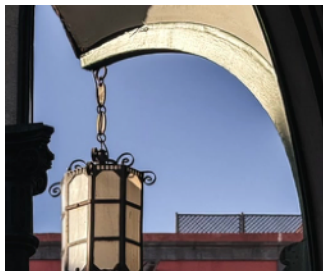
Fixing Issues with Skies

In this lesson, we'll explore techniques to enhance skies in your images using Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Camera Raw (ACR), focusing on how to address common issues that make skies look unnatural. The goal is to ensure skies complement your images without appearing artificial or degraded by global adjustments.

Key Concepts

1. Halos and Glows (00:00:65): Specific sliders in ACR and Lightroom (highlights, shadows, clarity, and dehaze) can cause unwanted halos or glows in skies, especially in areas lacking detail.
2. Sky Masks (00:02:0): Sky masks in Lightroom aren't always precise, often fading into object edges, but are generally suitable for global adjustments to the sky.
3. Opposing Adjustments (00:02:12): To counteract halos, apply the opposite adjustments to the sky mask compared to the global settings (e.g., if global highlights are -21, set the sky mask highlights to +21).
4. White Balance and Color Temperature (00:10:26): Adjusting the white balance or color temperature of the sky can prevent unnatural cloud neutrality and add a pleasing warmth.
5. Mask Refinement (00:16:53): Zoom in and use overlay tools to refine masks, ensuring they accurately target the sky and avoid unwanted artifacts on other objects.

Addressing Halos and Glows



The main problem addressed is skies looking unnatural due to halos or glows, often caused by adjustments made using the **highlights**, **shadows**, **clarity**, and **dehaze** sliders. These adjustments, while improving the overall image, can create unwanted artifacts, particularly in areas of the sky lacking detail.

1. **Identify the Issue:** Look for dark or bright glows around objects where they meet the sky. These are telltale signs of the problem.
2. **Create a Sky Mask:** Use the masking tool and select "Sky" to create a mask targeting the sky.
3. **Counteract Problematic Sliders:** For each of the problematic sliders (highlights, shadows, clarity, dehaze) note the setting in the basuic adjustment panel. Then, within the sky mask, apply the *opposite* setting. For example:
    - If Highlights are set to -21 globally, set Highlights to +21 in the sky mask.
    - If Shadows are set to +11 globally, set Shadows to -11 in the sky mask.
    - If Clarity is set to +37 globally, set Clarity to -37 in the sky mask.
4. **Adjust Exposure:** After counteracting the sliders, the sky's brightness may change. Adjust the exposure slider within the sky mask to achieve the desired brightness.

This method cancels out the halo-producing effects of the global adjustments specifically in the sky, resulting in a more natural appearance.

Working with Multiple Masks

When multiple masks are already applied to an image, it can be trickier to correct sky issues. Other masks might be contributing to the halo effect.

1. **Assess Existing Masks:** Examine each existing mask to see if any are affecting the highlights, shadows, clarity, or dehaze.
2. **Adjust Sky Mask Clarity:** After applying the initial sky mask with opposing adjustments, further refine the clarity slider in the sky mask to combat any remaining halos. This may involve pushing the clarity further negative than initially anticipated.
3. **Evaluate and Refine:** Continuously toggle the sky mask on and off, carefully examining the sky for any remaining unnatural glows or dark areas.

This iterative approach helps to fine-tune the sky's appearance when dealing with complex masking scenarios.

Evening Out Skies

Sometimes, skies can have uneven tones, with one side appearing darker than the other. Lightroom offers tools to address this, though the approach differs for color and black and white images.

Color Images: Point Color Adjustment

The Point Color adjustment is used to even out the color and tone in color images.

1. **Select the Sky:** Create a sky mask to isolate the adjustment to the sky.
2. **Activate Point Color:** In the color mixer panel, use the eyedropper tool within the Point Color section to select a representative color from the sky. Choose a blue shade you want to even out.
3. **Adjust Variance:** Use the Variance slider to control the consistency of the selected color throughout the sky. Increasing variance introduces more color variation, while decreasing it creates a more uniform appearance.
4. **Adjust Range:** Adjust the range sliders to fine-tune the area of the sky affected by the Variance adjustment. This ensures the adjustment covers the full brightness range of the sky.
5. **Adjust Exposure:** Adjust the exposure slider within the sky mask to achieve the desired brightness.

Black and White Images: Curve Adjustment

Point Color is unavailable for black and white images. Instead, use the Curve adjustment to even out the sky.

1. **Select the Sky:** Create a sky mask.
2. **Activate Curve Adjustment:** Choose the Curve adjustment tool.
3. **Target Bright Areas:** Click on the donut icon. Click on a bright area of the sky that you *don't* want to change to lock in its brightness.
4. **Target Dark Areas:** Click and drag *up* on a darker area of the sky that you *do* want to change, as if using a dimmer switch. This brightens the selected area, evening out the sky's tone.

This method provides a way to selectively brighten darker areas of the sky in black and white images, achieving a more balanced and natural look.

Addressing White Balance Issues

Sometimes, the white balance in an image can make clouds appear unnatural, particularly if they are perfectly neutral. It is more visually pleasing if there is a hint of warmth in the sky.

1. **Select the Sky:** Create a sky mask.
2. **Adjust Temperature:** Use the temperature slider in the color panel to shift the sky's color towards yellow (warmth). This adds a subtle warmth to the clouds, making them appear more natural. A little hint of warmth in the whites of the sky is usually more pleasing.
3. **Reduce Vivid Blue:** If the sky is too vividly blue, shift the temperature slider slightly towards yellow to reduce the intensity of the blue.

This adjustment can significantly improve the overall look of the sky, especially when the initial white balance results in overly neutral or artificial-looking clouds.

Correcting Issues in Smartphone Photos

Images from smartphones, even when shot in RAW, often have baked-in processing that can lead to halos and noise in the sky.

1. **Reduce Sharpening:** Smartphones sharpen images by default. Reduce the global sharpening amount to minimize halos.
2. **Apply Sharpening Mask:** Use the masking slider in the Detail panel to restrict sharpening to areas with distinct detail, preventing noise exaggeration in the sky. Hold the Option (Alt on Windows) key while adjusting the

masking slider to visualize the areas being sharpened. Anything that turns black will not be sharpened.

3. **Apply Denoise:** If noise is still present, use the denoise checkbox in the Detail panel to reduce noise in the sky and the rest of the image.

Refining Masks

Inaccurate masks can cause unwanted artifacts in your images. It's important to check the image for detail and refine the mask until the issues are gone.

1. **Zoom In:** Zoom in on the image to see the details.
2. **Show Overlay:** Turn on the Show Overlay to see the mask overlay.
3. **Change Overlay Color:** If the mask overlay doesn't stand out, click the three dots to change the color overlay to B&W. This makes it easier to see the overlay.
4. **Subtract Objects:** Use the Subtract tool and select "Object" to remove unwanted areas from the mask. Paint around the object. This is better than subtracting the sky because sky masks often have soft edges.
5. **Add to Masks:** Use the Add tool to add any areas to the mask that are missing.
6. **Keyboard Shortcuts:** Use the Option+N (Alt+N on Windows) keyboard shortcut to subtract another object. Use Shift+N to add another area to the mask.
7. **Toggle Overlay:** Type the letter "O" to toggle the overlay on and off.

In summary, you can improve your skies by counteracting halo-causing sliders, evening out tones with color adjustments or curves, managing white balance, and refining masks. Paying attention to detail and knowing the tools will allow you to make natural skies.