

## Tech Tips – High Pass Filter

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You may have seen or heard someone recommending the High Pass filter in Elements or Photoshop as a way to do sharpening on your images. For those of you who haven't tried it here's how. After making all of the basic adjustment you want to your image either flatten it (after saving the layered file) or create a new composite layer by pressing <CTRL><ALT><SHIFT>E for a PC (<CMD><OPT><SHIFT>E on a MAC). With this layer selected go to Filter-Other-High Pass. Set the level to something on the low side, between 2.0 and 5.0 pixels is generally plenty, and then click OK. The image turns grayish but that is fine. In sharpening we are only interested in the edge effect introduced by the filter, not in the gray color that results. Just change the Blend Mode on the layer to Overlay and the image snaps back to color. This technique adds contrast because of the Overlay Blend Mode. If there seems to be too much contrast, try changing the Blend Mode to Soft Light. Both of these Blend Modes are blind to 50% gray, which is the main color the High Pass Filter generates. Check your High Pass layer before making the Blend Mode change. If you see significant color fringing, press <CTRL><SHIFT>U on a PC (<CMD><SHIFT>U on a MAC) to desaturate the layer and eliminate any color influence.

Did you know you can also use the High Pass filter to soften an image? Here's how. After making all of the basic adjustment you want to your image either flatten it (after saving the layered file) or create a new composite layer by pressing <CTRL><ALT><SHIFT>E for a PC (<CMD><OPT><SHIFT>E on a MAC). With this layer selected first change the Blend Mode to Overlay. Now go to Filter-Other-High Pass and select a higher setting, say between 10 and 20 pixels, and click OK. Since the Blend Mode was already set to Overlay you will see the sharpening effect, though at the higher settings it may seem exaggerated. Here's the trick, with the High Pass layer still selected press <CTRL>I on a PC (<CMD>I on a MAC) to invert the effect. Presto, instant softening. Since you may not want everything softened, add a layer mask and fill it with black to hide the effect. (For those with Elements remember that you will need to add a blank adjustment layer and then press <CTRL><ALT>G on a PC (<CMD><OPT>G on a MAC) to pin it to the High Pass layer as a clipping mask so that you will have the use of a mask on the layer.) Now paint with white where you want to add the softening effect back in. If the effect seems too strong, lower the layer's opacity to suit your taste. You can also modify the extent of the softening by using lower pixel settings for less softening and higher settings for greater softening. I find that using something between 10 and 20 gives me a good starting point that is easily modified using the layer opacity rather than repeatedly backing up and rerunning the filter at different settings. This technique also adds a faint "glow" to the image, making it very effective when you want to soften a model's cheeks or forehead when working on portraits. Rather than spending money for a "bokeh" plug-in try this way of creating a false bokeh to introduce controlled softening to your images.

Have fun using these effects. There is another very practical use for the High Pass filter that I'll cover in a later article.