

Summary of Black & White Conversion Methods (Tony Paine 2015)

All cameras shoot in color; conversion methods are all different and make a difference

Objective of B&W Conversion – Tonal Separation of Major Image Elements

1. **Simplest Level** – Automatic conversion by camera or software (no control)
2. **Simple 1-Step Methods** – all giving different results
 - Pick R, G or B channel only (Elements, LightRoom, PhotoShop, Raw...)
 - Set Saturation to Zero (any program) – gives low contrast image
 - Convert mode from RGB to Grayscale (most programs; also low contrast)
 - **Gradient Map Adjustment Layer** (PhotoShop & ??; also increases contrast)
 - Convert from RGB to LAB and use the Lightness channel
 - **Hi Pass Sharpen 250 pixels with LAB and set Saturation to 0 (see Action 5)**
3. **Level III: Simple Sliders**
 - Use a Hue/Saturation layer in Photoshop with a Gradient Map layer on top
 - Nik Silver Efex Pro 2 can do similar
4. **Level IV: Finest Control by Blending 3-8 Colors**
 - 3 colors: RGB Channel Mixer 6 colors: RYGBM **PS B&W Filter** 8 colors: ROYGBMP Raw, LightRoom

Consider the example of the Photoshop B&W Filter

 - Red, Yellow, Green, Cyan, Blue, Magenta sliders
 - 50/50/50/50/50/50 same as Saturation → 0
 - Default is 40/60/40/60/20/80 (different again)
 - Red, Green and Blue filter presets similar (but not identical) to RGB Channels
 - MORE of a slider (+ve) renders that color LIGHTER in B&W
 - Use the sliders to develop tonal separation between elements in the image
 - Try all the presets and some custom variations
 - **Option to maximize contrast with Gradient Map layer on top of B&W layer**
 - LightRoom and Raw are very similar to Photoshop, but have extra Orange and Purple sliders for a total of 8 sliders
5. **Recommendations**
 - Shoot in Raw if you can
 - Work in an RGB space
 - Although Grayscale file is 1/3 the size, RGB offers 256 vs 100 levels
 - Tinting ability in RGB space
 - Work at 16 bit, even with a starting JPEG
 - Files are 2X larger, but less chance of histogram artifacts
 - Optimize and sharpen color image to take advantage of color contrast; then convert to B&W
 - Explore different conversion methods to find one to suit the image. Radicalism suits B&W!

My Favorites are highlighted in Red. See also LAB conversion in Actions List.