

# FIX PHOTOS FAST



with  
ACTIONS



By Linda Sattgast

## Actions: Fix Photos Fast! Lighting Actions—Photoshop Elements

### Lighting 01: Lighter: Less Contrast

**Photos used in this lesson:**

lighting-01-lighter-less-contrast-1.jpg

lighting-01-lighter-less-contrast-2.jpg

When you see a photo that has a sharp distinction between light and dark, especially photos with harsh shadows that were taken in full sun, try using the action Lighter: Less Contrast. Click the play button on the Actions panel to apply it.

This action has turned out to be one of my most often used actions. If you go through everything this action does manually, it's kind of complicated, but using the action makes it almost instantaneous to apply.



You can modify the result of this action, as you'll see with this photo of my cat.

- You may occasionally want to run the Lighter: Less Contrast action twice.
- To lessen the effect of an action layer, you can either reduce the opacity of the layer in the Layers panel, or you can apply a layer mask.
- To apply a layer mask, in the Layers panel, click on the Add Layer Mask icon.
- Get the Brush tool. In Tool Options, open the Brush Picker and choose a soft brush. If you don't see a soft brush, reset your brushes by opening the Brush panel menu and choosing Default Brushes from the menu at the top. Set the Mode to Normal and set the Opacity to whatever you want for your brush. I used 50%.
- Make sure the Foreground color is black. If it isn't click on the curved arrow icon next to the Color Chips to switch colors.
- On your document, brush wherever you want to reduce the effect of the action.



## Lighting 02 Levels

### Photos used in this lesson:

lighting-03-levels-1.jpg

lighting-03-levels-2.jpg

Some photos only need a little bit of extra light to look good, and that's when a Levels adjustment would be appropriate.

- Select the Lighter: Levels action.
- Click the action play button.
- When the Levels dialog box comes up, adjust the sliders under the histogram, the graph in the middle.
- The histogram shows the tonal values in the photo and how much there is of each value.
- The right side of the histogram shows the light values.
- The left side of the histogram shows the dark values.
- The center part of the histogram shows the medium tone values.
- The sliders under the histogram correspond to the dark, medium, and light values.
- Many photos don't have histogram values that go all the way to the left or right, so you'll see a gap at one or both ends.
- To fix the photo move the right slider toward the left until the light tones look good.
- Move the left slider toward the right until the dark tones look good.
- Adjust the middle slider to the right or left depending on the effect you want.
- Moving the middle slider to the right makes your photo darker.
- Moving the middle slider to the left makes your photo lighter.
- Most of the time you'll only need to make modest changes.
- When you're satisfied with the lighting, click OK.
- Each photo has a unique histogram, but the main thing to remember is to move the sliders to the edge of the histogram.
- Very occasionally you may want to move the right or left slider further than the edge of the histogram





Here's another photo example. When I click to run the Levels action, I get a histogram that is a little different than last one. Some histograms will already stretch from side to side, and if that's the case, you might want to use a different action to adjust lighting.



## Lighting 03 Shadows/Highlights

### Photos used in this lesson:

lighting-02-shadows-highlights-1.jpg

lighting-02-shadows-highlights-2.jpg

The actions Lighter: Shadows/Highlights work well with photos that have dark areas you want to lighten without making the light areas too light.

- Look at the histogram first to see if the photo is missing tonal information. If so, run the Lighter: Levels action first.
- If parts of the photo are still too dark, run a Lighter: Shadows/Highlights action.
- There are four strengths of Shadows/Highlights actions, so choose the one that seems most appropriate.
- If the effect is too much, reduce the Opacity of the Shadows/Highlights layer.
- If you choose a Shadows/Highlights action that isn't right for your photo, simply delete it and try a different one.
- If you're not sure which strength to try, run the PLAY ALL Lighter: Shadows/Highlights action. Click on the visibility icon of the Shadows/Highlights layers to see the effect. Ctrl click (Mac: Cmd click) on the action layers you don't want and press the Delete key.



You can use a stronger layer of Shadows/Highlights with a layer mask to apply it only where you need it.

- Run Lighter: Shadows/Highlights maximum.
- Press Alt (Mac: Opt) and click on the Add Layer Mask icon to create a black mask that hides the Shadows/Highlights maximum layer.
- Get the Brush tool. In Tool Options, open the Brush Picker and choose a soft round brush. If you don't see a soft brush, reset your brushes by opening the Brush panel menu and choosing Default Brushes from the menu at the top. Set the Mode to Normal and set the Opacity to whatever you want for your brush. I used 30% opacity.
- Press the right or left Bracket keys to adjust the size of your brush.
- Make sure the Foreground Color Chip is white. If it isn't, press the letter D.
- Brush over dark areas of your photo to lighten them. The more you brush over the same area, the lighter it will get.



## Lighting 04 Lighter: Screen Blend Mode

### Photos used in this lesson:

lighting-04-screen-1.jpg

lighting-04-screen-2.jpg

Sometimes all you need is a little boost of light over the entire photo, and that's when the Lighter: Screen Blend Mode action comes in handy. If you manually create a duplicate layer and change the blend mode to Screen, most of the time it's way too light. The Screen Blend Mode action just gives you a little bit of light, and then, if you want more, you can simply run it again.

If the second time is too much, lower the opacity of the layer.



I often use the Screen blend Mode action along with another action. In this photo I'll first run the Lighter: Less Contrast action, and then add a slight boost of light with the Lighter: Screen Blend Mode action.



## Lighting 05 Darker: Multiply Blend Mode

### Photos used in this lesson:

lighting-05-multiply-1.jpg

lighting-05-multiply-2.jpg

Usually our photos need more light, but occasionally we take a photo that is too light. It's harder to get detail back in photos that are too light, but if there's detail in the photo, you can retrieve it by using the Multiply Blend mode.

- Select the Darker: Multiply Blend Mode action and click the action play button.
- If it isn't dark enough, you can run the action again.





Sometimes only part of a photo will need to be lightened, like the little boy in this photo. You can do that with a layer mask.

- Run the Darker: Multiply blend Mode action.
- If less than half the photo needs adjusting, you'll want to use a black mask. Press Alt (Mac: Opt) and click on the Add Layer Mask icon.
- Get the Brush tool, and in Tool Options set the Mode to Normal. Set the amount of opacity you want for your brush. I want 30%, so I'll press the number 3.
- Open the Brush Picker and choose soft brush. If you don't see a soft brush you can reset your brushes by opening the menu at the top of the Brush Picker and choosing Default Brushes.
- To paint some of the effect back in, make sure the Foreground Color Chip is white. If it isn't, press the letter D, which when you're in mask mode, makes the Foreground color white.
- Brush on your document wherever you want your image darkened.



## Lighting 06 Darker: Less Contrast

**Photo used in this lesson:**

lighting-06-darker-less-contrast.jpg

In this video we'll talk about a photo scenario that isn't very common, but it's a real problem when it happens. This is when you really over expose a photo, but there is still a dark area in the photo.

My example photo is overexposed, but there is a dark shirt in the photo, and the area under the hat is dark enough. When that's the case, try using the action Darker: Less Contrast. It works similarly to Lighter: Less Contrast, but it darkens instead of lightens. It will darken the lighter part of the photo without affecting the dark areas quite as much. They will get a little darker, but the photo will improve.

- If part of the photo is still too dark, click on the Add Layer Mask icon.
- Get the Brush tool. In Tool Options set the Mode to Normal. I used 50% Opacity for my brush.
- Open the Brush Picker and choose a soft round brush. If you don't see a soft round brush, choose Default Brushes from the menu at the top or click on the icon in the upper right corner to open the Brush Picker menu and choose Reset Brushes.
- Make sure the Foreground Color Chip is black. If it isn't, in the Tool Bar click on the curved arrow to switch Color Chips.
- Brush on your document wherever you want to hide the effect of the action layer.
- If your photo is still too light, run the action Darker: Less Contrast again.
- Copy the first mask you made to the new action layer by pressing Alt (Mac: Opt) and clicking and dragging the first mask thumbnail to the layer above it. NOTE: If your version won't copy a mask in this way, watch the Pre-



Class video for an alternative method.

- Now you can quickly brush with black over any other area that needs to be lighter. Again, you probably won't use the Darker: Less Contrast action very often, but when you need it, it'll come in handy.

## Lighting 07 Contrast

### Photos used in this lesson:

contrast-1.jpg

contrast-2.jpg

contrast-3.jpg

Since I've created two actions that decrease contrast, you may think I don't like contrast, but that is not the case. The majority of the photos I fix need a boost of contrast at some point or another in the editing process.

I often use the Contrast action to create more contrast. This action utilizes the Soft Light blend mode. Once you start using this action, you'll begin to recognize photos that need it. They'll have a certain lack luster grayness or fogginess about them.

- Select the Contrast action and click the Play button.
- The Contrast layer has a Soft Light blend mode, which lightens light areas and darkens the dark areas of your photo to create more contrast. It also makes the colors pop a bit more.
- The action sets the default opacity of Contrast layers at 50%, but you can increase or decrease the opacity as needed.
- Contrast can make the photo appear sharper.
- If you want more contrast, increase the layer opacity to 100%.
- For even more contrast, press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the Contrast layer and adjust the opacity of the duplicate layer as needed.

Even on a good photos I sometimes like to try the Contrast action just to see if it improves the photo.

When I tried it on this photo of a child in a high chair, the Contrast action gave the photo a small boost and made it appear slightly sharper, which is one of the effects of contrast



With some photos, like this ancient ruin from Ephesus, you may want to increase the opacity of the Contrast layer.

I've set the opacity of the Contrast layer to 50% in the action, because I've found that to be the most common amount of opacity most photos need, but you may need to adjust that number to anywhere from 10% to 100%.





## Lighting 08 High Key

### Photos used in this lesson:

lighting-08-high-key-1.jpg

lighting-08-high-key-2.jpg

lighting-08-high-key-3.jpg

One of the popular looks with photos is to have a really light image, which is called a High Key effect. I've included an action called Lighter: High Key to achieve this effect or to simply add a lot of light to a photo.

- Run the Lighter: High Key action.
- By default the High Key layer is at 50% opacity.
- Decrease the layer opacity if you want less light.
- Increase the layer opacity if you want more light.



The next photo, lighting-08-high-key-2.jpg, looked plenty light, but I tried High Key anyway. This time I decreased the opacity to 30% instead of 50%





The third example is a teenage girl, lighting-08-high-key-3.jpg. I ran the High Key action and left it at the default setting of 50% opacity.

So use the High Key action to create a lighter-than-normal photo, or when you need to add a lot of light to a dark photo.

