Nicer Looking Fade Effect

Adobe

Have you ever had a fade effect look as if it's starting or ending too abruptly—or almost being cut off? Here we explain how to use Adobe Photoshop to solve that problem and achieve better fade effects. Although the visible quality enhancement with this technique may vary, it's a good tip to know…

NICER LOOKING FADE EFFECT

1. Let's quickly review how to get a fade effect in Photoshop. Place an image to fade on a layer, and choose Layer > Add Layer Mask > Reveal All. Make sure that the Layer Mask Thumbnail icon is selected in the Layers palette. Using the gradient tool, set to default black and white, and click and drag over the image.

Layers Palette
The eye icon in the first column lets you know if the layer is visible or not. The second column has two icons, one being the paintbrush which tells you that you are painting on the layer, the other telling you that the layer mask is selected.

2. Now let's check out the fade effect you've created. You may notice that the fade looks as if it's starting or ending too quickly or almost as if it's being cut off. The higher the lightness contrast between the fading image and the background, and the shorter the distance of the fade, the more obvious this becomes.


3. Here's how to solve the problem. Follow the same process described in step 1, but when you draw a gradient on the layer mask, draw it about 25% longer than usual toward both the starting and ending directions.

NICER LOOKING FADE EFFECT

4. With the layer mask channel still selected as the current target channel, choose Image > Adjust > Curves. By adding two control points, shape an S-curve as shown here. You may want to adjust the curve to change the look of the fade transition. If you like the fade effect in the preview, click OK.
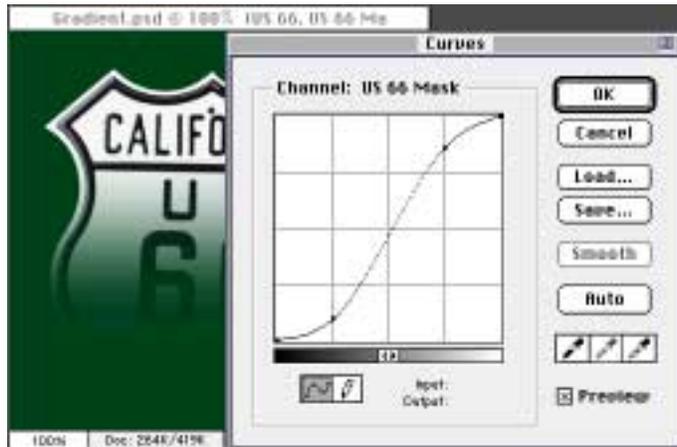
Curves dialog box
To add a control point in the Curves dialog box, click and drag on the graph area. To remove a control point from a curve, drag the control point off the graph area.

5. By applying the S-curve-based tonal correction to the layer mask, you add speed changes to the fade transition—some speed acceleration at the beginning and some speed reduction at the end. This prevents the fade from starting or ending too quickly; thus you get a more natural-looking fade.

Right: Fade created with the S-curve technique.

Left: Fade effect with default gradient.

Note: Fading edges also can be created with the Feather option on the Select menu and some Selection tools. Feather always creates natural-looking fading edges because it has the S-curve effect built-in.