

U3A Photographic Group – 16 September 2016

Combining Images

The best way to learn from these notes is to download the accompanying images and work through the examples yourself, to try and produce similar results.

These examples use Photoshop Elements. The principles will be exactly the same for other programs that support layers.

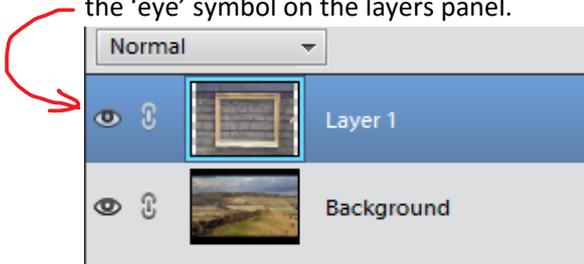
Example 1.

Open images 1a and 1b.

With 1b, select all > edit > copy

With 1a, edit > paste

The frame now appears as a layer on top of the landscape. You can switch layers on and off by clicking the 'eye' symbol on the layers panel.



Now, make sure that layer 1 is highlighted, as shown above (if not, simply click on it).

Using the polygonal lasso tool, select the inside of the frame.

Press the delete key.

You have now cut a hole in layer 1, allowing you to see the landscape below.

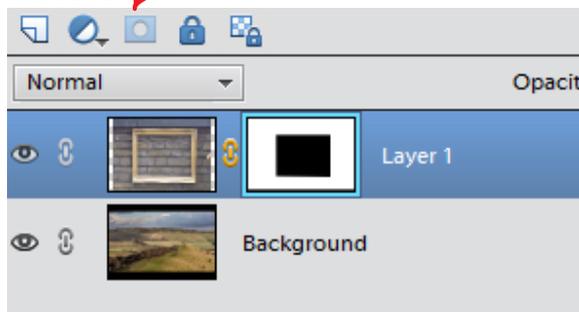
Deselect, crop as desired and you are finished.

Example 1 – a better way

Select the inside of the frame as above, then invert the selection

Then click on the 'add layer mask' icon (highlighted in yellow above).

Job done.



The mask that has been created is white in the area that was selected and black elsewhere. The black area hides that part of the layer, so you can see through to the layer below. Click on the layer mask to

highlight it then practice brushing black and white on the mask and you will see how it works. Try brushing with grey as well.

Example 2.

With 2b open, select the lady with the dog, using your favourite selection tool. Edit > copy.

Switch to 2a, edit > paste.

Use the move tool to position the lady where you want her.

Job done. Or is it? I'm sure, if you look closely, your selection was less than perfect. And she looks as though she's been stuck on.

Example 2 – a better way.

With 2b open, use any selection tool to very roughly select the lady, making sure that you don't miss any bits out. Edit > copy.

Switch to 2a, edit > paste.

Move her into position.

Now, making sure that the top layer is selected, select the lady and dog with your favourite tool. Then click on 'add layer mask'.

Now you can zoom right in, highlight the layer mask, and use a black to mask out any unwanted bits or a white brush to reveal any missing bits.

To make her look as though she's actually standing on the ground, rather than floating, you need to create a shadow under her feet. To do this, go to the bottom layer and use the burn tool, with a soft brush and low exposure, to darken the area. The area immediately under her foot needs to be quite dark. In the example below I've moved the lady up so that you can see the shadow more clearly.



But the sun is shining, so she needs a proper shadow as well.

Highlight the background layer, then create a new layer.

Use the lasso tool to trace a rough shape of the shadow. Fill it with black.

Set the blending mode to 'darken' and adjust the opacity to match your shadow with others in the image.

Example 3

Group photos are a pain. Someone is always blinking, looking away or otherwise awkward. The solution is to take several photos in quick succession and blend the best bits.

Open the best image of the series as your base image.

From one of the others, use the method above to select a 'better' head, and paste it on the base.

Now move it into place. You may need to rotate it slightly or even distort it, to achieve a best fit. Use the black and white brush on the layer mask to remove bits you don't need etc.

Repeat for any other heads that need replacing.

Be patient – it's not easy.

Example 4

You can't always choose the weather when you take photos, so if you are blessed with a dull day with a flat grey sky, what can you do?

Start with 4a and duplicate the background layer. This will enable you to get back to it if you mess things up. Then use the enhance tools to produce something like 4b.

We need to replace the sky with 4c (you do keep a library of skies, don't you?).

With 4c, select all, edit > copy and paste into 4a.

Now we could proceed as in example 2, but the selection needs to be very accurate and complicated.

Switch layer 1 (the sky) off for a moment. Now roughly select the sky, making sure that you select all of it, not worrying about also selecting other parts.

Switch the sky layer back on and 'add layer mask'

Now change the blending mode to 'darker colour'. This means that the darker colours show. In the sky, that is the new sky, but elsewhere it is the building and the trees.

It's not perfect (see 4d) so you will need to do a bit of tidying up on the layer mask to achieve the final result (4e).