

The Lighting Effects Filter

The Lighting Effects filter is like a little program in itself. With this filter, you can create a wealth of different lighting effects, from making a particular object look like it's under a spotlight to bathing your entire picture in soft, omni-directional light. You can even add colored lights.

The Lighting Effects filter isn't an essential part of Elements. You can work with the program happily for years without ever finding a use for it. But there are times when this filter may be just what you need for special effects, like putting an object in your photo under a spotlight or adding a strong directional ray of light to an image.

TIP If you just want to correct the overall lightness of your photo, use one of the other Elements commands, like Levels or Shadows/Highlights. Or use Curves, if you have an add-on that includes the Curves command (see Chapter 17 for some sources for extra tools for Elements.) Lighting Effects is more for creating special effects than basic brightness correction.

Getting Started with Lighting Effects

Using the Lighting Effects filter can be a bit complex. What follows is a brief run-down of how the filter works and what the controls do. That should help you get started, but experimenting with the filter will help you more than anything.

First of all, it's usually a good idea to create a duplicate layer (Layer → Duplicate) when using this filter. That way, you can adjust the duplicate layer's opacity after you've applied the filter.

To get started using the Lighting Effects filter go to Filter → Render → Lighting Effects, or select it from the Styles and Effects palette. You'll see the intimidating dialog box shown in Figure E-1.

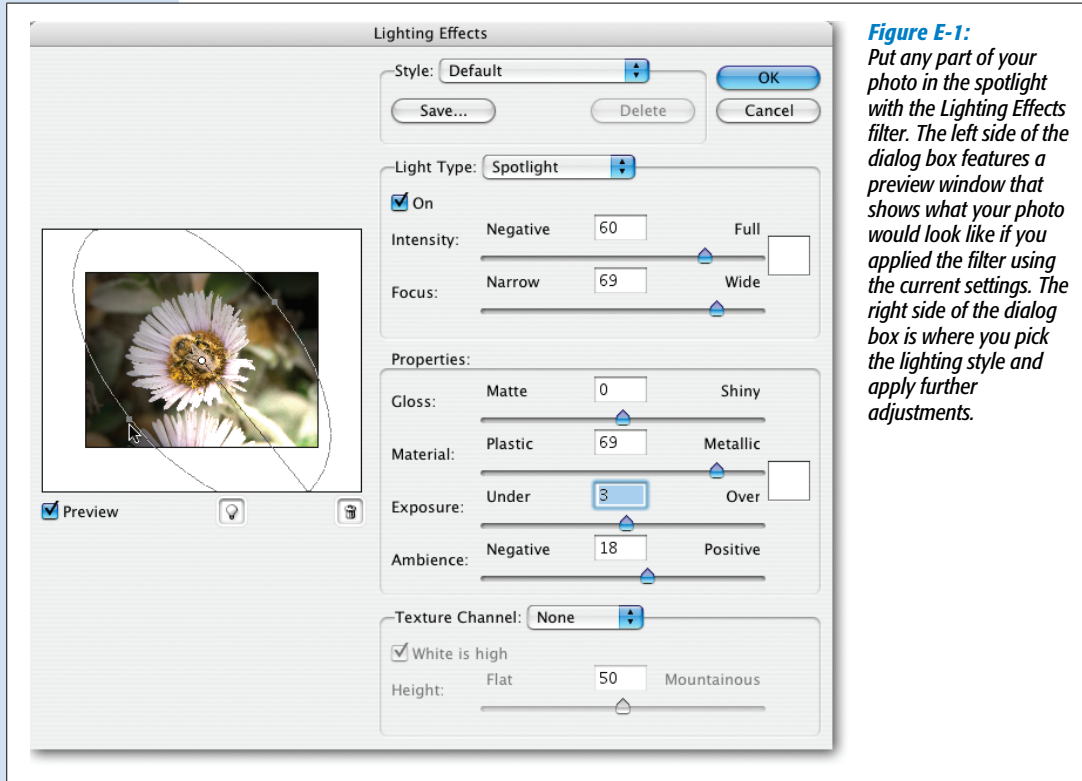


Figure E-1: Put any part of your photo in the spotlight with the Lighting Effects filter. The left side of the dialog box features a preview window that shows what your photo would look like if you applied the filter using the current settings. The right side of the dialog box is where you pick the lighting style and apply further adjustments.

The Lighting Effects dialog box is divided into two main parts. On the left side of the window is a preview of your photo with the current settings applied to it. You can also reposition the source point of the light here, and add additional lights or change the angle of the light. On the right is a long list of settings, divided into four main areas:

- **Style** is where you choose the general kind of light you want. There's a long list of styles to choose from, including simple single-light styles, colored lights, and styles with multiple lights aimed in different directions. If you don't know which you want, Default is a good place to start. Each style has its own settings for you to use as a starting point in making your own adjustments.

Once you've customized a style, you can also choose to save all your settings here for future use.

- **Light Type** is where you choose the coverage area (choices include Directional, Omni, or Spotlight), its intensity, and how wide the focus is. You can also change the light's color here.

- **Properties** contains the settings that control how the light reflects and how bright the *ambience* is (that is, the area outside your chosen light). You can also change the color of the ambient light.
- **Texture Channel** lets you add texture to your lighting effect by creating a relief effect.

Adding and Changing Light Sources

You have to select at least one light source when you use the Lighting Effects filter. Just as in real life, the light has to come from somewhere. You can move the light source around in the filter, just as you might move a spotlight or a photo studio lighting setup, and you'd do it for the same reason: to create the optimum lighting for your subject.

Usually the filter opens with one light source, but a few of the lighting styles have multiple sources. In the Preview window, you'll see a dot in the center of a circle, which represents the originating point of your light source. You can move the light source, as shown in Figure E-2.

When you move the light source, you change the location of the light source relative to your photo. This changes the light in the image the same way that moving a real light would make a difference in how light shines on an object you're photographing. You can also add more light sources if you want the light to come from additional directions.

If you want to add another light source, drag the little light bulb icon from under the Preview window to the spot in the Preview window where you want the light to focus. Every time you drag, you set another source. You'd use another source, for instance, if you were using the spotlight style but wanted to make two areas of your photo brighter than their surroundings, rather than just one. You'd then need to adjust each light source separately.

You can adjust how large the lighted area is in two ways. All the styles have a line extending from the light source showing the direction of the light. You can grab the dot at the end of the line (opposite the source) and pull it farther from the source to increase the distance the light travels. Or you can push it closer to the source to decrease its coverage. (This won't have a lot of effect on some of the omni styles). To change the direction of the light, grab the dot at the end of the line and pull it in the direction you want the light to shine.

TIP You can drag the light source anywhere in the Preview area, even outside the boundaries of your image if you want only the edge of the light to enter the photo.

Most styles also have a circle around the source showing the focal radius of the light. To light a broader area, grab one of the dots on the side of the circle and pull it wider. To reduce the area the light covers, push a dot closer to the light source to reduce the size of the circle.

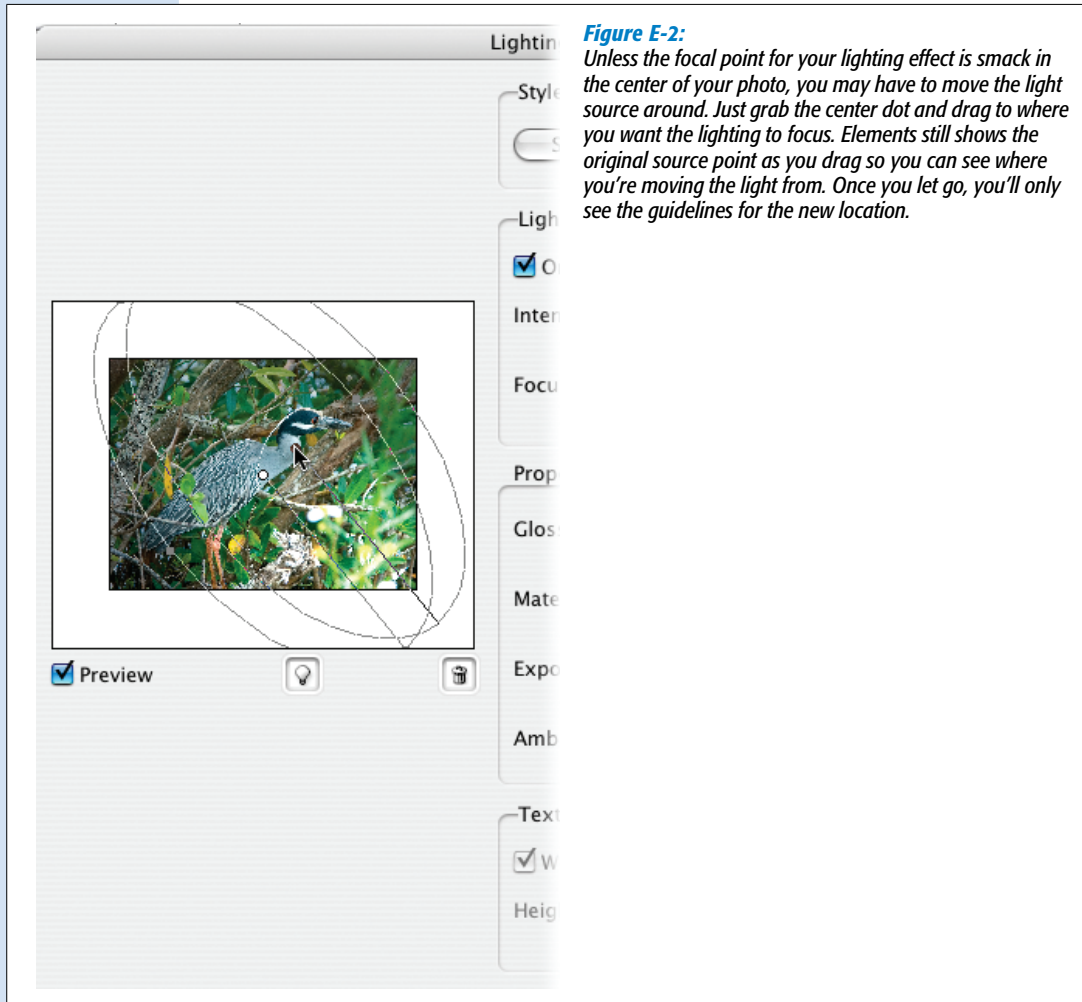


Figure E-2: Unless the focal point for your lighting effect is smack in the center of your photo, you may have to move the light source around. Just grab the center dot and drag to where you want the lighting to focus. Elements still shows the original source point as you drag so you can see where you're moving the light from. Once you let go, you'll only see the guidelines for the new location.

You can make all kinds of adjustments to the light using the settings on the right side of the Lighting Effects window. The settings are explained in the next section. You'll almost invariably need to make lots of changes to the settings before you get the effect you want.

If you want to get rid of a light source, just drag it to the little Trash can under the right corner of the Preview window.

Adjusting Lighting Effects Settings

You can produce very subtle effects with the Lighting Effects filter, but it usually takes quite a bit of tweaking the settings to get things just the way you want them. This is a complex filter with lots of settings, and at first you may find having so

many settings a bit confusing. If you play with each one, you'll quickly come to see how each can help you adjust one of the qualities of your light. You don't always need to change all the settings, but each one is valuable sometimes, depending on the image you're lighting.

Each of the four settings sections of the dialog box comes in handy for getting exactly the effect you want. Here's a rough guide to what the settings in each section do. (Not every setting is available for every light style. For instance, the focus setting is grayed out for omni lights because omni lights are unfocused by definition.)

The first section, Style, is where you choose the kind of lighting you want. Your choices are:

- **Default** is the basic lighting style, which you can customize with any of the settings in the following areas. It creates a single-light spotlight of medium intensity.
- **Blue Omni** is an unfocused overall light. It starts out blue, but you can use the color square in the Light Type section of the dialog box to change it to a different color.
- **Circle of Light** creates four colored spotlights arranged in a circle. The colors are red, blue, yellow, and white.
- **Crossing** creates an effect like a spotlight with a wide focus and medium intensity.
- **Crossing Down** is like Crossing, only with two lights instead of one.
- **Five Lights Down** makes five white spotlights that shine down from the top of your image.
- **Five Lights Up**. With this setting, you get five white spotlights that shine up from the bottom of your image.
- **Flashlight** creates a focused yellow spotlight of medium intensity, like a real flashlight.
- **Floodlight** makes a white spotlight with a wide focus.
- **Parallel Directional** gives you a full-intensity blue directional light or a white medium intensity directional light. Neither light is focused.
- **RGB Lights** produces three spotlights, one each of red, green, and blue.
- **Soft Direct Lights** is similar to Parallel Directional, only with less intensity.
- **Soft Omni** gives you one medium-intensity light with no focal point that fills the image.
- **Soft Spotlight** produces a full intensity spotlight with a wide focus.

- **Three Down** produces three parallel medium-intensity lights that shine down from the top of the image.
- **Triple Spotlight** is similar to Three Down, only all three lights focus on the same point in the image.

The two buttons, Save and Delete, let you choose to save your settings for a particular style and later remove it, respectively. If you want to apply the same effect to another photo, you can just click the Save button and name the style when asked. From now on you'll see it as a menu choice in the list of available styles. To permanently remove a style, click the Delete button.

The next section, Light Type, lets you turn your light on and off and make basic adjustments like the color, focus, and intensity of the light.

- **Light Type.** This determines which of the three main lighting varieties your style will use: Directional (the light flows in one direction from the light source), Omni (more diffused lighting), or Spotlight (the light is focused on a point in your image).

You can pick any of these settings, but for some Styles, choosing a Light Type that's at variance with the Style may give you a very small lighted area or none at all. For instance, if you choose Soft Omni as your Style and Spotlight as your Light Type, only a small area gets illuminated. Think about what kind of light you'd use to get the effect you want if you were using a real light.

- **On.** Turn this setting off if you need to see the preview without the light. You can also use it to turn off a light if you are using a style that involves multiple lights. It's useful for adjusting the ambient light without getting distracted by the strength of the spotlight.
- **Intensity.** This setting determines how strong the light is. Move the slider to the right for more intense light.
- **Focus** is where you pick whether your light covers a narrow or wide area. Move the slider to the right for a wider area and to the left for a narrower one.
- **The Color square** lets you change the color of your light. The square starts out white for most styles, but you can create a colored light, too. Just double-click the square to bring up the Elements Color Picker (see Chapter 7) and choose the color you want.

The next section, which Adobe calls Properties, lets you adjust the quality of your light.

- **Gloss** determines how much the surfaces in your photo reflect the light. Matte gives you no reflection at all, while Gloss produces a shiny look.
- **Material** tells Elements what characteristic is going to dominate in the reflected light. Plastic means the effect reflects the light's color; Metallic means it reflects the color of the object.

- **Exposure** increases and decreases the amount of light. 0 is neutral. Positive values mean more light, negative mean less light.
- **Ambience** controls how diffused and blended with other light in the photo your effect will be. If the default dark background takes you aback, move this slider to the right to lighten the ambience.

There's another color box on the right side of this section that lets you set a color for the ambience, if you wish. For example, you could have a green spotlight with red ambience if you want.

The final area is Texture Channel. You can use the Lighting Effects filter to add texture to your image by creating a relief effect, as shown in Figure E-3.



Figure E-3: One of the more popular uses for the Lighting Effects filter is to create textures. Here's a rather exaggerated use of the Texture Channel to create a highly textured effect. Usually, you'd use this in conjunction with other filters for artistic treatments of your photos.

- **Color Menu.** The color choices in the pull-down menu let you adjust the amount of texture for the individual color channels in your image (see Chapter 7).
- **“White is high”** means that if you choose to use a texture, the white parts of the image will stand out from the page. Turn off “White is high” if you want the dark parts to stand out. You can also create textured effects from any transparency in your image, or from saved selections (see Chapter 5).
- **Height** determines how much the texture stands out from the page. Move the slider to the left for a flat look or to the right to make the texture stand out more.

You may need a bit of practice to get really comfortable with the Lighting Effects filter. Once you understand how the controls work, you can create very sophisticated lighting effects with it. You may also find that your increased understanding of lighting helps you with lighting your photographs as you take them.