Bramhall Photographic Society

PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS
SELECTIONS AND MASKS

(This technique will work in any version of Elements although the screenshots may vary slightly)

When you first open Elements and look for the Selection Tools, there only appears to be 4 (under the SELECT heading, on the far left) one of these is actually the Move Tool but the other 3 have more options when each one is 'activated'

For instance the Rectangular Marquee Tool has, hidden in its Tool Options (which appear below, as soon as you click on it) an Elliptical Marquee Tool. This Tool Options box can be hidden or viewed by clicking on the 2nd icon along from the left at the base of the window. Usually left visible though, so its options are easily used. With both the rectangular and the elliptical marquee tools there is the option to choose:-

New – this allows you to draw a new rectangle several times and the previous one disappears.
Add to selection – This allows you to draw several separate shapes one after the other, or to draw a new **shape which adds to one of the others.**
Subtract from selection – This is self-explanatory, you can remove an area from an already drawn selection by drawing a rectangle over the area you wish to remove.
**Intersect with Selection** – I have still to find a use for!
Move Tool
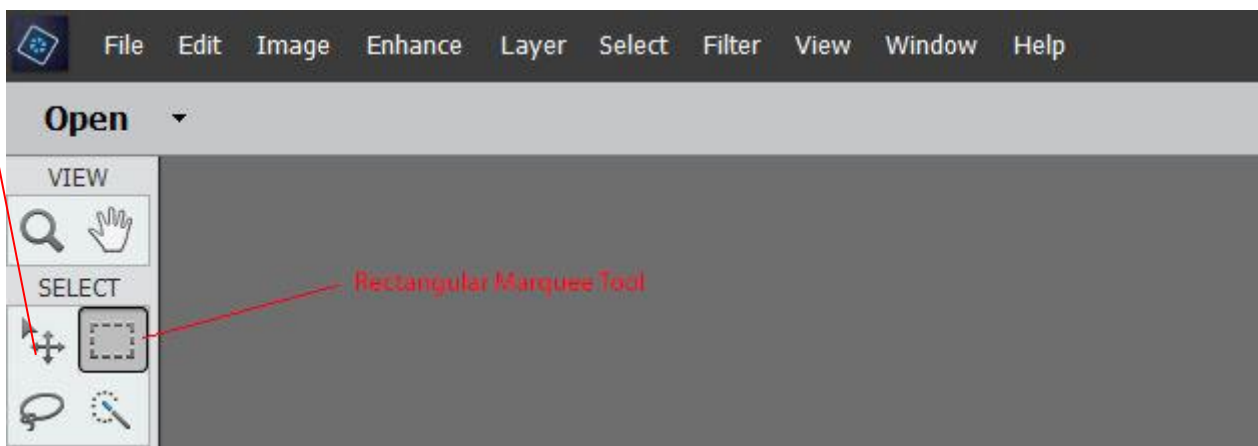
In the next section – you can choose to feather the selection, choose an Aspect – Normal (for any size oval or rectangle) – Fixed (for a circular or square selection) or Fixed size (where you input a number of chosen pixels)

In the next section **Refine Edge** brings up a new dialogue box. Using Feather from this box allows you to see the amount of feathering, because it masks, in red by default, the area not selected.
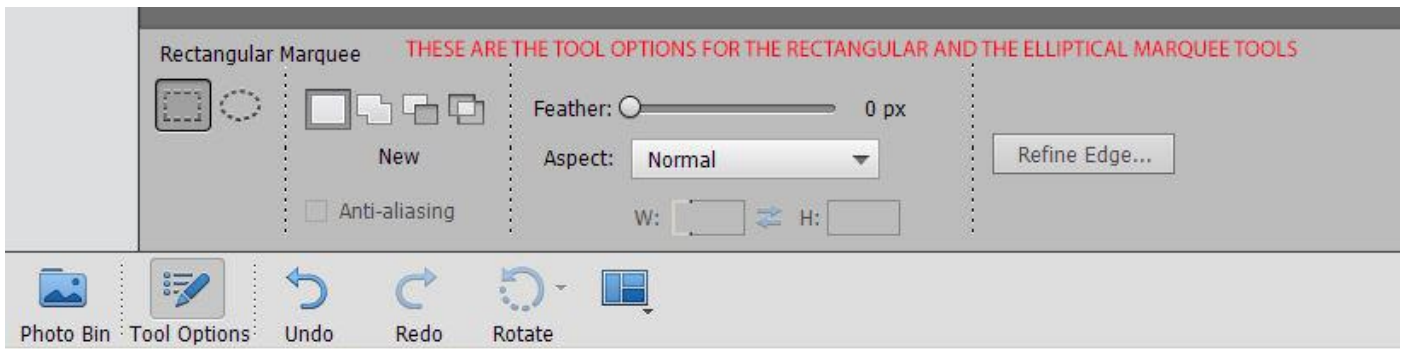
The Lasso Tool is good for rough freehand selections; the polygonal lasso tool is good for lots of straight edges and the magnetic lasso tool cleverly 'sticks' to edges of your choosing. You need to help it along with clicks along the edges of the area you are attempting to select.
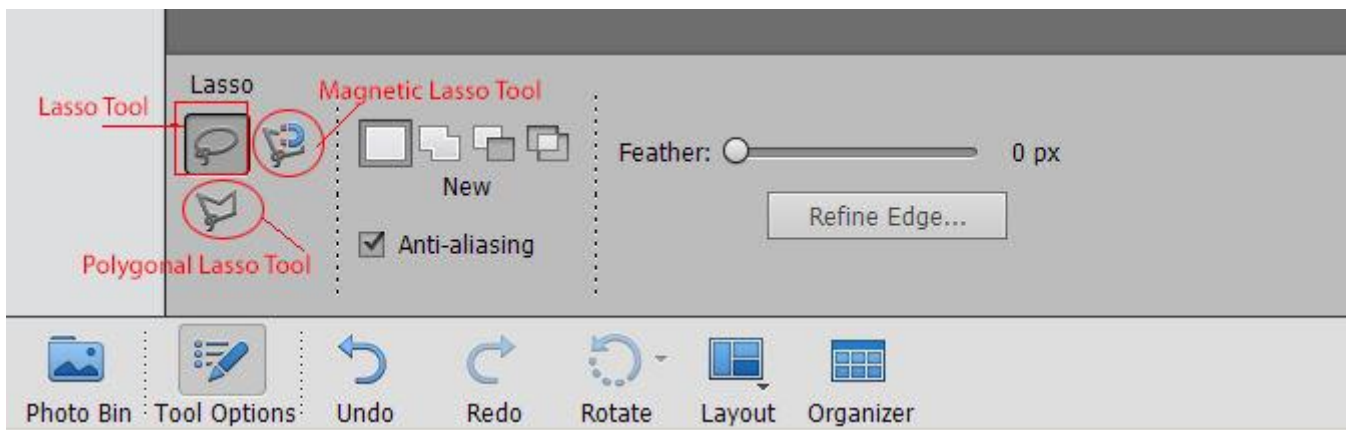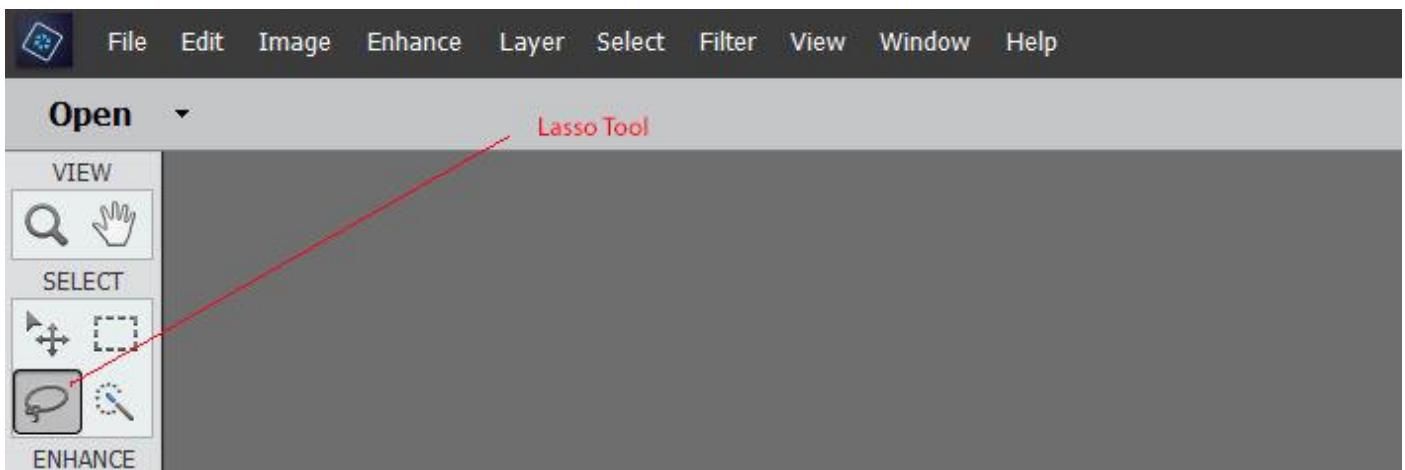

The last of the set of selection tools comes under the **Quick Selection Brush**
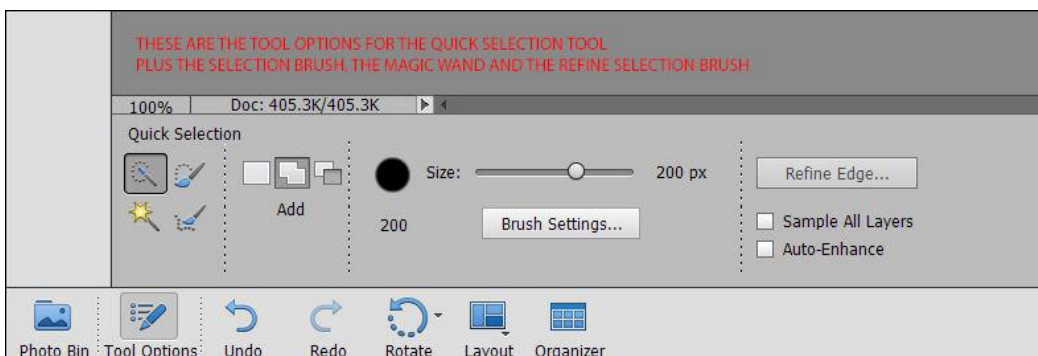
The Quick selection brush – Works by single clicks within the area you want selected. The brush can be made larger or smaller dependant on the amount of detail to be selected in your image. If it selects too much (outside of the area you want) simply hold down the keyboard **Alt key** and you will notice a small minus symbol appears within the brush size, as opposed to the usual plus symbol you see when selecting.

The Selection Brush is more manual – it doesn't 'find edges' but is useful for either large area selections or for more detailed tiny areas where the quick selection brush maybe picks up too large an area.
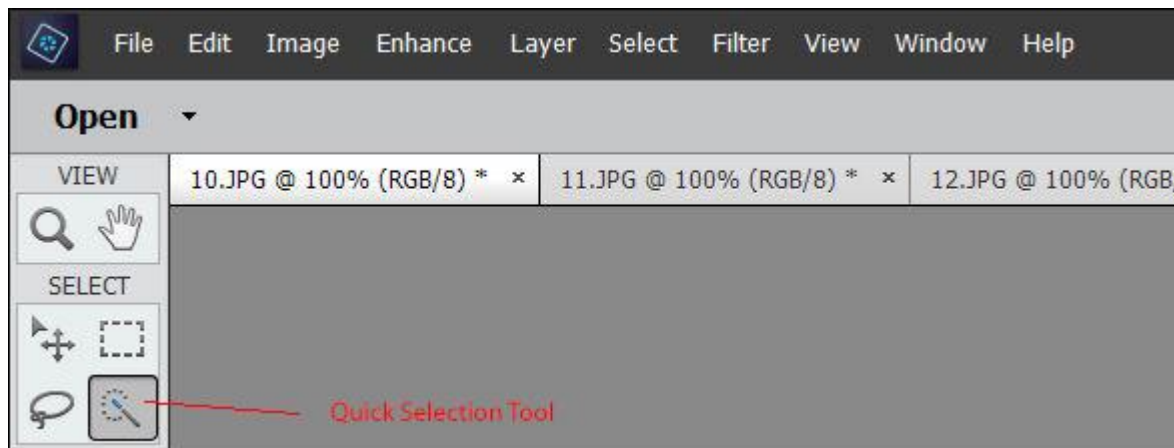
HANDY TIP* When using any of these selection tools – Make sure that your Caps Lock is not on!

In fact if **Caps Lock** is on when trying to use **any** of the tools in Elements or Photoshop, you will not see the brush size for instance or the crop symbol or any of the other helpful things you need to see when using these tools. It can be very disconcerting when nothing seems to look right and you wonder why – if this happens - CHECK YOUR CAPS LOCK!

MASKS

We touched on Masks earlier when looking at Adjustment Layers – in the previous document.

Every adjustment layer opens with its own layer mask, and these are extremely useful.

The layer mask opens by default filled with white, and as so, it shows through all of adjustments made. If you feel you would like to partially hide/remove some of this adjustment, simply paint with the Brush Tool (Black) at 100% to hide/remove completely, or at a lower opacity to just soften the effect.

First, you must make sure the 'mask' is active, by a single right click on the mask, then when you paint on the image, with black, you are removing/hiding the Adjustment effect, and with white you are revealing the Adjustment effect. If you brush away more of this white mask than you meant to – just swap to white (X = keyboard shortcut)

A layer mask can also be filled with black by clicking on the mask thumbnail and checking that black is your background colour and press Ctrl + backspace – the mask fills with black.

A black mask completely hides any adjustment made, and you can then brush with white to paint in this adjustment in the specific areas you want.

Tip: To quickly swap the foreground/background colours, simply press X on the keyboard

To enhance a particular area in the image – make a selection with the tool of your choice, with a large feathered edge (for a subtle change at the edges) and press Ctrl + J which will make a copy of this selection which will sit above the Background layer. **Ctrl+J** is a shortcut for Layer – New – Layer via copy

If you then open up a levels layer for instance, click on the little square at the bottom left of the dialogue box, and it will link the levels to the selection layer. This means that any adjustments you make in the levels dialogue box will only affect this selected area. Many selections can be made on the image, each with its own linked adjustment layer, enabling indefinite subtle (or otherwise) adjustments to be made over the image.

I do hope these notes are helpful, and if I have not explained myself clearly enough, please feel free to contact me at
heather.carslake@sky.com