FIND PHOTOS FASTER
Harness the power of the Organizer with ratings, keywords, and smart albums, so you can spend less time hunting for photos and more time enjoying them.

REVEAL BEAUTIFUL SKIN
Learn how to make fine lines and blemishes disappear through the magic of layer masks.

PURRFECT PET PHOTOS
Send your favorite furry friend to the groomer with three simple editing tricks.

GET CREATIVE WITH DINGBATS
Unleash the artistic potential in these fun fonts by adding color, texture, and more.

PLUS
Sharpen Your Photo Skills
Tips and Tricks
Subscriber Showcase
Editor's Note

I love the sense of hope and renewal that comes with turning over the calendar at the beginning of each year. In my family, we have a host of traditions to mark this passage. One of my favorites is the lighting of wishes. We start by writing down the problems, traits, or other negative pressures we'd like to let go of. Then we fold the paper into origami shapes, throw them in the fireplace, and watch them disappear. It's a very cathartic experience. We end the day by inviting friends over to a traditional Southern feast of Hoppin’ John for good luck. Any year that starts with friends gathered around a table is bound to be filled with joy.

Many of us also use the new year as an opportunity to take on new challenges. If one of your resolutions is to get out and take more photos, then flip to page 14. There, photographer Derrick Story has laid out five photo challenges to help you sharpen your skills and break out of the photography rut that so many of us slip into. Try one new challenge a week—or any time you're in need of a little inspiration.

If you're hoping to use the new year as an excuse to finally get organized, we've got help for you there, too. On page 17, Jeff Carlson shows you how to take advantage of the many tagging tools in the Organizer—ratings, keywords, face recognition, and more—to help quickly tame an overgrown photo library. Even if you only use a couple of these strategies (I personally am obsessed with ratings), you'll find that a small investment in time now can pay off big the next time you're desperately hunting for that perfect shot. Mac users who don’t have the Organizer can use many of these same strategies in Bridge or iPhoto.

For our part, we're looking forward to bringing you even more great photo-editing and photography techniques in 2011. We're also working to find new and better ways to connect with you—to share the latest news, pass along interesting tips, and point out other sites and projects that inspire us. For example, did you know you can now follow us on Facebook and Twitter? You'll find links to the accounts on our home page (Photoshop-ElementsUser.com). Both sites offer an easy way to see what we're up to and to join in the conversation about shooting, editing, and being creative. We'd love to hear from you.

Whatever your resolutions are for the new year, I wish you much success and happiness for 2011!

Kelly Turner
kelly@photoshopelementsuser.com
4 The Secret to Smoother Skin
Harsh lights and aggressive sharpening can make any of us look a little worse for wear. But with the new Layer Mask feature in Elements 9, it’s easy to undo the damage and create soft, beautiful skin. By Matt Kloskowski

7 3 Fast Fixes for Pet Photos
Even our furry friends need a little touch-up work sometimes. We’ll show you how to tackle some of the most common pet issues, including reflective eyes, flawed fur, and blurry shots. By Lesa Snider

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From animal shapes to flowery flourishes, let these wacky fonts turn your Type tool into a handy clip-art repository. We’ll show you how to load up on dingbat fonts and offer tips for customizing them with colors, filters, and more. By Diana Day

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Every month, in our exclusive subscriber-only area, we post new videos and tutorials from some of the top Photoshop Elements gurus. Here are the most recent postings:

NEW VIDEOS
- Instant Holiday Card
- Quick & Dirty Border Effect
- Using Displacement Maps
- Old-Fashioned Photo Effect
- Fix One, Fix ´Em All
- Creating Masks with Threshold Adjustments
- Removing Chromatic Aberration
The Secret to Smoother Skin
Learn how to create soft, flawless skin that still looks natural

By Matt Kloskowski  Editing portraits is always a balancing act. While we usually want sharp details, overly sharpened skin is a big no-no, as it tends to accentuate the fine lines and minor flaws most of us would rather ignore. This is why skin softening is one of the best techniques you can apply to your portraits. This handy fix removes some of the texture that razor-sharp photos, nice cameras, and bright lights can emphasize, while reducing blemishes and wrinkles—turning you into a photo-editing hero.

I’ll show you how to harness the power of layer masks—one of the new features in Photoshop Elements 9—to quickly soften skin without compromising the sharp details in other parts of the portrait. (Don’t have Elements 9? You can accomplish the same thing with a simple workaround. For instructions, go to the Magazine section of the website and click on the January/February 2011 issue.)

The crisp details in this photo do wonders for the subject’s eyes and hair. Unfortunately, they also accentuate the texture of her skin—something she won’t thank us for. To get the best of both worlds (sharp details and smooth skin) open the image in Photoshop Elements 9 and press Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J) to duplicate the Background layer.

To download my original image, and to view a video showing how to do this with previous versions of Elements, go to the Magazine section of the website and click on the January/February 2011 issue. PhotoshopElementsUser.com

EXTRAS: FOLLOW ALONG!
2 The first thing we want to do is blur the living daylights out of the photo. Select Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur. For a low-resolution photo (less than 6 megapixels), set the Radius to 6 pixels. For photos taken with a 6- to 10-megapixel camera, use a Radius of 20 pixels. And for images with 12 megapixels or more, try a Radius of 25 pixels. Click OK when you’re done.

3 At this point, the entire image should look blurry. Since the goal is to smooth the skin while keeping the detail areas—like her eyes, hair, and eyebrows—sharp, we need to find a way to selectively apply the blur. This is where the new Layer Mask feature in Elements 9 comes in.

Press-and-hold the Alt (Mac: Option) key and click once on the Add Layer Mask icon at the bottom of the Layers palette. This adds a black layer mask to your blurred layer (Layer 1) and removes all the blurriness from the image. In a moment, we’ll go back and paint in the effect just where we need it.

Here, I’ve painted only the left side of her face, so you can see the effect of the skin softening.

4 Click on the layer mask thumbnail to make it active in the Layers palette. Press the letter D to set your Foreground color to white, and then use the Zoom tool (Z) to zoom in on her face. Grab the Brush tool (B) and choose a medium-sized, soft-edged brush from the Brush Picker in the Options Bar.

Now, begin painting over her skin, being careful to avoid detail areas such as the eyes, hair, clothing, eyebrows, nostrils, lips, and jewelry. As you paint on the layer mask with white, you’ll reveal the blurred layer it’s linked to.

Continue painting on both sides of her face until you’ve carefully covered all the non-detail areas. You’ll have to vary the size of the brush to get under her nose and between the eyes and the eyebrows.

The white areas of the finished layer mask indicate where the effect has been applied.

5 More than likely, the skin will be a little too smooth at this point. To significantly lighten the softening effect, try lowering the opacity of Layer 1 (with the layer mask) to 50 percent or less.

We now have the porcelain-skin look we wanted. You can stop at this point if you’re satisfied; however, I often find that the results still look a little artificial. For a more natural appearance, let’s make a few additional adjustments.
Make the other layers visible again by Alt-clicking (Mac: Option-click) on the eye icon for the layer you were just working on, and then drag your gray texture layer to the top of the layer stack. Now change the blend mode of this top layer (Layer 2) from Normal to Soft Light. When you first do this, it’ll bring back the skin texture with a vengeance. You can now dial in the exact amount of original skin texture you’d like visible by lowering the Opacity setting of this texture layer. The lower you make the opacity, the less skin texture is visible. For this particular photo, lowering the Opacity to 25 percent gave about the right balance between softening and texture.

To refine the skin texture further, press-and-hold the Ctrl (Mac: Command) key and click once on the layer mask’s thumbnail. This loads the painting we did on the layer mask as a selection. Now, click on the Background layer (your selection should still be in place), and then press Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J). This takes the selected area of the Background layer and places it in a new layer (Layer 2). Now, Alt-click (Mac: Option-click) on the eye icon to the left of Layer 2 to hide all other layers. You should see the awful-looking thing shown here.

Next, we’ll bring the texture, highlights, and shadows back into the smoothed skin. Select Enhance>Adjust Color>Remove Color to strip the color from the layer, and then choose Filter>Other>High Pass. In the High Pass filter dialog, drag the Radius slider all the way to the left—the image will look very flat. Now slowly drag the Radius slider to the right until some of the texture, highlights, and shadows start to return to the image (as shown here). I can’t give you an exact number to dial in every time, so just drag it until your image looks somewhat like the one you see here, then click OK.

Make the other layers visible again by Alt-clicking (Mac: Option-clicking) on the eye icon for the layer you were just working on, and then drag your gray texture layer to the top of the layer stack. Now change the blend mode of this top layer (Layer 2) from Normal to Soft Light. When you first do this, it’ll bring back the skin texture with a vengeance. You can now dial in the exact amount of original skin texture you’d like visible by lowering the Opacity setting of this texture layer. The lower you make the opacity, the less skin texture is visible. For this particular photo, lowering the Opacity to 25 percent gave about the right balance between softening and texture.

Fast Fixes for Pet Photos

Make sure the furry members of your family look their best with these touch-up tricks.

By Lesa Snider

Pets give us unconditional love and endless hours of joy. So, it’s no wonder we’re constantly snapping their pictures! Unfortunately, we often end up with glowing pupils, fur imperfections, or a blurry shot. To make matters worse, many of Photoshop Elements’ automated retouching tools—such as Red Eye Removal—won’t work with pets. But that doesn’t mean Elements can’t get the job done. I’ll show you how to fix your pets’ eyes, touch up unruly fur, and employ sharpening techniques that’ll accentuate their beauty. Follow these steps and you’ll have your pet looking picture-perfect in no time.

1. Eliminate Glowing Eyes

Your feline friend may have the temperament of an angel, but under the harsh glare of your camera’s flash her eyes can take on a spooky, demonic glow. Similar to the red-eye effect in humans, animals’ eyes tend to turn green, gold or white when bright light reflects off the retinas. While there’s no quick fix for glowing eyes, you can easily rebuild the pupils from scratch by following these simple steps.
To see the eyes better, choose the Zoom tool (Z), and then click and drag diagonally with your mouse to draw a rectangular box around both eyes. This causes Elements to zoom in on the eyes. Press Shift-Ctrl-N (Mac: Shift-Command-N) to add a new layer, and in the resulting dialog box, name it “pupils.”

Next, select the pupils in the photo. Although you can use any selection tool, the Magic Wand tool (W) is particularly well suited because it automatically selects similar colors. In the Options Bar, turn on the Sample All Layers option. This makes Elements look through the empty “pupils” layer to the underlying image layer. Also make sure the Contiguous option is on to ensure you don’t accidentally select pixels elsewhere in your image.

Now, click inside the first pupil to select it. If the Magic Wand doesn’t grab the whole pupil the first time, Shift-click on another spot to add more to the selection. You can also increase the Tolerance setting in the Options Bar to pick up a larger selection (try a setting of 50 to start). Once you have the first pupil selected, hold the Shift key and select the second pupil so you end up with a selection of both.

To help the new pupil blend in with the surrounding pixels, click the Refine Edge button in the Options Bar. If the image you’re working on is fairly large (for example, if it was taken at your digital camera’s high-quality setting), set the Smooth amount to 5 and the Feather amount to 3 pixels (for smaller images, lower those numbers). Drag the Contract/Expand slider to the right until your selection reaches the edges of the pupil (I used 27 percent), and then click OK.

Avoid the Glow

To prevent glowing pupils in the first place, turn off your flash when snapping photos of your pet. Of course, if the room is dim or your pet is active, you may not be able to avoid using your flash. In this case, try snapping the shot while your pet isn’t looking directly at the camera—which is easier said than done.
At this point, the funky glow is gone, but the solid black pupils don’t look entirely realistic either. To make the new pupils look more natural, we’ll add a small reflection. Press Shift-Ctrl-N (Mac: Shift-Command-N) to add another new layer and name it “glint.” Before you close the New Layer dialog box, set the Opacity field to 75 percent and click OK.

Press D to set the foreground and background colors to their defaults (black and white, respectively), and then press X to switch the two so white is on top. Select the Brush tool (B). From the Brush Picker in the Options Bar, choose a soft-edge brush that’s approximately a quarter of the size of the pupil. Now, with your brush cursor positioned a couple of pixels from the first pupil’s edge, click once to add a glint (if you click too close to the pupil edge, the glint bleeds over into the iris). Mouse over to the same spot on the other pupil and repeat to add a matching glint.

When you’re finished, choose File>Save As. Give the file a new name so you don’t overwrite your original file, and select Photoshop from the Format pop-up menu.

### Get the Right Size
To see a preview of your brush size as you adjust it, place your cursor over the pupil, and then press the left bracket key (\[) to decrease the size, or the right bracket key (\]) to increase it. The size of your cursor will change to reflect the brush size.

### EXTRAS: GET MORE ONLINE!
For another way to remove green eye from pet photos, watch our online tutorial. Type http://bit.ly/gnlvfl into your browser.
Fix Flawed Fur

Humans aren’t the only creatures that suffer from bad hair days; it can happen to pets, too. And while an unruly mane doesn’t necessarily spoil a photo—pets are free spirits, after all—when stray hairs, goopy tears, or other unwanted elements distract from your pet’s adorable face, they’re worth taking care of. Elements offers a number of tools that attempt to automatically cover up small flaws, but for the intricate detail work around a pet’s eyes and nose, you’ll typically get the best results from the Clone Stamp tool. Here’s how to put it to work.

1. Open the photo in Elements and zoom in on the area you want to fix. Press Shift-Ctrl-N (Mac: Shift-Command-N) to create a new layer and rename the layer “cloning.” This will prevent you from permanently altering your original image and let you easily erase your cloning work if something goes wrong.

2. Activate the Clone Stamp tool (S) and turn on Sample All Layers in the Options Bar. This tells Elements to look through the active empty layer to pick up (or sample) pixels from the underlying photo layer.

Removing the doggy tears and the stray hair over the eyes made a big difference in the quality of this photo.
Take Better Pet Photos

For portraits that really show off your furry pal's unique character, remember these tips as you're composing your shot:

**See Eye to Eye** Instead of taking downward-pointing aerial shots, get down low to photograph your pet on their level (if you're physically able) or from other unusual angles.

**Go with the Hits** Try to capture your pet's personality by photographing them in their favorite spot or playing with their favorite toy.

**Get Closer** You don't always have to fit your entire pet into the shot. Try zooming in on your pet's cutest spot, such as an eye, nose, or paw.

**Catch the Action** If your pet is athletic, try snapping them while playing. To capture animals in motion, set your camera to Sport mode (the icon usually resembles a person running) or manually set it to a faster shutter speed.

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3 To set a sample point for the Clone Stamp tool, mouse over to your image and **Alt-click (Mac: Option-click)** on a good area of fur nearest to the problem area (your cursor will turn into a target while you're holding the modifier key). For best results, try to sample fur that's similar in length and going in the same direction as the fur you're fixing. Release the **Alt/Option** key and then click and drag across an area you want to fix. As you drag your mouse, you'll notice a small crosshair moving in tandem with your brush cursor; it indicates the area you're copying from.

Because of the intricate details in fur, you'll typically get better results if you don't try to do too much in a single stroke. Instead, keep your strokes relatively short and regularly set new sample points by **Alt/Option-clicking** on a different area. You want to avoid introducing repeating patterns. If it happens, just set another sample point and brush back over that area. This kind of retouching is quite tedious, so be prepared to spend a bit of time with it.

4 When you’re finished, save your file as a Photoshop document (**File>Save As**) as described in Step 7 of the previous technique.

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The round cursor indicates your brush, while the crosshair cursor shows you where you are sampling from.

The dark brown doggy tears under the left eye have been replaced with cloned fur from the snout and under the eye.

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Sharpen Blurry Photos

Pets rarely sit still—there’s simply too much running, jumping, and playing to do. While all that energy makes for a fun companion, it also makes getting sharp photos nearly impossible. But before you discard an otherwise perfect shot because it’s a little blurry, why not let Elements take a crack at it? The program’s Emboss filter may just be able to save it. Sound impossible? Follow these steps and you’ll be a believer.

1. Open the photo in Elements and duplicate the image layer by choosing Layer>Duplicate Layer. Double-click the layer name and change it to “emboss.” If you’ve been retouching your photo and already have several layers in your Layers panel, you’ll need to create a merged layer for sharpening instead. While holding the Alt (Mac: Option) key, open the Layers panel’s fly-out menu (circled below) and choose Merge Visible (if you don’t press Alt/Option before opening the menu, this won’t work). Elements will create a new layer containing the merged contents of all other layers.

Be Selective  If not all of the layers in your document pertain to your pet, you can Shift-click to select only the layers you need before merging.

Layers Help
Help Contents
New Layer...  Open Layer
Duplicate Layer...  Delete Layer
Delete Linked Layers  Delete Hidden Layers
Rename Layer...
Simplify Layer  Clear Layer Style
Link Layers  Select Linked Layers
Merge Down  Merge Visible
Flatten Image  Panel Options...
Close  Close Tab Group

Before Merging

After Merging

New Merged Layer

Choosing Merge Visible creates a composite layer at the top of your stack. I’ve renamed it “emboss.”
With the "emboss" layer active, choose **Filter>Stylize>Emboss.** In the resulting dialog box, set the Angle to 135 degrees, enter 5 pixels for the Height (you may need to go higher if your photo is extremely blurry), set the Amount to 100 percent, and then click OK. The resulting image will look gray and the edges of your subject will be brightly colored. We'll fix this in the next step.

To eliminate the gray, make sure the "emboss" layer is still active in the Layers panel and then change the blend mode to Hard Light (it’s set to Normal by default). This blend mode wipes away gray, leaving only the raised edges visible so they stand out more and appear sharper than they really are. Toggle the layer’s visibility on and off (by clicking the eye icon) to see the difference.

**Simple Sharpening**

As you can see, the Emboss filter can do wonders for photos that are slightly blurry. But for photos that need only a little sharpening and are otherwise in focus, stick with a lighter approach.

Once you’ve duplicated the image layer (or merged multiple layers, if necessary), Choose **Enhance>Unsharp Mask** and in the resulting dialog box, enter an Amount of 120 percent, a Radius of 1, and a Threshold of 3. Radius controls the width of the sharpening halo (how many pixels on either side of the edge get analyzed and changed), while Threshold controls how different neighboring pixels have to be before Elements considers them an edge. Oddly enough, Threshold works the opposite of how you might expect: Setting it to 0 sharpens every pixel in your image.

Five photo challenges to sharpen your eye and inspire creativity

By Derrick Story

Do you feel like you take the same type of photos over and over? Whether it’s the subject matter, your camera angle, or a particular combination of settings, it’s tempting to fall back on familiar tricks whenever you set up a new shot—after all, you don’t want to mess up. But experimentation is the best way to learn about your camera and infuse your shots with fresh energy. To help you break out of your rut, I’ve created five photo challenges that encourage you to explore different camera techniques and improve your photographic eye. While many of the concepts won’t be entirely new to you, forcing yourself to focus on a single technique for an entire week will help make you a more versatile photographer.

Challenge 1

Explore the Edges of the Day

Bankers’ hours are good for business, but not the best for photography. If you’ve become a 9-to-5 shooter, then challenge yourself to experiment with twilight and sunrise landscapes.

When the light is at a low angle, it creates dramatic silhouettes, interesting shadows, and brilliant colors. To make a good thing even better, you don’t have to apply any special techniques to capture nature’s waxing and waning glory. Basically, all you have to do is be there and be ready to shoot. If the light is very dim, increase your ISO to 400 or 800 to make your camera more sensitive.

Not sure when the sun comes up in your neck of the woods? You can find sunrise and sunset timetables online at sites such as Calendar Updates (www.calendar-updates.com). Just enter your ZIP code and press the Enter (Mac: Return) key.

There’s a window of opportunity for beautiful shots when the lights first come on in the city, while there’s still color in the sky. For best results, increase your ISO to 400, steady your camera, and enjoy what appears on the LCD.
By shooting in burst mode, I was able to get these three shots in quick succession.

Challenge 3
Shoot in Burst Mode to Capture the Decisive Moment

You’ve probably experienced this scenario: You carefully compose your shot and press the shutter button at the peak of action, only to be disappointed later that you totally missed the moment. You may have assumed the culprit was your own reflexes, but chances are it wasn’t your fault. With every camera there’s some delay between the time the shutter button is pressed and when the image is actually recorded. This delay can range from minimal with high-end SLRs to intolerable with some compact cameras.

The solution? Switch to burst mode. By shooting a quick sequence of pictures instead of a single frame, you dramatically increase your odds of capturing the decisive moment. And if you’re lucky, you may end up with more than one great shot. In fact, burst mode isn’t just for action shots. Turning it on when taking a portrait or shooting at a family gathering can provide insurance against untimely blinks and help capture unguarded expressions.

To get rolling, find the Drive setting on your camera. Look for an icon that’s a series of rectangular boxes representing a sequence of frames. Sometimes it’s an easily accessible button; other times it’s buried in the menu system. Once you’ve set this, compose your picture and hold down the shutter button. The camera will continue to fire until you lift your finger or fill up its memory.

Challenge 2
Discover New Worlds with Macro Shots

We often take the long view when observing life. We tend to peer up the road, wonder what’s around the corner, and dream about the future. While doing so, we can miss beautiful things right under our nose. This is why close-up photography is so refreshing.

This technique varies slightly depending on the type of camera you have. If you have a compact camera, look for Close-Up mode, which is usually represented by a flower icon on the back of the camera or in the Scene menu. This mode lets you focus at a closer distance for an “insect’s view” of the world. Since compact cameras tend to have a greater depth of field relative to their DSLR cousins, you won’t need to worry as much about getting your focus precisely right. Even if you slightly miss your target, you may very well still get a good shot. But don’t get sloppy. Compose carefully for best results.

Precision is more important for DSLR photographers shooting close up—especially if using a lens designed for macro photography since these have a very shallow depth of field. Take care while framing the shot to ensure that the exact spot you want is in focus. Of course, you don’t need a special lens to take macro shots; most kit lenses do a good job of focusing up close. In either case, a tripod will help steady the camera during exposure.

Get close to your subject to focus on the little details.

Choose Your Focus For heightened drama, focus on the element in the composition that is closest to the lens. That part should render beautifully crisp while the elements behind it become silky smooth.

by Derrick Story

Photo Tips
HONE YOUR PHOTO SKILLS

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By shooting in burst mode, I was able to get these three shots in quick succession.

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Get close to your subject to focus on the little details.
Challenge 4

**Lose the Color**

There’s more to a good photograph than bright colors. By concentrating on lines, textures, and graduated tones, you can move your images from snapshots to works of art. In fact, there’s no better way to improve your skills than visualizing in black and white.

When you’re out shooting, challenge yourself to imagine how a scene would look with the color removed. Focus your eye on the textures, gradations, and lines. (If you’re having trouble doing this, then switch to the B&W scene mode on your camera. However, this should be only a temporary aid. Once you start to get a feel for it, switch back to color so you continue to develop your artistic eye.)

When you return to your computer, convert one of your best shots of the day to black and white in Photoshop Elements (Enhance > Convert To Black And White) to see how you fared. Play with the different settings until you’re satisfied with the image. Then study it. If it’s good, what makes it that way? The tones? The textures? The way the elements are arranged?

Over time, you’ll develop a creative eye that’s not blinded by color—which should improve all of your shots.

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Challenge 5

**Strip out Distractions**

Many times we’re so excited by what we see in the center of the viewfinder, we forget that there’s a bunch of stuff we don’t need in the rest of the frame. This is why every photo program has a cropping tool. Cropping helps remove distracting elements from our composition letting the main subject shine brighter.

Challenge yourself to open a photo you like in Elements, then crop at least one third of it away. More often than not, you’ll like the edited version even better. Once you’ve improved a few images on the computer, take that knowledge back out into the field. Compose the first image as you normally would, then take a second shot with a tighter composition. The two-shot approach will give you maximum coverage of a scene and help you become aware of nonessential details in your viewfinder.

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**The Best of Both Worlds**

If you want to shoot in a black-and-white scene mode for practice, but still want the flexibility to work with color shots, then see if your camera offers a Raw + Jpeg mode. The Jpegs will be grayscale, but the raw files will be full color. That way you can easily compare the two different looks when viewing them on your computer.

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Derrick Story is the author of *The Digital Photography Companion* (2008; O’Reilly Media) and instructor for Lynda.com. He also publishes a blog and weekly photography podcast at www.thedigitalstory.com.
Tired of scrolling through your massive photo library? Learn to use the Organizer’s tagging tools to quickly pinpoint the photos you need.

By Jeff Carlson | In the days of film, the photos that didn’t end up in frames or photo albums often got packed away into shoe boxes, stuffed in drawers, or scattered throughout the house. Thanks to the digital age, we no longer have to worry about keeping track of negatives and prints. But that doesn’t mean the clutter is gone—it simply moved to our hard drives.

If you’re tired of tediously hunting for that one prized shot hidden among years of vacations, parties, and other milestones, it’s time to take action. The trick is to apply metadata, information about each image that can include keywords, ratings, or other useful tags. The Elements Organizer makes it easy to apply this type of information; however, figuring out how to put all of these options to work can be bewildering.

I’ll show you how to not only use the Organizer’s tools to add valuable metadata to your photos, but also how to take advantage of that data to quickly track down the photos you want. Not all of the techniques I’ll discuss may appeal to you—some people like to apply keyword tags, while others are fine with just searching by date. Whatever your preference, you’ll find that by making a little effort now, you can save valuable time and better enjoy your favorite photos later.
Identify Your Best Shots

Most of us don’t spend a lot of time hunting down bad photos. This is why, whenever I import a batch of photos, my first action is to take a quick pass through them and assign star ratings. Ratings are one of the most useful organizational tools at your disposal, as they allow you to quickly sort through your photos to find your best shots—which are also typically the ones you’ll want to spend the time editing, include in projects and books, or send off to family and friends.

When applying ratings, you’ll want to see your photo up close so you can make a fair judgment of its quality. You can enlarge the display size so only one picture appears at a time by double-clicking on any photo. But for an even better look at the shots, press Ctrl-F11 (Mac: Command-F11) to enter Full Screen mode. This removes the Organizer interface so nothing distracts from your full-screen image. (You can also click the Display pop-up menu and choose View, Edit, Organize In Full Screen.)

The Organizer lets you apply as many as five stars to your photos. You can assign stars in a number of ways: by clicking on the rating icon, by choosing Edit>Ratings, or by right-clicking on an image to access the contextual menu. But there’s an even easier option. With an image selected, just type a number key (0 through 5) either at the top row of your keyboard or using the 10-key layout of a numeric pad. The rating appears below the image in the Organizer (if you don’t see it, choose View>Details). In Full Screen mode, look for the stars in the retractable Quick Edit pane.

There’s no one right system for applying ratings. I typically assign ratings in two steps. To begin, I assign anything that’s passable at least one star, and potentially better shots two stars. Then, as I take a closer look and make edits, I increase the ratings to make the top shots stand out. When I run across a shot that just isn’t good—the ones beyond the hope of any slider or adjustment layer—I delete it outright by pressing Ctrl-Delete (Mac: Command-Delete). That prevents them from cluttering up my library. (If you’re uncomfortable with permanently throwing anything away, see page 24 for an easy way to round them up and archive them before removing them from your library.)

Your personal system will depend on how much energy you want to put into evaluating your images. Some photographers may make a clear distinction between a four-star and five-star photo, while others stick with just a couple of ratings—a high rating for the most promising shots and a low one for mediocre shots worth noting for later editing.

Ratings are one of the most useful organizational tools at your disposal.
Add Context with Keywords

In addition to knowing which shots are worth your attention, it helps to know what’s in your photos. Are there flowers, famous landmarks, your best friend? This type of information can be invaluable later when you’re hunting down a particular shot—for example, when you’re trying to find all the shots of your children taken at the beach over the years.

The Organizer’s keyword feature lets you add labels to your photos, including who’s in them, where they were taken, what color is dominant, and any other details that may be helpful. While the process of adding this type of information can seem laborious at first, there are some simple ways to speed things up.

Add Keywords Manually
The Keyword Tags panel contains all the tags used by photos in your library, broken into a hierarchy of categories and sub-categories. To create a new tag, click the Add button (the plus sign) and choose New Keyword Tag from the menu that appears—or simply press Ctrl-N (Mac: Command-N). In the Create Keyword Tag dialog, choose a category or sub-category from the Category pop-up menu. For example, a tag for “Space Needle” could appear within the Places category, or you could assign it to a more specific “Seattle” sub-category.

Once a tag is created, you can add it to an image by dragging the tag’s icon onto the photo’s thumbnail (or several selected thumbnails). Alternately, drag thumbnails onto a tag’s icon in the Keyword Tags panel. Hold down the Ctrl (Mac: Command) key to select multiple photos.

Where Should My Files Go?

When you import photos into the Organizer (File>Get Photos And Videos>From Camera Or Card Reader), the Photo Downloader dialog gives you the option of choosing where the image files get saved on your hard drive. By default, the software creates folders labeled with the images’ shot dates and places them within the Libraries\Pictures folder (on Windows) or in your Home directory’s Pictures folder (on the Mac).

In an effort to get organized, it can be tempting to subvert the Organizer’s system and instead create a more complex folder structure based on events (such as “Christmas 2009”) or themes (such as “Flowers” or “Family”). But this type of approach can easily fall apart (for example, what if you have a picture of your mom among a field of flowers?) and actually requires more effort to maintain.

Unless you’re a professional photographer keeping track of multiple clients, I recommend sticking with the default destination. The whole point of the Organizer is to organize, so why not let it do the work of keeping track of where everything is stored? You’re better off spending your organization efforts applying keyword tags, ratings, and smart albums to locate images in a variety of useful ways. If you later need to locate a photo’s file on your hard drive, simply bring up the Properties panel (Window>Properties) and click the Reveal In Explorer (Mac: Reveal In Finder) button to the left of the file’s path.

One exception to this rule is when you’re storing images on a disk other than your computer’s primary internal drive. In that case, use the Photo Downloader dialog to specify the alternate disk, but then let it continue organizing files based on date.
Take Advantage of Smart Tags

You don't have to do all the work when creating keyword tags. The Organizer can scan your images for common characteristics, such as overexposure or underexposure, good or poor focus, and the like, and then tag your photos accordingly. These special tags, called smart tags, appear as purple tag icons in the Photo Browser.

A Quicker Way to Tag

Personally, I don't spend much time organizing categories and sub-categories. For one thing, navigating a complex hierarchy of tags requires a lot of unnecessary mousing around. And it doesn't really matter to me how my keywords are organized; I can always just type a keyword in the Organizer's search field and view all the photos tagged with that keyword.

If you feel the same way, here's a quicker way to apply keywords: select one or more photos and, in the Tag Selected Media field at the bottom of the Keyword Tags panel, type the keywords you want, separated by commas. Matches to existing tags appear in a pop-up menu as you type (though it's usually faster to just type the rest of a term than reach for the mouse). Any tags that didn't previously exist are added to the Other category when you click the Apply button or press Enter (Mac: Return). By the way, you can also do this while in Full Screen mode using the Quick Organize tab that pops out from the left edge.

Get a Different View

Having trouble remembering what keywords you've used in the past? Click the Tag Cloud button in the Keyword Tags panel to reveal all of your assigned keywords in a concentrated paragraph form. Terms used more frequently appear in a larger type size than the rest, while tags applied to selected images are highlighted in dark gray. To apply tags to a photo, drag them from the cloud to the image; Ctrl-click (Mac: Command-click) to select multiple keywords before you drag them as a group.

Take Advantage of Smart Tags

You don't have to do all the work when creating keyword tags. The Organizer can scan your images for common characteristics, such as overexposure or underexposure, good or poor focus, and the like, and then tag your photos accordingly. These special tags, called smart tags, appear as purple tag icons in the Photo Browser.

**Decide Keyword Tag Icons**

With photo details visible (View>Details), you'll see several tag icons below each photo. Position your mouse over an icon to display a tooltip identifying the assigned tags. Here's a quick guide to what they represent:

**Colored Tags** Individual colored tags correspond to the color and type of tag assigned in the Keyword Tags pane. People, for example, are indicated with a blue tag while keywords from the Places category are green.

**Purple Tags** A purple tag indicates that one or more smart tags are applied.

**Gold Tags** A gold tag indicates that several types of tags are applied, but the image's filename is obscuring them.
By relying on objective analysis, smart tags can be helpful when you need to quickly weed out potentially problematic images—for example, to concentrate only on high-resolution images or those images that are in focus.

You don’t have to do much to begin using smart tags. In fact, the Organizer performs this scan automatically by default. However, the process can be quite processor-intensive. To keep your system from getting bogged down, I recommend disabling the automatic scanning. Press Ctrl-K (Mac: Command-K) to open the Organizer’s preferences, click the Media Analysis heading, and then uncheck the Analyze Media For Smart Tags Automatically checkbox. Now you can decide when to run the analyzer. Just select a range of photos—for example, a batch of photos you just imported—and choose Edit>Run Auto-Analyzer.

To prevent system slowdowns, turn off the option to analyze photos automatically.

Applying Keywords During Import

If you tend to use the same collection of keywords over and over again, you may be able to save time by creating a metadata template that applies common tags and picture data during the import process. For example, suppose you regularly take photos of three very different subjects: people, food, and landscapes. You could create three templates that include your contact and copyright information, as well as subject-specific tags (such as “dining,” “food photography,” and “cuisine”).

Setting up a template, however, isn’t an intuitive process. To start, open an image in the Editor and choose File>File Info. In the dialog that appears, switch to the IPTC tab and fill in the fields you want to include in the file, such as Creator (that’s you), your address, copyright notice, and any keywords (separated by commas or semicolons). Remember that you’re creating a template that you can use repeatedly, so stick with general keywords that can apply to all the photos being imported in one batch. (You’ll add more specific tags that apply to individual photos later.)

Next, click the pop-up menu to the left of the Cancel button (the label likely reads “Import,” unless you chose another option at some point earlier). Choose Export from the menu, give the template a descriptive name, and then click Save. Click Cancel to close the File Info dialog, or click OK to apply the metadata to the current image file.

To apply a template to incoming photos, launch the Adobe Importer application (File>Get Photos and Videos>From Camera Or Card Reader) and click the Advanced Dialog button. Choose your template from the Apply Metadata pop-up list in the lower-right corner of the dialog. When you click Get Media, the Photo Downloader asks if you want to import the new keyword tags; click the Select All button and then click OK. Your custom metadata is applied to all photos imported in that session.
Identify Your Favorite Faces

In addition to making judgments about the technical characteristics of your photos, the Organizer's image analyzer can help you identify the people in your photos. This means you can quickly pull up all the photos of your favorite cousin without having to scan through your entire library.

Using the Organizer’s face recognition tools requires a bit of a time commitment—particularly at the beginning as you help the software learn to identify people. Eventually, however, the program will begin suggesting names based on other identified images, and the process will move much more quickly.

Finding Faces

The Organizer places a white box around areas it thinks are faces. The algorithm it uses for this is pretty good, but don’t be surprised if it messes up occasionally and tries to identify non-humans as faces. When this happens, click the X that appears when you move the cursor over the selection box to remove it. If a face gets missed, you can add it by clicking the Add A Missing Person button just below the image, and then dragging a rectangle around the face.

Once the Organizer has located a face, it’s up to you to tell it whom that face belongs to. Position your cursor over the white box and click the “Who is this?” text. Type a name in the field—if it matches an existing People tag, the name will come up. Otherwise, press Enter (Mac: Return) to create a new People tag.

As more examples are added to the Organizer’s database, the software will start to ask if a face belongs to a specific person. Click the green checkmark icon if the match is correct, or click the red X and enter the correct person’s name.

Speed up the Process

Identifying people one photo at a time can become tedious. Instead, consider doing the following: Select a range of photos (or your entire library) and choose Find>Find People For Tagging. You can also click the Start People Recognition button in the Keyword Tags pane (the icon resembles a Polaroid). A dialog appears containing groups of faces and the best guess of their identity. If any do not belong, select them and click the corner X button to remove them. Double-clicking a thumbnail reveals the entire photo if you need to view it in context. Then click Save.

Continue scanning the next screens for potential matches, clicking Save each time to advance to the next one. At some point, the Organizer will ask you to label faces that it cannot match to existing people tags. The software will continue to throw faces at you until it has identified everyone, but you can click Cancel at any time to take a break. The data you’ve entered up to that point will be retained.
Put It All Together

Now that your photos are rated and tagged, you’re ready to start taking advantage of all of the extra metadata by quickly sorting through your image library. The Organizer offers a few ways to do that.

Savvy Searches

If you’ve applied keyword tags to your photos, you can click the checkbox to the left of a tag in the Keyword Tags panel to view photos that share the tag. Likewise, clicking a name in the Cloud view reveals photos tagged with that term.

You can also drag tags from the panel to the Find bar at the top of the photo browser to locate all the photos that contain those tags. If you’re using Windows, you can even drag a photo—not just a tag—to the Find bar and view photos that share similar characteristics, which is pretty neat.

While these methods work, I find them a bit too labor-intensive for my impatient nature. Instead, I prefer to use the Organizer’s Search field. Just enter a term into the Search field and watch results appear as you type. One advantage to this approach is that the Organizer can apply some logic to searches. For example, to view photos tagged with “Fremont” but exclude items also tagged with “coffee,” enter “Fremont not coffee.” Another advantage is that the Search field examines all the metadata associated with an image, not just keywords. So it can find search terms in captions and titles, as well.

Staying Organized on the Mac

If you own a Mac and don’t own Photoshop Elements 9, you won’t have access to the Organizer. However, you can use many of these same organization techniques in Adobe Bridge (included with Elements 6 and Elements 8) or Apple’s iPhoto.

In Bridge, you rate a photo by pressing Command and a corresponding number key (such as Command-2 for two stars). A “smart collection” operates the same as a smart album, and keywords are remarkably similar to the Organizer’s keyword tags: Press Command-F5 to view the Keywords interface, select one or more photos, and mark the checkboxes for any keywords you want to apply in the Keywords panel. What you won’t find in Bridge are smart tags or facial recognition. (For an in-depth guide to using Bridge, watch our video series “Getting Started with Adobe Bridge,” available at http://bit.ly/dQAlth.)

Likewise, iPhoto ’09 and later versions can identify faces, maintain smart albums, and rate photos (also by adding Command when pressing a number key). iPhoto also offers a way to assign keywords: In iPhoto ’11, click the Info button to display the Info panel (or choose View>Info), and in the Keywords field, start typing new tags separated by commas (iPhoto will turn each tag into its own blob). In iPhoto ’09, make sure you have View>Show Keywords enabled, position your cursor below the photo, click, and type the keywords in the field that appears.

Typing “Fremont” into the search field (top) gives us every image tagged with the Fremont keyword rated higher than two stars. Adding “not coffee” to the search (bottom) limits the results further.
Smart Albums
Keyword searches are handy, but they really only scratch the surface of what the Organizer can do. To unlock the power of all the metadata the Organizer keeps track of, try your hand at creating smart albums. These special collections let you specify a range of search criteria, including keywords, data captured from your camera, date ranges, and so on. The Organizer then searches your library and collects any and all photos that meet those criteria—even after you’ve removed or added new items to your library. This means your smart albums are always up-to-date.

Building a Smart Album
Suppose you’re creating a photo book and want to include a recent photo of your mother. You can create a smart album that quickly finds the top-rated photos of her taken within the last three months. Here’s how:

In the Albums panel, click the Add (+) button and choose New Smart Album. Enter a name for the album in the Name field, and then click the radio button next to the All Of The Following Search Criteria [AND] option. This tells it that matching photos must meet all the criteria you specify.

From the first criteria pop-up menu, choose Keyword Tags and, in the second pop-up menu, choose the person’s name.

Click the Add (+) button at right to add another search criterion. Set the next item’s pop-up menus so they read “Rating is higher than 2 stars” (or whichever rating you choose; for example, you could specify “Rating is 5 stars” to further narrow the results).

Click the plus sign at the end of the second row to add a third criterion and set it to “Capture Date is within the last 3 months.” Click OK to create the smart album.

Putting Smart Albums to Use
Once you get the hang of how smart albums work, you’ll find plenty of practical uses for them.

For example, if you’re running low on hard disk space and want to cull photos you know you’ll never use again, you could create a smart album that looks for images with a rating of zero stars and the Low Quality smart tag applied. You could then trash the results, or back them up to an external drive if you don’t want to throw them away permanently. You can revisit the smart album (in the Albums pane) every few months when disk space gets tight again to find the latest matches and repeat the process.

Have a digital photo frame or iPod? You can also use a smart album to keep a collection of your favorite photos—those given your highest rating—to use as the source for a screen saver, digital picture frame, or to sync to an iPod or similar device.

A Smart Investment
Tagging photos often feels like the homework you need to finish before you can go outside and play. As you can see, though, it’s not the slog it appears to be, and the rewards of being able to find the photos you want, quickly and easily, offset the amount of metadata massaging you put into it up front.

Have Fun with Dingbats

Turn your Type tool into a mini clip-art collection with these unusual fonts

By Diana Day | One of my major Photoshop Elements addictions is fonts—and one type of font that particularly fires up my imagination is dingbats. Instead of standard numbers and letters, these fun fonts are filled with interesting graphics, decorative characters, and other artistic elements, effectively turning your Type tool into a handy clip-art repository and a ready source of inspiration.

As decorative elements, dingbats offer a number of benefits. For example, dingbats have the same vector properties as regular fonts, which means the edges stay nice and sharp even when enlarged. And once installed in your system’s font folder, you can use the images in any program without worrying about compatibility issues, graphic formats, or version numbers. Dingbat fonts are also easy to organize and use. Each font typically contains fewer than 100 themed images, which helps keep the file size small.

For those who haven’t spent a lot of time with dingbats, I’ll show you how to find and install them, explain how to apply them to projects, and share some of my favorite tips for customizing the graphics in interesting ways. I hope after seeing how versatile and creative dingbats can be, you’ll become as fond of them as I am.

Stocking up

You can find plenty of free dingbat fonts on the Internet, as well as many commercial ones. A good place to start is with your favorite search engine. For example, typing “download dingbat fonts” into Google’s search field will return a long list of sites to explore. Most font sites also have a search box where you can input keywords for a particular type of dingbat.

Downloading Dingbats

You download and install dingbat fonts as you would any other font. Once you find a dingbat font you like, look for a Download button or link. Sometimes you’ll see separate download links for Windows and Mac versions of the font. If compatibility isn’t specified, the downloaded font should work in both platforms.
On Windows, clicking the Download link should open a dialog that lets you save the file to your computer. (I usually save downloads to my computer’s Desktop so I can easily find them.) In Mac OS X, the font will typically appear in the Downloads folder (found within your user folder) unless you’ve specified a new location in your browser’s preferences.

Font files are quite small in size and typically download quickly. Once the download is complete, locate the font file and take a look at the filename. If it ends in .TTF, the font is ready to be installed. If it ends with .ZIP, however, you’ll need to uncompress the file before installing it. The easiest way to do this is to double-click on the zipped folder to open it, and then drag the file(s) within to your Desktop. Alternately, in Windows you can right-click on the zipped folder and select Extract All from the pop-up menu.

Installing the Font

You don’t need to install fonts into Elements itself. Elements simply uses the fonts installed on your computer.

To install the font in Windows, add the font file to your computer’s Fonts folder (C:\Windows\Fonts). An easy way to find the folder is to click the Start button, and then in the Search or Run box (depending on your Windows version), enter “fonts.” Drag or copy-and-paste the .TTF font file into the Fonts folder.

To install a font in OS X, double-click on the Font Book application (in the Applications folder), select File>Add Fonts, and navigate to the downloaded font file. The next time you start Elements, that font should be available in the Type tool’s Font menu.

What’s a Dingbat?

The term “dingbat” was originally coined to refer to a printer’s ornament or spacer used for typesetting in old metal-type print shops. Extra space around text or illustrations was filled by “ding”ing an ornamental graphic into the space then “bat”ing tight to prepare it for inking. In the computer world, the term is used to describe any digital font made up of symbols, shapes, and pictures, rather than alphabetic and numeric characters.

Read the Fine Print

After extracting a .ZIP font file, you’ll often find a text file containing the terms of use for the font. In some cases, for example, they may require a license for use in commercial projects. Be sure to read and follow the terms included with the font or posted on the download site.
Inserting a Dingbat Character

The trickiest part of using dingbat fonts is finding the exact graphic you want. Each image in the dingbat font is assigned an alpha or a numeric key on your keyboard—but determining which letter belongs to which picture can be a frustrating process of trial and error. To help, here are a few ways to quickly decode dingbat fonts:

Use a Character Map

Windows comes with a simple Character Map utility accessed from Start>All Programs>Accessories>System Tools>Character Map. However, the size of the viewer is quite small, making it hard to see details of the individual characters.

The Mac also offers a Character Viewer. To access it in OS X 10.6, open the Keyboard system preferences, and then turn on the Show Keyboard & Character Viewer In Menu Bar option. A new icon will appear on the right side of the OS X menu bar (circled), which gives you access to the Character Viewer. In the Characters window, choose Glyph from the View menu and then select the dingbat font from the Font menu. You’ll see a display of all the graphics in that collection. Select the item you want to add and then look in the Character Info pane at the bottom of the window to see which keyboard character corresponds to that graphic.

Use a Font Manager

Many third-party font managers, such as Xiles’ free NexusFont for Windows (www.xiles.net), let you view and print which key is associated with each dingbat in a font set. If you use dingbats often, you’ll appreciate the added flexibility and convenience such programs can offer. (Check the online Extras section for links to free and commercial font managers.)

Create a Cheat Sheet

It’s also easy to create your own template for the character set in any font using your favorite word processor. Just type A through Z in both uppercase and lowercase, set it to a large size, and then select all of the text and change the font to the one you want to view or print out. (Keep in mind that some fonts also use numeric keys, and in a few rare cases, punctuation keys.) The advantage of this method is that you can customize the size of the font to make it easier to read and you can keep keys for several different font sets on the same page.

Mac users can use Font Book to print out a similar map. Command-click on each font you want to print and then select File>Print.

The free NexusFont from Xiles gives Windows users an easy-to-read map of dingbat files.

Techniques

HAVE FUN WITH DINGBATS
Having Fun with Dingbats

Once you’ve typed the desired character in your layout, you can resize it and place it wherever you want, just as you would any typed text. But there’s no need to stop there. The graphic nature of dingbats makes them ripe for a number of creative uses, including festive borders, full-color illustrations, clipping masks, and much more.

Create a Border

Want to add a decorative edge to your invitations or collages? Type a dingbat, or multiple dingbats, and arrange them in a border on your canvas.

Here’s an even better option: Turn a dingbat into a brush that you can then paint with. To create a new brush, type one or more dingbat characters in a blank document, and then choose Edit>Define Brush. (For more details on creating and saving custom brushes in Elements, see “The Brush Tool” in the July/August 2010 issue.) Next, open the document you want to decorate and select the Brush tool (B). Set your foreground color to the desired shade, and in the Options Bar, select the newly created dingbat brush from the Brush Picker (it’ll be at the bottom of the list). Click the Brush Dynamics icon, and in the resulting dialog, set the Spacing slider to 150 percent or higher. Click once where you want your border to start, then press the Shift key and click where you want the border to end. Elements will “paint” a straight line of spaced images between the two points.

To Simplify or Not?

When you add text with the Type tool, you’re creating vector shapes. Instead of the static pixels you get with photos, vectors are made up of lines and curves defined by their geometric characteristics. This is what makes it possible to scale the characters to any size without getting jagged lines, and why you’re able to go back and edit your text long after you’ve written it. Unfortunately, many of Elements’ tools will only work with pixel data. This means that before you can apply filters or decorate them with painting tools, you’ll need to simplify your type layers—turning the vectors into pixels. So keep in mind that once you simplify a type layer, you’ll no longer be able to edit the font characters.

To simplify a type layer, choose Layer>Simplify Layer or right-click on the type layer and select Simplify Layer from the pop-up menu.

Paint in Multiply Mode

As with other fonts, you can create a dingbat in a single color by selecting a foreground color before typing. But there are also plenty of other interesting ways to use color with your dingbats. For example, to paint the unfilled areas of a dingbat image with the Brush tool (B) without obliterating the outlines and solid areas, create a blank layer above the image and set its blend mode to Multiply. Then paint with the Brush tool in your choice of colors. If you mess up, you can simply use the Eraser tool (E) to wipe away the unwanted color without damaging your dingbat’s outlines.
Put Dingbats to Work

In addition to being fun to play with, dingbat fonts also have a practical side.

**Drop Caps**

Use fancy dingbat letters as drop caps with text for word art or journaling.

**Logos**

Dingbats are an ideal starting point for a logo design. Simply add text to a dingbat image and you’re all set.

**Embellishments**

To make reusable embellishments, type a dingbat on a transparent background, use any of the ideas here to color or decorate it, then save it in PNG format to preserve its transparency. You can then use it later in a scrapbook layout or other image.

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**Fill with the Paint Bucket Tool**

For an even quicker way to apply color, you can use the **Paint Bucket tool (K)** to fill entire sections with a single click. There are two caveats with this technique. The first is that you’ll have to simplify the dingbat type layer (see “To Simplify or Not?”). The second is that the dingbat’s outline can’t have any gaps. If there is a gap, the color will escape and fill the whole canvas. To prevent this from happening, use the **Brush tool (B)** to paint any gaps closed before filling with the Paint Bucket.

**Use the Gradient Tool or Clouds Filter**

To create subtle gradations of tones, apply a gradient or the Clouds filter (which produces a mottled effect) to your dingbat. In both cases, the effect works best with dingbats that are predominantly solid rather than simply an outline.

To apply a gradient, create a new blank layer above the dingbat layer, then **Ctrl-click (Mac: Command-click)** on the dingbat layer’s thumbnail to create a selection in the shape of the character (your blank layer should still be selected in the Layers palette). Pick the **Gradient tool (G)**, select a gradient from the Options Bar, and then drag the cursor across the selection to define how far the gradient stretches.

To fill the selection with the Clouds filter, follow the previous directions to get a selection of the dingbat shape. Pick coordinating foreground and background colors, then choose **Filter>Render>Clouds**. Adding a thin stroke to the edges of your selection will add a nice finishing touch for either of these effects. Choose **Edit>Stroke (Outline) Selection**.
Use Dingbats as Clipping Masks
You can also use dingbat shapes as digital cookie cutters to mask out part of a photo, scrapbook paper, background texture, or other image. (As when applying gradients, this works best with dingbats that are mostly solid.) To start, type a large dingbat character on your canvas. Arrange the image or texture you want to mask in a layer above the dingbat, then press Ctrl-G (Mac: Command-G) to group the image layer with the dingbat layer beneath it. This will limit the visible areas of the image layer to the shape of the dingbat. (For more details on using a clipping mask, see “Designing Storyboards” in the November/December 2010 issue.)

Merge or Disassemble Dingbat Images
There’s no rule that says you have to use dingbats in their original condition. If you’re feeling creative, type multiple dingbat layers, then arrange them to form new designs. Once dingbat type layers are simplified, they are easily manipulated. You can remove part of an image by erasing it, or by selecting part of the image with the Lasso tool (L) and deleting it. You can also cut and paste parts of the image, then rearrange them with the Move tool (V).

Combine Effects, Filters, and More
With a little imagination, you’ll find that the possibilities for customizing your dingbat images are nearly limitless. I often combine several of the techniques I’ve mentioned—along with effects, additional filters, and textures—to create complex designs. For example, in my harvest image (left), I’ve painted the original dingbat with the Paint Bucket tool (K), applied a Sandstone texture (Filter>Texture>Texturizer), added a drop shadow (Window>Effects), and much more. The finished image makes a nice addition to a note card. (You’ll find detailed instructions for how I created this image in the online extras for this article.)

I hope these ideas inspire you to use dingbat fonts in your own Photoshop Elements projects. I’m sure you’ll find many more applications for them on your own.

Diana Day, retired H.R. Manager and self-taught Elements user, teaches Elements to members of her community by hosting a PSE Users Group, and tutoring Elements users one-on-one in their homes. Diana also puts her skills with Elements to practical use administering her church’s web page and public relations projects.
Fake a Panorama

Elements’ Photomerge Panorama feature (File>New>Photomerge Panorama) lets you take multiple photos that were shot across a scene and stitch them together into a wide panoramic image. But sometimes we don’t remember to take multiple photos while we’re there. Well, you can still get a similar effect with cropping. Grab the Crop tool (C) and drag a wide crop rectangle across your photo, being careful to keep the height of the crop rectangle significantly shorter than its width. Once you’ve created your crop box, just place your cursor inside the rectangle and move it around until you get the composition you’re looking for.—Matt Kloskowski

Limit Hue/Saturation Adjustments

You don’t always want to adjust the saturation of all the colors in your image equally. For example, you might want to adjust only the red tones in a field of red flowers. No problem. With a quick keyboard shortcut, you can force the Hue/Saturation dialog to target specific colors while leaving the rest alone. With the Hue/Saturation dialog box open (Enhance>Adjust Color>Hue/Saturation), hold down the Alt (Mac: Option) key and press the number 3. You’ll see the pull-down menu at the top of the dialog change to Reds. Press Alt/Option-4 and it changes to Yellows. Alt/Option-5 targets Greens and so on. By the way, these shortcuts work with a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer, too.—MK
Mac: Get a Full-Screen Preview in Bridge CS4
Want to browse your images in Bridge CS4 without the distraction of the Bridge interface? Just select the image and press the spacebar (or select View>Full Screen Preview). This opens the selected image in a Full Screen mode. You can then click on the image to quickly zoom in to 100 percent; right-click and drag on the image to move around; or press the arrow keys to move to the previous or next image. Pressing the spacebar a second time returns Bridge to the previous viewing mode.—MK

To avoid seeing white canvas around the edges of your straightened image (top) set the Canvas Options to Crop To Remove Background (bottom).

Straighten in Camera Raw
Here’s another straightening tip—this time for Camera Raw. Let’s say you’re straightening a photo that looks off, but you’re not quite sure how much to straighten it. For example, perhaps there’s no clear horizon line so you don’t know what “straight” is. In that case, look for something vertical. Unless you’re shooting with a really wide-angle lens, like 28mm and below (where distortion is a factor), vertical lines should remain straight. So they’re a good alternative if you have nothing else in your photo that obviously should be straight. Simply press A to access the Straighten tool and then follow the edge of any line that should be vertical. In this example, I’ve used the edge of the barn.—MK

Revert Back to Your Original
Let’s say you’re working on a saved image with various layers and adjustments. Then you go and add more layers and more adjustments. After a while you realize this just isn’t going the way you wanted and you’d like to start over from where you last saved. There’s no need to close the file and reopen it. Elements has a feature called Revert (Edit>Revert), which jumps back to your last saved image. Keep in mind that this only works if you’ve saved your image at some point. If you’ve never saved it, then there’s nothing to revert to.—MK

To quickly see your image without any distractions, switch to Full screen mode (right).
Subscriber Showcase

Here is a selection of some of the best recent work by subscribers, showcasing original photos and completed projects from magazine tutorials and videos on the website. See the note on Page 35 for information on how to submit your work for the next issue.

Aiken Snowfall (My Front Porch); Aiken, On Track for the Future

Steve Rich | Aiken, South Carolina
The town of Aiken does not have significant amounts of snowfall each year. In early 2010, however, our little town was blanketed with a nice amount of snow. The HDR image of my porch was taken as daylight was breaking, using a tripod for the multiple exposures. I processed the image using Topaz Adjust’s Crisp setting and enhanced and sharpened it with Photoshop Elements 8.

The railroad coach photo was taken near the Aiken railroad depot, which, after eight years of planning and fund-raising—and a year of construction—has been replaced on its original site. This old passenger car was built in the early 1900s. As fund-raising continues, the interior of the car will be available for the public to rent for events.

I took the photo using a tripod for the HDR process, processing it with Photomatix Pro and Photoshop Elements 8. I ran another HDR process on the final image to give it that grungy look I was after.

New York Botanical Garden Forest

Conor Coen | The Bronx, New York
From the master image I copied the Background layer and used the Gaussian Blur filter with a Radius of 20 pixels, then lowered the opacity to 49 percent. Color enhancement was done with Levels to make the final photo more neutral in tone.
Prince Rupert Eagle

**Bill Day | Sacramento, California & Anchorage, Alaska**
This photo was taken in Prince Rupert, British Columbia. Eagles were flying in all directions and I just happened to zoom in and panned this one at eye level. I opened the image in Camera Raw and made a few adjustments, then turned to Elements 8 to enhance the photo further. I started with an Auto Smart Fix adjustment, lightened the shadows, and applied the Unsharp Mask filter to sharpen the image. The sea below made a nice background for the image.

Geometry Blues

**Clifton Jones | Cambria Heights, New York**
This image was taken at the IAC building in New York City. I used Photoshop Elements 8 with some basic Levels and Hue/Saturation adjustments, and Topaz Adjust to give the image some HDR-style pop.

Charlotte

**Michel Gosselin | Gatineau, Québec**
To get this image, I took about 50 photos with the baby sleeping on a fur blanket. I purposefully wanted the exposures of the photos to be slightly different so that the edges would show as I overlapped them. Everything was done with Elements 6; I placed the individual photos on their own layers and adjusted each one slightly with Levels and Hue/Saturation controls.

Mommy and Me

**Doris Pacheco | Madera, California**
This photo was taken at a local fair. The mother ewe had just given birth and she was lovingly protecting her newborn.
Lake Superior Lighthouse

Joseph Sandrin | Bayside, Wisconsin

This photo was taken during an October storm on Lake Superior; it was very cold with a strong wind off the lake. The original image (above left) was not very good, and I had to do a lot of work to get something usable. First, I cropped and straightened the photo and used the Clone Stamp to remove the light poles. Next, I performed a series of adjustments using layers to isolate parts of the picture and used Topaz Adjust, Denoise, Simplify and Detail to get the look I wanted for each segment. I then adjusted the opacity of the various layers to get this final look.

Several sessions went into this piece. By using a painting style, I was able to overcome the lack of resolution in the original. (The file grew to over 120MB in size.) And, by using layers, I could experiment to get the look I wanted and delete what did not work.

Contemplation

Brian Kraft | Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Our granddaughter Lexi was playing in the backyard one afternoon last summer. I was outside with my camera, looking for photo opportunities, when I happened to catch her in this moment of contemplation. This has become one of our favorite pictures of her.

Baby Moorhen

Deena Spector | Trumbull, Connecticut

I used the Smudge Tool on this image, which I took while I was in Florida. It is based on techniques from Digital Image Magazine’s “From Photo to Painting with the Smudge Brush” (http://bit.ly/e5YSJn), found in the online Extras article for the July/August 2010 issue, “Online Tutorials for Drawing and Painting.”

EXTRAS: SUBMIT YOUR WORK!

Go to the Magazine Subscriber Gallery section in the Elements Village forums and read the message, “How to Submit Images to the P.E.T. Subscriber Showcase,” which has the info you’ll need to upload your photos. The next deadline is Jan. 28. www.ElementsVillage.com