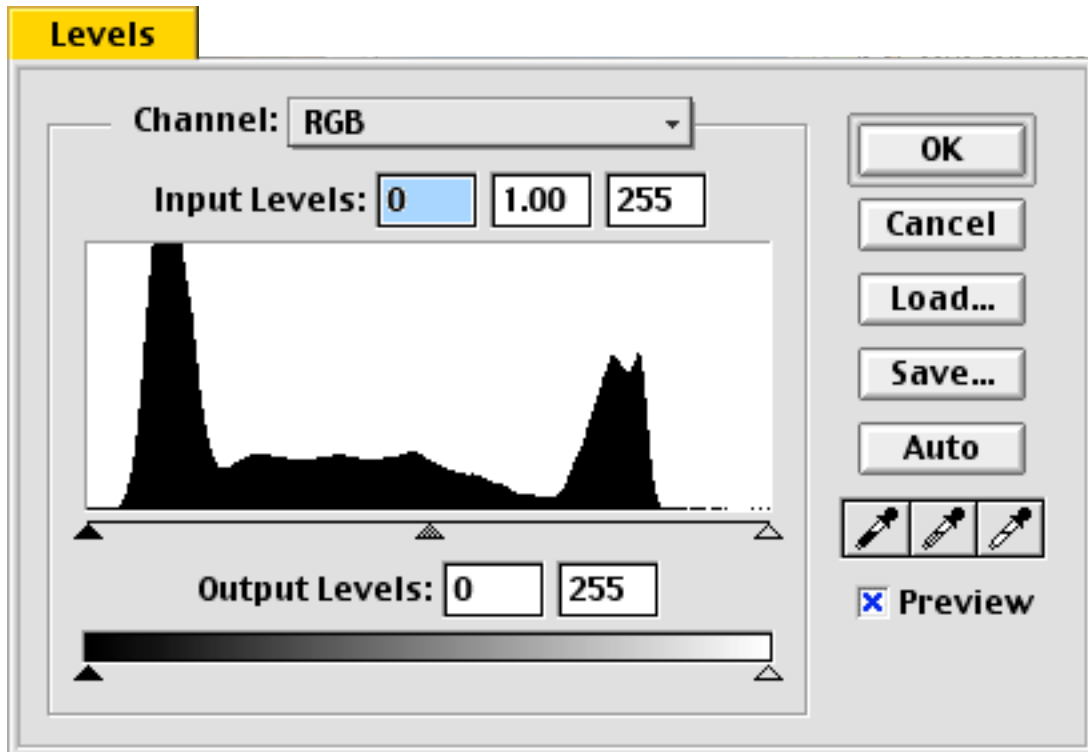


Fig. 2. Levels window

Sometimes there is no straight line portion to the left and right of the mountains of pixels. But in Fig. 3 you might experiment and pull the right cursor inward a bit and see if it helps. Be sure to use Command + Z to see the changes you make. This lets you recover easily from a bad move.

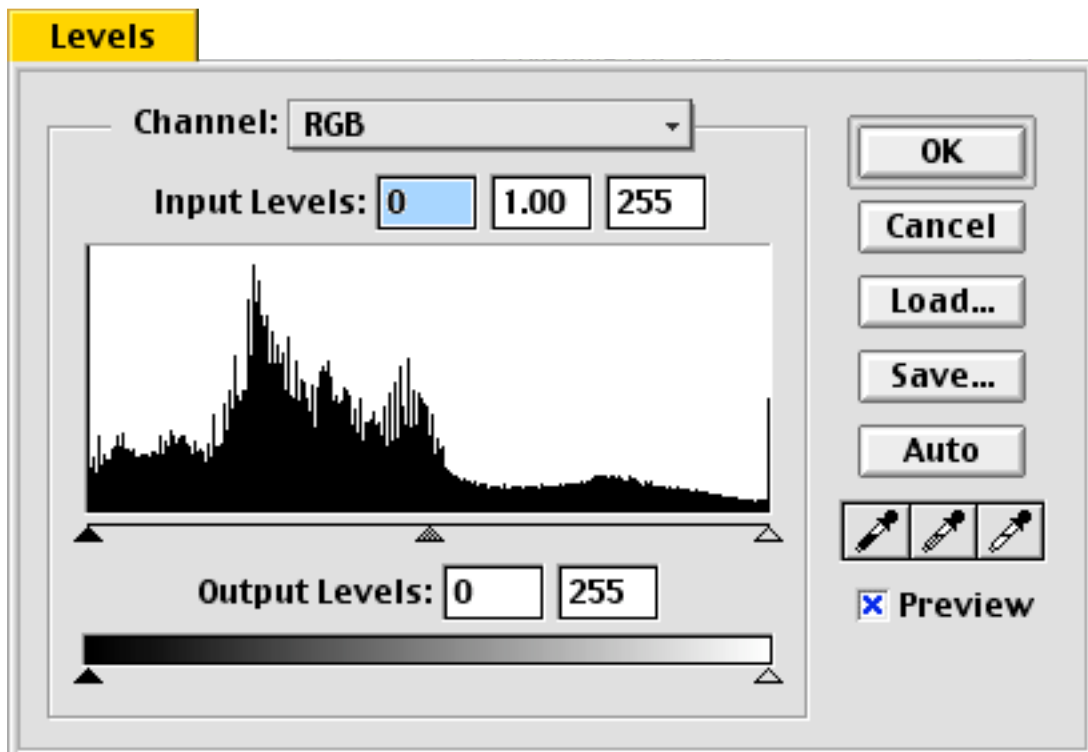


Fig. 3. Levels window needing less change

One more example in Fig. 4 shows pixels which extends all the way to the right and left (almost) sides. But I chose to move the right hand cursor in a bit anyway. Only Command + Z-ing to check results will tell you what to do. You can also drag the middle cursor. This changes the gamma of the image. It increases the contrast in either the light or dark areas. Usually it is best to drag the center cursor a bit to the left, to enhance contrast in the dark areas. You try. You see.

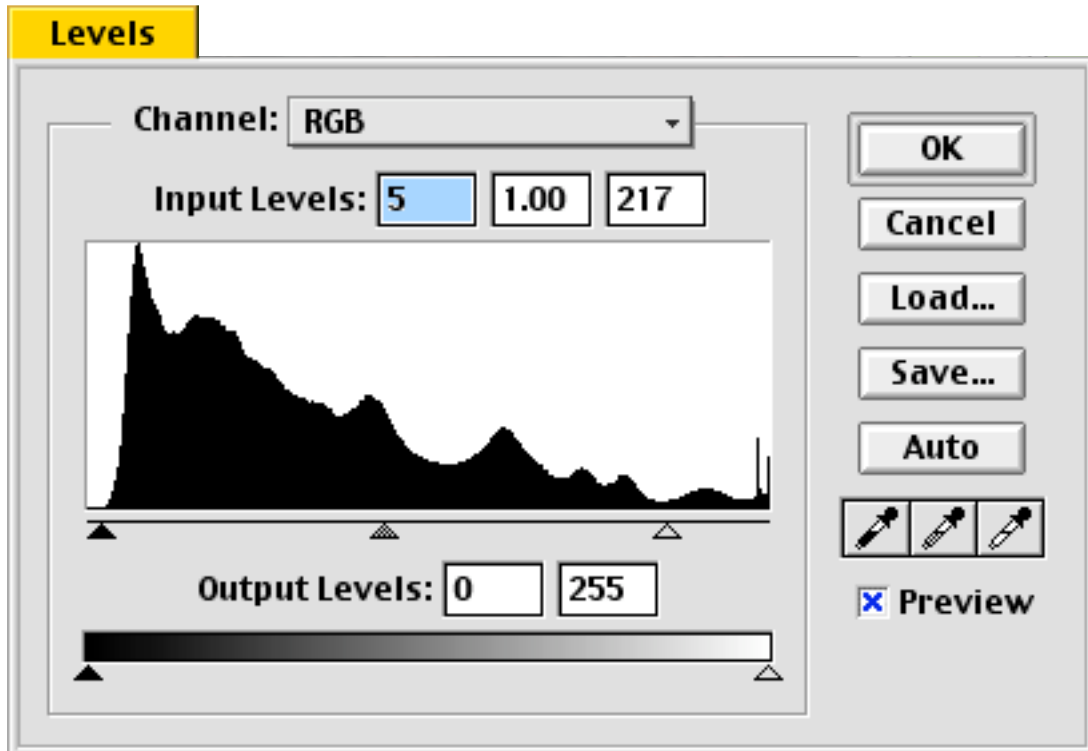


Fig. 4. Levels with right cursor pulled in further

Next I go to Hue/Saturation... (Command + U), Fig. 5. Try pulling the Saturation cursor to the right of center. Something in the range of +15 to +25 might be a good starting point. I find digital photos can often profit from a little saturation. You can play with Hue and Lightness if you want to, but unless the flaws in your image really need these controls, it might be best to leave them at zero for now.

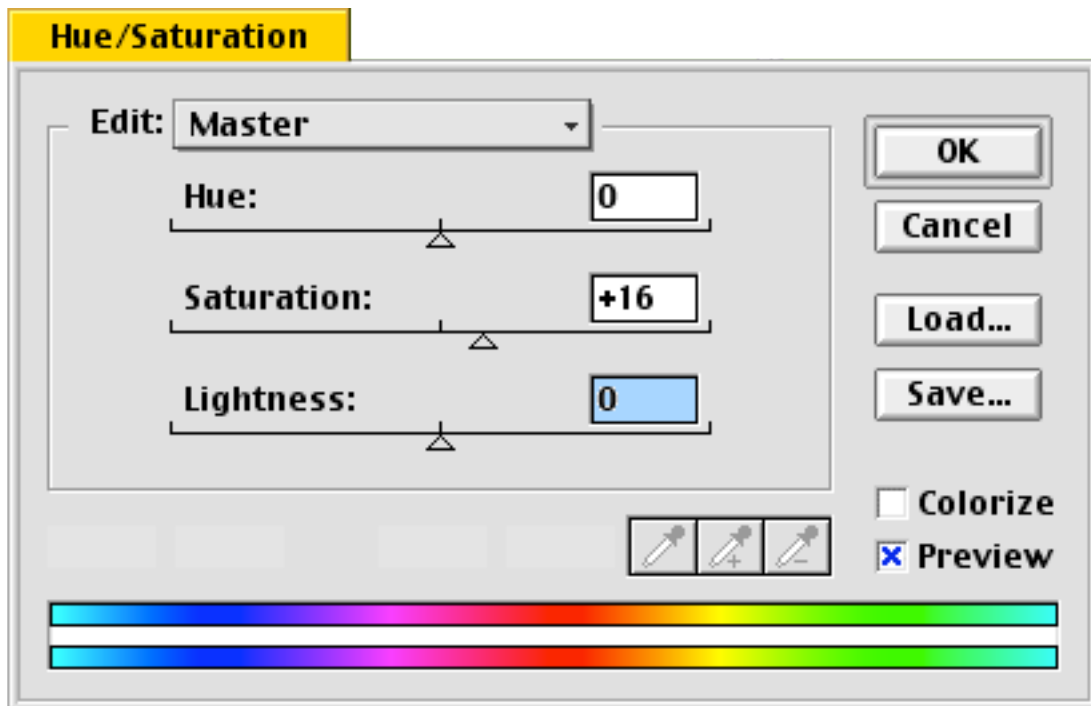


Fig. 5. Hue/Saturation window

Go to Brightness/Contrast... now (Fig. 6). Play with both controls to see if you can improve your image using this control. I recommend against using Brightness/Contrast at all. These controls act on the entire image, and not on the areas needing help. Use this only as a last ditch move.

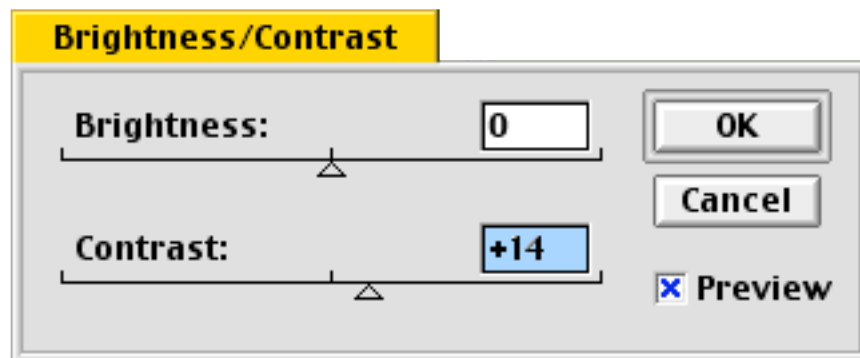


Fig. 6. Brightness/Contrast window

Select Color Balance (Command + B). Play gently with the controls while Tone Balance is left set on Midtones. As you gain confidence, you can also play with Shadows and Highlights. I am not at that level of confidence yet myself! Remember the Command + Z to Undo and Redo each action you take. You can always Cancel to get back to where you were before you used any one of these tools.

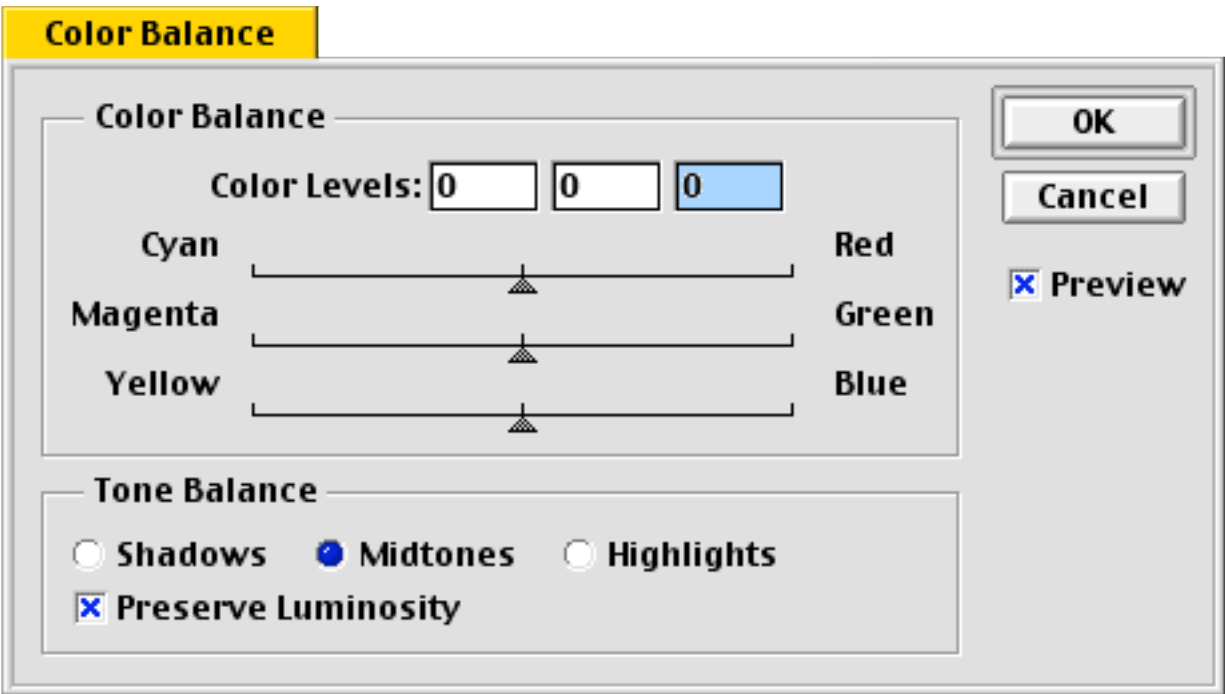


Fig. 7. Color Balance window

So what if your image is slightly out of focus. I am not talking about a totally blurry image. But if it is not quite sharp, there is hope. Go to the Filter menu and select Sharpen. You will see the choices shown in Fig. 8. So shall we go to Sharpen? That seems like a logical choice. Or maybe Sharpen More, or Sharpen Edges?

The answer is NO! You want to go to Unsharp Mask... Of course there is a technical explanation for why this is the way to go, but I will not bore you with it here (mainly because I would have to look it up again).



Fig. 8. Sharpen choices

In Unsharp Mask, Fig. 9, you can change Amount, Radius and Threshold. It is hard to tell you what figures to use. But Robin Williams says start with about 200% for Amount, 3-4 for Threshold, and scan resolution divided by 200 for the Radius figure. These are starting points. Notice that you have a window within the Unsharp Mask dialog which lets you select the part of the image where you can best tell the results of your changes. But since the actual image is still showing on screen, keep an eye on it as you make changes and Undo and Redo with Command + Z.

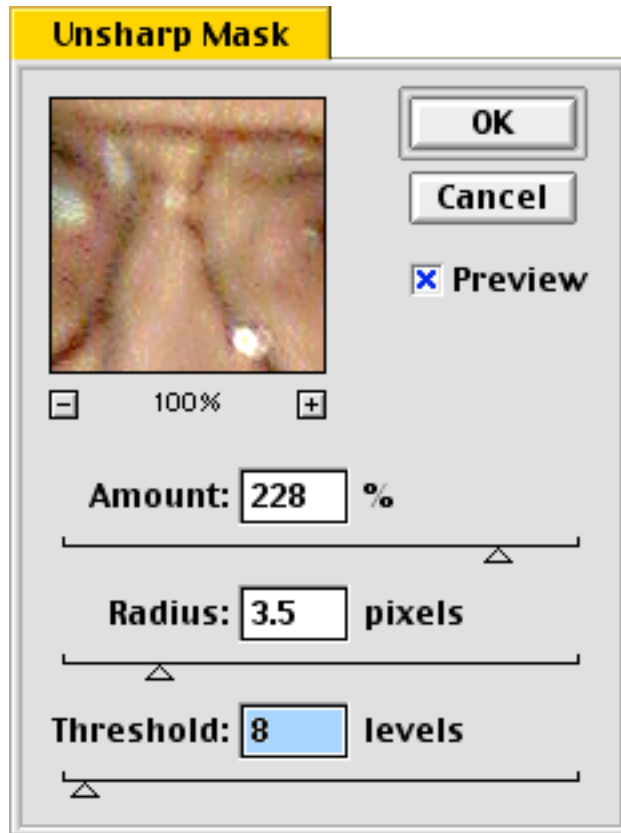


Fig. 9. Unsharp Image window

Right now I am going to duck out and hide until the true Photoshop experts get tired of trying to find me! There are surely better ways to make changes in your images if you are an expert in Photoshop. So??? Without a long learning curve, I can improve my digital photographs so that they please me quite well.