Retouching Guide

Start with a well exposed, image that is in focus and fairly close up of a face. Also, choose an image that gives you something to retouch, you want some wrinkles, pimples, spots on walls etc. Challenge yourself. NO flash please.

This is a guide to help decide on what to do when - in what order. Not all images will need all these steps. Remember also to retouch age appropriately, that is someone 80 should have more wrinkles than someone 20! As you learn new techniques you will add them to your retouching routine. This is just a guide to get you started. Be CREATIVE. HAVE FUN!

1. Get rid of anything you want to permanently remove - not just fade - for example, spots on walls, signs, blemishes, red eye etc. Use the retouching tools: patch, red eye, healing brush, spot healing brush, or a combination of all. Do this on the background layer.

2. Transform (Edit > Free Transform or Command T) to make subject thinner or wider - or taller or shorter. (Drag side arrow in or out, up or down slightly.) Subtle. You may not Transform on a background layer, so make sure to turn your background into a regular layer before this step.

3. Crop excess, if necessary, leftover from step 2.

4. Loosely select eyes including brows and use the shortcut Command J to paste that selection to a new layer. Name your new layer something appropriate.

5. Transform (Command T or Edit > Free Transform) to make eyes larger. If you don’t want to change the proportion, hold the shift and opt key while dragging out from the corner anchors. I like to drag up slightly too, not holding shift/opt to make the eyes wider.

6. Add a layer mask to your new eyes layer (click on the 5th icon from the right on the bottom of the layers palette) and paint with black around the edges. (This works best when you lower the brush opacity to less than 100% in the Options bar.) The purpose of this mask is to blend the new eyes smoothly into face below. Use a large, soft brush. (If you forget and use a hard brush you can go to Blur > Gaussian...
Blur and gently blur the mask after painting. Turn the eyeball for the "eye" layer on and off occasionally to see where the edges are to make your work easier.

This technique can also be used to change the size of mouth, nose etc.

7. Select whites of both eyes and use the sponge tool (nested with the dodge and burn tools) set to de-saturate (in the options bar) to remove red. Don’t go too far or they’ll look dirty gray. Subtle! You may also want to brush over lightly with the dodge tool. Don’t forget to use Edit > Fade to soften your effects if they are too strong.

8. De-saturate teeth using technique above. Again, don’t go too far or they’ll look dirty gray. Subtle!

9 Try the sponge tool set to saturate to darken lips or to deepen eye color.

10. Add a new, empty layer on top of all other layers. Name the new layer “retouch”. You will be doing all fading to this layer. Use the healing brush or spot healing brush, making sure "sample all layers" is checked in the Options bar. Your goal on this new layer is to get rid of all wrinkles. It will not look good, but phony, but for now, that’s what you want.

Alternatively you may prefer to do step 10 in 2 or more layers, one for the forehead and one for under eyes, for example.

11. Lower the opacity of the retouch layer or layers to make your subject look natural and age appropriate. Do not forget this last step or your subject will look like they had a facelift!