



THE BIG GUIDE TO RIAT

LIGHTROOM

EDITING MADE SIMPLE

A quick, easy-to-understand guide for aviation photographers

No complicated editing talk. Just what each control does, which way to move it, and when it may help your photo.



A simple place to start

Lightroom can look confusing when you first open it. There are lots of sliders, panels and tools, but you do not need to use every one. This guide explains the main controls in everyday language, with aviation photography in mind.

The aim is not to give you one perfect set of numbers. Every photograph is different. Light, weather, aircraft colour and camera settings will all change what the image needs. Make small adjustments, keep checking the full image, and stop when the photograph looks natural to you.

JACK'S QUICK TIP

Start with the light, then correct the colour, then deal with noise and sharpening. Leave local masks and small clean-up jobs until near the end.

A useful editing order

1	Crop and straighten Tidy the frame and level the horizon.
2	Set the brightness Adjust exposure, highlights, shadows, whites and blacks.
3	Correct the colour Set white balance, then use vibrance or the Colour Mixer.
4	Add detail carefully Use texture, clarity, sharpening and noise reduction gently.
5	Make local changes Use masks for the aircraft, sky or background.
6	Final check Zoom out, take a short break and look again before exporting.

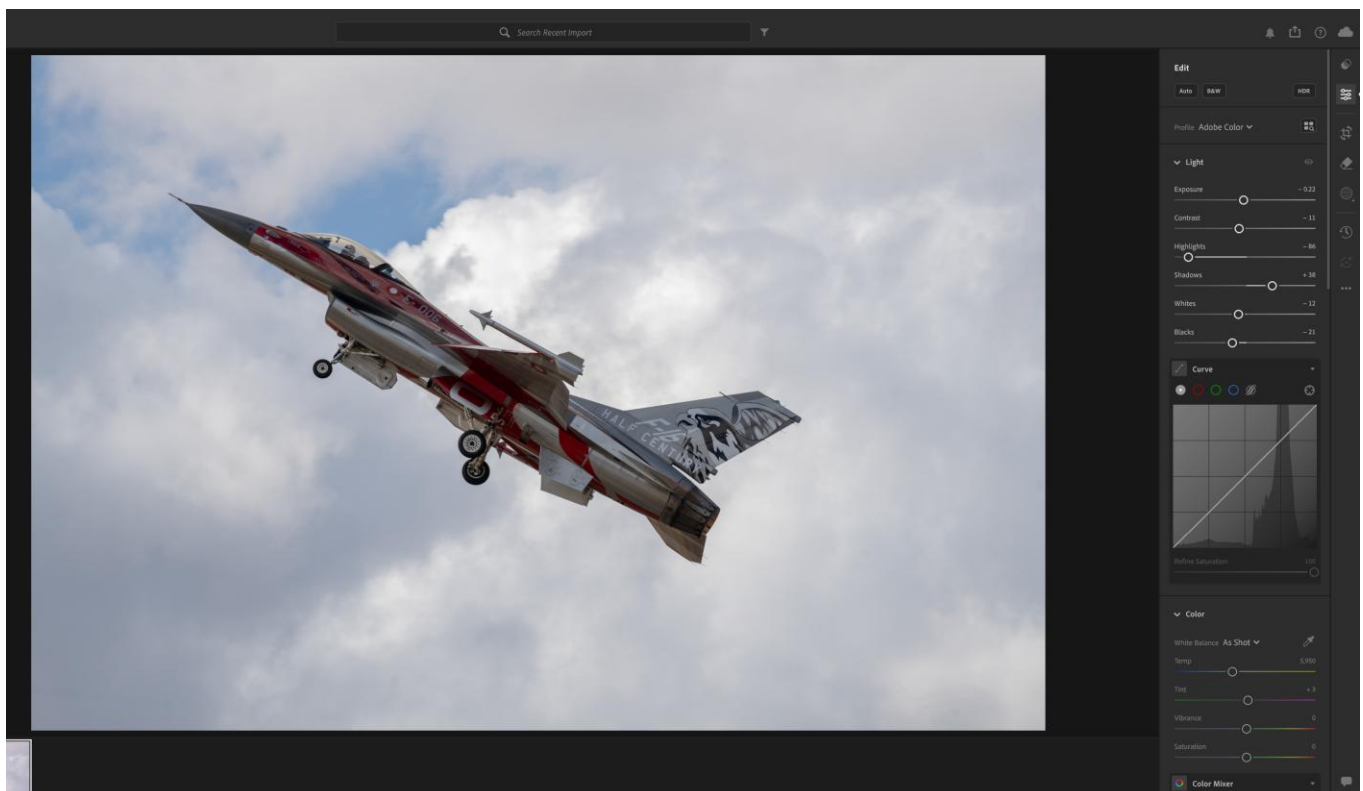
1. Light and contrast

These controls shape the overall brightness and help recover detail in very bright skies or dark aircraft undersides.

Exposure Changes the brightness of most of the image. Move left: darker overall Move right: brighter overall Good for: fixing an image that is generally too dark or too bright	Contrast Changes the gap between light and dark tones. Move left: softer and flatter Move right: stronger and punchier Good for: adding depth, but too much can hide detail
Highlights Targets the brightest areas. Move left: brings detail back Move right: makes bright areas stronger Good for: clouds, reflections and pale aircraft	Shadows Targets the darker areas. Move left: deepens dark areas Move right: reveals more detail Good for: aircraft undersides, cockpits and shaded areas
Whites Sets how bright the brightest clean tones become. Move left: reduces the brightest point Move right: adds brighter whites Good for: giving the image a clean top end without clipping	Blacks Sets how deep the darkest tones become. Move left: deeper blacks Move right: lifts the darkest areas Good for: adding depth or recovering blocked shadows

JACK'S QUICK TIP

If the sky is washed out, try lowering Highlights before lowering Exposure. This can protect the sky without making the aircraft too dark.



2. Presence and colour

These sliders can give an image more life, but they are easy to overdo. Small movements normally look more natural.

Texture

Changes fine surface detail without strongly changing the whole image.

Move left: smooths fine detail | Move right: brings out fine detail
Good for: rivets, paintwork and aircraft panels

Dehaze

Cuts through mist and low-contrast haze.

Move left: adds haze and softness | Move right: adds depth and clears haze

Good for: distant aircraft and flat skies

Saturation

Changes every colour by roughly the same amount.

Move left: moves towards black and white | Move right: makes every colour stronger

Good for: broad colour changes; usually use less than Vibrance

Clarity

Adds or removes contrast around medium-sized detail.

Move left: gives a softer look | Move right: adds a crisp, dramatic look

Good for: clouds and aircraft detail; use carefully around bright edges

Vibrance

Boosts weaker colours more than colours that are already strong.

Move left: mutes colour | Move right: adds controlled colour

Good for: a natural-looking colour lift

White Balance

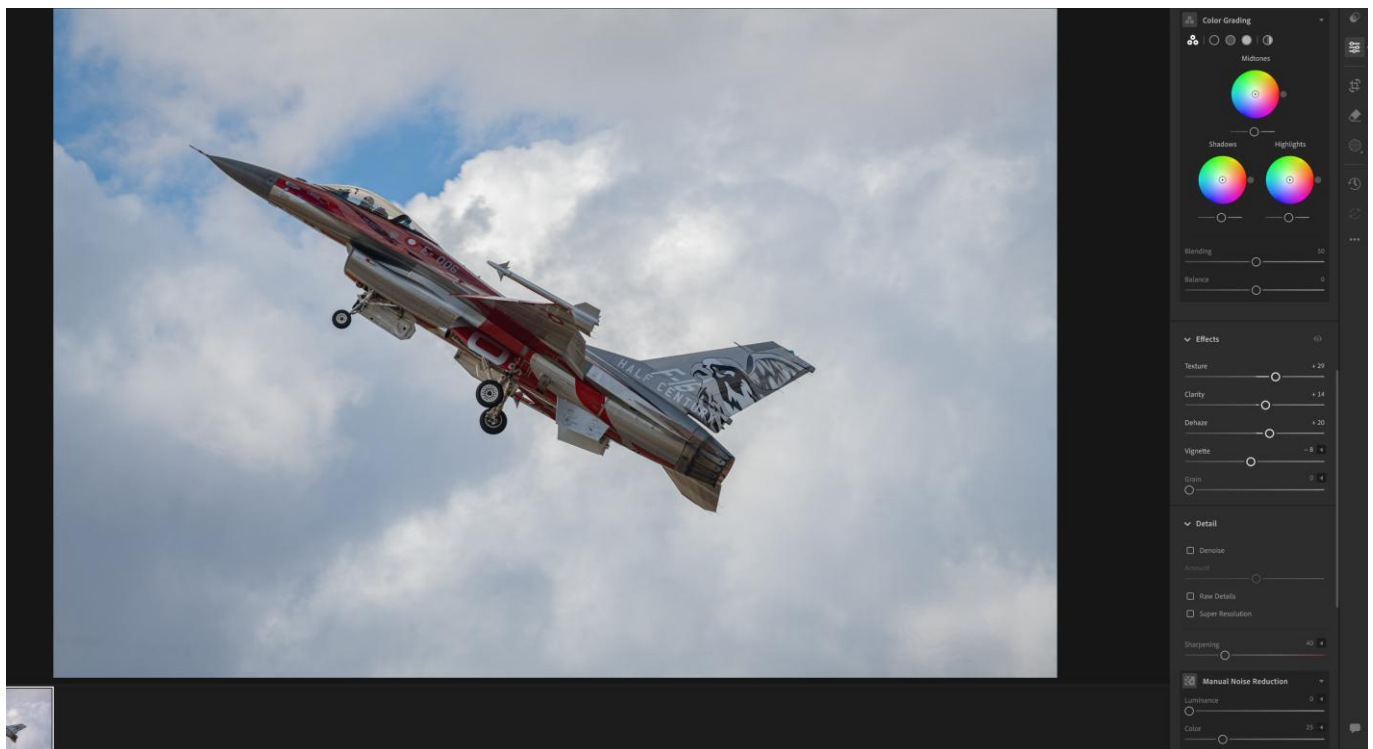
Temperature controls blue-to-yellow; Tint controls green-to-magenta.

Move left: cooler or greener | Move right: warmer or more magenta

Good for: removing an unwanted colour cast

JACK'S QUICK TIP

Watch red roundels, warning markings and blue skies. If they begin to look unnatural, you have probably pushed the colour too far.



3. Tone Curve and Colour Mixer

These panels give you more control than the main sliders. They are useful, but you can still create a good edit without making large changes here.

Tone Curve

The curve is another way to control brightness and contrast. The left side represents dark tones, the middle controls midtones and the right side controls bright tones. A gentle S-shape, slightly down in the darks and slightly up in the lights, can add contrast. Keep the curve subtle so you do not lose aircraft detail.

Hue

Changes one colour into a nearby colour.
Move left: shifts one way | Move right: shifts the other way
Good for: correcting a sky that looks too cyan or grass that looks too yellow

Luminance by colour

Changes how light or dark one colour appears.
Move left: darkens that colour | Move right: brightens that colour
Good for: deepening a blue sky or lifting a dark aircraft colour

Saturation by colour

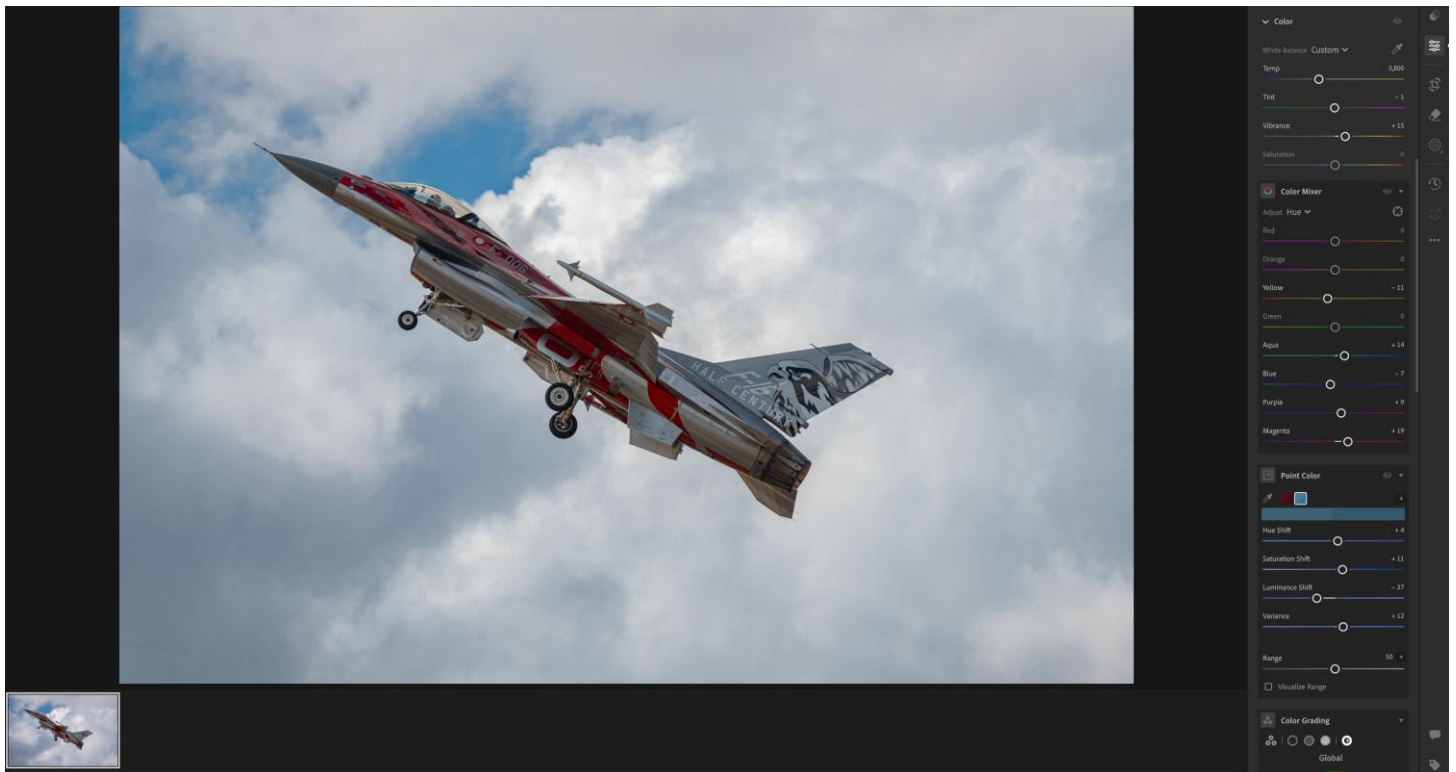
Changes the strength of only the selected colour.
Move left: mutes that colour | Move right: strengthens that colour
Good for: controlling bright reds, blues or greens without changing everything

Point Colour

Lets you click a colour in the image and adjust a narrow colour range.
Move left/right: depends on the chosen control
Good for: fixing one exact paint colour, light or background tone

JACK'S QUICK TIP

Be careful when darkening blue skies with Luminance. Pushing it too far can create noise, banding or a bright outline around the aircraft.



4. Sharpening and noise

Zoom to 100% when judging fine detail. At normal screen size, too much sharpening or noise reduction can be difficult to spot.

Sharpening Amount

Controls the overall strength of sharpening.
Move left: less sharpening | Move right: more sharpening
Good for: bringing back crisp edges after processing

Detail

Controls how much fine texture is sharpened.
Move left: smoother result | Move right: more fine detail
Good for: panel lines and texture, but it can also reveal noise

Luminance Noise

Smooths grey-looking grain caused by higher ISO or lifting shadows.
Move left: keeps more grain and detail | Move right: smooths more noise
Good for: dark shots and heavily recovered shadows

Radius

Controls how wide the sharpened edge becomes.
Move left: finer edges | Move right: wider edges
Good for: matching sharpening to small or large detail

Masking

Stops sharpening smooth areas and keeps it mainly on edges.
Move left: sharpens more of the frame | Move right: protects smooth areas
Good for: keeping clear skies from becoming grainy

Colour Noise

Removes small red, green or blue speckles.
Move left: keeps more colour detail | Move right: removes more colour speckles
Good for: high-ISO images and dark areas

JACK'S QUICK TIP

Noise reduction removes detail as well as noise. Use enough to calm the grain, but keep markings, panel lines and lettering looking real.



5. Lens, shape and effects

These controls correct lens problems, straighten the frame or add a finishing effect.

Lens Profile

Uses a profile for your lens to correct dark corners and curved lines.

Move left/right: not a slider, enable the correction

Good for: a clean starting point, especially with wider lenses

Vertical / Horizontal

Changes perspective when lines appear to lean.

Move left: tilts one direction | Move right: tilts the other direction

Good for: buildings, hangars and static aircraft scenes

Vignette

Darkens or brightens the edges of the frame.

Move left: usually darkens edges | Move right: lightens edges

Good for: gently guiding attention towards the aircraft

Remove Chromatic Aberration

Reduces coloured edges around high-contrast subjects.

Move left/right: not a slider, enable the correction

Good for: purple or green edges around wings and bright skies

Rotate / Scale

Rotate levels the image; Scale fills empty edges after correction.

Move left: turns or reduces | Move right: turns or enlarges

Good for: straight horizons and tidying corrected edges

Grain

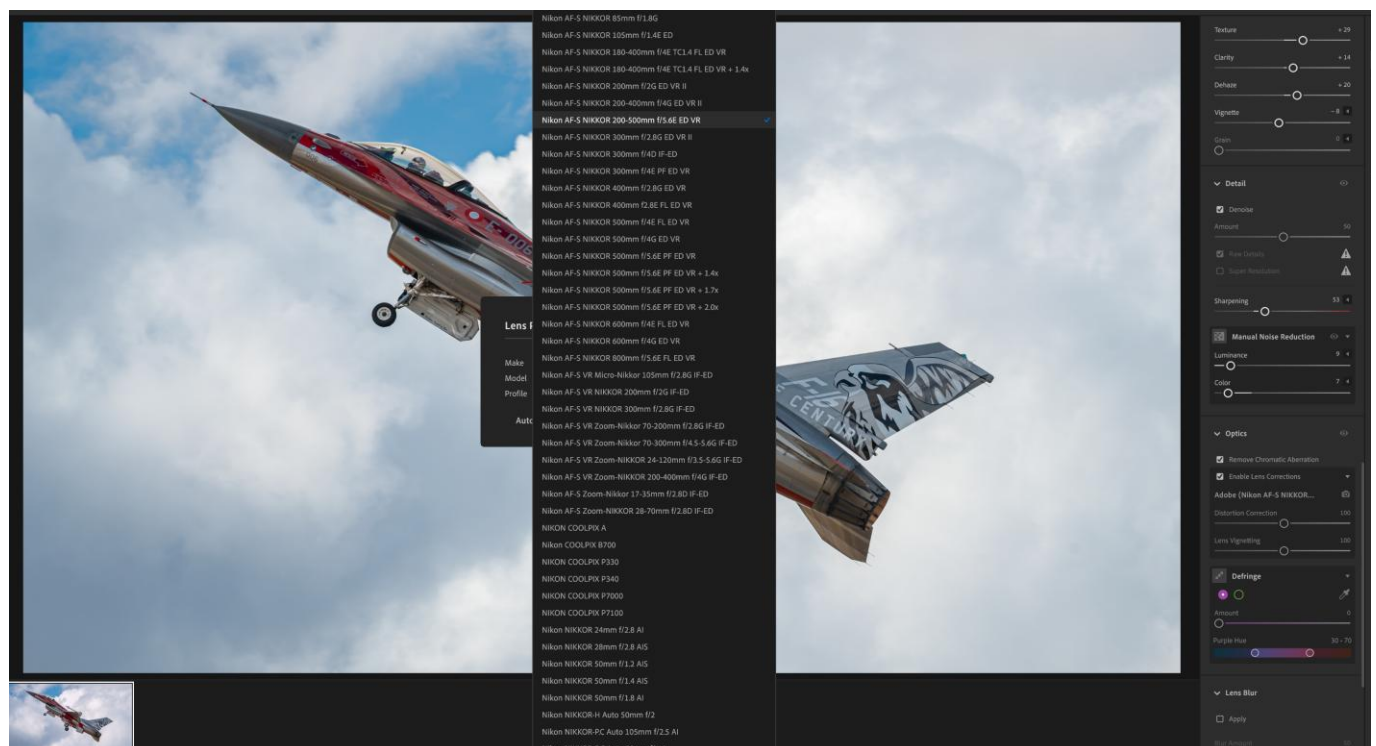
Adds a film-like texture.

Move left: less grain | Move right: more grain

Good for: a creative look; it is not normally needed for a clean aviation image

JACK'S QUICK TIP

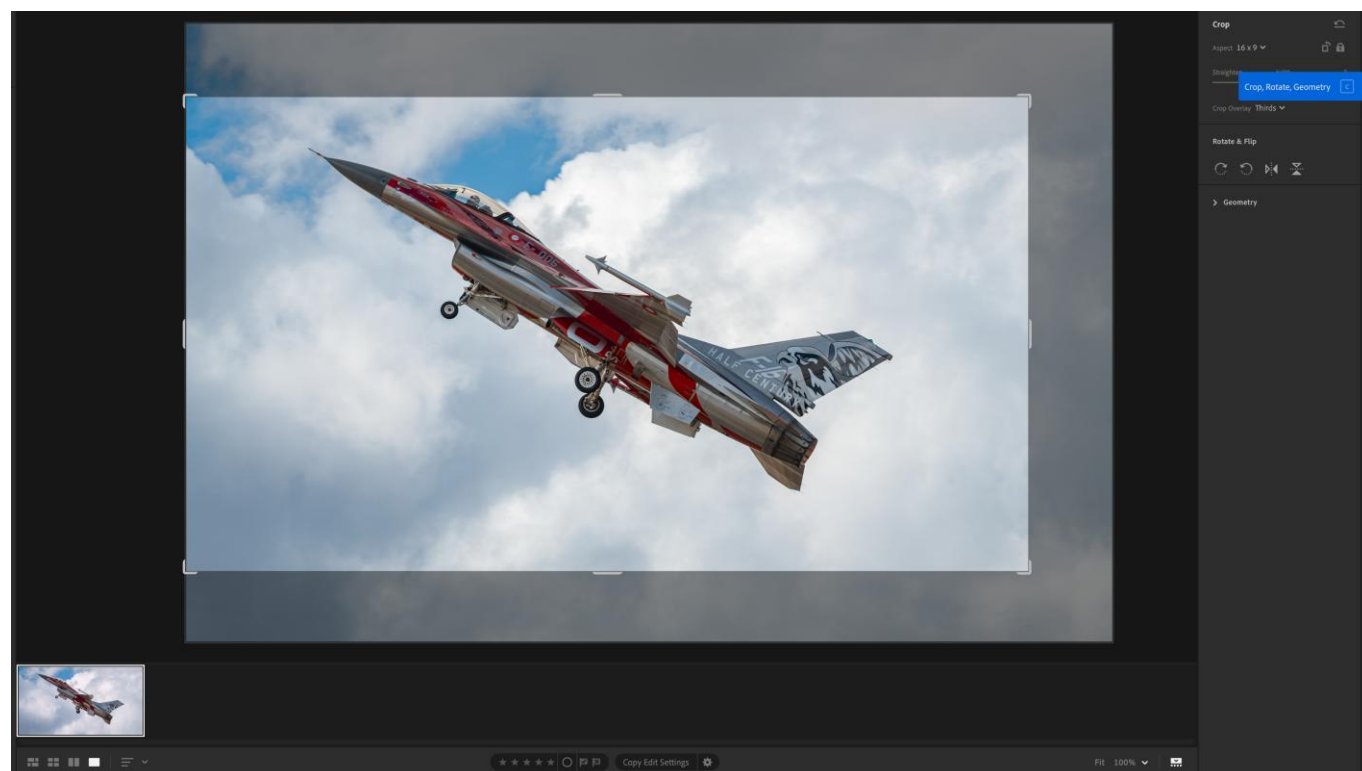
Straighten using something you know should be level. Runways and buildings help, but remember that an aircraft may genuinely be climbing or banking.



6. Crop, clean-up and masks

These tools change selected parts of the photograph instead of changing the full frame.

Crop and Straighten	Improve the framing, remove distractions near the edge and level the image. Leave enough room in front of a moving aircraft so it has space to fly into. Plus makes the runway straighter if taken at an angle
Remove / Heal / Clone	Clean sensor dust, small distractions or marks. Heal blends with the surrounding area; Clone copies another area. Check the result at 100%.
Select Subject	Lightroom tries to find the aircraft or main subject. Useful for lifting a dark aircraft without brightening the sky.
Select Sky	Selects most of the sky. Useful for lowering highlights, reducing haze or controlling blue tones.
Brush	Paint an adjustment exactly where you want it. Use a soft feathered edge and build the change slowly.
Linear Gradient	Adds a gradual adjustment from one side of the image. Useful for a bright sky or foreground.
Radial Gradient	Creates a round or oval selection. Useful for a gentle lift around the aircraft or a controlled darkening outside it.
Add and Subtract	Improve a mask by adding missing areas or removing areas Lightroom selected by mistake.
JACK'S QUICK TIP Masks should be hard to notice. If the aircraft looks cut out or has a bright halo around it, reduce the adjustment and refine the mask edge.	



7. A quick aviation edit

Use this as a starting checklist, not a fixed recipe. The best settings are the ones that suit the photograph in front of you.

1	Composition Crop distractions, level the horizon and leave space in the direction of travel.
2	Overall light Set Exposure so the image looks balanced. Check the histogram and warning indicators.
3	Bright and dark detail Lower Highlights if the sky or pale paint is too bright. Raise Shadows gently if the aircraft underside is too dark.
4	White and black points Adjust Whites and Blacks for a clean range of tones without losing important detail.
5	Colour Correct White Balance first. Add a small amount of Vibrance if needed.
6	Aircraft detail Use Texture for surface detail. Add Clarity carefully and avoid hard halos.
7	Clean the file Remove dust spots, especially in clear skies. Apply lens corrections.
8	Noise and sharpening Check at 100%. Balance clean areas with believable detail.
9	Local masks Make small corrections to the aircraft or sky only when the full-image controls are not enough.
10	Step back Zoom out, compare before and after, and make sure the final result still looks natural.

JACK'S QUICK TIP

There is no rule saying every slider must be moved. Often the cleaner edit comes from making fewer, more deliberate changes.

Created by The Big Guide to RIAT

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