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ACADEMY

A GUIDE TO NEWBORN BABY EDITING

Tips for beginners.

In my last article, I spoke of the elements that we should focus on to achieve a beautiful image ‘in camera’. The next step is to polish these images in the editing process.

Newborn babies offer a whole range of challenges when it comes to retouching; these include baby acne, dry skin, blotchiness, redness and jaundice. It is essential to have a good understanding of your editing software and the processes and techniques needed to overcome these challenges.

Here are a few tips to help keep the editing processing time down to a minimum and ensure the best possible results:

GET IT RIGHT IN CAMERA

It is important to remember that we use photo editing software such as Photoshop to polish an already well lit, nicely composed and correctly exposed image into an exceptional one. Photoshop is not used to try and convert a poor image into something that is merely acceptable. To save time in Photoshop and ensure a

pleasing end result you need to have as best an ‘in-camera’ image as possible. So, what makes a great in camera image?

- It must be in focus.
- It must be well composed.
- It must be lit well (good exposure and direction of light).
- It must have accurate colours (white balance).
- It must have excellent attention to detail (fix the blanket creases, straight hair bands etc).



KNOW YOUR TOOLS

Photoshop is the most popular tool of choice when it comes to skin retouching and is used to enhance an image. If you are entirely new to Photoshop, it is a good idea to enrol in a Photoshop course to understand the basics. Photoshop is incredibly powerful, and at first, it can be very daunting. Don’t stress! The good news is that we do not need to use very advanced or complicated techniques. After a basic course for beginners, and a few days of practice you will get be able to tackle most scenarios we as newborn photographers usually encounter.

GET THE COLOUR RIGHT

The colours we see on our computer monitors are not always those that our camera created. It is essential to calibrate (colour correct) your monitor to be sure we have an accurate representation of the baby's skin colour. If you have the budget, buy a professional retouching monitor that can just about display the full gamut of colours that your camera captures. (I use an Eizo ColorEdge CG277). This monitor can self-calibrate, which is very handy, but it is also quite costly.



For your existing monitor or laptop screen, you should invest in a monitor calibration tool to ensure you have accurate colours that is set to an industry standard. The most popular monitor calibration tools are made by [Datacolor](#) or [X-Rite](#).

Remember, if your monitor is not calibrated you will have a great looking image on the screen, but when it comes to printing that image, the colours will be different.

CONSISTENCY

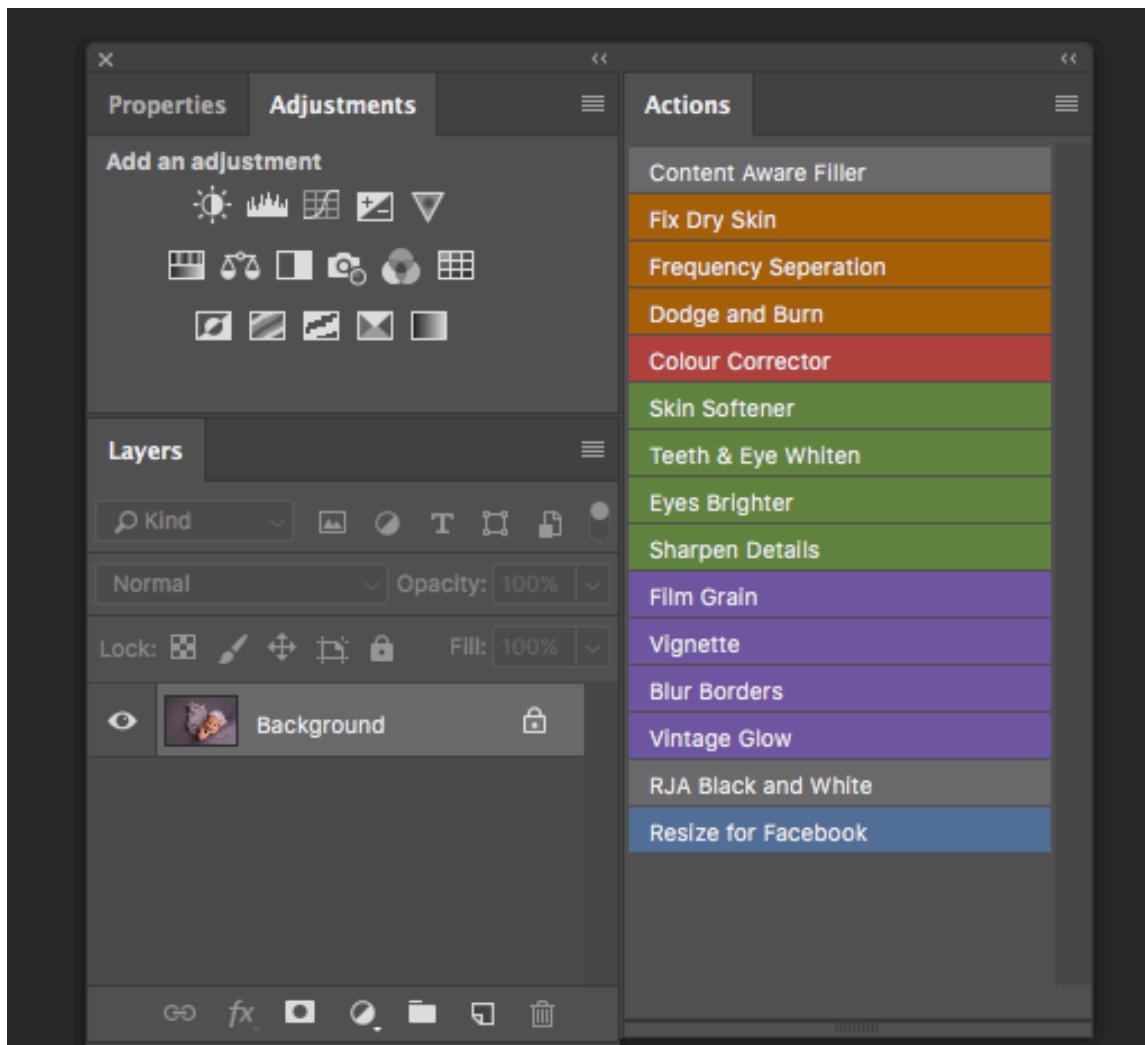
Always try to work on the same monitor and in the same lighting conditions. If the light in the room in which you are editing is inconsistent, you will have inconsistent colour and exposure from one gallery to the next. For instance, if the room is too bright, you will tend to overcompensate by darkening the image. If bright red walls are reflecting red light onto your screen, you may compensate by adding green into your image. I like to edit at night in a dark room, so I am consistently editing my pictures in the same lighting conditions. If editing at night does not suit your lifestyle, invest in some nice thick curtains or blackout blinds so you can get your room nice and dark, consistency is the key.

CUT OUT THE DISTRACTIONS

I always try to edit a full session from start to finish in one go. It means that all of the images in that gallery will look much the same. When I edit at night, the kids are in bed, and there are fewer distractions. I switch off the social media and close down my email. My headphones and my 80's playlist come out, and I get the gallery edited within a couple of hours instead of a whole day!

...AND ACTION!

Use Photoshop actions to speed up your workflow. When it comes to editing newborn babies, we encounter the same challenges over and over again. A Photoshop action is a recorded series of steps used to correct a specific problem. This sequence of steps can then be re-applied to another image by simply clicking a button.



You can't rely on Photoshop actions alone, but they do help when it comes to reducing the amount of time you spend in front of the computer.

Buy a Photoshop action set that is specific for newborn baby retouching. These actions will address all of the unique problems we face when editing newborn

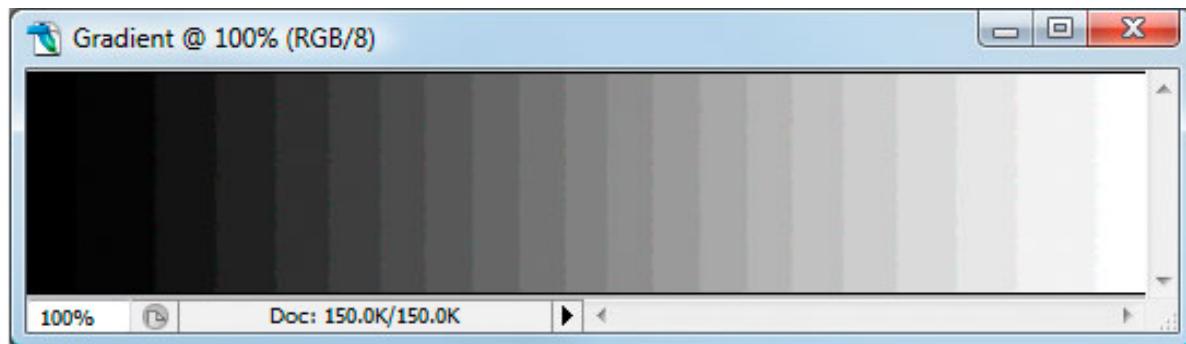
baby skin. [My newborn action set](#) is available at the Russ Jackson Academy website.

16-bit vs 8-bit? (RAW vs Jpeg)

At the risk of getting too technical, I will keep this short; It is important though!

A 16 Bit image (RAW, TIFF and PSD) has infinitely more separate colours than an 8 Bit image (Jpeg) image. At face value it is impossible for the human eye (or our screens) to see the difference between the two so why does it matter?

It comes down to the editing process, particularly when it comes to applying filters such as gradients and vignettes. When applying a vignette to an 8-bit image (jpeg), we encounter a common problem known as "banding". "Banding" happens when Photoshop can no longer display smooth transitions from one colour to the next. Instead, you get an ugly stair-stepping effect between the colours. When applying a vignette to a full 16-bit image, these steps are dramatically reduced, and we have a smoother transition between the colours and tonal ranges.



Shoot your photos in the RAW format and then edit them in Photoshop as a 16-bit image. Keep in mind that when working with 16-bit images, the file size is much larger than you'd have with an 8-bit image, and if you have an older computer, it could have an impact on how long it takes you to work in Photoshop.

Save your 16-bit version as a Photoshop .PSD file and then save a separate 8-bit JPEG version in a separate folder which can be used for your clients USB and for printing.

DON'T OVERDO IT.

We can easily over-retouch a baby's skin. There is nothing worse than a plastic looking baby that looks more like a children's doll. Our customers are paying us for beautiful pictures of their baby, and we have a professional and moral obligation to supply them with just that. For instance, it is not hard to accidentally change the complexion of a baby; some nationalities have more yellow hues in the skin which can easily be mistaken for jaundice. I always do a quick before and after comparison before I save a retouched image to be sure that I have not overdone the retouching process.

Remember, babies are beautiful just the way they are. When it comes to retouching, all we have to do is remove the temporary blemishes that will pass after a few weeks.

Just because you can doesn't mean you should.

I go into much more detail and demonstrate my editing workflow in my '[*Editing for Newborn Photography*](#)' online workshop.

All the best and stay safe!

Russ