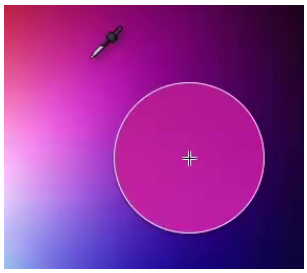
Point Color & Variance

In this guide, I'll walk you through the Point Color feature in Lightroom, Lightroom Classic, and Adobe Camera Raw (ACR), focusing on the Variance slider and its practical applications. This is a powerful tool I now use regularly, and I think you will too once you understand it!

Accessing Point Color
The Point Color tool is located in the Color Mixer panel within the Develop module of Lightroom Classic. Inside the Color Mixer, you'll see two tabs: "Mixer" for adjusting individual colors and "Point Color," where you'll find the Variance slider.

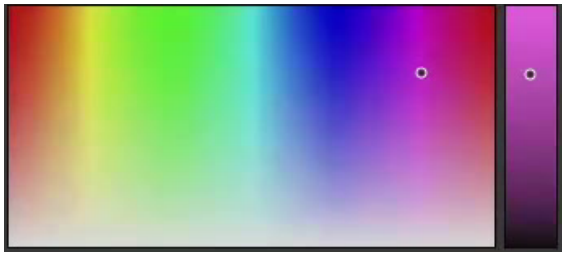
Selecting a Color with the Eyedropper
To use Point Color, the first thing you'll need to do is grab the eyedropper tool and click on a specific color within your image.

Visual Aids:



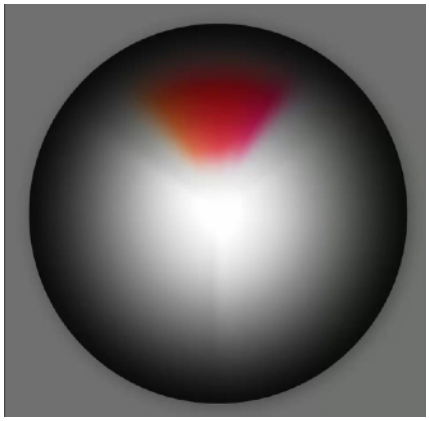
Enlargement Circle: A circle pops up to give you a magnified preview of the color you're about to select.

Color Bar: Look to the right side of your screen for a vertical bar that displays a more vivid representation of the color you're hovering over. This is especially useful when working with subtle colors.



Understanding the Color Range
After selecting a color, Lightroom displays the range of colors that will be affected by your adjustments. You can expand or collapse the range controls using the controls under the ”Range" heading.

Visualize Range: Check this box to see a black-and-white representation of the areas *not* being affected by your selection. This helps you understand the scope of your adjustments.



Adjusting the Color Range: Granular Controls
Expanding the "Range" section by clicking on its triangle reveals several sliders for fine-tuning the color range:

Range Slider: A general slider to expand or contract the overall range of affected colors.

Hue Range: Controls the range of hues (basic colors) affected. The area inside the rectangle receives the full adjustment, with a gradual fade-out towards the edges, determined by the gap between the rectangle and the slider handle.

Saturation Range: Determines the range of color saturation (vividness) that will be affected.

Luminance Range: Selects the range of brightness levels to be adjusted.

Pro Tip: When adjusting the Hue Range, always leave a little gap between the edge of the range and the slider handles to create a softer, more natural transition.

Color Mixer Adjustments

These sliders allow you to modify the selected color range:

Hue Shift: Changes the basic color within the selected range.

Saturation: Adjusts the color's vividness (more or less colorful).

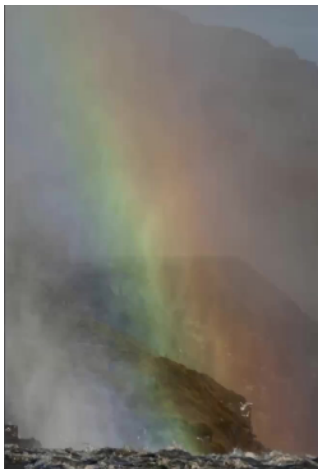
Luminosity: Modifies the brightness of the selected range.

Variance: Decreasing Variance shifts the colors *adjacent* to the selected color on the color wheel *towards* the selected color. Increasing Variance pushes the adjacent colors *away* from the selected color, creating greater differentiation.

Color Wheel Awareness: Always visualize the color wheel! Variance affects colors based on their proximity *on the wheel*, not necessarily their physical proximity in the image.

Practical Examples

Enhancing a Rainbow
Let's say I want to make a rainbow more prominent.



1. **Select Colors:** Using the eyedropper, click on different areas of the rainbow. Remember that you can adjust three colors at once: the one directly under the circle and the ones to the immediate right and left on the color wheel.
2. **Adjust Variance:** Increase the Variance to create a greater difference between the colors in the rainbow.
3. **Fine-Tune Ranges:** Adjust the Hue, Saturation, and Luminance ranges to refine the effect and ensure smooth transitions. Narrowing the hue range creates more space for the fade out.

Evening Out a Blue Sky

It's rare that I'll apply Point Color to an entire image without a mask. This allows for localized adjustments and prevents unwanted changes.

1. **Create a Mask:** Use Lightroom's masking tools (e.g., "Sky" selection) to isolate the area you want to adjust.
2. **Access Point Color:** Make sure you are using the Point Color adjustments *within* the Masking panel, *not* the one in the global Color Mixer.
3. **Select a Color:** Use the eyedropper to click on the tone within the sky that you most desire and then lower the Variance setting.
4. **Correcting Masking Errors:** Sky masks often cover more than just the sky. Hover over the mask name to see a red overlay, revealing the areas being affected. Change the overlay to 'color overlay on black and white' for better accuracy. Use the Subtract tool with either the Object selection or a brush to remove unwanted areas from the mask. You can also try using the Landscape > Architecture subtract option.

Isolating a Wide Range of the Same Color

1. **Select a Color:** Click on the color you want to target, in this case the sun-lit red from the side of the building.
2. **Visualize Range:** Turn on "Visualize Range."
3. **Adjust Ranges:** Use the Hue, Saturation, and Luminance ranges to exclude unwanted areas from the adjustment. Here's how to adjust the luminance range to target darker reds: Expand the Saturation range to include mellow colors, then limit the Hue range to exclude yellowish colors.

Start Global, Then Mask

Here's a quick way to create a mask that allows you to adjust the entire image:

1. **Create Initial Mask:** Select the brush tool and click once on the image.
2. **Invert:** Check the "Invert" box in the mask settings. This will select *everything but* the area you brushed.
3. **Paint:** Paint over the area you previously painted on to replace the masked area.

Fall Color with Multiple Masked Adjustments

Often, I'll duplicate a mask multiple times to isolate and fine-tune different color ranges within the same area. This saves time and ensures consistency.

1. **Create Initial Mask:** Create a mask that selects the general area you want to adjust (e.g., "Vegetation").
2. **Adjust Variance (First Mask):** Use the Variance slider on the first mask to create initial color separation (e.g., make greens and oranges more distinct).
3. **Duplicate Mask:** Duplicate the mask by right-clicking on it and selecting "Duplicate."
4. **Reset (Duplicated Mask):** Reset the adjustments on the duplicated mask.
5. **Fine-Tune (Duplicated Mask):** Use a second point color adjustment and adjust the Hue, Saturation, and Luminance sliders to precisely adjust individual colors within the duplicated mask (e.g., target only the greens and mellow their saturation).

Point Color on People

Below are some useful adjustments to apply to photos of people.

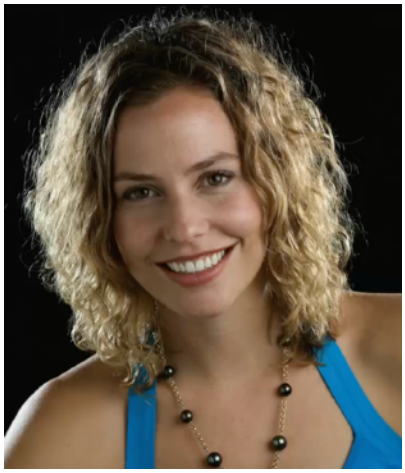
Correcting Skin Tones

1. **Create a Mask:** Select the person in the image using the Object Selection tool, or by manually painting a mask.
2. **Select a Color:** Click on a well-lit area of the skin.
3. **Reduce Variance:** Lower the Variance to make the shaded areas of the skin look more similar to the lit areas.

Multiple Masks for Portraits

1. **Create Separate Masks:** Use the "Person" mask and create separate masks for teeth, lips, eyes (iris and whites), and facial skin.
2. **Adjust Each Mask:**

Teeth: Select the whitest tooth, adjust luminance range to include darker areas, and lower variance to brighten shadows.



Lips: Select the most colorful part of the lip and lower the variance to make the rest of the lips look more similar. You can try bringing the range slider up to make the highlights more red.

Eyes (Iris): Select an in-between color in the iris and increase variance to enhance color variations. Bring up the whites to brighten the eyes.

Eyes (Whites): Select the brightest, least colorful part of the eye. Lower variance to reduce redness.

Face: Select a good area of skin and lower variance to reduce redness in cheeks and shadows.