

Adobe Photoshop Elements

Top 5 Tools For The Perfect Picture

The following instructions are intended to be a rough guide to get you started editing your digital photographs using Adobe Photoshop Elements. In some versions of the software the tools mentioned might be in slightly different places but they all have the same names so you'll be able to find them if you have a hunt around.

Don't be frightened that you'll ruin your picture, as long as you don't save over your original you can create as many versions of it as you like and always come back to where you started and try again.

The golden rule is: **NEVER WORK ON THE ORIGINAL OR ONLY COPY OF THE PHOTOGRAPH.** Always save it as another name before you start work, if anything goes wrong you can throw that version away and start again from the original.

The most important thing is to have fun and enjoy being creative!

1. Rotating Your Picture

If you've turned your camera round and taken a portrait picture, when you open it in Adobe Photoshop Elements it'll be the wrong way round.

1. To rotate the whole picture, select **Image** from the menu at the top of the screen.
2. Select **Rotate** from the drop down menu. This gives you lots of options to cover all circumstances.
3. Just click on the option that will rotate your picture to the right orientation.

2. Cropping

1. First decide on the size you want your final picture to be. You can stick to standard sizes such as 7"x5", 8"x10" etc. or for a more modern feel you could always crop your picture square.
2. Select the Crop tool from the tool palette or press 'C' on your keyboard. At the top of the screen (under the menus) you will see the options palette for the crop tool. Here you can set the size you want to crop your picture to, along with the resolution.

Tip: Unless you are preparing a picture for the internet keep the resolution at 300dpi.

3. Type in the width and height you want your picture to be. You can specify this in millimetres, centimetres, inches or pixels.

To choose a size in inches, type the number followed by *in*.

To choose a size in centimetres type the number followed by *cm*.

To choose a size in millimetres type the number followed by *mm*.

To choose a size in pixels (mainly for when your preparing images for the internet) type the number followed by *px*.

If you don't want to crop your picture to a specific size, just leave the Height and Width boxes empty.

4. Place the cursor at one of the top corners of the area you want to define as your finished picture. Hold the left mouse button and drag the cursor across the picture diagonally. You'll see a box appear over your picture.

5. When you have a selected the area you want, release the mouse button. You'll see a darker border around the selected area of your picture, this shows the part of the picture you'll remove with the piece you want to keep in the middle.

6. At this point, notice the grips at the corners of the box. You can use these grips to resize your selection and to rotate it.

Tip: This is an ideal opportunity to straighten the horizon on that landscape or correct a picture that isn't quite straight.

You can also move the whole selection at this point to get the position of the crop just right. Just place your cursor in the middle of the selection somewhere and click and drag the box to the right location. You can also use the arrow keys on your keyboard to make fine adjustments.

7. Once you are happy that you've selected the right area, double click inside the picture or press return and the computer will crop the original image and resize it to your specifications.

*Tip: If you are unhappy with the result you can always undo the action, either by holding **Ctrl** and pressing **Z** or by clicking on the **Edit** menu at the top of the screen and selecting **Undo**.*

3. Adjusting Brightness and Contrast

There are two ways to do this:

- Brightness/Contrast
- Levels

1. Brightness/Contrast

On the menu bar at the top of the screen, select **Enhance**, then **Adjust Brightness/Contrast**.

This opens a small window with two sliders. Adjust the brightness slider first and then the contrast. Adjust these two sliders until you are happy that your picture is brighter without the highlights being over exposed or the shadows being too dark.

Once you're happy click on the **OK** button.

Levels

On the menu bar at the top of the screen, select **Enhance**, then **Levels**.

This opens a larger window showing the Histogram for your picture. (Don't worry too much about the Histogram at this point or what it means.)

Under the histogram you'll see three small triangular points.

- The left hand point represents shadows and contrast.
- The middle point represents mid tones.
- The right hand point represents highlights (and to a lesser extent the strength of the colours within your picture)

Ideally the left and right points should sit at each end of the black portion of the histogram above. (Where the black bit stops – this may not be at the edge of the little window so don't worry.)

You can click and drag the triangular points to adjust the lighting within your picture.

- If you move the right hand point to the left you'll notice the lighter bits of your picture get brighter, you'll also notice the colours get a little more vivid.
- If you move the middle point to the left you'll notice your picture gets a little lighter in the mid tones.
- If you move the left hand point to the right you'll notice the darker areas get a little darker and you'll add contrast to your picture.

This method is a little more advanced than the Brightness/Contrast controls and gives you more control and slightly better results. As with most tools in Adobe Photoshop Elements, the more you experiment with it the more you'll get used to the effects of the tool and the better the results will be.

Once you're happy click on the **OK** button.

*Tip: You'll notice a little tick-box with **Preview** written next to it. As you adjust the controls try clicking this button on and off. This will show you the before and after effects of your adjustments.*

*Tip: If you are unhappy with the result you can always undo the action, either by holding **Ctrl** and pressing **Z** or by clicking on the **Edit** menu at the top of the screen and selecting **Undo**. Then you can go back and try again.*

4. The Unsharp Mask

The Unsharp Mask tool is a great way of giving a picture that little bit more 'bite'. Even a photo that already looks sharp will benefit from a subtle use of this tool.

1. On the menu bar at the top of the screen, select **Filter**. Under the **Sharpen** menu there are four options, select the bottom one – **Unsharp Mask**. This opens up a window with three sliders below a 'zoomed-in' sample of your picture.

2. As a starting point, type in the box next to the top slider (**Amount**) a value of 125. In the next box (**Radius**) type 1.5. For now you can ignore the bottom slider.

Tip: The trick with this filter is to keep its effect subtle, if you make the effects too strong it can look awful and spoil a nice picture.

*Tip: You'll notice a little tick-box with **Preview** written next to it. As you adjust the controls try clicking this button on and off. This will show you the before and after effects of your adjustments.*

3. You'll probably find that the values above are about right. It's really a matter of taste and the size of your picture as to how much you'll need to adjust the two sliders.

4. Keep adjusting the sliders until you get an effect you're happy with and don't forget to keep switching the preview on and off to check the before and after effects of the filter.

5. Once you're happy click on the **OK** button.

*Tip: If you are unhappy with the result you can always undo the action, either by holding **Ctrl** and pressing **Z** or by clicking on the **Edit** menu at the top of the screen and selecting **Undo**. Then you can go back and try again.*

5. Adjusting Saturation

Saturation is the strength of the colours within your picture. For example, if you want to make a blue sky bluer, you can increase the saturation.

1. On the menu bar at the top of the screen, select **Enhance**, then **Adjust Colour** and **Hue/Saturation**.

This opens a window with three sliders.

Hue: This adjusts the colour of the whole image or selection – best to leave that alone for now.

Saturation: This will affect the colour within the image, making it stronger if you move the slider to the right and weaker if you move the slider to the left. (If you move the slider all the way to the left you end up with a black and white picture)

Lightness: This acts like the Brightness slider on the Brightness/Contrast menu. The effects of this slider aren't usually very flattering when used on an entire image so it's probably best not to worry about that slider either.

2. Keeping an eye on the main picture in the background, move the **Saturation** slider to the right a little. Notice how all the colours within your picture become a little stronger.

3. Adjust the **Saturation** slider until you're happy with the results – be careful not to over-do it though. Don't forget to click the **Preview** button on and off so you can check the before and after effects of the filter.

4. Once you're happy click on the **OK** button.

*Tip: If you are unhappy with the result you can always undo the action, either by holding **Ctrl** and pressing **Z** or by clicking on the **Edit** menu at the top of the screen and selecting **Undo**. Then you can go back and try again.*

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