

# How To Sharpen An Image

## *Using the High Pass Technique*

Most if not all digital images require sharpening. Sharpening in Adobe Photoshop will allow you to select the precise amount of sharpening and the areas of the image that require sharpening most. If sharpening for screen it is very much a case of “what you see is what you get.” For images destined for print however, the monitor preview is just that - a preview. The actual amount of sharpening required for optimum image quality is usually a little more than looks comfortable on screen.



The best sharpening techniques are those that prioritize the important areas for sharpening and leave the smoother areas of the image well alone, e.g. sharpening the eyes of a portrait but avoiding the skin texture. These advanced techniques are essential when sharpening images that have been scanned from film or have excessive noise. So let the project begin.

NOTE: It is not advisable to sharpen images that have been saved as JPEG files using high compression/low quality settings. The sharpening process that follows should also come at the end of the editing process, i.e. adjust the color and tonality of the image before starting this advanced sharpening technique. Reduce the levels of sharpening later if it proves too much.

### **Step 1**

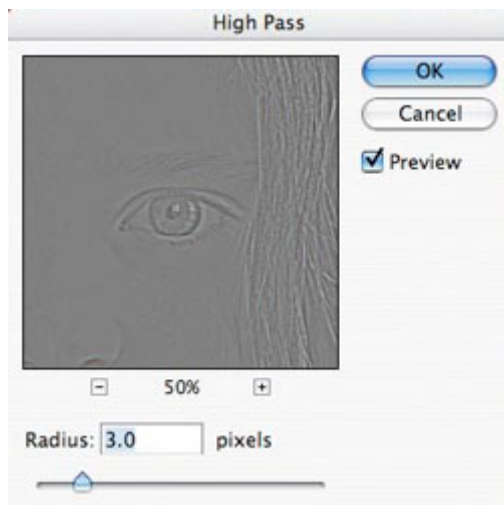
Duplicate the background layer and set the blend mode to Overlay. Select 'Overlay' from the blend modes menu in the layers palette.

### **Step 2**

Choose Filter > Other > High Pass. Increase the pixel radius until you achieve the correct amount of sharpening. A pixel radius of 1.0 if printing to Gloss paper and 3.0 if printing to Matte paper would be about normal.



Choose Overlay from the blend modes menu in the Layers palette and then choose Filter > Other > High Pass.

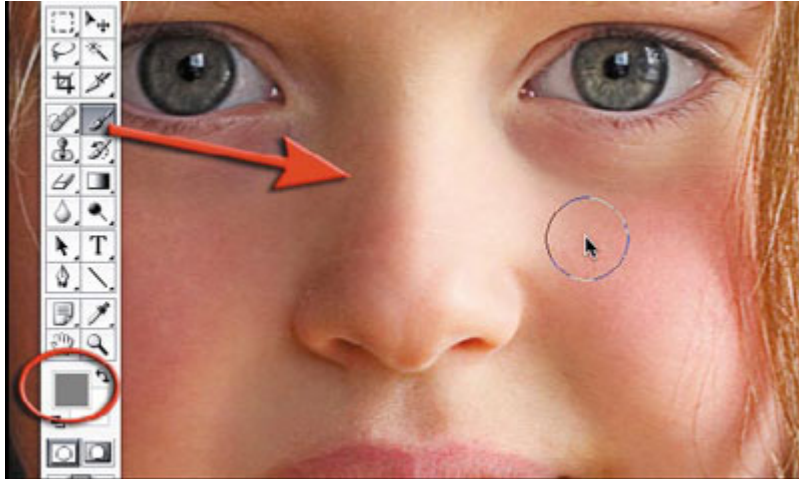


Increase the pixel radius in the High Pass dialog box until you achieve the correct amount of sharpening.

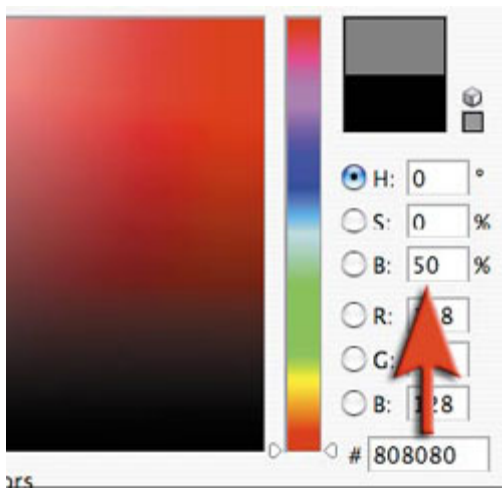
Note: To adjust the level of sharpening later you can either adjust the opacity of the High Pass layer or set the blend mode of the 'High Pass' layer to 'Soft Light' or 'Hard Light' to increase or decrease the level of sharpening.

### Step 3

Click on the Foreground color swatch in the Tools palette to open the Color Picker. Enter 0 in the Hue and Saturation fields and 50% in the Brightness field to choose a midtone grey. Select OK. Paint the High Pass layer to remove any sharpening that is not required, e.g. skin tones, skies etc. This technique is especially useful for limiting the visual appearance of noise or film grain.



Click the Foreground color swatch in the Tools palette to open the Color Picker.



Type 0 in the Hue and Saturation fields and 50% in the Brightness field of the Color Picker.

#### Step 4

Remember at this point the settings you have selected are being viewed on a monitor as a preview of the actual print. To complete the process it is important to print the image and then decide whether the image could stand additional sharpening or whether the amount used was excessive. If the settings are excessive you can choose to lower the opacity of the 'High Pass' layer. You can alternatively switch the blend mode of the 'High Pass' layer to 'Soft Light' to reduce the sharpness or 'Hard Light' to increase the sharpness.

#### Saturation and sharpening

Most techniques to increase the contrast of an image will also have a knock-on effect of increasing color saturation (called "color fringing"). Be aware of color fringing as you're editing your images and adjust accordingly.