



USING BLENDING MODES IN PHOTOSHOP

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Introduction

In this tutorial I'm going to cover the use of blending modes in Photoshop. Most people associate blending modes with layers, since most artists use them that way (i.e. just throw on an overlay layer), but they are also implemented in other useful features in Photoshop.

Because of this, I think it's more important to know the effects of blending modes first. Also since there are so many, it's best to know the most commonly used modes in digital painting today.

So let's get started!

How I use blending modes

There are three main places you'll be using blending modes in Photoshop: layers, brushes, and styles. They'll appear in a handful of other places in Photoshop (such as the Fill function), but those three are where they are used the most. I use blending modes with layers and brushes mostly-- styles I only get to for doing text graphics or special effects.

We'll go about this by walking through a landscape painting session and looking at how I might use each mode along the way.

Once you know how they work, you can tinker around with them in whatever way you want.

I normally try to start with both colors and values when I go about painting, but for the purposes of using all the common blending modes in this tutorial. Start by sketching your line work on a brand new layer in a brand new document.

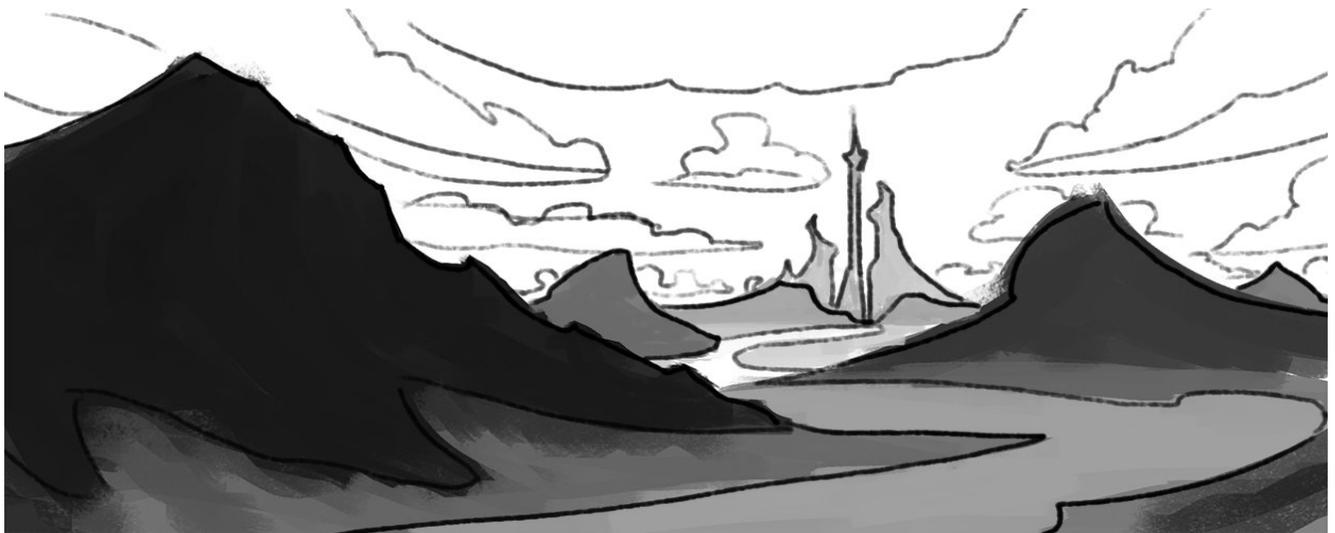
MULTIPLY MODE

Like a lot of other artists, I often put my line work on a multiply layer. This is so that you can start an under-painting beneath that will show through.



Change the blending mode of this layer in the pull-down menu where “Normal” is written to Multiply.

What Multiply does: *All white is made transparent, all black is opaque.* Anything other than white or black is see-through, like a light gel or piece of film. It is the opposite of the Screen blending mode.

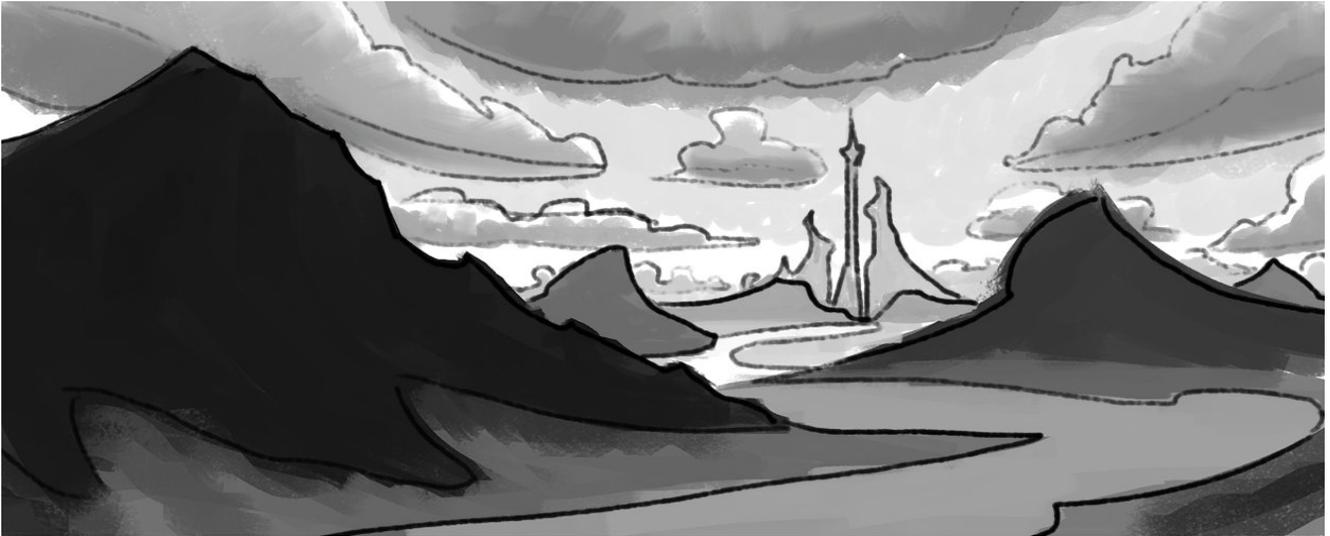


Remember your atmospheric perspective :)

Create a new layer underneath and fill it with white. Fill in your line work with the basic values of your landscape.

DARKEN MODE

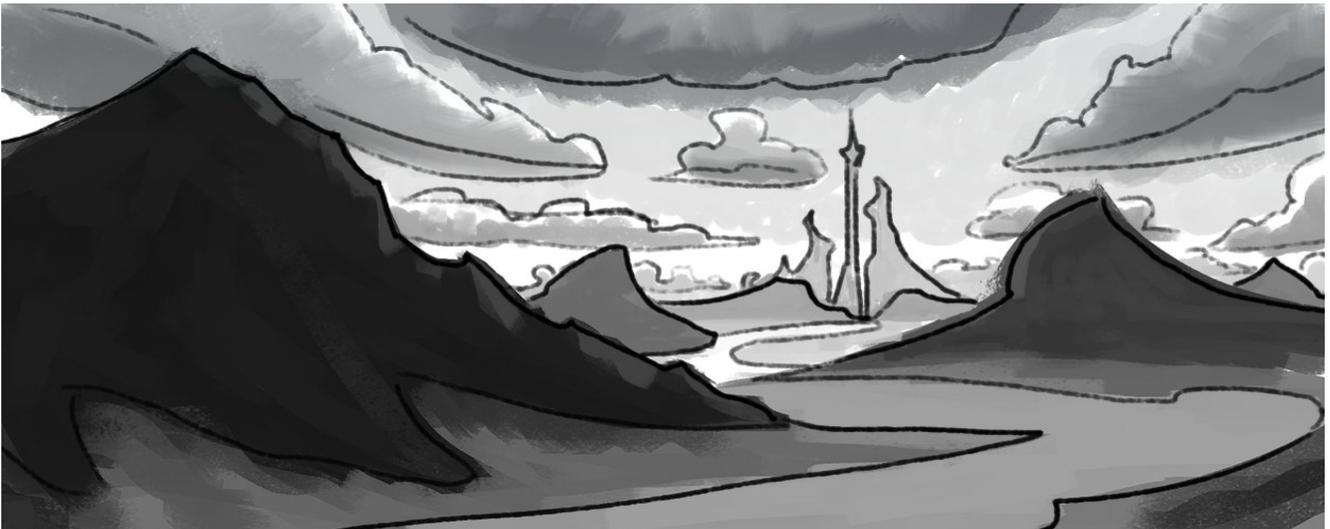
Set your paintbrush blending mode to Darken on the pulldown menu next to your brush controls. Paint in the sky using a value range that is lighter than the landscape below. Be unafraid of crossing your stroke through the land below!!!



What Darken does: *All values lighter than the content will darken to it, but anything darker will be untouched.* This mode is opposite of Lighten Mode.

LIGHTEN MODE

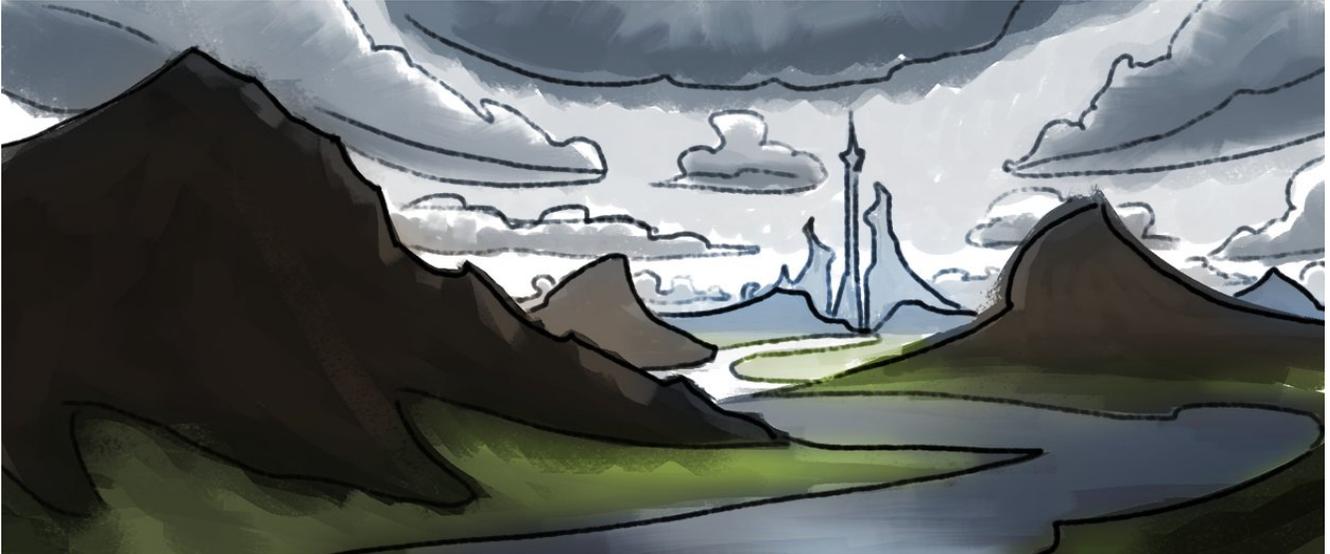
Set your brush mode to Lighten, and choose a value that is a step lighter than the rock. Paint the lighter rock values with it, and be unafraid of crossing through the sky above!



What Lighten does: *All values darker than the content will lighten to it, but anything lighter will be untouched.* This mode is opposite of Darken Mode.

OVERLAY MODE

Change your brush mode back to Normal. Create a new layer and set its blending mode to Overlay. Now lets colorize! Use a soft brush, maybe an airbrush to gradually add color to the black and white image underneath. Use two layers to push the value and saturation further if necessary.



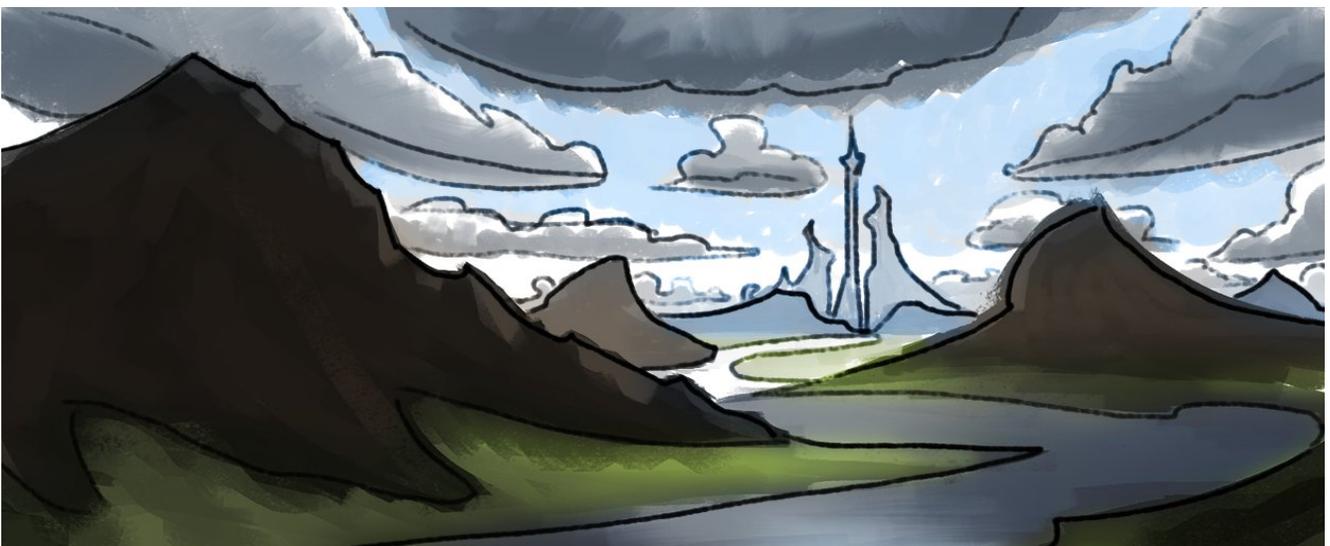
What Overlay does: *All values and colors will lighten/darken and saturate towards the content.* This is the most commonly used blending mode, as it both colorizes *and* adjusts values in one fell swoop.

Important note: In painting, it really is best to paint in the colors and values straight up. Not only is it more like traditional media, but you develop a natural sense of where and how saturated colors should be in a scene. You can skip the colorizing step altogether this way, and won't develop a dependency on this technique. I mainly use overlay layers to make huge sweeping adjustments to lighting in an image.

Sometimes, it's hard to make color adjustments quickly to certain areas. In those cases it's faster to directly change the color to whatever hue you have selected. The Color blending mode does just that!

COLOR MODE

Add on another layer and set its blending mode to Color. Choose a sky blue hue and saturate that



really, really light gray that the overlay layer was having so much trouble colorizing. Color any areas that don't seem to have the right amount of saturation while you're at it.

What Color does: *Adjusts only hue and saturation, not value.*

Now we're ready for some normal painting. Flatten the image and turn it into a picture already!



Trick of the trade: If you're having a hard time getting rid of your line work, use a lighten layer to lighten those black lines up to the surrounding values/colors! This technique is great for quickly covering up undesired artifacts.



Again, what does an overlay layer do best? Big sweeping lighting changes. Use them to create pools of light or a border vignette to hone the lighting onto your focal points:



SCREEN MODE

Screen mode is useful for things like light blooming, light sabers and materials with shiny halos. In this case, I created a layer in Screen mode to push back the rocks and castle further into the background. Nothing creates depth in a landscape image quite the way atmospheric perspective does! Also add in some corpuscular rays (popularly known as “God rays”) using the screen layer.



What Screen does: *All black is made transparent, all white is opaque.* Anything using this mode will appear to glow. It is the opposite of the Multiply blending mode.

If you want to go for even more intense glow effects, try using a “Linear Dodge (Add)” mode – it seems to literally burn the light into the image. Great for things like fire.

Render the image out as you see fit, and experiment with the other blending modes on the way. You never know what you might come up with!



Now, go out and paint something with your new knowledge of the basic blending modes!

