

Fundamental Photoshop

Little things make a big difference when working in Photoshop

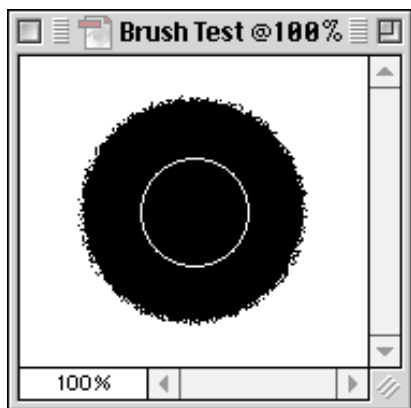
■ BY BEN WILLMORE

This is the kickoff installment of Fundamental Photoshop where you can work on building a deeper understanding of the program by starting with the basics. Your guide will be Ben Willmore, NAPP member and author of the best selling book *Official Adobe Photoshop 5 Studio Techniques*. In this installment, get ready to arm yourself with the truth, as Ben sheds light on some of the most common false assumptions made about Photoshop's features.

Assumption #1: The round painting cursor indicates the size of your brush.

When you choose File>Preferences>Displays and Cursors and set the Painting Cursors option to Brush Size, your painting cursors will change from the default icon to a circle. Most users assume this circular cursor indicates the actual size of your brush—it doesn't, especially if you use a soft brush.

Try this out: Create a new grayscale document about 300x300 pixels, grayscale with a white background. Then choose New Adjustment Layer from the pop-up menu of the Layers Palette. Choose Threshold from the type pop-up menu and then move the Threshold slider all the way to the right. Next, click on the layer below the adjustment layer and then reset your foreground color to black by typing "D." Finally, choose a soft-edged brush and click anywhere in your document. Now you can see where your brush actually ends. Surprise!

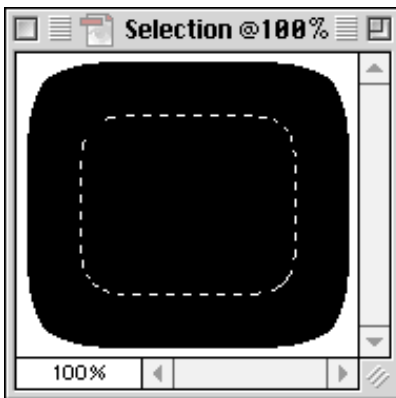


Assumption #2: The Marching Ants indicate the edge of a selection.

The marching ants show you where an area is at least 50% selected. When you have a hard-edged "normal" selection, then the marching ants do show you approximately where the selection ends (ignoring the fact that Anti-aliasing actually makes the selection end about one pixel outside the

marching ants).

When you have a feathered selection, that changes everything. If you choose Select>Feather and enter an amount of 10, that will feather the edge centered on the marching ants. That means the selection will start fading out approximately 5 pixels inside the marching ants and end approximately 5 pixels outside the marching ants. But the marching ants will show up in the middle of the feathered area. To see this for yourself, try the following: create a new grayscale document about 300x300 pixels in size with a white background. Now use the Marquee tool to make a selection about half the size of the document, choose Select>Feather and use a setting of 10. Press "D" to reset your foreground color and then press Option-Delete (PC: Alt-Backspace) to fill that area with your foreground color. Notice that the paint extends beyond the edge of the marching ants. To see exactly what the marching ants represent, choose Select>Deselect and then choose New Adjustment Layer from the pop-up menu of the Layers palette. Create a Threshold adjustment layer and move the slider all the way to the right. This will show you everything that is darker than white and therefore indicate where the selection stopped affecting the image. Next, move the slider to the middle where the number reads 128. This



should be exactly where the marching ants are showing up because they indicate where an area is 50% selected. You can also move the slider until the number reads 0 to see where the selection starts to fade out.

When you type 10 for a feather value, the feathering actually takes up more than 10 pixels! That's because Photoshop uses a Gaussian blur to make it fade and the blur uses a bell shaped curve to blend into the image.

Assumption #3: View>Print Size displays your image at the size it will be printed.

I wish it did. But, unfortunately, Photoshop makes the assumption that your monitor is displaying 72 pixels in each inch, which isn't always the case. To see for yourself, create a new document that is 4 inches by 1 inch with a resolution of 300dpi. Now choose Print Size from the View menu and then hold a ruler up to your screen and notice that the image is not being displayed at the actual size it will be printed. Here's how to get a real print size preview: choose View>Show Rulers, choose Window>Show



Navigator, and then double-click on the ruler and set its measurement system to Inches. Finally, hold a physical ruler up to your screen and move the magnification slider at the bottom of the Navigator palette until the on-screen ruler matches the ruler you are holding in your hand. ■

Ben Willmore is the author of the bestselling book *Official Adobe Photoshop 5 Studio Techniques (Adobe Press)* and the founder *Digital Mastery, a training and consulting group based in Boulder, Colorado. Ben provides hundreds of Photoshop tips and tutorials on his web site at www.digitalmastery.com.*



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