

MASTERING PHOTOSHOP FOR WEB DESIGN

LAYERS
BRUSHES
TYPE
COLOR
TONE

ANTI-ALIASING
TRANSFORMATION
INTERPOLATION

CREATIVITY
SHARPNESS
TRANSFORMATION
INTERPOLATION

“Photoshop is a powerful tool, and although the basics can be easy to grasp, mastering the application can be extremely difficult. This is where Mastering Photoshop comes in: it takes readers through the app in depth and relates all tasks back to the creative process. There’s much to learn in here, for beginners and experts alike.”

— Elliot Jay Stocks, designer, illustrator and speaker

Introduction

This book was written in the hope of filling a gap — a gap that has existed for as long as designers have been using Photoshop for Web design; a gap that we so often fill with tutorials focused on the latest trends and on inspiration galleries that are quickly browsed and forgotten; a gap that is growing as quickly as our technologies. It's a gap of foundation.

The fast pace of the Internet has focused us on the latest and greatest techniques, which typically have a lifespan of only a few months. Rarely do we focus on the fundamentals, the principles that outlive the trends. Unfortunately, the principles are often less appealing than the shiny and new. Photoshop tutorials offer quick results. They hold our hands step by step until something incredible appears, but they rarely go in depth to explain the principles that enable us to create something unique and incredible of our own.

Mastering the fundamentals of our tools opens our minds and unlocks our inherent creativity. It helps us recognize the difference between timeless and trendy. It increases our efficiency and ultimately makes us and our work more valuable.

My hope is that this book helps you gain a deeper understanding of Photoshop. If you're a beginner, I hope it gives you the comprehension you need to bring your ideas to life. If you're a veteran, I hope it unveils some of the mysteries that have always boggled you. Ultimately, though, I hope this book increases your appreciation of the fundamentals and the subtleties that make Photoshop such a powerful tool.

About the Author

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*Dedicated to my relentlessly supportive wife, Maggie,
without whom this book would not be possible. Thanks for
putting up with me!*

— Tom

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Chapter 4, **Brushes**

Wabi-sabi is the traditional Japanese aesthetic of the imperfect. It promotes the beauty and humanness of worn, naturally aged objects. For example, the patina of an ancient bronze statue adds an appreciable imperfection. The implied history and naturalness add a sense of legitimacy and uniqueness that a new statue simply can't provide.

Many websites today are like new statues, with perfectly polished design elements, crisp edges and geometric shapes. While this makes for clean, easy-to-use interfaces, it can also create a rather cold user experience. Introducing

some imperfect design elements can help cut through the stark precision and produce a wonderfully unique aesthetic.

Photoshop's tools are designed to execute with absolute precision. The exception is the brush tool, which is capable of adding randomness and imperfection. Mastering the digital brush is by no means easy. It carries the same difficulties as the sable brush hidden at the bottom of your art bin. In fact, the difficulty is multiplied by the disconnect between the hand and monitor. Developing Photoshop brush skill takes time, but it is well worth the effort.

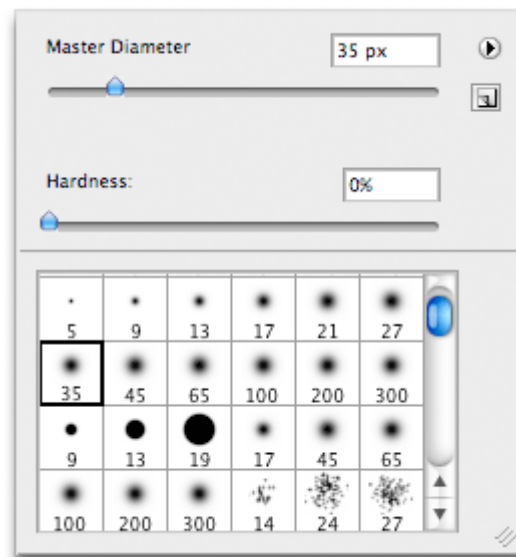
Basic Settings

Along the brush's properties bar are some simple yet powerful settings that determine the strength and shape of the brush. These settings have a big impact on the how the brush applies paint, so understanding them is important.

Brush

The brush menu, which is accessible by clicking the drop-down menu next to the brush preview or by right-clicking on the canvas, presents three options to control the shape of your brush: "Master Diameter," "Hardness" and "Brush Shape."

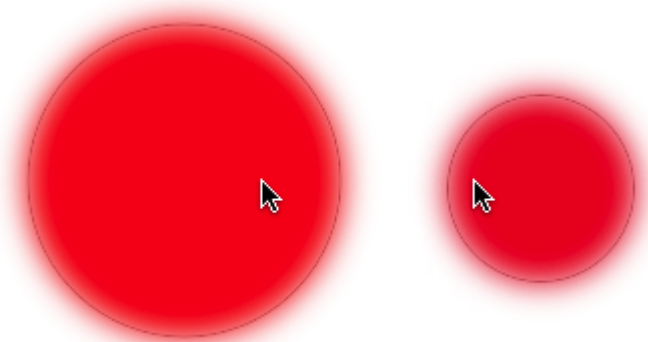
The Master Diameter setting sets the overall width and height of your brush in pixels. While hard to notice on a standard round brush, making a brush larger than its original size can make it blurry. So, if you want to maintain clean edges, keep an eye on the brush's original diameter. This setting is easily controlled using a couple of shortcuts. Use [and] to modify the diameter in increments of 10 pixels, or use the on-canvas drag method: with your mouse cursor on the canvas, hold down Option + Control + Shift (Alt + Shift + Right-click) and drag the mouse left or right. The brush will change in size as you scrub back and forth. This is great for when you need a precise size on the fly.



The brush menu is easily accessible by right-clicking on the canvas.

The hardness setting is available only for Photoshop's round brushes. Setting the hardness as a percentage from 0 to 100 will feather the edges of the brush: 100% is a crisp edge, and 0% is a completely feathered edge from the center of the brush to the circumference. For broad alterations to this setting, use the keyboard shortcuts Shift +] and Shift + [to change the values in 25% increments, or hold Command + Option + Control (Control + Alt + Right-click) and drag inside the canvas to change the values and see them take effect as you do it.

At the bottom of the panel is an assortment of brush presets that gives you quick access to the brushes you use most. Some of the defaults are just simple shapes and textures, but others have been customized with advanced settings in the Brushes palette (F5). Photoshop has a number of brush libraries you can add to the list using the panel's flyout menu, but you can also load and create custom brushes (see "Brush Presets" on page 59).



The on-canvas drag shortcuts make diameter and hardness adjustments simple and intuitive.

Mode

The brush's mode sets how painted pixels affect those already on the current layer. These modes work the same way that Blend Modes work on the layer's palette, except that they're converted to absolute values when the stroke is finished. This is an important distinction to understand: once you've painted using a blending mode, that mode cannot be altered after the fact, because then you would be using blending modes on the layer's palette.

Setting the mode changes how the paint affects the layer's current pixels.



mode:
NORMAL



mode:
MULTIPLY

The brush tool also introduces two blending modes not found in the layer's palette: "Behind" and "Clear." The Behind setting allows you to paint only in the areas of the layer that are transparent; this can be helpful if you need to paint behind a subject and leave filled pixels intact. The Clear setting essentially turns the brush into an eraser; instead of adding paint to the layer, it removes it.

The Behind mode allows you to paint strictly in transparent areas. Clear mode essentially turns the brush into an eraser.



mode:
BEHIND

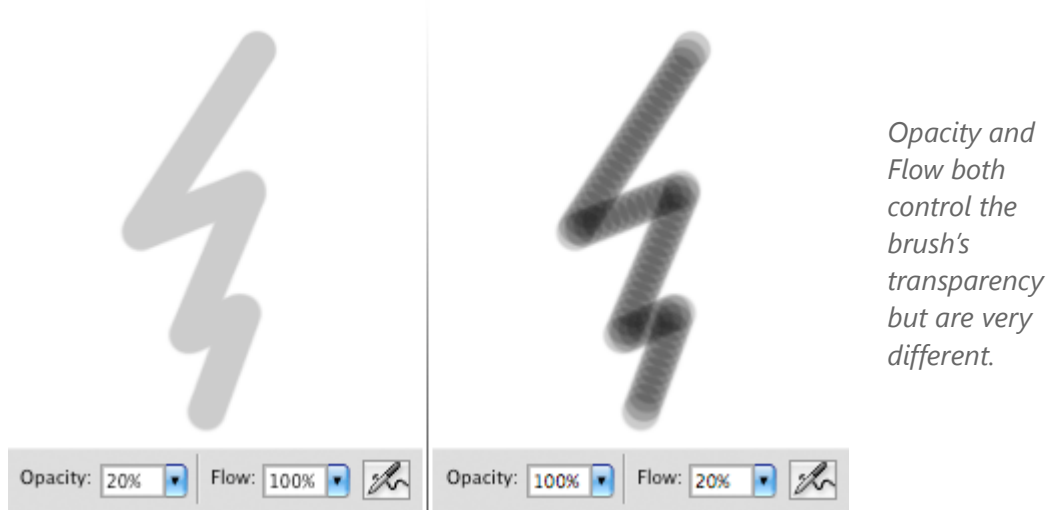


mode:
CLEAR

Opacity, Flow and Airbrush

These three settings work in unison to determine the amount of paint laid on the canvas. The opacity setting is the master control: it sets the maximum amount that can be painted with each stroke, mouse down to mouse up, regardless of any other setting.

Flow, on the other hand, sets the amount of paint applied to an area every time the brush moves. So, if your Flow setting is set to 20%, and you click one area of the layer, only 20% will be painted. However, if you move the mouse back and forth over an area with the same setting, the paint will build up incrementally by 20%.



Finally, the Airbrush setting allows you to add paint based on time instead of movement; by simply holding the mouse down in one area, you multiply the brush's effect. You can quickly set the Opacity of a brush using the number keys (5 is 50%, 65 is 65%). By holding Shift while inputting the numbers, you can control the brush's Fill setting. Note: if the Airbrush setting is on, then these two shortcuts are reversed.

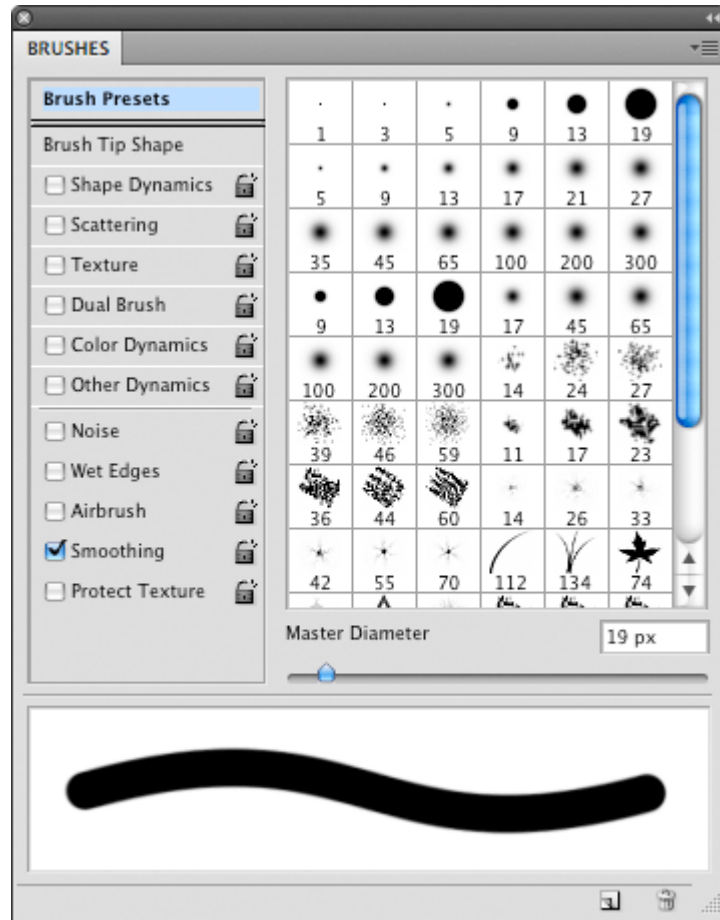
Advanced Settings

On the Brushes palette (F5) are dozens of settings that control the way the brush paints, from shape and size to flow and scatter. Understanding how to use these options is the key to creating wonderful brushes.

Brush Presets

The Brush Presets menu lists all of the currently available brushes. While some of the presets simply change the shape of the brush, others have advanced settings.

Photoshop has a number of brush libraries in addition to the defaults that can be easily appended to the current list of presets. These presets are accessible in the flyout menus located on the Brushes Palette and in the Brush drop-down menu in the toolbar. Photoshop provides a dozen or so libraries, including Dry Media, Wet Media, Natural and Calligraphic but you can load a custom library by choosing "Load Brushes."

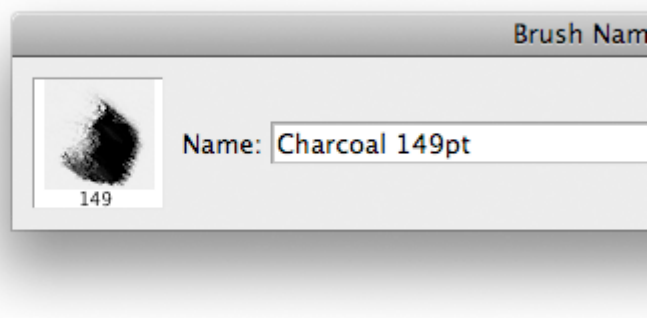
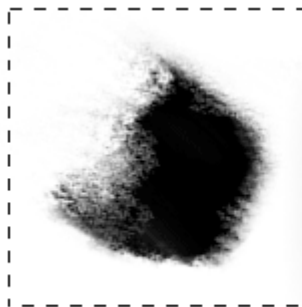


The brushes in the Brush Presets list are not just brush shapes: some also have advanced settings.

If you've created a brush that you would like to save as your own custom preset, you can do so by clicking the "Create New Brush" button at the bottom of the palette. This will add the brush to your preset menu; but if the menu is reset, the brush will be lost. Luckily, Photoshop allows you to export a custom library so that you never lose your favorite brushes. Simply choose "Save Brushes" from the fly-out menu, and then you can export an ABR file containing all of the brushes currently in the Brush Presets menu.

You can customize even further by creating your own brush shape. To do so, start by selecting the area you'd like to create the brush sample from (or select the layer you'd like to use). Then, select Edit → Create Brush Preset. Name it and click OK. A new brush preset will be added to the menu.

Creating a custom brush shape is the first step to creating a completely unique brush.



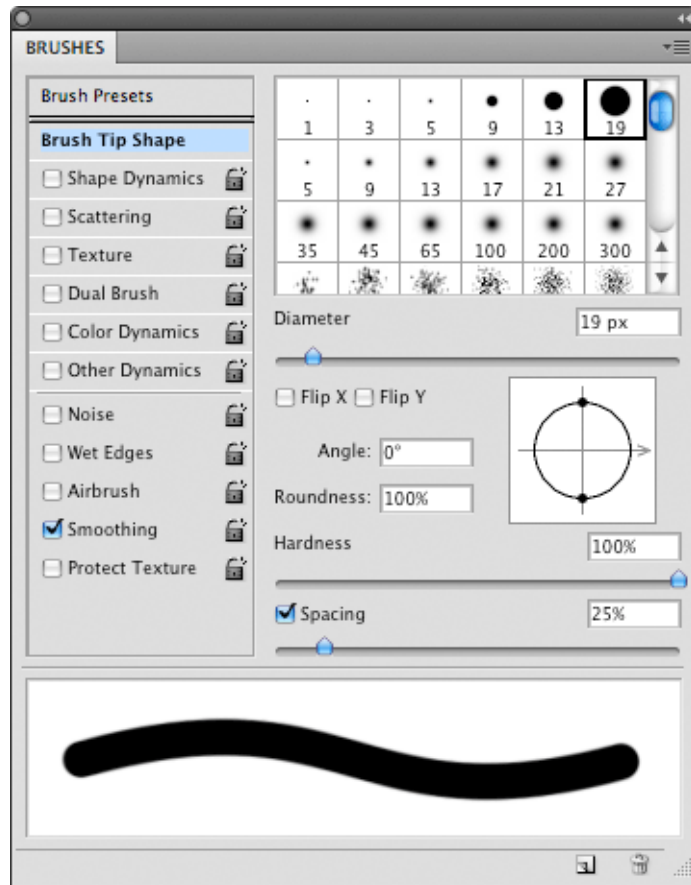
Brush Tip Shape

This group allows you to control the primary shape of the brush. Many of these settings, which are outlined above, are also found in the Brushes toolbar, but here we also have options for flipping, rotation, roundness and spacing. Rotation, Flip X and Flip Y modify the orientation of the brush. Setting Roundness to lower than 100%

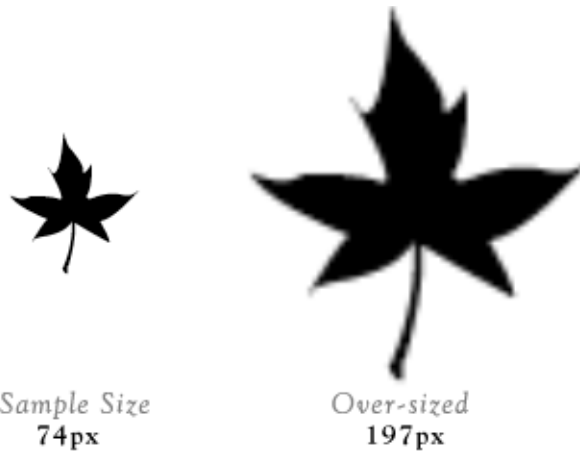
squishes the brush along its original x-axis; this can be used to easily create a calligraphic brush. You can also control the values by dragging the arrow and control points on the image to the right.

Photoshop scales brushes by interpolating them up or down; no vector brushes are available. Therefore, some brushes become gritty or pixelated if scaled too big. To quickly return a brush to its original size, click the "Use Sample Size" button.

The final setting in this group is Spacing, which determines how often the brush is sampled onto the layer. Lower values place the samples close together, and higher values space them farther apart. Spacing not only changes the stroke's appearance but can drastically affect Photoshop's performance. Setting it to 1%



The Brush Tip Shape menu controls the primary shape of the brush.



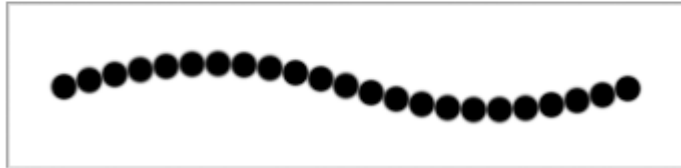
Over-sizing a brush can cause unwanted pixellation. This can be remedied with the Use Sample Size button.

can produce smoother edges, but a large or complex brush can seriously bog down Photoshop. If performance is an issue, keep this setting as high as possible. Spacing can also be turned off using the check box next to its name. This causes the brush to sample with inconsistent spacing based on the speed of your movements.

SPACING: 1%



SPACING: 100%



Spacing greatly affects the smoothness of your brush but can also impact rendering speed.

Brush Control Methods

A number of the settings in the Brushes palette allow you to set a method for controlling values. They include Off, Fade, Pen Pressure, Pen Tilt, Stylus Wheel, Rotation, Initial Direction and Direction. Some of these settings require a tablet, such as a Wacom. If you don't have a tablet, or if the method is not available with your particular stylus, Photoshop will display an error icon to notify you.

Off

Control is completely negated with the Off setting, which means that values will remain consistent throughout the stroke of the brush.

CONTROL: OFF



Without a control set, each sample of the brush remains consistent.

Fade

The Fade control allows you to specify the number of steps over which the setting will incrementally decrease until it reaches its minimum. So, by default, setting the Size control to Fade with 10 steps will cause the brush to decrease its size by 10% each step until the brush reaches 0. This can be used with the Size setting to create individual strands of hair. While many of the settings allow you to specify the fade's minimum percentage, some use a preset amount. For example, setting steps for the Angle Fade determines how many steps will be used to rotate the brush 360°.

SIZE CONTROL: FADE, 300 STEPS



The Fade Control incrementally decreases values until the minimum is reached.

Pen Pressure

Pen Pressure is an extremely useful setting but requires a pressure-sensitive tablet device. It determines values based on how hard you press the pen to the pad. This often makes for intuitive painting, especially when used on size and opacity settings.

SIZE CONTROL: PEN PRESSURE



Pen Pressure requires a tablet device and determines values based on how hard the stylus is pressed to the pad.

Pen Tilt

The Pen Tilt setting changes values based on the angle of the pen to the tablet. When the pen is perfectly perpendicular to the tablet, the variance is set to 0%. As you tilt the pen, the values increase. This setting is especially helpful for controlling

the angle of the brush, because it also takes into consideration the direction in which the pen is pointing on the tablet. So, holding the pen at an angle and pointing it to the left of the tablet will point the brush to the left.

Stylus Wheel

If your stylus is equipped with a Stylus Wheel, you can use it to control variance on the fly by rotating it. This may be helpful for quickly changing settings between strokes, although using it to change values during a stroke is difficult.

Rotation

This is another setting that requires a special type of stylus. If your stylus supports Rotation, you can simply rotate the stylus to control values. This is probably best used with the angle setting.

ANGLE CONTROL: OFF



ANGLE CONTROL: PEN TILT, POINTING RIGHT



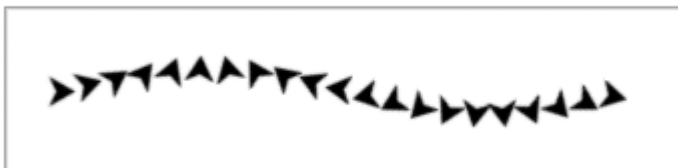
By setting the Angle Control to Pen Tilt, you can match the brush tip's rotation to your hand's rotation.

SIZE CONTROL: STYLUS WHEEL



Stylus Wheel

ANGLE CONTROL: ROTATION



Rotation

Initial Direction

When using the Initial Direction setting, the brush will not immediately start applying paint. Photoshop waits to see in which direction you move the brush and then rotates the brush according to the angle.

Direction

The Direction setting can be particularly useful for painting things like grass along a contour, because it rotates based on the direction your brush has traveled since the last step.

Shape Dynamics

Now that you have set a basic shape and size, you can add some variance using Shape Dynamics. Here you'll see three different types of jitters, which control the amount of variation allowed for size, angle and roundness. Setting any of these options to above 0% will cause the brush to

ANGLE CONTROL: DIRECTION



The Direction control rotates your brush so that it naturally follows the curve of the stroke.

ANGLE CONTROL: INITIAL DIRECTION



The first movement you make using the brush determines the angle when using the Initial Direction control.

SIZE JITTER: 100%



ANGLE JITTER: 100%



ROUNDNESS JITTER: 100%



The Shape Dynamics' jitter controls can be used to add variation to the brush shape.

sample at random values within the range set by the percentage (e.g. setting the Angle Jitter to 50% will limit the brush's rotation to 180°).

Scattering

The Scattering menu allows you to vary where each sample of the brush is placed and how many samples are placed per step. Three sliders are here for you to control: Scatter, Count and Count Jitter.

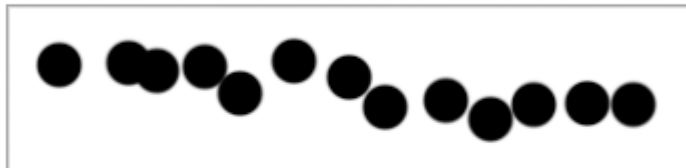
The Scatter setting sets a percentage for how far off the origin the sample is allowed to travel. By default, this controls the variance only along the y-axis, but by clicking the "Both Axes" check box, you set the same value for the x-axis.

Count and Count Jitter work together to determine how many samples are generated in every step. Count dictates the maximum number of samples allowed, while Count Jitter randomly chooses a number in that range to sample. If the Scatter setting is not set to above 0%, then the Count setting will place the brush on top of itself, which can create a "heavy" brush with jagged edges.

SCATTER: 150%



SCATTER: 150%, BOTH AXES



SCATTER: 175%, COUNT: 3



SCATTER: 175%, COUNT: 3, COUNT JITTER: 100%



Scattering can add a lively randomness to a stroke.

Texture

Adding a texture to your brush can give a wonderful sense of depth. Photoshop allows you to apply any of your Texture presets to the brush. You can then modify the scale or invert it. The Mode drop-down menu provides a list of blending modes that determine how the texture mixes with the current values of the brush. Although most of these blending modes will look familiar to you, they function a little differently here. For example, you would think that setting the Mode to Multiply on a brush that is completely black wouldn't have any effect. However, Photoshop compensates by reducing the original values of the brush so that the texture is visible.

TEXTURE MODE: DARKEN



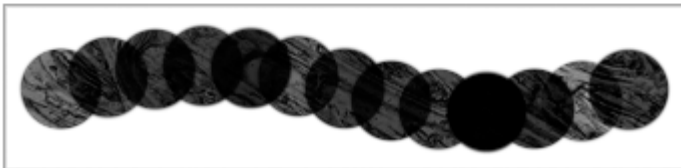
TEXTURE MODE: DARKEN, DEPTH: 50%



TEXTURE EACH TIP



TEXTURE EACH TIP, DEPTH JITTER: 100%



Using a texture adds tactility and depth to each stroke.

At first, the Depth setting seems to work by setting the opacity of the texture. But what it really does is ramp the values of the texture from their original grayscale values (at 100%) to completely white (0%). This allows for more dramatic results than you would get by simply reducing the texture's opacity.

This menu also has a feature, called Texture Each Tip, that allows you to control the texture of every brush sample. Checking this option turns a couple of other sliders on that set the Minimum Depth and

Depth Jitter. Altering these values gives each sample a random depth within the set range.

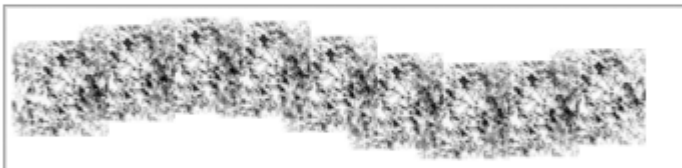
Dual Brush

Combining two brushes using the Dual Brush option opens the door to some fantastic effects that you could never create with a single brush. As the name implies, this setting uses two different brush shapes to create the final sample. The primary brush is basically used as the mask that the dual brush is contained within. The Dual Brush menu has a few settings for the second brush that work in the same manner as the ones for the primary brush. The differences you set in Shape, Spacing, Scattering, Count and Mode make for a more dynamic and naturally random brush stroke.

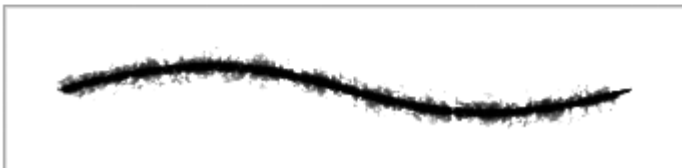
PRIMARY BRUSH



SECONDARY BRUSH



DUAL BRUSH



Combining brush shapes creates unique effects that you cannot achieve otherwise.

Color Dynamics

The Color Dynamics menu helps you inject some color variation into your brush strokes. You can control the colors by using the Foreground/Background Jitter, or you can allow Photoshop to randomly select values using the Hue, Saturation and Brightness Jitters.

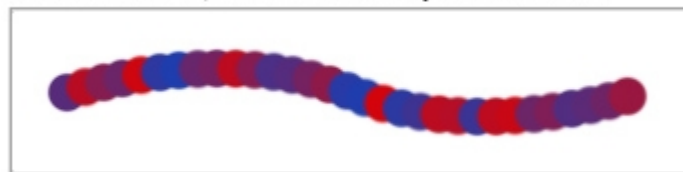
The Foreground / Background Jitter controls how much of the background color is allowed to be sampled into the brush.

Note that the background color is added to (not substituted

for) the foreground color. This means that if your foreground color is red and your background color is blue, the intermediary samples will be a purple hue.

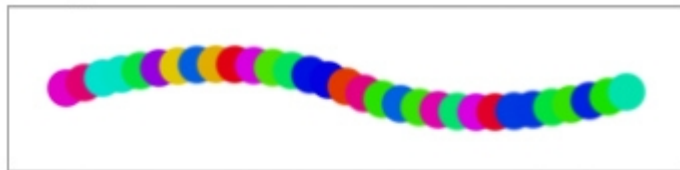
The Hue, Saturation and Brightness Jitters determine the maximum amount of variance allowed based on the foreground color's values for each. So, if your foreground color has a saturation or brightness value of 0, then your brush strokes will be completely grayscale. At the other extreme, setting a foreground color to 100% brightness and saturation will make every possible color available to use.

FOREGROUND/BACKGROUND JITTER: 100%

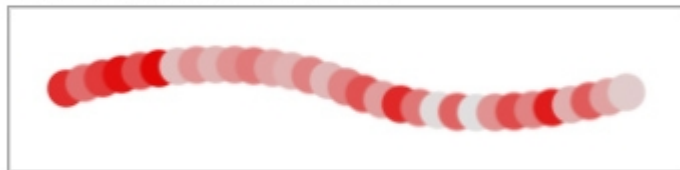


The Foreground/Background Jitter randomly blends two colors.

HUE JITTER: 100%



SATURATION JITTER: 100%



BRIGHTNESS JITTER: 100%



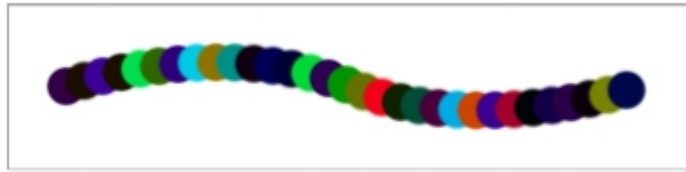
Hue, Saturation and Brightness Jitters can be used to add variation to the foreground color's properties.

In addition to the Jitter settings is a Purity slider. This sets how pure the saturation is for each sample. If set to 0%, it does nothing; if moved to 100%, it limits the Saturation value for each sample to 100%. However, don't mistake this for an overriding setting for saturation; it sets only thresholds for it. So, setting it to -50% ensures that saturation values never go above 50%, and a setting of -100% completely removes all saturation.

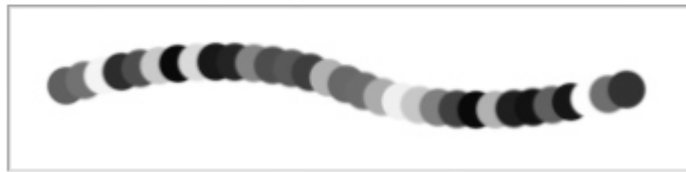
Other Dynamics

With the Other Dynamics menu, you can jitter and set controls to vary the brush's opacity and flow. Both of these jitters depend on the brush's current settings in the properties bar. They don't allow the brush to gain opacity; they only determine how much lower it can go. The pen pressure control is an intuitive match for either of these settings.

HUE, SATURATION & BRIGHTNESS JITTERS: 100%;
PURITY: +100%



HUE, SATURATION & BRIGHTNESS JITTERS: 100%;
PURITY: -100%



The Purity slider sets a threshold for each brush sample's saturation level.

OPACITY JITTER: 100%



FLOW JITTER: 100%



OPACITY AND FLOW JITTER: 100%



Opacity and Flow Jitters both change the transparency of each brush tip shape, but the Flow Jitter allows the samples to compound.

Other Settings

Noise

This generates random noise within the gray values of your brush shape.

NOISE



Wet Edges

This decreases the interior values of your brush, while leaving the edges at full opacity. In doing so, the brush creates an effect similar to watercolor, with its “wet” edges.

WET EDGES



Airbrush

This allows paint to build up incrementally based on the Flow setting and limited by the Opacity setting (see Opacity, Flow and Airbrush above).

Smoothing

This setting smoothens the curves of the stroke to prevent polygonal curvatures. Turning this off might help if your brush is rendering slowly.

Protect Texture

This ensures that the same texture is used for every brush with a texture.

Other Palette Options

Lock Setting

Next to each menu name in the Brushes Palette is a padlock icon. This allows you to lock settings so that when you switch to a different brush preset, the settings from

that menu carry over to the new preset. This is handy when you need a similar effect but don't want to rebuild it with a new brush shape.

Resetting

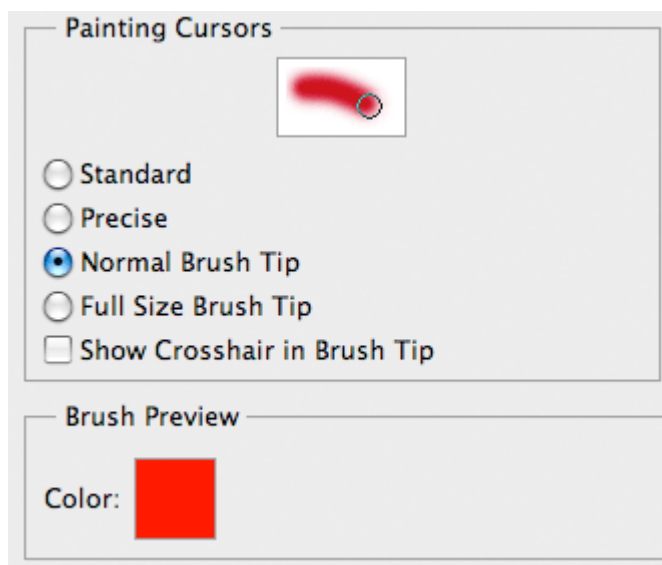
The Brushes Palette has two different ways to reset controls in its flyout menu: "Clear Brush Controls" and "Reset All Locked Settings." Clear Brush Controls turns off all controls except for Smoothing, but keeps the locked settings locked. Reset All Locked Settings also turns off all controls but unlocks everything.

Quick Tips

Learning the technical aspects of the digital brush is only the first step to becoming a master brush artist. A bit of talent mixed in with neverending practice are also required. Here are some quick tips to help you along the way.

Changing the Cursor

If the normal cursor isn't to your liking, you can change it. In Photoshop's Preferences menu (Command/Control + K) is a section called Cursors (Command/Control + 5). Here you have the option to change the "Painting Cursor" from Normal Brush Tip to Standard, Precise or Full-Size Brush Tip. You can also create a hybrid cursor by using the Normal or Full-Size Brush Tip in conjunction with the "Show Crosshair in Brush Tip" option.



Changing the cursor might give you better control of the brush.

Below the Paint Cursors section is an option for the Brush Preview color. This is the color that is displayed when modifying the brush shape with the on-canvas drag shortcuts: Control + Option + Drag (Alt + Right-click + Drag) to change the diameter, and Control + Option + Command + Drag (Control + Alt + Right-click + Drag) to change the hardness.

Painting Straight Lines

Painting a freehand straight line is nearly impossible. Luckily, Photoshop has some features to help with this. By holding the Shift key while painting, your stroke will be constrained to 45° angles. Painting straight lines that aren't locked to 45° angles is just as easy: click to start a line, and then Shift-click at another point, and you'll get a perfectly straight line between the two points.

Clicking to start a line and then holding Shift and clicking somewhere else will paint a perfectly straight line between the two points.



Painting Perfect Curves

Photoshop's Paths palette allows you to stroke a path using the current brush's settings. This can be extremely helpful if you have a tricky curve or complex shape to paint.



Stroking a path with your brush gives you perfect control over the stroke's curvatures.

First, set up your brush. Then, select the path you wish to stroke; and in the Paths palette, Option-click the Stroke path with the brush button. This will present you with a dialog box that allows you to set the tool to stroke with. You can even use the Simulate Pressure button to activate any control methods you have set on your brush.

Other “Painting” Tools

Remember that the Brush Tool is not the only tool that uses brush settings. By customizing other tools, you can create some very impressive effects. The other “Painting” tools include the following: Pencil, Eraser, Background Eraser, Clone Stamp, Pattern Stamp, Healing Brush, History Brush, Art History Brush, Smudge, Blur, Sharpen, Dodge, Burn, Sponge, Color Replacement and Quick Selection.

Keyboard Shortcuts

B	Brush tool
Shift + B	Rotate through Brush tools (i.e. Brush, Pencil and Color Replacement tools)
F5	Show or hide Brushes palette

Brush Settings

[Decrease brush diameter
]	Increase brush diameter
Shift + [Decrease brush hardness by 25%
Shift +]	Increase brush hardness by 25%
Digit combination (with airbrush off)	Set the brush's opacity
Shift + Digit combination (with airbrush off)	Set the brush's fill
Digit combination (with airbrush on)	Set the brush's fill
Shift + Digit combination (with airbrush on)	Set the brush's opacity
Option + Shift + "+" (Alt + Shift + "+")	Next blending mode
Option + Shift + "-" (Alt + Shift + "-")	Previous blending mode
“;”	Previous brush
“.”	Next brush
Shift + “;”	First brush
Shift + “.”	Last brush
Caps lock	Toggles between Precise and Normal cursors
Control + Click (Right-click) inside canvas	Bring up the quick brush menu
Control + Shift + Click (Shift + Right-click) inside canvas	Brush blending mode menu
Control + Option + Drag (Alt + Right-click drag) inside canvas	Change the brush's diameter

Control + Option + Command + Drag (Control + Alt + Right-click drag) inside canvas	Change the brush's hardness
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Painting

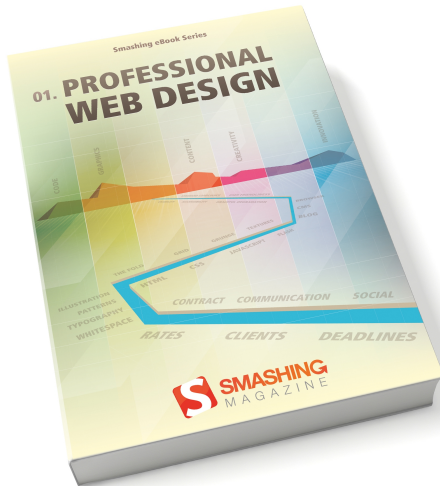
Shift + Drag	Constrain the brush to 45°
Click, move cursor, then Shift + Click	Draw a straight line from the first click to the second click

Helper Tools

Option (Alt)	Temporarily switch to Eyedropper tool
Shift + Option (Shift + Alt)	Temporarily switch to Color Sampler tool
Command (Control)	Temporarily switch to Move tool
Command + Option (Control + Alt)	Duplicate and Drag layer
Space	Temporarily switch to Hand tool

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