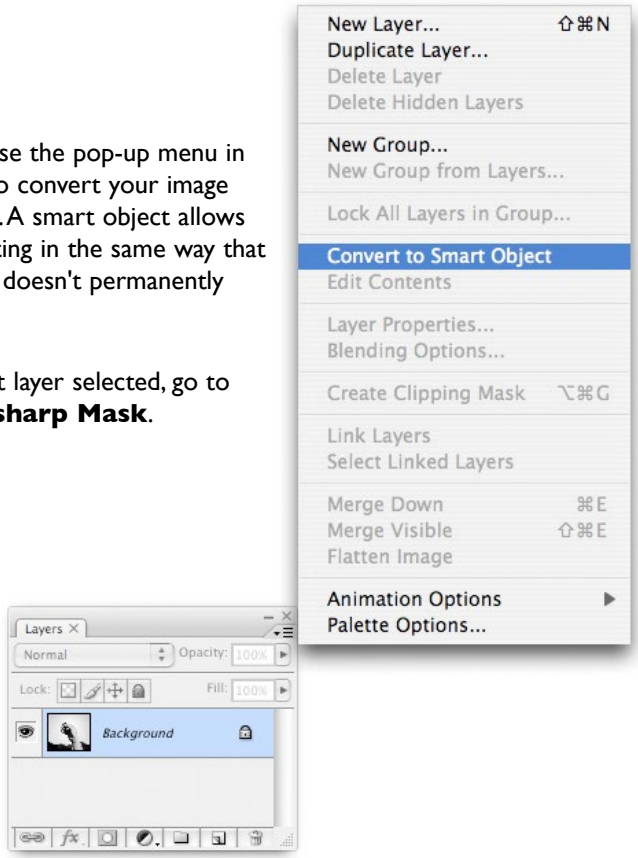
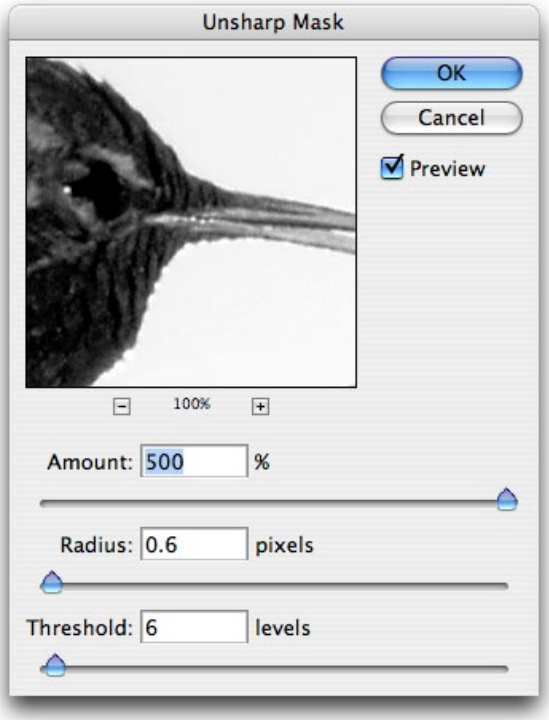
HOW TO SHARPEN using a SMART OBJECT and the UNSHARP MASK FILTER

Sharpening is one of the last things to do to an image. Almost every digital file improves with some sharpening, but you must be careful, because it is easy to oversharpen and degrade image quality. When you sharpen, you are creating the illusion that an image is optically sharp because you are increasing the contrast along edges that already exhibit sharpness. The visual principles of the unsharp mask technique have been used by painters for centuries to make select portions of an image appear optically sharper.

1. In the Layers palette use the pop-up menu in the upper right corner to convert your image layer into a smart object. A smart object allows for non-desctructive editing in the same way that a levels adjustment layer doesn't permanently alter your picture.

2. With the smart object layer selected, go to **Filter>Sharpen>Unsharp Mask**.





3. Set the **AMOUNT** all the way to 500%.
Amount adjusts the contrast between adjacent pixels.

4. Adjust the **RADIUS** until you can see distinct thick "halos" around edges of adjacent contrast. **RADIUS** adjusts the "thickness" of the dark and light halos you are making.

5. Adjust the **THRESHOLD** until you are only increasing contrast along existing edges of significant contrast - where a dark edge meets a light edge, for example. You generally want to avoid sharpening smooth skies, etc.

When **THRESHOLD** is set to "0", every single pixel will have its contrast affected. When set to "10", two adjacent pixels must differ in their luminosity values by an amount of "10" or greater to be affected by sharpening.

6. Reduce **RADIUS** to the smallest amount that is still detectable to your eye when viewed at 100%.

7. Slowly reduce **AMOUNT** until your sharpening isn't obvious when viewed at 100%.

8. Turn your sharpened layer on and off in the layers palette to compare it to your unsharpened version. If your sharpening is overly obvious, reopen the sharpening window and adjust appropriately.

The original image viewed at 100%