

Art of Blending | Module 2

Video 02-05 Playing Detective

Sometimes you need to play the detective to get the result you want when blending, so I thought I would give you an example of what I mean.

Here's a photo of a white pitcher and flowers against a white background. If I move a light colored texture above this layer (grunge-LSattgast-04) and change the blend mode to Darken, I get two effects I don't want. Because this texture is so light, even the white background has enough of a darker tint in some places that the Darken blend mode won't display the texture over some of the background.

The second problem is that the texture shows up on the white pitcher, and, in my opinion, it doesn't really look good there. That problem is easy to fix—just use a layer mask to hide the texture over the pitcher.

So let's go back to the first problem. The Darken blend mode will only display the texture layer if the layer below is lighter than the texture layer. What needs to happen in order for the texture to show up? Well, we either need to make the texture darker than the layer below, or we need to make the photo layer lighter—if we want to use the Darken blend mode. We could always try some other blend modes, but for the sake of argument, let's stick with Darken for now.

So tell me, detectives. How could I make the texture darker or the photo lighter? Think through the possibilities and then start with the easiest solution that doesn't trash the photo. And, if possible, use a non destructive method so you have the option to change your mind.

Have you thought through some possibilities? Here's what I came up with:

Levels Adjustment–Darker

I could make the texture darker by using a Levels adjustment layer on the texture. If I clip it to the texture layer by choosing Layer > Create Clipping Mask, it will affect only the texture layer. But I find that I don't really like the darker texture. So I'll drag the adjustment layer to the trash.

Auto Color

I could use Auto Color to adjust the white balance of the photo. I'll click on the photo layer and duplicate it by pressing Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J). Then I'll press Ctrl Shift B (Mac: Cmd Shift B), which is the shortcut for Auto Color. That's an improvement. Now I can see more of the texture, but there are still some areas where the texture doesn't show up.

Levels Adjustment–Lighter

Another option is to use a Levels adjustment layer to lighten the photo, but anything I try to do with Levels ends up trashing my photo. So even though this works—I can now see the texture—it isn't a good solution for me. Again, I'll just drag the adjustment layer to the trash.

Lighten with the Dodge Tool

How else could I lighten the layer below? What about the Dodge tool? The Dodge tool lightens the pixels you brush over, and allows you to choose where to lighten the layer.

To make this non-destructive, I would click on the original layer and press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the layer.

- Get the Dodge tool.
- In Tool Options, select a large soft brush from the Brush Preset Picker. The Range should be Midtones and the Exposure should be around 50% for this particular photo—it will vary depending on your photo. Brush to lighten the layer where you want the texture to show through. And that works like a charm.

What if I wanted the texture to show in an area that was really dark—like some of the roses?

- Click on the Create a New Layer icon and make sure the new layer is directly below the texture layer.
- Get the Brush tool. In Tool Options choose an appropriate brush. Mode should be Normal and Opacity 100%. (In Photoshop Flow should also be 100%.)
- Make sure the Foreground Color Chip is white, which you can get by pressing the letter D and then the letter X.
- Paint over the rose and the texture will show up and cover the area.

Here's how it looks after I've added a layer mask on the texture layer and used the Brush tool to paint with black over the area I don't want the texture to show, which is on the white pitcher.

The point of this video is that blend modes don't always work the way you want them to on the first try, but don't give up. Put on your thinking cap, and come up with solutions!