

Getting Creative With Layers

Photoshop Layer Basics

To Open a Blank Layer go to the menu

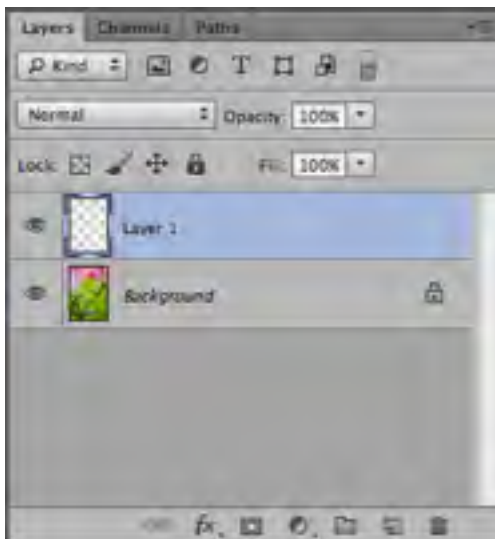
Layer-New--Layer or Shift CMD (CTR on PC) N

Or, Click on the Icon in the Layers Palette next to the “Trash” icon that says “Create New Layer” when you hover over it.

If you do not see your Layers Palette, Press F7 or go to Window-Layers

Blank layers are good for image cleanup (dust removal, cloning), adding canvas, adding text, crop and straighten...non destructive editing.

Hide the layer (make it temporarily invisible) by clicking the “eye” icon for the layer.

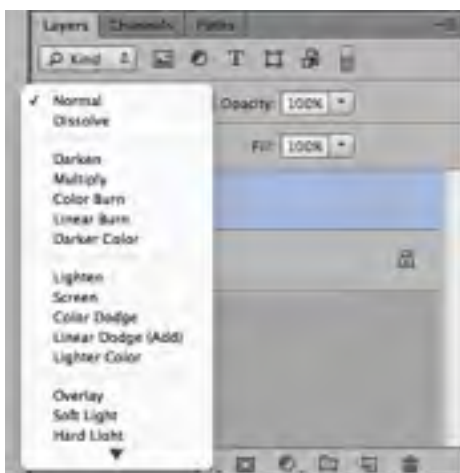


Delete the layer by dragging it to the trash icon.

Change the opacity of the layer by dragging the opacity slider to allow the layer beneath to come through.

Change the blending mode using the drop-down menu. The blending modes are separated into basic groups based on similar behavior.

- Group 1 Darkens Images
- Group 2 Lightens Images
- Group 3 Alters Contrast
- Group 4 Comparison
- Group 5 Composite

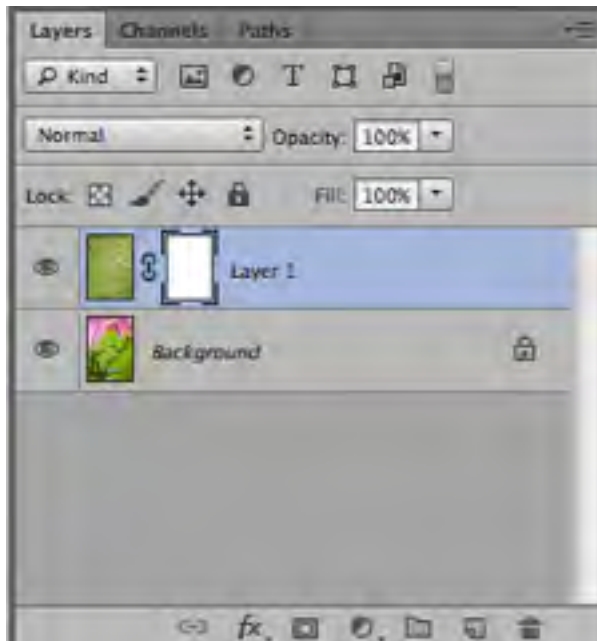
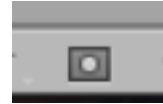


You can not use blending modes on the background layer. Most commonly used are Multiply, Screen, Overlay, Color, Luminosity.

Layer Masks

Adding a layer “mask” either hides the layer or allows it to show through, depending on your adjustments. You can lower the opacity of the mask or simply “brush” areas of the image that you want to change.

To add a layer mask, click the icon at the bottom of the layers palette that is a square with a circle in the middle.

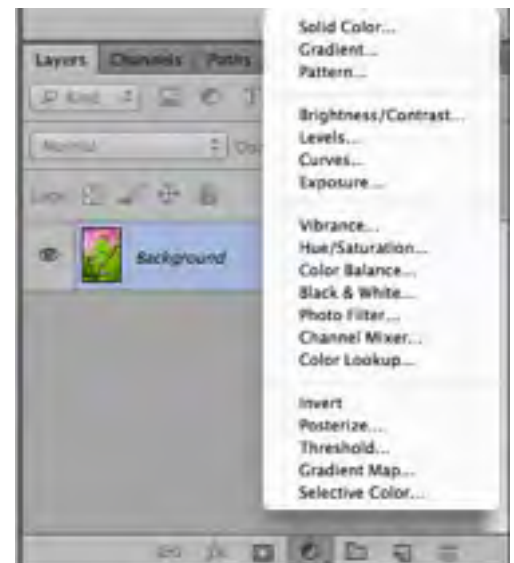


The layer mask is selected when the “brackets” are highlighting it. The mask is white when 100% of that layer is visible. The mask is black when 100% of that layer is concealed. Anything in between is a shade of gray. ie: 50% gray will give 50% opacity or transparency of the layer. Clicking the layer mask icon automatically makes a 100% White mask. Hold the Alt (option) key and click the mask icon to get a layer mask that is 100% Black. To change the transparency of the layer mask,

we use the brush tool.

Adjustment Layers

Click on the half black, half white circle in the layers palette to bring up the Adjustment layers. Or, go to the menu and choose “Layer” then “New Adjustment Layer” and it will bring up the same list. Adjustment layers allow you to work non-destructively on an image, preserving the original photo. You can further enhance the adjustments by adding a layer mask to either reveal or conceal



areas of the adjustment. (ie: if you add a “hue/saturation” adjustment layer, you can add a layer mask to then restrict your changes to only the areas where you want to see the effect)

Blending Exposures

Open two images in photoshop...one exposed to preserve shadow detail, one exposed to preserve highlight detail. Alternatively, you can process a single properly exposed RAW file twice, processed once for the highlights and once for the shadows resulting in two images.

- *Tip: Within Photoshop’s “Preferences” navigate to “Interface” and make sure “Open Documents as Tabs” is checked.*



Select One image: Either Command-A (Select All), Or go to the menu and click on the “Select” option and then go to “All”. I simply click on the tab of the image to select it.

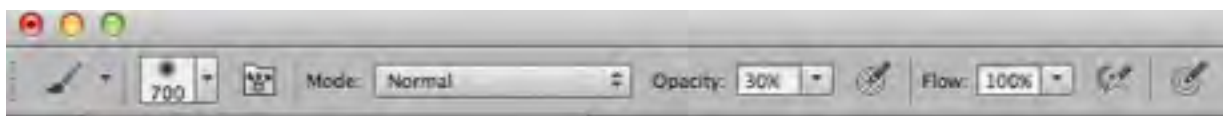
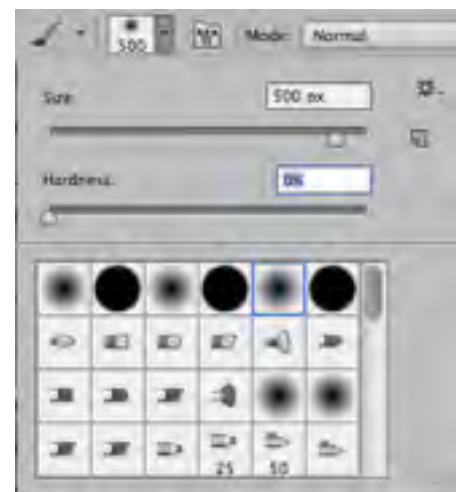
Select the “Move” tool (see inset photo) or just type “V” for the move tool shortcut.

Click on the first image, while holding the mouse down, drag that image/ cursor to the tab of the other image until the photo appears. Line up the cursor with the other image (about middle) and let go of the mouse. The first image is now in a LAYER on top of the second image.

Lower the opacity to make sure the two layers are lining up. Use the move tool (V) to reposition until they match.

Alternative Method: Go to “Select” then “All” to select your first image. Then go to “Edit---Paste” to past it onto the second image.

Add a layer mask by clicking on the layer mask icon. Press “B” to bring up your brush. Start with a soft brush (Hardness Zero) at 30 to 40 % Opacity (the brush opacity at the top menu...this option is at the bottom of Elements (...not the opacity of the layer in the layer palette.) Brush strokes are cumulative...keep going until you get what you want.



Hit the “X” key to switch between a black brush and a white brush.

Tip: Alternatively, You can select a 100% Opacity Brush from the beginning, paint/brush to reveal the layer portions that you want, then add a Gaussian Blur to blend the transition zone. Go to the menu and select “Filter” then “Blur” then “Gaussian Blur” after you are done brushing in the layer. Select a pixel number that gives you the amount of blur/transition that you want.

This same technique can be used to blend elements between photos: ie: if you’ve got a great shot from a cloudless day and want to add clouds from another image, or if you are shooting moving water and take one shot for the subject (trees, sand, whatever is stationary) and want a “particular” type of wave or water movement. Take a dozen photos of the water moving and “pick” the one that works best and blend that with the original image.

Blend Using “Selections”

Selections can be a workshop in of itself, so I’m not going into any great detail here. There are on-line tutorials specific to selections. The most basic are the Marquis tool, the lasso tool, the magic wand, and the quick selection tool. Which ever tool you choose is up to you and the subject that you wish to move from one photo to another..or from one part of an image to another part of the image. The basic principal in using layers is the same.

Make your selection (your tool of choice)

Click the “Move” tool or just type the letter “V”

Click on the selection and drag it to wherever you want to place it. Hover your curser over the “tab” of the other image to see it and then place your object/selection.

Alternatively, you can click on “copy” in order to copy the selection to Photoshops clipboard, and then highlight the other photo and select “Edit-Paste Special- Paste Into” In Elements it’s Edit-Paste into Selection.

Use “Free Transform” (Cmd/Ctr T) to change the size of the selection that you just moved. Click the Check mark to confirm the “transform” or type the “enter/return” key.

Add a layer mask and begin brushing (White or black brush depending on the color of your mask. Use a white brush on a black mask to reveal the layer and a black brush on a white mask to reveal the layer)

Confused? Go back to Layer Masks and Blending Exposures to review!

Blend “Textures” with Layers

Textures are a “trial and error” technique. As long as you’ve practiced using layers and layer masks, textures are a natural progression. The possibilities with textures are endless. You can process the same image with a dozen different textures and get a dozen entirely different looks...and you may like each and every one of them! That’s what makes textures so much fun!

Open an Image you wish to apply a texture. Go to your texture file collection. Choose a texture that has some similar tonalities (though you could go extreme in the other direction for color if you wish) and similar mood. Apply soft textures if you wish to convey a feeling of softness or serenity or beauty. Choose a “grunge” texture if you wish to add grit and contrast and...well...Grunge! It’s entirely up to you...your mood...the mood you wish to convey.

- Select All for your texture file.
- Select the Move tool (V)
- Click and drag the texture onto the other photo.
- (Or...you can “Select All” and “Copy” the image and then “Paste” it over the other one.)



- Use the “free transform” to size the texture file to match your image file...you may need to zoom way out to see the bounding box for the free transform.
- Experiment with Blending modes first as they may produce a result quickly and easily with little work on your part.
- Add a layer mask if more alterations are needed/wanted.

You can use multiple textures in multiple layers. You can use the same texture multiple times. You can alter a texture prior to using it as a layer. For this image I added contrast to the texture with a levels adjustment prior to using it.

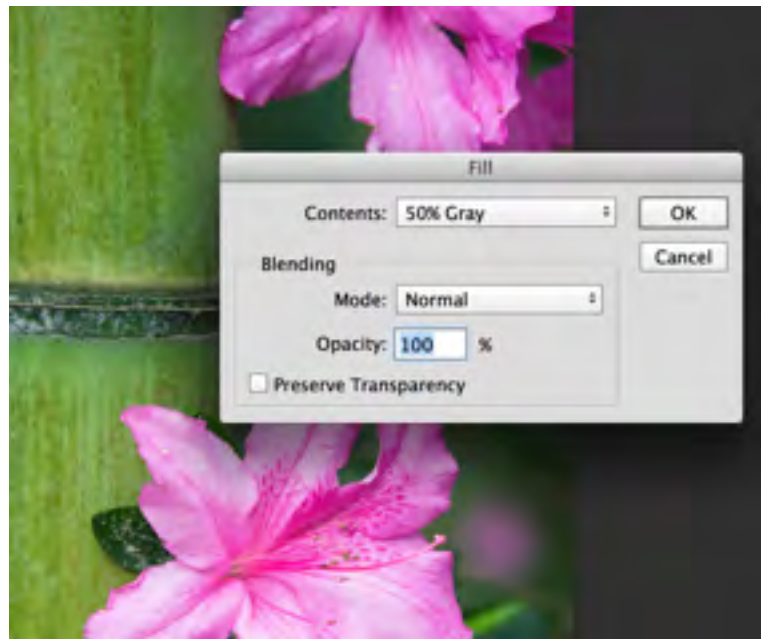
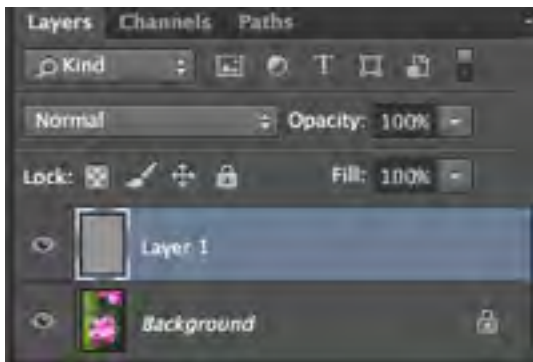
- *Tip: Back Up ALL of your textures to another Hard Drive before you start using them. They are jpeg images and will degrade with use.*

To create a Dodge and Burn Layer:

Create a new blank layer.

Go to “Edit-Fill” and Choose 50% gray for the contents.

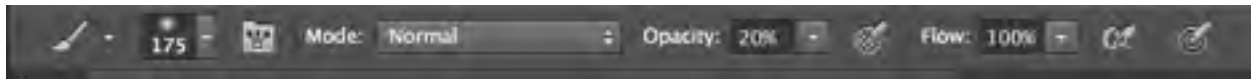
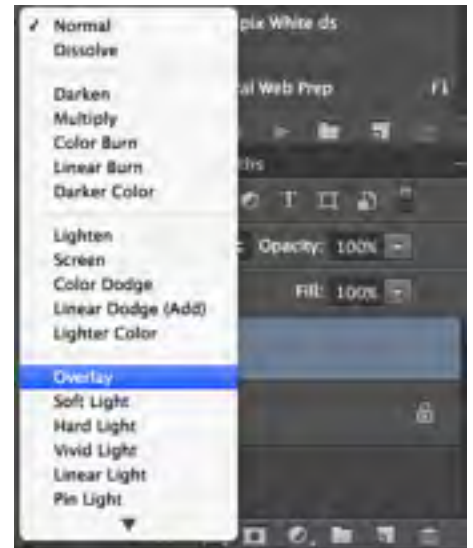
Make sure that “Preserve Transparency” is left unchecked and the opacity is 100% with “Normal” blending mode. Your layer’s palette should look like this with a blank layer that is completely gray.



Go to your layers palate. Select the drop down menu for your blending modes.
Select “Overlay”

Your image should look normal again.
Select your Brush by typing the letter “B” or selecting the brush from the tool menu bar.
Choose a soft edge brush. (Hardness Zero)

Set your brush opacity to anything from 10 to 30 percent. This is NOT the opacity in the layers palate...that number affects the opacity of the LAYER. I’m referring to the opacity of the brush itself which is located at the top of the interface. (Elements users...its at the bottom).



The higher the number the stronger the effect but you want to start with subtle adjustments. Each brush stroke (lifting the mouse or your finger in between strokes/unclicking) is cumulative. So beginning with a low opacity brush is a good idea so you can make subtle adjustments where needed and simply add more brush strokes to areas where heavier adjustments are necessary.

To LIGHTEN (dodge) areas: Paint with a WHITE brush

To DARKEN (burn) areas: Paint with a BLACK brush.

See video tutorials of the above method at my YouTube Channel.

Go to YouTube and search: [Kate Silvia Photography](#) to get to my channel if the included link does not work.