

Improving image impact through tonal adjustment

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FORMAT FOR TONIGHT

- Brief introduction on “tonality” and how this can be adjusted to improve your images
- Questions and discussion
- Trying out the approach using your own images and software



Introduction



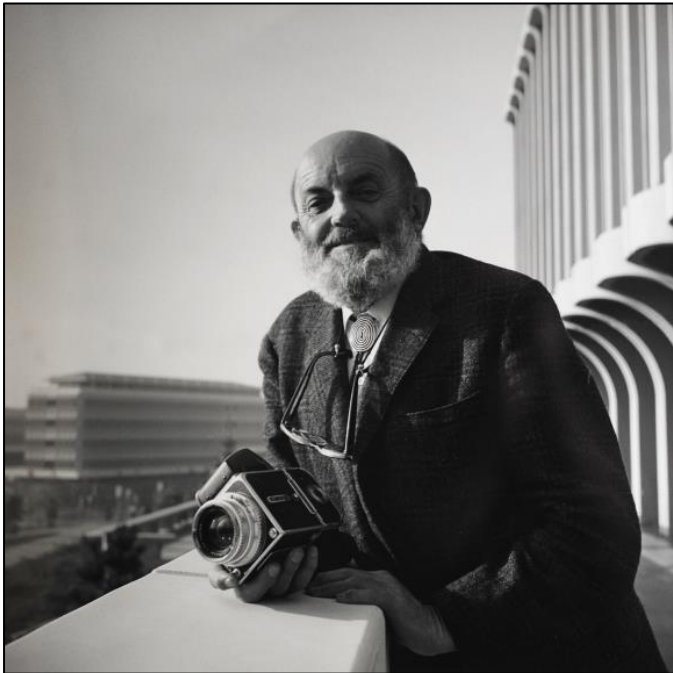
WHAT IS TONALITY

In photography, the tonal range or “tonality” is mainly an expression of contrast. A long range refers to as high contrast, a medium range means moderate contrast, while a short range refers to low contrast, or flatness.

The term tone refers to any area of uniform density on a print, negative, transparency or pixels on a screen. Tone is also used to refer to visual weight or perceived lightness or darkness of an image.

In simple terms tone is the strength of greys between white and black. It relates to brightness, lightness and darkness, and varies according to the direction and intensity of illumination.

ANSEL ADAMS WAS THE MASTER OF TONALITY



- Ansel Adams is well known for spending a whole day in the darkroom, just to produce one print.
- 50% of his creative process occurred in the Dark Room
- He pioneered the zone system, which we loosely know today as burning and dodging. He would paint onto the enlarger the areas of the photo he thought should be darker or lighter than others.

“Dodging and burning are steps to take care of mistakes God made in establishing tonal relationships.”

VISUALISING YOUR IMAGE

- What did your eye “see” when you took the image
- Does the file from your camera reflect this
- Will the viewer see what you saw (or thought you saw)
- How can post processing better meet what you want the image to convey
- How can you improve the composition and impact of the image

AN EXAMPLE OF TONAL CORRECTION

(Alan Ross – an assistant to Ansel Adams)



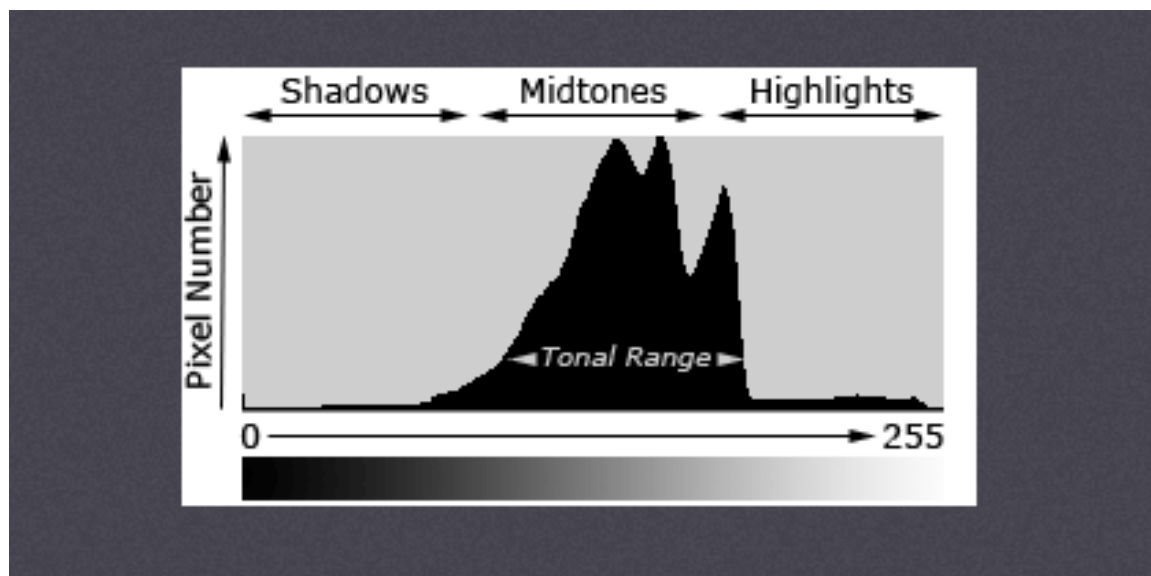
A - Straight Print



B - Final "visualized" Print

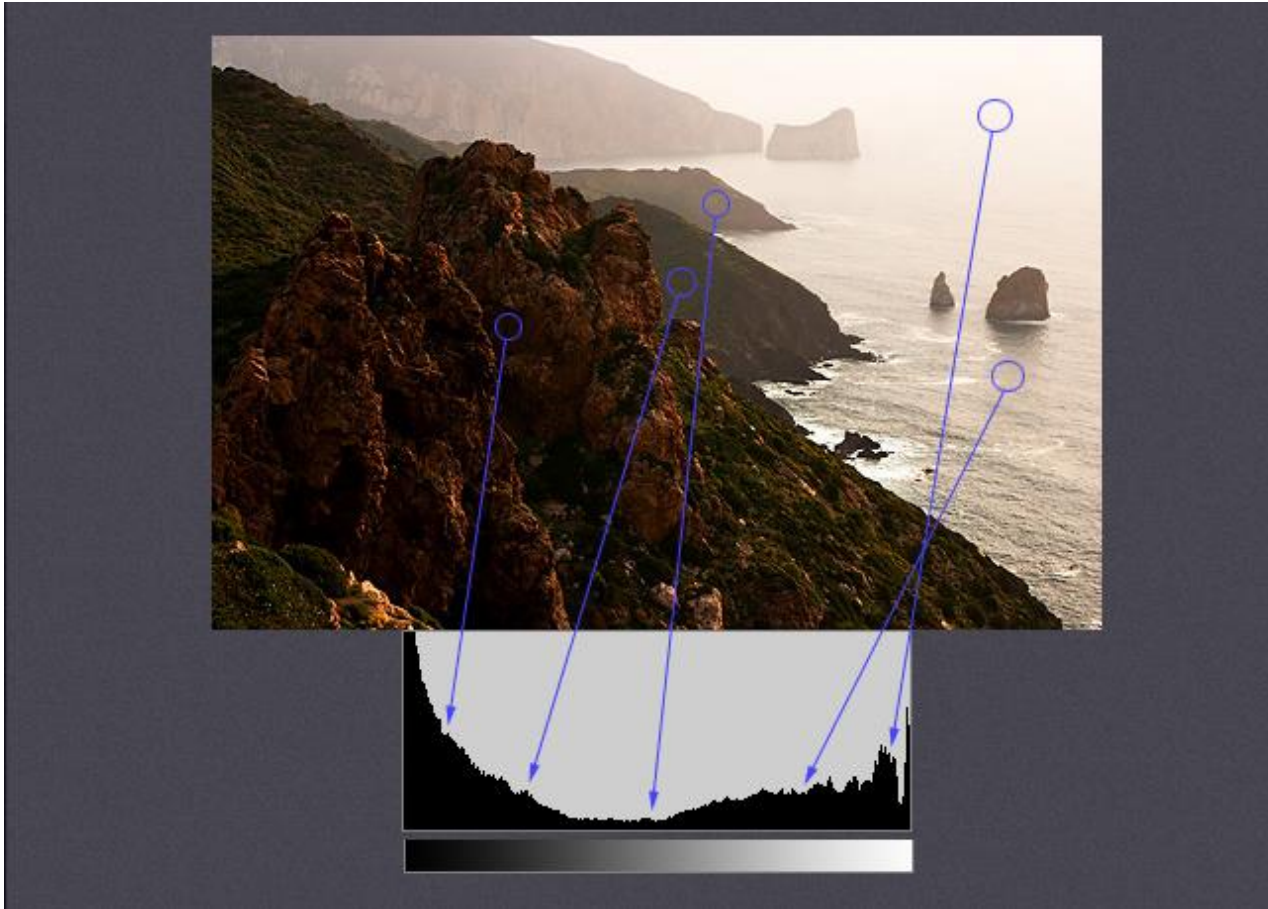
Particularly important for mono but works for colour too

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE HISTOGRAM



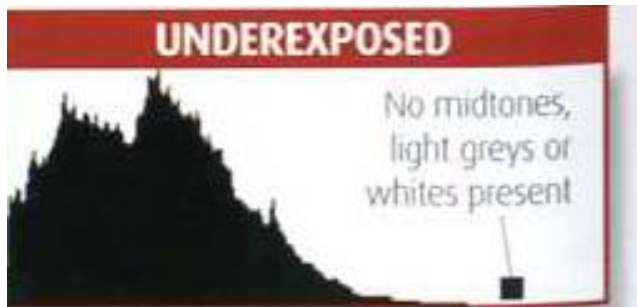
- The histogram helps you understand your image
- Shows distribution of light and dark pixels
- Each pixel has a brightness level from 0 (pure black) to 255 (pure white)
- Useful in making post production changes

HISTOGRAM ILLUSTRATION

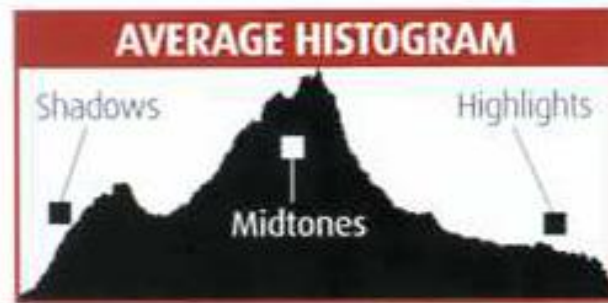


Example showing how the tonal values of each part of the image match to the histogram

USING THE HISTOGRAM



Note that sometimes you may wish to have low key image with pure blacks for drama or silhouette effects



The normal "ideal" exposure

Note that sometimes you may wish to have high key image with pure white for soft effect



TYPICAL POST PRODUCTION SEQUENCE

Always think about image composition (see separate notes)

1. Crop and (if necessary rotate/flip) image to **improve composition** –
(Note the tighter the crop the lower the quality)
2. Adjust **basic exposure**, brightness
3. Use levels and curves or contrast/clarity/vibrance if necessary to either add **balance or punch** or alternatively **soften an image**
4. Adjust or remove **highlights** to avoid distracting bright areas and where necessary ensure adequate **shadow** detail
5. Adjust **saturation** up or down as necessary to adjust **depth of colour**
6. Adjust **colour temp/colour tone** if required
7. **Mono** conversion if required
8. Minor cloning/spot removal to **remove distracting elements**
9. **Darkening corners (vignette)** if necessary to “hold” picture
10. Final sharpening and **preparation for image output**



More complex techniques (covered in other workshops)

e.g. Moving pixels around through cloning or merging elements from different images, filters, specialist software etc.

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Global adjustments

(affects all pixels to the same extent)

Or local adjustments

(affects only selected pixels identified in different layers)

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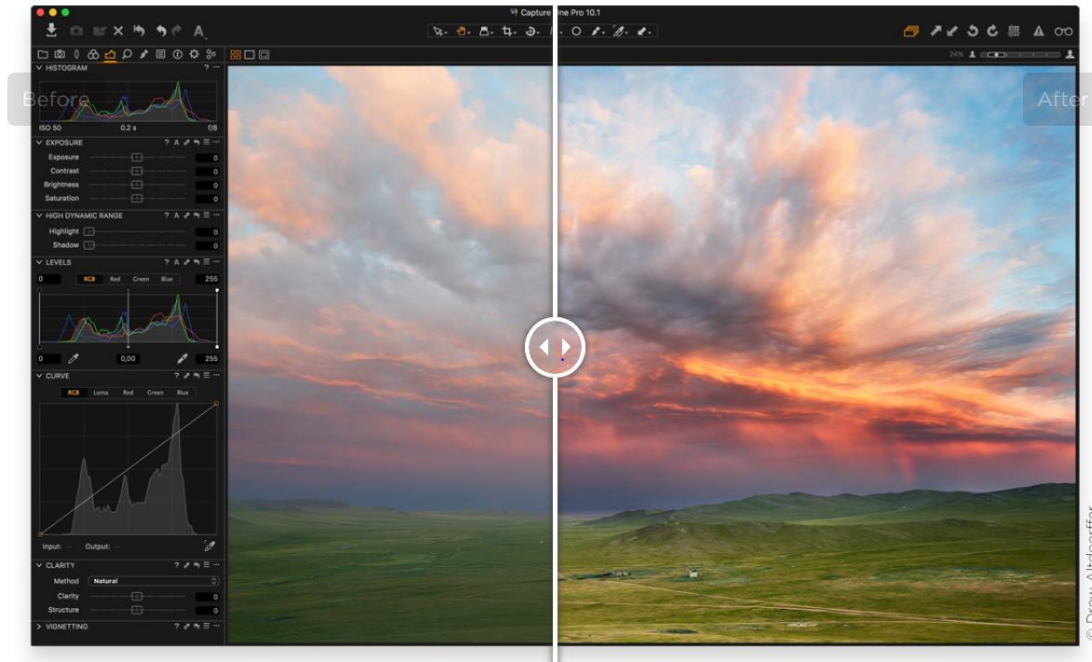
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The options for tonal adjustment

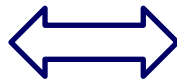
ALL ADJUSTMENTS MUCH BETTER/EASIER IN RAW



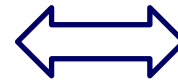
- The available tools will vary between software and the names may be different but essentially do the same thing
- Check what is available in your software and understand what each does

THE TONAL TOOLS ALL INTERACT

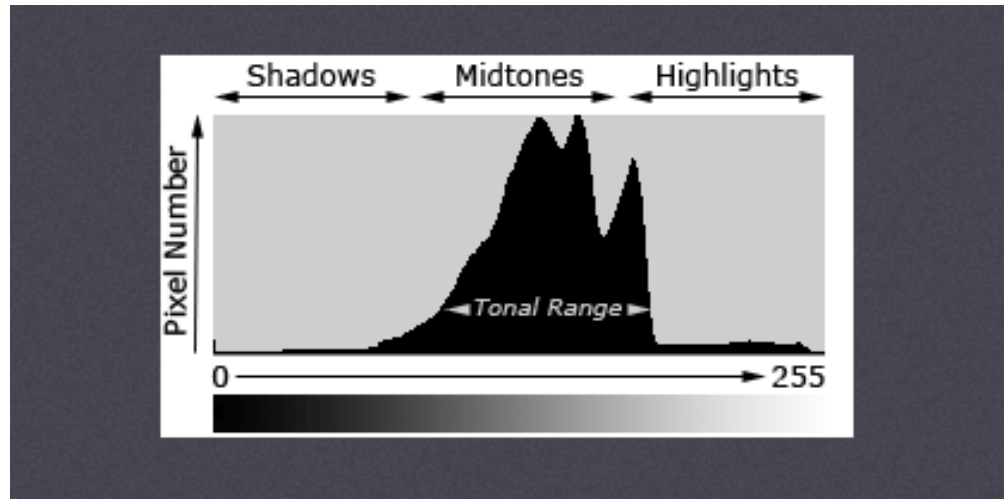
Exposure/
Brightness



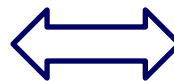
Levels



Curves

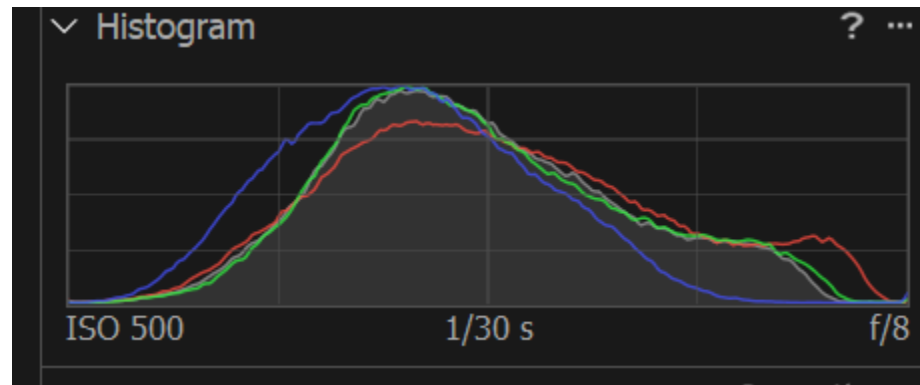


Highlights/
shadows



Contrast/
Clarity

EXPOSURE/BRIGHTNESS ADJUSTMENT



- Exposure slider essentially mimics what happens in camera. It scales the settings up and down by a constant factor
- Brightness adjusts mainly the midtones but preserves the highlights better than simply changing the exposure. It tends to improve the midtones better compared to just changing the exposure
- If image taken in bright sunlight reducing “brightness” allows better overall tonal adjustments

LEVELS ADJUSTMENT

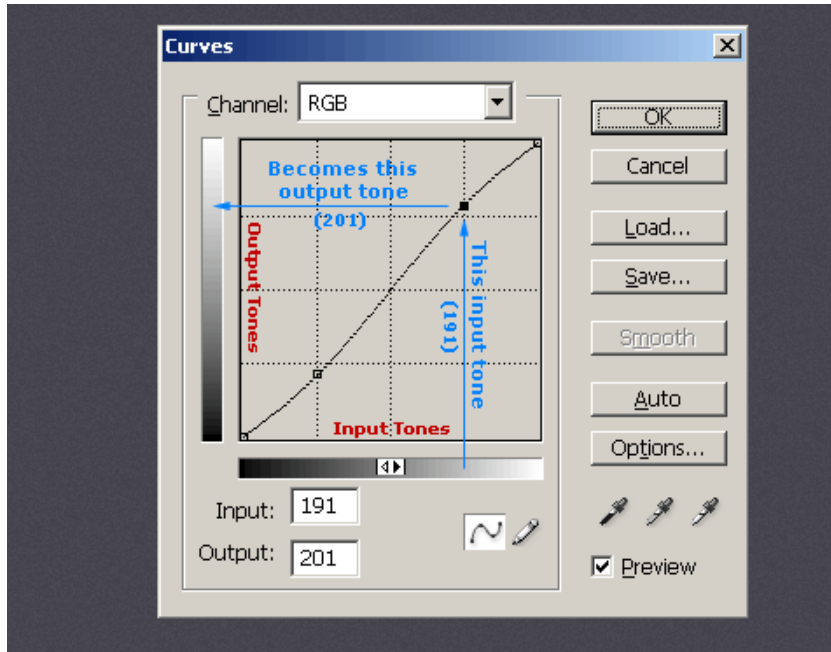
Using the Levels Tool



The left image is straight out of the camera and shows both lens flare and some degree of underexposure. The right image is after correction in the Levels Tool.

- The levels tool allows you to “stretch” the histogram thus gaining a whole range of tones from pure black to pure white
- Can also change the midtones
- Creates a more dynamic/contrasty image
- In some software called simply “white/black” tools

CURVES ADJUSTMENT



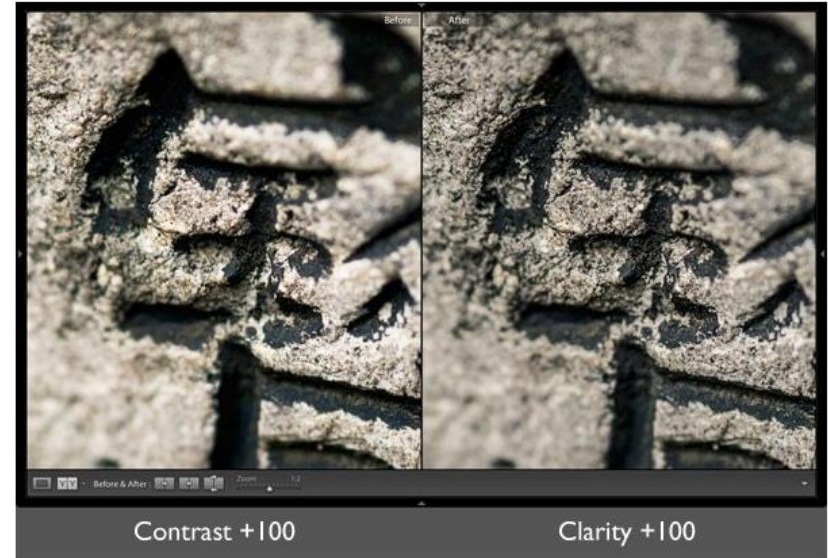
- The levels tool only allows changes to:
 - Black point
 - White point
 - Mid tone (grey)
- The curves tool allows you to selectively brighten or darken any particular pixel brightness value
- Can adjust tonality of all colours (RGB) or selective colour channels
- An S shaped curve can give added contrast to the image
- Or can brighten/darken mid tones

HIGHLIGHTS AND SHADOWS

- Often has different names in different software e.g. fill light/recovery
- Tool only works for RAW but allows you recover details in
 - Burnt out highlights
 - Deep shadows
- Most software has option which allows you to show burnt out areas of image (e.g. red)
- Benefits for image
 - Completely burnt out areas rarely work well (unless intentional e.g. high key pictures)
 - Bright areas which take the eye away from the main subject, particularly at the edge are generally not a good thing
 - Improves blocked out shadow areas (i.e. solid black) again unless intentional silhouette effect

CONTRAST AND CLARITY

- Contrast
 - Contrast darkens the shadow areas and brightens the highlights
 - Images taken in bright conditions often benefit from reducing contrast
- Clarity
 - Clarity is a more subtle increase in micro-contrast by working more on mid tonal values
 - Different names in other software e.g. vibrance
- If +ve both can increase drama and mood or if -ve can be used to “soften” an image



Use contrast with care

Clarity tool can often bring out texture better than contrast

WHOLE IMAGE OR SELECTIVE MODIFICATION

- All software allows you to make tonal corrections on the whole image
- But better effects can often be achieved by making selective adjustments to only part of the image
- In some software this can be done on the raw file in others it has to be done on a Jpeg/Tiff file
- The way to do this varies between software but typically
 - Using masks/brushes to highlight certain areas and then applying the tonal adjustment just to this part of the image
 - In PS creating a new layer to which the correction is made and then using a mask to selectively change which bits of the image the adjustment applies to

Remember Ansel Adams



Now its your turn!

1. Check what tools you have available on your software
2. Try each tool on an image to see what difference each makes- watch the histogram whilst doing this
3. Try different options for both whole image and selective tonal adjustments
4. Discuss and share tips with colleagues