

Fundamental Photoshop

Little things make a big difference when working in Photoshop

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

With literally hundreds of keyboard shortcuts available in Photoshop, it's not surprising that many of us get instant amnesia when trying to remember even a few of them. If your memory cells shrivel up every time you try to recall a shortcut, then this article is for you. Knowing the logic behind the commands can help increase your efficiency when performing common tasks, so let's figure out what Adobe was thinking when they came up with the shortcuts. In order to fit all this on just one page, I'm going to mention only Mac shortcuts, but it all still applies in Windows, just substitute Alt key for Option, Control for Command, and Right-mouse button for Control-clicking.



Hold the Shift key to constrain the proportions while scaling an image.

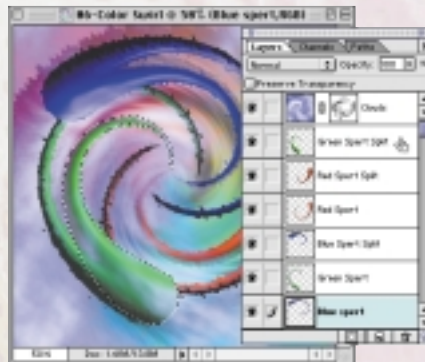
Shift: Constrains something or allows you to work on more or multiple things

When you are scaling a layer using the Edit>Transform>Scale command, you can hold Shift to constrain the proportions of the image, preventing you from squishing it horizontally or vertically. When you are using the Line tool, you can also hold Shift to constrain the line to an increment of 45°. And when making a selection with the Marquee tool, the Shift key does two things, depending on when you hold it down. If you hold it before you click the mouse button, then it means you will add to the selection that is already on your screen. If you hold it down after you've clicked the mouse, then it constrains the selection to a square. Or, if you're an advanced user, you might Shift-click on the names of multiple channels to edit more than one at a time.

Command: Replaces a menu command or loads something as a selection

This is also useful when you are stuck in an adjustment dialog box or filter, where you might not have easy access to the menu bar. For example, type Command-plus(+) and Command-minus(-) to zoom in and out while you're adjusting an image using Levels. You can also Command-click on the name of a layer to select everything on that

layer or Command-click on a Channel, Path, or Layer Mask to load it as a selection.



Command-click on the name of a layer to select all the elements on that layer. Add Shift to add to an existing selection or Option to subtract from it.

Option: Changes the behavior of something

If a button can usually perform two functions, then you will most likely have to use the Option key to get to the second choice. For example, when you are in an adjustment dialog box (Levels, Curves, etc.), you can hold the Option key and the Cancel button will change to a Reset button, which will reset that dialog box back to its default setting. You can also hold Option when choosing an adjustment, and the dialog box will use the last settings you applied to your image instead of using the defaults. Or, when you are using the Marquee tool, the Option key does two things depending on when you hold it down. If you hold it before you click the mouse button, then you will take away from the current selection. If you hold it after you have pressed the mouse button, then you will start your selection from the center instead of the corner. When you Option-click on the new layer icon at the bottom of the Layers palette, Photoshop will ask you for a name for the new layer.

Control-click: Presents you with a contextual menu for the currently active tool

When you are using a selection tool, control-clicking will present you with a menu that includes feathering, stroking, and filling the

selection. When you use a painting tool, it will let you change the current brush size. Or, my favorite, if you are using the Move tool and have your cursor over your image, you can Control-click and get a list of all the layers that are directly under your cursor. Choosing one of the layers listed will make that layer active! That allows me to work without all my palettes cluttering my screen.



Control-click while using the Move tool to quickly switch the currently active layer.

Spacebar: Allows you to scroll around your image or move a selection while creating it

When you are using any tool, you can press the spacebar to temporarily switch to the hand tool. Once you let go, you will be back to the original tool. When you use the Lasso tool, you can press the Spacebar to scroll around your image, even when you are in the middle of making a selection. That's great, because I like to be zoomed into my image, so I can see what I'm doing. When you are using the Marquee tool, you can press the Spacebar to move a selection before you have released the mouse button to finish the selection.

So, that's the general thinking behind the modifier keys. Now, I hope you will be able to toss your amnesia out the window and start using keyboard shortcuts like a pro. ■

Ben Willmore is the author of Official Photoshop 5 Studio Techniques (Adobe Press). You'll find info about Ben's national Photoshop seminars and hundreds of free tips at his Web site: www.digitalmastery.com.



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