

How to Use the Photoshop Displace Filter

Learn to distort images with the Photoshop displace filter.

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You can use the Photoshop displace filter to create all kinds of cool effects.

How the displace filter works

The displace filter uses one image, which is called a displacement map, to bend the pixels of another. It looks at the luminosity values, lights, and darks of the image to alter the pixels of the image you wish to modify. Any values of 50 percent gray will have no effect. Any values lighter or darker than 50 percent will bend pixels up and to the left or down and to the right respectively.

Create a waving flag effect

1. Start off with the flat art for your flag. This could be a scan of a flag or the artwork for the flag. Put the flag in its own layer. The background layer can be a blue tone to simulate a sky.
2. Click on the "Make New Layer" icon at the bottom of the layer's palette to create a new layer above the flag layer.
3. Choose Edit > Fill to fill the layer with a 50 percent gray. Slightly lower the opacity for the gray-filled layer so that you can see the layer of the flag beneath.
4. Using a large airbrush tool -- the size is determined by what size you wish the folds to be -- spray some black tones across the flag at various places.
5. Do the same with a white color on other sections across the layer that overlaps the flag beneath.
6. Return the opacity for the layer to 100 percent. You might want to soften the tones a bit by giving the layer a Gaussian Blur filter (Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur).
7. The filter needs a separate image to do its trick. Select all and copy it to the clipboard.
8. Create a new file. (Photoshop will create a file with the exact

dimensions of the contents of the clipboard.) Paste it into the new file and save it.

9. In the file with the flag, select the layer with the flag and hide the layer with the airbrushed tones in it by turning off its eye icon.
10. Choose the Displace filter (Filter > Distort > Displace). Leave the settings as they are and press OK. A second dialog box will pop up asking for the displacement map. Choose the image you created for the map. This will distort the flag to simulate the wind-tossed look.
11. Select the layer with the tones in it. In the layer's palette, set the mode for the layer to Hard Light.
12. Reduce the opacity. This creates the highlights and shadows necessary to give the flag a realistic 3D look.
13. With the Option key (Alt on a PC) pressed, click between the layer of the flag and the layer of the tones in the layers' palette. This creates a Clipping Group of the two layers.
14. Choose Edit > Transform > Distort to merge the two layers into one and to distort the layer to a shape similar to a flag hanging from a pole.

The end result is a flag waving in the wind.

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