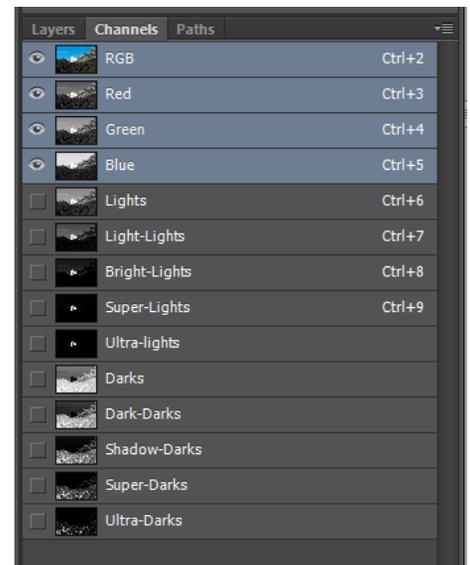# Luminosity Masking

Luminosity masks are a way to adjust specific tonal ranges in the image without having to adjust the entire image. These masks ignore color and instead evaluate the Image for luminance selecting only bright or dark areas in the image. Luminosity masks are created by making a selection that was created on a channel (RGB, Red, Green, and Blue). Then an adjustment (such as a Curves Adjustment) is made to that tonal selection. Luminosity masks should be done before you do any creative adjustments. You begin by making five masks of the brightest areas in the image ranging from 50% of the brightest areas down to only the very brightest areas (3.125% of the brightest pixels). Then you repeat the process making five masks for the darkest areas. Luminosity masks are a very powerful tool to give your image a real pop.

- **Making Luminosity Masks:** It is highly recommended to make an Action by first clicking on the **Create new action** button (folded paper icon) and calling the action Luminosity Mask. The record button will turn red.

- **Making Brightest Luminosity Masks:**

    - To begin depress **Ctrl+Alt+2** and a selection of the brightest pixels (brighter than 50% grey) will be made excluding the darker pixels. You can also select the brightest pixels by clicking on Channels and then dragging the RGB layer to the dotted circle icon (Load Channel as Selection). The quickest and easiest way to make a selection is to depress the Ctrl key and click on the RGB Channels thumbnail. Anything brighter than 50% grey will now have marching ants around it. Then save your selection by holding down the **Alt key** and clicking on the **'Save selection as channel'** icon at the bottom of the channel panel (it's a square with a circle in it). A dialog box will appear and name your selection as '**Lights**.' If you **do not want a red Mask**, select 0% opacity. If you were to deselect your selection (**Ctrl+D**), you can easily reload the selection, by depressing the **Ctrl** key and clicking on the 'Lights" channel thumbnail. This singles 'Lights' mask channel may be all you need to adjust the brightest areas of the image; however, if you want to refine your selection to adjust the very brightest pixels, continue with the next steps.

    - Next you will make a selection of 25% of the brightest pixels. With the selection ants marching, hold down the **Shift+Alt+Ctrl** keys and click on the 'Lights' Channel. You will notice that some of the selected areas will be removed with fewer midtone areas selected. Then save your selection by holding down the Alt key and clicking on the 'Save selection as channel' icon. Name this channel '**Light-Lights.'**

    - Repeat holding the keys down and clicking on the last channel so that the selection is gradually narrowed to reveal only the very brightest pixels. You will end up with '**Lights**' (50% of brightness pixels), '**Light-Lights**' (25% brightest pixels), '**Bright-Lights**' (12.5% of brightest pixels), '**Super-Lights**' (6.25% of brightest pixels), and '**Ultra-Lights**' (3.125% of brightest pixels).

- **Making Darkest Luminosity Masks:**

    - **Control-click** on that channel on the Lights channel. Then go to **Select > Inverse** (**Shift+Control+I**)—this changes the selection to be the opposite of what it was. That means instead of it being a highlights selection, it's a shadow selection. Save this as a new channel (hold down the **Alt key** and click on the **Save selection as channel** icon) and name it **Darks** and set Opacity to 0%.

    - Alternative way to select the darkest areas of the image, you simply click on the 'Lights' mask and duplicate the layer (right click and choose Duplicate Channel). In the Dialog box name this new channel **'Darks'** and check the **Inverse** box. You now have a selection the image's darkest areas (50% grey to the very darkest pixels).

    - Then once again progressively intersect the masks with themselves (**Shift+Alt+Ctrl**) to create narrower and narrower selections of the darkest areas of the image. Then save the resulting Luminosity mask (depress the

Alt key and click on the **'Save selection as channel'** icon at the bottom of the channels panel). The resulting dark Luminosity masks should be labeled as '**Darks**' (50% darks), '**Dark-Darks**' (25% darks), '**Shadow Darks**' (12.5% darks),' **Super-Darks**' (6.25% darks), and '**Ultra-Darks**' (3.125% darks).

▪ Finally deselect the selection (Ctrl+D) and stop the Action recording.

- **Making Adjustments using Luminosity Masks:** After you have made the mask selections you can do the following:

  ▪ You can make a Curves adjustment using one of the created Masks. Remember black hides and white reveals. Note that some parts of the mask will be gray and when making adjustments, those areas will be adjusted but to a lesser degree. Therefore, the adjustment will occur mainly in the white areas of the mask.

    To make an adjustment, **Ctrl-Click** on one of the Mask channels to bring up the selection (marching ants) for that tonal range. Then select the Layers tab and depress the 'Create and new fill or adjustment layer' icon and select Curves. To view the mask on the document window, click on the Mask thumbnail and either depress the "\" key (areas being masked will be overlaid with a Ruby color) or depress the Alt key and click on the mask to display a black & white mask. Adjust the curve to lighten or darken the selected area. Turn the visibility icon off to see a before and after state. Note: if you experience undesirable color changes during the Curves adjustment, change the blend mode to **Luminosity** so you are only changing the luminance or tone. Be sure to move the black and white sliders in while holding down the Alt key to see where clipping begins. You can also make other adjustments to the Luminosity Mask by highlighting the mask layer and then adding an adjustment such as Vibrance. Be sure to clip the added adjustment layer to the masked area below by holding down the Alt key and moving your cursor between the layers and clicking. Since the Curves adjustment come with a mask, you can paint with a Black brush to reduce changes to areas you do not want to adjust. To clearly see where you want to paint black, depress the Alt key and click on the mask so that the document window becomes the black and white mask and then paint black over the white areas. Also you can use the Opacity slider to reduce the affect. Levels/Curves adjustments normally work best with 'Light-Light' and 'Bright-Lights' or 'Dark-Darks' and 'Shadow-Darks' selections. If you have several adjustment layers, you can group them by highlighting all the layers (hold down Shift key and click the last layer) and then depress **Ctrl+G**. Then name the group by double clicking on the name.

  ▪ If the original image is slightly "flat" looking and can use some contrast and color punch do the following: First make a selection of the tonal area you want to affect such as 'Lights." Depress **Ctrl+J** which will create a new layer based on the selection. Then on this new layer select a blend mode such as Overlay, Multiply, etc. To increase the affect, select this duplicated layer and duplicate it by depressing **Ctrl+J**. This will repeat the operation and increase the affect. If the affect is too strong, reduce opacity of the new layer.