



The Power of Adjustment Layers


With Adjustment Layers You Can Stack Up As Many Reversible, Non-Destructive Image Adjustments As You Like

Adjustment layers merely change the appearance of the layer(s) below without modifying any of the pixels. You can change an adjustment layer's settings long after you've created it and you can stack adjustment layers to produce cumulative editing effects. If you save your images in the Photoshop (.psd) format, the adjustment layers are saved with them and remain fully editable. Adjustment layers are versatile. You can turn them on and off to compare the edited image with the original. You can reduce their opacity to dial down the strength of the adjustment. You can also produce selective color or tonal adjustments by painting on an adjustment layer's mask, enabling you to fine-tune which areas are being altered. So while it's still possible to apply levels and curves adjustments, for example, directly to an image layer, why would you? Adjustment layers give you much more control.

1. Add an Adjustment Layer

Open "The Power of Adjustment Layer.jpg". This landscape has rather dull tones and it's a good subject for a whole series of adjustments.




If you open the Layers panel you'll see just one 'Background' layer containing the photo. Click the adjustment layer button  at the bottom of the panel and chose Brightness/Contrast.

2. Brightness and Contrast

Very quickly we can make our picture look better by increasing the Brightness and reducing the Contrast.



3. Adding a Vibrance Layer

You can now see the new adjustment layer added above the background image in the layers panel. But fixing the brightness and contrast has made it obvious that this picture has a serious lack of color saturation, and the solution is to add a vibrance adjustment layer. Click the adjustment layer button  at the bottom of the panel and chose vibrance.



4. Add a Photo Filter

The vibrance adjustment layer's been added at the top of the Layers panel and we've moved its properties panel down to the right of the screen so that it doesn't get in the way.



5. Everything can still be changed

This Photo Filter layer has been added at the top of the Layers panel, and it's given our image a subtle, warm look. So now we have three adjustment layers stacked on top of each other, but we can still go back and change the Brightness/Contrast layer, say, to modify the overall effect.

6. Layer Order Is Important

Layers panel to change their order, but be aware that it can change the overall effect. Here, for example, moving the vibrance layer above the Photo Filter layer means that the photo filter's warming effect has been exaggerated.

