

Art of Blending | Module 2

Video 02-01 White Photo Shoot

White is magical. Whether it's a snowy hillside, a cloudy sky, or your favorite crockery, you can create some really special effects with white.

We don't always have access to a cloudy sky or snowy hillside, but we can create our own photo shoot with white as the background, so let's go over how to do that.

It's really quite simple. All you need is a table, a white or cream colored sheet or wall, and, if you use a sheet, a way to prop up the sheet.

Here I set up a small table outside near the fence and then draped the sheet over the fence and table. If you don't have a white sheet, check for one at a second hand store. It comes in handy for a lot of photo shoots, so it would be a good investment. Alternately, you could borrow one from a friend for this occasion.

And there's one more thing—you need good lighting. No dappled sunlight or bright sun. A cloudy day is perfect, but, if the weather doesn't cooperate, make sure you're completely in the shade.

If it's too bright or dappled outside, try inside. Find a spot near a north facing window, if possible. Here I draped my white sheet over the back of the couch and onto the floor in front of a sliding glass door.

You can see my floor and exercise ball on the left, but I would crop that out, of course. Also, notice the shadows. There are two shadows, one from the window that goes one direction and a shadow from my living room light that goes another direction. The direction doesn't matter too much, but the key is that the shadows are light and blurry because of the diffuse light. Normally it's best not to have shadows that are dark or sharp.

Favorite Objects

So what are we going to shoot on this white sheet or against a white wall? Well, I have a little project in mind that I'm working on, and if you want to, you can join me, or you can choose another idea to focus on as long as it involves white as part of your image, because that's what we're practicing this week.

I'm working on a little book called *A Few of My Favorite Things*, harking back, of course, to that famous song sung by Maria to the Von Trapp children on a stormy night.

My idea is to make the book small, 8x8 inches or smaller, and only put one photograph per page, but to have every photo be of something that I love, and to use blending to turn it into a piece of art that grabs me emotionally when I see it!

For example, I love books. I love them not only because of the stories they tell, but I love the feel of them in my hand, and the smell of the binding glue, and old books are especially beautiful and interesting to look at, so I took this photo of a book against a white sheet and turned it into a piece of art.

I also love to dance, so I took a photo of a pair of dance shoes. After blending, I added my favorite quote about dancing, and that may be something you want to do as well. It's totally up to you.

Here, for example, I took a photo against the white sheet of my daughter Allison holding a vase of flowers. Here's my final blending photo, where I cloned a few flowers to fill them in, did my blending, and then added a tag that says, "Remember to smell the roses."

These last two examples are fairly subtle, but you can also get more aggressive with your blending. Here's my original garden gloves photo, and here's my finished image, which I accomplished with blend modes.

I'll explain how I blend with white in the next two videos, and I'll provide the photos I use for blending so you can practice, with them if you wish, but for the assignment for this lesson, I want you to use your own photo. You'll need to locate photos with white or, if you don't have any, you'll need to photograph some favorite objects using a white or cream background.

I hope you have as much fun photographing your favorite things as I did!

Video 02-02: Blending with White, Part 1

Now that we have some photos, it's time to experiment blending with white. In this video we'll use blending to keep the white area light but add some interesting texture to make it more artistic. To do that we'll use the Blend Mode called Darken.

The Darken blend mode looks at the layer below and decides which areas are darker or lighter. If the layer below is darker, nothing happens. The pixels stay the same. If the layer below is lighter, then the blended layer will show through. It will "Darken" the layer below.

To demonstrate, I'll use a photo of a whimsical 3-piece wooden set that includes a piano, a piano bench, and a rabbit. This was a gift from a friend, and it's on my Favorite Things list. The photo was taken on a white sheet, but the white balance was not perfect, so it has a bluish tint.

In both Photoshop and Photoshop Elements you can often fix a white balance problem with a simple shortcut. I'll press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the layer and press Ctrl Shift B (Mac: Cmd Shift B) to run the Auto Color command, and that looks better.

One of the ways I keep track of what I've done is to rename the layers, so I'll double click on the name and change it to Auto Color. Press Enter to commit the change.

Now let's look at the light and dark areas of this photo. It's pretty obvious isn't it? The sheet and keyboard keys are light and the rest is dark, though the shadow is somewhere in between. If I want the background to stay light AND I want the blended texture to stay off of my object, I'll need to choose light texture overlays, so that's what I did. I scrolled through the textures and noted which ones were light enough and also had a texture I thought might be interesting for this particular photo. Here are the textures from our class collection that I thought would fit the bill.

Slide Show of light textures

The first texture I decided to use was paper-cardboard-LSattgast-05

How did I know which one to choose, you may ask? I first narrowed it down to the kind of texture I needed—a light colored texture—and then I just scrolled through them looking for something that would go with my photo. Sometimes you'll know what kind of texture you're after, such as wood, or a wall, or paint, etc., and other times you won't have any idea. You're just scanning through the textures looking for something that might work.

So let's try this on our photo. When I change the blend mode to Darken, all the areas darker than the sheet show the texture—not in a blended way, though. The pixels look like they would in the Normal mode, except they're only visible if the pixels on the layer below are lighter.

Let's look at several other possibilities. This is paper-cardboard-LSattgast-01. When I change it to darken, here's what I get. Notice the shadow under the objects don't get changed because they're a little darker. It looks kind of blocky, so when that happens, I add a layer mask and use a soft brush at around 30% opacity to soften the edges.

If I want this texture a little lighter I can click on the layer thumbnail to activate it and press Ctrl L (Mac: Cmd L) to get Levels. Now I can move the right slider a little to the left to brighten the overlay.

Here's another light texture possibility: paint-LSattgast-12. I can copy the layer mask from the layer below to soften the drop shadow.

This one is paint-LSattgast-05. I like the feel of this one.

And finally, I used paper-cardboard-LSattgast-06 and blurred it a little—I can't even remember how much Gaussian Blur I used, maybe a 10 pixel blur. It looks like way too much texture at 100% opacity, but was kind of cool at a low opacity like 3%.

Now it's a matter of deciding which single overlay to use or whether to use a combination. If you find one you love, you can stick with that one. If you have more time, you can experiment with combinations, because remember, the darkening is affected by whatever is below. If you have other overlays below, that will affect the darkening as much as the original image.

Final Overlay Choices

I used five different overlays, all in the Darken mode, at various opacities:

paper-cardboard-LSattgast-05	100%
paper-cardboard-LSattgast-01	40%
paint-LSattgast-12	30%
paint-LSattgast-05	100%
paper-cardboard-LSattgast-06	3%

Remember to use your keyboard shortcuts for layer opacity to make it fast and easy to try out different possibilities.

Once you're done with the Darken overlays, you can evaluate your photo to see if you want to do anything else. You can use other overlays and blend modes, if you wish. I did several more things with mine:

- I thought the objects were a little dark, so I used a light colored Monaco tile overlay (tile-Monaco-LSattgast-01) and changed the blend mode to Soft Light. This made the light area of my photo a little too light, so I used a layer mask to erase the effect from everything but the objects.
- I also added a very light musical pattern because of the piano. This is a pattern I created for the free Little Known Scrapbooking Secrets Mini Class.
- Then I added a ray of light that I created with the Custom Shape tool. It's at 40% opacity, so it's just a subtle effect.
- I added a distressed stroke outline. These are not things I'll be teaching you how to do, since our topic is blend modes, but I just wanted to show you how I finished this up for my Favorite Things album.
- The last thing I did, though, was add one more blending layer, wood-LSattgast-02, changed the blend mode to Color Burn, and masked away most of the effect so that it's mostly around the edges. I also reduced the opacity to 50%. I just felt it needed a bit more warmth and character, which this last layer added.

Please don't feel like you must add as many layers as I have. Often one layer will do the trick for the Darken mode, and then you can add other blend modes, if you feel the need for anything else.

So that's Part 1 of how to use the Darken Blend Mode to create wonderful effects on a white background!

Overlays Used for Whimsical Rabbit

paper-cardboard-LSattgast-05	paper-cardboard-LSattgast-06
paper-cardboard-LSattgast-01	tile-Monaco-LSattgast-01
paint-LSattgast-12	wood-LSattgast-02
paint-LSattgast-05	

Video 02-03 Blending With White, Part 2

In Part 1 of this lesson we looked at blending light colored textures onto a photo with a white background. In Part 2 we'll still be using photos with a white background, but this time we'll blend with dark textures.

There are two main differences. The dark textures usually trash the object, so it's usually best to select the object in your photo and copy it to a new layer. The second difference is that instead of using the Darken blend mode, we'll be using Color Burn.

First let's talk about selecting. There are many ways to select an object, but since the subject of this class is not about selecting, I'm just going to give you a rudimentary demonstration.

- Press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the layer.
- Use the Quick Selection tool to make your initial selection. This tool will be in different locations in different versions of Photoshop Elements. Having a white background and a hard edge like this shell does make selecting objects easier.

Once you make your initial selection, you can fine tune it with any other appropriate selection tool.

- Right click (Mac: Ctrl click) on the selection outline and choose Feather. Enter .5 pixels and click OK.
- Click on the Add Layer Mask icon.
- Click on the original photo layer to select it.

Choose Texture Overlays

- Go through your textures and choose dark textures that you think might look good with your object. Here are my choices.

Slide Show (see video)

Apply a Texture

- Move a texture onto your document above the background layer and below the selected object. I used wood-LSattgast-22. Resize, if necessary.
- Change the blend mode to Color Burn.
- If the effect isn't quite enough, press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the layer, and adjust the opacity as needed to create the look you want. (I used 40%.) Here's how it looks without the selected object on top.
- If the shadow is too strong, click on the Create a New Layer icon and drag the new layer below the texture overlays.
- Get the Brush tool. Press the letter D and then the letter X to get white for the Foreground color. In Tool Options, choose a soft brush at 10% opacity. Mode should be normal. Paint over the shadow area to make it less intense.

Texture Example 2

Here is another example of a texture overlay in the Color Burn Mode. This texture is called dark-metal-LSattgast-02.

If you look at the list of blend modes, all the modes in the second group darken your image in some way. That's why they're grouped together. Multiply just makes your image darker, but Color Burn makes it darker and makes the color more intense. It also shows through to the background better Multiply does, which I'll demonstrate with a different photo.

I did add another texture (wood-LSattgast-16) and simply lowered the opacity to 30% without changing the blend mode.

Texture Example 3

The third texture I tried was my favorite (wall-LSattgast-07). I used Color Burn at 100% for the first one and then duplicated it and reduced the opacity to 50%. I love how the texture seems like the foam from the sea!

Here's something I often do if I want to make some slight adjustments. I create a merged layer by pressing Ctrl Alt Shift E (Mac: Cmd Opt Shift E), and then I can make any adjustment I want. In this case I'll change the blend mode to Soft Light to add contrast to the image, and I'll reduce the opacity to 50%

Here it is after I added a frame and compass. Now let me show you some other examples.

Photo Example 2

Here's a pineapple photo and here's the texture I used with it: wood-LSattgast-01. I'll change this to Color Burn and duplicate the layer. I'll bring the opacity down to 40%.

The textures I used in this photo became a little too grungy after using Color Burn, so I added a layer of flat color above them and changed the mode to Color Burn. By adjusting the opacity (60%) I can control how much of the grunge stands out, but I'm still able to see the outline of the table and the folds of the sheet.

If the pineapple is a little too dark, I can add a Levels adjustment layer and move the sliders as needed. I can even clip it to the pineapple layer so it only shows up on the pineapple by choosing Layer > Create Clipping Mask.

Photo Example 3

In this example I used a clear vase. To make the vase appear to be transparent, I used a layer mask to brush away part of the vase.

Think like a detective and figure out what the photo needs. This may require creating a merged copy and applying a bit more blending, but every photo is so individual that I can't tell you in advance what your particular photo will need.

So now you have two possibilities for practicing blending, one with a light texture and one with a dark texture. Try at least one for this lesson, and if you have time, do both. You'll learn a lot about the Darken and Color Burn blend modes in the process!

Video 02-04 Darken and Lighten

We've already looked at the Darken blend mode as a way to easily fill a white background, but in this video we'll use it to create some fun grunge.

I've added a file called scratches-LSattgast-01, and the first thing I want to do is to create a lot of contrast, to make this much more black and white.

- Desaturate the image first by pressing Ctrl U (Mac: Cmd U) to get the Hue/Saturation dialog box. Move the Saturation slider all the way to the left. Click OK.
- Press Ctrl L (Mac: Cmd L) to get the Levels dialog box.
- Move the right and left sliders under the histogram toward the center and click OK when you're satisfied.

Now you can use a blend mode to get rid of the black and keep the white. It's a blend mode that's the exact opposite of Darken, which is Lighten. Lighten drops out black and keeps the light.

Here's another document that has black scratches (scratches-LSattgast-03). Let's see how we can use these scratches on this document.

- Press Ctrl U (Mac: Cmd U) to get the Hue/Saturation dialog box and move the Saturation slider all the way to the left. Click OK.
- Press Ctrl L (Mac: Cmd L) to get the Levels dialog box and move the sliders toward the center to increase the contrast until you have black grunge on a white background. This would work great with the Darken mode, but I happen to want white scratches.
- If you ever want the scratches in the opposite color you can invert the colors by pressing Ctrl I (Mac: Cmd I).

- Now you can change the mode to Lighten, and there you have white scratches without the black.

So remember to use the Darken and Lighten modes for grunge. Darken reveals the dark and hides white. Lighten reveals white (or you can think of it as light) and hides the dark.