

COLOR CORRECTING YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS

One of the first steps, and the most important step in color correcting your images, is to first calibrate your monitor. There are several methods and tools at your disposal.

One of the easiest ways to do this is to use a monitor calibration tool. Several companies make all kinds of versions but there are only a few out there I trust and use.

Datacolor Spyder 4 Elite is a great tool to use to calibrate your monitor. It is easy to use and does a decent job at displaying accurate color. This is the one I use and you can purchase it for around \$200.00. If you print your own photographs, they also sell another tool that goes with the Spyder that calibrates your monitor and your printer. So what you see is what you get.



X-rite also makes several monitor calibration tools such as the **X-Rite ColorMunki**. It is also easy to use and does a decent job at displaying accurate colors.



There is software that you can use to try and zone in on a decent monitor calibration, but if you are a professional photographer than this wouldn't really benefit you.

Now that you have your monitor calibrated and know you can accurately display colors, your next step is to buy a gray card or color checker to help aid you in capturing the correct colors on set or on location. Yes you can use these for portrait work along with landscape and wildlife shoots.



Now that you have done everything to accurately display the colors on your screen, it is time to import and work on your images.

In the following sections I will show you different ways to go about processing your images to use the above tools and what to do if you do not have all the fancy gadgets to help you make sure you have perfect colors.

COLOR CORRECTING YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS

Whether you're outdoors or within a studio, you can use a grey card or color checker to help color correct your photographs. Both of these tools do the same thing but with a color checker you get a bonus. They have certain color swatches, usually a neutral grey, pure white and pure black. The color picker has several different swatches to better correct your images and it comes with software to create a color profile based off of the color checker used in your sample image. You can then apply this to your photographs to display the correct colors.

USING A GREY CARD OR COLOR CHECKER

1. When placing your grey card within your scene, make sure that it has the same angle of light falling on it as your subject and the same camera angle. Normally, if it is a person I am photographing I will have them hold the card in front of their face.
2. After you have taken your grey card image, you are okay to photograph the rest of your shoot. I like to do this as my first shot after I have everything setup so I don't forget at the end of the shoot.
3. Import your images into Adobe Lightroom, Photoshop, or the program of your choice.
4. Now create a curves adjustment layer. You will see three eyedroppers. The top one is for setting your shadow details, the middle one for midtones, and the bottom one for setting the highlights.
5. Select the top Black Point Eyedropper and click on the black swatch to set the shadows.
6. Now select the Gray Point Eyedropper and click on the dark grey swatch to set the midtones.
7. Now select the White Point Eyedropper to set the highlights. This will basically correct itself. Your image is now color corrected.

APPLYING YOUR SETTING TO MULTIPLE IMAGES

If you shot in JPG mode or opened your images in Photoshop without using the Adobe Raw Converter, this is how you would apply your settings to multiple photographs.

USING PHOTOSHOP BYPASSING CAMERA RAW

1. In your curves dialog box, click on the arrow pointing down with the lines next to it. Click on save curves preset. This will save your settings to use in other images with the same lighting.
2. Now open an image that you want to apply the same setting too.
3. Create a new curves adjustment layer.
4. Click the same arrow that you used to save the curves preset but this time click load preset.
5. Click on the curves preset you created and click load.
6. You have now color corrected your image.

USING ADOBE RAW OR BRIDGE TO COLOR CORRECT YOUR IMAGES

USING ADOBE RAW OR BRIDGE

1. Select all the images, including your grey card image, and open those in Adobe Camera Raw. If you're using Bridge, you can select them all, press Command-R (PC: Ctrl-R), and you'll see all the images appear in a filmstrip on the left side of the Camera Raw window.
2. Select the White Balance tool (I) from the Toolbar (it is the eyedropper half-filled with grey), and click it directly on the grey swatch.
3. Your White Balance is now set.

APPLYING YOUR SETTINGS

1. Either click the select all or press and hold the Command (PC: Ctrl) key and click on any images in the filmstrip on the left that you want to have this exact same white balance setting.
2. Next click on the Synchronize button at the top of the filmstrip. This brings up a dialog box with several setting that you can copy. Either select all to apply all changed or just check the White balance option.
3. You have now applied and color corrected all of your images.

NO GREY CARD, NO WORRIES

This is a really useful and cool trick to help you find middle grey within a scene if you do not have a grey card. It works most of the time but not always.

APPLYING YOUR SETTINGS

1. Open the image you want color corrected.
2. Create a new layer.
3. Click on Edit>Fill (Shift-F5)
4. When the dialog box comes up, under Contents use the drop down box to select 50% grey and click apply.
5. Change the blend mode to difference.
6. Now create a threshold adjustment layer.
7. Now drag the slider under the histogram all the way to the left (your photo will turn completely white). Now, slowly drag the slider back to the right, and the first areas that appear in black are the neutral midtones.
8. To help you remember where those areas are, use the Color Sampler Tool. Use this tool to select a few different areas that have a good density of black. I do this because sometimes you can get a less than desirable result or you may find you like one area over another.
9. Once you have done this you can delete the two layers you created and return to your original image layer.
10. Create a Curves Adjustment layer.
11. Select the Midtone Eyedropper (the one in the middle of the three) and click the areas that you sampled with the Color Sampler Tool. Decide which one you like the best.
12. You have now color corrected your image.

USING A LEVELS ADJUSTMENT LAYER

Using a levels adjustment layer is a quick and simple way to adjust your images. It is great for beginners and works across most of the editing programs. Keep in mind that it doesn't always produce the best results.

1. Create a Levels Adjustment layer.
2. You will see a drop down named RGB. You will select each level, Red, Green, and Blue to color correct your image.
3. Now you will be adjusting your histogram. In each channel, slide the right slider all the way to the left until it reaches the start of the peak.
4. Your image will look extremely messed up until you finish each channel.
5. Once you finish, observe your image and make sure there is not a blue, green or red cast. If there is, go back to the channel with the color cast and adjust it to the left or right to adjust.

CONCLUSION

I hope these tips have been helpful and you are on your way to correctly displaying photographs with accurate color. Do keep in mind there are situations where you may not want to have properly color corrected images. If you are a fine art photographer or landscape photographer that wants to boost the vibrance or saturation of the sky and so on. This techniques work great as a starting point.

When I work on any of my images my first steps are to color correct the images I will be using, whether it be a landscape or portrait, and then I start my creative edits, adjusting vibrance etc.

If you want to view more tutorials, you can go to <http://shaunschlagerphotography.blogspot.com/>