

RAW PROCESSING INTRODUCTION

There are various ways to process your RAW files from Camera, but all mechanisms do more or less the same thing.

RAW format is not an image format, it is a DATA file that has to be converted by some software to view the file as an image.

A number of s/w products exist and you may have got s/w with your camera to do this but for the purposes here we are talking about using ADOBE LIGHTROOM and/or ADOBE PHOTOSHOP to process your RAW file.

Even with Adobe products there are a number of ways to ‘manipulate’ your ‘RAW image’, so the details below are not the only way, but for simplicity I’m limiting this to probably the most common methods.

ADOBE RAW PROCESSING BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. When you open a RAW file in either Lightroom or Photoshop, Adobe automatically applies the RAW conversion to your image (so you can see it as an image). You have to do nothing except ensure the version you are running supports the RAW format from your camera (It uses the RAW conversion mechanism from your Camera manufacturer, built into the Adobe product).
NOTE – On the adobe site you can find (somewhere!) a list of RAW formats supported by different versions of PS/LR.
2. In the case of Photoshop, it then automatically presents you with Adobe’s RAW ‘manipulation’ screen, where you can and should ‘tweak’ the image to bring out the most appropriate exposure/tones/contrast/colour temperature etc.
3. In the case of Lightroom, once imported, you can (if you wish) use the ‘Quick develop’ facility or better, the ‘develop module’ to carry out the same processing as above (for Photoshop).
4. LIGHTROOM VS PHOTOSHOP – This paper isn’t looking at this question, but briefly - LR has developed considerably in recent years and offers many of the adjustments you can do in PS and in some cases making them easier to use. Many photographers now only use LR or use LR initially, only going into PS for specific tasks not available in LR.

I personally rarely use LR develop module (I only use LR to manage my image library), preferring to do all my adjustment work in PS, mainly for the reasons I suggested not using some of the adjustments available in CAMERA RAW. It is a personal choice, but below are the key differences.

- a) The key and significant difference is LR does not offer a LAYERS facility so when editing in LR you are always working on the same, single version of the image. This can be very restricting depending on what you are trying to achieve.
- b) You can edit in LR and then open the image in PS (with or without) the LR adjustments.
- c) Having said above, another important difference is LR editing is ‘non-destructive’. LR doesn’t actually change your basic image unless you tell it to. It saves the adjustments you make in its library separate to the image although they are always shown on the image. This

means you can revert back to the original without LR adjustments whenever you want. It also holds a 'history' of changes so you can step back through that if you wish, but only consecutively i.e. you have to step back from the latest change.

PHOTOSHOP RAW PROCESSING

1. Open your RAW file (stored on disk somewhere) in PHOTOSHOP.
2. The Adobe CAMERA RAW manipulation screen is automatically presented with your image and specifically for your Camera RAW format (identified from the RAW file).
3. The image you see is 'direct from the camera' with no adjustments (unless you have set up some level of automation).
4. On the right is the main adjustment panel. I would recommend you only use the top two sections of the BASIC panel (White balance and Exposure section). Clarity, Vibrance and Saturation are better done in Photoshop itself.
5. There are also a number of other options shown as icons above the BASIC panel, again I would recommend restricting changes here to 'Lens corrections'. Everything else is better done in PHOTOSHOP.
6. There are various other adjustments that can be made from the Icons shown above the image, but again, my personal preference is to do these in PHOTOSHOP as this gives you far greater flexibility and recovery options.
7. Once you are happy with your basic adjustments, click 'OPEN IMAGE' tab. This opens the image in Photoshop with the adjustments applied.
IMPORTANT NOTE – When you have done what you want to do in PS, use SAVE AS otherwise you will overwrite your original RAW file with the changes and lose the 'digital negative' – the original image from your camera. Save as either a PSD or as a TIFF to retain any LAYERS you created in PS.
8. Provided you saved As a PSD/TIFF when you reopen that file in PS you will be presented with the image exactly as it was when you saved it, with all your working layers etc. so you can just carry on working as you were.
9. As an added option ... yes I know, not another one ... (in current version of PS) ... once in PS there is a 'filter' called 'CAMERA RAW' which gives you the same options. This can be useful if you convert your RAW files to DNG on import (DNG is Adobe's own RAW format) ... subject for another day.

LIGHTROOM RAW PROCESSING

I'm not an expert in LR develop module as I rarely use it, so there may be features/options I'm not aware of.

1. Having imported your image file into your LR library/catalogue, you will see it displayed under the folder your import process dictated. This is the unaltered 'RAW' image from your camera.
2. Click on the 'DEVELOP' module at top right of the LR page. This opens the module that allows you to manipulate/adjust your image. The BASIC section gives you the same (or very similar) options to the Adobe Camera Raw screen discussed above.
3. When you have finished adjusting your image, just click on 'LIBRARY' module to return there.

4. Note, a small symbol appears in bottom right of your library thumbnail to indicate there are LR adjustments applied to the image. You can click on that symbol to take you back into DEVELOP module to make further changes.
5. Note also you are working on the file that is the original RAW file. You have no 'digital negative' to go back to as you have changed it Although see comment above about LR 'non-destructive' editing.
6. You can 'reset' (remove) all LR adjustments in the DEVELOP module by clicking on the RESET button. The History still shows the previous changes so you can go back.

There are various webpages giving you guidance on RAW processing – obviously Adobe have a load of articles, but there are many more if you search for RAW PROCESSING.

A good starting point in Adobe is <https://helpx.adobe.com/camera-raw/using/supported-cameras.html>

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12/4/16