

Controllable texture >> By adding texture to a 50% gray layer above the image and then using the blending modes to apply the texture to the picture you can add grain to your picture non-destructively. Image courtesy of www.ablestock.com copyright 2005.

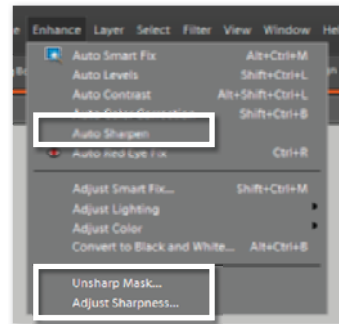
Advanced sharpening secrets

To most of us sharpening is a way of improving the clarity of photos using a single-click option such as Enhance > Auto Sharpen in Elements, but why should we relinquish control when it comes to this final step in the editing process? Here we look a little deeper at some of the more customizable options that allow the user to more easily match the sharpening effect with the subject matter and output destination of their photos.

Sharpening – What are the options?

Photoshop Elements provides a variety of sharpening options designed to increase the clarity of digital photographs. In previous versions these options were listed in the Filter > Sharpen menu and include the Sharpen, Sharpen Edges, Sharpen More and Unsharp Mask filters. In version 5.0 the options were moved and are now grouped under the Enhance menu and include Auto Sharpen, Unsharp Mask and Adjust Sharpness filters.

Digital sharpening techniques are based on increasing the contrast between adjacent pixels in the image. When viewed



Sharpen options >> Elements 5.0, 6.0 and 7 group the sharpening options under the Enhance menu. Unsharp Mask remains but the other filters have been replaced with the one-step Auto Sharpen and the sophisticated Adjust Sharpness options.

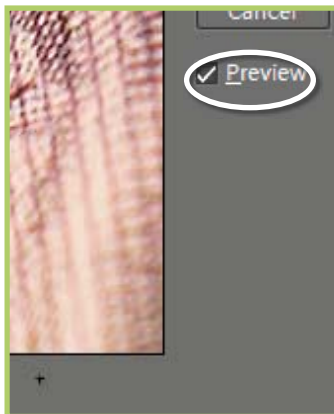
from a distance, this change makes the picture appear sharper or more defined. So applying a sharpening filter does not, and will never, make a poorly focused picture suddenly appear as if it has been focused correctly. Instead these filters are designed to make your photos appear more sharply defined.

For many users selecting an option such as the Auto Sharpen is about as far as they go when it comes to thinking about how to sharpen their pictures, but this 'one-click' filter fail to take into account the content of the photo and the intended use for the image – two factors that should determine the amount of sharpening you apply. So for the ultimate control of your sharpening use the advanced features in the new Adjust Sharpness filter, or the tried and tested Unsharp Mask filter. Both these options contain controls that allow the user to manipulate the strength of the sharpening effect and adjust which parts of the picture the filters are applied. Let's look at each in turn.

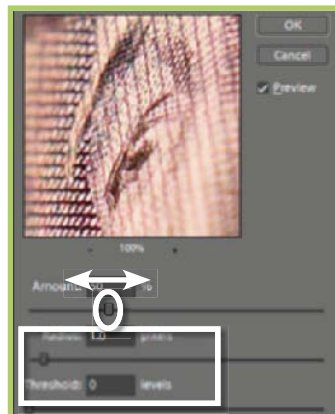
6.39 Unsharp Masking to the rescue

Suitable for Elements – 7.0, 6.0, 5.0, 4.0, 3.0, 2.0, 1.0 | Difficulty level – Intermediate | Resources – Web image 632 | Related techniques – 6.40, 6.41 | Menus used – Enhance

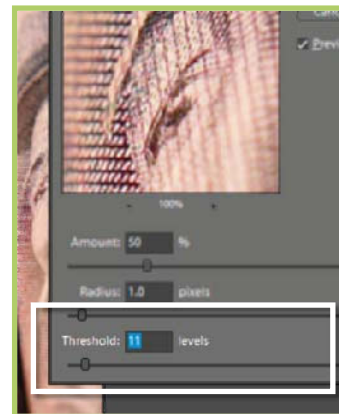
Of the various sharpen filters that Photoshop Elements contains the Unsharp Mask provides some of the greatest control over the sharpening process by giving the user a range of sliders which, when adjusted, alter the way the effect is applied to pictures. Though a little confusing to start with, the Unsharp Mask filter is one of the best ways to make your scans or digital photographs clearer. However, to get the most out of the feature you must understand and control carefully each of the three sliders. So how does the feature work?



Step 1 >> Make sure that your picture is zoomed in or magnified to at least 100% before selecting the Unsharp Mask option from the Enhance menu. Select the Preview option in the dialog to ensure that the sharpening effects are shown on the full image.



Step 2 >> Start with the radius set to 1 and the Threshold value adjusted to 0. Gradually move the Amount slider upwards watching the sharpening effect as you go. Stop when you find a setting where the picture appears 'halos' but contains no sharpening 'halos'.



Step 3 >> To restrict the effect from being applied to skin tones, blue skies or other areas of smooth tone gradually increase the Threshold slider until the sharpening is just being applied to the picture's edges.

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The **Amount** slider controls the strength of the sharpening effect. Larger numbers will produce more pronounced results whereas smaller values will create more subtle effects. Values of 50% to 100% are suitable for low-resolution pictures whereas settings between 150% and 200% can be used on images with a higher resolution.

The **Radius** slider value determines the number of pixels around the edge that are affected by the sharpening. A low value only sharpens edge pixels. High settings can produce noticeable halo effects around your picture so start with a low value first. Typically values between 1 and 2 are used for high-resolution images, settings of 1 or less for screen images.

The **Threshold** slider is used to determine how different the pixels must be before they are considered an edge and therefore sharpened. A value of 0 will sharpen all the pixels in an image whereas a setting of 10 will only apply the effect to those areas that are different by at least 10 levels or more from their surrounding pixels. To ensure that no sharpening occurs in sky or skin tone areas set this value to 8 or more.

**Unsharp Mask Top Tip:**

Be careful when you are using the Unsharp Mask filter with your pictures. A little sharpening will improve the look of your photographs but too much sharpening is really noticeable and almost impossible to repair once applied to your picture. If you are unsure of your settings, apply the effect to a copy of the image first.



Adding clarity >>> Careful sharpening can really add to the clarity of a digital photo, but like most enhancement techniques it is best to make such changes subtly. (a) No-sharpening. (b) After Unsharp Mask. (c) After Adjust Sharpness. (d) High Pass/Blend Light mode approach.

Book resources and video tutorials can be found at: www.photoshopelements.net

6.40 Adjust Sharpness for the ultimate control

Suitable for Elements – 7.0, 6.0, 5.0 | Difficulty level – Intermediate | Resources – Web image 632
Related techniques – 6.39, 6.41 | Menus used – Enhance

Until the release of Photoshop Elements 5.0 the best way to take control of the sharpening in your photographs was to use the Unsharp Mask filter. But the most recent release has included a brand new sharpening tool that will easily steal this crown. The Adjust Sharpness filter (Enhance > Adjust Sharpness) provides all the control that we are familiar with in the Unsharp Mask dialog plus better edge detection abilities, which leads to less apparent sharpening halos. The Filter dialog contains a zoomable preview, sliders to control the sharpening plus a drop-down menu where you can choose the type of sharpening to apply. You can control the sharpening effect with the following settings:

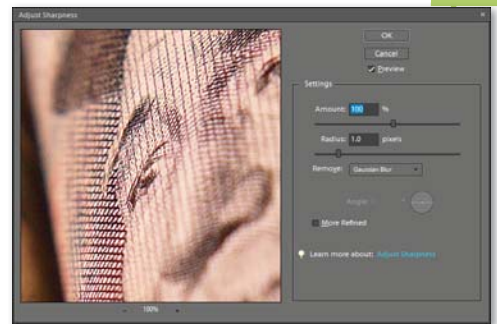
Amount – Strength of sharpening effect.

Radius – Determines the extent of sharpening. Higher values equal more obvious edge effects.

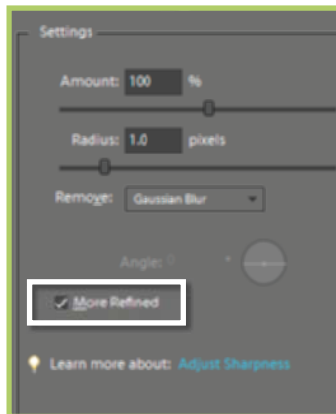
Remove – Determines sharpening algorithm used. Gaussian Blur uses the same approach as the Unsharp Mask filter. Lens Blur concentrates on sharpening details and produces results with fewer halos. Motion Blur reduces the effects of blur caused by camera shake or subject movement.

Angle – Sets Motion Blur direction.

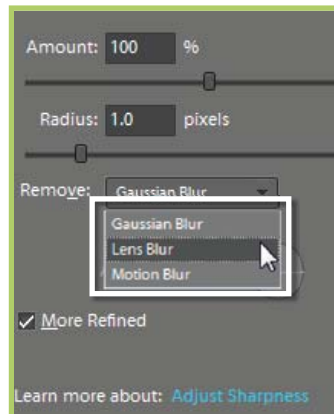
More Refined – Longer processing for better results.



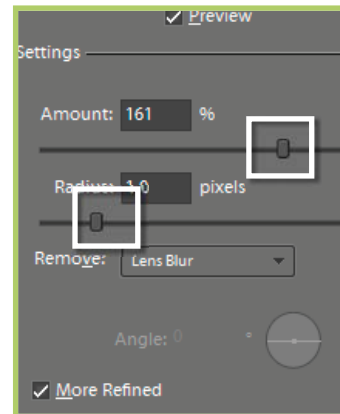
Adjust Sharpness >> The Adjust Sharpness feature introduced in Elements 5.0 extends the customized sharpening ability first started with the Unsharp Mask filter.



Step 1 >> Make sure that your picture is zoomed in or magnified to at least 100% and then select the Enhance > Adjust Sharpness filter. Select the Preview option in the dialogue to ensure that the sharpening effects are shown on the full image and also tick the More Refined option unless you are working with a large file or a slow computer.



Step 2 >> Choose the Lens Blur entry from the Remove menu. This option provides the best sharpening with least halo artifacts. Choose Gaussian Blur if you want to simulate Unsharp Mask results or Motion Blur if you are trying to get rid of the effects of camera shake.



Step 3 >> Start with the radius set to 1 and gradually move the Amount slider upwards watching the sharpening effect as you go. Stop when you find a setting where the picture appears clearer but contains no sharpening 'halos'.