

PHOTOGRAPHY PROCESSING

WORKFLOW

I have been asked to write some notes on processing workflow, so here it is.

Firstly, I need to say, there is no set workflow. People have different ways of approaching their processing and use different software, so what I have written below reflects my own steps and even then, they are not always followed in that strict order!, sometimes it depends on the picture and what you are trying to achieve with it.

Having said this, there are some general recommendations that I will make, to guide you in the manner in which you process your images.

I'm going to assume you are shooting RAW, although much of this applies to JPEG images as well. I'm also assuming you are using Lightroom and/or Photoshop, although again the principles will apply to whatever editing s/w you use.

If you use Lightroom DEVELOP module or even in the RAW CONVERSION PANEL, you may do some of these steps in those modules, if not do them in Photoshop.

1. DENOISE. If you have shot your image with a long exposure or high ISO, its worth DENOISING before you start processing. As soon as you start processing you are likely to start exaggerating any noise, so minimise that to start with.
2. COLOUR CASTS – correct any obvious colour cast, for example if you used the wrong LIGHT BALANCE setting when taking the photo.
3. STRAIGHTEN. Straighten your picture (or correct any distortion) Reason is this will usually 'crop' your image to some extent.
You may find by doing this that you have lost too much from the edges of your picture and may need to extend your canvas and use 'auto fill' to maintain your image content as you want it. If so extend your image before you straighten/crop/correct distortion, IF your image will work with an extended canvas!
If it is clear you will be cropping your picture, I do it early on so extraneous elements/tones/colours etc. don't impact on your later processing.
This exercise depends very much on the image as to whether to correct first, then extend or vice-versa.
4. CURVES/LEVELS. I usually apply these at this stage because I don't use Camera RAW for this purpose. It is to ensure you have the contrast and tones right in your image. You may want to apply numerous Curves adjustment layers for different parts of the image (using masks). I tend to use a mix of CURVES with LUMINOSITY MASKS, in order to select specific tonal areas for the Curves to work on. (and may well repeat this step later in my processing if I feel it necessary)
5. At this stage you could do whatever your imagination dictates in your processing. It is totally subjective.
I tend to use TOPAZ a lot to process my image (other Filter s/w are available on the market),

but basically you are processing tones, colours, vibrance, clarity, sharpness etc. applying your artistic interpretation.

6. SHARPEN - Having got your image as you want, usually if you need to sharpen, you would try to do it as late as possible as it tends to add 'artifacts' if you are not careful.
7. DENOISE again if necessary and the image will stand the inevitable 'softening' that denoise brings.
8. Check for Dust spots. Zoom in considerably and then scan across moving the image back and forward slowly. You will see any dust spots far easier this way as the eye picks them up better in movement.
9. Check Edges for any obvious distractions close to the edge of the image and clone out if necessary. Also clone out any unwanted elements in the image.
10. It is very easy to think your image is correct as far as tone/colour is concerned, when it isn't. You have been working on your image for a while and got used to how it looks. A CAST is not always obvious to you. As a final 'check' I usually apply an AUTO TONE to my image, just to check that whatever PS thinks it should be is not drastically different from what was there before. It's an easy way to ensure you have no unnoticed cast on your image. You can always delete the Auto Tone after or reduce it's opacity if you feel it has changed your tones too much from what you intended.

I haven't gone into a lot of detail on steps as they really do vary depending on the image, S/W you use and your own preferences. Other people may have a different approach, but the above are broadly what I tend to do and why.

Calvin.