
POST PRODUCTION

HOW TO MASK IN LIGHTROOM CLASSIC IN 2024 (WITH AI MASKING)



By Jane Allan

Lightroom masking has been around for a couple of years, but the advances in Lightroom's new AI masking tool have made a HUGE difference to photo editing! In this article I'll show you how to mask in Lightroom Classic for portrait photography in particular.

Edit part of an image with masking in three steps:

1. **Create** mask – select the part of an image
2. **Refine** the area selection, if necessary
3. **Edit** the selected area

As you'll see, the new AI masking panel is mind blowing!

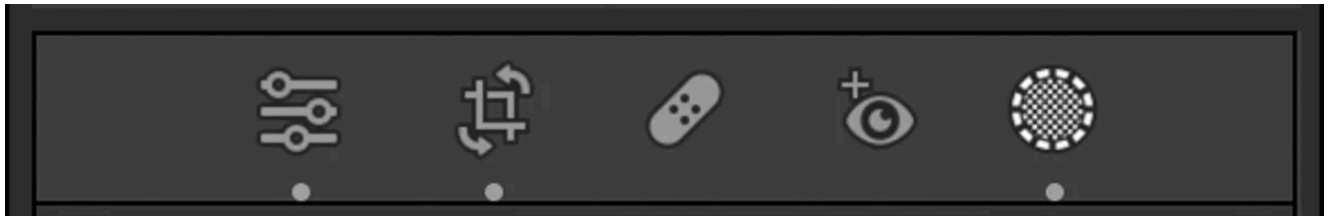
What is Lightroom masking?

If you've never used Photoshop, you might not have come across the term mask. It's a way to select part of the image to edit and with this major update Lightroom now also has the facility.

As images are made up of all sorts of different objects and backgrounds, using AI, Lightroom masking gives us different options to easily select different aspects of an image to edit.



Above is the Lightroom Classic tool strip in the Develop Module and below you can see the tools that are in use in a particular photo as they have dots beneath them.



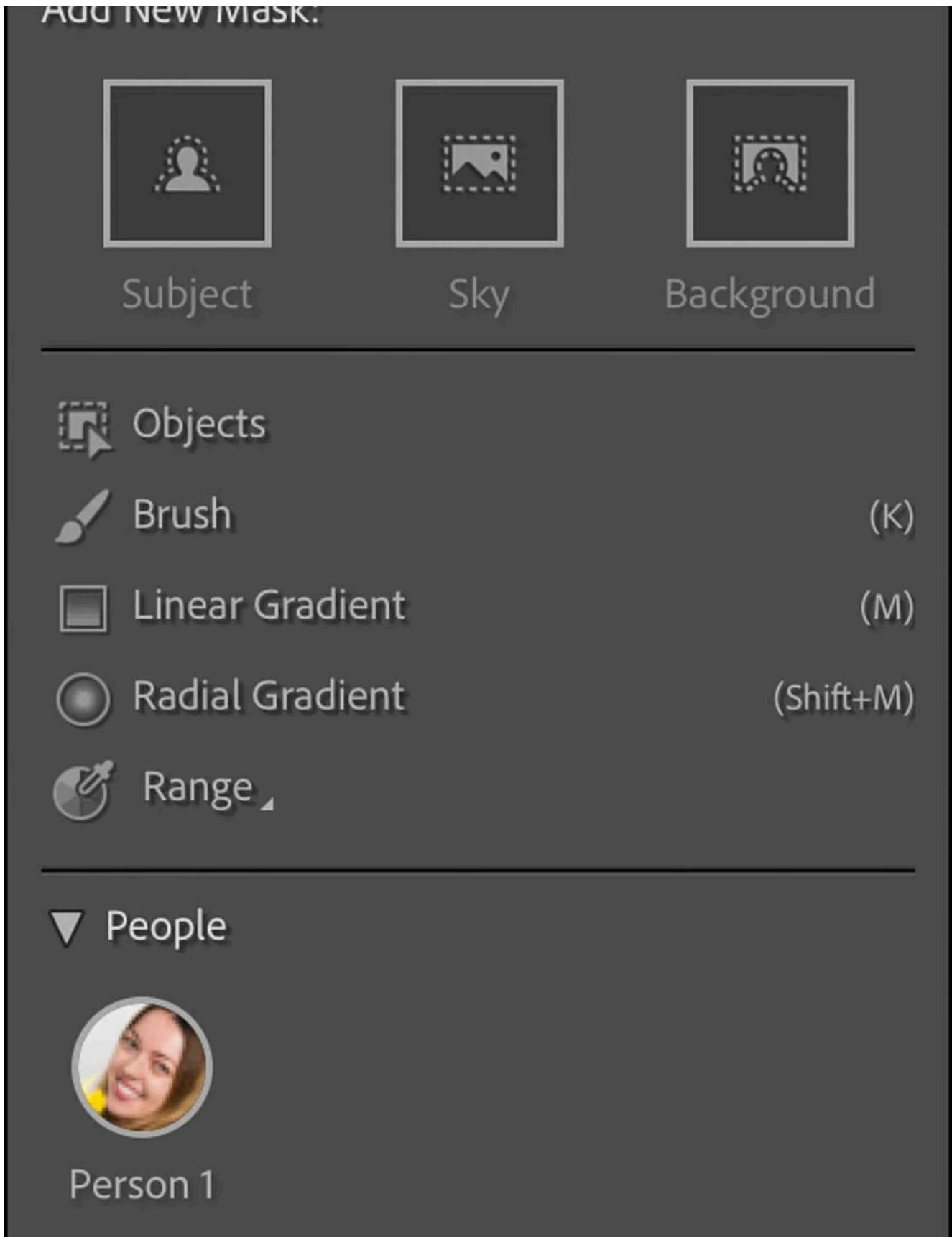
Where's the masking tool in Lightroom?

In the Develop Module, **just below the histogram there's a tool strip** – a row of icons that used to be for local adjustment tools. The last icon on the right is the masking tool icon and some of the local adjustment tools (radial filter, graduated filter, brush tool) have been moved into the masking tool.

When you open the masking panel you'll see masks grouped into three sections under "Add New Mask":

- Subject, Sky, Background
- Objects, Brush, Linear Gradient, Radial Gradient, Range
- People

If you spotted that you can select subject and also select people, it's not a mistake. Both types of masks are for people in photos, but offer different types of adjustments.



Step 1: Create mask in Lightroom Classic

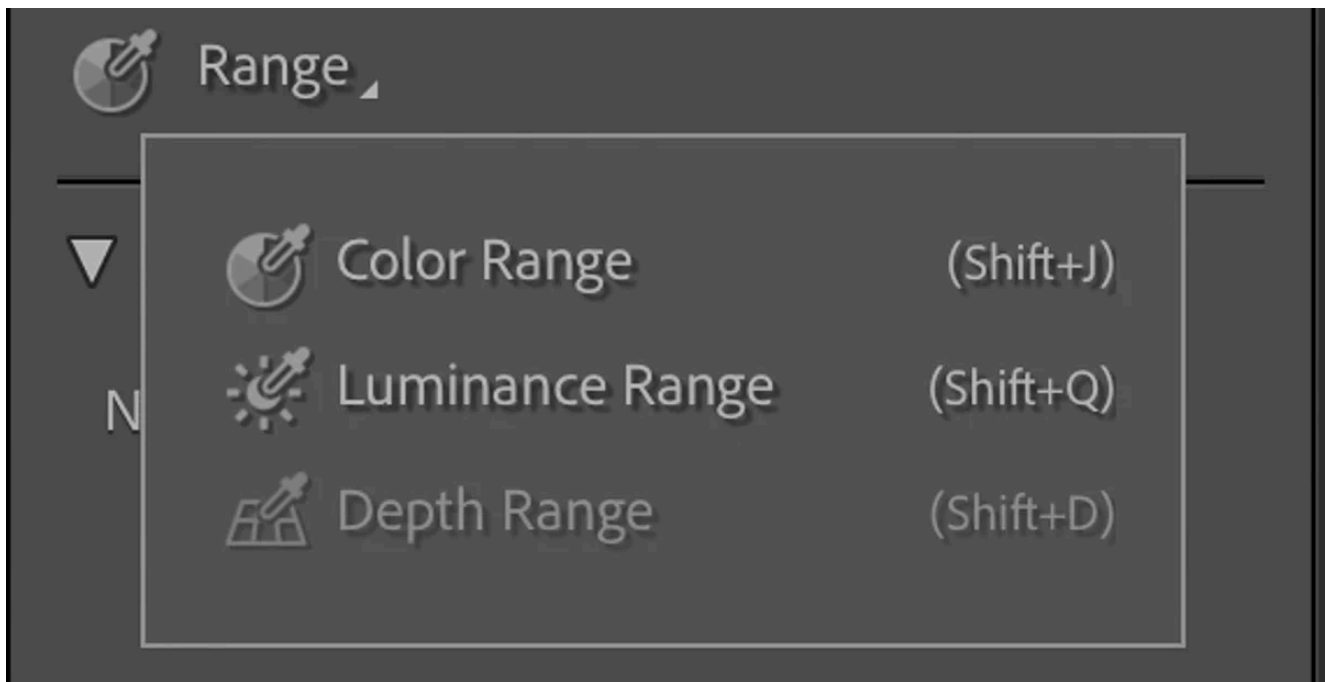
First, create a mask of the area you want to edit:



- Select the mask you want to use

You can also use the shortcut key (**Shift+W**) from anywhere in Lightroom to go straight to the masking panel in the Develop module.

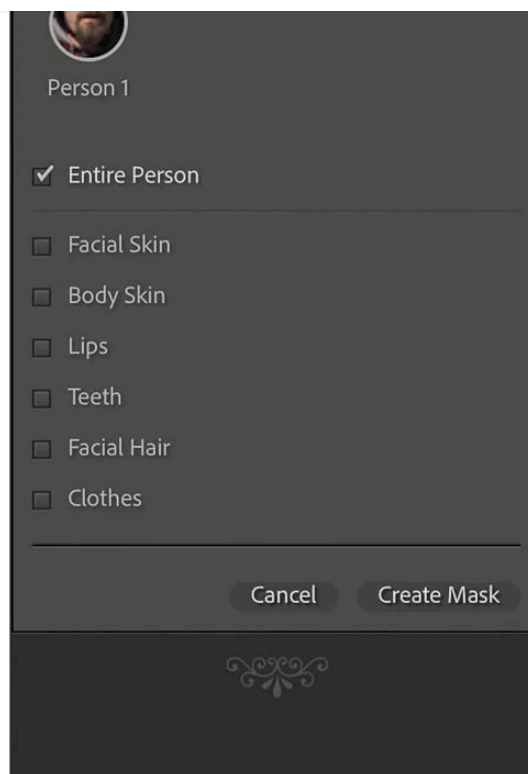
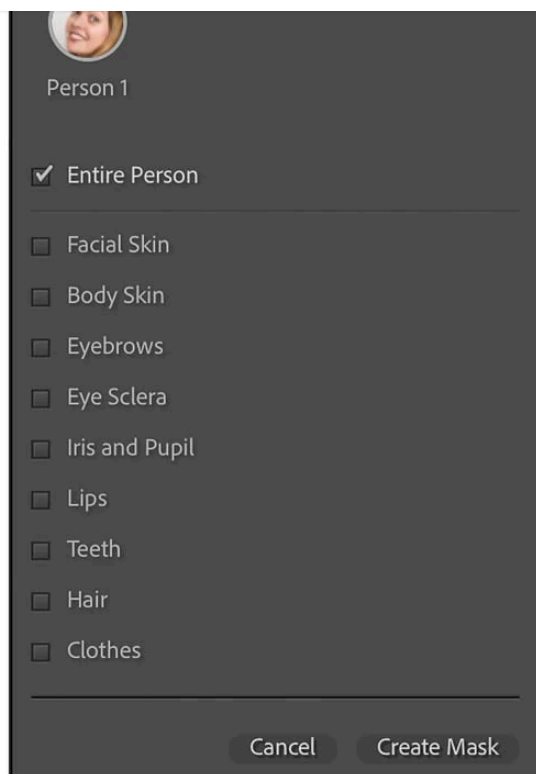
If you've already created a mask, the Masks panel will look different and you need to click on Create New Mask to get access to all the masks.



Lightroom range mask options

Next, **choose the type of mask you need** based on what you want to edit. We have 21 ways to mask in Lightroom Classic, but they're not all immediately obvious.

- Click on Range to choose from the **three range masks**: color range, luminance range and depth range.
- Click on the triangle next to People to open the **"Person Mask Options"** panel. Then select very specific areas: entire person, face skin, body skin, eyebrows, eye sclera, iris and pupil, lips, teeth, hair. More on this auto mask option in a moment.



Lightroom people masking options. You can see that if a feature is not visible in the photo it's not shown in the list of Person Mask Options. For example, on the right there's no Facial Hair option and on the left, because he's wearing sunglasses, the eye options aren't available to select.

So, the **21 different masks in Lightroom Classic** are:

1. Select Subject
2. Select Sky
3. Select Background
4. Objects
5. Brush
6. Linear Gradient
7. Radial Gradient
8. Color Range
9. Luminance Range
10. Depth Range
11. Entire person
12. Face skin



15. Eye sclera
16. Iris and pupil
17. Lips
18. Teeth
19. Hair
20. Facial Hair
21. Clothes



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And, believe it or not, each one of these new features of Lightroom masking is useful, especially for portrait photographers! We'll take a look at each type of mask before getting into Lightroom masking tools.



1. Subject mask

The subject mask isn't just for selecting people, you can also use it as an auto mask for selecting objects. With a single click you can now **accurately select the subject, or subjects**, in your photo.

Just **click "Subject"** under "Add a new mask".

Lightroom will automatically create a mask of the subject/s.



2. Sky mask

It's now very easy to edit the sky in photos, because all you need to do is **click "Sky"** under "Add a new mask".

Lightroom will automatically create a mask of the sky.

You can find out more [here on how to darken a sky in Lightroom](#).



3. Background mask

Selecting the background is a new Lightroom masking feature that makes it very easy to [edit the background in photos](#). Previously, we had to select subject and then invert the mask to select the background. Now it's a one click thing.

Simply **click "Background"** under "Add a new mask".

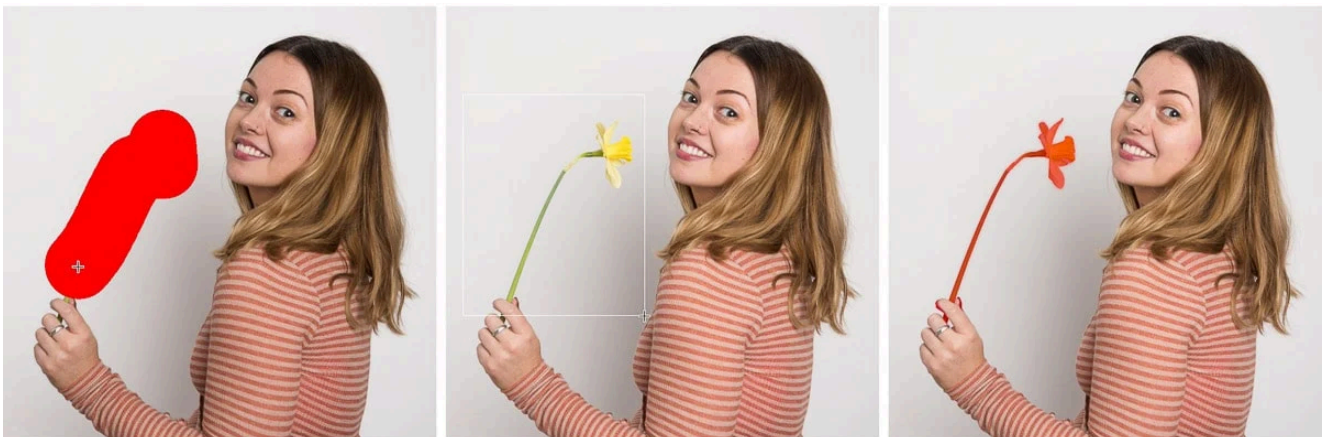
With a single click Lightroom automatically creates a mask of the background (and foreground, basically the entire image except for the subject).



4. Objects mask

The objects mask is another new auto mask option, but isn't a one click solution. Plus, unlike selecting objects with Select Subject, there's an extra step. However, you do have **two ways to select objects with the Objects mask** in Lightroom Classic – brush or click and drag to select.

Click **“Objects”** under **“Add a new mask”** to open the objects panel. Then:



From left: selecting object with brush, selecting object with rectangle click and drag tool, object mask



enough for the AI to detect the object to mask

OR

- **Click and drag a rectangle around the object**, even if it's an odd shape. The AI will detect the object within the rectangle and create an object mask



5. Brush mask

The brush tool used to be called the local adjustment brush tool and was in a different place. It works the same way still, but even better.

Under “Add New Mask” **click on Brush** to open the brush tool. Or push K on the keyboard to open the brush tool in the Develop module from anywhere in Lightroom.

- Set brush size and feather and make sure flow is set to 100



Then brush over the area to apply the mask.

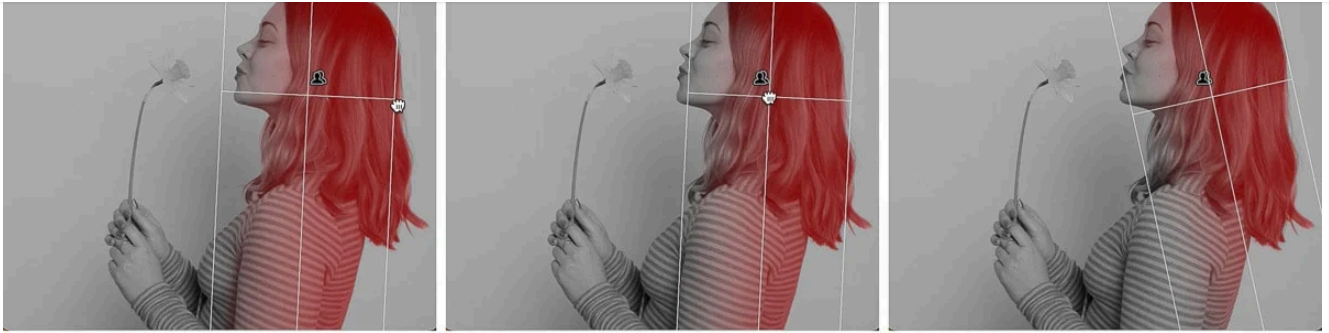
It's easier if you can see the mask overlay when you do this, so push O to show the mask overlay. By default it'll be a red overlay. (More on how to use Lightroom overlays further down.)



6. Linear Gradient mask

This used to be called the **Graduated Filter** in older versions of Lightroom. It's also now in a different place, but works the same way.

Under "Add New Mask" in the mask panel **click on Linear Gradient** to create a linear mask. Or push M on the keyboard to open the Linear Gradient tool in the Develop module from anywhere in Lightroom.



I intersected a subject mask with a linear gradient mask, which is why the linear gradient mask is on the subject only

- Click and drag from the edge of the image inwards
- Adjust the mask by clicking and dragging on either the top handle or the bottom handle to make the transition more or less smooth
- Move the mask up or down by clicking and dragging the center handle
- Change the angle of the mask by hovering over the middle line until you see a double sided arrow and then click and drag either up or down to rotate the mask (or left or right if your linear gradient is from the side of the photo)

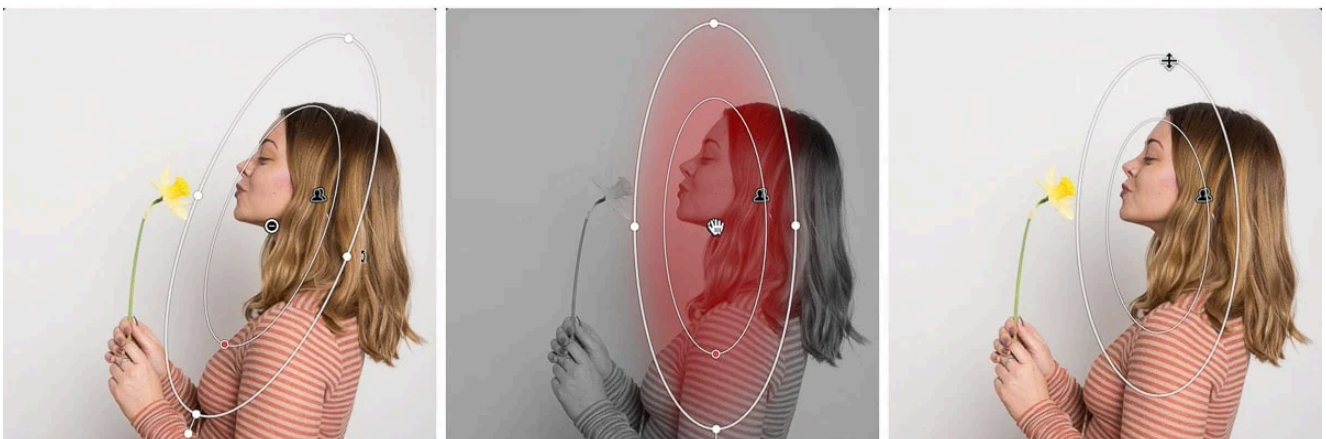
If you can't see these lines, push H on the keyboard to show them and then H again to hide them.



7. Radial Gradient mask

This used to be called the **Radial Filter** and, like the Linear Gradient, was in a different place. It too works the same as in previous versions of Lightroom Classic.

Under “Add New Mask” in the mask panel **click on Radial Gradient** to create a radial mask. Or push Shift+M on the keyboard to open the Radial Gradient tool in the Develop module from anywhere in Lightroom.



- Click and drag to create the mask



transition more or less smooth

- Change the roundness of the mask by clicking and dragging on the outer handles
- Move the mask by clicking anywhere in the masked area and dragging it
- Change the angle of the mask by hovering over the outer line until you see a double sided arrow and then click and drag to rotate the mask

If you can't see these lines, push H on the keyboard to show them and then H again to hide them.



If you look carefully you'll see that the green traffic light, appears to be red in this photo. That's because it's a red overlay mask, which I created with the color range mask

8. Color Range mask

It's so easy now to, **for example**, change the color of a subject's shirt by creating a color range mask. There are two steps.



- Click **“Range”** under **“Add a new mask”** in the masking panel to open up the range mask tool
- Click **Color Range** (or use the keyboard shortcut Shift+J)
- The cursor becomes an eyedropper tool

Now you have **three different ways to use the color range mask**, depending on your needs. So for the next step:

- For a **single, solid color**, like a blue sky for example, just click on on the color to select it
- For a **range of a color** click and drag around the area of the color
- To adjust **several colors** hold Shift and click up to five different colors to select them

Lightroom will automatically create a color range mask.



9. Luminance Range mask



When you create a luminance range mask Lightroom selects an area based on the luminance value (brightness of the area) you select. So, with this range mask option, you might have to remove some of the mask afterwards.

You also have a **couple of options** with this type of range mask. So the first step:

- **Click “Range”** under “Add a new mask” in the masking panel to open up the range mask tool
- **Click Luminance Range** (or use the keyboard shortcut Shift+Q)
- The cursor becomes an eyedropper tool

Next step, select the area:

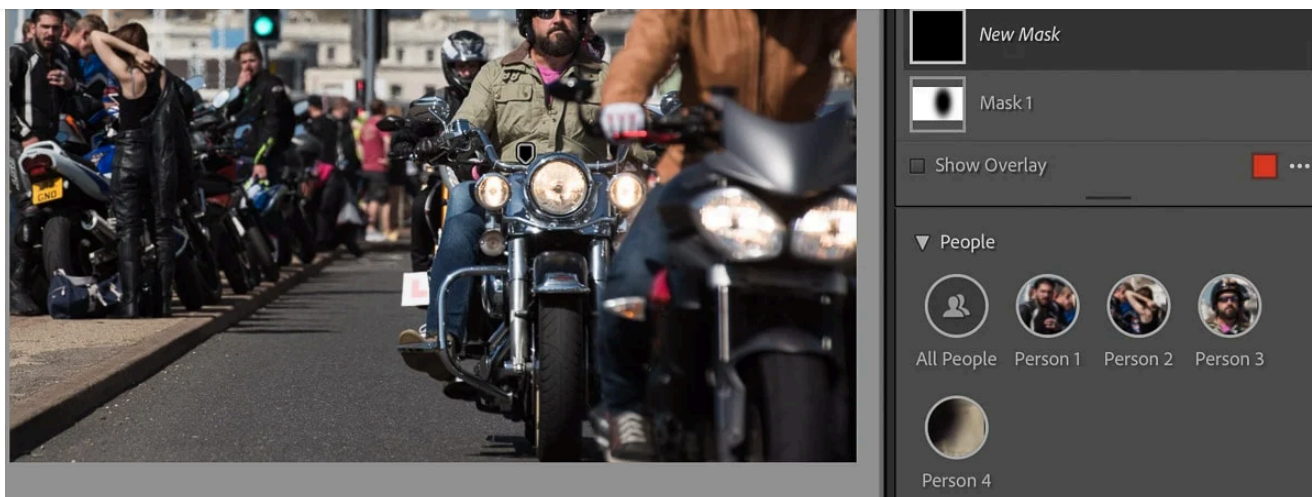
- Either **click and drag** on a small part of the area with the luminance value you want to change
- Or **adjust the luminance range slider** by dragging the two triangles below the slider to select and increase or decrease the luminance range you want to adjust

Lightroom automatically creates a luminance range mask and you can then refine the area by brushing out some of the mask (as you’ll see a little further down).

Pro tip: to see the selected area, check the “Show Luminance Mask” box below the slider.

10. Depth Range mask

This range mask option will be grayed out on images created with digital cameras, except **for iPhone photos** as they have depth information enabled.



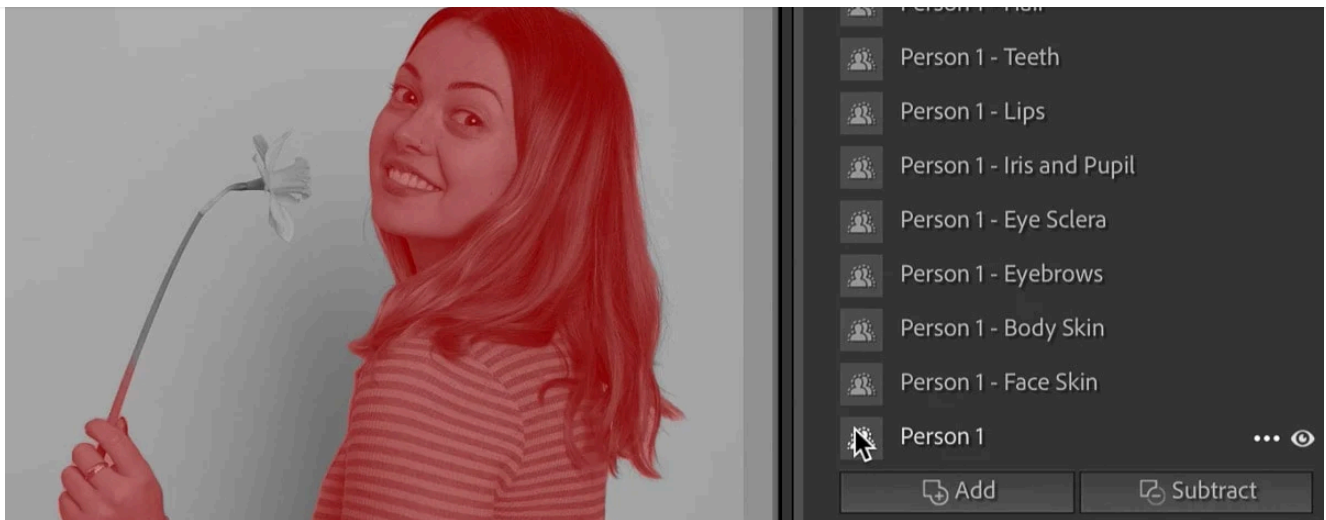
Even in a busy and challenging image with people wearing helmets, Lightroom could detect and automatically create 4 people masks

People masking in Lightroom

The next **9 masks** are all accessed from the **People masking tool**. Just click on “People” to open up all the Lightroom masks for editing either an entire person, or people, or parts of them.

Lightroom artificial intelligence recognizes different people in an image to create masks. After masking and editing each person individually with this new auto mask feature you can sync the edits to several photos at once. This saves a lot of time for portrait photographers.

I've used it extensively to batch process images for in person sales sessions, because it's so quick and easy to show processed photos for selection. Then, after a client has selected the images they want, I take a closer look and give them a more detailed edit.

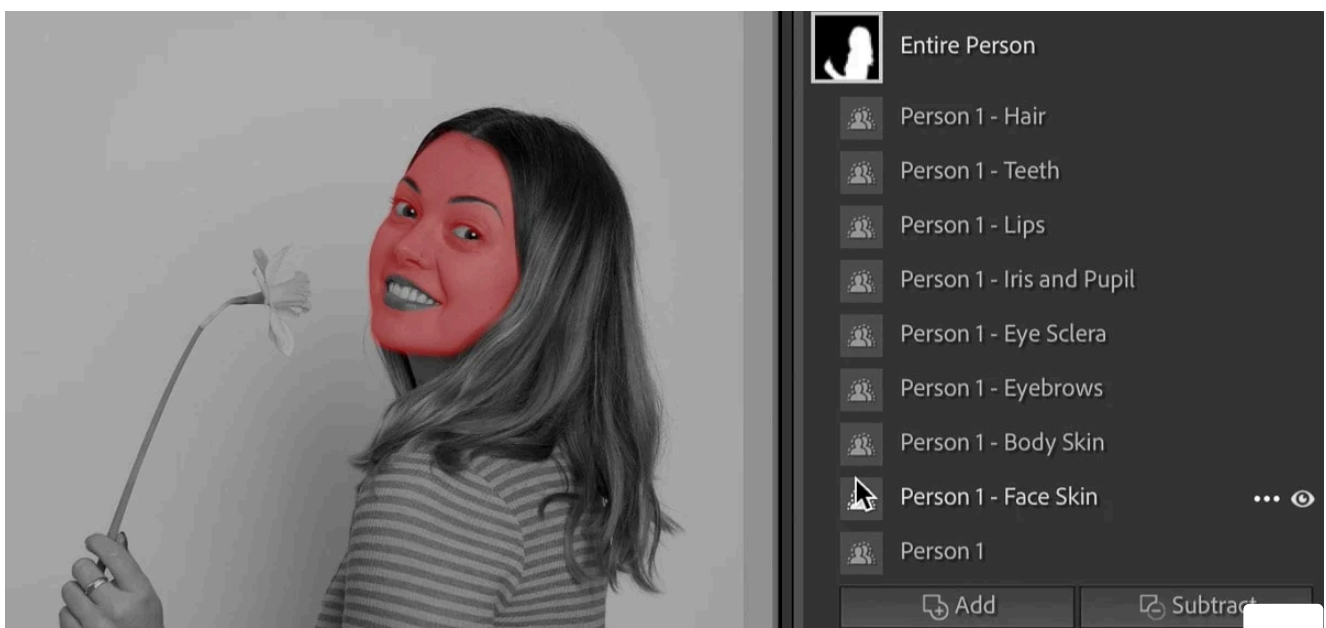


11. Entire person mask

To make adjustments to an **entire person**, or **several people**, in an image, open the People masking tool.

- Click **“People”** under “Add a new mask” in the masking panel
- Select the person or people from the by clicking on the relevant profile pictures
- In the Person Mask Options click **Entire Person**

Lightroom automatically creates masks of each person selected.

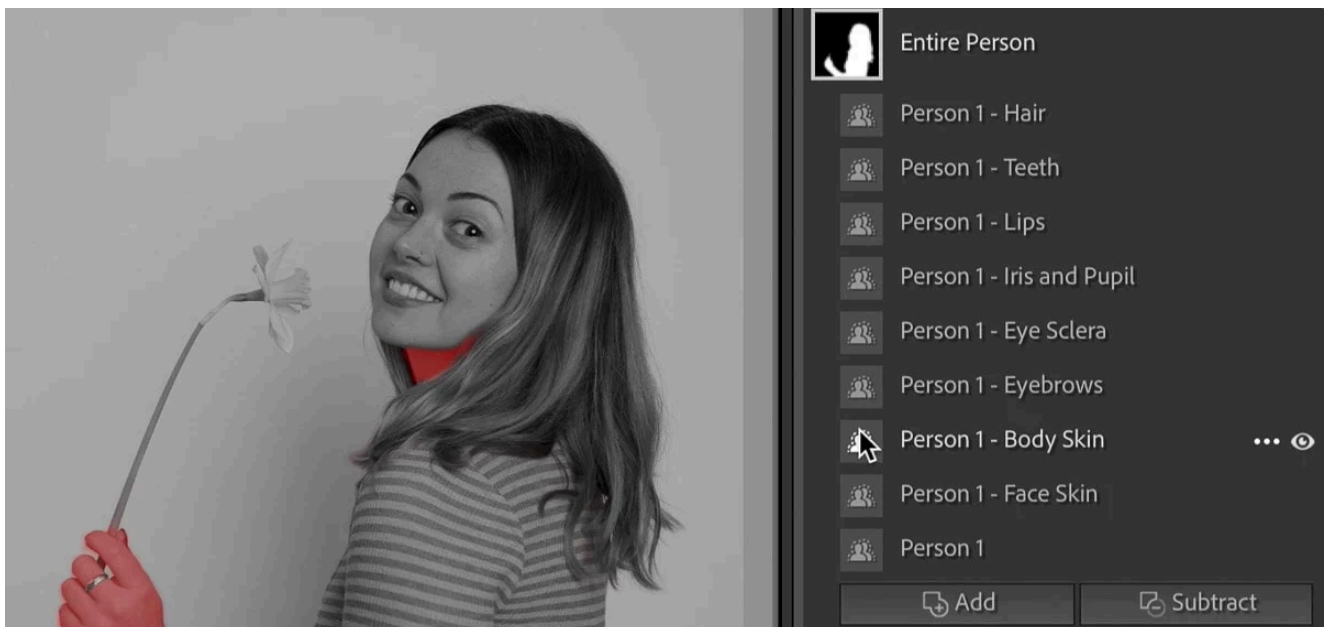




To make adjustments to the **face skin of the main subject, or several subjects**, in an image, open the People masking tool.

- Click **“People”** under “Add a new mask” in the masking panel
- Select the person or people from the by clicking on the relevant profile pictures
- In the Person Mask Options click **Face Skin**

Lightroom automatically creates masks of the face skin of each person selected.

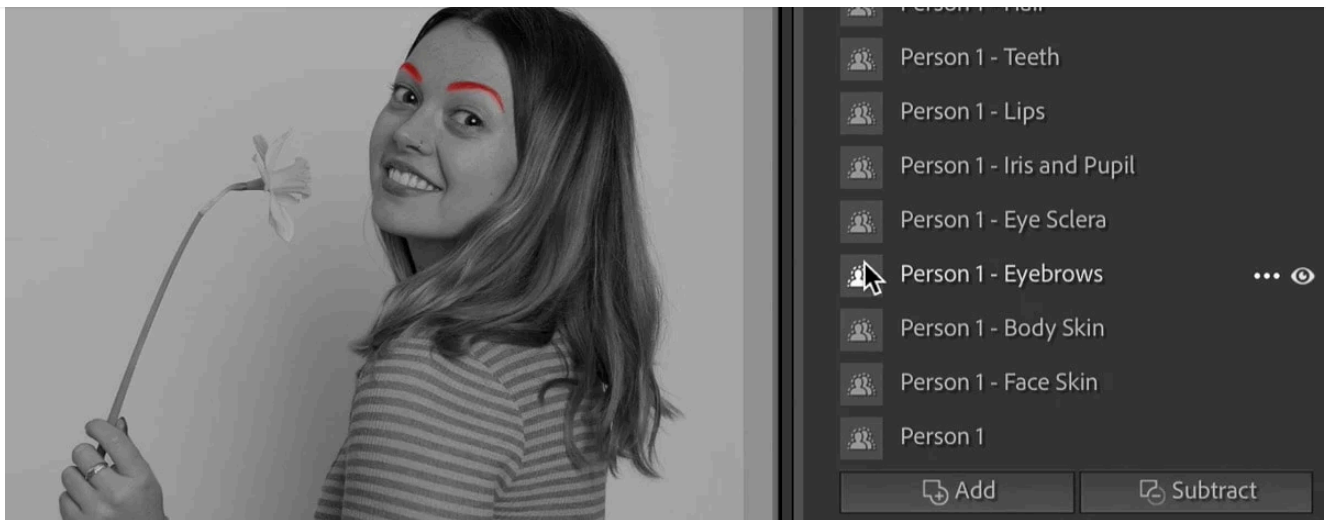


13. Body skin mask

To make adjustments to the exposed **body skin of the main subject, or several subjects**, in an image, open the People masking tool.

- Click **“People”** under “Add a new mask” in the masking panel
- Select the person or people from the by clicking on the relevant profile pictures
- In the Person Mask Options click **Body Skin**

Lightroom automatically creates masks of the exposed body skin, excluding clothing of each person selected.

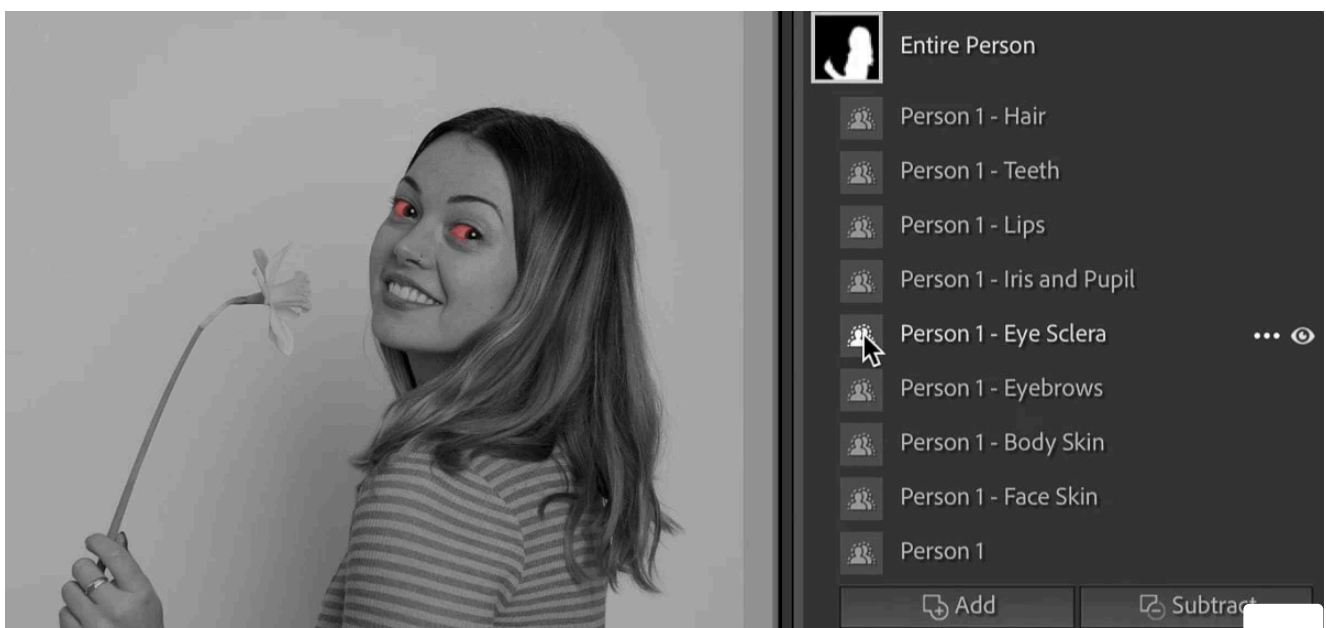


14. Eyebrows mask

To make adjustments to the **eyebrows of the main subject, or several subjects**, in an image, open the People masking tool.

- Click **“People”** under “Add a new mask” in the masking panel
- Select the person or people from the by clicking on the relevant profile pictures
- In the Person Mask Options click **Eyebrows**

Lightroom automatically creates masks of the eyebrows of each person selected.



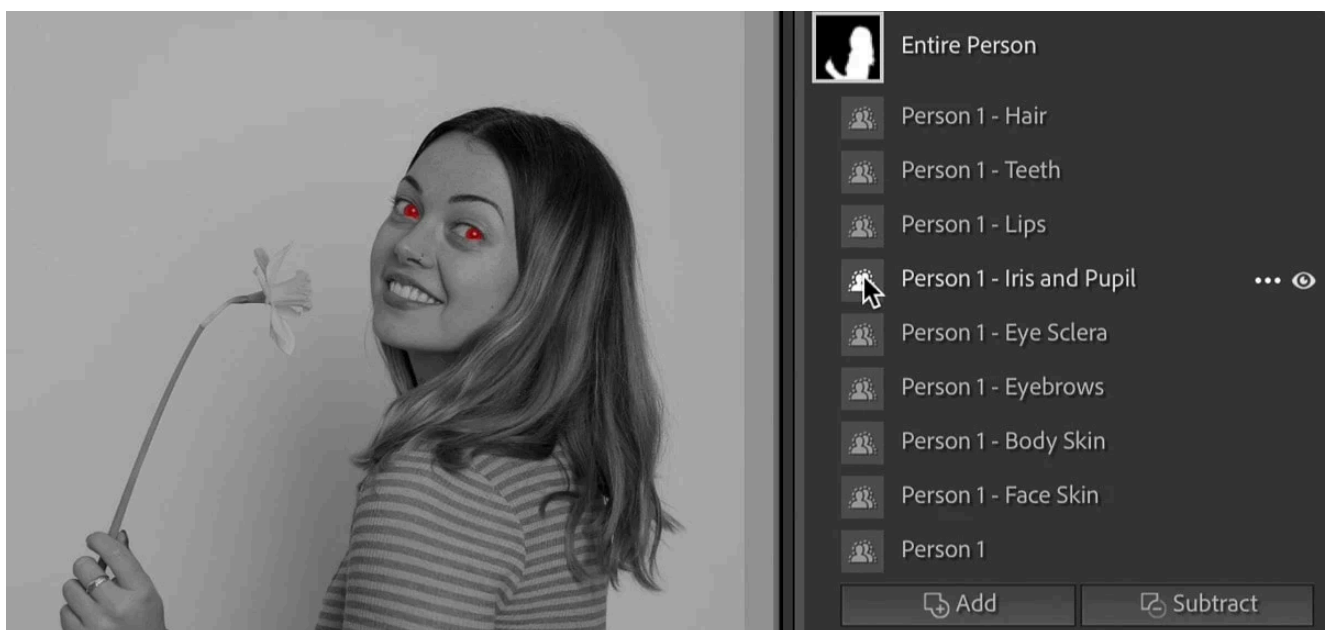


To make adjustments to the **eye sclera of the main subject, or several subjects**, in an image, open the People masking tool.

- Click **“People”** under “Add a new mask” in the masking panel
- Select the person or people from the by clicking on the relevant profile pictures
- In the Person Mask Options click **Eye Sclera**

Lightroom automatically creates masks of the whites of the eyes of each person selected.

Pro tip: to whiten the whites of the eyes, reduce the saturation. Don't brighten them by increasing exposure as it creates an unnatural, obviously edited look.



16. Iris and pupil mask

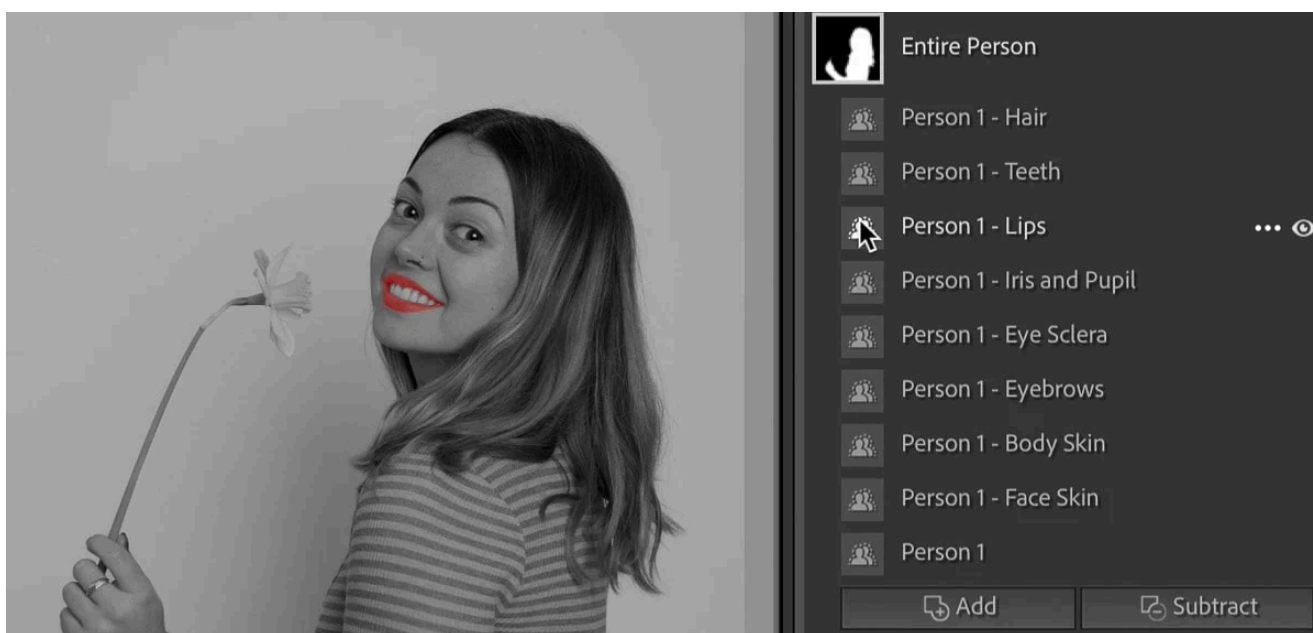
To make adjustments to the **iris and pupils of the main subject, or several subjects**, in an image, open the People masking tool.

- Click **“People”** under “Add a new mask” in the masking panel
- Select the person or people from the by clicking on the relevant profile pictures



Lightroom automatically creates masks of the iris and pupil of each person selected.

Pro tip: to bring out the detail in the iris without taking your processing to a point where it looks unnatural, just increase the shadows slider and the clarity slider slightly.

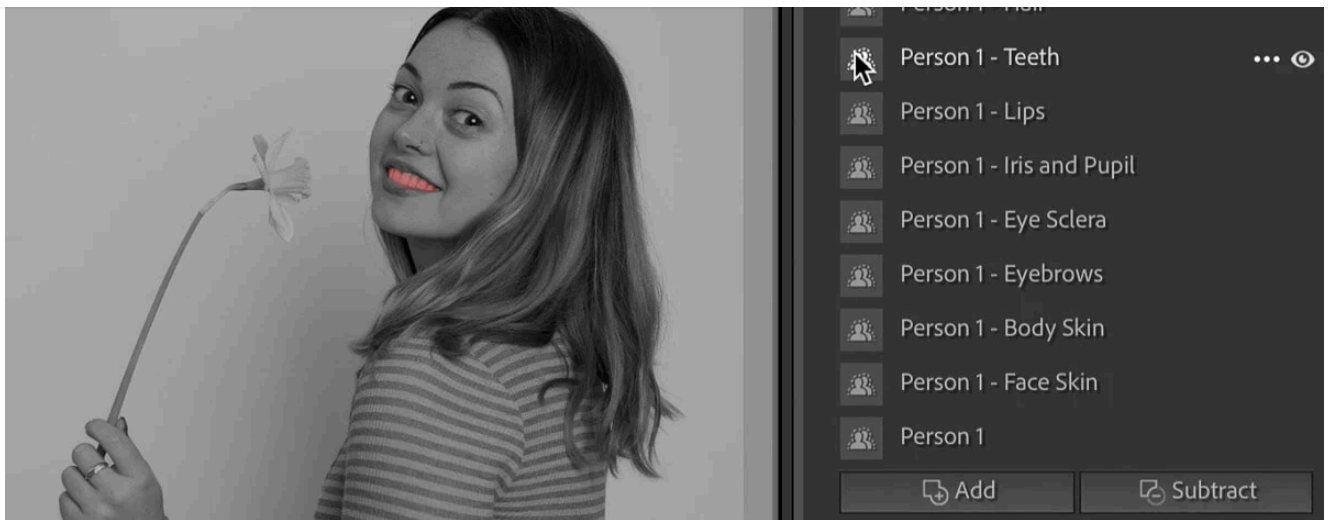


17. Lips mask

To make adjustments to the **lips of the main subject, or several subjects**, in an image, open the People masking tool.

- Click **“People”** under “Add a new mask” in the masking panel
- Select the person or people from the by clicking on the relevant profile pictures
- In the Person Mask Options click **Lips**

Lightroom automatically creates masks of the lips of each person selected.



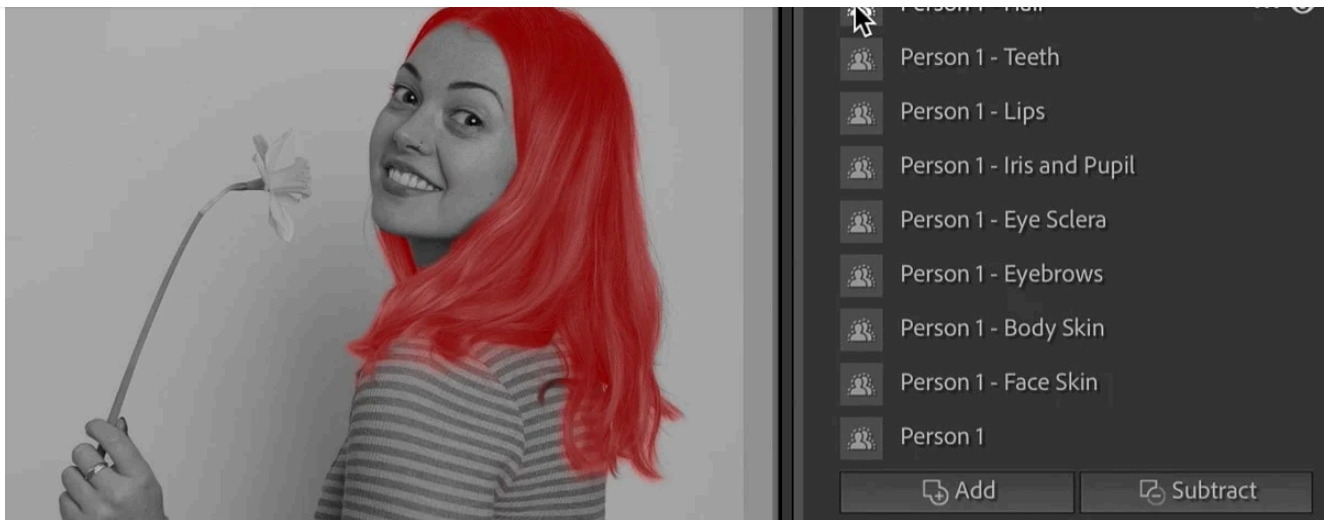
18. Teeth mask

To make adjustments to the **teeth of the main subject, or several subjects**, in an image, open the People masking tool.

- Click **“People”** under “Add a new mask” in the masking panel
- Select the person or people from the by clicking on the relevant profile pictures
- In the Person Mask Options click **Teeth**

Lightroom automatically creates masks of the teeth of each *person* selected so that you can whiten them individually. You’ll really appreciate this when batch processing a shoot. More on that in a moment.

Pro tip: to whiten teeth, reduce the saturation. Don’t brighten teeth by increasing exposure etc as it creates an unnatural look.



19. Hair mask

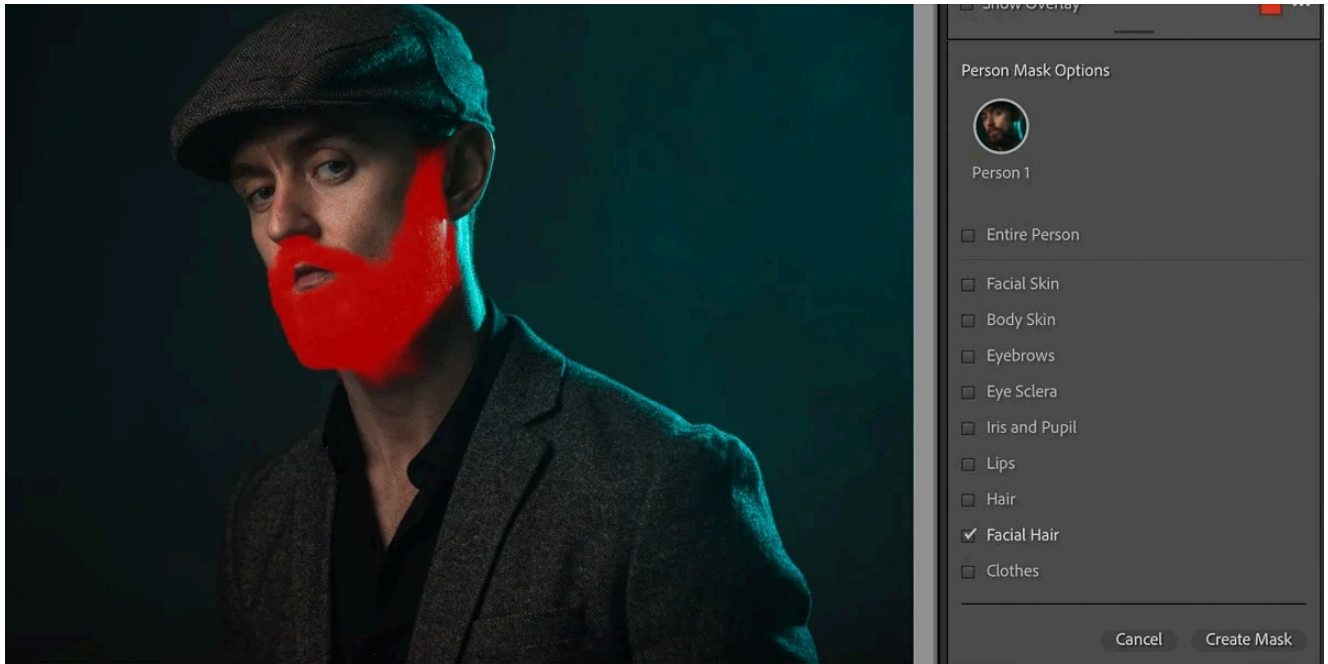
To make adjustments to the **hair of the main subject, or several subjects**, in an image, open the People masking tool.

- Click **“People”** under “Add a new mask” in the masking panel
- Select the person or people from the by clicking on the relevant profile pictures
- In the Person Mask Options click **Hair**

Lightroom automatically creates masks of the hair of each person selected.

Pro tip: increase the shadows to bring out the texture in hair, especially dark hair. Also, be careful about sharpening hair, which can make it look dry and unhealthy.

The next two people masks were added a few months after the original Lightroom masking update, along with additional masking features that I’ve already mentioned.



20. Facial hair mask

To make adjustments to the **beard of the main subject, or several subjects**, in an image, open the People masking tool.

- Click **“People”** under “Add a new mask” in the masking panel
- Select the person or people from the by clicking on the relevant profile pictures
- In the Person Mask Options click **Facial Hair**

Lightroom automatically creates masks of the beard of each person selected.



21. Clothes mask

To make adjustments to the **clothes of the main subject, or several subjects**, in an image, open the People masking tool.

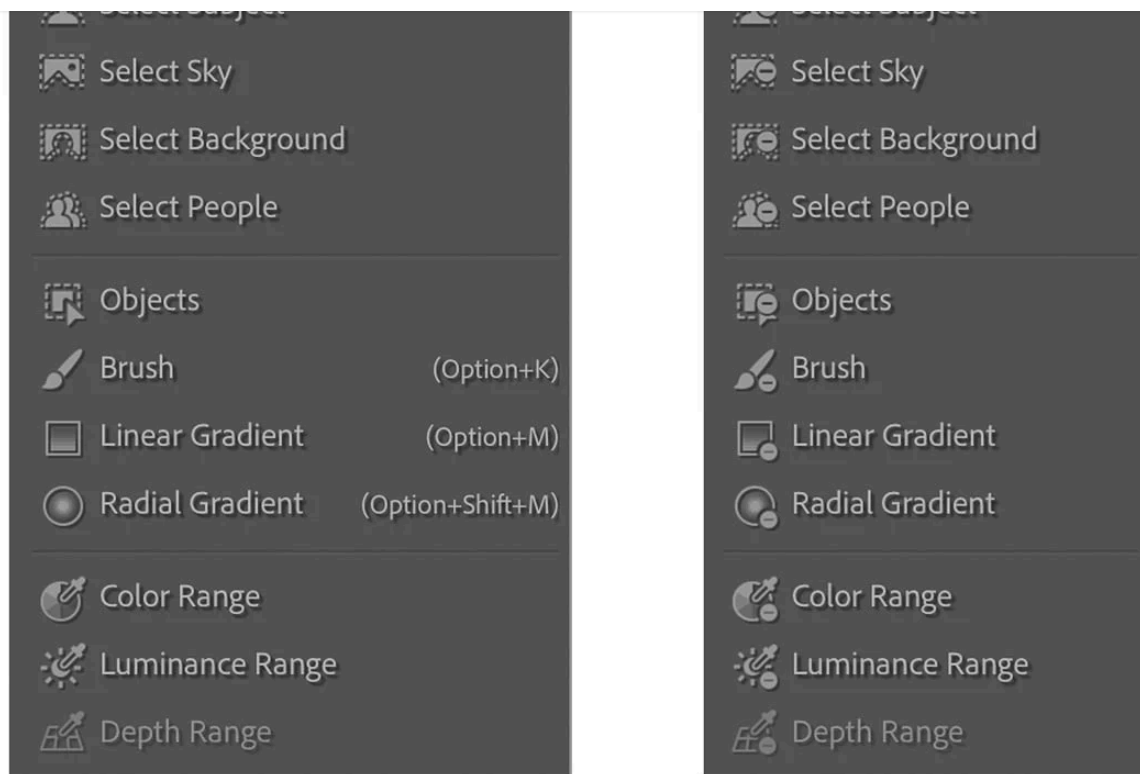
- Click **“People”** under “Add a new mask” in the masking panel
- Select the person or people from the by clicking on the relevant profile pictures
- In the Person Mask Options click **Clothes**

Lightroom automatically creates masks of the clothes of each person selected, which makes changing the color of clothes so much easier!

Step 2: refine a Lightroom mask

If some of the area selected includes parts of the image that you don't want to edit, you need to remove it. Or if the artificial intelligence didn't automatically include all of the area you want to edit in your initial mask, you need to add it in.

Again, you have options for refining Lightroom masks.



Click Add or Subtract buttons to open relevant drop down menus to refine a mask in Lightroom

Add or Subtract from a mask

The easiest way to **refine the masking area** is with Add or Subtract. In the mask panel, just below the mask thumbnail there are two buttons:

- Add
- Subtract

When you click on either of these buttons a drop down menu will open to **select the type of mask you want** to use to either add to the mask or remove from the mask.

Your “Add to Mask with” or “Subtract from Mask with” options will look very familiar by now, because they are:

- Select Subject
- Select Sky
- Select Background
- Select People



- Linear Gradient
- Radial Gradient
- Color Range
- Luminance Range
- Depth Range

They all work in the same way. However, as you'll probably use the brush tool most of the time for adding to or subtracting from a mask, this is the one I'll mention in detail...

How to subtract from mask with brush tool

To remove parts of the image you don't want included in your mask:

- Click the subtract button
- Select the brush
- Adjust the size and feather of the brush
- Make sure the flow is set to 100
- Check the "Auto Mask" box for AI help with area selection
- Brush to deselect areas of the mask

It's easier if you can see the mask overlay when you do this, so push O on the keyboard to show it. To switch it off push O again.



Hold down Alt or Option and the Add and Subtract buttons change to an Intersect button with a drop down menu to select masks to intersect with

Intersect with a new mask

Sometimes add and subtract aren't subtle or clever enough, so this is when to use "Intersect with a new mask".

However, only once you've created a mask can you intersect it with another mask to refine the original masked area. Here's how it works...

- Create a mask
- Click and hold down Option (Mac) or Alt (Windows)
- The Intersect button appears in the panel below your mask (replacing the Add and Subtract buttons)
- From the drop down menu select the mask you want to intersect your first mask with (while still holding down the key)
- Create an intersect mask
- This erases parts of the first mask, leaving only the area where the two masks overlap

You could also select Intersect Mask With from the drop down mask menu (three dots in the panel to the right of the mask thumbnail).



Below left is the before image and on the right is the final image after I applied a radial mask to create the appearance of a background light and intersected it with a subject mask to subtract the subject from the mask



Pro tip: Intersecting a Subject mask with a Radial Gradient mask is a great way to add a background light in studio portraits by brightening part of the background only.

How to use the masking panel tools

Create New Mask

Once you've created one mask and the Masks Panel opens it looks slightly different. You won't see the mask options straight away. Instead, you'll see that at the **top** **there's a big +** that says Create New Mask. And it does what it says on the tin.



Switch all masks off and on

The switch at the top left of the Masks Panel switches all masks off to view your starting image and then back on to view the final image.

Or use the **before and after view tool** to compare your original image with the edited image side by side.

See/hide mask for individual masks

The eye indicator is a useful tool for switching off the mask to see the image without your mask so you can check that you're not over processing. Switch it back on to see the image with the mask applied.

When you mouse over a mask you'll see the eye indicator on the right of the mask panel. If there's a line through it, the mask is hidden and if there's no line through it (default) it's not hidden.

Mask menu options



mask options, including:

Rename mask

Double click on the mask thumbnail to open the renaming dialog box. Type the new name and click OK. You can change the name at any time.

Again, this may seem like a gimmick ...until you have several masks on one image, or if you want to sync a mask across several photos.



Invert Mask

Sometimes it's easier to select an area that you don't want to adjust and then invert the mask to deselect it and instead select the area you want.

Many Lightroom masks can be inverted with one click by **checking the invert box just above the Segmented Masking Panel**. Alternatively, you can use the Lightroom shortcut for inverting, which is '*' (the asterisk key).

Duplicate and Invert Mask

Self explanatory – Lightroom will copy the mask and then invert it.

I can see this being useful from a speed point of view if you've darkened the background with a mask and then want to brighten the subject. By duplicating and inverting the background mask, a new subject mask is created to edit. The other way would of course be to create new mask and then select subject.

Intersect Mask with

I covered how to intersect a mask above in step 2 on refining a mask.

Duplicate Mask

In other words, copy the mask.

Hide

Another simple explanation – hide the mask.

Delete Mask

If you no longer want the mask, select delete mask. Or, with the mask selected, the delete button on your keyboard.



You could end up with unused masks **created from brushes** and local adjustment presets, during a batch process, or manually created. With this option you can delete all the unused masks at once.

Update AI Masks

If you've changed an AI Mask, use this option to update the mask.

Auto Hide Masking Panel

Also does what it says on the tin.

Mask overlay options

At the bottom of the Mask Panel you'll find the overlay tools.

Show/hide mask overlay

It's much easier to mask an area when you can see it. **To see the mask overlay push O on the keyboard** and push it again to switch it off.

Or use the long method, which is to check and uncheck the Show Overlay box at the bottom left of the mask panel.



Change mask color overlay

The **default mask overlay color is red**, but you don't have to stick with a red mask overlay. After all, if you're masking a red object, you need the mask to be a different color for it to stand out.

Click on the red square (color swatch) to open up your overlay color options. They are:

- Red
- Green
- White
- Black



Or use the color picker tool to select the color you'd like your overlay to be.

The shortcut to cycle through the overlay color options is Shift+O.

You also have two further overlay options:

- **Adjust the opacity** of the color overlay with the Opacity slider
- Next to “Overlay Shows” choose “**Affected Area**” (default) for the color overlay or “**Unaffected Area**” to display the color overlay on the area not included in the mask.



Clockwise from top left: Color overlay, Color overlay on B&W, Image on B&W, Image on Black, Image on White, White on Black

Change overlay mode

Not only can you change the color of the overlay, you can also change how you see it.

This may sound gimmicky, but I find the Color overlay on B&W very helpful, because it helps me to see instantly where the mask is.

To **open the overlay mode** menu:

- **Click on the three dots next to the square overlay color swatch** in the mask panel
- Or **with the color swatch open, click the text next to “Overlay Mode”** at the top of the overlay panel

Overlay mode options are:



black and white

- **Image on B&W** – masked area is in color with the rest of the image in black and white
- **Image on Black** – masked area is in color and the rest of the image is black
- **Image on White** – masked area is in color and the rest of the image is white
- **White on Black** – masked area is white and the rest of the image is black

Mask badges

You can choose to hide or unhide mask badges. I prefer to have them unhidden so that I can see instantly if there's a mask on an image.

Mask badges are the little **icons on the image representing a type of mask** in the area.

- Click on a mask badge to open the mask
- Or just hover over the icon to quickly see the masked area



Amount slider

The **Amount slider at the top of the mask panel** gives you greater control over the strength of the mask.

Increase or reduce the overall effect of your mask settings to your desired level with the amount slider. All the adjustment sliders you've altered will adjust equally at once.

By default the amount slider, is set to 50 – in other words, half way. To alter the mask settings:

- **Increase** – drag the amount slider to the right
- **Decrease** – drag the amount slider to the left



Lightroom Segmented Masking panel in solo mode

Step 3: Edit the selected area

Now you know how to mask in Lightroom Classic, you're ready to make your selective edits to the masked areas of your image.

Adjustment sliders



usual basic panel sliders, separated into:

- **Tone** – Exposure, Contrast, Highlights, Shadows, Whites, Blacks
- **Color** – Temp, Tint, hue, Saturation
- **Presence** – Texture, Clarity, Dehaze

Plus:

- **Curve** panel – Point curve and RGB curves
- **Detail** panel sliders – Sharpness, Noise, Moire, Defringe

Exactly which panels and sliders you use will depend on the image and the look you want to achieve. You now have the option to make edit any part of an image easily instead of the entire image. For example:

- Darken the background of an image
- Make color adjustments to a specific area of an image
- Smooth skin
- Tonal adjustments like brighten subjects or darken the sky
- etc

You can view the Segmented Masking Panel sliders in **solo mode**, which collapses the sections so that you can work on one section at a time. Much like the way the [Lightroom HSL panel](#) works.

- Right click and select Solo Mode
- To expand all again, just right click and select Expand All from the drop down menu

You'll see an eye indicator to the right of each collapsed section. Unused sections have a grayed out eye.



Step by step Lightroom masking example

Here's a quick demonstration of how to mask in Lightroom Classic detailing the Lightroom masking steps I took to edit the image, clockwise from top left:

First photo – Step 1 – select masking area

- I selected the green door with the brush tool of an Objects mask

Second photo – Step 2 – make adjustments and subtract from mask

- I used the tone sliders to increase: exposure by 97, shadows by 9 and whites by 17
- Used the color sliders to set: Temp to -18, Tint to 41, Hue to -87.3, Saturation to -10
- Then I refined the mask by subtracting the railings from the mask with a brush tool. You can see that they're green.

Third photo – Step 3 – add to mask



Fourth photo – final image.

How to batch edit with masks

Yes, you read that right – **process images faster with batch editing**. Once you've created masks and made adjustments to them on one photo, you can **apply the mask (or masks) to other similar photos**.

To sync mask settings across a series of photos:

- Select the edited image
- Then select unedited image/s
- Click the Sync button
- Select the mask/s you want to sync
- Click the sync selections button

Then sit back and be amazed while Lightroom's new masking tools do all the work!

Shortcuts mentioned in how to mask in Lightroom



tutorial are:

- D – Develop module
- Shift+W – masking
- K – brush tool
- M – linear gradient mask
- Shift+M – radial gradient mask
- Shift+J – color range mask
- Shift+Q – luminance range mask
- ‘ – invert mask
- O – show and hide mask
- Shift+O – cycle through mask overlay colors
- H – hide and show mask badges

Leave a comment

Let me know in the comments if you have any questions or suggestions on how to mask in Lightroom Classic.



2 thoughts on “How to mask in Lightroom Classic in 2024 (with AI masking)”

Tom

February 13, 2024 at 11:37 am

Jane,

The Lens Lounge is an amazing site! So well written and organized. Your examples and illustrations are outstanding – I haven't seen better. Thank you for sharing your experience and expertise!

This section on Lightroom AI masking 2024 is very insightful. On my version of Lightroom Classic, the shortcut (M) is for Linear Gradient, with (Shift+M) for Radial Gradient. Also, the asterisk (*) key is a great shortcut key for inverting a mask.

Thanks again,

Tom

[Reply](#)

Jane Allan

March 1, 2024 at 12:34 pm

Hi Tom

Yikes! Thanks for pointing out the error – I've fixed it now. Usually it's just left and right that I mix up when writing. Also – great point about the



Glad you enjoy the site and thanks for your input.

Reply

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■ ABOUT ME



Hi! I'm Jane Allan, professional portrait photographer and founder of The Lens Lounge - photography tutorials and online courses. Here to help you create the photos you dream of by sharing everything I've learned.

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