

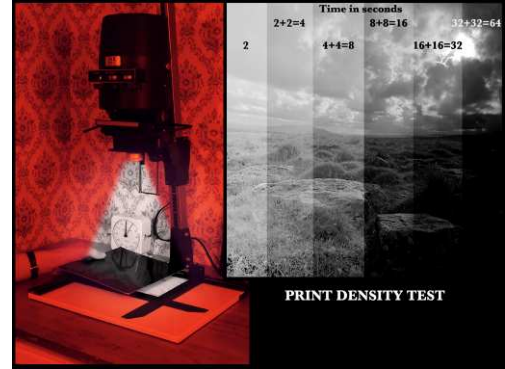
Making a print test-strip in the Digital Darkroom

It's easy to make a print from a digital image. It's not so easy to make a decent print!

In the darkroom

Any competent darkroom worker appreciates the need to do tests to get the best out of a negative.

The digital worker needs to take a leaf out of the same book... here's how.



The digital problem

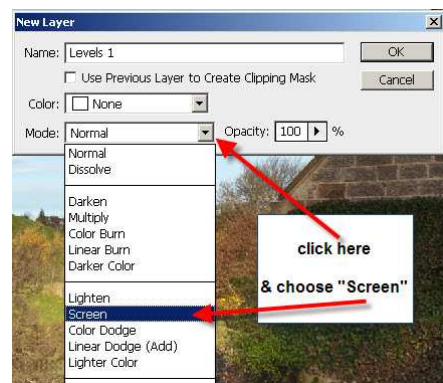
More often than not, a print made from a digital image tends to be darker than the image seen on screen. Using a correctly calibrated monitor and good print profiles will help a great deal but, for best results, some extra adjustment may still be needed.

Making a digital image lighter

Once the image has been prepared for printing, it can be useful to prepare a separate, flattened version ready for these final adjustments.

Working on this flattened version, from the menu bar, choose Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Levels

Set the mode to "Screen"



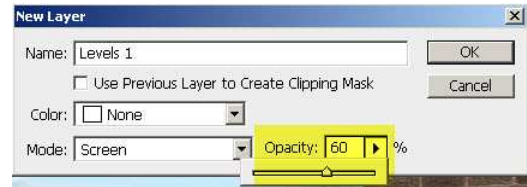
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Making the test-strip

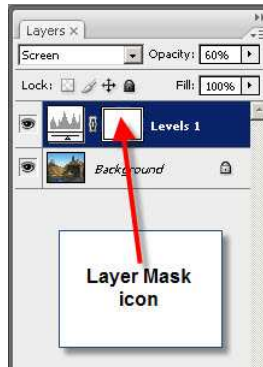
Set the Opacity to 60%.

You may wish to type in a suitable name for the adjustment layer, e.g. "lighten"

Click OK



In the layers palette, click on the layer mask icon.

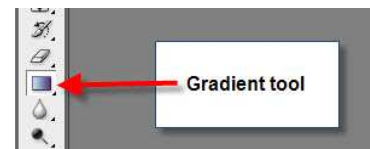


In the toolbox, make sure that the foreground and background colours are Black and White respectively.

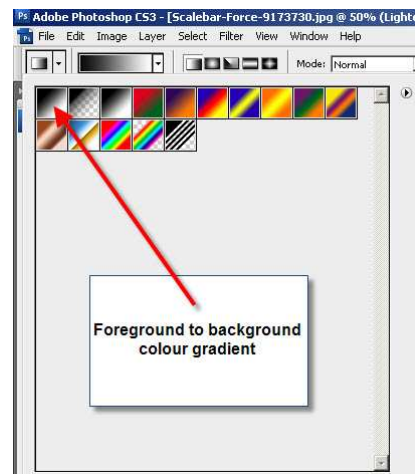


If not, press "D" to get the default colours and, if necessary, "X" to swap them over

In the toolbox choose the Gradient tool



Select the foreground to background gradient.



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On the image itself click on one edge and, while holding down shift and keeping the mouse button pressed, drag to the opposite edge then release the mouse button and shift key.

(Holding down shift helps to draw in a straight line).

This has the effect of changing the mask so that it fades gradually from black to white.



Looking at your actual image, you should see a gradual change in density from one side to the other. This is the result of the layer mask and levels adjustment layer.

If you now print the image, you will be able to judge the correct density to use.

But we haven't finished with Photoshop yet – it can help us further...

Dividing the mask into definite regions.

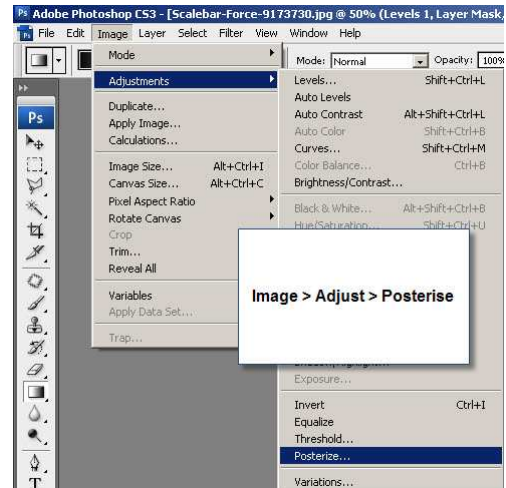
A conventional darkroom test-strip has definite bands to identify each exposure. We can make our digital test-strip imitate this...

Make sure that the layer mask is still highlighted in the layers palette.

From the menu bar, choose Image>Adjustments>Posterise

Choose a suitable number of divisions (e.g. 5)

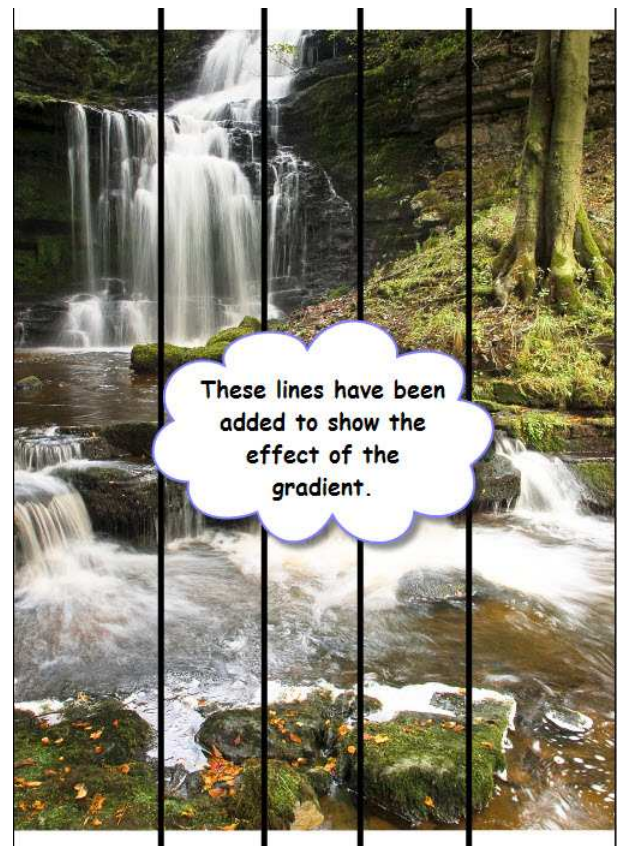
then click OK.



Completed test strip

Your test image should now show definite bands of different exposures. It's ready to print.

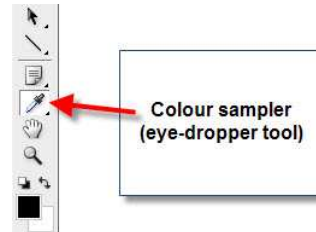
NB you won't see the black lines shown here – I've added them to try to show the effect of the gradient more clearly.



Using the printed test strip

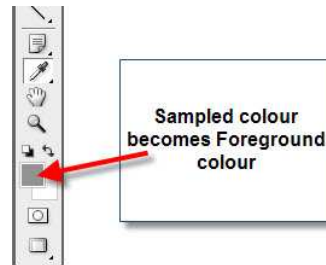
1. Examine your printed test-strip to see which zone looks to be the correct exposure
2. make sure that the layer mask is still highlighted in the layers palette (if in doubt, just click on it).

3. select the eye-dropper tool



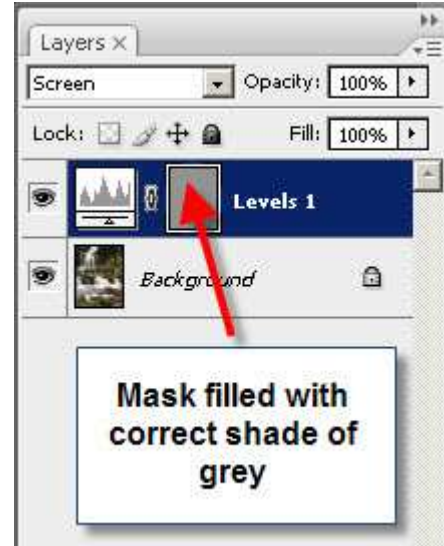
4. click **on the image** where the exposure is correct.

This will set the foreground colour to a shade of grey.



5. choose Edit>Fill to fill the layer mask with this grey colour.

This sets the correct exposure for the entire picture.



Make your final print

All that remains is to print your image with the adjustment layer and its associated layer mask. The density should now be a good match between screen and print.

