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Photoshop Elements > Selection Tools > Quick Selection Tool What's a Selection?

A selection is a shape drawn on a photograph.

It's a dotted line.

The dots move, so the selection line is called the marching ants.

Whatever happens next, only happens in the selected area.

You can change the selected area's tone, contrast, color, and numerous other edits.

The Best Selection Tool Is . . .

. . . the Quick Selection tool.

It's magical.

There's far less need to use the other selection tools.

Select the Sky

Let's select the sky in the photograph below.



[Manhattan Sorrow by Ludovic Bertron](#)

You can [download the photograph](#) or use one of your own.

If you use the above photograph, please observe the license details, such as crediting Ludovic Bertron if you publish his photograph.

If you use your own photograph, please select one where there's a simple edge.

For example:

- Use a photograph of a mountain with a cloudless sky above.

It will be easy to select the sky.

There's a simple edge between the mountain and the sky.

- Don't use a photograph of a sky filled with clouds and flapping Tibetan prayer flags.

It will be hard to select just the sky amongst the myriad edges of the clouds and flags.



[Adha65](#)

Yes: Keep it simple, at first!



[Royonx](#)

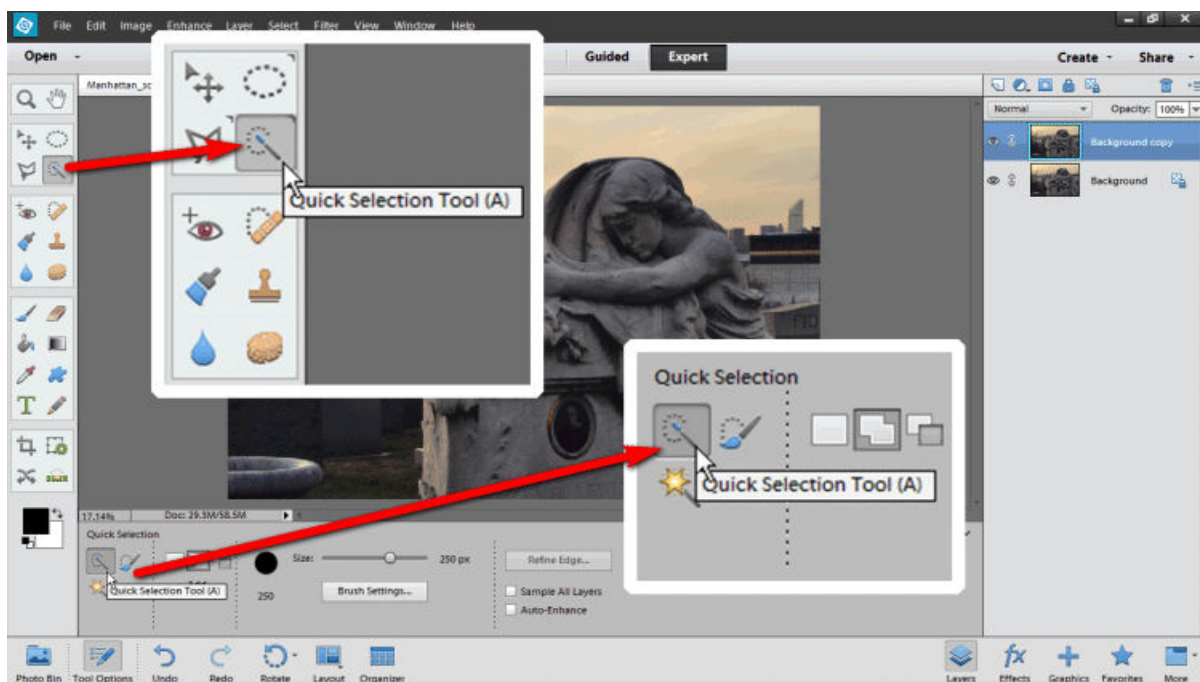
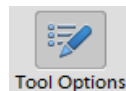
No: Too hard for a beginner!

To Work

Do the following.

- 1) Select the Quick Selection tool.
 - a) Click the icon in the tool panel (top arrow).
 - b) Then, in Tool Options, check to make sure the Quick Selection tool icon is selected (bottom arrow).

If you don't see Tool Options, click the Tool Options icon in the lower-left corner of your screen.

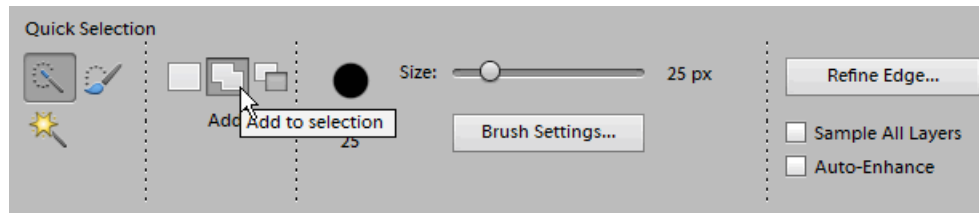


You'll see the brush, a circle, on your photograph.

- 2) In options bar/Tool Options, there are three icons:

- New selection
- Add to selection
- Subtract from selection

Make sure either New selection, or Add to selection, is selected.



The brush will have a plus in the middle of the circle.



3) Press the bracket keys, [and], on your keyboard to change the size of the brush.

Here, you want the brush smaller than the space above the grave marker.

4) Click on the sky above the trees on the left side of the photograph, hold down the mouse button, and drag the brush across the sky.

Let the Quick Selection tool do the work.

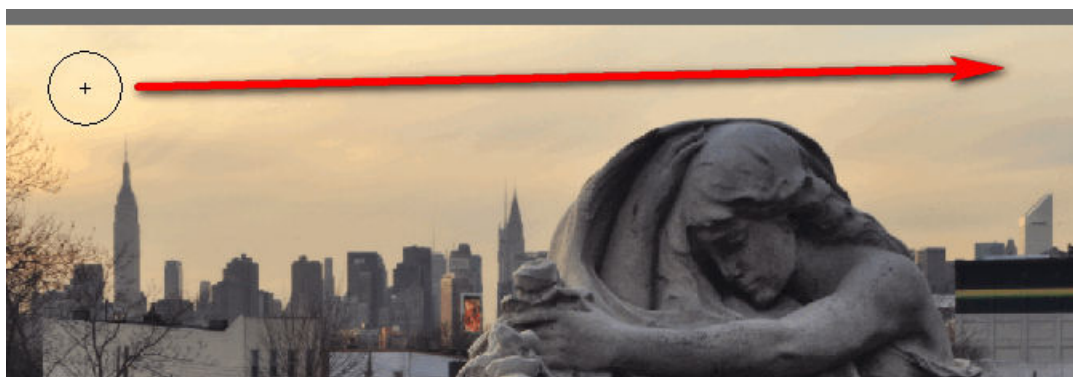
As you click, hold, and drag the brush across the sky, stay away from the trees, buildings, and marker.

Let the tool jump the selection to these objects.

There's no need to move the brush to these objects.

You can get the brush close, but don't touch the objects with the brush.

Let the brush do its magic.



5) The tool will make some mistakes.

That's okay.

If you brush the trees, buildings, or marker by mistake, click the Undo arrow at the bottom of your screen.

If you press the Esc key in the upper-left corner of your keyboard, the selection will disappear and you can start over.

6) After making the selection, use the Zoom tool to

view the selection up close.

7) Check the selection for errors.

In our example, there are likely to be three mistakes.

We'll fix them down below.

8) You can move along the selection easily by doing the following.

a) Hold down the space bar.

The cursor will change to the Hand tool.

b) Click and hold on the photograph.

c) Move your mouse.

The photograph moves.

Correction: Inside, Moving Outward

In our example, the Quick Selection tool probably failed to scoot down between two buildings.

Below, the selection was stopped by the tree branches.



So, we need to move the selection down.

We need to **add** more to the selection.

Therefore, the Quick Selection tool needs to be on Add.

In options bar/Tool Options, make sure the Add icon is selected.

Another way of saying the above:

If you're inside the selection, about to nudge it out, make sure you're on Add.

Above, the Quick Selection tool is about to add to the selection.

The brush was made smaller by pressing the bracket keys.

The brush is about to be dragged down between the buildings to nudge the selection between the buildings.

9) Click, hold, and drag the brush down.

If the tool makes a mistake, click the Undo arrow and try again.

Tips

When nudging a little, make the the brush less powerful by making it smaller.

As mentioned, let the tool do its job.

Don't move the brush to the edges of the trees, buildings, and marker.

Get close to the edges and let the tool jump the selection to the edges of the trees and buildings.

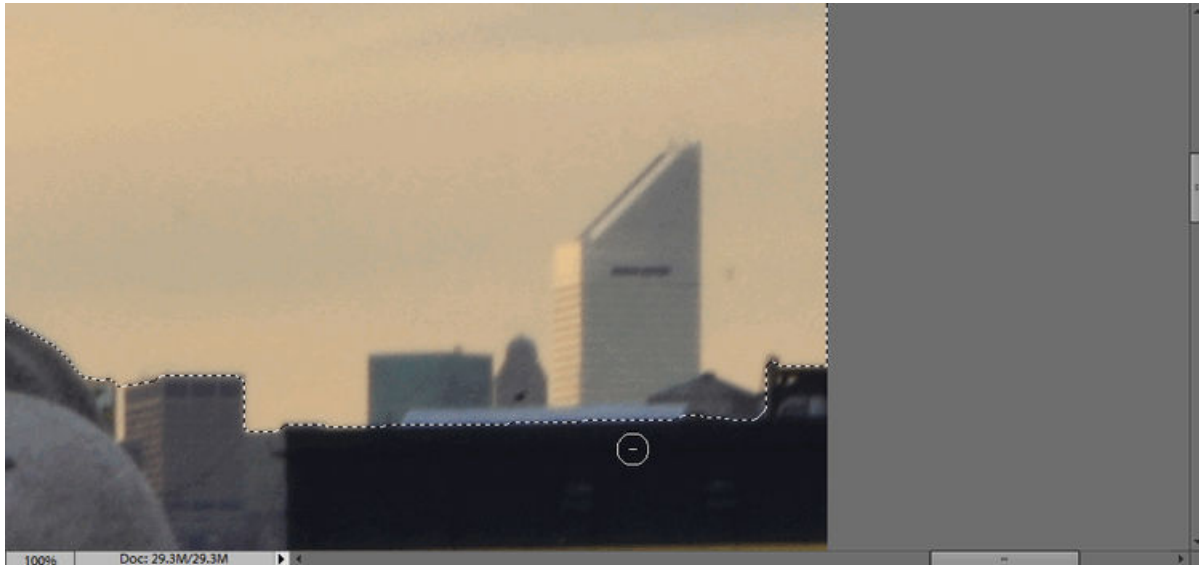
Correction: Outside, Moving Inward

Below, the Quick Selection tool selected some of the buildings.

We just want to select the sky.

The tool added to much.

We need to subtract from the selection.



The Quick Selection tool needs to be on Subtract.

In options bar/Tool Options, make sure the Subtract icon is selected.

The brush will have a - in the middle of the circle.

Another way of saying the above:

If you're outside the selection, about to nudge it in, make sure you're on Subtract.

Note

With all of the other brush tools, you can change Add to Subtract (or plus to minus) simply by pressing and holding the Alt key (Windows) or Option key (Mac).

For an unknown reason, this convenience doesn't work well with the Quick Selection tool.

Every time you need to go back-and-forth between Add and Subtract, you have to click the Add icon or the Subtract icon in options bar/Tool Options.

Argh!

Back to Work

In the screen shot above, the brush is about to be dragged up to nudge the selection up to the sky.

10) Click, hold, and drag the brush up.

Again, if the tool makes a mistake, click the Undo arrow and try again.

Because the Citicorp building (triangular top) has a similar tone as the sky, you'll have to nudge the selection back-and-forth, Add and Subtract, a couple of times.

Likewise, when you correct the selection near the trees on the left side, you'll have to nudge the selection back-and-forth until it's where you want it.

11) Save the selection by doing the following.

- a) Go to, at the top of your screen, Select > Save Selection.
- b) Enter a name for the selection.
- c) Click OK.

Should you need the selection later, go to Select > Load Selection.

More than One Selection Tool

You may need to use another selection tool to make a selection.

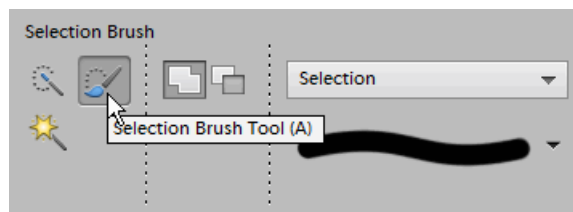
If the Quick Selection tool isn't working well in part of a selection, switch to the Selection Brush tool.

Where the Quick Selection brush tries to do all of the work for you, the Selection Brush tool is 100% mechanical.

It's not magical.

Where you drag its brush, that's where the selection is created.

As needed, select Add to selection or Subtract from selection in Tool Options.



Tutorials

There's a detailed explanation of making selections [here](#).

The tutorial below is about burning and dodging when using selections.

Go to [Using Selections](#).

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