

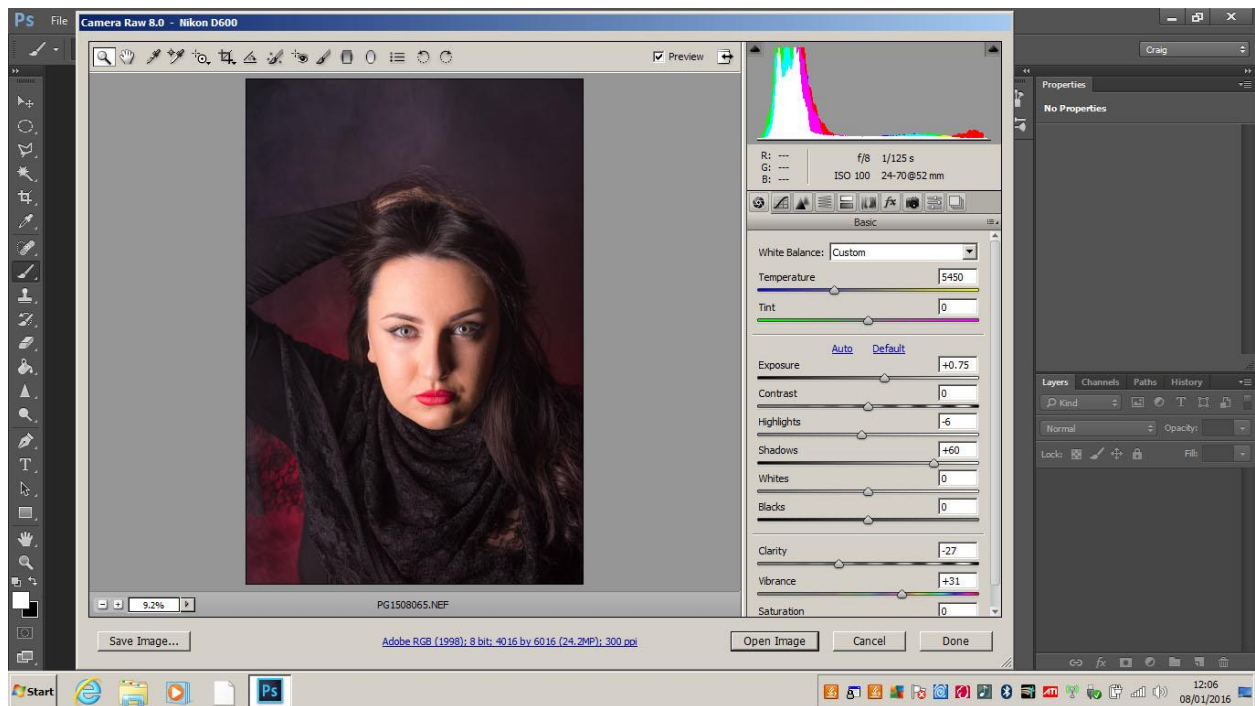
Adding Softness to a Portrait using Field Blur

This handout follows on from the 'Blur Gallery in CS6' handout from last April.

As I explained at the last meeting, when taking studio shots we normally set the f-stop to about f/8 or f/11 to get a decent depth of field and keep the eyes and face sharp. If we wanted to use a large aperture to have selective focus on the eyes then we could knock the power down on the lights, use a neutral density grad or even use a continuous lighting set-up. This isn't easy when we do our teaching nights.

One solution is to take a sharp picture and then introduce blur to the parts we want.

Open your image. I've shown the RAW conversion settings I used below.



Make a copy of the background layer and right click on the layer and choose Convert to Smart Object.

Now go into Filter>Blur Gallery and choose Field blur.

By default the amount of blur is set at 15px. This is okay for the background so I clicked to set a point in one corner. To add another pin, just click somewhere else. I set 3 more pins at 15px blur in the corners.

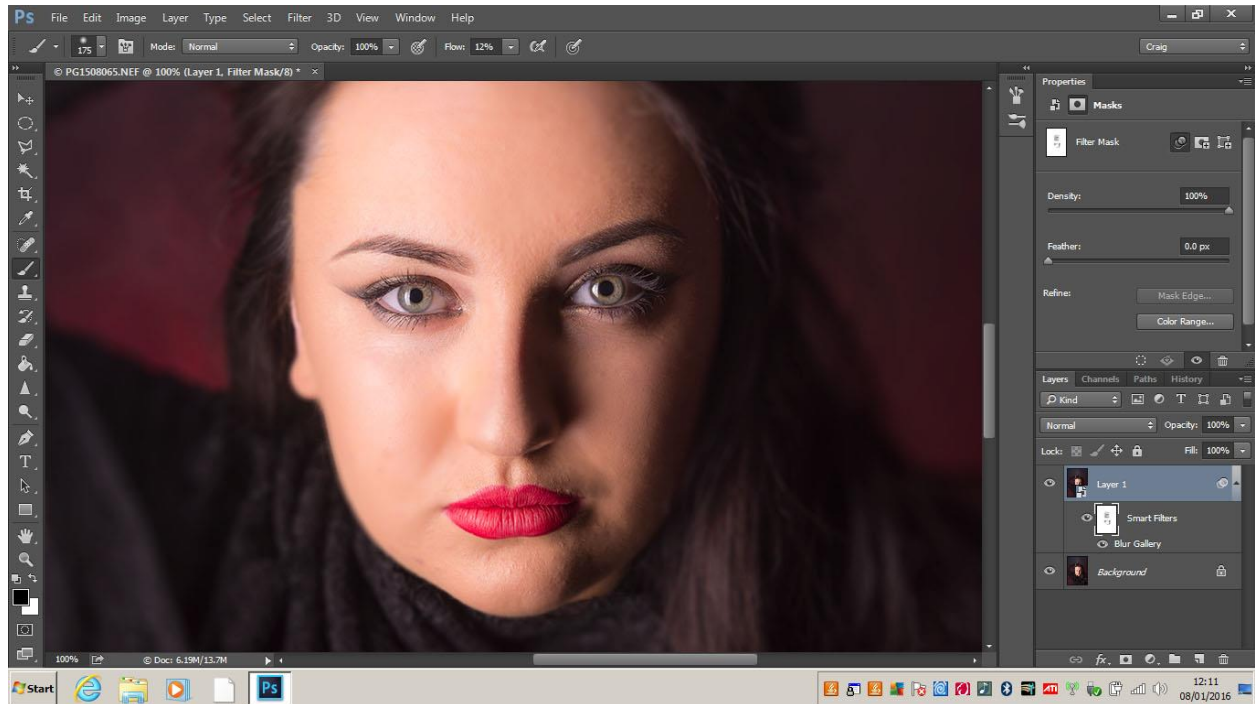
Now I want the eyes and mouth sharp. Set a pin where the eye is and reduce the blur to 0 using the slider (you can do this on the pin itself, but is more difficult!). Do the same for the other eye and the mouth.

I now set a few pins at an intermediate blur (7px) on the cheeks, chin, some of the hair and forehead. Hold down H to hide the pins to get a better idea of how the image is looking.

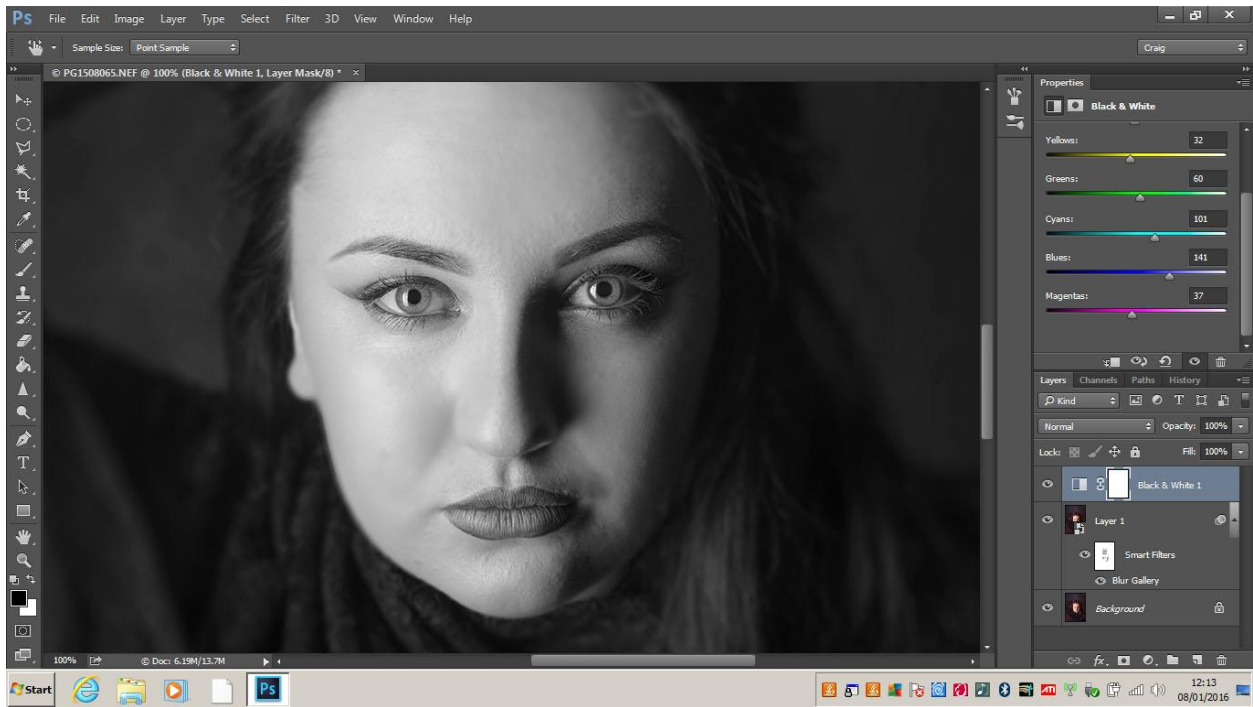
So we now have sharp eyes and mouth, slight blur to the rest of the face and a blurred background.

Click Okay.

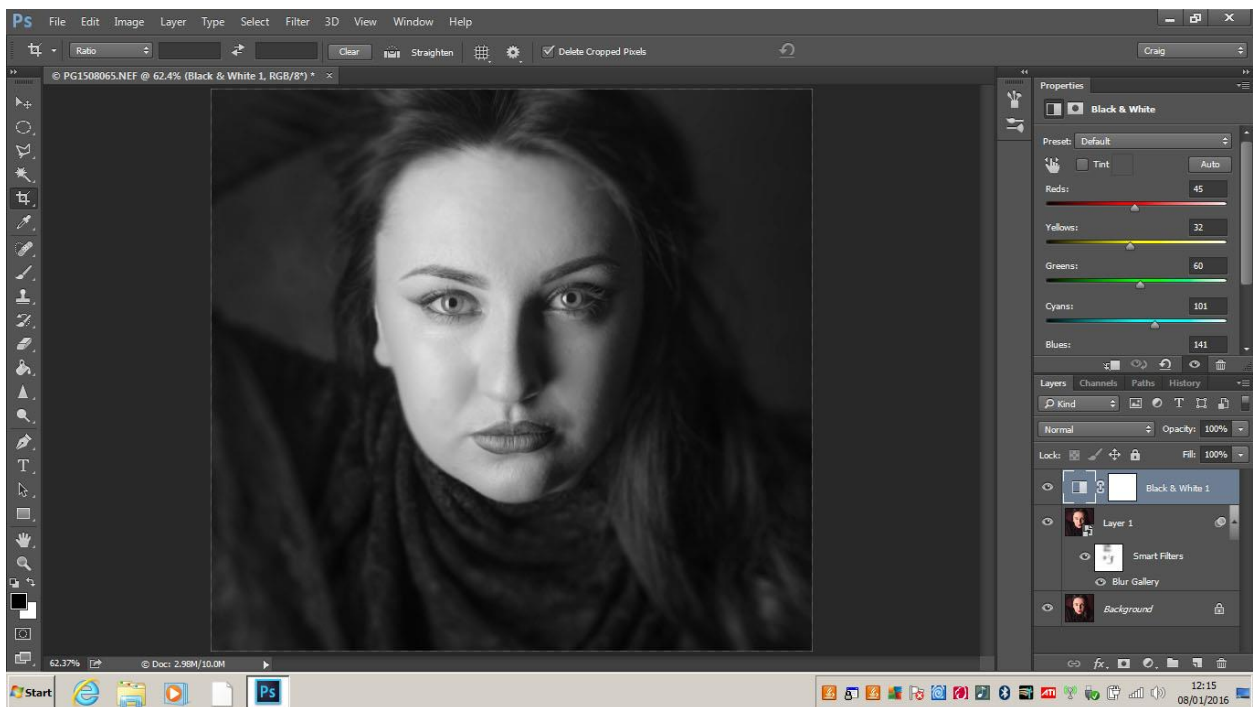
I wasn't happy with the amount of blur on the nose so I selected a black brush at about 20% opacity and painted on the mask to bring back a bit of detail.



This image looked good in monochrome so I did a conversion using the Black and White adjustment layer using the settings below. The red slider was also moved a little to the right to lighten the skin.



I wasn't happy with the initial composition being off-centre so I cropped fairly tight in a square format with the eyes roughly on the third.



An alternative crop would be to crop in tight to draw attention to the eyes and put the nose on the third. I left this one in colour for comparison. I think I prefer this one.



Done!