

Portraiture
Post-processing
for the Advanced



Banhup photography
available light portrait photographer

banhup.com

2nd edition

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Introduction

This is a sequel to my first ebook on portraiture post-processing for the beginner. In that ebook I described how I would process a straightforward portrait from start to finish illustrated with numerous diagrams to assist the beginner. As mentioned in that ebook, even though it was aimed at the beginner, the techniques described is already a good start to get pro-like results.

However life as a photographer is not always as simple as that. Many a times we will be challenged by some images begging for more from the photographer to get some stunning post-processed results. Moreover as a photographer we are always looking for ways to improve ourselves. This is where this ebook will have its main objectives. Let me state clearly here that this ebook is not a description of all the techniques available in Adobe Photoshop CS5; it is to describe what I personally use.

Like the first ebook, I will be showing many examples with many more images to illustrate the many challenges one may face. It is my hope again that a picture will be worth a thousand words. As I assume the reader has either read my ebook for beginners and/or is an advanced user of Photoshop, I will not be describing in detail some of the steps mentioned here for not wanting to repeat myself and/or boring the advanced user. If you think you do not want to miss out anything, I suggest you get that ebook to make this series a complete collection.

I would like to mention here that I will be using Adobe Photoshop CS5 on a Mac computer. For users of Windows operating system I have included alternative steps to guide you along. I will also be using some saved actions in this ebook. If you like you may download these actions at my [download centre](#) at my website. Specially for this new edition you get a free 3-month Priority Membership to have full access to this centre where I will add files whenever I have them.

I will be following very much the same tested format used in the first ebook. I will first give a brief run-through of my workflow followed by the processing of some examples that require challenges.

All the images used here are my own. If you like to see more you may go to my various sites to view them at your leisure.

For the benefit of those who do not know me, I am a pediatrician who have now optionally retired, and a very keen available light portrait photographer. I now do almost exclusively available light photography simply because it allows me to shoot almost anywhere and anytime with minimal preparations. More importantly the post-

processing techniques described here complement this form of photography beautifully.

Finally it is my sincere hope that you will find this ebook beneficial and that after reading it, you can enjoy your photography at a higher level. Yes, go out, shoot more and have fun!

Acknowledgements

Many of us have our own teachers, friends and favorite photographers to provide us tips and inspirations to guide us along. I have my fair share of these and to them I extend my sincere gratitude. Special thanks must be given to Manuel Librodo Jr. who has opened up the world of post-processing for me. He is a true master of portraiture whose vision and post-processing techniques are simply awesome. Without him and the many who have helped in one way or another, I wouldn't be what I am today.

I would also like to thank all of you who have made this a possibility as without your support and encouragement I would not have embarked on this project. I would also like to thank all my friends who have taken the effort and time to go through this ebook, and giving me feedbacks and recommendations to make this ebook as what it is today.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my beautiful wife Li Har, my children Shao Wen, Sheng Rong, Shao Wei and Sheng Han, for their understanding for allowing me to spend some precious family time on the writing of this ebook.

Before you continue with this ebook...

For all those who have bought my first ebook you are already aware that I strongly suggested that you change the default color space in Photoshop of sRGB (which is the correct color space for Web posting) to Adobe RGB (1998) which supports a greater gamut of colors. I have also suggested that you set your in-camera color space to Adobe RGB (1998). If you have not done so I suggest you do it now.

In the same ebook I have also advised the reader to shoot in RAW. I went on to discuss the advantages of shooting in RAW. I believe that if one is a serious Photoshop user he/she should be shooting in RAW. Henceforth I will be describing my workflow with the assumption that the reader is shooting in RAW.

The above aside, let's move on and have some fun.

Chapter 1 Sharpening - the final say

We will be using this all the time hence I would like to describe this first.

There are many ways you can sharpen your images and my two most used methods are using Unsharp Mask as a base - a simple straightforward Unsharp Mask and one with tweaks. Whichever method you use always remember to do your sharpening as the last step in your workflow. It cannot be over-emphasized that one should get a sharp image in-camera. Even then one should sharpen his image at the end of the workflow simply because the post-processing being done will affect the sharpness somewhat.

There are no magic figures to follow but what I am going to describe here are my two most commonly used sets. Remember to always do it to taste and not to overdo it to such an extent that you see halos. When that happens your amateurish attempts at post-processing will stick out like a sore thumb.

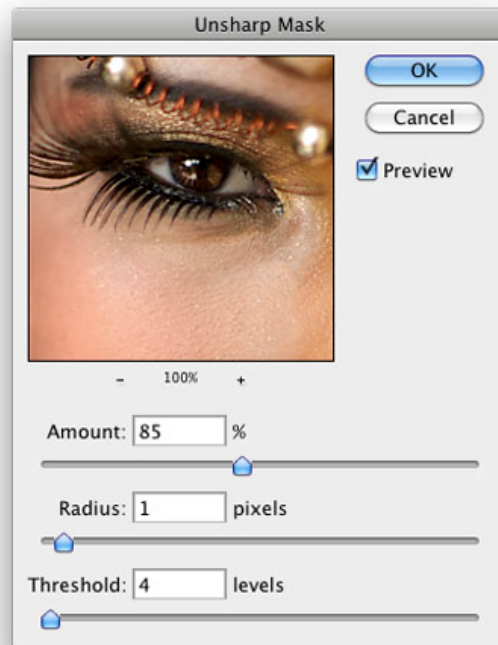
1. Simple Unsharp Mask

Start with Duplicate a Layer by pressing Command-J (Windows: Control-J).

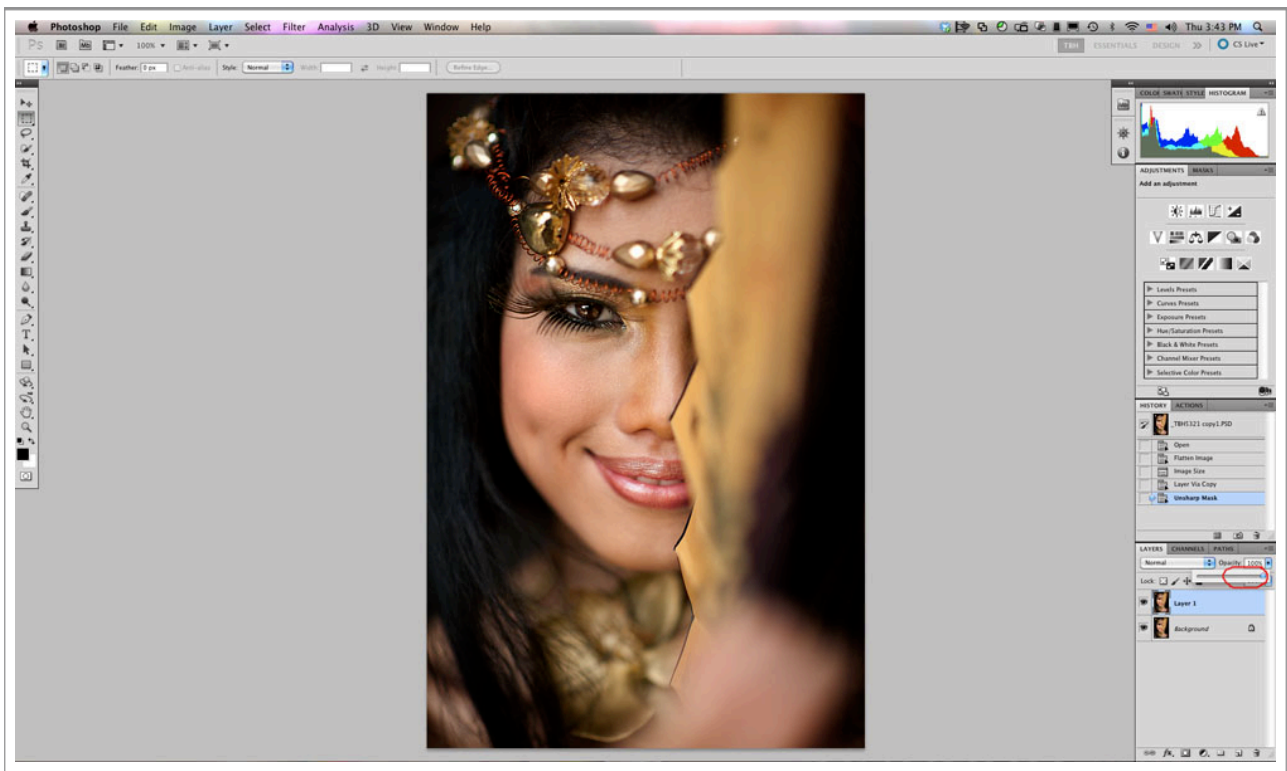
Zoom in to 100% for a better view of exactly what the sharpening is doing to your image. To zoom in just press Command + (Windows: Control +).

Go to Filter>Sharpening>Unsharp Mask and from the dialog that appears use Amount 85% (or more, your choice), Radius 1 pixel and Threshold 4 levels and click OK.

Practice points: *Doing to taste all along the workflow is what determines the final result. Each and every step has a bearing to the next. It is therefore important that you do it well and to what you want to achieve.*



Then adjust the opacity to taste (circled in red).



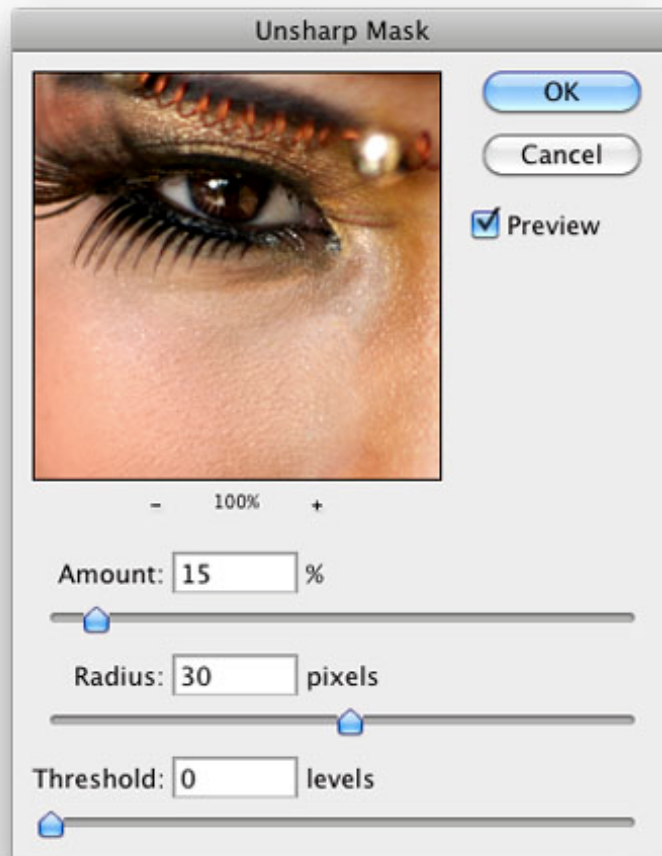
Practice points: Since we can adjust the opacity slider you may experiment with the Amount level to achieve an optimum sharpening to your preference. It is good practice to zoom in to 100% when you perform this step to better judge the effects the sharpening has on your image.

2. Unsharp Mask with tweaks

This will involve quite a few steps and as such I would advise you to save this as an Action. I have done so and saved it as F6 so that at the end of my workflow I just press F6. (You may download this action [here](#) if you have not done so already). I have tried different values for the various steps to be described below and the values suggested are the best to my taste. You may experiment with other values but I suggest you use these for a start.

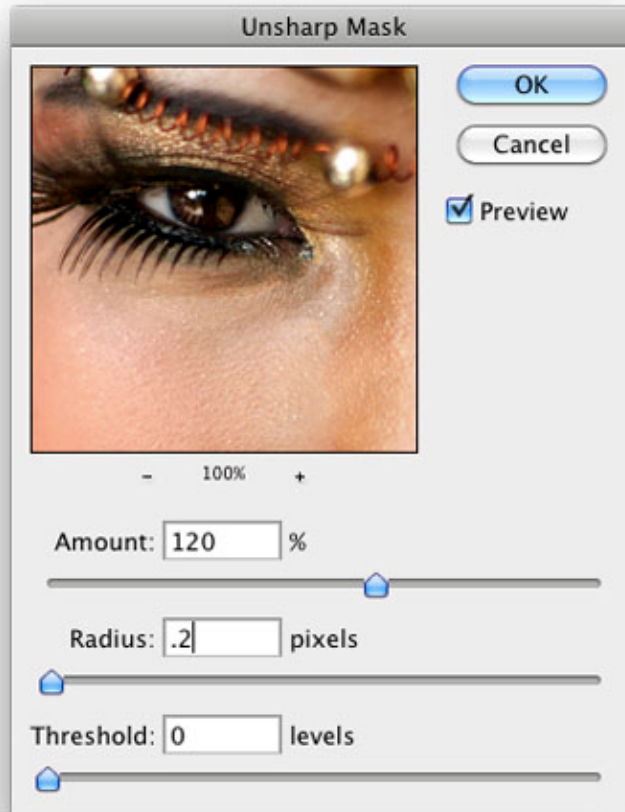
Again start by Duplicate a Layer and zoom in to 100% as stated above.

Click Filter>Sharpen>Unsharp Mask and apply values of Amount 15%, Radius 30 pixels and Threshold 0 levels.



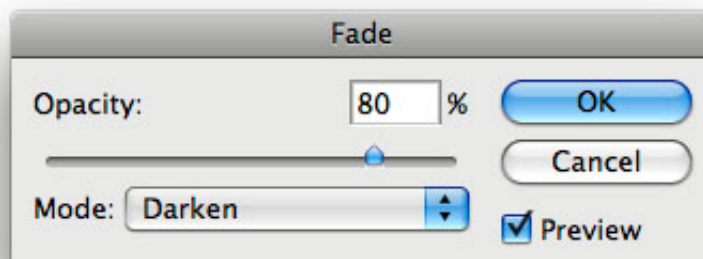
Click OK to apply the values.

Now click Filter>Sharpen>Unsharp Mask again and use 120, 0.2 and 0 for Amount, Radius and Threshold respectively.

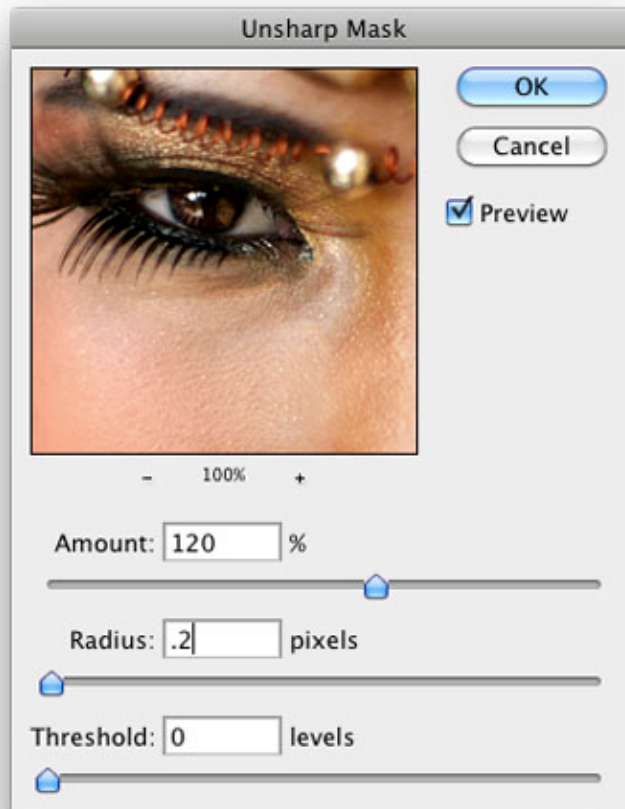


Click OK to apply values.

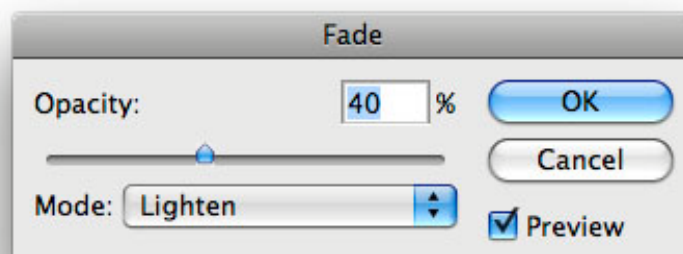
Then go to Edit>Fade Unsharp Mask and change the Mode to Darken and reduce opacity to 80%. Click OK.



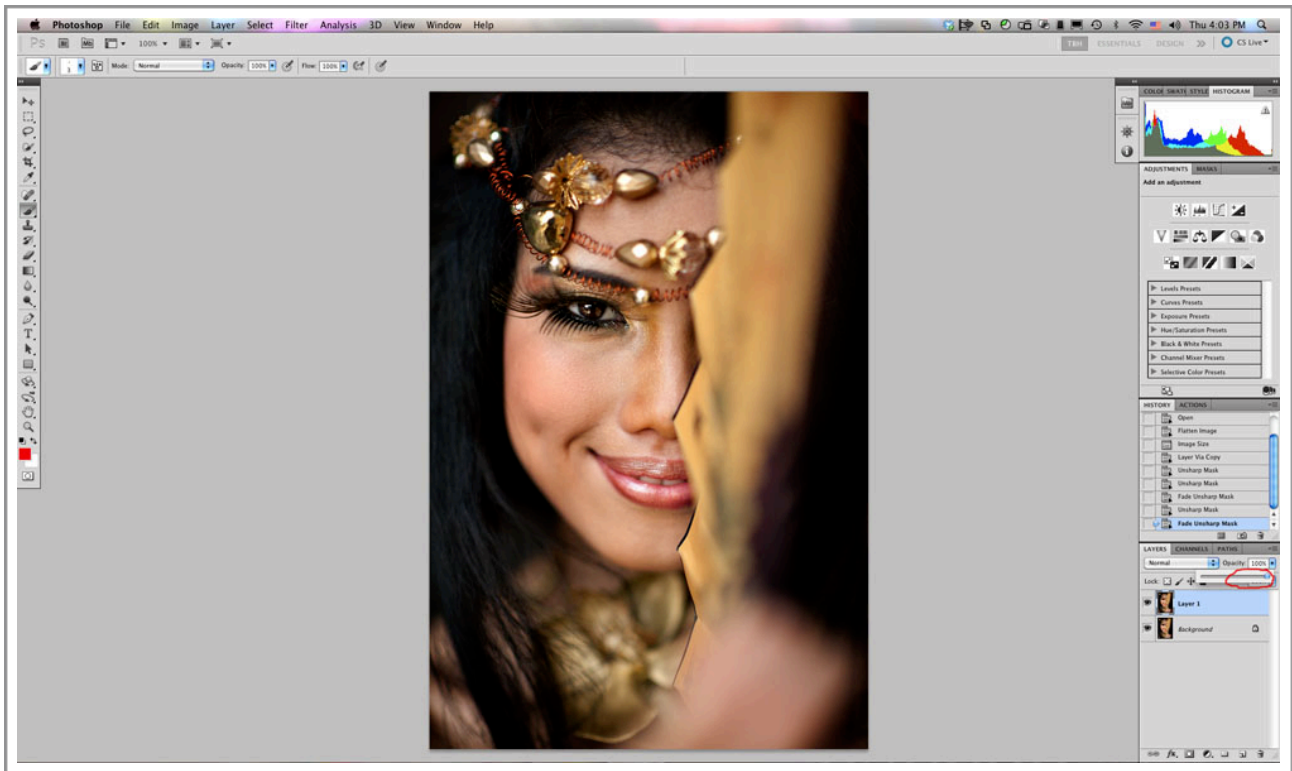
Repeat Filter>Sharpen>Unsharp Mask at 120, 0.2 and 0.



Then go to Edit>Fade Unsharp Mask but this time set the Mode to Lighten and reduce the opacity to 40%, and click OK.



With these steps of sharpening your image will be dramatically sharpened. You may still adjust the opacity of Layer 1 to your taste like so.



You can now appreciate why I have saved these steps as an Action to save me time in my workflow. I have described the method of saving actions in my first ebook and I shall not be describing it here again. I have also written a tutorial on this at my website. Click [here](#) if you want to know more.

I suggest you save this sharpening technique as an Action too (or download from [here](#)). That way you will save a lot of time whenever you need to use it - which would be very often, let me assure you. Let's now see the Before and After images.

Practice points: Notice that for all intents and purposes this tweaked Unsharp Mask results in a more contrasty image. If you already have a contrasty image I suggest you use the basic Unsharp Mask.

Before



After



Chapter 2 How to enhance facial features

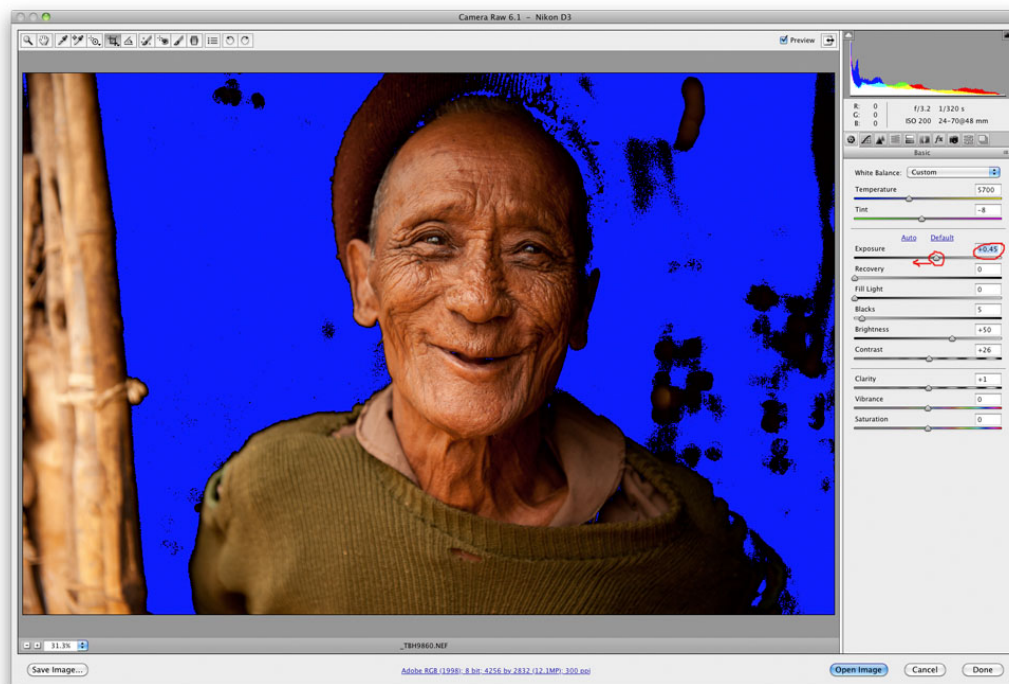
This image will illustrate how I process images of senior citizens where I want to enhance their facial features. It was taken at Inle Lake, Myanmar at a photo-safari organized by me. Read the story about him [here](#) if you like.

The following steps will show how I would process this image. Notice that I divide my workflow into three stages i.e Initial preparation, Post-processing proper and Final preparation. Before we continue, you may download his photograph [here](#).

Initial preparation

1. Open file in Adobe Bridge

On opening the RAW file I found the image slightly under-exposed. Hence I increased the Exposure slider to 0.45 (to taste with close monitoring of the skin exposure). Also notice the clipped shadows (shown by blue background - I have enabled this function as mentioned in my ebook for Beginners). Below is the result.



Practice points: To enable the function to show clipped shadows and blown highlights, click on the white and black up arrows respectively at the top of the histogram.

I would like to see some details in the clipped shadows mentioned above. To do that I dragged the Fill Light slider to the right till I could see the details.



This photo is a bit too warm for me hence I reduced the Temperature by adjusting the slider to the left to 4900K (to my taste).



Notice the histogram. This is still a warm image (my preference).

You will notice as we go along that I do many steps to my taste and sometimes I go against the conventional. To me I must please myself first before I can please anyone else.

Back to the processing. I like to have a closer crop of this image. I have selected the crop tool (circled in red) and cropped this image like so:



You will also note that there are many more parameters one can adjust if required but I honestly seldom use them. I do occasionally play with the Recovery slider to reduce blown highlights and the Clarity slider to improve on the apparent sharpness of the image etc.

Satisfied that I did not require to adjust anything else, I click Open Image to get the following in Photoshop.



For those who still insist on shooting in jpegs the above steps obviously would not apply. I do occasionally (very, very occasionally) shoot in jpegs. If I do I would apply Auto Tone, Auto Contrast and Auto Color to see if it improves on the captured image before I proceed with further post-processing. To do that, first Duplicate a Layer.

Then go to Image>Adjustments>Auto Tone and click followed by adjusting the opacity to taste. Repeat this with Auto Contrast, and Auto Color to see their effects.

If it does nothing much to the image, skip this step.