Making Selections in Photoshop

Making selections in Photoshop is an art. There is no **right** way to make a selection. You have to look at each image and assess the best method in each circumstance. There is no substitute for practice. Most often you will use **more than one** tool and more than one technique to make a single selection.

Why make selections?

- To make particular tonal or other corrections to a part of the image: for example when you sharpen an image you should avoid sharpening the sky.
- To add or remove parts of an image: for example to change the background of a portrait or blur a background to emphasise a foreground.
- To make composite images

## *How to make a selection*

Manually

Look at the toolbox and identify the Marquee tools. The tiny arrow at the bottom right of the tool tells you that alternative tools are available within the group. Click on the arrow and the rest of the tools appear: All of the marquee tools work in the same way:
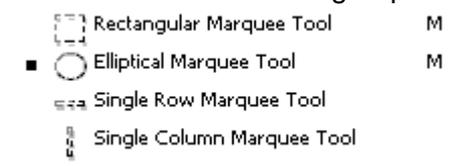
- make sure that an image layer is selected
- choose a marquee tool
- drag the tool in the image to select a region
- You can force the rectangle to be a square by holding down the SHIFT key. In the same way you can force the ellipse tool to be a circle.
- You can move the selection by choosing the Move tool and dragging **inside** the selection.

Another set of manual selection tools are the lasso tools. These are underneath the marquee tools in the toolbox.
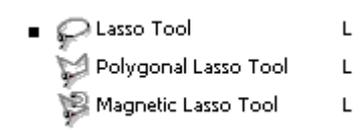
- the lasso too lets you draw free hand round objects. You close the area you want to select by double clicking.
- the polygonal lasso draws straight line segments around an object. You make a single click to place a point and double click to finish off the area. This tool is useful for selecting architectural features.
- the magnetic lasso snaps to edges of objects. It lets you easily select objects that have an obvious edge against the background. You drag the tool just like the ordinary lasso and double click to finish. There are additional parameters in the horizontal toolbar that let you control how the tool picks edges and how often to mark points around the edge.

Using Picture Content Information

Very frequently it is easier to use picture content to help make a selection rather than rely on your manual dexterity. You can use both colour and brightness information.

A crude colour selection tool is the magic wand. This selects parts of an image based on a colour in the image. You click the magic wand on the desired colour and the tool selects all areas which have the same colour. The tool has several modifiers:


- tolerance specifies how closely selected pixels must match the original pixel you clicked on – you can specify 0 –255 for this value.
- anti-alias specifies that additional pixels will be selected to help smooth the edges of a selection
- contiguous specifies that all pixels selected must adjoin one another. If this option is deselected then all pixels in the image will be considered for selection.
- sample all layers, when selected, takes into account all other layers.

A better content selection tools is available from a menu: Select/Color Range. This is a complex tool and you should be sure to explore it thoroughly.

The **Select** drop down lets you choose between Sampled Colors, Pre-defined colours, and also highlights, mid-tones and shadows.

The default is **Sampled colors** and this works in conjunction with the eyedropper tool and the **Fuzziness** slider. This tool is very similar to the magic wand but it has the big advantage that you get a preview of the areas that will be selected when you click on **OK**.
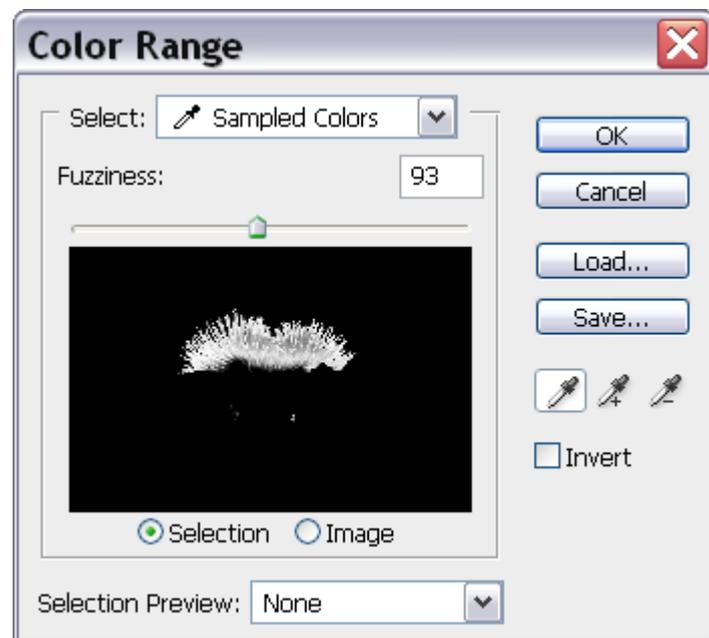
When you have made a selection you can add to it or subtract from it by choosing one of the alternative eyedroppers.

The **Load** and **Save** buttons let you save the parameters that make up your selection (the colour range). It does **not** save the selection.

Modifying a Selection

Major changes

Once you have made a selection, you will probably want to modify it. Selections are represented by the "marching ants". You can add to or subtract from selections using

the manual selection tools in conjunction with their modifiers. . From left to right the modifies are: **New selection**, **Add to selection**, **Subtract from**

Selection, **Select the intersection** (difference) of the selection. Most commonly you will use the **Add to selection** and the **Subtract from selection** modifiers.

It doesn't matter with which tool you made the original selection, you can use the manual selection tools to modify the original. For example if you used the magic wand and it selected some part of the image you didn't want selected, you can use the **manual lasso** with the **Subtract from selection** option to remove it.

Minor changes

As well as making overall changes to you selection you will probably want to pay particular attention to the edges of a selection. You can do this from the **Select/Modify** menu. Here there are several choices including **Expand**, **Contract** and **Feather.**

- **expand** lets you expand a selection border by a defined number of pixels that you can enter in a dialog box
- **contract** is the opposite of expand
- **feather** creates a transition between selected and non selected areas which basically fades the selection at the edge. It gives rise to ill defined edges if you are copying and pasting bits of an image, but it is very useful for creating the vignettes at the edges of images so much admired by judges.

Saving a selection

It's not uncommon to spend a considerable amount of time making a selection. You should make sure that you maximise this effort by saving your selections. Use the **Select/Save Selection** menu to do this. By doing so you will be able to return to an image at a later date and have that difficult selection at you fingertips through **Selection/Load Selection**.

Because Photoshop is so complicated you will learn new techniques over an extended period of time. As you learn new things it's very instructive to return to some of your older images and apply your new knowledge. Saving selections is a good way of speeding up your workflow.

Other Issues

The most important side issue is that you need to think laterally when making a selection. Very often it's easier to select the parts of an image that you **don't** want. You can use this to your advantage because there is a menu item **Select/Inverse**. This takes your selection and selects the unselected pixels instead. This is so useful that you should learn the keyboard shortcut for it: <SHIFT><CNTRL> I

The final issue is that making selections as described above is just the beginning. There is a whole range of selection techniques based on Masks. This is outside the scope of this tutorial.

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