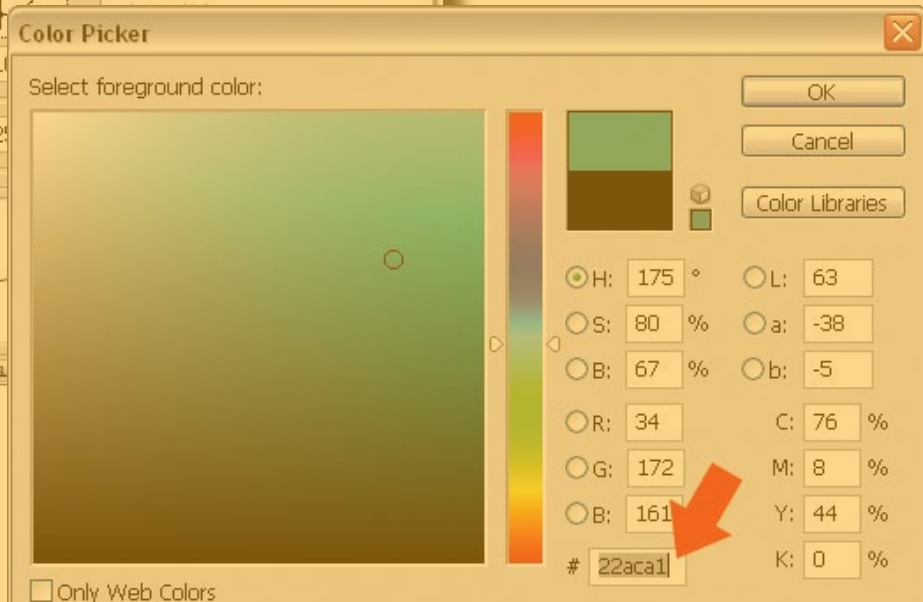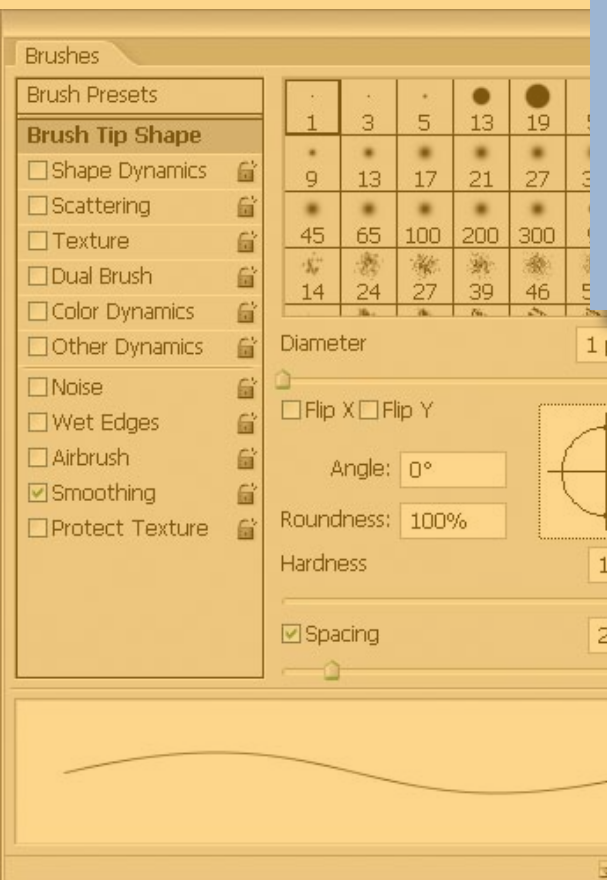# 2 Basic Skills

Now that you're familiar with Photoshop, you're probably eager to get right into it! This chapter covers some of the basic tasks that Photoshop users should master, such as resizing and rotating documents and layers, working with masks, creating curves and custom shapes, working with transparent images, and more!

This chapter covers fundamental solutions that we'll call upon throughout the remainder of this book. And as an added bonus, I'll show you how to create a coupon box with dotted borders—no doubt you've always wanted to make your very own one of these!

Brushes

Brush Presets						
	1	3	5	13	19	

Brush Tip Shape

- ☐ Shape Dynamics 🔓
- ☐ Scattering 🔓
- ☐ Texture 🔓
- ☐ Dual Brush 🔓
- ☐ Color Dynamics 🔓
- ☐ Other Dynamics 🔓
- ☐ Noise 🔓
- ☐ Wet Edges 🔓
- ☐ Airbrush 🔓
- ☑ Smoothing 🔓
- ☐ Protect Texture 🔓

	9	13	17	21	27	
45	65	100	200	300	
14	24	27	39	46	

Diameter   1 px

☐ Flip X ☐ Flip Y

Angle: 0°

Roundness: 100%

Hardness

☑ Spacing

Rename Brush...
Delete Brush

Text Only
Small Thumbnail
Large Thumbnail
Small List

Color Picker

Select foreground color:

OK
Cancel
Color Libraries

- ⦿ H: 175 °   ○ L: 63
- ○ S: 80 %   ○ a: -38
- ○ B: 67 %   ○ b: -5
- ○ R: 34
- ○ G: 172   C: 76 %
- ○ B: 161   M: 8 %
- # 22aca1   Y: 44 %
- K: 0 %

☐ Only Web Colors

Placing a Graphic in your File

Often you'll want to import existing graphics and artwork into your Photoshop document. A problem for Photoshop? Not at all—in fact, there are several ways you can do this!

External graphics can be placed in Photoshop as raster layers or Smart Objects. First, I'll show you how to place these graphics, then we'll talk about the difference between raster layers and Smart Objects.

Solution

■ **placing artwork from a web page**

Copy the artwork from the web page, then select **Edit > Paste** or press *Ctrl-V* (*Command-V* on a Mac) to paste it into your Photoshop document. Photoshop will create a new layer containing the artwork, or place it into a selected empty layer. The artwork will be on a raster layer.

■ **placing artwork from flattened image files**

A flattened image file—such as a GIF, JPEG or PNG—contains artwork on a single layer. Open the file in Photoshop and use **Select > All** or press *Ctrl-A* (*Command-A*) to create a selection of the entire document. Click on your Photoshop document then select **Edit > Paste** or press *Ctrl-V* (*Command-V*) to paste it. Photoshop will paste the document into a new or selected empty layer as it does when pasting artwork from a web page. The artwork will be on a raster layer.

■ **placing layers from a different Photoshop document**

Position the document windows so that both are visible. Select the window of the document you wish to import from, to bring up its **Layers** palette. Select and drag the necessary layers over to the new window and release the mouse button when you see a thick, black outline around the window. This will copy the layers across as shown in the example at the top of the next page. The copied layers will retain their original properties.
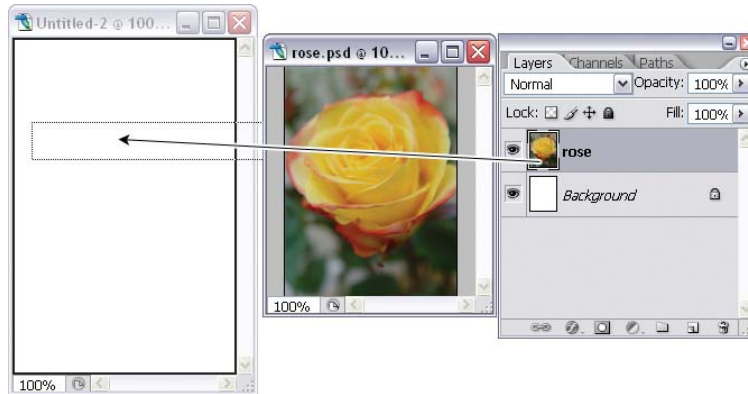
Copying a layer from one Photoshop document to another

- **placing artwork from Illustrator**

  Open Illustrator and select the artwork you wish to export
  to Photoshop. Copy the artwork using *Ctrl-C* (*Command-C*
  on a Mac). Switch to Photoshop while Illustrator is still
  open and paste your copied artwork using *Ctrl-V*
  (*Command-V*).

  A dialog box will appear, asking you whether you wish to
 paste the artwork as a **Smart Object**, **Pixels**, **Path** or a
  Shape Layer.

Paste dialog box

- **placing artwork as a Smart Object**

  Select **File** > **Place** and choose the file you wish to import. Click **Place** to import
  the file into your Photoshop document as a Smart Object. For PDF and Illustrator
  files, Photoshop will display a dialog box that asks you to select the pages you
  wish to place. Choose the pages you want and click **OK**.

  The Smart Object will initially be placed with a
  bounding box surrounding it, as shown here. You can
  use this bounding box to move, rotate, scale, or make
  other transformations to the object. When you're done,
  double-click inside the bounding box to commit the
  Smart Object to its layer.
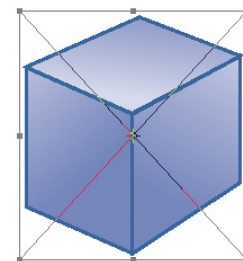
The bounding box for an image
pasted as a Smart Object

Discussion

Smart Objects

A Smart Object is an embedded file that appears in its own layer in Photoshop. A Smart Object layer is distinguished by an icon that overlays the thumbnail image displayed in the **Layers** palette, as shown in the example below.

Smart Objects are different from other layers because they are linked to a source file (e.g., an Illustrator file, JPEG, GIF or other Photoshop file). If you make changes to the source file, the Smart Object layer will also be updated with those changes.
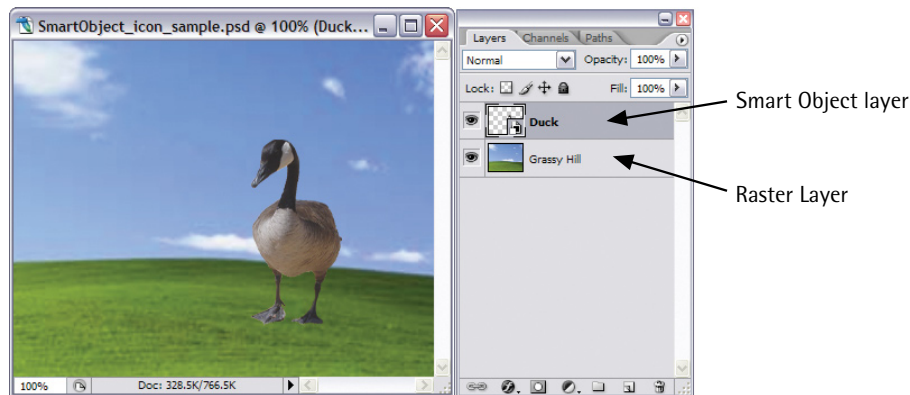
Raster layer vs Smart Object layer

In contrast, **raster layers** (or regular layers) are fully editable, so you can draw and paint on them, fill them with colors, or erase pixels. Unlike Smart Objects, where you retain image quality, if you resize a raster layer smaller, you will lose information.

This is demonstrated in the example on the next page, which shows the result of a Smart Object that has been decreased in size, then resized back to its original dimensions. The same steps, when applied to a raster layer, produce an image that is blurred and of lower quality.

Smart Object resized to 50%

raster layer resized to 50%

Smart Object resized to 25%

raster layer resized to 25%

Smart Object resized back to 100%

raster layer resized back to 100%

The difference in image quality when resizing a Smart Object compared to a raster layer

Because Smart Objects are linked to an outside document, you can resize them without losing the original image data. While you can apply layer effects and some transformations to Smart Object layers, you cannot actually manipulate (paint, draw, erase) their pixels because they are not editable from external documents. You can open the original source file for editing by double-clicking on the Smart Object icon.

Rasterizing

You can **rasterize** Smart Objects by right-clicking on the name of the Smart Object layer and choosing **Rasterize Layer**. This will break the link to the original source file and treat the layer as an ordinary raster layer.

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Resizing a Document

Solution

Bring up the **Image Size** dialog box by selecting **Image > Image Size** or pressing *Ctrl-Alt-I* (*Command-Option-I* on a mac). You can resize the document by altering either the **Pixel Dimensions** or the **Document Size**. Use the former when resizing images that will be used on screen (such as images that will be used on a web page), and the latter when resizing images that will be printed. You can maintain the original document proportions as you resize the image by checking the **Constrain Proportions** checkbox. To scale layer styles (drop shadows, strokes, etc.), check the **Scale Styles** checkbox.
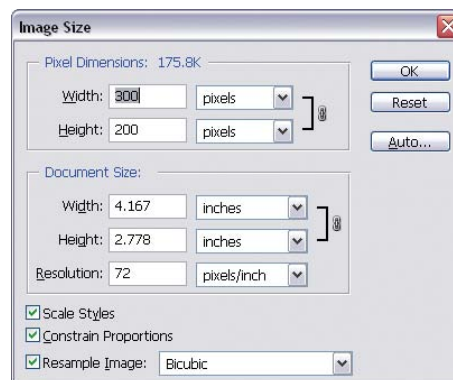
Image Size dialog box

Resizing a Layer or Selection

Photoshop also lets you resize layers or particular portions of a document without affecting the overall size of the document.

Solution

From the **Layers** palette, select the layer that contains the element you wish to resize. If the layer contains other elements that you don't wish to resize, select your element using one of the selection tools.

After making your selection, use **Edit > Free Transform** or press *Ctrl-T* (*Command-T* on a Mac). A bounding box with handles will appear around your selection. Click and drag these handles to resize the element, as shown in this example. To keep the transformation in proportion so that the image does not appear squashed or stretched, hold down the *Shift* key and resize it using the corner handles.

Resizing an element using corner handles

You can also resize the element to a specific width or height using the options bar. In the example below, I clicked the **Maintain Aspect Ratio** button (signified by chain links), then specified the width—this changed the height of my element automatically. If I had not maintained the aspect ratio, only the width of my rose would have changed.

Press *Enter* or double-click inside the bounding box to apply the transformation.
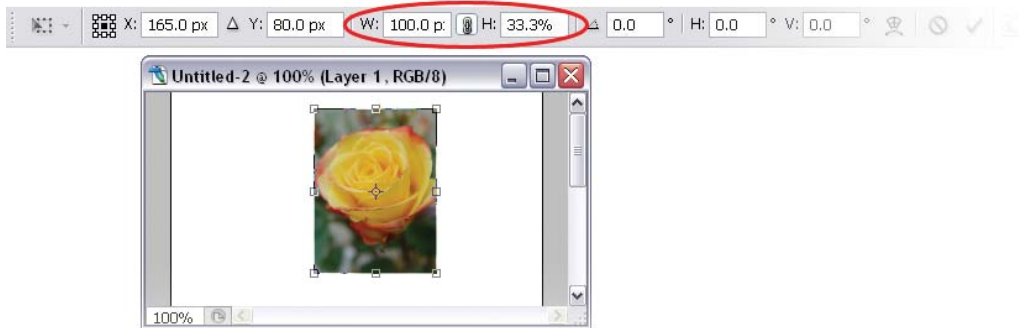
Using the **Free Transform** options

Discussion

When you resize different layer types, you get different results.

- Vector shape layers, such as text or shape layers, can be resized larger or smaller without loss of quality.
- Smart Objects can also be resized larger or smaller without loss of quality, depending on the original file. If the original file is a vector graphic, the Smart Object can be resized without ever losing quality. If the original file is a GIF or similar, the Smart Object can be resized up to the size of the image dimensions, above which it will start to lose quality.
- Raster layers or selections can only be resized smaller. Resizing them larger will usually result in loss of quality.

Rotating a Layer or Selection

Earlier, you may have used the **Free Transform** command to resize layers and selections, and thought it was pretty swell. What you probably weren't aware of at the time is that the very same command can also be used to *rotate* layers and selections!

Solution

Make a selection or choose the layer you'd like to rotate. Select **Edit > Free Transform** or press **Ctrl-T** (**Command T**), and move your cursor outside the bounding box. You'll see that it turns into a curved, two-headed arrow as shown in this example. You can click and drag this cursor to rotate the elements within the bounding box.

Hold down the **Shift** key to constrain the angle movement to 15-degree increments. You can also set a specific angle of rotation (between −180° and 180°) in the **Angle** text box in the options bar.

Rotating a selection
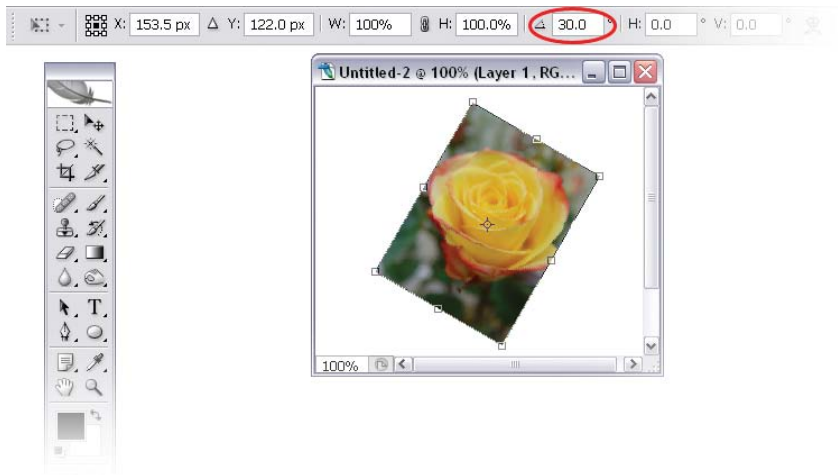
Setting the angle of rotation in the options bar

TIP   Rotation Alternatives

For 90- or 180-degree rotations, you can select **Edit > Transform** and choose from **Rotate 180°**, **Rotate 90° CW**, or **Rotate 90° CCW**.

Press **Enter** or double-click inside the bounding box to complete the transformation.

Using Drawing Tools to Create Lines

Solution

Vertical and Horizontal Lines

Using the Brush or Pencil Tool (**B**), move the cursor to the position from which you'd like the line to start on your document. Click and hold down the mouse button. Hold down the **Shift** key to constrain mouse movement to straight lines, then drag the cursor to draw your line. Release the mouse button to complete the line.

Diagonal Lines

Using the Brush or Pencil Tool (*B*), position the cursor at the point from which you'd like the line to start and click once (release the mouse button this time). Hold down *Shift* and click on the spot where you'd like your line to end. Photoshop will connect the dots with a straight line.

Perfect Squares and Circles

Solution

If you've been a bit adventurous and tried your hand at drawing a few shapes in Photoshop, you've probably found that it can be difficult to draw a perfect square or circle "freehand."

The solution is simple—if you hold down the *Shift* key while creating a rectangle or ellipse, Photoshop will ensure that the shape is a perfect square or circle. This works for both the selection and the shape tools.

Straightening the Edges of a Rounded Rectangle

It's pretty straightforward to create rectangles and rounded rectangles using their respective shape tools. But what if you want a rectangle on which only some corners are rounded?

Solution

1   Create a rounded rectangle using the Rounded Rectangle Tool (*U*) highlighted in this example. Be sure to use the **Shape layers** option in the option bar, not the **Fill pixels** option.
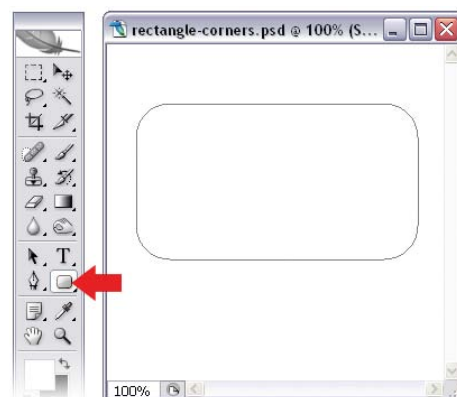
Creating a rounded rectangle

2 Choose the Convert Point Tool (*P*), which you'll find in the Pen Tool flyout menu. Click on the path to show the **anchor points** of the vector shape. These are represented by small white squares, as shown at right.

3 Click on each of the anchor points that make up the rounded corner you want to "straighten."
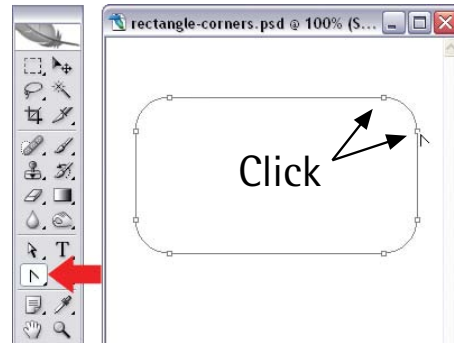
Clicking on the anchor points with the Convert Point Tool

This will change the curve into a "cut" corner, as shown in the example below.

The result of using the Convert Point Tool

4 Select the Direct Selection Tool (*A*) and click on the top angled point (zoom in if necessary). Holding the *Shift* key to constrain the movement to a horizontal path, drag the point laterally until it aligns vertically with the bottom point, as shown in this example. You can move the point using the arrow keys for more precision if you prefer.

Moving the corner point

5 To tidy it up, select the Delete Anchor Point Tool (found in the Pen Tool flyout menu), and click on the bottom point to delete it (as shown in this example) as it's now become redundant. *Voila*! You've got a straight edge on a rounded rectangle!
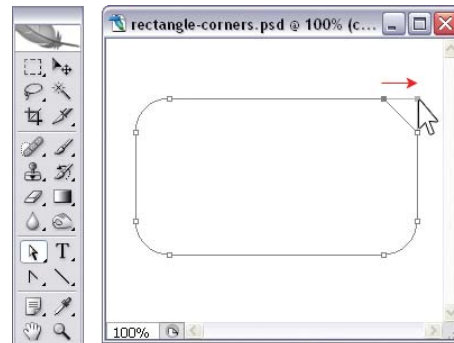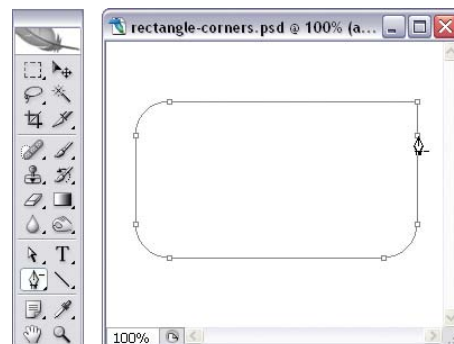
Deleting the anchor point

Curved Design Elements

There may come a time when you find yourself wanting to create curved design elements such as those shown here. You've probably noticed that Photoshop doesn't have a "curve" tool. Where does the curvy goodness come from?

Curved design elements

Solution

The answer, in a nutshell, is the Pen Tool (*P*).

Creating curves involves learning how to draw your own vector shapes—it's exciting stuff! If you've never used vector drawing tools before, you're in for a treat!

Think back to your adventures with the pencil and brush drawing tools, where you clicked and dragged the mouse to create a shape. The Pen Tool is distinctly different, because instead of creating a shape, you are clicking and dragging to set anchor points and curve directions. It takes some practice, but mastering the Pen Tool is your key to creating delightful curves.

Let's start with the basics. Before I explain how to make curved shapes, I'll quickly go over how to draw polygon shapes with the Pen Tool—it's quite easy, and sets a good foundation for drawing trickier curves.

Let's draw a triangle. Each click with the Pen Tool will create a corner point. Click once to create the first point, then again to create the second point. A line segment will automatically connect these points to form a path. Click again to create the third point—a line segment will connect this to the second point, extending the path. Any subsequent points created hereafter will be connected with line segments, but since we're creating a triangle, we only need three points. To make the triangle shape, simply close the path by clicking on the first point we created. You'll notice that the cursor changes into a pen with a little circle when you move it over the original point—this means that you can close the path by clicking on that point. Alternatively, you could close the path simply by pressing *Enter*. The example below shows the four clicks described to create a triangle.

Using the Pen Tool to create a polygon

Let's have a go at creating some curves. This time, when you click to place a point, drag the mouse. You'll see two lines extending from the point you've made. These are known as Bezier control handles, or "handlebars." The length and direction of these handlebars will determine the curvature of the path that we are about to

Curved paths

make. Release the mouse button and move your cursor to another position. Click and hold down the mouse button again. You'll see that a path has been created between your first and second points, and that one of your handlebars has disappeared. If you drag your mouse, new handlebars will extend from the second point.
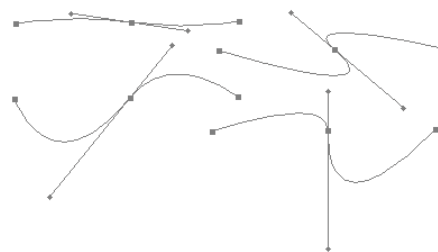
Choose the Direct Selection Tool (*A*) and adjust the curve by dragging the end points of the handlebars, as shown in this example.

Let's try making the curved shapes I showed you on the previous page using these techniques.

Adjusting the curve with handlebars

Curved Shape 1

Follow along with the diagram opposite.

1   Using the Pen Tool (*P*), click once to create a point.
2   Hold down the *Shift* key and click above the first point to create a straight, vertical line.
3   Keeping the *Shift* key down, click to the right of the top point to create a straight, horizontal line.
4   Still holding the *Shift* key, click below the point on the right-hand side to create a vertical line segment a bit shorter than the first one we created.
5   Position your cursor as shown. Press *Shift* and click and drag to create a point with horizontal handlebars.
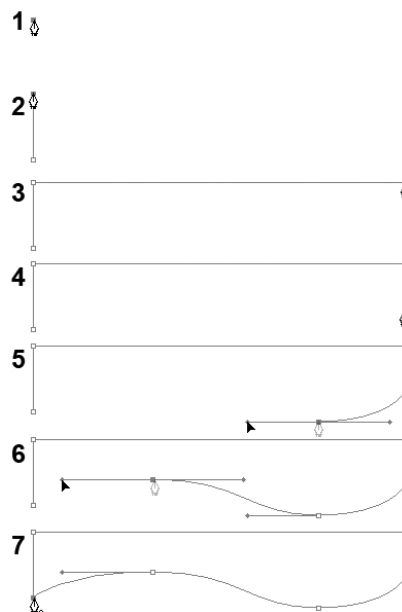
Step by step for Curved Shape 1

6   Position the cursor as shown in step 6 in the diagram. Hold down *Shift*, click and then drag to create another point with horizontal handlebars.

7   Click once on the original point to close the shape.

Curved Shape 2

1   Using the Pen Tool (*P*), click once to create a point.

2   Hold down the *Shift* key and click above the first point to create a straight, vertical line as shown.

3   Keeping the *Shift* key down, click to the right of the top point to create a straight, horizontal line.

4   Position the cursor as shown. Click and drag to create a point with handlebars, then hold down *Shift* and drag to the left to create the curved section.

5   Click once on the original point to close the shape.
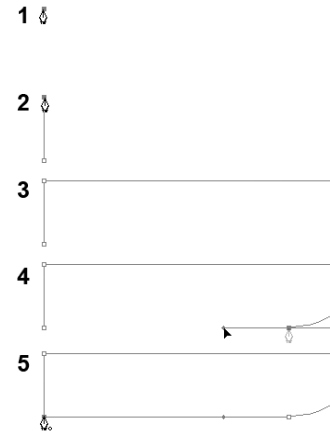
Creating Curved Shape 2

Curved Shape 3

1   Using the Pen Tool (*P*), click once to create a point.

2   Hold down the *Shift* key and click to the right of the first point to create a straight, horizontal line.

3   Keeping the *Shift* key down, click above the point on the right-hand side to create a straight, vertical line.

4   Hold down the *Alt* key (*Option* on a Mac). Click on the point you just created and drag the mouse up and to the left to create a handlebar.

5   Click on the original point to complete the shape, but do not release the mouse button. Drag the mouse downwards and to the left, as shown in step 5 in the diagram, to create a handlebar. Use the Direct Selection Tool (*A*) to adjust your curve with the handlebars.
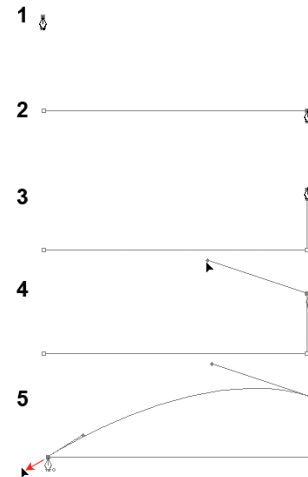
Creating Curved Shape 3

Reusing Vector Shapes

As you work more with shapes, you may find that you're often recreating the same vector shape. If it's a simple shape—one that doesn't involve outlines or layers—you can save it as a **custom shape** and access it later using the Custom Shape Tool (*U*).

WARNING   Save your Shapes!

After you create and add your custom shape, I recommend that you click on the small arrow in the custom shape flyout box and select **Save Shapes…** . This will save all of the custom shapes that are currently visible into a *.csh* file. This way, if you ever need to reinstall Photoshop or reset the preferences, you'll be able to reload your shapes.

You'll find that most customizable elements, such as layer styles, patterns, and brushes, provide menu options that allow you to save the custom settings you've created for them.
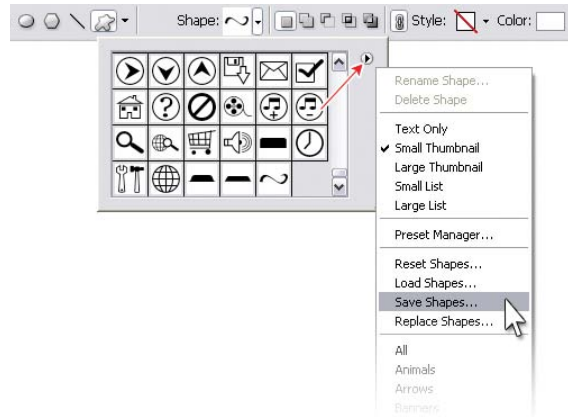
Saving custom shapes

Solution

1   Select your vector shape by clicking on it with the Path Selection Tool (the black arrow).

2   Select **Edit** > **Define Custom Shape…** .

3   Type a name in the **Shape Name** dialog box and click **OK**.
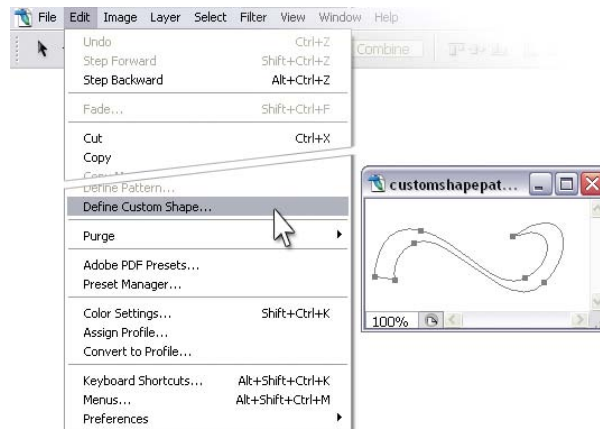

New custom shape

Defining a custom shape
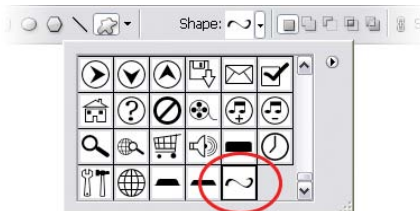
4   To use your shape, select the Custom Shape Tool (*U*) and scroll down the list of available shapes—you'll see that your shape's been added!

Sampling Colors from Image Files

Solution

Open the image file in Photoshop. If you're not able to open it in Photoshop (the image might be embedded in a document, for example), open it in an appropriate program that lets you view the file on your computer (such as a web browser, or Microsoft Word if the image is in a Word document).

- If the image is open in Photoshop, select the Eyedropper Tool (*I*) and click on the image to grab the color. Your foreground color will be set to the color you selected.

- If you've opened the image in another program, resize and move the Photoshop window so that you can see both the Photoshop window and the image simultaneously (this example shows the SitePoint web site next to the Photoshop window). Select the Eyedropper Tool (*I*). Click anywhere in the Photoshop window, and then drag the eyedropper out to the image you're sampling color from. In the example shown here, I sampled the orange color from the SitePoint logo. You can see that this color has been set to the foreground color in the Color Picker.
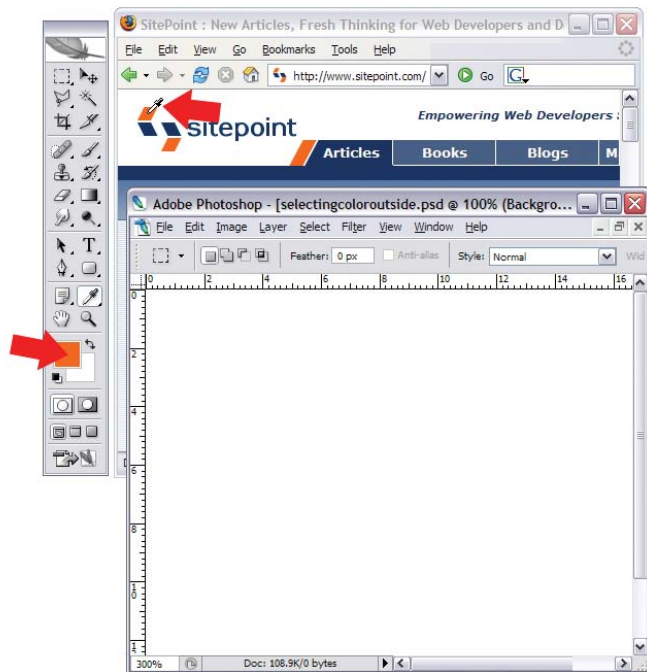
Sampling a color from outside the Photoshop interface

Finding the Hexadecimal Code for a Color

Solution

When you're working on the HTML and CSS for a web site design, you'll need the six-digit hexadecimal codes for the colors that you use. Photoshop makes these available to you in two ways.

TIP   Time-saving Tip

Some icons in the **Info** palette have a little arrow icon next to them. You can change the **Info** palette display options by clicking on these icons—this way, you won't need to go through the **Palette Options** dialog, which saves you two clicks!
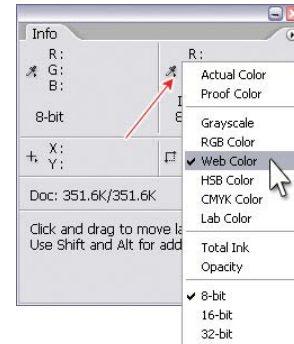
Choosing the color display option

Using the Info Palette

As you move the cursor around a document, the **Info** palette will show you the value for the color over which the cursor is positioned. By default, the palette is set to display the RGB and CMYK values for colors. You can configure the information displayed in the palette by clicking on the small arrow on the top right-hand side of the palette

and selecting **Palette Options…**. A dialog box will appear, displaying the options you can change. Among other things, you'll see two drop-down menus to change the **Color Readout** —change one of these to **Web Color**.

Selecting **Palette Options…** for the **Info** palette
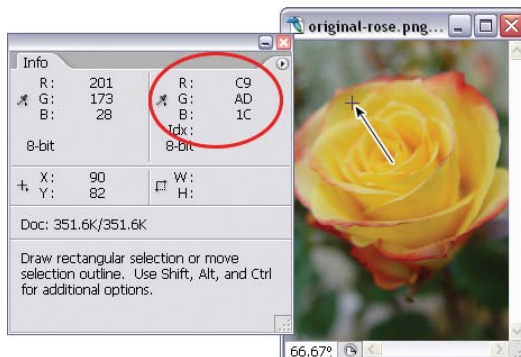
The **Info** palette displays the hexadecimal color codes

This will display the hexadecimal codes for the color's red, green, and blue values. String these together to get your six-digital hexadecimal code. In this example, the hexadecimal code is *c9ad1c.*

The hexadecimal color code displays in the **Color Picker**

Using the Color Picker

The hexadecimal codes for colors are also displayed in a text field at the bottom of the **Color Picker** dialog box, as shown here. You can highlight the color code, copy it using *Ctrl-C* (*Command-C* on a Mac), and paste it into a style sheet or HTML file. Note that the hash sign (#) isn't copied, so don't forget to add that when you're pasting the code!

Adjusting Layer Transparency

Solution

We talked about this task briefly in "Layer Shortcuts and Tasks" in Chapter 1. To adjust the transparency of a layer, change its opacity using the **Opacity** field in the **Layers** palette.

If you have the selection, move, or crop tools selected, you can change the transparency simply by typing a number—the opacity level will magically change to reflect that percentage!
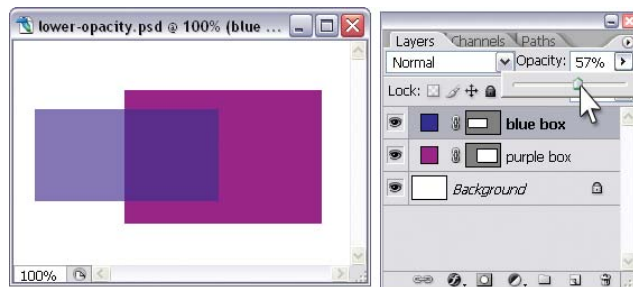

Changing the opacity of a layer

Fading an Image into the Background

An effect that's commonly used in web design is to fade a whole image, or part of an image—its edges, for example—into the background on which it sits. You can easily produce this funky effect using gradients and layer masks in Photoshop.

Solution

1 Arrange your Photoshop document so that the image you wish to fade is on one layer, and the background color is on another layer.
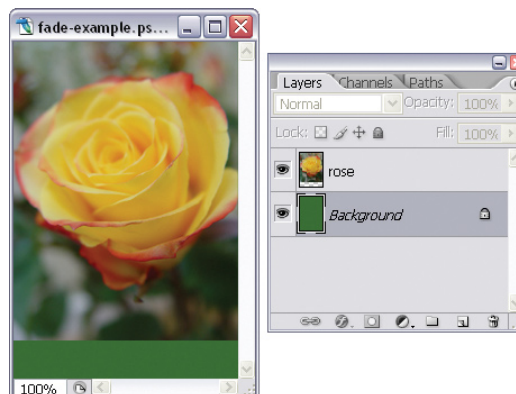
Initial document

2 Select the image layer and click on the Add Layer Mask icon (signified by a white circle on a dark gray background) at the bottom of the **Layers** palette, as shown in this example. A blank rectangular thumbnail will appear next to the layer thumbnail, representing the layer mask. Make sure this thumbnail is selected.
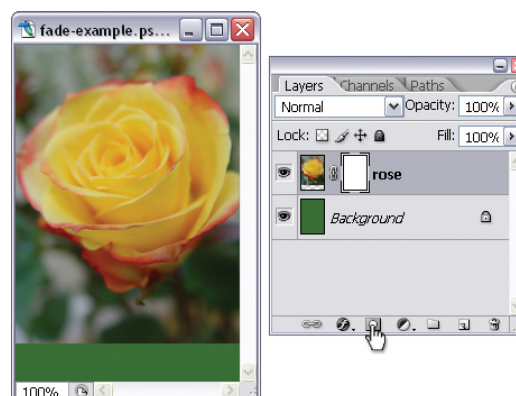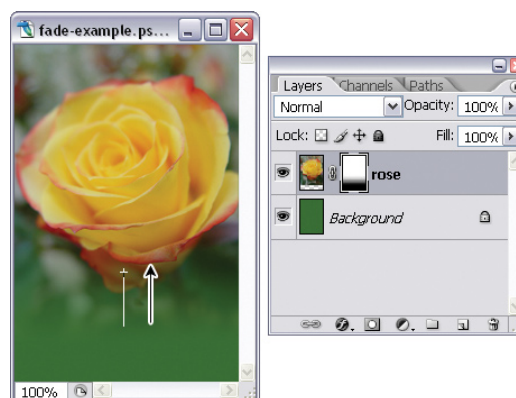

Creating a layer mask

Selecting the Foreground to Transparent gradient

3 Set your foreground color to black. Select the Gradient Tool (*G*) and choose the Foreground to Transparent gradient.

4 Apply the gradient by clicking at the bottom edge of the image and dragging the mouse upwards. Hold down *Shift* to constrain the gradient path to a straight line. Release the mouse button, and the gradient will be applied. Your fade effect is complete!

Adding the fade effect

Discussion

Layer masks are grayscale images that show or hide areas of the layers to which they have been applied. The gray tones on the mask reflect the transparency of corresponding areas on the layer: black areas are completely transparent and, therefore, invisible; white areas are not transparent at all, so they're completely visible; and shades of gray have varying degrees of transparency, depending on how dark the gray is (the closer it is to black, the more transparent the corresponding section on the image layer will be).

You can edit a layer mask using any of the drawing or painting tools, including the pencil and brush tools (*B*), the Gradient Tool (*G*), and the Paint Bucket Tool (*G*). Drawing on a mask affects the mask only, and does not touch the pixels that make up the image. Draw or paint on the mask in black, white, or gray.

In this solution, I used a black-to-transparent gradient to create a gradient on the layer mask. This allowed the upper part of the image to remain visible, but let the lower part fade away so that the background color could show through.

We could also have created a fade effect with the Brush Tool (*B*). In the example shown, I've selected a soft-edged brush, set my foreground color to black, and painted along the bottom of the image on the layer mask to paint out the areas I want to fade.

Creating a layer mask using the Brush Tool

You're probably wondering why you wouldn't just paint a green gradient on the bottom of the picture layer, or on its own layer, to achieve the same effect. Why use a layer mask?

The beauty of layer masks is that they are **non-destructive**. They don't actually modify any of the pixels on the image layer itself—a benefit that, ultimately, gives you greater flexibility. If you decided that you didn't want the effects you'd created using your layer mask, you could get rid of the mask and the original image would remain intact. Or, if you decided you didn't like the green color, you could change the background color and the fade effect would still work.

Blending Two Images Together

Solution

Blending two images together is very similar to fading an image into its background: you'll apply a layer mask to at least one of your images. If you haven't created layer masks before, read the solution titled "Fading an Image into the Background, in Chapter 2."

Arrange your Photoshop document so that one of the images overlaps the other, as shown in the example below. I've usually found that the effect works best if the image backgrounds have similar colors or textures, although this is not mandatory by any means!
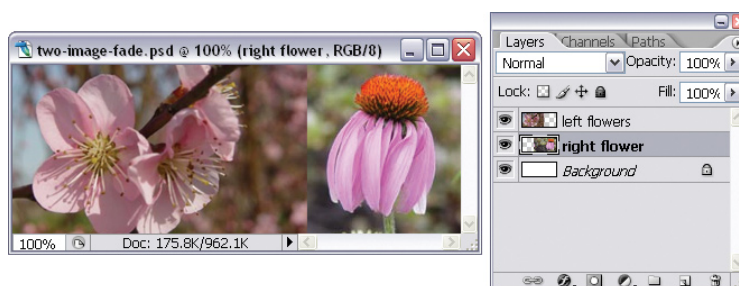
Initial document with two image layers

Create a layer mask for the top layer and use the Gradient Tool (**G**) or the Brush Tool (**B**) to create a fade effect as I described in "Fading an Image into the Background." If you've hidden too much of the layer with the layer mask, you can make these areas visible again by painting them back with white on the layer mask.
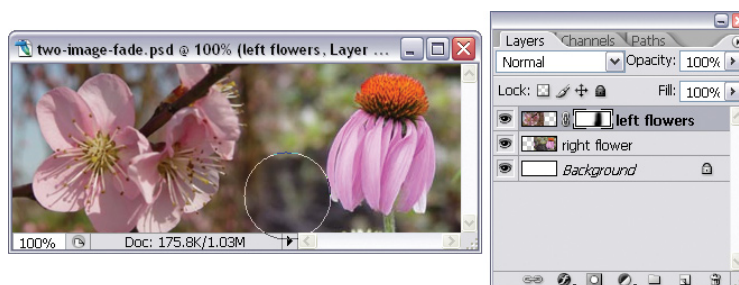
Creating a layer mask

Personally, I'm pretty happy with that effect so I'll leave it there. You can see the final result here.
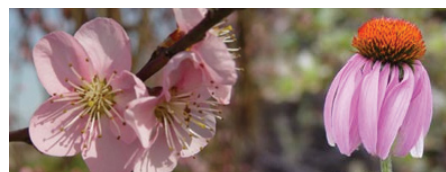
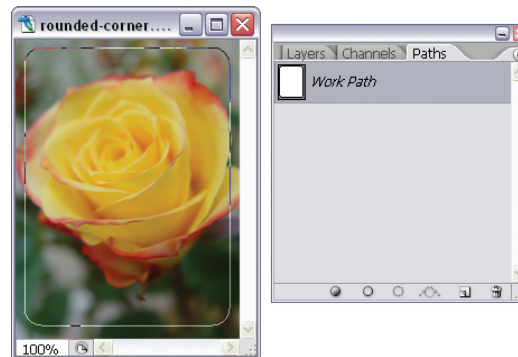Beautiful flowers

Rounding the Corners of a Photo

Solution

1   Select the Rounded Rectangle Tool (*U*) and choose the **Paths** option, as shown here.

Choosing the Paths option

2   Use this to create a rounded rectangle path over the image. You can view the path in the **Paths** palette.

Creating a rounded rectangle

3   Select **Layer** > **Vector Mask** > **Current Path**. Photoshop will create a vector mask using the rounded rectangle path you just created. The example here shows the new vector mask in the **Layers** palette. You can use the Direct Selection Tool (*A*) to modify the path and change its shape.
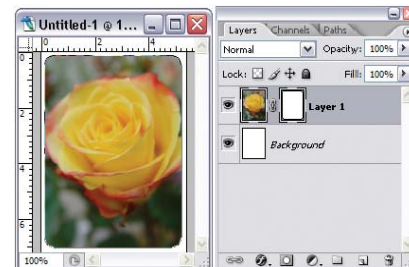
Creating the vector mask

Masking Multiple Layers with the Same Shape

Let's say that you have multiple layers and you want them to be masked with the same shape. You could create a layer mask for one and then duplicate the mask for each layer, but what if you want to change the shape layer later? If you were motivated enough, you could go through each layer and modify the shape mask … but why would you bother when you could easily halve the time that job would take using the clipping mask?

Solution

In this solution, I'll start with an interface design for a simple web site. It has a header bar, a menu bar, and a content area as shown in the example here.

Web site design

I'll paste in the flower images that I blended together earlier in this chapter. As you can see in the example below, the images are bigger than the header area. I want them to be contained within the header region, but I still want to be able to move them around. The solution may seem simple at first—a layer mask on each layer will do the trick. But what if I decide to change the header height later? I'll have to modify all the masks.
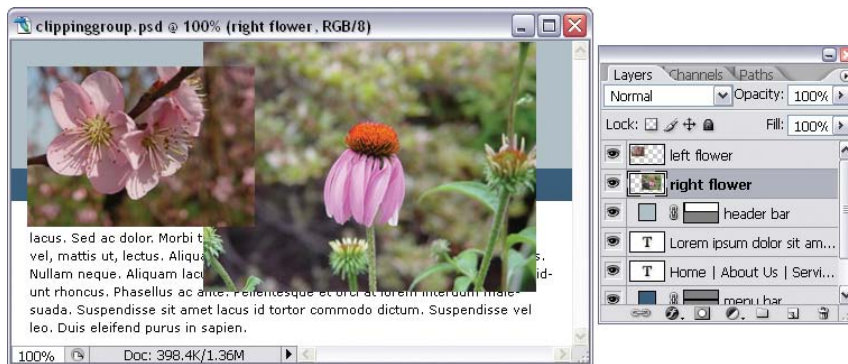
Images for header area

Enter the clipping mask. First, your document must have a shape layer that contains the shape of the "masking" area. Put the layers you need to mask directly on top of this shape layer.

In the **Layers** palette, move the cursor to the boundary between the shape layer and the layer above it. Hold down the *Alt* key (*Option* on a Mac). The cursor will change into two overlapping circles, as shown in this example.

Holding the *Alt* (*Option*) key changes the cursor

Click once. The top layer will be **clipped** by the bottom layer. If you examine the **Layers** palette, you'll notice that the thumbnail for the top layer now has a black arrow next to it, and our shape layer's name is underlined.
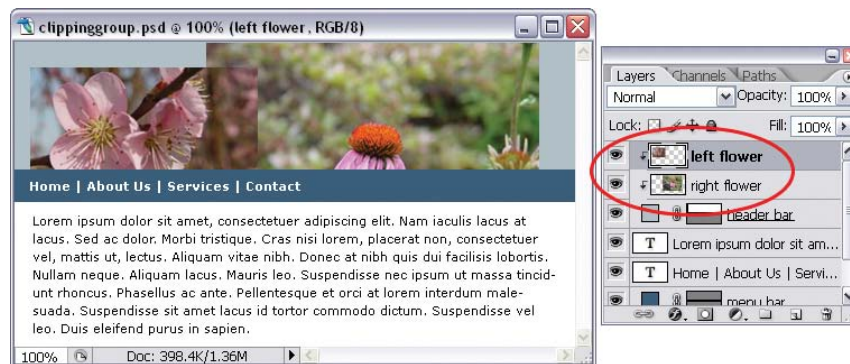
Clipping one of the layers with another

Now let's do the same with our second image. Move your mouse up to the edge of the next layer in the **Layers** palette, hold down *Alt* and click.

Both layers have now been clipped by the base layer, as shown in the example below.
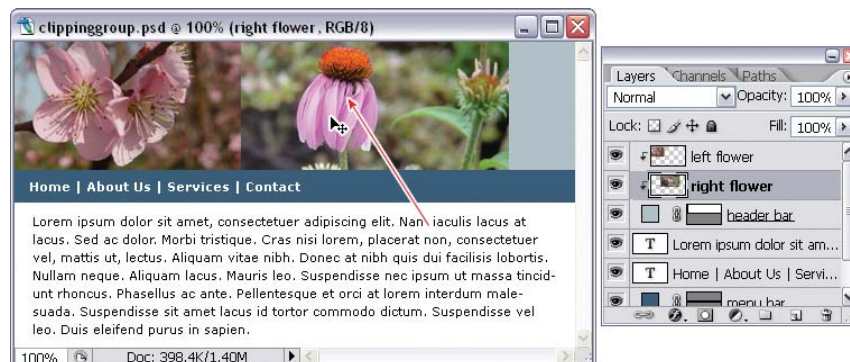

Clipping another layer

Creating a clipping mask for multiple layers

You can move the individual layers around, and they will remain clipped by the shape of the base layer. The image below illustrates this point.

Moving a layer with a clipping mask

As a final flourish, I'm going to use the solution from "Fading an Image into the Background" to fade the right edge of the second flower into the background. Our final result is shown below.

Adding a layer mask

Discussion

A clipping mask allows you to mask multiple layers using a single, editable mask that sits on its own layer. This mask will clip all the layers that sit above it, which saves you from needing to create multiple layer masks based on the same shape.

The clipped layers inherit the base layer's properties. So, for example, if the base layer has a 50% opacity, the clipped layers will also have 50% opacity.

To unclip layers, hold the *Alt* (*Option*) key and click below the layer you wish to unclip. All the layers above it will be unclipped.

Making a Dotted Coupon Box

You've probably seen dotted coupon boxes before, and saved a good dollar or two by using them! This solution shows you how to create a coupon-style box with dotted borders using customized brush strokes.


Loading square brushes

Solution

1   Select the Brush Tool (**B**).

2   Open the **Brushes** palette. Click on the small arrow in the top right-hand corner and select **Square Brushes**. A dialog box will appear, asking you whether you want to replace or append to the list of brushes you currently have displayed. You can always restore your original brush settings by selecting **Reset Brushes…** (click **Append** if you'd rather add the default brushes to your current list, otherwise click **OK**.)

3   Choose **Brush Tip Shape** and select a square brush whose diameter matches the length you want each dotted stroke to have. If the size is not quite right, you can adjust it with the **Diameter** slider as shown in the image on the right.

4   Increase the **Spacing** slider until the spacing between brush strokes works for you.
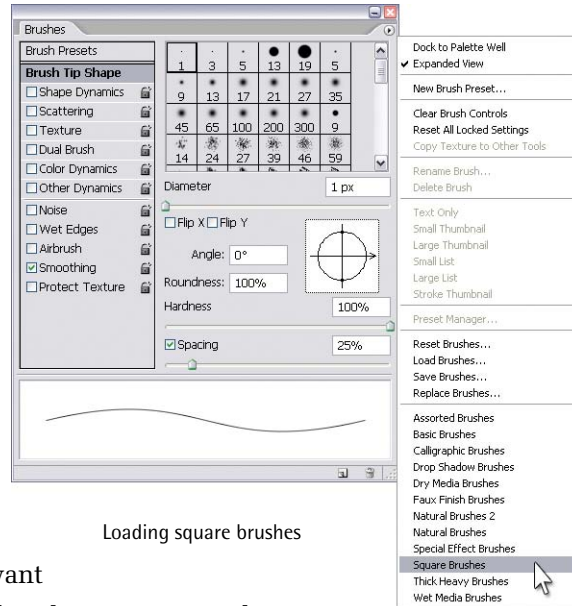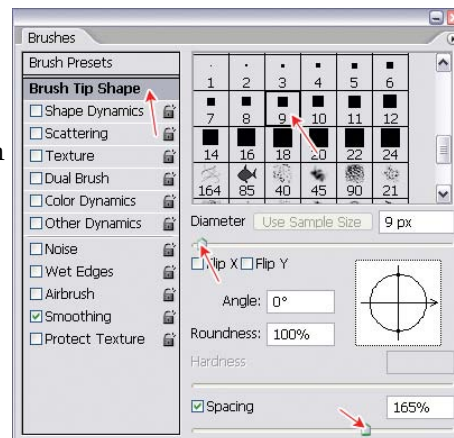
Modifying brush tip shape options
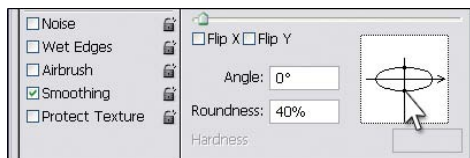
Changing the height of the stroke

5   You might want to squash your brush so that it's more of a rectangle. Click on the top or bottom point of the circle in the dialog box and drag it towards the horizontal axis until the stroke looks similar to that in the image at left.

6   Check the **Scattering** checkbox and change the scattering amount to 0%.
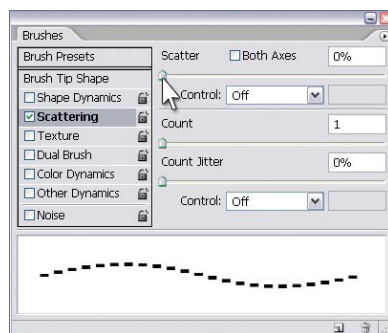
Changing the scattering amount

7   Right. Now you're ready to draw your box! Choose a foreground color for your dotted line. Create a new layer, hold down the *Shift* key, and drag across your document to draw a horizontal line.


Drawing a dotted line

8   Next, return to the **Brushes** palette and drag on the horizontal axis arrow to rotate the brush by 90 degrees (or type *90* in the **Angle** textbox). This will allow you to draw vertical strokes.

9   Hold down *Shift* and drag the mouse down to draw a vertical line.

10 Rotate your brush back to zero, and draw your second horizontal line.

11 Complete your box by rotating the brush to 90 degrees once more and drawing the last vertical line.
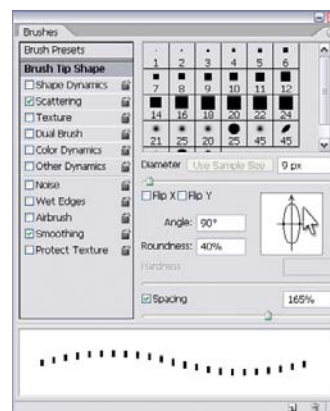
Rotating the brush

Finished coupon box

Applying a Drop Shadow

Solution

Choose the layer to which you wish to apply the drop shadow, and select **Layer >
Layer Style > Drop Shadow**. Play with the opacity, angle, distance, and other settings in
the **Layer Style** dialog box until you're happy with the effect.

Note that the value for **Angle** will affect all drop shadows in your document, so that
the light source is consistent across your entire image.

TIP   Dragging your Shadow

You can also click directly in the document window and drag the drop shadow around, as
shown here. Make sure **Drop Shadow** is highlighted in the **Layer Style** dialog box, otherwise
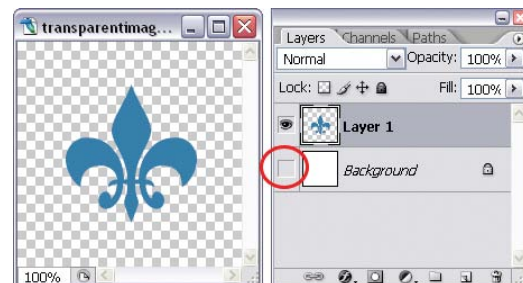this won't work!
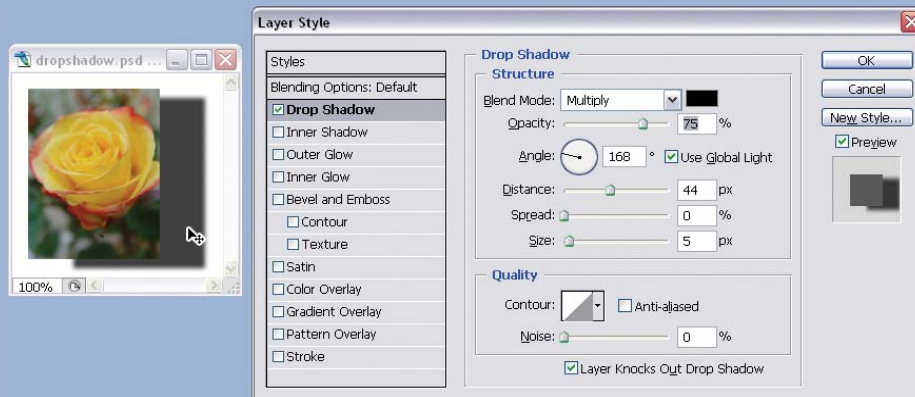
Moving the drop shadow

Images with Transparent Backgrounds

Solution

Open a Photoshop document that
contains transparent areas.
You'll see that Photoshop marks the
transparent areas with a gray,
checkered pattern.

Document with background layer turned off

Select **File** > **Save For Web…**, or press *Shift-Alt-Ctrl-S* (*Shift-Option-Command-S* on a Mac). In the dialog box that appears, choose **GIF** and check the **Transparency** option, as shown in the image to the right. While both GIFs and PNGs support transparency, some browsers (including Internet Explorer 6) do not support PNG transparency. For this reason, I'd recommend that you use GIFs to meet your transparent image needs.
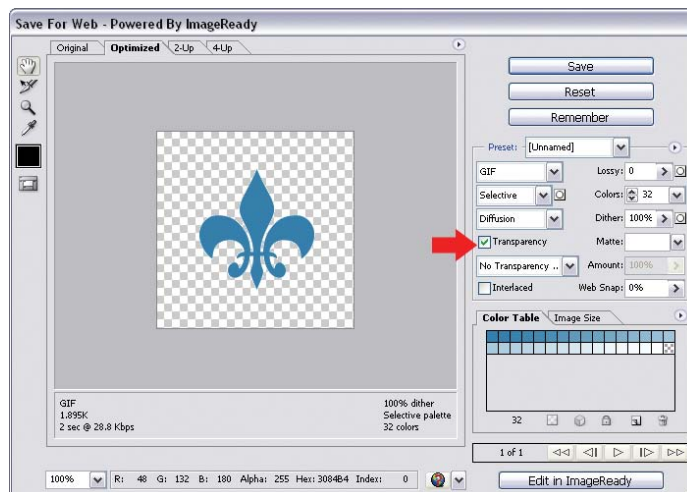
Saving as a transparent GIF

Click **Save** and name your file.

Discussion

Images with curved, smooth edges, like the one in this example, maintain the illusion of crisp edges as a result of **anti-aliasing**—partially transparent pixels are added onto the edges of the image to smooth them, as shown here. However, when you save an image as a GIF, these partially transparent pixels are saved as non-transparent pixels where white is the default "background" color.


Close-up of anti-aliased shape

If you're not placing this image on a white background, it might be wise to define a custom matte color by clicking on the **Matte** arrow, as shown here. Otherwise, you'll end up with a white "color halo" around the image.
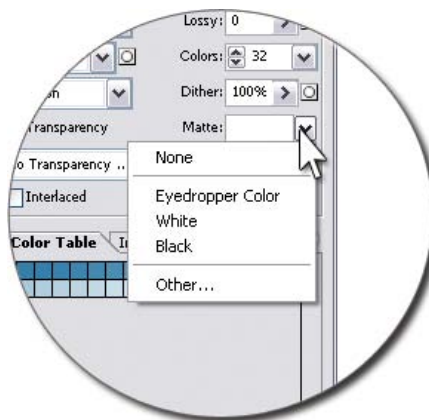
Choosing alternate matte color

Let's say that we're going to place this graphic against a bright red background. Click on the **Matte** arrow, choose **Other…,** and select a bright red.
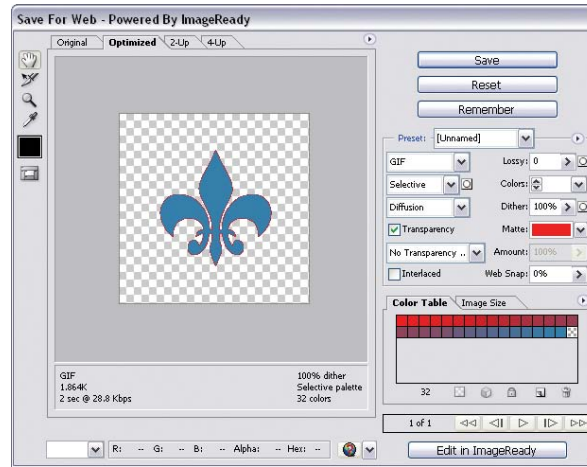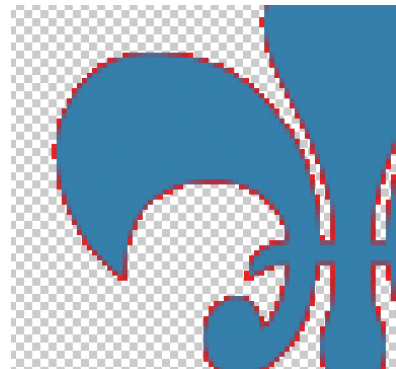

Setting a bright red matte color

Now you'll be able to see a red color halo around the graphic. If you zoom in, you'll see that those anti-aliased pixels behave as though they're sitting on a red background.

Click the **Save** button to save your image.

Close-up of color halo

No matte vs red matte

Summary

In this chapter, we looked at solutions to some of the basic functions that Photoshop users should master. We learned how to import graphics into a Photoshop document, how to resize and rotate images and selections, how to use the *Shift* key to constrain movements, and how to use masks and basic layer styles to create effects. We also looked at the basics of creating vector shapes and saving transparent GIFs. These skills form a great foundation for using Photoshop, and we'll definitely turn to them in the coming chapters!

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