Adjustment Layers

Adjustment Layers are one of Photoshop's most valuable features. They allow you to adjust images without altering the original. Photoshop Elements provides a large selection of Adjustment Layers. In this chapter you will look at the BRIGHTNESS/CONTRAST layer, the LEVELS layer, the GRADIENT MAP layer and the SOLID COLOUR layer.

Brightness/Contrast layers

One of the most common problems when taking a photo is incorrect exposure. Photos that are over-exposed have too much light in them. Photos that are under-exposed are too dark. An BRIGHTNESS/CONTRAST layer allows you to minimize these effects.
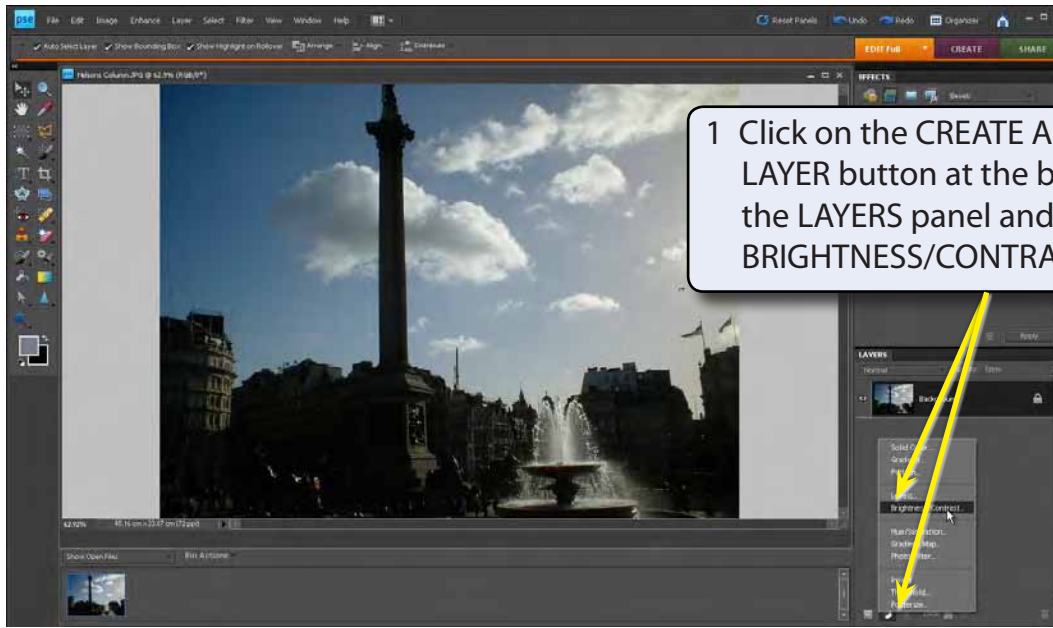
A   Loading the Sample Photo

A photo that is under-exposed has been prepared for you and it will need to be adjusted so that the buildings in it can be more clearly seen.
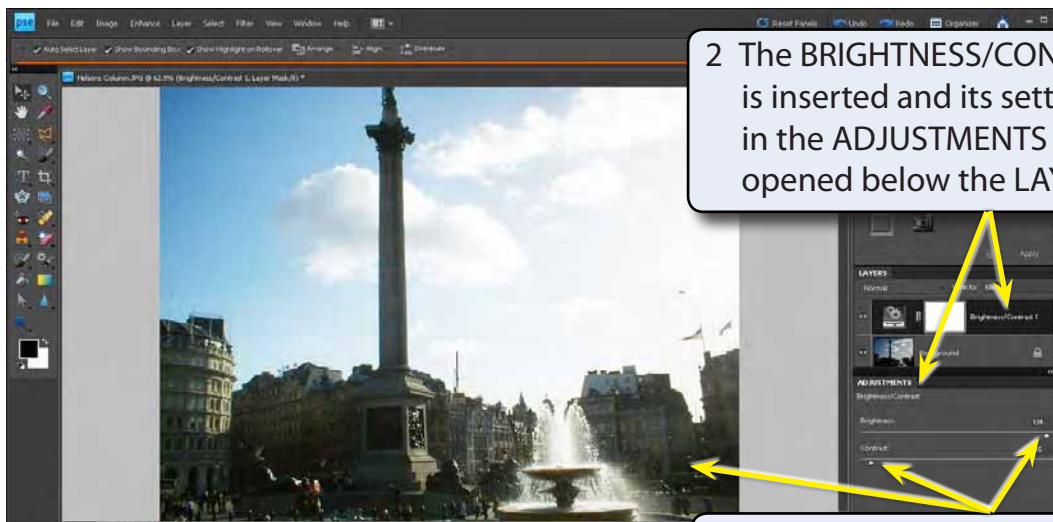
1   Load Photoshop Elements in EDIT MODE or close the current file.

2   Display the FILE menu and select OPEN.

3   Access the PSE8 SUPPORT FILES, open the CHAPTER 16 folder and load the NELSON'S COLUMN file.

4   Press CTRL+0 or COMMAND+0 to set the view to FIT ON SCREEN.

5   The photo is too dark to see the buildings clearly.

B   Inserting the Brightness/Contrast Layer

A BRIGHTNESS/CONTRAST LAYER can be added on top of the background layer so that the original layer is not altered in any way.

1 Click on the CREATE ADJUSTMENT LAYER button at the base of the LAYERS panel and select BRIGHTNESS/CONTRAST.
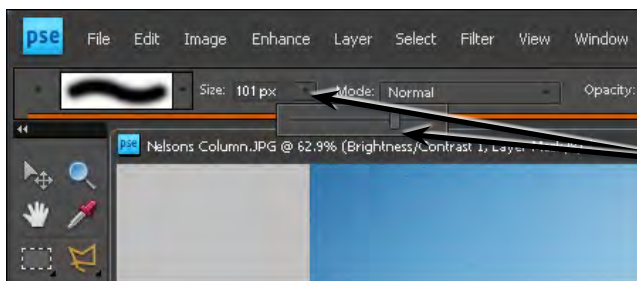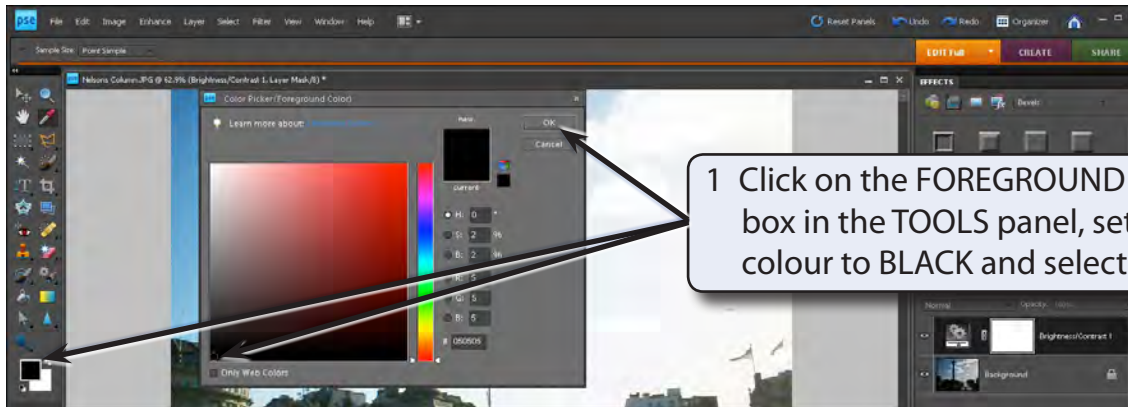

2 The BRIGHTNESS/CONTRAST layer is inserted and its settings opened in the ADJUSTMENTS panel which is opened below the LAYERS panel.
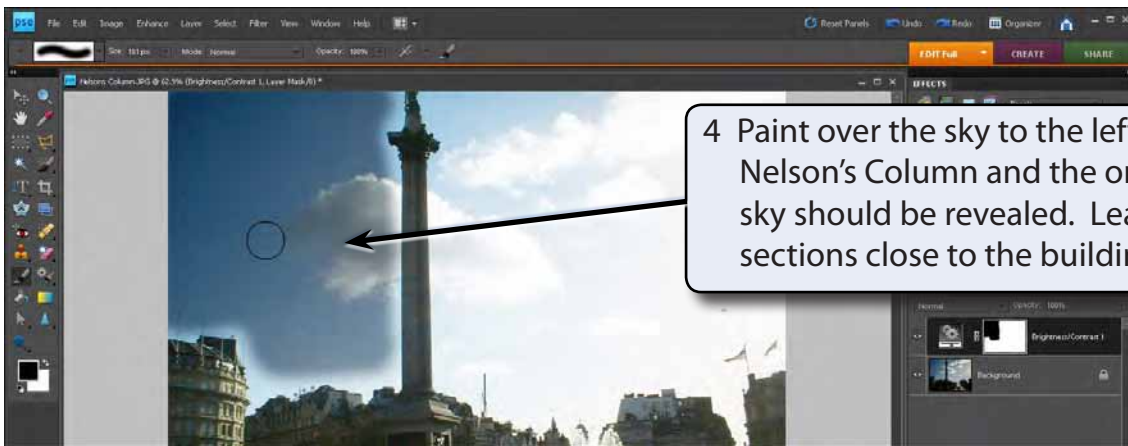
3 Increase the BRIGHTNESS to about +134 and decrease the CONTRAST about to about -45 to view the buildings more clearly.

4   Click on the CLOSE box at the top right of the ADJUSTMENT panel to close the panel. You may need to move the ADJUSTMENT layer down a little to see its CLOSE BOX.

C   Displaying Part of the Background Layer

Unfortunately the sky and the fountain are now over exposed and do not look natural. When you create an ADJUSTMENT layer a MASK is included in the layer. This allows you to paint over parts of the background photo that have better exposure.

1 Click on the FOREGROUND COLOUR box in the TOOLS panel, set the colour to BLACK and select OK.

2 Select the BRUSH TOOL from the TOOLS panel.

3 In the OPTIONS BAR set the BRUSH SIZE to about 100 px then click on the BRUSH arrow again to close the brush slider.

4 Paint over the sky to the left of Nelson's Column and the original sky should be revealed. Leave the sections close to the buildings.

NOTE: i **You can use the [key to reduce the brush size for painting close to the column.**

ii **You can use the UNDO command if you make a mistake with the painting.**

iii **The areas that you paint are displayed in the right thumbnail in the BRIGHTNESS & CONTRAST layer. It is the MASK thumbnail for that layer.**

5 Paint over the right side of the column, but leave the areas close to the buildings and fountain.