

Fundamental Photoshop

Little things make a big difference when working in Photoshop

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

In this installment, we'll explore filters. But you won't actually learn how to use a single filter—instead you will learn some general principals that apply to most, if not all, of Photoshop's filters.

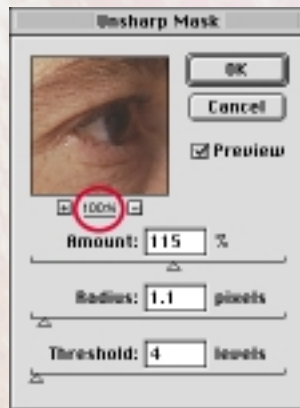
Go ahead and click on the Filter menu and explore the different submenus that Photoshop presents to you. You'll notice that certain filters have three periods after them while others do not. Those three little periods indicate that a filter will present you with a dialog box full of options. So, when you are about to sharpen your image, you are presented with Sharpen, Sharpen Edges, Sharpen More, and the special one (which has three periods) Unsharp Mask. You could almost think of the other choices in this case as being presets that enter numbers into the Unsharp Mask dialog box. When you're new to Photoshop, you start with the generic version, and once you want additional control, you look for those three little periods... get the idea.



Once you get into one of the filters that presents you with options, you have a bunch of choices that you might not be aware of. If you are using a filter that offers a preview (like Unsharp Mask), then you can click in the preview window and see what the image looked like before you applied the filter—release the mouse button and you see what it will look like after you apply the filter. You can also click-and-drag in the preview area to scroll around your image. If you are having trouble finding what you're looking for, click on the minus button to zoom out to make it a bit easier to see what's in your image. In fact, on many of the filters, you can even click inside your image window and the preview

will jump to that area.

If the filter also shows you a preview in the main image area, you can toggle from before and after by turning the preview checkbox on and off. Without knowing that, you may keep playing with the controls and wonder why it's not changing much. Occasionally, you might notice that the main screen hasn't updated yet. Adobe includes an indicator to let you know if the image is still updating. If you notice a flashing line under the percentage listed below the preview window in the dialog box, then that preview has not updated yet. If you see the same flashing line under the preview checkbox, then the main screen hasn't updated yet.



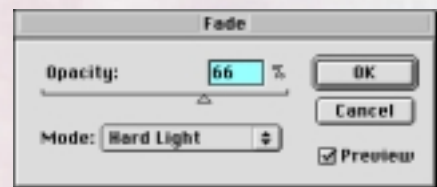
You can also change the zoom amount of the main image while you are in a filter dialog box. Either go up to the View menu and use those choices or type Command++ (plus) or Command-- (minus) to zoom in or out. You can also press the Spacebar to access the Hand tool or hold Command-Spacebar to access the normal Zoom tool where you can click-and-drag to zoom in on a particular area.

I often like to watch the main screen as I move a slider just a little bit. This becomes much easier once you realize that you can also use the up and down Arrow keys to change a number. Hold the Shift key when using them to increase the numbers in larger increments.

Sometimes, I play a little too much and really mess up my image. Instead of pressing Cancel and then trying a second time, you can hold the Option key and the Cancel button should change to Reset, which will get you back to the settings you started with

when you first opened the filter. You can even type Option-Command-. (period) as a shortcut. If you think everything looks OK, then you can press Return, which is the same as clicking the OK button.

If you use a particular filter all the time, then you might want to know about a certain keyboard shortcut. The last filter you used will be the very first filter in the Filter menu, and it is also the only filter that has a keyboard shortcut—Command-F. If you type that, then Photoshop will apply the filter that you last used with the identical settings. If you would rather have Photoshop open the dialog box for that filter, add the Option key.



If you notice the effect of the filter is a bit too strong, choose either Filter>Fade... or type Shift-Command-F, and you'll be able to lessen the effect by lowering the Opacity setting. Or you can make the filter only effect the brightness of the image by setting the Mode menu to Luminosity, Color (which only changes the colors in the image, leaving the brightness unchanged) or Hardlight (which makes 50% gray disappear and can do wonders for the Emboss filter).

One last thing to watch out for: most filters work better in RGB mode compared to CMYK mode. The filters just aren't smart enough to deal with cyan ink (which is quite messed up), and they also apply way too much black ink, making for a dark brown result. In fact, dozens of filters are grayed out in CMYK mode, including the extremely useful Lighting Effects filter.

Now, you should feel a bit more comfortable making your way through Photoshop's maze of filters ■

Ben Willmore is the founder of Digital Mastery, a training company which presents the national seminar tour of "Master Photoshop in 3 Days." Ben provides hundreds of free Photoshop tips on his web site, www.digitalmastery.com.



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