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# Technique

## Power Editing Using Adobe Lightroom Classic CC

### Mastering a few high-octane tools can speed up your workflow

Text & Photography By Brian Matias

Developing a powerful software application that proves to be intuitive for an end user is no easy feat. Adobe Lightroom Classic CC is a perfect example of this. There are so many nuanced considerations about the User Experience (UX), User Interface (UI) and accessibility of all those power features that have to be made early on and, sometimes, it results in the obfuscation of truly powerful tools. Ultimately, software developers have to choreograph a ballet that balances the discoverability of all these powerful features without overwhelming the user with an unnecessarily complicated UI. Unfortunately, this typically results in the user never discovering some of the application's most useful tools and features. Fortunately, I'm here to pull the rug on some of Lightroom's most powerful—and somewhat hidden—features that will add serious power to your photo editing workflow.

Before we begin, I'd like to highlight that several of the tricks listed below make heavy use of modifier keys. A modifier key will modify an action or tool when it's pressed in conjunction with another key or when interacting with a click or slider. On the Mac, the most common modifier keys are the Shift, Option, Control and Command keys. On Windows, users have the Shift, Alt and Control keys. In this article, we'll be focusing on the Option/Alt key. As a Mac user, I'll be using Option (Opt) as reference, so for the Windows users out there, replace "Opt" with "Alt," and you'll be able to follow along in harmony.

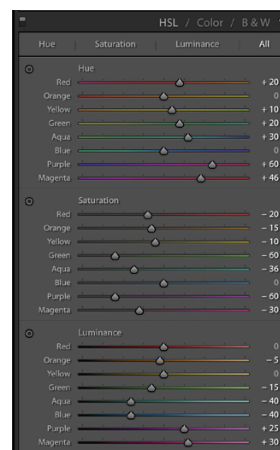


### The Quick Reset

One of my favorite panels in Lightroom's Develop module is Hue/Saturation/Luminance (HSL). I rely on those sliders very heavily as I dial in specific colors, as well as how strong and bright they appear. However, it's not uncommon for me to make a snap decision to

start over and retune the sliders in this panel, and if I didn't know that I could reset all of the sliders at once, it would be a laborious chore.

Let's use this photo of a stream in Oregon's Columbia River Gorge and the respective HSL values I dialed in to grade it.



By fine-tuning the sliders in the HSL panel, I was able to grade this photo of a rapidly moving stream in Oregon. As you can see, nearly every slider was adjusted accordingly to suit my creative vision for the image. When you press and hold the Opt/Alt key, you'll see the option to reset each of the three slider sections.

While it may look like all those sliders were haphazardly adjusted, each one serves a specific purpose and ultimately led to the end result. However, there have been instances where I've chosen to go a different route with this panel, and rather than manually return each slider to its default "0" position, I can batch reset each section by simply pressing and holding on the Opt key. Doing so reveals a "Reset" option for the Hue, Saturation and Luminance sliders. While holding on the Opt key, if I click on the Reset Hue button, for example, it will automatically return each slider under the Hue section back to their default "0" positions.

This hidden trick has saved me a lot of time and allows me to focus more on the creative process rather than the manual chore of resetting each slider individually.

### Toning With Power

The histogram should be one of your closest friends in Lightroom. Within this lovely graph of peaks and valleys lies a visual representation of the highlights, shadows and mid-tones that your

image is made up of. More importantly, the histogram will show you where your image has any blown-out highlights or clipped shadows, areas where there's no tonal information because it's too bright or too dark, respectively. To correct for this, you'll likely be using a combination of sliders found in the Basic panel of the Develop module.

You'll likely be using the Exposure, Highlights, Shadows, Whites and Blacks sliders to adjust the tone of the photo with the (typical) goal of recovering lost highlight and shadow detail. However, wouldn't it be great to see exactly where those blown-out highlights and clipped shadows were while dragging those sliders? The good news is that you can by using the Opt/Alt key. Let's use this photo of a verdant forest in Oregon. By looking at the histogram, I can instantly see that I have both blown-out highlights and clipped shadows because I can see that the warning indicators for both are illuminated.

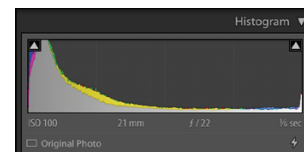
Now that I know that I have tonal information that needs recovering, it'd be great to visualize those areas while dragging on the Basic panel sliders. To get a

graphical representation of the threshold of my image's tonal range, I can press the Opt key while clicking and holding on any of the sliders under the Basic panel. For the sliders affecting the brighter parts of the image (Exposure, Highlights and Whites), the image will turn black, and anything blown out will appear white. For the sliders affecting the darker parts of the image (Shadows and Blacks), the image will turn white, and any clipped areas will be shown in black and yellow.

With this information, it makes applying fine tonal corrections very easy because I can see exactly where I've exceeded the threshold of my image's tonal range. All I need to do is adjust the respective sliders to the left or right until the threshold preview is either just about all black or all white. Correcting the image's tone takes no time at all, and I'm left with a truer representation of the scene.

### Total Sharpening Control

When I'm out photographing landscapes, I'm focusing on getting a good composition and capturing all of the natural beauty in front of me. I'm not really

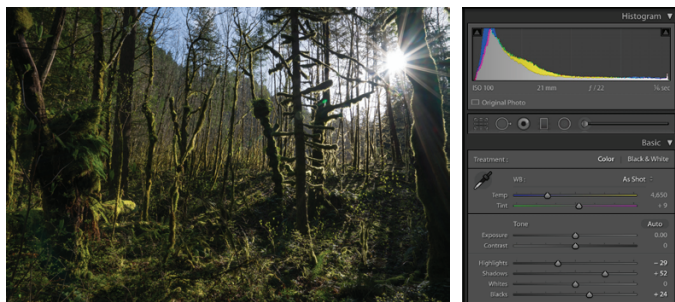


This photo has a very wide dynamic range with the bright sun and the dark shadows. As a result, the histogram is showing blown-out highlights and clipped shadows by illuminating warning icons. The illuminated triangle in the top left indicates clipped shadows, and the illuminated triangle in the top right indicates blown-out highlights.





Both of these images represent the brightest and darkest parts of my photo where I have no tonal information. I can use the sliders under the Basic panel in an attempt to recover that information.



By making the necessary adjustments to the tonality of my photo, the histogram now shows no tone warnings, and my image is ready for further processing.

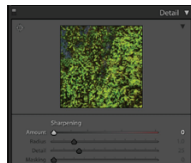
concerning myself with how sharp my image is (not to be confused with ensuring proper focus). That's because I know Lightroom has really effective sharpening tools that make it easy to sculpt out important details and textures.

Let's use this photo of a boulder sitting in the middle of a stream as our example. First, we'll bring the Detail panel into view. This is where your sharpening controls are. By default, I have no additional sharpening applied to the photo because that's how I have Lightroom configured (we'll cover that in the next section).

When I zoom in for a 1:1 view of the boulder, I notice that it's missing some sharpening. Remember, it's completely in focus, but it could stand out a bit more in terms of texture. So, the appropriate course of action is to add sharpening. However, if you're like me, you want to know exactly how much sharpening you're applying (to prevent over-sharpening), and you want to control where

the sharpening effect is applied (to prevent sharpening any naturally smooth regions like skies, water, etc.).

Fortunately, here's another instance where the Opt/Alt key shines brightly. Not only can it help you visualize the effect that the sharpening is having on your photo, but it can also display exactly where it's being applied and where it's



I prefer not having any sharpening applied to my photos until I'm nearing the end of the post-processing. By default, Lightroom adds a small amount unless you have it configured otherwise.



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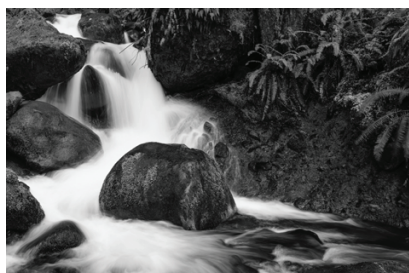


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It's important to zoom in with a 1:1 view on your primary plane of focus to determine how sharp your photo is. Doing so will also tell you whether you need to apply additional sharpening.



By pressing and holding on the Opt/Alt key while dragging on the Amount slider, your image will be rendered in greyscale, making it much easier to see the way Sharpening is being applied to your photo.



While it's important to properly sharpen your photo, it's equally important to control where that effect is applied. There's no need to add sharpening to smooth areas, and the Masking slider makes the task of suppressing that very easy.

remove color from the equation. I find this to be immensely helpful and begin to see detail being restored almost immediately. The Amount slider controls the overall effect of sharpening, so be careful not to overdo it.

Finally, I want to ensure that the sharpening applies to the areas that actually need it. I usually prefer to keep naturally smooth areas, like skies and soft backgrounds, free of sharpening. The Masking slider takes a unique approach here by analyzing the image content and applying sharpening to high-contrast areas and masking, or removing, it

from flatter areas. By pressing the Opt key while dragging the Masking slider, you'll see a mask gradually build up. The areas in white are your targeted areas where sharpening is applied. As you drag the slider more, you'll notice more areas turn black. These areas will have sharpening suppressed. I prefer to have a full zoomed-out preview of the image while using the Masking slider. As I drag the Masking slider to the right, I can see that the Sharpening effect is being removed from the flatter areas, like the running water and shadow areas.

### Lightroom Defaults Your Way

I saved one of my favorite hidden features for last. This trick will allow you to control exactly which settings get applied to every photo you import into Lightroom as opposed to the default settings that Adobe provided. Let's say you're the type of photographer who likes a lot of contrast automatically applied to your image. Or you enjoy running the temperature slider a little on the cooler side. Or maybe you don't want any sharpening to be applied to your photos, as I referred to in the previous section (because Lightroom adds a Sharpening amount of 25 to every imported photo by default).

Fortunately, it's very easy to set your own custom default state of the Develop Module for all imported photos of a given camera model. First, get the Develop Module to a state that you'd want applied to all imported photos going forward. Next, press and hold the Opt/Alt key while hovering on what normally is the Reset button at the very bottom of the Develop module panels list. As you hold down the Opt/Alt key, the Reset button will change and display as "Set Default..." By clicking this button, you'll be presented with a dialog box asking you to confirm that you want to set the current Develop settings as default for the photos created by the respective camera model. When you click on the "Update to Current Settings" button, all subsequent photos taken with that camera model will have your new default settings applied. It's an easy way to save time by not having to repeat the same steps over and over.

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Brian Matiash is a professional landscape and travel photographer, published author and podcaster based out of Lincoln, Nebraska. He specializes in fusing photography with experiential storytelling and practical instruction to help others grow creatively. He also co-hosts the "No Name Photo Show," one of the most popular photography podcasts in Apple iTunes.



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