

Portraits in Photoshop

Skin Tones

If the white balance is too cool, your skin will appear grey or bluish. On the other hand, if the white balance is too warm, the skin will look yellow or orange.

In ACR/Lightroom - Use White Balance Eye Dropper (top bar - 3rd tool from left) – click on an area in the photo that should be white – e.g. eyes.

Adjust temperature if still too cool or too warm. May need to adjust Tint as well.

Check Exposure using the Histogram - make sure that the curve does not go too far to the left or the right. Skin tones may be either grey and dark (underexposed), or too bright and blown-out in some spots (overexposed). Use Exposure, Contrast, Highlights, Shadows, Whites, Blacks to adjust. Try Auto first.

Go to Luminance on HSL/Greyscale tab (4th tab). Adjust Orange slider to brighten (right) or darken (left) the skin tones.

Blemishes

Use Spot Healing Brush – create a new blank layer (Shift+Ctrl+N / Shift+Cmd+N) or button at bottom of Layers palette. Name it Spot Healing.

Select Spot Healing Brush (8th tool down) – make sure Soft Brush, Type = Content Aware and there is a tick in Sample All Layers.

Zoom in to around 200% on your image and use a brush that is only slightly larger than the blemish you are trying to remove.

Consider the blemish, wrinkle, or distraction you are trying to remove. Is it darker than the skin tone? Or is it brighter than the skin tone?

If the distraction is lighter, select Darken from the Mode in the Options bar. If the distraction is darker, select Lighten. Only the distracting elements are removed, leaving more of the original texture surrounding it intact.

How far you go is going to be a matter of personal preference.

Adjusting the Contrast In Specific Areas

Bright areas and shadows on models face - Create a new blank layer (Shift+Ctrl+N / Shift+Cmd+N) or button at bottom of Layers palette. Name it Face. Go to Edit>Fill – Contents = 50% Gray, Mode = Normal, Opacity = 100%.

You will then have a completely grey layer. Change the Layer Blending Mode to Soft Light. If you prefer a more pronounced effect, use Overlay.

Choose the Brush Tool, make sure it is a soft brush. Set the Opacity to 15% and the Flow to 10%. Make sure your brush colours are black and white – press D. Paint with black to darken any highlights and paint with white to lighten any shadows. If you want to start again, go to Edit>Fill and fill with 50% grey again.

Hair – create a new layer filled with 50% grey and change the Layer Blending Mode to Soft Light. Using a soft brush (Opacity 15%, Flow 10%) Brighten (white brush) or darken (black brush) parts of the model's hair as required.

Brighten Eyes - create a new layer filled with 50% grey and change the Layer Blending Mode to Soft Light. Name it Eyes. Using a white soft brush (Opacity 15%, Flow 10%) paint over the eyes. Don't overdo this.

Change the brush size often and match it to the size you are working on. If your brush strokes are noticeable on any of these layers, select that layer and go to Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur. Choose an amount between 20 and 40 pixels and press OK.

You can reduce the Opacity of any of these layers to reduce the effect if you need to.

You can do this on other parts or the models body or their clothes.

Merge the layers using Merge Visible (Shift+Ctrl+Alt+E / Shift+Cmd+Option+E).

Sharpening

Sharpen the Eyes – use the sharpen tool and paint over the eyes. Make sure your strength is only about 20%. You can use the Layer Opacity to reduce the effect of the sharpening if you have overdone it.

Overall Sharpening – Merge the layers using Merge Visible (Shift+Ctrl+Alt+E / Shift+Cmd+Option+E).again. Go to Filter>Other>High Pass. Select a Radius of between 1 and 5 by moving the slider until the preview image looks like a faint outline of your image, and press OK. Change the Layer Blending mode to Soft Light. Zoom into 100% and reduce the Layer Opacity until you can barely see the effect.