Basic Manipulations

This tutorial covers the basics of image manipulation, how to create, open and save images, how to rotate and crop them and a section on adding text to your images. We will be coming back to many of these areas to fine tune how we use them in later tutorials. This is a quick whizz through to get you started.

Creating a new image

To create a new image you can either go to the File menu, click on New then select 'Blank File' or you can use the keyboard shortcut, Ctrl-N. Both will take you to a dialogue box where you can type in a name for the image and set some size options. You can change the size of an image at any point - the dimensions you put in here are just to get you started.

Elements gives you a number of size preset groups to choose from in a dropdown list. So, if you want to create an image that you want to print at A4 size then you would select the preset 'International Paper' then go to the 'Size' dropdown list and select A4.

Alternatively, you can type in the actual dimensions you want to use in the Width and Height boxes – don't forget you can change the units (pixels, inches, cm etc) you are working in by selecting from the dropdown list on the right of each input box.

The default resolution is 300 ppi (pixels per inch). This is typical for printing, while 72 would be typical for display on a screen. A future tutorial will cover resolution and re-sizing in some detail.

In the 'Color Mode' dropdown list you have three options, Bitmap – which only allows black or white pixels, Greyscale – which only allows black, white and shades of grey and RGB (Red, Green and Blue) – which allows the full range of colours.. For the vast majority of the time you will be working in RGB even if you are working on a black and white image, because it gives you access to the most tools and options.

The last option is the background colour. For now, just leave this as white. When you have everything as you want it, just click on OK and your new document appears in the working space and in the Project Bin.

Opening an image

To start editing an existing image, such as a photograph you've taken, you need to open it into the working area. As with most things in Elements there is more than one way to open an image. You can go to the File menu and then select 'Open', you can use the keyboard shortcut of Ctrl-O (holding the Ctrl key down and pressing the letter O), or you can click on the Open icon just above the tool box. They will all take you to the file browser where you can navigate to the folder and the file you want to open. You then click on the file name and click on 'Open' or double click on the file name.

When the file is open you will see it in the main working area and a thumbnail (small) version in the Photo Bin.

Closing an image

If you want to close an image without making any changes then you can use File > Close, the keyboard shortcut Ctrl-W or click on the cross at the top right of the image.

Saving a document

After we've been working on an image, we usually want to save the results. The various versions of the Save command are found on the File menu. They are 'Save', 'Save as', and 'Save for Web'.

The 'Save as' command brings up the 'Save as' dialogue box which gives you options to change the file name, where you are going to save it, the file format etc.

The 'Save for Web' is a little more complex as it gives you a number of technical options that you might want to consider if you are preparing an image for a web site or blog. It will optimise the image to make a small file size. For the majority of cases all you'll need to do is select gif or jpg from the drop down list under Preset and leave all the default options as they are.

There will be a separate document on file formats and what some of them are commonly used for.

Now, on to doing some manipulations. Before we start it's worth stating what may be blindingly obvious - ALWAYS, ALWAYS, WORK ON A COPY OF YOUR IMAGE, NEVER THE ORIGINAL! The capitals are justified here. I keep all my images in archive folders. Then, when I want to use one for a particular project I copy it into a new project folder. That way, if I really foul things up I can just go and get a new copy from the archive. It's amazingly liberating to know that, whatever you do you can always get another copy and start afresh.

Don't forget that, when you are playing round with these options to see what they do, you can use Ctrl-Z to undo your last step so you are ready to try the next one.

Rotate

Before you start cropping or re-sizing you may want to rotate your image and look at it from different angles. If, for instance you've taken a photograph of buildings but you didn't have the camera quite straight then you can correct this now before you start cropping the edges. On the other hand, if the image is abstract rather than figurative the patterns may be more pleasing at one angle than another. So, have a play and see what you like best.

The Rotate commands are in the Image menu. So, if you click on Image, then Rotate you will get a number of options. These are divided into two main sections. The top section refers to the whole image so you can rotate the image by 90° in either direction, by 180° or you can flip (mirror) the image on the horizontal or vertical axis. You can also rotate the image by a set amount – the custom setting. So, for instance, you can rotate it by 3° to the right (clockwise) or to the left (counterclockwise).

The second set of options refers to rotating a layer, so we'll look at these when we cover layers in a later tutorial.

I'll just whizz through a few examples so you can see the results. Between each rotation I'll be using Ctrl-Z to undo what I've just done so each one starts from the same view of the image.

Crop (c)

Cropping is the term used for cutting out a piece of an image. It's often used to get rid of clutter round the edges to concentrate on the main elements of the image.

To select the Crop tool, either click on it in the toolbox or press the letter C on your keyboard.

You use it by putting the cursor at the top left hand corner of the section you want to cut out. You then drag diagonally down to the bottom right hand corner of your selection. You then release the mouse button.

The area outside your selection is shown darkened and each side of the crop box will have a drag handle that you can pull in or out to make the selection bigger or smaller.

You can **move the crop box** around by dragging with the mouse or by nudging with the cursor keys. Once you have the section you want to keep highlighted, then press the Enter key or click on the green tick.

If you decide you want to **cancel the crop** then simply press the Esc key or click on the red 'cancel' sign, next to the green tick.

You can also **set the specific width and height of the crop** in the Options bar. So, if you are preparing an image for a specific place on a web site that is 100 pixels by 50 pixels you can put these figures into the option bar and your crop will be exactly that size.

You can also use Elements' **preset sizes** from the dropdown list. So, if you know you want to print your cropped image on 6" by 4" paper, a standard photo paper, then you can crop your image to that size.

The last option which appeared in version 10 is the ability to **set an overlay** grid to help you decide where to crop your image. You can select the grid you want, or no grid, from the Options bar.

It's also worth remembering that the size options are what's known as 'sticky' settings. So, whatever you set now will still be there next time you use the tool. So, if you wonder why Elements won't let you make the crop you want to, then check that you have 'No restriction' set in the Aspect Ratio box on the Tool Options.

A few tips to finish this section:
- If you put the width and height dimensions in the wrong boxes then you can swap them easily by clicking on the double arrows between the width and height boxes. It just saves having to put them in again.
- **I**f you are having problems getting the crop boundary in exactly the place you want it and the selected area keeps jumping around then hold the Ctrl key down while you are dragging the crop boundaries. This temporarily switches off the 'snap to grid' function.
- Every now and then the Crop tool just seems to stop cooperating – it just won't do what you want it to. In that case click on the icon with four horizontal lines at the right-hand side of the Options Bar and select 'Reset the tool'. That should sort it out.

Adding text (t)

The text tool is represented by the letter T in the toolbox and the shortcut is just to press the letter T on your keyboard. If you select the tool then the font, colour, size and so on can be changed on the Options Bar.

Inserting text
To add text to your image, click where you want your text to begin and start typing.

Note the flashing insertion point where the text will start. It's very easy to get one of these accidentally and if it's small you sometimes can't see it. You just find that Elements won't let you do anything else until you either accept it by clicking on the green arrow or cancel it by clicking on the cancel icon. For this reason, if Elements appears to lock up, look in the Tool Options for the tick/cancel which indicates that there is an insertion point somewhere on your image. Just press the Esc key to get rid of it and free up Elements.

As Elements automatically puts each piece of text on a separate layer, you can move them around independently by dragging with the mouse, while you hold the ctrl key down. The Ctrl key turns any tool temporarily into the Move tool. Watch the cursor change. So the sequence is - hold the Ctrl key down while you drag with the mouse, then release the mouse button.

To change any of the options for a given piece of text, make sure the text is highlighted first. You can do this two ways. The first is to select the text by 'swiping' with the mouse. Look for the cursor to change shape to the 'I' bar as it approaches the text, then depress the left-hand mouse button, highlight the text and release the button.

Alternatively you can double click the T symbol on the layer containing the text in the Layers panel.

Vertical text
Lastly for this bit we'll look at producing text that flows down the screen instead of across it. If you want your text to flow vertically instead of horizontally then either select the vertical text tool, which is in the Text Tool Options, before you start to enter the text. Or, you can select a piece of text you've already entered and then click on the 'Change text orientation' button in the Tool Options. This often looks a bit strange as the spacing can be a bit odd.

If you'd like your text to rotate so that it's vertical then you need to highlight it, then, holding the Ctrl key down, move the cursor slightly away from a corner of the selection box. You'll see a double headed arrow appear. Drag the box round until it is at the angle you want. Finally, click on ok, the green tick.

Creative text
There are a number of ways that you can use text creatively in Elements. The first method is called warped text, a great name. You can change the shape of the text by highlighting it and then selecting the 'warp text' button (the T over a double headed curved arrow) on the Options bar. Then select a shape and the relevant options.

Text around a Shape
In version 10 of Elements, Adobe introduced three ways to make text follow a particular shape. Under the standard text tool you will find tools to make text follow a selection, a custom path or a preset shape. We'll look at the first two later so, for now, we'll just look at making text follow a preset shape.

For this select the 'Text on Shape' tool, a capital T on a sort of scroll shape from the Tool Options. Select a shape to use then drag with the mouse until the shape is the size you want. This gives you a path for the text to follow – this line doesn't print. Move the cursor close to the path line until the cursor becomes an I-bar, a text insertion point. Click once and then start typing in

your text. The text should flow round the shape. Once you have typed in as much text as you want then click on the green tick in the Options bar.

Tip: If the default for your particular shape is for the text to be inside the shape and you want it outside the shape then, after you've clicked on the shape but before you've started typing, hold the Ctrl key down and drag the insertion point to where you want it.

We'll cover using styles, filters, effects and gradients on text when we come to the relevant section.

Summary of keyboard shortcuts:

To create a new blank document	Ctrl-N
To open an image	Ctrl-O
To save an image	Ctrl-S
To 'save as'	Shift-Ctrl-S
To close an image	Ctrl-W
Select the Crop tool	C
Select the Text tool	T