

Day 24: Use the Power of Local Adjustments

Changes that affect the entire picture (global changes) are only going to take you so far. To take complete control over your picture, you need to be able to make changes to specific parts (local changes). The good news is that this is now pretty easy.

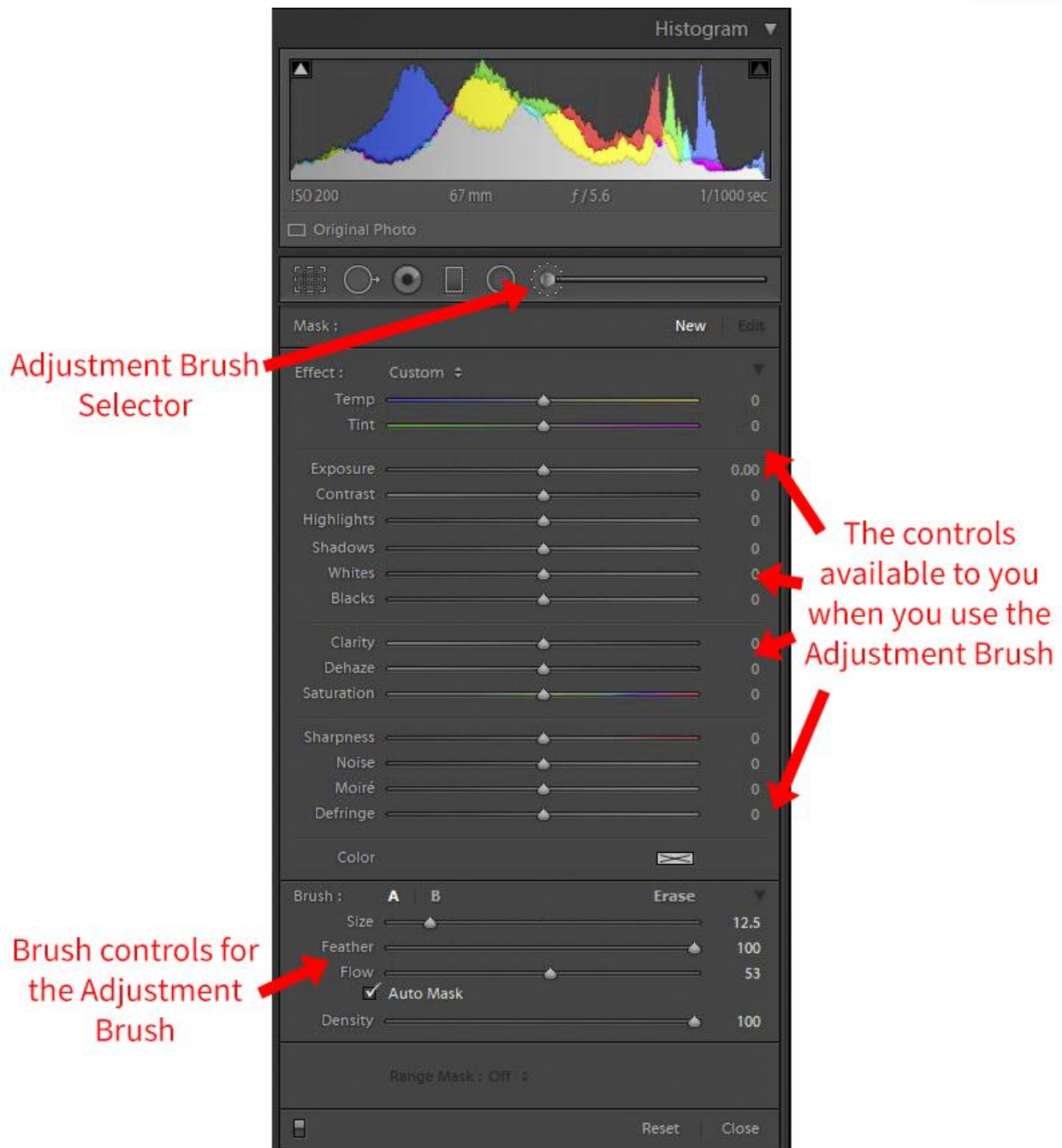
The big decision you need to make up front is if you are going to gently blend in the change, or make the change with a hard, defined edge. The techniques are different, but I'll show you both. First, I will show you how to do everything in Lightroom. If you are just getting started, I recommend you stick with this method. The Photoshop methods are slightly more powerful, but involve a lot more steps. Lightroom is plenty capable and much simpler.

The Lightroom Way:

In Lightroom, there are three different ways to make local adjustments: (1) the Adjustment Brush, (2) the Graduated Filter, and (3) the Radial Filter. In this lesson we are going to focus on just the Adjustment Brush. The controls for the other two methods are basically the same, so you can apply these tips to those later.

The Adjustment Brush

The Adjustment Brush is just what it sounds like: a control where you paint on your picture wherever you want the changes to be made. You select it by pressing the icon on the top right of your screen (in the Develop module) or by pressing K. On the page following is the location of the icon as well as what appears when you select it.



As you can see, there are a lot of sliders that appear. The top set of sliders are all the adjustments you can make to your picture. These are all things we have either already covered in this course, or will soon get to. You have your white balance controls - Temp and Tint - at the very top (we will get to these pretty soon). After that you have all the exposure sliders we just covered in

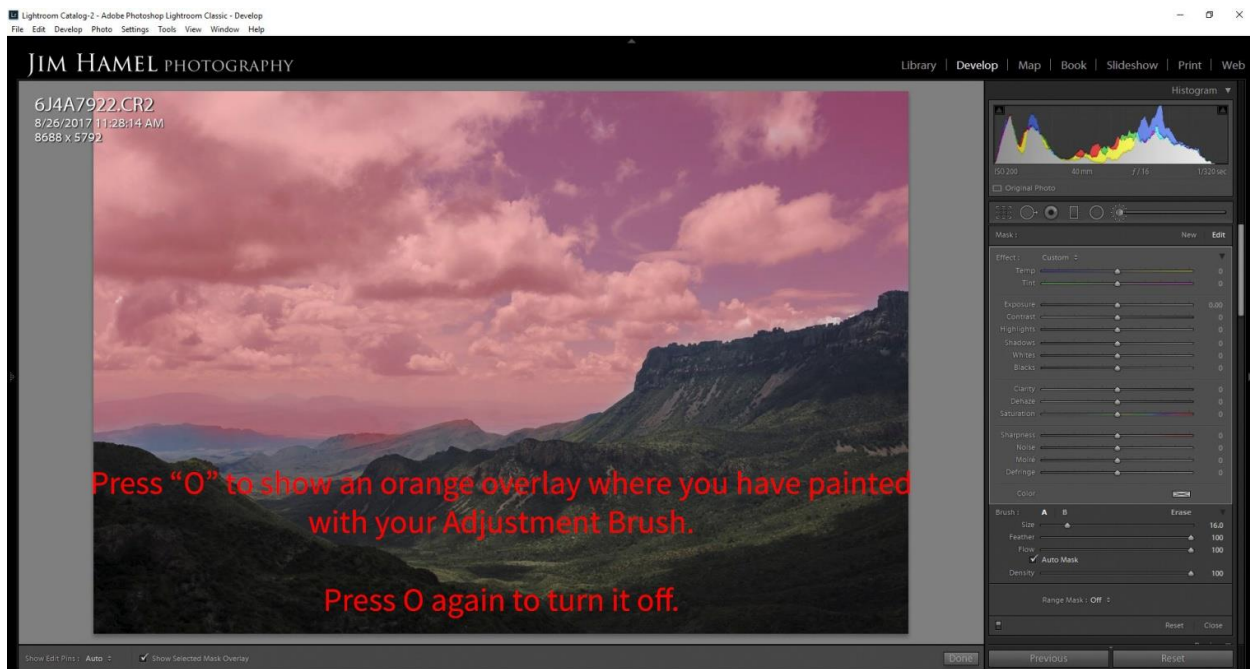
the last lesson (exposure, highlights, shadows, etc.). Following those, you have controls for color, sharpness, and other effects.

Since we are covering all those controls separately in other parts of the course, I want to focus on how to actually use the brush here. For that, we will use the controls near the bottom.

Before we get to those controls, let's talk about the big picture here. Once you have selected the Adjustment Brush, you will see a circular icon on your screen. Move that around to what you want to "paint" onto your picture. When you click and paint, the effects you have set using the sliders in the graphic above will be applied to the places you paint, but nowhere else. That's all there is to it. It is basically like painting.

Here's the thing - don't worry so much about what effect you are adding to the picture at first. What you want to do is just paint in the areas you want to add effects. You can change the effects later. In other words, you are not stuck with the effect you painted in. You can adjust those sliders however you want after you have painted. In fact, what I often paint in an extreme amount of brightness first, just so I can see where I painted. After that, I tone that down and dial in the effects I actually want.

Note that you don't have to do that though. Lightroom has an Overlay command that will show orange wherever you paint, if you would rather do that. Press O to turn on the overlay. Press it again to toggle it off.



With that said, let's talk about how you set the size of your brush and how you control the actual painting process. To do that, we'll talk specifically about the controls on the bottom of the graphic set forth on the previous page with all the controls on it.

- **Size** - Ok, this one is pretty obvious. This control sets the size of brush. If you pull the slider to the right the brush gets bigger. You can also control the size by using the bracket keys ([and]). Use larger brushes for bigger, more wide open areas. Use a smaller brush to get into smaller areas.
- **Feather** - This is the amount of transition space between where you are adding your effects and the outside area of the picture. If you set this high, there will be a softer transition between your effect and the unchanged portion of the picture. If you set this low, there will be a harder edge. Keep this high to blend in changes gradually. We will talk more about creating harder edges soon.
- **Density** - Think of this control as opacity. It affects the percentage to which the effects apply to your picture. In other words, if you paint an area of your picture and apply an exposure increase, but then set the density to 50, it will only apply that effect 50%.
- **Flow** - This is the same as density, but it applies per stroke. In other words, the effect will be applied by a given percentage each time you paint a stroke onto your picture.

Creating a Hard Edge - Using Auto Mask

In the midst of all these brush controls, you will see a little check box labeled Auto Mask. This is a very important control. When you check this box, Lightroom will attempt to limit your painting to specific areas. How does it do this? By looking for lines and other abrupt changes. As long as you don't go over these edges, Lightroom will help you by not spilling the effect over into that other area. Essentially, through this Auto Mask checkbox, Lightroom allows you to create hard edges using the Adjustment Brush.

- **Auto Mask On** - changes you make using the Adjustment Brush will be limited, based on lines and other abrupt changes. Use this when you want to make changes within defined areas.
- **Auto Mask Off** - changes you make using the Adjustment brush will spill over into other areas without regard to lines. Use this when you are trying to gradually blend in changes.

New adjustment brushes

Of course, you might want to make different changes to different parts of your picture. That's just fine. Just click New at the top of the Adjustment Brush controls and you will get a whole new Adjustment Brush. You can make different changes somewhere else. In addition, if you want to come back to the old changes, just click on the dot that will appear on your picture within the area you previously painted. When you do so, the Adjustment Brush sliders will re-appear and they will reflect the changes you already made. You can now adjust them further.

The Photoshop way: Masking

There is something of a constant theme regarding the difference between Photoshop and Lightroom. The theme is that Lightroom does a great job of allowing you to make changes and it is very simple, while Photoshop does an even better job but it is very complicated. Making local adjustments falls right in line with that theme. Photoshop provides a myriad of tools that allow you to make very specific selections - down to the individual pixel level - but it is more complicated.

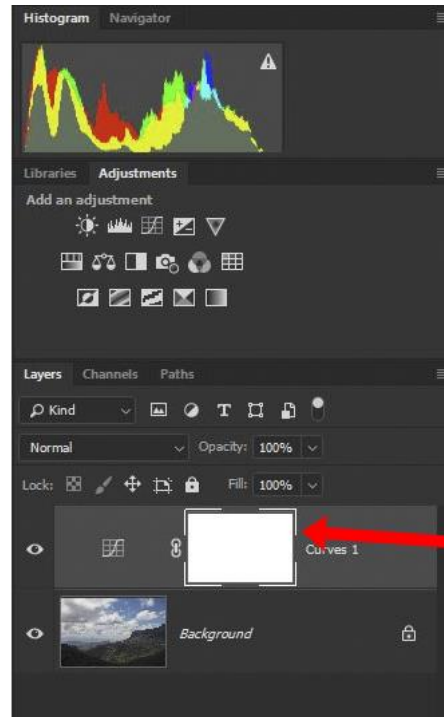
To get you started, I'm going to show you the two best ways to make selections. That will help keep things simple, so you aren't conflicted about which method to use. Even better, these aren't terribly complicated, but they are extremely powerful. We'll use one soft-edged technique (for blending in changes gradually) and one hard-edged technique (for making changes to discrete areas).

Soft Edges - Using the Brush

Just like Lightroom had the Adjustment Brush, Photoshop has its own brush tool. It is just called the Brush tool.

Before we talk about using the Brush tool, we need to talk big-picture with Photoshop for a second. In yesterday's lesson you learned how to make changes to brightness values to pictures. You learned that the best way is through the Curves Adjustment Layer. That's what we'll start with here. Whereas yesterday we focused on the change to brightness level, today we're going to focus on the fact that this set of controls is on its own layer.

Layers are one of the most powerful features in Photoshop. They allow you to make changes without affecting the underlying image. If you later decide to discard the changes, you can just delete the layer. Or you can just go back and make changes to it.



Layer Mask (white/reveal)
automatically added
to the Curves Adjustment Layer

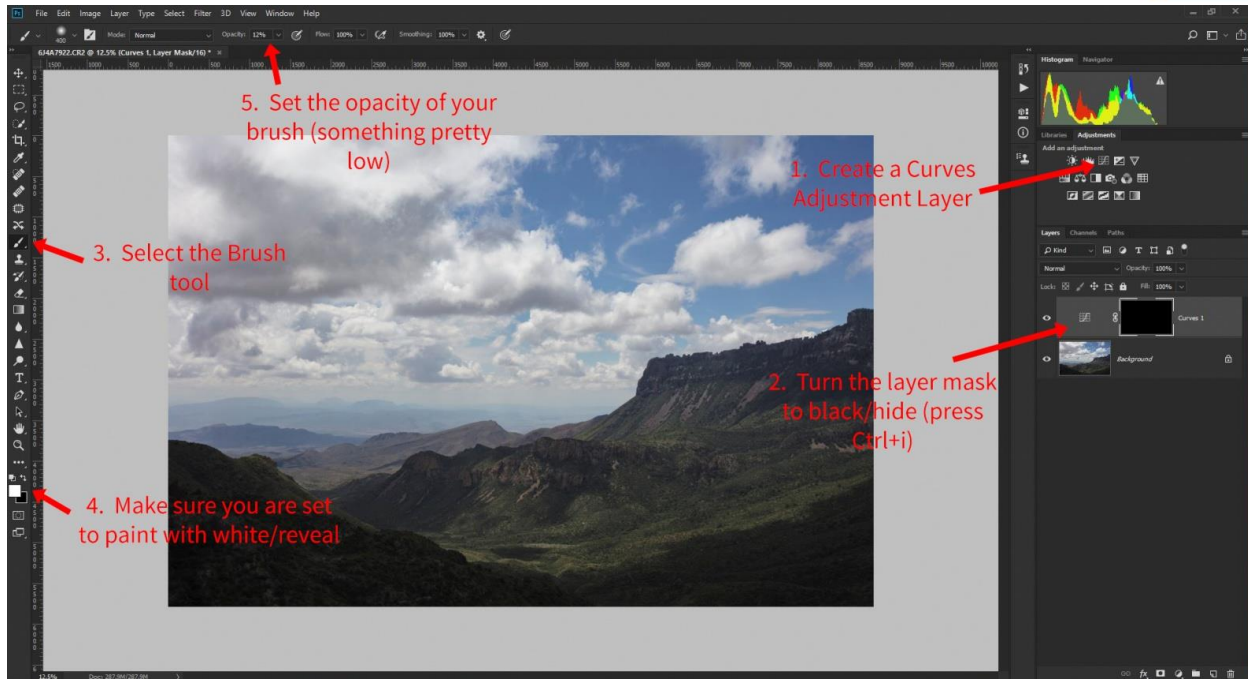
Attached to layers are something called layer masks. These determine the extent to which changes are allowed to shine through onto your picture. Let's take the simplest cases first. If you have a white layer mask, all changes apply to the underlying image. White means the changes shine through. If you have a black layer mask, however, none of the changes will apply to the underlying image. Black means the changes are blocked.

This is the key to making selections in Photoshop, particularly with the Brush. Without further ado, let's just show you how this works. Start with a picture and create a Curves Adjustment Layer. Make changes to the curve to brighten or darken the image. Now we're going to allow you to brush that effect in exactly where you want it and only to the extent that you want it.

- Convert your layer mask to black. To do so, just press Ctrl+I. That inverts your layer mask so it is black. Whatever changes you made to the image using the Curves Adjustment Layer are now hidden from view. You won't see them on your picture at the moment. Don't worry, they are still there - they are just hidden. Now we are going to use the Brush tool to unhide them to the extent you want.
- Select your Brush tool. You can select it from the tools on the left side of your screen, or just press B.

- Press D. That stands for default. It will just reset the colors of your Brush and make sure you are painting with white. Likely this was already the case, but it is good to make sure.
- Set the size of your Brush using the left and right bracket keys ([and] - same as the Adjustment Brush in Lightroom).
- Now set the opacity of your Brush. Do this by finding the Opacity control on the top of your screen and lower it. I suggest you do something like 10-15% for now. The idea is that you use this low opacity to slowly build up the effect where you want it. That will allow you to gradually blend in the change.
- Now just brush it in. Because you are using a low opacity, keep brushing away where you really want to see the effect. Just give it a stroke or two to places where you just want a little bit of the effect.

As you move along, you can check your work and make changes. Press the little eyeball to the left of your layer, which will toggle whether you can see that layer or not. If you turn that off, you will see the picture without the changes. Turn it back on to see the changes. Keep doing that to check on progress as you go. Keep in mind that you can also change the curve as you go. If you want to increase the effect you are making to the picture, just crank up the changes you make. You can decrease as well.



If you paint in areas where you did not mean to, or you just decide later to throttle back on things, you just paint with a black Brush. Press the X key, which will change your paint color to black. Now when you paint, the Brush tool will decrease the effect. Remember that a black layer mask hides the effect of the layer. Therefore, by painting with black, you are hiding the effect. Pressing X again will switch your Brush back to white.

Hard Edges - the Quick Selection Tool

Now we are going to talk about how to make changes to discrete portions of your image with hard edges. Photoshop excels at this, and there are a number of ways to do it. I'm only going to show you only one way, but in my view it is the best way. It is called the Quick Selection Tool. What we will do here is make a selection using this tool, and then make changes only to the portion of the image we selected using this tool.

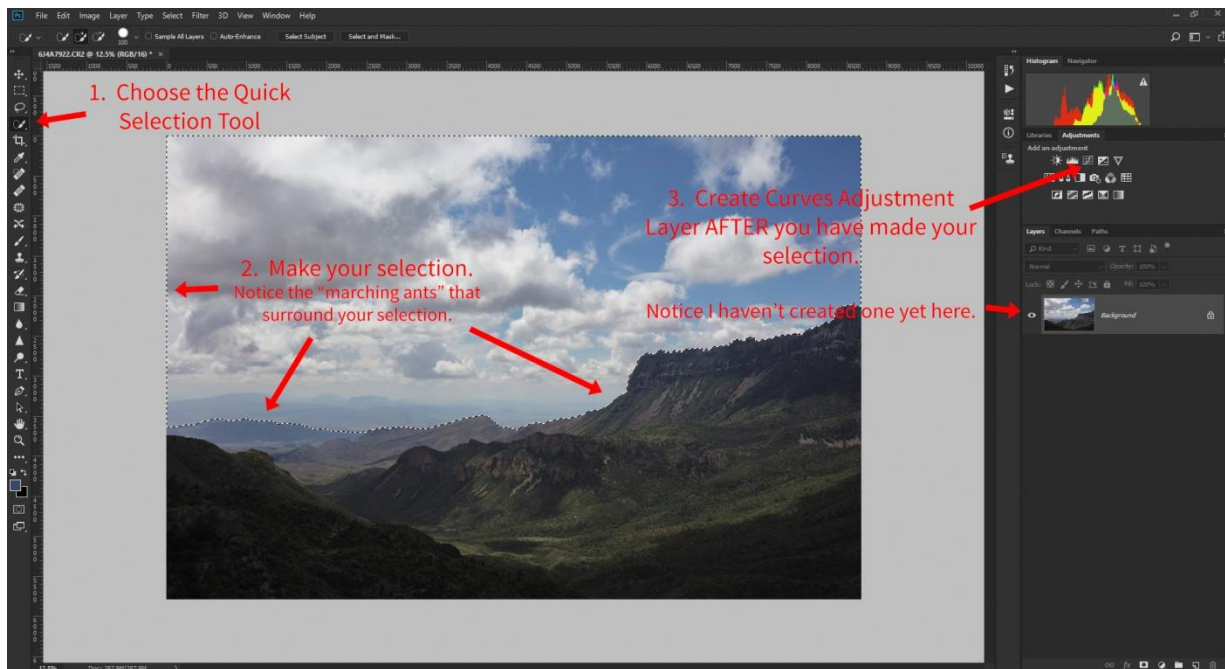
The Quick Selection Tool is listed in the tools on the left side of your screen. Just click on it, or you can press W to select it. Once you do that, just size your cursor using the left and bracket keys ([and]) and you are ready to go.

To use this tool, just click on the picture and drag around in the areas you want to select. You'll see the tool actively looking for edges, which it will attach to. If the edge isn't far enough out, just keep moving your cursor out until it grabs the correct edge. If you go too far, just press the Alt key while holding your mouse button down and that will remove from your selection. Drag around until it looks the way you want. It works really well and sometimes appears like magic.

Here's one key I want to mention right away. Do this selection process first - before making any changes to the image itself (like creating a Curves Adjustment Layer, which we will be doing here).

Once you have your selection defined, it is time to make changes to your selection. To do that, as will probably come as no surprise to you, we'll create a Curves Adjustment Layer. Just click on the Curves Adjustment Layer icon and watch what happens.

Nothing actually changes in your picture yet because you haven't changed the curve yet. But look at the layer mask for the Curves Adjustment Layer you just created. As you can see, Photoshop automatically creates a layer mask that only includes the area you selected with your Quick Selection Tool. That is to say, everything you selected will show up in White - meaning you can see the changes you make (or are about to make) - and everything not selected will show up in Black - meaning any changes you make will not appear in this area. Now you can make whatever changes you want to your tone curve and the change will only apply to the selected area.



That's really all there is to it, but there are a few additional tips I want to provide. Sometimes when you start making changes you'll see that your selection isn't quite as good as you hoped. In other words, you'll find that you didn't include areas you should have included or vice versa. I have found that the easiest way to clean that up is just to use your Brush tool. Just select the Brush tool (B) and paint with white or black, depending on whether you want to add or subtract to your selection.

Another handy thing is the ability to invert your selection. A lot of times your picture will fall into two discrete portions. A good example is a picture with the ground, which needs one set of changes, and the sky, which needs a completely different set of changes. Let's say you create a selection using the process set forth above for changing the ground. The rest of the picture is sky, so you invert the selection to make a selection of that, which you can then make changes to. To do that, choose Select > Reselect, which will reselect your prior selection, then choose Select > Inverse, which will invert the selection to choose the remainder of the image. Now create your Curves Adjustment Layer and you can make changes to that portion of your image.

Day 24 Assignment

Local Adjustments

Description:

Make changes to *discrete portions* of your picture using the Lightroom and Photoshop tools we discussed in this lesson. For example, you might darken the sky of your picture and lighten the foreground. Or you might brighten a person without changing the surrounding area.

Keys to Success:

- For quick and simple adjustments, use the Adjustment Brush in Lightroom. Most of the time, ensure that the Auto Mask box is checked.
- For more significant changes, unleash the power of Photoshop using masks and Curves Adjustment Layers.
 - For a soft transition, make the change first, then invert your mask (Ctrl+I) and brush in the change with a low opacity brush.
 - For a selection with a definite, hard edge, select pixels using the Quick Selection tool and then create a Curves Adjustment layer.

Upon Completion of this Assignment:

Now you can change what you want, but leave other parts of the picture alone. These techniques put you in complete control over the tones in your pictures.