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Photo-Tech

Layer Blend Modes for Photographers

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We typically use Layer Blend Modes in the Layers Palette, selected by a pop-down menu at the top of the palette. A Layer Blend Mode determines how the layer interacts with the layer below it. There are quite a few blend modes, and they are organized into several groupings based on similarities between the modes. Below is a list of Groupings and the individual Blend Modes that, as photographers, we use most often:

The Basic Modes Group - These don't depend on the content of an underlying image.

Normal Mode - this is the default mode.

The Darken Modes Group - White pixels leave the underlying pixels unchanged. Anything darker than white tends to darken the underlying image. Useful for when you want to add density to an image.

Multiply Mode - Used to build density (darken). The effect is similar to sandwiching two negatives in an enlarger.

The Lighten Modes Group - Black pixels leave the underlying pixels unchanged. Anything brighter than black tends to lighten the underlying image. Useful for when you want to lighten an image.

Screen Mode - Used to reduce density (lighten). The effect is similar to projecting two slides onto the same screen.

The Contrast Modes Group - This is like a combination of the Darken and Lighten Modes. 50% gray pixels leave the underlying pixels unchanged, while any areas darker tend to darken the underlying image, and any areas lighter tend to lighten the underlying image. Ideal for adding contrast and exaggerating the detail contained in an image.

Overlay Mode - Use this for non-destructive dodging and burning - brushing with white to dodge; with black to burn. The procedure for selecting this for to create a Dodge & Burn layer differs in that you must first create your new layer by Alt-Clicking (Mac: Option-Clicking) on the New Layer button at the bottom of the Layers Palette. This brings up a dialog where you need to select the Overlay blend mode in the pop-down menu and check the box for "Fill with overlay-neutral color (50% grey)." Now you can dodge and burn by painting with white or black.

The Color Modes Group - Divides the colors that make up an image into three components: Hue, Saturation, and Luminosity (brightness). Ideal for when you want to adjust the color of an object or to control how adjustments are applied to an image.

Color Mode - Used to change color balance without affecting luminosity.

| f-Stop Based Corrections |
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| To Lighten by 1 Stop - apply Screen Mode at 38% Opacity |
| To Darken by 1 Stop - apply Multiply Mode at 38% Opacity |
| For half-stop adjustments, use 19% Opacity |
| For one-third stop adjustments, use 12-13% Opacity |
| For one-quarter stop adjustments, use 9% Opacity |

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