

Art of Blending | Module 5

Video 05-01 Blending With Scrapbook Paper

As scrapbookers, we already have a ready supply of blending overlays in the form of scrapbook paper. Not all scrapbook paper may be suitable for blending with photos, but a lot of it is, so let me show you an example. I'll use this photo of a girl sitting on a bench.

Photo: Bench

- I started by adding paper: evakipler-beingme-pp-solid2 using the Multiply mode at 100%.
- I really liked the effect overall, especially on the tile, but the girl and bench were too dark.
- So I duplicated the original photo layer and changed the blend mode to Screen at 100%.
- This was nice, and I could have stopped here, but I felt like something was missing. I felt like it needed a little bit of contrast, so I clicked on the paper layer and pressed Ctrl Alt Shift E (Mac: Cmd Opt Shift E) to create a merged layer, changed the blend mode to Soft Light, and reduced the opacity to 60%.
- Now the contrast was good, but it still seemed a little dark to me, so I duplicated the Screen photo layer at 100% opacity.
- Now the light was good, but the color seemed a bit too bright, so I added a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer and reduced the Saturation to -15.

As you can see this is a very subjective process! Whether you use the texture overlays I've already given you or whether you use scrapbook paper, you'll need to make decisions as you work that affect the outcome of your photo.

Photo: Airplane

Here's a photo where I added Paper4-70-recollection-JoanneBrisebois above my photo and changed the blend mode to Color Burn at 100%. When I add a light paper like this, I usually start with one of the darkening blend modes, because they often work well—not always, but often.

The nice thing about scrapbook papers is that the designer has already done some blending for you to give the paper some great texture, so you might as well take advantage of that. You can see the texture better if I zoom in.

The only thing I had to watch out for with this paper was the folded lines, to make sure they landed strategically around the subject.

Photo: Hydrangea

- I used KrystalHartley_everafter_pp7 in the Linear Burn mode at 100% on this photo of hydrangeas.
- That made the photo too dark, so I duplicated the photo layer and changed the blend mode to Screen at 90% to lighten it.
- I clicked on the top layer and created a merged layer (Ctrl Alt Shift E for Windows, Cmd Opt Shift E on a Mac). I changed the blend mode to Screen at 40%.

Photo: Sunset Silhouette

- I placed 03paper-solid-TravelAdventure-DSD above the photo and changed the blend mode to Color Burn at 50%.
- Sometimes it's that easy to create the look you want.

Photo: Airplane Flag

- I used paper6-75-MePersonally-TaylorMade. On dark papers like this I don't generally use the darkening blending modes. The best mode turned out to be Vivid Light at 70% opacity.
- It was too dark for the airplane, however, so I selected the airplane out of the photo and placed it on a layer above the blending layer.
- Then I copied the paper layer to the top of the Layers panel and changed the blend mode to Soft Light at 70%, which gave the airplane a very subtle texture and added more texture to the sky.

Photo: Saddle Mountain

Here's a closeup of a photo where I used regular texture overlays as well as scrapbook paper to blend with my photo. You can see the cracks from one of my cracked textures, and I used a gradient color layer to bring out these vivid colors, but notice this wonderful canvas texture. The paper that produced that texture is Classic Linens Yuletide 08 by Susie Roberts using Soft Light at 80% opacity. In this case I kept the brown color, but sometimes I desaturate the color and just keep the texture.

Susie also has other paper textures that work really well for overlays, so you might want to check them out in her store. <http://www.digitalscrapper.com/shoppe/Susie-Roberts/>

Paper Collection

I've collected some papers for you to use as a starting point, which you can download next to this video. These papers are from past Premier kits, so some of you will already have them, but these are papers I chose because they work really well for blending. I didn't include any papers from any kits that we don't have the rights to use, so I don't have any of Susie's papers in this collection, but the ones I've given you will be enough to get you started.

From here you'll want to begin gathering your own papers that make good texture overlays. I think you'll find, as I have, that scrapbook papers make really good photo overlays!

Video 05-02 Blending Thinking Process

In this video I want to demonstrate blending a photo with paper to show you my thinking process when I run into problems. Every photo is different, so there's no way I can say, "Do it this way" for your photo, but what I can do is give you examples of the types of problems you may encounter and how to work through them. The more you know about how to correct a problem, the better you'll be at blending.

Blending is often unpredictable, but that's one of the reasons why it's "art." And it's one of the reasons why you'll often come up with an unexpected solution that is really cool. Anyone can be a good blender, even if you're just getting started, but the more you learn how to compensate for the problems you encounter, the better you'll be.

For example, I like this photo I took in Venice of a pigeon on a dome with ancient cracked paint. I like the photo, but it doesn't seem dramatic enough for being in Venice, and the sky is washed out.

The first thing I'll do is add Paper 11 from Count The Ways by Joanne Brisebois. I found that the darker blend modes worked better with the sky, so I chose Multiply as my blend mode.

Now is when I began to encounter problems and seek solutions:

Problem: Now the pigeon was too dark.

Solution: There are several ways to solve that, but I chose to duplicate the photo layer and change the blend mode to Screen.

Problem: This worked great for the pigeon, but it lightened the dome too much.

Solution: So I added a layer mask and brushed away the effect on the dome.

Problem: I wasn't too sure about the teal color.

Solution: I duplicated the teal layer and hid the original so I would still have it if I changed my mind. With the copy layer active, I pressed Ctrl Shift U (Mac: Cmd Shift U) to desaturate it.

Problem: It seems like the photo could use a little more contrast.

Solution: I made a merged copy of the layers (Ctrl Alt Shift E in Windows and Cmd Opt Shift E on a Mac) and changed the blend mode to Soft Light, which added contrast.

Problem: This improved the contrast, but it made the bird darker.

Solution: I duplicated the merged layer, and changed the blend mode to Screen.

Problem: This made the bird lighter, but it made everything else a little too light as well.

Solution: I pressed Alt (Mac: Opt) and clicked on the Add Layer Mask icon to get a black layer mask. Then I got the Brush tool with white for the Foreground color and painted in the effect on the bird.

Please Note! It's very easy to leave a halo around a masked object, so please be careful to avoid that! It's a dead giveaway that you've applied a mask, and it doesn't do your photo any favors.

Problem: I felt like the bird could stand to be a little lighter.

Solution: Duplicate the Screen layer and reduced the opacity to 50%.

Problem: I want the bird to stand out a little more.

Solution:

- Create another merged copy.
- Press Ctrl Shift U (Mac: Cmd Shift U) to desaturate it.
- In the Menu Bar choose Filter > Other > High Pass. When the dialog box comes up, enter 10 pixels for the Radius and click OK.
- Change the blend mode to Overlay.

Problem: Now it was too sharp.

Solution: Duplicate the layer mask and add it to the High Pass sharpened layer.

The What If Stage

Once you solve your problems and have a good blending effect, you may sometimes decide to enter the "What If" stage, where you try other possibilities.

For the pigeon photo, I liked the effect I had made, but I was curious about what would happen if I hid the desaturated paper layer and made the original colored paper layer visible. When I did that, I felt it was too green, but I wondered what would happen if I changed the color, so I added a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer, clipped it to the paper layer so it would only affect the paper, and experimented with the Hue slider. I chose -141 to give it a warmer look.

The Final Decision

Now the question is which one of these is my favorite? To make my decision, I can create merged layers so I can go back and forth quickly between the two possibilities.

Create a merged layer and then hide it.

Change the look and create another merged layer.

Look back and forth between the merged layers until you settle on the one you want to keep.

I've decided to keep the warm colored one. I hope this example has given you more insight into the mental process of creating beautiful blended photos.

Video 05-02b History and Layer Comps

In Photoshop you have two additional tools, to help you compare versions—the History panel and the Layer Comps panel. We'll start with the History panel.

History Panel

- In the Menu Bar, choose Window > History to get the History panel.
- Click on the camera icon to take a snapshot of the current state of your document.
- Go back to the Layers panel and make any changes.
- Go back to the History panel and take another snapshot.
- Click on the snapshots at the top of the panel to see one version or the other.
- The History states and snapshots are not saved when you close the document, but they're useful for returning to an exact history state while you're working on your project.

Layer Comps

Layer Comps are great because they do get saved with the document.

- In the Menu Bar, choose Window > Layer Comps.
- Click on the Create New Layer Comp icon.
- When the dialog box comes up, give it a name and click OK.
- Make any changes you want to the document.
- Create another Layer Comp.
- Click in the box to the left of a Layer Comp to see that version.

Caveat: This is the simple version of using Layer Comps. Occasionally you have to create a similar layer separately for each version. Also, older versions of Photoshop may not have Layer Comps.

So you can use these methods, as well as merged layers, to keep track of different versions of the same photo.

Video 05-03 Blending With Elements

In this video I want to talk about blending elements with photos. As digital scrapbookers, we often acquire kits that contain elements perfect for blending. We also see art in the world around us that we can photograph and use for blending. This design, for example, was carved on an ancient building in Luxembourg.

Blending elements with photos is a skill you'll use sparingly, but when you do use it, your photo will appear extraordinary!

In a way, blending elements is a lot simpler than blending textures. You don't usually have to do a lot of adjusting, so the most important skill is choosing an element and placing it well. Almost always you'll want to be understated rather than in-your-face.

In this photo, for example, I blended a word. I used Linear Dodge and reduced the opacity to 20%, but that's because I started with black type. I could have used white type and gotten the same effect by simply reducing the opacity. Isn't opacity a type of blending? Of course it is! Any time you reduce opacity, you're seeing a combination of at least two layers, which is what blending is all about.

I also added a black stroke outline around the type and simply reduced the opacity to 20% without changing the blend mode.

This photo would have been great with just the type, but I added this circle design from the Family Yearbook kit by Julie Mead because of my scrapbook page design.

Here I blended the same element onto my background paper. I felt that the page would look better with three of these elements, which would form a triangle, but rather than put it on the background paper, I made a more subtle triangle of elements by blending it with the photo.

Here it is without it, and here it is with it. It just adds a little more connection. And here's what the full page looks like.

Photo: Lily

When I say "subtle," I really do mean subtle. Here's a photo where I used conventional blending to get an artistic look, but I had some space left over, so I decided to add a couple of very subtle elements.

The first element was a watermark. Here's the original photo I took of a sidewalk impression. In other words, this is the mark of the company who created the sidewalk, but I thought it looked kind of cool, so I photographed it. Nobody will even be able to read this, but they will notice a slight watermark, and that's all I want. Could I have made my own watermark? Absolutely! You might want to do that sometime.

I also added a design against the right margin. It's so subtle, you almost don't see it, but if you hide it, you can see that it adds character to the photo.

Photo: Windmill

Here's a photo I took of a windmill. I blended with textures first and then blended a couple of elements—the flag and the word art. In this case, I wasn't subtle at all, so it's not a hard and fast rule that you have to be subtle every time, and part of it will depend on what you like.

Photo: Garden-Gloves

Here's one more example. My original photo of garden gloves is on a white background. Here's what it looks like after I've blended with textures and added some blended elements. The leaves are blended, and so is the type and the tape.

I've given you a couple of folders of elements to download. One contains photos of elements that I've taken over the years, and the other contains elements from prior kits we've featured. Again, you may already own some or all of these kit elements, but I've gathered them into one convenient location, and you'll probably have other elements you'll want to use for blending as well.

Video 05-04 Blending On Scrapbook Pages

I'd like to wrap up this lesson by taking a look at some of the many possibilities of using blending on your scrapbook pages. Some of you do this all the time already, so it won't be that new to you, though you may come across an idea or two that you haven't thought of before. Others rarely or never blend on their pages, so for you this will be an eye-opening demonstration.

Page: Always Anna

As I mentioned before, I've started using blending more and more on photos that I put on scrapbook pages. Most of the time the blending is subtle. I sized this photo so it covers the entire background, and I added a Monaco tile texture. This time I used Divide at 40% as the blend mode. The Divide blend mode is only available in Photoshop, but you can easily use a different mode.

Look at the difference it makes in the photo, and it adds a few scratches as well that are kind of fun.

Page: Sunset Silhouette

On this page I used one of Susie Robert's Map Overlays. This is the original look, but I changed the blend mode to Hard Light at 100% to give it a more subtle look so that the attention stays on the photos.

Page: Crater Lake

Here's a page from a camping trip to Crater Lake in Oregon. This is an example of something I do frequently. I put type on a page and change the blend mode to Overlay. I did that with the Vintage Hand overlays by Susie Roberts, and also with the camping certificate we got from the camp host. Doing it this way adds interest and information without being too busy.

I also blended two pages from the Photographie kit by Joanne Brisebois. If I hide the top page, you can see what a difference it makes. I desaturated the top paper to keep the color the same and changed the blend mode to Hard Light at 70%.

I actually do quite a bit of tweaking with papers to get them just as I want them. You apply the same techniques that I've been showing you, but you simply apply them to kit papers.

Page: Yuma Air Show

Grunge is another item that often works well when you change the blend mode. Here I've changed the grunge to Color Burn, which really makes it pop.

Page: Infinity Pool

Here's a page where I used an edge overlay by Joanne Brisebois. Look what happens when you change it from Normal to Soft Light. It makes all the difference in the world!

Page: Columbia Slough

One thing I do all the time is adjust the lighting of a paper with blend modes.

- Press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the paper layer.
- Change the blend mode to Screen if you want the paper lighter, and then adjust the opacity.
- Change the blend mode to Multiply if you want the paper darker, and then adjust the opacity. I changed the opacity on this paper to 70%.

What you'll find is that blending on a scrapbook page really isn't hard. The hardest part is figuring out what you want! Once you know that, you can figure out what to do to get it.

Page: iPhone

Here, again, is a page where I used a photo as the entire background. I reduced the opacity of the title and added chevrons. Each piece of the chevron, which has a different shade of gray, has a blend mode of Soft Light at 20%, which gives it a very cool look!

I felt like something was missing, though. I wanted to add some kind of texture to the page, so I added this paper: JoanneBrisebois_Harvest1912_Paper5. I changed the blend mode to Color Burn at 100% opacity and masked away some of the effect.

What a difference that one paper makes!

Page: Sylvia Beach

For my last page I'll show you how I created my own paper using blend modes. I started by designing the page, and then I had an idea for the kind of background paper I wanted. I wanted a light paper with a hint of wood, a bit of grunge, and very light color. Here are the steps I took:

- Open wood-LSattgast-14.
- The lines in the wood were too strong, so I added wall-LSattgast-14 and reduced the opacity to 80%. That took away some of the wood texture.
- Look for a paper in the color and texture you want. I tried out two papers: pp-solid2-68-EscapetToNature-Eva-Kipler and ps1-78-UnderThePier-KellieMize, both of which are in your Art of Blending Papers folder. I actually experimented with both of them and then discovered that I liked them better together than as individual papers.

I used Hard Light at 100% on the blue paper and Hue at 70% on the teal paper.

I wanted a fairly plain paper, but this seemed a little too plain, so I looked in the Art of Blending Designs folder and used design 11. I ended up only using the very bottom edge of the design.

I used Hard Light at 50% opacity.

Then I put the same layer at the top but flipped it vertically.

- Press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the layer.
- With the Move tool, click and drag the design upward.
- Press Ctrl T (Mac: Cmd T) to get Transform options.
- Right click and choose Flip Vertical.
- Double click inside the outline to commit the change.
- Move it beyond the top of your page until only the bottom edge is showing.

This is my finished page. I wanted a very subdued background, so that's what I got, but I could have made it a lot brighter with more design on it, if that was my intention.

Again, it comes back to knowing what you want. When you know what you want, a little detective work will help you get it!