



Photoshop Mastery

Taking Photoshop to the next level

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

Multiply Your Options with This Blending Mode

The layer blend mode in the Layers palette determines how the active layer will affect the underlying image. If you change from Normal to Multiply mode, Photoshop will “print” the active layer on top of the underlying image... and so opens up an entire universe of possibilities.

Just imagine that the underlying image has been printed onto a sheet of paper and then that same sheet is sent back through the printer for a second pass. On the second pass, the active layer is printed on top of the original print. If you’re a photographer, it might help to think of Multiply mode as sandwiching two slides together. The bottom slide would be the underlying image and the top slide would be the active layer. In Multiply mode, white simply disappears and anything darker than white will darken the underlying image.

Since Multiply mode acts like ink, use it anytime you have some scanned text in which you don’t want the white paper background to show up. Just drag the scanned image on top of any photograph with the Move tool (V) and change the layer blend mode at the top of the Layers palette to Multiply. If any hint of the paper texture of the scanned image remains, choose Image>Adjustments>Levels and move the upper-right slider toward the middle until the paper texture disappears.

Because white disappears in Multiply mode, you can use it with any filter that produces a lot of white. For instance, if you’d like to exaggerate the edges of objects in an image, duplicate the original layer (Command-J [PC: Control-J]), choose Filter>Stylize>Find Edges, and then set the layer blend mode to Multiply. That will add black lines to the edges of the objects in your image. If you find that there are too many lines, just choose Filter>Noise>Median to



From left to right, original, filter alone, and filter applied using Multiply

simplify the duplicate layer before you apply the Find Edges filter.

To create a contoured image (which looks interesting when applied to someone’s face), start by choosing Filter>Noise>Median and adjust the Radius until all the fine detail is gone but you can still recognize major features in the image. Next, press Command-J (PC: Control-J) to duplicate the layer and set the layer blend mode to Multiply. With that layer active, press Command-J (PC: Control-J) nine times so you have a total of 11 layers. As each one of those layers will darken the underlying image, your document might look almost black.

To create the contour effect, click on the bottom-most layer, choose Filter>Stylize>Trace Contour and use a Level of zero. Click on the next layer in the stack, press Option-Command-F (PC: Alt-Control-F) to access the Trace Contour dialog, and this time use a Level setting of 25. Now repeat this process (make next layer active, apply filter) and each time add 25 to the setting you last applied (0, 25, 50, 75, etc.). If the resulting image is too complex, turn off the Eye icons on every other layer.

Multiply mode is useful when applying layer styles to an image. Let’s say you’ve decided to add a Color Overlay and a Gradient Overlay to the same

layer (via the Add a Layer Style pop-up menu at the bottom of the Layers palette). Well, the Color Overlay style would completely cover the Gradient Overlay, so all you’d see is a solid color being applied. But if you set the Blend Mode pop-up menu to Multiply in the Color Overlay category of the Layer Style dialog, it will print on top of the Gradient Overlay, allowing them both to contribute to the look of the image.

Finally, if I’m working on a complex brochure that has Photoshop graphics filling the page with text overlaid in QuarkXPress or InDesign, I’ll export the text from the page-layout program (as an EPS or PDF) and then overlay it onto my Photoshop file using Multiply mode (to get rid of the white background). That way I can precisely position the graphics relative to the text and then trash the text layer before saving the image.

We’ve just scratched the surface of what’s possible with Multiply mode. I hope you’ll start to integrate it into your projects and come up with creative uses for this invaluable feature. ■

Ben Willmore, founder of Digital Mastery, a Colorado-based training and consulting company, is a member of the Photoshop Hall of Fame and tours the country with his seminar, "Photoshop for Photographers." He's also author of Photoshop CS Studio Techniques and co-author of How to Wow: Photoshop for Photography.