

Add a Gradient to your Adjustment Layer

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



Image: Monument Valley

As you can see, this image is way too light. Make a background copy and change the blending mode to “multiply”.



Now that the image looks a little better, flatten the image (layer/flatten image).

Now lets use a gradient to darken the sky without darkening the bottom half of the image.



Choose: Layer / new adjustment layer / Levels. Adjust the levels while looking at the sky area only. When the clouds look good, click OK.



Don't worry that the foreground looks too dark.

The attached mask always starts out white (revealing the adjustment)



Press the letter “D” and then the letter “X” until Black is the foreground color.

Press Alt / Delete (PC) or Option / Delete (Mac) to fill the mask with black.

The layer palette will look like this:



Press the letter “X” until the Foreground color on the toolbar is White.

Choose the linear Gradient Tool.



It's time to put a gradient in the mask. Hold the shift key and draw a line from the top of the image to the bottom.



You don't have to drag across the whole image. Try drawing the gradient halfway. The layer palette will look like this:

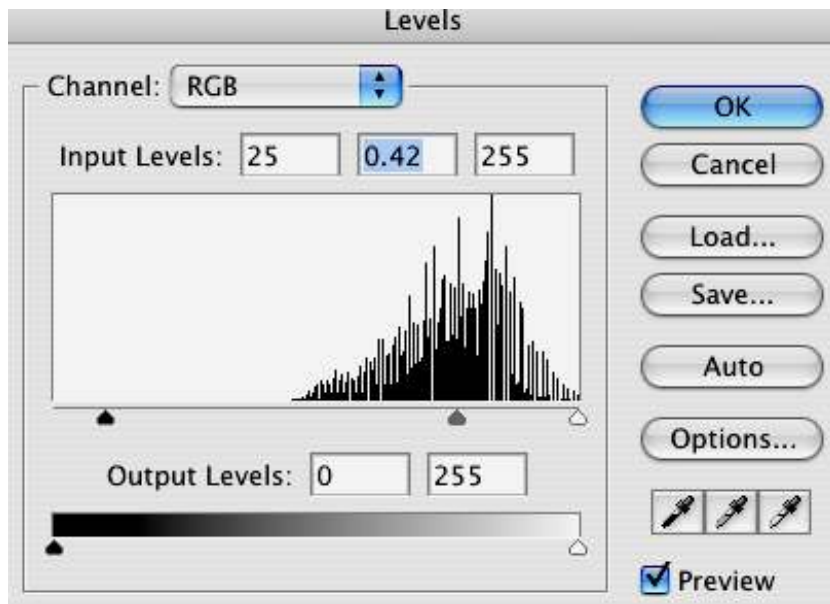


You can redraw the gradient again and again to get the exact transition you're looking for.

Double click on the "Levels" adjustment layer icon in the layer palette.



Adjust the Levels box one last time.



Once you get this technique down there won't be a need for any graduated filters for your camera.