Real World Example of the Luminosity Blend Mode

Here we have a photo of a nice holiday table setting, full of reds, oranges and yellows:

Photoshop Tutorials: A holiday table setting.

I'm going to increase the contrast in this image using a Curves adjustment layer and a traditional "S" curve. I'll click on the **New Adjustment Layer** icon at the

bottom of the Layers palette and choose **Curves** from the list of adjustment layers that appears:
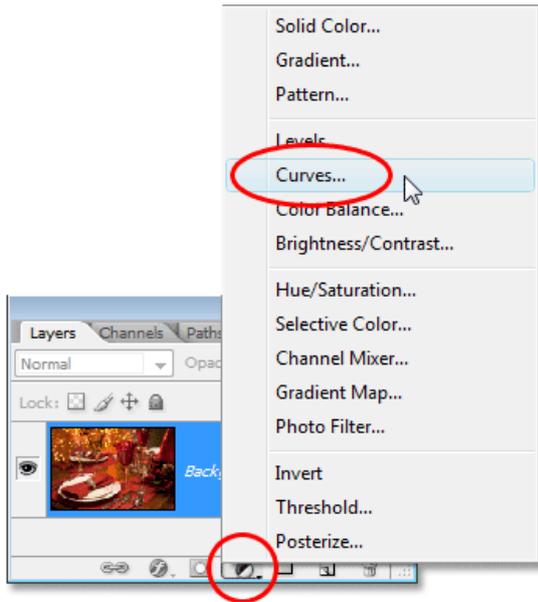
Inside the Curves dialog box is a large 4x4 grid, with a diagonal line running through it from the bottom left to the top right. To change the shape of the diagonal line into a traditional "S" curve, I'll click on the line near the top right corner to add a point, then I'll nudge the point up a little by pressing the Up arrow key on my keyboard a few times.

I'll then click on the line near the bottom left corner to add another point, then nudge the point down a little by pressing the Down arrow key on my keyboard a few times. This reshapes the line into something resembling a letter S (sort of, anyway), which is why it's known as an "S" curve:
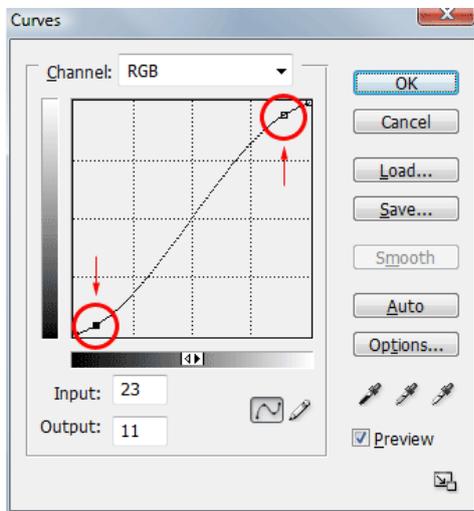
I'll click OK to exit out of the dialog box. The "S" curve lightens the highlights in an image and darkens the shadows, which increases contrast, and as we can see in my image now, the contrast has been increased. Notice also, though, that the colors now appear more saturated as well, since the Curves adjustment layer affected not only the shadows and highlights but also the color saturation:

To have the Curves adjustment layer affect only the contrast and ignore the color information, all we need to do is change the blend mode of the adjustment layer from its default Normal to **Luminosity**:
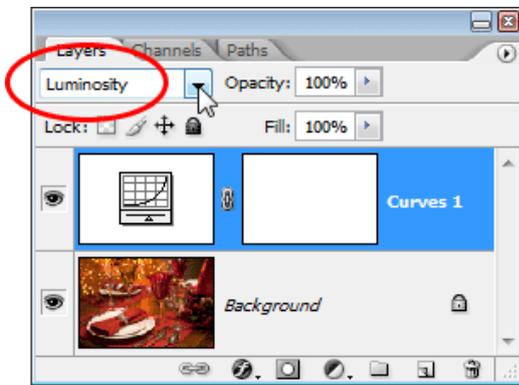
Now that the blend mode is set to Luminosity, the Curves adjustment layer is no longer concerned with the color information in the image. The contrast is still increased, but the color saturation has returned to normal:

It may be a bit difficult to see the difference in the screenshots here, but try it on your own, switching between the Normal and Luminosity blend modes, and the difference will be easier to see, especially if your photo contains lots of reds and blues.

Another common use for the Luminosity blend mode is when it comes to sharpening images. Most people use Photoshop's classic **Unsharp Mask** filter to sharpen their photos, and there's certainly nothing wrong with using it. The only problem is that the Unsharp Mask filter sharpens both the lightness values and the color information, and this can lead to a more noticeable "halo" affect around people and objects in the image. We can use the Luminosity blend mode, along with Photoshop's **Fade** command, to limit the effects of the Unsharp Mask filter to just the luminosity values, ignoring the color.

Immediately after applying the Unsharp Mask filter, go up to the **Edit** menu at the top of the screen and choose **Fade Unsharp Mask**:
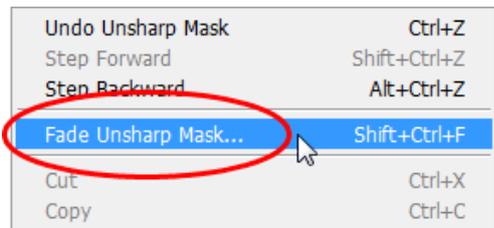
Photoshop Tutorials: Go to Edit > Fade Unsharp Mask.

When the Fade dialog box appears, change the **Mode** option at the bottom (which is short for "blend mode") to **Luminosity**:
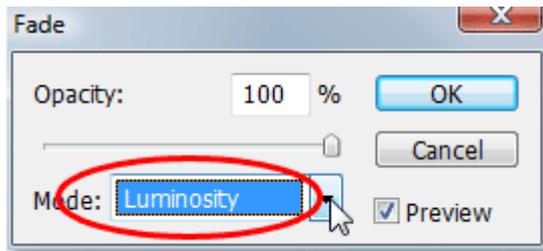
Photoshop Tutorials: Change the blend mode in the Fade dialog box to Luminosity.

This effectively changes the blend mode of the Unsharp Mask filter you just applied to Luminosity, which means the filter is now safely ignoring the color information in the image and is sharpening only the lightness values. Add this extra step any time you apply the Unsharp Mask filter to give you better sharpening results!