

Layer Masks

– a quick introduction

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This tutorial is designed for Photoshop CS2/3. It has not been tested in versions below CS2. It will NOT work for Photoshop Elements, please look for the PSE masking tutorial.



Layer masks are a great way to achieve some neat effects quickly, or to do some difficult tasks more easily. We will just go over the basics here on how layer masks work, and what you can do with them.

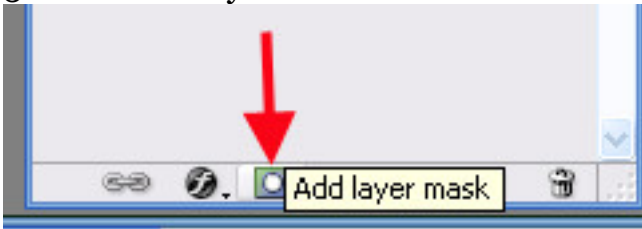
A Layer Mask does exactly what it says: it MASKS the LAYER it is attached to. MASK=HIDE. Anything that is MASKED will be HIDDEN or not visible.

To learn about Layer Masks, let's play a little:

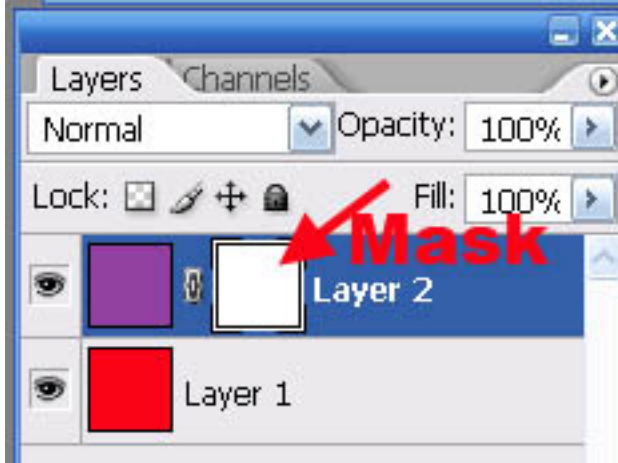
1. Create a new document. (File>New)
2. Fill with a color. (Edit>Fill>Color)
3. Create a new layer. (click on new layer icon: )

4. Fill with a different color. (Edit>Fill>Color)

5. Click on Layer Mask icon at bottom of layers palette

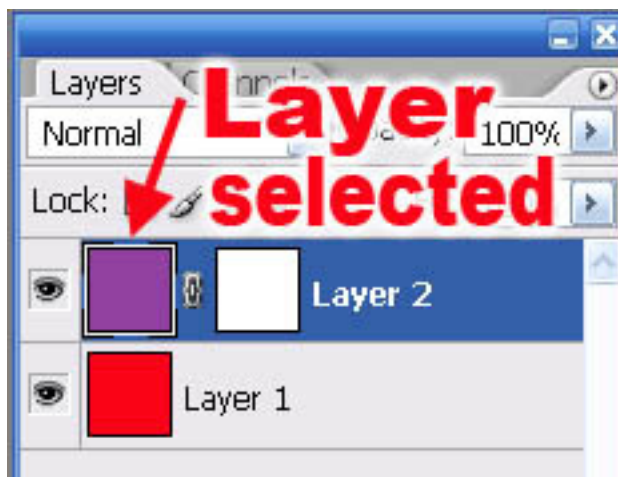


Your layers palette should look like this:




Notice that the Layer Mask is selected. You can tell because it has a black and white border around it.

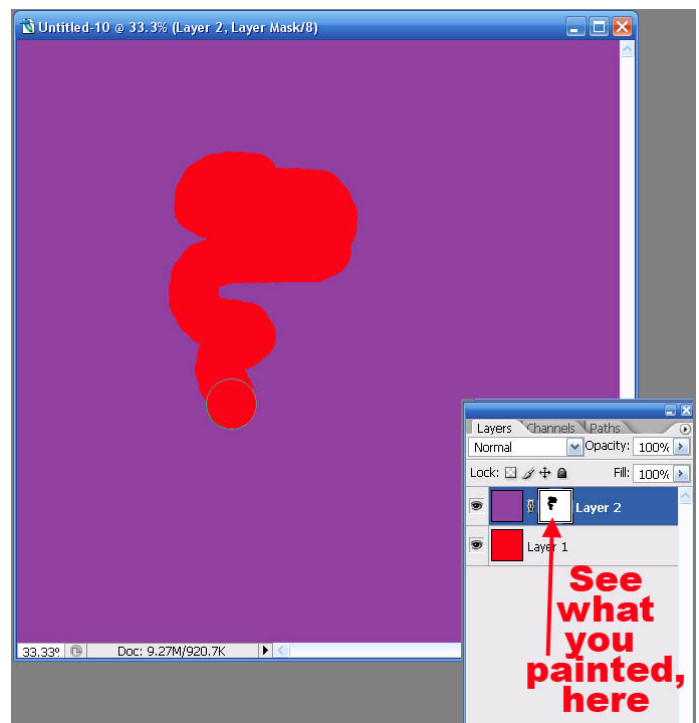
If your layers palette looks like this:



You have the layer itself selected. Click on the white square (MASK) to select it.

6. With the Layer Mask selected, Press D to change your colors back to Black and White.

Choose your Brush tool  and start painting on your document. You will see that wherever you paint, the top layer goes invisible, and the bottom layer shows through.

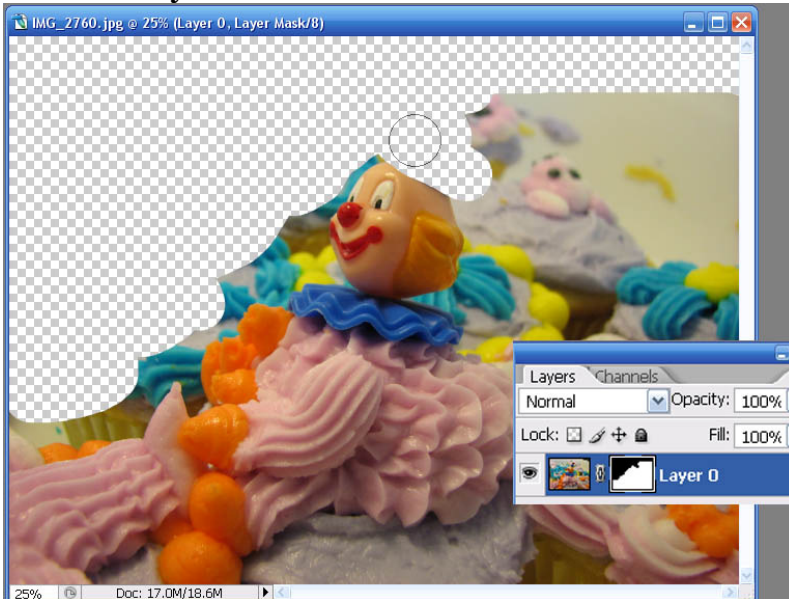


LESSON so far: Wherever you paint BLACK on the mask will be HIDDEN on that layer.
Now, the flip side of that: painting white!

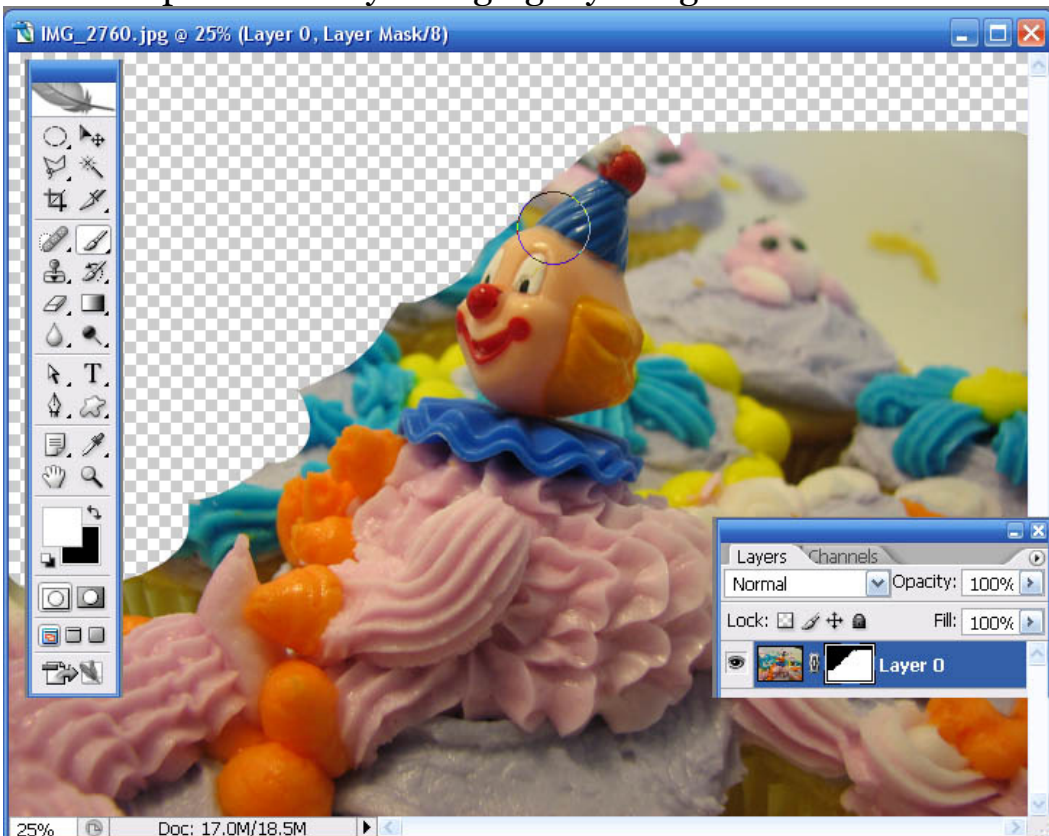
If you paint WHITE on the mask, it will SHOW what's on that layer – so you can fix something you did wrong, or adjust your mask.

Here's an example –

I used a layer mask to extract the clown from this photo – but OOPS! Cut off his hat!!



But I can put it back by changing my foreground color to white and painting it back in!

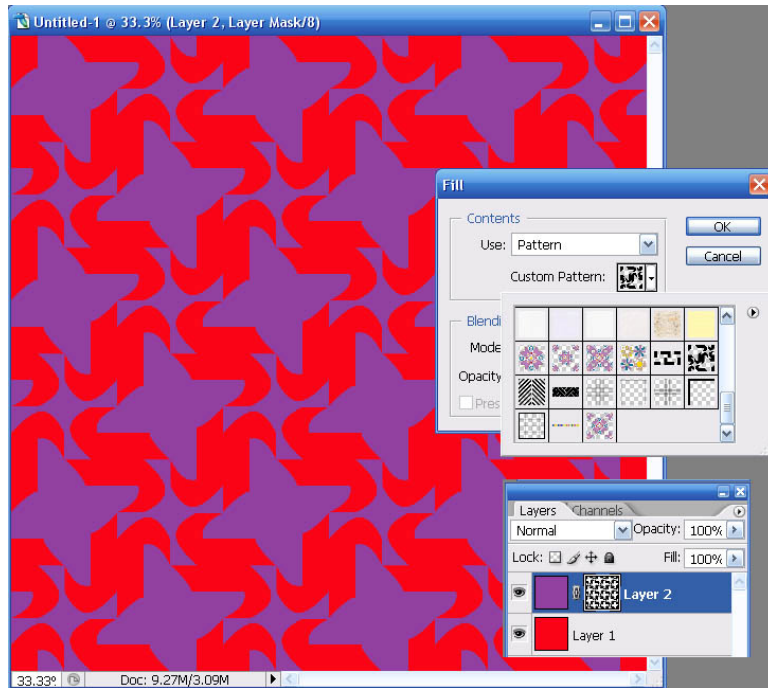


Look at the layer mask, notice you can see where I painted white to remove my mistake!

THAT's the basics! Black HIDES, White SHOWS. Easy Peasy!
I find this most useful for Extractions, it lets me use soft edged brushes if I want, and lets me fix mistakes easily, even if I don't notice them till way later!

BUT WAIT – there's more!
Here are some other ways to use a Layer Mask:

PATTERN FILL:



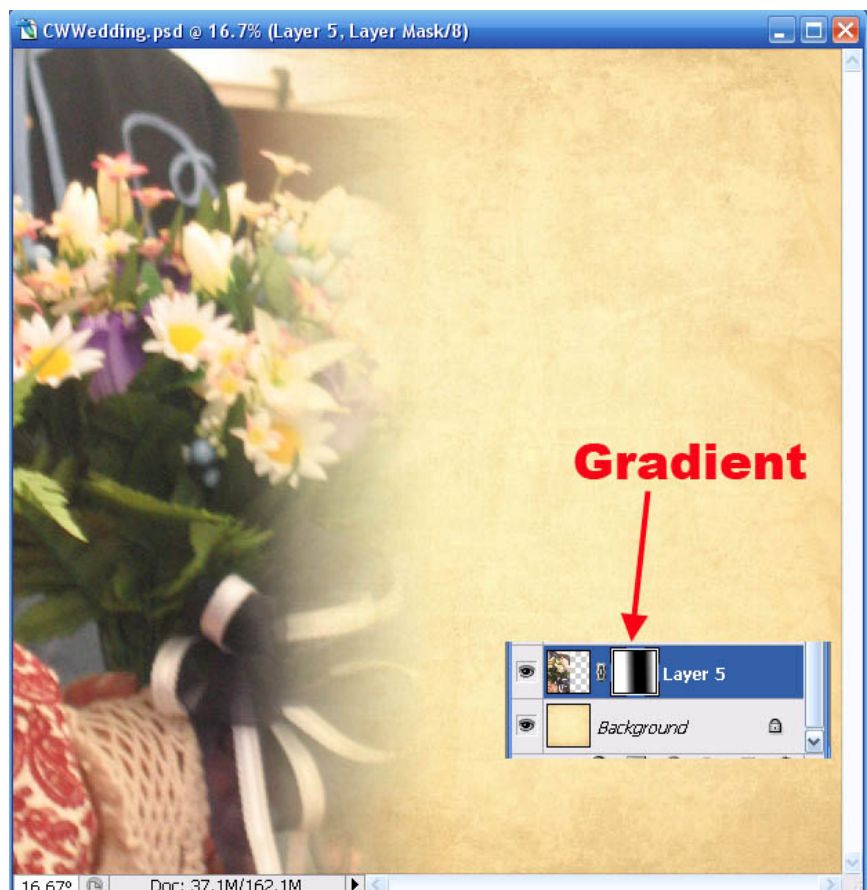
To do this, have the Layer Mask selected and go to Edit>Fill>Pattern and choose a black and white pattern.

GRADIENT FADE:

You can fade photos or papers into each other by using a gradient.

With the mask selected, choose your gradient tool, and select a black and white gradient from the presets.

Click on your photo and drag to draw the gradient. You will see it in the mask, and wherever there is black, your photo will be hidden!

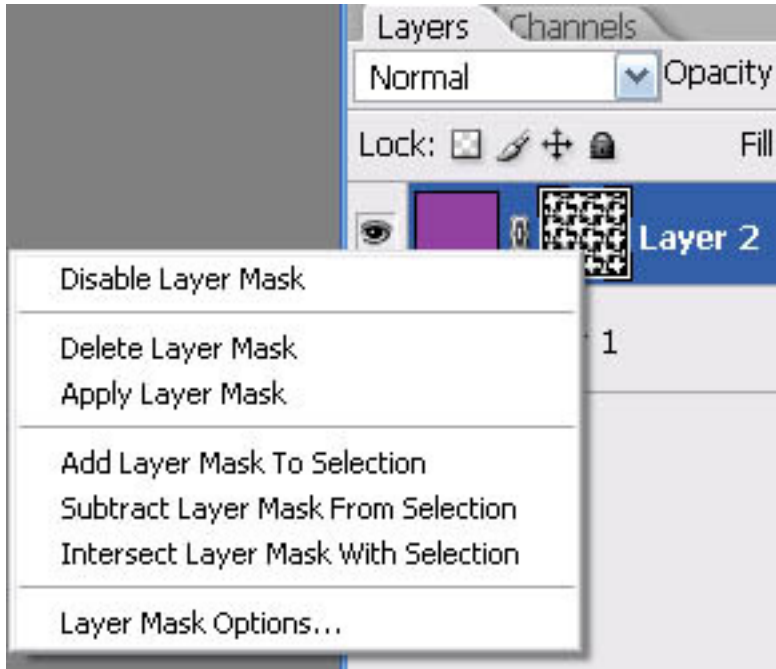


ONE LAST THING:

What if I decide I don't WANT a mask? NOW what do I do?

To get rid of the mask, Right click on the mask thumbnail,

and choose Delete Layer Mask:



You see there are lots of other things you can do there...

but that's best left for a class!

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QUICK RECAP:

To use a layer mask –

1. Have the layer you wish to mask selected.
2. Click on the layer mask icon at the bottom of the layers palette
3. Choose the brush tool, and paint black what you wish to remove from view.
4. Change color to white to paint back in areas you wish to see.
5. To delete the mask, right click on it and choose Delete Layer Mask.

Happy Scrapping!

-Jenn White