

# Useful Photoshop Keyboard Shortcuts

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Rev: August 13, 2013

Many of these shortcuts work with Elements as well as Photoshop CS. The title says “Useful”; I mean I use them and find them to be helpful. Users of Photoshop soon realize that there are usually many ways to do anything in Photoshop. Some of the shortcuts I will show you here may be unique and provide the only way (I don’t know another way) to accomplish the task.

## **Why some keyboard shortcuts are important to learn:**

Photoshop is rich in tools, affects, and ability to handle layers and masks. Some of the filters call upon a secondary software program. When in the secondary program; there are sometimes a set of tools for use while in the program, other tools in Photoshop are often no longer accessible. Under these circumstances the drop-down menus at the top of the screen may no longer be available to you. To get around the problem one can usually use a keyboard shortcut.

Photoshop CS has a Keyboard shortcut list that is accessible from the “EDIT” drop down menu list (at bottom); Edit>**Keyboard Shortcuts (alt+shift+ctl+k)**. In addition; more information on this subject is available through the Photoshop “HELP” facility. Click on “Help” and type in “Keyboard Shortcuts”.

## **Nomenclature:**

The keyboard strokes indicated in the paragraph above (**alt+shift+ctl+k**) means; while holding down the “alt” key, and the “shift” key and the “ctl” key and pressing and releasing the “k” key and then releasing the other keys will execute the operation. This general nomenclature is used throughout this article.

## **Let’s talk about some general and often used system keyboard and mouse shortcuts:**

These will work in many programs and are usually universal for most operating systems.

1. **HIGHLIGHT/SELECT (using the mouse; left click-hold & drag), Also referred to as “Drag”:**
  - a. This will create a selection of the information that becomes highlighted. In some programs (ie: WORD), a picture can be selected simply by left clicking the image. Once information is selected there are usually a number of things you can do with it (see below).
    - i. In Photoshop; making a selection of pixels (using selection tools) is equivalent and a number of things can be done with such a selection (see below).
2. **HIGHLIGHT/SELECT “ALL” (ctl + a)**

- a. This will select the entire active document. In the case of Photoshop; it will select the entire area of the active layer (transparent areas will remain transparent).

### **3. COPY selection (ctl+c)**

- a. Highlight/select something, press and hold “ctl” and press the letter “c”, then release “c” and release “ctl” keys. This will place the highlighted information into the computer’s “clipboard” (an internal temporary memory area) this is also sometimes referred to as a “scratchpad”.

### **4. PASTE selection (ctl+v)**

- a. Set the cursor where you want to place the information that has been copied to the “clipboard” (click – to establish the cursor at that place), press and hold ctl and press the letter “v” to paste the clipboard information at that location.
- b. A similar “paste” capability exists in Photoshop allowing you to “paste” **pixels that were stored in the “clipboard”**, to a new layer, file, etc.
  - i. This is done by activating a new layer and executing the “paste” operation (ctl+v).
  - ii. Or to add to another file, activate the file of interest, then activate the top layer in the stack (it could be the background layer) and execute the “paste” operation (ctl+v).
    1. This is used to take pixels from one picture and then putting them into another picture (an example is replacing a sky).

### **5. CUT selection (ctl + x)**

- a. To cut-out something that has been previously selected/highlighted; make a selection (you can use the selection tools in Photoshop) and while holding the “ctl” key down press the letter x on the keyboard.
  - i. If you have made a selection on a layer in Photoshop prior to executing this shortcut, the pixels within the section will be removed from the layer. These pixels are stored in the computer’s “Clipboard” also called a “scratchpad” memory. They are available to be “pasted” into someplace else (see #4).

### **6. CANCEL previous operation (ctl + z)**

- a. To cancel the previous operation hold the “ctl” key down and press the letter z. This is particularly useful if you have just “cut” something and it included pixels you did not want to throw away or you made a poor selection and want to repeat.
- b. This will work in many other programs (ie: WORD, PHOTOSHOP).

### **7. Save the present screen image to the scratchpad ----shift +”print screen”**

This is useful when trying to copy an image from an email or the internet to modify it in Photoshop. It places the entire screen image into the computer

clipboard, and it can be pasted using the paste command, in your software or by the shortcut described above, into a new blank document in Photoshop, then cropped to obtain only the image information and can then be modified in Photoshop to your liking, resaved and emailed. Note the resolution of a screen image is usually about 72 dpi.

**The above seven keyboard shortcuts are very important and work in many different software programs.**

## **Photoshop useful shortcuts:**

Most Photoshop operations can be accomplished by using the commands located under the menu headings at the top of the Photoshop window.

If you open the “info” palette there will be hints printed at the bottom of the palette window to give you clues as to how the tool that you are using can be used. Pressing the ctl, alt, or shift key will change the hint to indicate what the tool has switched to. You can also use “ctl + (shift or alt). Yes, using these special keys can change your tool to another tool, or provide an additional feature (particularly true for selection tools and the hand tool).

- Photoshop shortcuts are so many in number that some of the shortcuts operate only with certain tools, windows, or palettes activated. Keep this in mind when you suddenly discover your shortcut is not working.
- To find the keyboard shortcuts for your version of Photoshop, you will probably find it under edit>keyboard shortcuts (ctl+alt+shift+K).
- **Save the present screen image to the scratchpad ----(shift +”print screen”)**
  - This is useful when trying to copy an image from an email or the internet to “play-with” in Photoshop (see #7 above). It places the entire screen image into the computer clipboard, which can be pasted, using the paste command in your software or the shortcut described above, into a new blank document in Photoshop. It can then be cropped to obtain only the image information and modified in Photoshop to your liking, resaved and emailed.

### **1. MOST TOOLS**

- a. Photoshop has a very nice helpful feature that will prompt you with a short description of a tool or icon by hovering over it with your mouse pointer. You must check the “show tool tips” preference in the preferences set-up under edit>preferences>interface>check the “show tool tips” box to activate this feature. I find it is a useful feature to maintain.

- b. In general, when using selection tools, holding the “shift” key will “add” to your selection and holding the “alt” key will subtract from your selection.
  - i. This is useful to fix your selection by including or eliminating pixels while you are working in a small area.
  - ii. Use the “q” key to toggle between “Quick Mask” mode and “Marching Ants” mode.
- c. I usually revert back to the “hand” tool as my default tool while I am planning, or contemplating what to do next. The hand tool will just allow you to move the entire image around your workspace. It automatically switches to a select arrow when the cursor moves into another palette area.
  - i. In this way you do not accidentally, move, erase, paint, or in some other way upset your work in progress.
  - ii. To switch to the “zoom-in” tool while the “hand” tool is activated press the “ctl” key.
    - 1. To “zoom-out” while the “hand” tool is activated press the “alt” key.
    - 2. To switch to the “hand” tool while using a “selection” tool press the “space bar”.
      - a. Holding the “space bar down” and pressing the “ctl” key will change the “hand tool” to the “zoom-in” tool as before.
      - b. Holding the “space bar down” and pressing the “alt” key will change the “hand tool” to the “zoom-out” tool as before.
- d. I tend not to use the tool shortcuts to select them. I find it too much to remember and find selecting the tool better for me to concentrate on the operation to be done. I do switch to the hand tool and zoom while using selection tools (see “c” above).
  - i. Remember when you make a tool selection you should check the tool options bar at the top to assure all the tool parameters are where you want them (ie: brush size, hardness and opacity, foreground and background color if pertinent, etc.).

## **2. Copy the active layer (or selected pixels) to a new layer: ctl + j**

- a. This is useful to copy just a selected area to a new layer.
- b. Since a new image opens as a background layer I usually preserve the original image layer and immediately make a copy of it so that I do not accidentally modify the original.
- c. This will also create a new layer of selected pixels from another layer. Only the pixels selected will be in this new layer.
- d. Highlighting a “layer” will allow you to copy the entire layer as it is (including the blending mode and opacity options).

## **3. Adjust brush size: ( [ or ] )**

- a. When using a brush like cursor you frequently need to make the brush larger or smaller. Use the keyboard shortcut “[” or “]” to reduce brush size (hard left/open square bracket) or enlarge brush size (hard right/close square bracket).
  - i. Use shift + “[” or “]” to change the hardness of the brush in 25% increments, “[” reduces hardness and “]” increases hardness.

#### **4. Fit to Screen**

- i. To; “fit to screen” double click the “hand” tool.
- ii. The hand tool allows you to drag the image within the window to navigate. Very useful with an enlarged view.

#### **5. To switch to the hand tool to navigate your image; press and hold the spacebar.**

##### **a. HAND TOOL (Space Bar + drag)**

- i. Press and hold the “space bar”. This will cause the cursor icon to change to the “hand tool” icon and allow you to use the mouse to drag the image around on the monitor. This is particularly useful while you have enlarged an image and wish to examine other parts of the image outside the viewing area.

#### **6. Switch to; “magnifying glass – zoom-in” tool to enlarge an area “spacebar + ctl”.**

- a. To zoom-out use “spacebar +alt”. To select an area to view use “spacebar + ctl” and drag out a rectangular area by dragging along a diagonal”.
- b. MAGNIFYING TOOL – ZOOM-IN TOOL (space bar + ctl)**
  - i. Press and hold the “space bar” and then press and hold the “ctl” key. This will allow you to change the mouse cursor to the magnifying glass cursor (ZOOM TOOL) and by holding the left mouse key and dragging the mouse diagonally to create a “selected area”, you can present that area on the monitor. This enlarges the area selected (you will notice a small “plus” (+) in the magnifying glass icon.
- c. SHRINKING TOOL – ZOOM-OUT (space bar + alt + left click at center of area to be shrunk)**
  - i. This will change the plus (+) to a minus (-) in the magnify cursor icon.
  - ii. If you have the magnify tool selected you can change from magnify to shrink by pressing and holding the “alt” key and clicking the left mouse key with the cursor at center of where you want to shrink.

#### **7. FOREGROUND/BACKGROUND DEFAULT COLORS (d)**

- a. The default colors (black and white) are forced back to default by pressing the “d” key.
  - i. It is a good idea to reset to default since painting with Black and White could yield a shade of gray that may look black or white, but isn’t.
  - ii. To switch the foreground and background colors press “x”. This will toggle the colors back and forth.

## **Layer manipulation:**

### **1. Convert the background to an unlocked layer;**

- a. “Double click the background layer”, name your layer or hit the “enter key” in response to the new layer window (default name is “layer 0”). “Alt + double click” will bypass the “new layer” window.

### **2. To quickly select an adjustment layer**

- a. Use the “black&white cookie” icon (in the “layers Palette” to select the adjustment you like from a menu.
- b. To open the “New Layer” window before opening the adjustment layer itself; press and hold “alt” key while clicking and holding the black & white cookie icon from the layers palette icons and selecting the desired adjustment from the menu.
  - i. This permits you to set the blending mode to “overlay”, or any other mode in the overlay group, to reveal the “Use previous layer as clipping mask” check box. Checking this box will force the adjustment layer being created to act upon only the previous pixel bearing layer and not all of the layers below. This is particularly useful for blending multiple images ie: when compiling a panorama.
    - 1. In addition, you can check a “fill with 50% gray” check box. This automatically opens the new layer filled to 50% gray set to an Overlay mode to allow you to dodge & burn using the paint with white and black technique on the 50% gray.
      - a. Paint with a low opacity brush to slowly dodge or burn. This technique for dodging and burning provides a lot of control and selectivity.

### **3. To place a merged composite layer at the top of the stack**

- a. select the top layer and hold down the alt key + click and hold the left mouse button on the small “drop-down-menu-arrow” at the top right corner of the Layers Palette (note-pad icon) and highlight/select the “merge visible” command and release the left mouse key.
- b. Alternatively; with the top layer active, while holding the “alt key down” go to layers>merge visible.

- i. This procedure is useful to create a layer that has been adjusted and contains pixels so as to allow the use of filters on the completely adjusted image pixels.

**4. To turn ON one layer and turn all other layers OFF:**

- a. (alt + Click) the “eye” icon on the layer of interest.
- b. Restore all layers as before by repeating the above operation.

## **Selections and Masks:**

Recognize that selections are saved to the Channels Palette (selection>save selection). These so called alpha channels are black and white and shades of gray. There are many ways to create masks, and selections from the masks.

**Every adjustment layer has a mask attached to it by default.**

### **5. Quick Mask**

- a. A selection is easily visualized and modified using the “quick mask” features of Photoshop. This technique utilizes a brush to help paint-in to correct a mask. The quick mask is not an active selection, however, and must be converted to a selection before it can be used to actually “mask” a layer of pixels.
  - i. Press (and release) the “q” key to toggle between the quick mask mode and the standard “marching ants” presentation for your selection.
    - 1. Selections can be saved as alpha channels.
      - a. Select>save selection
        - i. You will see later that it is not necessary to save a selection if you have created a layer containing your selected pixels (ie; making a selection of. Pixels and then putting them on their own layer using (ctl + j).
          - 1. Simply (ctl + click) the icon of the layer containing the selected pixels (see #7).

### **6. Creating a selection from a layer with already selected pixels:**

- a. When you have created a selection with any of the selection tools and placed the selection on its own layer (ctl + j) only the pixels within the selection are placed on the newly created layer. The remaining area of the layer is empty. This permits pixels on layers below to be visible.
  - i. The icon of such a layer usually obviously displays the fact that there are transparent areas. By (ctl + Clicking) the icon on such a layer, Photoshop will make a selection around all of the pixels in the layer. This selection will select all pixels that are not totally

transparent. Any opacity greater than zero will be included in a selection.

## 7. Creating a selection from a mask:

- a. Any mask/alpha-channel can be used to make a selection; (ctl+Left click) on the mask icon that you want to use to create a selection. This eliminates the need to “save” a selection and “load” the selection when you want to use it (as long as the channel or mask exists).
  - i. If you have isolated a selection on its own layer you can simply (ctl + click) on the pixel icon to re-load the selection (see #6 above).
- b. If you move to the “Channels” palette and have an alpha channel (or saved selection) that you would like to use as a selection simply (ctl + click) the black and white icon.

## 8. Viewing a mask on a layer (alt + click mask icon)

- a. You can view the gray scale mask attached to any layer by holding the “alt” key down and “left clicking” the mask icon.

## 9. Combining Masks/Selections:

- a. This can prove to be an extremely useful set of keyboard shortcuts. *This is a set of keyboard operations that I believe can not be done any other way (there are other ways to combine masks and utilize selection tools).* It is particularly useful when trying to create a complex or difficult mask/selection.
  - i. Consider selecting a person. You can concentrate on the various parts of the person and create separate selections, saving the body, the arms, the legs, and the head and hair. These saved selections are in the “channels” palette and they can later be added together to develop the entire person. The beauty is that you can concentrate your efforts on each part to refine and create an excellent mask.

### 1. Add a selection to another selection using keystrokes:

- a. Having made one selection to add another from a layer or a mask; (ctl + shift + click) on the icon of the mask or the layer.

### 2. Subtract a selection from another selection using keystrokes:

- a. Having made one selection to subtract another from a layer or mask; (ctl + alt + click) on the icon of the mask or layer.

### 3. Intersect one selection with another using keystrokes:

- a. Having made one selection to intersect another from a layer or mask; (ctl + shift + alt + click) on the icon of the mask or layer.



**10. Deleting a Selection (ctl + d) ; Hide a selection (ctl + h)**

- a. We have talked about creating selections, adding them, subtracting them, intersecting them; this will explain how to “delete” a selection, and to “hide” a selection.
  - i. If you have a selection and wish to delete it to “clean-up” your window, or you changed your mind simply hold down the “ctl” key and press and release the “d” key (for delete).
  - ii. To hide the marching-ants while maintaining the selection press and hold “ctl” and then press and release “h” (for hide). This is useful if you are dodging or burning through a luminosity selection or a mask it allows you to observe the areas being painted without the distracting marching-ants. This (ctl + h) keyboard control “toggles” the marching-ants ON and OFF.

**11. Create a Luminosity Selection (*a very detailed mask resembling a black & white rendition, with all levels of gray greater than 50% indicated by marching ants*):**

- a. Two methods are presented here;
  - i. To create a luminosity selection, go to the “Channels” palette (ctl + click) on the RGB channel icon (colored pixel icon – usually channel #1).
  - ii. Over the years the keyboard shortcut to create a luminosity selection has changed. Depending on your version of Photoshop or Elements different keystrokes may be required. Try (ctl + alt + ~ (tilde)), or (ctl + alt + 1) or (ctl + alt + 2).

**12. A few more words about luminosity mask/selection:**

- a. This is where the operations of #9 above shine:
  - i. Recall that the luminosity mask has shades of gray. When you intersect grayscale masks with itself the process uses a multiply algorithm. Black is zero (0) and white is 256, therefore, areas that are both 256 become 256, while areas where either mask is 0 will yield a zero (0). The gray areas tend to make areas that intersect less than before. Basically the contrast goes up and the bright areas are reduced in area. This tends to mask the brighter-brights. This is the process used to refine and make more selective luminosity masks.

See more on Luminosity Masks on the Huntington Camera Club Website:

<http://hccny.org/web/tutorials.php>

Help & Tutorials>Help & Tutorials>Photoshop>Layers and Masks>Luminosity Masks – How Used Part 1-3.

**13. To create a “Layer” from a “Channel/Mask”:**

- a. Use a “copy/paste” technique. With the mask made visible in the window (see #8);
  - i. select “all” (ctl + a), copy it (ctl + c), go back to the layers palette if you are not there and create a new layer. *To return properly to the layers palette from the channels palette, first return to channel 1 then click the layers Tab.* Then “paste” the copied mask into the already created new layer (ctl + v).