



Fundamental Photoshop

Little things make a big difference when working in Photoshop

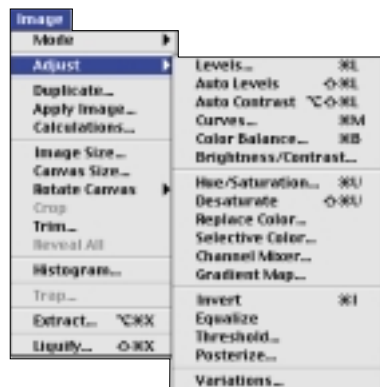
BY BEN WILLMORE

Learning to adjust

This month, we're going to explore Photoshop's adjustment options. But instead of looking at the choices in the Image>Adjust menu, you'll learn something more useful; general principles that apply to most, if not all of the adjustment choices.

When you choose Image>Adjust from Photoshop's menu, you'll notice some of the submenu items have three periods (ellipsis) after them and others don't. Three periods after a submenu item means that a dialog box full of options will appear, prompting you for settings to use. Many of the choices that don't have periods after them are simply shortcuts for things that could be done using one of the other choices. For instance, Desaturate does the same thing as choosing Hue/Saturation and lowering the Saturation setting to zero. Another clue that some commands are related is that their keyboard commands will be very similar (such as Levels and Auto Levels).

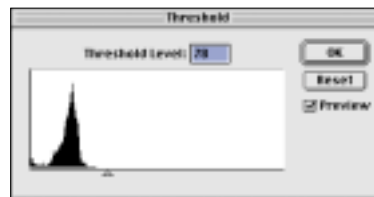
You might notice that each time you use an adjustment that involves a dialog box, it will always start with the default settings. If you'd rather have it use the last settings you used in this Photoshop session, then hold the Option (PC: Alt) key when choosing the adjustment. You can even use the keyboard shortcuts listed in the menu and add Option (PC: Alt) to do the same thing.



Three periods after the name of an adjustment choice indicates that a dialog box will appear asking you for settings.

Once you're in an adjustment dialog box, you'll have a bunch of choices that are available with all adjustments. First off, you can press Esc instead of clicking the Cancel button. You can also press Enter as a substitute for clicking the OK button. Or, hold the Option (PC: Alt) key, and the Cancel button will change into a Reset button, which will bring you back to default settings. You can also hold Option (or Alt) and then press Esc to reset things back to their default settings.

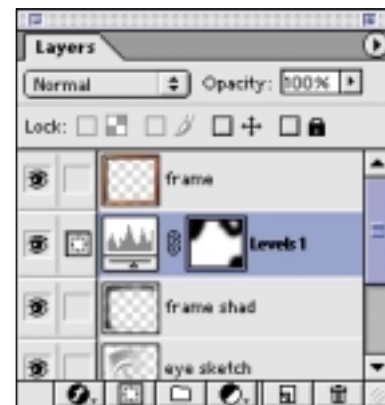
In most adjustment dialog boxes, you'll find that a number changes whenever you move one of the sliders. As an alternative to playing around with the sliders, you can click on one of those numbers and then use the up and down arrow keys to change the number in small increments, or add Shift to change the number in larger increments. If you'd like to find out what range of numbers can be used for a particular setting, enter a ridiculously high number—say 9999999—and then press Enter. Photoshop should then tell you the range that's usable. If the dialog box you're in has more than one number field, then you can press Tab to cycle through the fields and quickly change each setting.



Hold the Option (PC: Alt) key to change Cancel into Reset.

When adjusting an image, you can compare the original and adjusted versions by toggling the Preview button off and on.

All the choices under the Image>Adjust menu will only affect the layer that's currently active. If you'd like your adjustment to affect multiple layers, then choose one of the options under the Layer>New Adjustment Layer submenu. This will apply an adjustment as a separate layer that will change all the layers below it, but none of the layers above it. Not only that, but when an adjustment layer is active, you can use the Eraser tool to erase the adjustment from parts of your image (erased areas show as black in the Layers palette). You can also use the Paintbrush tool to paint the adjustment back into an area you previously erased.



Adjustment layers apply to all the layers underneath, but none that are above it.

You can even double-click on the left thumbnail image for an adjustment layer in the Layers palette to change the adjustment settings you've used. ■

Ben Willmore is the founder of Digital Mastery, a Colorado-based training and consulting company which presents the national seminar tour of "Photoshop Mastery." Ben provides hundreds of free Photoshop tips and tutorials on his Web site www.digitalmastery.com.