

CREATING A VIGNETTE EFFECT

Introduction

Adding a vignette to an image is an effective and easily achieved creative effect. The vignette works by darkening the edges of the image but leaving the central area of the image unchanged. As the eyes are drawn to the lighter areas of the image, the effect helps to keep the viewers attention on the centre of the image. It doesn't work with every image however the effect can be very appealing when used selectively.

Here are the steps to adding a vignette in Photoshop.

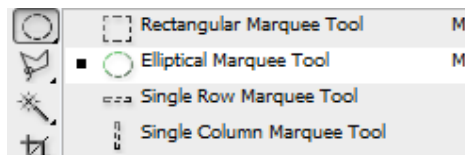
Step 1 – Selecting your image

Select the image to which you will add the vignette and open it in Photoshop. Here I have selected a typical mountain landscape view from the Lake District. With this type of image it is very easy for the viewers' eye to wander out of the edge of the frame as it follows the line of the mountains. It is therefore a good candidate for the vignette treatment.



Step 2 – Select the area for the vignette

For this example I will use the Elliptical Marquee tool from the tools pallet to select the centre of the image.



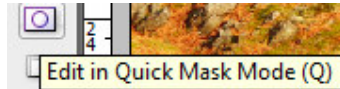
Another alternative is to use the Rectangular Marquee which tends to work well with architectural images.

Here is how my image appears once I have made the selection.



Step 3 – Refine the selection

Having made the selection we need to refine it by feathering the edge. This is what blends the vignette effect into the image and is essential if the effect is to work. This is difficult to achieve so we will switch to the Quick Mask mode. The Quick Mask is found towards the bottom of the Tools Pallet and appears as a square with a circle inside it.



Having switch to the Quick Mask mode you should see the area of the vignette much more clearly as shown below.



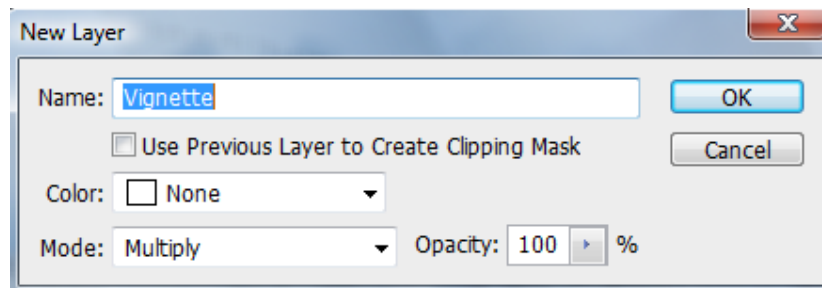
Now there are a number of ways to refine the edges but the one demonstrated here will work with even very old versions of Photoshop.

First switch off the Quick Mask mode by clicking the icon in the tools panel again. Next select “Select | Modify | Feather...” from the menu. When the dialog appears enter a value of somewhere between 50 and 250 pixels. The value depends on the dimension of the image with larger images requiring a higher Feather value. You can now switch back to the Quick Mask mode to evaluate the effect. Here is the result on my image of a 250 pixels feather.



Step 4 – Add a Curves Layer

Once you are happy with the level of feathering in your image (you can repeat the Feather step above if you need to) switch off the Quick Mask mode. Next add a new Curves Layer by selecting “Layers | New Adjustment Layer | Curves...” from the menu. When the dialog is displayed name the layer “Vignette” and set the blending mode to “Multiply”.

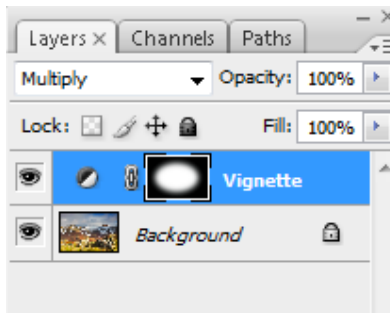


When you click OK a new curves layer will be added to the image. This will cause the image to appear as below.



Step 5 – Invert the Curves Layer Mask

In the Layers window you should see the new Curves layer and you should notice that it has a layer mask attached to it as shown here.



This is actually the reverse of what we require so we need to invert the layer mask. To do this press “Ctrl – I” on the keyboard and the mask will invert. This will cause the edges of the image to darken. The final result is shown below.



Additional information

You can add multiple Vignette layers as described above to build up darker vignettes and also blend them with your image seamlessly. When you have added a vignette, its worth adjusting the layers Opacity setting in the layers pallet to blend the effect and make it more natural. I have left the final example above unchanged to help you see the result better. Its also possible to open the curves adjustment layer by double clicking on it and then use this to darken the vignette further.

Good luck and remember not to use this technique sparingly.