

Introduction to selections in Photoshop

©nigelbuckner.com 2009

Introduction

Selections in Photoshop (PS) enable you to define part of an image so a particular area can be manipulated in some way. In its basic form, selections make it possible to cut out part of an image so that it can be repositioned or pasted into another image. This is the equivalent of using scissors or a knife in the physical world.

Selections can also be used to target a part of an image so that effects can be applied to a specific area such as changing the colour of something or applying other effects.

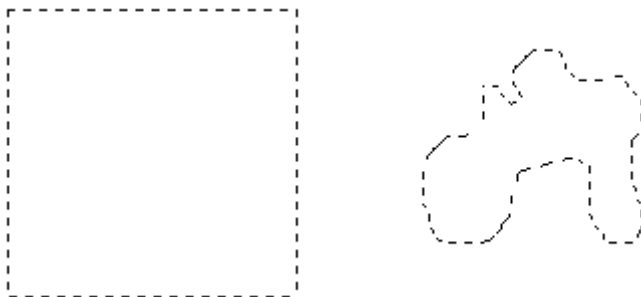
Being able to make and use selections is fundamental to being able to use PS effectively. Without using selections most effects and changes are applied universally to an image and control is limited.

When we are using PS we are dealing with a virtual world as opposed to a physical world. In the physical world, cutting something out from an image needs little explanation. In PS it is necessary to learn a new set of tools and rules to be able to do this.

PS supplies a set of tools for making selections which are designed for use in different situations. Sometimes it may be necessary to combine more than one tool for making a selection. Selections can also be modified after being made, for instance the edge can be smoothed or the selected area can be enlarged or reduced in size. Therefore, making a selection in PS becomes a technical, rational process. *Put simply, you need to look at the situation in your image and decide which are the best tools for the job.*

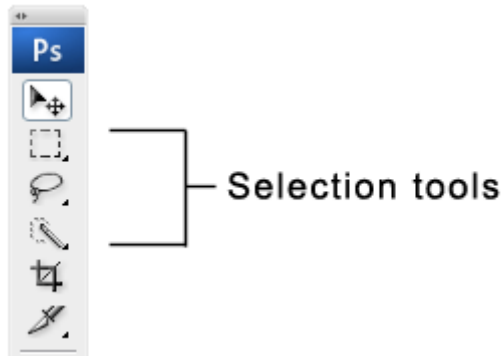
How a selection looks

A selected area is characterised by a dotted outline which is referred to as “marching ants”



Where to find the selection tools

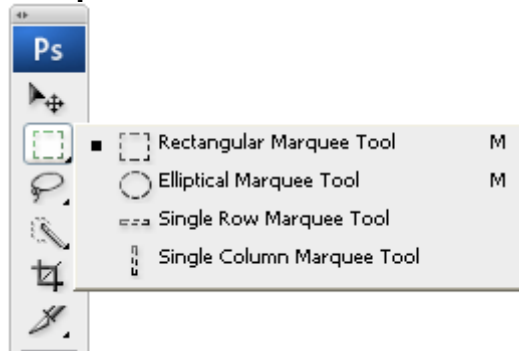
The selection tools are divided into three groups and are found in the Tools palette



If you click and hold on any of the selection tools in the Tools palette, a pop-out menu will appear with alternatives in that group.

Explanation of the selection tools

Marquee tools



Rectangular Marquee

- Square or rectangular selections.
- Click and drag on image to define an area. Moving in a diagonal direction creates an open shape. Moving in a horizontal or vertical direction creates a shallow shape.
- Holding down *shift* whilst drawing and moving in a diagonal direction constrains the selection to a regular square.

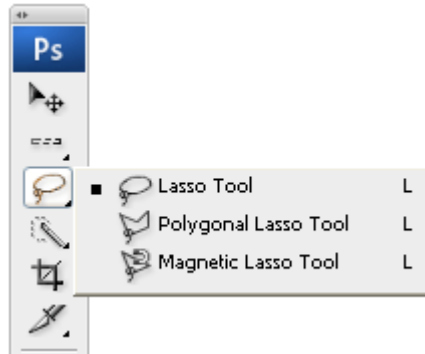
Elliptical Marquee

- Oval selections.
- Click and drag on image to define an area. Moving in a diagonal direction creates an open shape. Moving in a horizontal or vertical direction creates a shallow shape.
- Holding down *shift* whilst drawing and moving in a diagonal direction constrains the selection to a regular circle.

Single Row/Column

- Creates a selection one pixel wide
- Click on image to define. Selection extends to edge of document.

Lasso tools



Lasso Tool

- Creates irregular shaped selections.
- Click and drag on image and move the mouse to create the desired shape. Close the selected area by moving to the beginning point and releasing the mouse.
- Releasing the mouse button at any time whilst drawing closes the selection.

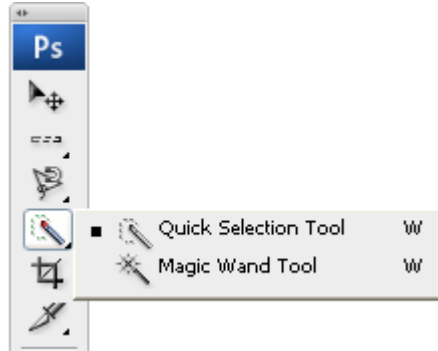
Polygonal Lasso

- Creates irregular straight sided selections.
- Click on image to create the first point and then click for subsequent points.
- Close the selected area by moving back to the beginning point and clicking when a small circle appears on the cursor icon.
- Double clicking will also close the shape.
- Press the *Esc* key if the tool gets problematic.

Magnetic Lasso

- Use for drawing around an object that has a strongly defined edge.
- Click once on the edge of an object and then continue to trace around the edge by moving the mouse. The tool will cling to the edge by creating anchor points.
- Close the selected area by moving back to the beginning point and clicking when a small circle appears on the cursor icon.
- Click to create extra anchor points if necessary.
- The back/forward delete keys will remove the last anchor point when drawing.
- Press the *Esc* key if the tool gets problematic.

Wand tools



Quick Selection Tool

- Use for selecting areas that have a defined outline
- Click and drag on an object. After releasing the mouse the tool extends the selected area up to defined edges.
- Use this tool to select a small area at a time, adding to the selected area piece-by-piece.

Magic Wand Tool

- This tool selects an area by colour.
- Click on an image and the selection will extend to include an area of similar colour to the point originally clicked on.

When selecting

Taking away from a selected area

Holding down the ALT key

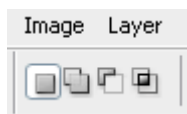
Often, when selecting an area in an image, the selection may extend beyond the desired area. In this case the unwanted part needs to be subtracted from the selection. You can use a selection tool to take the unwanted area away. Decide which tool you need for the job and hold down the *Alt* key and select the unwanted area. This will subtract this area from the selection.

Adding to a selected area

Holding down the Shift key

Often, when selecting an area in an image, the selection may not extend far enough to select the desired area. You can extend the area when using a selection tool by holding down the Shift key.

Adding and subtracting from a selection can also be done by selecting the appropriate button in the Options panel (top of work area) for the selection tool. Select the option and then use the tool.



Buttons for amending a selected area in the selection tool Options panel. Mouse over to reveal their functions

Deselecting

- To remove a selection use Ctrl + D on keyboard or go to Select > Deselect.
- If the active selection tool is the Rectangular Marquee, Elliptical Marquee or Lasso then clicking on the document will deselect a selection.
- Clicking with any of the other tools will begin or create a new selection.
- The exception is the Quick Selection Tool which defaults to adding to a selected area.

Moving a selection

A selection can be repositioned without moving the contents by using a selection tool. To do this, click and drag within the selected area. *This does not work with the Quick Selection tool.* A selected area can also be nudged by using the arrow keys, when any selection tool is the active tool.

To move a selection with its contents use the Move tool.

The Select menu

The Select menu contains options for modifying selected areas. For instance it is possible to affect the size or smooth edges in some way.

Select	Filter	Analysis	View	Window
All			Ctrl+A	
Deselect			Ctrl+D	
Reselect		Shift+Ctrl+D		
Inverse		Shift+Ctrl+I		
All Layers		Alt+Ctrl+A		
Deselect Layers				
Similar Layers				
Color Range...				
Refine Edge...		Alt+Ctrl+R		
Modify				▶
Grow				
Similar				
Transform Selection				
Load Selection...				
Save Selection...				

Explanation of the options:

All – This will select the whole image. The selection goes around the edges of the document. Remember this will only select the contents from one layer.

Deselect – Removes any active selection.

Reselect – Reinstates the last deselected selection.

Inverse – Effectively turns the selection inside-out. The area outside the selected area becomes the selected area and the previously selected area becomes deselected.

All Layers, Deselect Layers and **Similar Layers** refer to making layers active in the Layers palette. They do not create selections in the document.

Colour Range – This enables you to make selections based on colour. Opens up with its own dialogue box.

Refine edge – A very useful tool that enables a selected area to be modified and refined. Opens up with its own dialogue box with explanations of the various options.

Modify – Similar to refine edge but with the options as separate items. Also contains Border, an option to convert the edge of a selection into a border.

Grow and **Similar** – These options work in the same way as the Magic Wand. *Grow* will increase the size of the selection to include pixels of a similar colour to those already selected. *Similar* will select colours similar to those already selected wherever they are in the image. These options use the same Tolerance as set for the magic wand.

Transform Selection – This is like the Free Transform tool. Enables a selection to be resized and rotated but without affecting the contents of the selected area.

Load Selection – Opens up a dialogue with options to load a *saved* selection into the document window or load a selection based on the contents of the currently active layer, but not the *Background* layer.

Save Selection – A selection can be saved as part of the document. Once a selection is saved it can be deselected and retrieved at any time even after closing and reopening the document. This can be useful and time saving especially when needing to use the same selection several times and with different modifications. The selection is saved as a Channel. The saved selection is loaded with Load Selection.