

SCRAPPER'S GUIDE

The Easiest Way To Learn Digital Scrapbooking. **Guaranteed.**

Bring on the Blur! (Photoshop)

Tip of the Week by Jan Walker on March 1, 2010

Here's a simple way to add some drama to your images, highlight your subject and minimize a distracting background all at the same time!

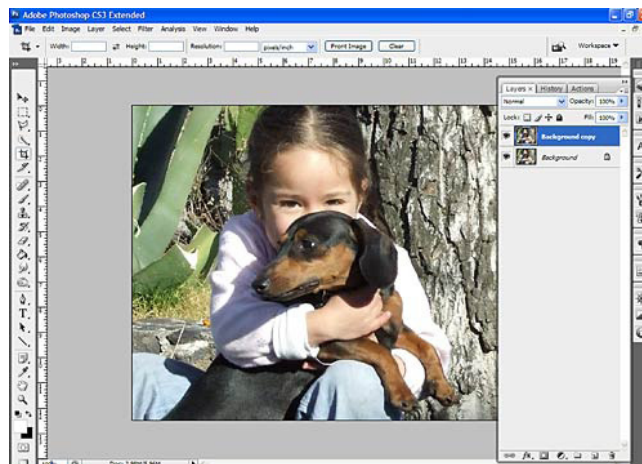
Without getting into a complicated discussion about depth of field (DOF), let me just give you the basic idea... an image with a shallow DOF is an image where one particular portion is in sharp focus and the rest of the image is slightly blurred, which naturally draws the eye to the sharper, more defined area. Here's an example of an image photographed with a fairly shallow depth of field:



So what do you do if you have a photo you want to use on a layout, but it has a background that steals focus from your subject? Maybe you've photographed your child outside, but there are distracting objects in the background... or maybe you have a great image of your favorite flower, but it gets lost among the details of the leaves and branches behind it.

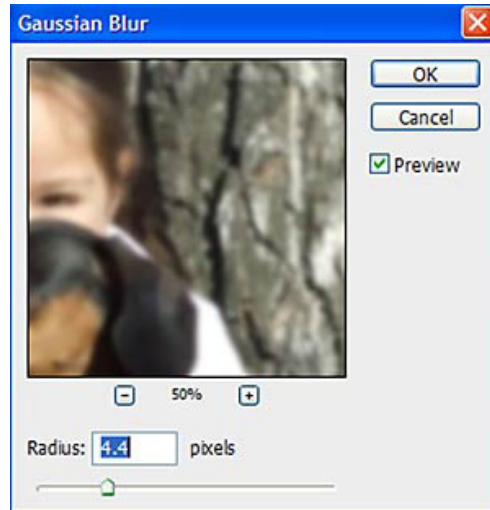
With the depth of field principle in mind, we'll use Photoshop to create a similar type of contrast between your subject and background. Let's get started!

Step 1: Open the image you'd like to work with, and click Ctrl+J (Cmd+J on a Mac) to create a duplicate layer.

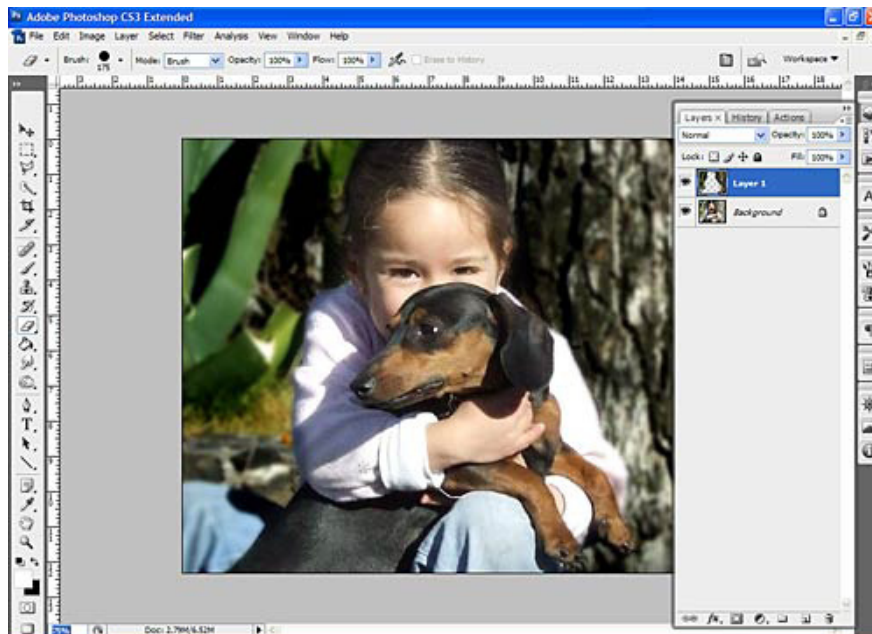


On the example image, you'll see that the plants and the bark of the tree in the background are distractions that compete for your attention, when the real focus of the image should be the little girl and her dog.

Step 2: Click on your duplicate image and in the Options bar, select Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur. For this example, I set the blur radius to 4.5 pixels. Your image may need slightly less, or slightly more, depending upon the complexity of its background. Be careful not to blur too much, though, or your finished result will look less than natural. Once you've set the radius, click Okay.



Step 3: With your blurred layer selected, go over to the Toolbar and click on the Eraser brush and choose a soft brush. We're going to erase the blur from your subject area, and leave it on the background. If you have a fairly large subject area, you can use a large brush, starting in the middle of your subject as you erase the blur.

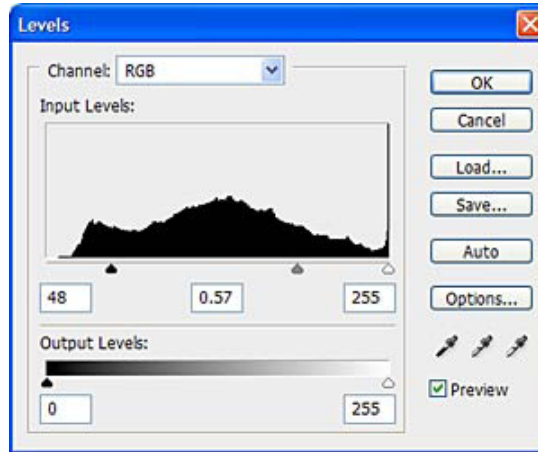


As you move closer to the edges of your subject, reduce the size of your brush by clicking on the left bracket key so that you can refine those detailed areas. You don't have to erase the very edge of your subject, and take care that you don't erase any of the background. Work slowly and carefully. If you accidentally erase some of the background, click Ctrl+Alt+Z (Cmd+Alt+Z on a Mac) to step back and redo that area.

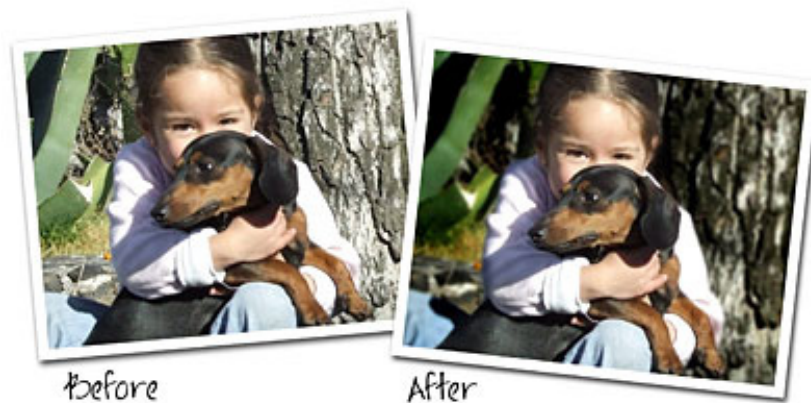
Once you've finished erasing the blur from your subject, take a look at the difference you've made in your

photo by clicking on the eye icon to the left of the blurred layer to hide it. Toggle back to see your finished result.

Bonus tip: If you want to minimize the background even more, click on the blurred layer and then, from the Menu Bar, choose Image > Adjustments > Levels. Move the middle slider to the right until your background begins to darken. You can also move the left slider to the right to darken it up a bit more. Use your own judgment as to how dark you want your background to become. Make sure it still looks natural. Click okay.



You can now save your finished image as .jpg. Be sure to rename it so you can preserve the original image... and you're done!



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