

Adobe Studio on Adobe Photoshop CS

# Dodge, burn, sponge, and smudge

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We now move from painting to editing. And by editing, I mean using the tools in Adobe® Photoshop® to modify the colors, luminosity values, and color transitions in a photographic image. We start with Photoshop's core editing tools, which are as follows:

- The dodge tool lightens pixels as you paint over them.
- The burn tool darkens pixels as you paint over them. If you're having problems keeping the dodge and burn tools straight, just think of toast—the more you burn it, the darker it gets.
- The sponge tool adjusts the saturation of colors, making them either duller or more vivid.
- The smudge tool smears colors. Used in moderation, it can be useful for smoothing out harsh transitions.

There are other edit tools, but these are the ones you're most likely to use.

Perform an emergency makeover

The following exercise explains how to use these edit tools and the paintbrush to solve some common retouching problems.

## 1 Open the photo of some poor sap who requires an emergency make-over.

The image I used is an all too accurate head shot of me, your gruesome-looking author, pictured in horrifying detail below.



If you don't want to use my face—and who can blame you—use a picture of yourself, a loved one, or a dire enemy. The specific concerns may be different, but the general approach will be the same. One potential difference: Because my flesh tones trend toward glow-in-the-dark white boy, my face needs a little dodging and a whole lot of burning. If the face you're working on is rich in melanin, it may require just the opposite.

## 2 Click the dodge tool in the toolbox.

Located directly above the T, the dodge tool is the first of Photoshop's toning tools.

### 3 Reduce the Exposure value to 30 percent.

Located in the options bar, the Exposure value controls the intensity of edits applied by the dodge tool. In my experience, the default value of 50 percent is too extreme for most editing work. Press the 3 key to take it to 30 percent.

### 4 Drag over the image details you want to lighten.

In my case, I started with my nose—my big old splotchy, freckly nose. I reduced the brush diameter a few notches (to, say, 40 pixels) and dragged inside the eyes, teeth, and eyelids. I also dragged over the smile lines trailing away from my nose. The image below shows the areas that received my attentions in color. (Unaffected areas are overlaid in blue-gray.)



**Tip:** The biggest mistake people make when working with the edit tools is to push things too far. For example, it's tempting to take my coffee-stained teeth and scrub them until they're pearly white. But if you do that, my newly brilliant smile will look unnatural. Better to make small adjustments—one or two passes at most—so that you leave the shadows intact. We'll get rid of the yellow in Step 14.

### 5 Bring up the History palette.

If it's not already visible on screen, choose Window > History. The History palette lets you undo multiple operations. And as if that's not enough, you can brush back portions of a previous state using the history brush.

By default, Photoshop tracks the last 20 operations. But it's easy to click and drag more than 20 times with the dodge tool without even noticing. And once a state gets bumped off the History list, there's no restoring it. Of course, you could raise the number of history states, but doing so can dramatically slow down Photoshop when applying large-scale adjustments. A much better practice is to get in the habit of saving significant points in the adjustment of an image—such as when you finish using a certain tool—as snapshots.

### 6 Create a snapshot of the current state.

Press the Alt key (or Option) and click the camera icon at the bottom of the History palette, as shown below. Name the new snapshot "Dodged Image" and click OK. The snapshot appears at the top of the History palette and will steadfastly refuse to roll off, even after 20 more operations.



## 7 Select the burn tool in the toolbox.

Click and hold the dodge tool icon to display a flyout menu and then choose the burn tool.

## 8 Reduce the Exposure value to 20 percent.

Again, the default Exposure value is 50 percent, far too radical for burning. Press the 2 key to permit yourself more subtlety and flexibility.

## 9 Drag over the image details you want to darken.

The burn tool adds shadows, and shadows give an image volume, depth, and form. I started by increasing the brush diameter several notches (200 to 300 pixels) and dragging up and down both sides of my face, including over the ears. Then I reduced the brush to around 80 pixels and painted under my eyebrows, nose, cheekbones, and chin; along the sides of my nose; and over my thinning hair, as indicated by the full-color areas below. Basically, use the burn tool anywhere you would apply makeup.



Don't worry about dragging over the same spots with the burn tool as you did with the dodge tool. If they require burning, edit away. About the worst that can happen is you can under-saturate color values, but that's something you can remedy later with the sponge tool.

## 10 Brush away any mistakes.

After you've toasted any and all desired details with the burn tool, you may want roll back the effects of the tool using the history brush. Here's how: Click in front of the Dodged Image state in the History palette to set it as the source of the history brush edits. Then click the history brush in the toolbox and paint to restore details to their pre-burned appearance.

For example, while I was careful to avoid painting with the burn tool inside my eyes or teeth, the blurry edges of the brush couldn't help but affect them. By painting with the history brush and a small brush diameter, I managed to restore the post-Step 4 brightness of eyes, teeth, and anything else that appeared too dark.

## 11 Create another snapshot.

Having arrived successfully at another juncture in the editing process, press Alt (or Option) and click the camera icon at the bottom of the History palette to create a snapshot. Name this snapshot "Burned Image" and click OK.

## 12 Select the sponge tool in the toolbox.

Now to modify the saturation levels. Press Alt (or Option) and click the burn tool icon to advance to the next toning tool, the sponge.

### 13 Reduce the Flow value to 30 percent.

Though it's calculated differently, the Flow value in the options bar serves the same purpose as the dodge and burn tools' Exposure value—it modifies the intensity of your brushstrokes. In my experience, the default value of 50 percent is too much. Press the 3 key to knock it down to 30 percent.

### 14 Drag in the image to leech away aberrant colors.

Make sure the Mode option in the options bar is set to Desaturate. Then drag inside the teeth. A couple of passes gets rid of most of the yellow and leaves the teeth a more neutral white. (Be sure to leave behind some yellow. Gray teeth won't look right.) I also dragged over some of the more lurid pinks in the eyelids, ears, and lips, as well as some unusually orange patches in the forehead (see the colored areas below).



### 15 Switch the Mode option to Saturate.

You can also increase the saturation of colors using the sponge tool. After choosing Saturate from the Mode pop-up menu in the options bar, click a few times inside each of the irises.

### 16 Create another snapshot.

Not essential, but always a good idea. Alt-click (or Option-click) the icon at the bottom of the History palette, name this snapshot “Sponged Colors,” and click OK.

### 17 Select the smudge tool in the toolbox.

Click and hold the blur tool icon—the one that looks like a drop of water—to display a flyout menu of focus tools. Then choose the smudge tool.

### 18 Reduce the Strength value and change the Mode setting.

The smudge tool's default settings are designed to create painterly effects. If you want to use it to edit an image, you need to rein the tool in a bit. Press the 2 key to reduce the Strength value in the options bar to 20 percent. Then choose Lighten from the Mode pop-up menu. Now the tool will smear light colors into dark ones and not the other way around.

### 19 Drag in the image to smear colors.

Press the ] key a couple of times to increase the brush diameter to 30 pixels. Then drag across my bottom lip to smooth over the grooves and make the skin look more hydrated. Be sure to trace along the lip, as demonstrated by the area highlighted in color below.

(Dragging across will recruit colors from the teeth and whiskers.) In all, you may have to drag across the lip three or four times to give it that “Just ChapStick’ed” look. I also painted across some of the more pitted portions of my skin.



- The dodge and burn tools are interchangeable. Just press the Alt key (Option on the Mac) to darken with the dodge tool or lighten with the burn tool. This is a great way to take the settings assigned to one tool—such as a brush diameter and Range setting—and apply them to the opposite function.
- The dodge, burn, sponge, and smudge tools work best when used with a soft brush (typically, a Hardness value of 50 percent or lower). The color replacement tool can go either way, hard or soft.
- Feel free to cheat. Just because you have all these edit tools doesn't mean you have to use them. For example, my lower lip was resolutely determined to remain a bright crimson despite my best efforts. So I selected it with the lasso tool and used the Hue/Saturation command to nudge it more toward red and bring down the saturation. It doesn't matter how you get there as long as it works.

Below you can see the original photograph next to the edited version. Now you know why I never let an image out of my studio without a proper retouching.

## 20 Create yet another snapshot.

I called mine “Smudged Colors.” We've now seen all the tools mentioned in the name of this exercise. Don't expect to be able to retouch an image in one pass. After all, a change made with the color replacement tool might beg you to make another with the burn tool, which in turn requires you to take up the sponge tool, and so on. In short, expect to revisit all these tools as you create that near-perfect image.

## Last words

As you work back and forth inside your image, here are a few techniques and last words of advice:

- The dodge and burn tools affect specific color ranges. By default, the Range menu in the options bar is set to Midtones, which changes the midtones and protects the highlights and shadows. If you prefer to adjust the lightest or darkest colors, choose Highlights or Shadows instead.



*Frankly scary original (left) and image after a big dose of edit tools (right)*

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