

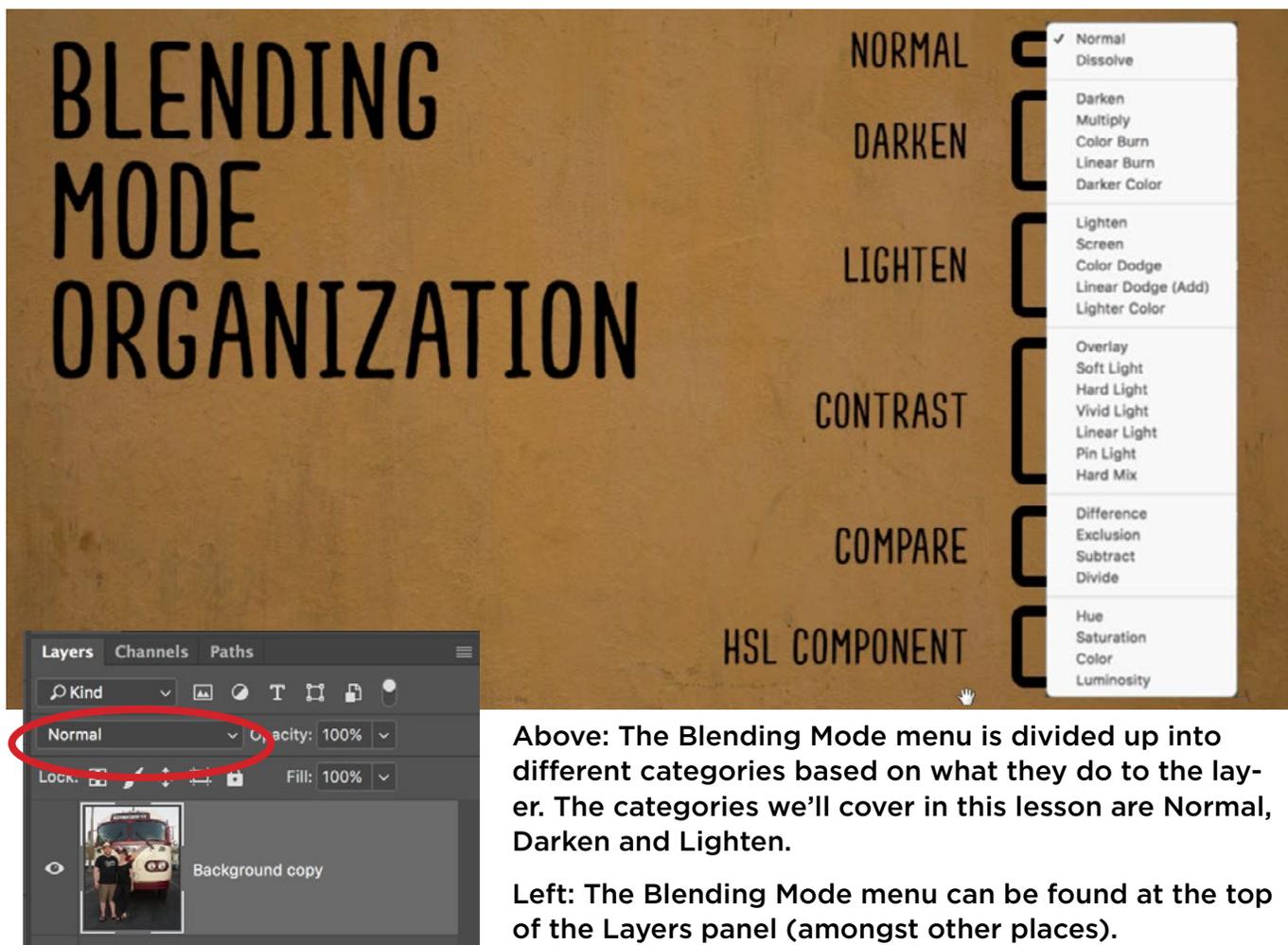


Blending Modes: Part 1

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Blending modes are one of my favorite features when it comes to the creative use of Photoshop, and that's what we're going to cover in this lesson.

The blending mode menu is a list of modes that you're going to find in many different areas of Photoshop. We will look at the menu as a whole and then talk about what each individual mode does. Note that we covered the different mode categories in a previous Masters Academy video, but here is a quick recap:



Above: The Blending Mode menu is divided up into different categories based on what they do to the layer. The categories we'll cover in this lesson are Normal, Darken and Lighten.

Left: The Blending Mode menu can be found at the top of the Layers panel (amongst other places).

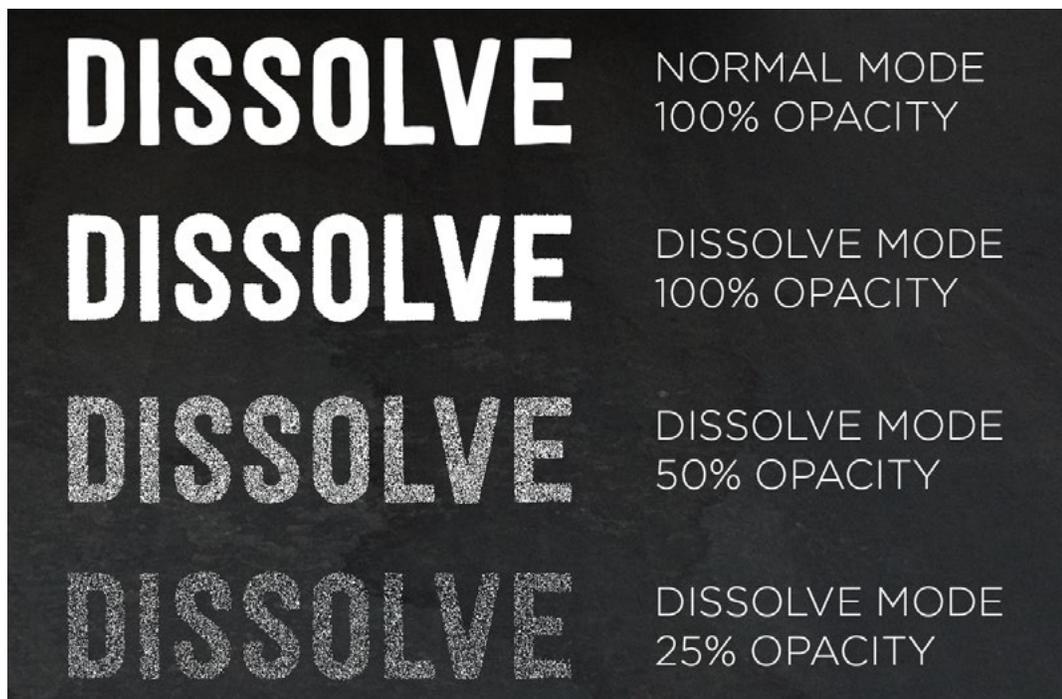
The Blending Mode menu can be found at the top of the Layers panel (amongst other places) and the chosen blending mode will determine how the active layer will interact with what's below it. Let's look at the blending modes, one by one.

Normal

When a layer is set to the Normal blending mode, there will be no special blending between the active layer and what's underneath it. When set to Normal, the only way your active layer will blend with the layer (or layers) underneath is if you change the Opacity or Fill setting.

Dissolve

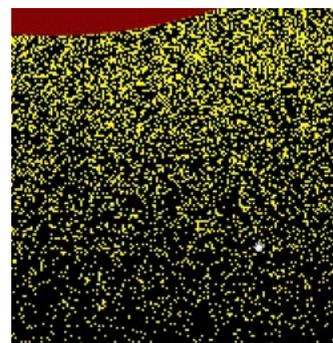
Just as with the Normal mode, when you use the Dissolve blending mode, there is no special blending between the layer you're working on and the layers underneath. In order for this mode to do anything, you need to have a layer that you can partially see through. When using Dissolve mode, it will prevent the opacity and the fill settings from allowing the layer to become partially transparent. The pixels will either completely show up or completely disappear, but it will try to simulate that partial opacity by creating noise (a diffusion dither pattern). This can be used to create a variety of effects.



The lower the opacity of the layer, the more scattered the little specks will be when the layer is set to Dissolve mode. At 100% opacity, you can only see jagged edges on the layer. As the opacity gets lower and lower, you can see more of a scattered effect.



Above left: The yellow glow was placed on its own layer beneath the text layer. Above right: The layer with the yellow glow was set to the Dissolve blending mode. As the glow fades out toward the edges, you'll see the Dissolve specks become more and more scattered. Right: A close-up of the scatter effect created by the Dissolve blending mode.



In the example image, we have a blurred glow effect beneath some text. When we changed the blending mode to Dissolve, the glow took on a look of scattered specks, more close together in the solid area and more scattered in the transparent area. I would like to add an additional effect to the glow in the form of a motion blur, but in order to work with those little specks that make up the layer, we'll have to make it so they're permanently part of the layer and not just the result of the blending mode. Here's how to accomplish that. First, create a new, empty layer below the layer with the different blending mode (in our case, it's the glow layer). Make sure that the blending mode of this new layer is set to Normal. Then, activate the layer with the blending mode again (the glow layer), go to the Layer menu and

choose Merge Down. This will deposit the visual look of the layer with the glow onto the layer underneath. The blending mode will still be set to Normal. Now, you can apply an effect on the layer. In our example, we applied a radial blur and you can see that the effect was applied to each scattered dot that was originally created by using the Dissolve mode.



After we merged the glow layer down into an empty layer, the Dissolve effect became part of the layer. This allowed us to apply an effect (radial blur) to the individual specks.

Darken Modes

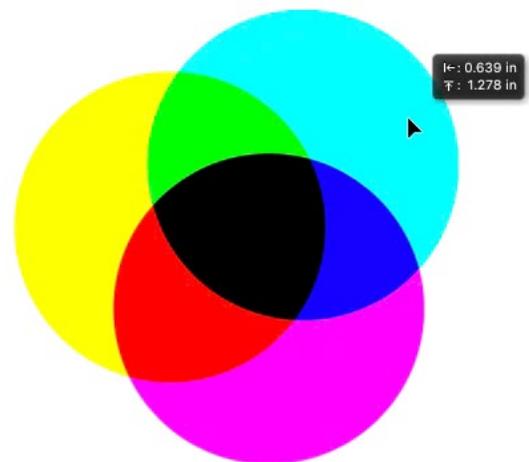
The next category of blending modes in the menu is a series I like to call darken modes. Darkening is the only thing they are capable of doing to your picture. When you use one of these modes, Photoshop will be incapable of brightening whatever is underneath the active layer.

Multiply mode When working with Multiply mode, I think of it as printing with ink. It acts as if you're applying ink to an image (the underlying layers) that is also created out of ink. When printing with ink, the light areas of the image don't get any ink because the paper will provide the "whiteness." It's the dark areas that will need the most ink. The darker the area, the more ink that will be used.

When I demonstrate what's happening behind the scenes, I sometimes create a shape for each of the colors that make up an image. In RGB mode, those shapes would be red, green and blue. For CMYK mode, those shapes would be cyan, magenta and yellow. When you're in RGB mode, you're usually thinking about light and when you're in CMYK mode, you're usually thinking about ink. We mentioned above that the Multiply blending mode will cause your layer to act like ink, so in demonstrating the cyan, magenta and yellow shapes, I will set them to Multiply and then overlap them slightly so that you can see what happens when the different colors of ink are overlapping.



In order to create a highlighter effect that looks like we actually put ink on paper, we used the Brush Tool on an empty layer above the paper layer (left) and then set the blending mode of that layer to Multiply (right).

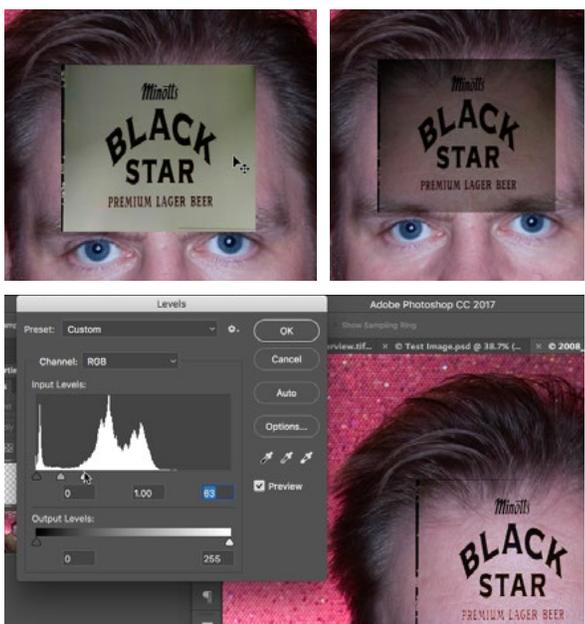


We're demonstrating how cyan, magenta and yellow ink would blend together by placing the three different colors on different layers and setting those layers to Multiply mode.



Left: The background image layer. Center: A black-to-white gradient was placed on a new layer above the background layer. Right: The blending mode of the gradient layer was set to Multiply, demonstrating that the mode can only darken and not lighten.

To discover other uses for Multiply mode, just think about scenarios where ink would be applied to something. Some examples would be adding a tattoo to skin, placing a graphic on clothing, or a brick wall, etc. When using Multiply mode for one



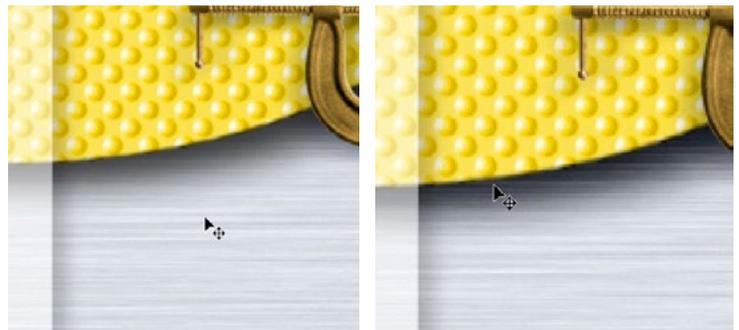
A logo was cut from one image and then pasted into another image as a tattoo. To make it look realistic, the blending mode was set to Multiply and a Levels adjustment was used to force more areas of the logo layer to white.

of these uses, remember that any white areas will not be visible after the blending mode is changed. In the example image, we've taken a logo off of a truck and are placing it as a tattoo on skin. Because the area surrounding the logo is not perfectly white, we'll have to do some tweaking in order for the logo to appear without any of the surrounding areas. In an instance like this, we'll use a Levels adjustment (Image > Adjustments > Levels), dragging the white slider to the left, forcing more and more areas to white. When an area is white in Multiply mode, it becomes invisible. After dragging the white slider to remove as much of the surrounding area as possible, we'll click OK and then use the Eraser tool to remove any excess (that we don't want to be part of the tattoo).



The same logo that was used as a tattoo on the previous page was then moved to a shirt pocket and free-transformed to make it look like the angle and position was realistic. The blending mode is again set to **Multiply** so that the logo blends nicely with the underlying layer (the shirt).

Linear Burn This mode acts a lot like Multiply mode. It's a more aggressive version in that you'll usually end up with a lot more areas becoming solid black. This mode also allows more of the texture to show through. Knowing this, I will usually test out Linear Burn in addition to Multiply when trying to achieve the darkening effect.



Left: The drop shadow is set to the Multiply mode. Right: The drop shadow is set to Linear Burn.

Color Burn This blending mode will also darken the image but it will make it more colorful as well. When you use the Color Burn mode, Photoshop will take whatever color is in the active layer and force it into the layer underneath. This blending mode can be useful for adding more drama to skies, in that it can tend to act like



An empty layer was added above the image layer and we are painting with light gray to create a polarized effect in the sky area.

a polarizing filter. To achieve this effect, open the image that contains the sky you want to enhance. Create a new, empty layer above the image layer and set the blending mode of the empty layer to Color Burn. Then, activate the Brush Tool and, using a lighter gray shade, paint over the sky area. Alternatively, you could create a selection around the sky and then fill that selection with the foreground color (the light gray shade). If you would like

to add color to something shiny like metal, this would be a good mode to use. In the example image, we have a chrome effect on some text. To change the color, we added a new, empty layer above the chrome layer and then changed the blending mode



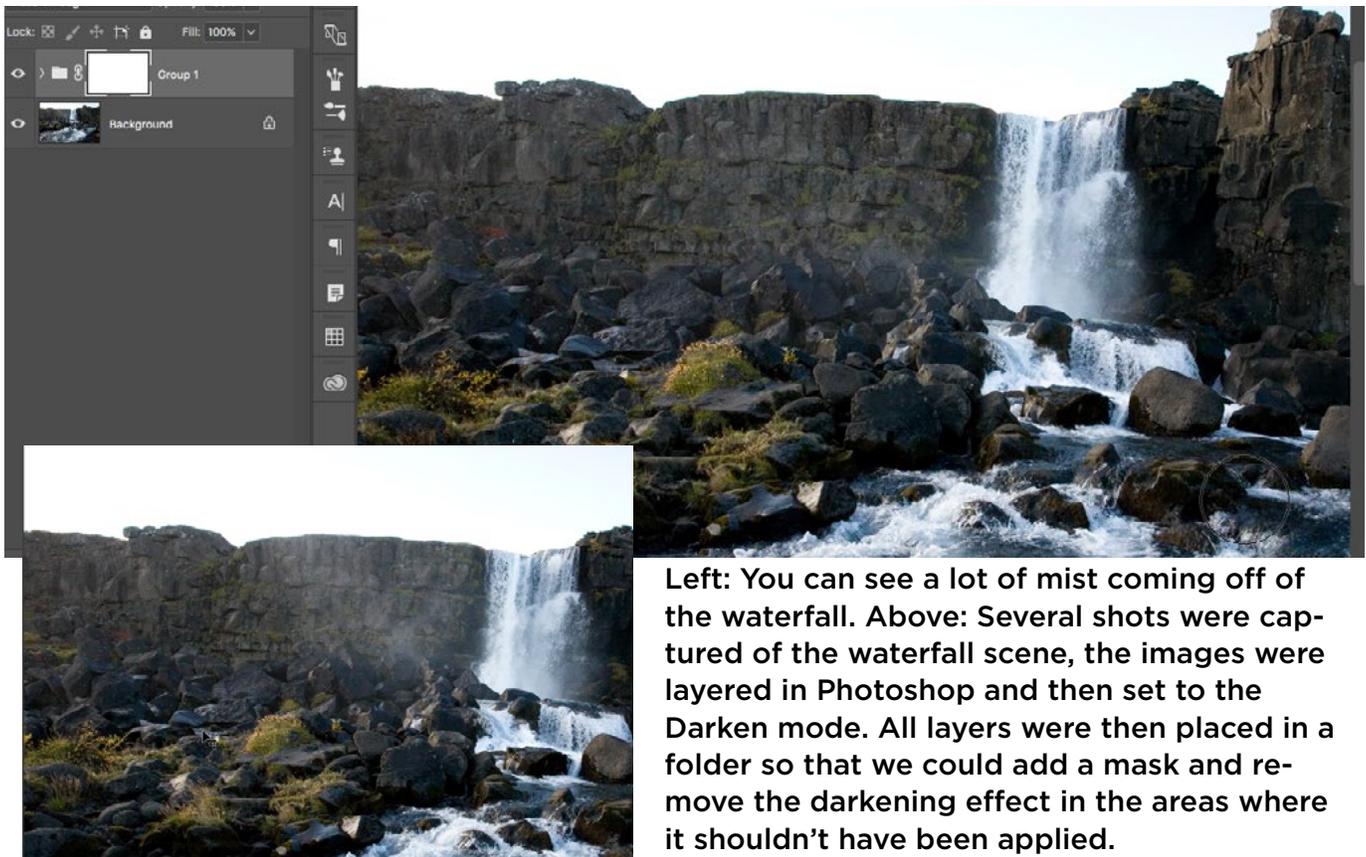
Here, the Color Burn mode is being used to change the color of this metallic text. We're painting on a layer above the text layer with a yellow brush.

to Color Burn. We then set the foreground color to yellow and painted (with the new layer active) over the metal in order to achieve a gold effect.

Darken mode When using the Darken mode, Photoshop will compare the active layer with the layer that is directly underneath it. It will only allow the areas that are darker than what's underneath to remain. Anything that's lighter than the underlying layer will disappear. This can be useful when you have a scene that has undesirable smoke or steam in it. In an instance like this, take several photos of the same scene. If the smoke/steam is moving, it will be in different positions in every frame. Then, open all of the images as separate layers in a Photoshop document. Set the blending mode of all layers except for the background to the Darken blending mode. This will compare each layer with the underlying layer and eliminate all areas that are lighter. Since smoke is light, it will be minimized by using this technique.

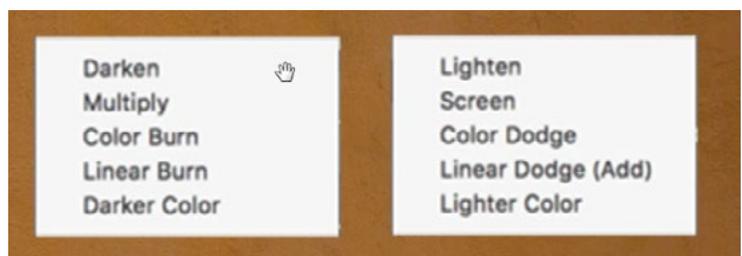


There was a lot of steam in this scene. To minimize the steam, I took several photos of the same scene, layered them in one Photoshop document and then set the blending mode of the layers to Darken.



Lighten Modes

The next category down in the Blending Mode menu is the Lighten modes. With all of these blending modes, the only thing they're capable of doing is brightening the underlying picture. The lighten blending modes directly relate to the darken modes that we covered earlier. Each of the blending modes in the darken list has an opposite, and those opposites can be found in the lighten list.



Above is the list of darken modes and the lighten modes that directly relate to them.

Screen mode While Multiply mode causes the layer to act like ink, the Screen blending mode causes the layer to act like light. It is only capable of lightening the image. When you set a layer to the Screen mode, it will take any light that's in the active layer and combine it with the light in the underlying layer. The Screen mode is incapable of darkening the image. The Screen blending mode can be very useful when it comes to creating light-painted composites.



Left: The background image layer. Center: A black-to-white gradient was placed on a new layer above the background layer. Right: The blending mode of the gradient layer was set to Screen, demonstrating that the mode can only lighten and not darken.

When light-painting, I usually take several different exposures, lighting a different part of the scene in each exposure. To combine all of the exposures to create the final, complete composite, I will open all of the images as layers in a single Photoshop document. Then I will set all of the layers (except the background layer) to a lighten blending mode. In this case, I'll use the Screen mode. For each layer I change to the Screen mode, it will take the light that's in that layer and add it to the layer below.

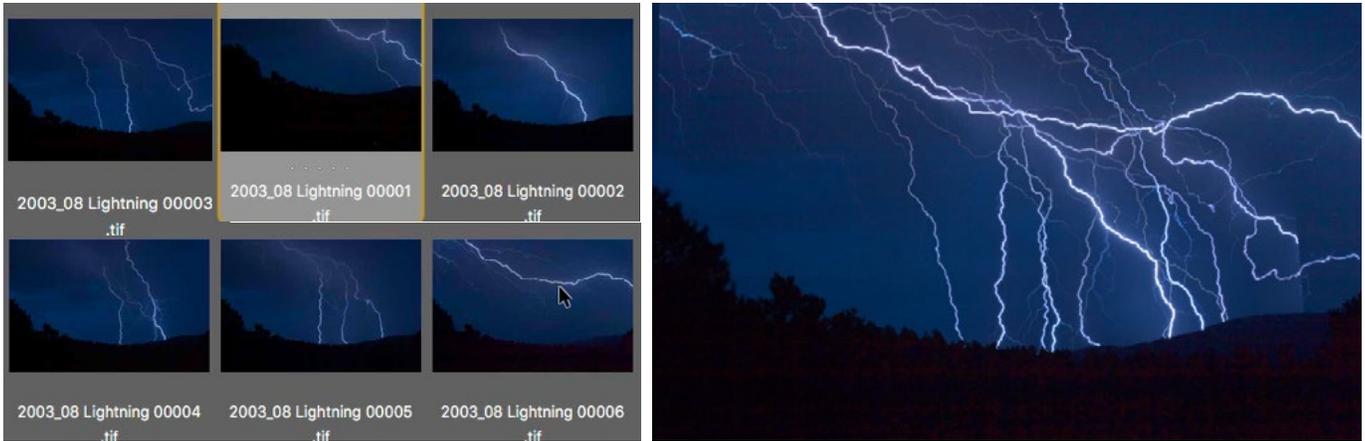


Right: A single frame from the light-painted scene. Above: Several exposures were made to create the light-painted image. They were stacked as separate Photoshop layers and the blending mode was set to Screen. This allowed the light from each layer to add up and create the result.



Linear Dodge This mode will create a similar end result to the Screen mode, but it will be more aggressive with the brightening effect. In general, I turn to the Screen mode first, but if it doesn't do the best job in lightening the image, I might then turn to the Linear Dodge mode.

Lighten mode The Lighten blending mode will compare the layer you're working on to the layer that's underneath it. Any areas that are lighter than the underlying layer will be brightened. It will only be able to brighten what's under it. Any part of the active layer that is the same or darker than what's underneath will just disappear. This is also a great blending mode for combining light-painted images, or



The images on the left were all combined using the Lighten blending mode, which allowed all of the lightning strikes to build up.

lightning images, as we demonstrate in the lesson video. You can think of Lighten mode as a less aggressive version of Screen mode. This is the mode I usually use when creating light-painted images.

Another creative use for the Lighten blending mode is to “fill out” a waterfall and make it look as if more water is flowing. In the video example, we took several frames of the same waterfall (with the camera on a tripod) and then opened all of the images as separate layers in a single Photoshop document. Because the falling water is in different positions within each frame, we set the blending mode of all the layers to Lighten. The water is light, so with this mode, the water built up more



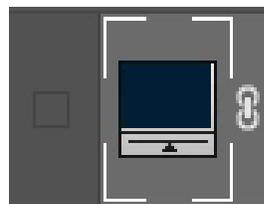
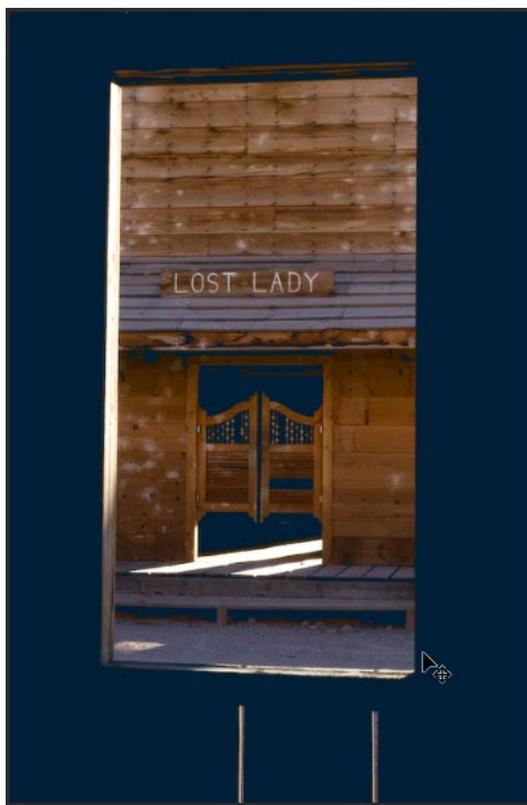
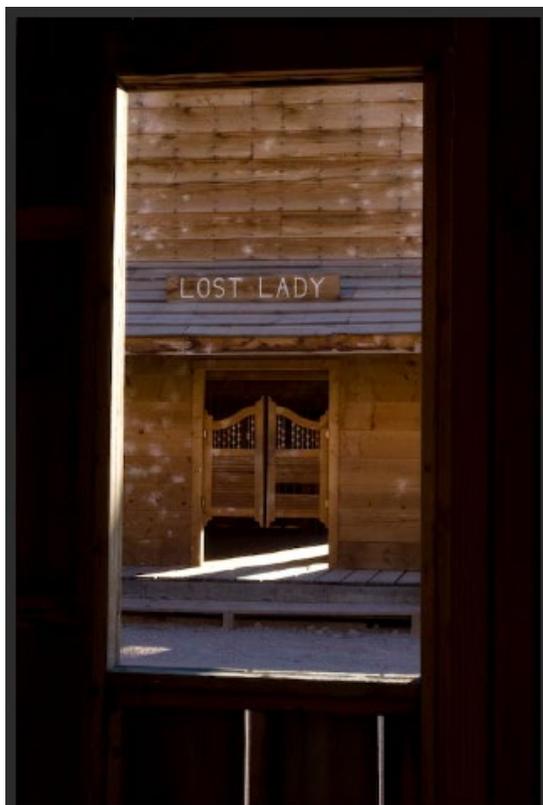
Left: A single frame of the waterfall scene. Right. Several frames were layered in the document and set to Lighten mode. This created a build-up effect on the water flowing down the waterfall.

and more with every layer. This is a very similar technique to the one we used earlier in the lesson where we removed the mist from this image by stacking several frames and then setting them to Darken mode. When setting the layers to Lighten mode, we actually increased the mist in the air that was caused by the waterfall. To eliminate the mist (but preserve the filling effect on the waterfall, we placed all of the layers (except the background) into a folder (or layer group), added a layer mask to the folder and then painted with black on the mask in all areas where we wanted to eliminate the mist. Because all of the layers were inside the folder, the mask was applied to all of them.



Here, we are comparing the light-painted image with the layer set to Screen mode (left) versus the layers set to Lighten mode (right). The effect is less exaggerated when using Lighten mode.

Lighter Color mode This blending mode is related to the Lighten mode. When you set a layer to this mode, Photoshop will compare the active layer to what's in the layer underneath. Any parts of the layer that are darker than the underlying layer will disappear. Any parts of the layer that are brighter than the underlying layer will remain visible. The main problem with this mode is that it creates very harsh transitions. Because of this, I usually use the Lighten blending mode because the transitions are smoother. The Lighten blending mode looks at each of the individual color channels (red, green and blue) in order to create that smoother color transition.



Far left: The original image.

Above: A solid color layer was added above this image layer.

Directly left: The blending mode of the solid color layer was set to Lighter Color. Any areas darker than the color layer took on that dark blue shade.