

# When Your Prints Are Too Dark

## A Simple Approach to Fixing the “Prints too Dark” Problem

Some time ago I wrote an article called ‘Why are my prints too dark’, trying to answer a question I was regularly asked...

In the majority of cases, it is simply that your monitor is set too bright.

Why does this make prints dark? Well, if you edit on a bright screen the whole image is bright, and that includes the shadows.

When you print and look at the print in normal lighting, the whole print is darker (i.e. it reflects less light) – which once again includes those shadows.

Because of the way our vision works we notice the crunched up shadows more than we notice the lowered overall brightness, hence the ‘Print too dark’ problem.

The ‘proper way’ to approach this is by lowering your screen brightness when calibrating your screen.

Ideally the brightness should match the lighting you are using for looking at your prints.

However with some computers, such as the Apple iMac, setting the screen brightness is a real problem and although setting screen/viewing brightness with a hardware calibrator is the ideal solution, it’s not always available.

### A Simple Approach

One way round this is to create a simple adjustment curve that you can load for editing, and then dispense with it when printing

Open a known good test image and without any adjustments, print it (we suggest the very good Datacolor test image).

On your ‘overly bright’ screen, the image will now look brighter than the print.

The print should look even and balanced – all the different little parts of the test image are designed to show potential print problems (there is more information on the download page) ... if the print looks awful – you have problems elsewhere in your print setup.

Create a simple curves adjustment layer and drag the centre point of the curve downwards – this will make the whole image look darker. Note the numeric values ... showing how a mid tone value of 128 should be reduced to a darker 112.

Once you are satisfied that it’s fairly similar to the print, then save this ‘darkening’ curve.

One important thing to remember when making the comparisons is to take care in allowing your vision to adapt to each situation (screen vs. print viewing).

Physically move your head to compare – never put the print up against the screen.

Now open an image you want to edit.

Apply the saved curve – your image looks too dark.

Now edit the image (keeping the curve in place) until you like it.

Disable the curve – the image will look too bright, but print this bright version. Your print should now come out pretty much as you wanted.

### A Less Cumbersome Approach

Editing the image with the curve applied can be a bit of a nuisance.

The simplest approach is to turn the curve into one that brightens the image, and you only apply it just before printing.

If your darkening curve dips down, then your ‘brightening curve’ will curve upwards by a similar amount – this is experimental, so be prepared to do a number of test prints to see how well it works for you.

With care you can get several small test prints on a sheet of paper, so this doesn’t have to use up lots of ink and paper

Using this new curve, you only apply it just before printing – it brightens up the image that is being sent to the printer, hopefully by just enough to fix your printing issues.