

# > photo montage

## > objective(s):

Students will create a composition of several photographic images using various transition techniques, combined with self-created graphics and supporting typography of a selected subject matter

## > curricular focus:

This lesson emphasizes integrating multiple visual elements into one cohesive, unified design. On the technical end, the emphasis is on creating a precision COB as well as layer management and blending modes.

## > specifications:

save as: Photo Montage\_LastnameF.psd and Dominant COB\_LastnameF.psd  
dimensions: 7.5"x10" or 10"x7.5"  
resolution: 200 dpi  
mode: RGB  
contents: Transparent

## > instruction:

- slideshow of strong photo montage compositions
- discuss compositional techniques
  - foreground group (usually 3-4 people)
    - dominant image
      - most important person noticeably larger than other foreground images (regardless of actual scale)
    - all foreground images have same image sharpness, lighting, contrast and color cast
    - all foreground images are unified through overlapping
    - all foreground images are complete or cut off/fade no higher than upper thigh
    - symmetrical versus cascade arrangement (see *Foreground Composition* on page 8)
      - symmetrical- dominant in middle with supporting images balanced on each side
      - cascade- dominant off to one side with supporting images vertically on the other
    - color casting is used minimally or not used at all
  - title
    - placed above or below foreground group
    - title often partially overlaps foreground group to add unity
  - background (usually 2-4 images)
    - seamless transition of images using feathered edges
    - background images are desaturated and overlaid with a monochromatic or analogous gradient
  - supporting graphics/artwork
    - graphics reinforce the overall mood and draw the viewer's eye toward the foreground group and/or title
- discuss color casting (see *Color Casting* on page 10)
  - overlaying a color/gradient over images to create mood or to unify with other images
  - foreground
    - used over top of full-color images or not used at all
    - helpful if you have trouble with consistency of color balance/contrast between images
  - background
    - used over top of mostly or fully desaturated images
    - helpful to create separation/depth from foreground images

***continued on page 2***

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- discuss image transitional techniques
  - overlapping
    - foreground people should overlap to create unity
  - feathered edge
    - when not using a complete image, edges should fade gradually away over a substantial distance
    - use a large Eraser brush set to 0% hardness
    - continually click outside of the edge to let the eraser 'grow' gradually into image
  - transparency
  - layer blending modes
    - always explore/experiment with Layer Blend Modes to see if anything 'cool' happens
- review how color impacts mood and message
  - emotive quality: color reflects mood
    - see official MHSCG Color Guide at <http://www.mhscg.com/color-resources.html>
  - pull color: using the most prominent color from the dominant image(s)
    - for example: dominant subject is wearing a red shirt so background is color cast with red or warm colors
- review how font selection impacts mood and message
  - if you do not use existing wordmark logo then your font selection must 'feel' appropriate for topic/images
  - self-created text should be embellished with graphic treatment
- review of cut-out background techniques
  - watch How to COB a Person (<https://youtu.be/YjLHI2CFUI0>)
  - watch How to COB a Logo (<https://youtu.be/d18QmvF35jk>)
- review adjusting image contrast using Levels (see *Contrast Correction* on page 11)
- review adjusting image color using Color Balance (see *Color Correction* on page 12)
- review creating color cast using Layer Style: Color Overlay or Gradient Overlay
  - remove color from image(s) using Hue/Saturation
    - go to Image: Adjustments: Hue/Saturation
    - move Saturation slider to the left to remove desired amount of color
  - create color cast with Color Overlay Layer Style
    - go to Layer Style: Color Overlay/Gradient Overlay
    - select desired color or gradient, Blending Mode and opacity

**tutorial begins on page 3**

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## STAGE ONE: IDEATION

- **step one:** select topic and approve with instructor
- **step two:** research photographic resources
  - final artwork must have a minimum of five total images (photographs)
    - minimum three in people in foreground
      - dominant (most important character) and two supporting characters
    - minimum two in background
      - can be locations/environments, additional characters, objects, etc.
      - remember that the background must be full bleed
    - wordmark and graphic logos can be used but do not count as images
  - to Bing.com
    - go to Bing.com and select Images from the top menu
    - enter your query in the Search window
    - go to Filter: Image Size: Extra Large
    - click on the desire image to open it, then right+click and select Save Image As
  - download images
    - you need to download multiple options for each element so you have flexibility when sketching ideas
    - foreground
      - download a minimum of two for dominant and each foreground supporting character
      - images must be complete (no cut-off portions) from the mid-thigh and up
      - legs do not have to be complete
        - legs can fade out or tuck behind foreground title, wordmark/text or graphic treatment
      - save as: Dominant 1\_LastnameF, Dominant 2\_LastnameF
      - Foreground A1\_LastnameF, Foreground A2\_LastnameF
      - Foreground B1\_LastnameF, Foreground B2\_LastnameF
      - same requirements as dominant (see above)
    - wordmark logo (if it exists)
      - you are not required to have/use this; you may create your own text title
    - background
      - download images of locations, additional characters or objects
      - for example: Star Wars- starfield, Darth Vader, Death Star and Star Destroyers
      - save as: Background 1\_LastnameF, Background 2\_LastnameF, etc.

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## STAGE TWO: THUMBNAIL SKETCH(ES)

### • Note:

- minimum two different compositions (no mock-up required)
  - try one of each arrangement (symmetrical and cascade)
  - try a different images in your background
  - try different self-created graphics
- use silhouettes for people- do *not* try and draw interior details
  - only need to show body pose, scale and location
- label all visual elements
 

foreground/background images	filters and effects	color casting type and color
transparencies (percent amount)	feathered edges	layer styles
colors	fonts	

### • step one: decide on foreground (minimum 3 images)

- draw only dominant and supporting foreground images first then get approved by instructor
  - label each as FG
- dominant
  - should be approximately half the height of the document (or more)
  - should be visibly larger (usually by about 1.5-2 times) than other foreground images
  - should be the most important person of your subject
- additional supporting foreground images
  - must overlap/be overlapped by the dominant to create unity
    - remember, foreground must function as one image unit!
  - supporting foreground images should be same size on poster regardless of actual size
    - easiest technique is to measure by head size (chin to top of skull (not hair))

**caution!**- do not plan ahead on your background; do what is best your foreground first  
 students often make the foreground group too small or place it too low to accommodate their backgrounds but that is a bad move; the foreground drives the background, not vice versa

### • step two: decide on background (minimum 2 images)

- draw background images then get approved by instructor
  - label each image as BG
- can be people, objects, environments, logo, etc.
  - what works best with what you've already done with your foreground?
- decide how you will transition between the two images
  - overlapping, transparency, feathered edge, etc.

### • step three: decide on title

- draw title text as it really appears then get approved by instructor
- can be self-created text or wordmark logo
  - does not count as one of your six total images
- decide on location, size and graphic treatments

### • step four: decide on self-created graphics

- draw self-created graphics then get approved by instructor
- must reinforce the overall mood of the piece
- can be part of foreground, background title, etc.
- can be raster or vector

### • step five: decide on color casting (label type and color)

- foreground- either no color cast or full-color color cast
- background- either partial or full desaturation color/gradient cast

### • step six: double check all labels

- foreground/background images, color casting, transparencies, feathered edges, filters, effects, styles, etc.

### • step seven: discuss sketch(es) with instructor

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## STAGE THREE: CREATE FOREGROUND

- **Note:** remember to reference and work from your sketch
- **step one:** place all foreground images then properly locate, scale and order them first
  - dominant should be approximately half the overall height of the document (approx 750 pixels)
  - foreground support characters are usually the same scale
    - base off of facial features
    - try using guidelines to line up eyes and mouths to establish consistent scale
  - create any necessary transitions (feathered edges)
    - use a large Eraser brush set to 0% hardness
    - continually click outside of the edge to let the eraser 'grow' gradually into image
  - avoid common mistakes:
    - foreground group too small and/or too low
    - foreground images do not overlap enough to function as single visual element
    - supporting foreground people are not the same scale
  - get approval
  - apply all layer masks
    - do not waste memory on data you are hiding
- **step two:** place title text or wordmark logo
  - get approval for overall foreground composition
- **step three:** adjust all foreground images so they are identical to each other in color and contrast
  - **remember:** foreground images need to appear as if it is one posed photo taken together
  - create temporary background layer
    - create a new layer underneath all foreground images and fill it white or black
    - this will make it easier for you to judge color/lighting discrepancies between images
  - use Levels, Color Balance and maybe even Hue/Saturation to achieve continuity
    - see pages 11 and 12 for techniques
    - you may need to go back and forth between those techniques to get the desired results
  - apply a slight color cast to help unify the foreground (if needed/wanted)
    - duplicate and merge foreground images to protect your work
    - apply a mild, gentle Color Overlay (Layer: Layer Style: Color Overlay)
      - select appropriate Blending Mode and greatly lower Opacity
  - approve with instructor then delete temporary white/black background layer

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## STAGE FOUR: CREATE BACKGROUND

- **step one:** place, locate and scale all background images
  - create any necessary transitions (feathered edges)
    - use a large Eraser brush set to 0% hardness
    - continually click outside of the edge to let the eraser 'grow' gradually into image
  - approve with instructor
- **step two:** adjust all background images so that they are identical to each other in contrast
  - hide all other layers (foreground and title) to visually isolate background
  - desaturate background images
    - to fully desaturate go to Image: Adjustments: Desaturate
    - this is the recommended approach; this allows the full impact of the overlay to come through
    - to mostly desaturate go to Image: Adjustments: Hue/Saturation and move Saturation slider
    - remaining color must be subtle so the color/gradient overlay can still have an effect and that the background does not compete with foreground
  - create a new layer underneath all background images and fill it white or black
    - use white if you want your background layer lighter than your foreground
    - use black if you want your background layer darker than your foreground
    - this will make it easier for you to judge color/lighting discrepancies between images
  - use Opacity and Levels to achieve consistency in contrast between all background images
    - see pages 11 and 12 for techniques
    - you may need to go back and forth between those techniques to get the desired results
  - get approval from instructor
  - merge background images
    - including white/black layer
  - add color (or gradient) cast to background images
    - create a new layer, name it Background Color Cast
    - add gradient fill
    - go to Layer: Layer Style: Color Overlay or Gradient Overlay
    - select color, Blending Mode and Opacity
    - adjust Layer Blending Mode and/or Opacity
  - approve with instructor

## STAGE FIVE: CREATE SELF-CREATED ARTWORK

- **step six:** add self-created artwork
  - get approval

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## > requirements:

- **file specifications**

- document is set to exact dimensions and resolution (see Specifications)
- no unnamed or hidden layers

- **foreground image group:**

- minimum of three images appear in the foreground
- one of the images is clearly larger than the rest, serving as the dominant image of the composition
- additional foreground images overlap (in front or behind) dominant and are supportive and unifying
- foreground image group is appropriate scale and location
- foreground images are adjusted so they are identical to each other in color and contrast
  - any color casting to the foreground images is with permission only

- **title/text:**

- subject title appears
  - can be either the name of the subject matter, a thematic title, or both)
  - may use wordmark logo image for title but does not count towards image count
- font selection reflects and supports the overall mood
- text is set to anti-alias Smooth
- creative use of text is (if used) is effective
  - for example: layer styles, filters, effects, warps, layer blending modes, gradients, etc.
- any additional text elements do not compete with title
  - text used as graphic element have no other requirements

- **background images:**

- minimum of two images appear in the background
- images support the overall subject matter through additional people/characters, objects and/or environments
- background images effectively blend into each other through gradual feathering
- background images are extremely similar in value contrast
- background is full bleed (no negative space in document)

- **self-created graphics:**

- self-created graphics are utilized in the foreground and/or background
  - vector graphics imported from Illustrator are permitted
  - tutorials may be incorporated at instructor's discretion and are pre-approved
- graphics enhance/reinforce the overall mood of the composition without competing with imagery



# > foreground composition

## > symmetrical

dominant is centered with a supporting character on each side; supporting characters are the same size



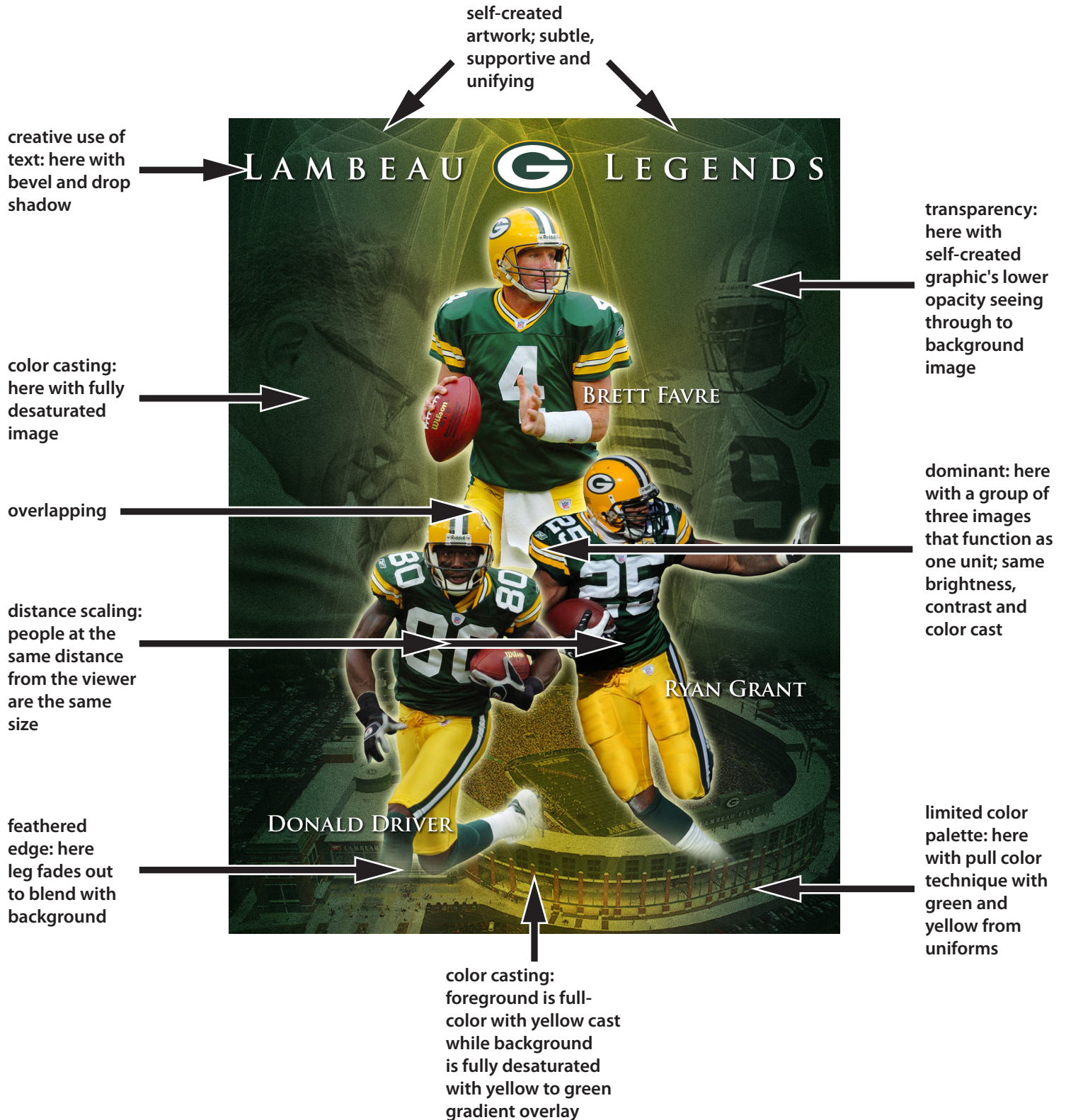
## > cascade

dominant is off-center with supporting characters on one side; supporting characters are still the same size as each other





# > photo montage example





# > color casting

Color casting is when you alter the colors of images to match each other. This is usually done with a color overlay but normally requires adjusting brightness and contrast first.

## **FULL-COLOR color cast**

[foreground only]

In this example, most of the real, natural color of the images come through the yellow color overlay to unify them. This is done in the foreground only

### **How to do it:**

Get the foreground faces' skin to match as closely as possible with contrast (Levels: Ctrl + L) and tone (Color Balance: Ctrl B). Create a new layer and place it above your foreground people. Fill the layer with the color you wish to unify them together with. Finally, select a Layer Blending Mode and Opacity to taste.



## **PARTIAL-DESATURATION color cast**

[foreground or middleground]

In this example, only some of the real, natural color of the images come through the orange color overlay on the left and the green color overlay on the right.

### **How to do it:**

Get the foreground faces' skin to match as closely as possible with contrast (Levels: Ctrl + L) and tone (Color Balance: Ctrl + B). Next, partially desaturate each face equally (Hue/Saturation: Ctrl + U). Create a new layer and place it above your foreground people. Fill the layer with the color you wish to unify them together with. Finally, select a Layer Blending Mode and Opacity to taste.



## **FULL-DESATURATION color cast**

[background only]

In this example, the images of the two faces were completely desaturated before being overlayed in blue. This allows the faces to retreat into the background. This is done with background images only.

### **How to do it:**

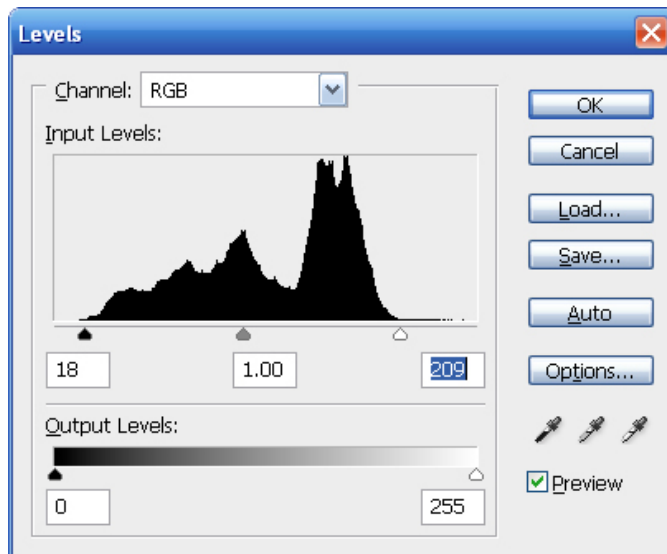
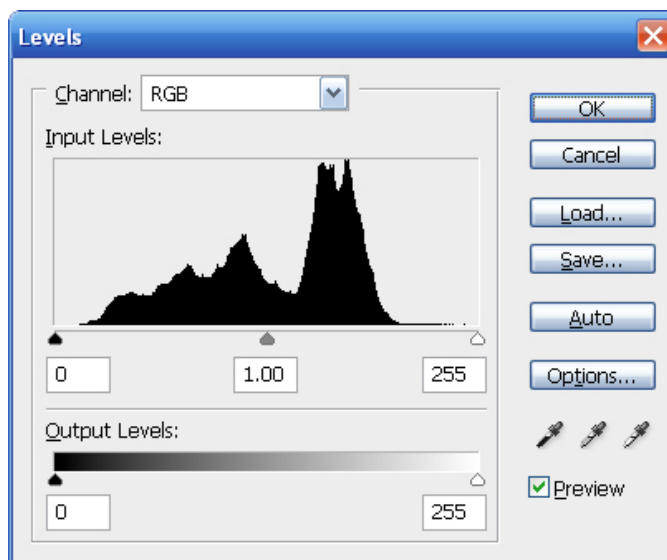
First, fully desaturate each image that will be in your background (Desaturate: Shift + Ctrl + U). Next, use Levels (Ctrl + L) to match the brightness/contrast of each image. Create a new layer and place it above your foreground people. Fill the layer with the color you wish to unify them together with. Finally, select a Layer Blending Mode and Opacity to taste.



# > contrast correction

## > adjust image contrast

- first try auto correcting
  - go to Image: Adjustments: Auto Levels (Shift + Ctrl + L)
  - evaluate the result by comparing before and after by pressing Undo (Ctrl +Z)
  - if it is a drastic improvement, Save (Ctrl +S) and move on to Color Balance
  - if it is not a drastic improvement, Undo and perform manually (see below)
- manual contrast correction
  - go to Image: Adjustments: Levels (Ctrl + L)
  - evaluate the Histogram
    - a histogram is a bar graph showing the amount of darks, midtones and highlights
    - move the black and white "pyramids" to the "base of the mountain"
    - place them where the bar graph starts to ascend (see below)
    - move the gray (midtone) pyramid (most likely left) to adjust the overall lightness
    - do not overadjust (see below)



# > color correction

## > adjust image color

- first try auto correcting
  - go to Image: Adjustments: Auto Color (Shift +Ctrl + B)
  - evaluate the result by comparing before and after by pressing Undo (Ctrl +Z)
  - if it is a drastic improvement, approve with instructor and Save (Ctrl +S)
  - if it is not a drastic improvement, Undo and perform manually (see below)
  - remember, you are trying to get the color as realistic as possible
  - Auto Color usually overcorrects so expect to have to do this manually
- manual color correction
  - evaluate your image
    - is it too yellow?
    - too pink?
    - too green?
    - too blue?
  - go to Image: Adjustments: Color Balance (Ctrl + B)
  - use the Color Balance slider to compensate for incorrect color cast
    - Cyan, Magenta and Yellow (left) are opposite Red, Green and Blue (right)
    - example: if your image is too pink, move the middle slider slightly toward green
    - most adjustments are minor (rarely more than +/-20 either way)
    - remember to check and uncheck Preview to compare before and after
    - do not overcorrect!

