Photoshop Shortcuts

We all know that the mouse was invented to make our work with the computer faster and more intuitive. The graphical user interface that is mouse driven may have been created mostly to look cool, but the combination of mouse and graphical interface allow us to perform tasks much faster than in the days of the command prompt.

Even with the benefits of a mouse, the keyboard is still an important tool for making quick work of the tasks you need to perform in Photoshop. While the mouse is fast, a quick keyboard shortcut can be considerably faster.

There was recently a series of posts on the NPN Image Editing Forum about Photoshop Shortcuts. After reading this article, I recommend that you visit the Image Editing forum and share some of your own favorite shortcuts.

Windows Versus Macintosh

Yes, I know. "Them's fightin' words". I'm not about to get into a discussion of the relative merits of these two operating systems (either can be used to produce excellent photographic prints). However, when talking about keyboard shortcuts there are some differences between the two. Rather than include both versions every time I mention a keyboard shortcut, I'll stick with one throughout this article and give you the translations up front. Since I'm a Windows user, the keyboard shortcuts here are for Windows. If you're a Mac user, simply apply the translations for the keys that are different. When the Control (Ctrl) key is used on a Windows keyboard shortcut, the equivalent on Macintosh is the Command key. When the Alt key is referenced, the Mac equivalent is the Option key. That's all you need to know in order to translate from one to the other!

Mouse Shortcuts

There are some important shortcuts that utilize the mouse. One of my favorites is for opening files, although this specific tip only works for Windows users. Most users still select File > Open from the menu bar to open a file. Those who have learned some basic keyboard shortcuts know they can use Ctrl+O to quickly access the File Open dialog box. But my favorite method is to simply double-click on the desktop area, which is the dark gray background of the main Photoshop window.

Another major shortcut using the mouse is right-clicking. If you're a Macintosh user with a single-button mouse, you can use the Control key to get the same results as right-clicking. However, I would suggest getting a two-button mouse to make the process faster and easier.

When using a tool from the Tools palette, the right-click option can help you select options for the specific tool faster. For example, with any of the tools that use a brush (brush tool, clone stamp, eraser, etc.), right-clicking will bring up the brush selection options directly where you right-clicked. With the gradient tool, you can select from the available gradients by right-clicking. Other tools have different options, and I would recommend that you explore the options available when using a given tool by right-clicking on your image.

Right-clicking on layers in the Layers palette and various other areas of the Photoshop interface also offer a variety of shortcuts to common tasks. If an action you want to perform involves several clicks to perform, try out the right-click to see if there is a faster way.

Navigation

Moving around in your image can be a bit slow using the mouse. The Navigator palette provides a relatively quick method of zooming and navigating, but I generally prefer to use some keyboard shortcuts. The beauty of most of these shortcuts is that they'll work even if you have a dialog box (such as Levels or Curves) open.

Of course, navigating around your image can be a real hassle if one or more palettes are blocking the image. If you're using a multiple monitor setup, this isn't an issue. But if you only have one monitor, those palettes can really get in the way. Fortunately, you

can quickly hide them (or bring them back) by pressing the Tab key. Especially if you know the shortcut keys for the tools you frequently use (see the next section), this can provide a very efficient way to work, hiding the palettes while working on your image, and bringing them back only when you actually need to access one of them.

The next step is to be able to quickly and easily zoom in or out and move your view to different areas of the image. You'll often find yourself wanting to look at the image at 100% zoom, or at a size that fits the available desktop area so you can see the full image. You can zoom to 100% quickly by double-clicking on the Zoom tool on the Tools palette. To fit the image into the available desktop area, double-click on the Hand tool on the Tools palette or press Ctrl+0 (zero).

If you want to size the image at any other zoom setting, it is generally faster to use the keyboard shortcuts. Simply hold the Ctrl key and then press the plus (+) key to zoom in and the minus (-) key to zoom out.

Once you've zoomed in, you'll often want to look at a different area of the image. The Hand tool allows you to drag the image around in the image window, so that you can change what area of the image you're looking at. For even faster navigation, simply hold the Spacebar key and then click and drag with the mouse. This will give you the Hand tool no matter what tool is currently selected.

Tools

Whenever you want to access one of the tools from the Tools palette, the mouse is a reasonably quick way to point and click to a tool. However, the keyboard shortcuts can often be faster, especially if you've hidden the palettes. Of course, I'm not going to list every tool here and tell you what the shortcut key is. If you have the "Show Tool Tips" option turned on the General section of the Preferences dialog box, you can simply move your mouse pointer over a button on the Tools palette and after a moment the Tool Tip text will appear. This text will tell you the name of the tool, along with the keyboard shortcut for that tool in parenthesis.

There are a variety of tools that make use of a brush, and all of these often require that you change the brush size. I still see many users clicking the brush dropdown on the Options bar to select a different brush size. Instead, simply press the left square bracket ([) to reduce the brush size, and the right square bracket (]) to increase the brush size. If you have the Displays & Cursors preference for Painting Cursors set to Brush Size, the mouse pointer will show you the size of the brush. You can toggle between a precise and brush size mouse pointer with the Caps Lock key.

Dialog Boxes

Most mistakes in Photoshop are solved with the History palette, or with the ever-faithful Alt-Z keystroke. When you're in a dialog box, such as Levels or Curves, and you find yourself making a real mess of your image, these options aren't available to you. At first glance, it would seem that the only option is to click the Cancel button and start over. However, there is another option. If you hold the Alt key, the Cancel button will change to Reset. Simply hold the Alt key and click on the button, and the dialog box will return to the default values. Keep in mind that if you are using an adjustment layer, this means the values will be reset to the original default values, and you'll lose whatever adjustments you had previously made.

Another really cool shortcut offers help in fine-tuning values during adjustments. For example, when you are adjusting the sliders in the Color Balance dialog box, it can be a challenge to find the best setting because the mouse doesn't afford very fine control for most users. Fortunately, there's a shortcut to help you out. Just about any text box in Photoshop that accepts a number can be incremented or decremented using the arrow keys on your keyboard. With the text box selected, simply press the up arrow key to increase the value and the down arrow key to decrease the value. If you hold the Shift key, the number will increase or decrease by a factor of ten.

But Wait, There's More

I've barely scratched the surface of the shortcuts available to make your work in Photoshop faster and more efficient, having just highlighted some of my favorites.

A graphic designer by the name of Trevor Morris has put together an excellent cheat sheet of Photoshop keyboard shortcut keys, available for download from his [website](). I strongly recommend that you download this handy reference, and start to learn some shortcuts that will make your life easier.

There are a huge number of shortcuts in Photoshop, and learning the ones that provide quick access to the actions you perform most frequently can offer a huge benefit in your workflow. With all the time you'll save using shortcuts, you'll be able to spend more

time taking great pictures!

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About Tim Grey...

Tim enjoys sharing information about digital imaging as much as he enjoys learning it in the first place. Tim publishes an almost-daily [Digital Darkroom Questions](#) (DDQ) e-mail service that provides a forum for photographers to have their questions related to the digital darkroom answered. He is editor of *The Digital Image*, a quarterly journal published by [George Lepp](#). He also teaches courses to help photographers master the digital darkroom at the [Lepp Institute of Digital Imaging](#).

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