25 / ADJUSTING COLOR W/ CURVES

There are many ways to adjust color and brightness within Photoshop, but curves offers the most precise control. In this section we will focus on getting comfortable reading and adjusting curves. The process of adjusting color may be referred to as *color adjustment* (term often used by photographers), *color correction* (term often used by videographers), or *color grading* (a term traditionally used by filmmakers). While some of the palettes shown in thus tutorial may differ visually from the version of Photoshop you're using in the Visual Language labs, the functionality is the same.

RECIPE: MAKING A CURVE ADJUSTMENT LAYER

The image of the Apple we're working with is darker than we would like. The following exercise will use curves to brighten and balance the image.

YOU WILL NEED:

- Computer with Adobe Photoshop CS6.
- The "sad apple" file from the last exercise.

STEPS:

1. Make sure the adjustments panel is open: Windows > Adjustments. Then click on Curves to mask the curves adjustment layer.

2. Notice that a new layer is automatically created above your background layer. Curves shows us the RGB histogram and has an adjustable diagonal line as well as a black and white points on the bottom left and right. By adjusting these points you adjust the tonal range of your image. This is also known as adjusting the "levels."

ADJUSTMENT LAYER

A special layer which allows you to adjust the image in a way that is NOT permanent. We can change it or remove it at any point in our project. It usually affects all of the layers below it, but by clicking on the square with an arrow icon at the bottom of the adjustment layers palette, you can restrict the changes to the single layer below the adjustment layer.

3. We can adjust the level of the composite RGB channel or we can adjust the levels of each individual Red, Green and Blue channel. Adjusting individual channels gives us much more control. Click on the portion of the adjustment window that says "RGB." We will start with the Red channel.
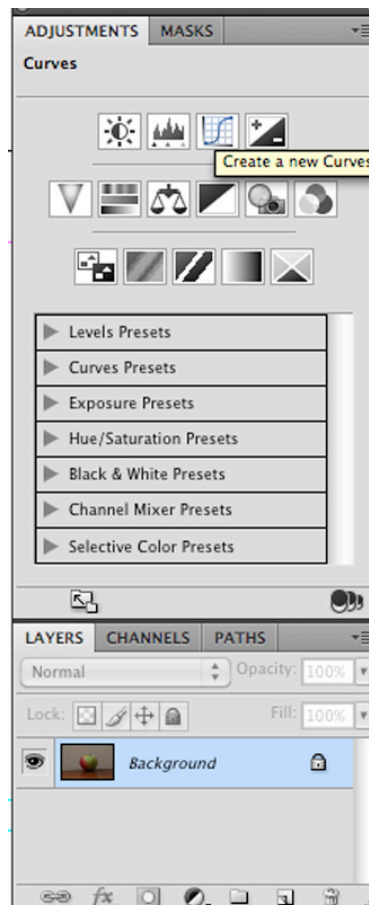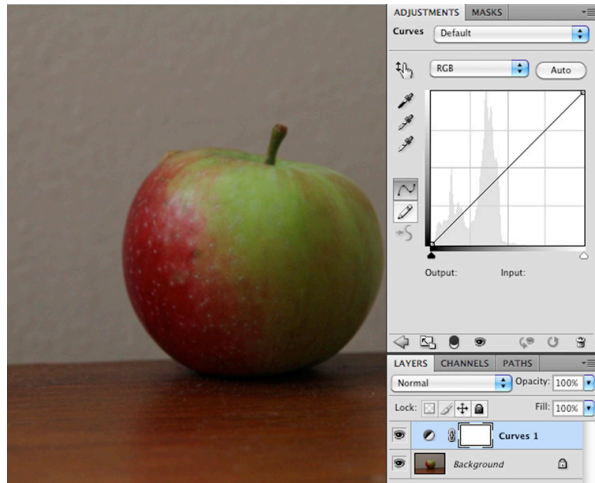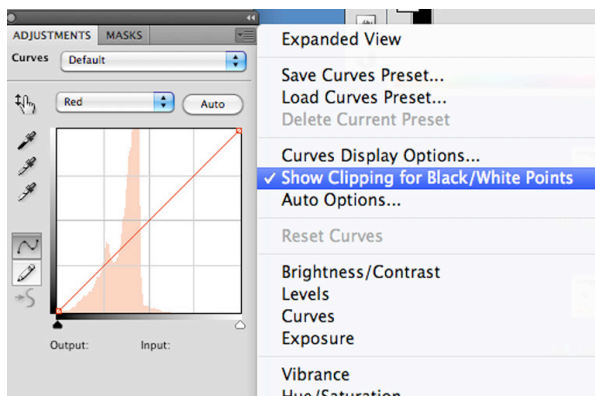
4. Click on the list icon at the top right of your window. This icon is at the top of every window in Photoshop and gives you more options. Scroll down to "Show Clipping for Black and White Points."

CLIPPING

The clipping option alerts you to when your highlights become blown out or when your shadows become too dark.


5. Notice how the white point on the right is in a portion of the histogram that lacks any information. We want

to move that point towards the left to brighten up the image.

6. With the clipping option checked click on the white point and the screen turns black. If you move the white point to the left you can begin to see red areas on the image. The red marks tell us which points are now too bright. Once we see red we can slowly bring the white point to the right until the last bit of red disappears.
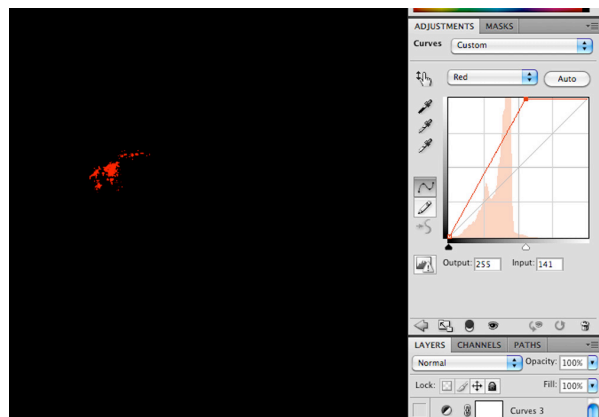

7. Notice how the image has become red. This is because we were brightening up the tonal values of the Red Channel. We will continue to balance the other channels to even out our image.
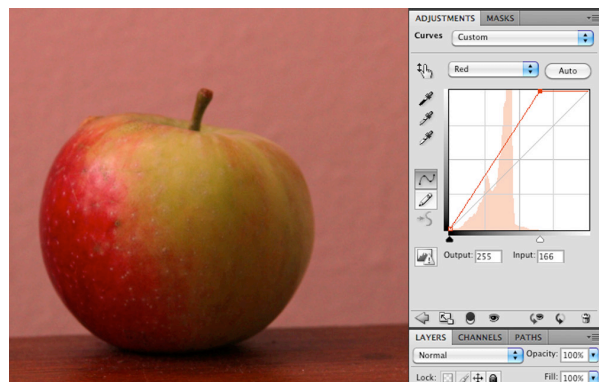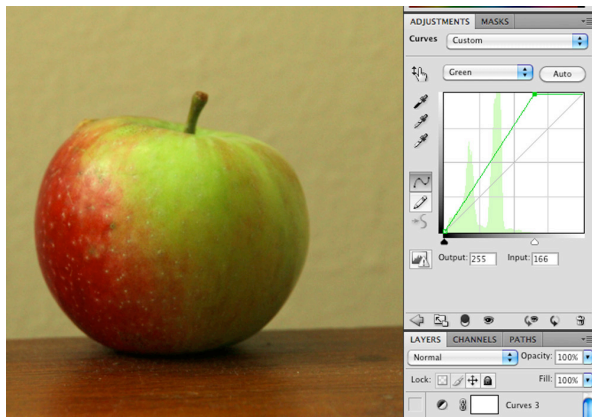

8. Change from the Red to the Green Channel. Make sure that you have the clipping option checked. Bring in the

white point until you see the green clipping then slowly bring it back until the screen is black again.
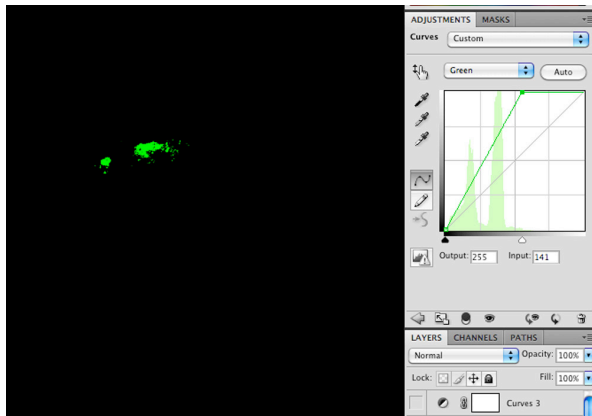
9. Now the image should appear much brighter, though with a green color cast.

10. Now we are ready to change the Blue Channel. Blue is a strong hue in RGB mode and it can sometimes overpower your image. Instead of bringing the white point to where it begins to clip, turn off the clipping option so that you can view the image as you adjust it.

11. Bring your white point all the way to the left where your histogram information ends. The image probably has a slight blue color cast.

12. Slow adjust define slow adjust? use the arrow keys? the white point back until the blue color cast disappears and the image seems natural. You've now adjusted the image using curves.

13. Before we close switch to the RGB Composite Channel in your curves dialogue box. You should notice that there is a separate adjustment line for each color channel.
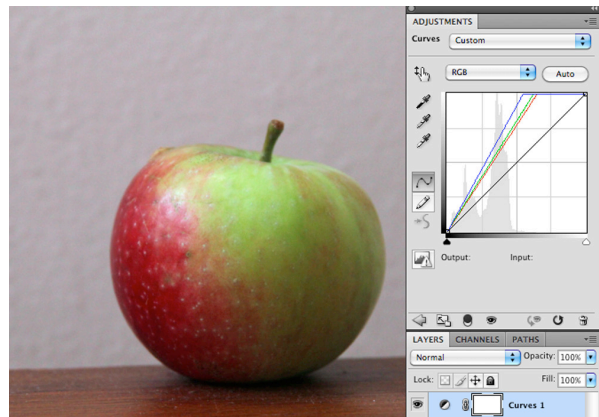
Notice how the "tonal curve" of the red, green, and blue layers have been individually adjusted in order to bring the overall color and tonal scale in line with a "properly exposed" image (which remains a highly subjective judgement).

GOING FURTHER WITH COLOR

There is so much that can be done with color. If you are interested in learning more there's an excellent Lynda.com tutorial by Taz Tally called: Photoshop CS4: Color Correction. Even though it is for an older version of Photoshop the methods still apply the current CS6 version.