

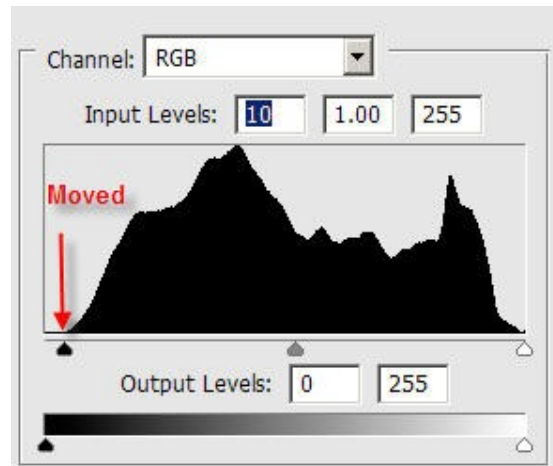
Shadows/Highlights and Color Curves Correction (PE5)

Check Your Picture First

Before you start any color or contrast correction on your photos, take a look at the picture. Is it too dark in places? Is it too bright? Does it have some really bad color? While there are many things you can do with a photo, the first thing I do is add a Levels adjustment layer. To add this layer, click on the black/white circle icon at the bottom of the layers palette, and select Levels. Let's use an example. Here is a photo of a ship which you may have seen before in the tutorial on using selections to change portions of a picture..



As we mentioned previously, it has a nice sky, but the water is a little dark. If we add a Levels layer, we can see the histogram, and it spreads along most of the axis. The most we can do is move the black point inward to the start of the slope, as in this capture of the histogram.



When we look at the revised picture, it brings out the cloud a little better, but it makes the dark ocean even darker. So using a regular Levels layer is not the answer to fixing this photo. What we want to do, in a photo like this with strong differences in light and dark is one of two things:

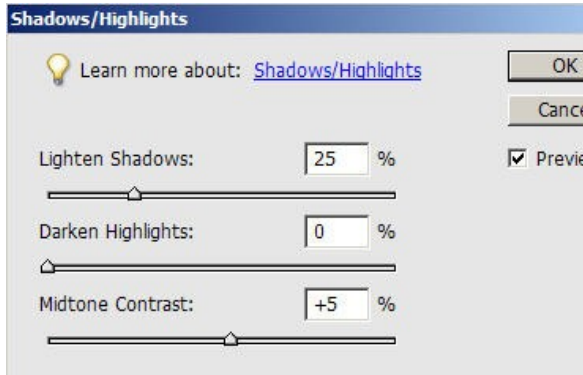
- either add a shadows/highlights correction, or
- add a selection to isolate the ocean, and then add a Levels layer

Let's try the shadows/highlights first. But before we do, remember to either turn off the Levels layer, or throw it away in the trash.

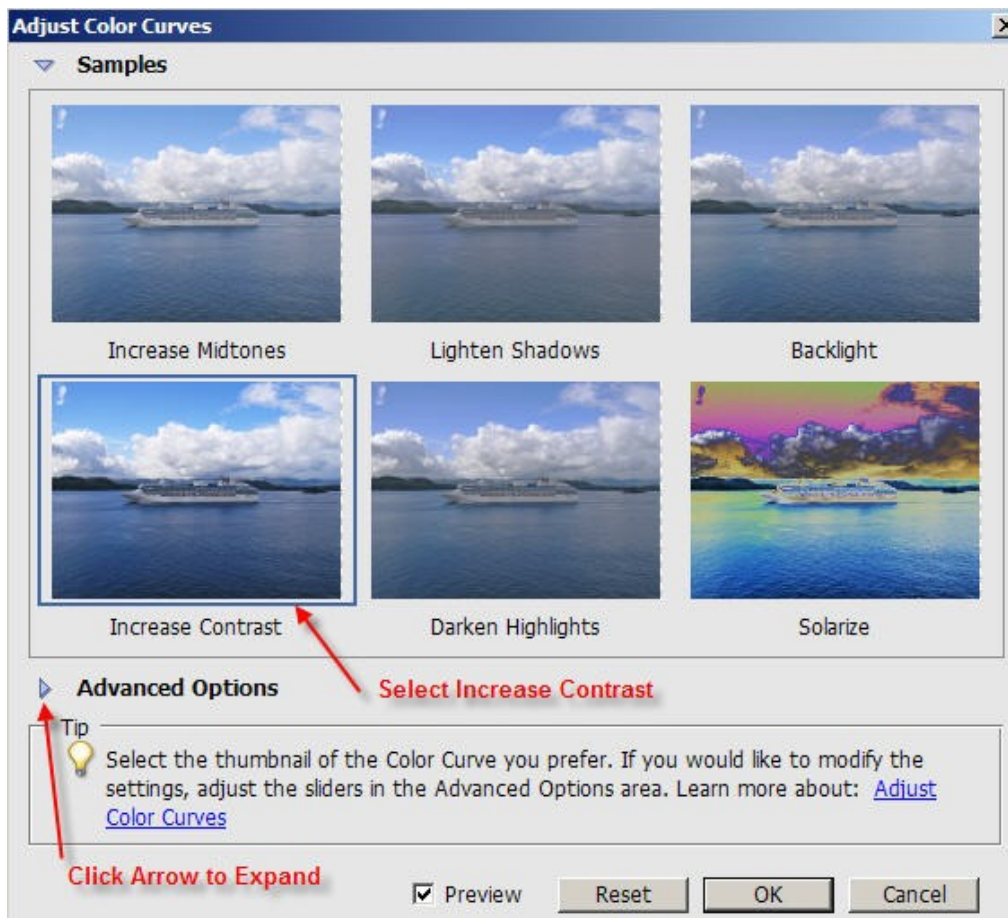
Shadows/Highlights and Color Curves Correction

Using the shadows/highlights correction on your picture will permanently change whatever layer you apply it to. So, first make a copy of your background layer. Then rename the background copy layer as

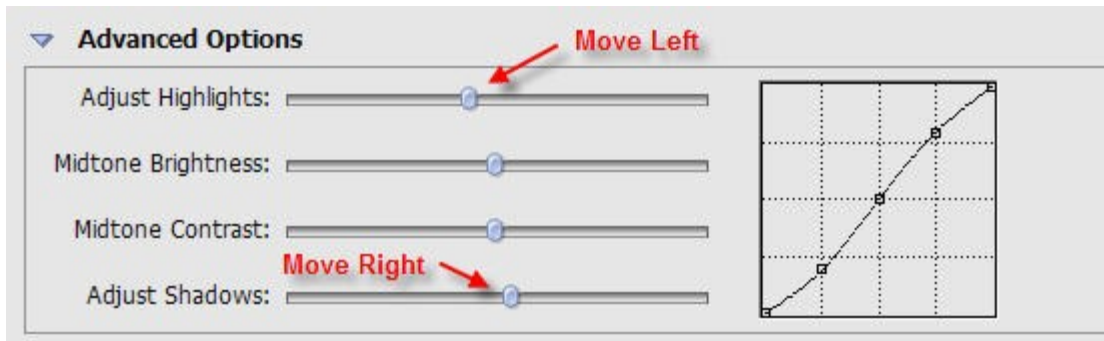
Shadows/Highlights. With that layer active, select Enhance > Adjust Lighting > Shadows/Highlights. You will get another screen where you can adjust the details. The default on lightening the Shadows is 25%, and that works well here. I opted to increase the Midtones to +5%.



The photo looks better, but the whole thing looks a little washed out. Now, those of you who bought Photoshop Elements 5 will like what happens next. To punch up the picture we need to add a Color Curves correction, BUT, we must first make a copy of the Shadows/Highlights layer. Then select Enhance > Adjust Color > Adjust Color Curves. You will get a screen with multiple views of the photo.



We are going to improve the contrast, so we select the image for Increase Contrast. The other thing we do is click on the small arrow next to the Advance Options phrase to get more control over our picture. After we open the Advance Options, we need to make some further changes to the Photoshop Elements Color Curves Increase Contrast settings. I find that the Increase Contrast default settings are often too harsh. So to make them more suitable for this picture (and for most photos that I have processed), I move the upper settings tab for Adjust Highlights to the Left, and the Adjust Shadows settings tab to the Right. As you make these changes you can see the changes they make to the "Curve" on the right. This "Curve" is what we would see in a regular version of Photoshop if we were to add a Curves Adjustment layer.



After All these adjustments, we get a very nice picture of our ship in the ocean.



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