CREATE RAINBOW EYE COLORS IN PHOTOSHOP CC 2020

In this tutorial, I show you how easy it is to turn someone's eyes into a rainbow of colors with Photoshop. To create the effect, all we need is a basic shape tool and one of Photoshop's rainbow-colored gradients. The only problem is that in Photoshop CC 2020, Adobe made changes to the gradients, and the gradient we need is not available by default. So the first thing you'll learn is where to find the gradient and how to load it into Photoshop.

From there, I'll show you how to create the main rainbow eye color effect, and how easy it is to create different variations, including how to reverse the gradient colors, how to rotate the colors around the eyes, and even how to choose different gradient styles. And best of all, we'll create the entire effect without making a single permanent change to the original image.

Here's what the main rainbow eye color effect will look like. As I mentioned, we'll be learning how to create different variations as well:

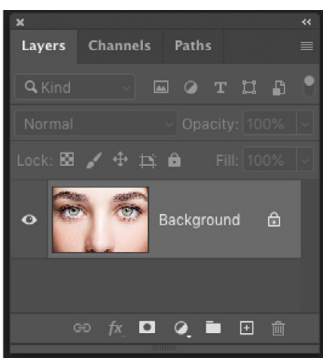For best results with this tutorial, you'll want to be using Photoshop CC 2020 or later. Let's get started!

The final rainbow
eye color effect.

Step 1: Open your photo

Start by opening your image into Photoshop. I'll use this image from Adobe Stock:

The original photo.
Credit: Adobe Stock.

In the **Layers panel**, the image appears on the Background layer:

Photoshop's Layers panel.

Step 2: Load Photoshop's legacy gradients

To give the eyes their rainbow colors, we'll use a gradient known as Spectrum. And in previous versions of Photoshop, Spectrum was easy to find because it was one of the default gradients. But Photoshop CC 2020 replaces the original default gradients with new ones, and the originals have all been moved into a *Legacy Gradients* set. And to use this set, we first need to load it into Photoshop.
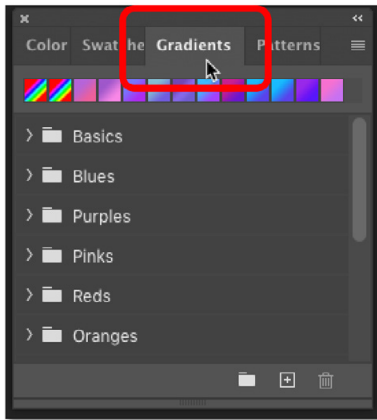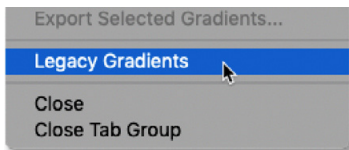
To load the set, open the **Gradients panel**. You'll find it in the same panel group as the Color, Swatches and Patterns panels:

The new Gradients panel
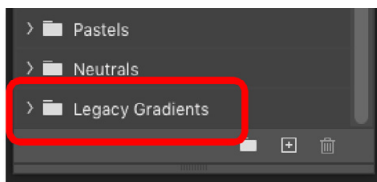in Photoshop CC 2020.
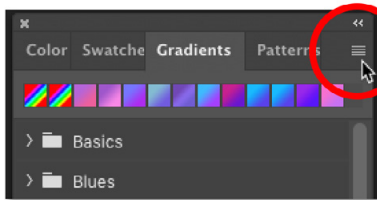
Then click on the panel's **menu icon** in the upper right:

Opening the Gradients
panel menu.

And choose **Legacy Gradients** from the menu:

Loading the legacy
gradients.

Scroll down through the folders in the Gradients panel and you'll find the new Legacy Gradients folder at the bottom. We won't be selecting our gradient from the Gradients panel, but we now have it loaded into Photoshop and ready for when we need it:

The Legacy Gradients
folder appears.

Step 3: Select the Ellipse Tool

Next, select the **Ellipse Tool** from the toolbar. The Ellipse Tool is one of Photoshop's basic shape tools, and we can create most of the rainbow eye color effect using this one tool.
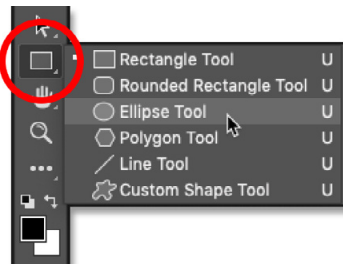
By default, the Ellipse Tool is hiding behind the **Rectangle Tool**. So to select it, **right-click** (Win) / **Control-click** (Mac) on the Rectangle Tool's icon and then choose the Ellipse Tool from the fly-out menu:

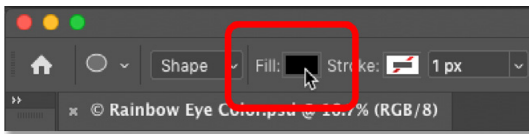Selecting the Ellipse Tool from behind the Rectangle Tool.

Step 4: Set the Tool Mode to "Shape"
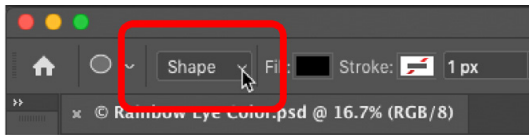
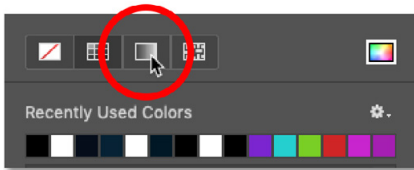In the Options Bar, make sure the **Tool Mode** is set to **Shape**, not Path or Pixels:

Setting the Tool Mode to Shape.

Step 5: Change the Fill Type to "Gradient"

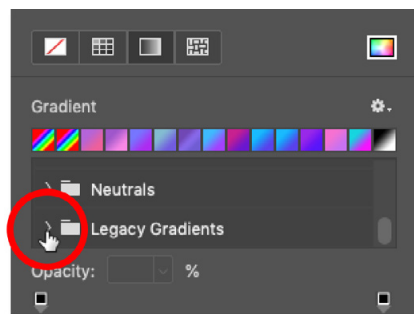Since we'll need to fill our shape with a gradient, click on the **Fill color swatch** in the Options Bar:

Clicking the Fill color swatch.

And then in the Fill Type dialog box, choose **Gradient** from the choices along the top:
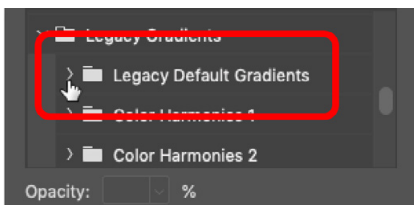
Selecting the
Gradient fill type.
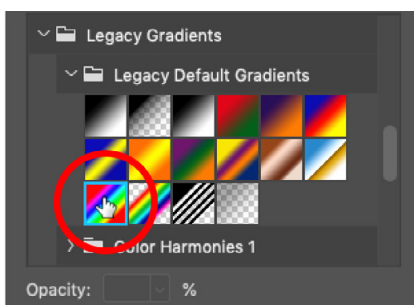
Step 6: Choose the Spectrum gradient

Still in the same dialog box, scroll down through the gradient folders until you reach the **Legacy Gradients** folder at the bottom (the one we loaded in earlier), and click on the arrow to the left of the folder icon to twirl it open:

Opening the Legacy
Gradients folder.

Inside the Legacy Gradients folder, twirl open the **Legacy Defaults Gradients** folder:

Opening the Legacy Default
Gradients folder.

And then inside that folder, select the **Spectrum** gradient by clicking on its thumbnail:

Choosing the
Spectrum gradient.

Step 7: Change the Gradient Style to "Angle"

With the Spectrum gradient selected, change the **Gradient Style** option from Linear (the default setting) to **Angle**. And when you're done, press **Enter** (Win) / **Return** (Mac) on your keyboard to close the dialog box:

Changing the Gradient
Style to Angle.
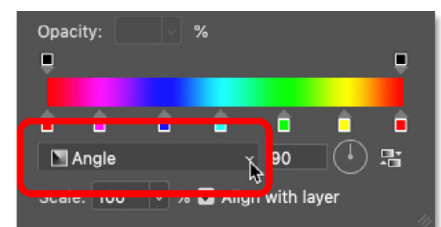
Step 8: Draw an elliptical shape over the first eye

We're ready to draw our first shape. Choose one of the eyes (doesn't matter which one) and position your mouse cursor directly in the center of the pupil (the dark area in the middle). We're going to draw the shape out from this point.


I'll start with the left eye. Click in the center of the eye to set the starting point for the shape:

Positioning the mouse cursor
in the center of the eye.

Then with your mouse button still held down, begin dragging away from that point in any direction. An outline of the shape will appear.

How to draw a perfect circle

Once you've started dragging, press and hold the **Shift** key on your keyboard and the **Alt** (Win) / **Option** (Mac) key. The Shift key locks the shape into a perfect circle, while the Alt (Win) / Option (Mac) key tells Photoshop to draw the shape from its center (the spot where you first clicked).
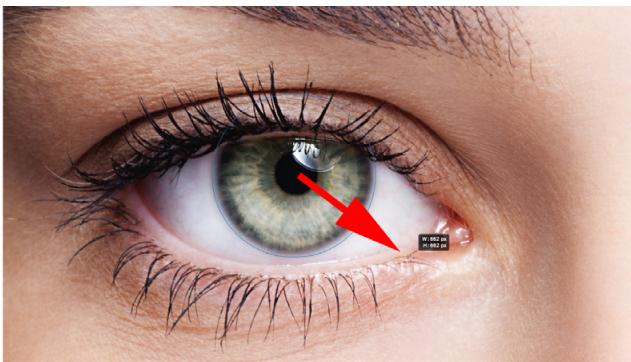
Continue dragging until the outline of the shape surrounds the entire iris (the colored area). Don't worry if some of the shape extends into the white of the eye or into the eyelids. We'll clean up those areas in a moment. For now, just make sure that the entire iris fits within the outline of the shape:

Drawing the shape out from the center
until the outline surrounds the entire iris.

How to reposition the shape as you draw it

If you need to reposition the shape as you're drawing it, keep the Shift key and the Alt / Option key held down and add the **spacebar**. Drag your mouse to move the shape and center it over the eye, and then release the spacebar to continue drawing.


When you're done, release your mouse button, and then release your Shift and Alt (Win) / Option (Mac) keys. Make sure you release the keys *after* you've released your mouse button or you'll lose the effect that those keys were having.

Photoshop draws the shape and fills it with our Spectrum gradient:

The shape covers the area
we want to colorize.

Step 9: Change the shape layer's blend mode to "Color"

Changing the blend mode of the shape to "Color".
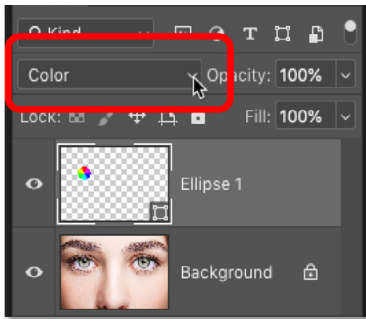
In the Layers panel, the shape appears on its own shape layer above the image. To blend the colors of the gradient in with the eye, change the **Blend Mode** of the shape layer from Normal to **Color**:

The result after changing the shape's blend mode to "Color".

The Color blend mode colorizes the eye with the colors from the gradient. Don't worry if the outline is still visible around the shape. It will disappear as soon as we choose a different tool:
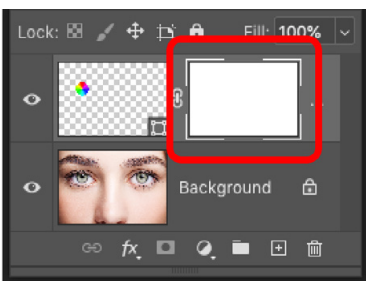
Step 10: Add a layer mask to the shape layer

To clear away the gradient from the white of the eye and the eyelids, we'll use a layer mask. With the Shape layer still selected, click the **Add Layer Mask** icon at the bottom of the Layers panel:
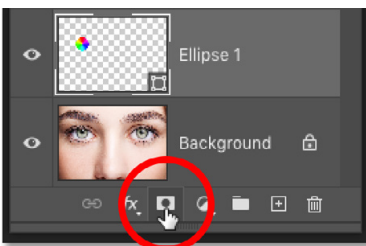
Clicking the Add Layer Mask icon.

A white-filled **layer mask thumbnail** appears on the shape layer. And notice the **highlight border** around the thumbnail. The border tells us that the layer mask, not the shape itself, is selected. This means that anything we do next will be done to the mask, not to the shape:

A layer mask thumbnail appears on the shape layer.

Step 11: Select the Brush Tool

We'll hide the unwanted areas of the gradient by painting over them with black on the layer mask. First select the **Brush Tool** from the toolbar:

Selecting the Brush Tool.

Step 12: Set the brush color to black

Photoshop uses the current **Foreground color** as the brush color, which means that to paint with black, we need to set our Foreground color to **black**. The current Foreground and Background colors appear in the two **color swatches** near the bottom of the toolbar. The Foreground color is the swatch in the upper left.

If your Foreground color is not set to black, press the letter **D** on your keyboard to quickly reset the Foreground and Background colors to their defaults. This sets the Foreground color to white and the Background color to black. Then press the letter **X** on your keyboard to swap the colors, making your Foreground color black:

The Foreground color (upper left) should be set to black.

Step 13: Paint around the iris

In the Options Bar, make sure the brush's **Blend Mode** is set to **Normal**, and that **Opacity** and **Flow** are both set to **100%**:
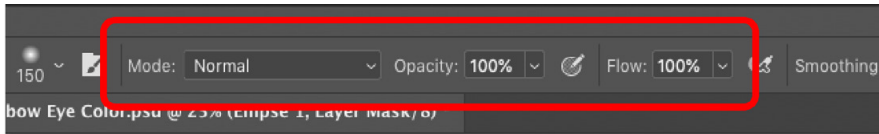
The Mode, Opacity and Flow options in the Options Bar.

Then simply paint around the outside of the iris to hide the unwanted colors from the gradient.

For best results, use a small soft-edge brush. To change your brush size from the keyboard, press the **left bracket key** (**[**) repeatedly to make the brush smaller or the **right bracket key** (**]**) to make it larger. Or to adjust the hardness of the brush, press and hold your **Shift** key while pressing the l**eft bracket key** to make the brush **softer** or the **right bracket key** to make the brush **harder**.

Here, I'm painting away the gradient that extends into the white areas of the eye. Since we're painting on a layer mask, we don't see our brush color as we paint. Instead, the gradient colors disappear in the areas we paint over:

Hiding the gradient in the white areas of the eye.

I'll also paint over the eyelid at the top to remove the gradient colors from that area:

Hiding the gradient
in the eyelids.

How to fix a mistake

If you make a mistake and paint away some of the color in the iris, press the letter **X** on your keyboard to swap your Foreground and Background colors. This will set your Foreground color to white. Paint over the area with white to restore the colors. Then press **X** to swap the colors again, setting your Foreground color back to black, and continue painting.

Finally, I'll paint inside the pupil in the center of the eye to remove the unwanted color from that area:

Hiding the gradient
in the pupil.
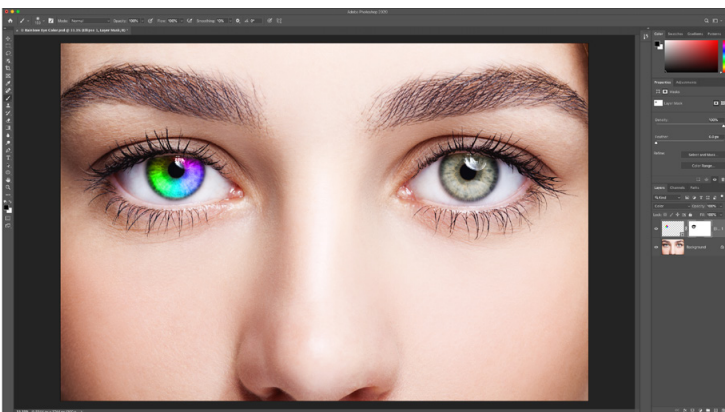
So far, so good. We now have our first eye colorized with our rainbow colors:

The rainbow eyes
effect so far.

Step 14: Reselect the Ellipse Tool

Let's quickly do the same thing with the other eye. First, reselect the **Ellipse Tool** from the toolbar:

Reselecting the
Ellipse Tool.

Step 15: Draw a shape over the second eye

Positioning the cursor
in the center.

All of the options we chose last time for the Ellipse Tool are still active, so there's no need to choose any of them again. All we need to do is position our mouse cursor in the center of the other eye and click to set the starting point for the gradient:

Then keep your mouse button held down and begin dragging away from that spot in any direction. Once you've started dragging, press and hold **Shift+Alt** (Win) / **Shift+Option** (Mac) on your keyboard to lock the shape into a perfect circle and draw it out from its center.

Drawing the second
shape around the iris.
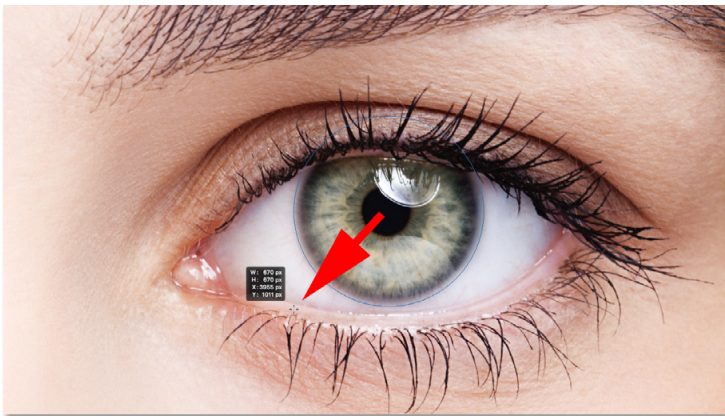
Continue dragging until the entire iris is surrounded by the outline of the shape:


The second shape
now covers the iris.

Release your mouse button, and *then* release your Shift key and your Alt (Win) / Option (Mac) key. Photoshop draws the second shape and fills it with the same Spectrum gradient:

Step 16: Change the shape's blend mode to "Color"

In the Layers panel, the second shape appears on its own shape layer. To blend the gradient colors in with the eye, change the **Blend Mode** of the layer from Normal to **Color**:

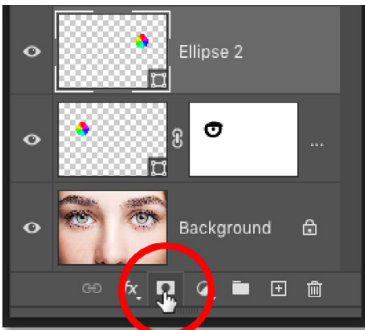Changing the second shape's
blend mode to "Color".
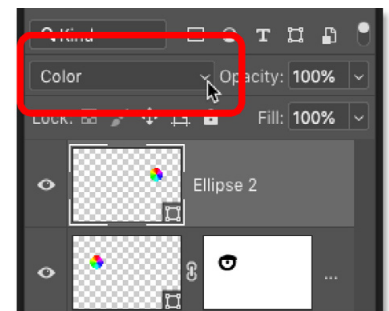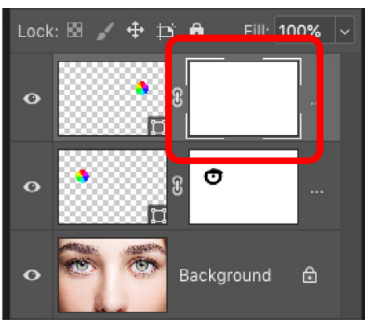
This colorizes the second eye:

The second eye is now
colorized, just like the first.

Step 17: Add a layer mask

All we need to do now is clean up the areas around the iris. Add a layer mask by clicking the **Add Layer Mask** icon at the bottom of the Layers panel:

Clicking the Layer
Mask icon.

A white-filled **layer mask thumbnail** appears on the shape layer. And once again, the **highlight border** around the thumbnail tells us that the mask itself is selected:

The second layer
mask is added.

Step 18: Select the Brush Tool
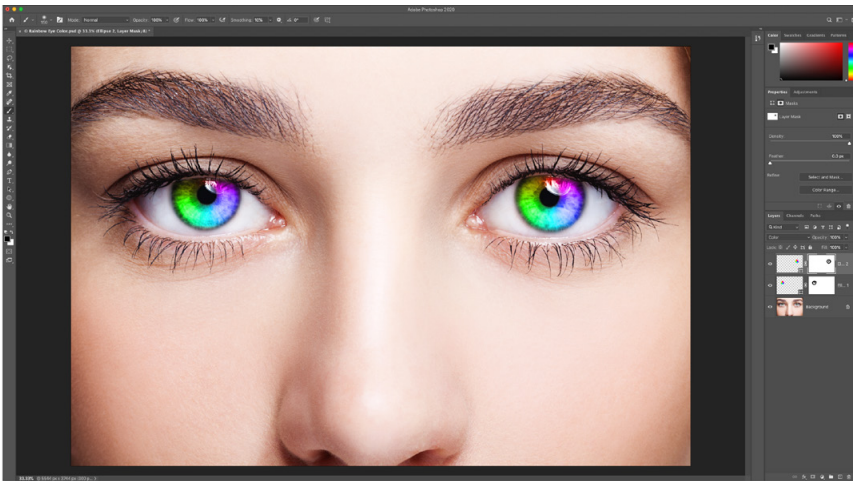
Select the **Brush Tool** from the toolbar:

Reselecting the
Brush Tool.

Step 19: Paint away the unwanted color

Then with the **Foreground color** still set to **black**, paint over the white parts of the eye, the eyelid and the pupil in the center to hide the gradient colors from those areas:

Cleaning up the areas
around the eye.

And with that, the main part of our effect is done! Both eyes have been colorized with our rainbow colors:

The result after colorizing and cleaning up the second eye.

Step 20: Lower the opacity of the shape layers (optional)

If you find that the colors are too bright, causing some of the detail in the eyes to be lost, you can reduce the intensity of the colors by lowering the opacity of the shape layers. And we can lower the opacity for both shape layers at the same time.
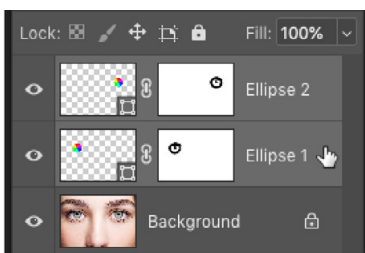
I currently have the top Shape layer ("Ellipse 2") selected in the Layers panel. So to select the other shape layer as well, I'll press and hold my **Shift** key and I'll click on the "Ellipse 1" layer. Both shape layers are now highlighted:

Selecting both shape layers at once.
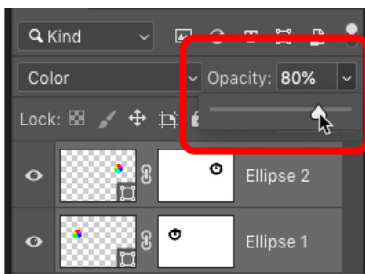
Then with both layers selected, I'll lower the **Opacity** value in the upper right of the Layers panel from 100% down to **80%**:

Lowering the opacity of the shape layers.

With the opacity lowered, the colors appear slightly less intense, and more of the original detail in the eyes is visible:

The result after lowering the opacity.

How to customize the rainbow eye color effect

So now that we've created the initial rainbow eye color effect, let's learn how to customize it and create different variations. And we can do that just by editing the gradient settings.
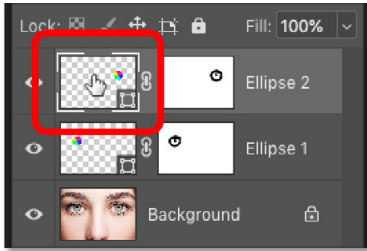
To edit the gradient settings for one of the eyes, double-click on its **shape thumbnail** in the Layers panel. I'll start with the eye on the right:
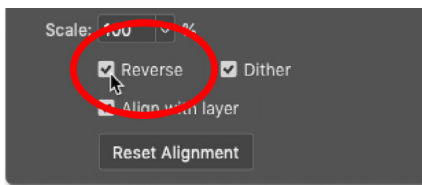
Double-clicking on the shape thumbnail for the right eye.
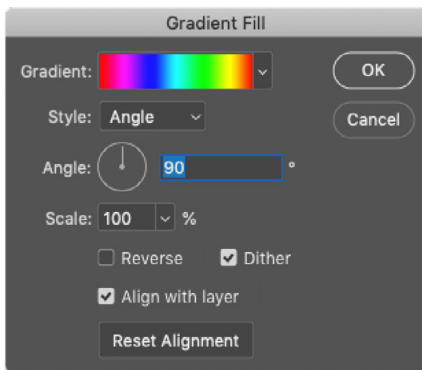
This opens the **Gradient Fill** dialog box with various options we can change:

The Gradient Fill dialog box.

Option 1: Reversing the direction of the gradient

One thing we can do is reverse the direction of the colors in the gradient. And we do that by selecting the **Reverse** option:

Selecting "Reverse" in the Gradient Fill dialog box.

Photoshop shows us a live preview of the effect so we can keep the Gradient Fill dialog box open as we experiment with the settings. But keep in mind that we're changing the effect for only one eye at a time. So to make the same change for the other eye as well, you'll need to double-click on its shape thumbnail in the Layers panel and use the same setting(s).

Here's what the effect looks like after reversing the colors in the right eye. The eyes now appear to mirror each other with their colors:

Creating a mirror effect by reversing the colors in one of the eyes.

Option 2: Changing the angle of the gradient
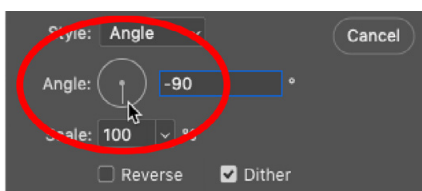
We can also rotate the colors around the eye using the Angle option. You can click inside the dial and drag it around to change the value, or you can enter a specific value. The default angle is 90°. At this angle, the color red is currently at the top of the eye. I'll change the angle to **-90°**:

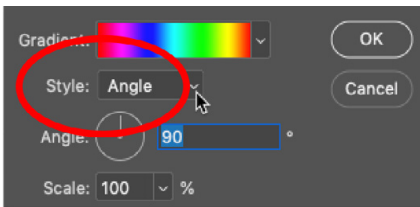Changing the angle of the gradient.

With the angle rotated, the red now appears at the bottom of the eye on the right:

The effect after rotating
the angle of the gradient
in the right eye.

Option 3: Changing the gradient style

The other option we might want to change is **Style**. It's currently set to **Angle** because that's what we chose back when we were drawing the shapes:

The Style option in the
Gradient Fill dialog box.
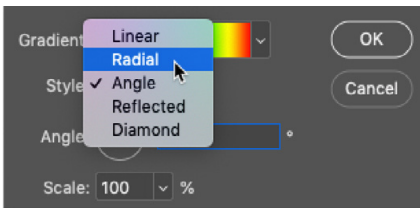
But if you click on the box, you'll see other styles we can choose from. I'll select one of the more interesting ones, like **Radial**:

Changing the style of the
gradient to "Radial".

And here's what the Radial style looks like. Again, I'm only affecting the eye on the right at the moment:
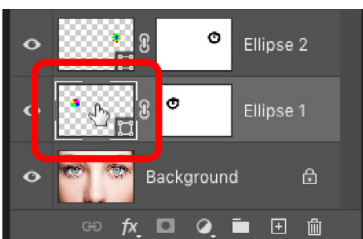
The effect after changing
the style of the right
eye to Radial.
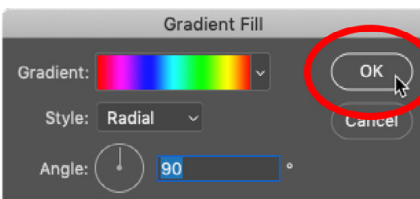
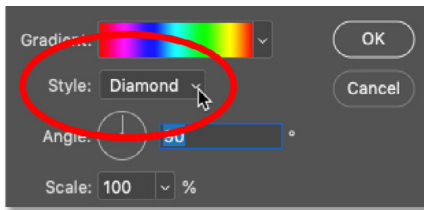When you're done with your changes, click OK to close the Gradient Fill dialog box:

Closing the dialog box.

Changing the gradient settings for the other eye

To edit the gradient settings for the other eye, double-click on its **shape thumbnail** in the Layers panel:

Double-clicking the Shape
thumbnail for the other eye.

And then in the Gradient Fill dialog box, make any changes you need. Just for fun, I'll set the **Style** of the gradient for the left eye to something different, like **Diamond**:

Changing the Style
to "Diamond".

Then I'll click OK to accept my changes and close out of the Gradient Fill dialog box.

And now, both eyes have their own unique settings:

Each eye is now set to a different variation of the effect.

And there we have it! That's how to add rainbow eye colors to your subject with Photoshop!

For more Photoshop tutorials, and to download the latest PDFs, visit us online at **www.photoshopessentials.com**!