

# Put a Gradient In Your Adjustment Layer

I used to use a graduated filter on my camera to darken clouds without darkening the foreground. Here's how to make a graduated filter in Photoshop.

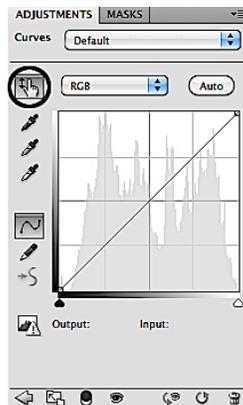
The gradient tool is one of my favorites.



Start with a Curves adjustment layer. Click on the little black/white circle at the bottom of the layer palette and choose: Curves.



Click on the little hand in the curves box



Click in the sky and drag down to darken the clouds.



Don't worry that the whole image is getting darker. The gradient will fix that.

Press the letter "D" on the keyboard to set the Foreground/Background colors on the toolbar to Black/White.



Then press the letter "X" after, to get white on top



Pressing "X" scrolls the foreground/Background color between black and white.

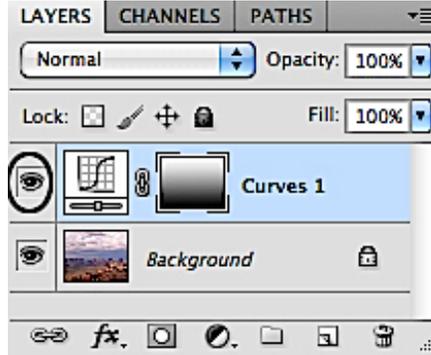
Choose the Gradient tool on the toolbar.



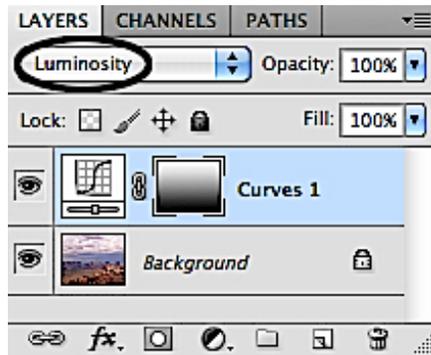
Click and drag from the top of the screen to the bottom.



Click the layer eyeball on and off to see the effect.



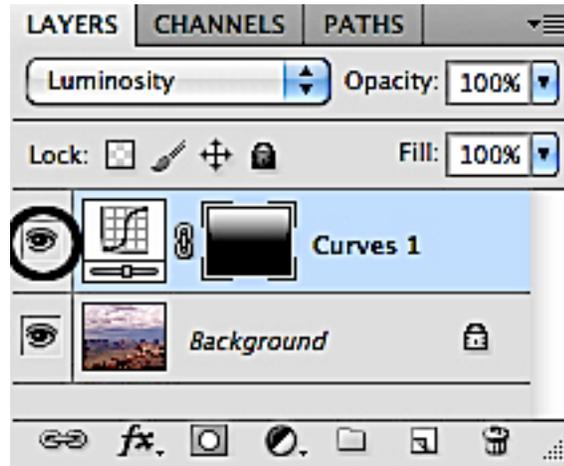
The clouds have picked up a color shift from such a large Curves adjustment. Sometimes a large Curves adjustment will cause the colors to get too exaggerated. Change the layers' blending mode to "Luminosity". This will decouple the color from the adjustment.



Let's redraw the gradient from the top of the screen, but this time only drag down half of the way.



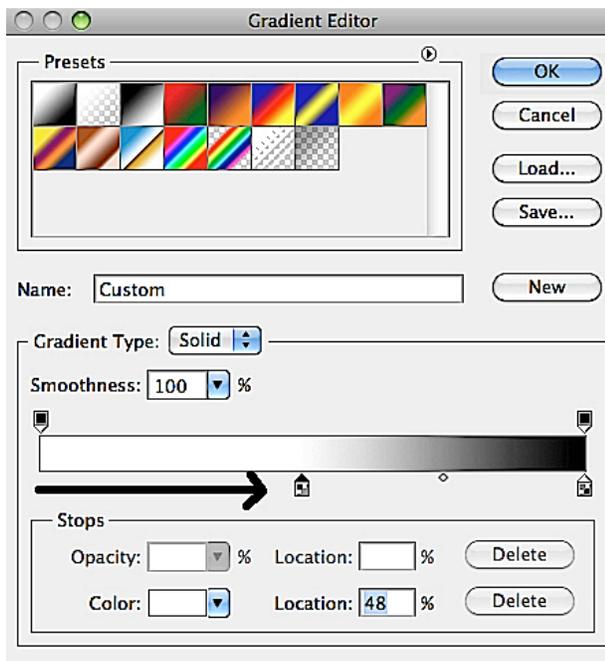
Click the layers' eyeball on and off to see the new gradient adjustment.



I usually have to draw the gradient several times to get it just where I want it. You can even adjust how fast the gradient transitions. With the gradient tool chosen, look at the top option bar and click on the gradient at the top of the screen to bring up the Gradient editor.



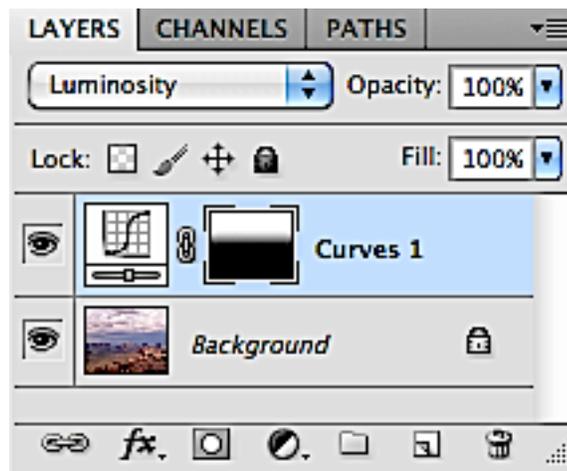
Drag the "Color Stop" slider to the right and click OK.



With the Gradient tool chosen, hold down the “Shift” key on the keyboard and drag from the top of the image to the middle of the image.



Turn the layer eyeball on and off. Look at the layer mask. It will show a very different transition.

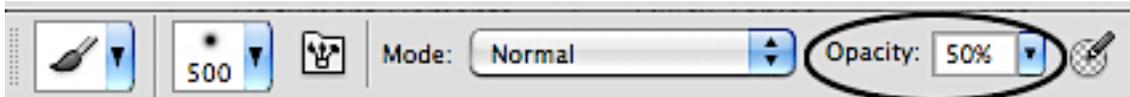


The gradient editor is a great way to make the exact gradient needed. Sometimes you need a long slow transition and sometimes you need the gradient to transition quicker. So draw the gradient and then turn the eyeball on and off to see if you need to adjust how quickly the gradient works.

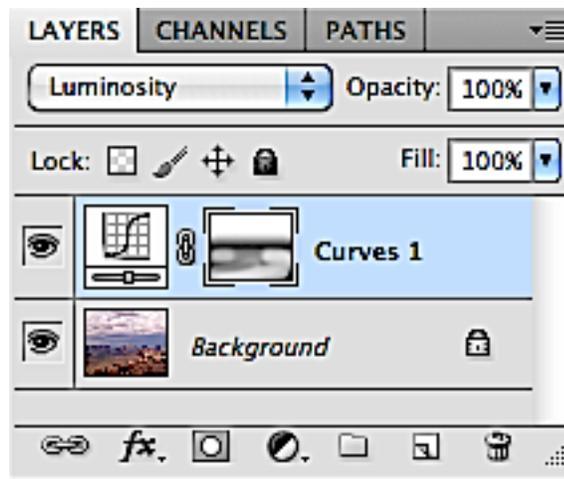
The gradient has darkened the sky without darkening the foreground. Let's paint some of the foreground darker. Press the letter "X" to set the Foreground color to white.



Choose the "Brush" tool and set the opacity of the brush to 50%.



Now click and drag across the foreground to darken the area. The gradient can be customized for each image this way. Think of it like making a custom gradient for the shot. The mask might look like this:



If you don't like where you have painted and simply press the letter "X" to set the foreground color to "Black" and paint across the same areas.



With masks, painting in the image with white reveals the adjustment and painting with black hides the adjustment. Learning to paint with different opacities is the feel that will come with practice.