# Adobe Photoshop

Layer Masks in Photoshop with Julieanne Kost

Software needed Adobe Photoshop 5.0 or later

Layer masks are my secret weapon of Photoshop! This tip and technique demonstrates how to use them to easily combine images together. You will learn to use the gradient tool to create gentle gradations from one image to another but really, it's just the tip of the ice burg. If you want to effect only certain areas, be sure to try painting in the mask with one of the many painting tool available in Photoshop. Just remember, paint with black to hide the image on the layer, paint with white to reveal the image on the layer. For varying degrees of transparency, try painting with different amounts of opacity.

Open the first file. Select File > Open and open the beach file. This is the file that we are going to drag the other file into to create our composite image.
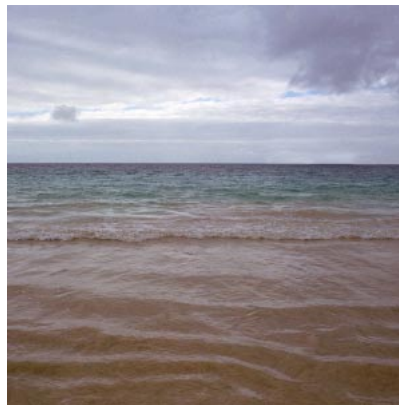
Open the second file. Select File > Open and open the cracked earth file. This is the file that we will use for the foreground in the final image. Position the images so that you can see at least a small part of both.

Drag and drop. From the tool box, select the Move tool. Position the Move tool over the cracked earth image. Click and drag with the mouse to move the cracked earth image over the beach file. When the cursor and the sand image is positioned over the beach image, the beach image will show a highlight around the edges of the file. Let go of the mouse to "drop the file".

Reposition the cracked earth. With the Move tool still selected, reposition the cracked earth layer at the bottom of the image.


Add a layer mask. Select Layer > Add Layer Mask > Reveal All to add a layer mask to the cracked earth layer.
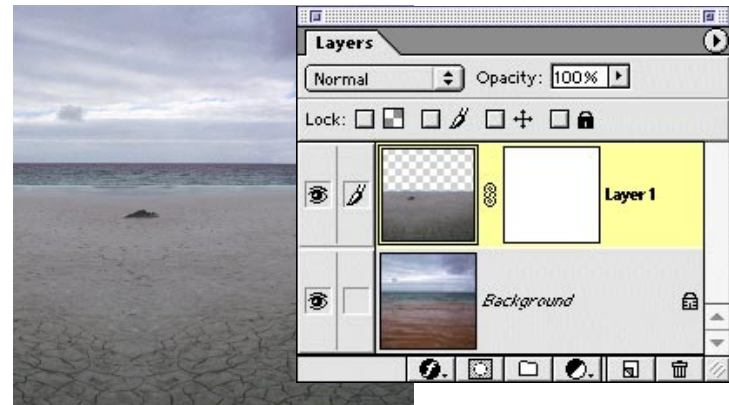

Select the Gradient Tool. From the tool palette, select the Gradient tool. From the Options bar, select the Black to White gradient from the selection of gradients.
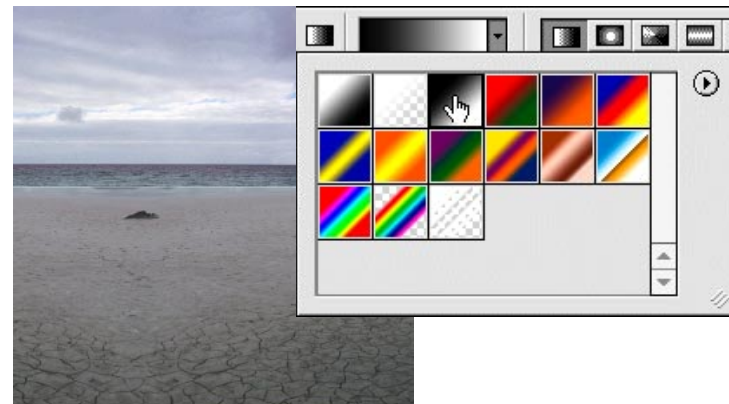

Drag the gradient. Since the gradient that we choose was black to white, it will begin painting black (that will hide the image) and transition to white (where we can see the image) over the duration of the drag. Begin dragging at the top of the transitional area and continue dragging downwards the length that you want the transition between the cracked earth and the beach image to occur.
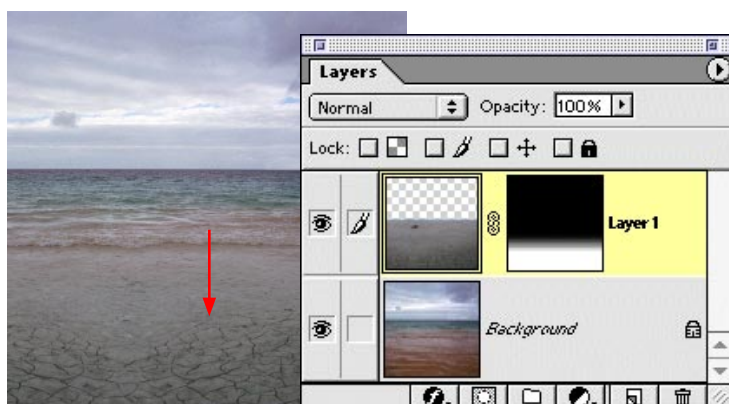
Open the file. Select File > Open and open the clouds file. Repeat the previous steps to drag and drop the clouds into the beach/sand image, reposition them, and add a layer mask.
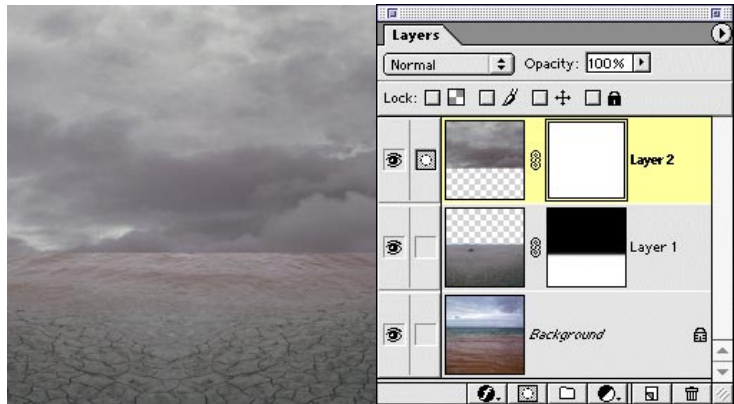

Create the mask. Using the Gradient tool with the same settings as before, drag a gradient from slightly below the horizon to slightly above. *Note: if needed, change the opacity of the layer to decrease the intensity of the new clouds.*
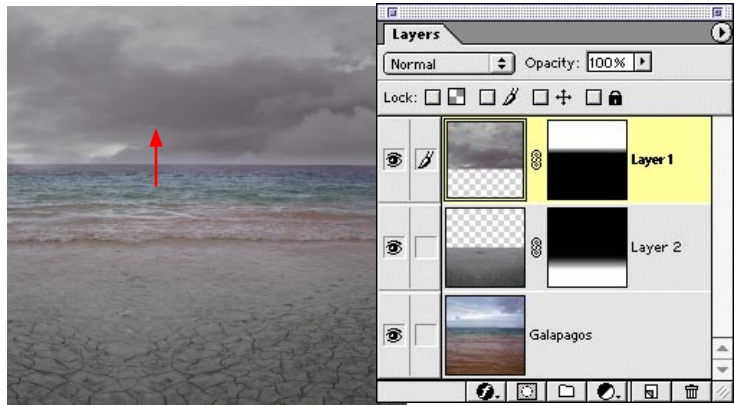

Add an Adjustment Layer. The cracked earth's color doesn't match the sand in the beach layer. To correct this, target the cracked earth layer in the Layers palette, and select Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Color Balance. To limit the color adjustment to the cracked earth, in the New Layer dialog box, check the Group with Previous Layer option and click OK.
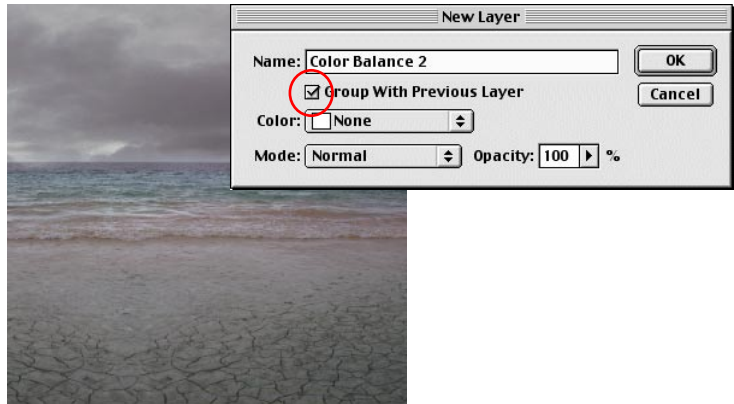

Balance the colors. In the Color Balance dialog box, move the sliders to match the colors of the cracked earth layer to the sand in the original beach image. When they match, click OK.

3
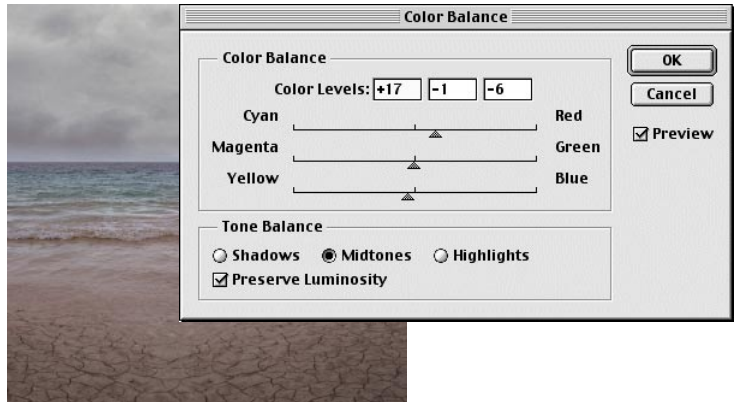
Add another Adjustment Layer. The color balance of the clouds layer also doesn't match the beach layer. To correct this, target the clouds layer in the Layers palette, and select Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Color Balance. In the New Layer dialog box, check the Group with Previous Layer option to limit the adjustment to the clouds layer. Click OK.
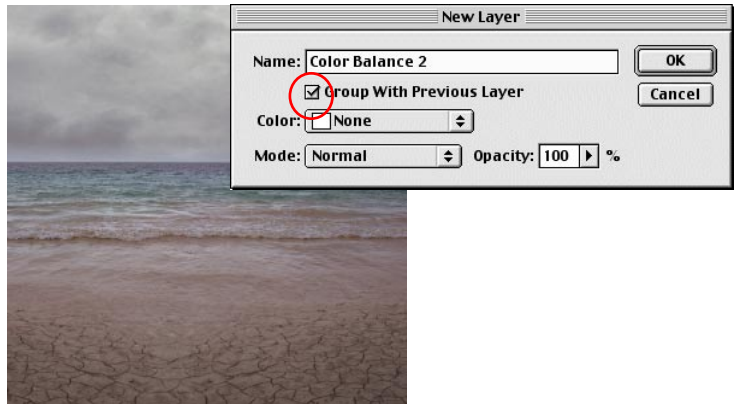
Balance the colors. As before, use the sliders in the Color Balance dialog box until the color balance of the clouds matches the original beach sky. Click OK.
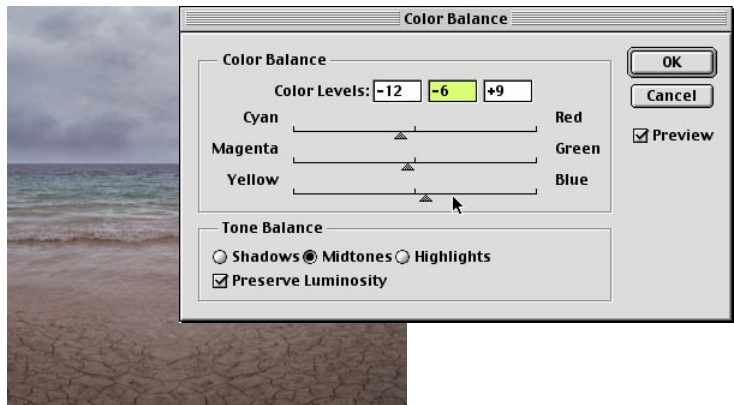
Add the edge file. Select File > Open and open the edge file. Drag and drop the edge file into the composite image. Hold down the shift image while "dragging and dropping" to drop it in the center.

Blend the edge. On the Layers palette, change the Blend Mode to Screen to eliminate the black center from the layer, leaving only the white edge visible.

4