How to make selections

While in the Editor in Adobe Photoshop Elements, you can select an entire image or isolated parts of an image for editing. To select the entire image, use the commands in the Select menu. For more precise selections, you can choose from several selection tools in the toolbox and tools subsets in the related Options panel (**Figure 1**).

When you make a selection, a border identifies which parts of the image are selected. You can refine a selection by adding to it, subtracting from it, expanding it, contracting it, or moving it. You can also hide the selection border to see the effects of your edits more clearly.

Selection tools

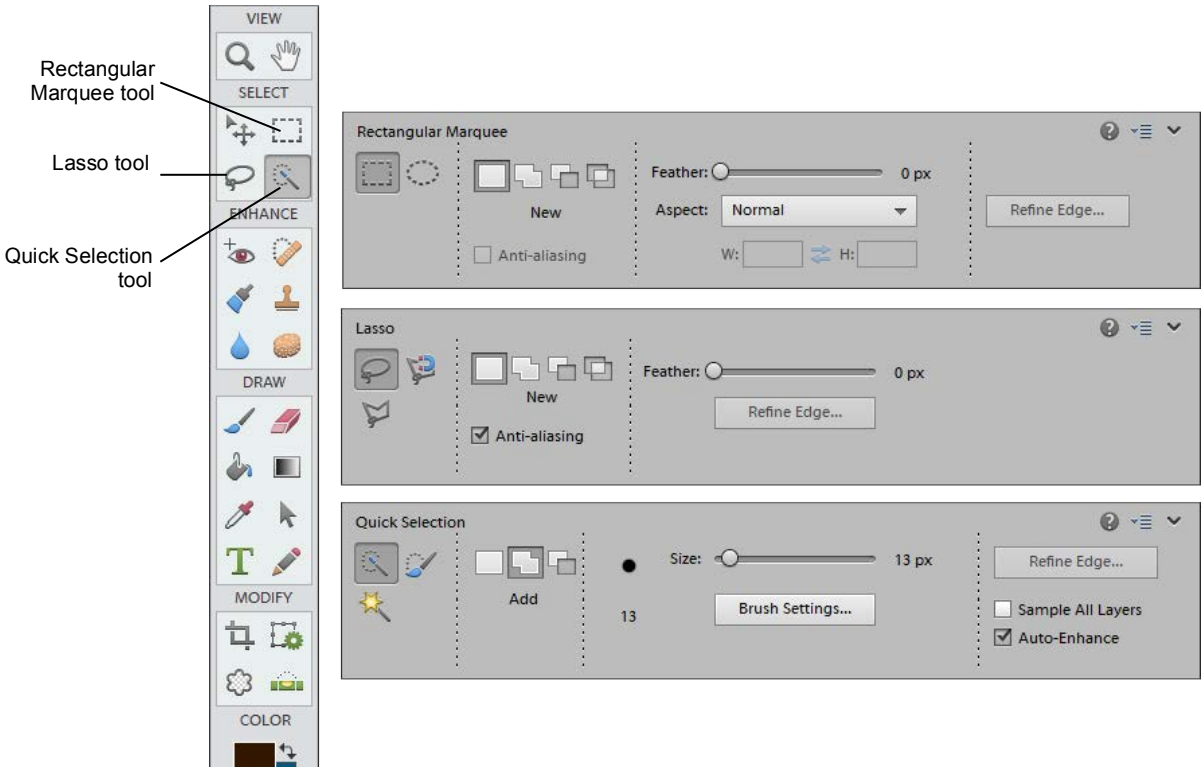

Figure 1 Selection tools and Options panels

Rectangular Marquee: Draws square or rectangular selection borders.

Elliptical Marquee: Draws round or elliptical selection borders.

Lasso: Draws freehand selection borders. This tool is great for making very precise selections.

Magnetic Lasso: Draws a selection border that snaps to edges you drag over in a photo.

Polygonal Lasso: Draws multiple straight-edged segments of a selection border. Use this tool to surround an area with perfectly straight segments.

Magic Wand: Selects pixels of similar color with one click.

Quick Selection: Automatically makes a selection based on color and texture similarity when you draw, scribble, or click the area you want to select.

Selection Brush: Selects the area on which you paint.

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Selecting an entire image

Sometimes all you need to do is select an entire photo or all the contents of a single layer. Choose Select > All. The entire canvas area is selected, and changes apply to the entire canvas area for whichever layer is currently selected. Use this command to copy the entire contents of one layer to another layer or to another file, or for applying special effects, such as filters.

You can also use the Select menu to deselect, reselect, or hide a selection.

For the step-by-step instructions in this guide, open the Editor and select Full from the Edit tab to work in the Standard Edit workspace.

To select and deselect all the contents of a layer by using commands:

1. In the Layers panel, click the layer you want to work with.
2. Choose Select > All.

   The selection border, sometimes referred to as *marching ants*, shows you have selected the entire canvas for the active layer. You can now cut, copy, or apply edits to the selected area (**Figure 2**).
3. To remove the selection, choose Select > Deselect.
4. To repeat the most recent selection, choose Select > Reselect.

   The selection border reappears.

   Note: Sometimes the selection border can make it difficult to see what you are editing. You can turn off the selection border while maintaining the selection by pressing Ctrl+H (Windows) or Command+H (Mac OS). Press Ctrl+H (Windows) or Command+H (Mac OS) a second time to show the selection.

   Be careful when hiding a selection. Accidentally deleting parts of an image or applying an effect unintentionally is very easy when the selection border is hidden. It is best to briefly hide the selection to see what you need to see, and then turn it back on right away.

Figure 2 Entire image selected

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Using the marquee tools

The Rectangular Marquee tool draws square or rectangular selection borders, and the Elliptical Marquee tool draws round or elliptical selection borders. You can choose between tools and options using the Marquee Options panel (**Figure 3**).

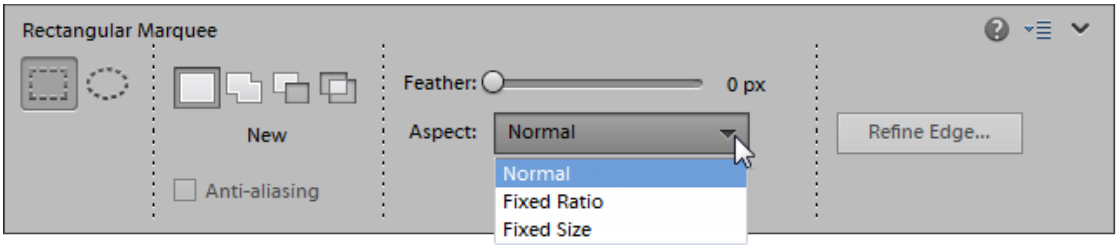

Figure 3 Marquee Options panel

To select rectangular or elliptical areas:

1. In the Layers panel, click the layer you want to work with.
2. In the toolbox, select the Marquee tool, Currently selected tool will be shown in the toolbox (**Figure 1**).
3. In the Options panel, select either the Rectangular Marquee tool or the Elliptical Marquee tool (**Figure 3**).
4. Select an Aspect for the tool in the options panel.

   Normal: Drag to control the size of the selection.

   Fixed Aspect Ratio: Control the proportions of the selection by using the Width and Height boxes.

   Fixed Size: Set a specific size for the selection area by typing values in the Width and Height boxes.

   Note: You can also feather the selection, which softens the border of the selected area.
5. Drag over the area you want to select (**Figure 4**).

   Note: With the marquee tool still selected, you can drag the selected area to a new position in the image. This moves the selection border but not the selected piece of the image. To move the selected piece of the image, change to the Move tool before dragging the selection.

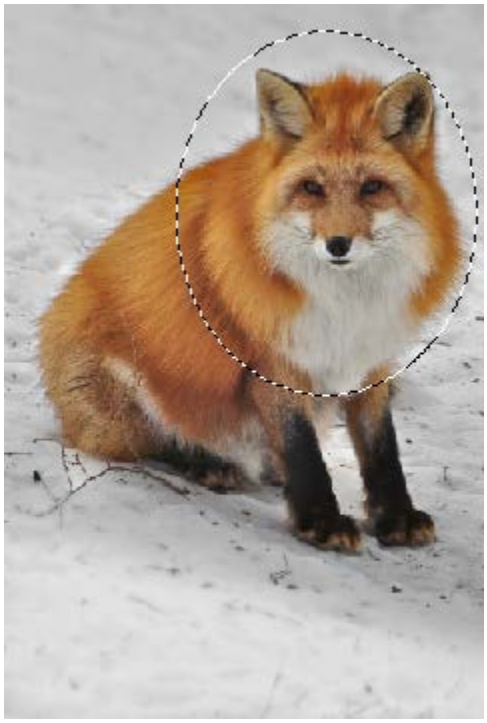

Figure 4 Elliptical marquee selection

Modifying selections

Making selections in Photoshop Elements can be a trial-and-error process for even the most experienced photo editors. Fortunately, Photoshop Elements provides several options for adjusting your selections. You may have noticed the small square buttons in the options panel when a selection tool is active (**Figure 5**). These buttons control how a selection tool functions, whether to start a new selection with each click or to add or subtract from the current selection area. They are available for all of the selection tools except the Selection Brush tool and Quick Selection tool, which have their own set of options.

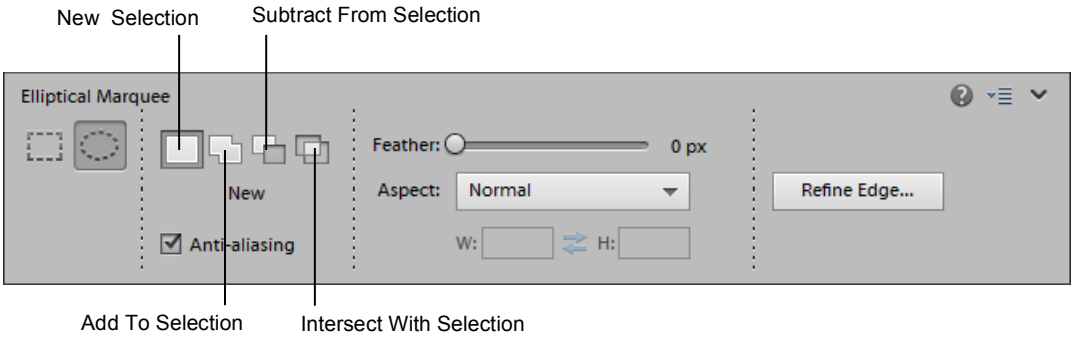

Figure 5 Selection options

New Selection: Replaces the current selection with a new selection when you click and drag. With this option selected, dragging within the selection adjusts the position of the selection over the image.

Add To Selection: Adds to the existing selection wherever you drag.

Subtract From Selection: Removes from the existing selection wherever you drag.

Intersect With Selection: Selects the part of the existing selection that overlaps wherever you drag.

You can also modify the current selection by using the Modify commands in the Select menu (**Figure 6**). For example, you can expand or contract a selection by a fixed number of pixels. You can select the inverse of the current selection. For example, you might select an area you want to preserve and then select the inverse (everything else) and delete it.

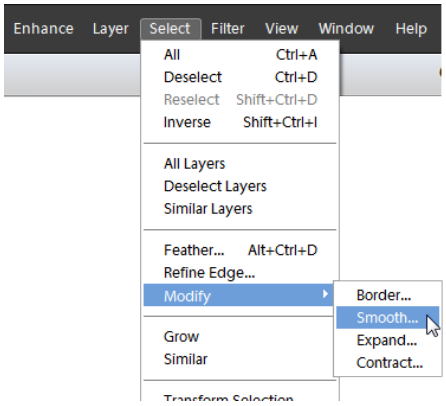

Figure 6 Modify submenu

After making a complex selection, you may also want to save it. After saving a selection, you can easily reload it from the Select menu.

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To add or subtract from a selection:

1. In the Editor, choose a selection tool and select an area of the image (**Figure 7**).
2. To add to the selection, click the Add To Selection button in the options panel and drag an area to add it to the selection.

   The selection border expands to include the area you added (**Figure 8**).

   Note: If you drag across the current selection border, the old and new selections blend together to form a larger selection. You can also drag to add a new selection border that is separate from the original selection (**Figure 9**).
3. To subtract from the selection, click the Subtract From Selection button in the options panel and drag an area to remove it from the selection.

Figure 7 First selection

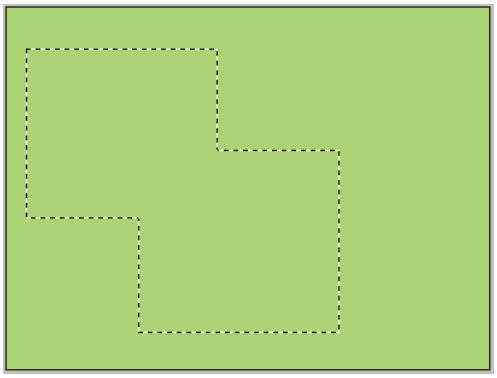

Figure 8 Add to expand the selection

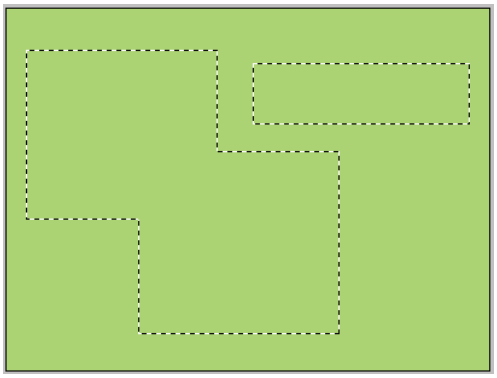

Figure 9 Add a separate selection

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To create a selection from an intersection:

1. In the Editor, choose a selection tool and select an area of the image (**Figure 10**).
2. Click the Intersect With Selection button in the options panel and drag an overlapping area to create the intersection (**Figure 11**).

   When you release the mouse button, the intersection defines the final selection (**Figure 12**).

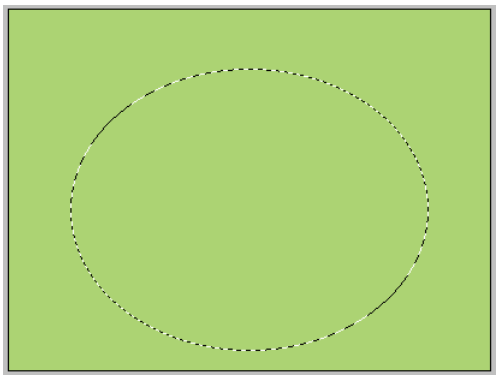

Figure 10 First selection

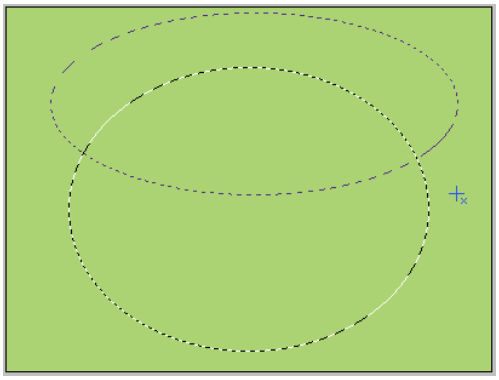

Figure 11 Drag to create the intersection

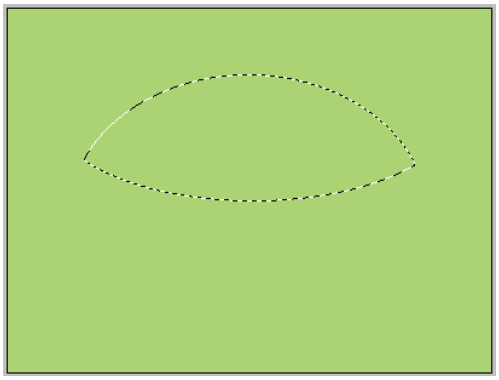

Figure 12 Final selection

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To expand and contract selections:

1. In the Editor, choose a selection tool and select an area of the image.
2. Choose Select > Modify > Expand or Select > Modify > Contract.

   The Expand (or Contract) Selection dialog box appears (**Figure 13**).
3. Enter a number of pixels between 1 and 100.
4. Click OK.

   The selection border expands or contracts by the number of pixels you specified.

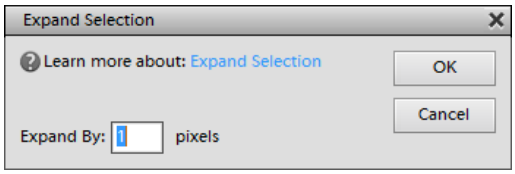

Figure 13 Expand Selection dialog box

To save a selection:

1. In the Editor, use one or more selection tools to define a selection.
2. Choose Select > Save Selection.

   The Save Selection dialog box appears (**Figure 14**).
3. Enter a name for the selection and click OK.

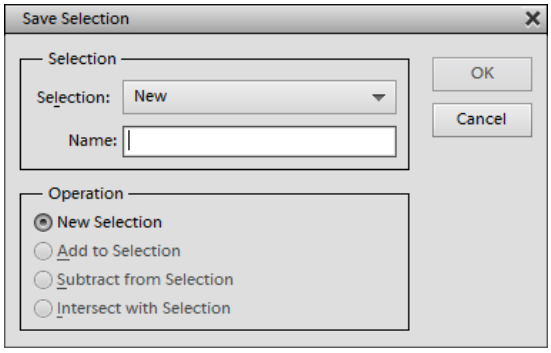

Figure 14 Save Selection dialog box

To load a saved selection:

1. Choose Select > Load Selection.

   The Load Selection dialog box appears.
2. Select a selection to load from the Selection menu (**Figure 15**).
3. Click OK.

   The selection border appears.

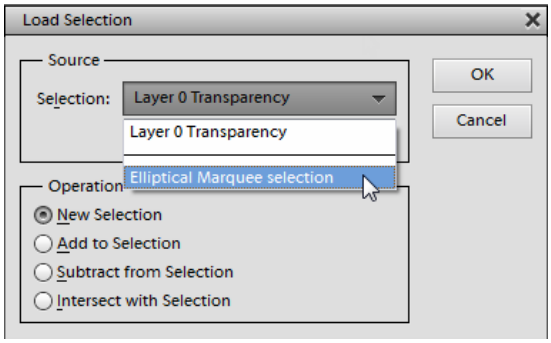

Figure 15 Load Selection dialog box

Moving a selection

After you make a selection, you can move the entire selection to another part of the image. This can create interesting effects, especially with photo collages and other projects that use parts of photos. You can also move selections to adjust the location of an object in the image. By default, when you move a selection, it is removed from its original position. When you hold down the Alt key (Windows) or the Option key (Mac OS) and move a selection, Photoshop Elements moves a copy of the selection, leaving the original intact.

To move a selection:

1. Make a selection by using the Rectangular Marquee tool, the Elliptical Marquee tool, or another selection tool.
2. Click the Move tool in the Toolbar.

   The border of the selection changes to transform handles.
3. Drag the selection to another position (**Figure 16**).
4. Choose Edit > Undo Move to return the selection to its original position.
5. Hold down Alt (Windows) or Option (Mac OS) and drag the selection again.

   Photoshop Elements makes a duplicate of the selection (**Figure 17**).

Figure 16 Moving a selection

Figure 17 Copying a selection

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Putting a border on a selection

You can add a border to any selection by using the Stroke command.

To add a border to a selection:

1. Make a selection by using the Rectangular Marquee tool, the Elliptical Marquee tool, or another selection tool.
2. Choose Edit > Stroke (Outline) Selection.

   The Stroke dialog box opens (**Figure 18**).
3. Enter values for the following stroke options.
   - *Width:* Enter a width in pixels.
   - *Color:* Click the color box to open a color selector.
   - *Location:* Choose Inside, Center, or Outside to determine where the stroke appears in relation to the selection.
   - *Blending:* Blending determines how the stroke color blends with the background (if at all). Leave this at Normal for no blending.
   - *Opacity:* Reduce this number from 100% to make the stroke transparent.
4. Click OK.

   The border appears around the selection (**Figure 19**).

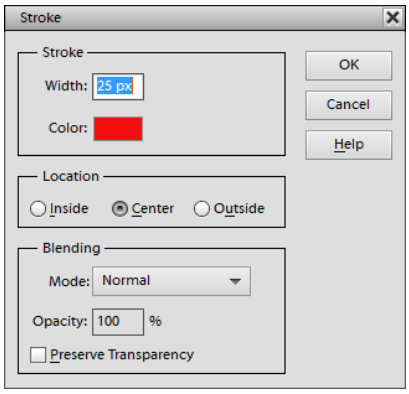

Figure 18 Stroke dialog box

Figure 19 Stroke applied to selection

Changing the color of a selection

1. Make a selection by using the Rectangular Marquee tool, the Elliptical Marquee tool, or another selection tool.
2. Choose Edit > Fill Selection.

   The Fill Layer dialog box opens (**Figure 20**).
3. Choose a color for the fill.

   By default, the fill will match the foreground color currently selected in the toolbox. You can also choose the background color, use the color picker to choose a color, use a pattern, or directly choose black, white, or grey.
4. Choose whether to blend the fill with the background.

   Leave Blending at Normal for no blending.
5. Reduce the value of Opacity to make the fill transparent.

   When the Opacity is set at 100%, the fill is solid.
6. Click OK.

   The color of the selection changes (**Figure 21**).

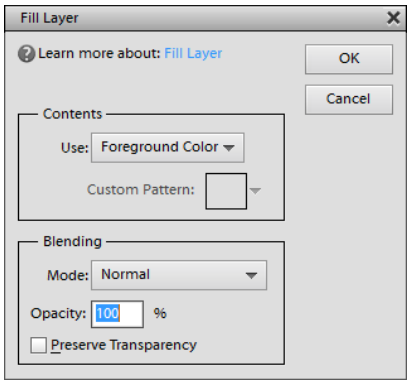

Figure 20 Fill Layer dialog box

Figure 21 Fill applied (Opacity at 50%)

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Using the Quick Selection tool and the Selection Brush tool

Use the Quick Selection tool to “paint” a selection quickly with an adjustable round brush tip. As you drag, the selection expands outward, finding and following defined edges in the image. The marks you make don’t need to be precise because Photoshop Elements draws the selection border for you automatically.

The Selection Brush tool selects whatever you paint. Use the Selection Brush to clean up a selection if the Quick Selection tool doesn’t produce the exact results you’re looking for.

When using the Quick Selection tool to identify a selection area, you can create a new selection, add to the existing selection, or subtract from the existing selection by using the buttons in the options panel (**Figure 22**).

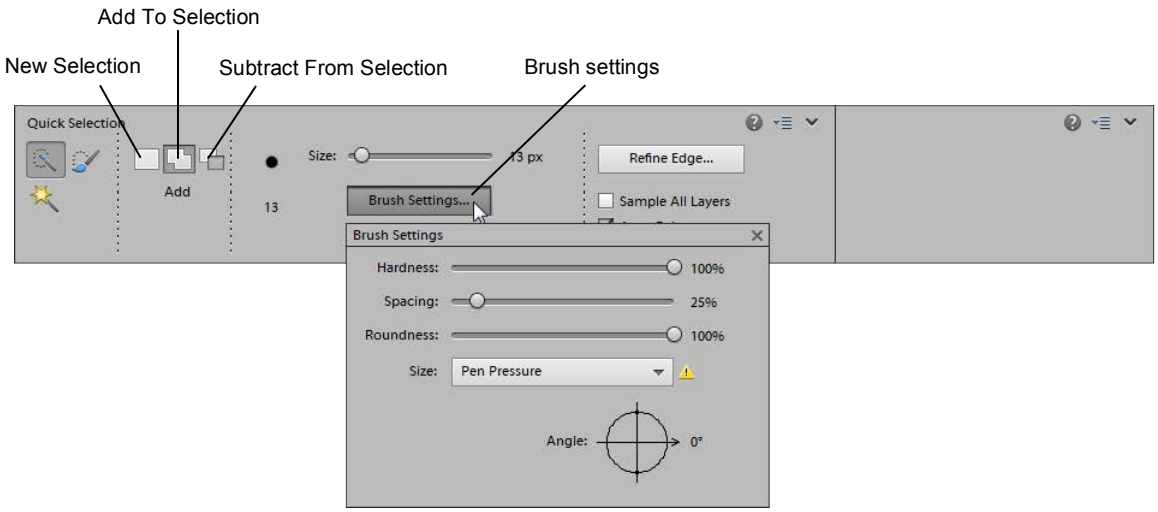

Figure 22 Quick Selection options

Use the Brush picker in the options panel to set the size and shape of the Quick Selection tool. Select the Sample All Layers option if you want the selection to apply to all layers instead of only the layer currently selected in the Layers panel. Select the Auto-Enhance option to reduce roughness and “blockiness” in the selection boundary. Click the Refine Edge button to make adjustments to an existing selection.

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To select an area by using the Quick Selection tool:

1. In the Layers panel, click the layer you want to work with.
2. In the toolbox, select the Quick Selection tool.
3. Open the Brush settings (**Figure 23**) to change the brush tip size of the Quick Selection tool. Type a pixel size or move the Diameter slider. Use the Size pop-up menu options to make the brush tip size sensitive to pen pressure or a stylus wheel.
4. Click or drag inside the part of the image you want to select (**Figure 24**).

   The selection grows as you drag. As you drag near the edges of a shape, the selection area extends to follow the contours of the shape edge.

   If the selection isn't perfect, you can try again or use the Add To Selection and Subtract From Selection options to refine the selection.
5. Click the Refine Edge button to improve the quality of a selection's edges and view the selection against a different background for easy editing.

   The Refine Edge dialog box opens (**Figure 25**), with the following options.

   The options available from the Refine Edge dialog box include:

   - *View Mode:* From the pop-up menu, choose a mode to change how the selection is displayed. Show Original displays the image without a selection preview. Show Radius displays the selection border where edge refinement occurs.
   - *Refine Radius and Erase Refinements tools:* Let you precisely adjust the border area in which edge refinement occurs.
   - *Smart Radius:* Automatically adjusts the radius for hard and soft edges found in the border region.
   - *Radius:* Determines the size of the selection border in which edge refinement occurs. Increase the radius to create a more exact selection boundary in areas with soft transitions or fine detail. The ideal radius depends upon selection size and content, so experiment with different settings.
   - *Smooth:* Reduces irregular areas ("hills and valleys") in the selection border to create a smoother outline.
   - *Feather:* Create a soft-edged transition.

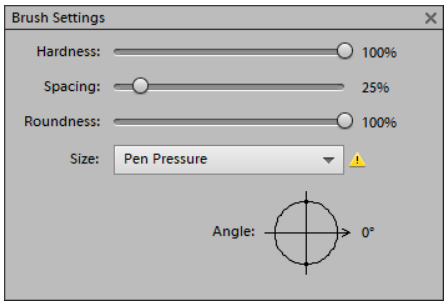

Figure 23 Brush settings for the Quick Selection tool

Figure 24 Using the Quick Selection tool

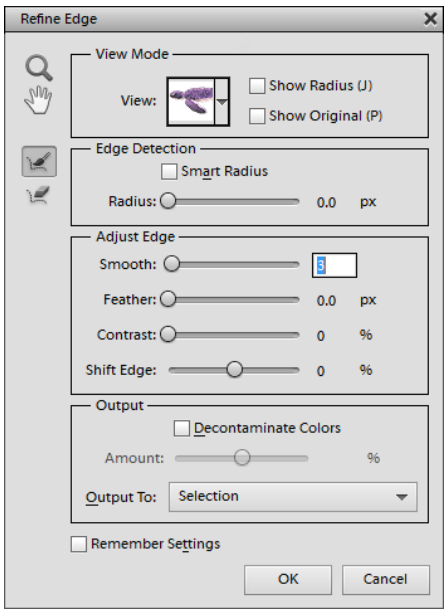

Figure 25 Refine Edge dialog box

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- *Contrast:* Sharpen selection edges and remove fuzziness. Typically, however, the Smart Radius option and refinement tools are more effective.
- *Shift Edge:* Shrink or enlarge the selection boundary. Enter a positive value to expand or a negative value to contract. Most useful for making subtle adjustments to soft-edged selections. Shrinking the selection can help remove unwanted background colors from selection edges.
- *Decontaminate Colors:* Replaces color fringes with the color of the subject.

  Note: Because this option changes pixel color, it requires output to a new layer or document, preventing unexpected changes to the current layer.
- *Amount*: Changes the level of decontamination and fringe replacement.
- *Output To:* Determines whether the refined selection becomes a selection or mask on the current layer, or produces a new layer or document.

To refine a selection by using the Selection Brush tool:

1. Change to the Selection Brush tool.
2. In the options panel, click either Add To Selection or Subtract From Selection (**Figure 26**).
3. In the options panel, select a size for the brush.

   Note: You can also determine hardness for the brush, as well as choose to make the selection a mask. For more information on masks, see “Edit the layer masks” in Photoshop Elements Help.
4. Drag to paint the areas you want to add to or subtract from the selection.

   Note: Zooming in may help you to refine a selection. To use the Zoom tool, choose View > Zoom In, or press Ctrl+= (Windows) or Command+= (Mac OS).

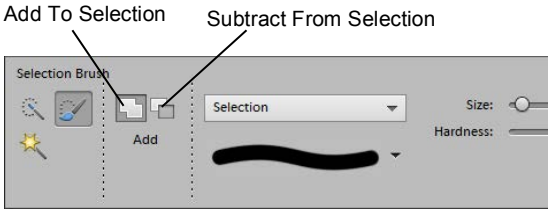

Figure 26 Selection Brush options

Using the Magic Wand tool

You can use the Magic Wand tool to select any part of an image with a similar color range. For example, if the image contains a large area of similar color, such as a blue sky, the Magic Wand tool can make selecting this large area very simple.

When using the Magic Wand tool, you can modify its behavior by using the settings in the options panel (**Figure 27**).

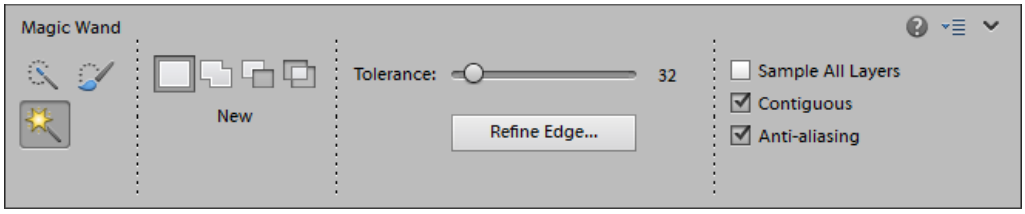

Figure 27 Magic Wand options panel

Tolerance: A low tolerance selects colors very similar to the pixel on which you click. A higher number selects a wider range of colors. Type a number from 0 to 255.

Sample All Layers: Bases selection on colors in all the visible layers. With this option deselected, the selection will be based on colors in the active layer only.

Contiguous: Selects only pixels that are adjacent to each other. With this option deselected, pixels with a similar color throughout the image will be selected.

Anti-alias: Produces a smooth selection edge.

Once you begin your selection, you can add to the selection by holding down Shift as you click. You can subtract from the selection by holding down Alt (Windows) or Option (Mac OS) as you click.

To make selections based on color:

1. In the Layers panel, click the layer you want to work with.
2. In the toolbox, select the Magic Wand tool.
3. Select options for the Magic Wand tool in the options panel.
4. Click in the image to select an area of one color (**Figure 28**).
5. If necessary, add to or subtract from the selection.

   In this example, the first click selected the interior of the boat. To add to the selection, Shift was pressed while clicking the second color in the gunwale (**Figure 29**).

   To subtract from the selection, hold down Alt (Windows) or Option (Mac OS) as you click.

Figure 28 Define the color for the selection with a click

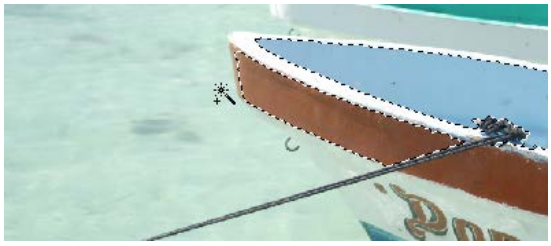

Figure 29 Add to the selection with a Shift-click

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Using the lasso tools

To make very precise selections that contain a range of colors, use the lasso tools (**Figure 30**). The basic Lasso tool lets you draw a freehand line around an area to define the selection border. The area can be any shape or size. When the two ends of the line meet, the selection is complete.

If freehand drawing is too challenging, you can use the Polygonal Lasso tool. The Polygonal Lasso tool draws straight-edged segments each time you click. You can add as many segments as needed to surround the selection area. By zooming in and placing lots of very short segments together, you can create a selection border that appears to be a smooth curve.

If your image includes complex edges set against high-contrast backgrounds, try the Magnetic Lasso tool. The Magnetic Lasso tool draws a selection border that snaps to the edges of objects you drag over in the photo. The area you are selecting needs a clearly defined edge with plenty of contrast for this to work well.

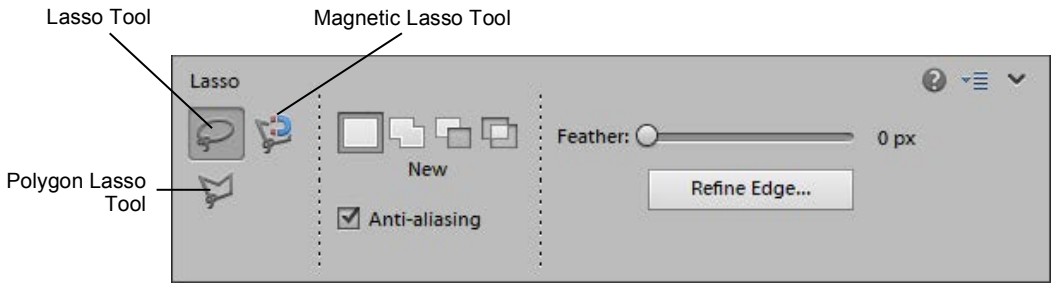

Figure 30 Lasso Tools options panel

To draw selections with the Lasso tool:

1. In the Layers panel, click the layer you want to work with.
2. In the toolbox, select the Lasso tool.
3. In the options panel, select options for the Lasso tool.
4. Drag to enclose the area you want to select (**Figure 31**).

   Note: As you drag, you define the selection area. When the end of your selection returns to where you started, the selection is complete. Go slowly and be patient. If you are not getting the result you want, it may be easier to deselect and start over.

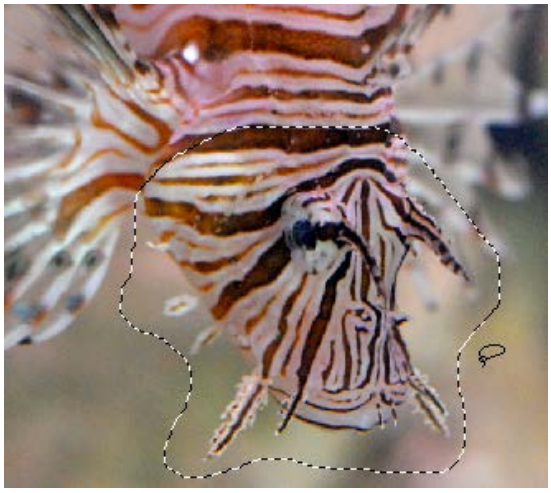

Figure 31 Drawing a selection with the Lasso

To make a selection by using the Polygonal Lasso tool:

1. In the Layers panel, click the layer you want to work with.
2. In the toolbox, select the Lasso tool.

3. In the options panel, select the Polygonal Lasso tool and set options.
4. Click where you want the first straight segment to begin, and then click again where you want the first segment to end and the next one to begin.
5. Continue clicking to create segments (**Figure 32**).

   Note: If you zoom in and create many very short segments, the selection border appears to be smoothly curved.

   If you make a mistake, press Delete to erase segments and back up. You can switch from straight-edged segments to a freehand drawing by holding down Alt (Windows) or Option (Mac OS) and dragging.
6. To close the selection, do one of the following:
   - Position the pointer over the starting point and click.
   - If the pointer is not over the starting point, double-click, or Ctrl-click. A straight selection segment is drawn from your pointer to the starting point of your selection.

   Note: If you zoomed in, you can zoom back out to see the finished selection.

Figure 32 Selecting with the Polygonal Lasso tool

To make a selection by using the Magnetic Lasso tool:

1. In the Layers panel, click the layer you want to work with.
2. In the toolbox, select the Magnetic Lasso tool.
3. In the options panel, select options for the Magnetic Lasso tool.
4. Click (and release) to start the selection. Then move the pointer along the border of the area you want to select (**Figure 33**).

   The Magic Lasso automatically snaps to the border between the selection and the rest of the image.

   If you make a mistake, press Delete to erase segments and return to an earlier state in the process.
5. To close the selection, do one of the following:
   - Position the pointer over the starting point and click.
   - If the pointer is not over the starting point, double-click, or Ctrl-click. A selection segment is drawn from your pointer to the starting point of your selection.

Figure 33 Selecting with the Magnetic Lasso tool

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