

## Enhancing a Portrait Style Render

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Tools Needed

**\* Any version of Poser and an image editor silimilar to Photoshop.**

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### Introduction

Given that [photo](#) based textures and ready-made content are used extensively in Poser [work](#) the novice Poser artist should not be afraid to use "post-work" to enhance their renders after the fact to make them the best images they can. Maybe the first thing a Poser user should [learn](#) is to smudge away the joint creases and other flaws nearly inevitable in a render. This tutorial [will](#) consider methods [derived](#) from traditional photography as they can be applied to a Poser render for further enhancement of the image. Photoshop will be used here but the concepts should apply in work with other image editors.



**Step 1 - Tips for Render Composition**



Here is a basic render. I have used James Casual and the Modern Mansion found on the standard Poser install. I think about how my figures has placed its weight on the ground and how the weight is shifted within the figure as this influences the figures posture even as seen in a head and shoulders render. Notice the asymmetry of the shoulders that adds visual interest here. I also place my scene elements to make interesting shapes in my background and so as not to seem to intersect the figure inadvertently in any awkward places. I think about how the background interacts with the shapes of the figure; see here how the horizontal and diagonal lines in the background meet the figure's ears for instance, creating nice shapes and not seeming to pierce the ear opening. Als see how the areas of light and dark in the background interact with the figure; the sky through the window shows the curves of the head and the areas of light and dark found on either side of the figure are intended to create interest and relate to the light and shadow on the face. Choosing the height at which to place the camera is as important as any other issue of framing as the angle of view controls the shapes in the composition as well as the mood.

I have turned the shadow feature off on my lights that are set to "infinite" so that the scene itself will not cast shadows where they are not wanted; I use the infinite lights set to a low intensity to create the ambient lights set in a scene. These lights are to make sure everything gets a minimal level of lighting so they are visible and to act as a "fill-light" to show detail in the shadows. Unless I am representing sunlight with an infinite light I use spot lights to create the primary highlights and shadows , this is because the spots can be arrange inside the scene space so that shadows from things such as walls, ceiling and props can be controlled. I think hard about what light sources might be realistic in a scene, I place spot lights and point lights where I think actual light sources might be located in a real world scene; lamps, camera flash, reflection. Once I have done this I can play with lights placed for artist expression which may or may not represent accurate light sources. Always do test renders with shadows to see that the shadows don't obscure anything inadvertently and that they make pleasant shapes on the shapes and planes in a scene.

## Step 2 - Creating a Quick Mask



This is a nice way to make a selection mask for the eyes. The eyes can of course be selected by hand with the lasso tool in Photoshop but I find this method easiest. This method works best if the render dimensions are identical to the preview dimensions. The dimensions should certainly have the same aspect ratio. I have gone to the Preview Mode selector and chosen "Element" style. I have set each eye of the figure to silhouette preview mode and chosen for the foreground colour a bright shade of blue not found in the scene... any colour not found elsewhere in the scene is suitable. I choose "anti-alias" from the render menu and export the image with an appropriate name so I can match it to the Render file, I add to the name the suffix "mask" to distinguish it from the render file.

### Step 3 - Applying the Quick Mask



I open my render, it is safest to save it under a new name first thing so if I make mistakes or change my mind the original render is not ruined. Also to create a duplicate "background layer" in this file so that the original render is below your working layers.

Open the quick mask image, make sure it is the same dimensions as your render, select all, copy, got to the open render window and paste. The images should be aligned properly. You can check by lowering the opacity of the new layer. Now use the Magic Wand selection tool to select the blue eye area. Delete the mask layer and the selection should be intact on the duplicate background area. Cut and paste this selection and you should have a floating layer with only the eyes on it.

#### Step 4 - Light and Shadow on the Eyes



Use the burn tool set to a soft small tip and an intermediate opacity to burn the upper area of the eye where a shadow from the lids might fall on it. As you have isolated the eyes to their own layer what you do will not effect the eyelids or any of the rest of the face.

Now dodge the lower part of the iris. In the image here you will see the eyes of the original eyes inset above the now modified eyes for comparison. Remember you can do this dodging and burning zoomed in on the eyes for better control but if you zoom in too close you will not see the effect properly.

Since these modified eyes are on their own layer you can use the layer opacity slide to control how much of the modification you want to appear in the final image. Once you have the effect you want merge the layer down to the duplicate background layer.

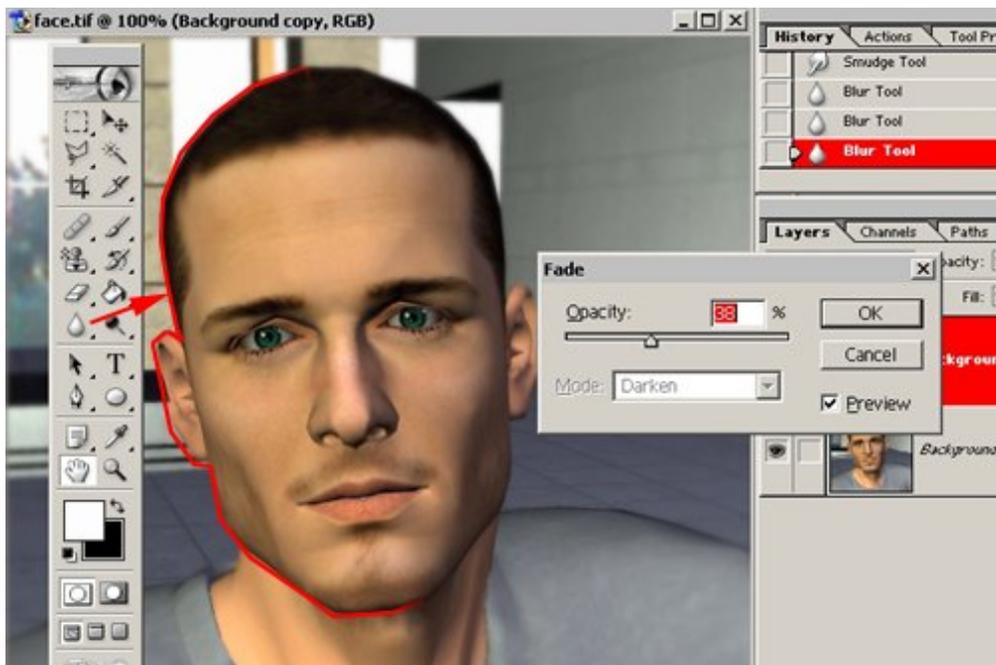
#### Step 5 - Faking Depth of Field



Here we want to simulate the effect of depth of focus from photography. What this means is that a certain distance from the camera (virtual camera in this case) is in focus while things closer and further than that distance are more blurry to greater or lesser degree. Poser 6 Firefly render can simulate depth of field but the render times are long and any detail lost to the blurring can not be recovered. In post-work we have control over the focus, the amount of focus overall, and can choose to do expressive rather than realist focus. We apply Gaussian Blur to this new layer rather than using the standard blur filter. The blur can be quite strong as the layer opacity can be changed after to make the effect more subtle.

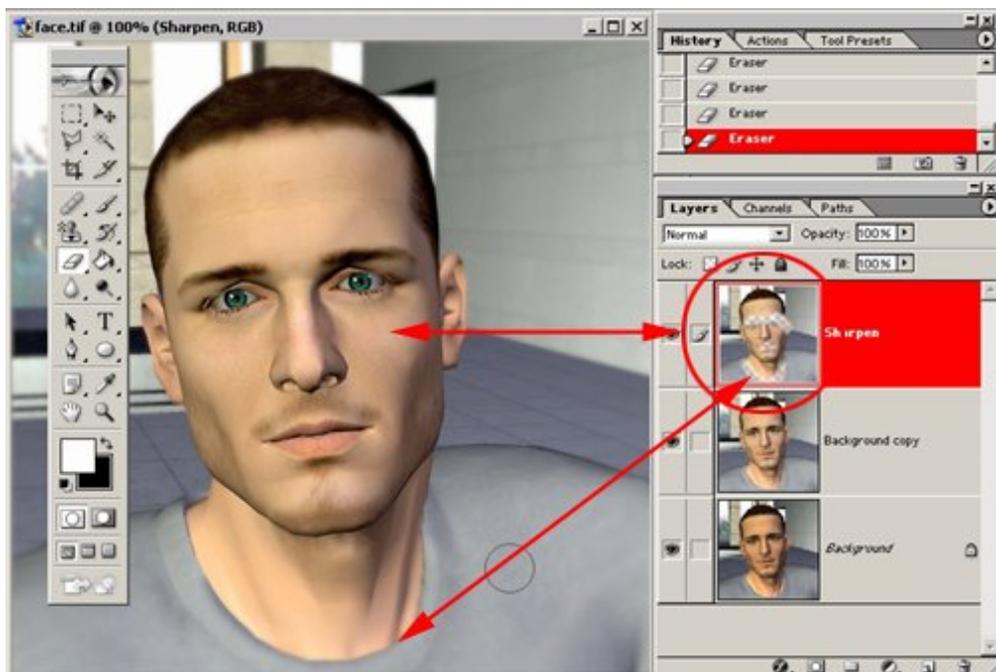
Make a mask by clicking the mask button on the layer pallet while the blur layer is selected. Choose the paint brush and select a large soft brush tip. Select black and white for your foreground and background colours. Make sure your mask is selected by clicking on its icon in on the layer palette and paint black where you want to reveal the original sharp render. If you make a mistake you can paint the mask back with white. Think of black on the mask blocking the blurred layer and white on the mask as transparent letting the blur through. You can use the opacity setting on the brush tool for greater control. Remember that everything a certain distance should be in focus, this means the floor, clothes, props, etc. Merge down the blur layer when you are done.

## Step 6 - Fixing the Edges



Choose the blur tool set to an intermediate opacity and the “darken” method. Trace the edges where the figure overlaps the background, and edges in the background that are too harsh, and even where the figure overlaps its self such as the jaw line over the neck or the nostril area. You can use the “Fade” command in Photoshop to lessen the effect.

### Step 7 - Contrast and Grain

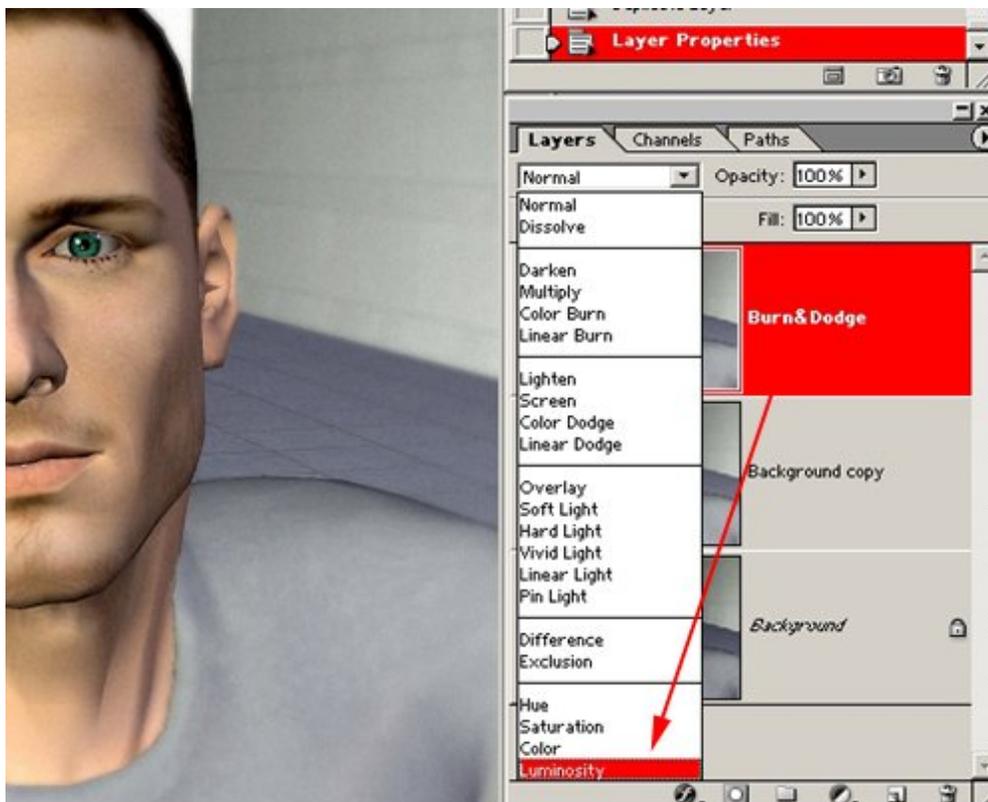


We are nearly done! Use the levels tool from the image menu to adjust the tonal range of your image to suit you. I often find Poser renders dark and muddy so I move the midtone point a bit to the left to brighten the images and then adjust the shadow pointer to maintain strong darks.

Create a new copy of the duplicate background you have been working on and apply the sharpen filter to it. You can then use the eraser on this layer where the sharpening has caused unpleasant edge artefacts; usually in details areas such as the eyes. Merge the sharpen layer down. Where there are artifacts from sharpening such as light pixel fringes along dark edges you can often obtain a nice correction by using the blur tool set to the “darken” method.

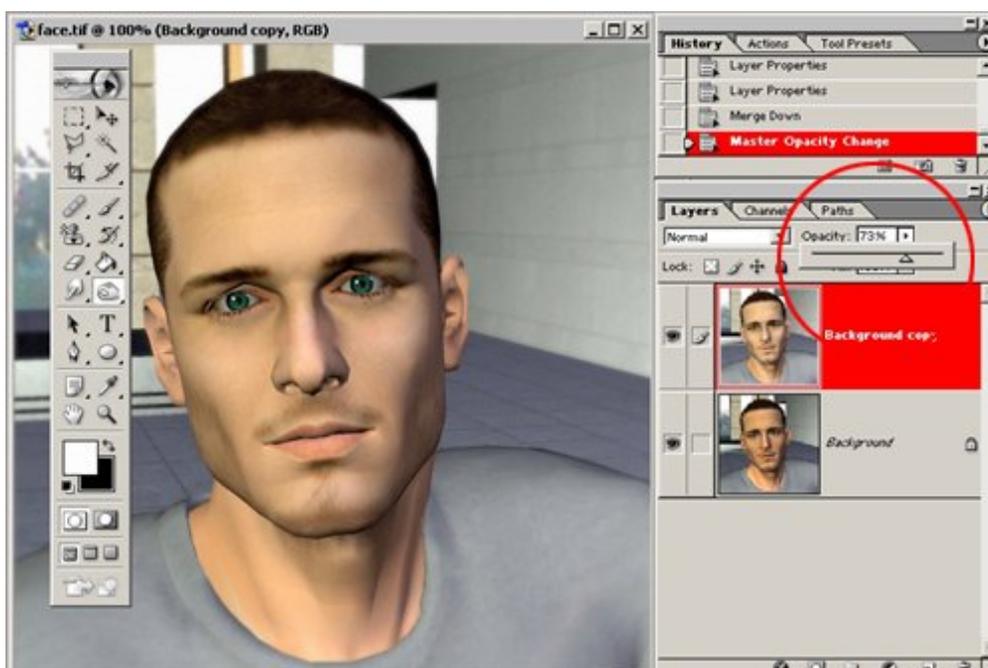
Noise can give a realistic look to a render but any JPEGs you save from the image will take more memory. Grain tricks the eye into imagining there is more detail in the image and hides texture problems like the overly smooth sweater in this image. Make a duplicate layer, add noise, set the opacity to the desired effect and merge down.

### Step 8 - Dodge & Burn



The reason for dodging and burning on a new layer are two-fold. First for reversibility, but more importantly because the dodge and burn tools can effect colour saturation and distort colours in an unpleasant way. By working on a duplicate layer set to the "Luminosity" method only the brightness of the image will be affected. Begin by dodging what is already light and you believe would be struck by light in the scene and then burn where the shadows need strengthening such as on the neck under the chin and jaw. You can experiment with expressive use of dodge and burn as well, the lights and darks can be used to emphasise certain areas as visual focal points in the composition. Merge the layer down.

### Step 9 - Fade All



Since the work has all been on or above the original duplicate layer you can now adjust its opacity to let the original render through to greater or lesser degree. Merge the layer down.

### Step 10 - The Finale



You may want to reduce the saturation of the image as Poser renders can have colours that are un-realistically vivid. I have adjusted the levels one last time because I want a light atmospheric look.