

**Making Selections**  
**Refining Selections**  
**Effects and Selections**  
**Cutting & Pasting Selections**  
**Stroking & Filling Selections**

## Chapter 5

# Select and Isolate Areas in Your Photos

## Working with selections

A key function of Photoshop Elements – and one which a number of tools support – is selecting.

Selecting means isolating areas of your image file so that effects can be applied to that area only, without affecting the rest of the image.

Selections can have hard edges or soft. They can be changed and refined and even saved.

Selecting and isolating are true keys to this program's power.

When an area of your image file is selected (surrounded by a moving dotted line), effects and tools applied will only affect the selected area, leaving the rest of your image unchanged.



### Why select and isolate?

There are three main reasons for selecting an area of your image file:

1. To apply an effect or adjust the color or lighting of one section of your image file without affecting the rest of the image;
2. To protect areas of your image file so that, for instance, you can paint or erase a background without touching another area of your image;
3. To cut an area of your image file – cutting a person from a photo, for instance – so that you can either paste him or her in another image file or to remove him or her completely.

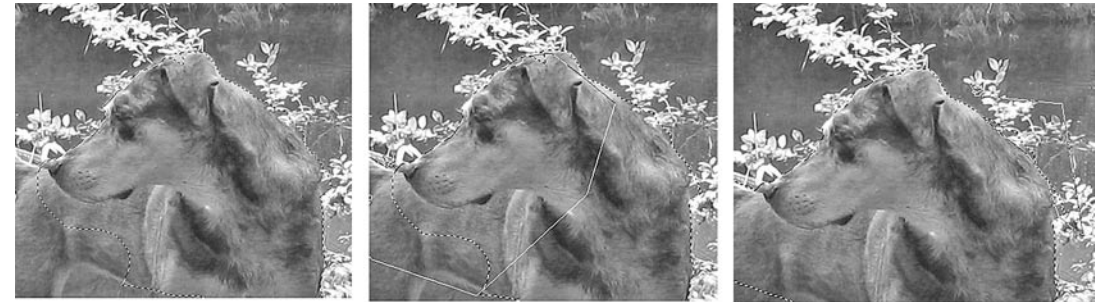
In **Chapter 4, Get to Know the Photoshop Elements Toolbox**, we discuss a number of tools that can be used to select and isolate areas of your image file.

The **Marquee Tools**, which include the **Rectangular Marquee** and **Elliptical Marquee Tools**, allow you to select a circular or rectangular area of your image file.

The **Lasso Tools**, which include the **Magnetic Lasso**, **Polygonal Lasso** and freehand **Lasso Tool**, allow you to draw any shape as a selected area.

The **Magic Wand Tool** automatically selects an area of your image that shares a similar color range, based on the tolerance level you've set.

The **Quick Selection Tool** allows you to select an area by "painting" across it, selecting adjacent pixels of similar color as you paint.



A complicated selection may require several passes with several tools to get exactly right – using the Add to Selection and Subtract from Selection controls to refine the selected area.

As you select an area, it will appear with a moving, dotted line surrounding it – commonly referred to as "marching ants." As we discuss in the individual descriptions of each tool in **Chapter 4**, the selection tools can be used in combination with each other – while selecting the **Add to Selection** and **Subtract from Selection** options – to create or refine any shape of selection.

### Feathering

Selection tools usually include an option to "feather" your selection. **Feathering** means softening the edges of the selection.

For instance, if you were to use the **Elliptical Marquee Tool** to select an area of your image file, this selection would be, by default, a perfect oval or circle, with a clearly defined, hard edge.

But in a number of situations, you'd like that edge softer.

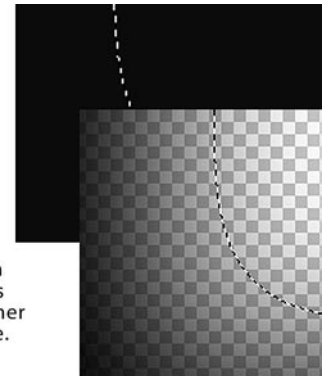
If you're applying an effect to a selected area in a photograph, for instance, you might like the boundary between the affected area and the non-affected area to be softly defined. This can make the effect seem more natural than a hard, abrupt edge might.

Also, when you're cutting a subject from one photo in order to paste him or her into another, a slight feathering around the edge can help blend the pasted image so that it fits more naturally into the new background.

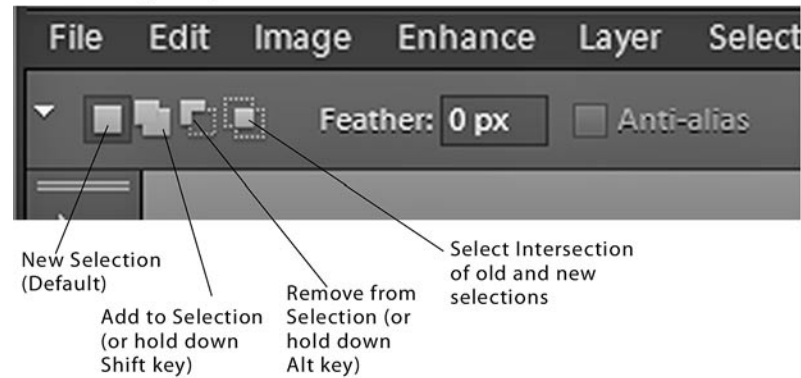
**Feathering** is measured in pixels. This means that, when working with a low-resolution image, you'll need fewer pixels in your feathering than you will in a higher-resolution image to achieve a similar softened edge effect.

**Feathering** also plays a role in the **Refine Edge** function, as we discuss later in this chapter.

A "feathered" selection has a softer edge so that, when the selection is removed or an effect is added to it, the distinction between the selected and unselected area of your image is a gradation rather than a solid line.



The Option Bar for each Selection Tool includes settings for adding to or subtracting from your selected areas.



You can add to an already selected area by clicking on the **Add to Selection** button on the **Option Bar**, or by holding down the **Shift** key as you continue to select.

You can remove an area from your selection by clicking the **Subtract from Selection** button on the **Option Bar** or by holding down the **Alt/Option** key as you select.

You can refine your selection so that it includes only the area overlapped by your current and new selections by clicking the **Intersect with Selection** button on the **Option Bar**.

As you build your selected area, two other keyboard shortcuts are worth noting:

To go back a step at any point in the program – even deselecting the most recent area you’ve selected or removed from your selection – press **Ctrl+z** (⌘+z on a Mac) or click the **Undo** button in the upper right of the interface.

To deselect an area completely, press **Ctrl+d** on a PC or **⌘+d** on a Mac.

### The Select drop-down menu

The **Select** drop-down on the Menu Bar offers a number of solutions for refining and changing your selected area.

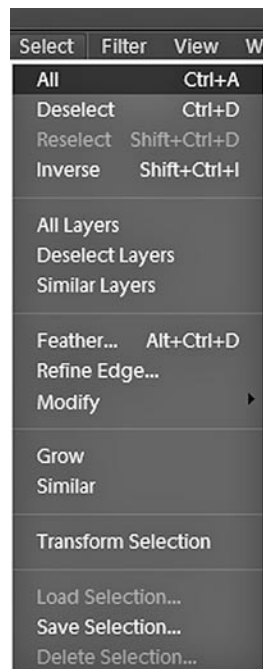
**Select All** (**Ctrl+a** on a PC or **⌘+a** on a Mac) selects your entire displayed image. If you are working on a layered file, you will select only the image which appears on the active layer. (For more information, see **Chapter 8, Working with Layers**.)

**Deselect** (**Ctrl+d** or **⌘+d**) deselects all of your selections.

**Reselect** (**Ctrl+Shift+d** or **⌘+Shift+d**) re-selects all that you’ve just deselected – in case you suddenly change your mind.

**Inverse** (**Ctrl+Shift+i** or **⌘+Shift+i**) switches your selection so that the areas you currently have unselected become your selected areas and vice versa.

**Feather** (**Ctrl+Alt+d** or **⌘+Option+d**) allows you to apply feathering, after the fact, to the currently selected area.



**All Layers** and **Selected Layers** expand your current selection to other layers in your image file, if you are working on a layered file.

**Grow** expands your selected area to similarly colored adjacent pixels in your image file, based on your current selection.

**Similar** selects all similarly colored pixels throughout your image file, whether they are adjacent to your current selection or not.

### Refine the edge of your selection

Once you’ve selected an area in your image file, you can refine the edge of the selection by selecting **Refine Edge** under **Select** on the Menu Bar. This is a great tool for softening the hard edges of your selection to make them seem more natural and less abrupt. The three settings are:

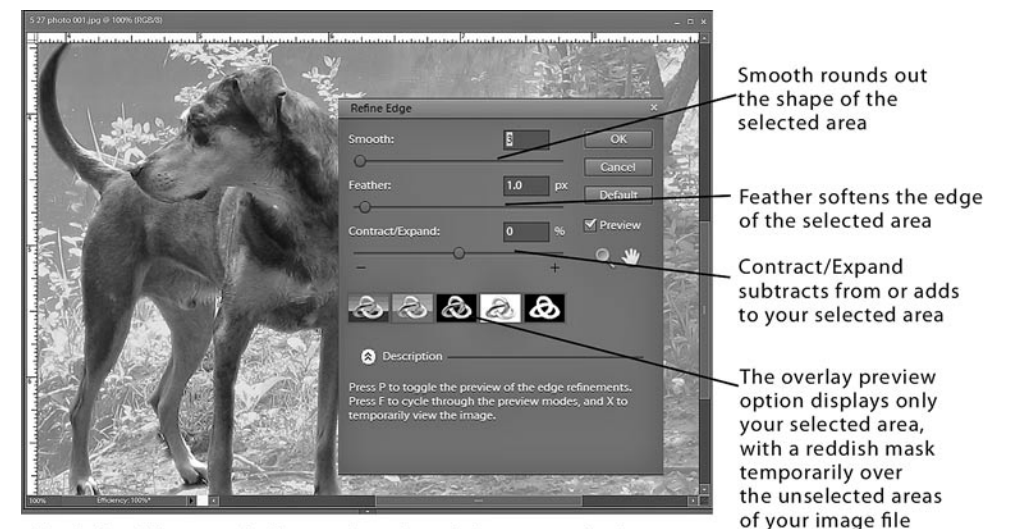
**Smooth**. This determines how detailed your selection is. The higher you set **Smooth**, the more the fine details in the edge of your selected area will be rounded out.

**Feather**. As discussed above, feathering softens the boundary between the selected and unselected areas, giving sometimes a more natural, less abrupt edge to your selection.

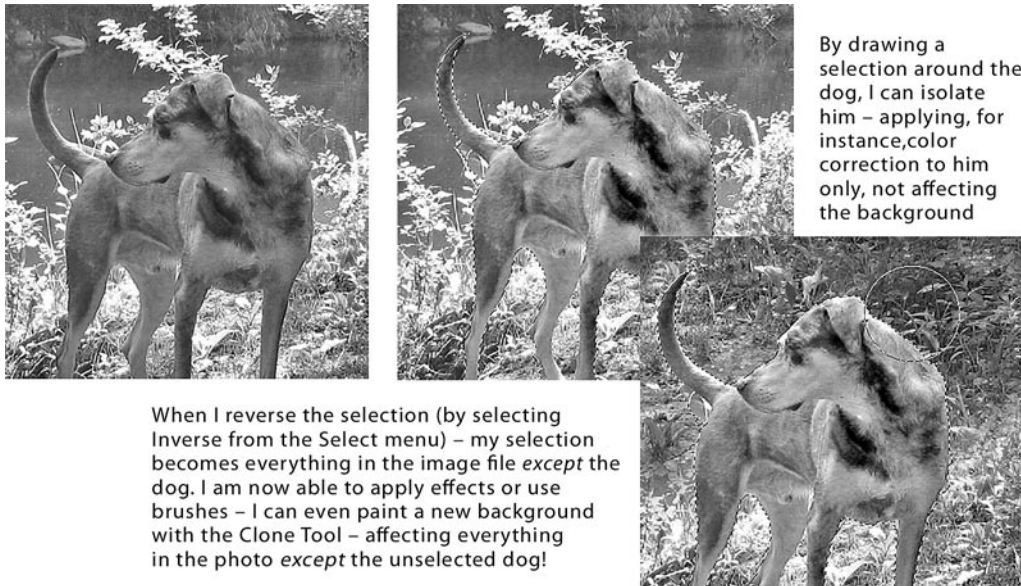
**Contract/Expand** adds a few extra or removes a few extra pixels from around the edge of your selection. This can be helpful if, for instance, you’re cutting a person from a background and, in your current selection, some of the background is still showing around the edges. **Contract/Expand** and **Feather** are often used in combination to refine a very clean, natural edge.

If you have **Preview** checked in the option box, your selection will be updated live as you adjust the settings.

The **Overlay Preview** option displays your photo with a temporary red mask over it, giving you a preview, of sorts, of what your selected area will look like when isolated or removed from the rest of the image. The overlay, of course, is for preview only, and will not appear once you’ve **OKed** your **Refine Edge** settings.



The Refine Edge panel offers options for refining your selection.



By drawing a selection around the dog, I can isolate him – applying, for instance, color correction to him only, not affecting the background

When I reverse the selection (by selecting **Inverse** from the **Select** menu) – my selection becomes everything in the image file *except* the dog. I am now able to apply effects or use brushes – I can even paint a new background with the **Clone Tool** – affecting everything in the photo *except* the unselected dog!

### Work with selected areas

A key reason to select an area of a photo is so that an effect can be applied to the area you've isolated without affecting the rest of your image file.

In the example above, for instance, the dog in the original picture is too green. However, we'd prefer that any color corrections we make affect the dog only, and leave the rest of the picture as is.

Using a combination of tools – adding to and subtracting from my selection and then refining the edges – I isolated the dog. I was then able to make color changes to the dog only, without affecting any other part of my image file.

I then inverted the selection (choosing **Inverse** from the **Select** menu) so that the background was selected and the dog was not. Using the **Clone Tool**, I painted in more foliage behind the dog. Because the background was selected and the dog was not, the **Clone Tool** added these trees and leaves right around the dog, as if he were not even there!

### Cut and paste a selection into another photo

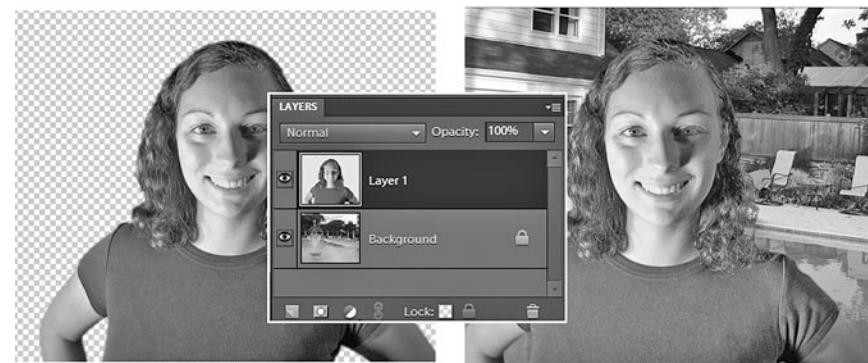
As you work with Photoshop Elements, you will likely be doing a lot of cutting and pasting. This is, for instance, a simple way to take a person photographed in front of one background and place him or her in front of another.

To cut your subject from a background, draw a selection around him or her using a combinations of tools – adding to and subtracting from your selection as needed. (If your subject is well defined from the background, you may be able to do most of this with the **Magic Wand Tool**, using the other selection tools and the **Add to Selection** or **Subtract from Selection** options.)

Then, to ensure your selection has a slightly softened, natural edge, use **Refine Edge to Contract/Expand** and **Feather** it.



Because she was shot against a green screen, the young woman is easily selected by selecting the background with the **Magic Wand Tool** and then inverting the selection. She is then pasted over the pool background.



Because pasting places her on a layer, her image can be refined separately, the edges can be softened and she can be tinted to match the background more naturally.

To cut your subject from his or her current background, press **Ctrl+c** on a PC or **⌘+c** on a Mac.

Open a photo file that you'd like to use as your subject's new background. To paste your subject into this new background press **Ctrl+v** on a PC or **⌘+v** on a Mac.

Whenever you paste an image into another image file, it will appear as new layer in that file, as seen in the illustration on the previous page. (In fact, even if you paste the image into the *same* image file you cut it from it will become a new layer.)

This is to your advantage for a number of reasons:

1. If you need to, you can continue to refine the edge of your pasted-in image so that it fits more naturally with its new background (even using the **Eraser Tool**, if you'd like, to remove more of the image). A very effective feature for adding a more natural edge to your pasted image is the **Defringe Layer** tool, which we discuss in **Chapter 7, Correct Color and Lighting**;
2. While it remains a layer, you can resize the pasted-in image separate from the rest of the image file.

Resizing a layer is very easy in Photoshop Elements.

When a layer is selected (by clicking on it to activate it in the **Layers** palette), it appears in your image file outlined in a dotted line, defined on each side and on the corners with a “corner handle.” (If your layer image is larger than your current image file, these corner handles may appear outside of the image file, and you may need to **Ctrl+–** on a PC or **⌘+–** on a Mac to see these handles.)

To resize the image on your selected layer, click and drag on these corner handles.

As you drag the corner handles, you may notice that the **Option Bar**, along the top of the interface, displays a number of **Transform** options. Using these transform options, you can resize or rotate your layer’s image precisely by typing numbers into the spaces on the **Option Bar**.

If **Constrain Proportions** is checked, your image will resize its height and width proportionately – which is usually what you’ll prefer. If you turn off **Constrain Proportions**, you will resize the layer’s height and width separately, resulting in a squeezed or disportionate picture.

To finish the resizing, click the green checkmark on your image file or press the **Enter** key.

(While you’re in resizing image mode, no other functions in Photoshop Elements will work. So, if you find after resizing your image that no other tool will activate, press **Enter** or click on the green checkmark to complete the resizing.)

If you’re enlarging your layer’s image by dragging the corner handles, keep in mind the golden rule of raster art: *You can’t add pixels where they don’t exist.*

You can expand the size of your image only so far before the pixels will begin to break up and your image will appear fuzzy or pixelated. For this reason, it’s best to cut and paste between image files that are of similar size and resolution.

Your layer will remain a layer until you flatten your layers or save your file as a file format other than a Photoshop (PSD) file. (For information on flattening a layered image see **Chapter 8, Work with Photoshop Elements Layers.**)

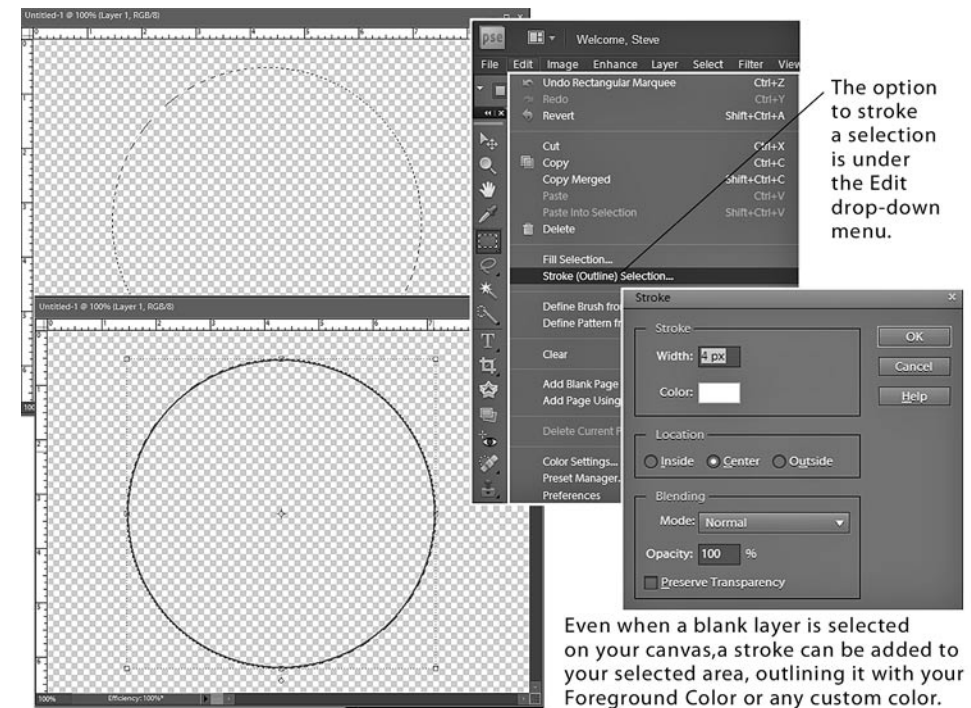
### Fill or stroke a selection

Any area that’s selected can also be filled or stroked. In fact, even a selected area on an otherwise blank layer can be filled or stroked.

**Filling** means painting the selected area with color or a pattern

A selected area can be filled in any one of a number of ways:

1. Dragging the **Paint Bucket Tool** onto the selected area. The selection will then be filled with the **Foreground Color**.
2. Selecting the **Gradient Tool** and dragging a line across the selection. The selection will be filled with a gradation of the **Foreground to Background Color** (or however you’ve defined your gradient), colored from the beginning to the end of the line you’ve drawn.



3. Pressing **Alt/Option+Backspace**. The selection will be filled with the **Foreground Color**.
4. Pressing **Ctrl+Backspace** (or **⌘+Backspace** on a Mac). The selection will be filled with the **Background Color**.
5. Selecting the **Fill Selection** option from the **Edit** drop-down on the Menu Bar.

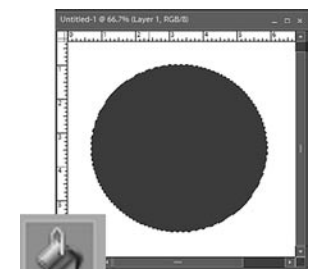
The **Fill** option panel offers a number of possible ways for filling your selection, including: with the **Foreground Color**, **Background Color** or a custom color; black, white or gray; or a **Custom Pattern** from the dozens of patterns available in the pattern library.

**Stroking** means outlining a selected area.

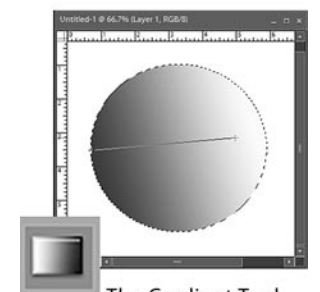
A selected area can be stroked by selecting **Stroke (Outline) Selection** from the **Edit** drop-down on the Menu Bar.

By default, the stroke color will be the current **Foreground Color**. However, by clicking on the color swatch square on the **Stroke** option panel, you can launch the **Color Picker** (See **Chapter 4**), from which you can select any color for your stroke.

The width of the stroke is measured in pixels, by default. And you may set the stroke to appear just outside your selected area (**Outside**), on your selection line (**Center**) or just inside the selection line (**Inside**).



The Paint Bucket fills your canvas or your selected area.



The Gradient Tool fills your canvas or selected area with (by default) a gradation from the Foreground to the Background Colors.

