

Dead Zone Blur Streaks Tutorial

In this Photoshop photo effects tutorial, we'll learn how to create a cool motion blur-type of effect by first colorizing a photo, then selecting a single column of pixels from the main subject and stretching it across the image to create streaks of color. We'll use a layer mask and a brush when we're done to paint away the streaks in areas where we don't need them. If you're wondering where the "Dead Zone" part of the name came from, the idea for this tutorial comes from the DVD box art for the final season of one of my favorite tv shows, The Dead Zone. I'll be using Photoshop CS5, but any recent version of Photoshop will work.



The final result.

Let's get started!

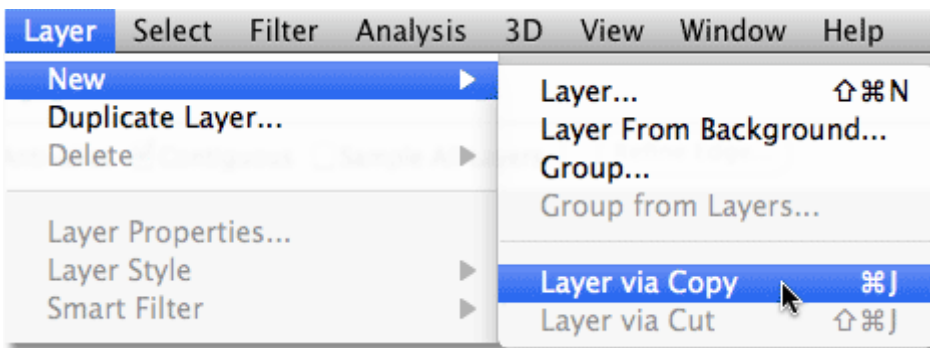
Step 1: Duplicate The Background Layer

Open the image you'll be using for the effect. Here's the photo I'll be working with:



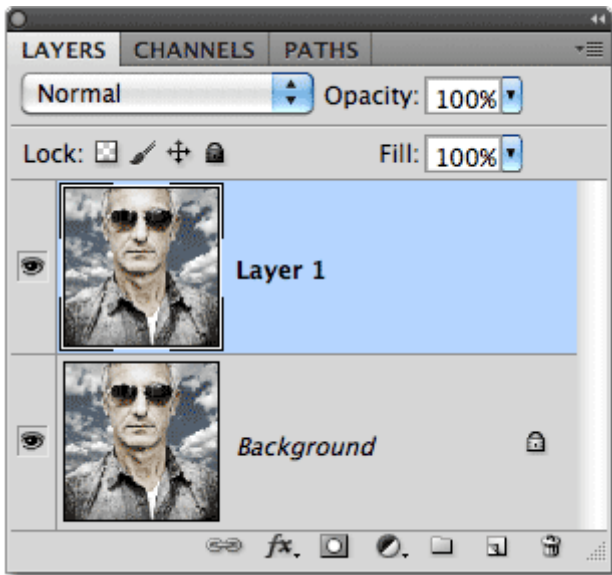
The original image.

The first thing we want to do to is create a copy of the image so we're not working directly on the original (in case we ever need it again later). The original image is sitting on the Background layer in the Layers panel. To make a copy of it, go up to the **Layer** menu in the Menu Bar along the top of the screen, choose **New**, then choose **Layer via Copy**. Or, for a faster way to copy a layer, press **Ctrl+J** (Win) / **Command+J** (Mac) on your keyboard:



Go to Layer > New > Layer via Copy.

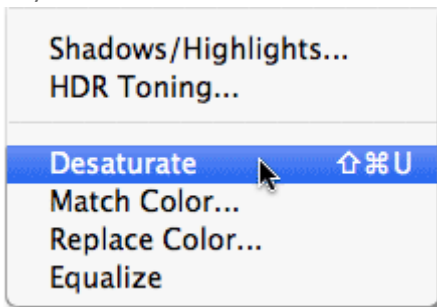
A copy of the layer, which Photoshop names "Layer 1", appears above the Background layer:



We can now safely work on the effect without touching the original image.

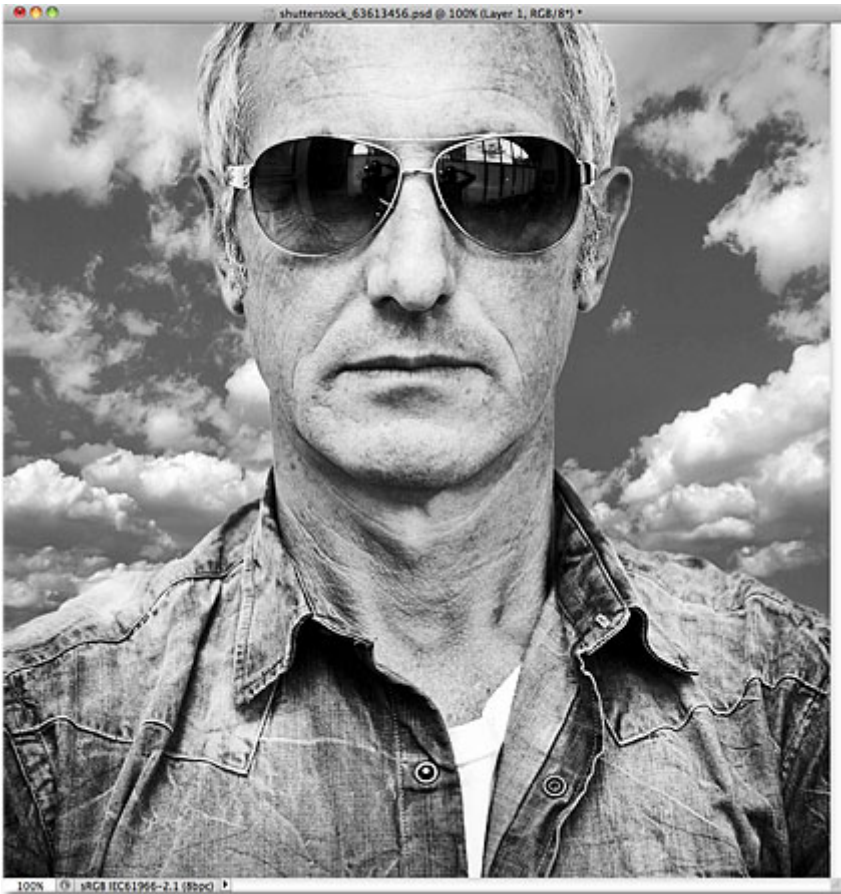
Step 2: Desaturate The Image

Next, before we colorize the image, let's quickly remove the original colors by desaturating the photo. Go up to the **Image** menu at the top of the screen, choose **Adjustments**, and then choose **Desaturate**, or press **Shift+Ctrl+U** (Win) / **Shift+Command+U** (Mac) to access the Desaturate command with the faster keyboard shortcut:



Go to Image > Adjustments > Desaturate.

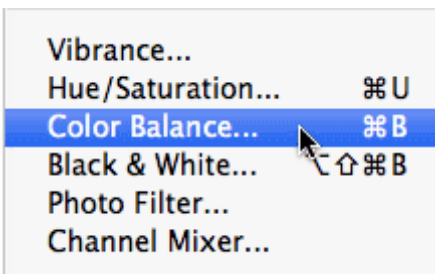
The image will now appear in black and white, although in my case, the original colors were pretty subtle to begin with:



Desaturating an image removes all color, creating a quick and dirty black and white version.

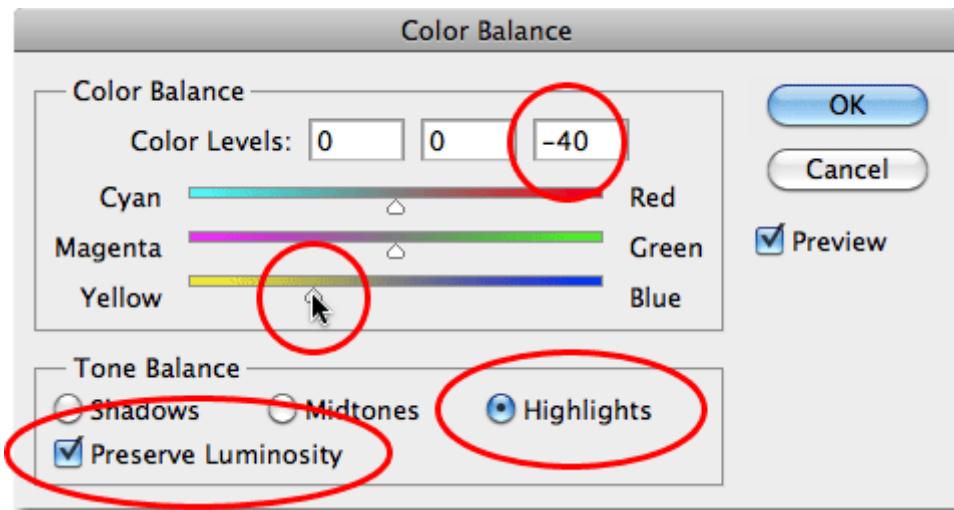
Step 3: Colorize The Image

With the original colors out of the way, let's add our own. Go up to the **Image** menu once again, choose **Adjustments**, and then choose **Color Balance**:



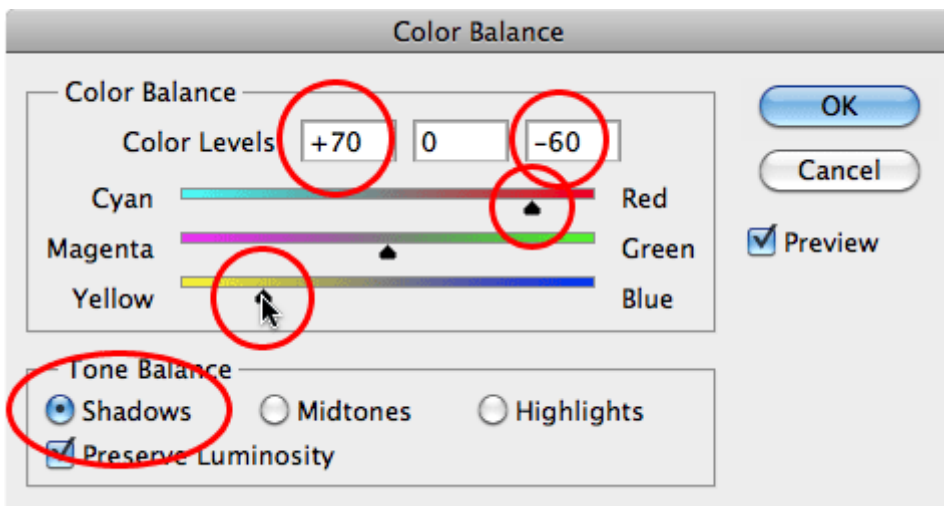
Go to Image > Adjustments > Color Balance.

Photoshop's Color Balance command allows us to choose different colors for the shadows, highlights and midtones of the image. If you want to use the same colors I'm using, first select the **Highlights** option in the dialog box, then drag the bottom of the three color sliders towards **Yellow** until the right **Color Levels** input box shows a value of **-40**. This adds yellow to the highlights. Make sure the **Preserve Luminosity** option is checked:



Adding yellow to the highlights.

Next, select the **Shadows** option, then drag the top color slider towards **Red** until the left Color Levels input box shows a value of **+70**. Drag the bottom color slider once again towards **Yellow** until the right Color Levels input box shows **-60**. This adds an orange color to the shadows:



Adding orange to the shadows.

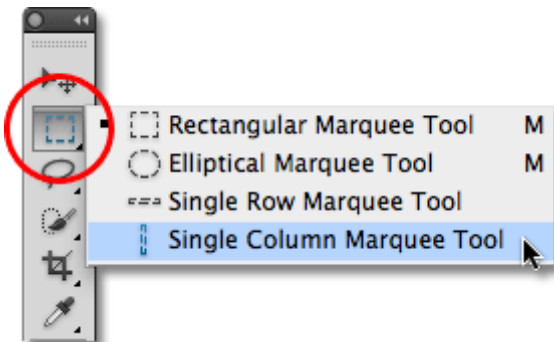
Click OK when you're done to close out of the Color Balance dialog box. The colors in your image should now look similar to this (assuming you used the same colors I did):



The image with the shadows and highlights now colorized.

Step 4: Select A Single Column Of Pixels

Grab the **Single Column Marquee Tool** from Photoshop's Tools panel. By default, it's hiding behind the Rectangular Marquee Tool, so click on the Rectangular Marquee Tool and hold your mouse button down for a second or two until a fly-out menu appears, then select the Single Column Marquee Tool from the list:



Click and hold on the Rectangular Marquee Tool, then select the Single Column Marquee Tool from the list.

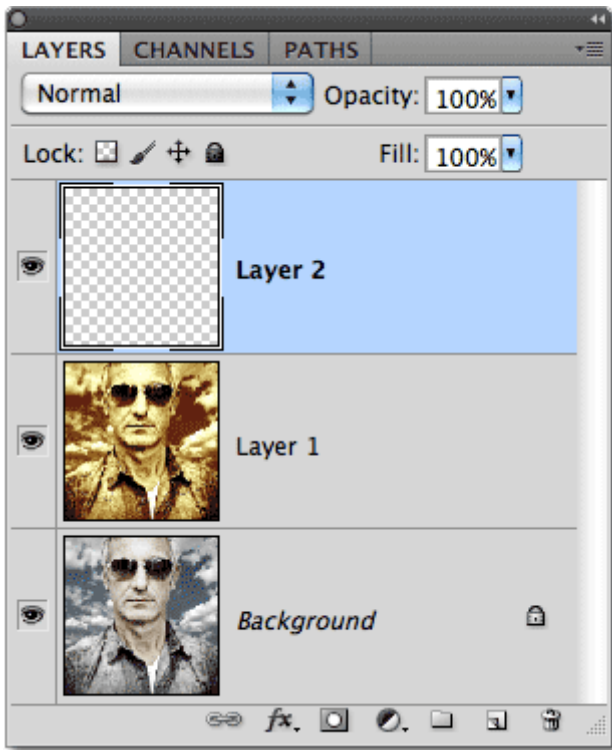
As its name implies, the Single Column Marquee Tool selects a single column of pixels in the image. Clicking anywhere in the image will select the pixel you clicked on plus every pixel above and below it from top to bottom. For this effect, we want to select a column of pixels that will divide the subject in half. I'm going to click in the center of the man's nose. A very thin selection outline appears, dividing his left half from his right (it may be a little hard to see in the screenshot since the selection is only 1 pixel wide):



A thin selection outline appears running vertically through the center of the subject.

Step 5: Copy The Selection To A New Layer

Just as we did back in Step 1, go up to the **Layer** menu, choose **New**, and then choose **Layer via Copy** (or press **Ctrl+J** (Win) / **Command+J** (Mac) on your keyboard) to copy the selected column of pixels to its own layer. Nothing will seem to have happened to the image in the document window, but a new layer containing the column of pixels appears above the other layers in the Layers panel. Photoshop names the layer "Layer 2" (normally we should be giving our layers more descriptive names, like "colorized" and "pixel column", but with only three layers needed for this effect, there's not much use in renaming them):



The column of pixels is now copied to its own layer.

We'll see how to stretch our column of pixels across the image to create blur streaks next!