**INTRO TO CURVES FUNCTION IN PHOTOSHOP 7, CS, CS2, CS3 and PSE 5**
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The curves function is quite helpful in fixing a variety of problems you may have with your images….things like too dark, too light, too blue, too red, etc. All of these can be adjusted with the curves tool.

To use the curves tool, first open up your image. Then click on IMAGE>ADJUSTMENTS>CURVES. Or you can press CONTROL-M. This will then open up the curves window where you can make adjustments. Personally, I prefer to put the curves adjustment on its own layer. To do that, go to your layers palette and click on the split circle icon (4th from left) which says "create new fill or adjustment layer" (see diagram below). The reason why I prefer this method will be explained further down.
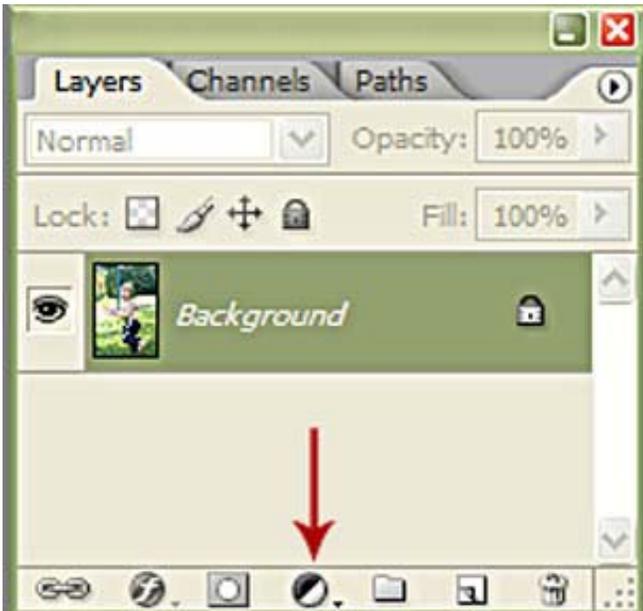

When you click on that, a drop-down list will show up. Scroll down to CURVES and click on that.
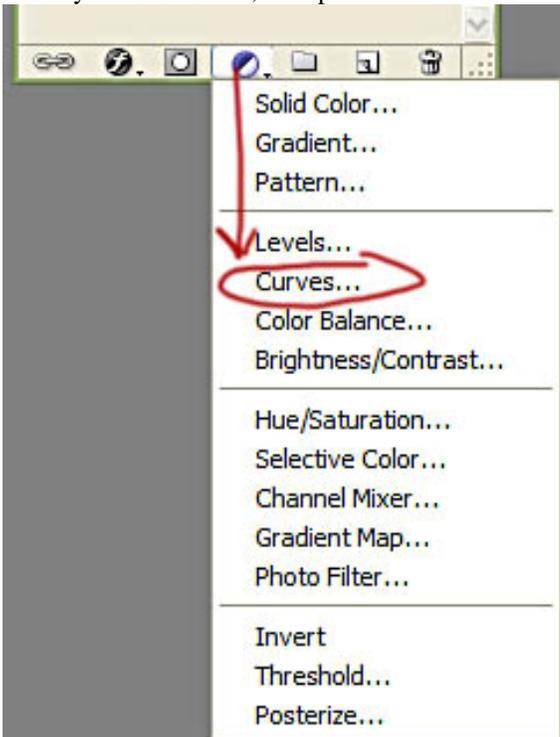
 A new window will open up. This is the actual curves adjustment window. There is a diagonal line that runs across the middle. You

can click the mouse anywhere on that curves and drag the curve into different positions and it will affect your image appearance. There are a multitude of different positions you can put the curve into….play around to see what happens.

One thing I like to do is to increase the shadows and the highlights just a bit. To do this, I will make a gentle S curve from the diagonal line. Some images will need more strength in the shadows than others, so I treat each image differently. Here is just an example of what a gentle S curve looks like. To make this curve, click your mouse anywhere along the top section of the line and pull it upwards to increase the brightness of the highlights. Then click your mouse anywhere along the lower section of the line and drag it downwards to darken the shadows a bit. One way to remember which way is dark and light is to look at the side bar on the left and bottom. See how it goes from black to white? The black represents the shadows and the white is the highlights.
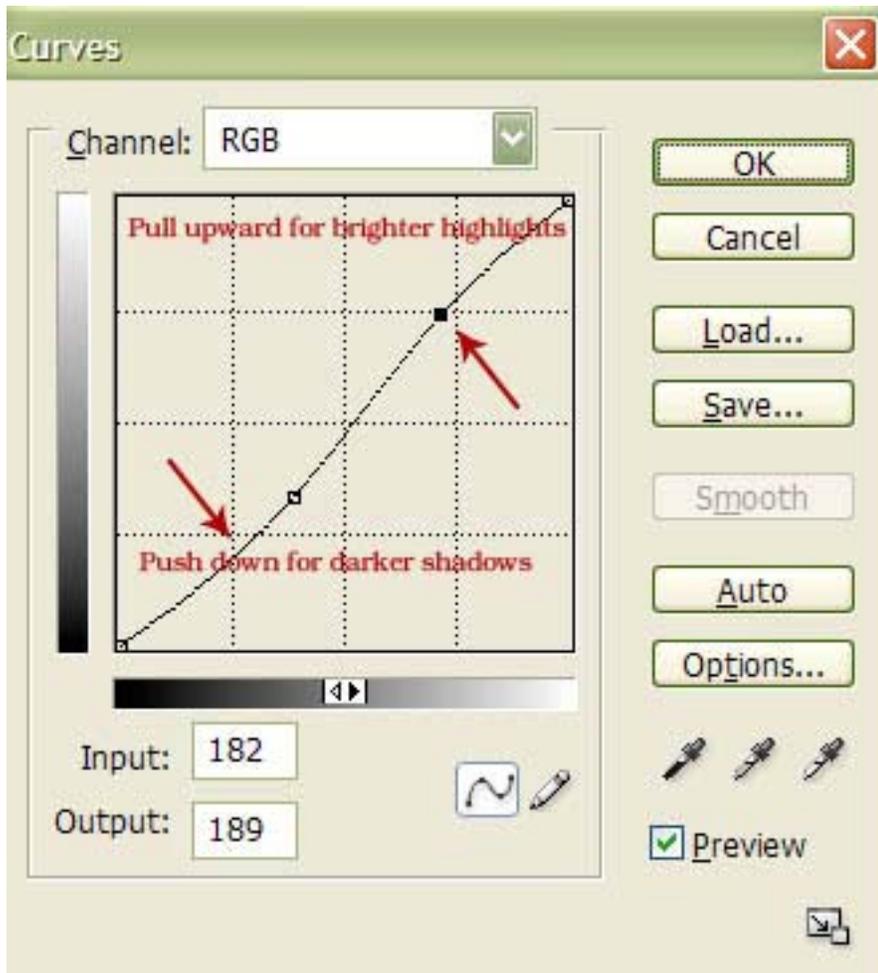
Another fun thing to do with the curves function is to boost each color channel separately. At the top of the curve box is the word CHANNEL. The default is RGB which means you will affect all colors the same way at the same time. But if you click on the drop-down arrow, you can adjust only one color at a time.
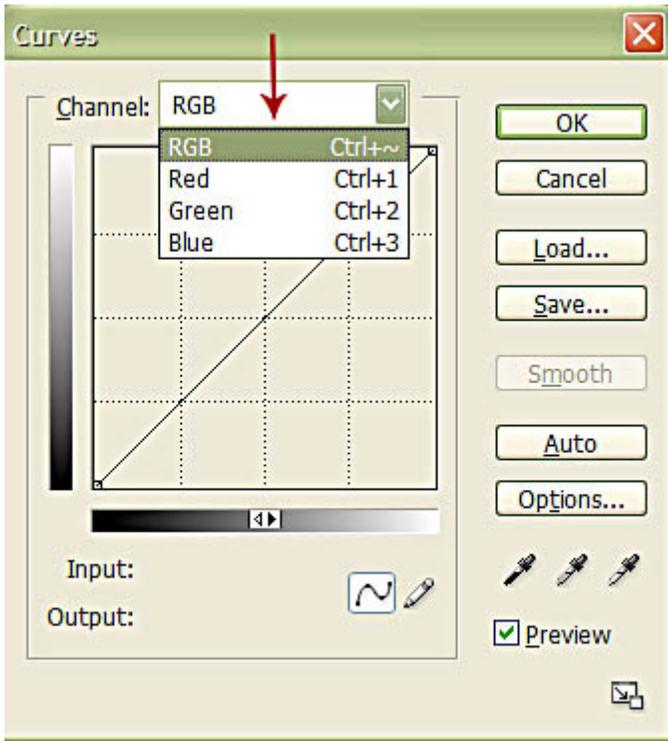
Clicking on the Red channel will affect either Red or Cyan.
Clicking on the Green channel will affect either Green or Magenta.
Clicking on the Blue channel will affect either Blue or Yellow.

So go ahead and click on the Red channel. Now position your mouse in the center of the grid box and click on the diagonal line. Push the line upwards to increase the reds in your image. If your image has too much red, you can pull that diagonal line down to reduce the red (or increase the cyan). Below is an example of this. Remember…..push upward to increase the stated color channel or pull downward to decrease the stated color channel.   The other thing to consider is that a gentle touch is all you need when fiddling with curves. If you go too far, the color will look bizarre. So if you want that effect, go crazy. But for the most part you will just make minor adjustments.

ORIGINAL
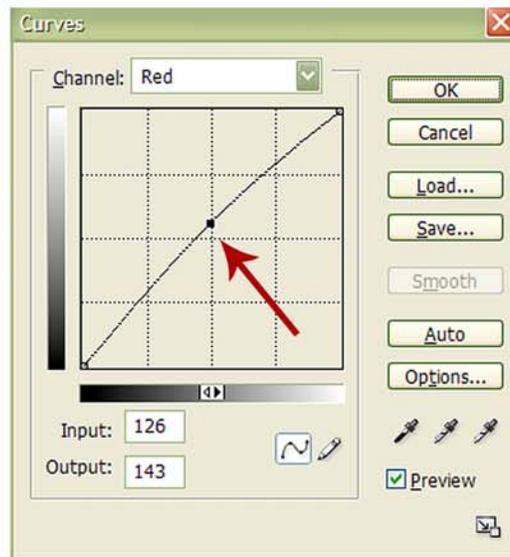
INCREASED RED CHANNEL
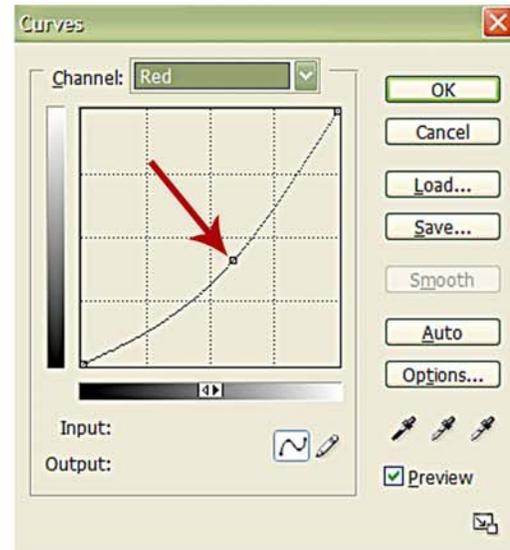
DECREASED RED CHANNEL
(or increase cyan)

Okay, so now that you've had a chance to play with the curves function, I'm going to explain why I like to put this adjustment as it's own layer. When you look at your layers palette with the curves adjustment, you will see a white box next to the curves. This is a layer mask. Layer masks are a great way to mask off the adjustment so that it only affects certain areas of your image.
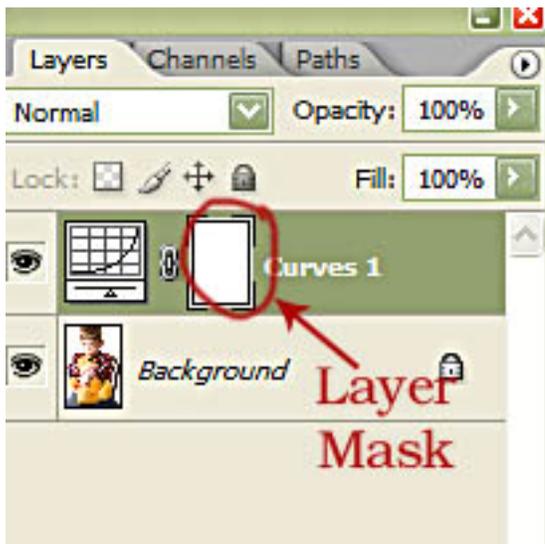
Okay, so let's put that into practice. First open your image and create your curves adjustment. I'm going to make my son's blue eyes more blue by selecting the BLUE CHANNEL on the Curves adjustment and pushing the curve upward. Then click OK.

Now if you notice, my entire image has a stronger blue cast to it. I don't want the entire image to be bluish. I only want the blue to affect his eyes. So this is where the mask comes into play. Go to your layers palette and click on the mask. Then press CONTROL-I to invert the mask. Now you will have your image looking the same as it did originally and your mask has now turned black because you inverted it.
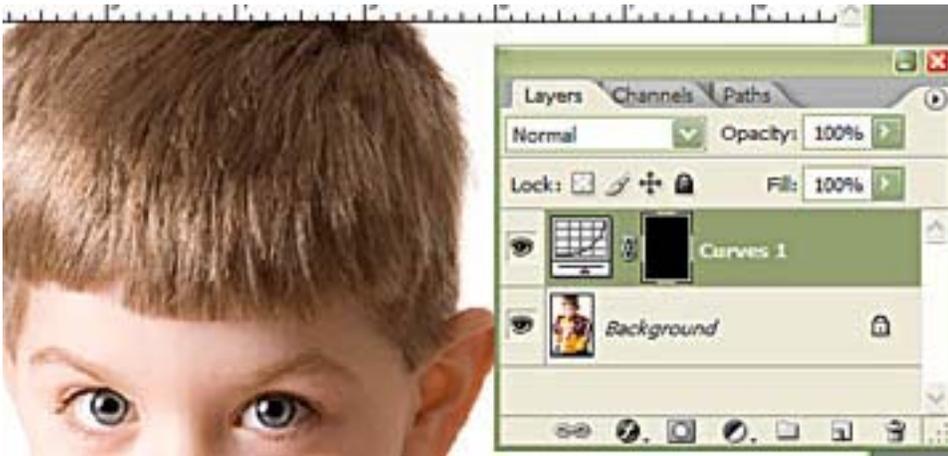
Now we will use a paint brush ON THE MASK to apply the blue curves adjustment only to the places where we want it. For my photo, that means just the eyes. If you've not worked with masks before, you may want to read my layer masks tutorial at DigiScrapping Tutorials.

Okay, so here is the deal with layer masks. When your mask is white, you need to use black paint to get the effect to show up. When your mask is black (inverted), then you need to use white paint to get the effect to show up. The mask we are using here is a black (inverted) mask. So I am going to choose a soft round brush and change my paint color to white. Then I will brush over the iris on each eye to reveal the blue curves adjustment.

Now I just need to do the same thing on the other eye.

Okay, but what if the blue is too much? You can adjust the opacity of the curves layer. Just lower the opacity until you are satisfied. The opacity adjustment is in the layers palette up in the top right corner.

Great, but what if the blue isn't quite the right shade? You can double-click on the curves adjustment icon in the layers palette and tweak the color by dragging the curve up, down, etc.

Okay, but what if I paint on too much of the effect – how do I fix it? No problem. When working with layer masks, all you need to do is switch paint colors to make a fix. When using a black inverted mask, you paint on the effect with white paint. To "erase", you simply switch to black paint and brush back over the area where you made a mistake.

So how do I make the eyes bluer and then the lips more red? You will need a second curves adjustment layer. Make one adjustment to increase the blue, invert your mask and paint on the effect for the eyes. Then

make a second curves adjustment layer to increase the reds, invert that mask and paint on the effect for the lips.

How many curves adjustment layers can I have for one image? As many as you need. You can have one for eyes, one for lips, one for hair, one for shirt color, one for background exposure adjustments, etc. The possibilities are endless.

And that concludes our basic introduction to curves adjustments. Have fun playing!!