

Using Curves to Correct Colors in Photoshop

Curves are a tool in Photoshop that appears complicated to many users. In fact, once understood, curves are a relatively easy feature that are used to adjust colors within a photograph. The adjustment procedure is selective so that while some colors are shifted, others are left alone. This makes curves indispensable for fixing photos that are faded, have low contrast, or suffer from exposure problems.

Open the photograph on which you wish to make color corrections.

The photograph illustrated on the right will be used for this handout. Examination of the photo reveals that it appears "flat" because it lacks contrast. It also is also missing some red tones, the green may not be correct, and there is a little too much blue.



Never work on the original photo. You should work on a copy so that if there is a mistake you can recover the original image. The next steps tell how to make a quick copy of your photograph.

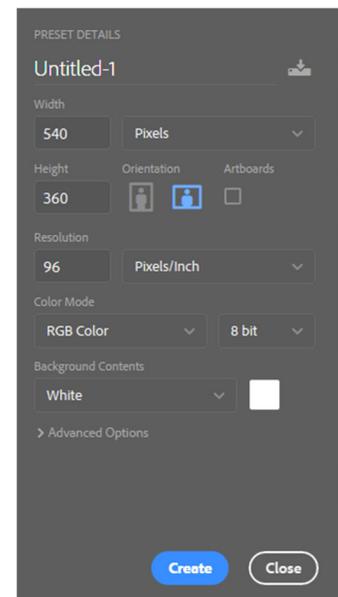
Press Control+A on the Windows keyboard. This selects all of the image. The famous Photoshop marching ants will appear around the edge of the photograph.

Press Control+C on the Windows keyboard and Command+C on Mac. This copies the image into the computer's clipboard.

Press Control+N on the Windows keyboard. This causes the New Image control panel to appear. It is illustrated on the right.

Type a new name for the image into the Name box.

Choose the correct mode for the image. For this handout we will use RGB.



NOTE: RGB (Red Green Blue) is suitable when the image will be displayed on a monitor, such as the Web or a PowerPoint presentation. CMYK (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, Black) is appropriate when the photo will be printed on a CMYK printing system, such as a laser printer, or a high quality professional press.

Select White in the Contents section of the Control panel.

Click Create. A blank image will appear on your screen.

Press Control+V on your Windows keyboard and Command+V on Mac. The image will be pasted into the blank image as a new layer.

Click Window on the Menu bar. A drop down menu will appear.

Make sure Layers is checked on the drop down menu. The Menu pallet will be floating on the screen. It is illustrated on the right.

The image in the photograph will be in Layer 1. The background will be white.

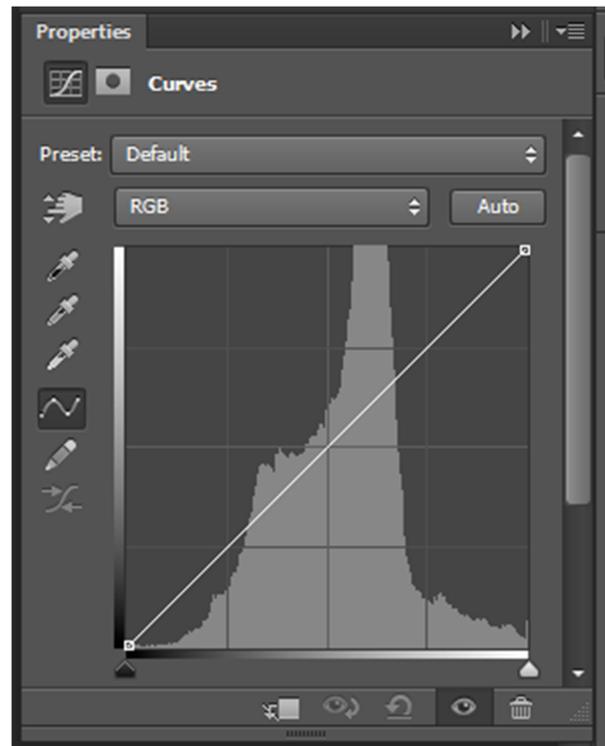
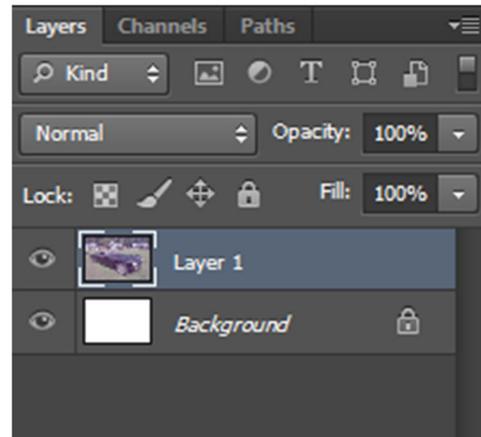
Click the New Fill or Adjustment Layer button  at the bottom of the layers pallet.

Select Curves from the list that appears.

The Curves control panel will appear and a new adjustment layer will be added to the Layers pallet. The Curves control panel is shown on the right.

The Curves panel allows you to correct contrast, colors, and other characteristics of the photograph.

Typically, the first step is to correct contrast.



Find the spot in the photograph that should be black, such as in the wheel well of the example photo.

Make sure that RGB is selected in the Channel box.

Select the black eyedropper button  in the Curves control panel.

Place the eyedropper over the darkest black point in the photograph and **click**.

An adjustment is made.



You may wish to improve the contrast further by setting the lightest areas.

Select the white eyedropper button. 

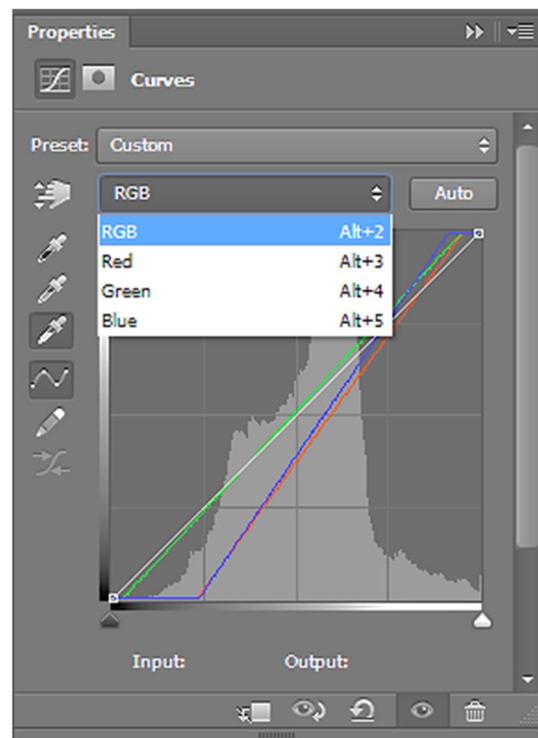
Place the eyedropper over the whitest area in the photograph and **click**.

Examine the photograph closely. Determine if it any specific color, red, green, or blue, needs adjusting.

If, for instance, red should be corrected, select Red from the Channel drop down list. This list is shown on the right.

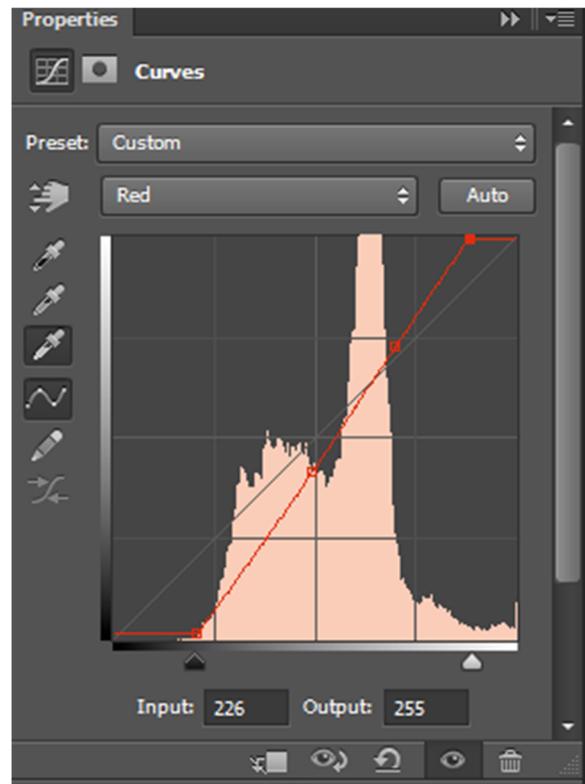
The Curves control panel will change to show the settings for the red channel

Adjust the curves graph by placing your mouse pointer over shadow handle in the lower left hand corner of the graph or the highlights handle in the upper right corner.



The red tones in the photo will change as you drag the handle.

The illustration shows how the curve for the adjusted red channel might look.



Do the same with the other color channels if necessary. When you are satisfied with the results, **click OK**. **Save** your adjusted photograph.

NOTE: You may wish to try the Auto button. Sometimes this works, other times it does not work well enough.

