

TURNING COLOR INTO BLACK AND WHITE

There are several ways to turn a color photo into a black and white image in Photoshop. The results are often image dependent. It is good to test these techniques before deciding which one is best for your photo. The four approaches we will look at are Channels, Grayscale Mode, Lab Mode and Channel Mixer in the Monochromatic mode.

Looking at the individual Red, Green and Blue Channels

By looking at the individual red, green and blue channels of your color image you will see the density for each of these colors. Often there will be an interesting monochromatic version of the color image on one of these channels, or even two, and since it takes so little time to look, why not? Make sure you have the “Show Color Channels in Color” unchecked in the display and Cursors Preferences window to see each channel in grey scale terms. Select the Channels palette. Then click on each channel to view it. Keep in mind that you are only looking for a good starting point which may be quite refinable with further density adjustments using Levels or Curves. If you do determine that one of your individual channels will work then simply select the individual channel:-Control 1 for red-Control 2 for green-and Control 3 for red. (Control~ for RGB). Next select the image and copy it Control C—Create a new document Control N—and Paste it Control V. You will be in grayscale because you copied a grayscale channel.

If you have two good channels you can create a third to improve the overall image or operate on the two good channels separately using masks. This topic will be saved for a later date.

Going to Greyscale Mode

Just going from RGB mode to grayscale mode seems too easy so it should make you a little suspicious. However, sometimes the results are quite rewarding and it takes just a second to see so do check. To do this go to Image/Mode/Grayscale. Accept the “Discard color information” warning. This is the same result you get when you Desaturate 100% dropping all color out. Use Image/Adjustment/Hue Saturation command. With this method the color information is not lost. Notice however that the distinction between the reds, yellows and greens is lost using this technique which might be fine for some images.

Remember that what works for some images won't necessarily be the best method for others and refinements in density may be needed.

Going to Lab Mode

The lightness channel in LAB mode is always worth checking out. Just switch modes from RGB to LAB and click on the Lightness channel. Essentially a representation of the

overall density of the color image in grayscale terms, the Lightness channel will often have a more expanded tonal range than the results from just going from RGB mode to grayscale mode. Just copy this Lightness channel into a new grayscale document or trash the A and B channels then switch modes from Multi to grayscale. There is usually very good shadow separation with this method although the image often appears a little too light overall. The image becomes very successful with a slight midtone darkening with the Curves adjustment.

Using Channel Mixer

Go to the Image adjust and click on the Monochrome box and your color photo instantly turns to black and white. With individual controls of each channel's participation you can see a myriad of grey scale versions of any color image . Although the default setting of +100 Red, 0 Green, 0 Blue is a good starting point, do experiment with varying the amounts for each channel to get most interesting grey scale rendition of your color image. Be sure to have the Show Info box out and check your density adjustments before you say OK to make sure you are holding highlight and shadow detail. The sum of the three channel settings should be 100%. You can use pre defined channel mixers found at <http://www.outbackphoto.com/workshop/channelmixer/channelmixer.html> You can play with the Constant to lighten or darken the image; however post processing using Curves would be more appropriate. After the Channel Mixer has been applied the document stays RGB. Flatten the layers and the Mode/Grayscale. Use curves then sharpen.

In conclusion it is good to look at these four various techniques of creating a black and white photo out of a color image. You might even decide to use two different approaches and combine the best of both using compositing layers techniques.

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