

Art of Blending | Module 10

Video 10-01 Practical Blending Tips

Blending to create an artistic result may not be something you do every time you scrapbook, but if you're like me, you'll find yourself using blending more and more to create an effect you want, no matter what you're doing with Photoshop or Photoshop Elements. In all honesty, I use blending the most for fixing photographs to help them look their best, whether or not I apply other more artistic blending techniques.

So, in this video I want to run through some of the ways you can use blending to fix or enhance photos, including a great tip to lower your file size and add versatility.

I'll demonstrate on this photo of my cat Sylvester. He's sitting next to a window, so the right side of his face is a little blown out, and his right eye has a milky glaze over it because of the light. In the lower right corner of the photo, his fur looks mostly brown. He does have a little bit of brown fur, but the light accentuates it more than it should.

Traditional Blending

To start fixing this photo the traditional way:

- Press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the photo.
- Change the blend mode to Multiply.
- Press Alt (Mac: Opt) and click on the Add Layer Mask icon to get a black mask.
- Get the Brush tool. In Tool Options choose an appropriate brush from the Brush Picker. The mode should be Normal, and the Opacity around 30%.
- Brush over the image where you want it to be darker.
- In Tool Options, change the brush opacity to 100%, reduce the size of your brush, and brush over the right eye to darken it.
- Although this works great, having a second photo layer in the Layers panel will add more file size to your image.

Adjustment Layer Blending

Instead, consider using an adjustment layer to do the same thing for a lot less file size.

- I'll hide the blended layer by clicking the visibility icon, and click on the original photo to make it the active layer.
- On the Layers panel, click on the Adjustment Layer icon and choose Levels from the menu. Actually, any adjustment layer that doesn't produce an immediate effect will work fine, but Levels is a good choice. Don't, however, make any changes to the adjustment layer.
- Change the blend mode to Multiply and you get the exact same effect as you got by duplicating the layer and changing it to Multiply.
- The adjustment layer already has a mask, so depending on the photo, you can use it as is, or you can fill it with black, which is what I'll do using the Fill shortcut of Ctrl Backspace (Mac: Cmd Delete) to fill with the Background color.
- Use the Brush tool just like before to brush in the effect you want. However, since I already have a layer mask, I'll press Alt (Mac: Opt) and click and drag the mask from the hidden layer to this one, and I'll click OK to the dialog box. Copying a mask in Photoshop Elements is a little different, so you would need to use the techniques I described in an earlier video.

If you compare the two results, they're identical, but if I save two copies of this file, one using the traditional method that duplicates the photo layer, and the other using the adjustment layer method, the adjustment layer method would win the file size contest by saving me almost 10 MB of file size. The adjustment layer version was 18.7 MB while the traditional way was 27.2 MB. And if you add more than one blended layer, that amount of saving begins to really add up. So consider using an adjustment layer whenever you can. I'll simply delete the duplicate layer.

Color Blend Mode

Another way I often use blend modes for photos is to change the color. Notice how the right eye has much more teal in it than the left eye—they don't match well because of the uneven lighting. To make the colors match, I can use the Color blend mode.

- Click on the original photo layer.
- Click on the Foreground Color Chip. Use your cursor to sample the correct color from another part of the image, in my case, from the left eye, and click OK.
- Get the Brush tool. In Tool Options, change the blend mode to Color and the opacity to 50%.
- Brush over the right eye to change the color. You may also want to brush some over the left eye.
- If you don't want to brush directly on the image, you can create a new blank layer and change the blend mode to Color. Painting with the color you want on a layer set to Color will have the same effect as painting directly on the photo with a brush that is set to Color in Tool Options.

Linear Burn Blend Mode

Let's do one more thing to this image.

- To make the eyes stand out a bit more, Create another Levels adjustment layer, or simply press Alt (Mac: Opt) and click and drag to duplicate the first adjustment layer.
- Fill the mask with black to hide the effect.
- Change the blend mode to Linear Burn.
- Reduce the opacity of your brush to 10% and make sure the Mode is Normal.
- Paint in some of the Linear Burn effect until it looks good to you.

I started out with a good image, but using blend modes made a huge difference. Two of my top blend modes for making adjustments are Multiply to make an image darker and Screen to make the image lighter.

Soft Light and Overlay

Two of my other favorite blend modes for fixing photos are Soft Light and Overlay. So many photos don't have good contrast, and this is such an easy way to give good contrast.

Let's try it on this photo of art that I took in the Vatican.

- Create a neutral adjustment layer with no changes. I used Levels.
- Change the blend mode to Soft Light at 100% opacity.
- This makes the image a little dark, so press Alt (Mac: Opt) and click and drag out a duplicate of the adjustment layer above the original.
- Change the blend mode to Screen. Using these two blend modes transforms this photo into what I actually remember seeing at the Vatican.

I was able to create a scrapbook page filled with art by using this technique on the photos. This gold border on my page was created from a photo. It wasn't originally yellow, but I was able to change the color using blend modes. I didn't keep notes of exactly how I adjusted this, so I can't give you that information.

So whether you apply blending to a photo to make it look better, or to a scrapbook page to add an effect you want, you're going to use the knowledge you've gained in this class to know how to go about doing it!

Video 10-02 Vintage Blending

As I'm sure you've already figured out, blending is perfect for a vintage look. This page contains lots of blending. If I hide all the blending, here's how it looks. Rather pale and uninteresting, isn't it?! You already know enough to create a vintage look, but let me walk you through what I've done for this page to spark ideas for you.

- I took a flower from Beautiful You by Kristin Cronin-Barow, duplicated it, and changed the blend mode to Linear Burn at 70% opacity.
- The leaves are from AlphabetSoup by Digilicious. I duplicated all the leaves and changed the blend mode to Soft Light at 100% opacity.
- I duplicated the ribbon from the kit Autumn Flowers by Dana Zarling and changed the blend mode to Color Burn at 80% opacity.
- Here's a ticket from the kit Big Ideas by One Little Bird. I clipped the texture bark-LSattgast-06 to it and changed the blend mode to Color Burn at 50% opacity.
- The frame and background paper are by Joanne Brisebois, and I didn't actually have to do anything to that.

Old Post Card Template

For the three photo post cards I used a template I created called Old-Post-Card-template-LSattgast.psd that you'll find in your class photo download for this lesson. Let me give you a closer look at the template.

Here's the background of the template. You may recognize this from the demo photo I gave you when I taught how to square up textures. It made a beautiful vintage looking background for my old post card. You could use just this part of the post card for any number of things.

The next layer up is a stroke outline that has a rounder corner at the top than at the bottom. Above that is a clipping mask that also doubles as a blending overlay. I'll show you how that works in just a moment.

Here I've clipped a photo to the clipping mask, but the photo was taken recently and doesn't match the vintage look, so let's change that. I duplicated the clipping mask/overlay layer, placed it above the photo, and changed the blend mode to Multiply at 100% opacity. I did mask away a little of the effect over her face.

I felt like the post card needed something else, so I added one of our class textures, fabric-chenille-LSattgast-01. The blend mode is Color Burn at 100% opacity.

I thought scratches would look great on this vintage post card, so I used the texture I created in the lesson called Texture Shortcut, where I took some blended textures and quickly created a new texture from them. I can tell that particular texture is going to be one of my favorites!

And finally, her face still seemed a little dark, so I added a Levels adjustment layer with most of it masked away. I really just wanted to illuminate her face.

All that was left to do was add a title, which I distressed using "Blend If" in Photoshop, but Photoshop Elements users could easily use a layer mask to accomplish a similar look. The font I used is called Orator Std. If you don't have that font, your computer will substitute another font, or you can choose a new font yourself.

By the way, I could make this even grungier and older looking, but this gives it a vintage look without being too destructive of the photo!

Vintage Backgrounds

Another place you can apply your blending skills to get a vintage look is with scrapbook papers. Either blend two or more scrapbook papers together to get a vintage look or simply create your own paper. This is the texture I created for one of my texture creation demo videos in a previous lesson.

I also created this texture that you have in your Art of Blending Textures folder. It works great for vintage. This is the texture I got from my mother's wooden clipboard, but I blended other textures with it to come up with the final look.

Or do what I did here for this page about my mother's first time skiing on Mt. Rainier. I had a photo of Mt. Rainier that my son took when he climbed it. It was perfect for my layout—all it needed was a little blending to make it suitably vintage.

So if you ever need vintage, blend modes are your best friends!

Video 10-03 More About Sketches

When you create sketches from photos to use with blending, it helps to have an ideal photo with nice clean sharp edges that the Find Edges filter can work with, but that won't always happen. In this video we'll go over some ways you can work with a less than ideal photo to overcome problems.

I'll go through the process of creating a line drawing with this photo and then share some tips on how to make it better.

Creating a Sketch

- In the Layers panel, click on the Adjustment Layer icon and choose Hue/Saturation.
- Move the Saturation slider all the way to the left to turn the photo into a grayscale image.
- Click on the Adjustment layer icon again and choose Levels.
- Move the right and left sliders under the Histogram toward the center as needed to create a contrasty image. I used Input Levels from left to right of 3, 1.00, and 200.
- Press Ctrl Alt Shift E (Mac: Cmd Opt Shift E) to create a merged layer.
- Choose Filter > Stylize > Find Edges.

Improve the Sketch

This looks pretty good, but we can improve it:

- Create a new Levels adjustment layer and change the blend mode to Multiply. It may help the image to move the right histogram slider to the left slightly. I moved mine to 233. This makes the light gray areas whiter.
- Get the Brush tool. In Tool Options choose an appropriate soft brush. Mode should be normal and Opacity (Photoshop: and Fill) should be 100%.
- Press the letter D and then the letter X to get black for the Foreground Color Chip.
- Brush away any areas you don't want to show (left cheek, eyelid, and forehead).
- Press Alt (Mac: Opt) and in the Layers panel click on the top Levels layer and drag up to create a copy.
- Press D to reset the Color Chips.
- Press Ctrl Backspace (Mac: Cmd Delete) to fill the mask with black.
- Paint with white on the mask to paint in areas that need to be darker.
- Press Ctrl Alt Shift E (Mac: Cmd Opt Shift E) to create a merged layer.
- Press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the layer.
- Press Alt (Mac: Opt) and click on the Add Layer Mask icon to hide this layer temporarily.
- Click on the merged layer below the hidden layer.
- In the Menu Bar choose Filter > Blur > Surface Blur. Use a Radius of 15 and a Threshold of 15. Click OK.
- Click on the top merged layer and click on the black mask to activate it.
- Brush with white to bring back any detail you want. I brought back some hair detail.
- Press Ctrl Alt Shift E (Mac: Cmd Opt Shift E) to create a merged layer.

Fill in Missing Detail

Now we want to fill in some missing details. This image is missing detail in the right eyelashes and eyebrow, so to fix that, I can copy them from the left side and move them to the right. Here's how:

- Get the Lasso tool.
- In Tool Options, click on the Add to Selection icon. Enter a Feather value of 3. Leave Anti-Aliased checked.
- Click and drag a selection outline around the left eyelashes leaving a little bit of space around them for the feathering.
- Press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to copy the selection to a new layer.
- Press Ctrl T (Mac: Cmd T) to get Transform options. Move the eyelashes over the right eye. Resize as needed. It helps to press the Ctrl key (Mac: Cmd key) so you can move a corner separately until the eyelashes line up. Double click inside the outline to commit the change.
- Click on the Add Layer Mask icon, get the Brush tool, make sure the Foreground color is black, and brush away any edges you don't want to show. When you're satisfied, press Ctrl E (Mac: Cmd E) to merge down.
- Follow similar steps to copy and resize part of the left eyebrow to the right.
- Lower the opacity of the right eyebrow slightly. (I used 80%)
- When you're satisfied, press Ctrl E (Mac: Cmd E) to merge down.
- Be sure to return the Lasso tool Feather value to 0 so you're not surprised the next time you use it.

Even Out the Hair

Because some of the hair had more detail, it turned out darker. To even out the hair, here's what I did:

- Press the Ctrl key (Mac: Cmd key) and, in the Layers panel, click on the Create New Layer icon to put a blank layer below the merged layer.
- Press D to reset the Color Chips.
- Press Ctrl Backspace (Mac: Cmd Delete) to fill the new layer with white.
- Click on the top merged layer.
- Click on the Add Layer Mask icon.
- Get the Brush tool and select a soft brush. In Tool Options the Mode should be normal and the Opacity should be around 20%. On the layer mask, brush over the darker hair with a black brush to hide some of the layer and reveal the white layer below.
- When you're satisfied, press Ctrl Alt Shift E (Mac: Cmd Opt Shift E) to create a merged layer.

You can leave the photo as is, or you can use it for blending.

Darker Skin Tones

When the skin of your subject is darker, you'll need to tweak some of the settings. I did three things differently with this image:

- First, I made it much more contrasty. I did that after I made my first merged copy by changing the blend mode of the merged copy to Screen and using Levels to crank up the contrast even more. Then I create a new merged layer before I ran the Find Edges filter.
- Secondly, I changed the Surface Blur Threshold setting to 30 instead of 15, but I left the Radius the same.
- And thirdly, I made an additional merged copy and pressed Ctrl I (Mac: Cmd I) to invert it. This made the lines white and everything else black. I added a black layer mask and painted with white to bring back her wonderful black hair with white highlights and also to paint in some missing lines in her eyes.

If I zoom in close, and hide the inverted layer, you can see that some of the detail is missing in her eyes, so I manually painted them in from the inverted layer.

Unfortunately, this is not an image I have permission to share, so you won't find it in the class practice photos, but if you have one of your own, you can try this out.

Line drawings are really fun to use in blending, which is why I wanted to give you a few extra tips on how to make them really shine!

Video 10-04 Get Inspired

Blend modes have become indispensable for me. I use them for fixing photos, for blending photos, and for creating artistic effects. I mostly use them for scrapbooking, but blending fits with just about any digital project.

I've had four main goals for you in The Art of Blending class:

- To inspire you, because you'll never try something new unless you're inspired.
- To teach you the technical blending skills you need to know
- To demonstrate how versatile blend modes are. They can be as simple or complex as you want to make them to achieve the look you want.
- And finally to give you a gentle push beyond your customary habits and boundaries. My hope is that you'll take the things you've learned in this class and routinely apply them to your projects. So let's take a final look at a few of my scrapbook pages that use The Art of Blending techniques.

Forty-Nine Palms

On this page about a hike to an oasis, I blended a little bit of grunge texture over the page. You can especially see it on the sky. And then I added a masked edge technique to my entire scrapbook page. For my edge I used the texture wood-LSattgast-04.png. If you'll recall, in the lessons about edges, I taught how to copy an image into a layer mask and adjust it to create an edge.

Venice Market

My next page is about the marketplace in Venice. I clipped the photo to a layer mask, but the rest of it is mostly about blending, even though it's very subtle. I used edge-LSattgast-01.jpg from the ArtOfBlending-Edges folder to create this border edge, and then I added various elements that I blended into the page. I also used a traditional non-blended element, the curled cord, so it's fine to have a combination of blended and traditional.

Venice Window

Here's a page where I used Photoshop filters to create a line drawing from the photo. My background is the texture wood-LSattgast-02. I added a Hue/Saturation layer to slightly modify the color. I wanted to add a little more red to go with the bricks in the photo, and then I added Monaco Tile 01 and changed the blend mode to Color Burn at 50%. That added this wonderful crack.

Here's the original line drawing, which I blended into the background using Multiply at 100%. Above that is a clipping mask by Susie Roberts, and finally the photo, which is clipped to the mask. It's a very simple layout, but with the blended background, the photo clipping mask, and a little tag with a custom drop shadow, it feels like a piece of art, rather than just an ordinary photo.

Happy

This page was really simple and fast to create because I used one kit, ArtPlay Palette Family by Anna Aspnes.

- I used a simple background paper and added a dotted frame.
- The next paper provided most of the page design.
- I blended my line drawing into the page by changing the blend mode to Multiply at 100% opacity.
- I added the photo and frame. On the photo added a layer mask and used a gradient to achieve the effect of the photo fading away on the right.

- And finally, I added a cluster from the same kit and word art from the kit.

Dream Takes Flight

The last page I'll show you also uses a line drawing. Almost everything on this page is blended. Let me show you how I put it together from the background up.

- I blended two papers together, Country Cottage paper 1 by Gina Miller and paper 7 from It's A Man's World by Manuela Zimmerman.
- I cloned a little of the white out in the upper left corner because of a blending I did later on, which I'll show you in just a minute.
- I used part of paper #7 from Country Cottage by Gina Miller. Here I used a layer mask to hide all but a portion of the paper design.
- I added my line drawing set to Color Burn at 100% opacity, and then duplicated the layer to increase the visibility.
- Then I began to add elements:

Two coffee stains that I created.

Several items from ArtPlay Palette Family by Anna Aspnes:

A border set to Color Burn at 100%

An edge overlay set to Soft Light at 100%

Two word transfers set to Normal

Several items from Perfect Harmony by digilicious:

Keyboard— I used the Shear filter to curve it and changed the blend mode to Multiply at 100%

Musical notes set to Color Burn at 40% and layer masks to blend them in.

Flower set to Hard Light at 100%

Paint 02 set to Overlay at 100%

Title: Fonts are Pablo and Hero Light

Butterflies from Sweet Escape by Kristin Cronin-Barrow. I used a Color Burn blend mode on them, and they're set to different opacities.

Paper from Classic Linens Yuletide by Susie Roberts as an overlay set to Color Burn at 40% and partially concealed with a layer mask.

Tile-Monaco-LSattgast-04 set to Color Burn at 100%

Rose from the Perfect Harmony kit by digilicious

Levels Adjustment layer to give the entire page more contrast between light and dark.

This page was really fun to create. I put on some favorite energetic music and just began to try things out. For these kinds of artistic blended layouts, you just have to let go and have fun with it. Try out anything that comes to mind. It really gets you working outside the box!

So, in conclusion, let me repeat the goals I have for you in this class:

- I hope you've been inspired watching these lessons!
- I've given you the technical skills, so it's just a matter of practicing them.
- By now you should know that often an artistic effect can be quite simple, but, if you desire, you can also combine many layers to get a more complex artistic look.
- And, finally, I hope that you'll take the things you've learned in this class and apply them routinely to your photos and digital projects!

It's been my great pleasure to share with you in this adventuresome journey!