

Movie 3

Basic Camera Raw workflow

The tone adjustment controls

The tone adjustment controls allow you to make adjustments to the highlight and shadow clipping points as well as the overall tone balance and brightness. You can adjust these sliders manually, plus you can click on the Auto button to auto-set the Exposure, Recovery, Blacks, Brightness and Contrast settings.

Exposure

The Exposure slider is used to set the overall brightness, so that the photograph looks ‘correctly exposed’. You can use the Exposure slider to visually assess how brightly exposed you want the picture to be and use this as your primary tool for adjusting the image brightness. If you hold down the  **alt** key as you drag the Exposure slider this shows you a threshold preview which indicates where there might be highlight clipping, or you can rely on the highlight clipping indicator shown in Figure 1 to tell you which highlights are about to be clipped.

Recovery

You don’t have to worry too much about setting the Exposure too bright or clipping the highlights, because the Recovery slider can be used to restore some of the detail which at first may appear lost. The Recovery slider cleverly utilizes the highlight detail in whichever channels contain the best recorded highlight detail and uses this to boost the detail in the weakest highlight channel. There are limits as to how far you can push a Recovery adjustment, but you may be able to recover as much as a stop or more of overexposure. Camera Raw can sometimes use extra tricks such as ignoring digital gain values used to create higher ISO captures. If you hold down the  **alt** key as you drag the Recovery slider you will also get to see a Threshold mode preview, which can often make it easier to determine the optimum setting here.

Blacks

The Blacks slider is used to clip the shadow point and here again I find it useful to hold down the  **alt** key to obtain a Threshold mode preview to help determine the point where the shadows just start to clip. The main thing is to set the Black slider so that the shadows just begin to clip, though try not to set lower than 2 or 3 if you can help it.

How Camera Raw calculates

Camera sensors have a linear response to light, and unprocessed raw files therefore exist in a ‘linear gamma space’. Human vision on the other hand interprets light in a non-linear fashion, so one of the main things a raw conversion has to do is to apply a gamma correction to the original image data to make the correctly exposed, raw image look the way our eyes would expect such a scene to look (see Digital exposure in Chapter 3). The preview image you see in the Camera Raw dialog presents a gamma corrected preview of the raw data, while the adjustments you apply in Camera Raw are in fact being applied directly to the raw linear data. The reason I mention this is to illustrate one aspect of the subtle but important differences between the tonal edits that can be made in Camera Raw to raw files and those that are applied in Photoshop where the images have already been ‘gamma corrected’. Note that in the case of non-raw files, Camera Raw has to temporarily convert the image to a linear RGB space to carry out its calculations.

Fill Light

The Fill Light kind of matches the behavior of the Shadow amount slider in the Shadow/Highlight image adjustment. If you drag the Fill Light slider to the right this adds more lightness to the dark tone areas and lightens the darkest shadow areas. However, if you overdo this adjustment it may knock back the contrast too much and you'll end up with an artificial looking result (although see the Movie 1 PDF regarding using Process Version 2010).

Suggested order for the basic adjustments

The first step should be to set the Exposure to get the overall image brightness looking right, taking care not to introduce too much highlight clipping. If necessary, use the Recovery slider to restore any important detail that may be clipped in the highlight areas. Next, use the Blacks slider to set the shadow clipping, followed by the Fill Light slider should you need to reveal more detail in the shadow areas. The Brightness and Contrast sliders should be used last to fine-tune the image after you have adjusted these four sliders first.

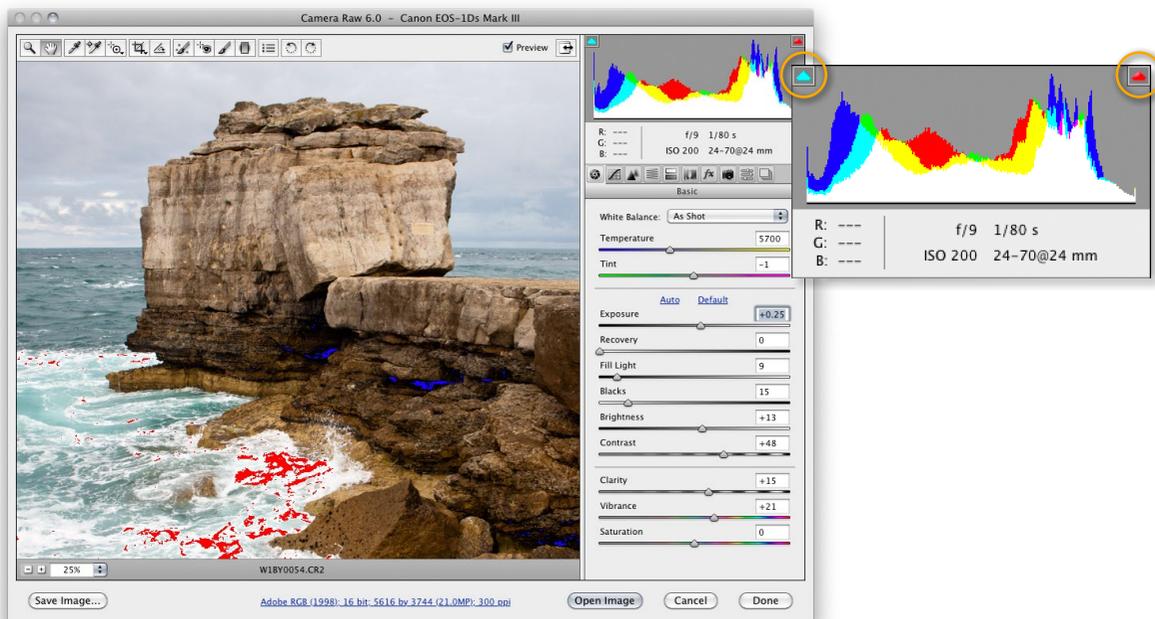
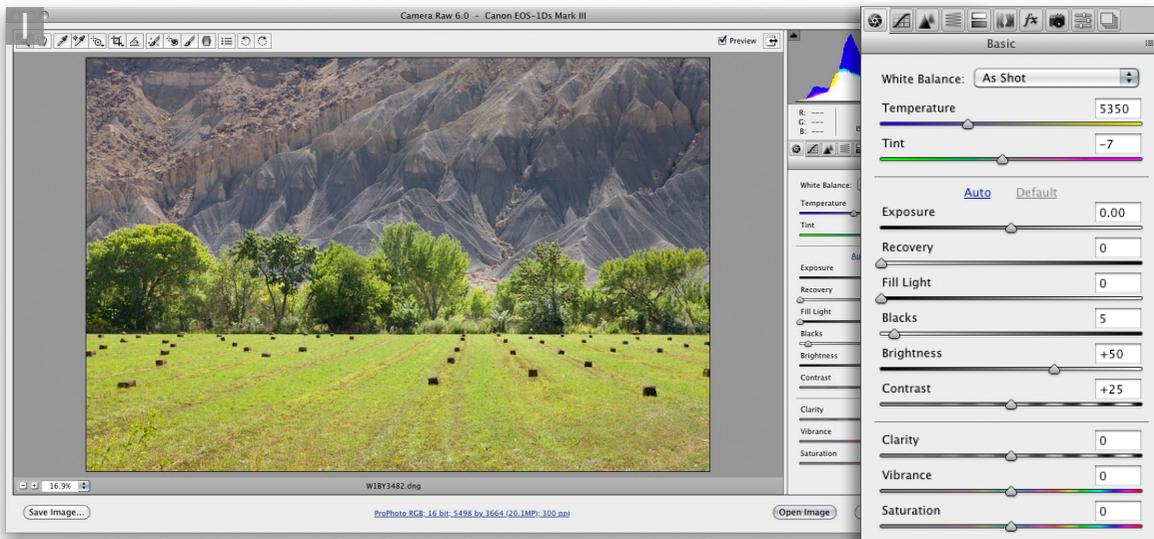
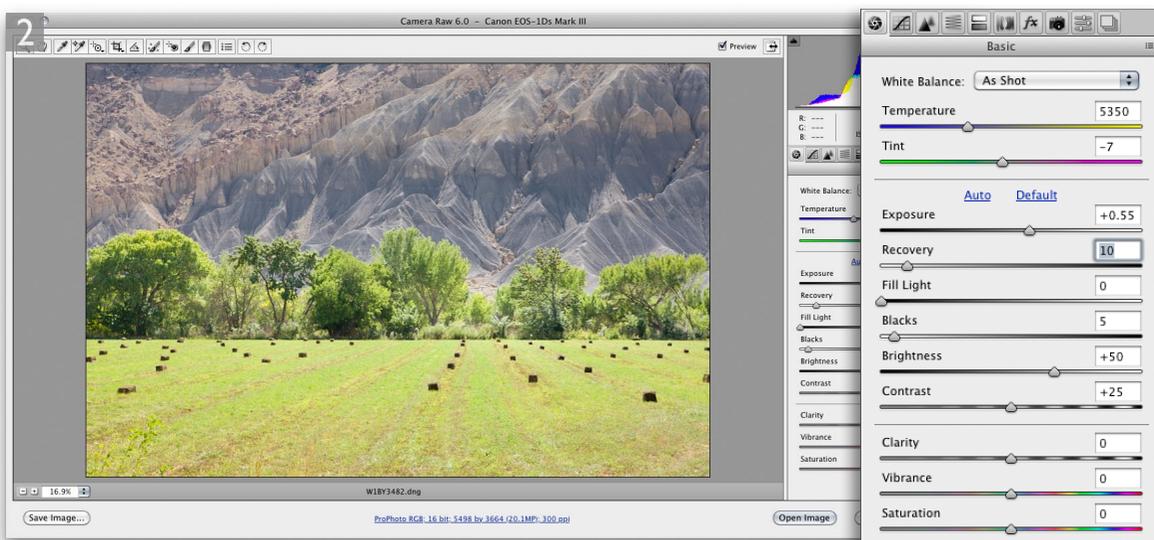


Figure 1 If you click on the clipping indicators in the Histogram panel you will see a colored overlay in the preview image that indicates any shadow and highlight clipping.

Basic image adjustment procedure



1 This shows a raw image as viewed in the Camera Raw dialog, using the default settings in the Basic panel. One way to quickly optimize an image is to click on the Auto button. If you then want to reset all the settings you can do so by double-clicking on the individual sliders, or by clicking on the Default button.



2 In this example I adjusted the Exposure to make the photograph look lighter, to achieve what looked like the best visual brightness. You don't have to worry about blowing out the highlight detail because you can always use the Recovery slider to restore any highlight detail that may be clipped (but without destroying the exposure effect).



3 The next step was to optimize the shadows. I used the Blacks slider to set the clipping point for the shadow detail and after that I used the Fill Light slider to lighten the darker areas of the photograph. Note that as you adjust the Recovery and Blacks sliders, you can hold down the **alt** key as you drag to see a threshold view of the image, which can help you determine how far to drag to set the correct amount of clipping.



4 Lastly, I used the Brightness and Contrast sliders to fine-tune the tonal balance of the photograph.

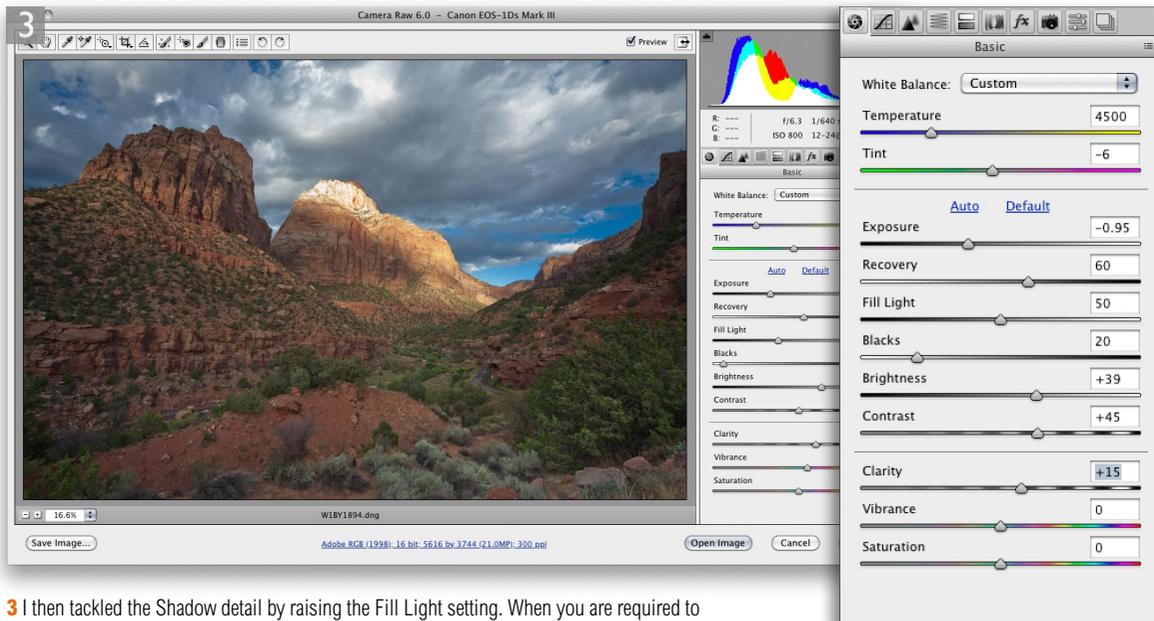
Correcting a high contrast image



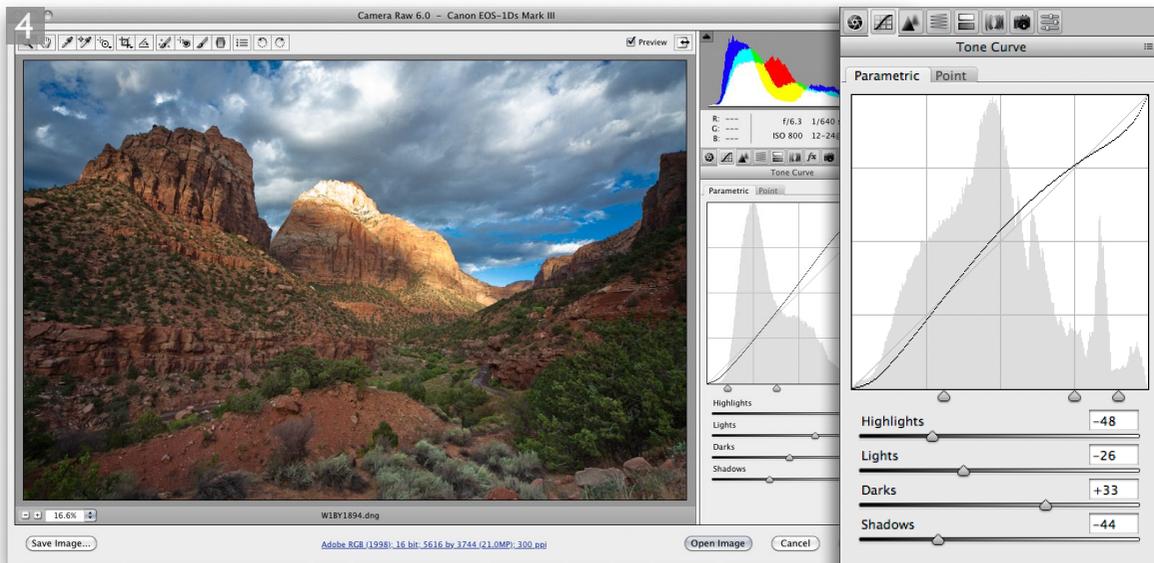
1 This photograph has a wide subject brightness range, and is shown here opened in Camera Raw using the default settings.



2 The first step was to take care of the highlights. I adjusted the Exposure slider to apply a negative Exposure adjustment, followed by a Recovery adjustment to hold more of the detail in the highlights.



3 I then tackled the Shadow detail by raising the Fill Light setting. When you are required to push the Fill Light adjustment to such extremes, it is not uncommon to have to raise the Blacks (as I did here). The picture was not yet perfect, but we can now see detail at both ends of the tonal scale.



4 Lastly, I went to the Tone Curve panel and used the slider settings shown here to carefully add contrast to the photograph where it was needed most.

Adobe™ Photoshop™ CS5 for Photographers

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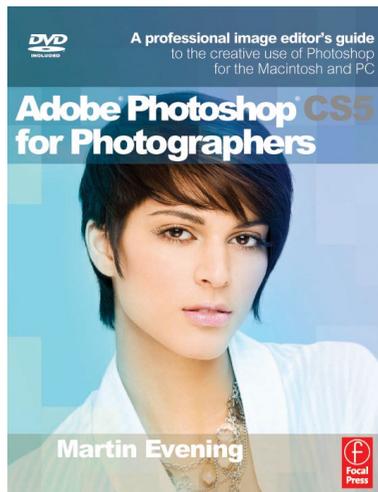
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