

# Photoshop Elements Tips

## Why Layers?

If you've never used an application that allowed you to create layers, you probably don't know what the advantages are in having them.

Aside from the minor attraction of being able to keep your image organized by putting each element on its own separate labeled layer, the overwhelming advantage of layers is that they allow you to segregate your edits. I'll demonstrate what this means in the following lesson. If you are a true beginner, this tutorial will also show you quite a few basic things about Element's tools.

I'll start with a simple, combination of drawn shapes, and then I'll move on to a photograph.

Start by choosing File > New. Make your new document approximately five by five inches, any resolution, with a white background.

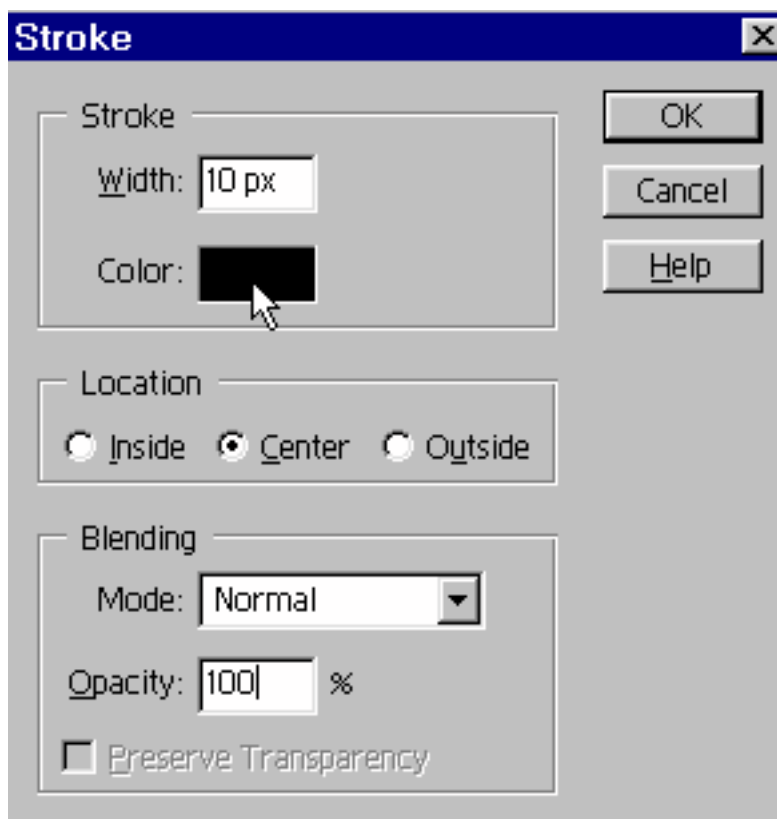
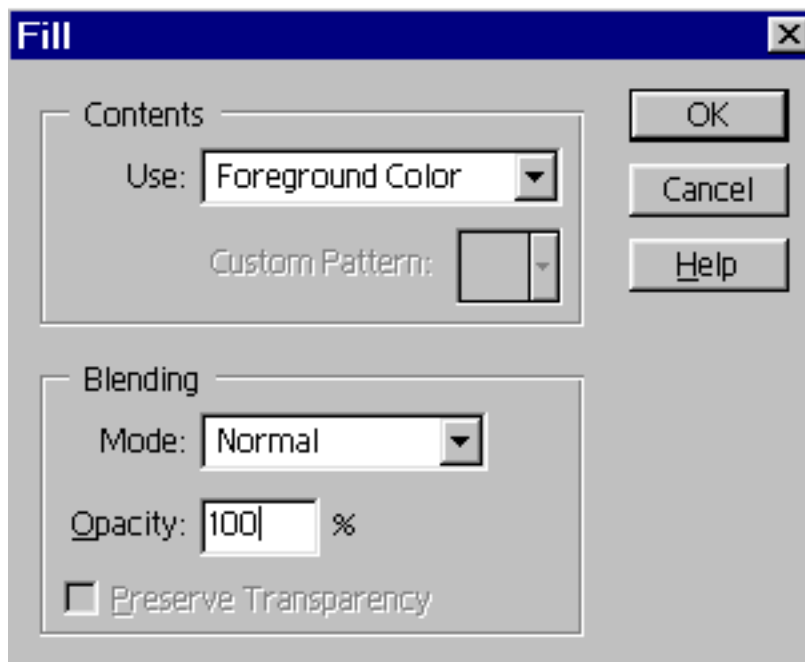
Choose the elliptical marquee tool from the toolbox. It's hidden behind the rectangular marquee tool, in the upper left corner of the toolbox.

Drag in the document to create a selection. Press the Shift key as you drag to make the selection a perfect circle. Press the spacebar (while still pressing both the left mouse button, and the Shift key) to reposition your selection as you drag, if necessary.

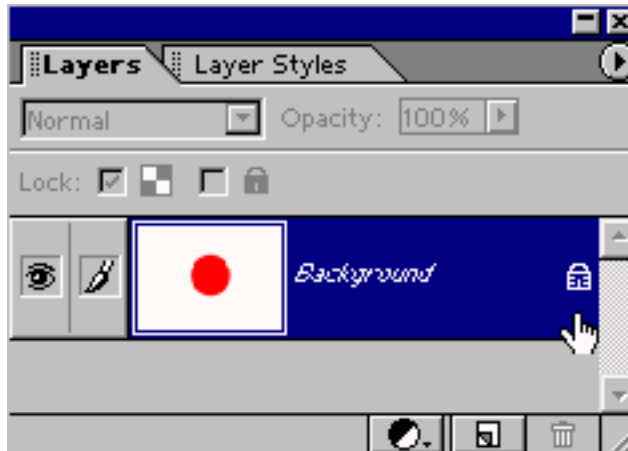
Once you have your selection, any size, though a 2-3 inch diameter will be best, it needs to be filled with color. I clicked on the red swatch in the upper left corner of the Swatches palette to make that my foreground color. I then chose Edit > Fill and chose

Foreground from the menu.

You can also press Alt-Backspace to fill a selection with the current foreground color.



Choose **Select > Deselect**, or press **Ctrl-D** to deselect all. I now have a red circle on a white background on the background layer. Your Layers palette now looks like this.

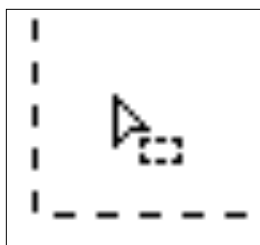


Note the padlock icon that the cursor is pointing to. All new documents are created with one, background layer. Unlike regular layers, this background layer does not allow transparency, and cannot be moved.

However, it is a simple matter to turn the layer into a “regular”, unlocked layer. Just double-click the layer, and give it a new name in the dialog box that appears. Or, simply click **OK**, and accept Adobe's default name of **Layer 0**.

Now, suppose I want to add a black, rectangular outline around my red circle to frame it.

I would choose the rectangular marquee tool in the toolbox, and drag my marquee in the image. Note that you can move an active selection outline after you've created it by having a selection tool chosen in the toolbox, and then positioning the cursor within the selection outline. The cursor will then look like this.



Drag with the cursor within the selection outline to reposition it.

You can also use the arrow keys to nudge a selection outline one pixel at a time (or hold down **Shift** while using the arrow keys to move it ten pixels

at a click), so long as you have a selection tool chosen in the toolbox. The selection tools are the marquee, the lassos, and the magic wand.

With the rectangular selection active, and in position, I clicked the default colors box in the bottom left corner of the toolbox.



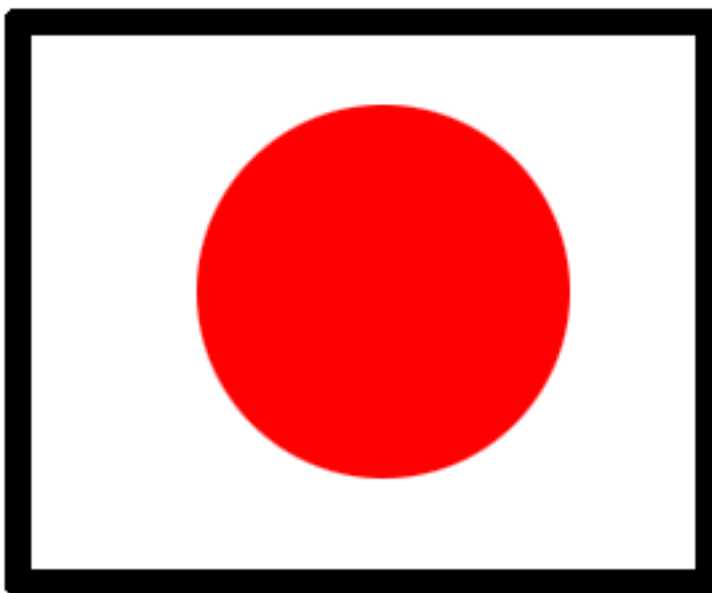
This makes black the foreground color. I then chose Edit > Stroke. The current foreground color shows up as the chosen stroke color in the dialog box. If you want to choose a different color, click on the color box, which the cursor is pointing to in the illustration above, and the color picker will appear.

Once you have chosen the color, and width that you want, click OK, and the selection outline will be painted in that color and width.

Press Ctrl-D, or choose Select > Deselect to deselect the outline.

I now have a black outline around my red circle, all on a white background, and all on the one background layer.

What happens if I notice that my outline is not properly aligned ? How can I correct it ? As you can see, the frame needs to be moved just a little bit to the right.



Since the frame is on the same layer as the circle, it would be a real nuisance to select the black outline, delete it, and then recreate it.

If I had created the outline on its own layer, on the other hand, moving it would be a simple matter of dragging with the move tool or nudging with the arrow keys.

Since I haven't done very many edits, I still have the option of stepping back in the History palette, and starting over again.

However, had I done more than my allotted history steps (as chosen in Edit > Preferences > General), that option would no longer exist. When you consider that each click with the clone tool, each selection, deselection, or brush click is a history state, it's very easy to exceed the number of history states you have allowed yourself (the default is 20) and no longer have the option of redoing things.

Okay, so I'll step backwards to where I dragged the rectangular marquee outline, but before I stroked it, and I'll do it right this time.



**Copyright © 2000 by Jay Arraich.  
All rights reserved.  
All photographs copyright ©2000 by Jay  
Arraich  
jay@arraich.com**

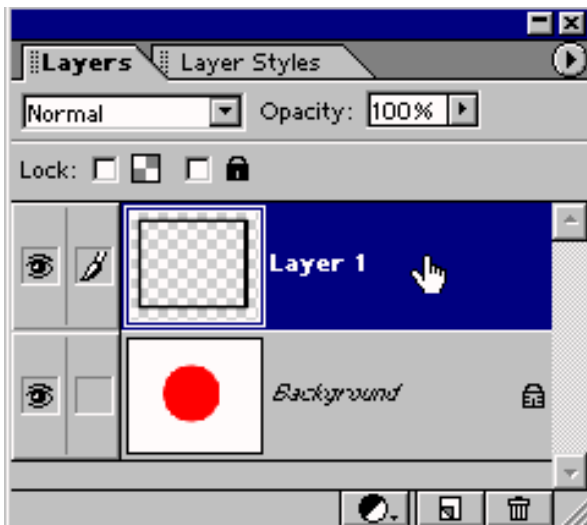
# Photoshop Elements Tips

## Why Layers?

After stepping back in History, and with the rectangular selection active once again, I clicked the New Layer button at the bottom of the Layers palette to create a new layer.



With that layer selected in the Layers palette (the selected layer is dark blue), I then stroked the selection, the same as before. However, this time, the stroked outline was created on its own layer, above the red circle's layer.



Remember to press Ctrl-D to deselect after you've finished adding the stroke.

Now, to move the frame into alignment, I only have to select the move tool in the toolbox, and either drag the frame in the image, or use the arrow

keys (with the move tool selected in the toolbox) to nudge it into position.

Note that if you have Auto Select Layers checked in the move tool's options bar, you will have to click directly on the black pixels of the frame to move it.

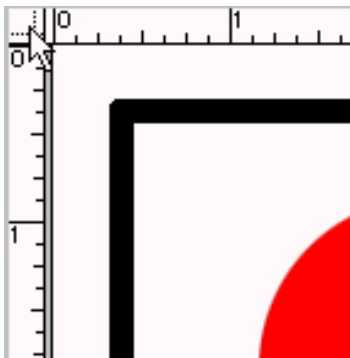


If you have that option unchecked, you can click anywhere in the image and move the layer, so long as it is selected in the Layers palette.

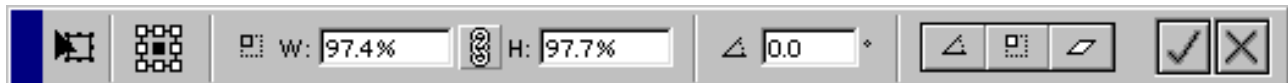
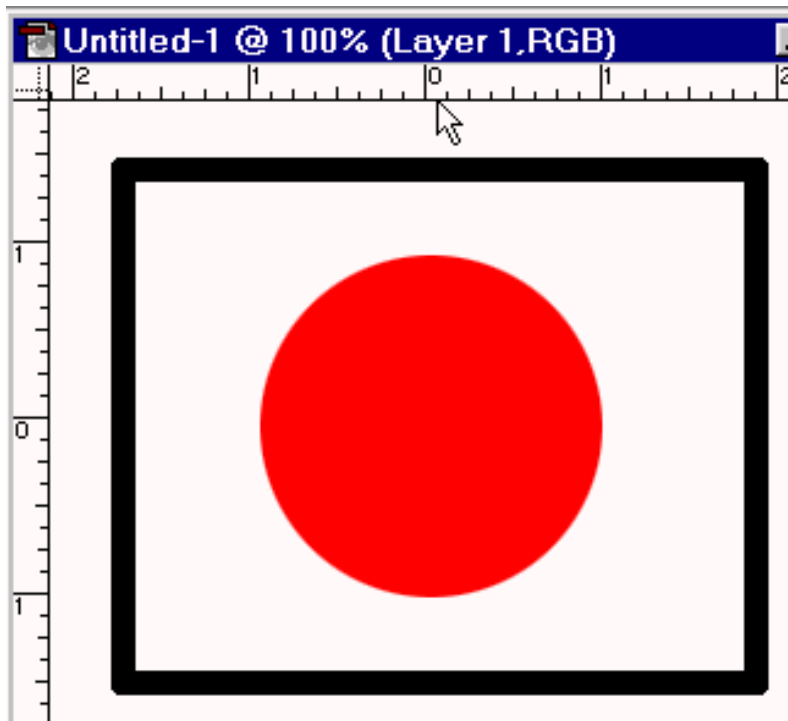


If you have difficulty aligning layers, here are two tips that may help. Unlike Photoshop, Elements does not have guides or align commands so you may have a hard time lining things up.

First, try using the grid. Choose View > Show Grid. Second, try moving the ruler's origin to a central location. To do this, choose View > Show Rulers. Place your cursor in the upper left corner of the document, at the zero point of both the horizontal and vertical rulers.



Click and drag. Drop the origin as near as you can to the center of one of the objects you are trying to align. You will then be able to use the offsets to position the other object. See the example below. The zero point for both the horizontal and vertical has been placed at the circle's center.



*[transform options bar]*

Another option that you will have, when an object is on its own layer, is that of transforming it. If you select/check the Show Bounding Box option



on the move tool's options bar, your object will show a highlighted box, with handles. In case you don't know, the little, hollow square, shown on the black frame, below, is a "handle."



You can use these handles to transform your layer, and all its contents. The minute you make any kind of transformation (drag a handle), the move tool's options bar changes to the transform options bar, shown above.

You will have the option of accepting or refusing the transformations you make, by clicking either the big **X**, or check mark at the end of the options bar.

Hover the cursor over a handle to see how it can be used. The cursor shown below is the rotate cursor. Drag in a circular motion to twirl the layer.



The icon, shown next, will scale the image both vertically, and horizontally. Press the Shift key to scale proportionally.



And, this one, shown below, is a side handle. This will scale the width, only.



All of this moving, and transforming can be done almost effortlessly because the frame is on its own layer. The red circle on its background layer has not been affected in any way by what I have done to the other layer.

Ninety-nine percent of the time, it is much, much better to put anything, and everything on its own layer. If you have the option of doing so, take it.

Okay. That was the very basic stuff. Next I'll show you what you can do with an image.

Try and get in the habit of never, ever editing the background layer which contains your original image. Always use a duplicate layer, or a copy of a portion of that layer.

Any edits done directly to the original can only be undone within the limits of your history undo states. It is a simple matter to work on a duplicate layer, or to make sure you use Adjustment Layers instead of direct adjustments. I promise you, you will be sorry if you don't.

# Photoshop Elements Tips

## Why Layers?

For the next part of this lesson, I used the photograph of a rose, shown below. You may use this if you like, though any image will do.

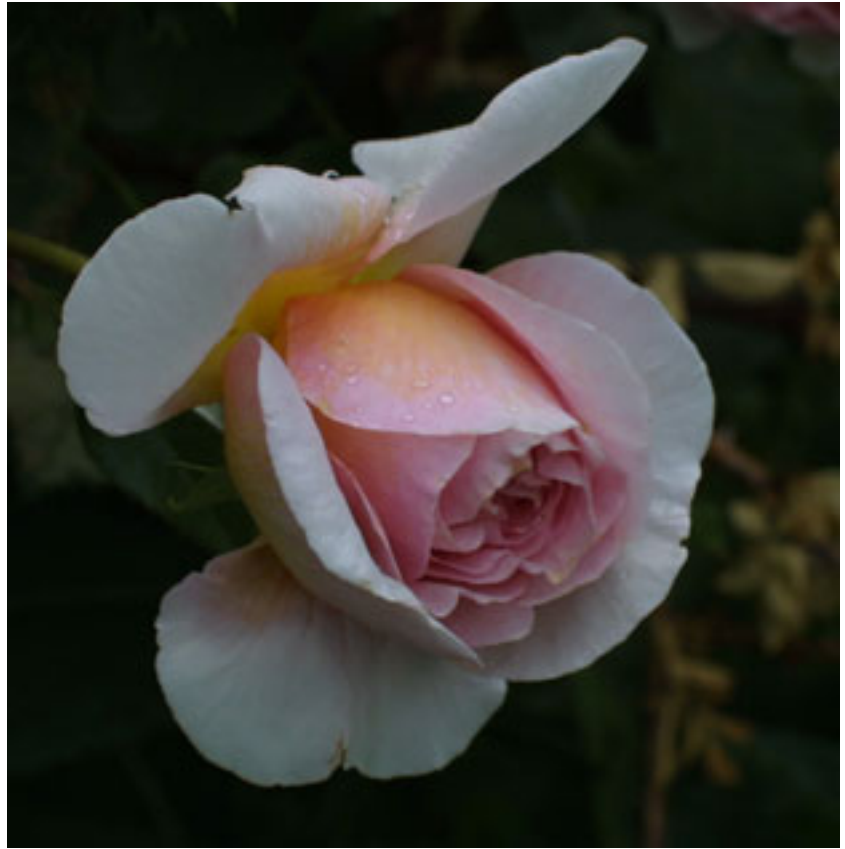
If you download the rose photo, be sure and open it in Elements and save it in psd (Photoshop) format before starting. The JPG format does not allow layers.

The first thing I'll do is adjust the contrast by using Levels. There are two ways to do this. You can choose Enhance > Color > Brightness/Contrast > Levels, or you can choose Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Levels.

If you use the Enhance route, the Levels changes will be applied directly to the image. The only way to change the effect is to use the History palette to undo it, if you still have the option.

On the other hand, if you use an Adjustment layer, the effect is contained in that layer. The image layer, below it, is untouched.

Naturally, I used the latter. I clicked the New Adjustment Layer button at the bottom of the Layers palette (the black and white circle) to add a Levels adjustment layer to the rose.

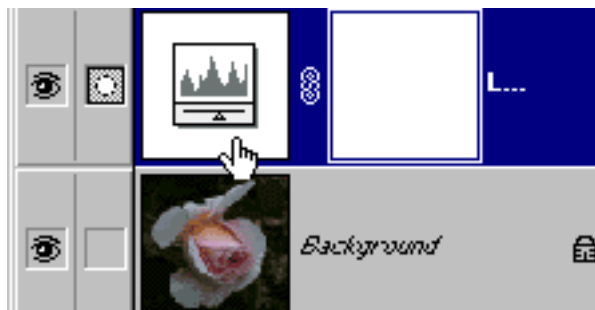


*[original image]*



*[overcorrection with Levels]*

I have purposely overdone the Levels adjustment, shown above, so I can point out that this can be corrected at any time by simply double clicking the Levels icon on the adjustment layer (shown with the cursor pointing to it, below). This will reopen the Levels dialog box, with the current settings, which I can correct.



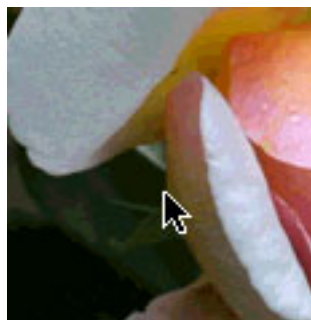
This tutorial is not going to be about Levels, but in case you are a beginner, and have no idea how it works, the thing that looks like a black mountain peak in the Levels dialog box (the histogram) is a representation of your image's tonal values.

Standard procedure (though not necessarily the best one for any given image) is to move the two, tiny end triangles that you see below the black mountain, inward until they just touch the edges of the histogram.

Be sure the Preview option box is checked so you can see what you're doing to the image. It's generally best to leave the center triangle alone, though you are encouraged to slide it around and see what it does.

After a Levels correction, the next thing most people want to do with an image is correct any scratches, dust or other blemishes.

I should have picked a dirtier photo. It wouldn't hurt to remove the bit of light stem that is showing on the left side of the rose.



For this you will want the clone stamp. If I use it

directly on the background layer, I will probably be just fine. However, it is just as easy to make a new layer, and make the changes there. That way, if I don't like the results, I can simply delete the layer.

I can also see how the image looks before and after the changes by clicking the eyeball icon on the added layer to remove visibility of the layer which contains all the clone additions.



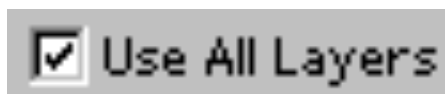
Here's the procedure. Click the New Layer button at the bottom of the Layers palette to add a new, empty layer. Make sure that layer is selected (it will be dark blue - click on it to select it if it's not).

Zoom way in on the area that you want to edit. The easiest way to do this is to choose the zoom tool in the toolbox, and drag a rectangular selection around the area you want to zoom to. When you release the mouse button, the screen will maximize that area.



Note that this is not a “selection” like you would make with a selection tool; it is just looks like one for a moment, as you are dragging the outline.

Next, choose the clone stamp tool in the toolbox. Make sure Use All Layers is checked in its options bar.



Choose a brush appropriate to the spot you want to cover. Press the Alt key, and click on a spot that has the color, and luminosity that you want to apply to the blemish. Then release the Alt key, and click on

the area that you want to correct to transfer the image data to cover that spot.

It is almost always a better idea to click, and not stroke with the clone stamp. Click repeatedly, as needed to cover the spot. It is also often better to use a reduced opacity. You can change the opacity on the clone tool's options bar.

I went ahead and removed two little bumps from the petals at the top of the image since they were distracting. See the results of the corrected Levels adjustment, and the clone stamp edits, below.

Next, I'll show you some filter effects and layer blend mode techniques.



**Copyright © 2000 by Jay Arraich.  
All rights reserved.  
All photographs copyright ©2000 by Jay  
Arraich  
jay@arraich.com**



## Why Layers?

Since I was happy with the Levels adjustment I had, and the clone corrections looked good, I wanted to merge these layers together to make subsequent steps less complicated. Note that once these three layers are merged, you can't go back and change them.

I clicked on the little arrow in the upper right corner of the Layers palette and chose Merge Visible from the menu. As the title of the command indicates, you can exclude a layer from merging by clicking its layer's eyeball icon and turning off its visibility. I had all mine visible, so, after using the command, I was left with one layer.

A common technique used to correct images that are overall either too dark, or too light is to make a duplicate layer, and use the layer blend modes to correct the tones.

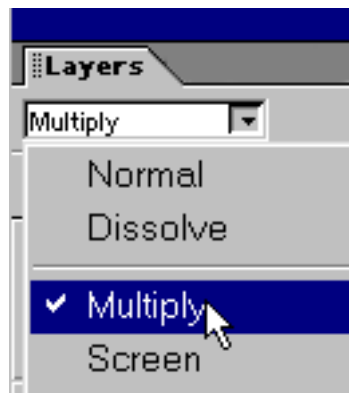
To do this, click on the little arrow in the upper right corner of the Layers palette, and choose Duplicate Layer from the menu. Or, you can drag the layer that you wish to duplicate onto the New Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers palette.

In the dialog box that appears, it's a good idea to give the duplicate layer a name that indicates what you will be using it for.

Any layer can be renamed at any time by double clicking its name in the Layers palette (Photoshop 6.0 users, you have to press Alt while double-clicking to rename anything other than the

background layer).

With the duplicate layer directly above the original, select it, and change its blend mode to Multiply if you want to darken your image.

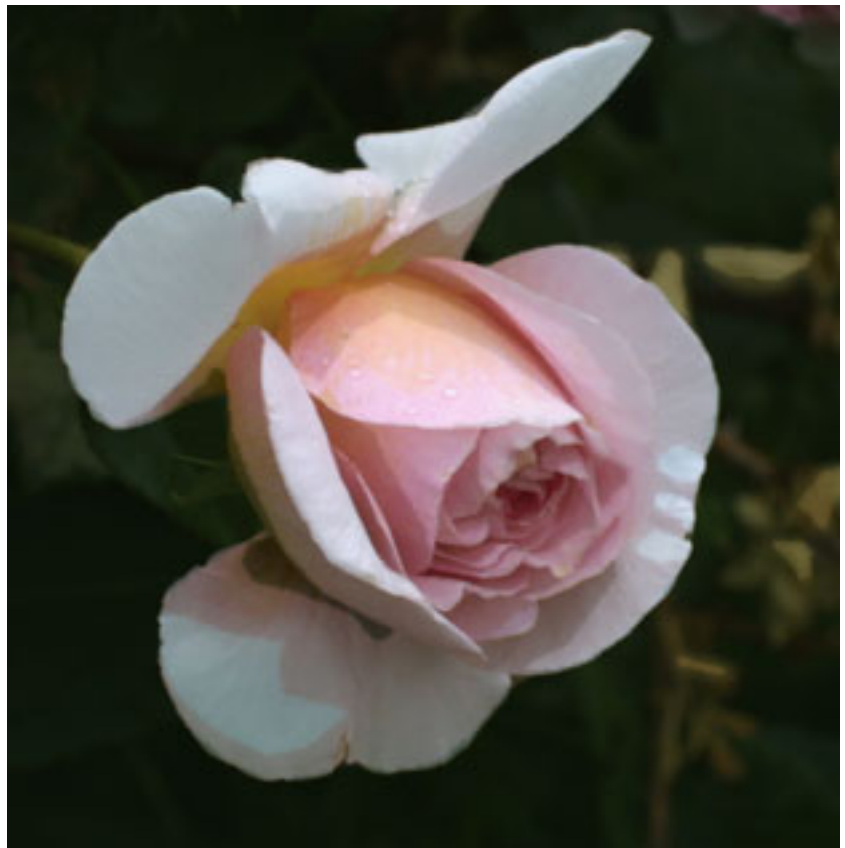


Change the blend mode to Screen if you want to lighten your image.



Use the layer opacity setting to adjust the degree of lightening or darkening (click on the little arrow to the right of the Opacity percentage text box to access the slider shown activated, above).

If you would like to create artistic effects with your image, you can apply filters to the duplicate layer (filters affect the currently selected layer, only). You can then use the layer blend modes, and/or layer opacity settings to blend the filtered image with the unfiltered original, in the layer below.



Above are two examples of filters applied to the duplicate layer. The top image shows the results of using Filter > Artistic > Colored Pencil. After the filter was applied (with the default settings), the duplicate layer's opacity was changed to 32 %.

The second example, above, has had the Filter > Artistic > Cutout filter applied. The duplicate layer's opacity was changed to 37 % in this case.

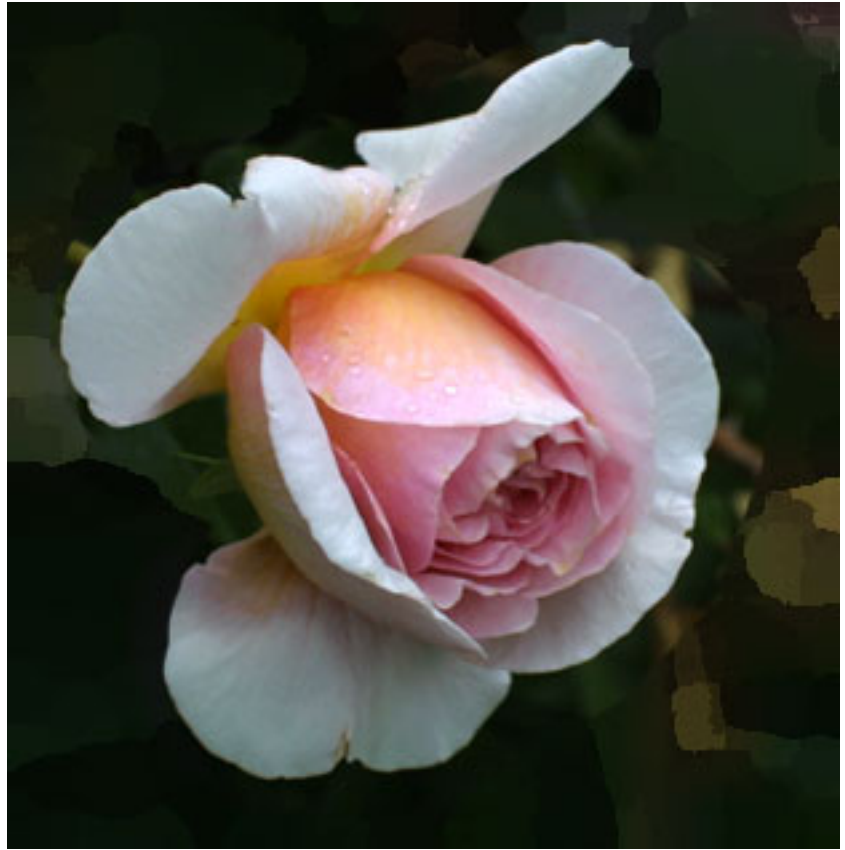
Another way to use filters on a duplicate layer is to erase a portion of the image from that layer, allowing the unfiltered image, on the layer below, to show through.

In the example below, I applied the Filter > Artistic > Palette Knife filter to the duplicate layer. I then used the eraser tool to erase all of the flower from the duplicate layer. This allowed the unfiltered flower to be seen, while leaving the filtered green background of the duplicate layer.



See the resulting image, below.

Sharpening of your image should be left until last. Corrections and edits that you make to an image can change the way you will apply sharpening, so you want to make it your last step before outputting the image (printing, etc.). I'll cover sharpening, next.



**Copyright © 2000 by Jay Arraich.  
All rights reserved.  
All photographs copyright ©2000 by Jay  
Arraich  
jay@arraich.com**

# Photoshop Elements Tips

## Why Layers?

To sharpen images, the Filter > Sharpen> Unsharp Mask should always be your first choice. The sharpen tool in the toolbox can be used for adding sparkle to specular highlights, but otherwise, its best to stick with the unsharp mask.

For information on how to use the settings in the unsharp mask dialog box, please see my **Sharpening** tutorial in the Photoshop section.

In Photoshop, there is an option that allows you to change the blend mode and opacity of a filter after it has been applied. (It's found via Edit > Fade Filter in v. 6.0; it's at Filter > Fade Filter in earlier versions.)

One of the best uses of this feature is to change the blend mode of the unsharp mask filter from Normal to Luminosity after it has been applied.

This is because sharpening can often introduce off-color halos to the edges it sharpens in color images. By using the Luminosity blend mode, you exclude color information from the blend.

Since you don't have this Fade feature in Elements, sharpening a duplicate layer, and using the layer blend modes is a way to approximate this effect.

Another common sharpening technique used for portraits where you might want the eyes and mouth to be very sharp, but the skin to be a little blurry, and soft is to sharpen a duplicate layer, and use a layer mask to limit its application to the eyes and mouth.

If you would like to try this, you'll need to read

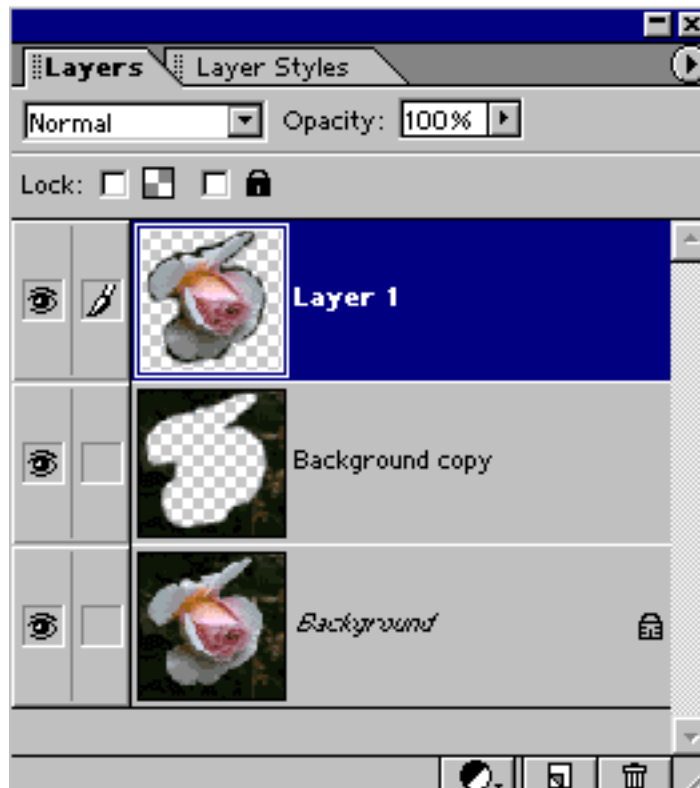
through my **Layer Masks** tutorial to find out how to add a mask to a layer in Elements.

You can do a crude approximation of a layer mask's effect by using the eraser with a soft brush and a low opacity to stroke away sections of the duplicate, sharpened layer over areas of the image where you want the unsharpened, softer layer below to show through.

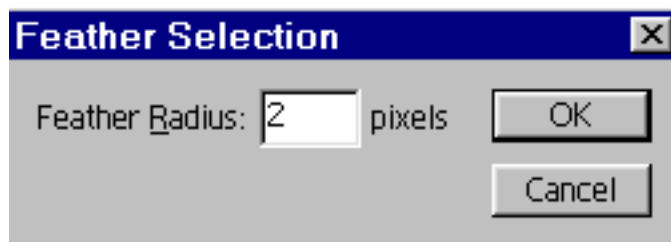
I'm going to show you a simple, fun way to use sharpening, along with Gaussian blurring to create an artistic effect.

To start, I used the lasso tool to drag a loose selection around the flower. See below.





With the selection active, I chose Select > Feather and entered 2 in the dialog box that appeared.



After making sure the duplicate layer was selected in the Layers palette, I chose Layer > New > Layer via Cut. You can use Layer via Copy if you prefer. It won't make any difference in this case, though it's easier for me to show you what I'm doing if I use Cut.

Please note that the Layer > New > Layer via Copy (shortcut is Ctrl-J) is very, *very* handy. Just drag a selection around the area you want to work on, give it a little feather, and click Ctrl-J to copy the selection to a new layer.

You can use this command any time you want to isolate a part of your image on another layer for correction — which is what this tutorial is all about!

You can see the resulting layers (from Layer via Cut) in the illustration above. I selected the top layer, with the cutout rose on it, and applied Filter > Sharpen

> Unsharp Mask using a setting of 120 % for Amount, and the default radius and threshold.

Next, I selected the middle layer which has the green background on it, and applied Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur using a very large radius (5) to make the background completely soft. The resulting image is shown, below.

If you try this effect, it's a good idea to magnify your image, and go over the edge where the sharp layer meets the blurry one to look for abrupt transitions. Use the blur tool to make the edges blend smoothly.

Pay attention to which layer you have selected when you go to use the blur tool. You need to select the layer that contains the pixels you want to blur.



**Copyright © 2000 by Jay Arraich.  
All rights reserved.  
All photographs copyright ©2000 by Jay  
Arraich  
jay@arraich.com**