

# ADVANCED COMPOSITING

with Aaron Nace

Compositing is the art of combining multiple photos into a single, seamless image. From creating alien landscapes to solving common editing problems, compositing skills can open up a whole new world of possibilities in Photoshop. Here are some of the most important things to consider when starting a composite image.

## 1 FINDING INSPIRATION

Before jumping into a creative composite, you'll need a theme or an idea to help you find (or capture) the right images. When looking for a spark of inspiration, we suggest looking to your favorite artists, movies, books, or even just the world around you.

Many great photo composites combine an image of something ordinary with an image of something fantastic.

## 2 CHOOSING & CAPTURING PHOTOS

In order for a composite to look realistic, you need the right collection of photos. As powerful as Photoshop is, the images you use need to have similar lighting, color, and perspective for them to look like they were captured in the same scene.

If one photo was captured outside on a bright sunny day from a low angle, and another was captured indoors at night from a high angle, there's little chance of being able to realistically blend them into the same scene.

When building a composite, it's best to work from the background elements to the foreground elements. So try and choose the main background image first. This image will determine the lighting, color, and perspective you'll need the other mid-ground and foreground elements to match.

It's easier than ever to find the images you need to create a great composite. There are many great places to find a wide variety of stock images on the web. From free resources like *Pexels.com* and *Unsplash.com* to subscription services like *Adobe Stock*, you're bound to find a set of images that will blend together beautifully.

Lastly, if you're a photographer, capturing your own images will give you the most amount of control when gathering images for a composite.

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## 3 STAY FLEXIBLE

Once you've selected your images, it's time to start building the composite in Photoshop. It's important to stay as flexible as possible once you start the compositing process. As you edit, you may discover that a particular image isn't working like you thought it would, or you might develop a slightly different idea for the effect you want.

Compositing is a lot of planning and preparation, and a lot of trial-and-error once you begin the editing process. But experimentation and discovery is all part of the joy of compositing!

## 4 COMPOSITING TOOLS IN PHOTOSHOP

Compositing is such a fun creative challenge because it requires almost every tool and trick in Photoshop to make it work. However, there are a handful of tools that are absolutely essential to creating a realistic composite, and they're tools that you'll find yourself coming back to again and again throughout an edit.

### SELECTIONS

Compositing is all about taking an element from one image and placing it into the environment of another image. That means you need to be able to select objects or people in a photo, cut them out, and remove their original backgrounds. Mastering Photoshop's many selection tools will help you take your compositing skills to new heights.

**Tools to try:** Select Subject, Select and Mask, the Pen Tool, the Magic Wand Tool, Select Color Range, Channels.

### CLIPPING MASKS

When you right-click on a Layer and select Create Clipping Mask, you're making it so that that Layer only appears where the Layer directly underneath it is visible. This allows you to make edits that will only affect individual elements in a composite. Clipping Masks are an important tool for dialing in the lighting and color of each individual element so that they match the background and environment.

### LAYER MASKS

Once you've made a selection to cut something out, the next step is usually converting that selection into a Layer Mask. Layer Masks allow you to control the visibility of the Layer its connected to. They also allow you to control where certain edits will and will not be visible in the scene. You can edit a Layer Mask by painting or filling parts of the mask with white, black, and/or gray. Remember that white means visible, black means invisible, and gray means partially visible.

### ADJUSTMENT LAYERS

Even if the images you chose for a composite are close in lighting and color, you're still going to need to do some work to get them to match perfectly. Adjustment Layers are the best tools for the job. Adjustment Layers allow you to apply edits to an entire image, a Group of Layers, a single Layer (using Clipping Masks), or even just part of a Layer (using Layer Masks).

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## 5 CHECK YOUR WORK

After staring a project from the same views for hours (or days!), it's easy to get used to seeing it a certain way and then overlook the things that might not be working.

In order to keep your eyes fresh, make sure to take regular breaks, change up how you're viewing your image (zoom in, zoom out, view it on different screens or devices), and show it to some trusted friends for feedback and advice.

You'll be surprised how often you find ways to make an image better just by getting a slightly different perspective!

## 6 TIE IT ALL TOGETHER

Once all of the individual elements have been adjusted to fit in the same scene, it's important to apply some edits to the image as a whole to help tie the composite together and to cover up any small inconsistencies.

For example, after matching the lighting and color of each element to the environment, you may want to add some additional lighting effects and color grading to the scene as a whole. This will help create the illusion that everything was captured in the same photo since there will be an additional set of adjustments that have been applied to everything equally.