

Digital Signals and Image Processing

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Contents

Contents	1
1 Digital Image Processing	3
1.1 Elements of Visual Perception	3
1.1.1 Image Formation	3
1.1.2 Brightness Adaptation and Discrimination	3
1.2 Image Generation Components	3
1.2.1 Electromagnetic Spectrum	3
1.2.2 Image Sensors	4
1.2.3 Human Perception	4
1.3 Image Sensing and Acquisition	4
1.3.1 Image Sensing Modalities	4
1.3.2 Image Formation	5
1.4 Image Sampling and Quantisation	5
1.4.1 Dynamic Range and Contrast	6
1.4.2 Spatial and Intensity Resolution	6
1.4.3 Image Interpolation	6
1.5 Relationships Between Pixels	7
1.5.1 Neighbours of a Pixel	7
1.5.2 Adjacency and Connectivity	7
1.5.3 Connectivity	8
1.6 Distance Metrics	8
1.7 Mathematical Operations	9
1.7.1 Element-wise Operations	9
1.7.2 Linear Operations	9
1.7.3 Spatial Operations	9
2 Intensity Transformations & Spatial Filters	9
2.1 Intensity Transformations	9
2.1.1 Identity Transformation	9
2.1.2 Negative Transformation	10
2.1.3 Logarithmic Transformation	10
2.1.4 Power-Law (Gamma) Transformation	10
2.1.5 Piecewise-Linear Transformation	10
2.2 Histogram Processing	11
2.2.1 Histogram Equalisation	11
2.2.2 Histogram Matching	11
2.3 Spatial Filtering	11
2.3.1 Correlation	12
2.3.2 Convolution	12
2.3.3 Padding	12
2.3.4 Averaging Filters	12
2.3.5 Smoothing Linear Filters	13
2.3.6 Order-Statistic Non-Linear Filters	13

2.3.7 Sharpening Filters 13

1 Digital Image Processing

Digital image processing is the processing of images on a digital system using algorithms. A digital image is a binary representation of visual data that is composed of a finite number of elements, each with a particular location and value.

Image processing methods can be divided into two categories:

- Methods where the input and output are images.
- Methods where the input is an image and the output is some information extracted from the image.

1.1 Elements of Visual Perception

The human visual system has influenced and contributed to many advancements in image processing. The human eye has light receptors called rods and cones. Humans have around 6 to 7 million cones in each eye that are highly sensitive to colour and fine details. On the other hand, there are a total of 75 to 150 million rods across both eyes, that are sensitive to low levels of illumination.

1.1.1 Image Formation

Photo camera lenses are fixed in focal length and they focus at various distances by varying the distance between the lens and imaging plane (film/chip). The human eye works in the opposite way, where the distance between the lens and the imaging plane (retina) is fixed, but the focal length for focus is varied by changing the shape of the lens.

1.1.2 Brightness Adaptation and Discrimination

The human eye is capable of discriminating between a wide range of intensity levels. This range of light intensity levels is on the order of 10^{10} .

1.2 Image Generation Components

There are three components to image generation:

- **Object:** The object being imaged.
- **Energy Source:** The source of energy that illuminates the object.
- **Sensor:** The sensor that detects the energy reflected from the object.

Depending on the properties of the energy source and object material and geometry, the emitted energy can be reflected, transmitted, or absorbed.

1.2.1 Electromagnetic Spectrum

The main source of energy for imaging is electromagnetic (EM) radiation. EM radiation consists of propagating sinusoidal waves characterised by their oscillating frequency f . Using Planck's equation, the energy of a photon can be calculated as

$$E = hf$$

where $h = 6.626\,070\,15 \times 10^{-34}$ J s is Planck's constant and f is the frequency of the wave. Given the speed of light $c = 299\,792\,458$ m s⁻¹, we can also calculate the energy using

$$E = \frac{hc}{\lambda}.$$

The EM spectrum is divided into regions based on the frequency of the waves. The visible light spectrum is a small part of the EM spectrum that is visible to the human eye. The visible light spectrum ranges from 380 nm to 700 nm. Earth's atmosphere also blocks certain parts of the EM spectrum, such as short wavelength UV and X-rays.

Perceived colour (hue) is related to the wavelength of light, while the **brightness** is related to the intensity of the radiation.

1.2.2 Image Sensors

Image sensors capture a specific range of the EM spectrum, for example:

- RGB sensors capture the visible light spectrum.
- Infrared sensors capture the infrared spectrum.
- X-ray sensors capture the X-ray spectrum.
- Ultraviolet sensors capture the ultraviolet spectrum.

1.2.3 Human Perception

Human perception is context-dependent. Perceived intensity around regions of discontinuous intensity appear to undershoot and overshoot around the boundary (see Mach band effect). The eye can also fill in non-existing information and wrongly perceive geometrical properties of objects. To produce a powerful vision system, we need both a powerful image sensor and image processor to extract useful information from an image.

1.3 Image Sensing and Acquisition

Image sensing is the process of transforming illuminated energy into a digital image. The process involves the following steps:

1. Convert the illuminated energy into an electrical signal.
2. Digitize the electrical signal to obtain a digital image.

1.3.1 Image Sensing Modalities

Image sensing is done using three principal modalities:

- **Single Sensing Element:** A single sensor that captures the energy. For example, a photodiode. To generate 2D images, the sensor must be appropriately displaced in the x and y directions.

- **Line Sensor:** A sensor that captures energy along a line. To generate 2D images, the sensor must be displaced in the direction perpendicular to the line.
- **Array Sensor:** A sensor that captures energy in a 2D array. The sensor is divided into rows and columns, with each element capturing energy at a specific location. A typical arrangement is the **CCD** (Charge Coupled Device) sensor.

1.3.2 Image Formation

Let us denote the intensity of a monochrome image by the 2-dimensional function

$$\ell = f(x, y)$$

where x and y represent the spatial coordinates captured by the sensor, and f is a scalar function of the intensity of the energy radiated by a physical source. As such, this function is non-negative and finite:

$$0 \leq \ell \leq \infty.$$

f is characterised by two components:

- **Illumination:** The amount of source illumination incident on the scene $i(x, y)$. Here $0 \leq i(x, y) < \infty$.
- **Reflectance:** The amount of illumination reflected by the objects on the scene $r(x, y)$. Here $0 \leq r(x, y) \leq 1$.

Therefore, we can describe the image formation process as

$$f(x, y) = i(x, y) r(x, y),$$

where $r = 0$ implies total absorption, while $r = 1$ implies total reflectance. For monochrome images, we can define the minimum and maximum intensity values as L_{\min} and L_{\max} , respectively, where

$$L_{\min} \leq \ell \leq L_{\max}, \quad L_{\min} = i_{\min} r_{\min}, \quad L_{\max} = i_{\max} r_{\max}.$$

The range of intensity values $[L_{\min}, L_{\max}]$ is called the **intensity/gray scale**. Commonly, this interval is transformed to the interval $[0, L - 1]$, where L is the number of intensity levels.

1.4 Image Sampling and Quantisation

Image sampling is the process of sampling discrete points in a continuous image. Regardless of the sensor arrangement, the image is sampled at a fixed rate in the x and y directions and the resulting points are called **pixels**. These pixels are stored in an array that is $M \times N$ in size, where M is the number of rows and N is the number of columns, arranged as shown below:

$$\mathbf{X} = \begin{bmatrix} x_{00} & x_{01} & \cdots & x_{0,N-1} \\ x_{10} & x_{11} & \cdots & x_{1,N-1} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ x_{M-1,0} & x_{M-1,1} & \cdots & x_{M-1,N-1} \end{bmatrix}$$

Image quantisation is the process of converting the continuous intensity values of an image to discrete values. The number of intensity levels L is determined by the number of bits used to represent each pixel. The number of intensity levels is given by

$$L = 2^k,$$

where k is the bit depth. Thus the quantised intensity values will range from $[0, L - 1]$. The **quality** of an image is determined by the number of discrete intensity levels used in both sampling and quantisation.

1.4.1 Dynamic Range and Contrast

The **dynamic range** of an image is the ratio of the maximum intensity value to the minimum intensity value:

$$\text{Dynamic Range} = \frac{L_{\max}}{L_{\min}} = \frac{i_{\max}r_{\max}}{i_{\min}r_{\min}}.$$

The upper limit is determined by the sensor's saturation level, while the lower limit is determined by the sensor's noise level. The **contrast** of an image is the difference in intensity between the brightest and darkest regions of the image:

$$\text{Contrast} = L_{\max} - L_{\min} = i_{\max}r_{\max} - i_{\min}r_{\min}.$$

- A **high** dynamic range implies a large difference between the brightest and darkest regions of the image, and therefore high contrast.
- A **low** dynamic range implies a small difference between the brightest and darkest regions of the image, and therefore low contrast.

1.4.2 Spatial and Intensity Resolution

The **spatial resolution** of an image is a measure of the smallest discernible detail in an image, measured as the number of pixels per unit area (dots per inch). In some images, sampling an image at a low rate can result in **aliasing**, where high-frequency components are incorrectly represented as low-frequency components (see the Moiré pattern).

The **intensity resolution** of an image is the smallest discernible change in intensity level, which is related to the number of intensity levels used to represent the image, for example, 8-bit and 10-bit images. Choosing a low number of intensity levels can result in quantisation noise, where intensity levels are incorrectly represented.

1.4.3 Image Interpolation

Image interpolation is the process of estimating the intensity values of pixels between the sampled points. Interpolation is used to increase and decrease the resolution of an image for resampling and resizing. Common interpolation methods include:

- **Nearest Neighbour:** The intensity value of the nearest pixel is used to estimate the intensity value of the pixel.

- **Bilinear:** The intensity value of the nearest four pixels is used to estimate the intensity value of the pixel.
- **Bicubic:** The intensity value of the nearest sixteen pixels is used to estimate the intensity value of the pixel.

1.5 Relationships Between Pixels

The following sections will define some common sets that are used to describe relationships between pixels in an image.

1.5.1 Neighbours of a Pixel

The **neighbours** of a pixel $\mathbf{p} = (x, y)$ are the pixels that are adjacent to \mathbf{p} .

- The **4-neighbours** of \mathbf{p} are defined as the pixels that are adjacent to \mathbf{p} in the **cardinal** directions:

$$\mathbf{N}_4(\mathbf{p}) = \{(x, y-1), (x-1, y), (x+1, y), (x, y+1)\},$$

- The **diagonal-neighbours** of \mathbf{p} are defined as the pixels that are adjacent to \mathbf{p} in the **diagonal** directions:

$$\mathbf{N}_D(\mathbf{p}) = \{(x-1, y-1), (x+1, y-1), (x-1, y+1), (x+1, y+1)\},$$

- The **8-neighbours** of \mathbf{p} are defined as the pixels that are adjacent to \mathbf{p} in both the **cardinal** and **diagonal** directions:

$$\mathbf{N}_8(\mathbf{p}) = \mathbf{N}_4(\mathbf{p}) \cup \mathbf{N}_D(\mathbf{p}).$$

1.5.2 Adjacency and Connectivity

Two pixels \mathbf{p} and \mathbf{q} are **adjacent** if they are neighbours and their intensity values are similar or belong to the same set of values V based on a threshold. This can occur in one of three ways:

- **4-Adjacency** when $\mathbf{q} \in \mathbf{N}_4(\mathbf{p})$.
- **8-Adjacency** when $\mathbf{q} \in \mathbf{N}_8(\mathbf{p})$.
- **M-Adjacency** when $\mathbf{q} \in \mathbf{N}_4(\mathbf{p})$ or $\mathbf{q} \in \mathbf{N}_D(\mathbf{p})$ and $\mathbf{N}_4(\mathbf{p}) \cap \mathbf{N}_4(\mathbf{q}) = \emptyset$. This statement avoids double-counting an adjacency when \mathbf{q} is a diagonal neighbour of \mathbf{p} while another cardinal neighbour exists between \mathbf{p} and \mathbf{q} . Consider the binary example with $\mathbf{p}, \mathbf{q}, \mathbf{r} \in V = \{1\}$:

$$\begin{bmatrix} 0 & \mathbf{r} & \mathbf{q} \\ 0 & \mathbf{p} & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix}.$$

Here we do not consider \mathbf{p} and \mathbf{q} to be M-adjacent, as \mathbf{p} and \mathbf{q} are already adjacent through \mathbf{r} .

A **path** (or curve) between two pixels \mathbf{p} and \mathbf{q} is a sequence of $n+1$ pixels $(\mathbf{p}_0, \mathbf{p}_1, \dots, \mathbf{p}_n)$ such that $\mathbf{p}_0 = \mathbf{p}$ and $\mathbf{p}_n = \mathbf{q}$, where \mathbf{p}_i is adjacent to \mathbf{p}_{i+1} for $i = 0, 1, 2, \dots, n-1$. This path is said to have length n , and is *closed* if $\mathbf{p}_0 = \mathbf{p}_n$.

1.5.3 Connectivity

Consider a subset of pixels in an image S with $\mathbf{p}, \mathbf{q} \in S$.

- \mathbf{p} and \mathbf{q} are **connected** if there exists a path between \mathbf{p} and \mathbf{q} such that all pixels in the path are in S .
- The set of pixels connected to \mathbf{p} in S form a **connected component**.
- If S only consists of *one* connected component, then S is said to be a **connected set** and is called a **region** R .

Two regions R_1 and R_2 are adjacent if their union forms a connected set, i.e., another region. Regions that are not adjacent are said to be **disjoint**.

1.6 Distance Metrics

The **distance** between two pixels \mathbf{p} and \mathbf{q} can be measured using a variety of metrics. The most common metrics are:

- **Euclidean distance:**

$$d(\mathbf{p}, \mathbf{q}) = \sqrt{(x_p - x_q)^2 + (y_p - y_q)^2}.$$

- **Manhattan (D4) distance** (or city-block distance):

$$d_4(\mathbf{p}, \mathbf{q}) = |x_p - x_q| + |y_p - y_q|.$$

- **Chessboard (D8) distance** (or maximum distance):

$$d_8(\mathbf{p}, \mathbf{q}) = \max(|x_p - x_q|, |y_p - y_q|).$$

In general, any metric d that satisfies the following properties is a **distance metric**:

- The distance from a point to itself is zero:

$$d(\mathbf{p}, \mathbf{p}) = 0.$$

- **Positivity:** The distance between two distinct points is always positive:

$$d(\mathbf{p}, \mathbf{q}) > 0 : \mathbf{p} \neq \mathbf{q}.$$

- **Symmetry:** The distance between two points is always the same regardless of ordering:

$$d(\mathbf{p}, \mathbf{q}) = d(\mathbf{q}, \mathbf{p}).$$

- The Triangle Inequality is satisfied:

$$d(\mathbf{p}, \mathbf{q}) \leq d(\mathbf{p}, \mathbf{r}) + d(\mathbf{r}, \mathbf{q}).$$

for all $\mathbf{p}, \mathbf{q}, \mathbf{r}$ in this metric space.

1.7 Mathematical Operations

1.7.1 Element-wise Operations

Given two images \mathbf{X} and \mathbf{Y} of equal dimensions, an element-wise operation is an operation that is applied to each pixel in the image. Suppose we wish to apply the binary operation \otimes on \mathbf{X} and \mathbf{Y} . The resulting image \mathbf{Z} is given by

$$\mathbf{Z} = \mathbf{X} \otimes \mathbf{Y} = \begin{bmatrix} x_{00} \otimes y_{00} & x_{01} \otimes y_{01} & \cdots & x_{0,N-1} \otimes y_{0,N-1} \\ x_{10} \otimes y_{10} & x_{11} \otimes y_{11} & \cdots & x_{1,N-1} \otimes y_{1,N-1} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ x_{M-1,0} \otimes y_{M-1,0} & x_{M-1,1} \otimes y_{M-1,1} & \cdots & x_{M-1,N-1} \otimes y_{M-1,N-1} \end{bmatrix}$$

Here the operator \otimes can represent any binary operation, such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division.

1.7.2 Linear Operations

The operator H is a linear operation if it satisfies the following property:

$$H[a\mathbf{X} + b\mathbf{Y}] = aH[\mathbf{X}] + bH[\mathbf{Y}],$$

for images \mathbf{X} and \mathbf{Y} , where a and b are constants.

1.7.3 Spatial Operations

The operator T is a spatial operation if the output pixel value is determined by the values of pixels in the neighbourhood of any input pixel. T can be categorised as one of three types of spatial operations:

- **Pointwise:** The output pixel value is determined by the value of the input pixel only.
- **Neighbourhood:** The output pixel value is determined by the value of the input pixel and any neighbouring pixels.
- **Global:** The output pixel value is determined by the value of pixels in the entire image.
- **Geometric:** The output pixel value is determined by the spatial location of the pixel.

2 Intensity Transformations & Spatial Filters

2.1 Intensity Transformations

An intensity transform aims to modify the contrast of an image by changing the range of intensity values in that image. The following sections will define some common intensity transformations. In the following sections let r be the input intensity and s be the output intensity of an image.

2.1.1 Identity Transformation

The identity transformation is the simplest intensity transformation which does not alter an image. It is defined as

$$s = T(r) = r.$$

2.1.2 Negative Transformation

The image negation transformation is used to invert the intensity values of an image. It is defined as

$$s = T(r) = (L - 1) - r,$$

where L is the number of intensity levels in the image.

2.1.3 Logarithmic Transformation

The logarithmic transformation is used to enhance darker regions of an image by compressing brighter regions. It is defined as

$$s = T(r) = c \log(1 + r),$$

where c is a constant that scales the intensity values of the image.

2.1.4 Power-Law (Gamma) Transformation

The power-law transformation is used to correct the gamma of an image, either by enhancing or reducing dark or bright regions. It can be thought of as a generalisation of the logarithmic transformation. It is defined as

$$s = T(r) = cr^\gamma,$$

where c is a constant that scales the intensity values of the image and γ is the gamma value.

- When $\gamma < 1$, the transformation enhances the darker regions of the image, while compressing the brighter regions.
- When $\gamma > 1$, the transformation enhances the brighter regions of the image, while compressing the darker regions.

2.1.5 Piecewise-Linear Transformation

Piecewise-linear transformations are used to enhance the contrast of specific regions of an image. Some common piecewise-linear transformations include:

- **Contrast Stretching:** Enhances the contrast of an image by stretching the intensity values to the full range of intensity levels.
- **Intensity Level Slicing:** Enhances the contrast of specific regions of an image by setting the intensity values of other regions to zero or by leaving them unchanged.
- **Bit-Plane Slicing:** Highlights the contribution made to image appearance by specific bits in the image.

2.2 Histogram Processing

Histograms are used to visualise the distribution of intensity values in an image. Given an image $\mathbf{X} \in [0, L-1]^{M \times N}$, the histogram $h_{\mathbf{X}}(k)$ is defined as

$$h_{\mathbf{X}}(k) = n_k,$$

where n_k is the number of pixels in the image with intensity value k . If we normalise these values, we find the probability of obtaining a pixel with intensity value k :

$$p_{\mathbf{X}}(k) = \frac{n_k}{MN}.$$

It follows that

$$\sum_{k=0}^{L-1} p_{\mathbf{X}}(k) = 1.$$

2.2.1 Histogram Equalisation

Histogram equalisation is a method used to spread the most frequent intensity values in an image to the full range of intensity levels, thereby achieving a more uniform distribution of intensity values. To do this, we will use the following transformation that maps the cumulative distribution function of an input image \mathbf{X} to the cumulative distribution function of a uniform distribution:

$$s = T(r) = (L-1) \sum_{j=0}^r p_{\mathbf{X}}(j) = \frac{L-1}{MN} \sum_{j=0}^r n_j.$$

2.2.2 Histogram Matching

In some cases, we wish to match the histogram of \mathbf{X} to the histogram of another image \mathbf{Y} . To do so, consider the histogram equalisation of \mathbf{Y} with intensity values z :

$$s = G(z) = (L-1) \sum_{j=0}^z p_{\mathbf{Y}}(j) = \frac{L-1}{MN} \sum_{j=0}^z n_j.$$

Thus we have the mapping:

$$T : r \mapsto s \quad \text{and} \quad G : z \mapsto s.$$

As both T and G map to the same equalised space, we can define the transformation $z = H(r)$ that maps the histogram of \mathbf{X} to the histogram of \mathbf{Y} as

$$z = H(r) = G^{-1}(T(r)) = G^{-1}(s).$$

2.3 Spatial Filtering

Spatial filtering is the process of creating a new image by applying a mask (or kernel, template or window) to each pixel in an image. This new pixel value is determined by the intensity values of the pixels in the neighbourhood of the original pixel. The mask is defined as a $m \times n$ matrix \mathbf{W} with elements w_{ij} that represent the weights of the pixels in the neighbourhood of the pixel being processed. For convenience, m and n are typically odd integers.

The output pixel value is given by the weighted sum of the intensity values of the pixels in the neighbourhood of the pixel. This can be done using one of two operations:

- **Correlation:** The mask is shifted across the image and the weighted sum is calculated at each position.
- **Convolution:** The mask is first flipped horizontally and vertically before it is shifted across the image.

2.3.1 Correlation

The (i, j) th element of the correlation of an image \mathbf{X} with a mask \mathbf{W} is defined as

$$y_{ij} = \mathbf{W} \star \mathbf{X} = \sum_{s=-a}^a \sum_{t=-b}^b w_{st} x_{i+s, j+t}$$

for $a = \frac{m-1}{2}$ and $b = \frac{n-1}{2}$.

2.3.2 Convolution

The (i, j) th element of the convolution of an image \mathbf{X} with a mask \mathbf{W} is defined as

$$y_{ij} = \mathbf{W} * \mathbf{X} = \sum_{s=-a}^a \sum_{t=-b}^b w_{st} x_{i-s, j-t}$$

for $a = \frac{m-1}{2}$ and $b = \frac{n-1}{2}$.

2.3.3 Padding

For masks larger than 1×1 , the indices w_{st} will exceed the bounds of the image \mathbf{X} . To prevent this, the image is often padded with an additional border of pixels. Common padding methods include:

- **Zero Padding:** The border is padded with zeros.
- **Boundary Replication Padding:** The border is padded with the intensity values of the nearest pixel.
- **Reflection Padding:** The border is padded with the intensity values of reflected pixels (one pixel away from the border).

2.3.4 Averaging Filters

Averaging filters are used to reduce noise in an image by averaging the intensity values of the pixels in the neighbourhood of the pixel being processed. An averaging filter considers a continuous function of two variables, such as the multivariable Gaussian function:

$$w_{st} = \frac{1}{2\pi\sigma^2} \exp\left(-\frac{s^2 + t^2}{2\sigma^2}\right).$$

2.3.5 Smoothing Linear Filters

Smoothing filters are used to reduce noise in an image by averaging the intensity values of the pixels in the neighbourhood of the pixel being processed. A general implementation for filtering an $M \times N$ image with a **weighted averaging filter** of size $m \times n$ is defined as:

$$y_{ij} = \frac{\sum_{s=-a}^a \sum_{t=-b}^b w_{st} x_{i+s, j+t}}{\sum_{s=-a}^a \sum_{t=-b}^b w_{st}},$$

2.3.6 Order-Statistic Non-Linear Filters

Order-statistic filters are used to reduce noise in an image by replacing the intensity value of a pixel with the median, maximum, or minimum intensity value of the pixels in the neighbourhood of the pixel being processed. Median filters have good noise-reduction capabilities with less smoothing and are used to remove impulse or salt-and-pepper noise.

2.3.7 Sharpening Filters

Sharpening filters are used to enhance edges and discontinuities in an image. One technique is to consider the Laplacian of the image $f(x, y)$:

$$\nabla^2 f = \frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial y^2}.$$

For discrete images, we will use the first-order forward difference approximation:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial f}{\partial x} &= f(x+1, y) - f(x, y) \\ \frac{\partial f}{\partial y} &= f(x, y+1) - f(x, y), \end{aligned}$$

and the second-order central difference approximation:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial x^2} &= f(x+1, y) - 2f(x, y) + f(x-1, y) \\ \frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial y^2} &= f(x, y+1) - 2f(x, y) + f(x, y-1). \end{aligned}$$

The Laplacian allows us to identify transitions in intensity values across an image by creating a filter with one of the following masks:

$$\mathbf{W} = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & -4 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \quad \text{or} \quad \mathbf{W} = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & -1 & 0 \\ -1 & 4 & -1 \\ 0 & -1 & 0 \end{bmatrix},$$

where the first mask will sharpen the image, while the second mask will sharpen the negative of the image. In general, we can sharpen edges by adding the Laplacian to the original image:

$$g(x, y) = f(x, y) + c \nabla^2 f(x, y),$$

where $c = -1$ will sharpen the image, while $c = 1$ sharpen the negative of the image.

2.3.8 Unsharp Masking and High-Boost Filtering

Unsharp masking is a sharpening technique that enhances edges and discontinuities in an image by subtracting a blurred version of the image from the original image. The process takes the following steps:

1. Blur the original image $f(x, y)$.
2. Subtract the blurred image from the original image to obtain the mask

$$g_{\text{mask}}(x, y) = f(x, y) - \bar{f}(x, y),$$

where $\bar{f}(x, y)$ is the blurred image.

3. Add the mask to the original image to obtain a sharpened image:

$$g(x, y) = f(x, y) + kg_{\text{mask}}(x, y), \quad k > 0.$$

where

- $k = 1$ corresponds to unsharp masking.
- $k > 1$ corresponds to high-boost filtering.