

# Advanced Layer Masking

## Assignment | Project Due & Critique 4.10 | First Shoot Due 3.20

Expanding on the idea that photographs are fragments and cannot depict the truth, use layer masking to create a new image representing your own imagined in an “impossible photograph”. Combine at least three separately shot photos to create one new composition. The photos should include a background image, and two other images placed within the new context. Plan ahead for the camera height/angle, the lighting direction and intensity to match up. Add custom shadows wherever applicable. The layer masking must be done with enough craftsmanship so that the final image appears to be real.

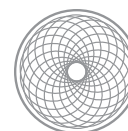
- These items must be considered for the final composition to appear realistic:
  - The direction, angle and intensity of the lighting must match up.
  - The camera height, angle and zoom must be similar.
  - The sharpness and focus of each image must make sense within the composition.
  - Anticipate shooting for the assignment more than once. Be creative and don't settle for something that's just OK!
- Import these photos into one PSD file and use Layer Masking to blend them.
  - Work with a good selection created with the Polygonal Lasso or Pen Tool, for best results. Use that selection to add a Layer Mask using the selection bounds.
  - Use the Refine Mask command to match the blending of each layer mask's edge to the background layer of your composition.
  - Use the Free Transform command (Edit>Free Transform) to size each layer so it makes sense within your new composition. The shortcut is Command+T (Mac) or Control+T (PC). You may also want to flip the layer using Edit>Transform>Flip Horizontal or Vertical. Content-Aware Scale is also an option.
  - Use the Carrie's Custom Shadows Tutorial to create shadows for your new layers, as applicable. Absolutely do NOT use the Layer Style>Drop Shadow.
- Turn in one print and one final PSD or TIF file to Assignments > Carrie > Advanced > Advanced Layer Masking.

## Goals

- To create an impossible photograph that appears believable.
- To expand skills with adjustment layers and layer masking.
- To learn how and when to add custom shadows.
- To create a dynamic composition considering the elements of composition at your disposal, as well as the unique challenge of this assignment.

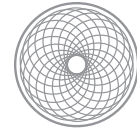
## Requirements

You may use one previously shot image for this assignment, all the rest should be new and shot for this class.



## Grading Considerations

- Is the subject matter creative and engaging?
- Is the photo depicting something that would otherwise be impossible.
- Have you used at least two precisely masked layers?
- Have you used any adjustments, and if so, are they successful?
- Have you used camera controls, lighting and composition to enhance the image?



# Advanced Layer Masking Tutorial

1. Start by narrowing down the first two photos that you would like to work with. Pick which one will be your background layer and open it in Adobe Photoshop. Next, add the second photo to the image by Placing it as a Smart Object. This allows you to Transform the Smart Object's size without losing quality. Go to File>Place and select your second file. It will appear in the current document with transform controls around it.
2. Before you transform the Smart Object, select it in the Layer palette and lower the Opacity setting so you can just how you size it with the background layer. Somewhere between 50-60% should work great. Now your placed image appears semi-translucent so you can line it up how you like. If you need to, you can also flip or rotate the image during this time using Edit>Transform>Flip Horizontal or simply rotating the bounds by using the mouse outside of the layer transform controls.



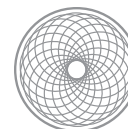
*The placed file, at 58% opacity with the transform controls active.*

Polygonal Lasso or Pen Tool to trace the outline of your image. Zoom in to at least 100% to ensure an accurate and precise selection.

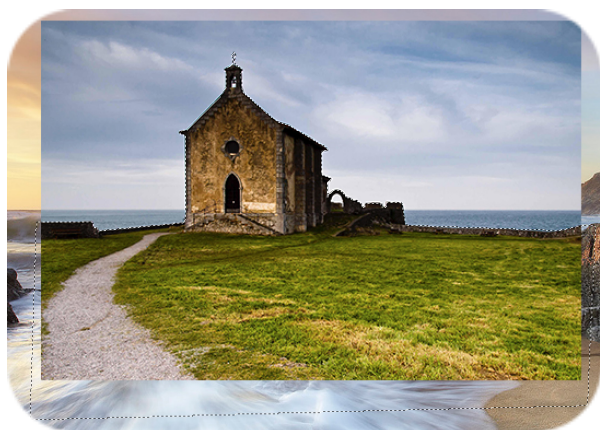
- 4.1. Note: if you use the Pen tool, you will have to go to the Path palette to load that path as a selection. To do so, select the *Work Path* in the Path palette. Go to the Path palette menu options and select Save Path. This

3. When you're finished, apply the transformation by selecting the check mark at the top, or selecting the return key. After you've applied the transformation, restore the layer Opacity to 100%. **Save the file now, and save often.**

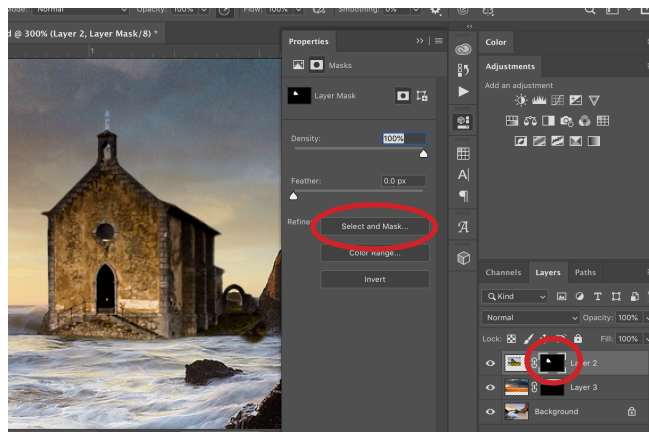
4. Next, it's time to apply a layer mask. Start with a good selection of the areas of the image that will need to be closely masked. In this example, the outline of the building where it overlaps with the sky. Use the



will permanently save your path with the document. Next, use the Command key (Mac) or Control key (PC) and click on the Path thumbnail to load it as a selection.

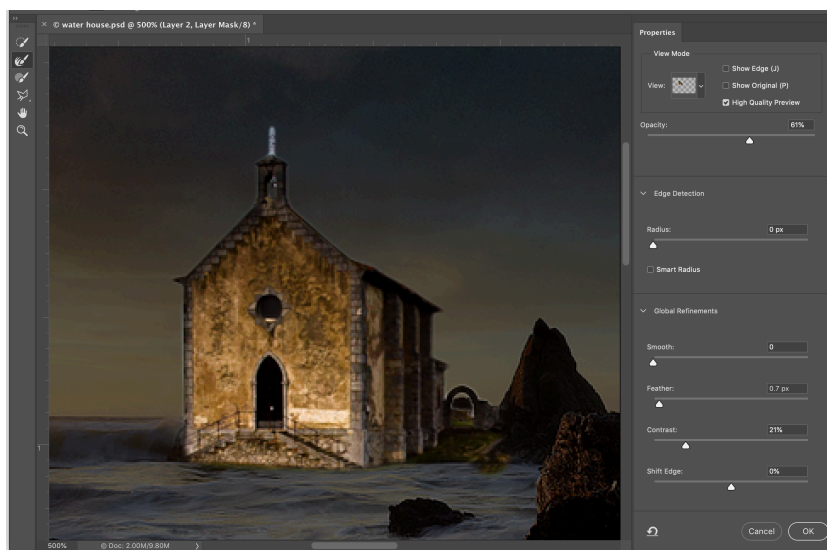


*A very precise selection around the house, but not around the land area since that will be blended by hand.*



*Select your layer mask. In the Properties palette, select Refine> Select & Mask*

5. With your selection active, apply a new layer mask to the layer. Go to Layer>Add Layer Mask>Reveal Selection. A layer mask will appear, using the selection you made. Now you need to make sure the edges look realistic within the context of the bottom (background) layer. Double-click on the mask to open the Properties palette (if it's not open already). Select Refine Mask. Make adjustments to blend the edges of the mask so it realistically appears to be a part of the background image. In this example, I used the Smart Radius to help distinguish the edge of the church with the sky background, the Feather to soften the mask edges, and Shift Edge to tighten the mask to the outline of the church.

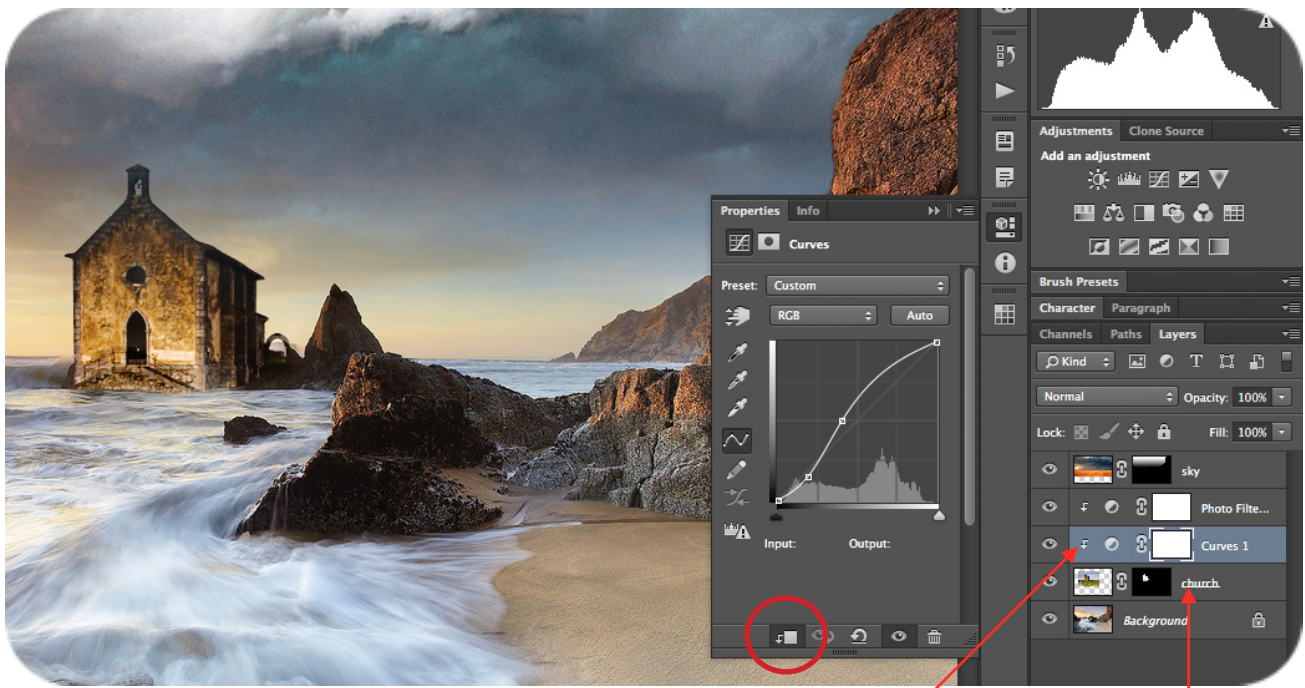


*The Select and Mask Dialogue box. Adjust the settings so your layer blends well with the background layers of the composite. Make sure the sharpness of the edge, matches that other edges around it.*



*The layer with the foreground blended away manually using the Paintbrush tool to edit the layer mask. Always make sure all the interior transparent elements are masked too, such as the archway and top of the church.*

6. If you have an image like this example, which has a foreground with no distinct edges, you may need to complete the blending of the layer mask with the paintbrush. Before you do, I highly recommend saving a copy of your current layer mask as an alpha channel. This way, if you mess up with your painting of the mask, you can always bring back your original selection in two clicks. To save it as a selection in the Channel palette, first load it as a selection. Use the Command key (Mac) or Control key (PC) and click on the layer mask thumbnail in the Layers palette. This will load it as a selection. Then go to the menu Select>Save Selection. Name your selection and select OK.
7. Next, start editing the layer mask with the Paintbrush tool. *Tip: always start by making sure the layer mask thumbnail is selected before you start painting.* In this example, I used a very soft edged brush, a painting Opacity of 50% and the color black to mask away the foreground of the grass that I didn't want. Remember that painting with black hides the layer, painting with white reveals the layer. So you will always need to look at the layer you are masking in your specific project and ask yourself what needs to be masked away and what should be revealed for that layer, then paint accordingly.
  - 7.1. If you make a mistake, just toggle the foreground and background colors so you're painting with white to bring parts of the layer back. A great shortcut for toggling between the foreground and background colors is selecting X on the keyboard. Selecting D also sets the foreground/background colors to black and white, in case they are not already set to that for editing the mask.
8. Once you get the first layer masked properly, it's time to move on to adding the second layer. Follow the same basic steps outlined above. Place the image. Transform it so it fits as you intend within the image. Make a selection and apply a layer mask. Edit the layer mask using Refine Mask and the paint tools so it appears realistic within the image.



8.1. In this example, I added a new sky to the image. I started by making a selection of the visible area of the sky in the image using the Polygonal Lasso. Then, I used that selection to apply a Layer Mask. I wanted the sky to blend in a gradually so that it was more visible at the top, and less at the bottom so that the horizon stayed brightly lit with the original background. I loaded the layer mask of the sky layer as a selection by Command+ Clicking on the layer mask thumbnail. I then used the Gradient tool with a black to white gradient to paint within this selection, thus blending the sky evenly, top to bottom.

*Select the clipping to layer button in the Properties palette to isolate the adjustment to the layer below it. The arrow pointing down in front of the Adjustment layer icon indicates that the adjustment layer is clipped to the transparency of the first layer below it. The layer that it is clipped to is underlined.*

9. Once you have your masked layers in place, make sure their color, contrast and tonal range match the rest of the composition. Adjustment Layers are perfect for this. Use whatever adjustments your image might need. Since you are in a composite image, you may only want a particular Adjustment Layer to affect one layer, not all of them. There is a great feature available with the Adjustment Layer that will clip the adjustment to the transparency of the layer below it. To start, select the layer you want to edit. Add your Adjustment Layer. In this example, I used Curves. In the Properties palette, select the bottom button on the far left, the Clip to Layer button. This will isolate whatever effects your Adjustment Layer makes to the transparency of the first layer below it.

9.1. You can add multiple adjustment layers to this arrangement. In this example, there is a Curves adjustment layer and Photo Filter adjustment layer both clipped to the Church layer.

10. Other finishing touches include Adjustment Layers that affect the overall color or tone of the image, such as toning it, changing the overall contrast or converting it to black and white, etc. If applicable, you should also add custom shadows to any new layer that requires it. See the Carrie's Custom Shadow Tutorial for complete instructions.

11. Turn in the final composite as a PSD or TIF file, complete with all the layer masks and adjustment layers included. Also provide a print.