

# Blending Two Versions of One Exposure

## Preliminaries

Prepare two .jpg images using a single exposure (using your RAW convertor and a single well exposed RAW exposure is best). One version of the image ("Highlights") should preserve highlight details (it will look too dark, with the shadow areas blocked); the other image ("Shadows") should preserve shadow details (it will look too bright, with the highlight areas probably burned out).

## Doing the Blend

Open the images *Turret\_Arch\_Highlights.jpg* and *Turret\_Arch\_Shadows.jpg* in Photoshop.

Click on the Move tool. Hold the Shift key down and drag *Turret\_Arch\_Shadows.jpg* onto *Turret\_Arch\_Highlights.jpg*.

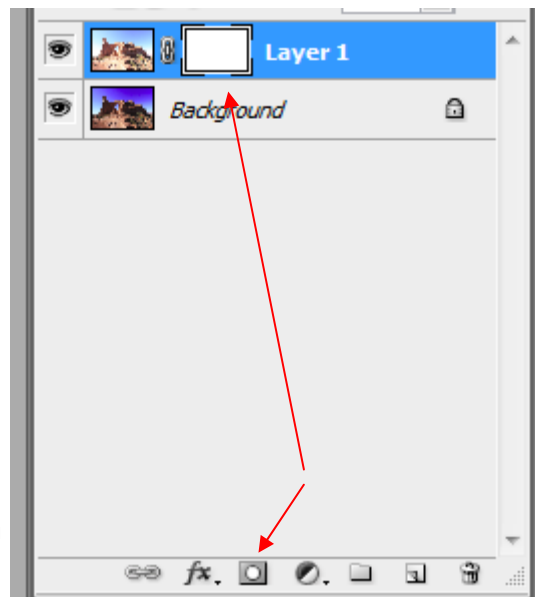
Add a mask to the top layer by clicking on the layer mask icon at the bottom of the palette.

Click on the background (or bottom layer). Select the entire layer by holding down the Ctrl key and touching "A". Select copy the entire layer by holding down the Ctrl key and touching "C".

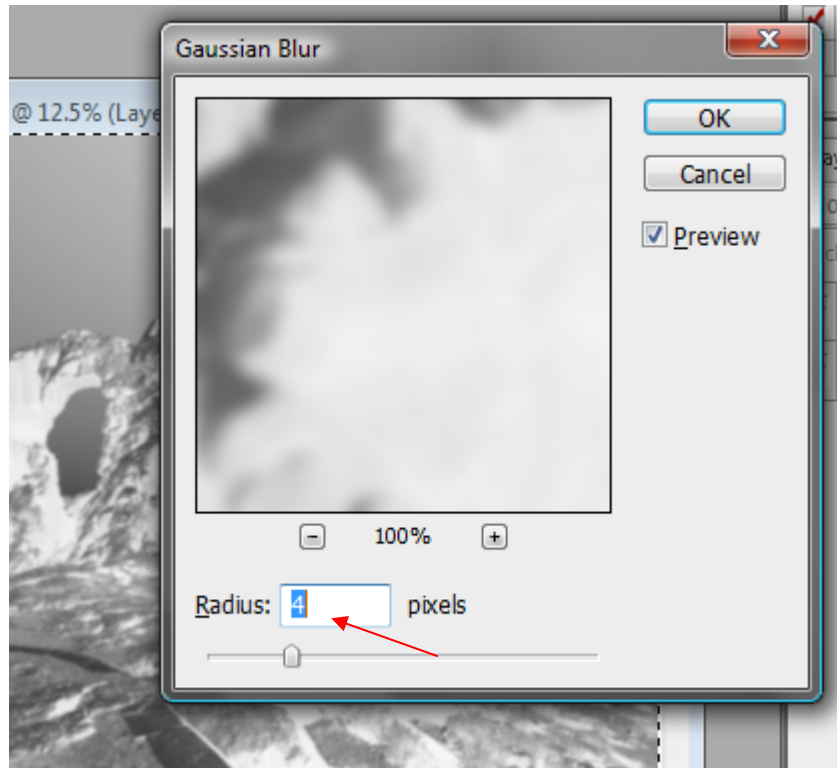
Select the mask in the top layer by holding down the ALT key and clicking it. Paste the bottom layer into the mask by holding down the Ctrl key and touching "V".

Now invert the mask by holding down the Ctrl key and touching "I".

Click **Filters**, choose and click **Blur**, choose and click **Gaussian Blur**.



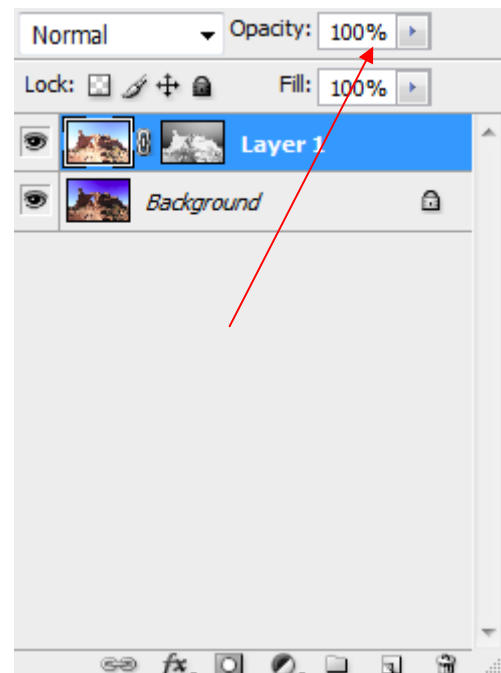
Set the **Radius** to 4 pixels. (You have to have a radius large enough to obscure details in the mask, but not so large as to cause haloes around places where light and dark parts of the image meet).  
Click the top layer to deselect the mask.



Use the **Opacity** slider at the top of the **Layers** palette to adjust how much the top layer modifies the image.

Click on **Select**, choose and click **Deselect** to remove the selection.

Click on **Layers**, choose and click **Flatten Image**.



The image of Turret Arch that preserves the highlights, at the expense of blocked shadow areas. This is called the "Highlights" version.



The image of Turret Arch that preserves the shadows, at the expense of burned out highlight areas. This is called the "Shadows" version.

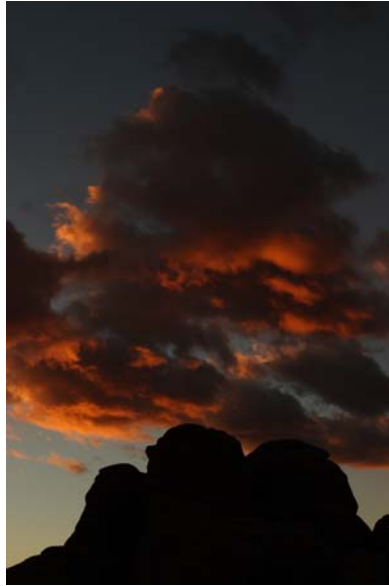


The result of blending the two versions of the single **RAW** exposure. The shadow areas of the brighter version have been combined with the highlight areas of the darker version. Midtones (like the sky) are averaged between the two versions.

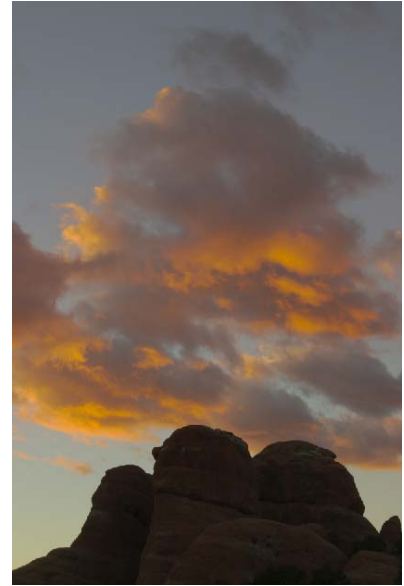




The “normal” version of a RAW exposure of the sunset in Devils Garden Campground, Arches National Park, Utah. I overexposed this image in error.



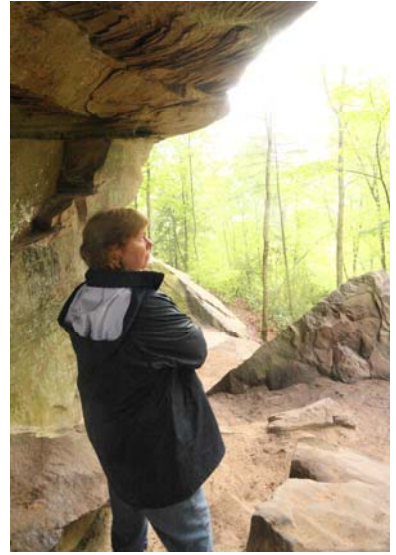
A darker version of the RAW exposure that preserves the highlights, the shadows are blocked up.



Blending the two versions opens the shadows slightly and darkens the clouds.

It is possible to select various areas of a photo and adjust each individually. To make the version at the right, I selected and then brightened the rock monoliths at the bottom. Next I selected the brighter parts of the clouds, and darkened them. The last step was to increase the saturation of this area. You can download an action called *Luminosity\_Masks.atn* which will allow you to create a series of masks that isolate various areas of a photo according to the brightness (Lights, Light Lights, Bright Lights, Super Brights, Basic Midtones, Expanded Midtones, Wide Midtones, Super Midtones, Darks, Dark Darks, Shadow Darks, and Super Darks). I used two of these masks to process the final image.





Two versions of one RAW exposure taken at the Red River Gorge Natural Area in northeast Kentucky. The centre version is the blend of the left (underexposed two stops) and the right (overexposed one stop).