

Selecting Hair using Photoshop

By: Michael Hohol as captured from the Glyn Dewis at Photoshop Virtual Summit 3
January 17, 2022

1. When making selections of a subject that has really easy to correctly select areas because of lots of contrast between the background and subject versus hard to select areas, it is best to work on different areas of the image to allow you to use different techniques, and then later combine your selections.
2. You can start with a difficult area such as the hair of a head.
 - a. On your background layer, start with the Quick Selection tool and select the head with some hair, or use a different selection tool to do it.
 - b. You don't need to select hair that is part of the person's body since it will easily be contained within the body's selection.
 - c. When you have single or small areas of hair that also have the background showing through portions of those areas, it is best to not select those single or small areas of hair, at this point.
 - d. Just start with the selection of hair and head that does not have any background showing through.
 - e. You should label this layer something like Head And Hair.
 - f. Now when you have done the previous selection, use the Select and Mask option. but before you click on Select and Mask, make sure you Check Mark the Enhance Edge.
 - g. When in the Select and Mask, choose Onion Skin and use the Transparency slider to allow you to see the hair that has the background showing through.
 - h. Now click on Refine Hair option at the top of your screen, but first make sure the Properties panel Refine Mode is set to Color Aware.
 - i. You can look at what has happened and then maybe toggle between Color Aware versus Object Aware to see which gives the better selection of those difficult hair areas; note you can change the View mode to On White to maybe see the results better.
 - j. Now using the View mode Transparency, check mark the Properties panel Smart Radius to see if this makes a better selection; and very gradually change the Radius to 1 px or 2px etc. to see what happens; you may have to use the Transparency slider to move it to a higher percentage to see what is being selected better when using the Smart Radius.
 - k. If the hair becomes too crispy there will be a way to correct this later.
 - l. You should use the Brush – minus to deselect areas that are not wanted in your hair selection.
 - m. In the Properties panel, you don't have to check mark the Decontaminate Colors, unless your background is strong and causing a color cast on the hair.
 - n. Output to New Layer with Layer Mask.
3. There are a few techniques to try to see if it will help with making your difficult hair selections better:
 - a. Alternative #1: Try duplicating your new layer (Head And Hair) with its mask, once or twice or three times. However, you need to watch for grey being added to those fine hairs or the hairs become over-sized. Delete one, a few or all of the duplicated layers as needed.
 - b. Alternative #2: Select the (Head And Hair) layer's mask. Select a very soft edged round brush. Make sure the foreground color is white. Select blend mode of Overlay with opacity at 100% and Flow 100%. Paint on the layer mask for by the difficult hair areas –

it will make the not quite white areas to be totally white. However, you need to watch for grey being added to those fine hairs or the hairs become over-sized.

- c. Alternative #3: Create a new blank layer, above your selected head hair layer, and name this layer Clone. Select the Clone Stamp tool with options Opacity 100%, Flow 100%, aligned, sample Current & Below, create a clipping mask to attach it to the selected head hair layer by holding down the Option (Mac) or Alt (Windows) key and position your cursor between those two layers then click to create the clipping mask. Using the Clone Stamp tool, choose an area of the not-fine or not-difficult hair areas within the better part of the head's hair to sample and then apply it to the fine hairs or difficult hairs areas; make sure you sample different areas that may have different color before you apply it.
- d. Alternative #4: This method uses somebody else's hair to composite into your image. Go to Adobe Stock and you will try to find a similar Adobe Stock image that has hair very similar to your image. You could type in the search bar "wavy hair on white" for example. You can choose an image and then click Download Preview a small resolution image that you can look at to see if it will work for you, and if it does you can then buy & license it to use the full version; it will download to your creative library. Open the creative library to find the image. Open up the channels panel for this image. Choose a channel that has the most contrast. Create a copy of that channel by clicking on the channel and dragging down to the panel's below icon that looks like a square with a plus + sign inside that is the new channel icon. Use the lasso tool to roughly choose the hair area of the head and include the fly away fine hairs and make sure you have the right or left or right & left head hair areas since you may need hair that is from a specific area. Invert this selection. Edit > Fill with White. Now open up the Levels tool and select the white point icon and click on any part of that layer that is not pure white and it will turn it pure white. Still in the Channels, select the copy of the channel you just made, and at the bottom of the panel click on the far-left icon that looks like a circle made up of tiny pinpoint circles, which is the Load Channel. Select > Save Selection and in the Document window click on New and type in a name you like that describes the hair type e.g. Wavy Hair. This will open up a new image for that hair, and will probably be showing the Channels panel but switch to the Layers panel. Go to the Image > Image Size and change the width and height so that neither will be no greater than 5000 pixels. Edit > Define Brush Preset and type in a Name you like e.g. Wavy Hair. Go to your image that you have been working on, and create a new blank layer at the top. Choose the brush tool and go way to the bottom to find your brush that you just named e.g. Wavy Hair. You can make the brush smaller by holding down or clicking the left bracket key. Try to get the brush at the appropriate size for your subject's hair (or head size if the brush you made includes the full head's size). First capture the color of your subject's head when still using the brush tool by holding down the Option key (Alt on Windows) to sample an area of color for your subject. You can rotate your brush to match your subject's hair orientation by holding down the Shift key and use the right or left arrow keys to rotate your brush into a good position to match your subject's hair orientation. With your brush tool in the correct position, click and it will apply that to your layer. Do this at different areas of your subject's hair. Now move this layer to be below your main image. You may need to tweak the image a bit by doing some black at a lower opacity to blend the brush hair with the original hair, and you may need to darken or lighten the Wavy Hair by duplicating the layer or using a different mode.