

pse ADOBE® PHOTOSHOP® ELEMENTS

Focusing on filters

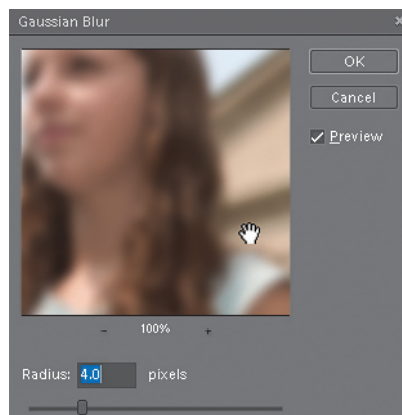
By Lesa Snider King

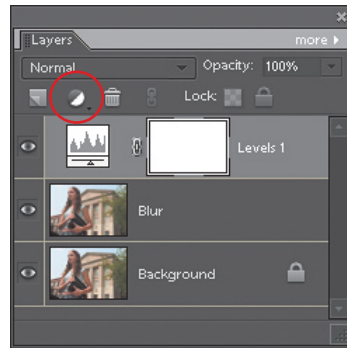
One of the best ways to accentuate the subject of a photo is to create a shallow depth of field, characterized by a sharply focused subject and blurry background. However, if you can't swap lenses on your SLR camera or forget to set your point-and-shoot to portrait, filters can help you blur your background after the fact.

STEP ONE: Open the offending photo and duplicate the Background layer by pressing Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J). Double-click the new layer and name it Blur.

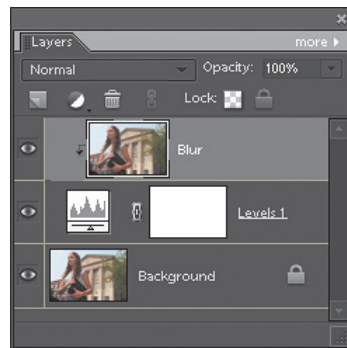


STEP TWO: Hop up to the Filter menu and choose Blur>Gaussian Blur. In the Gaussian Blur dialog, increase the Radius until you have a very blurry image. (We set the Radius to 4 px, but this value will depend on the resolution of your image.) Tip: Click-and-hold the preview window of the Gaussian Blur dialog to see a before-and-after preview. You can also use the Hand cursor in this same window to move the preview image around. When you're finished, click OK to close the dialog.

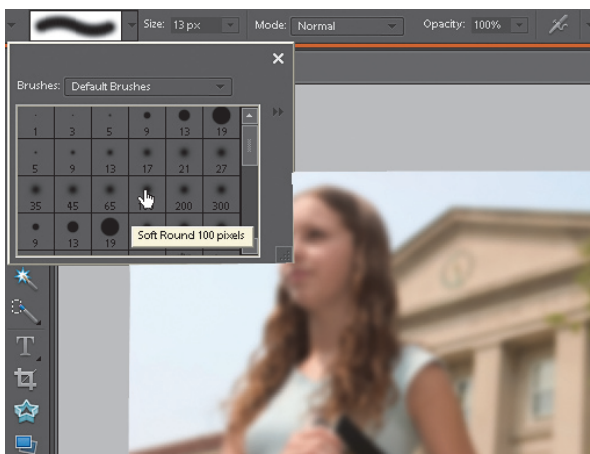




STEP THREE: Obviously, it wouldn't do to make the entire image blurry, so we'll add a layer mask to hide the blur from the subject. Click the Create Adjustment Layer icon at the top of the Layers palette and choose Levels from the drop-down menu. Immediately click OK to close the Levels dialog since we're only using it for its layer mask.



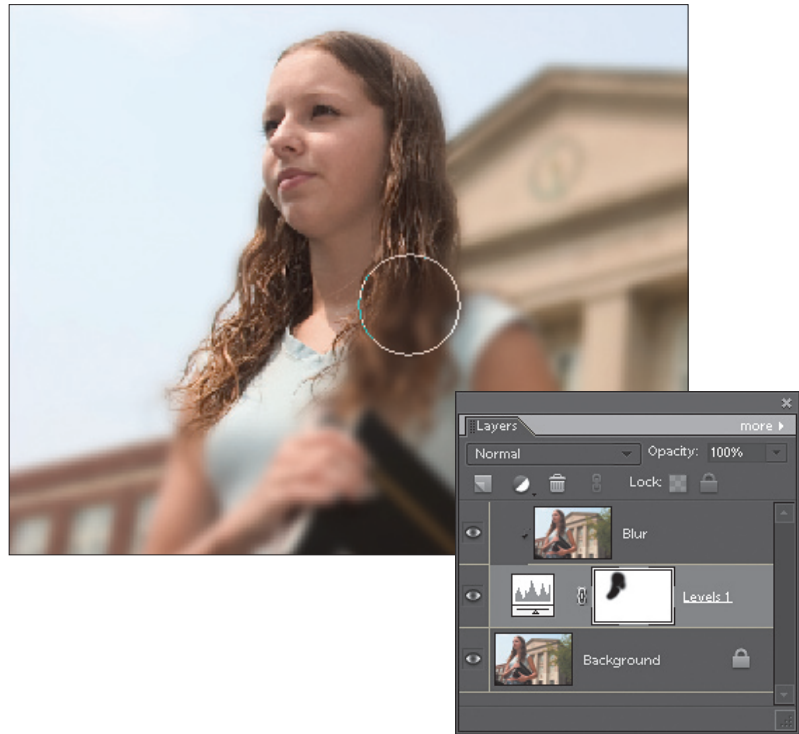
STEP FOUR: Click-and-drag the adjustment layer between the Background and Blur layers, then target the Blur layer by clicking its layer and choose Layer>Group with Previous. This groups the blurry layer with the adjustment layer, enabling us to use the Levels layer mask on the blurred layer.



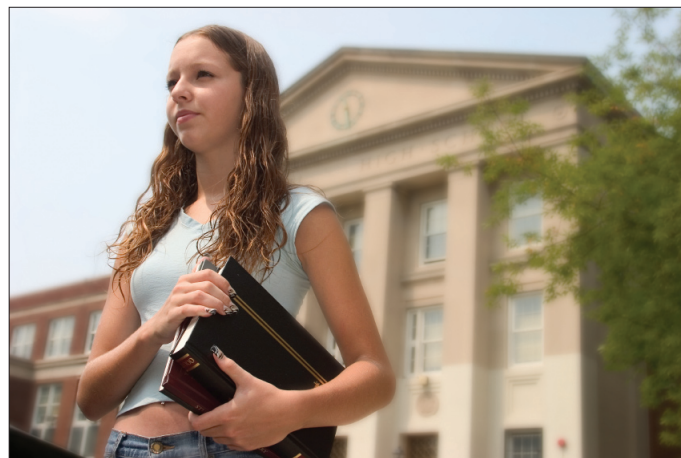
STEP FIVE: When working with layer masks, keep in mind that painting with black conceals and white reveals. So let's do some concealing. Select the Brush tool (B) and from the Options Bar at the top of the screen, choose the Soft Round 100 Pixels brush from the Default Brushes. Press D to set the Foreground and Background swatches to their defaults (black and white, respectively).

STEP SIX: Select the layer mask thumbnail (a hairline border will surround it), and paint over your subject. If you make a mistake and hide too much of the blur, press X to swap the Foreground and Background colors again and paint back over those areas with white. This will restore the blurry areas.

Tip: When doing this kind of detail work, it's handy to memorize these keyboard shortcuts: Press the Bracket keys ([/]) to adjust brush size, Ctrl+/- (Mac: Command+/-) to zoom in/out, and the Spacebar to move around within the image once you're zoomed in.



STEP SEVEN: When you're finished painting the layer mask, select the Blur layer and lower its Opacity by hovering your mouse over the word Opacity at the top of the Layers palette and clicking-and-dragging it to the left a bit to soften the effect. As you can see, blurring the background really puts the emphasis on what matters most: the subject of your photo. Until next time, happy background blurring! ■



As the founder of the free tutorial site, GraphicReporter.com, and chief evangelist for iStockphoto.com, Lesa is on a mission to teach the world to create better graphics. She writes for Photoshop User, Layers, and Macworld magazines. Catch her Graphics Tip of the Week live each Wednesday on YourMacLife.com, and subscribe to her new podcast, Graphic Secrets for Business, on iTunes.

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