

Art of Blending | Module 4

Video 04-01 The Color Wild Card

Color and light affect my photo every time I snap a picture, but I'm usually thinking more about whether I have enough light or if there's too much light, or if my subject is in dappled sunlight, rather than the color of the light.

This photo of the Oregon coast, for example, was taken during the day. The next one was taken at sunset, and the last one was taken at dusk with very little light remaining.

Notice that each of them, apart from the lighting, also have different colors associated with the time of day. So our photos already have a color "cast" to them, if you will. Depending on the time of day, our location, where the sun is, and our camera settings, our photos may tend toward the cool side, with more blue in them, or toward the warm side, with more yellow in them.

For example, I took this photo of the Acropolis, and two weeks later, Sharon Maughan visited the Acropolis and also took a photo of the Acropolis.

Mine is definitely on the cool side, and Sharon's photo is on the warm side. Part of that may have been the weather or time of day, and part of that was undoubtedly due to our camera settings.

Let's take a closer look at this color idea, because you can use color to control the mood of your digital blends.

Let's say I open a photo in Photoshop or Photoshop Elements, and I create a new layer of color directly above it in the Layers panel. To make the color interact with that photo, I can:

- Change the Opacity
- Change the Blend Mode
- Change both the Opacity and the Blend Mode

If I hide the color layer and show it again, you can see that the color adds warmth to the photo and gives it a sunnier look.

In the same way, if I blend a blue layer of color with my photo, and here I'm using the same blend mode and opacity, Color at 20% opacity, my photo has a cooler appearance, as though there was less sun. Almost makes you want to put on a sweater!

This week we're going to practice manipulating the color of our photos before we add any kind of texture overlay. We'll discover that even the texture overlay can affect the color, and we'll talk about ways to control color to create the effect we want.

To get your imagination and creative juices flowing, first watch this slide show of before and after. More than the texture, notice the difference in color.

Video 04-02 Warm or Cool?

Let's explore the effect of blending colors with our photos. I'll do that with this photo of Venice. Now, one thing I noticed about Venice is that the light there is fantastic for taking photos—it's kind of a golden light—and, of course, there are so many interesting buildings and canals and bridges to photograph, so you can really go crazy taking pictures there.

Notice the beautiful warm yellow paint and the jade color of the awning and the red tile of the roofs. These colors are everywhere in Venice, but this photo doesn't actually do them justice. What I saw with my eyes was warmer than what came out of my digital camera, so I want to make the colors warmer.

I can do that by using color overlays with the right colors and changing the blend mode and opacity to suit my photo.

I considered having you manually experiment with a specific set of colors, which I do think would be instructive, but most of us are pretty busy, and I want to get beyond changing just the color of the photograph and delve into textures as well, so instead, I opted to give you two actions that instantly produce either a warm or a cool effect.

Everyone with Photoshop will be able to use this action set, and anyone with Photoshop Elements 11 or greater will be able to use the action set as well.

If you're using a copy of Photoshop Elements that doesn't support actions, you won't be left out. I'll supply you with a couple of documents that do the same thing, and I'll demonstrate how to use them in a separate video.

Installing and Using Actions in Either Photoshop Elements or Photoshop

- In the Menu Bar, choose Window > Actions to open the Actions panel.
- Click on the icon in the upper right corner to open the flyout menu and choose Load Actions.
- Navigate to the folder with the "DS-Color Actions.atn." Double click on it to load it.
- Click on the name of the action you want to run.
- Click the Play button.

Action Demo

I'll click on the Color-Warm action and click the play button.

Now I'll go back to the Layers panel, and there is my set of layers. You'll notice that one of the layers is hidden—the yellow layer. Sometimes you'll want to add yellow. You'll need to experiment, because here's the thing—every photo is different! It will be the rare time that you'll use the action and not tweak something.

Try changing the blend modes and opacity, and add your own colors. To get a new color layer, click on the Adjustment Layer icon and choose Solid Color. The Color Picker will come up and you can choose any color you want. Then click OK.

Many actions will flatten the image once the effect is accomplished, but I want to give you complete control and not only allow you to make changes, but encourage you to make changes, especially at first.

I can also experiment taking colors away by hiding some of the layers—and that will give you a different effect.

Notice that the action gives me a Levels adjustment layer and a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer. Double click on the thumbnails to make them active so you can adjust them.

With Hue/Saturation you can adjust the Hue and Saturation. If I want to make this appear old and washed out, I could lower the Saturation, but I'm just going to leave mine at zero.

At the top of the Layers panel, there's a layer called Dark Edge. You can see the effect if I toggle the visibility off and on. It just adds a little bit of darkness around the edge. You may not want that at all, and if not, just delete it, or if you want to keep it, you can adjust it any way you wish.

Once you've adjusted the colors you can flatten the image if you wish, but you may want to tweak the colors again after you add a texture overlay, so my advice is to hang on to the color layers until you're completely done.

Folders in Photoshop

In Photoshop I like to put my color layers in one folder.

- Click on the top layer and Shift click on the bottom color layer, not including the background layer, to select them all.
- Press Ctrl G (Mac: Cmd G) to put them in a folder.
- Double click on the name of the folder and change it to Color-Warm. Press Enter to commit the change.

Now you can open the folder and work on the color layers any time you wish, but you can close the folder when you don't need them. In Photoshop Elements you'll need to keep them as individual layers, since folders aren't available.

Cool Colors

Let's try the cool colors on the same photo. I'll hide the Warm layers by clicking on the visibility icon of my folder in the Layers panel. I'll open the Actions panel, and choose Color-Cool this time. Click the button to get a cool set of layers.

- I'm using a light blue set to Soft Light at 10%.
- I'm using the same Jade as before, Color at 20%.
- My rust color is Vivid Light at 10%—the same one I used with the warm colors. Some colors go well with both warm and cool.
- I'm using dark blue with a blend mode of Multiply at 20%.

Again, feel free to change blend modes and opacities and to adjust Levels or Hue/Saturation or leave them as they are.

Don't forget you can change the blend mode of an adjustment layer. For example, if I change Levels from Normal to Soft Light, it gives me more contrast and changes the look of my photo.

Again, I have the dark edge around my photo. I'll put all these layers in a folder like I did before (Photoshop only), and then let's take a look at them.

Here's the original, here's the warm, and here's the cool. I like the warm effect best, so that's what I'll keep.

When you add one or more texture layers, you may find that you want to adjust one or more colors, which is why I prefer not to flatten my layers early on.

Now it's your turn to practice adding color to your photos! If you use Photoshop Elements and don't have actions yet, watch the video called PSE Color Workaround.

Video 04-03- Blending Color and Texture

When you use color in blending, the color becomes a main component of your overall blending strategy. In most cases, the texture overlays should enhance the color choice you've made, not eclipse it, so I thought I'd share some of my favorite texture overlays for color blending, or any blending, for that matter.

These are textures you already have, but I've duplicated them and placed them in a folder called ArtOfBlending-Favorites. As you can see, there aren't very many, but they produce a texture that works well by itself or with other textures.

These are MY favorites, so don't take my word for it. Try them out and see if you agree. As you find your own favorites, add them to this folder.

Texture Examples

Let me go through my favorite textures using one photo so you can see the difference. Here's a photo of a large piece of driftwood on the beach. If I add warmth to it, here's what it looks like, and if I add cool colors, here's what it looks like. Now let's start adding textures.

- Warm: cement-LSattgast-04, Soft Light at 60%
- Cool: cement-LSattgast-04 Inverted—Press Ctrl I (Mac: Cmd I) to invert a texture layer.

- Warm: cement-LSattgast-11, Soft Light at 100%
- Cool: cement-LSattgast-11, Soft Light at 100%

- Cool: cement-LSattgast-12 Overlay at 70%

- Warm: metal-LSattgast-11, Soft Light at 100%, then duplicate the texture layer and mask away some of the effect.
- Cool: metal-LSattgast-11, Soft Light at 100%, then duplicate the layer and mask away some of the effect.

- Warm: paper-cardboard-LSattgast-02, Soft Light at 100%

It's a very subtle texture. Here it is without the texture, and here it is with it.

Then I duplicated the texture layer.

Here's the same texture overlay on the cool version:

- Cool: paper-cardboard-LSattgast-02, Soft Light at 100%, then duplicate the texture layer.

Remove Spots

The Monaco tiles are some of my favorite textures because they are so soft and subtle. Some of them do have cracks and spots, however. When you're after a subtle look, you can remove spots by clicking on them with the Spot Healing Brush.

- Warm: tile-Monaco-LSattgast-04-spots-removed, Soft Light at 100%; duplicate at 80%
- Cool: tile-Monaco-LSattgast-04-spots-removed, Soft Light at 100%; duplicate at 80%

- Warm: wall-LSattgast-04 Soft Light at 100%, duplicate twice at 100%
- Cool: wall-LSattgast-04 Soft Light at 100%, duplicate twice at 100%

Adjusting Textures

I've already mentioned that you can invert a texture, but you can also change a texture by using blend modes.

- Press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the texture layer.
- Change the blend mode to get a new look. In my example I changed the blend mode to Multiply at 100%, which darkened it a little.

- Warm: wall-LSattgast-20 multiply, Soft Light at 100%, duplicated at 100%
- Cool: wall-LSattgast-20 multiply, Soft Light at 100%, duplicated at 100%

- Warm: wood-LSattgast-02, Soft Light at 100%, masked, and wood-LSattgast-12 at 50%

Here are my two favorite textures:

- Warm: tile-Monaco-LSattgast-04, Soft Light 100%, duplicated at 80%, and wood-LSattgast-02, masked Soft Light at 100%, dark edge
- Cool: metal-LSattgast-11, Soft Light at 100%, duplicated at 100% but masked over the driftwood, dark edge, merged and lightened slightly with Levels

Texture Tips

Every one of the textures in the full Art of Blending texture folder is useful in some way, but they're good for different reasons, so here are a few tips:

- Good Photos—Start with a good photo. In most cases, adding blend modes won't appreciably improve the look of your photo.
- Subtle or Bold? In most cases subtle is better. I'm not saying you can't use a bold texture, but it's harder to make it look good, so when you're getting started and you're not sure of yourself, try subtle. I'll show you how to use some of those bolder textures in a future lesson.
- Clashing Textures—If your photo already has pretty strong textures, adding strong blended textures will cause the two to fight. Keep the blended textures subtle so they point to the main focus of your photo. Your object with blending is to first make people see your photo and then notice the blending. Don't sacrifice your photo to create a wowzy blending technique.
- Is Texture Needed? As you're using color, you may decide that color is the only blending you need. You may not need to add a texture, especially if the photo is busy or has a lot of texture in it already.

Video 04-04 Colorful Textures

We've looked at changing the color of the photo first and then adding texture, so in this video we'll look at what to do with colorful textures.

Adjust the Color

Here, for example, I've added a very colorful texture, `distressed_01-JosephFranics`. If I change the blend mode to Soft Light, I get a very nice texture on the sky, but it did change the color. If I like the color, fine and good. If I don't, I can simply desaturate the texture.

If I want to completely desaturate the entire texture, the easiest way to do that is with a keyboard shortcut, Ctrl Shift U in Windows or Cmd Shift U on a Mac.

If I want to minimize the color but not get rid of it entirely, the best way to do that is with a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer clipped to the texture. I'll press Ctrl Z (Mac: Cmd Z) to undo the desaturation I just did with the keyboard shortcut.

- Open the Adjustment menu and choose Hue/Saturation.
- In the Menu Bar choose Layer > Create Clipping Mask
- Make any adjustments you want in the dialog box, and they will only affect the texture. For example, you could change the color of the texture to fit better with your photo. Or you could lower the Saturation for less of an effect, or increase it for more of an effect.
- Since an adjustment layer comes with a mask, this gives you the option to mask away some or all of the effect on part of the photo while leaving it on the rest of the photo.

Adjust the Light

You can also adjust the light of a texture.

- Add the texture of your choice and change the blend mode. I used `tile-Monaco-LSattgast-06`, Soft Light at 100%.
- Adjust the color as described above, if necessary. This one is neutral enough.
- To adjust the lighting, press Ctrl L (Mac: Cmd L) to bring up the Levels dialog box. Move the sliders under the histogram until you're satisfied.

Moving the right or middle slider to the left will make the texture lighter.

Moving the left or middle slider to the right will make the texture darker.

Moving the right and left sliders toward the center will create more contrast.

Color Gradients

You can add a colored gradient and blend it into your photo to add magic to it! My two favorite colors to do this are a mustard yellow and a jade or teal green, but experiment with your own colors to see what kinds of effects you can produce.

- In the Layers panel, click on the Create a New Layer icon.
- Get the Gradient tool. In Tool Options open the Gradient Picker and choose Foreground to Background. If you don't see this option, open the flyout menu and choose Reset Gradients.
- Choose the Gradient icon of your choice. For my photo I used the Linear Gradient.
- The Mode should be Normal and the Opacity 100%
- Check Dither and Transparency, but not Reverse.
- Click on the Foreground and Background Color Chips to choose your colors. For this example I used Hex# b4872c for the Foreground and Hex# 137170 for the Background.
- On your document, click and drag a gradient from the bottom to the top. Press Shift as you click and drag to keep a straight vertical line. Undo and try again if you don't like the result.
- Change the blend mode. I used Vivid Light at 30% opacity.

Once you have your magical gradient, you can add colored texture overlays to make the color even punchier. I used two colored textures on mine. Unfortunately, they aren't part of the class textures, so I'm not sure where they are, but you get the idea. Those colored textures brought out more color in the sky and in the rest of the photo as well. I also blurred part of the photo to drive your eye to my husband, who is the backpacker featured here.

So there you have some great tools to use with color as you blend your photos. Whatever you can imagine, think of a way you could do it with color and textures!