

PANEL OVERVIEW AND OPTIONS

Revised for PPW2025 0.1.0, May 2025

This document gives a brief overview of what each button in PPW2025 does, and what happens, if anything, when the button is Option-clicked. For more detailed information, click the question mark icon in the button that interests you, and it will bring up a lengthy PDF giving a full description of what's going on, with illustrations.

Enclosed in the download package is also a PPW Overview file, which details a suggested workflow. If something more comprehensive is desired, consult *Modern Photoshop Color Workflow* by Dan Margulis.

From top to bottom of the new panel, then:

1. Variants

This section is aimed at power users who have adapted the Picture Postcard Workflow in a nontraditional way. The PPW as originally proposed was much speedier than existing methods because certain liberties were taken. It was generally assumed that if the image was important enough, these shortcuts would be eliminated and the correction time increase.

Experience has shown, however, that if time allows it's more effective to do several quick versions from scratch and then explore how to best to blend them. The Variants structure gives a framework for organizing these elements efficiently.

2. The Usual Suspects

These five buttons offer nothing that can't be easily accessed in Photoshop, but you may find a one-click approach more convenient. They are:

Curves

Clicking this creates a new Curves Adjustment Layer. Curves can then be applied using Photoshop's Properties panel.

Options: Option-clicking the button prompts you to name the new Curves Adjustment Layer. Also, it calls up the traditional (pre-Creative Cloud) curves dialog. This used to be a big deal, because when the Properties panel was first introduced its curves dialog was much smaller and unreasonably difficult to work with. Today, it can be resized within the Properties panel. We have therefore eliminated as unnecessary the Adjust Curves Layer button found in PPW Panel v.5.

RGB

Executes Image: Mode>RGB. *Options:* None.

LAB

Executes Image: Mode>LAB. *Options:* None.

Add Composite Layer

Creates a composite of all visible layers. *Options:* None.

Duplicate Layers

Duplicates all selected layers. *Options:* None.

3. The Hammers

These actions address images where there is too much contrast between highlight and shadow areas. Typically this is caused by strong sunlight, but there are many other instances.

S/H + OK

Clicking this, the least volatile of the four buttons in the set, applies Photoshop's Image: Adjustments>-Shadows/Highlights, using the workflow's recommended defaults rather than Photoshop's.

Options: Option-clicking the button allows creation of a Smart Filter, either for this file only, or as a permanent default.

Bigger Hammer

The most violent of the four buttons, this script is best for images that live or die by how much detail can be gotten in highlight areas. Typical uses might be in whitewater, or in skies where the cloud formation is very important. A 13-page PDF elaborates how it works, and what can be changed.

Options: Option-clicking the button opens a Pandora's Box of variations. See the PDF documentation, which is accessed by clicking the question icon next to the Bigger Hammer button.

Lesser Hammer

An intermediate-strength script, typically not the first choice. A 15-page PDF compares it with the more commonly used Velvet Hammer.

Options: The Lesser and Velvet Hammer scripts require an 8-bit file. Option-clicking their buttons enables you to specify what to do if your file is 16-bit.

Velvet Hammer

The least dangerous of the three Hammer scripts, it is particularly suitable for fleshtone images. *Options:* As described above for Lesser Hammer.

4. The Blur Shortcuts

The following do nothing more than access the appropriate Photoshop filter. There are no defaults and no options.

Gaussian blur/Surface blur/D&S (Dust & Scratches)

5. False Profiles

Like the Hammer scripts, the first two of these address images where the difference between light and dark is excessive. Here, however, it is not assumed that highlight and/or shadow detail is critical, rather an overall smoothing effect is desired.

Note that applying a false profile implies that you intend to convert the file to some other color-space, likely LAB, shortly thereafter. Retaining a file bearing a wildly unusual profile is a recipe for disaster.

1.4 gamma

The script starts by redefining RGB. Pixels do not change, but the file is *interpreted* as being lighter. A Multiply layer is added, to which the user must apply a blurred mask. *Options:* None.

Important note for version 0.1.0. Your file must carry an embedded profile in one of the six RGB spaces that previous PPW Panel versions supported: Apple, Adobe, ColorMatch, ProPhoto, sRGB, and Wide Gamut. If it doesn't, the file must be converted to one of the above before running this script. A file in any other RGB, or with no profile at all, currently causes the script to fail; we intend to correct this in future releases.

1.0 gamma

This is a more violent version of the above, used for originals that are grossly too dark.

False CMYK

This one has largely been supplanted by the introduction of the H-K script. However, it can still be useful in images where color is the enemy and a dull, depressing look is desired. It generates a somewhat washed-out image but with an artificially created black channel that is useful for restricting color while holding shadow detail. *Options:* None.

Like the previous two scripts, the use of a false CMYK profile means that there will have to be a subsequent conversion to another colorspace.

Other gamma

This option is not fully implemented in version 0.1.0. We do not recommend its use at this time.

6. The Sky Actions

Skies often appear too weak in the context of the overall image. These two actions identify and darken blue areas, hoping to create more contrast with existing clouds. They don't work if the sky is almost completely blown out. Also, intervention is needed if the image features other blue objects, since these scripts have no way to differentiate them from sky areas.

Note that these date from before the time of Artificial Intelligence. Photoshop can now generate its own convincing skies, sometimes yielding a happier result than these scripts would.

Darken Sky SC

This creates an alpha channel representing all blues, which is then used as a mask to multiply the underlying file. The alpha channel is saved because it may need to be edited if there are important other blues in the image. You will need to discard this channel to save the file as a JPEG. *Options:* None.

Darken Sky B

This script works exactly like the other, except that its mask is based on the B channel of LAB, even though the script itself operates in RGB. The result is better if the cloud pattern is complex with little patches of blue peeking through. It's less effective with large cloudless areas. *Options:* None.

7. The Desaturation Scripts

PPW's powerful color enhancement tools can create problems in objects that don't accept more color gracefully. These two can help avoid them.

Skin Desaturation

This script is for images where fleshtones are critical. It is a pre-emptive strike against making them too colorful with subsequent PPW maneuvers. The file is converted to LAB in the process. *Options:* None.

H-K

The name derives from a visual phenomenon known as the Helmholtz-Kohlrausch Effect. It states that even if a machine measurement evaluates two swatches as being of the same darkness, a human observer will believe that the less colorful of the two is darker.

The script exaggerates this effect by identifying less saturated areas and, on separate layers so that each can be adjusted individually or eliminated, darkens them and/or desaturates them further. Like many PPW steps, this may temporarily make the image look worse. It is dangerous if misused. But as the saying goes, when everything is colorful then nothing is colorful. If that describes your image, H-K followed by a color boost can be extremely effective.

Options: The script creates an alpha channel that is more or less a saturation mask. By default, it is discarded after the script runs. By Option-clicking the button, you can direct that the alpha channel be saved, either this time only or as a permanent default.

8. The Color Enhancers

These are the signature moves of the PPW. The philosophy is that it is easier to make a final adjustment when an image is too colorful than when it is not colorful enough. Everything takes place in LAB. There are three components, listed from easiest to most complex:

- Adjustments to the L channel (contrast only)
- Increased color, with masks intended to prevent it from going into undesired areas
- The Modern Man From Mars, a sophisticated routine based on a user-defined advisory selection that tells Photoshop the sort of things that interest us. Based on this selection, which is then discarded, the script forces similar colors and similar darknesses apart, even if this causes a hue change in certain items; the variation is often worth the cost.

MMM + CB

Here is the workhorse script for most images. It requires an advisory selection. The user can adjust the amount of MMM and of CB in many different ways.

Options: Option-clicking the button permits a comparison of two different MMM advisory selections. It also allows some modification of how the Color Boost portion functions. (Both of these capabilities are available in expanded form in the standalone MMM and CB 2025 scripts.)

CB 2025

This is a more sophisticated version of the color boosting routine found in MMM + CB. Because it is a new script in this release, it doesn't have its own documentation yet. It breaks the color boost into separate layers, for the A (with its own preloaded layer mask) and for the B of LAB. There are also optional layers to restrict the color boost in greens and/or blues, and a curve at the ready to change the L channel.

Options: None at present.

MMM

This is a standalone version of the Modern Man From Mars routine found in MMM + CB.

Options: Option-clicking the button allows the user to make up to four selections to govern the MMM routine, and then to toggle between the selections to decide which one to use. Very effective in fashion images, where the fleshtone balance is critical.

9. Sharpening

Sharpen 2025

The most complex of all the PPW scripts, this one works in LAB, where it applies five different sharpening routines, and three different exclusion possibilities. Everything is generated by halo map, which can be modified easily. Most users will take the simple path of adjusting overall opacity, but each kind of sharpen can be modified individually.

Options: Option-clicking the button allows adjustment of halo size for each type of sharpen, to be applied one time, saved as a permanent default, or saved as a preset that can be re-loaded into future images. It also permits the inclusion or exclusion, either one-time or as a permanent default, of any or all of the Exclude Blues, Soften Shadows, and Suppress Skin layers.

10. Additional Actions

The 2018 v.5 of the PPW Panel introduced a feature called “My Actions.” It permitted users to add their own actions for access within the panel. We intend to provide something like this functionality in the future, but it is not yet complete.