Using tools

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These notes were written to accompany tuition at Amersham Photographic Society, focusing on just the key facts needed to master each aspect of digital image manipulation with Photoshop Elements.

The set of tools available in Photoshop are fairly similar across the more sophisticated image editing programs. If necessary, the *Toolbox* is made visible by *Window>Tools*. Each tool is accessible by a keyboard shortcut, e.g. for the *Eraser* tool press 'E'. These keyboard shortcuts are shown below, in brackets after the tool name; it's worth remembering them to save time selecting the icons with the mouse. In some cases, multiple tools are grouped together (see page 3), in which case press *Shift* + the keyboard shortcut repeatedly until the required tool appears, e.g. press *Shift+L* for each of the *Lasso*, *Polygon Lasso* and *Magnetic Lasso* tools in turn. When each tool is selected, any options available for that tool are displayed at the top or (recent versions) bottom of the screen. These notes describe the tools of most use to photographers.

The final page of these notes shows the *Toolbox* in Photoshop Elements 12 (note the last-used option in a grouped box with multiple tool options will be retained 'on top' until changed).

Marquee tool (M), Lasso tools (L), Magic Wand tool (W), and Selection Brush tools (A): the uses of these tools are described in the separate notes '*Making selections*'.

Move tool (V): this tool enables the movement of *Selections* and whole *Layers*. The useful option in the *Move* tool, *Auto Select Layer* will select and move the appropriate layer under the cursor if the image is composed of multiple components on different layers. Movement is normally achieved by dragging the mouse in the selection. For fine control, press the *Arrow* keys for single pixel movements or combine with the *Shift* key for 10-pixel movements.

Crop tool (C): once selected, the mouse can be used to drag out a rectangle. Pressing the *Return* key or clicking the tick box then crops away everything outside that rectangle. This applies to all layers and also to any parts of the image that are temporarily outside the Canvas area. All cropped data are removed permanently. Options enable the crop rectangle to be rotated (e.g. to correct a slanting horizon) and distorted.

Brush tool (B), Pencil tool (N), and Paint Bucket tool (K): these produce areas of flat colour (the '*Foreground*' colour) which are rarely appropriate to photographs. However they can have application in producing masks and borders. Only the first few brush shapes in the brush palette are likely to be useful.

Clone Stamp tool (S): if there could be only one tool in Photoshop the *Clone Stamp* tool would be it! The size and softness of the tool is adjustable, and it functions by picking up an area of a photograph and overlaying it elsewhere. The ability to remove spots and blemishes and to tidy up, or even completely remove, unwanted areas of the image is unparalleled. Before using this tool you must indicate where the sample is to be taken from by pressing the *Alt* key and clicking there. It's worth practicing with the *Clone Stamp* tool. The secret is to keep sampling different areas around the target and to avoid replicating any obvious feature. The eye is very good at spotting a repeating pattern.

Healing Brushes (J): the *Healing* Brush and *Spot Healing Brushes* tools take the *Clone Stamp* tool even further by magically blending the 'brushed' area into the surrounding image, again after specifying the area to be used for the 'healing paint' with *Alt/click*. A recent addition to the *Spot Healing Brush* is the *Content Aware* option, which sometimes produces quite large and miraculous repairs.

Red Eye tool (Y): occasionally useful for removing the red-eye effect from on-camera flash. The same thing can be achieved with the *Sponge* Tool.

Impressionist Brush (B): enables the area under the brush to be replaced by a 'scrambled' version of the image. You're unlikely to find a compelling reason to use it. Beats me why Adobe includes such trivia and yet don't include something genuinely useful like a colour management system comprehensible to humans.

Eraser tools (E): often useful for creating difficult selections or erasing holes in layers. *Magic Eraser* and *Background Eraser* try to semi-automate the identification of an edge when making selections or removing backgrounds, usually with limited success.

Gradient tool (G): most useful for generating gradients for layer masks and occasionally useful for making rainbows!

Blur, Sharpen and Smudge tools (R): provide local blurring, sharpening and smudging (really!). Occasionally useful, e.g. to soften a visible edge.

Dodge, Burn and Sponge tools: familiar concepts to darkroom workers, these useful tools provide localised contrast and saturation control in small areas, but should not be overused. Use repeatedly at low settings for best control. The *Burn* tool is useful for creating shadows when combining images. Arguably, digital workers could learn from traditional photographers and spend more time on burning and dodging detailed areas of their images.

Type tool (T): enables the addition of text to an image which can be distorted and manipulated to create some interesting effects. Ensure the *Type Mask* options are not selected.

Eyedropper tool (I): mainly useful for picking up a colour from the image to use for a complementary border, text or graphic element. Picks up a *Foreground* colour by default. Hold the *Alt* key to sample a *Background* colour (which is the colour of the *Canvas* beneath the image).

Hand tool (H): when the image is zoomed-in, selecting this tool enables the mouse to be used to pan around the image. Double-click this tool for a handy shortcut to fill the screen with the image.

Zoom tool (Z): select and click to enlarge the area of the image centred on the mouse. Hold the *Alt* key down to zoom out. Double-click this tool for a handy 100% magnification of the image, where each image pixel is visible and maps to one pixel on the screen.

Foreground and Background colours: the two small squares at the bottom of the toolbar show the current foreground and background colours. These are the colours typically used by painting and drawing tools and some filters. The colour of each can be changed by double-clicking on it and using the *Colour Picker* that appears. Alternatively, use the *Eyedropper* tool. At the top right of the two boxes is a tiny symbol to swap the two colours (X). At the bottom left is another to return to the default black and white (D).

Undo and History: when working on an image there will inevitably be times when you will need to undo work and go back to an earlier state. To undo the last action press *Ctrl+Z*. To re-do the action press *Ctrl+Y*. The *Undo History* palette (*Window>Undo History*) shows a list of recent actions, with the latest at the bottom. Clicking on an earlier action restores the image to that state. As soon as a new action is performed, all states below this point are deleted.

You can set the number of history states in *Edit>Preferences>Performance*, but beware of increasing the number from the default of 50 as computer resources will be heavily impacted. Also note that if you have 50 history states and you make 50 small brush strokes, then no previous history remains. As a fall-back you might choose to save the image file with a new name every (say) half-an-hour.

N.b. A graphics tablet extends the range and controllability of some of the tools making, for example freehand selections much easier. The pressure sensitivity feature is particularly useful for blending edges or delicate painting effects with the *Selection Brush*.

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Toolbox overview

A **View tools**
- ▪ 🔍 Zoom (Z)
- ▪ ✋ Hand (H)

B **Select tools**
- ▪ Move (V)
- ▪ Rectangular Marquee (M)
  - Elliptical Marquee (M)
- ▪ Lasso (L)
  - Magnetic Lasso (L)
  - Polygonal Lasso (L)
- ▪ **Quick Selection (A)**
  - Magic Wand (W)
  - Selection Brush (A)

C **Enhance tools**
- ▪ Red Eye Removal (Y)
- ▪ **Spot Healing Brush (J)**
  - Healing Brush (J)
- ▪ **Smart Brush (F)**
  - Detail Smart Brush (F)
- ▪ **Clone Stamp (S)**
  - Pattern Stamp (S)
- ▪ **Blur (R)**
  - Sharpen (R)
  - Smudge (R)
- ▪ **Sponge (O)**
  - Dodge (O)
  - Burn (O)

D **Draw tools**
- ▪ **Brush (B)**
  - Impressionist Brush (B)
  - Color Replacement (B)
- ▪ **Eraser (E)**
  - Background Eraser (E)
  - Magic Eraser (E)
- ▪ **Paint Bucket (K)**
- ▪ **Eyedropper (I)**
- ▪ **Gradient (G)**
- ▪ **Pencil (N)**

E **Shape tools**
- ▪ **Rectangle (U)**
  - Rounded Rectangle (U)
  - Ellipse (U)
  - Polygon (U)
  - Line (U)
  - Custom Shape (U)

F **Type tools**
- ▪ **Horizontal Type (T)**
  - Vertical Type (T)
  - Horizontal Type Mask (T)
  - Vertical Type Mask (T)

G **Modify tools**
- ▪ **Crop (C)**
- ▪ **Cookie Cutter (Q)**
- ▪ **Straighten (P)**
- ▪ **Recompose (C+C)**

▪ Indicates default tool   * Keyboard shortcuts appear in parenthesis