

# Using Blend If to Introduce a New Sky

By

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There are occasions when pictures are taken which are let down because the sky is a bland white or overcast grey and which would benefit from a replacement sky. There are many ways to add a new sky, some more successful than others and, quite often, different pictures required different techniques. This procedure demonstrates a simple way to replace skies using the “Blend If” feature found within the Layer Styles palette. This function allows you to remove certain tones from one image to reveal the image underneath. Thus a pale sky in one image can be removed to reveal a sky on a layer underneath.

Open a picture that needs a new sky. In this example the image below left at Fig 1 will be used. The replacement sky is below right at Fig 2.



Fig 1



Fig 2

Ensure your sky is suitable to the image. For instance a bright blue sky with a few fluffy clouds would not be appropriate in this image. The conditions are not sunny so a cloudy sky with some character is more appropriate.

Drag (or copy and paste) the sky picture into the original picture and arrange it so that it fully covers the sky area of the original picture. The Layers panel should look like Fig 3

*Note: In CS5 & CS6 a quick way to drag one image into another. With the Move tool (V) active click on the image you wish to move, drag it up to the tab of the image you want to move it to (keep the mouse key depressed), the receiving layer will become active, then drag downwards into that image. Holding down the shift key whilst doing this will ensure it is placed centrally.*

Double-click the ‘Background’ layer to convert it to a layer and drag it above the sky layer.

At this point it bear in mind that all light tones will be removed from the original picture. “Blend If” will remove tones in other areas as well as the sky if they are within the range that you select. If that is likely to be a possibility, duplicate the picture layer (Ctrl(PC)/Cmd(Mac) + J) then click the eye icon to switch it off. Activate the lower picture layer. The Layers panel should look like Fig 4.

To apply “Blend If” (or any other Layer Style), click the fx icon at the bottom of the layers panel (outlined in red) or double-click the layer thumbnail. Either action will open the Layer Styles dialog box.

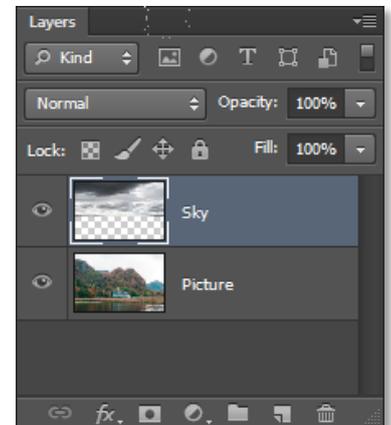


Fig 3

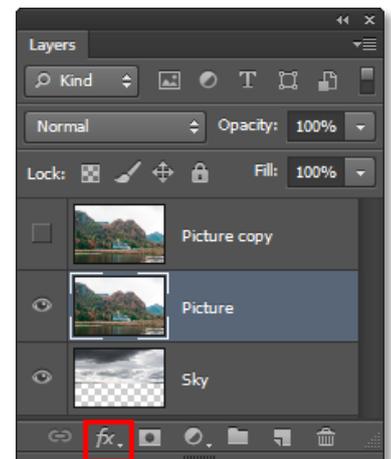


Fig 4

Click the 'Blending Options' at the top of the menu list.

The dialog box shown in Fig 5 will open. The "Blend If" options are at the bottom and the one to be adjusted is outlined in red. Drag the white triangle from the right-hand side inwards; the sky and light tones of the active layer will fade and the layer underneath will show through. Notice that the white triangle has a vertical black line running vertically through the centre of it. Hold down the Alt/Option key and drag either the right side of the triangle to the right or the left side of the triangle to the left. The triangle will separate. Adjust these separated triangles to get the blend you require.

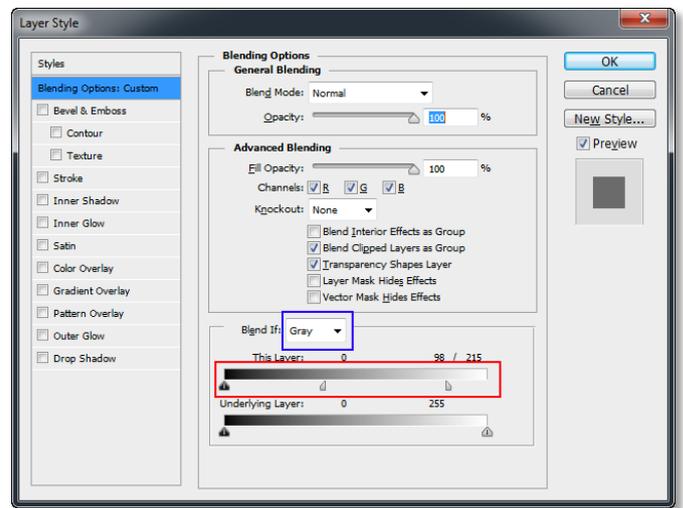


Fig 5

With the triangle set as one solid item the transition of the blend will be very harsh. Splitting it softens the blend transition. The effect is that everything to the right of the triangles is fully blended and everything to the left of the triangles is untouched. The gap between the triangles is the transition area. The wider the gap is the softer the transition will be.

Now, if there are light tones in the image that have been affected but you do not wish to blend, you should now activate the upper (duplicated) layer. Apply a layer mask to this layer (second icon on the left at the bottom of the Layers panel) and fill it with black to hide the layer. (See below for a quick way to apply a black-filled layer mask). Switch your Foreground colour to white (shortcut X) and, with the layer mask active, paint on the areas that have been affected. Where you paint, the pixels on the top layer will be revealed. The painted effect is shown in Fig 6.

In this image the white building to the right of the big house was affected as well as some highlight areas in the foreground water. These areas have been painted back in using a layer mask on the duplicated image layer.

The finished picture is shown in Fig 7.

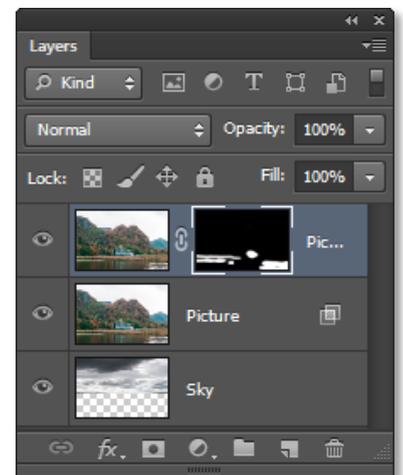


Fig 6



Fig 7

*Note: To apply a black-filled Layer Mask. By default, clicking the Layer Mask icon will show a layer mask filled with white, revealing the layer contents. Holding down the Alt/Option key will fill it with black, concealing the layer contents. Painting with white will reveal the layer contents where you paint.*