## Topic 7 – Layer Masks

Learning Outcomes

In this lesson, we will take a look at layer masks in Photoshop. By the end of this lesson, you will have a good understanding of what layer masks are and what they are used for in Photoshop.

Layer Masks

Layer masks are a great feature of Photoshop because they allow us to subtly hide and show selective portions of an image or Photograph. Here we have two different layers. It's better to start with two, just so you can get an idea of how this whole process works.
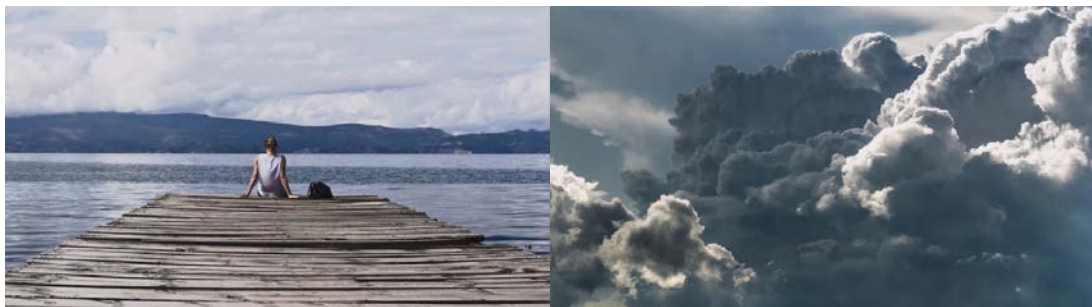
We have this, At Peace layer which is this woman sitting looking out onto the horizon and then we have the storm clouds layer also. The first thing to do is to toggle off the visibility for the clouds and the waterfall and add a layer mask on the curtain layer in order to blend the bottom of the curtain with river below. In order to add a layer mask, choose layer and then layer mask, reveal all.

Layer Masks

At the moment, we're working with a photograph or a pixel based document but masking always work the same way in Photoshop. You could be working with a type layer or a shape layer, a smart object. It doesn't matter. Wherever the mask is white, it's going to show the contents of that layer and wherever the mask is black, it's going to hide it. If you paint with a grey, then you will get varying levels of transparency or varying level of opacity of the content in the layer. So let's start by selecting our brush tool. Tap the b key in order to select it and if you want a larger brush then right click in order to access the brush preset picker and increase the size here or tap return in order to hide that.
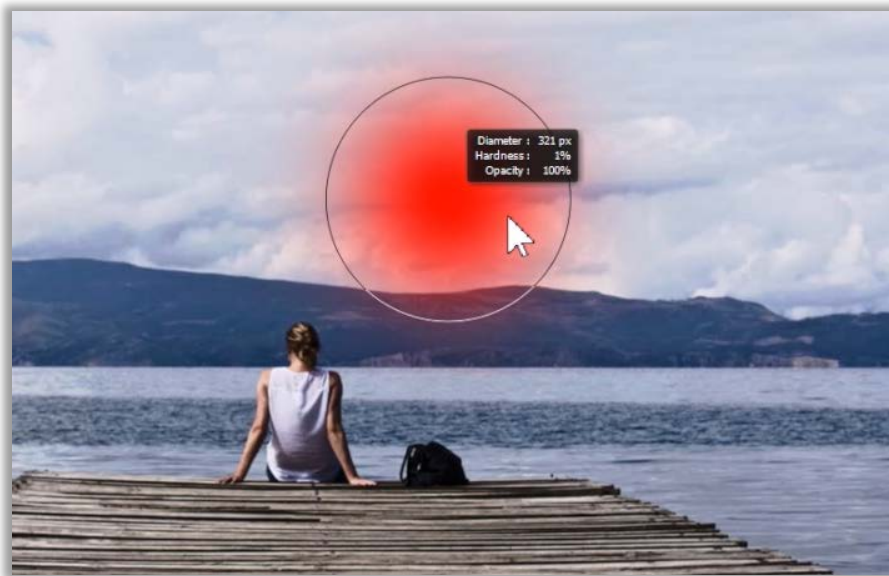

Use the right bracket key in order to get a larger brush but a shortcut is using the control and the option key because then you can drag left and right in order to increase or decrease the size of the brush very quickly. You can also drag up and down in order to change the hardness of the brush. Select a hardness of zero when you are painting now because you will want a nice soft edge brush. That's going to give a transition between the foreground colour, which you're going to choose as black and that's going to give a nice soft edge when you paint so you won't see a sharp transition between the curtains and the river.

Layer Masks

So in order to get black as the foreground colour, tap the d key to get the default colours and then tap the x key in order to exchange them so that the foreground colour in the colour swatches here is black. You could also use these icons. The one on the left, the two swatches will give the defaults and the double headed arrow exchanges them.
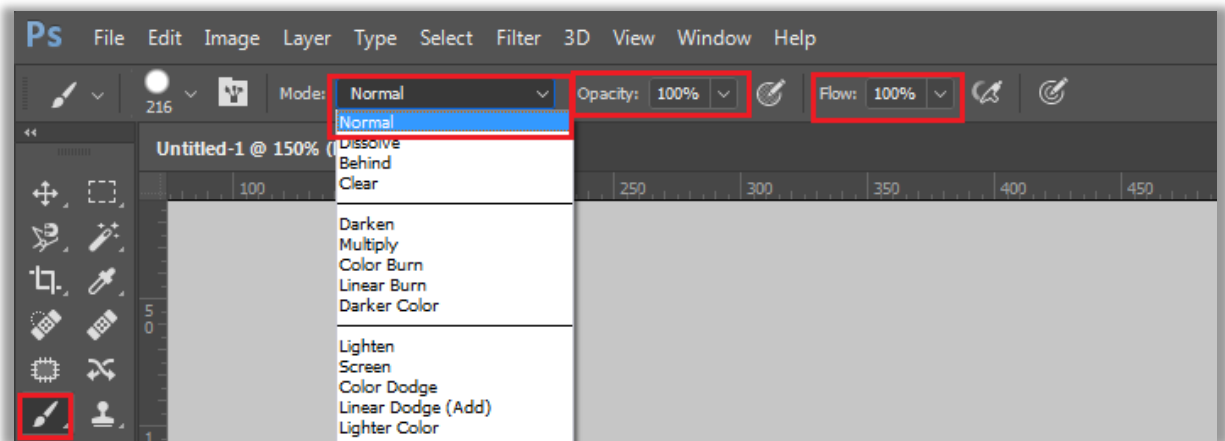
Make sure that the blend mode is set to normal. The opacity and the flow are both set to 100 and then click and paint over the bottom of the curtain and you can see in the layer mask wherever you've painted with black, you've hidden the curtain layer so that you can see the river layer underneath it and wherever the mask is white, we can still see the curtain.

Layer Masks
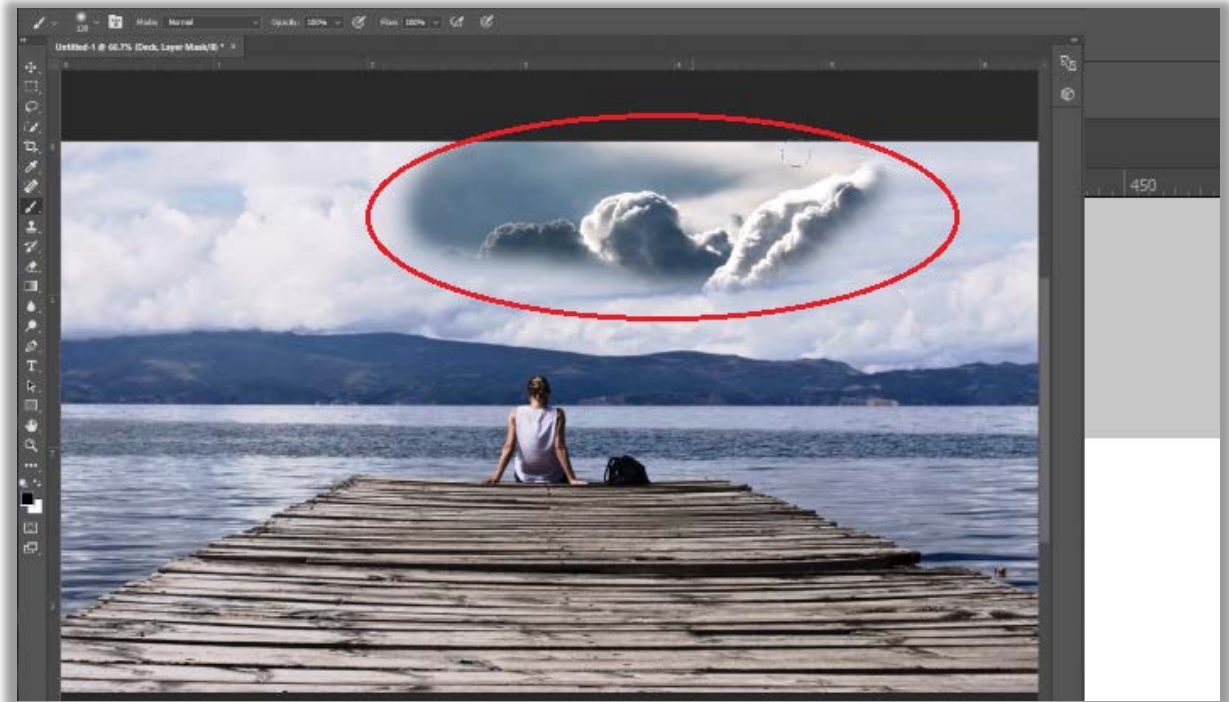
Now if you paint too much or too far, you can either use the keyboard shortcut command Z to undo your last paint stroke or we could exchange our foreground and background colour by tapping the X key and then because you're painting with white, wherever you paint in the mask, it will reveal more of the curtain. If you ever want to see the mask, hold down the option/ALT key and click on the mask.

Continue this process as you please, adjusting the blend between the two layers. We have created an unusual affect and perhaps it is not entirely realistic - the idea is that you are free to experiment when you merge layers and adjust your layer masking.

One of the most difficult things when you're learning layer masks in Photoshop is just remembering to target the mask when you want to work on the mask and the layer when you want to work on the layer. If you remember that where the mask is white you can see the information on the layer and where the mask is black the information is hidden, then you'll have no trouble at all masking in Photoshop.

Layer Masks

<u>What have we learned today? A Summary</u>

We have learned how layer masking works and how it can be used when we are post-processing our digital photographs. This is a great tool to use in Photoshop and feel free to experiment with different photos so you can see how it can be applied in different settings.