# How To Add Falling Snow

## How To Add Snow With Photoshop

Step 1: Add A New Blank Layer

To begin, let's add a new blank layer above our photo. If we look in our Layers palette, we can see that our photo is sitting on the Background layer, which is currently the only layer we have. Click on the **New Layer** icon at the bottom of the Layers palette. It's the icon second from the right, beside the Trash Bin:
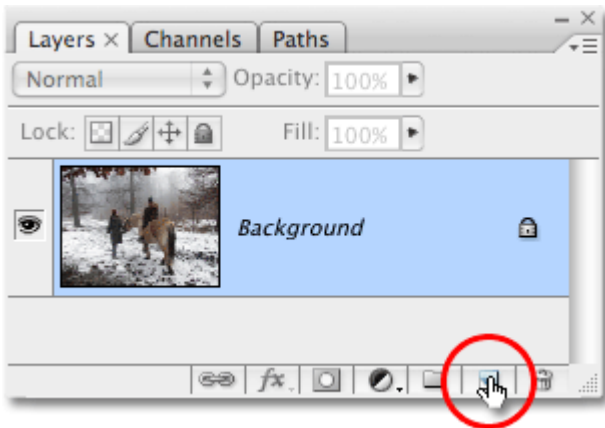
Click on the New Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers palette.

Nothing will seem to have happened in the document window since the layer we just added has nothing on it yet, but if we look again in the Layers palette, we can see that we now have a new blank layer, which Photoshop has automatically named "Layer 1" for us, sitting directly above the Background layer:
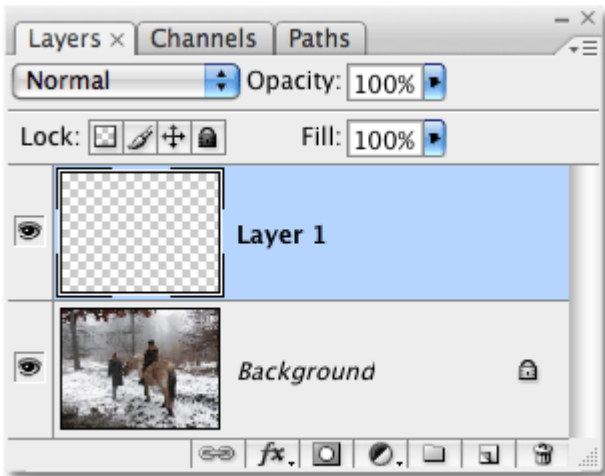

The new layer appears above the Background layer.

Step 2: Fill The New Layer With Black

Now that we have our new layer, let's fill it with black. Normally, to do anything to a specific layer, we first have to select the layer in the Layers palette, but in this case, Photoshop has automatically selected our new layer for us, so we're good to go. We can tell that "Layer 1" is selected because it's highlighted in blue. To fill

the layer with black, we'll use Photoshop's **Fill** command. Go up to the **Edit** menu at the top of the screen and choose **Fill**:
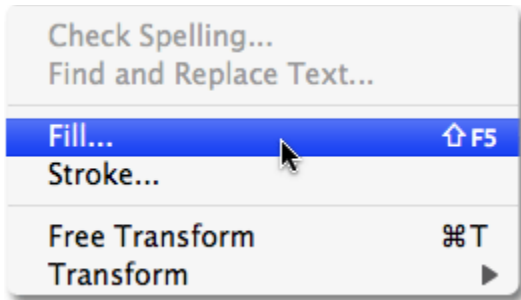

Go to Edit > Fill.

This brings up the Fill command dialog box. At the top of the dialog box is the **Contents** section. This is where we tell Photoshop which color we want to use to fill the layer with. Choose **Black** from the list, then click OK to exit out of the dialog box:
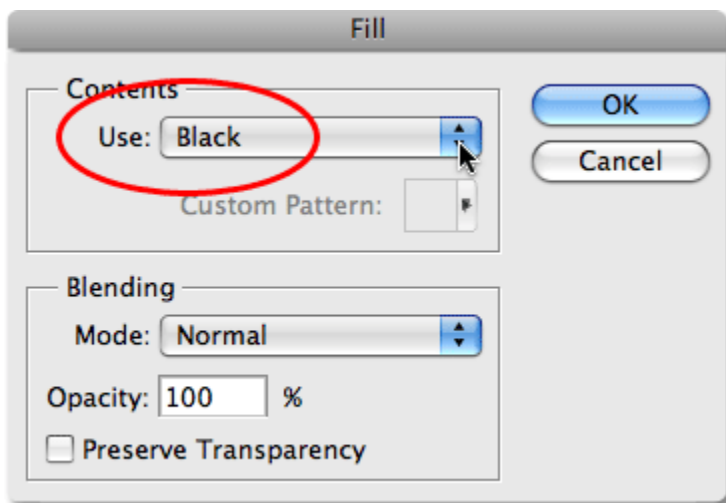
Select "Black" in the Contents section at the top of the dialog box.

Since "Layer 1" is sitting above our photo on the Background layer, filling "Layer 1" with black blocks our photo from view. The entire document window now becomes filled with black:
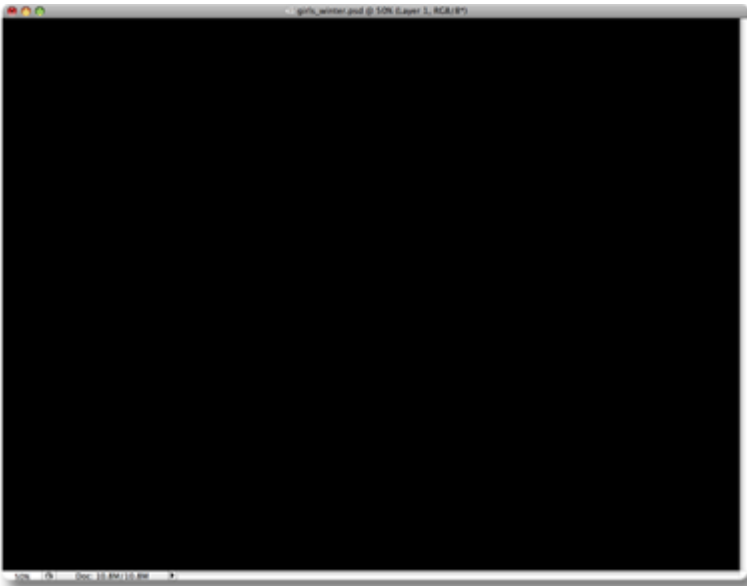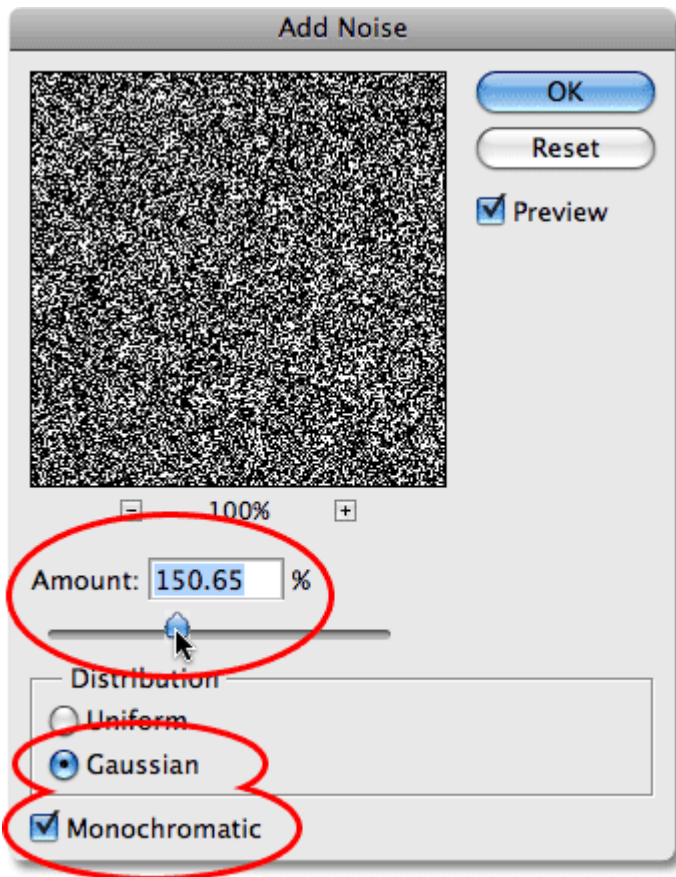
The document window is now filled with black.

Step 3: Add Some Noise

Let's add some noise to this layer, which in just a few short steps will become our falling snowflakes. When most people hear the word "Noise", they immediately think of whatever music those darn teenagers are listening to these days, but in Photoshop, noise is actually nothing more than a whole bunch of little dots. Photoshop has a filter built specifically for adding noise to an image, and by sheer coincidence, it happens to be called the **Add Noise** filter. Go up to the **Filter** menu at the top of the screen, choose **Noise**, and then choose **Add Noise**:
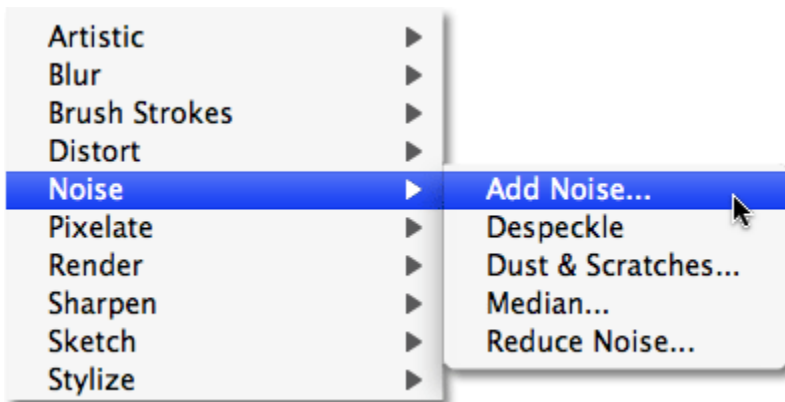

Go to Filter > Noise > Add Noise.

This brings up the Add Noise filter dialog box. Use the **Amount** slider in the middle of the dialog box to adjust the amount of noise that's being added. There's no specific amount to add for this effect, we just need a lot of noise. Dragging the slider to a value of around **150%** or so should do the trick. At the bottom of the dialog box, select the **Gaussian** option, and way down at the very bottom, select the **Monochromatic** option, which will give us little black and white dots for our noise instead of the default red, green and blue dots:

The Add Noise filter dialog box in Photoshop.

Click OK when you're done and you'll see your document window fill with noise:
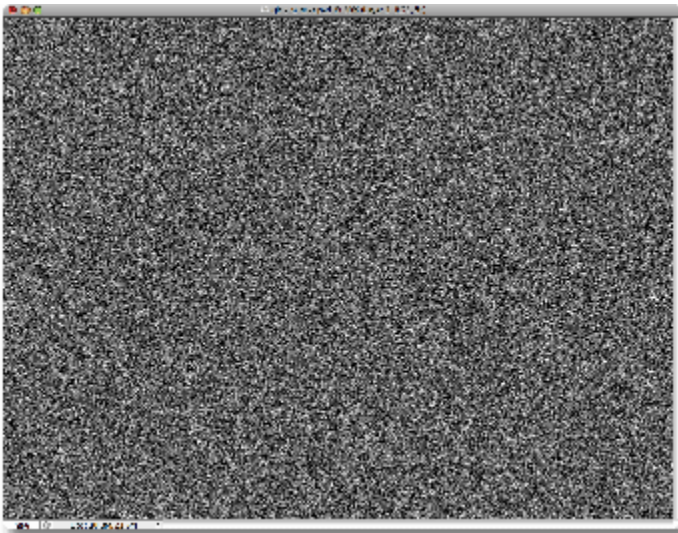
The image is now filled with noise.

Step 4: Apply Some Blurring To The Noise

Let's soften our noise up a little bit by applying some blurring to it. This will also help to clump some of the little dots together, creating different sizes and shapes for our snowflakes! The most popular way to blur something in Photoshop is with the Gaussian Blur filter because it's very simple to use and yet still gives us

control over the amount of blurring being applied, but for this effect, we can use something even simpler. Go up to the **Filter** menu, choose **Blur**, and then choose **Blur More**:
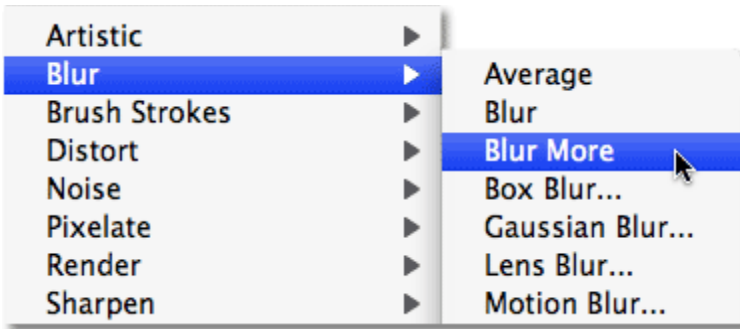

Go to Filter > Blur > Blur More.

The Blur and Blur More commands have been around since forever in Photoshop and both give us a quick, no-hassle way of blurring an image. Blur offers a subtle amount of blurring, and Blur More offers a slightly stronger amount. Problem is, as you may have noticed when you applied the Blur More command, there's no dialog box associated with them, which means we have no control over the amount of blurring that's applied. Normally, that's a bad thing, and it's a good reason to stick with the Gaussian Blur filter or one of the other more advanced blurring filters in Photoshop. For this effect though, all we needed was a subtle amount of blurring to apply to our noise, so this was a rare case where the Blur More command worked just fine.

## Step 5: Reduce The Amount Of Noise With The Levels Command

At this point, our document is filled with lots of noise. Too much noise, in fact. We need to get rid of some of it so our noise looks more like snowflakes and less like, well, noise. For that, we'll use Photoshop's **Levels** command. Go up to the **Image** menu at the top of the screen, choose **Adjustments**, and then choose **Levels**:
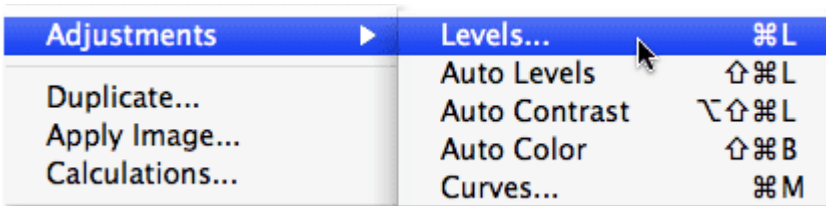

Go to Image > Adjustments > Levels.

This brings up the Levels dialog box. In the center of the dialog box is a graph known as a **histogram** which gives us a visual representation of the tonal, or brightness, range of our image. In other words, it shows us how many **pixels** in the image, if any, are pure black, how many, if any, are pure white, and where the rest of the pixels fall along the brightness scale between black and white. Directly below the histogram are three little sliders - a black one on the far left, a white one on the far right, and a gray one in the middle. We're going to use these sliders to not only remove much of the noise but also to brighten the noise so that our snowflakes appear white and not some dull gray color.

First, to brighten the noise, click on the **white slider** below the histogram and drag it to the left until it's just past the point where the right side of the histogram slope begins. You'll see the noise in your image become brighter. Then, to remove much of the noise, click on the **black slider** and drag it to the right. As you drag the black slider, you'll see large areas of the noise getting progressively darker and eventually disappearing into pure black:
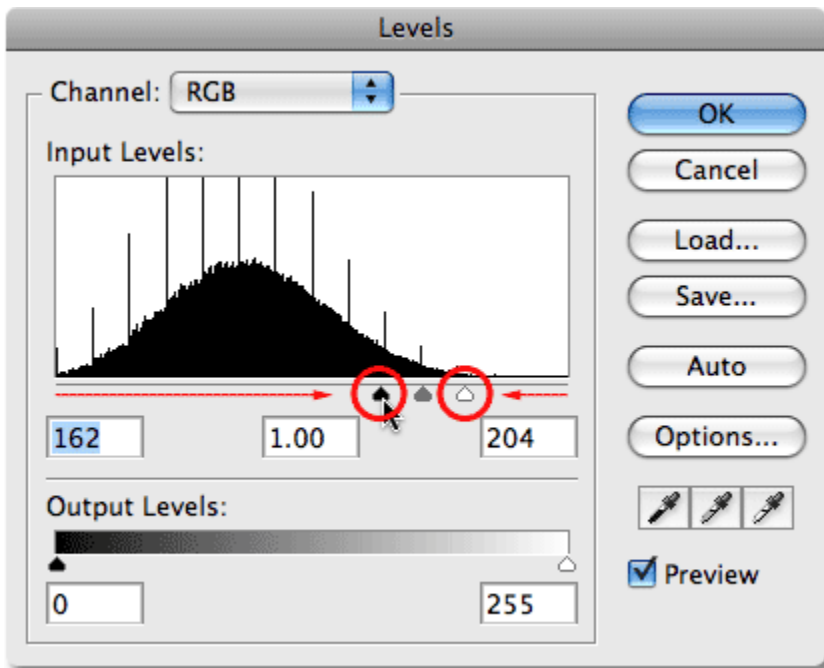
Drag the white slider to the left to brighten the noise, then drag the black slider to the right to remove much of the noise.

Continue dragging the black slider towards the right until you've removed enough noise so that what remains looks less like noise and more like snow, then click OK to exit out of the Levels dialog box. Your image should now look something like this:
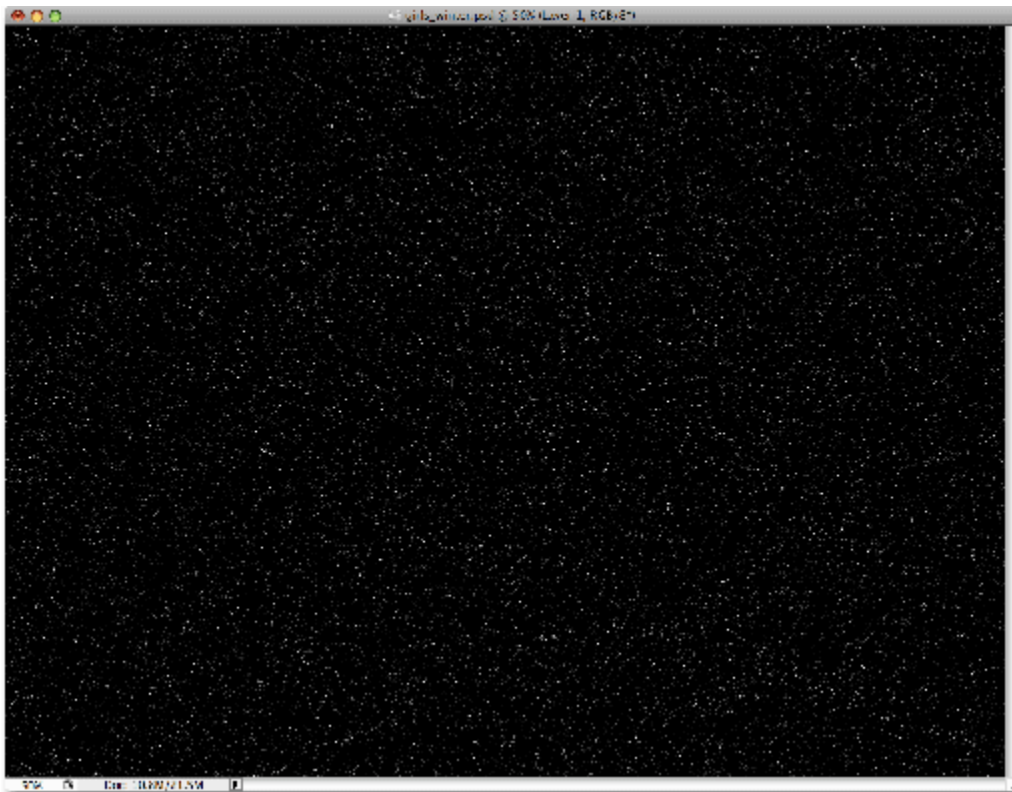
The image after reducing the amount of noise with the Levels command.

Step 6: Change The Blend Mode Of The Layer To "Screen"

Things are starting to look a bit more wintry, but we do have one small problem. We've created all these nice white specks to use as snowflakes in our photo, but we can't actually *see* our photo! It's still being blocked from view. We need to hide all the black areas on the layer while keeping the white specks visible. Fortunately, Photoshop makes this incredibly easy thanks to layer **blend modes**! Blend modes give us all kinds of interesting ways to blend layers together, and one of them in particular will do exactly what we're looking for. With "Layer 1" still selected, go up to the Blend Mode option at the top of the Layers palette. It doesn't actually say "Blend Mode" anywhere, but you'll see a drop-down box that by default is set to "Normal". This is the Blend Mode option. Select the **Screen** blend mode from the list:
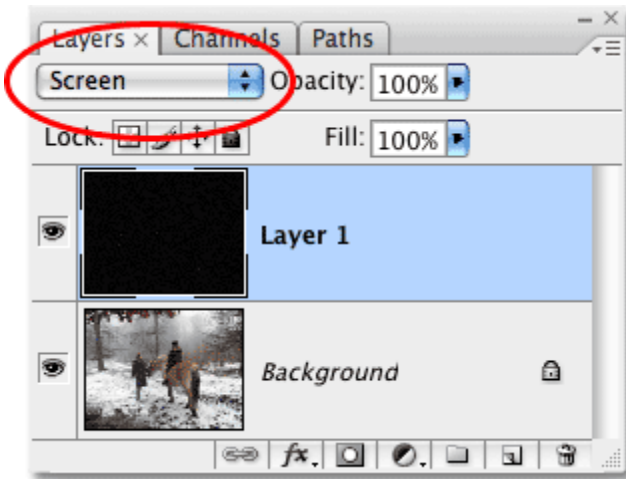
Change the blend mode of "Layer 1" to Screen.

With the blend mode of "Layer 1" set to Screen, any areas on the layer that are pure black will completely disappear from view, revealing our photo on the Background layer behind it, while our white snowflakes will remain visible! If we look at our image in the document window, we can see that sure enough, our photo is now visible behind the snowflakes:
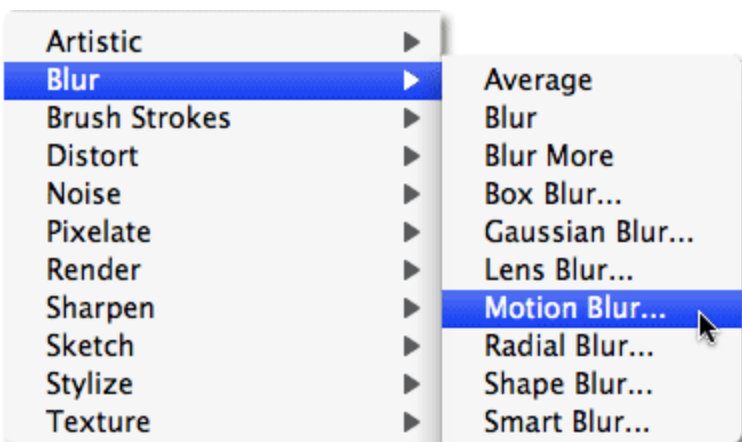
The photo is now visible behind the snowflakes.

## Step 7: Apply The "Motion Blur" Filter

Our snowflakes are still looking a little harsh, and they also look like they're just stuck on the photo rather than falling from the sky. Let's give them some motion using Photoshop's **Motion Blur** filter. Go up to the **Filter** menu, choose **Blur**, and then choose **Motion Blur**:

Go to Filter > Blur > Motion Blur.

This brings up the Motion Blur dialog box. At the bottom of the dialog box are the two controls for the filter. The first one is **Angle**, where we can set the direction we want our snowflakes to be falling from. Set it to around **-65°**. Below that is the **Distance** option where we decide how much of a motion trail we want an object to have. Let's give our snowflakes just a hint of motion, not too much. I'm going to set mine to around **8 pixels**:
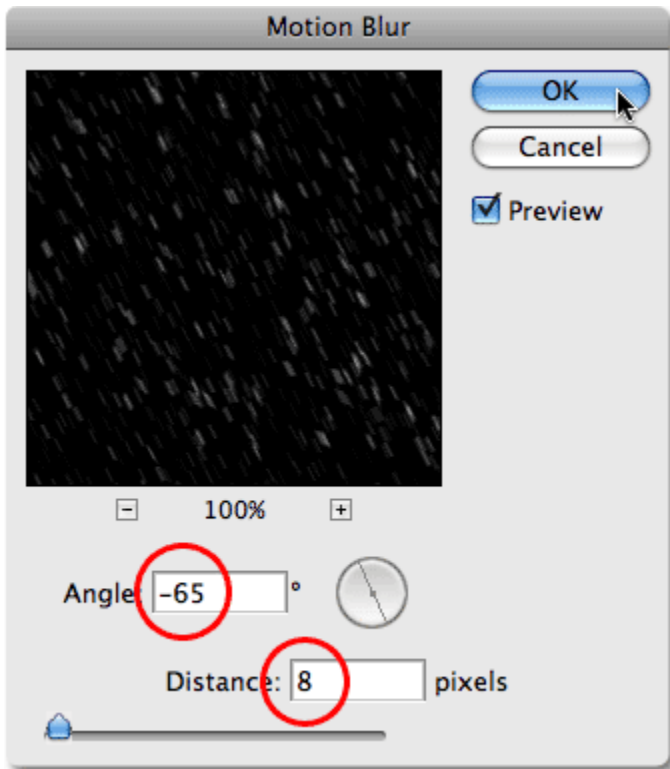
Add motion to the snowflakes by adjusting the Angle and Distance options in the Motion Blur dialog box.

Click OK when you're done to exit out of the dialog box, and your falling snowflakes should now look more realistic:

The snow now appears to be falling at a slight angle.

Step 8: Duplicate The Layer

Now that we have one layer of falling snow, let's use it to create a second layer, this time with bigger snowflakes, to give the snow a sense of depth. First, let's duplicate "Layer 1". Go up to the **Layer** menu at the top of the screen, choose **New**, and then choose **Layer via Copy**. Or, for a much faster way, simply press the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+J** (Win) / **Command+J** (Mac). Either way duplicates "Layer 1" and if we look in the Layers palette, we can see that we now have a new layer named "Layer 1 copy" sitting above "Layer 1":
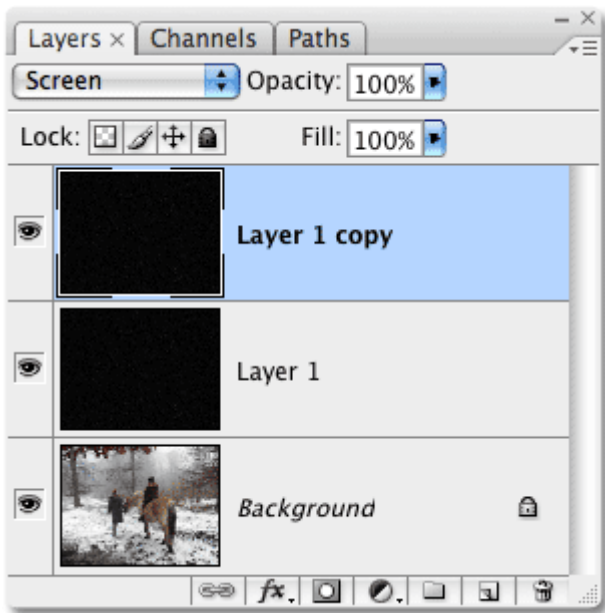
The Layers palette now shows a copy of "Layer 1" sitting above the original.

Step 9: Rotate The New Layer 180°

Let's try to cover up the fact that we're using a copy of the exact same snowflakes by rotating the new layer 180°. With "Layer 1 copy" selected in the Layers palette, go up to the **Edit** menu at the top of the screen, choose **Transform**, then choose **Rotate 180°**:
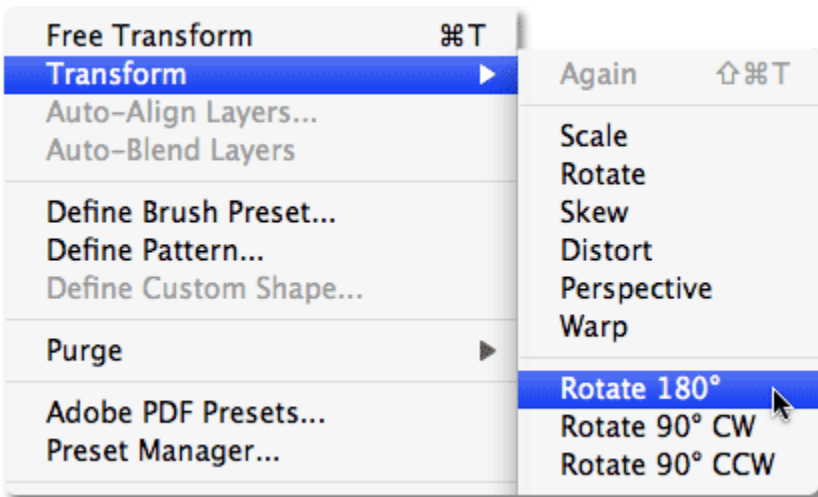

Go to Edit > Transform > Rotate 180°.

This way, the snowflakes on the new layer will still appear to be falling at the same angle as the originals on "Layer 1" but they'll be spaced out differently. In fact, it will now look like you have twice as much snow falling in your image, when all we've done is made a copy of our original snowflakes layer and rotated it.
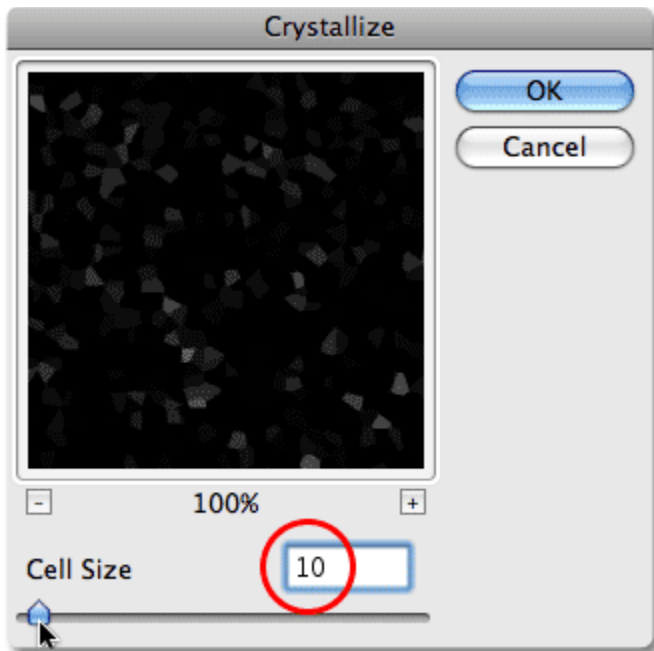
Step 10: Apply The "Crystallize" Filter

We need to convert our small snowflakes into bigger ones, and for this effect, Photoshop's **Crystallize** filter works nicely. Go up to the **Filter** menu, choose **Pixelate**, and then choose **Crystallize**:
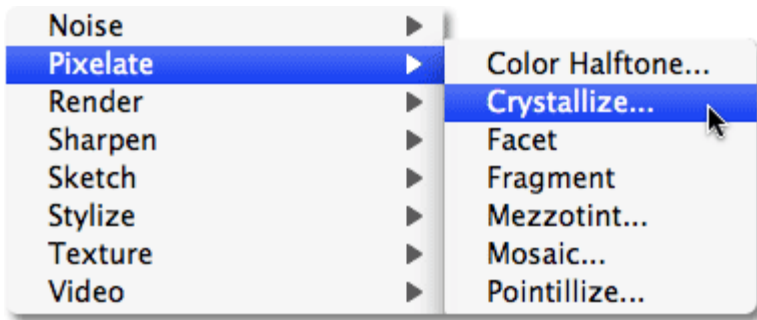
Go to Filter > Pixelate > Crystallize.

This brings up the Crystallize filter dialog box. The Crystallize filter breaks an image into little sections, or "cells", of color, and you can adjust the size of the cells with the **Cell Size** option at the bottom of the dialog box. The default value of **10** usually works well for this effect. If you look in the preview area of the dialog box, you'll see that our snowflakes have increased in size. They don't exactly look like snowflakes at the moment, but we'll fix that in a moment:

Create larger snowflakes with the Crystallize filter.

Click OK to exit out of the dialog box. The photo now has a nice mix of small snowflakes and larger, well, white shapes that will look more like snowflakes once we give them some motion:

50%   Doc: 10.8M/32.3M

The image after applying the Crystallize filter.

Step 11: Apply The "Motion Blur" Filter

We need to give our larger snowflakes some motion so they look more realistic in the photo. Go up to the **Filter** menu, choose **Blur**, and then choose **Motion Blur** once again. When the Motion Blur dialog box appears, leave the **Angle** set to **-65°** so the larger snowflakes appear to be falling at the same angle as the smaller ones. Since these flakes are larger than the original ones we created, we'll need to increase the length of the motion blur a little bit. Set your **Distance** option to around **16 pixels**:
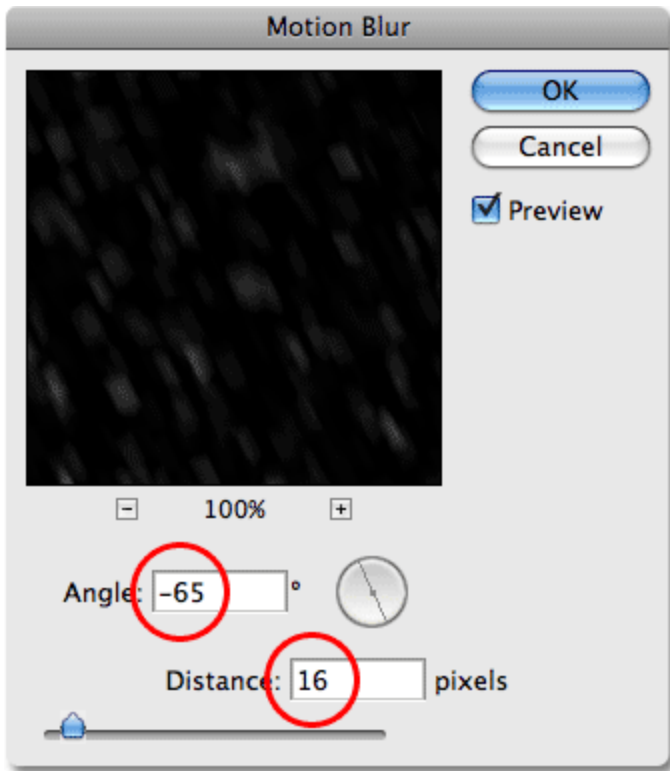
Add motion to the larger snowflakes with the Motion Blur filter.

Click OK to exit out of the dialog box. And with that, our main "falling snow" effect is complete:

50%   Doc: 10.8M/32.3M

The main "falling snow" effect is now complete.

At this point, if you're happy with the results, you can stop here. If you find that your falling snow is a little hard to see in the image and you want to brighten it up a bit, follow along with the next couple of steps.
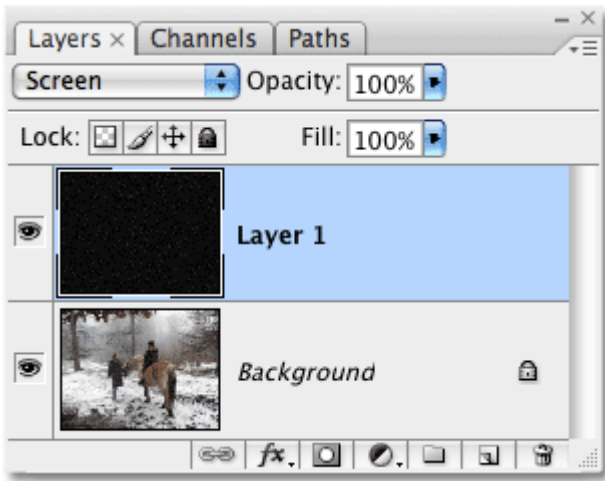
Step 12: Merge The Two Snow Layers Together

With the top "Layer 1 copy" layer still selected in the Layers palette, go up to the **Layer** menu and choose **Merge Down**:
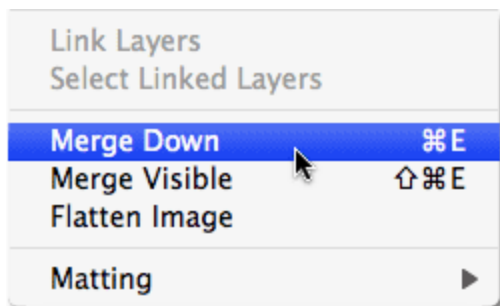

Go to Layer > Merge Down.

This will merge the top two layers together, and we can see in the Layers palette that our two snowflakes layers have been merged into "Layer 1":

The two snowflakes layers have now been merged into a single layer.

Step 13: Duplicate "Layer 1"

Now that all of our snowflakes are on a single layer, let's duplicate the layer. Use the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+J** (Win) / **Command+J** (Mac) to quickly duplicate it. Our Layers palette shows that we're back to having two snowflakes layers, except this time, each layer contains all of our snowflakes:
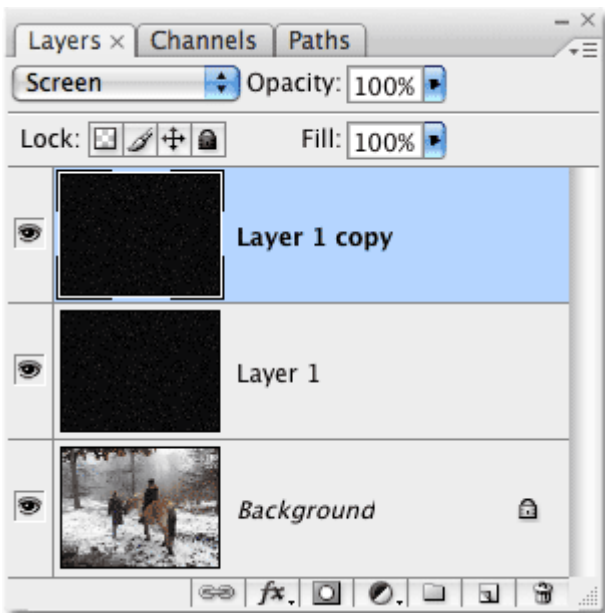
The Layers palette once again shows "Layer 1 copy" sitting above "Layer 1" after duplicating the layer.

With both layers now containing the exact same snowflakes and both layers set to the Screen blend mode, if we look at our image in the document window, we can see that we've doubled the brightness of the falling snow:

The falling snow is now much brighter in the photo.

Step 14: Lower The Opacity Of The Top Layer

If you find that your falling snow is now too bright, simply lower the opacity of the top layer until you're happy with the results. You'll find the **Opacity** option directly across from the Blend Mode option at the top of the Layers palette. I'm going to lower mine all the way down to about 35%:
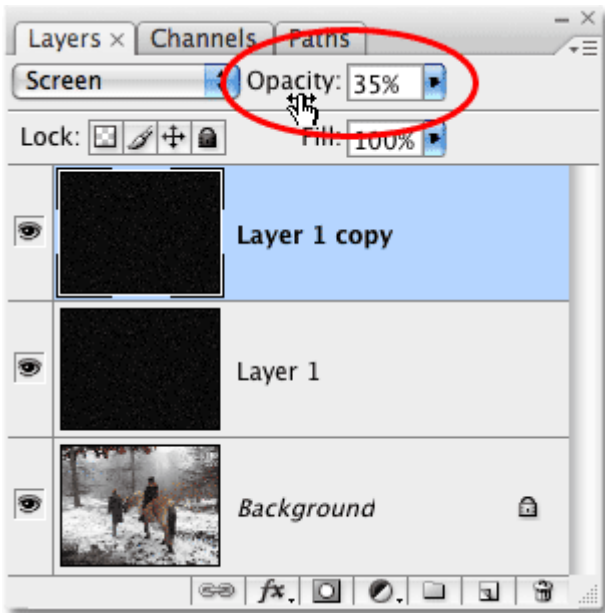
Lower the opacity of the top layer to adjust the brightness of the falling snow.

Once you've adjusted the brightness of the snow with the Opacity option, you're done! Here's my final result:

The final "falling snow" effect.