

Black & White Photography — Workbook

This workbook is a hands-on companion to the Black & White Photography course, giving you structured exercises, worksheets, and checklists to apply tonal theory and darkroom technique directly to your own images. Work through each section alongside the corresponding module, completing exercises in the field and at your editing desk. Bring your annotated workbook to critique sessions or portfolio reviews — it doubles as a record of your visual development.

Seeing Without Colour

Build the core skill of pre-visualisation by training your eye to assess scenes in terms of luminosity, texture, shape, and form rather than colour.

Exercise: Zone System Calibration Walk

Choose a location with strong tonal variety — a park, a busy street, or your home. Spend 45 minutes photographing 20 different surfaces or subjects. For each shot, write down your intuitive Zone guess (0–X) before looking at the histogram, then record the actual histogram peak. The goal is to narrow the gap between intuition and measurement over time.

- Which Zone did your eye guess incorrectly most often — highlights or shadows? What does this tell you about your natural exposure bias?

- Which surfaces or subjects produced the most accurate Zone guesses? Is there a category (stone, skin, sky) where your intuition is already calibrated?

- Pick the three images with the best tonal range. What light quality (direction, hardness) was present for each?

- How did the histogram shape differ between your Zone V subjects and your Zone II–III subjects? Sketch the two histogram shapes.

Worksheet: Light Quality Field Log

Complete one row per shooting session for your next five outings. Record the light conditions and how they translated into tonal quality in your images. Review all five rows at the end of Module 1 and identify patterns. Date and location

Time of day

Light direction (front / side / back / overhead)

Light hardness (hard point source / soft diffused / overcast)

Approximate colour temperature (warm / neutral / cool)

Dominant Zone range of the main subject

Did shadow texture appear or disappear? Notes

Best image from this session and why

Checklist: Module 1 Pre-Shoot Checklist

- Enable Monochrome Picture Style on camera so EVF shows black-and-white preview
- Enable highlight alert (blinkies) in camera review settings
- Identify the dominant graphic element in the scene before pressing the shutter (shape / texture / form)
- Mentally label the key subject to a Zone (0–X) before metering
- Check the light direction and estimate shadow length relative to subject height
- Plan one alternative composition using a different graphic element as the anchor
- Note the light quality in your phone or a pocket notebook for later review

Camera Setup and Exposure for Monochrome

Apply technically correct RAW capture and exposure discipline to ensure your files carry the maximum tonal latitude for processing.

Exercise: ETTR Exposure Comparison Test

Select a high-contrast scene (e.g., a building facade in direct sun with deep shadow areas). Photograph the same scene at three exposures: metered (0 EV), +1 EV (ETTR), and -1 EV. Process all three in Lightroom at identical settings (no exposure correction). Compare shadow noise at 100% zoom across the three files.

Write your observations below.

- At 100% zoom, describe the shadow noise quality in each of the three exposures. Which is cleanest?
- Was there any highlight clipping in the +1 EV (ETTR) exposure? If so, which areas clipped?
- After pulling the +1 EV exposure back by 1 stop in Lightroom, how does it compare in shadow quality to the metered exposure?
- Based on this test, what will your default exposure offset be for high-contrast daylight scenes?

Worksheet: Colour Filter Effect Tracker

Photograph the same scene six times using six different B&W Panel presets in Lightroom, each approximating a physical colour filter. Rate the tonal effect on sky, foliage, and skin from 1 (no effect) to 5 (dramatic effect) for each subject category.

Scene description

No filter — sky tonal value (Zone)

No filter — foliage tonal value (Zone)

No filter — skin tonal value (Zone)

Yellow equivalent — sky / foliage / skin zones

Orange equivalent — sky / foliage / skin zones

Red equivalent — sky / foliage / skin zones

Green equivalent — sky / foliage / skin zones

Which filter gave the most useful tonal separation for this specific scene?

Which filter would you use as a default for this subject category in future?

Checklist: Long Exposure Setup Checklist

- Attach sturdy tripod and verify all leg locks are tightened
- Set camera to base ISO (100 or 200 depending on model)
- Switch to manual or aperture-priority mode
- Focus and compose before attaching ND filter
- Attach ND filter and verify it is clean and properly seated
- Calculate exposure time using the ND multiplier or ND Timer app
- Set 2-second self-timer or attach wired/wireless remote shutter release
- Enable mirror lock-up (DSLR) or electronic first-curtain shutter (mirrorless)
- Review histogram immediately after capture for clipping in both shadows and highlights
- Take a second exposure with +1/3 stop as insurance bracket

Digital Darkroom: Monochrome Processing Workflow

Build and document a repeatable Lightroom-to-Silver Efex Pro workflow that you can apply consistently across all your monochrome images.

Exercise: Tone Curve Mood Study

Select one well-exposed landscape or street image. Process it three times with the same B&W Mix settings but three different tone curves: (1) a classic S-curve, (2) a flat-bottomed high-contrast graphic curve, and (3) a lifted-shadow matte curve. Export all three as JPEG. Print them at A4 or view side by side on screen. Write your analysis below.

- Which curve best matched the mood you intended when you captured the image? Why?
- In which tonal zone (shadows, midtones, or highlights) was the difference between the three curves most visible?
- If you were preparing this image for a gallery print, which curve would you choose? If for a social media post, would your choice differ?
- Save your preferred curve as a Lightroom preset. What name will you give it to make it easy to identify later?

Worksheet: Dodge-and-Burn Session Log

After completing a dodge-and-burn edit on any image, record the masks used and the adjustments applied. This builds a personal reference library of techniques that work for specific subject types. Image filename or Lightroom capture date

Subject type (portrait / landscape / architecture / street / abstract)

Mask 1 type (Subject / Sky / Luminance Range / Brush / Radial) and zone targeted

Mask 1 adjustment: Exposure value applied (positive = dodge, negative = burn)

Mask 2 type and zone targeted

Mask 2 adjustment: Exposure value

Mask 3 type and zone targeted (if used)

Mask 3 adjustment: Exposure value (if used)

Total number of masks used in this edit

Did the dodge-and-burn clarify the subject hierarchy? Notes

Checklist: Silver Efex Pro Film Grain Evaluation Checklist

- Open image in Silver Efex Pro from Lightroom via Edit In menu
- Set initial conversion using the B&W Filter panel equivalent to your planned tonal filter
- Compare at least three film emulsion presets before committing to one
- View grain quality at 100% loupe before final decision
- Reduce grain size by 20–30% from default for landscape and architecture subjects
- Increase grain softness by 20–30% to prevent grain competing with fine subject texture
- Apply Structure adjustment last — check for halos around high-contrast edges
- Save the SEP settings as a Custom Preset named by film type and subject category
- Save back to Lightroom and review the resulting TIFF at 100% zoom in Develop module

Exercise: Full Workflow from RAW to Finished File

Take one of your best RAW captures through the complete workflow documented in Module 3. Time yourself. The goal is to complete a full professional monochrome edit in under 30 minutes once you know the process. Record your times and notes for each stage.

- Which stage took the most time on your first complete run-through? Was this a skill gap or a decision-making bottleneck?

- At the Silver Efex Pro stage, which film emulsion preset matched the emotional quality of your image most closely?

- After completing the edit, view it on your phone screen (narrower gamut). Does the tonal balance hold? Are there any blocked shadows or blown highlights you missed on the desktop?

- What single change would most improve your next edit of a similar subject?

Print, Present, and Build a Monochrome Portfolio

Apply editorial and technical discipline to select, sequence, and present a portfolio of monochrome work that communicates a coherent visual voice.

Exercise: The 10% Edit — Portfolio Cull

Gather your 40–100 best monochrome images produced during this course or from any recent sustained period of work. Apply the three-test editorial process: tonal structure (thumbnail test), subject clarity, and technical quality. Target a final selection of 8–12 images for your portfolio series. Record your reasoning below.

- How many images did you begin with, and how many passed the thumbnail tonal structure test?

- Which of your finalists demonstrate the strongest Zone System discipline — where the full tonal range from near-black to near-white is purposefully used?

- Is there a consistent subject category (portrait / landscape / street / abstract) that dominates your strongest images? What does this reveal about your photographic instincts?

- Which single image would you choose as the opening piece for your series, and what makes it strong enough to set the tone for everything that follows?

Worksheet: Portfolio Sequence Planning Sheet

List your final 8–12 selected images in the order you intend to present them. For each image, record its tonal key and dominant graphic element to check for rhythmic variety across the sequence.
Image position (1–12)

Image title or filename

Tonal key (low key / mid-toned / high key)

Dominant graphic element (shape / texture / form / leading lines)

Does this image pair well with the one before it? Why or why not

Sequence role (opener / development / contrast / resolution / closer)

Checklist: Final Output and Archive Checklist

- [] All images edited in Lightroom with Adobe Linear profile as base
- [] Soft-proofing completed with the ICC profile for your chosen paper (print) or sRGB assigned (web)
- [] Output sharpening applied: Matte or Glossy for print, Screen for web
- [] Web exports: sRGB, JPEG quality 85–90, longest edge 2400–3600px
- [] Print exports: 300 PPI, 16-bit TIFF, ProPhoto RGB, matched to paper ICC profile
- [] Copyright metadata embedded in all exported files (Artist field + Copyright field)
- [] RAW files backed up to at least two separate physical locations
- [] Lightroom catalogue backed up this week
- [] All final images exported to a dedicated portfolio folder with a consistent naming convention
- [] Sequence reviewed in printed contact sheet form at least once before final presentation

Your Action Plan

1. Complete the Zone System Calibration Walk exercise this week using any camera or smartphone
2. Enable Monochrome Picture Style on your camera and shoot an entire session without switching back to colour
3. Process one existing RAW file twice — once with no B&W channel mixing, once with an orange-equivalent filter applied — and compare the two results
4. Photograph one long-exposure scene using a 6-stop or 10-stop ND filter; review the histogram for clipping before packing up the tripod
5. Build your personal Lightroom B&W develop preset (Linear profile, preferred curve, preferred B&W mix) and save it with your name as the preset name
6. Process one image in Silver Efex Pro using three different film emulsion presets; save your preferred as a named custom preset
7. Perform a dodge-and-burn edit on a portrait using at least one Luminance Range mask; log the mask settings in your Dodge-and-Burn Session Log
8. Complete the 10% Edit cull on your existing monochrome images and identify your strongest 8–10 images
9. Order a paper sampler from Hahnemühle or Ilford and print one reference image on each included paper
10. Sequence your final portfolio selection of 8–12 images; print a contact sheet and review the tonal rhythm across the sequence

