Adjustment Brush Tips

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In this lesson, we're going to learn some tips and tricks for using the Adjustment Brush in both Lightroom and Adobe Camera Raw. Know that there are two other lessons dedicated to learning how to use the Adjustment Brush. One focuses on landscape images and the other focuses on portrait images. I am dedicating so much time to teaching this tool because it allows us to do so many more adjustments in Lightroom or Camera Raw without needing to move to Photoshop. When we move an image to Photoshop, it is no longer a raw file and we are therefore more limited in the adjustments we can make without degrading the image. Also, when we do these adjustments in Photoshop, we are using layers and therefore increasing the file size exponentially. Therefore, any tool that allows us to do a lot more of our work in Lightroom or Camera Raw is worth learning!

Keyboard shortcuts (Timestamp 1:50)

Keyboard shortcuts allow us to work much more efficiently. Let's look at a few shortcuts related to the Adjustment Brush.

K: Adjustment Brush Tapping the K key will activate the Adjustment brush in both Lightroom and Camera Raw. In Lightroom, you don't need to already be in the Develop Module. This shortcut will automatically move you to the Develop Module and activate the brush.

Bracket keys: Change brush size Use the bracket keys ([ ]) to change the size of the brush. The left bracket key ([ ) will make the brush smaller and the right bracket key ( ]) will make the brush larger.

Shift + Bracket keys: Change Feather setting Hold down the Shift key while tapping the left and right bracket keys to change the feather setting. This determines the softness of the brush edge.

Two fingers on track pad: Change brush size In Lightroom, there is another way to quickly change the brush size. If you are using a track pad, you can make the brush larger by using two fingers to drag up. Drag down to make the brush smaller. The scroll wheel of a mouse will do the same thing. Note that this method only works in Lightroom. It does not work in Camera Raw.

Two fingers + Shift on track pad: Change brush size Hold down the Shift key while using two fingers to scroll up or down and this will change the Feather setting. Again, this is the setting that determines brush softness.

Number keys: Change Flow setting The Flow slider can be found at the bottom of the Adjustment Brush settings panel and it determines how much of the adjustment is applied with each stroke. Lowering this setting allows you to gradually build up an effect. You can also change this setting by using the number keys. Tapping 3 will give you a Flow setting of 30%. Tapping 5 will give you a Flow setting of 50%, etc.

Tap two numbers in quick succession to get a more precise setting (Ex: 53). Tap 0 (zero) to set the Flow to 100%.

A: Toggle Auto Mask on and Off (M for Camera Raw) The Auto Mask check box can be found within the brush settings at the bottom of the Adjustment Brush slider panel. Tap the A key to toggle this check box on and off. (In Camera Raw, you will instead tap the M key.)

Forward slash (/): Switch between A and B brush settings In Lightroom, we can have two different brush settings that we can switch between. These are represented by the A and B buttons within the Adjustment Brush panel. Tap the forward slash key (/) to toggle between the A brush and the B brush. Note that Camera Raw does not have the A and B option.

Option key (Alt on Win): Erase the adjustment When using the Adjustment Brush, you can hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) to temporarily switch to the Erase setting. This will erase the adjustment for as long as the key is held down. You can still use the other shortcuts (number keys for Flow, bracket keys for brush size, etc.) while using this Erase setting.

Command key (Ctrl on Win): Temporarily toggle Auto Mask setting If the Auto Mask check box is turned off and you would only like to use Auto Mask for a very short time, you can hold down the Command key (Ctrl on Win) to turn it on. When you release the key, the setting will turn off again. If, instead, the Auto Mask setting is turned ON, then holding down the Command key will temporarily turn it OFF. It will basically give you the opposite state that the check box is currently set to.

O: Toggle the "Show Selected Mask Overlay" check box (Y in Camera Raw) The "Show Selected Mask Overlay" check box is located below the main image window in Lightroom. When this setting is turned on, a colored overlay will appear in the areas where you paint with the Adjustment Brush. Tap the O key to toggle this setting on and off. In Camera Raw, tap the Y key.

Shift+O: Cycle mask overlay color When using the Selected Mask Overlay, you can specify the color of the overlay by clicking on the Tools menu and choosing Adjustment Mask Overlay. This will give you a menu from which you can choose Red, Green, White or Black. You can alternatively use the keyboard shortcut Shift+O to cycle between the colors.
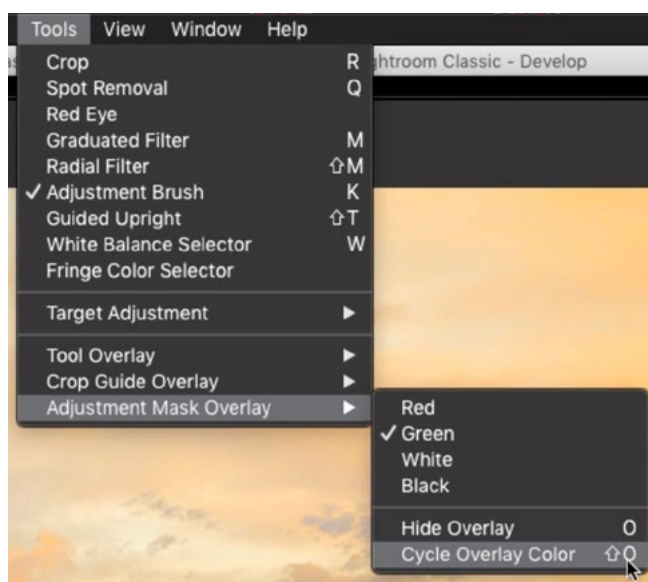
**When using the Mask Overlay, you can choose from four different mask colors.**

H: Cycle between "Show Edit Pins" menu options After using the Adjustment Brush, a pin will appear on the image in the area where the adjustment is. When you create additional adjustments, additional pins will appear to represent each adjustment. You can click on the pins to activate the different adjustments so that you can make changes to them. The "Show Edit Pins" menu allows us to control how these pins behave. We can choose to make them visible all the time, or we can specify that they're only visible when we hover our cursor over the image. In Lightroom, the "Show Edit Pins" menu is located in the bottom left. In Camera Raw, the menu is on the bottom right. Tap the H key to cycle between the different menu options.

Option+Command+P (Alt+Ctrl+P in Win): Toggle visibility of Adjustment Brush effect In Camera Raw, you can get a before and after view of the effect you've created with the Adjustment Brush. Use the keyboard shortcut Option+Command+P (Alt+Ctrl+P in Win) to get a view of what the image looked like before the adjustment was made. Use the shortcut again to turn the adjustment effect on again.

Efficiency Techniques (10:51)

Adjustment Brush Presets

When the Adjustment Brush is active, all of the settings relating to the tool will appear in a panel on the right side of the interface. At the top of this panel is a preset menu. (It's set to "Custom" by default.) Presets allow us to quickly apply adjustments that we use all the time. When we choose an option from this menu, all of the sliders will change, dialing in
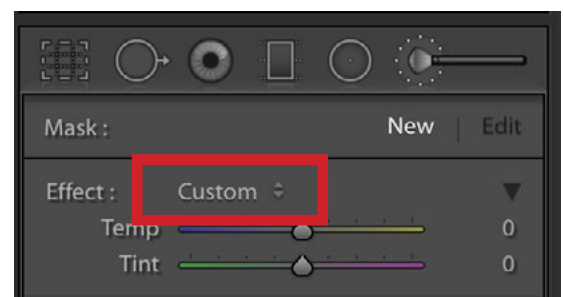

When the Adjustment Brush is active, click this menu to access the presets.

the particular effect designated by the preset. We can also create custom presets for adjustments that we regularly use. For example, let's say that we often brighten the eyes in portrait images by painting in an adjustment that uses the Shadows, Whites, Texture and Clarity sliders. We could set up a preset that automatically dials these sliders to their correct positions so that we don't need to adjust them every single time we want to enhance some eyes.

To create a preset, first set up the sliders in the ideal positions. Then, click on that preset menu and choose to "Save Current Settings as New Preset." (This option is near the bottom of the menu.) A little box will appear, prompting you to give the preset a name and then click the Create button. In the video example, we're creating a preset for the eyes, so we'll name this preset "Eye Enhancer." Now this preset will appear in the preset menu and we can use it as needed.

You can create presets for all sorts of adjustments. For portrait images, we can have one preset for the eyes, as shown above. We can have another to smoothen skin, another to enhance lips, another to whiten teeth, and so on.

To delete a preset, first make sure that it is selected from the menu. Then, click on the menu again and choose "Delete…"
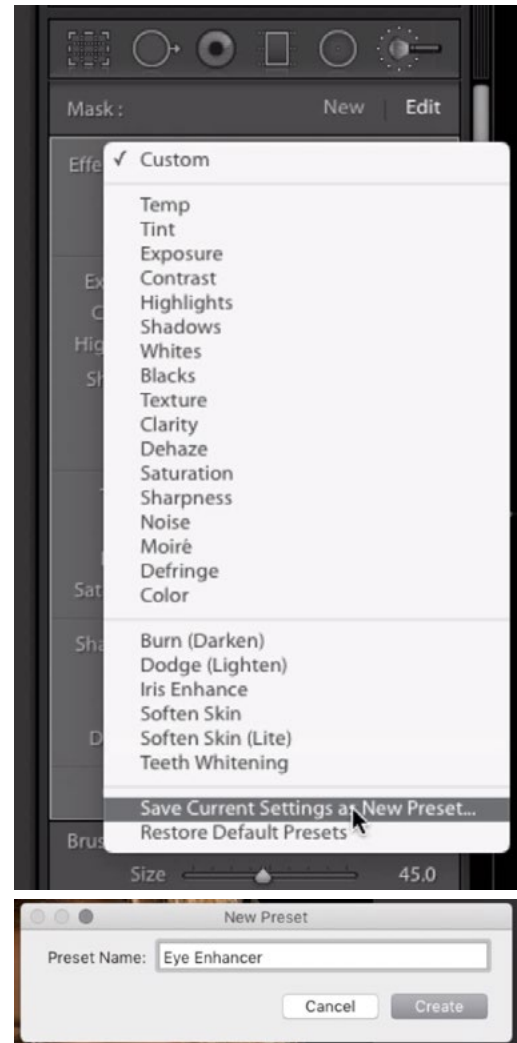
Here, we set up the sliders and are choosing to save those settings as a new preset.
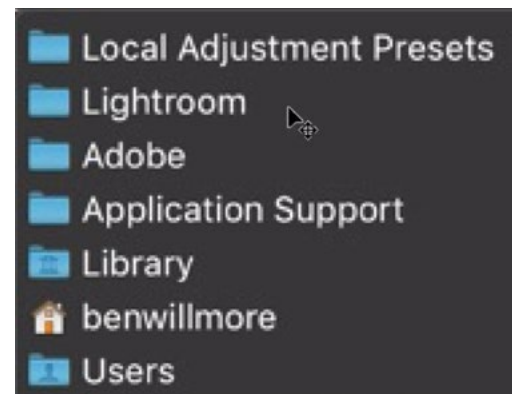

Here, you can see that I have created several presets for adjusting portrait images.

All of these presets are stored in a standard location on your hard drive. On a Mac, this is the path to the file:

Users > *your user name* > Library > Application Support > Adobe > Lightroom > Local Adjustment Presets.

This is the path to the Lightroom Adjustment Brush presets folder on the Mac.

You could additionally delete or rename presets from right within this file if you choose to do so. This would make it easier delete several presets at once. (In the Lightroom interface, you can only delete them one at a time.)

Copy an Adjustment from one Area to Another

Let's say that we want to take an adjustment that we applied to one area and we want to be able to quickly copy that same adjustment to another area. We don't want it to be part of the same adjustment because it's nice to be able to fine-tune the areas independently of one another. Yes, we could use a preset for this, but it's not really worth it if we're only going to use this adjustment once.
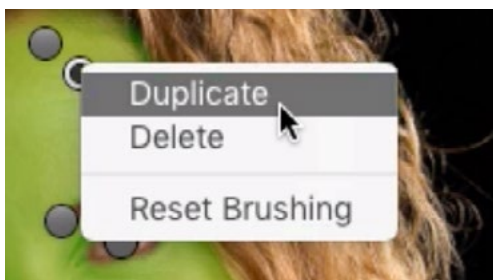
We right-clicked on the pin for the adjustment to access this menu. Here, we can choose to duplicate the adjustment.
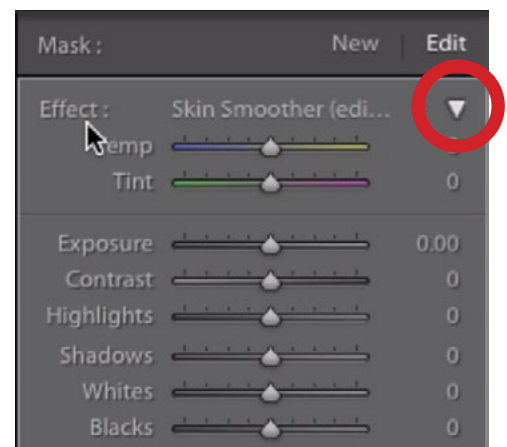
We'll activate the adjustment that contains the settings we want to copy. We'll right-click on the pin for that adjustment and a little pop-up menu will appear. From this menu, we'll choose Duplicate. A new pin will appear directly on top of the original pin. It will not be visually obvious that there are two pins because they are overlapping. Now, we can click and drag the pin to the new location where we want the adjustment to be applied.

The adjustment will cover an area that is the same shape that we painted in the original adjustment. This will not likely be ideal for the new location, so I like to set the Adjustment Brush to Erase and use a large brush to erase the entire adjustment. Then, I'll use the brush again to paint in the adjustment in the desired area.

Change the Intensity of the Entire Adjustment

After using all of the Adjustment Brush sliders to create a specific effect, let's say you notice that the effect is too strong. You COULD manually lower all of the sliders that were used to create the adjustment, but there's a faster way of doing that. In the very top right corner of the Adjustment Brush panel, there is a little disclosure triangle. Click on it and all of the sliders will be condensed down to one single slider. When you move this slider, it will affect all of the adjustment sliders that were set to something other than 0 (zero). If you move it to the right, all of those individual sliders that you used would be increased. If you move it to the left, they will be decreased.

Here the Adjustment Brush panel is expanded. Clicking the triangle (circled) would condense it.

If you like condensing your adjustment brush settings down to once single slider, there's an even easier way of achieving the same result. Simply use the up and down arrow keys on your keyboard to affect all of the sliders that are not currently set to zero. You don't even need to contract the panel down before doing so.
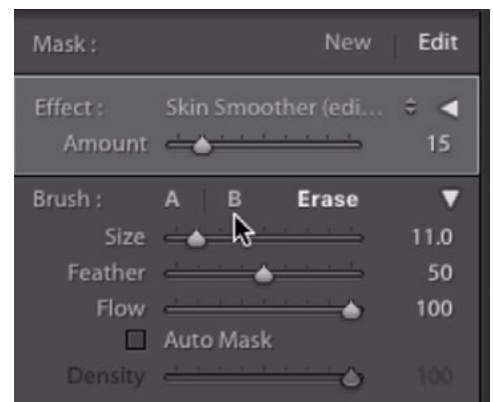

The Adjustment Brush panel has been condensed and now just consists of one Amount slider.

Get more Control when Moving Sliders

When moving the Adjustment Brush sliders, you may sometimes find that it's hard to move the sliders to the precise setting you're after. To have more control, expand the slider panel by hovering your cursor over the left edge of the panel and then clicking and dragging that edge to the left. The sliders will expand to get longer and this will give you more precise control over their positions because moving the sliders will give you a more subtle change to the image.
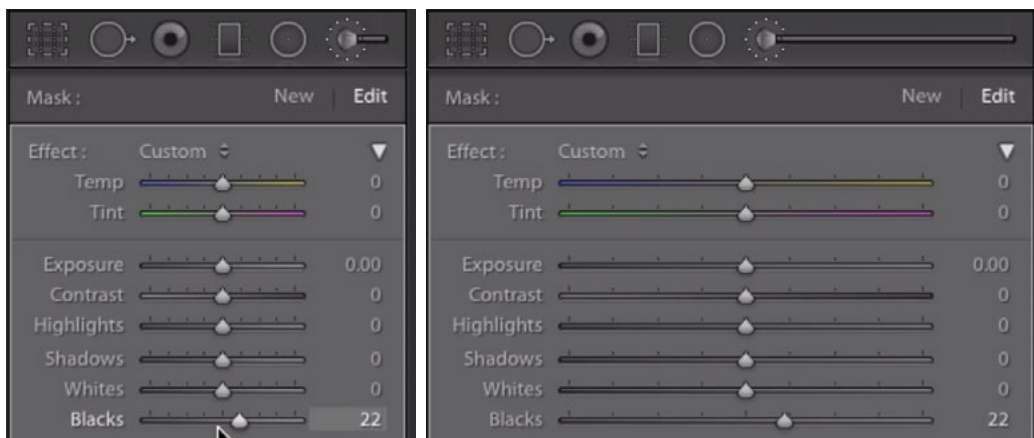

At left, you can see how the width of the panel can be expanded to give you more control when using the sliders.

Tips Relating to Specific Adjustments (21:30)

Using the Adjustment Brush to correct for mixed lighting If you have multiple light sources in a scene that are different colors, your image may have some undesirable mixed lighting. In the example image of a gas station, there are telephone pole lights that are casting blue light on the building. The lights on the building itself are casting a more yellow light. If I try to use the Temp and Tint sliders to correct for the blue cast, the area that has the yellow cast will get worse, and vice

versa. In a case like this, I'll use the Adjustment Brush to paint over the lighting I want to change. In the example image, that's the front part of the building that is lit by the yellow lighting that is coming from the building. Then, I'll use the Temp and Tint sliders to correct that lighting, making it more similar to the lighting that is coming from the street lights. In this example, I used the Temp slider to make the area more blue and I used the Tint slider to make the area more green. By using the Adjustment Brush, we can change the lighting of one area while leaving the lighting in the rest of the image alone.
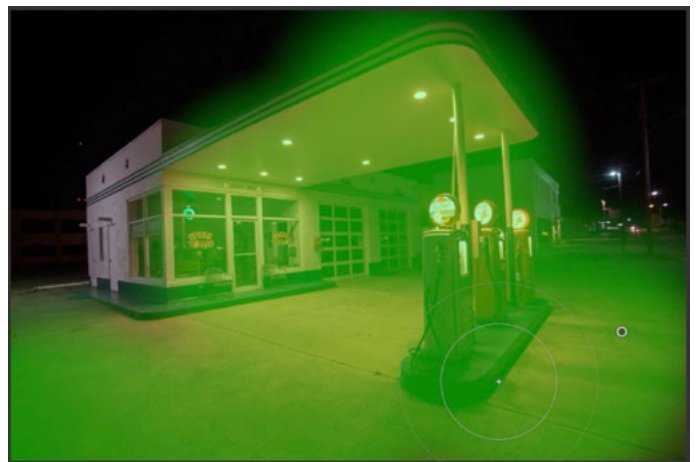

ABOVE LEFT: This is the original image. There is blue lighting coming from the street lights and yellow lighting coming from the building. ABOVE RIGHT: The Adjustment Brush was used to paint over the area with the yellow light. LEFT: The Temp and Tint sliders were used to match the light to the light from the street lamps.

Removing Moiré (24:11)

Moiré is an artifact that you sometimes get when photographing something that consists of a fine grid. This can include clothing, screened doors or windows, etc. What happens is that you're photographing this fine grid by using a grid of pixels and the two grids don't line up.

The Adjustment Brush has a special Moiré slider that is not found in other areas of Lightroom. When I find the moiré artifact in an image, I will paint over the area with the Moiré slider moved to its highest setting. Then, I will dial the slider back until I find the lowest possible setting that still removes the artifact.
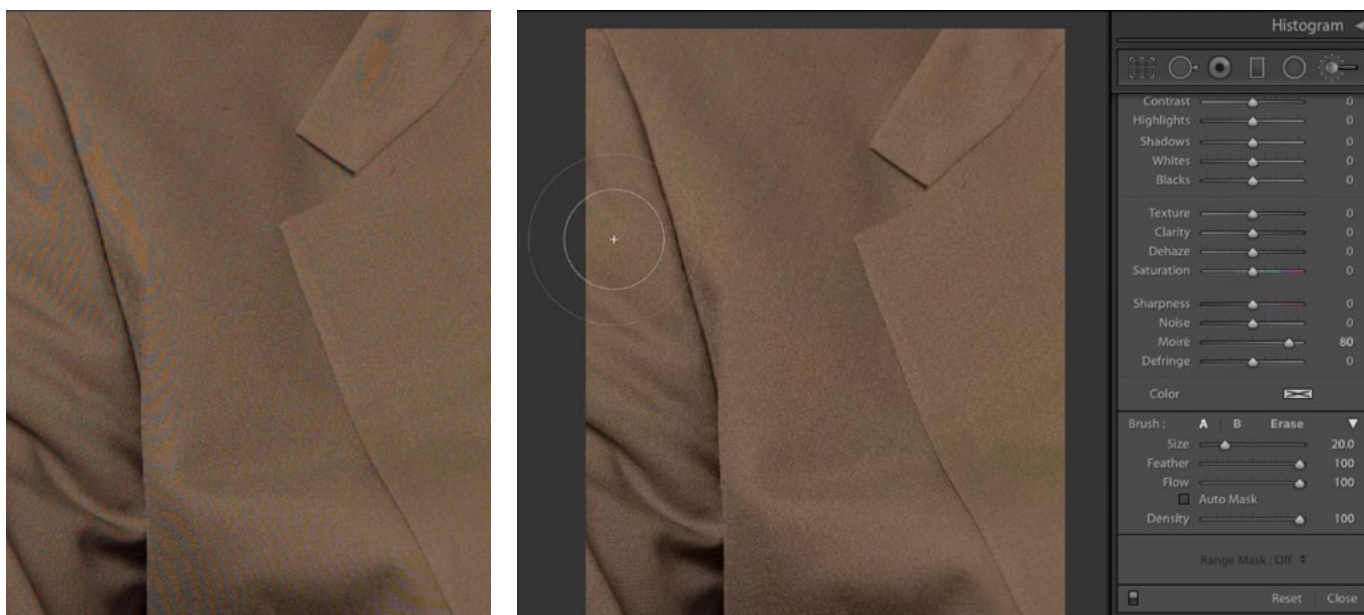

LEFT: You can see the moiré artifact on the jacket in this image. RIGHT: The Adjustment Brush is being used, with the Moiré slider at a high setting, to paint over the artifact.

Removing Chromatic Aberration with the Defringe Setting (26:35)

Chromatic aberration is an undesirable artifact that appears as a colored fringe along the edge where two parts of the photo meet. It is common to see this when you have a tree, building or mountain up against a blue sky. There is a "Remove Chromatic Aberration" check box within the Lens Corrections tab, but it sometimes doesn't quite do the trick. When this is the case, you can turn to the Adjustment Brush.

The Adjustment Brush has a Defringe slider that is not found in other areas of Lightroom. I like to set this slider very high and then use a small brush to paint over the artifact. Then, I will move the Defringe slider down to find the lowest setting that still fixes the problem.
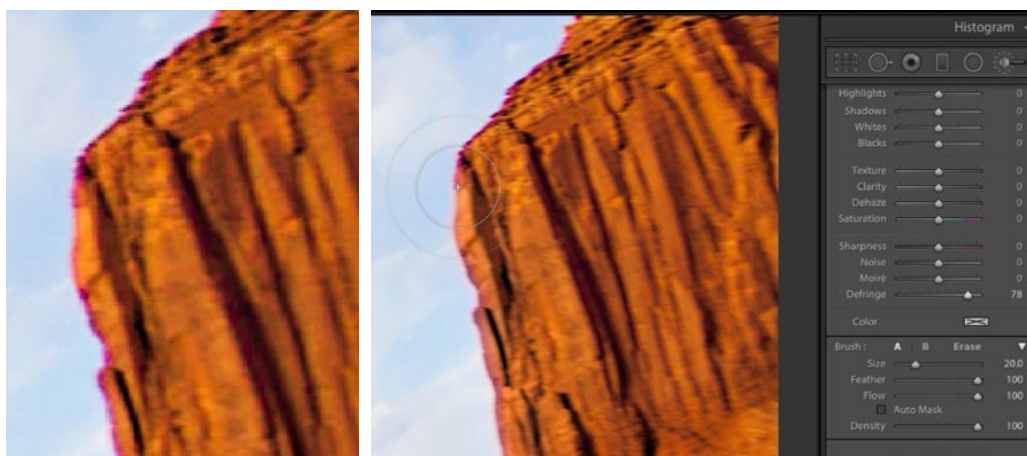
FAR LEFT: You can see the colored fringe where the sky meets the rock. DIRECTLY LEFT: The Adjustment Brush is being used, with the Defringe slider set very high, to remove the chromatic aberration.

Remove Noise when Adding Blurring (28:47)

The Adjustment Brush can be used to selectively blur certain areas of an image, and this can help to draw attention to the sharp subject. There is one thing to watch out for when doing this, however. If your image has any noise, the blurring effect will remove it, but it will only remove the noise in the area where the Adjustment Brush was used to apply the blurring. This means that you can have an area with noise right next to an area with no noise and that looks unnatural.

When viewing the image in full screen, you're not going to see the noise and texture that's in the picture, so it's best to zoom in order to inspect things. If you see this happening, there is a technique that can be used to match things up. In the example image, I blurred a tree branch using the Adjustment Brush, but the surrounding sky was not blurred and it has some noise. This creates an undesirable, mismatched look.

At left is a screen shot from the original image. In the screen shot at right, the Adjustment Brush was used to blur the branch. As a result, the branch has no noise but the surrounding sky does have noise.

The Detail panel contains the settings for Sharpening and Noise. By default, Lightroom applies a certain amount of sharpening to every image upon import. This is going to exaggerate any detail, including the noise. We don't want that noise to be sharpened. Below the Sharpening setting is the Masking slider and this determines how much of the image will receive the sharpening. Hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) while adjusting this slider. This will give us a view where everything that is white will be receiving the sharpening. As we move the slider to the right, less and less of the image will be covered in white. What it's doing it removing the sharpening from the areas that have less and less detail. Drag this slider up until all of the areas that don't contain any true detail turn black.

In the Detail tab, the Masking slider is being used with the Option key (Alt on Win) held down. This gives us a view where everything that is white will be receiving the sharpening.

In the example image, this helped to remove a lot of the noise, but we can additionally apply some noise reduction to further remove the noise. Remove noise by dragging the Luminance slider (under the Noise Reduction settings) to the right. It's best to be zoomed in on the image when doing this so that the results are noticeable.