



Dodge & Burn Layers

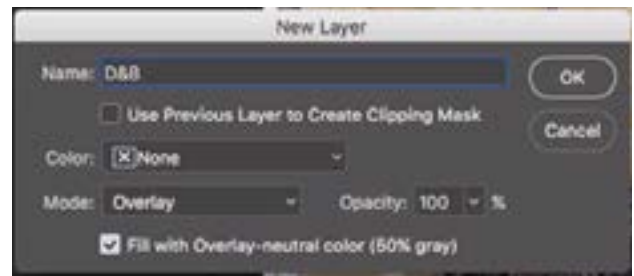
# Dodge & Burn Layers

In this lesson, we're going to take a look at dodge & burn layers. The terms dodge and burn come from techniques used in a photographic darkroom. The process of dodging will block the light from hitting the paper in some way, causing the image (or part of the image) to be lighter. The burning technique is when extra light is added in order to make the print (or part of the print) darker. We're going to be creating the same types of effects using a technique in Photoshop.

This technique is going to create a special kind of layer that will allow us to paint with black and white in order to darken and lighten different parts of our image.

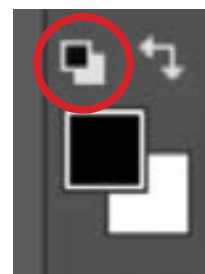
We're going to start by creating a layer that is full of 50% gray. The reason for this is that we are going to use a blending mode that will ignore all areas that are 50% gray, meaning those areas will not affect the image at all. Any areas that are lighter than 50% gray will lighten the image and any areas that are darker than 50% gray will darken the image.

We will hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and click on the New Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. Holding down the Option key while clicking on the New Layer icon will cause it to ask us for settings before the new layer is created. In the dialog box that appears, I will name the layer D&B (for dodge and burn), I'll set the Mode menu to Overlay, I will turn on the "Fill with Overlay-neutral color" check box and then click OK.



**When creating the dodge and burn layer, we will set the Mode to Overlay and turn on the "Fill with Overlay-neutral color" check box.**

Next, I will activate the Brush Tool and make sure that my foreground and background colors are set to their default settings, which are black and white. You can set these colors to their default settings either by clicking on the little black and white squares above the fore-



**Clicking on the little black and white squares circled will set the foreground/background swatches to their default settings.**

ground/background swatches in the Tool Bar or you can simply hit the D key. I will use a soft-edged brush and paint on the image with black in order to darken areas of the photo. I will paint with white to lighten areas of the photo.



Here, we painted on the top half of the dodge and burn layer with black and the bottom half of the layer with white. The lightening and darkening effect is too strong because the Brush Tool was set to 100% opacity.

With the Brush Tool set to apply the “paint” at full opacity, you’ll see that the darkening and lightening effects are too extreme. In order to paint in the effect more gradually, I will lower the opacity of the Brush Tool by using the Opacity slider in the Options Bar above



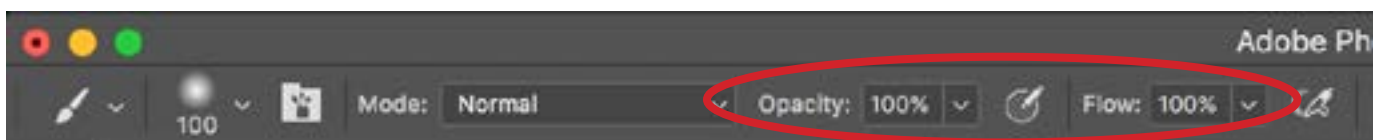
This is what the dodge and burn layer looks like after we painted with black and white at 100% opacity.

the main image window. (You can also change the opacity by using the number keys. Ex: The 2 key will set it to 20%.) In order to paint in a very gradual change, I will set the brush opacity to 20%. I will then start painting with black over the area that I think is too light. In the example image, it's the top of the photograph. Then I'll paint with white over the area I think are is dark, which is the face on the mural. I can easily switch between painting with black and painting with white by clicking on the little double-arrow icon above the foreground/background swatches in the Tool Bar or I can hit the X key to eXchange the foreground and background colors.

Since the opacity is set to 20%, we can build up the lightening or darkening effect by releasing the mouse button after painting and then starting to paint a second time. Every time you release the mouse button and then start painting again, the effect will build up.

## Opacity vs. Flow

When the Brush Tool is active, you will find Opacity and Flow settings in the Options Bar and you'll find that they act very similarly to each other. When you lower the Opacity setting, you can paint over the same area again and again, and as long as you never release your mouse button, you will only get one "coat" of paint. Once you release the mouse button and start painting again, it will begin to add a second coat. When you lower the Flow setting, the paint will build up as you paint multiple times over an area WITHOUT releasing the mouse button. You can compare it to painting with a can of spray paint. To quickly change your flow setting using keyboard shortcuts, hold down the Shift key while clicking the number keys. (The 3 key will be 30%, the 4 key will be 40%, etc.) To get an extremely low flow setting, hold the Shift key and then two numbers in quick succession, the first of them being zero. (05 will give you 5%.)

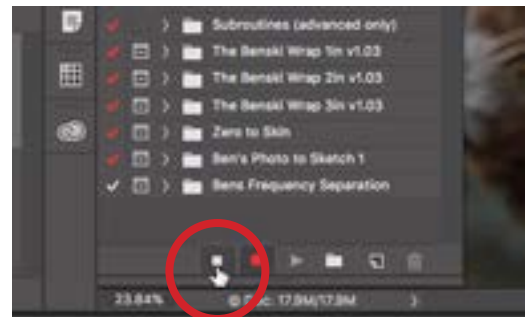


**The Opacity and Flow settings can be found in the Options Bar when the Brush Tool is active.**

## Make an action to create a dodge & burn layer

You can automate the process of creating the dodge and burn layer by creating an action to complete the task for you. You'll need to work with the Actions panel and if it's not already open in your interface, go to the main menu and choose Window > Actions. To create a new action, click on the New icon at the bottom of the Actions panel. A dialog box will appear, asking you for a name. I'll use the name "Dodge & Burn Layer." You can also use the Set menu to specify whether you'd like the action to be placed in a folder (if you like to organize your actions into folders). Click the Record button. Now, everything you do in Photoshop will be recorded into the action.

Hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and click on the New Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel. When the dialog appears, name the layer "Dodge & Burn Layer" (or something similar), set the Mode menu to Overlay, turn on the "Fill with Overlay-neutral color" check box and click OK. Next, hit the D key to reset your foreground and background colors. Finally, hit the Stop button at the bottom of the Actions panel to stop recording.



**Click the stop button at the bottom of the Actions panel to stop recording an action.**

To use the action, open the image you'd like to dodge and burn. Then open the Actions panel, click on the name of the "Dodge & Burn Layer" action and then hit the Play button at the bottom of the panel.

## Tips & limitations for the dodge & burn technique

**Fixing mistakes** Let's say that you overpaint on the dodge and burn layer and need to go back and fix it. That can be challenging if you've done a lot of detailed work on this layer, as is the case in our example. I'll turn off the visibility of the image layer so that I can view and work on the dodge and burn layer directly. To even out the lightening or darkening effect in specific areas, I can sample a shade of gray directly from this dodge and burn layer so that I can copy the brightness

of that area to paint somewhere else. With the Brush Tool active, I will hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) to temporarily switch to the eyedropper. I'll use the eyedropper to click on the shade that I'd like to copy and then release the Option key. That shade will now be designated to the foreground color and I can use it to paint over the desired area. Note that the Brush Tool must be set to 100% flow and opacity in order for the shades to match. In the video example, I decided that I had lightened the eyes of the sloth too much. To make the eye brightening match that of the rest of the sloth's face, I sampled a shade of gray from the face area and used it to paint over the eye areas.

**Limitations** If you have an area in your image that is blown out to solid white, the burning technique will not be effective in darkening it. It will only make the image look grayish in that area.

If you have an area that is blown out to white or an area that is completely black, and your image happens to be a raw file, then the Adjustment Brush within Camera Raw will be more effective in bringing some of the detail back. This is because a raw file has more detail in the highlights and the shadows.



**With the Brush Tool active, hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) to temporarily switch to the eyedropper.**



**We're painting with the color we just sampled.**



**The burn technique will be ineffective on areas that are blown out to solid white like the area on this sloth's face.**



Here are before (top) and after images, where we used the dodge and burn technique to darken the outer areas in the frame and lighten the grassy area to draw attention there. Below, you can see what the dodge and burn layer looked like when we were finished.



I dodge & burn REAL slow.

