



Refining B&W Images

In this lesson, we'll learn how to refine black and white images using mask adjustments in Adobe Camera Raw or Lightroom. This goes beyond basic slider adjustments to enhance specific areas of your photos, creating more compelling visual narratives.

### Key Concepts

- **Mask Adjustments (00:53):** Apply localized edits to specific parts of an image, allowing for targeted refinements beyond global slider adjustments.
- **Object Selection Tool (02:30):** A powerful tool that automatically detects and isolates distinct objects within an image, simplifying mask creation.
- **Shift + N Shortcut (03:46):** A keyboard shortcut to quickly create a new mask of the same type as the currently active mask, speeding up repetitive tasks.
- **Curve Adjustment (06:47):** A versatile tool that allows for precise control over tonal ranges, essential for forcing areas to solid white or black.
- **Linear Gradient Mask (14:53):** A mask that applies adjustments gradually over a defined area, useful for smoothing transitions and creating atmospheric effects.
- **Auto Mask (12:03):** A brush setting that helps confine brush strokes to areas of similar color, preventing unintended overspray.
- **Histogram (17:57):** A graphical representation of the tonal distribution in an image, useful for identifying clipped highlights or pure blacks.
- **Duplicate and Invert Mask (37:00):** A technique to create a mirrored or opposite version of an existing mask, efficiently creating complementary adjustments.

### Refining Black and White Images with Masks

This section will walk you through the process of using masks to enhance specific elements in your black and white photographs. We'll start with an example of how to remove distracting color and then delve into techniques for achieving pure whites and blacks.

#### Initial Image and Color Removal

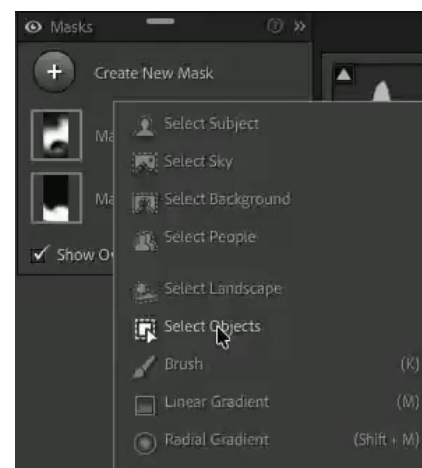
My first example image is an iPhone panorama that had distracting color elements. The goal was to shift the viewer's focus from the color to the graphic qualities of the image, specifically the spiral staircase.

The original image had color that pulled attention away from the desired focal point. By converting to black and white and using masks, I aimed to guide the viewer's eye through the image's shapes and lines. The final result has no color distractions, emphasizing the spiral and leading the eye through the composition.

#### Masking Windows for Detail Removal

A key adjustment in the first example was removing detail from the windows to achieve a cleaner look. This was accomplished using the "Objects" mask type.

1. **Create a New Mask:** Navigate to the masking area in Lightroom or Adobe Camera Raw and select "New Mask."
2. **Choose Object Type:** Select "Objects" as the mask type.
3. **Paint Over the Object:** Click and drag to paint over one section of the window. Lightroom will automatically detect and mask the object.



4. **Add More Objects:** If the initial selection doesn't cover the entire window, click on the mask to expand it and select "Add." Then, choose "Add Object" and paint over the remaining parts of the window.
5. **Use Keyboard Shortcut:** To efficiently add more object masks, highlight the active mask component in the mask panel, and then press Shift + N. This shortcut creates another mask of the same type, allowing you to quickly paint over additional window sections.
6. **Repeat for All Windows:** Continue using the Shift + N shortcut to paint over all the window panes. The presenter notes that this process can seem time-consuming but is relatively quick once accustomed to it.



### Forcing Areas to Solid White with Curves

Sometimes, standard adjustments like exposure and whites aren't enough to achieve pure white. For these situations, the presenter demonstrates a reliable method using the curve adjustment.

1. **Select the Mask:** Ensure the mask you want to adjust (e.g., the window mask) is active.
2. **Access the Curve Tool:** In the adjustment panel for the selected mask, navigate to the "Curve" section. Ensure the "Light" option (far left) is selected to work with brightness.
3. **Maximize Brightness:** Grab the dot in the upper-right corner of the curve graph and drag it all the way to the top.



This forces all tones within the masked area to use the maximum amount of light, ensuring they become solid white.

### Refining Central and Bottom Areas

Following the window adjustments, I made modifications to the central and bottom portions of the image to guide the viewer's eye.

- **Central Area Brightening:** A mask was created using a soft-edged brush to subtly brighten the central part of the image, drawing attention to that area.
- **Bottom Area Contrast Adjustment:** Another mask was applied to the bottom of the image. The presenter increased contrast and used the "Dehaze" slider to add density and make the dark areas darker, enhancing the overall mood.

### Forcing Areas to Solid Black with Curves

Similar to achieving solid white, you can force areas to solid black using the curve adjustment. This is particularly useful when standard sliders are insufficient.

1. **Select the Mask:** Ensure the target mask is active.
2. **Access the Curve Tool:** Navigate to the "Curve" section, making sure "Light" is selected (the white circle at the top of the curve instead of the red, green or blue circles).

3. **Minimize Light:** Grab the dot in the upper-right corner of the curve graph and drag it all the way to the bottom.

This forces all tones within the masked area to use zero light, resulting in solid black.

- **Confirming Pure Black:** To verify if an area is truly black, I suggest using the histogram's upper-left triangle. Hovering over it reveals an overlay of pure black areas.

Additionally, hovering the mouse over the image displays RGB values below the histogram; for pure black, all three numbers should be zero.



### Refining Subject and Backgrounds

In another example here are some of the techniques I used:

- **Highlighting Subject's Skin:** Masks were created to isolate the skin of a person, specifically her legs and shoulders, and her overall skin tone. The "Whites" slider was increased to brighten the skin and make the subject pop.
- **Blending Background Elements:** A mask was used to darken a distracting wall element between the subject's legs, helping it blend in better.
- **Enhancing Grout Lines:** To make grout lines more prominent, a mask was created by selecting objects and then using a brush to refine the selection. The "Whites" slider was increased to brighten these lines.
- **Balancing Light and Dark Areas:** Several masks were used to selectively darken areas that were brighter than adjacent ones, creating a more balanced and directed gaze towards the subject.



### **Dramatic Transformations**

Another example of how to refine an image to a more compelling final version:

**Darkening the Dome:** The dome at the top of an image was darkened.

**Enhancing Text Detail:** Masks were used to make the text and details in the upper part of a triangular structure more pronounced, using "Dehaze" or "Clarity" sliders.

**Brightening Text Area:** Another mask specifically targeted the text area to brighten it and match the tone of the area above.

**Darkening Small Elements:** A very small element was isolated and darkened to reduce its prominence.

**Adding Contrast to Bottom Area:** The bottom area of the image was brightened and had its contrast increased.

**Making Columns Prominent:** The columns were isolated and brightened separately to make them stand out.

**Highlighting Door Frame:** The door and its frame were isolated and brightened to make them more visible.

