

Sharpening

Which sharpening to use?

Photoshop offers several ways to sharpen your image, from Adobe Camera Raw to filters in Photoshop called Sharpen, Sharpen Edges, Sharpen More and Unsharp Mask. There are also several plug-ins available for sharpening.

Rules to Sharpen by:

1. **In all cases, zoom your image to 100% before sharpening (double click on the Zoom tool in the toolbox or press CTRL + 1 (the number 1)). This is the only way to accurately see the effect of the sharpening.**
2. **Do not over-sharpen. Over-sharpening can make a photo worse than no sharpening at all. If you see halos around objects, you've gone too far.**
3. **If sharpening in Photoshop, like most other adjustments, do the sharpening on its own layer.** Make a copy of the background layer (CTRL-J) and then do your sharpening.

When to sharpen

For medium to large prints:

There is an ongoing debate on whether to sharpen your image at any point in your “development” process (workflow) or only as the last thing you do. There are good theoretical reasons to make sharpening the last step. But tests have shown the eye cannot usually tell the difference between prints sharpened first or last. Do your own tests and make your own judgment.

For small images for the web:

For small images it is easier to sharpen after you have resized the image to its final size for the web. The sharpening effect tends to be lost if sharpening before a dramatic reduction in size.

Adobe Camera Raw converter

The raw converter has a couple of ways to sharpen your image – Clarity and Sharpen. CS6 has improved these tools to make them very useful. And with the Adjustment Brush the changes no longer need to affect the entire image. You can use Clarity or Sharpness on just portions of the image. Using the sharpening mask available really helps in sharpening only the edges of subjects in the photos. Holding the Alt key helps you see what the mask is doing. Every place that is white is where sharpening is occurring.

Unsharp Mask in Photoshop filters menu

Amount – You'll probably want something in the range of 100-200 but it depends on the resolution of the photo.

Radius is how far the program looks for an edge change in order to make its effect. Good values are .6 or .7. Only in rare instances should this go over 1.0.

Threshold tells the program at what contrast to look for differences between two touching shades. The lower the Threshold, the greater the sharpening effect you'll see. Start at 0

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and move it up until the grain and noise is minimized to your satisfaction. As you increase this setting, only the areas that are drastically different will be sharpened.

Only sharpen the parts of the image that need it

Skies and out of focus areas that have digital grain should not be sharpened. There are multiple ways to do this.

1. Select the areas you want to sharpen and feather the selection. Copy and Paste the selection. This will create a layer that only contains the areas selected. Then sharpen that layer.
2. Another way to do the same thing is to create a duplicate layer of the background. Sharpen it. Then add a layer mask and paint away the areas that shouldn't be sharpened using a soft edged brush.

Sharpening with the High Pass filter

Here is a quick "trick" to enhance your photos a little in a few steps.

1. First, duplicate your image layer [Ctrl + J].
2. With the new layer selected, select Filter > Other > High Pass from the menu and enter a value anywhere from 2-10 pixels.
3. Change the Layer Blend Mode to "Overlay" or "Hard Light". (This will temporarily look like you've ruined your image!)
4. If necessary, adjust the Layer Opacity slider until you get your desired results.

Topaz Detail Plug-in (\$40 at <http://www.topazlabs.com/>)

Topaz Detail does a good job sharpening. It allows localized as well as global sharpening. Comes with many presets but you can change the effect manually after that. It can also sharpen by tones such as sharpening just the highlights or just the shadows.

Alternative method for small files for use on the web

If changing the size dramatically from original resolution, say for the Internet, **first resize the image**. Then use Unsharp Mask with these settings: Amount-125 or more; Radius-0.2; Threshold-0. Then repeat this process three or more times.

Smart Sharpen

Smart Sharpen does a good job of sharpening an image and can improve the appearance of blurry images, to some degree.

There are three ways to remove blur. Of these, the Gaussian and Lens Blurs options are the most useful. For maximum results, check the More Accurate checkbox. This will increase the time it takes the filter to process the image but it may be worth it.

The Advanced setting allows you to selectively fade the sharpening effects in either the shadow or highlight areas.

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Boosting contrast – Creates a little more depth than the normal unsharp mask settings and maybe reduces appearance of haze a little

- Create a duplicate of the Background layer.
- With this duplicate layer active, select Filter > Sharpen > Unsharp Mask. Start with an Amount setting of about 20 and a Radius of 60, with the Threshold set to 0. Then adjust these settings to produce the best effect.
- The Amount is adjusting how bright the halos being created are going to be, and the Radius determines how far they're going to spread out.
- You'll notice that the bright halos around objects adjust in size and intensity as you adjust these values.
- Work to find the best result and click OK.

Sharpening edges only

- On the layers panel duplicate the background layer.
- On the Channels panel, make a copy of the green channel (it holds the most data).
- Increase contrast by using Levels on the channel. This helps select just the edges of objects in the photo.
- Turn the channel into a selection by using the icon at the bottom left of the channels palette.
- Now invert the selection.
- Select the RGB channel to bring back the photo in full color.
- With the selection still made and the layer copy highlighted, create a mask. The mask should match the selection.
- Now use Smart Sharpen or Unsharp Mask to sharpen the layer copy. Only the edges will be effected by the sharpening because of the layer mask.