

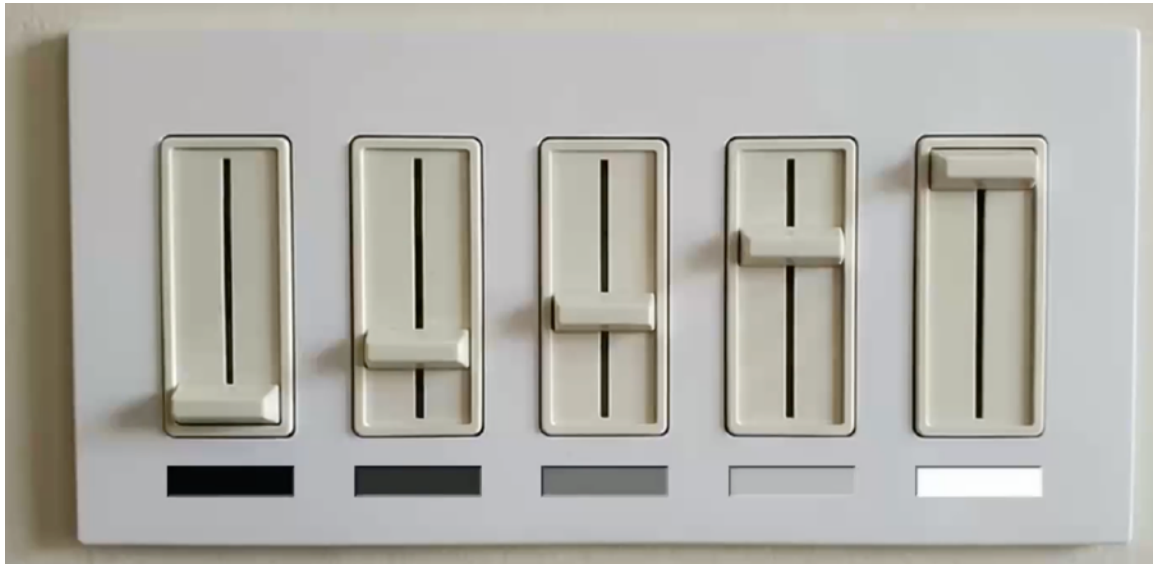


Curves: Pro-Level Tone & Color Control

This lesson explores the versatile adjustment tool, Curves, in Photoshop, focusing on its application for tone and color control in images.

Understanding Curves for Tone Control

Curves is an advanced yet powerful tool for adjusting image brightness and contrast without affecting color. The concept can be explained through an analogy of dimmer switches, where each dimmer controls a specific light or brightness level.



- **Dimmer Switch Analogy:** Individual dimmers represent brightness levels. Moving a dimmer up increases brightness, and down decreases it.
- **Curves vs. Simple Dimmers:** Unlike simple dimmers controlling single lights, Curves manipulate multiple brightness levels simultaneously. The diagonal line in the Curves dialog represents the initial state of light for each brightness level.
- **Contrast and Steepness:** The steepness of the curve indicates contrast. A steeper curve between two points signifies a larger difference in brightness, enhancing detail visibility. Conversely, a flatter curve reduces contrast.

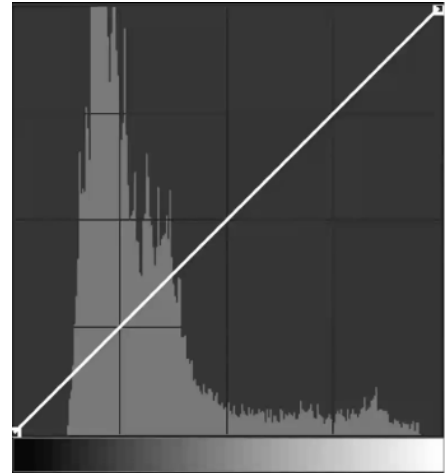
- **Inversion Warning:** Inverting an image (making dark areas bright and vice versa) by making the curve go downwards is strongly advised against, as it leads to unnatural results.



Building the Curves Dialog Box

The Curves dialog box has several key components that, when understood, make the tool more intuitive.

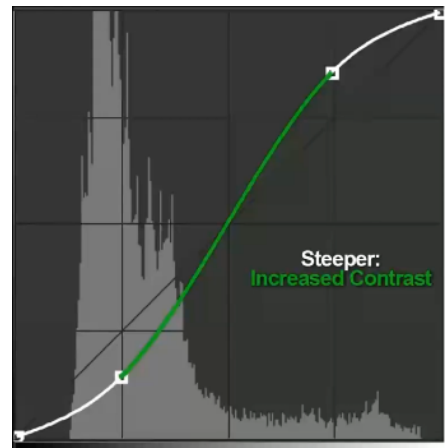
- **Gradient Bar:** At the bottom, a black-to-white gradient represents all possible brightness levels.
- **Grid and Diagonal Line:** The grid displays a diagonal line, indicating the default light output for each brightness level. This serves as the baseline for adjustments.
- **Histogram:** A bar chart overlay on the grid shows the distribution of brightness levels in the image, with taller bars indicating more prevalent tones.
- **Targeted Adjustment Tool (Hand Tool):** This tool allows users to click on an image area, create a point on the curve, and then drag up or down to adjust the brightness of that specific tone level.
- **Baseline Comparison:** The baseline (original diagonal line) is crucial for understanding adjustments. Points above the baseline indicate added light (brightening), while points below indicate reduced light (darkening).



Practical Application: Tone Adjustments in Images

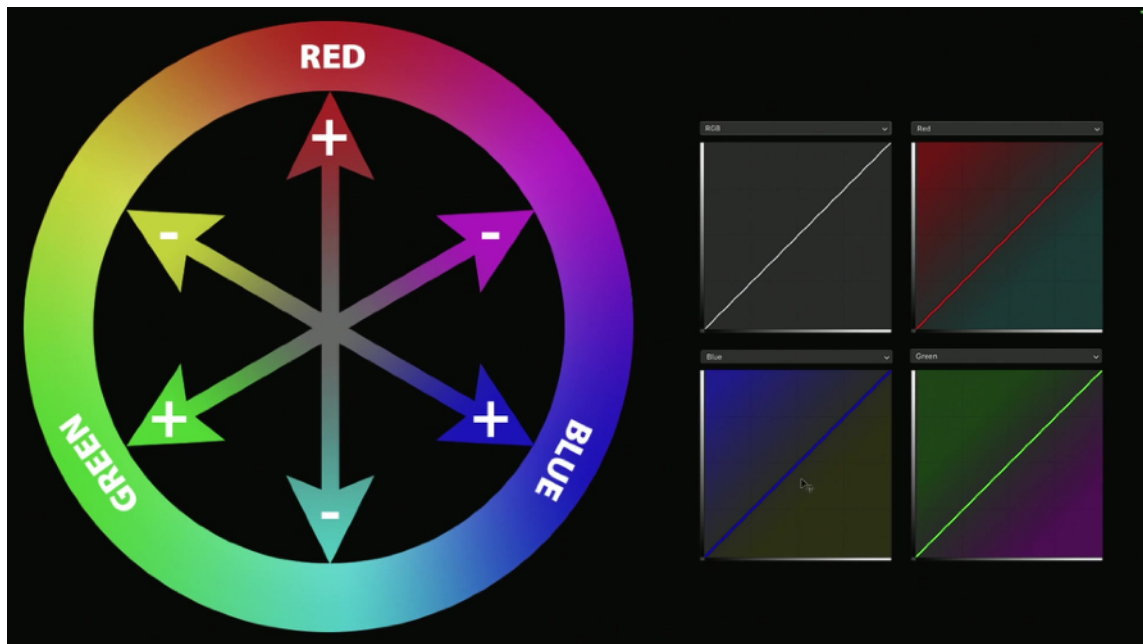
There's too much detail about how to use curves to explain it completely in this document, so I'll only provide some basic pointers here. Use the video as your guide for this section.

- **Reducing Brightness:** In an example with a bright area in a photo, I used the Object Selection Tool to isolate the area. Then, with the Curves adjustment layer active, the Hand Tool is used to click and drag the corresponding point on the curve downwards, reducing the light and making the area less prominent.
- **Enhancing Contrast:** To make a statue pop, I selected the statue and used the Hand Tool to drag downwards on darker areas and upwards on brighter areas. This steepens the curve between these points, increasing contrast and detail.
- **Matching Brightness Levels:** To blend a brighter area with its surroundings, I identified the target brightness level by hovering over a matching area. This value is then input into the Curves adjustment for the selected area, making them visually consistent.



Curves for Color Control

Beyond tone, Curves can also be used to precisely adjust the color balance of an image.



- **Color Basics (RGB):** Images are composed of red, green, and blue (RGB) pixels. Adjusting the brightness of these primary colors creates all other colors. When all three are balanced, shades of gray are produced.
- **Individual Color Channels:** In the Curves dialog, users can select Red, Green, or Blue channels to adjust the intensity of specific colors. Moving a curve upwards in the Red channel, for instance, adds more red to the image.
- **Color Matching:** To match a specific color, the Info panel is used to read the RGB values of a target color. These values are then input into the corresponding Red, Green, and Blue curves for the area being adjusted.
- **Luminosity Blending Mode:** When adjusting color with Curves, it's often beneficial to change the layer's blending mode to "Luminosity" at the top of the Layers panel. This ensures that only the brightness is affected, preventing unwanted color shifts.

Advanced Color Adjustments

The session delves into more nuanced color adjustments using Curves.

- **Adding Color to Black Objects:** To introduce color to a black object, the brightest areas of the black are targeted. By adjusting the Red, Green, and Blue values in Curves to match a desired color's RGB values, color can be "pushed" into the object.
- **Using Opposites:** When targeting specific colors like yellow, users can work with the Blue channel, as reducing blue leads towards yellow. This allows for more precise color shifts.
- **Sample Size:** When sampling colors, setting the "Sample Size" in the options bar at the top of your screen to a larger area (e.g., 5x5 or 11x11 pixels) instead of a single point can yield more accurate and averaged color results, especially on textured surfaces.

