STRETCHLEARN · WORKBOOK

Color Grading for Video — Workbook

This workbook accompanies the Color Grading for Video course and gives you hands-on exercises, structured worksheets, and checklists to practice every concept covered. Work through each section alongside the corresponding module, using your own footage whenever possible. The templates are designed to become permanent references in your grading toolkit.

Color Science Foundations

Apply your understanding of log formats, gamma encoding, and scopes to a real piece of footage before touching any creative controls.

Exercise: Log Identification Drill

Find three clips — ideally from three different cameras or three different shooting profiles on the same camera. Open each clip in DaVinci Resolve without applying any LUT or transform. Study the waveform and parade for each clip, then answer the prompts below.

• What does the waveform show for the darkest and brightest neutral areas in each clip? Record the IRE values.

• Looking at the parade monitor, which channel sits highest in the highlight range? What does this tell you about the white balance of the raw clip?

• Compare the visual appearance of each clip on your monitor. Which one looks the most washed out and grey — and does that match the log profile you expected from that camera?

• After applying the correct technical LUT for each clip, describe how the waveform shape changed and what that reveals about the dynamic range each log profile was preserving.

Worksheet: Camera and Log Profile Reference Sheet

Fill in this sheet for every camera body you regularly shoot with. Keep it as a standing reference so you never have to guess the correct LUT or color science setting in Resolve.

Camera make and model

Log profile name (e.g. S-Log3, C-Log3, V-Log L)

Native ISO for log recording

Correct Input Color Space in Resolve

Technical LUT name and file path

Grey card IRE value in log (from your own test footage)

Maximum usable stops of dynamic range (from manufacturer specs or personal test)

Notes (any quirks — e.g. magenta cast at high ISO)

Checklist: Scopes Baseline Checklist

[ ] Open scopes layout in DaVinci Resolve: Waveform + Parade + Vectorscope simultaneously visible
[ ] Confirm the waveform shows no clipping above IRE 100 and no crush below IRE 0 on a test clip
[ ] Identify a neutral grey or white area in the frame and verify R, G, B parade channels trace identically at that region
[ ] Find the Skin Tone Line on the vectorscope and confirm any faces in frame fall on or near it
[ ] Grab a reference still from a correctly exposed clip and save it to the Gallery
[ ] Switch scopes between Pre-Clip and Post-Clip modes and describe what changes after a LUT is applied

Node-Based Correction in DaVinci Resolve

Build and label a four-node correction tree, apply primary corrections to a real clip, and verify results against your saved reference still.

Exercise: Four-Node Tree Build

Starting with an ungraded log clip in DaVinci Resolve, build the four-node primary correction structure from scratch. Label every node before making any adjustment.

• Describe the purpose of each node in your tree before you add a single adjustment. What would you put on each one and why?

• After completing your primary correction on Node 2 (exposure and white balance), compare the parade monitor to your reference still using the split-screen wipe. Describe the most significant remaining difference.

• Disable each node in turn using Cmd/Ctrl+D. Explain in plain language what visual change each node is responsible for — as if explaining to a client.

Worksheet: Primary Correction Log

Record your primary correction values for each hero shot in a project. This log lets you compare shots quickly and identify outliers that need extra attention.

Clip name / scene number

Camera and log profile

Lift value (R, G, B) after black point set

Gain value (R, G, B) after white point set

Gamma adjustment applied

Contrast value used

White balance method (auto / manual / grey card)

IRE of black point after correction

IRE of white point after correction

Notes (any problem areas — clipping, noisy shadows, mixed light sources)

Checklist: Primary Correction Quality Gate

[ ] All four nodes are labelled (not left as default Node 01, Node 02)
[ ] Waveform shows no clipping above IRE 100 in any channel
[ ] Waveform shows no crushing below IRE 0 in shadow areas
[ ] Parade channels trace identically at the brightest neutral in the frame
[ ] Skin tones fall on or near the Skin Tone Line on the vectorscope
[ ] A reference still is saved to the gallery for shot matching
[ ] Node 1 is bypassing or applying only the technical LUT — no creative adjustments on this node

Exercise: Curve Contrast Practice

Grade the same clip three times using three different contrast methods: (1) Lift/Gamma/Gain wheels only, (2) Custom Curve S-curve only, (3) a combination of both. Compare them using the Gallery A/B viewer.

• Which method gave you the most control over the shadow/highlight rolloff? Describe the difference in the waveform shape.

• Using the Hue vs. Saturation curve, desaturate the background sky or foliage in your test clip without affecting skin tones. What range parameters did you use?

• Apply the Lum vs. Sat curve to reduce highlight saturation. At what IRE value did you start pulling down, and what effect did it have on skin tones versus white objects?

LUTs and Creative Looks

Build and export a signature look from scratch, apply and trim a creative LUT correctly, and add analogue texture that enhances rather than overwhelms.

Worksheet: LUT Library Tracker

Document every LUT you own or use regularly. This prevents the common problem of applying the wrong LUT to the wrong footage type months later.

LUT filename (with extension)

LUT type (technical / creative / hybrid)

Intended input color space (e.g. Rec.709, S-Log3, Log-C)

Intended output / display space

Recommended Key Output Gain percentage for creative use

Best-suited content type (e.g. documentary, corporate, narrative, social)

Source / purchase URL

Date added to library

Personal rating (1–5)

Notes

Exercise: Signature Look Design Challenge

Without using any third-party LUT, create a signature look on a test clip using only DaVinci Resolve's built-in tools. Export the result as a .cube LUT file.

• Before touching any controls, write down your three creative decisions in plain English: temperature direction (warm/cool), shadow tint colour (e.g. teal, green, blue), and highlight rolloff style (punchy/filmic).

• After completing the grade, compare the exported LUT applied to a different clip you have never seen before. Does the look hold, or does it clip or crush on different exposure values? What adjustments were needed?

• Describe in one sentence the kind of content this look is suited for — and what type of footage it would NOT work on.

Checklist: Film Emulation Texture Checklist

[ ] Grain is added on the final node AFTER the creative LUT node — not before
[ ] Shadow grain gain is set higher than highlight grain gain (replicating real film physics)
[ ] A halation parallel node is present at no more than 20% opacity
[ ] A full-resolution export frame has been reviewed (not just the timeline preview) to verify grain visibility
[ ] The overall image still reads as sharp and detailed despite grain addition — grain should add texture, not mud
[ ] The LUT and DRX have been exported and archived in the project folder with version suffix

Qualifiers, Matching, and Delivery

Practice secondary isolation on a real shot, match a two-camera dialogue scene, and set up a reusable delivery preset.

Exercise: Sky and Skin Secondary Isolation

Find a clip that contains both a sky (or other background) and a human face. Create two separate secondary correction nodes — one to adjust only the sky, one to adjust only the skin. Use HSL qualifiers for both.

• Describe the Hue, Saturation, and Luminance range values you used for the sky qualifier. What happened when you set the luminance range too wide — what unintended areas were selected?

• For the skin qualifier, how many passes with the eyedropper were needed before the mask was clean? What did Matte Finesse Blur do to the edge quality?

• Enable tracking on the skin qualifier node by pressing Analyse Forward in the Tracker panel. Play back the clip — does the mask hold on a moving subject, or does it drift?

Worksheet: Shot Match Log — Dialogue Scene

Use this sheet to document the matching process for every shot in a single scene. One row per clip. Fill in before and after values to track your corrections.

Clip number / cut point timecode

Camera angle description (wide / medium / close-up)

Reference clip name

Waveform white point before match (IRE)

Waveform white point after match (IRE)

Parade R balance before match (relative to reference)

Parade G balance before match (relative to reference)

Parade B balance before match (relative to reference)

Parade balance after match (R/G/B equal Y/N)

Skin tone line alignment before match (on / off / slightly off)

Skin tone line alignment after match

Color Match auto feature used (Y/N)

Manual trim required after auto match (describe)

Checklist: Delivery Pre-Flight Checklist

[ ] Delivery page Format, Codec, Resolution, and Frame Rate are set explicitly — defaults not used
[ ] Output colour space is confirmed as Rec.709 for YouTube/Vimeo or XYZ for DCP
[ ] Audio format is PCM 48kHz 16-bit minimum for broadcast; AAC 320kbps for web
[ ] Render has been added to queue and the estimated file size reviewed
[ ] Rendered file played back in an external media player (VLC or QuickTime) to verify colour, audio sync, and no encoding artefacts
[ ] DRX grade export completed and saved to project archive folder
[ ] LUT exports saved alongside DRX with matching version suffix
[ ] Still gallery exported as a PDF contact sheet for project archive

Your Action Plan

1. Shoot a dedicated camera test: record 30 seconds of a grey card, a colour checker, and a face in both log and standard profiles on your primary camera body
2. Build your Camera and Log Profile Reference Sheet (Section 1 worksheet) for every camera you own or regularly hire
3. Install DaVinci Resolve Free if not already installed and configure scopes layout: Waveform left, Parade centre, Vectorscope right
4. Apply the correct technical LUT to your grey-card test footage and verify the parade shows

equal RGB values at the grey card — this confirms your LUT is correctly matched
5. Grade a 60-second clip using only the four-node tree (no creative LUT) and achieve a parade-verified balanced image before adding any look
6. Download or purchase one reputable creative LUT pack (Ground Control, Koji Advance, or lwltbap) and apply three different LUTs to the same clip at 60% Key Output Gain — pick your favourite as a starting point for a signature look
7. Design your own signature look using only Resolve's built-in tools, export it as a 33-point cube LUT, and test it on five unrelated clips
8. Grade a two-camera dialogue scene of at least four cuts using the manual wipe-and-parade matching method — do not use auto Color Match until you can match manually
9. Set up and save three delivery presets in Resolve: YouTube 1080p H.264, YouTube 4K H.265, and a ProRes 422 HQ master preset
10. Archive your first complete project in a dated folder: footage organisd by camera roll, Resolve project file, LUT exports, DRX exports, still gallery PDF, and delivery files