

Image Analysis – Starting Point

At first glance, the image looks naturally taken, but it does not yet have a clearly guided visual focus.

The light is there, but it is not yet fully controlled. Because of that, the subject does not currently separate clearly enough from the background.

The exposure is generally solid, but some areas still look a little flat.

The contrast has not yet been worked out properly, which makes the image feel less deep.

The colors are basically fine, but they still feel slightly unstructured and not yet intentionally controlled.

As a result, the viewer's eye is not automatically guided toward the actual subject.

The subject itself is clearly visible, but it still does not stand out strongly enough from the rest of the image.

The background currently contains too much visual information and competes slightly with the main subject.

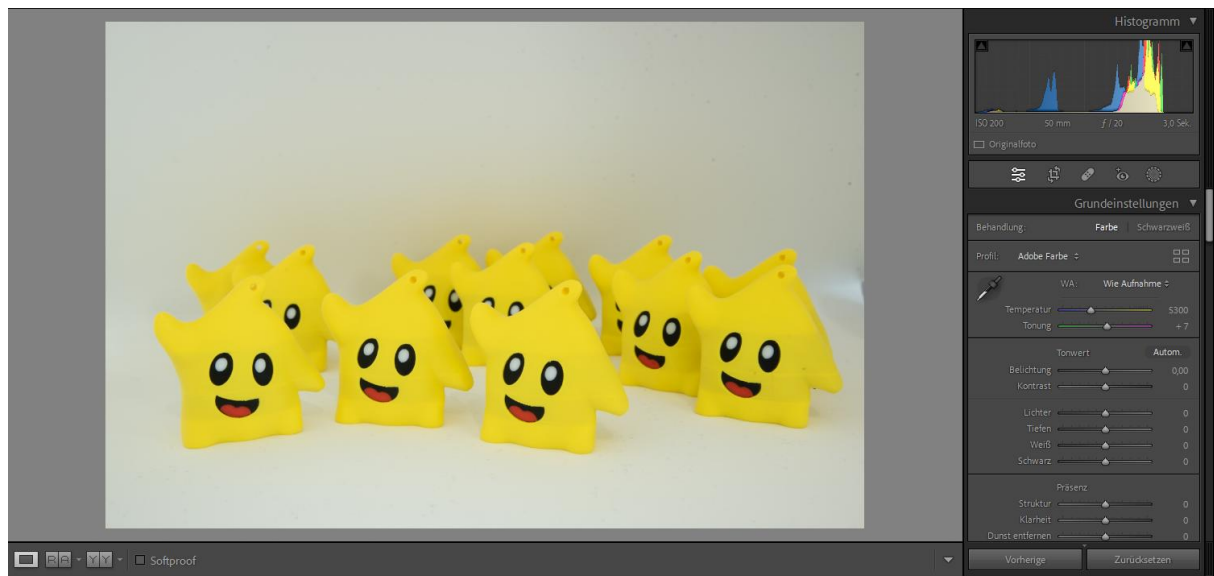
What we are going to improve during the editing process

- Increase contrast in a controlled way to create more depth
- Guide the light more clearly toward the subject
- Control bright areas more carefully
- Structure and calm the colors
- Separate the subject more clearly from the background

Important:

Nothing is changed in this step yet.

We are only analyzing the image so that every adjustment afterward remains understandable.



Crop – Improve the Framing

In this step, the framing is adjusted so the subject is clearly in focus and unnecessary empty space is removed.

Open the crop tool

Press:

“R”

or click on the crop tool.

Crop the image

Adjust the frame as follows:

- **Bottom edge:** pull it upward until only a narrow margin remains below the figures
→ roughly **5–10% of the image height**
- **Top edge:** leave it unchanged
→ intentionally keep more space above
- **Left / Right:** do not change

Orientation within the image

Use the grid lines as a guide:

- The front figures should sit roughly on the **lower third line**
- The upper area should remain visibly larger than the lower area

What we are doing here

We reduce the empty space at the bottom of the image.

This makes the figures feel more grounded and the image looks cleaner overall.

What changes in the image

- less distracting empty space at the bottom
- clearer focus on the figures
- more compact composition

What to watch out for

The margin below the figures must not disappear completely.

A small visible edge should remain.

Typical mistake

Cropping too aggressively makes the subject feel cramped.

Note

The bottom margin is intentionally smaller than the top one.

That makes the image feel more natural and less squeezed.



Basic Correction – Exposure and Contrast

In the first editing step, we create a clean technical base for the image.

At the moment, the image looks a little flat because brightness and contrast are not yet being controlled in a deliberate way.

The goal is to give the image more depth and bring out the forms more clearly, without making it look unnatural.

Settings in the Basic panel

- **Exposure:** +0.35
- **Contrast:** +30
- **Highlights:** -45
- **Shadows:** +30
- **Whites:** +20
- **Blacks:** -30

What we are doing here

We raise the exposure slightly so the image feels brighter and clearer overall.

At the same time, we reduce the highlights so bright areas do not blow out.

The shadows are lifted so details inside the subject remain visible.

Lowering the black values adds more depth to the image.

The increased contrast helps the subject stand out more clearly from the background.

What to watch out for

Make sure the yellow figures keep their texture and do not become overexposed.

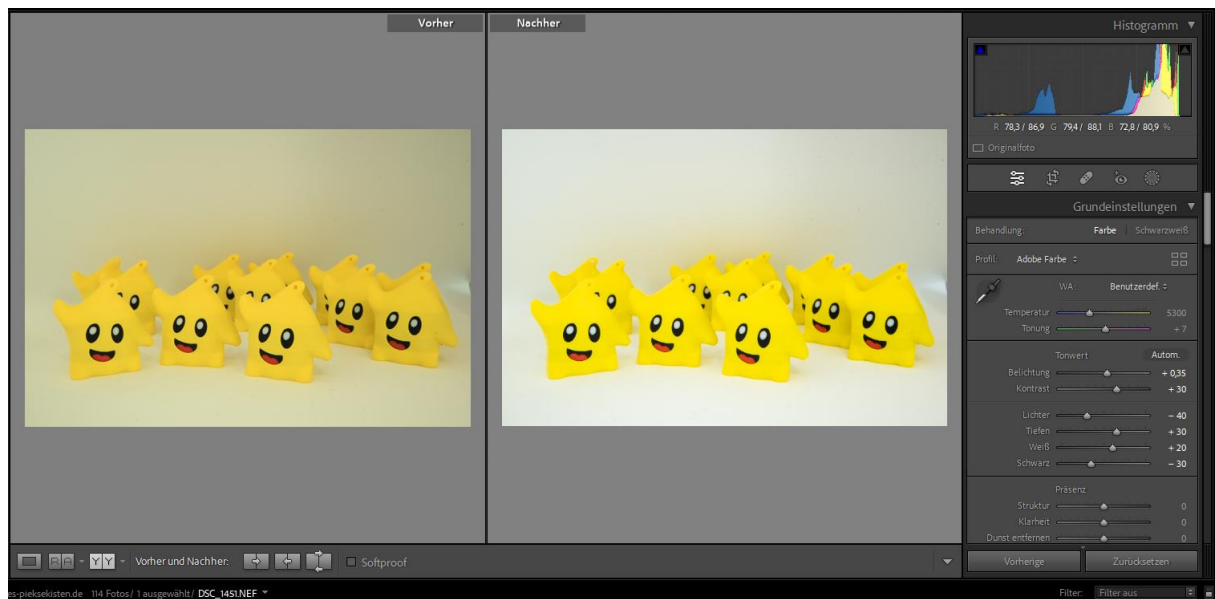
If the bright areas start to look too strong, reduce the highlights a little further.

The image should look clearer, but not artificially harsh.

Typical mistake

Many people push the contrast too far.

That creates harsh transitions and quickly makes the image look unnatural.



White Balance – Align the Colors Naturally

After the basic correction, we now focus on the color rendering of the image.

Especially with strong colors like yellow, it is important that they look clean and natural.

At the moment, the image has a slight warm cast, which makes the white background appear a little yellowish.

That also affects how the subject is perceived.

The goal is to make the background more neutral without making the yellow figures look unnatural.

White balance settings

We stay in the **Basic** panel and work in the **White Balance** section.

Set the sliders as follows:

- **Temperature:** from 5300 → 4800
- **Tint:** from +7 → +4

What we are doing here

We lower the temperature slightly to remove the warm color cast from the image.

That makes the background look more neutral and cleaner.

The tint is adjusted only a little to fine-tune the color balance without pushing the image in a different direction.

The yellow of the figures remains intact, but looks cleaner and less shifted.

What to watch out for

Make sure the yellow does not start drifting toward green.

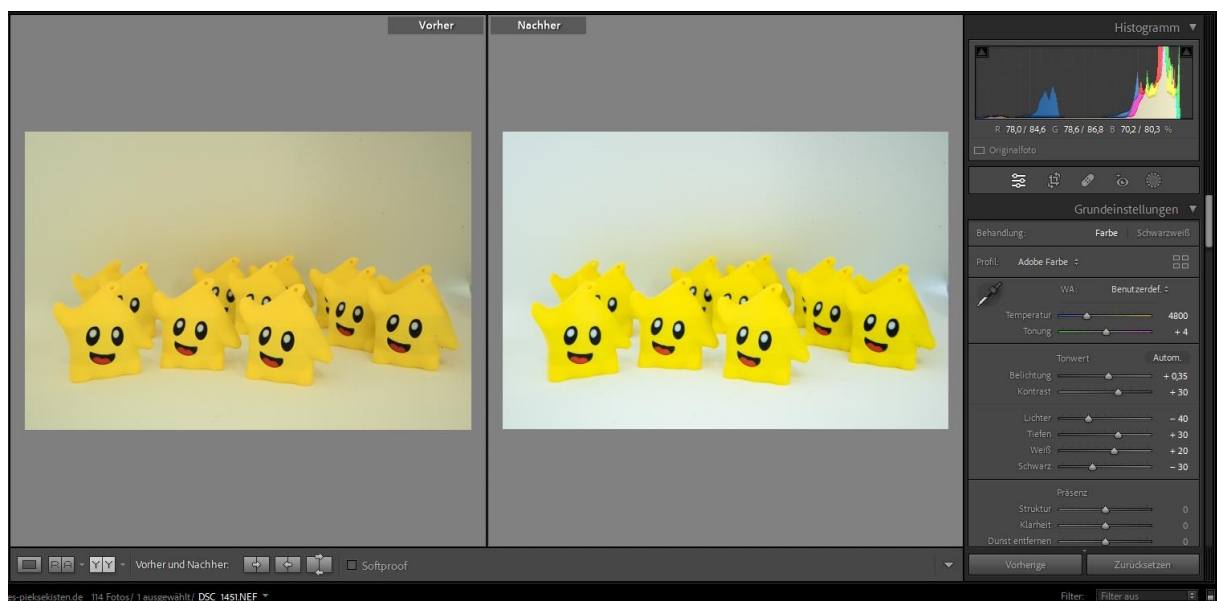
If that happens, the adjustment was too strong.

The background should look brighter and more neutral, but not completely sterile.

Typical mistake

Overcorrecting the temperature.

That makes the image lose its natural feel and quickly look too cold or unstable.



Highlights and Shadows – Control Them More Precisely

In this step, we make sure the image no longer feels flat, but starts to develop a clear light structure.

The goal is to emphasize the subject more strongly while making the background feel calmer.

Right now, the light is still distributed too evenly. Because of that, the image lacks visual depth and appears less three-dimensional.

Adjustments in the Basic panel

We continue working in the **Basic** panel.

Adjust the existing values slightly:

- **Highlights:** from -45 → -60
- **Shadows:** from +30 → +20
- **Whites:** from +20 → +25
- **Blacks:** from -30 → -35

What we are doing here

We reduce the highlights more strongly so bright areas are more controlled and do not dominate the frame.

That makes the background calmer.

The shadows are pulled back slightly so the image does not become too flat.

This creates more contrast within the forms.

The whites are increased a little to create controlled highlight accents.

At the same time, the blacks are strengthened to add more depth.

What to watch out for

Make sure no important detail is lost in the bright areas.

The yellow of the figures must not burn out.

The dark areas should become clearer, but not blocked up.

Typical mistake

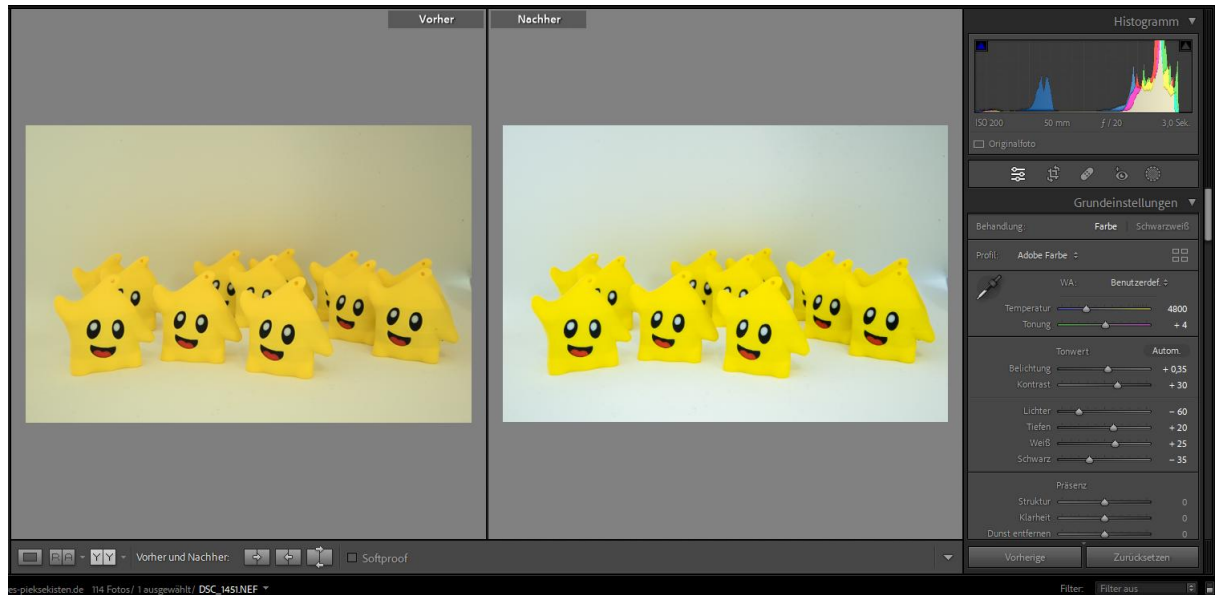
Pulling the highlights down too far makes the image gray and lifeless.

Pushing the blacks too far causes details to disappear.

Important

This step changes the image noticeably:

- before: flat
- now: first sense of depth



Control the Colors More Precisely – Clean Color Rendering

After the previous adjustments, the image already looks noticeably clearer.

In the next step, we make sure the colors are separated more cleanly and feel more controlled.

Especially with a dominant color like yellow, it is important that it does not appear oversaturated or visually messy.

The goal is to make the yellow of the figures look clean and high-quality while keeping the background calmer.

Adjustments in the Color / HSL section

Switch to the **Color (HSL)** panel.

Set the sliders as follows:

Yellow

- **Hue:** -5
- **Saturation:** -15

- **Luminance:** +15

Orange

- **Saturation:** -5

Green

- **Saturation:** -10

What we are doing here

The yellow is slightly desaturated so it does not look too harsh.

At the same time, the increased luminance makes it look brighter and cleaner.

The slight hue shift makes the yellow feel less aggressive and more natural.

Reducing orange and green helps remove distracting color traces in the background.

What to watch out for

Make sure the yellow still feels lively.

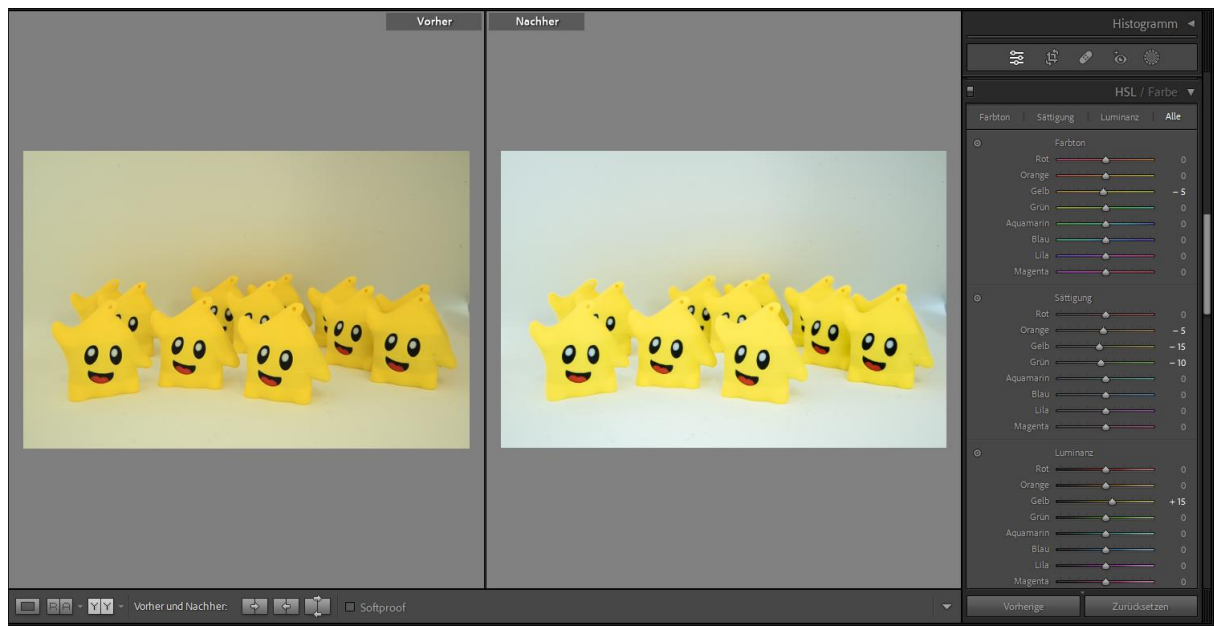
If it becomes too pale, the saturation was reduced too much.

The background should feel calmer, but not completely colorless.

Typical mistake

Reducing saturation too strongly makes the image quickly look dull and flat.

Colors should be controlled, not removed.



Emphasize the Subject – Strengthen the Foreground

In this step, only the main subject is emphasized.

For that, we place a radial mask over the front figures so the eye is guided more clearly toward the front row.

Create a radial mask

Click on:

Masking → Radial Gradient

Position of the mask

Place the mask so it cleanly covers only the front subject area.

Outer circle

- **Left:** from the left edge of the front-left figure
- **Right:** to about the right edge of the front-middle / front-right figure
- **Bottom:** directly at the ground below the front figures
- **Top:** just above the top edge of the front figures

Inner circle

Drag it large enough so that all three front figures lie fully inside the inner area.

The inner circle should be noticeably larger than at first, so not just one single figure gets emphasized.

Set the transition

The outer circle must remain larger than the inner one so the effect fades out softly.

Feather

- **80 to 100**

The transition should not be visible later in the final image.

Mask settings

- **Exposure:** +0.30
- **Contrast:** +10
- **Clarity:** +5

What we are doing here

The front figures are brightened slightly and emphasized more clearly.

This creates a visible focus on the main subject without making the effect look artificial.

What to watch out for

Make sure all three front figures are affected evenly.

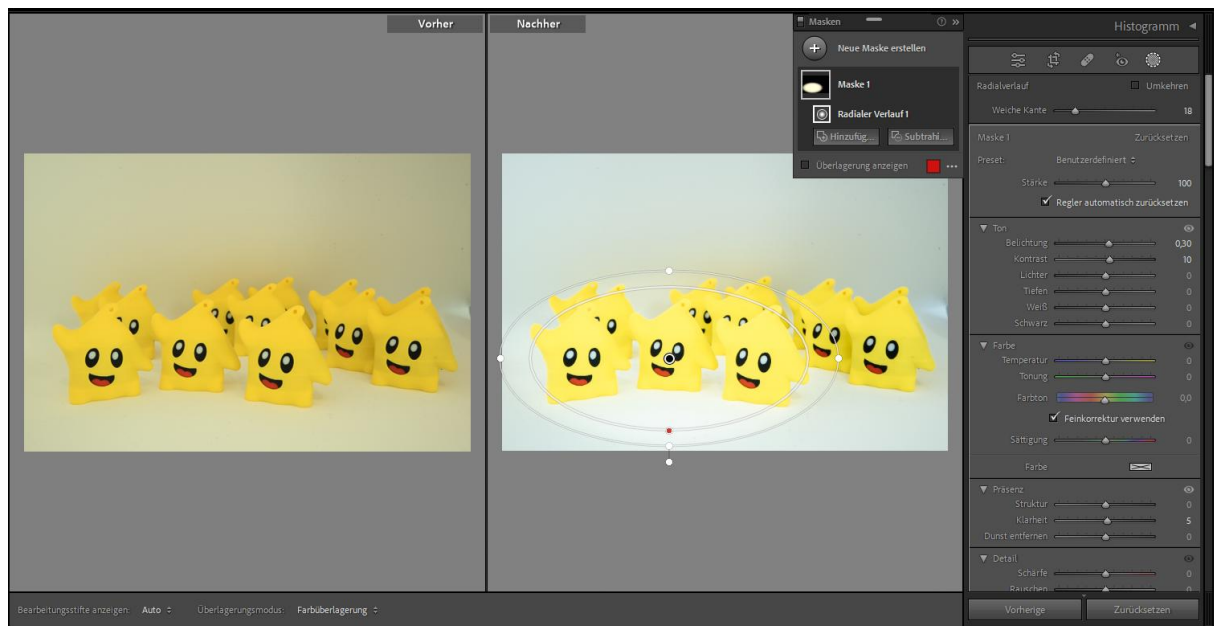
The effect must not sit only on the middle figure.

The mask must not extend too far into the upper background, otherwise too much empty area gets brightened unnecessarily.

Typical mistake

If the inner circle is too small, only one figure ends up being emphasized.

If the gap between the inner and outer circle is too small, the transition becomes hard and visible.



Calm the Background – Inverted Mask

After the subject has been emphasized, the next step is to deliberately pull the background back.

To do that, duplicate the existing mask and then invert it.

Duplicate the mask

Open the **Mask panel** on the right side.

Right-click the existing mask (the subject mask) and choose:

“Duplicate”

This creates an identical second mask with the same size and position.

Invert the mask

Select the new mask.

Activate:

“Invert”

This turns the previously excluded outer area into the active mask.

Why we duplicate the mask

Duplicating keeps the exact same mask shape.

That means the foreground and background remain perfectly aligned with each other.

Mask settings

Adjust the values as follows:

- **Exposure:** -0.20
- **Clarity:** -5

What we are doing here

The background is darkened slightly and softened at the same time.

This makes the subject stand out more clearly without creating a harsh effect.

What to watch out for

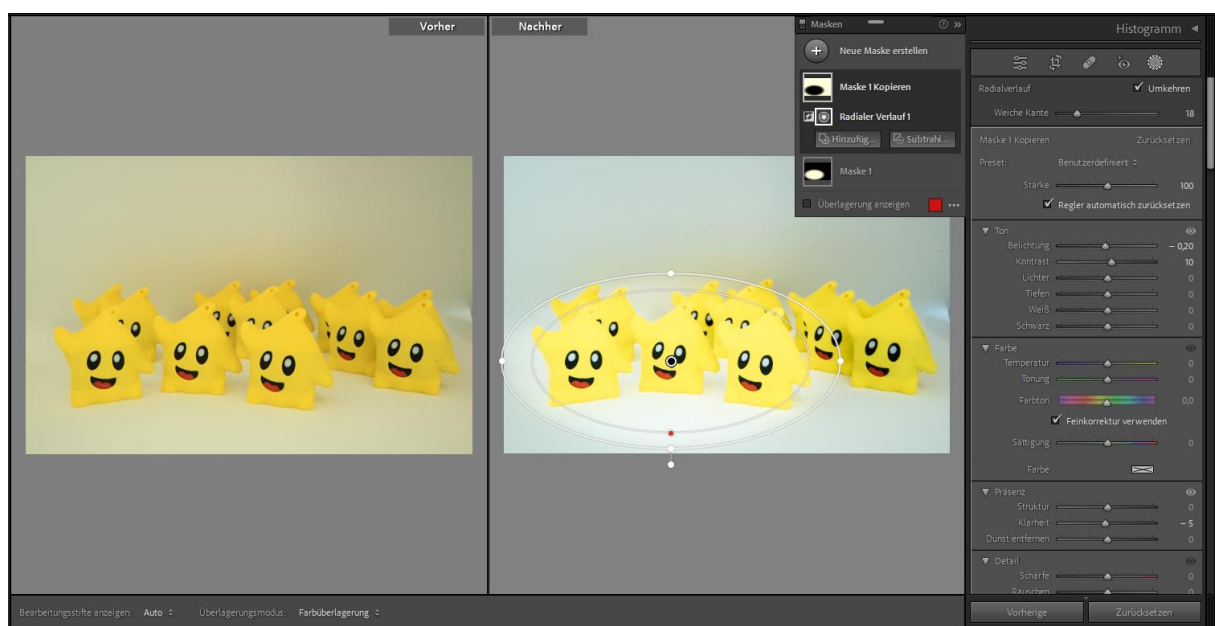
The darkening should remain subtle.

The background must not look artificially dark or cut off.

Typical mistake

Too much darkening quickly creates an unnatural look.

The image should feel calmer, not dramatically altered.



Tone Curve – Refine the Contrast More Precisely

In the final contrast step, the image is refined using the tone curve.

Here, we do not work with individual points, but with the built-in region sliders for the different tonal ranges.

Open the tone curve

Open the **Tone Curve** section on the right.

Make sure the **region view** is active so the sliders are visible.

Set the sliders

Adjust the values as follows:

- **Highlights:** +10
- **Lights:** +5
- **Darks:** -5
- **Shadows:** -10

What we are doing here

The bright areas are lifted slightly, making the image feel clearer.

The darker areas are lowered a little, creating more depth.

The midtones are only adjusted very gently so the image stays natural.

What to watch out for

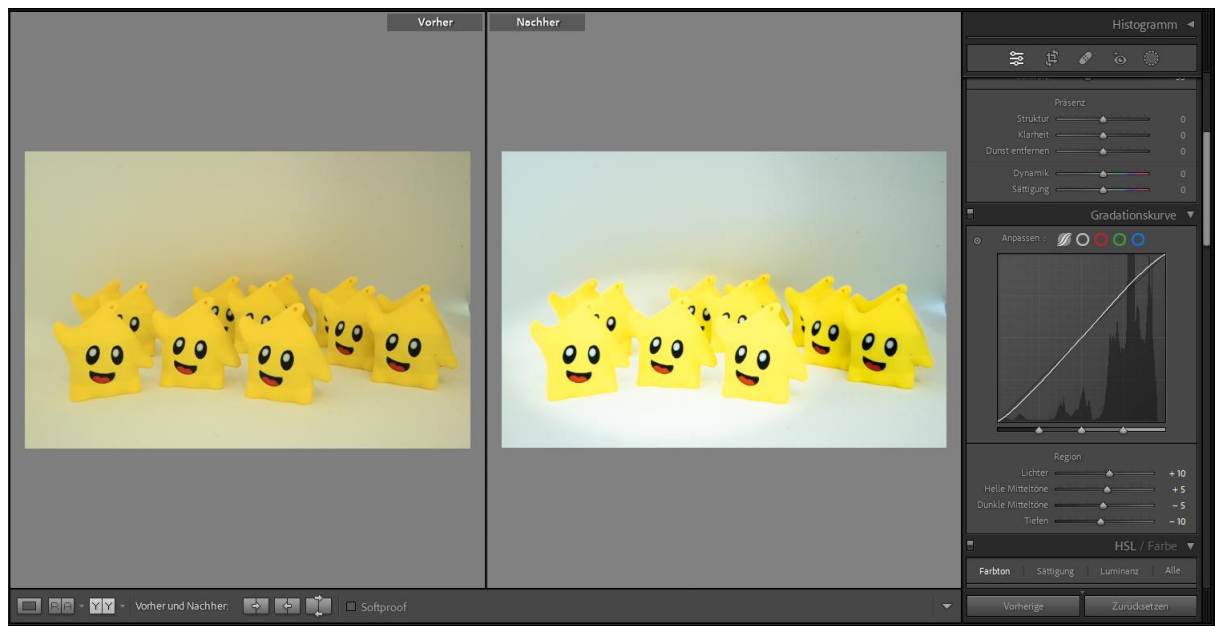
The adjustment must remain very subtle.

If the changes are too strong, the contrast quickly becomes unnatural.

Typical mistake

Pulling the shadows down too much causes details to disappear.

Pushing the highlights up too far leads to blown-out areas.



Sharpening – Bring Out the Important Details

In the final editing step, the image details are sharpened.

It is important here to emphasize only the relevant areas and not strengthen the background unnecessarily.

Open sharpening

Go to the **Detail** section on the right.

Set the values

- **Amount:** 40
- **Radius:** 1.0
- **Detail:** 25

Set masking

Hold down the **Alt** key and drag the **Masking** slider to the right.

- **Value:** around **70–80**

While holding the Alt key:

- **white = sharpened**
- **black = not sharpened**

The goal is that mainly the figures are sharpened while the background stays black.

What we are doing here

The contours of the figures become clearer and more defined.

The background remains soft, which keeps the image calmer.

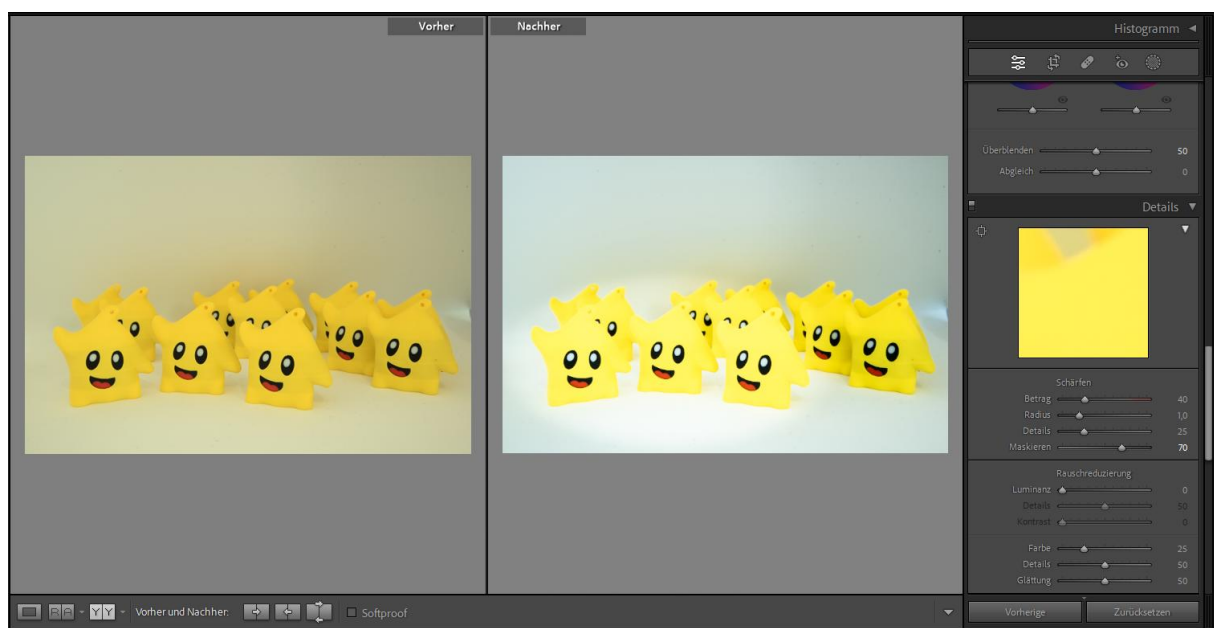
What to watch out for

Make sure no grainy texture appears in the background.

If too much is sharpened, the image quickly starts to feel noisy.

Typical mistake

Too much amount or too little masking causes the background to be sharpened as well.



Vignette – Strengthen the Visual Focus

In the final step, a subtle vignette is added.

This helps guide the viewer's eye automatically toward the center of the frame.

Open the section

Go to:

Effects → Post-Crop Vignetting

Settings

Set the values as follows:

- **Amount:** -12
- **Midpoint:** +20
- **Roundness:** 0
- **Feather:** 75

What we are doing here

The edges of the image are darkened slightly.

That makes the subject in the center stand out more clearly from the background.

What changes in the image

- the outer edges become slightly darker
- the focus shifts more strongly toward the front figures
- the image feels calmer and more controlled overall

What to watch out for

The vignette should not be noticeable as an obvious effect.

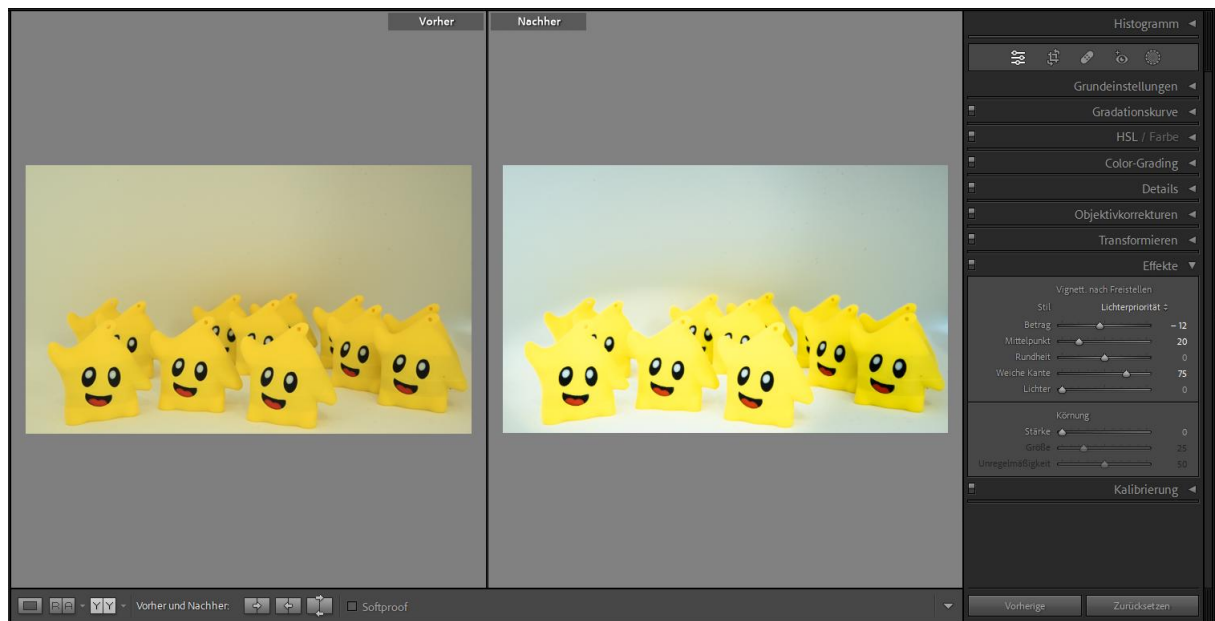
It should support the image, not dominate it.

Typical mistake

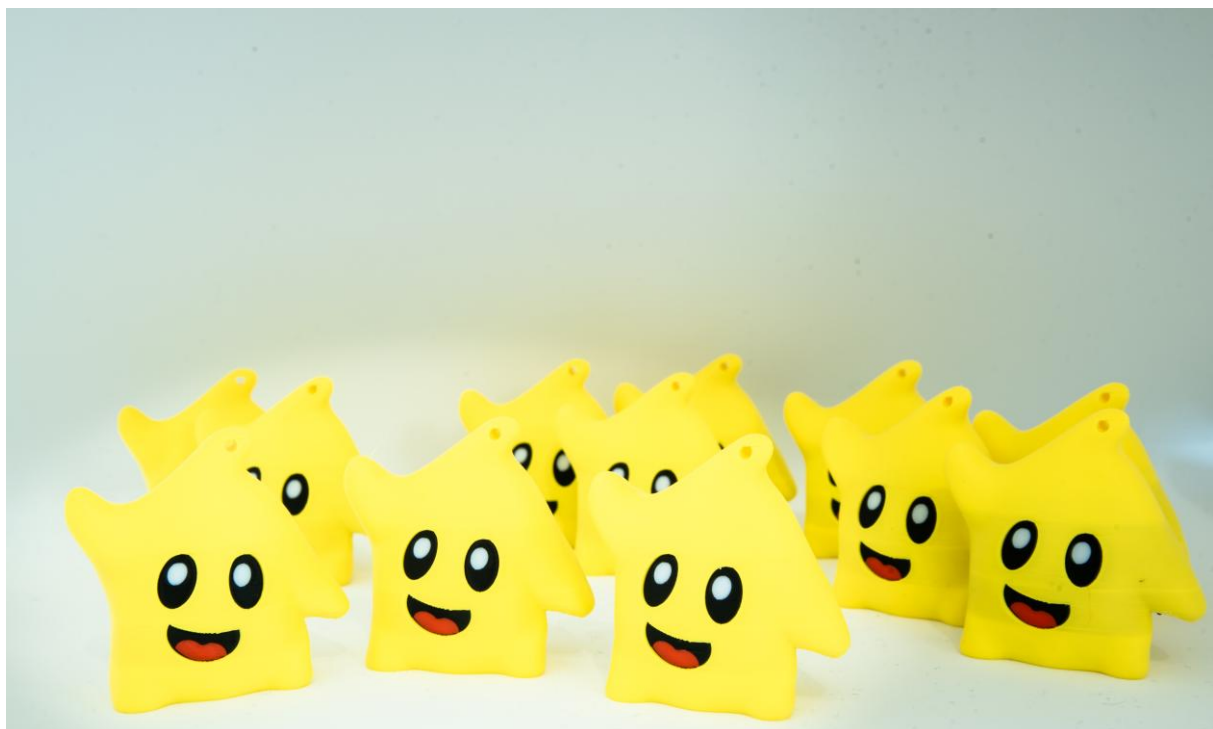
A value that is too negative, such as **-30 or more**, creates visibly dark corners.

Note

If you can clearly see the vignette, it is too strong.



This is your final picture. And it turned out really well.



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