

## Basic Local Contrast Enhancement

What is it?

**Local contrast** is a different application of the unsharp mask to enhance the contrast between adjacent areas that exhibit only a slight difference in luminance, as opposed to the normal unsharp mask which increases the apparent contrast (acutance) along a very narrow border between adjacent areas. Local contrast enhancement is especially effective to remove atmospheric haze from a photo and is sometimes referred to as a haze reduction filter.

### Applying the filter

Duplicate the background layer. Name it "Local Contrast"

Go to the Styles and Effects Palette, find "Filters" in the left window and "Sharpen" in the right window, Double click "Unsharp Mask"

Set the amount to 50%, set the threshold to zero and click the preview box to make it active (check mark visible)

Set the radius to ~50 to begin. In the 100% window, move around to find the highest contrast area in the photo, (ex: horizon or an object silhouetted against the sky)

Increase or decrease the radius until a "halo" becomes just noticeable, then increase just a little bit more (+5 to +10)

Click OK

### Fine Tune the filter

There are two "knobs" available to fine tune the effect. Set the magnification to 25%, 50%, or 100% (depending on the pixel dimensions of the photo) so that you can view the entire photo. Photoshop will accurately render the photo detail only at the above magnifications. Any other magnification will tend to make detail "more fuzzy".

The first knob is the right side window, opacity (default is 100%). Usually there will be too much contrast, so you can reduce it by reducing the opacity of the Local Contrast Layer

The second knob is the Layer Blend Mode (default is "Normal"). You can experiment with this to change the effect. "Multiply", "Darken" or "Overlay" modes can make a dramatic impact on the photo, so set opacity to 100% then switch the blend mode and experiment, changing the blend mode and re-adjusting the opacity.

Since all of this takes place on a separate layer, you can add a mask to isolate the contrast enhancement to a specific area of the photo.

Now go find a "dull photo" and add a little "snap" to it.