

PROFESSIONAL DODGE & BURN

Introduction

Careful application of Dodging and Burning to an image can really help set it apart from the competition. Most people editing their images will do all the necessary work at a global level but then fail to take advantage of localised adjustments to specific areas. Such adjustments help lead the viewers' eye through the image, emphasising the most important aspects for added impact.

Whilst Photoshop provides users with both a Dodge and a Burn tool, these don't offer non-destructive editing and give only limited control. This tutorial provides you with a more complete and professional approach to Dodge and Burn your images.

This tutorial was prepared using Photoshop CS3 but the same techniques should also work with other image editing software.

Basic Steps

Whilst dodging and burning can work well with any image, Black and White images offer perhaps the best examples. Here is a starting image that I have applied global adjustments to as well as a monochrome conversion. In the monochrome conversion I emphasised the red and green channels whilst reducing the blue. If you are unsure as to how this is done and would like further details consult my other tutorials on the [Lenscraft](http://www.lenscraft.co.uk) web site.



Figure 1 Starting Image

The next step is to make an assessment of my image and consider how I would like to change it. First impressions are that I would like to have a much darker sky but keep the sky around the tree quite light, giving a halo impression. I would also like to

lighten the tree trunk and the foreground. A small amount of vignette around the corners will also help draw attention to the tree and its symmetry.

To help my visualise this I will add a new layer to my image on which I can draw the changes in. To add the layer select

```
Layer | New | Layer...
```

from the menu. When the “New Layer” dialog box is displayed call the new layer “assessment” and click OK. A new empty layer will be added to your image and will automatically become the active layer.

In order to annotate the image with the changes we want to make select the “Paintbrush” tool from the Photoshop tools palette. Change the brush to around 40 pixels (though this will depend on the size of your image) and select a bright colour such as blue or red. With the “assessment” layer active you can now paint on the changes that you will make. My example is shown below.



Figure 2 Imaged marked up with assessment

The key thing to note here is that the mark up is applied only to the new assessment layer we created and can therefore be hidden at any time by clicking on the “eye” icon next to the layer in the “Layers” window.

In my assessment I have used -50 to indicate the image needs to be 50% darker in that area and +50 to indicate 50% lighter. These are however only rough guides and only you will see them. If you understand it, that’s all that’s required.

Applying the Dodge & Burn

We will now create a new layer onto which we can apply our dodging & burning work. To do this select

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Layer | New | Layer...
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as before however this time when the New Layer dialog is displayed call it “Dodge & Burn”. You should also change the “Mode” to “Soft Light” and check the “Fill with Soft-Light-neutral-color (50% gray)” option. When you have done this click the OK button and the new layer is created.

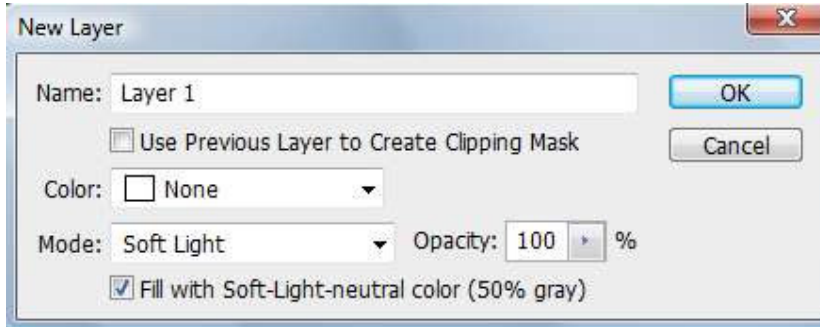


Figure 3 New layer dialog correctly configured

The new layer has been filled with 50% grey but because the blending mode is set to “Soft Light” you won’t be able to see it. If you change the blending mode to “Normal” in the “Layers” window you can see the grey colour. This can be a useful thing to do in order to check your work from time to time.

Setting up the paintbrush

It’s now time to start painting on the new layer. Select the paintbrush tool from the Photoshop tools palette and set a suitable size. In my example I will use a broad brush at first, around 250 pixels then reducing down to finer brushes are required.

You also need to return your colours for the paintbrush to the default Black and White. A quick way to do this is pressing D on the keyboard.

Next set the softness of the brush to around 25%-50%. This helps you blend the brush strokes together and not create an obvious adjustment in your image

The final set up you should make is to change the Opacity of the brush to 10% - 20%. Again this is to help blend the brush strokes together to make the adjustment appear natural.

Start Painting

Select the Black colour to apply with your paintbrush and paint this directly onto the “Dodge & Burn” layers in the areas you want to darken. As you paint you should notice that these area get a little darker however any bright patches won’t be affected. As you have the opacity of your brush set to between 10% and 20% the effect isn’t as pronounced as it would be at 100%. You should try to build up the darkening effect gradually by using multiple brush strokes. Building the effect gradually also helps you maintain a natural look.

Having darkened selected areas switch the paint colour to White so that we can lighten other areas. A quick way to change colour is to press X on your keyboard. This will keep swapping between the foreground and background colours, which should be Black and White. Now paint on to the “Dodge & Burn” layers in the area you want to lighten.

If you have started with a large paintbrush as I suggested, you will find that as you progress and want to pick out smaller details, you need to reduce the paintbrush

size. I find the best way of doing this is to use the square bracket keys on the keyboard. Pressing “[“ will decrease the paintbrush size whilst “]” will increase it.

If you now switch the blending mode of the “Dodge & Burn” layer to “Normal” you will be able to see the effect of your keystrokes. Here is my example.



Figure 4 Paintbrush strokes on Dodge & Burn layer

Final Touches

Here are a few final touches that allow you to fine tune your image:

- If you find the brushstrokes are too noticeable on your image try applying a Gaussian Blur to the “Dodge & Burn layer
- Try using the Overlay blending mode rather than Soft Light. Overlay has a much greater effect but can look a little too unnatural
- If you find your layer has too harsh an effect try reducing the opacity to something more pleasing.
- Don't think you have to build up the Dodge and Burn all on one layer. Sometimes it helps to use separate layers with perhaps different blending modes on each.

Here is my before and after image for comparison.



Figure 5 before Dodge & Burn



Figure 6 after Dodge & Burn