

TURN A PHOTO TO A PENCIL SKETCH WITH PHOTOSHOP

In this tutorial, I show you how easy it is to turn a photo into a pencil sketch with Photoshop. We'll start by turning the image into a black and white sketch, and then I'll show you three different ways to add color to your sketch, including how to use the photo's original colors, a single color, and a gradient!

The steps in this tutorial are fully updated for **Photoshop 2021** although 2020 will still work.



You can follow along with any portrait image. I'll use [this image](#) from Adobe Stock:

The original image.

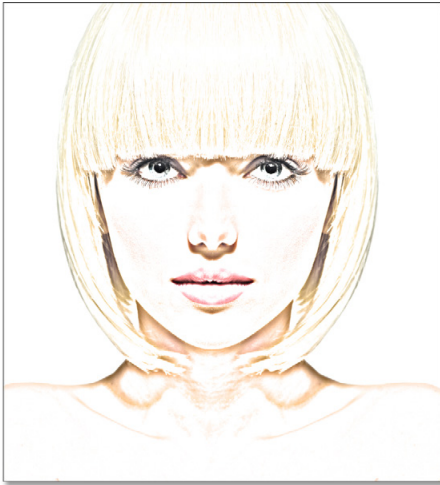


Here's how the photo will look as a black and white sketch:

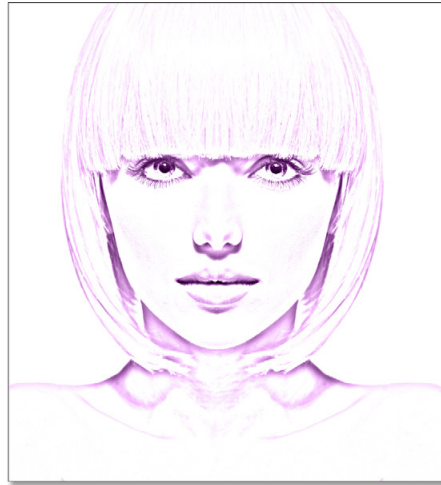
The black and white version of the sketch.

Then once we have the black and white version, we'll start adding color.

First, we'll learn how to color the sketch using the photo's original colors (left). Then we'll use a single color (middle). And finally, we'll add color using a gradient (right):



The original photo colors.



The single color version.



The gradient version.

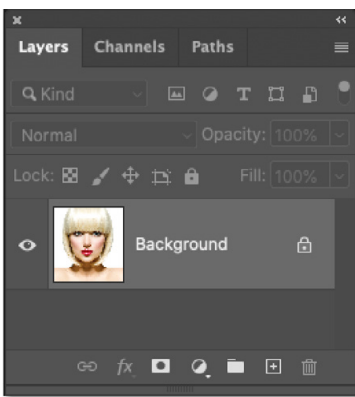
At the end of the tutorial, I show you how to switch between all four versions of the sketch so you can choose the one you like best.

Let's get started!

How to turn the photo into a pencil sketch

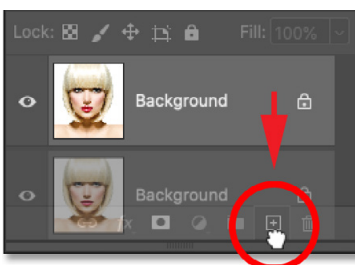
These first steps will turn the image into a black and white sketch.

Step 1: Duplicate the Background layer

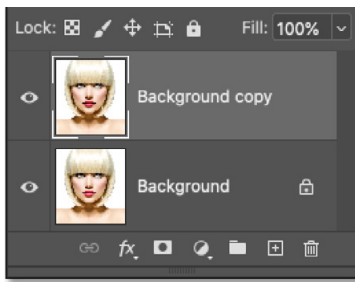


We'll start in Photoshop's **Layers panel** where the image appears on the **Background layer**:

We'll need this image when we add color to the sketch later on. So to keep it safe, we'll make a copy of it. Click on the Background layer and drag it down onto the **New Layer** icon:



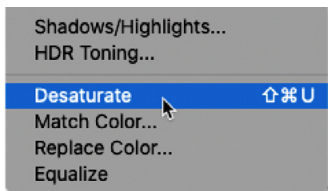
Making a copy of the Background layer.



A copy appears above the original:

The "Background copy" layer.

Step 2: Desaturate the layer



Next, we'll remove all the color from the "Background copy" layer using Photoshop's Desaturate command. Go up to the **Image** menu in the Menu Bar along the top of the screen, choose **Adjustments**, and then choose **Desaturate**:

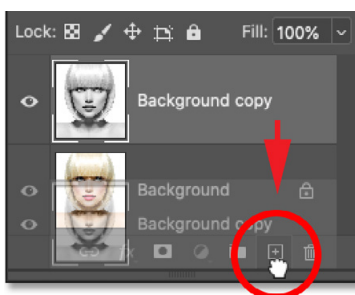
Going to Image > Adjustments > Desaturate.



Photoshop desaturates the image, leaving us with a black and white version of our photo:

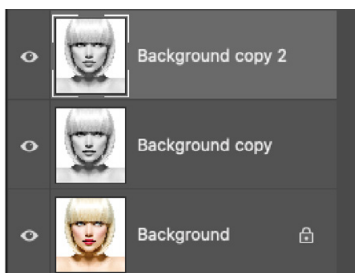
The image after desaturating the color.

Step 3: Duplicate the desaturated layer



Back in the Layers panel, make a copy of the desaturated version by dragging the "Background copy" layer down onto the **New Layer** icon:

Dragging the "Background copy" layer onto the New Layer icon.

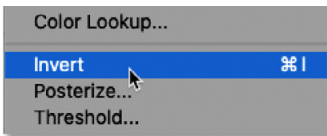


And again, the copy appears above the original:

The new "Background copy 2" layer appears at the top.

Step 4: Invert the layer

We need to invert the brightness levels on this layer, making light areas dark and dark areas light. For that, we'll use Photoshop's Invert command.



Go up to the **Image** menu, choose **Adjustments**, and then choose **Invert**:

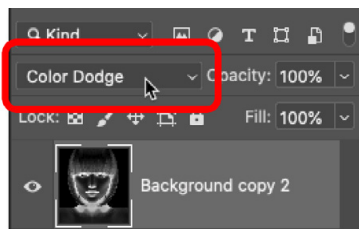
Going to Image > Adjustments > Invert.



This inverts the image, creating a film negative effect:

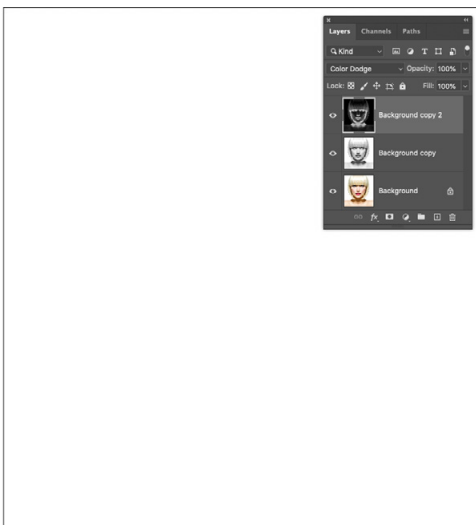
The image after inverting the brightness.

Step 5: Change the layer's blend mode to Color Dodge



In the Layers panel, change the **blend mode** of the inverted layer from Normal (the default) to **Color Dodge**:

Changing the blend mode to Color Dodge.

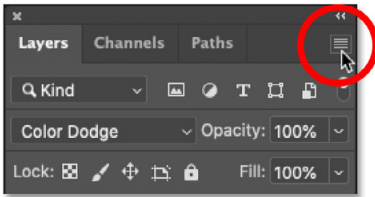


The document turns completely white, although you may see a few scattered areas of black depending on your image:

The result after changing the blend mode to Color Dodge.

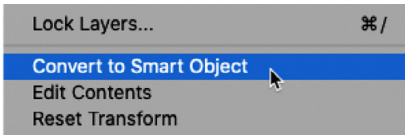
Step 6: Convert the layer into a smart object

To create the sketch effect, we'll blur the inverted layer using Photoshop's Gaussian Blur filter. But to keep the filter settings editable, we'll apply Gaussian Blur as a *smart filter*. And to do that, we first need to convert the layer into a *smart object*.



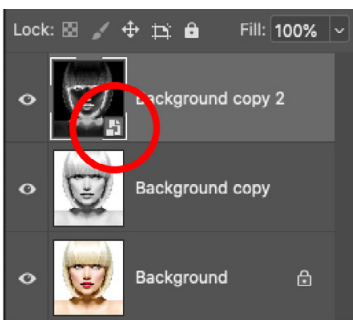
In the Layers panel, click the **menu icon** in the top right corner:

Clicking the Layers panel menu icon.



And choose **Convert to Smart Object** from the menu:

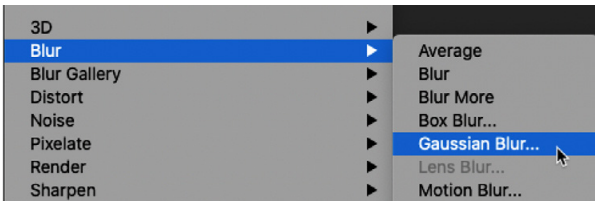
Choosing the "Convert to Smart Object" command.



An icon appears in the layer's preview thumbnail, telling us that the layer is now a smart object and we're ready to apply the filter:

The smart object icon.

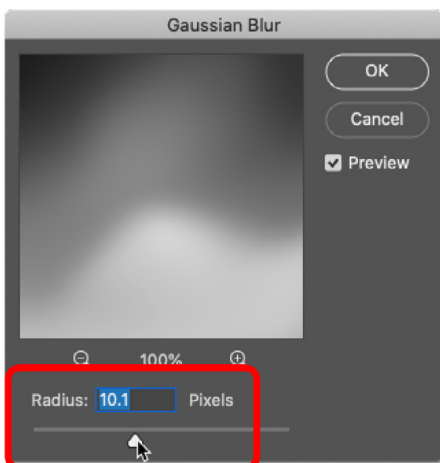
Step 7: Apply the Gaussian Blur filter



Go up to the **Filter** menu in the Menu Bar, choose **Blur**, and then choose **Gaussian Blur**:

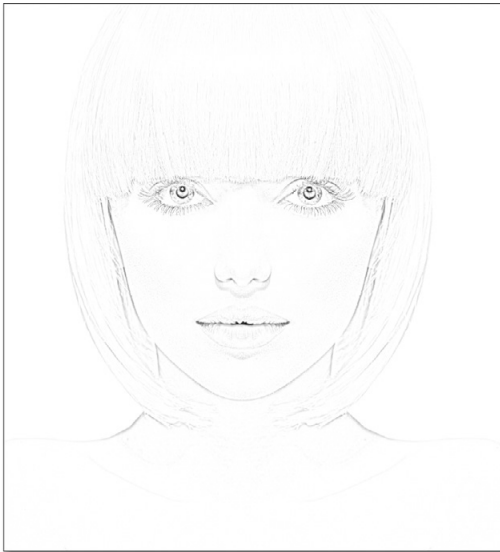
Going to Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur.

Then in the Gaussian Blur dialog box, drag the **Radius** slider along the bottom to blur the layer's contents. The sketch effect you achieve will depend on the amount of blur you apply. Lower radius values will create a sketch with fine thin lines, while larger values create more photo-realistic sketches.



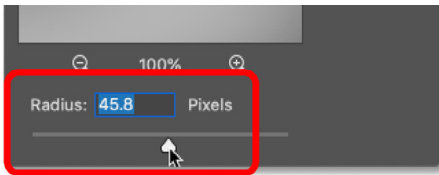
For example, if I choose a fairly low radius value of 10 pixels:

Starting with a lower radius value.



I end up with this effect here with very fine lines:

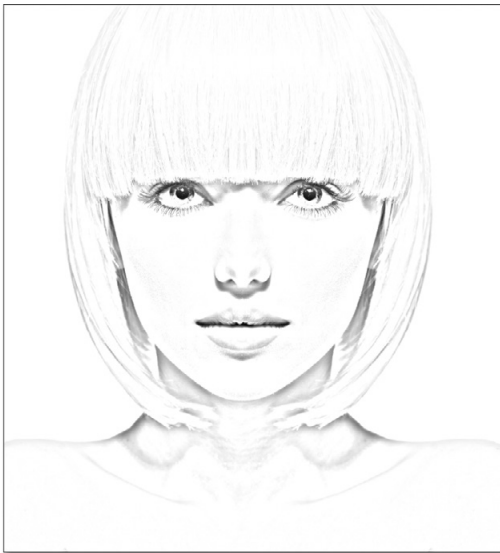
The sketch effect using a lower radius value.



But if I increase the value to something much higher, like 45 pixels:

Increasing the radius value.

The effect looks more like the original photo. The radius value you need will depend on your image and the look you're going for. So keep an eye on your image as you drag the slider to judge the results.

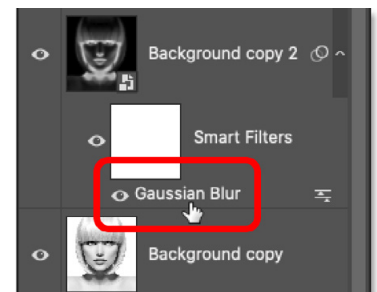


In my case, I'll go with the second, more photo-realistic version. Click OK when you're done to close the Gaussian Blur dialog box:

The sketch effect with a larger radius value.

How to edit the Gaussian Blur setting

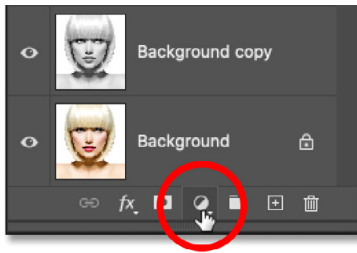
Since we applied the Gaussian Blur filter to a smart object, the Layers panel shows it listed as a smart filter below the smart object. You can double-click on the words "Gaussian Blur" at any time to re-open the filter's dialog box and experiment with different settings:



Double-click on a smart filter to re-open its dialog box.

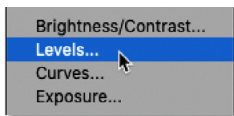
Step 8: Add a Levels adjustment layer

At this point, the sketch may look too bright with too little contrast. But we can darken it very easily using a Levels adjustment layer and a layer blend mode.



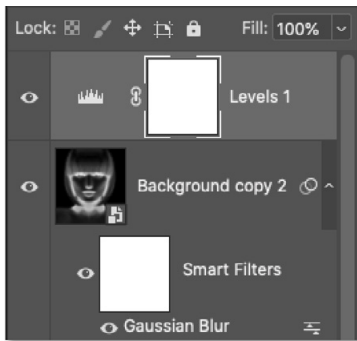
Still in the Layers panel, click the **New Fill or Adjustment Layer** icon:

Clicking the New Fill or Adjustment Layer icon.



And choose **Levels** from the list:

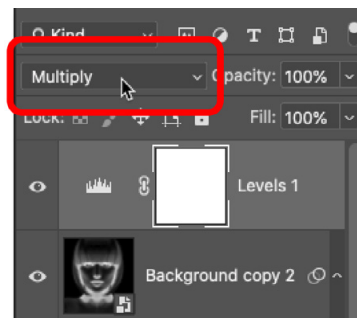
Choosing a Levels adjustment layer.



Photoshop adds a Levels adjustment layer above the smart object:

The Levels adjustment layer.

Step 9: Change the blend mode to Multiply



Then to darken the sketch, simply change the **blend mode** of the adjustment layer from Normal to **Multiply**:

Changing the blend mode to Multiply.

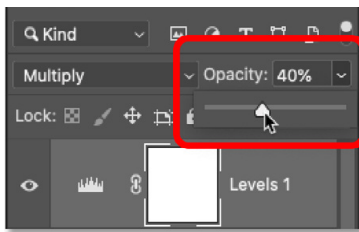
The Multiply blend mode is one in a group of blend modes that darken the overall image. And right away, the sketch appears much darker:



The sketch effect after changing the blend mode to Multiply.

How to fine-tune the brightness

If the sketch looks *too* dark, lower the adjustment layer's **Opacity** value, located directly across from the Blend Mode option in the Layers panel. The more you lower the opacity from 100%, the more the layers below the adjustment layer will show through, brightening the sketch back up.



I'll lower mine to around 40%:

Lowering the opacity of the Levels adjustment layer.



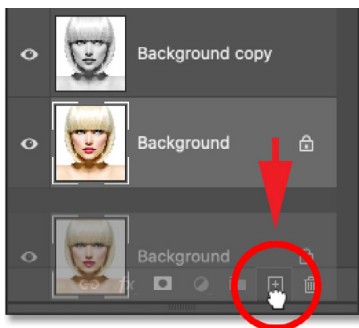
And with that, we have our black and white version of the sketch! Up next, I'll show you a few different ways add color:

The final black and white sketch effect.

Coloring the sketch with the photo's original colors

These next steps will add color to the sketch using colors from the original photo. After that, I'll show you how to color the sketch with a single color, and then with a gradient.

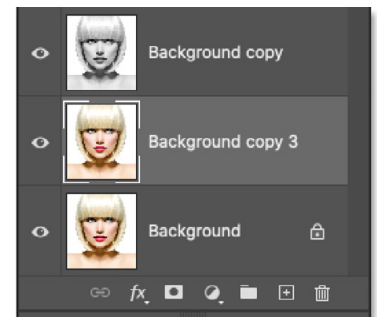
Step 10: Duplicate the Background layer again



In the Layers panel, make a copy of the original image by dragging the **Background layer** (the original one at the bottom) down onto the **New Layer** icon:

Making another copy of the Background layer.

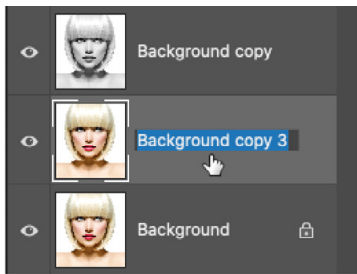
The copy ("Background copy 3") appears between the Background and "Background copy" layers:



The "Background copy 3" layer.

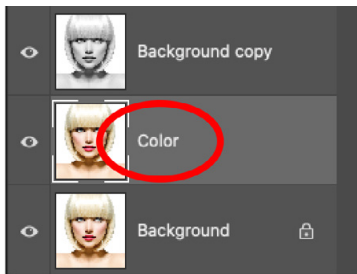
Step 11: Rename the new layer “Color”

At this point, our Layers panel is cluttered with copies of the Background layer. And they all have names like “Background copy”, “Background copy 2”, “Background copy 3” that tell us nothing about what the layer is being used for. So let’s rename our new layer to something more descriptive.



Double-click directly on the name “Background copy 3” to highlight it:

Highlighting the current name by double-clicking on it.

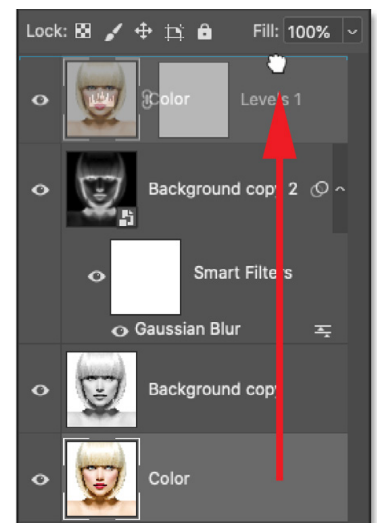


Then change the name to “Color”. Press **Enter** (Win) / **Return** (Mac) on your keyboard to accept it:

Changing the layer’s name to “Color”.

Step 12: Move the “Color” layer above the adjustment layer

We need the image to appear above the sketch. So click on the “Color” layer and drag it above the Levels adjustment layer. When a blue line appears above the adjustment layer, release your mouse button:



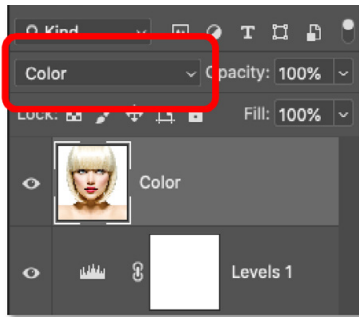
Dragging the “Color” layer to the top.



The image temporarily blocks the sketch from view:

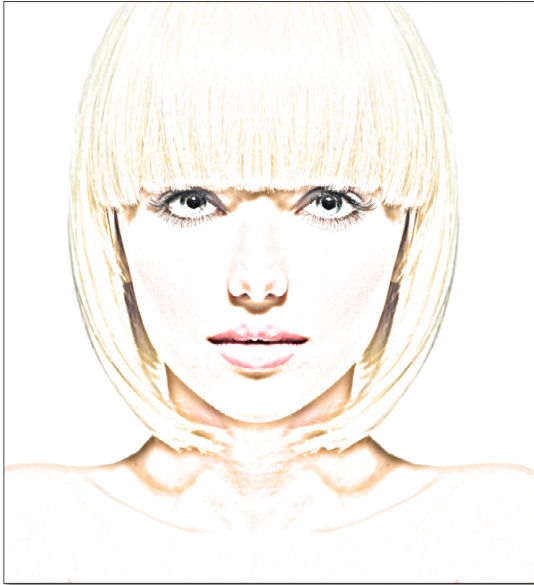
The original photo returns.

Step 13: Change the blend mode to Color



To blend the colors from the image into the sketch, change the **blend mode** of the “Color” layer from Normal to **Color**:

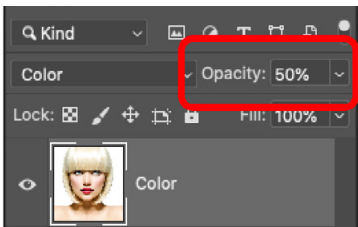
Changing the blend mode to Color.



The Color blend mode tells Photoshop to blend only the color from the active layer with the layers below it. And just like that, we've added the original colors back to the sketch:

The sketch colorized with the photo's original colors.

How to fine-tune the color intensity



If the color is too strong, lower the layer's **opacity**. I'll lower mine to 50%:

Lowering the opacity of the “Color” layer.

With the opacity lowered, the colors appear more subtle. And that's how to color the sketch using the photo's original colors:



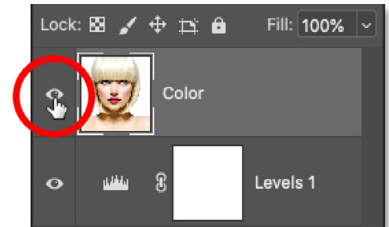
The result with the opacity lowered.

How to color the sketch with a single color

If you like the way your sketch looks with the colors from the photo, you can stop here. Otherwise, let's look at a second way to add color, this time using a single color. Then we'll finish off the tutorial by learning how to color the sketch with a gradient.

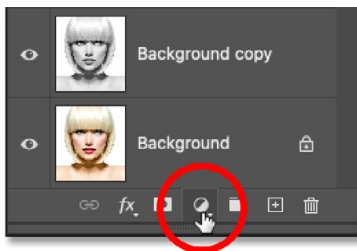
Step 14: Turn off the "Color" layer

Before we go any further, turn off the "Color" layer that we used in the previous steps by clicking its **visibility icon** (the eyeball) in the Layers panel:

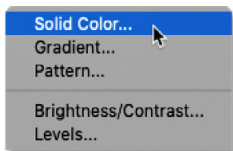


Turning off the "Color" layer.

Step 15: Add a Solid Color fill layer

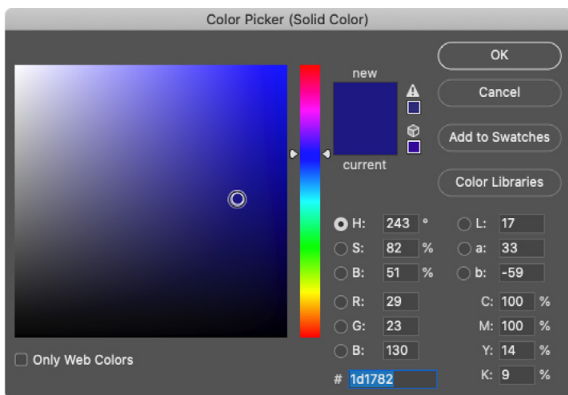


To color the sketch with a single color, we'll use a Solid Color fill layer. Click on the **New Fill or Adjustment Layer** icon at the bottom of the Layers panel:



Then choose **Solid Color** from the list:

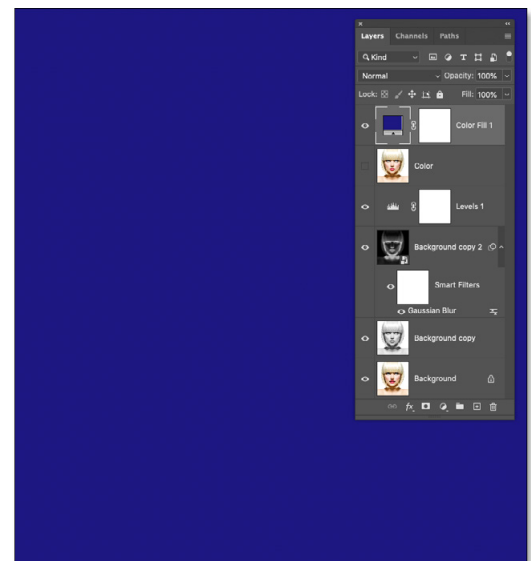
Choosing a Solid Color fill layer.



Photoshop opens the **Color Picker** where we choose the color we need. Don't worry about choosing the wrong color because you can always come back and choose a different one, as we'll see in a moment. I'll try a shade of blue. Click OK when you're done to close the Color Picker:

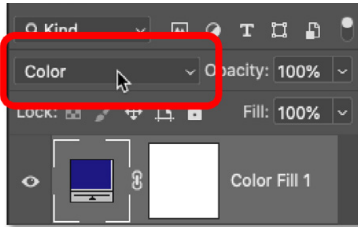
Choosing blue from the Color Picker.

In the Layers panel, the Solid Color fill layer appears above the other layers. And in the document, the color you selected temporarily blocks the sketch from view:



The color blocks the image.

Step 16: Change the blend mode to Color



To blend the color into the sketch, change the fill layer's **blend mode** to **Color**:

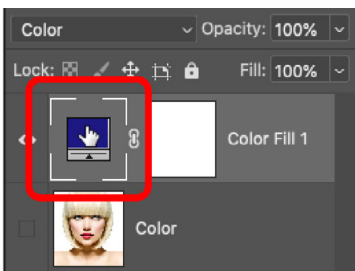
Changing the blend mode to Color.



And here's the result with the sketch colored in blue:

The color effect using blue.

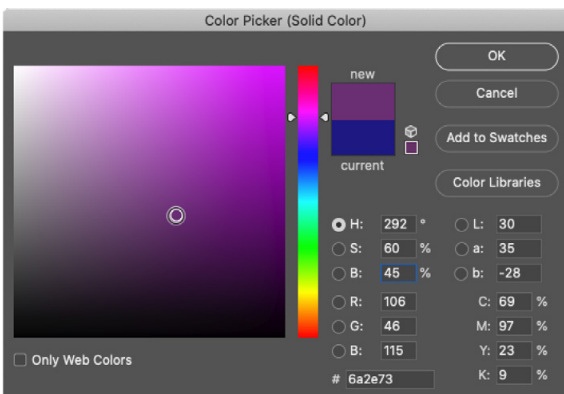
How to change the color



To try a different color, **double-click** on the fill layer's **color swatch** in the Layers panel:

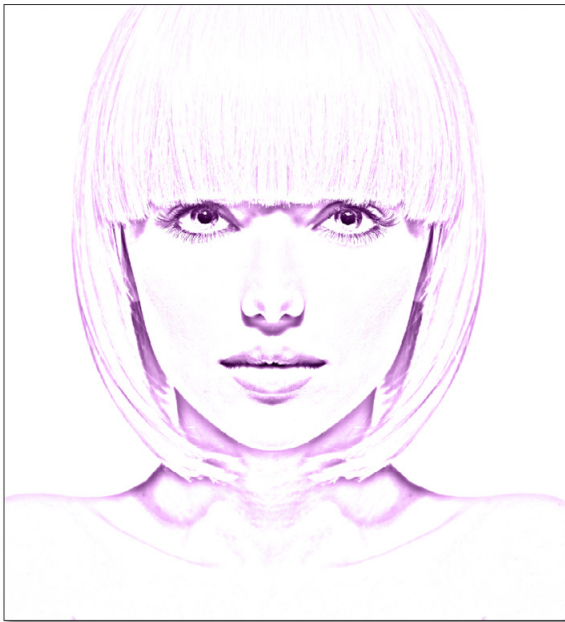
Double-clicking the color swatch.

And then choose a new color from the Color Picker. As long as the Color Picker remains open, you can keep selecting different colors and see a live preview in the document.



I'll go with a shade of purple. When you're done, click OK to close the Color Picker:

Choosing a different color from the Color Picker.

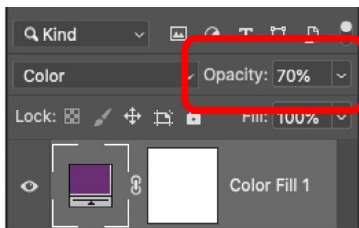


And now my sketch is colored in purple:

The color effect using purple.

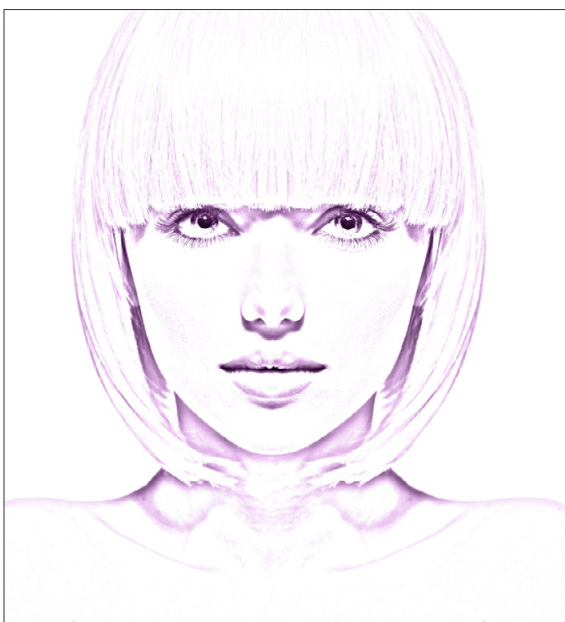
Adjusting the color's intensity

If the color is too intense, lower the fill layer's **Opacity** value. I'll lower it to 70%:



Lowering the fill layer's opacity.

And that's how to add a single color to your sketch!



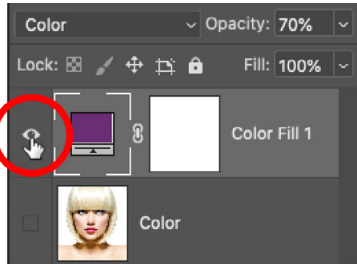
Up next, we'll finish things off by learning how to color the sketch with a gradient, and then I'll show you how to switch between all these different versions to choose the one you like best:

The result with the opacity lowered.

How to color the sketch with a gradient

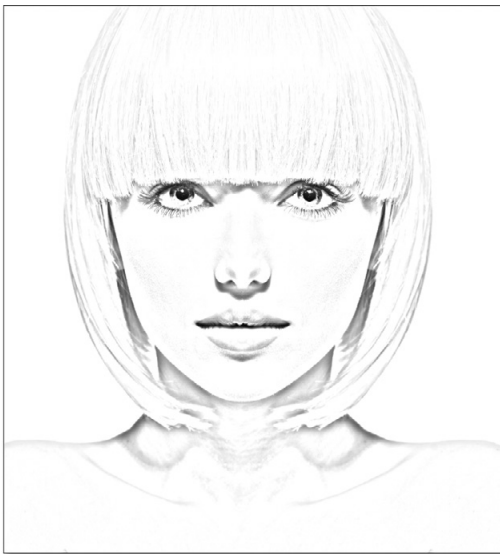
At this point, we've learned how to convert the photo to a black and white sketch, how to bring back the original colors from the photo, and how to add a single color. We'll finish off this tutorial by learning how to color the sketch with a gradient. I won't cover how to create your own custom gradients here. Instead, we'll use one of Photoshop's built-in gradients. And in the most recent versions of Photoshop (from 2020 and up), there are lots of new gradients to choose from.

Step 17: Turn off the Solid Color fill layer



First, if you've been following along from the beginning, turn off the Solid Color fill layer we used in the previous steps by clicking its **visibility icon** in the Layers panel:

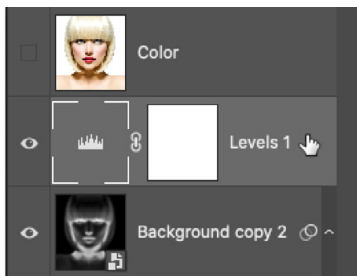
Clicking the fill layer's visibility icon.



This restores the black and white version of the sketch:

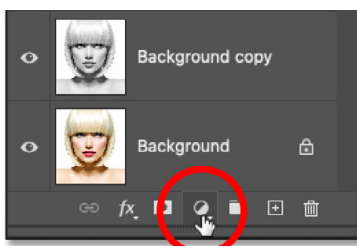
The black and white sketch returns.

Step 18: Add a Gradient Fill layer



To color the sketch with a gradient, we'll use a Gradient fill layer. And we'll add the fill layer directly above the Levels adjustment layer. So first, click on the **Levels adjustment layer** in the Layers panel to make it active:

Selecting the Levels adjustment layer.



Then click once again on the **New Fill or Adjustment Layer** icon:

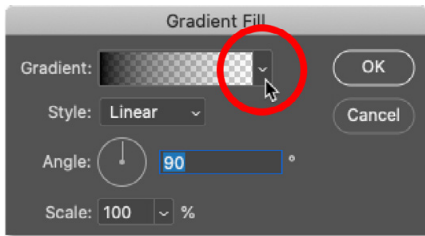
Clicking the New Fill or Adjustment Layer icon.



And choose **Gradient** from the list:

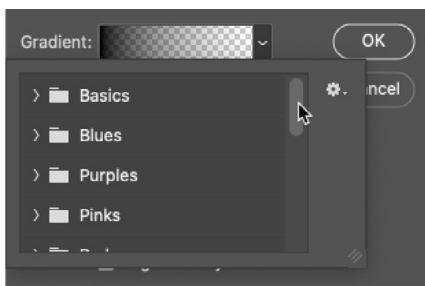
Choosing a Gradient fill layer.

Step 19: Select a gradient



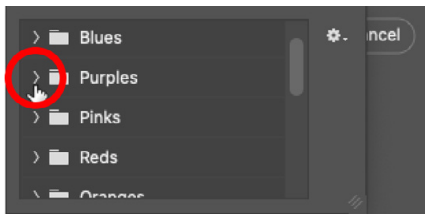
In the Gradient Fill dialog box, choose a gradient by clicking the small **arrow** next to the gradient swatch:

Clicking the arrow to the right of the gradient swatch.



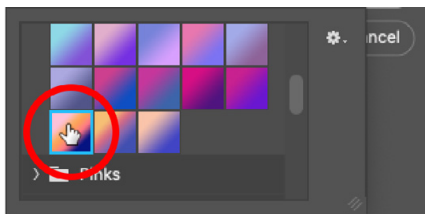
This opens the **Gradient picker** with lots of new gradients that were added back in Photoshop 2020. The gradients are divided into groups based on theme (Basics, Blues, Purples, and so on):

The Gradient picker.



To open a group, click the **arrow** next to the group's **folder icon**. I'll twirl open the Purples group:

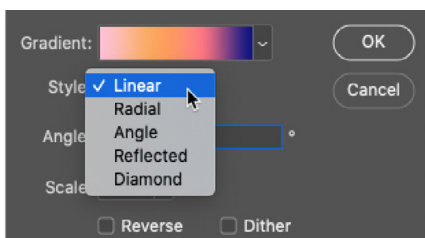
Twirling open one of the gradient groups.



Then to select a gradient inside the group and close the Gradient picker, double-click on the gradient's thumbnail:

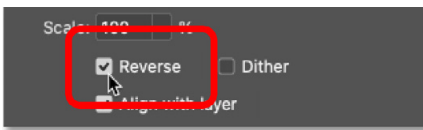
Double-clicking to select a gradient.

The gradient settings



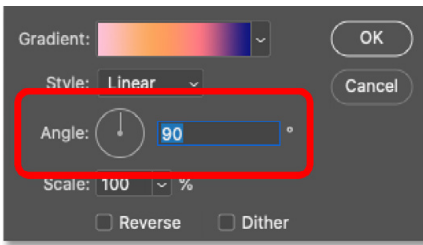
Back in the Gradient Fill dialog box, you can change the **Style** of the gradient from Linear (the default) to Radial, Angle, Reflected or Diamond:

The Style options.



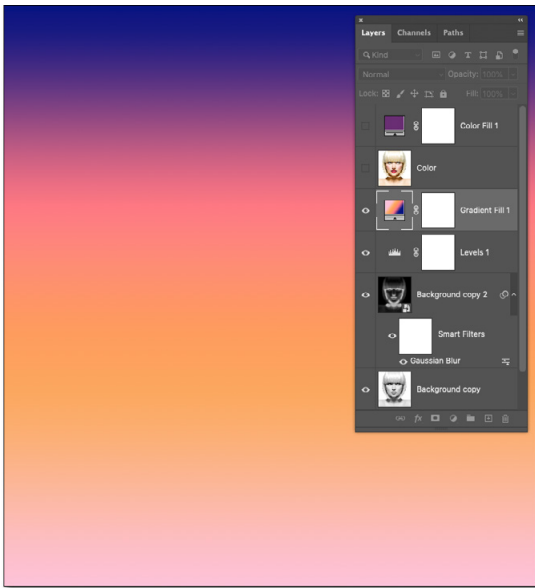
You can **Reverse** the order of the gradient colors:

The Reverse option.



And you can change the **Angle** of the gradient. I'll leave mine at the default of 90 degrees:

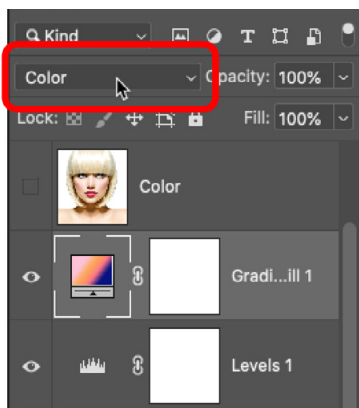
The Angle option.



Click OK when you're done to close the Gradient Fill dialog box. The gradient temporarily blocks the sketch from view:

The gradient is blocking the sketch.

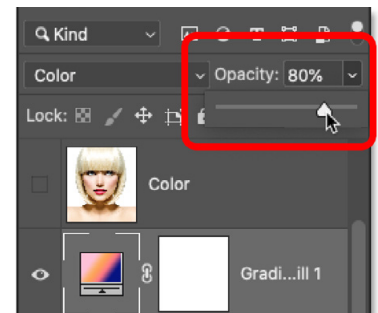
Step 20: Change the Blend Mode to Color



Back in the Layers panel, the Gradient fill layer appears above the Levels adjustment layer. To blend the gradient colors in with the black and white sketch, change the **blend mode** of the Gradient fill layer from Normal to **Color**:

Changing the blend mode to Color.

Then adjust the intensity of the colors if needed by lowering the layer's **opacity**:



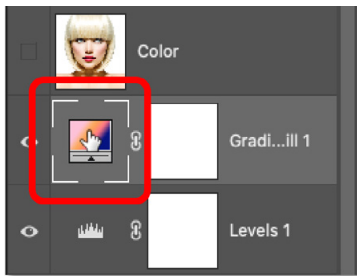
Lowering the opacity.



And here's my sketch using the gradient colors:

The sketch using the gradient colors.

How to choose a different gradient or edit the settings



To try a different gradient or edit any of the gradient options (Style, Reverse, Angle), double-click on the Gradient fill layer's **color swatch**. This will re-open the Gradient Fill dialog box where you can make any changes you need:

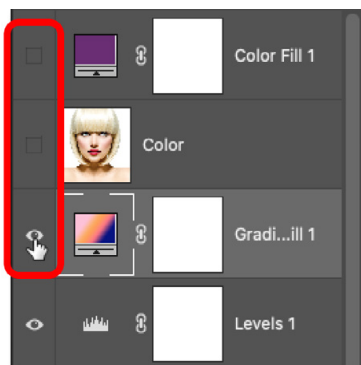
Double-click the Gradient fill color swatch.

How to switch between the sketch color effects

Now that we've colored the sketch with a gradient, what if you want to go back to the colors from the original photo, or the single color version, or even the black and white version? Here's how to switch between the different effects.

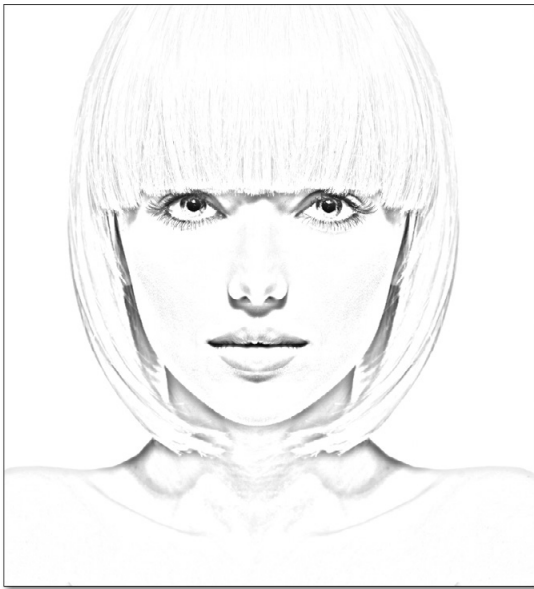
Restoring the black and white sketch

To hide all the color effects and return to the black and white version, simply turn off the "Color" layer, the Solid Color fill layer and the Gradient fill layer using their **visibility icons**.



I already have the "Color" and Solid Color layers turned off, so I'll turn off the Gradient fill layer as well:

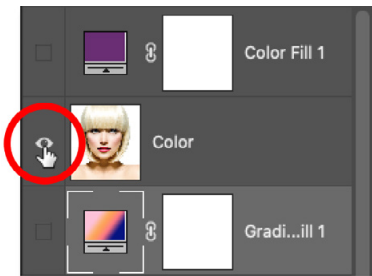
Turning off all three color effect layers.



With all three color effect layers turned off, I'm back to my black and white sketch:

Back to the black and white version.

Restoring a color version of the sketch



Then to turn on one of the color effects, click its visibility icon. I'll turn on my "Color" layer. Make sure you turn on only one color effect at a time, otherwise they will blend together:

Turning on the "Color" layer.



And with the "Color" layer turned on, we're back to the photo's original colors:

The original color version.

And there we have it! That's how to turn a photo into a black and white pencil sketch, along with a few different ways to color the sketch, in Photoshop!

For more Photoshop tutorials, and to download the latest PDFs, visit us online at [PhotoshopEssentials.com](https://www.photoshopessentials.com)!