



Introducing Layer Masks

Combine selected parts of images non-destructively using layer masks, so you're free to refine the selections at anytime

Photoshop has plenty of tools that enable you to select parts of images based on properties such as color or tone. In the case of our starting image, we have a basic sky that can easily be selected with a few clicks using the “Magic Wand” tool. After selecting the unwanted sky we could double click the background layer to unlock it and then choose Edit, Cut to remove the sky. We could then replace the original sky with something more interesting, such as a dramatic cloudscape.

After cutting out the sky they will be permanently deleted from the image layer. If it turns out that you've also selected and deleted the edges of a building, then you won't be able to recover those deleted details. However, by converting a selection into a layer mask you can hide unwanted areas on the attached image layer without permanently deleting them. This enables you to restore missing details from your image layer.

Layer masks turn a selection into a black- and-white image. The white part of the mask makes the corresponding pixels on the attached image layer 100% solid. The black sections of the mask make the associated pixels 100% transparent. You can then paint with black or white on the mask to change that pixels are visible and which are hidden, which enables you to refine the results of any selection tool until they are perfect. Unlike the Edit, Cut command, layer masks are non-destructive. This makes them the key tool in making more effective selections and producing convincing composite images.

