

Preparing a digital image negative

Preparing your source image:

1. Open Photoshop
2. Open your image:
 - File → Open...
 - Locate image (Desktop, Documents, etc.)
3. **Save** a new 'original' image as a Photoshop file
 - File → Save As...
 - Choose to make a Photoshop file (probably the default)
 - File name suggestion 'Description.psd'
4. Convert your image to 16-bit:
 - Image → Mode → 16-bits/Channel
5. Convert your image to Adobe RGB (1998):
 - Edit → Convert to Profile...
 - Destination Space/Profile: 'Adobe RGB (1998)'
 - Conversion Options: Engine - Adobe (ACE), Intent - Perceptual
 - 'Use Black Point Compensation is checked'

Editing your image:

NOTE: There are millions of ways to edit an image in Photoshop, and you can spend the rest of your life finding them. Below are a couple of quick and trusty editing paths to try.

Nik Silver Efex Pro 2 Filter

- Filter → Nik Collection → Silver Efex Pro 2
 - 000 Neutral
 - 005 High Structure (harsh)
 - 015 Full Dynamic (harsh)
 - 019 Fine Art Process

Applying a Contrast Curve:

1. Image → Adjustments → Curves (command-M)
2. Add a point at the corner of the lower left square
3. Add a point at the corner of the upper right square
4. These are two good starting points to make some subtle contrast changes
5. Pull these points slightly left/right, up/down
6. Once you are happy with the results, click 'OK'

Once you have converted your image to black and white and adjusted it to happiness, *this is a good time to **save** your file:*

- File → Save...
- File name suggestion 'Description BW.psd'

Getting your Image Ready to Print:

1. Change your Image Size, to be the proper size you want your negative to be
 - Image → Image Size...
 - Uncheck 'resample'
 - Choose your image size - this is the size your image will print without any added framing or borders

- It is a good idea to make you image size smaller than your photo paper. Why? Emulsion is hard to get even to the edges when sizing paper, or you might want to leave some margins for a border/framing
 - Resolution - somewhere between 300-600 Pixels/inch will yield the best results
2. Apply Unsharp Mask:
 - Filter → Sharpen → Unsharp Mask...
 - Good starting values are: Amount: 10, Radius: 60, Threshold: 0
 - This filter may start to make your image look worse on-screen, but it is an important part of the negative creation process to get a sharp final print
 3. Output Sharpen Filter
 - Filter → Nik Collection → Sharpener Pro 3 (2) Output Sharpener
 - Choose 'Continuous Tone' under Output Sharpening
 - Viewing Distance: your choice based on where you might hang this photo, probably 60-150cm is a good place to start
 - Printer DPI: 400dpi
 4. **Save** your image, as it is now 'Ready for Print'
 - File → Save As...
 - File name suggestion 'Description BW RFP.psd'

Applying the appropriate process response curve and making the image a negative:

NOTE: There are several ways to do this step in Photoshop. Below are a few different ways that all result in the same negative(s) being created, but one could possibly work better for your brain and workflow.

Simplest Method — less steps, some danger as this method works on the original layer:

1. Flatten your image (if you have created any layers)
 - Layer → Flatten Image
2. Load your pre-set process curve (provided by SEAP)
 - NOTE: If you want to add a border to your negative, do the following now:*
 - Select → All (command-A)
 - Image → Adjustment → Curves... (command-M)
 - If the curves are already loaded into Photoshop, choose from the 'Preset' pulldown menu
 - If the curves are not loaded into Photoshop, click the gear next to the preset pulldown and find the curves on your hard drive and load
 - Once you have found the proper curve (Silver Gelatin, Cyanotype, VDB, etc.), click 'ok' to apply the curve
3. Invert your image into a negative
 - Image → Adjustment → Invert (command-I)
4. **Save** your image as a new file:
 - File → Save As...
 - File name suggestion '*Description* BW SG NEG.psd'
5. You are now ready to print your negative!

Using Layers Method — a few more steps in this method, but if you want to use your PS file for multiple different negatives, this is a good method. The idea here is to create individual layers for each process curve, and an inverse (or negative) layer that can be applied to each response curve layer.

1. Flatten your image (if you have created any layers)
 - Layer → Flatten Image
2. Apply the first process response curve as a new layer (for Silver Gelatin, as an example)
 - NOTE: If you want to add a border to your negative, do the following now:*
 - Select → All (command-A)

- Layer → New Adjustment Layer → Curves
 - Name your new layer (eg. 'SG Curve')
 - Open the drop down menu in the upper right-corner of the layer tab and choose 'Load Curves Preset...'
 - Locate and load the appropriate curve (eg. 'SEAP_Silver.acv')
 - You will now have a new layer for your process response curve (eg. 'SG Curve Layer')
3. Apply the second process response curve as a new layer (for Vandyke Brownprint, as an example)
- NOTE: If you want to add a border to your negative, do the following now:*
 - Select → All (command-A)
 - Layer → New Adjustment Layer → Curves
 - Name your new layer (eg. 'VDB Curve')
 - Open the drop down menu in the upper right-corner of the layer tab and choose 'Load Curves Preset...'
 - Locate and load the appropriate curve (eg. 'SEAP_VDB.acv')
 - You will now have a new layer for your process response curve (eg. 'VDB Curve Layer')
4. Make the image a negative (inverse) as a new layer
- NOTE: If you want to add a border to your negative, do the following now:*
 - Select → All (command-A)
 - Layer → New Adjustment Layer → Invert...
 - Name your new layer (eg. 'Negative' or 'Invert')
5. Reverse your image - you need to do this to compensate for making the image a negative (which reverses the original once printed)
- NOTE: This action can also be done in the Print dialog
- Image → Image Rotation → Flip Canvas Horizontal
5. **Save** your image as a new file:
- File → Save As...
 - File name suggestion '*Description* BW Curves NEG.psd'

Adding a simple border to your image:

NOTE: besides looking nice, a border can be very helpful in aligning your negative and your photo paper in the contact print frame. This method will make the border a bit wider than your paper, which will provide nice guidelines for getting everything straight.

1. Add a black pinstripe to your image negative
 - Image → Canvas Size
 - In the Width and Height dialog boxes, increase the current values by a small amount (for example, a small but still visible pinstripe is .02, so 7 inches becomes 7.02 inches)
 - For 'Canvas extension color:' choose the opposite of what you want in your final image, since you are working in a negative now. If you want a little black pinstripe, choose white.
2. Add a white border to your image
 - Image → Canvas Size
 - In the Width and Height dialog boxes, increase the current width/height values by an inch to make a 1/2" border all the way around your image.
 - BUT, also add a tiny bit more so that your negative is slightly bigger than your paper, especially for Silver Gelatin prints.
 - For paper that is 8"x8" or 8"x10", make the width something like 8.0625 inches - this will give you a slightly larger negative than the width of your paper, which makes it much easier to align
 - For paper that is 8"x8" or 8"x10", make the height something like 8.02 inches - this will give you a little bit of margin for trimming your final print

- For 'Canvas extension color:' choose the opposite of what you want in your final image, since you are working in a negative now. If you want a wider white border, choose black.

Printing your image file:

* By selecting all before you add curves to your image, you will be limiting the effects of those curves to just the image itself, and not the border. This way you can get a pure white or pure 'dark' border.