

Fixing Group Shots

I think we have all found ourselves in the situation where we have been asked to take photographs of a group, and sometimes these group shots can be very important (weddings etc.) so we have to get them right and if we can't get them right in-camera we need to have a back-up plan. This is the back-up plan!

When we take photographs of groups it is ALWAYS a good idea to take more than one shot. There is always someone who closes their eyes, looks away or pulls a funny face at the wrong moment. Make sure everyone is looking at you and I give them a countdown so they know when I am going to take the picture. This doesn't always work so take more than one shot. The bigger the group the more chance you have of someone blinking. It is better to take 5 shots and bin 4 as we probably won't get the chance to take the shot again.

Sometimes we have a picture where most of the group are fine but one person was looking the other way. Luckily we have taken a series of shots and can combine these to make one good final image.

In this example I have one shot where the bride and groom are happy and looking at the camera but the bride's father has looked away. In the series of shots I took the best image of the bride's father also had the 'happy couple' not looking chuffed. Never mind – let's sort this out.



Open the 2 shots. If they were shot in RAW take them into Adobe RAW converter and adjust the first image. Do not crop at this point.

Click on Select All at the top left corner and Synchronise. This applies the adjustment we did to the first image to the second image, then click Open Images.

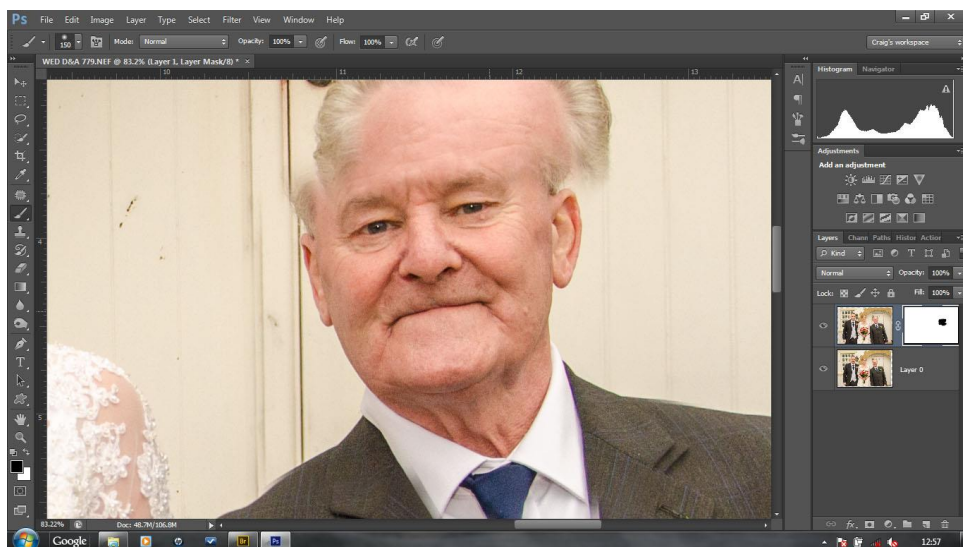
With the move tool select grab the tab of one of the images and drag down. Hold down shift and drag the image onto the other group shot and release. The 2 images are now on separate layers one above the other. It is easier if the top layer has only the one person needing correcting so if they are the wrong way round double click on the background layer to unlock it, click okay and it should now become Layer 0.

Now we want to align these images. A good starting point is to select both layers by Cntl+clicking on both and using Edit>Auto-align layers. Auto will be selected by default so click Okay. Click on layer 1 to make this active and reduce the opacity to see if Photoshop did a good job. Use the arrow keys to nudge the image if you think the images haven't aligned properly.

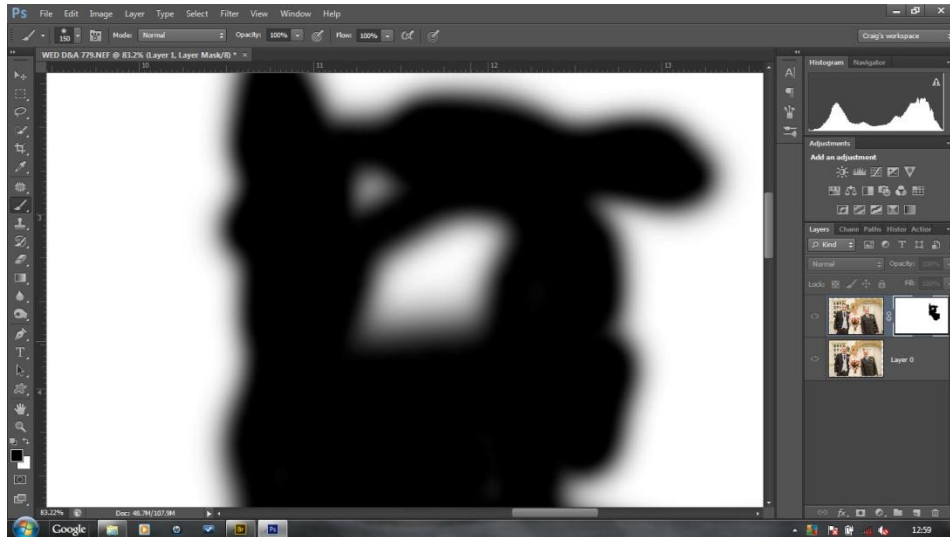
TIP: It is easier to blend images from a point which has little detail or from a point which hasn't moved between shots. In this example it could be the collar of the bride's father or I could align his right shoulder. The 2 things which make this image more difficult are the pattern on the suit and the wispy flowers.

Click back on layer 1 to make it active. Now select Layer>Layer mask>Reveal all from the top menu bar or click the little rectangle with a circle in the middle at the bottom of the layers palette. A white box should appear beside the layer 1 icon. Click on this to make sure it is active (a little box appears around the mask icon).

Select your brush tool (shortcut B) and make sure black is your foreground colour (shortcut D to return to default colours). Paint out the old head with a medium soft brush and the new head should appear! Use the spacebar to move around the image. Try to work to a point where the joint will become less obvious and keep an eye out for parts of the image which were out of alignment, maybe in the background.

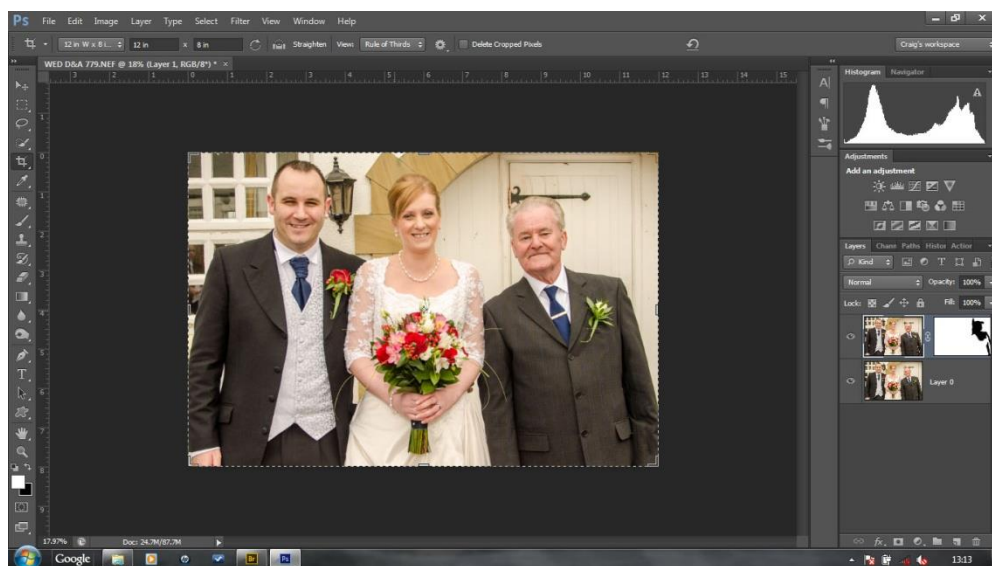


You can use Alt+click on the mask icon to check for missed areas on the mask. Alt+click again to return to the image.



If you want to remove a part of the mask you have just painted then switch to a white brush (shortcut X) and the parts of the bottom picture will return. Alter the brush size to paint any tricky parts.

Once you are happy with the mask double check by zooming in and use the spacebar to move the image around. I would save as a PSD with the layers at this point.



To finish off I would apply a crop and add a slight vignette. Sorted.