

BIPC Digital Imaging Study Group
Assignment 2005-1 , January 13, 2005 - Don Cooper
Subject: Using the Photoshop CS Pen Tool

Using the Photoshop CS Pen Tool

It seems that those who know how to use the Pen Tool love it, and the rest of us dread it. As one of the latter, I have attempted to learn and present in this paper a fairly clear approach to use of the tool.

Synopsis

We are most interested in using the Pen Tool to make selections. The resulting paths are smooth; no “jaggies” as can result from the Lasso Tool.

Definitions:

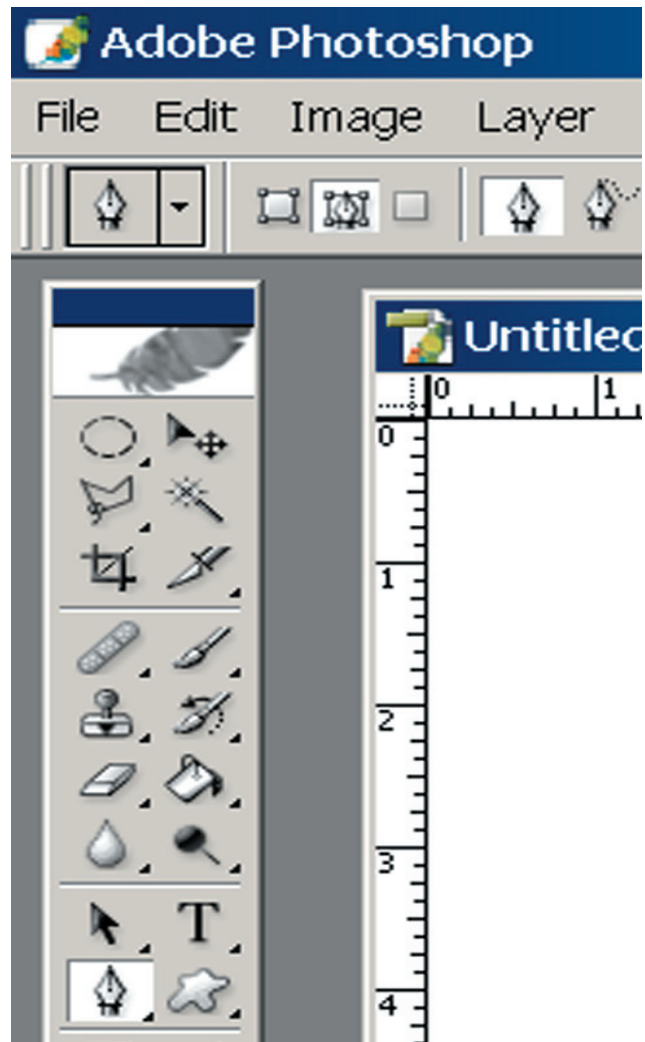
The Pen Tool is used to draw Vector Shapes. These are mathematically defined lines and curves.

The outline of a shape is called a Path.

To draw straight lines (segments) with the Pen tool:

1. Select the Pen tool (see screenshot opposite).
2. On the Options bar, select Paths (see screenshot).
3. Click to set the first anchor point at the beginning of the line.
4. Click at the end of the desired line. The line and a second anchor point will appear.
5. Ctrl-click anywhere to release the mouse.
6. Ctrl-click on the line to select it.
7. Still holding down the Ctrl key, shorten the line, lengthen it, rotate it and move it.

Go ahead and practise this much until, hopefully, you become comfortable with it.



Drawing curves with the Pen tool

You create curves by dragging the Pen tool in the direction you want the curve to go. Keep these guidelines in mind when drawing curves:

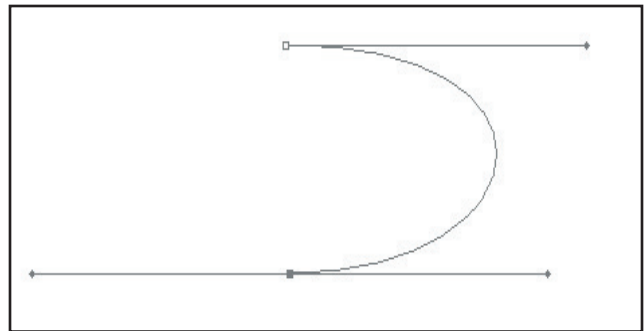
Always drag the first direction point in the direction of the bump of the curve, and drag the second direction point in the opposite direction to create a single curve. Dragging both direction points in the same direction creates an “S” curve.

When drawing a series of smooth curves, draw one curve at a time, placing anchor points at the beginning and end of each curve, not at the tip of the curve.

To draw a curve:

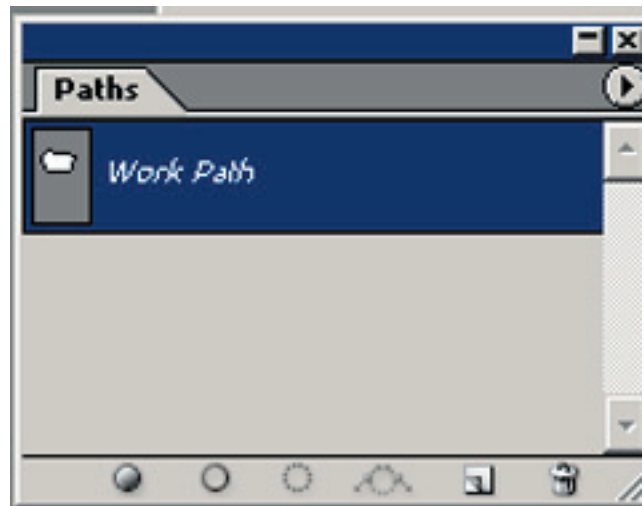
1. Position the pointer where you want the curve to begin, and hold down the mouse button. The first anchor point appears, and the pointer changes to an arrowhead.
2. Drag in the direction you want the curve segment to be drawn. As you drag, the pointer leads one of two direction points. Release the mouse button once you have positioned the first direction point.
3. Position the pointer where you want the curve segment to end, and drag in the opposite direction to complete the segment.
4. To release the mouse, ctrl-click anywhere.
5. Select the curve path by ctrl-clicking on it.
6. Ctrl-click on the right hand end of the first direction line and play with it to change the shape of the curve.
7. Do likewise with the left-hand end of the second direction line.

Now practise this for a while.



To Make a Path into a Selection:

1. In the Paths palette, click on the third icon from the left, *Load Path as a selection*, and the path becomes a selection.



Load path as a selection

Now for an Exercise:

We will attempt to:

1. Create a path around the numeric character 5.
2. Convert the path to a selection.

NOTE: When you have finished drawing a curve and want the next anchor point to be for a straight line, hold down the Alt key.

3. Move the selection.
4. Fill the selection with a new color.

Conclusion:

Before I began preparing for this exercise, I wasn't sure how to draw a straight line with the Pen Tool. It appears that in Photoshop CS it may have been simplified somewhat. Now I am almost comfortable with the process of creating a work path consisting of straight lines and curves and then converting the work path to a selection.

I plan to incorporate this into my tool kit from here on.



Beginning Figure



Figure after creating work path, selecting and filling