How to retouch a photo

If your photo requires more touch-up than you can achieve by using Quick Fix, you're ready to use the photo retouching tools in Adobe Photoshop Elements. These include tools for removing small and large imperfections, eliminating distracting objects, cloning parts of an image, blurring and sharpening parts of an image, adjusting color and contrast, and a lot more. The focus of this guide is five of the photo retouching tools, including Spot Healing Brush, Healing Brush, Clone Stamp, Blur, and Sharpen (**Figure 1**). Subsets of some of these tools are available from the Tool Options panel.

Note: The Crop, Recompose, Cookie Cutter, Straighten, and Red Eye Removal tools are covered in separate guides.

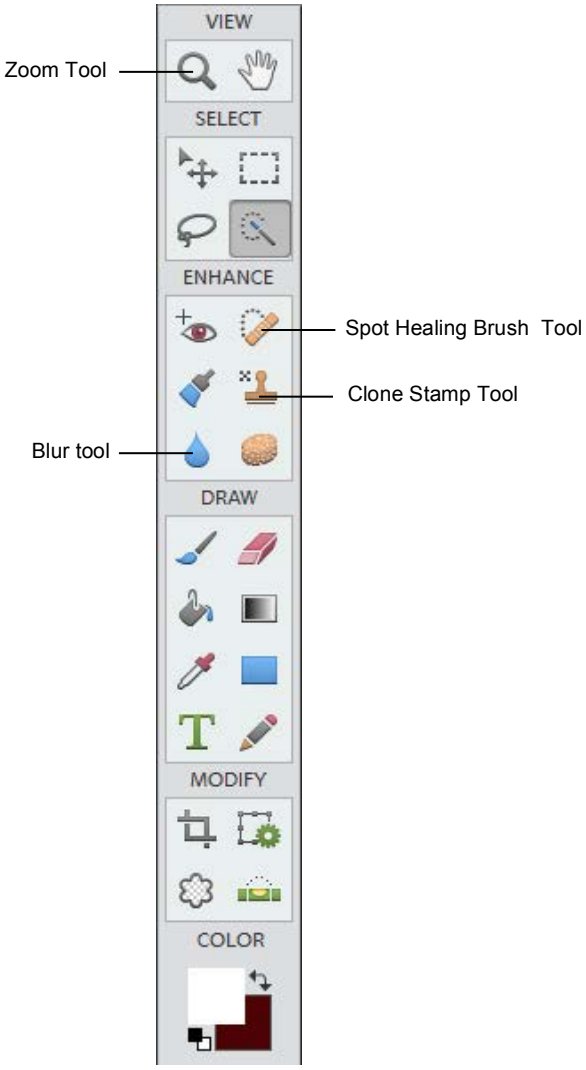

Figure 1 Toolbox

Spot Healing Brush: Removes blemishes and other imperfections in your photos. You can click once on a blemish or click and drag to smooth away small imperfections.

Healing Brush: Fixes large areas of imperfection when you drag over them. You can remove objects from a uniform background, such as an object in a field of grass.

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Clone Stamp: Paints with a sample of an image, which you can use to duplicate objects, remove imperfections, or paint over objects in your photo.

Blur: Softens hard edges or areas in an image to reduce detail. Blurring a busy background can bring your subjects more into focus.

Sharpen: Enhances the definition of edges in an image. Most images can benefit from some sharpening, but sharpening cannot restore a severely blurry image.

Occasionally, you may have several images of a subject that you like but that are individually unusable. There are several Photomerge tools that can help you retouch difficult photos. For example, the *Exposure tool* helps combine two images with differing exposures into one image with ideal exposure.

To remove spots or small imperfections:

1. Open the image in the Photoshop Elements Editor workspace and select Expert from the Mode tabs at the top of the workspace (**Figure 2**).
2. Select the Zoom tool and click the image to zoom in to the spot or imperfection you want to remove (**Figure 3**).
3. Select the Spot Healing Brush in the toolbox.
4. In the options bar (**Figure 4**), select a brush and specify a size for the brush.
5. In the options bar, select options for the brush.

   Proximity Match: Uses pixels around the edge of the selection to find an image area to use as a patch. Try this option first. If it doesn't work, undo the change and try the Create Texture or Content-Aware options.

   Create Texture: Uses all the pixels in the selection to create a texture in which to fix the area. If this doesn't work, try dragging through the area a few times.

   Content aware: Uses existing patterns and textures in the image to fill in spots. Select this option to remove unwanted objects without creating a hole in the background.

   Sample All Layers: Select this option only if you want the brush to sample pixels from all layers, not just the layer that contains the image.

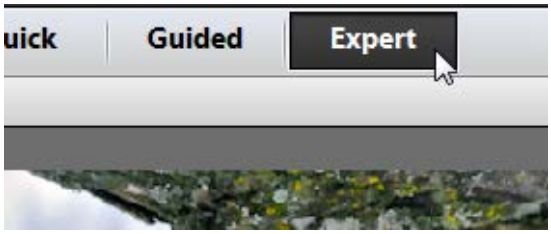

Figure 2 Selecting Expert in the Modes tabs

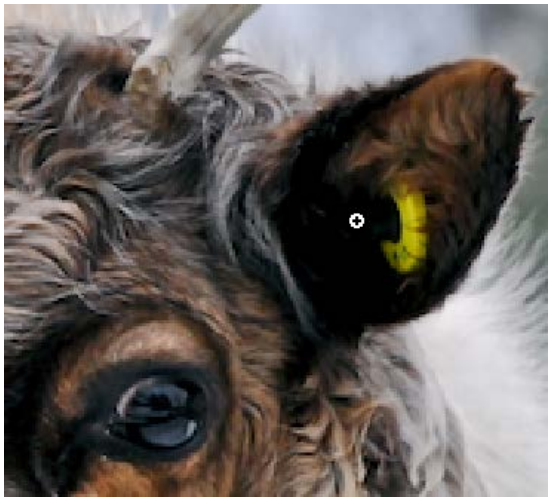

Figure 3 Zoom in to imperfection

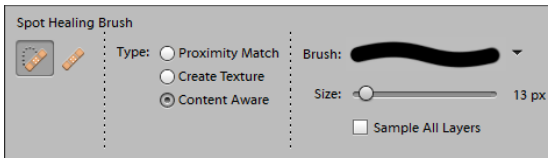

Figure 4 Spot Healing Brush panel

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6. Position the Spot Healing Brush pointer over the area to fix, and then click (**Figure 5**).

   The spot or imperfection is gone (**Figure 6**).

Figure 5 Click the spot to remove it

Figure 6 The spot is gone

To remove larger imperfections:

1. Open the image in the Editor.
2. Select the Zoom tool and click the image to zoom in to the area you want to repair (**Figure 7**).

   Note: In this example, the lens has several dust specks on it that appear as dark smudges in the final photo.

Figure 7 Zoom in to area to repair

3. Select the Healing Brush in the toolbox.
4. In the options bar (**Figure 8**), open the Brush picker options and select settings for the brush.

   Diameter: Controls the width of the brush.

   Hardness: Controls whether the brush edge is sharp or fuzzy.

   Spacing: Controls how far apart the brush marks are put down.

   Angle, Roundness: Similar to a real paintbrush, you can adjust the roundness of the brush and the angle used to hold the brush as you paint.

   If you are not sure which settings to use, try the default settings.
5. Select a mode and other options for the brush.

   Mode: Determines how the source blends with the existing pixels—wherever you Alt-click (Windows) or Option-click (Mac OS). *Normal* mode lays new pixels over the existing ones. Try this setting first.

   Source: Sampled uses pixels from the current image. *Pattern* uses pixels from the pattern you select in the pattern picker.

   Aligned: Deselect to use the sample pixels from the initial sampling point each time you stop and resume painting.

   Sample All Layers: Select this option only if you want the brush to sample pixels from all layers, not just the layer that contains the image.
6. Position the pointer over an area you want to sample (i.e., use to copy over the flaw), and then Alt-click (Windows) or Option-click (Mac OS) to sample the data (**Figure 9**).
7. Drag over the flaw to blend the existing data with the sampled data (**Figure 10**). You must release the mouse button to see the result.

   Repeat as needed. The imperfections are removed (**Figure 11**).

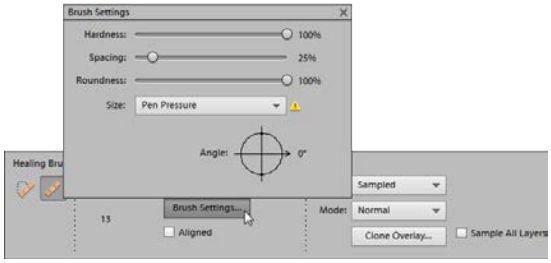

Figure 8 Healing Brush panel

Figure 9 Sample the data

Figure 10 Drag over the flaw to remove it

Figure 11 The imperfections are gone

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To clone a part of an image:

1. Open the image in the Editor.

   Note: In this example, the background could use another fish. Use the Clone Stamp tool to sample one of the existing fish and create a new one.

2. Select the Clone Stamp tool in the toolbox.

3. In the options bar (**Figure 12**), select a brush and specify a size for the brush.

4. In the options bar, select options for the tool.

   Mode: Determines how the source blends with the existing pixels—wherever you Alt-click (Windows) or Option-click (Mac OS). *Normal* mode lays new pixels over the existing ones. Try this setting first.

   Opacity: A low opacity allows the pixels under a paint stroke to show through. To paint solid, use 100 % opacity; 1% would be nearly transparent.

   Aligned: Deselect to use the sample pixels from the initial sampling point each time you stop and resume painting.

   Sample All Layers: Select this option only if you want the brush to sample pixels from all layers, not just the layer that contains the image.

5. Position the pointer over an area you want to clone (use to copy to another part of the image), and then Alt-click (Windows) or Option-click (Mac OS) to sample the area (**Figure 13**).

6. Drag to paint the cloned area to a new location on the image (**Figure 14**).

   As you drag, a cross hair remains on the image to show the center of the cloned area. The area is replaced by the cloned part of the image.

7. Continue to sample and clone until you get the results you want. (**Figure 15**).

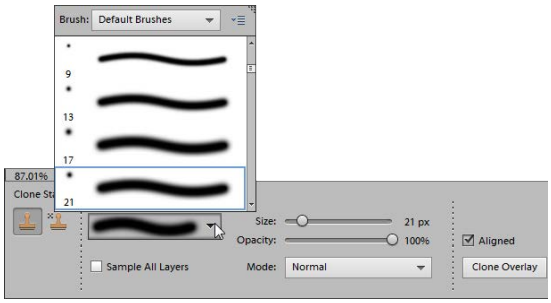

Figure 12 Clone Stamp options

Figure 13 Sample the area

Figure 14 Drag over the image to clone

Figure 15 The fish is cloned

To blur and sharpen parts of an image:

1. Open the image in the Editor.

   Note: In this example, the parent bird and the chick being fed are the focus of the picture and the background is very busy. Use the Blur tool to blur the background and the immediate foreground. Use the Sharpen tool to enhance the parent bird and its chick (**Figure 16**).

2. Select the Blur tool in the toolbox.

3. In the options bar (**Figure 17**), select a brush and specify a size for the brush.

4. In the options bar, select options for the brush.

   Mode: Determines how the source blends with the existing pixels—wherever you Alt-click (Windows) or Option-click (Mac OS). *Normal* mode lays new pixels over the existing ones. Try this setting first.

   Strength: Determines how much blur effect is applied with each stroke.

   Sample All Layers: Select this option only if you want the brush to sample pixels from all layers, not just the layer that contains the image.

5. Drag over the area you want to blur. Continue to blur the image until you achieve the results you want (**Figure 18**).

6. Select the Sharpen tool in the toolbox.

7. In the options bar, select a brush and specify a size for the brush.

8. In the options bar, select options for the tool.

   Note: Be careful not to over-sharpen the image. Over use of the Sharpen tool causes the image to degrade. If you accidentally over-sharpen the image, use the Undo command to back up.

Figure 16 Use blurring to focus on the subject

Figure 17 Blur options panel

Figure 18 Drag to blur the background and foreground

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How to remove unwanted objects from an image

You may need to remove unwanted objects or figures from your images without destroying essential content of a photo. Using the Content-Aware option with the Spot Healing Brush tool, you can remove selected objects constructively from one photo (**Figure 19**). Photoshop Elements compares nearby image content to seamlessly fill the selection, realistically maintaining key details such as shadows and object edges.

Figure 19 Image before and after an unwanted object (the garden hose) is removed with content-aware fill

To remove an unwanted object from an image:

1. In the Photoshop Elements Editor workspace, select the Spot Healing Brush tool.
2. In the options bar, select a brush and specify a size for the brush.
3. Select Content-Aware in the options bar (**Figure 20**).
4. Paint over the object that you want to remove from the image (**Figure 21**).

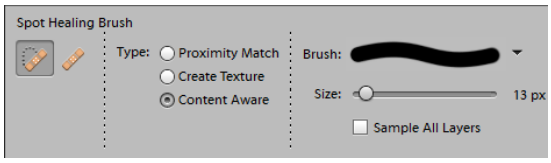

Figure 20 Options for the Spot Healing Brush tool

Figure 21 Paint over the object to remove

How to merge differently exposed photos

Often, photographers encounter situations where it's impossible to get one photograph with correct exposure, as when using a flash at night. In these cases, you can merge 2–10 photos of the same subject but with different exposures (**Figure 22**) by using the Photomerge Exposure feature of Photoshop Elements.

Figure 22 Two images with different exposures

To create a Photomerge Exposure merge automatically:

1. Select two or more images in the Editor Project Bin or the Organizer.

   For this example, two images are used.

2. Choose Enhance > Photomerge Exposure.

   The Photomerge Exposure window opens with a merged version of the two images (**Figure 23**).

   Note: By default, Photoshop Elements creates the merge with Smart Blending, which allows you to fine tune highlights and shadows (**Figure 24**). Simple Blending is faster but offers less control.

3. Drag the Highlight Details slider to fine tune highlights.

4. Drag the Shadows slider to fine tune shadows.

Figure 23 Merged image created automatically

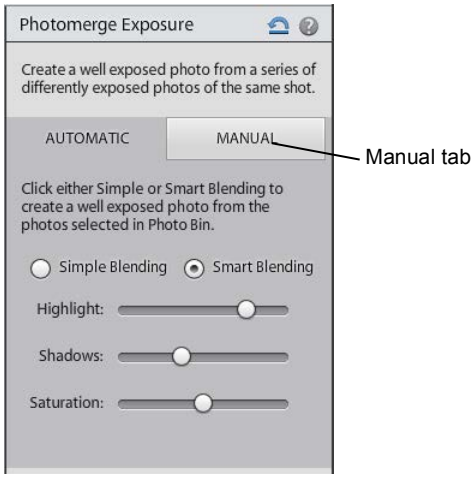

Figure 24 Photomerge panel

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To create a Photomerge Exposure merge manually:

1. Select two images in the Bin or the Organizer.
2. Choose File > New > Photomerge Exposure.

   The Photomerge Exposure window opens with a merged version of the two images.
3. Click the Manual tab (**Figure 24**).

   The leftmost image in the Bin or Organizer opens with a blank space on the right.
4. Drag an image from the Bin or Organizer into the space on the right (**Figure 25**).

   This image will serve as the final image in the merge.
5. Click the Selection tool in the Photomerge panel on the right (**Figure 26**).
6. Drag the pointer in the left photo to highlight areas to be merged into the right (final) photo.

   As you do, these areas will merge automatically (**Figure 27**).

   It may take trial and error to get your desired effects.

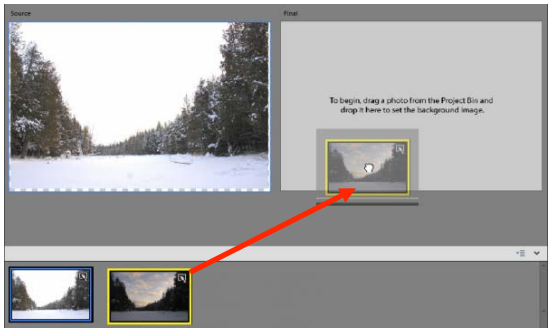

Figure 25 Dragging an image into the blank space

Figure 26 Photomerge Exposure, Manual mode

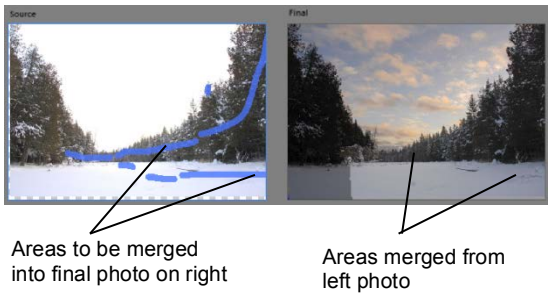

Figure 27 Selecting areas to be merged

7. To soften the transition between merged areas, you can take the following steps:
   - Drag the Transparency slider to the right. This reduces the opacity of the merged content.
   - Select the Edge Blending option. This softens the edges between merged content and existing content.

   These steps should produce an image with less pronounced contrast between merged and unmerged areas.
8. Click the Done button to accept the Photomerge (**Figure 28**).

Figure 28 Final manual Photomerge

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