

COLORIZATION TUTORIAL

We all have old black and white photographs that we have thought would (maybe) look better in color but have never done anything about. I remember in the fifties, that is the 1950's, my father developing black and white photographs and then adding color with water based colorants and brushes. The end results were OK but usually the children's cheeks were too rosy, the sky a little too blue (especially for England!).

Now however with Elements applying color is easy and with a little care it looks very realistic. There are two methods in common use, each has its place and sometimes a combination of them is the best solution. I will cover both methods here.

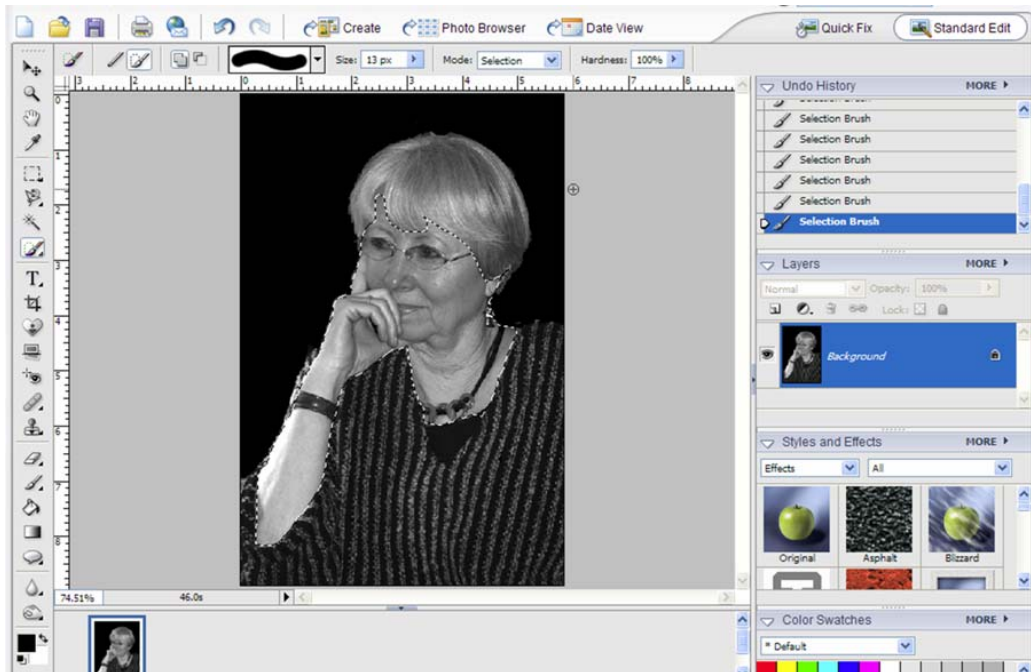
METHOD 1

This method is a very good way of creating realistic skin tones and is easier than it sounds. This is the image I have selected for treatment:

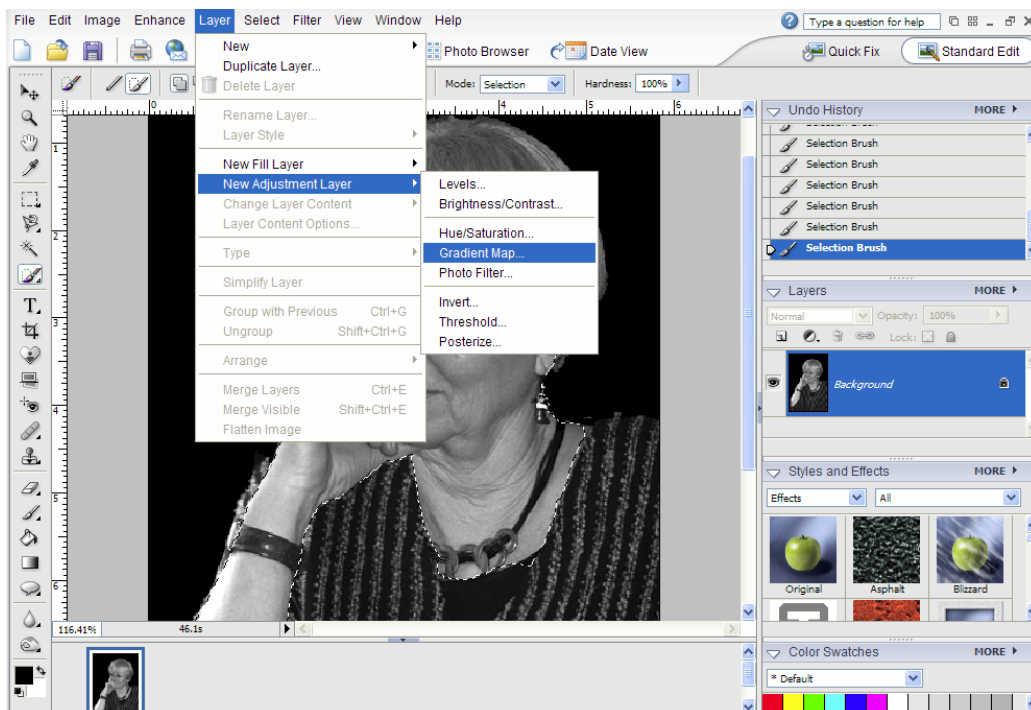


The original of this portrait is actually 8" x 10" it has been reduced to fit on this page.

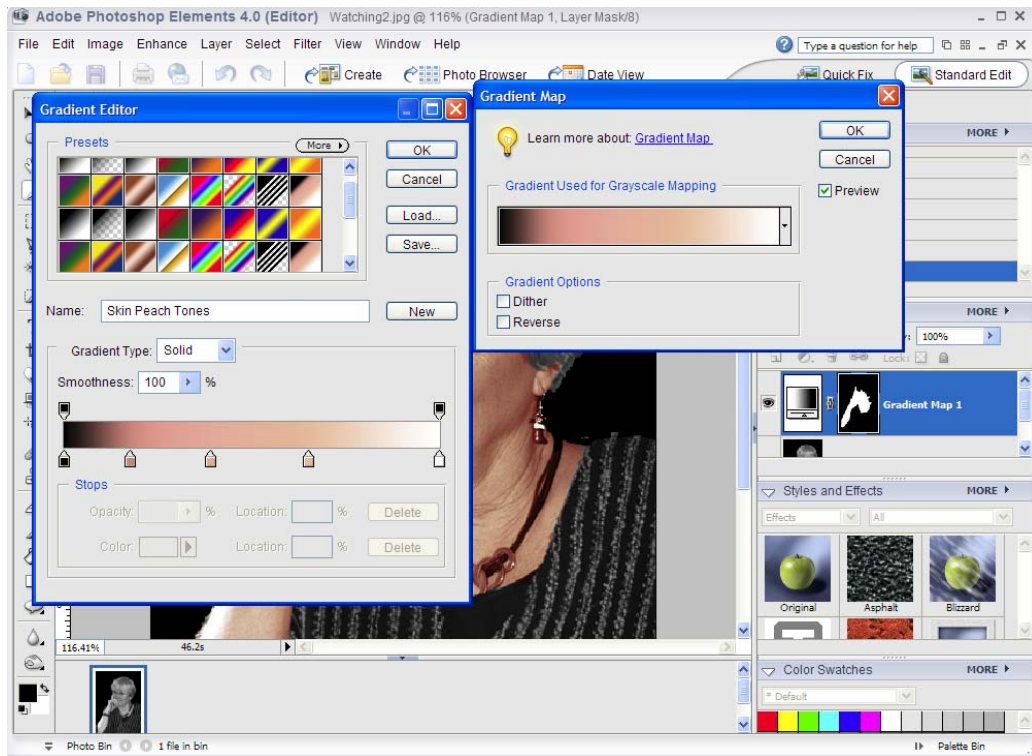
The first thing to do is to make a selection around the face, neck and arm. I used the magnetic lasso tool, adjusting the edge as required with the selection brush.



If you are a little off in your selection don't worry this can be fixed later. Next we must create a new adjustment layer. Go to Layer>Adjustment Layer>Gradient Map.



Set the blend mode to color and click OK. This brings up the Gradient Map Box; double click on the gradient preview bringing up the gradient Editor.



In the picture above the gradient I wanted is already selected. To create this gradient which I have called “Skin Peach Tones” first select “New” alongside the name and then click on the slider bar on the lower side of the gradient editor (here I used 5 equidistant points or stops) selecting a color for each stop.

In this case I used 00000,D38779,ECAC98,ECBE9D and FFFFFFFF(from the hexadecimal color code, see in tutorials).

Whenever you create a new gradient you should click on “Save” and give it a name. The next time you need it ,if it isn’t present amongst the gradients shown click on “Load” in the Gradient Editor and select the one you want. I have kept this particular gradient labeled as “Skin Peach Tones” as I have found it to be very good at for most skin tones.

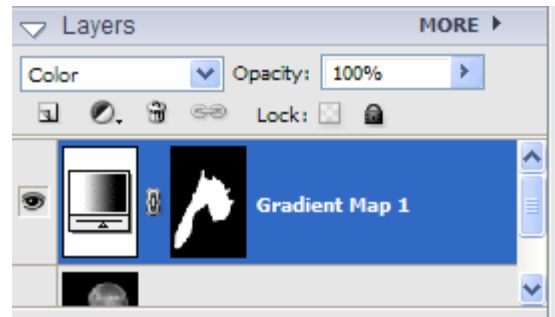
You can save as many gradients as you want just remember to give them a name that is meaningful and that it indicates what situation you used it.

Check the result on the portrait, it should look like this:



As you can see the resulting skin color is very realistic and even.

The only thing wrong here is that the gradient covered the necklace, watch band and eye glasses although this is not detrimental in this particular picture. However if you examine the layers pallet you will see the following:



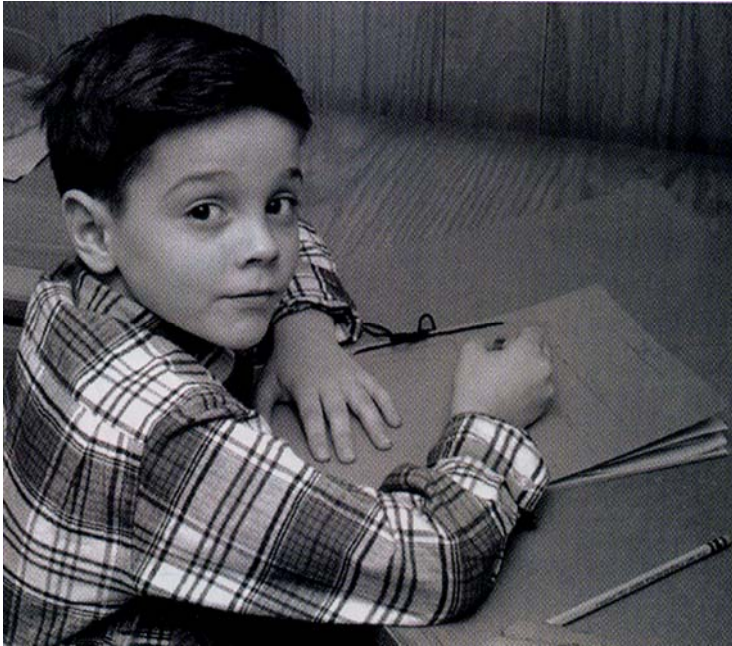
You will see that the area covered by the gradient color is shown white, the balance black. If your initial selection was off somewhat and you see areas that are colored when they should not be or areas missed the solution is to select the paint brush and add to the color by painting the area white (FFFFFF) or subtract from the area by painting black (000000). The actual tone can be adjusted by the opacity slider in the layers pallet (shown above as 100%) until you are satisfied. Here I used 84%. I also applied black to the eyes to remove the gradient.

Now we can select the blouse and add another gradient layer. Select the color you would like, in this case I chose the preset "brown,tan,beige" without selecting stops as the presets are already in place. The final result is shown on the right. Quite impressive!



METHOD 2

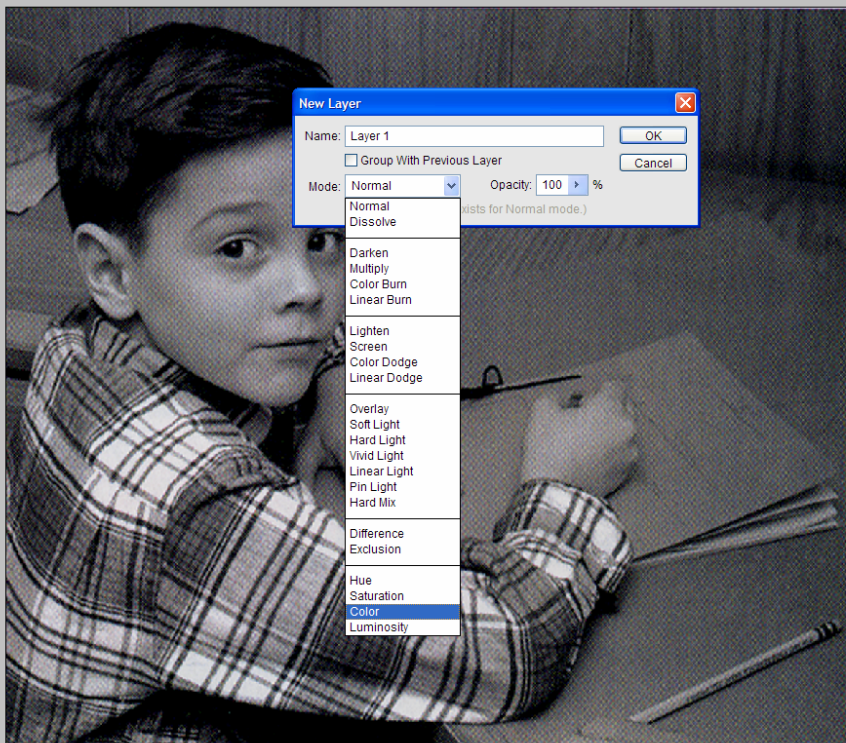
This method is probably easier but you need to be careful in which picture you select. First make sure your image has very few blank areas, i.e. large highlights. Also before starting make sure that the image is in RGB mode so if you have a gray scale picture you want to use convert it to RGB by going to Image>Mode>RGB.



This picture was scanned from a magazine so it is a little “grainy” but is ideal for this exercise.

After opening the file the first thing to do is to create a new layer.

Go Layer>New and in the Mode drop down menu select the color option as shown below. By doing this we allow the texture of the image below to show through any color we add.



This new layer is for applying paint but remember the paint only “sticks” to areas with gray tone pixels and not areas containing large expanses of white. If this is the case try using the burn tool on highlighted areas on the background layer before applying the color.

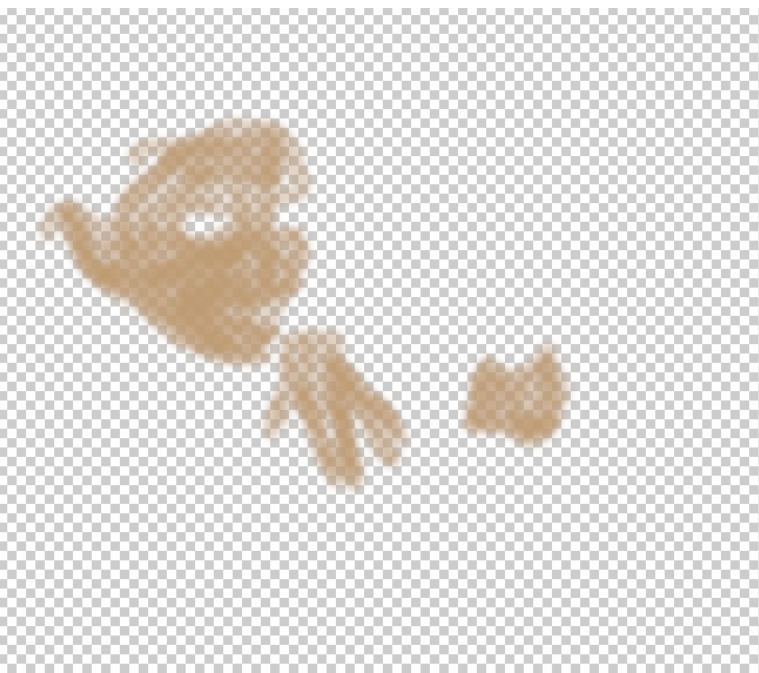
For choosing colors I usually open the color swatches pallet and dock it into the pallet bin for easy access.



To begin the coloring open the brush tool and select a soft edged brush. Then click on the airbrush icon on the menu bar, set the opacity level about 50% to start and slowly drag the brush across the area to be painted. I chose to do the skin tones first and selected light warm brown as my color.

Check the paint application frequently by turning off the background layer (click on the eye next to background in the layer

pallet) as shown below.

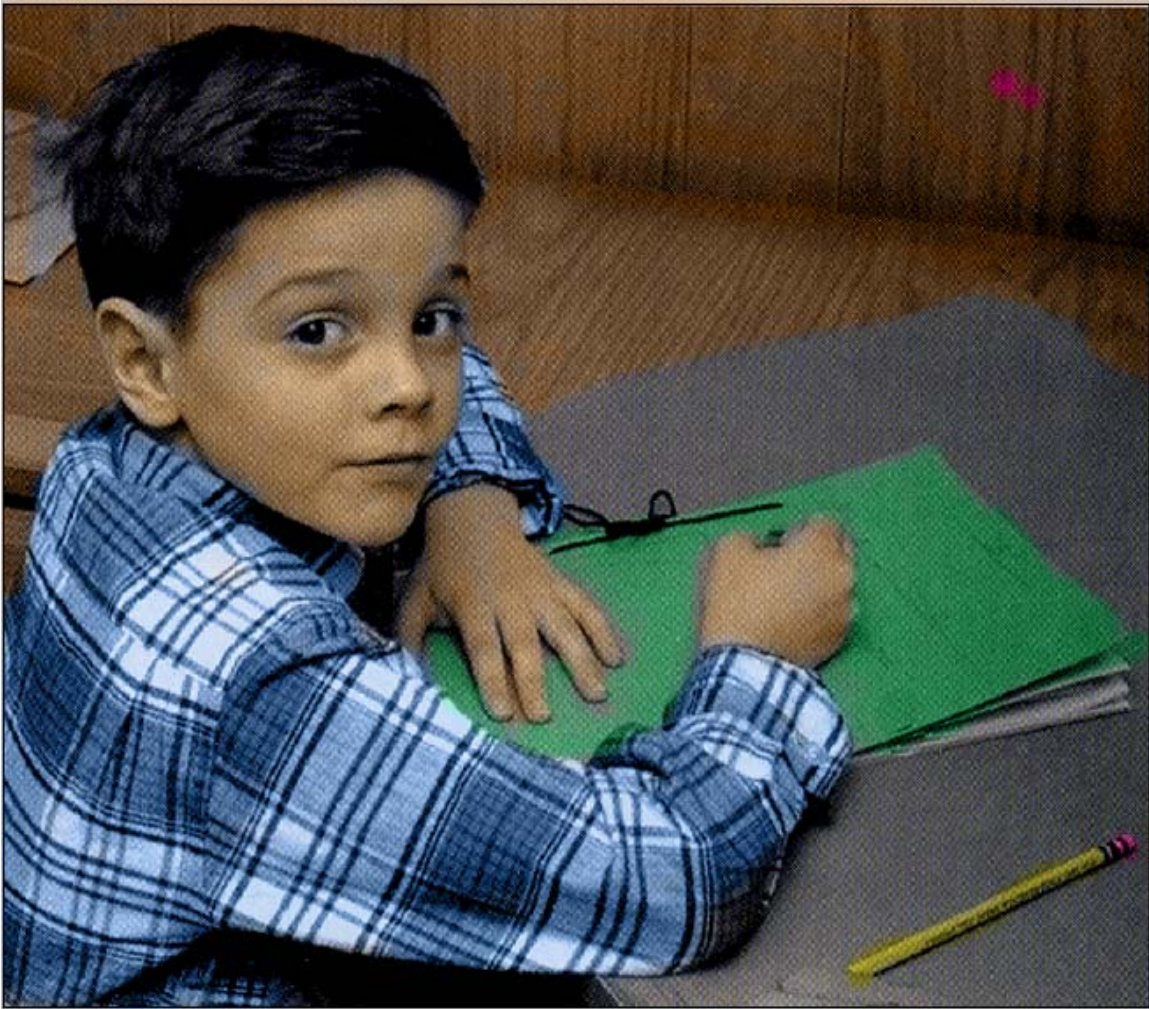


If the coverage is spotty or too thick in places the eraser tool can be used. Always remember if you don't like the result you can always go to the undo history pallet and retrace your steps and start over. Also when choosing skin color there are a lot of combinations that you can try so don't be afraid to experiment.

After you are satisfied with the skin tones move onto the rest of the picture.

By keeping the opacity down when you paint something like the shirt or the woodwork the underlying texture shows through giving a very realistic look to your coloring.

After painting the shirt, book, paneling and not forgetting the yellow pencil the end result looked like the picture below.



This is a very credible picture although the skin tone is not as good in my opinion as using the gradient adjustment layer and varying the opacity.

However there is nothing stopping you from first adding a gradient adjustment layer for the skin tone and then adding a new layer for painting. This in fact is what I have done many times in the past.

Again like everything else in Elements it all boils down to practice and experiment.

I hope you enjoyed this tutorial and hope that it will help you produce better pictures.