How to use gradient maps

In Adobe Photoshop CS6 you can change an image's colors by using a gradient. The Gradient Map command maps the tonal range of an image to the colors of a gradient fill. *Tonal range* describes the image's colors, with the lightest color (usually white) at one end and the darkest color (usually black) at the other end. Every color in between can be expressed in a shade of gray. This tonal range is known as *grayscale range*.

A *gradient fill* is a blend of two or more colors. When you apply a two-color gradient map to an image, shadows are mapped to the left end of the fill and highlights (the lightest parts of the image) are mapped to the right end of the fill. Midtones—normally grays—are mapped to the gradations in between.

Gradient maps can produce interesting effects when you apply them to photos or other images. You can change ordinary photos to science fiction landscapes or give an image a silvery shimmer. Photoshop provides a number of built-in gradient maps that work well with images. You can modify these or create your own gradients.

Applying a gradient map

You can apply a gradient map to any type of image in Photoshop by using the Gradient Map command.

To apply a gradient map:

1. Start Photoshop and open an image.
2. Ensure that the image layer is selected in the Layers panel.
3. Choose Image > Adjustments > Gradient Map.

   The Gradient Map dialog box appears (**Figure 1**).

   By default, the gradient appears as a simple blue-to-white gradient. If the Preview option is selected, your image switches to a monochromatic scale.

   Note: Once you create a new gradient in the Gradient Map dialog box, the new gradient will appear instead of the default gradient.
4. Click the triangle to the right of the gradient fill.

   A selection of gradient fills appears in the Gradient picker (**Figure 2**).
5. Click on a gradient fill to select it.
6. Click OK.

   The Gradient Map dialog box closes and the gradient map is applied to your image (**Figure 3**).

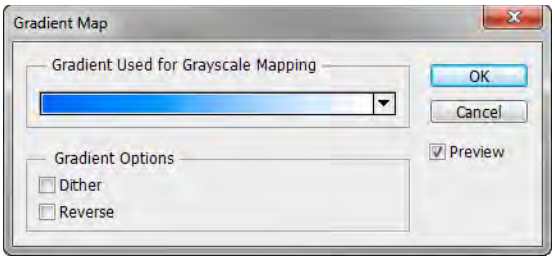

Figure 1 Gradient Map dialog box

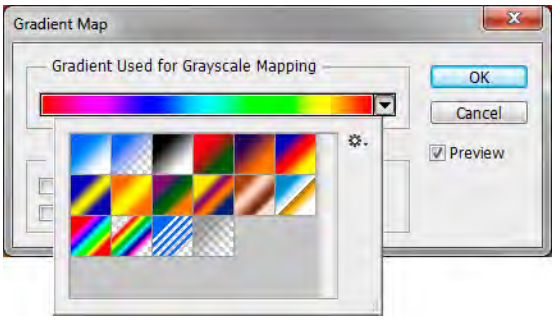

Figure 2 Gradient picker

Figure 3 Gradient map applied

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Customizing a gradient map

You may want to create a custom gradient map as an alternative to the presets in Photoshop.

To customize a gradient map:

1. Start Photoshop and open an image.
2. Choose Image > Adjustments > Gradient Map.

   The Gradient Map dialog box appears (**Figure 1**).
3. Click the gradient fill to edit it.

   The Gradient Editor appears (**Figure 4**).
4. Type a name for your new gradient in the Name text box.
5. Click New.

   A new gradient appears in the Presets pane. (At first, it won't look any different from the default gradient.)
6. In the pane below the Name box, click one of the stops on the gradient bar.

   Stops determine the colors in the gradient.

   The triangle above the stop turns yellow (or whatever color is currently selected), indicating that the starting color is being edited (**Figure 5**).
7. Click the Color box to edit the stop color.

   The Color Picker (Stop Color) dialog box appears (**Figure 6**).
8. Click a color in the Color Picker (Stop Color) dialog box to select it.

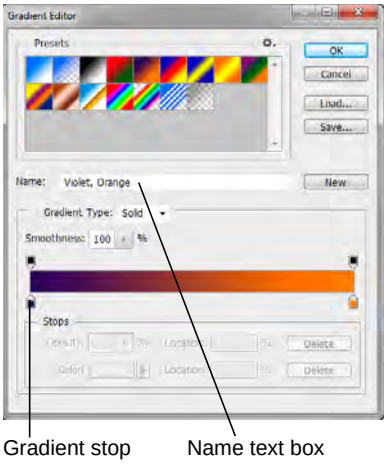

Figure 4 Gradient Editor

Figure 5 Gradient stop selected

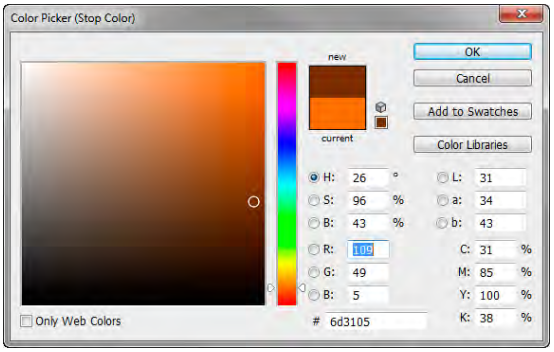

Figure 6 Color Picker (Stop Color) dialog box

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9. Click OK.

   The Color Picker (Stop Color) dialog box closes.

   The stop has changed to the new color.

10. In the center of the gradient bar, click below the bar in two or three places to add new stops (**Figure 7**).

11. Repeat steps 6–9 to change the colors of the new stops (**Figure 8**).

12. Click OK to close the Gradient Editor. Click OK again to apply the gradient map (**Figure 9**).

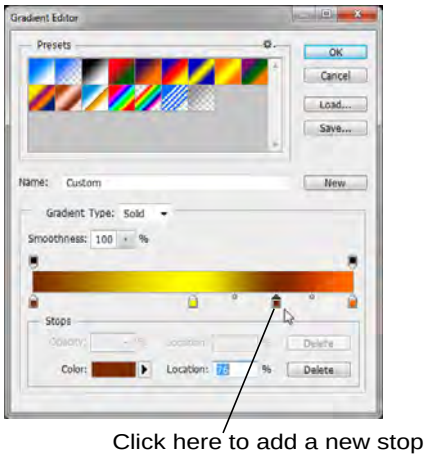

Figure 7 New stop color applied

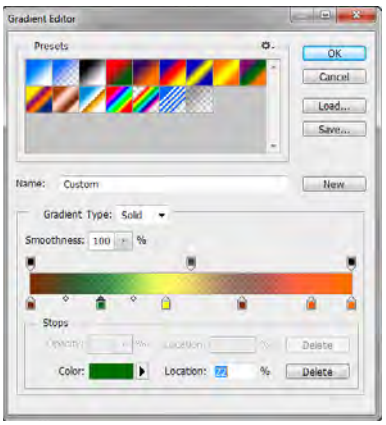

Figure 8 Multiple stops added

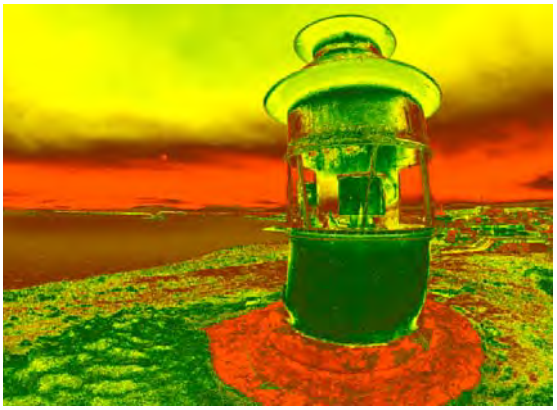

Figure 9 Custom gradient applied