

FIX PHOTOS FAST



with
ACTIONS



By Linda Sattgast

Fix Photos Fast! Sharp & Smooth Actions—Photoshop Elements

Sharp & Smooth 01: Brush Away Blemishes

Photos used in this lesson:

sharp-smooth-01-blemishes.jpg

sharp-smooth-01-wrinkles.jpg

Blemishes, such as facial acne, are usually temporary, which is why they are especially onerous on senior photos. Who wants to look back on their senior photos and see acne that no longer exists?

If there are one or two blemishes, the Spot Healing Brush takes care of them quickly, and I usually use the Spot Healing Brush on large spots, but when you have multiple spots, healing each one can get rather tedious, so instead I use the Brush Away Blemishes action.

- To demo I used the image sharp-smooth-01-blemishes.jpg from the images-05-sharp-smooth folder in your class downloads.
- Run the Brush Away Blemishes action.
- A dialog box tells you to adjust the Radius slider until the blemishes disappear. You don't want to go any further to the right than you have to—go just until you can no longer distinguish any spots and click OK.
- You'll get another dialog box that tells you to brush on the face to get rid of the spots.
- In Tool Options, make sure the Mode of your brush is Normal and the Opacity and Flow are 100%. Choose a soft round brush from the Brush Picker. If you don't see a soft round brush, open the flyout menu and choose Reset Brushes.
- Brush over the spots. This quickly removes only the spots without you having to be so careful. Avoid any dark areas you don't want erase, such as facial hair.



You can use this action to soften wrinkles, which I demonstrated with the photo:

sharp-smooth-01-wrinkles.jpg.

Reduce the opacity of your brush to around 30% and brush over wrinkles and lines, but don't overdo it, or it will look really fake!



Sharp & Smooth 02 Reduce Noise

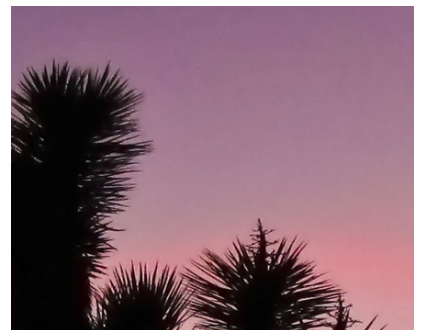
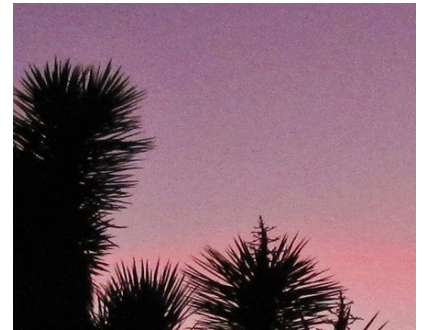
Photos used in this lesson:

sharp-smooth-02-noise-1.jpg

sharp-smooth-02-noise-2.jpg

Digital noise is often a problem with broad areas of flat color, such as the sky. I used the photo called sharp-smooth-02-noise-1.jpg to demonstrate.

- When you see digital noise, run one of the Reduce Noise actions. You'll usually need to run the Reduce Noise: maximum action, because the Noise filter isn't very strong, even though it's set to the maximum Strength setting in the filter dialog box. In fact, I've been frustrated with the results of this filter for many years, which is why I sought out an alternative, which I demonstrate in the next lesson.
- If it doesn't fully take care of the noise problem, run it again.



Next I showed you a more difficult photo. You can expect lots of digital noise when you lighten a really dark photo. This photo, is called sharp-smooth-02-noise-2.jpg. I lightened it up using the Levels and Screen actions, and I've given you the lightened version in your Images-05-sharp-smooth folder.

If you zoom in to 100%, you can really see the noise.

- Run the Reduce Noise-maximum action.
- Run the Reduce Noise-maximum action again.
- Click on the Post Noise Sharpen action, and run it as well. That will add back a little bit of sharpness, but not much. There's still so much noise that we don't want to sharpen it with a regular sharpen action, or it will look worse.

- One little trick is to use the Contrast action to make the image look a little sharper.
- If you bring the photo to a 33.33% viewing size, you won't see all the tiny imperfections you can see at a 100% viewing size. The 33.33% viewing size is approximately the size the photo will be when it's printed, and the photo does look acceptable. It will never be great, but it's a lot better than the original photo!

(These photos are displayed after the next lesson.)

Sharp & Smooth 03 Noiseware (Plugin)

Photos used in this lesson:

sharp-smooth-02-noise-1.jpg

sharp-smooth-01-wrinkles.jpg

sharp-smooth-02-noise-2.jpg

As I mentioned in the video on reducing noise, the noise reduction filters in Photoshop Elements work tolerably at best, so in this video I demonstrated the 3rd party plugin I use to reduce noise. It's called Noiseware, and I was introduced to it by Photoshop guru, Dave Cross, years ago. I had just accidentally shot a series of portraits with the ISO setting on my digital camera way too high, which created terrible noise on every one of the photos, so I asked Dave what I could do about it, because Photoshop's Noise filter was really inadequate for the job. That's when he told me about Noiseware and said it had saved his bacon more than once.

After you install Noiseware, you can access it from the Filter menu. The company that makes Noiseware is called Imagenomic, so that name will be added at the bottom of the Filter menu. Hover over Imagenomic to see the Noiseware option.

This gives you a dialog box where you can click on the image to see the original photo, and it gives you lots of controls to adjust, but I have a confession to make. I never use the dialog box.

In the earlier days of digital photography, my camera model introduced noise into almost every photo I took. I was using Noiseware so often that I finally made an action for it, and I still use that action, and those settings, to this very day.

The way I tweak the result is by running the action again if it isn't enough, or by reducing the opacity of the layer if the effect is too much.

I used Noiseware on three photos from prior lessons, starting with:

sharp-smooth-02-noise-1.jpg.

- Click the play button.
- When the dialog box comes up, it will tell you to brush over areas you don't want affected by the noise reduction, if you need to. Click Continue. Noiseware did a great job of getting rid of the noise.

Next I used Noiseware on the image sharp-smooth-01-wrinkles.jpg. With photos of people that aren't too noisy, I often brush away the effect of noise reduction over areas that should be sharp, such as the eyes and mouth, etc. This makes the skin look smoother and more flattering, but the image still looks sharp.

The last photo I demonstrated was sharp-smooth-02-noise-2.jpg. This image was so bad that I didn't brush away any of the noise reduction effect. The image definitely looked a little soft after running Noiseware, but when I ran some of the sharpening actions in this set, it looked much better. We'll be discussing the sharpen actions in the next few videos.

Now let's compare this result with the photo we did using Photoshop's Reduce Noise filter in the last lesson.



Original Photo



Lightening the Photo
Produced Noise



Post Noise Filter Action



Post Noiseware Action

No photo starting out with a lot of noise is going to be perfect, but this result was really quite good, and it was a 1000% improvement over the original!



I know there are other companies with noise reduction software, but I don't have experience with them, and I only want to present to you what I actually use. In case you're interested in this software, I put some information about Noiseware near this video in the classroom.

Sharp & Smooth 04 Sharpen: Unsharp Mask

Photos used in this lesson:

sharp-smooth-04-unsharp-mask-1.jpg

sharp-smooth-04-unsharp-mask-2.jpg

Almost every image is improved by a little bit of sharpening, and there are times when you'll want to do a lot of sharpening. Use actions to apply three different levels of sharpening using the Unsharp Mask filter, which is good for sharpening photos of people, because it has a setting called Threshold, which keeps smooth areas, like skin, from being over-sharpened.

You have three Unsharp Mask choices: Minimum, Medium, and Maximum. If you're not sure which one to use, run the PLAY ALL Unsharp Mask action.

- The Sharpen: Unsharp Mask-minimum action gives a nice little bit of sharpening to the photo, which you can see better if you zoom in to the eye and toggle the action layer off and on.
- The Sharpen: Unsharp Mask-medium action gives you a little more sharpening.
- Sharpen: Unsharp Mask-Maximum gives you even more sharpening..
- You'll need to decide how much sharpening you're comfortable using.
- Watch out for halos along the edge of an object. That's an indication of over-sharpening.

The sharpen filters look at the edges in your photo and make the lighter side of the edge lighter and the darker side of the edge darker to give it more contrast and make the edge jump out and look sharper. People don't tend to mind the darker side, but they do tend to notice the lighter "halo" effect, and it isn't as pleasing.

One of the idiosyncrasies of sharpening is that it is very resolution dependent. What works well on a medium sized photo would over sharpen a photo sized for the web.

On web or gallery images, you should use the smallest setting, and even then you may need to lower the opacity of the sharpen layer to reduce the effect of the sharpening.

Many of us have digital cameras that produce huge photos. The same photo in it's original size is 6000 pixels wide by 4000 pixels tall, which is more than 17 inches in width and over 11 inches tall. I included it in your class photo downloads so you can compare the two sizes. It's called sharp-smooth-01-unsharp-mask-2.jpg

When you apply the maximum sharpening to a large photo, it barely affects the photo. It looks like you used the minimum strength. If the sharpening isn't strong enough for you, simply run the action again, or you can try a combination of other sharpening filters that we'll discuss next.

So keep the resolution and size of your photo in mind when you choose a sharpening action. And don't be shy about discarding a sharpening layer and using a different strength, or running a sharpening filter more than once or reducing the opacity of a sharpen layer in the Layers panel.

Sharp & Smooth 05 Sharpen: Smart Sharpen

Photos used in this lesson:

sharp-smooth-05-smart-sharpen-1.jpg

sharp-smooth-05-smart-sharpen-2.jpg

sharp-smooth-05-smart-sharpen-3.jpg

sharp-smooth-05-smart-sharpen-4.jpg

Smart Sharpen is best used on scenery and objects rather than people, because it doesn't have a Threshold setting. I like to use it when I want more detail and texture in my photos.

As with all the sharpen actions, the amount of sharpening will greatly depend on the size and resolution of your photo. The larger the photo, the less effect it will show when you run the action.



The photo, called sharp-smooth-05-smart-sharpen-1.jpg, is sized for the web at only 700 pixels wide. I ran the action Smart Sharpen-Low, and I got a nice amount of sharpening.

You can adjust the opacity of the sharpened layer by clicking on the word Opacity in the Layers panel and dragging your mouse to the left.



For my second example I used a photo of Crater Lake called sharp-smooth-05-smart-sharpen-2.jpg.

When you sharpen, you do have to watch out that you don't get too much sharpening and texture in areas that shouldn't have texture, such as the sky or flat water. I often run a noise reduction action first on photos like this, or, instead of using Smart Sharpen, you can use one of the Unsharp Mask actions. Unsharp Mask has a Threshold setting built into the action that keeps smooth areas from getting sharpened.

I already ran a noise reduction action on this photo and saved it that way for you, so on this photo you can run the Smart Sharpen Action. On medium sized images like this, use Smart Sharpen: High.

If you zoom in, you can really see the difference. On this photo, I think this amount of sharpening is great.



For my third example I used a photo of the Acropolis, called sharp-smooth-05-smart-sharpen-3.jpg,

- Run the Smart Sharpen-High action once to get a nice amount of sharpening.
- Run it again to get even more definition.
- One other trick is to Run the Contrast action to make it even more impressive.



There's one thing you must watch out for when you use Smart Sharpen actions. I demonstrated on a photo of Venice called sharp-smooth-05-smart-sharpen-4.jpg. If your photo has a lot of small objects in it, especially in a repeat pattern, like the roof tiles on the buildings, you'll get a lot of white around them if you use too high a setting, so in this case, the Smart Sharpen: Low setting actually did a better job than the high setting.



Sharp & Smooth 06 Sharpen: High Pass Filter

Photos used in this lesson:

sharp-smooth-06-high-pass-1.jpg

sharp-smooth-06-high-pass-2.jpg

sharp-smooth-06-high-pass-3.jpg

The High Pass filter is truly amazing, and the two High Pass actions will help you apply this filter quickly and easily. There are two versions.

I use the Sharpen ALL: High Pass action when the entire photo needs sharpening or when I want to accentuate the texture of the photo, like I did on this photo called sharp-smooth-06-high-pass-1.jpg.



I use Sharpen SOME: High Pass when I want to add a bit of sharpening to specific regions of the photo. I demonstrated on the photo sharp-smooth-06-high-pass-2.jpg. I first ran the Unsharp Mask: minimum action to add a little bit of sharpening to the entire photo, but I mainly wanted to draw attention to the faces of the family, so I didn't want to sharpen the background anymore.



- Run the Sharpen SOME: High Pass action.
- The dialog box will tell you to adjust the Brush tool as needed and then to brush on your document to add sharpening.
- Brush over areas that need sharpening. If the photo is slightly soft, these areas will look much sharper. If the photo is pretty sharp to begin with, this will make those areas stand out even more.
- I like to brush over the eyes and glasses, if they have glasses, the lower edge of the nose, the teeth, and sometimes the lips, if it doesn't make them look chapped, and I might accent some of the hair, bits of clothing, and jewelry.

When I want a way-over-the-top sharpening effect, I combine sharpening actions. This is especially effective when you want the end result to be black and white. I used the image sharp-smooth-06-high-pass-3.jpg to demonstrate.

- Run the action Sharpen: Unsharp Mask-maximum.
- Click on the Add a Layer Mask icon.
- Get the Brush tool. In Tool Options set the Mode to Normal and the Opacity to 100%. Open the Brush Picker and choose a soft round brush. If you don't see a soft round brush, open the menu at the top of the Brush Picker and choose Default Brushes or choose Reset Brushes from the flyout menu.
- Make sure the Foreground color is black. If it isn't, press the letter D and then the letter X.
- On your document, brush where you want to remove the sharpening effect. I brushed along the eyelids, the white part of his left nostril, and his lips, because they're chapped.
- Run the action Sharpen SOME: High Pass. Brush on your photo wherever you want to increase the sharpness: eyes, hair, hand, chain, and edges of his costume.
- If you want, 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 black and white.

