

Art of Blending | Module 1

Video 01-01: Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to The Art of Blending! I am so thrilled to have you join me in this class! We're going to have a great time exploring the artistic possibilities of blend modes, and along the way we'll learn some other skills as well.

Be sure to check out the Pre-Class Videos, if you need an introduction to blending, layer masking, or using the Brush tool. I have videos there that will cover those basics. Even if you've been a digital scrapbooker for awhile, you may discover some new tips and tricks that will speed things up for you in this class.

So I do recommend that you watch those unless you're pretty experienced or you've taken our training in the past.

Photoshop and Photoshop Elements

Some of you will be using Photoshop and some will be using Photoshop Elements. The skills I'm going to teach you are virtually identical in both programs, so I'll be switching back and forth as I teach the lessons. Sometimes I'll use Photoshop and sometimes I'll use Photoshop Elements.

Downloading Class Material

Don't forget you can download all the class material. For the PDF manuals, I recommend that you right click on the image or link and choose the appropriate menu item for downloading with your particular browser. It's a little different for each browser.

For videos, click on the play button, and the video will open in a new window. As soon as it opens, you'll see a blue download button in the lower right corner. Just click on that button to download the video.

Forever Access

Remember, though, you have "Forever Access" to the class material, so you don't need to download the videos if you don't want to worry about the extra file space it's taking up on your computer. However, do feel free to download the videos if you want to.

Photographs Used In These Lessons

Throughout the lessons I'll be demonstrating the techniques on quite a few photos. You might recognize some of them that have been used in prior tutorials, but they've never been used to teach blending modes, so if you occasionally see one you recognize, just consider it an old friend.

Well, that's about it! I'm sure you're ready to get going—so I'll see you in the next lesson!

Video 01-02 Powerful Blending Photos

Since you can apply blending to any photo, does it matter which photo you choose? I think it does. Why not give yourself an edge by choosing or creating photos that are powerful to begin with—which begs the question: What makes a photo powerful?

I believe that powerful photos elicit an emotional response in the viewer. Something clicks in your brain when you see certain photos. Your response might be a sensation of awe or wonder or inspiration or the color combination may grab you, or the photo may make you smile or stir a longing inside you for a simpler life, but it does something to your emotions.

Sometimes a photo tells a story—or at least gives you a glimpse of a story.

You've already taken some photos like this. You know what it's like when you're scrolling through your most recent photo shoot and you suddenly come upon a photo that stops you in your tracks. Sometimes you'll even say out loud, "Wow!"

It's great when you run across photos like this, but rather than leave it to chance, let's talk about some general principles that make for great blending photos, and then I'll give you six simple photo recipes that you may not have thought about.

General Principles

Certain types of photos are classic blending photos. Here are four categories of photos that are frequently used for blending. Sit back and enjoy the slide show:

- **Interesting Architecture**
These are usually photos of parts of buildings—a doorway or window, or ivy covered wall—but it can also be larger portions of buildings or an entire edifice, such as a barn or cabin. These make great blended photos!
- **Landscapes**
Even the dullest landscape can turn into an interesting blended photo, but if you take a little time to get a great shot, so much the better!
- **Flowers**
Who doesn't love a blended flower or two or more? The catch is usually deciding which one to choose!
- **Objects Artistically Arranged**
Sometimes you'll see an object or set of objects that are perfect for a photo. Other times you'll put several objects together and create your own artistic grouping. These make great blended photos as well.

Did you enjoy the slide show? Even though many of those photos are straight out of the camera with no adjustments at all yet, you can tell that they follow good photography principles.

Photography Principles

- **Good Lighting**
This photo of a vintage car is a very nice photo, and I've actually used this photo for a tutorial once upon a time, but the lighting isn't ideal. The car is partially in the shade and partially in the sunshine. Like I said, it isn't bad, but just keep in mind that a photo with sharp contrast between light and shadow is generally not the best photo for blending. Then again, sometimes you can break this rule and use it to your advantage with blend modes.
- **Uncluttered Background**
I love this cat photo as much for what it isn't as for what it is. You can fully appreciate the subject and colors because it is so uncluttered. There's one little object that might be an electrical outlet or something, which I could clone away, if I got picky, but I don't know that I would need to do that.

Sometimes I remove items from the area. I did that with this camping photo—I removed some of our camping gear, which made a big difference in how the photo turned out. I left the two packs in the photo as part of the triangle of objects and for the splash of color.

- Rule of Thirds

If you dissect your photo into thirds horizontally and vertically, place the area of interest in your photo where two lines intersect. You may need to crop your photo to accomplish this. This is a good rule of thumb but it doesn't always have to be followed to get a great photo. Trust your instinct on this one.

- Blurred Background

Not every camera can do this, of course, but there are ways to compensate, which I'll be sharing in a separate video.

Six Photo Recipes

Now I want to share 6 Photo Recipes with you. If you think about these recipes before you push the shutter button, your chances of getting a great photo for blending definitely increase, so sit back and relax as you watch the slide show!

- Backlit-Silhouette

Let the light shine behind your subject to produce a partial or full silhouette. With photos like this, it's key to capture movement or position that "reads" well to the viewer. I like to snap lots of photos from different angles, and I often set up the shot by telling the subject what to do or how to stand. My best silhouettes, however, are usually photos that I "caught" by being prepared and watching for the right timing.

- Color

I love to photograph interesting color combinations that attract the eye.

- Distance

Capture people and objects from a distance against a vast expanse of sky, grass, water, beach, etc. Again, watch for the right movement of the person or pet. I like to put my camera on a multi-shot setting, so I can capture fast movement.

If you're shooting an object like a tree in the distance, you have plenty of time to plan out your shot, but your pet dog running along the beach is a different story!

- Emotion

Seeing emotion in other people brings out emotion in the viewer. If you can catch emotion as it's happening, you'll be likely to get a good shot. Try not to be in your face about this. Capture it from a distance. I have a camera that allows me to be looking in a different direction while I take a photo, which is helpful. Most people, though, are willing to be contemplative for you, and children are great for capturing emotion—if you can get your camera fast enough!

- Looking Away

Of all the recipes, this is the most important. People are so used to having their picture taken that they automatically straighten up and smile at the camera. Try to get photos where the person is looking away or completely turned away from you. If they suspect you're taking a photo, they may look away but get a little smile on their face that shows they know they're on "Candid Camera."

- Partial or Close Up

This refers to photos that get in real close to a subject or object, so that the viewer has to use their imagination to fill in the details. These can be really fun photos!

I hope you enjoyed the slide show and got some inspiration from it. One bad habit many of us have, and I'm no exception, is that in most of my photos, my subjects are looking at me and smiling. Next time you take photos, consciously try to take photos of your subjects when they're not looking directly at you.

These six photo recipes are a good place to start, but keep your eye out for other ideas that you can put in your inspiration file.

Inspiration

And speaking of inspiration, one place to find it is, where else? The internet! Any stock photo company has a searchable database, so you can search by topic or keyword.

The Morguefile website even has free downloadable photos with generous terms of use. You'll recognize this photo as one of the examples I used in the slide show.

<http://www.morguefile.com>

Flickr.com is a photo sharing site and has a wealth of great photos. Here, for example, I typed in the keyword emotion and found some amazing examples. Some photographers allow you to download and use their photos and some don't. Each photographer sets his or her own Terms of Use.

<http://flickr.com>

Once you're sufficiently inspired, I would encourage you to pick one of the six photo recipes and try it out this week. Choosing a recipe before you press the shutter button, may increase your chances of getting that perfect photo for blending!

Video 01-03 The Power of Blur

Whether you have a point and shoot camera or a top-of-the-line DSLR, you can add blurring effects to your photos that go beyond depth of field and add to the artistic statement of your photo, even before applying blend modes.

Here I have a photo of a cat sleeping on a bed. There's actually a little bit of depth of field, because the bedspread behind the cat is blurry, and even the part in front is slightly blurry. But even if there was no blurriness at all, you would follow the same steps.

- Press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the layer.
- In the Menu Bar, choose Filter > Blur Gaussian Blur. Enter 6 pixels and click OK. (The blur amount may vary depending on your photo.)
- Click on the Add Layer Mask icon and choose one of three ways to proceed:

Add a Reflected Gradient

- Get the Gradient tool.
- In Tool Options open the Gradient Preset Picker and choose the first icon, Foreground to Background. If you don't see this option, open the flyout menu and choose Reset Gradients.
- In Tool Options, click on the Reflected Gradient icon. The Mode should be normal and the Opacity 100%.
- Make sure the Foreground color is black. If it isn't, press the letter D and then the letter X.
- Click and drag a gradient from the center to the edge of where you want to remove the blur.
- To adjust the mask, get the Brush tool and brush with white to reveal the blur or black to conceal the blur. It's a good idea to reduce the Opacity of the brush to around 30% when you do this.

Method 2: Add a Radial Gradient

- Get the Gradient tool.
- In Tool Options open the Gradient Preset Picker and choose the first icon, Foreground to Background.
- In Tool Options, click on the Radial Gradient icon. All the other settings stay the same.
- Make sure the Foreground color is black. If it isn't, press the letter D and then the letter X.
- Click in the center of where you want the sharpest place to be and drag outward to create a radial gradient when you let go of the mouse.
- Get the Brush tool and make any adjustments necessary.

Method 3: Use the Brush Tool

With this option, you create the mask entirely with the Brush tool.

- Get the Brush tool.
- In Tool Options, open the Brush Preset Picker and choose a soft round brush. The Mode should be Normal. The Opacity can be variable depending on the result you want. I like to start at 50%. In Photoshop, you can also adjust the Flow. I keep that at 100%.
- Make sure the Foreground Color is black and brush away the effects of the blur to your satisfaction.

Note: You don't need to do all three of these blurs when you work on your photo. I'm just showing you your options. Choose the method that makes the most sense for your photo.

Optional Radial Blur

You can create some fun special effects if you add another blur after the first one. I don't do it on every photo, but it really adds a great touch to some photos. Here's how to do it:

- Press Ctrl Alt Shift E (Mac: Cmd Opt Shift E) to create a merged copy of your photo, including the Gaussian Blur you just did using one of the methods above.
- In the Menu Bar, choose Filter > Blur > Radial Blur.
- When the dialog box comes up enter 10 for the Amount. Use Zoom for the Blur Method and Good for the Quality. Click on the Blur Center image and move the center of the blur to the area of focus on your photo. It's not an exact science, so just eyeball it.
- This filter doesn't provide a preview, so simply click OK, and if you need to adjust anything, you can undo (Ctrl Z in Windows, Cmd Z on a Mac) and try it again.
- Add a layer mask to this layer and use one of the methods above to hide some of the blur.
- You can copy a mask from another layer to the new blur layer, if you wish. To do that, press Alt (Mac: Opt) and click and drag a mask to a new layer.
- Use the Brush tool to fine tune the effect by brushing on the layer mask.

These blur effects put the focus exactly where you want it, because the eye is drawn to sharpness more than blur.

Photo Blending Example:

Here's an example of a photo that was promising but needed a little something to add some pizzazz. I used a Radial Blur on the photo and masked the effect away from my husband Charlie to create a more mysterious look. Here is the final blended photo. We'll be going over some of these blending techniques later on in the class.

So whether you have depth of field ability on your camera or not, you can use these blur techniques to add a powerful focus to your photos before you blend them!

Video 01-04: A Blending Exercise

In this lesson we'll open the gate and step into the world of blend modes. We're not going to get technical or stuffy about it in this first lesson. We're just going to poke our finger into the blending paint, so to speak, and see what happens.

I'm going to take the photo we blurred in the last lesson and show you how I go about deciding on a blending overlay and which blend mode I use with it. We'll be looking at more specific techniques you can apply to your photos in future lessons, but for general blending, here's how I go about it.

Decide What You Want

Do you want a soft look or a bold look with more contrast?

Do you want the photo to be darker or lighter or stay about the same?

Do you want any texture or grunge?

Are you going for a vintage look?

How will you use this photo?

As you get to know the blend modes, you'll be able to choose a blending overlay based on the answers to these questions.

When I look at this photo I see that it's fairly busy with all the stripes in the bedspread and on the cat, so I don't think grunge would make it look better, unless I were going to almost trash the photo and make it look really old. I think I'm going to want a lighter, softer look, but I won't know for sure until I try out some blend modes.

Choose One or More Blend Modes

By now you should have downloaded and unzipped my ArtOfBlending-Textures folders. Since it was such a large download, I divided them up. After downloading, you may want to combine them all into one folder, as I have here.

I've listed them alphabetically by the type of texture they are, so bark appears at the top and wood appears at the bottom, with a number of categories in between, such as metal, paper, nature, walls, and tile, etc.

Take a look through it now in whatever viewing program you have. I'm using the Bridge in Photoshop. Scroll through them and get a feel for what there is.

There are over 200 blending overlays in this folder, but some of them are different sizes or presentations of the same texture, so there are about 150 unique textures.

I, of course, have my favorites, and so will you as you get acquainted with them.

I chose to open four overlays: two paper-cardboard overlays and two tile overlays from the harbor in Monaco.

Here's my result—I used:

- The light cardboard using Overlay at 50%, but I didn't end up using it.
- The dark cardboard using Overlay at 20%.
- The brown Monaco tile with Soft Light at 100%.
- The light Monaco tile with Soft Light at 100% opacity.

The look you get when blending depends on four factors:

- The overlay you use
- The blend mode you choose
- The opacity of the layer
- Any layer masking you do

With those four factors, you have infinite possibilities for creating an artistic look.

One thing I would caution against is feeling like your blending needs to be really obvious. Sometimes it will be, but more often than not it won't. Often it simply adds a bit of light or dark or contrast or color and a little bit of texture. It just makes your photo better, and if it doesn't make it look better or more artistic, then don't do it on that particular photo.

Always ask yourself, does this make the photo better or worse? Don't feel pressured to come up with something really wowzy. Subtlety is often better. Yes, we'll do some wild and crazy things that look really cool, but just a nice fresh look for your photo is also a legitimate goal.

I'm happy with my results! I could make it into a card, or put it on a scrapbook page, or put a saying on it and post it on Facebook, or any number of things.

So now let's talk about you.

Lesson 1 Assignment

It's your turn to try your hand at blending. I purposefully kept the blending part pretty low key because I want you to practice taking powerful photos, and that's going to take some time. If you do the photography this week, you'll have lots of photos to choose from in the coming weeks, so this is an important exercise.

- Choose one of the six Photo Recipes I gave you, take some photos, and pick at least one photo for blending for this lesson.
- Practice adding some blur and use layer masks to control the amount and placement of the blur.
- And finally, choose three or four blending overlays and use the blending shortcut to toggle through the blend modes.
- If a blend mode looks promising but it's just too much of an effect, adjust the opacity or use a layer mask to control where the blend mode appears. Feel free to remove some of the effect, if necessary.

Have fun photographing, blurring, and blending!

Video 01-05: Copying a Layer Mask in Photoshop Elements

Here's how to copy a layer mask from one layer to the other in Photoshop

Elements: **Method 1: Merge Down**

- Press Alt (Mac: Opt) and click and drag a copy of the layer with the mask just below the layer that needs the same mask.
- Press Ctrl A (Mac: Cmd A) to put a selection around the copied layer.
- Press Delete to remove the contents of the layer.
- Press Ctrl D (Mac: Cmd D) to deselect.
- Right click (Mac: Ctrl click) on the layer that needs a mask and choose Merge Down.
- When the dialog box comes up, click Preserve.

You now have an exact duplicate mask on the new layer.

Method 2: Copy and Paste

- In the Layers panel, click on the layer that needs a copy of the mask and click on the Add Layer Mask icon
- Alt click (Mac: Opt click) on the layer mask thumbnail you want to copy, which will show you the mask view.
- Choose Select > All or use the shortcut, Ctrl/Cmd A.
- Press Ctrl C (Mac: Cmd C) to copy the mask.
- Click on the mask icon of the layer that needs the mask.
- Press Ctrl V (Mac: Cmd V) to paste the mask contents.
- Press Ctrl D (Mac: Cmd D) to deselect.
- Alt or Opt click on the mask thumbnail to go back to the regular view.

The mask will now be copied to the correct layer.