



■ BY BEN WILLMORE

## Actions Frustration Fixer

Recently, I had to create an action that should have taken about two minutes, but ended up taking three days to get around all the limitations of the Actions palette. Here's how I got sneaky and forced actions to do my bidding (for advanced users only).

For this action, I needed to create a selection that was 3" wide by whatever height a document happened to be. I thought that simply entering 3 in the Width field and 100% in the Height field for a Fixed Size selection would work. Unfortunately, the Action recorded the size using the measurement system that the Rulers were set to, and you can't have different types of measurement for Width and Height. To get around this, I tried entering a huge number (40000 in) in the Height field. Selections can't usually extend beyond the document's edge so this should work.

### Work around unusual behaviors

Manually applying this technique produces a selection that's 3" wide and as tall as the active document; however, when I play back the action, Photoshop creates a selection that's really 3" by 40,000" (the selection extends beyond the document's bounds, which isn't usually possible). Now, when I include an action step to scale the selected part of the image, it assumes that the area to be scaled is 40,000" tall. But the result is within the bounds of the document and therefore much smaller in height!

To get around this odd behavior, I typed Q twice right after making the selection to toggle Quick Mask Mode on and off, which causes Photoshop to clip the selection so that it doesn't extend beyond the document's bounds.

Next, I wanted to create a selection exactly 3" wide that ended at the document's right edge. All measurements related to the Marquee tool use the same measurement system and of course, I used inches. But I didn't want to describe the selection's position using inches; otherwise, when I play back the action, Photoshop will always assume the width of the document in inches.

*"Keep a close eye on the Actions palette because there are some things that Photoshop ignores when recording an action."*

To get around this, I apply the same technique used for the original selection (on the left side of the document) and then try to move it to the right side of the document. But Photoshop doesn't offer an alignment option for selections (only for layers), so I copy the selected area onto its own layer (Command-J [PC: Control-J]) and it's the right size to align. Then, I select the underlying layer (assuming it's a background that fills the entire document so I could align to its right edge) by pressing Shift-Option-[ (PC: Shift-Alt-[).

### Alternate methods

Here's where you need to keep a close eye on the Actions palette because there

are some things that Photoshop ignores when recording an action. I want the two selected layers to have their right edges in alignment. Usually, you'd click on one of the Alignment icons, which appear in the Options Bar when the Move tool is active; but for some reason, Photoshop won't record that step in an action. Let's try another method: Going under the Layer menu and choosing Align>Align Right does the trick—the right edges are now aligned.

Next, I need a selection the same size as the layer we created earlier. Hold down the Command (PC: Control) key and click on the layer thumbnail in the Layers palette. Because we now have the selection we need, we'll drag the layer to the Trash icon, as it's no longer needed.

### Think creatively

The final challenge is to move the area that we just selected (on the right edge of the document) to the right by 3" and make the action work, regardless of the document size. I couldn't use inches in a transformation because it would record it as the number of inches it was from the upper-left corner of the document and that wouldn't allow it to be applied to any size document. To get around that, we'll add 3" to the width of the document (choose Image>Canvas Size, and in the dialog, check the Relative button, and choose 3 in for Width) and then align the layer to the right edge of the document. Done! ■

Ben Willmore is the best-selling author of Adobe Photoshop CS2 Studio Techniques and Up to Speed: Photoshop CS2, as well as co-author of How to Wow: Photoshop for Photographers. Ben spends many of his days as a "digital nomad" in his 40' motorcoach. Learn about his latest adventures at [www.wherisben.com](http://www.wherisben.com).