# RULES OF THUMB FOR RAW PROCESSING IN ADOBE LIGHTROOM

## I. BASIC TAB ADJUSTMENTS

1. USE YOUR CLIPPING MASKS (THEN TURN THEM OFF!)

Use the **Shadow (Blue) and Highlight (Red) Clipping Masks** to see clipping on the low and high ends of the tonal scale in your image. Very slight black clipping (a "black point" indicated by a hint of blue mask) is desirable, but highlight clipping (a red mask) anywhere is generally not. Keep these masks turned on (visible) as you process your image tonally, but turn them off when you start to work with the color of the image, as they can be distracting and throw off your color perception.

Clipping Masks OFF
(no white boxes)

SHADOWS   HIGHLIGHTS
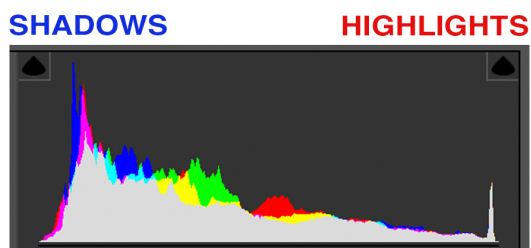
Clipping Masks ON
(white boxes)

SHADOWS   HIGHLIGHTS
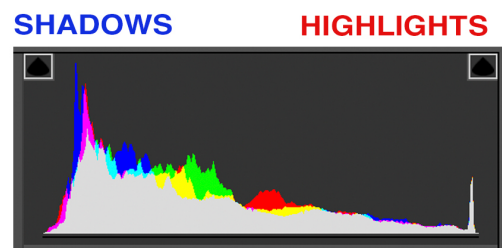
2. EXPOSURE FIRST IN TONAL ADJUSTMENTS (IF NECESSARY)

EXPOSURE adjusts the overall lightness or darkness of your image. If your histogram, when you come into Camera RAW, looks relatively centered, has some peaks across the board, or generally looks correct based on the image elements, you may not need to touch your Exposure at all. However, if your image is obviously too dark or light (histogram has only peaks far to the left or right), start by adjusting your Exposure. Then you can fine-tune the tonality by adjusting other areas of the histogram like shadows, blacks, highlights, and whites.

3. RULES OF BLACKS AND WHITES

In general, AVOID going UP ON BLACKS or DOWN ON WHITES in the Basic sliders. This compresses your histogram to the center and flattens your image. If, once your exposure has been adjusted, the dark areas look too dark or the light areas look too light (especially if they're clipping according to your masks), consider filling in the shadows by moving the Shadows slider to the right, or bringing down your highlights by moving your Highlights slider to the left. Then, if the image looks too flat, you can bring the BLACKS DOWN (only slightly, usually until you get a black point as indicated by a blue mask) and/or the WHITES UP, usually only slightly, just before it clips and shows a red mask.

While some images break this rule, an excellent rule of thumb is:

- Shadows up
- Blacks Down (slightly)
- Highlights Down
- Whites Up (Slightly)

4. *TONALITY FIRST, COLOR SECOND*

Adjust your image tonally BEFORE you white balance and begin to work with color in the HSL tab. (Tone first, global color second, individual colors in the HSL last).

5. *GLOBAL WHITE BALANCE FIRST, THEN SPECIFIC COLOR ADJUSTMENTS IN HSL*

Adjust the color GLOBALLY with white balance BEFORE you start to do color-by-color manipulation and adjustments in the HSL tab.

6. *WHITE BALANCE*

W is the shortcut key for the White Balance Dropper tool. Try to white balance using the white balance tool (on a black, white, or neutral gray area of the image), but if you can't (because there is no neutral spot in the image), then use the temperature (blue to yellow scale) and tint (green to magenta scale) sliders manually. *Temporarily* turning up your saturation all the way will help you to better see when a shift in color happens. Once you get the global color where you want it, double-click the saturation slider to bring it back to zero. You can use trial and error with the WB tool, clicking around on different white/gray/black areas until you find one that works. To go back to the original White Balance of the image as it was in-camera, choose "As Shot" from the WB drop-down.

White balance AS SHOT   **White balance (adjusted)**
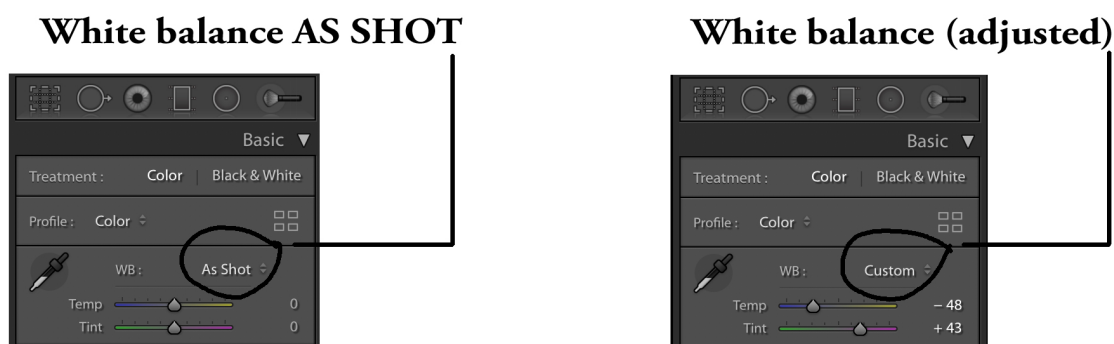
7. Use the "Y" key to view the Before/After view (Y/Y) to see the image before you started processing and after. "Y" toggles you in and out of this view.

8. In the Y/Y view, drag any one of the steps of your History into the left (Before) screen to see the image from that particular step (Before) to where you've ended up (After).

Dragging any one step in my history to the left screen in **Y/Y** view shows my before/after from that point to the present