



Bramhall Photographic Society

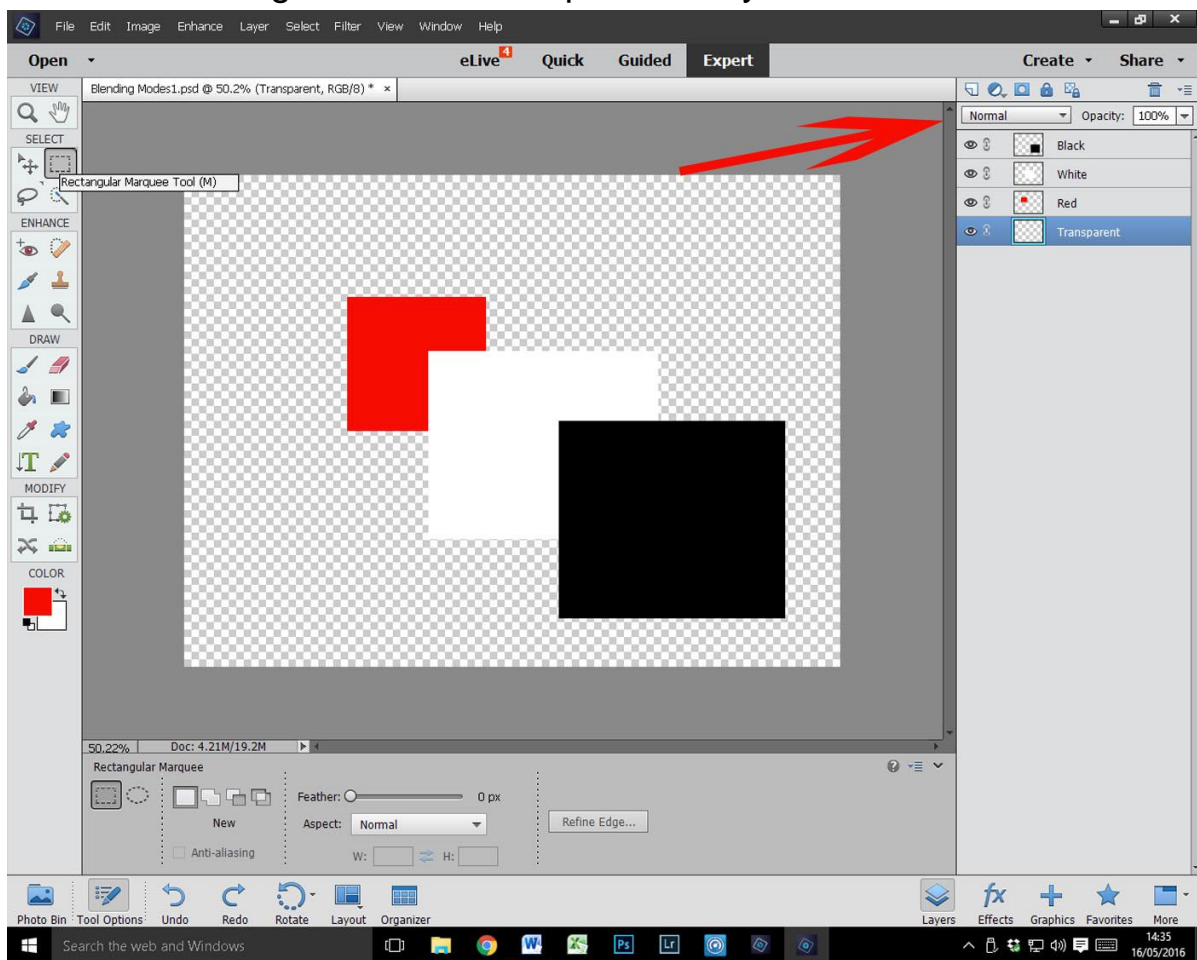
PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKSPACE

(This technique will work in any version of Elements although the screenshots may vary)

By now you will be familiar with the Elements Organiser, the need for Layers, Selections and Masks. You have seen how to make full and partial Adjustments and how to use the tools. In this session the function of the **Blending modes and Sharpening** techniques will be demonstrated.

1. Blending Modes

Blending Modes are an extension of Layers and can be found by clicking on the small rectangle towards the top of the Layers Pallet.



By clicking on this rectangle (which is usually showing the default 'Normal') a list drops down and shows a considerable number of alternatives to 'Normal'. They all have a function but at this level only a few are needed.

On the monitor are 3 open layers Black, White and Red. When the Blending Mode for each is set at 'Normal' and they overlap they perform as standard non transparent sheets. Changing the blending mode can modify how much

or how little is seen at the intersects. The apparent grouping indicated by the lines drawn under sets of Blending Modes has a meaning but it's not essential to understand this. Having clicked on the default 'Normal' the editor can cycle through all the modes observing the effect by using the up and down triangles/arrows on the keyboard. Although changing the Blending Mode can have an effect it is not always appropriate and frequently has no effect, it depends on the levels of contrast and/or brightness in the layers.

So why would you use Blending Modes? Not surprisingly the answer is for a variety of reasons. To blend layers together with a seamless transition.



To save time by helping with the merging of two layers.

For creative effects.

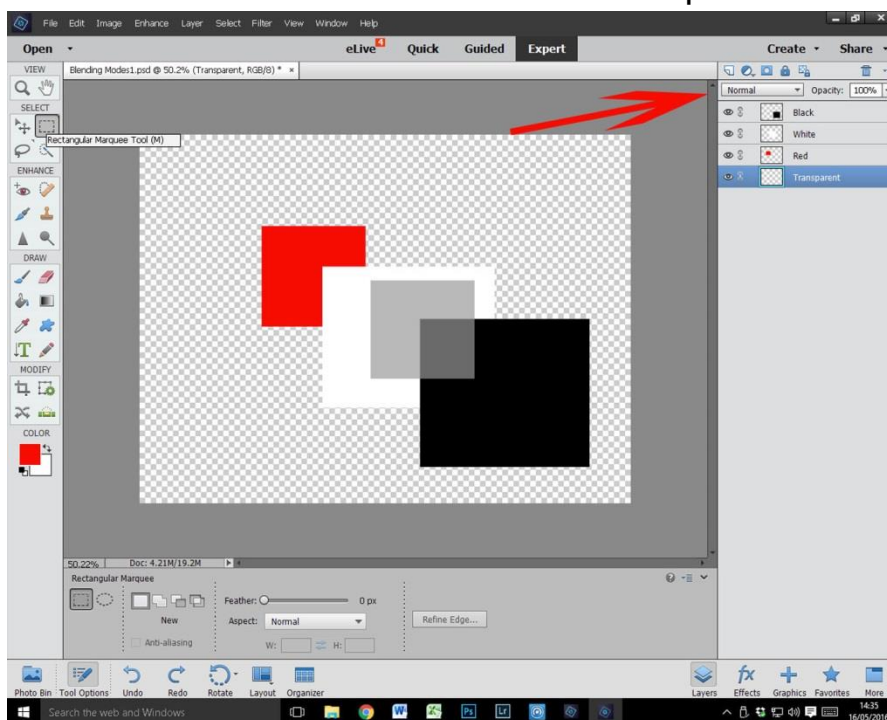


To darken or lighten specific areas of a photograph that might be over or under exposed. A completely inseparable part of Blending Modes is the 'Opacity' slider situated to the right. This, in this instance is used in conjunction with the Blending Mode to make the effect as realistic or as seamless as possible and gives the editor complete control over the look created. Although I describe this as editor in control the use of Blending modes apart from specifics can only be described as experimental (suck it & see).

2. Sharpening

As a result of technical requirements that we won't go into all digital cameras slightly soften captured images. Sharpness is not so important if you only intend to present your photographs as prints no bigger than 5" x 7", on a phone or a small screen. However, if you want to display your work with a larger print size or by projection its good practice to add sharpening. Even for small prints and tablets your photograph will look crisper if slightly sharpened. As usual with Photoshop there are several different ways of making such edits. We will concentrate on 2 of the most popular, "Unsharp Mask" and "High Pass".

The "Unsharp Mask" option is found from the menu under the "Enhance" drop down. Right at the bottom is "Unsharp Mask". You will also notice "Auto Sharpen" and Adjust Sharpness in the same dropdown list. The former appears to work reasonably well and it's a quick fix but there is no control over the result and any strange results that occur. The latter can be used but offers a somewhat higher level of adjustments that you may wish to investigate later by clicking on the "Learn More About:" link that appears when its controls window opens. "Unsharp Mask" offers you only 3 controls. The first one "Amount" is obvious it controls how strongly the sharpening is done. At this point it's helpful to explain how digital sharpening works. All that is happening is that the pixels at all points of contrast change have their contrast increased. This can be demonstrated with this example.



By increasing the "Amount" you simply increase the contrast from slight to heavy. By increasing the "Radius" you increase how many pixels from the edge are changed. Normally the setting giving the most suitable enhancement

will be between 0.5 and maximum 1.5 pixels so I have no idea why the range goes up to 1000! "Threshold" controls the areas affected. If you want all contrasting pixels affected then leave the default at 1. However, sometimes there will be parts of your image that are badly affected by digital artefacts if you sharpen them, sky being a good example. Experiment with the "Threshold" slider to find a good balance. As always it's a good idea to carry out this edit on a new layer.

My preferred sharpening technique is "High Pass". The reason for this is it gives control over the change but without too many decisions having to be made and the result can be softened to keep it realistic. This is probably a good point to emphasise that it's a bad idea to over sharpen images. As with most if not all procedures for sharpening its best carried out as the last editing process. A final layer comprising of all the edits carried out should be created. The fastest way of doing this is to use the keyboard. Holding down the following keys all at the same time will create this combined layer: -

Ctrl+Alt+shift+E it's a bit of a fiddle but after practice it's not difficult. Rename this layer as HP for High Pass. The "High Pass" option is found in the Menu bar under "Filter", in the drop down list point cursor at "Other" and on the fly out click on "High Pass". At this point your picture goes grey and there is a controls option window open on screen with only 1 slider. Ignoring the instructions for the "Unsharp Mask" technique set the slider to 4 pixels in this process and click OK. You still have a grey picture but as if by magic changing the blending mode for the layer to one of: "Overlay", "Softlight" or "Hardlight" removes the grey. Which blending mode you choose is down to personal preference but generally you achieve the harshest result with "Hardlight" and the softest with "Softlight". I usually select "Softlight". But, we are not finished yet. As with all layers you can change the opacity to reduce the sharpening affect if 100% opacity looks over sharpened. Its also possible to add a layer mask so that the sharpening can be 'painted' out from areas that you do not want sharpening. e.g sky, water, background or foreground areas, where the sharpening has produced artefacts and most importantly your mum's wrinkles. In this way it's possible to sharpen selected areas such as eyes in a portrait. Always look closely at your picture after sharpening to make sure that there has been no queer effects introduced.

It's important to know that with any sharpening technique you may be able to slightly improve a photograph that suffers from camera shake or subject movement. However, if there is significant movement you will probably end up overdoing the sharpening and making it look worse.

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