

A PHOTO PROCESSING WORKFLOW

Posted on 2017-01-25 by spd_wp_admin

Dear Reader,

In response to a conversation or two, I have been thinking about my photo processing workflow. The current process is divided into 5 major steps, the details of which are expanded upon below. What do you think? As always, I invite your comments.

- 1 – Transfer
- 2 – Check for Bones and Banality
- 3 – Adjust
- 4 – Remove Spots
- 5 – Remove Clutter

Assumptions and Principles

- Photos are Captured as Raw
- Tool set is Adobe Photography CC (Lightroom and Photoshop Subscription)
- Within my photo folder structure I have one called “Exercises and Ideas” for photos that have within them the seed of an idea, and are therefore worth keeping.
- Don’t spend time on photos that are without merit.
- Star Rating – This is my interpretation of the 5 star rating scale that can be set within Lightroom’s Library module.
 - 1 – Delete
 - 2 – Idea – Execution is poor but there’s a seed of an idea – destined for “Exercises and Ideas”
 - 3 – OK – Execution is fine – could be destined for “Exercises and Ideas” or could be shared
 - 4 – Yes – It’s a good photo but it’s missing special sauce
 - 5 – Oooh

1 – Step Transfer

Tool (s): Windows Explorer & Lightroom -> Library Module

1. Create Folder based on location/topic and date
2. Transfer photographs from camera to folder

3. Reformat Memory Card in Camera using camera's menu item
4. Add Folder to Lightroom
5. Assign all photos a star rating of 1

2 – Check For Bones and Banality

I often take a number of photos of the same subject with minor differences in composition, exposure, or lighting.

Tool: Lightroom -> Library Module

1. Go through folder keeping only those images where the lighting, focus, and framing are acceptable. Sometimes, unacceptable photos contain a seed of an idea.
2. Assign where appropriate a star rating of 2 – 5
3. Make sure that all 1 star photos have been deleted
4. The result of these 4 steps is a much smaller set of photos that inevitably require some adjustment. As an example, on a recent day trip to Johnson Canyon, 98 images made it back to the car. Of those 98 images, 86 were deleted leaving 12 images (1 – 2 star, 4 – 3 star, 7 – 4 star, 0 – 5 star).

3 – Adjust

Tool (s): Lightroom -> Develop Module

1. **Crop and straighten:** If desired, required, or warranted
2. **Lens Corrections:** “Enable Profile Corrections” – I am currently not using this setting
3. **Camera Calibration.Process:** Ensure it is the current one
4. **Profile.Process:** Choose the appropriate one. For me it is “Camera Landscape” or “Camera Standard”. I just started using this setting and it makes a noticeable and positive difference.
5. **Effects.Dehaze:** (optional) Anything above 10 seems to start shifting the image towards the un-natural. My most common adjustment is to 5 or 10
6. **Basic.Exposure:** Lighten the the exposure by 1/4 stop or so depending on the dehaze adjustment as a positive dehaze adjustment cools and darkens the image.
7. **Detail.Sharpen:** I try to keep things natural looking or “how I remember the scene”
8. **Basic** For a little bit I was making minor adjustments to Colour Temperature (usually to the warm side by 100-200 degrees K), but no more. The remaining collection of Tone and Presence adjustments are done in no particular order. Same comments hold true for the Presence adjustments as for the Detail ones.
9. **Adjust Star Rating:** Sometimes the above adjustments reveal strengths and weaknesses

4 – Remove Spots

Tool: Lightroom -> Develop Module

Using the spot removal brush, remove spots from images that are going to be shown, shared, displayed. These are images with star ratings of 4, 5, and possibly 3.

5 – Remove Image Clutter (optional)

Tool: Photoshop

Sometimes there are 4 star images that can be improved through the removal of such things as power lines. It is not worth the effort for 3 star images, and the rare 5 star images don't require this.

Cheers, spd

2 Replies to “A Photo Processing Workflow”

1. **spd_wp_admin** says:

2017-01-25 at 15:20 Edit

Thank you for the dialogue. Cheers, Sean

2. **keith** says:

2017-01-25 at 12:40 Edit

Mine, for what it's worth.

I migrate directly from camera chip to Lightroom. There are settings so Lightroom breaks up the big import folder into subfolders by date. Then I go through all images with one finger on the right arrow key, one finger on the 1 key to assign one star, and one on the x key. At the end there are three sets. One star means I'll look at it more, compare it to similar images to pick the best, since I might take dozens of a subject. An x to flag as rejected those that are out of focus or are not ever worth another look. The remainder with no star might be useful for experimenting on, and hard drive space is cheap. I'll periodically delete all the rejected images.

Then I'll look at just the one star, and figure out which I'll work on, sometimes by assigning a second star to keep track. Anything I edit gets 3 stars, and saved in a separate file outside Lightroom. Only the very best get 4 or 5 stars. I also use the colour ratings, blue to mark the 3 HDR images making a set. On one photo shoot of cats, each cat was assigned a colour, so I could easily show all the photos of each cat.

Along the way I'll assign keywords. It's easy if all the photos being imported are the same place or subject. Then as I edit each one I'll assign keywords. This is an evolving process.

My edit process, depending on the image. Figure out what crop, if any. Most landscapes go to 9x16, most portraits to 8x10. Some scenes demand different crops. Tweak exposure, white balance, and contrast if necessary. Use option key to prevent white and black clipping. Tweak shadows and highlights. Then clarity, vibrance, saturation. Then dehaze. All of these are done looking at the image, and tweaking till it looks right for the image. I might cycle through the settings, to fine tune each based on the impact of other settings. I might or might not do lens corrections or tweak individual colours.

I'll take out spots if I notice them. It's rare to use the neutral density filter, or radial filter, and even rarer to use the adjustment brush. I'm not as comfortable with those tools. I'm not a fan of removing stuff using Photoshop because I don't like what gets left behind, but maybe that's because I'm not doing it right. Not a fan of Photoshop in general.

Images get exported to a preset called social media, includes JPEG, 100%, sRGB, limit to 1,000K, long edge, 2048 Px, resolution 96 px. Images destined for print get different settings. There's also a lower right watermark.