

The stuff I left out

Little tidbits I should've included in the previous article

OK, this isn't *everything* I left out of the Photoshop article, but there are a few things which may fill it out a bit. These afterthoughts would have distracted from the techniques I covered in the earlier article. Many of these tips use features in Photoshop CS, but you can use most of them with the earlier versions, too.

I forgot to tell you who your friends are! You know **Control***-z is your friend. That's "Undo." (I think that ought to be a foot switch.) Do it again and it just *undoes* the undo. If you want to go back further in history, go to your History palette.

Another friend of yours is at the upper left of your keyboard. It's the **"Escape"** key. When you change your mind and realize you don't *really* want to crop something, but you have the crop tool greying out most of your photo, you don't *have* to finish the crop and then "Undo." Just hit Escape and, well, you've escaped.

Have you ever been making a really complicated

selection with the Polygon Lasso and you slowly realize you can't find your starting point? You click around and make more of a mess... pressing delete/backspace just deletes your last click, the History palette won't respond... A-argh! ESCAPE! That'll end your misery, but now you have to start the whole selection all over again.

A better thing to consider is *closing* the selection even though you don't know exactly what it is. Just press **"Enter"** (that closes the "loop"). That's what I do, then I get to add to or take away from whatever selection I've created. Usually I'm at least half way there. In fact the "half way there" method is a good one to *start out* with.

If you have a really complicated selection (which tend to close themselves when you can't do anything with the shape it has selected), select just a part of it, then add to it using the "add to" and "remove from" icons in the options bar at the top of your screen. In fact, if you think about it,

** To make this easier to read, I'm going to assume Mac folks know to press Command when I say control, OK?*

you might want to make part of your selection with one selection tool (say the magic wand) and subtract from it using another, then refine with yet another tool. This method can really speed up your selection process while maintaining the precision you want.

Another friend you have is the **Alt/Option** key. If you want an adjustment layer to affect *only* the layer directly beneath it, hold Alt and click on the line between the adjustment layer and the layer below it.

Holding the Alt/Option key also often allows you to bypass the “Are you sure?” dialog box such as when you’re deleting (trash canning) a file from Photoshop’s new browser.

Alt/Option makes the zoom tool zoom *downward*, that is, decrease the magnification. You know how to use the slider on the Navigation palette, right? If not, experiment with it. It’s another friend.

By now you probably know that when a dialog box offers you a two-button choice you can select the highlighted (default) one by just pressing “**Enter**,” right? At least now you do.

Shortcuts I use a lot

Get palettes out of the way

You probably know that to temporarily get all those palettes out of the way, you just press **Tab** (unless you’re using the Text tool). Often you’ll still want access to your Tool Bar (for the tools you don’t remember the shortcuts for), so just press **Shift-Tab** to toggle (on-off) all palettes except the Tool Bar. You can toggle the layers palette on and off by pressing **F7**!

Put it on its own layer

To quickly copy something onto its own layer, I select it and press **control-j**. That copies it, creates a new layer and pastes it. To *cut* it and create a new layer and paste (all at once), press **shift-control-j**.

Larger/smaller brush

The left and right “bracket” keys, [and], will

decrease and increase the size of the brush you’ve selected. Very efficient for covering large areas then going into the smaller areas. If you have a special mouse with additional keys, program them with this ability! Then you can have one hand on the mouse and the other on the “**x**” key (to change back & forth from foreground color to background color).

Using Guides

Pressing **Control-r** puts rulers at the top and left side of your photo. From them you can drag guide lines if you want them. You can toggle these on and off with **Control-semicolon (;)**.

Use an unnatural background color

When I’m removing a background area (say behind a sculpture) to put the subject on a seamless background with a shadow, I’ll make a new background layer that’s chartruse or something far from any color that is in the photo. Too often, before I started doing this, when I’ve planned to put something against a white background, I’ve neglected to remove white areas which come back to haunt me later, such as when I’m trying to cast a phony shadow from the subject (ask me if you want to know more about this).



Keyboard shortcuts *(how I remember them)*

When you started out in Photoshop it was just to fix up a photo or two. Me too. I didn't bother to learn keyboard shortcuts or anything else at first. I was happy when I finally found which of those drop-down menus at the top of my screen held the feature I was looking for. After a while I realized it's even *easier* to memorize the keyboard shortcuts! Now I don't have to search anymore!

You probably use **Control-c** for Copy, **Control-x** is Cut, and **Control-v** is Paste (I picture the caret insertion mark: **^**). **L** is Lasso, **I** is I-dropper (which is also the I-shaped Measuring Tool), **V** is the upside down shape of the Selection tool, what else would **Z** be but Zoom? **W** is Wand, **E** is erase... see how easy they make it? "Layers" starts with L... that's an upside down 7... **F7** is the Layers palette! When you've Tabbed the palettes out of your way you can still get around the missing Tool Bar. It seems strange, though, that there's no key to bring

back the Tool Bar by itself other than Shift-tabbing.

OK, a quiz: You've pressed Tab and your palettes are gone. You've created an Neutral Overlay Layer, or a Curves adjustment layer or a layer mask, and you want to paint on it... what shortcuts will you want? B gives you a brush, d gives you the default black foreground color/white background color, x switches between them [decreases your brush size and] enlarges it. What else could you want? Life is good!

Other efficiencies

Two more things which have made my life easier are Tool Presets and Actions.

Tool Presets (Photoshop CS)

Don't you find that you've gotten to like certain size and shape brushes with certain percentages of Opacity and Flow? Save yourself the nuisance of creating them from scratch all the time.

When you have chosen and shaped your favorite

"Why won't this work?"

I'm sure every once in a while you find yourself trying to do something very simple such as select an area or darken something, and it WON'T WORK! You click keys and abuse your mouse, and still NOTHING! Here's a list of questions to ask yourself.

1. Are you on the right layer?

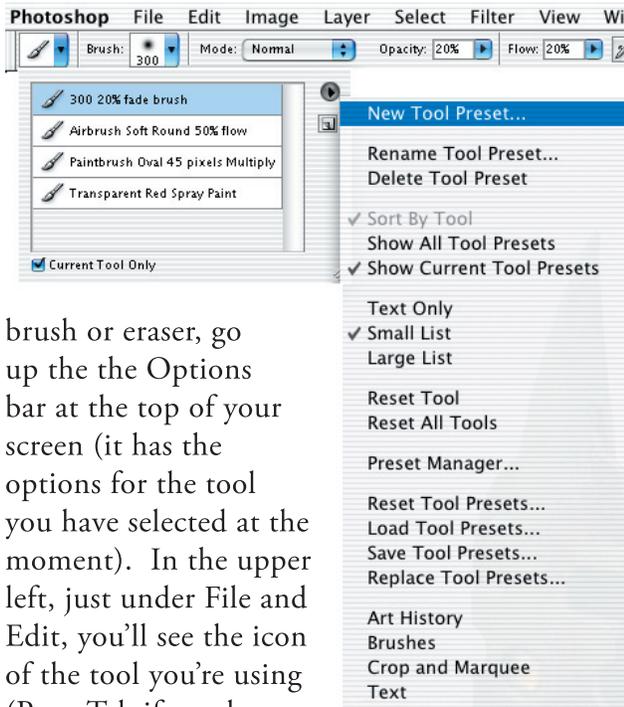
This is where I usually make mistakes. Maybe I've just made a layer visible (I clicked the eye in the layers palette), or juggled the order of my layers, but I'm not "addressed" to the layer I want to work on (it's not highlighted in the Layers palette). I'll often blink that eye on and off to be sure I'm on the layer I think I'm on. A trick, by the way: If you hold Control/

Command and click on something in your photo, Photoshop will address the layer that thing is on. Cool?

2. Is something (else) selected?

As you know, you select an area to prevent whatever you're doing from happening elsewhere. Rather than looking all over your photo for a tiny selection and asking everyone with access to your computer if they've selected anything, simply press **Control-d**. That'll de-select whatever's selected, and if nothing's selected it won't do anything at all. Go ahead, do it now. See? No harm done.

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brush or eraser, go up the the Options bar at the top of your screen (it has the options for the tool you have selected at the moment). In the upper left, just under File and Edit, you'll see the icon of the tool you're using (Press Tab if you have your palettes hidden).

To the right of that icon is a little black down-triangle. Click it and you'll see a list of Presets for that particular tool.

Photoshop gives you a few Presets to get you started, but the fun part is making your own! While you have your favorite brush, click that down-triangle and then click the right-triangle at the right of the drop-down box which appears. Select New Tool Preset. Hey, you can even name the brush!

Yes, you can name your favorite brush preset after me, but it's much easier to identify it later (when you have several in the list) if the name describes the brush by size, opacity, color, etc.

Actions

I have to admit that when I learned how to do actions I felt it had nothing to do with creatively improving photographs. Well, I soon got tired of doing the same mundane, sometimes complex things time after time. I learned to do actions just because it was that week's assignment. Now I find actions are the key to freeing me from the boring chores of Photoshop.

A prime example is my first action. I found that I was often going through the steps I told you about in the previous article to make a Neutral Overlay Layer. Over and over again... nearly every photo! I have better, more creative things to do, so I took a moment and created an Action I call Overlay Layer. Having made it, I now just open my Actions palette (I keep it in my Well at the top right of my screen), click on Overlay Layer and click the Play icon. *BOOM!* I have an overlay layer! (I have to say the "boom" part myself.) I can even "call" the action by just pressing Shift-F4!

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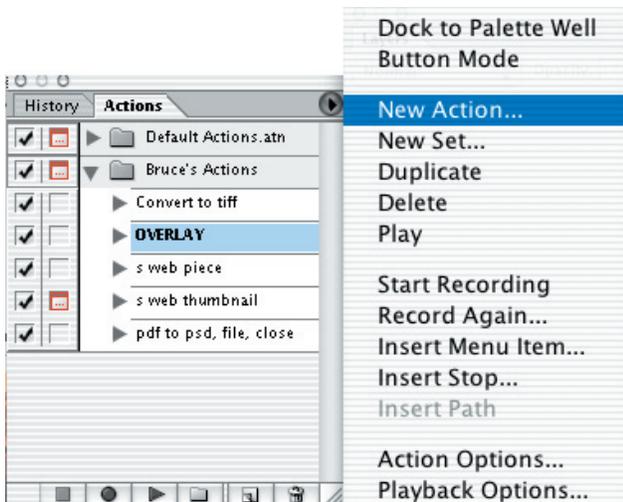
3. Is a dialog box open?

This may sound stupid, but sometimes I'll get distracted when, for instance, I've just begun to create a Curves adjustment layer (in my mind it's already done) and I notice something I forgot to do somewhere in the photo. I'll go try to Clone stamp out an imperfection, and the darn thing won't work! ... until I close my Curves dialog box.

When all else fails

Photoshop is wonderful, but it's not infalible. If you had to do as much thinking behind the scenes as Photoshop does, you'd go bonkers sometimes, too.

If Photoshop starts doing weird things we know it's tired and needs a rest, so Save your work and close the document then close Photoshop. Heck, the computer might need a fresh outlook, too, so often I'll shut everything down and Restart. While it's loading everything I take some kind of break, too. It's nice of your computer to insist on your taking little breaks now and then!

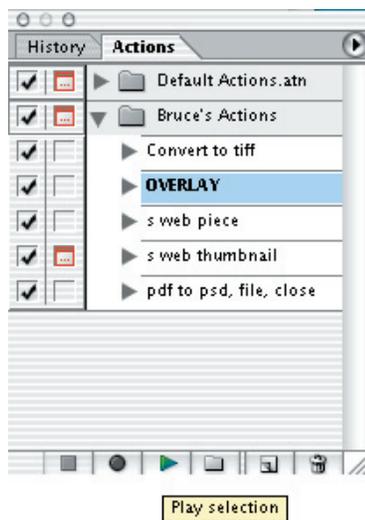


Making Actions is the easiest thing you can imagine. Can you operate a cassette recorder or VCR? You can do this (there's not even clock to set). Just click on right-triangle at the top the Actions palette and click "New Set." (You don't have to do this all the time. This is just to name your own action set.) I called my set simply "Bruce's Actions." Now go back to the Actions right-triangle and select "New Action." In what set? Well the set you just created, of course. Name the action something appropriate, decide upon a

shortcut, if you like, and click "Record."

Now all you have to do is actually perform the tasks you want the action to do for you in the future, and then click "Stop."

Wasn't that easy? Now you can do whatever that



action does anytime you want to with any photo. That's amazingly nifty!

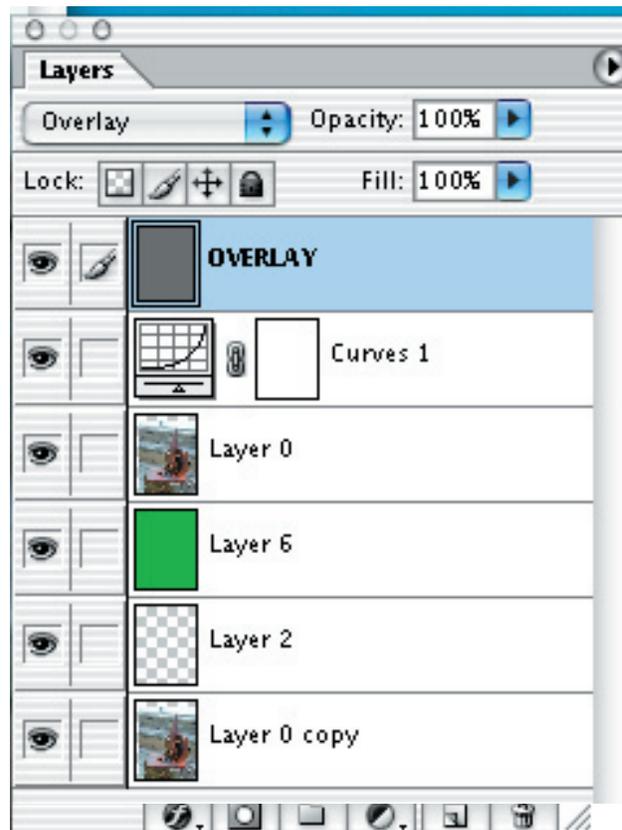
At work when I create a photo of a product, I open the file I downloaded from the digital camera previously and do a curves adjustment layer on it, and maybe a neutral overlay layer. I'll duplicate the background layer (so I have something to go back to if I lose part of my image) and put a (temporary) chartruse layer under my duplicate background layer, and an empty layer on top of that which will eventually be a place for my phony shadow. I've made one action which does all of the above steps. COOL!

I find it's faster to discard a layer I don't need (such as an unused Neutral Overlay Layer) than to make one when I need it.

Droplets

Now imagine creating an action, simple or very complex and being able to take a whole FOLDER

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All this with one action!

Fixing perspective distortion

If you point your camera even slightly upward or downward, it'll distort the photo. Go ahead and *do it...* it'll give you a much more interesting perspective than straight on, but let's fix the distortion afterward in Photoshop.

Using the Zoom tool (z) and holding Alt/Option, make your distorted image take up only two-thirds or so in your window. Double click the layer in the layers palette



and hit "Enter." This makes your background layer a regular, transformable layer.

Drag some vertical guide lines (as described earlier) onto the photo. The verticals in the photo should be parallel with these guides. Go up to Edit > Transform and click Distort. Drag the corner "handles" of the photo horizontally until the verticals in the photo match your vertical guides. Now you'll have to re-crop, but the perspective distortion is gone!



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of photos, apply the action to every single one of the photos and save a copy of each of the (modified) photos into a separate folder (leaving your originals unscathed). Wouldn't that be great?

When I clean up a photo of a piece of sculpture for susandrasculpts.com, I crop it to 8"x12" and Save that high resolution photo in a specific folder. I've created an action which will take a photo that size, change it to 72 dpi and 7" tall and **Save For Web** to a folder called "New Web Photos" then further reduce it and save that image (Save For Web) to a folder called "New Web Thumbs" (for thumbnail photos I put on the site's home page), then it closes the file without saving those changes. So I have the cleaned-up photo in its original, high-resolution form, a fairly large photo to go on its own web page, and a thumbnail, all from one action.

I won't bore you with the details of how to create this "super action" (you can easily do it yourself... Photoshop will give you help along the way), It's called a "Droplet" which allows you to perform an action to an entire folder. Having made an action you want to apply to an entire folder, go to File > Automate > Create Droplet, and fill in the blanks and follow the steps. Having done that, you can

just drag your "source" folder onto your Droplet, and it does everything for you. Your results appear in your "destination" folders. Ab-so-lutely cool.

I take my entire folder of newly cleaned-up sculpture photos and drag it to my Susandra Site droplet, and I have all of the web photos I need.

It's easy to custom make your own actions, and you can download literally thousands of Photoshop actions from Adobe Studio Exchange: share.studio.adobe.com

So now all you have to do is the fun stuff Photoshop allows you to do like remove telephone wires and people's wrinkles, and put in pretty skies and stuff. I hope these few tips have made Photoshop even easier for you and more fun.

Bruce Philpott is a professional graphics guy who writes these little articles mainly so he can put autobiographical notes like this one about himself at the end of the articles.

When he learns something useful, he feels obliged to pass it along to anyone else who shows an interest in learning. Now it's your turn to pass it along.

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