

DESKTOP EDITION | UPDATED AUGUST 2026

Adobe Photoshop

Beginner Cheat Sheet

What each tool and function does - with large visual icons and Mac/Windows shortcuts.

VISUAL TOOL INDEX



V



W



C



I



B



T



H



Z

THE BIG IDEA Photoshop is a stack of transparent sheets called layers. Select the correct sheet, then choose whether you are editing its pixels, its mask, or a non-destructive adjustment.

The five rules that will save you hours

1. **Check the active layer:** Most Photoshop mistakes happen because the wrong layer or the mask thumbnail is selected.
2. **Mask instead of erase:** A mask hides pixels without deleting them, so you can change your mind later.
3. **Use adjustment layers:** Brightness, colour and contrast remain editable and do not permanently change the picture.
4. **Use a Smart Object before repeated resizing or filters:** It protects the original content and lets filters stay editable.
5. **Save the PSD first:** Keep the editable master, then export a separate JPEG, PNG, PDF or WebP copy.

Your workspace at a glance

Area	What it is for
Application/Menu bar	File, Edit, Image, Layer, Type, Select, Filter, View and Window commands.
Options bar	Changes with the active tool. Look here for feather, tolerance, alignment, brush settings and more.
Tools panel	The vertical toolbar. A small triangle means more tools are hidden under that icon.
Document window	The canvas where you see and edit the open image.
Layers panel	Your control centre: order, visibility, masks, blend modes, opacity, effects and groups.
Properties panel	Controls the selected mask, adjustment, shape or other editable item.
Contextual Task Bar	A floating strip of useful next actions for the current selection or task.

Mac and Windows translation

Mac	Windows	Meaning
Mac: Cmd	Windows: Ctrl	Main command key
Mac: Option	Windows: Alt	Alternate/subtract/copy modifier
Shift	Shift	Constrain, add, cycle or modify

TOOL TIP Right-click or hold a toolbar icon to see hidden tools. Shift plus the tool key cycles through tools that share that shortcut when the preference is enabled.

02 Toolbar: move, select, crop and sample

Each large blue tile shows the tool symbol. The separate letter column gives its default desktop shortcut.

Icon	Key	Tool	What it does	Best used for
MOVE AND LAYOUT				
	V	Move - arrow/cross	Moves a layer, selection, guide or object. Turn Auto-Select on only when it helps.	Position logos, text and photos.
	V	Artboard - page	Creates or moves separate canvases inside one file.	Several designs or sizes in one PSD.
GEOMETRIC AND FREEHAND SELECTIONS				
	M	Marquee - dashed box/oval	Selects a rectangle, square, ellipse, circle, row or column.	Straight-edged areas and simple shapes.
	L	Lasso - rope loop	Draws a freehand selection border.	Fast, rough irregular selections.
	L	Polygonal Lasso	Builds a selection from straight line segments.	Bottles, labels, buildings and boxes.
	L	Magnetic Lasso	Tries to snap the border to a high-contrast edge as you trace.	Clear object edges against a different background.
	L	Selection Brush - brush/overlay	Paints a coloured overlay that becomes a selection. Available in newer versions.	Intuitive painted selections.
AUTOMATIC SELECTIONS				
	W	Object Selection - dotted box	Detects and selects a person or object inside a hovered, boxed or lassoed area.	The quickest first try for an obvious object.
	W	Quick Selection - brush/dots	Paints a selection and expands it along detected texture and edges.	Subjects with reasonably clear edges.
	W	Magic Wand - wand/star	Selects pixels with similar colour or tone. Tolerance controls the range.	Flat backgrounds and solid colours.
CROP, FRAME AND SAMPLE				
	C	Crop - corner marks	Trims, straightens or extends the canvas. Can use Generative Expand or Content-Aware options.	Reframing and changing aspect ratio.
	C	Perspective Crop	Crops and corrects a flat object photographed at an angle.	Documents, signs and rectangular labels.
	C	Slice / Slice Select	Divides an image into separately exported web sections. Rare in modern workflows.	Legacy web layouts.
	K	Frame - box with X	Creates a placeholder that automatically masks placed artwork to its frame.	Mock-ups and image placeholders.
	I	Eyedropper - pipette	Samples a colour from the image into the foreground colour.	Matching a logo or brand colour.
	I	Sampler / Ruler / Count	Stores colour readings, measures distance/angle or counts objects.	Accuracy, straightening and technical checks.

SELECTION MODIFIERS Shift adds to a selection. Option (Mac) or Alt (Windows) subtracts. Shift plus Option/Alt keeps only the overlap. Cmd/Ctrl+D deselects.

03 Toolbar: repair, paint and copy

For retouching, work on a new blank layer when the tool supports Sample All Layers or Current & Below.

Icon	Key	Tool	What it does	Best used for
REPAIR AND REMOVE				
	J	Remove - brush/spark	Brush over an unwanted object and Photoshop generates replacement pixels.	Wires, people, blemishes and distractions.
	J	Spot Healing - plaster	Automatically blends nearby texture, colour and light over small marks.	Dust spots and small blemishes.
	J	Healing Brush - plaster	You choose a clean source with Option/Alt-click; Photoshop blends it into the target.	Controlled skin and texture repair.
	J	Patch - stitched patch	Moves or replaces a selected damaged area using a clean area.	Larger blemishes and repeated texture.
	J	Content-Aware Move	Moves an object and automatically fills the old position.	Repositioning objects in simple scenes.
	J	Red Eye	Neutralises red pupils caused by flash.	Flash portraits.
PAINT AND COPY PIXELS				
	B	Brush - paintbrush	Paints foreground colour with controllable size, hardness, opacity and flow.	Painting, masks, retouching and local edits.
	B	Pencil	Paints hard-edged pixels without soft anti-aliased edges.	Pixel art and exact hard edges.
	B	Colour Replacement	Replaces colour while trying to preserve texture and shading.	Quick object recolouring.
	B	Mixer Brush	Mixes colours like wet paint and can blend existing pixels.	Digital painting and painterly blending.
	S	Clone Stamp - rubber stamp	Copies pixels exactly from an Option/Alt-clicked source.	Repeating texture and precise repair.
	S	Pattern Stamp	Paints with a stored pattern instead of sampled image pixels.	Repeating decorative textures.
	Y	History Brush	Paints an earlier History state back into selected areas.	Selective restoration during the session.
	Y	Art History Brush	Paints a stylised version of an earlier state.	Painterly effects, not normal restoration.

SAFER RETOUCHING Create a blank layer above the photo, then set the retouching tool to Current & Below or Sample All Layers. Your original photo stays untouched.

04 Toolbar: erase, fill and tone

These tools change pixels directly. Duplicate the layer first, or use a mask or adjustment layer when possible.

Icon	Key	Tool	What it does	Best used for
ERASE, FILL AND TONE				
	E	Eraser	Permanently deletes pixels or paints the background colour on a locked Background layer.	Only when permanent deletion is truly wanted.
	E	Background Eraser	Samples colour under the crosshair and erases matching pixels to transparency.	Simple backgrounds with clear colour separation.
	E	Magic Eraser	Deletes connected or similar colours with one click.	Very flat, simple backgrounds.
	G	Gradient	Blends between colours or transparency across a distance.	Backgrounds, masks, light and colour transitions.
	G	Paint Bucket	Fills connected pixels of similar colour, or fills with a pattern.	Flat areas and quick solid fills.
	-	Blur	Softens detail where you paint.	Small local softening; use Blur filters for broader control.
	-	Sharpen	Increases local edge contrast where you paint.	Small targeted sharpening; easy to overdo.
	-	Smudge	Pushes and blends pixels as if dragging wet paint.	Controlled blending and artistic distortion.
	O	Dodge	Lightens the painted area.	Local highlights; use on a separate layer when possible.
	O	Burn	Darkens the painted area.	Local shadows and edge darkening.
	O	Sponge	Raises or lowers colour saturation locally.	Small colour-intensity corrections.

MASK BEFORE ERASING A layer mask hides pixels without deleting them. Click Add Layer Mask, select the mask thumbnail and paint with black to hide or white to reveal.

05 Toolbar: type, paths, shapes and navigation

Paths and shapes are vector-based, so they remain clean when scaled. Pixel layers do not.

Icon	Key	Tool	What it does	Best used for
PATHS				
	P	Pen - fountain pen	Draws precise straight and curved vector paths using anchor points and handles.	Cut-outs, logos, bottle contours and text paths.
	P	Curvature Pen	Builds smooth curves with simpler clicking and dragging than the classic Pen.	Beginner-friendly curves and contours.
	P	Freeform Pen	Draws a path freehand as you drag.	Loose paths that can be refined later.
	P	Add/Delete/Convert Point	Adds, removes or changes anchor points and curve handles.	Refining an existing path.
	A	Path Selection - black arrow	Selects and moves an entire path or shape component.	Moving a whole path or vector shape.
	A	Direct Selection - white arrow	Selects individual anchor points and handles.	Reshaping one part of a path.
TYPE				
	T	Horizontal/Vertical Type	Creates editable text. Click for point text; drag a box for paragraph text.	Headlines, labels and body copy.
	T	Type Mask	Creates a text-shaped selection instead of a normal editable text layer.	Filling text with a photo or texture.
SHAPES				
	U	Rectangle / Rounded Rectangle	Creates an editable vector rectangle with fill, stroke and corner controls.	Panels, buttons, blocks and borders.
	U	Ellipse	Creates editable circles and ellipses.	Badges, rings and circular masks.
	U	Triangle / Polygon	Creates editable multi-sided vector shapes.	Graphic accents and geometric designs.
	U	Line	Draws a vector line with weight, ends and arrow options.	Dividers, leaders and arrows.
	U	Custom Shape	Places a reusable vector shape preset.	Icons and decorative shapes.
NAVIGATION AND MODES				
	H	Hand	Pans around a zoomed document. Hold Space for temporary Hand tool.	Moving your view without moving artwork.
	R	Rotate View	Rotates only the canvas view, not the actual image.	Comfortable painting or retouching angles.
	Z	Zoom	Changes magnification. It does not resize the image.	Inspecting detail or seeing the whole page.
	Q	Quick Mask	Shows a coloured overlay so you can paint and refine a selection.	Precise selection editing with the Brush.
	D	Default colours	Resets foreground/background colours to black and white.	Fast mask painting.
	X	Swap colours	Swaps foreground and background colours.	Switching between hide/reveal while masking.
	F	Screen modes	Cycles normal, full-screen-with-menu and full-screen display modes.	More canvas space.

BRUSH CONTROL [and] change brush size. Shift+[and Shift+] change hardness. Caps Lock switches between the normal brush outline and a precise crosshair.

06 Layers: the heart of Photoshop

Imagine transparent sheets stacked from bottom to top. Higher visible layers cover lower layers.

Common layer types

Layer type	What it contains	Remember
Pixel / image	Holds photos, painting and ordinary pixels.	Direct pixel edits can be permanent.
Type	Keeps text editable: wording, font, size, tracking and colour.	Do not rasterise unless necessary.
Shape	Holds vector paths with editable fill and stroke.	Scales cleanly.
Adjustment	Applies brightness, contrast or colour without changing the underlying pixels.	Comes with a mask.
Fill	Creates an editable solid colour, gradient or pattern.	Excellent for exact backgrounds.
Smart Object	Protects original content and supports editable Smart Filters and transforms.	Double-click thumbnail to edit contents.
Background	A special locked bottom layer used by some documents.	Click the lock to convert when needed.

What the Layers panel controls mean

Control	What it does
Eye	Shows or hides a layer. Hidden is not deleted.
Image thumbnail	Select this to edit the layer's pixels or contents.
Mask thumbnail	Select this to paint what the layer reveals or hides. A white outline shows which thumbnail is active.
Blend Mode	Changes how a layer mathematically interacts with layers below.
Opacity	Reduces the visibility of the entire layer, including effects.
Fill	Reduces the layer's own pixels while some layer styles can remain fully visible.
Lock	Prevents movement, transparency changes, painting or all edits, depending on the lock type.
fx	Adds editable layer styles such as Drop Shadow, Stroke, Colour Overlay and Bevel.
Chain link	Makes selected layers move or transform together without grouping them.
Folder	Groups related layers so the panel stays organised.
Half-filled circle	Creates a fill or adjustment layer.
Rectangle with circle	Adds a layer mask.

MASK RULE White reveals. Black conceals. Grey partly hides. Click the mask thumbnail, press B for Brush, press D for black/white, and press X to swap them.

Layer stack example

Order	Layer	Purpose
TOP	Curves adjustment + mask	Brightens only the label
	Wine&Earth logo - Smart Object	Scales without repeatedly damaging it
	Headline - Type layer	Wording and font remain editable
	Maroon background - Solid Colour Fill	Exact colour can be changed later
BOTTOM	Original photo	Kept untouched

CLIPPING MASK Clips the upper layer to the visible content of the layer immediately below. Use Option/Alt-click between the two layers, or Cmd/Ctrl+Option/Alt+G.

07 Selections and masks: edit only what you mean to edit

A selection is temporary. A mask stores that selection as an editable black, white and grey map.

Choose the right selection method

What you are selecting	Best first choice
Rectangle, circle or straight area	Marquee (M)
Obvious person, bottle or object	Object Selection or Select Subject
Object with reasonably clear edges	Quick Selection (W)
Flat, solid-colour background	Magic Wand (W) or Select > Colour Range
Rough irregular shape	Lasso (L)
Hard, precise product or logo edge	Pen path (P), then convert path to a selection
Hair, fur or soft edge	Select Subject, then Select and Mask / Refine Hair
Area you want to paint manually	Selection Brush or Quick Mask (Q)

Reliable selection-to-mask workflow

1. **Select the source layer:** Make sure you are selecting from the correct image, not from an empty layer or mask.
2. **Make a rough selection:** Use the method in the table above. Perfection is not needed yet.
3. **Add and subtract:** Shift adds; Option/Alt subtracts. Zoom in for difficult edges.
4. **Open Select and Mask:** Use appropriate view mode; refine hair/edges, smooth lightly, feather sparingly and shift the edge only when needed.
5. **Output to Layer Mask:** This keeps the hidden pixels recoverable.
6. **Inspect on light and dark backgrounds:** Halos are easier to spot when the background colour changes.

Selection words in plain English

Term	Meaning
Marching ants	The moving dotted border showing a selection. It does not show partial transparency very well.
Feather	Softens the boundary over a chosen distance. Too much creates halos or softness.
Anti-alias	Smooths jagged diagonal or curved edges with partially selected pixels.
Tolerance	Magic Wand range: low selects colours very close to the clicked colour; high selects a wider range.
Fuzziness	Colour Range's version of tolerance, with a more controllable preview.
Contiguous	On: only touching similar pixels. Off: similar pixels anywhere in the layer.
Inverse	Selects everything that was not selected, and deselects what was selected.
Expand / Contract	Moves the selection border outward or inward by a chosen number of pixels.

USEFUL MASK CLICKS Option/Alt-click a mask thumbnail to view the mask alone. Shift-click it to temporarily disable it. A backslash shows or hides the red mask overlay in many masking workflows.

08 Adjustments, colour and blend modes

Create adjustments from the half-filled circle in the Layers panel so they stay editable and automatically include a mask.

The adjustments you will use most

Adjustment	What it does	Best for
Brightness/Contrast	Simple overall lightness and contrast.	Quick corrections.
Levels	Sets black point, white point and midtone brightness using a histogram.	Fast tonal correction and faded images.
Curves	Precisely remaps shadows, midtones and highlights; individual colour channels can also be adjusted.	Best all-round professional tonal control.
Exposure	Changes exposure, offset and gamma.	HDR-style or technically under/overexposed images.
Vibrance	Raises muted colours more gently and protects already strong colours better than Saturation.	Natural-looking colour boost.
Hue/Saturation	Changes colour family, intensity and lightness, globally or for a chosen colour range.	Recolouring green to maroon, for example.
Colour Balance	Adds or removes colour in shadows, midtones and highlights.	Correcting colour casts.
Black & White	Converts colour to monochrome with control over how original colours translate to grey.	Controlled black-and-white images.
Selective Colour	Fine-tunes colour ingredients within reds, greens, whites, neutrals and other ranges.	Subtle brand and print colour correction.
Photo Filter	Adds a warming, cooling or coloured filter while preserving luminosity.	Fast overall mood or cast correction.
Gradient Map	Maps image brightness values to colours along a gradient.	Stylised grading and duotones.
Solid Colour Fill	Creates an exact editable colour layer with a mask.	Backgrounds and precise brand colours.

Changing one colour without changing the text

1. **Check the layer structure:** If the background and text are separate layers, select only the background layer. This is the cleanest solution.
2. **If they share one pixel layer:** Select the background using Magic Wand or Select > Colour Range. Keep the text outside the selection.
3. **For an exact flat colour:** Add a Solid Colour Fill layer, enter the exact HEX/RGB value, and let the selection become its mask.
4. **For a textured object:** Use Hue/Saturation or a Solid Colour layer set to Colour blend mode so texture and shading can show through.
5. **Refine the mask:** Paint black or white on the mask to protect lettering and clean the edges.

Blend modes worth knowing

Mode	What it generally does
Normal	No special interaction. Use for exact flat colour and normal artwork.
Multiply	Darkens; white has little effect. Useful for shadows and scanned linework.
Screen	Lightens; black has little effect. Useful for light, glow and lifting dark overlays.
Overlay	Adds stronger contrast using both Multiply and Screen behaviour.
Soft Light	A gentler contrast and lighting effect than Overlay.
Colour	Uses the layer's hue/saturation while largely preserving brightness underneath.
Luminosity	Uses only brightness and keeps the colour from layers below.

TARGETED BRIGHTENING Select the label, add a Curves adjustment layer, then brighten. The selection becomes the mask, so the bottle and background stay unchanged.

09 Text, transforms and sizing

Keep text as a Type layer and artwork as a Smart Object for as long as possible.

Text functions

Function	What it does	Use it for
Point text	Click once with Type (T) and type. The line grows until you insert a return.	Short titles and labels.
Paragraph text	Drag a text box, then type. Text wraps inside the box.	Body copy and fixed-width text areas.
Character panel	Font, size, leading, tracking, kerning, baseline shift, colour and other character settings.	How individual letters look.
Paragraph panel	Alignment, indents, spacing, justification and paragraph settings.	How blocks of text behave.
Warp Text	Bends editable type using preset arcs, flags, bulges and other shapes.	Simple curved headlines.
Text on a path	Places editable type directly along a Pen path or shape outline.	Following a bottle, badge or circular contour.
Transform Warp	Bends the entire layer using a grid and handles.	More custom distortion; convert to Smart Object first.
Rasterise Type	Converts letters to pixels and ends normal text editing.	Only when a pixel-only operation is unavoidable.

Transform functions

Function	Where/shortcut	What it does
Free Transform	Cmd/Ctrl+T	Scale, rotate and access other transform modes. Press Return/Enter to apply; Esc cancels.
Scale	Right-click in transform	Changes width and height. Modern Photoshop keeps proportions by default; Shift toggles that behaviour.
Rotate	Drag outside a corner	Rotates around the reference point.
Skew	Right-click in transform	Slants horizontally or vertically.
Distort	Right-click in transform	Moves corners independently.
Perspective	Right-click in transform	Moves opposite corners together to simulate perspective.
Warp	Right-click in transform	Bends artwork with a grid and control handles.
Puppet Warp	Edit menu	Pins areas and bends the space between them.
Flip	Right-click in transform	Flips horizontally or vertically.

Image Size, Canvas Size and Crop are different

Command	What changes
Image > Image Size	Changes pixel dimensions, print dimensions and resolution. Resample decides whether pixels are added/removed.
Image > Canvas Size	Changes the working area around the image without scaling existing content.
Crop tool	Reframes the visible image and can discard, hide or generate/extend outside content depending on settings.
Zoom	Only changes how large the image appears on screen. It does not change the file.

TEXT AROUND A BOTTLE Draw the bottle contour with the Pen tool, choose Type (T), hover until the path-text cursor appears, click the path and type. Use Path Selection (A), tracking and baseline shift to position it precisely.

10 Essential shortcuts

Read Cmd/Ctrl as Cmd on Mac and Ctrl on Windows; Option/Alt as Option on Mac and Alt on Windows.

Shortcut	Action
FILES AND EDITING	
Cmd/Ctrl+N	New document
Cmd/Ctrl+O	Open
Cmd/Ctrl+S	Save
Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+S	Save As
Cmd/Ctrl+W	Close document
Cmd/Ctrl+Z	Undo / redo last change
Option/Alt+Cmd/Ctrl+Z	Step backward through History
Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+Z	Step forward through History
Cmd/Ctrl+C / X / V	Copy / cut / paste
Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+V	Paste in place
Cmd/Ctrl+T	Free Transform
SELECTIONS	
Cmd/Ctrl+A	Select all
Cmd/Ctrl+D	Deselect
Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+D	Reselect last selection
Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+I	Inverse selection
Shift-drag	Add to selection; also constrains shapes where applicable
Option/Alt-drag	Subtract from selection; also draws from centre where applicable
Cmd/Ctrl-click thumbnail	Load that layer's visible pixels as a selection
Q	Enter or leave Quick Mask
LAYERS	
Cmd/Ctrl+J	Duplicate layer or copy selection to new layer
Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+J	Cut selection to new layer
Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+N	New Layer dialog
Option/Alt+Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+N	New blank layer without dialog
Cmd/Ctrl+G	Group selected layers
Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+G	Ungroup
Option/Alt+Cmd/Ctrl+G	Create/release clipping mask
Cmd/Ctrl+E	Merge selected layers
Shift+Cmd/Ctrl+E	Merge visible layers
VIEW AND PAINTING	
Cmd/Ctrl+0	Fit image on screen
Cmd/Ctrl+1	View at 100%
Cmd/Ctrl++ / -	Zoom in / out
Space	Temporary Hand tool
Tab	Show/hide panels
F	Cycle screen modes
[/]	Decrease / increase brush size
Shift+[/]	Decrease / increase brush hardness
D	Default black/white colours
X	Swap foreground/background colours

TOOL KEYS The full single-key tool list is built into pages 2-5 beside every toolbar function. Choose Edit > Keyboard Shortcuts to view, change or export your current shortcut set.

11 Saving, exporting and file formats

Saving preserves your working file. Exporting creates a delivery copy for web, print or another person.

Which format should I use?

Format	Layers	Transparency	Best for	Watch out
PSD	Yes	Yes	Editable Photoshop master with layers, masks, type and effects.	Save this first.
PSB	Yes	Yes	Very large Photoshop documents beyond normal PSD limits.	Not as widely supported.
JPEG	No	No	Photos and small delivery files.	Lossy compression; repeated saves reduce quality.
PNG	No	Yes	Logos, flat graphics and images needing transparency.	Usually larger than JPEG for photos.
WebP	No	Yes	Modern web images with efficient compression.	Check the receiving system supports it.
TIFF	Optional	Yes	High-quality print/archive workflows.	Large; ask the printer what they want.
PDF	Optional	Yes	Sharing or print delivery with page settings.	Check fonts, bleed and printer requirements.
GIF	No	Yes, limited	Simple animation or very limited-colour graphics.	Only 256 colours; poor for photos.

Save, Save As, Save a Copy and Export

Command	What it means
Save	Updates the current file in its current format.
Save As	Creates a new editable version or changes to a compatible save format.
Save a Copy	Creates a flattened/delivery-format copy when the document contains features that format cannot store.
Quick Export	Exports using the format and location chosen in Preferences.
Export As	Lets you choose format, dimensions, scale, quality, transparency and colour settings.
Save for Web (Legacy)	Still useful for fine file-size comparison and GIF workflows, but it is a legacy interface.

Web and screen delivery

- **Use RGB** and usually embed/convert to sRGB for broad browser and device consistency.
- **Choose the required pixel dimensions.** For screen use, pixel width and height matter more than the PPI number.
- **JPEG** is efficient for photographs; **PNG** is best when you need transparency or very crisp flat graphics; **WebP** can be smaller for modern web delivery.
- **Use Export As** to preview size and quality. Check the exported copy at 100% before sending it.

Print delivery

- **Build at the final physical size.** Around 300 ppi at final size is a common target for quality print, but the printer's specification wins.
- **Do not convert blindly to CMYK.** Ask the printer for the required colour mode, ICC profile, bleed and PDF standard.
- **For an A5 page,** confirm whether the printer wants A5 artwork plus bleed, crop marks, embedded fonts and a specific PDF preset.
- **Keep the layered PSD master** even after the print PDF is approved.

TRANSPARENT LOGO Hide or remove the background, confirm you see Photoshop's grey-and-white transparency grid, then export PNG with Transparency enabled. JPEG cannot carry transparency.

12 Common jobs and quick fixes

These are the safest beginner workflows for the kinds of design edits that come up repeatedly.

Common jobs

Job	Safe workflow
Remove a white logo background	Select the white with Magic Wand or Colour Range; add a layer mask; refine the mask; export PNG. Do not simply save as JPEG.
Brighten only a wine label	Select the label; add Curves; lift the curve; paint on the mask to protect the bottle and background.
Change green to an exact maroon	If separate, select the green background layer and use Solid Colour Fill with the exact HEX/RGB. If merged, select the green first, then mask the fill so the text remains untouched.
Replace one vintage number	Keep a copy of the original; sample nearby type style/colour; use editable text if possible; use Transform or Warp only after matching font, weight, size, tracking and perspective.
Curve wording around a bottle	Draw a Pen path along the contour; click the path with Type; use Path Selection, tracking and baseline shift to position the wording.
Remove an unwanted object	Duplicate or protect the source; use Remove Tool for a first pass; use Healing or Clone Stamp on a new layer for texture clean-up.
Make a background transparent	Create a selection of the subject; Select and Mask; output to Layer Mask; inspect on both light and dark temporary backgrounds.
Resize a logo safely	Convert the layer to a Smart Object first, then Cmd/Ctrl+T. Start from the best-quality source available.

When Photoshop will not do what you expect

Problem	What to check
Nothing happens when I paint	Check the correct layer/mask, visibility, lock, active selection, brush opacity/flow, blend mode and whether the layer is a Smart Object.
I am painting black, but the image disappears	You are probably painting black on a mask. That hides the layer; paint white to reveal it again.
I cannot edit text	Select the Type layer and Type tool. If it was rasterised, it is now pixels and normal text editing is gone.
The Move tool grabs the wrong thing	Turn Auto-Select off, or set it to Layer/Group correctly, then select the intended layer in the Layers panel.
My brush cursor became a crosshair	Press Caps Lock.
All panels vanished	Press Tab. If the workspace is still strange: Window > Workspace > Reset Essentials.
The tool acts strangely	Right-click the tool icon in the Options bar and choose Reset Tool. Also check its mode, opacity and sampling options.
There is a pale halo after removing a background	Refine the mask on contrasting backgrounds; use a small negative Shift Edge or careful mask painting. Avoid excessive feathering.
The image became blurry after scaling	Repeatedly enlarging raster pixels loses detail. Use the original/highest-resolution file and a Smart Object; avoid repeated down-up scaling.
Colours changed after export	Check document mode, embedded colour profile, export conversion and the app used to view the result. Use sRGB for general screen delivery.
Transform handles are missing	Press Cmd/Ctrl+T, or enable Show Transform Controls for the Move tool.
A command is greyed out	Finish/cancel active text or transform mode, deselect if needed, select a compatible layer, or edit/rasterise the Smart Object only when appropriate.

THE FIRST THREE CHECKS 1) Correct layer? 2) Image thumbnail or mask thumbnail? 3) Is there an active selection? These solve a remarkable number of Photoshop problems.

Official Adobe references

- [Photoshop workspace overview](#)
- [Selection tools overview](#)
- [Layers overview](#)
- [Layer masks](#)
- [Smart Objects](#)
- [Keyboard shortcuts](#)
- [Adobe Spectrum workflow icons](#)

Note: Photoshop changes over time, toolbars can be customised, and shortcuts can be reassigned. This guide uses Adobe's standard desktop workflow and current help available in August 2026.