



Lightroom Bitesize: The Adjustment Brush

In the first version of Lightroom every adjustment was made to the entire image and if you wanted to apply localised adjustments (to just a small area of the image) then you had to export to Photoshop and use that instead. From version 2, however, the Adjustment Brush was added which is a very powerful tool and it is important that you know how to use it.

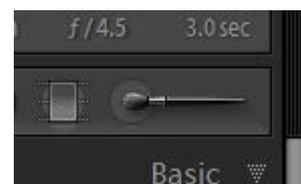
IMPORTANT: Prepare to be amazed, this is a fantastic tool.

We are going to use this photograph that I took specifically to demonstrate the power of the Adjustment Brush. It shows some very old books called the Art Journal which date from the mid 1800's sitting on our dining room table. I have lit the shot with an oil lamp which we use in the event of a power cut - but which gives the photograph an appropriate light given the age of the books.

It makes sense to carry out all of the basic editing (white balance, exposure, etc.) on the whole image first before carrying out any localised adjustments. I have already done this - and also cropped some dead space off the left-hand side.



Go into the Develop module of Lightroom. The Adjustment Brush is on the top-right of the tool panel (just under the histogram) and looks, conveniently, like a brush.





The first thing I want to do is to darken the table-top immediately to the right of the open book so that more emphasis is placed on the book itself.

Click on the Adjustment Brush to open it.

Top Tip !

Use the letter K key on the keyboard to quickly open the Adjustment Brush tool. You can do this even if you're not in the Develop module.

You will immediately notice a few things change:

- A new panel opens with various slider bars
- The cursor changes to two concentric circles.

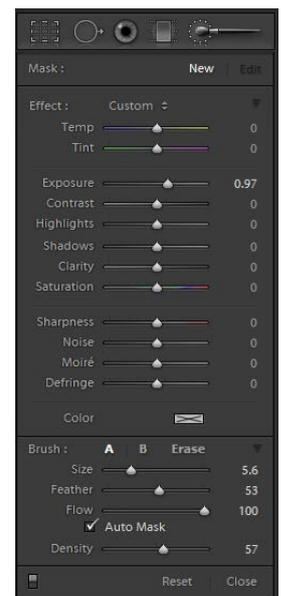
The top part of the panel has 12 sliders controlling the effects that can be painted on with the adjustment brush.

With the exposure, highlights and shadows sliders you are effectively dodging and burning the image (but in a more controllable way than with Photoshop) but you can also paint in clarity, saturation and sharpness too.

The lower part of the panel controls the brush itself. You can use the 'size' slider to adjust the brush size, you can use the [and] keys or you can use the scroll wheel on your mouse.

The Feather slider controls how soft the brush edges are and this is indicated by the outer ring of the cursor. To make the brush have a harder edge reduce the slider - you will also see the outer ring will reduce in size to give a visual indication of the reduced softness.

There are two custom brush sizes available (A and B) so you can set up your two most-commonly used types. Just click the appropriate letter at the top of the panel to swap between them. If you make a mistake and brush over an area accidentally then click on 'Erase' and the brush changes to erase the mask and not paint it on.



Top Tip !

When using brush A or B just press and hold the Alt key (Mac: Opt) to temporarily change the brush into an eraser.

The 'flow' is best left at 100%, and likewise the 'density'.

The 'Auto Mask' check box is very useful since it detects edges (based on colour) and masks them so stopping the brush from spilling over. I find it best to leave it switched on most of the time.



So we are going to darken the table-top to the immediate right of the book by locally reducing the exposure. To do this reduce the setting of the 'exposure' slider. Obviously you won't know how much to reduce it by - and you may be tempted to do it bit-by-bit. It may take some getting used to - but reduce it right down. The effect will be far too dark but it doesn't matter, we can adjust it later. Also, since we are going to be painting right up to the edge of the book make sure the 'Auto Mask' box is checked.

Now paint over the table-top area. It will go far darker than we want but we will adjust it in a moment.

You will notice a little pin appear when you start to paint. This is to identify the adjustment area. Clicking on the pin later will re-activate that localised adjustment area - very useful if you have several adjustment areas on the same image - as we will have later on.



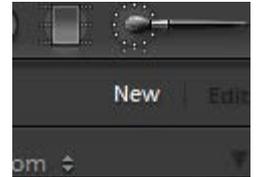
Now we have painted over the area that we want to darken. Far too dark but at least we can clearly see the area that we painted. Now to adjust it to something more acceptable.

Simply adjust the 'Exposure' slider to the right and see the painted area lighten. Stop when you have the desired effect.





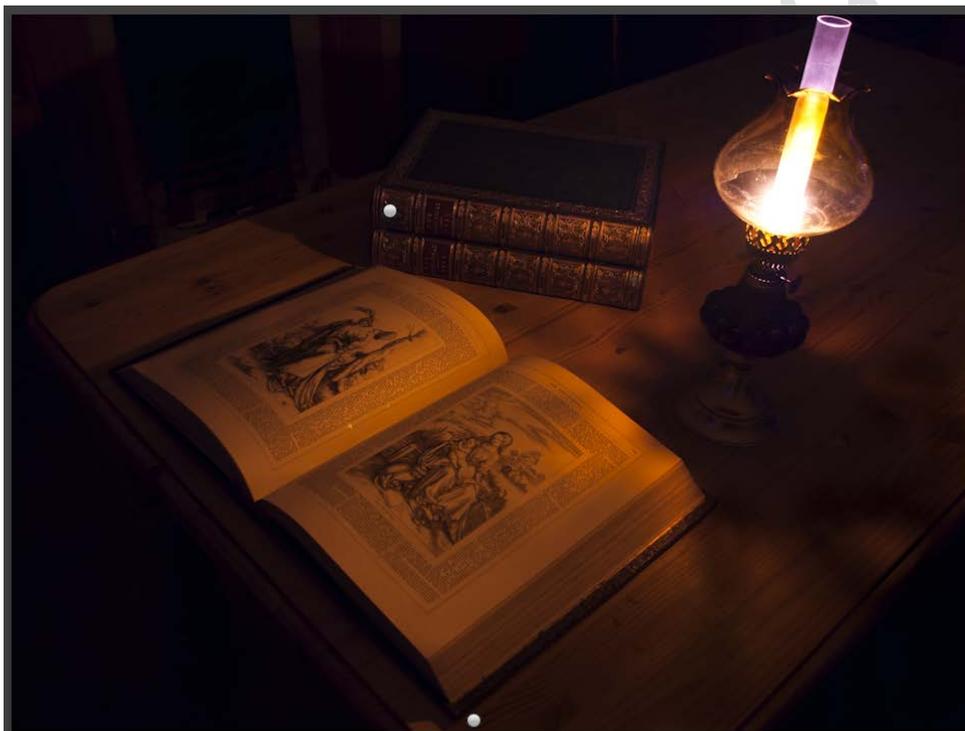
You will see that the pin head that identifies the adjustment area has a black centre. This shows that the localised adjustment area is still active. If you have finished with that area just press 'New' at the top of the tool panel. You will see the pin will now turn totally white indicating that the localised adjustment area is now locked. To edit it again, just click on the pin head.



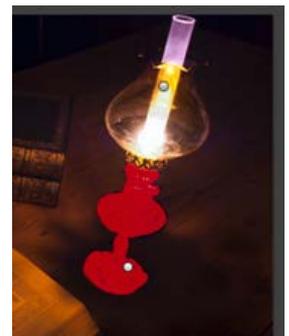
I just think that the pile of books at the back could do with being a bit lighter so we'll do a similar adjustment - but this time with the 'Exposure' slider turned right up.

Now we can re-adjust the exposure slider to give the effect we want.

In order to accentuate the embossing on the spines of the book I also take the opportunity to increase the 'Clarity' and 'Sharpness' sliders. Remember, this only applies to the localised area that we just brushed on.



If you want to check where you have painted over just hover the cursor over the applicable pin head and the painted area will show with a red mask overlay.





You can now continue editing and adding as many localised adjustment areas as you wish, as can be seen by the numerous pins on my completed version.



So here we have the final image with some localised adjustments which I think improve the overall effect. And all done so simply with just one tool in Lightroom.



Lightroom Bitesize

by
John Hallett Photography



And finally....

Top Tip !

If you have got a tablet use it with the Adjustment Brush - it brings dodging & burning to a whole new level.

If you found this tutorial useful please let me know by leaving a comment on my Facebook page (or just 'Like' it) at <https://www.facebook.com/johnhallettphotographs/> . Thanks