



ONE PAIR OF SLIDERS, 27 WAYS TO BLEND

The many uses of **Blend-If** — tonal blending that replaces minutes of masking with two handles

Blend-If hides or reveals pixels by brightness. Drag a handle and matching tones drop out; **split a handle** (hold Alt and pull it apart) to feather the transition. It works on This Layer or the Underlying Layer, and on any channel. Here is what those two sliders can do.

#	TECHNIQUE	EFFECT (BEFORE → AFTER)	HOW IT WORKS
A COMPOSITING			
1	SKY REPLACEMENT VIA BLUE CHANNEL		Photo on top, new sky beneath. Set Blend-If to Blue and drag This Layer's white handle left; the bright-in-blue sky drops away to reveal the drama below. Split the handle to feather the horizon.
2	COMPOSITING A MOON OR SUN		Moon on its dark background sits above the sky. Drag This Layer's black handle right to drop the dark surround, then split so the moon's edge feathers seamlessly into the night.
3	PLACING A SUBJECT BEHIND CLOUDS		Subject above a cloud layer. Drag the Underlying Layer white handle left so bright clouds punch back in front — the jet appears to fly behind them. Split for realism.
4	FAUX-HDR / EXPOSURE BLENDING		Stack a differently-exposed frame on top and use the Underlying Layer sliders to let correctly-exposed tones below show through — recover a blown sky with no masking. Best on flat horizons.
5	MATCHING SUBJECT TO A NEW SCENE		A Blend-If pass lets a dropped-in subject's shadows pick up the background's tones, so it reads as belonging rather than pasted on. Combine with a mask for mid-toned areas.
6	TIME-BLENDING (BLUE HOUR + STARS)		Blend just the lights or stars from a later exposure into a base frame by dropping out the darks of the top layer — the classic way to marry a sunset to a Milky-Way sky.
B BACKGROUND REMOVAL			
7	REMOVE A WHITE BACKGROUND		On This Layer drag the white handle left until the white surround disappears and transparency shows through. Ideal for logos, sketches, snow, clouds and light textures. Split to keep edges soft.
8	REMOVE A BLACK BACKGROUND		On This Layer drag the black handle right to drop the black surround. Perfect for fireworks, lightning, stars, lens flares, sparks, smoke and water splashes shot against black.
9	ISOLATE FINE, WISPY ELEMENTS		Because it works on tone, Blend-If handles hair-fine and semi-transparent edges — smoke, splashes, firework trails, star fields — far better and faster than a hand-drawn selection.
C OVERLAYS & TEXTURES			
10	TEXTURE IN MIDTONES ONLY		Texture above the photo on Multiply / Overlay / Soft Light. Drag the white handle left to hide it in the brights and the black handle right to protect shadows — texture stays embedded in the midtones.
11	LIGHT LEAKS, FLARES & BOKEH		These arrive on black; drop the black out (black handle right, or Screen mode) so only the glow remains. Use the Underlying black handle to let the subject's shadows show back through.
12	RAIN, SNOW, FOG & PARTICLES		Knock out the dark overlay background, then use the Underlying sliders to reveal the scene's shadows — so falling snow or mist wraps around the subject instead of covering it flatly.
13	BLENDING STOCK OVERLAYS		Any bright-on-black or dark-on-white stock element — dust, flares, cracks, foliage — can be dropped in tonally in seconds.

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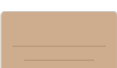
D TONE & EXPOSURE

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| 14 | SELECTIVE SHARPENING BY TONE |  |  | Put sharpening on its own layer (e.g. High Pass) and restrict it — out of noisy shadows and featureless skies, concentrated in the midtones. Always split. Being live, it adapts as tones change. |
| 15 | NOISE REDUCTION IN SHADOWS ONLY |  |  | Noise lives mostly in the darks. Put noise reduction on a layer and protect the highlights and midtones so smoothing hits only the shadows — preserving mid-tone detail. |
| 16 | DODGING & BURNING BY TONE |  |  | Blend-If feathers the effect so a dodge doesn't blow the darkest darks and a burn doesn't crush the brights — streak-free, natural tonal sculpting. |
| 17 | CONTRAST / CLARITY IN MIDTONES |  |  | Slide both This-Layer handles inward to protect shadows and highlights, so a contrast or clarity adjustment bites only in the midtones. |
| 18 | PROTECT HIGHLIGHTS & SHADOWS |  |  | When compositing, use Blend-If to stop an added element from destroying delicate highlight or shadow detail in the layers below. |

E COLOUR GRADING

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| 19 | SPLIT-TONING BY LUMINANCE |  |  | Apply a colour (solid or gradient map) and confine it — warm into highlights, cool into shadows — by restricting each colour layer to its tonal range. Feather generously for a filmic look. |
| 20 | ZONE SHADOWS OR HIGHLIGHTS ONLY |  |  | Applied to an adjustment layer, a colour-balance or solid-colour fill can be pushed into just the shadows (black handle) or just the highlights (white handle) — far more precise than Color Balance zones. |
| 21 | COLOUR GLOW IN THE HIGHLIGHTS |  |  | Paint or gradient a warm colour, then restrict it to the brightest areas so a golden sun-glow appears only where light naturally falls. |
| 22 | PER-CHANNEL COLOUR FIXES |  |  | Red / Green / Blue channel modes blend on a single colour's presence — confine a grade to certain colours, or clean up a black or white matte fringe left after a cut-out. |

F RETOUCHING

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| 23 | SKIN SMOOTHING THAT KEEPS TONE |  |  | Smoothed copy over a detailed copy; pull This Layer's white handle (split) to bring detail back where you want freckles and pores — smooth skin while preserving texture where it matters. |
| 24 | FREQUENCY-SEPARATION TEXTURE |  |  | On a high-frequency texture layer, split the handle so added texture transitions gradually and reads like real skin rather than a filter — back off further with layer opacity. |

G CREATIVE EFFECTS

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| 25 | ORTON EFFECT / DREAMY GLOW |  |  | Blend a blurred, brightened copy over the sharp original and keep the glow blooming in the highlights while protecting shadows from muddiness — the classic soft, ethereal landscape look. |
| 26 | DOUBLE-EXPOSURE PORTRAITS |  |  | Texture or cityscape over a portrait (Lighten / Multiply); use the white handle (split) to confine it to the shadows, or the Underlying black handle to lift the subject's own shadows through the texture. |
| 27 | SPEEDING UP COMPLEX MASKING |  |  | For any blend defined by light and dark — textures, skies, exposure blends, glows — Blend-If replaces minutes of painstaking masking with two sliders. Reserve hand-masking for shape-based blends. |



THE GOLDEN RULE OF BLENDING

Always **split the handles**. A hard Blend-If edge betrays the effect with jagged, aliased fringing; a split handle feathers the hand-off between what shows and what hides, and the blend becomes invisible. If a blend is defined by **shape** rather than tone, reach for a mask instead — Blend-If is for light and dark, not for outlines.