A Basic Introduction To Lightroom

By

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2.   What Is Lightroom?

Adobe Photoshop Lightroom (LR) is a photo processing and image organising software package developed by Adobe Systems for use on OSX and Windows operating systems. It allows viewing, organising and retouching a large number of digital images. LR's edits are non-destructive. However, despite sharing its name with Adobe Photoshop (PS), it is incapable of performing many PS functions such as adding layers, major doctoring such as adding, removing or altering the appearance of individual image items, rendering text or 3D objects on images or modifying individual video frames.

LR is not a file manager like Adobe Bridge (BR), i.e. it cannot operate on files unless they are imported into its database first. LR accepts only recognised image formats – raw, dng, jpgs, tiff files etc.

LR (v1.0) was first made available in Feb 2007 and sold for £199. The current version comes as part of the Creative Cloud suit complete with PS and retails for around £10/month. At that price, I now believe it's cheap enough for all photographers who use it, not to use a downloaded copy.

3.   Why Do I Use Lightroom?

Photography has been my hobby since 1992 but in October 2005 I bought my first DSLR, the Canon EOS 5D. Shipped with the camera was Canon's own software package Digital Photo Professional (DPP) – a software package similar to LR that allowed modification to RAW files but I discovered I could quite easily lose work if I didn't save the work done. LR auto-saves every command. As a result of losing work I switched to BR but I eventually discovered LR (v2.1) and realised that I could use LR to catalogue my images having sorted them into basic folders, give them meaningful filenames, rate the images according to my taste, delete those that don't make the grade (around 90-95% of all images) and perform very quick non-destructive editing on the remaining images without actually opening PS.

Unlike using my old darkrooms that were either in the bathroom or the garage, the cataloguing and manipulation can be done over short time periods, i.e. I don't really have to study the images in great detail in order to do this work. I am basically speed working in order to decide which images are worth keeping and which are not.

I am a self-taught photographer and I've learned how to use LR the hard way – by pressing each button to see what it does! It's certainly far easier and much more productive to spend one full day with a professional tutor by learning the basic functions allowing you to quickly move onto some of the more advanced features. I'm quite sure that being self-taught, I as many here will be missing out on some of the more advanced features but I am showing you some (but not all) features that I find useful and hope you can benefit from them too.

4.   Getting It Right In Camera

It cannot be stressed enough that you should get the image right in camera! If you can remember using slide film, you didn't have the ability to modify the film by cloning, adjusting exposure, highlights, shadows, etc. Everything had to be done correctly in camera. The digital age is no different.

Exposure, composition, point-of-focus, the background, the foreground, ambient lighting, flash lighting, aperture value, shutter speed, ISO level, tripod, filters, use of accessories, are just some things to consider when you are taking a photo. If you want your image to stand out above the rest, you must give yourself the necessary time to make sure your variables are set correctly in order to get the fantastic image. If not, you'll just have an ordinary image that'll require far more time spent at the post-processing stage and quite often, the image will require too much post-processing such that the image won't be worth recovering.

So just to reiterate – get it right in-camera!

5.   Working Your Way Around Lightroom

Before we start looking at LR, any commands listed in the document will work on both Apple Mac computers and ordinary Windows based PC computers.

You can save time when manipulating your images with the Copy & Paste commands If you need to modify many similar images, simply modify your initial image then copy and paste the changes from one to the next or to several images thus saving your time.

www.lightroomqueen.com/keyboard-shortcuts is probably the most concise website I've found listing all shortcuts for each module for each version of LR. A very useful shortcut is for the Info command. Cmd/Ctrl 'I' will turn on/off Info whilst pressing 'I' three times will toggle to reveal different information about the image. Another shortcut is holding down the Option/Alt key whilst adjusting sliders in the Develop module to flip the image to a negative and show the amount of the effect being applied. This is a really handy feature and works on many of the tools within LR. And so to business – LR is focused on the following workflow 'Modules':

5.1   Library

Similar in concept to the 'Organiser' in Adobe Photoshop Elements and other image organisers, this module imports and exports images, creates image collections, organises images by their metadata and adds ratings, flags or colours to them. Library is the gateway into LR. More features will be explained in section 6.

5.2   Develop

Supports non-destructive editing of images en-masse. This module is geared more towards retouching, i.e. enhancing and improving digital photographs, including changing colour balance, improving tone, removing red-eye effect, sharpening, reducing noise, cropping, straightening or converting to black-and-white. It is not capable of creating or editing non-photographic images (such as drawings, symbols, line arts or diagrams or maps), rendering text or 3D objects. It has limited photo-doctoring features. Only jpg and raw image formats are supported. It has a number of standard presets for colour correction or effects and supports the sharing of custom presets online. Another often used feature in the Develop module is the ability to synchronise edits from one particular photo to the whole selection of images. These features and more will be explained in section 7.

5.3   Map

Added in LR4, it facilitates geographical organisation of photos based on embedded or manually added geolocation data. I have used Maps though not all that much. I don't always add the data to the photos but it can added really quickly to all your photos.

5.4   Book

Added in LR4, it allows the creation of photo-books. Adobe offers this feature in collaboration with book publishing company Blurb. I haven't used this feature though I know I ought to create my own books.

5.5   Slideshow

Allows you to create slideshows from any number of photos. Music or background can be added to the slideshow. The opening slideshow was generated using LR.

5.6   Print

As it says on the tin, it prints your images. Printing parameters such as layout and orientation can be adjusted. I don't use this feature because I use PS to print all my images.

5.7   Web

Creates a gallery for website owners. Several templates that influence the layout are available. Even though I have my own website, I haven't got around to using this feature.

6   Library – In Detail

This is the basic image-handling module of the software. Files are initially imported into the relevant folder then renamed using LR but there are many more features in this module as we can see:

6.1   The Navigator

This is a thumbnail of the selected image. From here, you can select an area of the image to view or (preset) zoom right into the image.

6.2   Directories

Found on the LH edge of the screen and much as in Finder or Explorer, here are the directories that are being used within the LR database and a count of the images within each directory

6.3   The Film-Strip

Found on the bottom edge of the screen, this shows all the images as a filmstrip. Within each image are a few symbols including the star rating and the modification done to each image.

6.4   Histogram

www.youtube.com/watch?v=sawB7MDbOU8 This shows the main camera settings (ISO, focal length, aperture & shutter speed) and the pixel count of the three primary colours (RBY) and total pixel count. The display is divided into five areas and these are utilised further in the Develop module.

6.5   Quick-Develop Panel

www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTkSuaa5Mws Preset adjustments can be made in 1/3 stops by clicking on each arrow though there's much more control within the Develop module.

6.6   The Main Image

The selected photo is displayed in the centre of the screen.

6.7   Import/Export

Images are imported direct from the memory card attached to the computer. This is faster than downloading from the camera. Images can be exported by set formats, e.g. JPGs set to 1600x1200, TIFFs etc. You can also export directly to various social media sites.

6.8   Loading Photos From The Camera

Remove card from camera and connect card to computer.
Cmd/Ctrl-Shift-I will open the Import Dialog box.
In LR, select the source (directory).
Select all images on the card.
Make sure filename is correct.
Give the images a 2* rating.
Add as many suitable keywords as possible.
Select final destination.
Import images.
Delete images from card.

6.9   Naming Convention

What's in a filename? There are many 'standard' formats when naming your images but I use a 3 part convention that works for me: The 1st part is the name of the camera (1DX2), the 2nd part is the date (yyyy/mm/dd) and the 3rd part is the 4-digit number given by the camera. Just from the filename, I now know quite a lot of information about the photo without actually opening up LR or PS.

6.10   File Storage

Taking as many images as I do means I need a formula for storing images that works for me. A sample directory might be: drive\photos\years\2019\20191008 Nantwich CC. All my manipulation is done on a laptop but I also backup the images to external hard drives.

6.11   Keywords

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NwG0uPwT4c Used to identify images when searching either within LR, on the computer or on the internet. They are transferred into the metadata so will be attached to the image if/when you post images on the internet.

6.12   Star Rating

www.youtube.com/watch?v=yebuxUgQNpg I rate all my images for processing. When importing images, I initially set the star rating to 2. To alter the rating, select the image then type a number between 1 and 5. My ratings are:
1*:   It is going to be deleted.
2*:   I've not yet decided what to do with this image.
3*:   It's possibly good enough to keep but may still get deleted later on.
4*:   I've showed this image to the world.
5*:   It's won an award of some kind.

6.13 Deleting Images From Lightroom

I rate the images that don't make my grade as 1* images. I won't immediately delete the images but may just keep rating more images at 1*. When convenient, I'll select all images rated 1* and delete them. You have the option to either delete them from LR or delete them completely from your hard drive. I always choose the latter because if I don't need them in LR, I don't need them on the hard drive.

6.14 Sorting Images Within The Library

There are around 24 ways to sort the images in the filmstrip plus you can custom sort the images. These could be by rating, date taken, date uploaded, size, filename etc. Sorting by date captured generally works best for me.

6.15 Plug-In Extras

There are many plugins available for LR, e.g. Nik, Topaz, Photomatix, Helicon, etc. One software package I use is On1. It allows further image manipulation and the effects are ready to go. The B&W conversions, resizing images upwards of 1000%, creating edges for canvas wrap prints, additional colour effects all work for me. The package costs around £100 and there's technical help plus hundreds of online videos available. The software works as a stand-alone suite or as a plug-in via LR or PS. I usually use it as a plug-in module via LR.

7 Develop – In Detail

This is similar in layout to the Library module in but has quite a few subtle differences. This is also where the more advanced (non-destructive) editing takes place. Changes made to the RAW file within LR will be carried forward to any plugin or to PS but not if opening the RAW file in Finder/Windows Explorer.

7.1 Presets

Presets (some are available free from the internet, others will cost a few £s) allow you to make quick constant changes. These can be good if you like arty images or want to make consistent changes to a group of images. Hovering the mouse over the tool will show the effect being applied.

7.2 Processing RAW Images

It is the only way to go. Shoot in JPG and you aren't using all the available pixels or data. In fact, you are permanently fixing some of the data and won't be able to modify it, e.g. B&W or an incorrect white balance so I advise to always shoot in RAW!

7.3 Adobe Camera RAW

This is the basic importing tool that sits at the front of PS and within LR. It works in slightly different ways in both packages but if you understand one, the other is relatively easy. Here you can alter White Balance, exposure, blacks, whites, highlights, shadows, clarity, vibrance, etc.

7.4 Profiles

This is a new feature added in v7.3 and allows you to quickly alter images using presets but does not alter any previous image settings. This tool always features an Amount tool to control the amount of effect being applied to the image. Hovering the mouse over the tool will show the effect being applied. Profiles also work in ACW.

7.5 Cropping Tool

www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_ITpblcyos Crop to predetermined formats with the ability to crop and rotate at the same time. You can even crop to make a certain element of the image horizontal.

7.6 Spot Removal Tool

www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyhjkGewX60 This is simple, non-destructive cloning tool that can be reworked or deleted within LR. It's handy for removing dust-spots or anything relatively small in the image. A handy feature is the Visualise Spots check box that shows a negative of the image and highlights any dust spots.

7.7 Red Eye Removal Tool

www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCB5w5llV1k As advanced photographers, we know that red-eye would only ever be a problem if you take photos of drunken people at night time parties using a camera with on-camera flash. I never use this tool as I'm always too drunk at those parties! However, there is a tool here to reduce the red-eye effect.

7.8   Grad Filter

www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7OPGE0PvPA This tool has the ability to alter part of the image as though you are using a graduated filter. Landscape photographers will love this tool, especially when used in conjunction with neutral density graduated filters fitted to the front of the lens. Hold Shift key to create a horizontal filter.

7.9   Radial Filter

www.youtube.com/watch?v=_uJxIA7YjI4 Similar to the Grad Filter above but it operates radially instead of linearly.

7.10   Adjustment Brush

www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGKBcppFqD4 I find this is the most powerful of all the tools. It allows you to make (non-destructive) adjustments in any shape across the RAW image. Extra features within this tool are Auto Select (good for fine edge selection but not for large areas of similar tones so several brush sweeps may be required in order to make a full selection), Auto Mask On (turn off before making the adjustments).

7.11   Colour Control

https://helpx.adobe.com/lightroom/how-to/lightroom-hsl-color-adjustments.html If your image is too saturated or lacking in any particular colour, the individual colour(s) can be modified using sliders. Moving the slider from -100 to 100 and back shows the effect of that colour. Moving the Luminance after adjusting the colour saturation will either lighten or darken that colour. Don't fall into the trap of over-saturating your image. Quite often, you can reduce the saturation values to half the chosen values without making the image look too garish!

7.12   Sharpening Values

www.youtube.com/watch?v=imYJccSKx3E Sharp images look aesthetically more pleasing than soft or blurry images. Because of this, most photographers try to sharpen their images in post-processing applications, which can result in all kinds of problems such as over-sharpening – resulting in harsh, visible lines on edges and around objects or looking too textured or noisy. The worst result is when an image is already shot at high ISO levels and sharpening is applied on top of the digital grain, resulting in even more noise. However, when sharpening an image, the controls are:

- **Amount** specifies the amount of definition in your photo and gives the photo a crisp, sharp appearance. The higher the number, the more sharpening you will see. You might want to start with 50 as the default value, but can increase or decrease the amount depending on the image and noise levels.
- **Radius** changes the details of your photo as you sharpen the image. A smaller radius value works well for photos with lots of small details especially images with small aperture values such as landscapes. A larger radius value tends to work well on photos with wider apertures such as nature or portraits. The default value of 1.0 means LR will apply sharpening over 1 pixel around the edge. If you increase the radius to a maximum value of 3.0, sharpening will be spread over three pixels around the edge, resulting in unnatural looking thicker, "shadowy" edges. I use the default radius value of 1 and I certainly recommend keeping it under 1.5.
- **Detail** specifies how much emphasis the edges in a photo have. A higher detail value defines textures, while a lower value removes blurriness. A small value like 0 only sharpens large edges, while a high value like 100 would sharpen even the smallest edges. Try to stay below 50 on the detail slider, because higher numbers often considerably increase the amount of noise.
- **Masking** is the another really useful and versatile feature that masks out areas that should not be sharpened, similar to the mask tool in Photoshop. This is the tool that would take care of the extra noise produced by Amount and Detail sliders around your subjects. While not very useful for images that have too much detail and too many edges all over the image, it works best on images that isolate subjects from the background. The softer and less defined the background, the better the results, i.e. images shot with wide apertures.

Click the 1:1 option in the Navigator panel, which zooms in to a 100% view of the photo. In the view options bar underneath your photo, click the 'YY' icon to see the before and after view. Click and drag within your photo to compare the original photo with the sharpened photo. To return to a normal view, click FIT in the Navigator panel, and press D on your keyboard to return to a single photo view.

7.13   Noise Reduction

www.youtube.com/watch?v=imYJccSKx3E Noise is a by-product of using high ISO levels where the processor must amplify low signals from the sensor to create artefacts or odd specks of colour within the image. This noise degrades the quality of the image so noise reduction should be applied. Six variables are available when modifying noise reduction within LR thus:

- **Luminance** (similar to film grain) is usually set to 0. Once you have adjusted the Luminance Noise slider you can then adjust its Detail and Contrast sliders. You might want to push it up as high as 50, but can increase or decrease the variable depending on the image and noise levels.
- **Detail** controls the luminance noise threshold – the higher the value the more detail in the image but, as a result, you may experience some residual noise. If you use a lower value you will get a smoother result but with less detail. This value is usually set to 50.
- **Contrast** controls luminance contrast so high values will retain more contrast but you may also see more noise and mottling in the image. Lower values will give you a smoother result but again at the expense of reducing contrast. This is usually set to 0.
- **Colour** generally affects solid blocks of colour and is usually set to 25. You might want to push it up as high as 50, but can increase or decrease the variable depending on the image and noise levels.
- **Detail** controls the colour noise threshold. Higher values will protect detail in thin coloured edges at the expense of removing speckled colour. Lower values will give you some added smoothing of the colour noise but colours bleed into each other. Usually set to 50.
- **Smoothness** – adjusting will help reduce low-frequency colour mottling artefacts. Usually set to 50.

7.14 Lens Corrections

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixToozz4stA LR has the ability to make minor adjustments on a per-lens basis, e.g. you can correct for barrel distortion on a particular lens. There are a few variables to play with but one variable I will change, especially with images that contain water can be found by selecting the Colour tab, check the Remove Chromatic Aberration and boost the Purple Amount slider to somewhere between 8-12 depending upon the image but this may have little or no effect if you've removed all magenta and purple from your image.

7.15 Effects

Post crop vignetting is made possible within LR using this tool. The variables are self-explanatory. The ability to add grain is also possible using this tool though I can't think why you would want to add grain to an image.

7.16 HDR

LR now provides the ability to apply HDR techniques to a number of images in order to extend the dynamic range of your camera's sensor. Simply select the number of images then select Cmd/Ctrl H to activate the command. There are only 3 options: Auto-Align, Auto-Tone (both on/off) and De-ghost (none/low/medium/high). This command works really well.

7.17 Panorama

This effective tool within LR allows you to stitch several photos together. Try to provide at least 25%-50% overlap and hold the camera in portrait mode for horizontal panos so the software can competently stitch the photos together. Simply select the number of images then select Cmd/Ctrl P to activate the command. There are a minimum number of options: Type of projection: Spherical/Cylindrical/Perspective; Auto Crop and Boundary Warp (0-100). This is another command that works really well. You can also combine the HDR and Panorama commands and you can also batch process these commands to really speed up your workflow.

8 Q&A Session

There are lots of free tutorials available from the Adobe website - whether or not you have a pukka copy of LR. Many more helpful LR features can be found on the internet and on YouTube. The links shown have been found via Google and You Tube. Note – I've not managed to watch all of them.

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