

The Refine Edge Tool - Quick Photoshop Tutorial

Today I want to show you how to use the Refine Edge tool in Photoshop CS5.

I would like you to open Photoshop and to follow the tutorial and you will see it will take only a minute to complete it. Why? You're smart, that's why.

Once you have opened a photograph that would like work on, let's begin.

Refine Edge is a tool that is very useful for photographers as well as for home users. What does it do? Refine Edge helps you replace tricky backgrounds and fine details (soft edges and hair) from a photo with ease.

Enough talking, I want to show you how to get it done.

1. Begin! Select the subject from your photograph using **Quick Selection Tool (W)**. Use the **Add to Selection** and **Subtract from Selection** buttons to make sure you select your subject nicely. When you get to hair and soft areas, it's better to select less.



Subject with selection

Should look something like this image above.

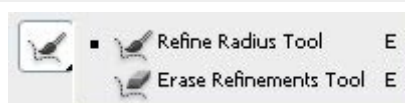
2. Open the **Refine Edge** dialog. First stop: **View Mode**; most of the times I'll use the black background, depends on photo. Second: **Edge Detection**. Here you need a small radius number, not too high and you'll see why. Third: **Adjust Edge**. How about experimenting what works for you? Never forget of the smooth setting, very useful. Fourth and last, is how we save the photo we worked on (**Output to**), and you'll have a list to choose from. Above that there's a box un-ticked saying "Decontaminate colors" which you should keep ticked at all times, and of course the amount at 100%. It's very useful when there's color "spill" from background to your subject.



Refine Edge Dialog

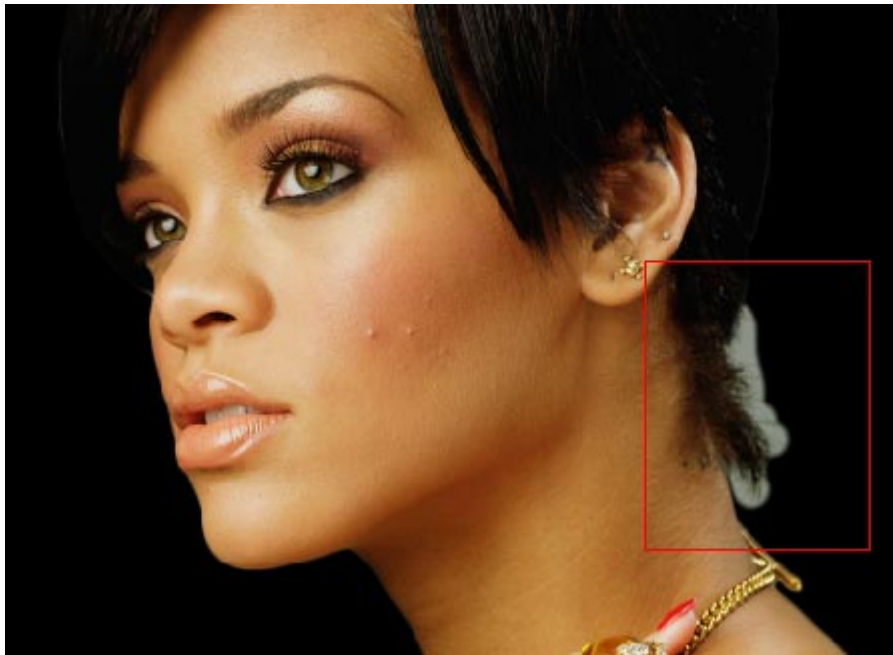
Remember settings are a good one to have ticked too. That's all the ticking work that is needed. I always choose to save the photo as a new document with a layer mask.

3. The most interesting things about these settings are the tricks you can do, it's Photoshop after all. On the left of the settings box you can see three objects: a magnifier (zooming), a hand (moving if you zoom in a bit), and a brush. Click right on the brush and you have a list there.



Refine Edge Tool

Using this tool you draw over the “tricky” edges. Keep the brush small enough to not select too much, just the area containing fine detail. Photoshop will treat that as “transition” area between inside and outside selection and will do its best to figure out what to keep.



Area that needs refinement

Final Result



Refine Edge Result

Mastering the Refine Edge takes time, but then again, practice makes perfect, isn't it?