

LET'S PRACTICE



PSA EID STUDY GROUP #22

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June is Layers Month

Our special topic in June will be layers. Think of layers a pieces of transparent paper....remember tracing in school? If you have your image on the bottom and you put a clear plastic over it and draw on it, you will change your picture.

In this example, I will be showing one way to replace a bad sky or background.

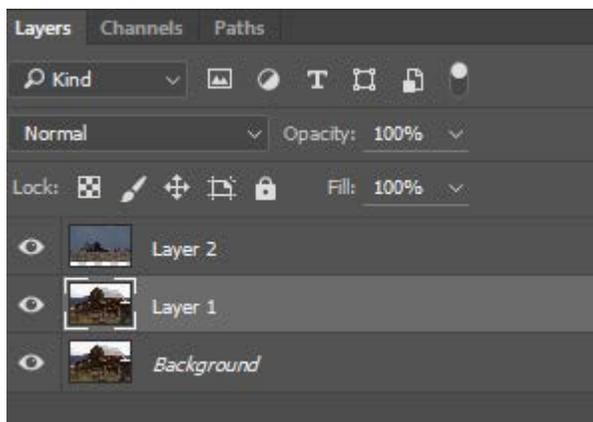
USING LAYERS

Open the original image and make a copy of the background layer (CTRL J or CMD J (Mac)).

Open the image with the sky or background you want to use as replacement for original.

Drag image with sky/background desired into working image and drop. This will create a new layer with the background/sky image.

The Layers palette now looks like this:



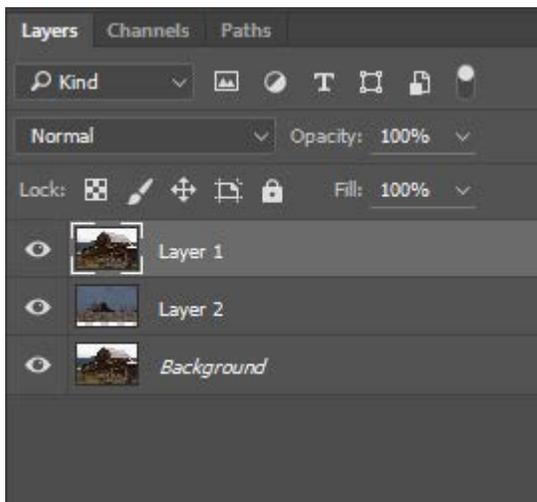
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The sky/background image is automatically placed on top. However, since I want to reveal only the sky, I switched the layer 1 with layer 2 (drag layer 2 down between layer 1 and the background) so now it looks like this:



You will notice the “sky” image is now totally covered but I can see the image I want to work on.

Next step will be to add a layer mask:



At the bottom of the Layers palette are these icons.

Choose this one.

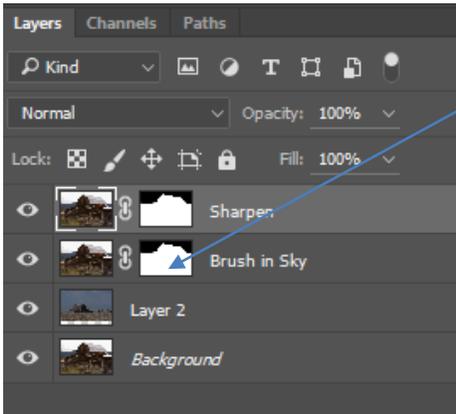
The layer mask came up white and I want to paint the sky in. The way to remember is that White reveals, Black conceals. Since the mask is white, I want to conceal the washed out “sky”. In this image though, the background is actually the base of the mountains.

Next I did a selection on the barn and the trees in the background using the quick select tool. In this case it did a pretty fair job since the contrast was good.

Now, select the mask to make it active and choose the brush tool. Be sure the color chosen is black.

Start painting in the background. It won't matter if you have your background selected and go over the area of the selection. It's only going to reveal what you have masked off.

Here is a view of what the masking will look like:



Another way to use layers is for sharpening. I always keep a PSD file intact with all the layers. If I use it for competition, I will flatten it, resize it and save it as a JPG – and rename it. This way you still have all the work you've done handy in case you want to make any changes.

For sharpening, I think everyone pretty well knows that you have to sharpen more for printing an image than for display on a screen. If you've been up close to a print, it will sometimes look pixelated however in a lightbox, it looks good.

So you have an image and you want to sharpen it for print. On the screen it looks kind of over-sharpened. You want to make a copy of the top layer and then rename it to Sharpen (like image above). Do your sharpening and then you can turn the layer off when you want to put it in digital competition or turn it on when you want to make a print. You don't need to have two copies of the same image if you use layers.

I have used layers to convert the same background image (original) into many conversions in Topaz presets. I can then turn each one on or off depending on what I want to use the photo for. You can experiment and turn layers on or off.

Remember – the visible layer on top is the one that controls the image so if you don't want to see it, you can turn it off to hide it. The next visible layer below will take over.

Stroke

I keep harping about using a stroke on your images—especially if you are planning to compete at the local club level or internationally with PSA.

So what is a stroke? A stroke is a small line, sort of like a frame, that sets your image off from the background (usually black). If you have dark edges on your image, they will blend right in with the screen and the image loses some impact (and points). The stroke defines the borders of the image.

On page one, you see my images set off from the white background with a black stroke. This doesn't mean a frame effect—though you can stroke big enough to make a frame. All you want is that little bit of difference between the black (or white) background and the image itself. If the stroke gets too large, it detracts from the image.

How do I get a stroke on my image, you ask? First, if you are in any other layer but the background layer, it's easy. Just go to the Edit tab and find the Stroke command. Click on it and a window will come up allowing you to choose the stroke's color and size. I usually use a 1-2 pixel stroke. Keep it rather small.

So:

- 1) Size your image before stroking it
- 2) Go to the Edit tab
- 3) Choose Stroke
- 4) Choose a color (it does not have to be white or black—whatever color complements your image (there is the eyedropper present to pick pixels from your image if you so desire)
- 5) Choose a size—usually one or two pixels. Go small and if it doesn't look good to you, add a pixel.
- 6) Choose OK and the stroke should show up.
- 7) If the stroke doesn't show up, increase the size by about 2 pixels until it does show up.

NOTE: You cannot use stroke on a background layer unless you first "Select All" or CTRL A.

If you have sized and flattened your image for competition or web viewing, this would be the command to use first. If you don't, Stroke will be grayed out and unusable.

I think you will find your images have more "punch" and will do better in competition if you use the stroke.