

Portrait Retouching With Frequency Separation

Frequency separation is like a god among the retouching techniques. It allows you to separate the texture from everything else in an image, resulting in easy edits and a fabulous photo finish

What is Frequency Separation?

The technique is used widely in editorial photography. The textures of skin—fine lines, wrinkles, pores—are placed on one layer, while the colors, tones, shadows and highlights are placed on another. This makes it easy to smooth out skin without creating that super airbrushed look.

“You don’t want to get rid of your skin texture because that’s what makes the images interesting and makes them look a lot more realistic.”

How To Create Frequency Separation

- Create two copies of your background layer (Command + J).
- Make the Layer Copy 2 invisible. This will become your **texture** layer.
- Layer Copy 1 is your **base** layer. Now add a blur: *Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur*
- Add just enough blur to get rid of whatever texture you want to keep. The blur should be just to the point where you can’t see the texture. For skin textures, try around 5 pixels

- Make Layer Copy 2 visible. A filter is needed that will take the information from this layer while subtracting the information from your base Layer copy. The difference results in a layer of only textures.
- Go to: *Image > Apply Image*
- Change Layer to Layer Copy 1 (base layer). Change Blending to Subtract. (The numerical values of scale and offset are set at 2 and 128. It’s the same every time; just leave them as is.)

- It should end up looking like a high pass filter.
- Add the texture back to Layer Copy 2 by changing the blending mode in the layers panel to **Linear Light**.

How to Use Frequency Separation for Retouching

- Choose the base layer. Use the Lasso tool and make a selection on the image of what you want to blend. Use a soft feathered edge on Lasso for better blending results.
- Hit Q to bring up Quick Mask. This gives a preview of what your selection.

- Now, add a blur: *Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur*
- Bring up the slider until the area is smoothed to the desired amount.

- Select like areas, and larger areas for better results. Don’t worry too much if you get some hair in a selection—this technique means hair registers as a texture.
- Depending on the area selected, you will probably want to change the blur amount each and every time.

- Change the opacity of the base layer if you overdid the blur and want more of the original image to show through.

Voila! Although you have flawlessly smoothed out the skin, the texture remains.

HOPE THAT THIS WORKS FOR YOU.

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