

Linda Gregory Tutorial Guides

Three Methods for Creating Black & Whites from Color Photos using Elements 6

Source: The Photoshop Elements 6 Book for Digital Photographers,

By Scott Kelby and Matt Kloskowski

(1) Using the Black & White Conversion Tool in Elements

Step One:

Open the color photo you want to convert to black and white, and then go under the Enhance menu and choose Convert to Black and White.

Step Two:

When you choose Convert to Black and White, a dialog appears and your photo (behind the dialog) is converted to black and white instantaneously. You'll see the color and black and white photos side by side. Your first step is to choose which style of photo you're converting from the list of styles on the lower-left side of the dialog. These styles are really just preset starting points that are fairly well-suited to each type of photo. The default setting is Scenic Landscape. Generally, you're trying to create high-contrast, black-and-white photos with lots of depth, so select the Vivid Landscapes style, which is much punchier, but try them all to see what each setting does to your photograph.

Step Three:

No matter which style you choose, you'll want to tweak the settings to really match your photo, and that's done by dragging one of the four Adjustment Intensity sliders that appear on the bottom-right side of the dialog. The top three (Red, Green, and Blue) let you tweak ranges of color in your photo (so, for example, if you'd like the sky darker, which is blue, you'd drag the Blue slider to the left). If you want something in the photo which is red to be brighter, you'd drag the Red slider to the right. Likewise with the Green Slider.

Step Four:

So you use those three sliders to come up with a mix that looks good to you. You don't have to use the sliders, but if you can't find one of the presents that looks good to you, find one that gets you close, and then use the Red, Green, and Blue sliders to tweak the settings. The fourth slider, Contrast, does just what you'd expect it would--if you drag to the right, it adds contrast and to the left removes it.

(2) Getting a Better Conversion from Color to Black and White

Step One:

Open the color photo you want to convert to black and white. Press D to set your Foreground and Background to the default black and white.

Step Two:

To simply remove the color from the photo leaves a very bland looking black-and-white image. To really appreciate this technique, let's do a regular conversion to black and white. Go under the Image menu, under Mode, and choose Grayscale. When the "Discard color information?" dialog appears, click OK, and note the bland conversion. Now you can press Ctrl-Z (Mac: Command-Z) to undo the conversion so we can try something better.

Step Three:

Go to the top of the Layers palette and choose Levels from the Create Adjustment Layer pop-up menu (it's the half-black/half-white circle icon). When the Levels dialog appears, don't make any changes, just click OK. This will add a layer to your Layers palette named "Levels 1."

Step Four:

Press X until your Foreground color is set to black, then go to the top of the Layers palette and choose Gradient Map from the Create Adjustment Layer pop-up menu. This brings up the Gradient Map dialog.

Step Five:

All you have to do here is click OK, and it gives you a black-and-white image. (Doing just this one little step alone, usually gives you a better black-and-white conversion than just choosing Grayscale from the Mode submenu.) Clicking OK will add another layer to the Layers palette (above your Levels 1 layer) named "Gradient Map 1."

Step Six:

In the Layers palette, double-click directly on the Levels thumbnail in the Levels 1 layer to bring up the Levels dialog again. In the Channel pop-up menu at the top of the dialog, you can choose to edit individual color channels (kind of like you would with Photoshop's Channel Mixer). Choose the Red color channel.

Step Seven:

You can now adjust the Red channel, and you'll see the adjustments live onscreen as you tweak your black-and-white photo. (It appears as a black-and-white photo because of the Gradient Map adjustment layer above the Levels 1 layer.) You can drag the shadow Input Levels slider to the right a bit to increase the shadows in the Red channel, but don't click OK.

Step Eight:

Now switch to the Green channel in the Channel pop-up menu in the Levels dialog. You can make adjustments here as well. Try increasing the highlights in the Green Channel by dragging the highlight Input Levels slider to the left. Don't click OK yet.

Step Nine:

Now choose the Blue channel from the Channel pop-up menu in the Levels dialog. Try increasing the highlights quite a bit and the shadows just a little by dragging the Input Levels slider. These adjustments are not standards or suggested settings for every photo; simply experiment by dragging the sliders, and when the photo looks better, stop dragging. When the black-and-white photo looks good to you (good contrast and good shadow and highlight details), click OK in the Levels dialog.

Step Ten:

To complete the conversion, go to the Layers palette, click on the More flyout menu, then choose Flatten Image to flatten the adjustment layers into the Background layer. Although your photo looks like a black-and-white photo, technically, it's still in RGB mode, so if you want a grayscale file, go under the Image menu, under Mode, and choose Grayscale.

(3) Black & White Conversions in Camera Raw

This is a very easy way to make great black-and-white photos from your color images. You're basically just three sliders away from a stunning black-and-white photo, and then all you have left to do is open the image in Photoshop Elements 6 and add some sharpening. You can also use Camera Raw to create a black and white with a .JPG photo, but let's start with a .RAW image.

Step One:

Start by opening a RAW photo you want to convert to black and white. Scott recommends clicking the Auto button (the button beneath the Tint slider) because it pumps up the exposure about as high as it can go without too much clipping, if any.

Step Two:

Now we're going to work from the bottom of the Basic panel up. The next step in converting to black and white is to remove the color from the photo by going to the Saturation slider and dragging it all the way to the left. This usually makes for a pretty flat-looking black-and-white photo. Now go up two sliders to the Clarity slider and drag it over quite a bit to the right to make the mid-tones snap.

Step Three:

Now you're going to add extra contrast by dragging the Contrast slider to the right until the photo gets real contrasty. It's important to set this slider first, before you set the Blacks slider, or you'll wind up setting the blacks, then adjusting the contrast, and then lowering the Blacks slider back down. That's because what the Contrast slider essentially does is makes the darkets parts of the photo darker, and the brightest parts brighter. If the blacks are already

very dark, then you add contrast, it makes them too dark, and you wind up backing them off again.

Step Four:

Lastly, go to the Blacks slider and drag it to the right until you get very rich-looking shadows. One of the characteristics of great black-and-white prints is that they have deep, rich blacks and bright, crisp whites, so don't be shy when you're dragging this slider to the right. Now head up to the Recovery slider and drag it a ways over to the right until the highlights darken up a bit.

TIP: Another thing to try is going through each of the White Balance settings (in the White Balance pop-up menu) to see how they affect your black-and-white photo. You'll be amazed at how this little change can pay off (make sure you try Fluorescent and Tungsten--they often look great in black and white).

Even if you don't shoot in RAW, you can use the Camera Raw converter. Go under Edit menu and choose Open As (Mac: Open). In the Open As (Mac: Open) dialog, navigate to the JPEG or TIFF photo you want to open and click on it once. Then you have to select Camera Raw in the Open As pop-up menu. You won't have as many White Balance options, but you will have all the other sliders available to create a black-and-white photo.

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If I've peaked your interest in black-and-white photography, join us on Monday mornings at 9:30 am for the Black-and-White Special Interest Group!

Linda Gregory