

Info

Module	Layer masks in Photoshop
Author	Tatyana Yanush
E-Mail	tyanush@delfi-software.com.ua
Time	
Modul comment	

Themes

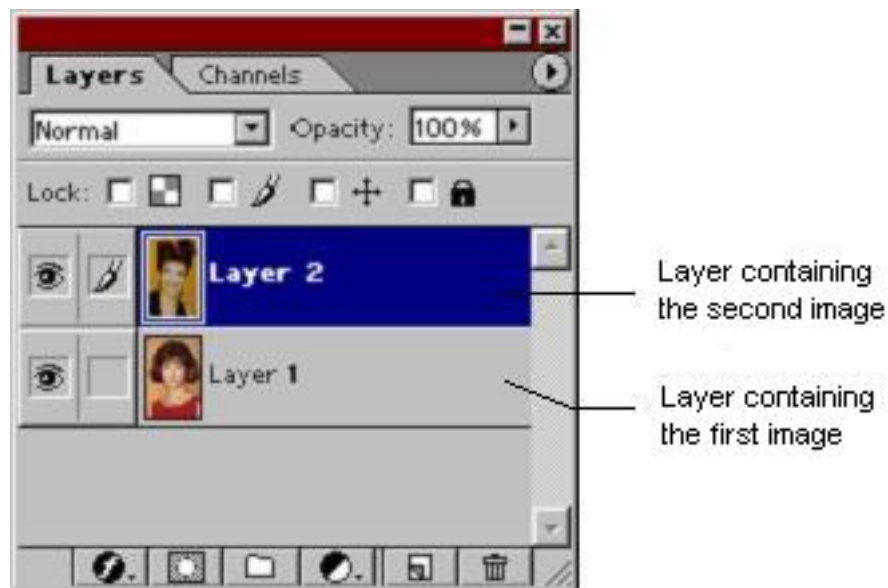
Layer masks

Layer masks make it easy to combine images placed on different layers. Layer mask defines the transparency level of particular areas. At the same time, no change is made to the pixels themselves.

To create a new layer mask, just click *Add Layer Mask* on *Layers* palette. A white rectangle will appear next to the layer thumbnail. Layer mask is a grayscale image. What you paint in black will be hidden, what you paint in white will show, and what you paint in gray shades will show in various levels of transparency.

Let's perform a simple collage using layer masks.

A montage will require at least two photos (see pic.1).



Pic.1. Creating collage

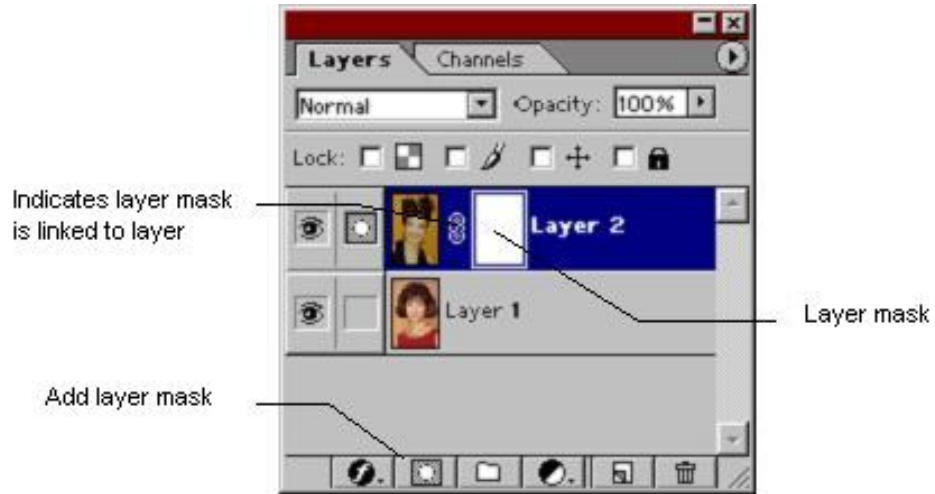
Let's replace the face of the first girl with the face of the second girl. The top layer covers the bottom one. As the images are of the same size, only the top layer is visible. To combine the face from the top layer with everything else from the bottom layer, everything but face on the top layer is to be made transparent.

This can be done in several ways. For example, using the Eraser Tool to remove all the areas on the top layer image omitting the face. However, in this case all the pixels will be lost, so if anything goes wrong we'll have to start over. Besides, it will be rather difficult to make the result look good. That is why layer masks are recommended.

A layer mask doesn't remove a single pixel on the layer, it just makes some of them temporary transparent.

Painting in black makes the image transparent while painting in white makes it opaque. The mask can be modified and corrected at any time.

To create mask on the top layer, click *Add Layer Mask* at the bottom of the *Layers* palette. The mask is displayed next to the layer thumbnail and automatically linked to it (this is indicated by the link icon) (see pic.2).



Pic.2. Adding a layer mask

By default, the layer mask is painted white, i.e. it is absolutely opaque. Thus, no changes can be seen.

Layer mask is editable when active. The mask sign next to the eye indicates that layer mask is selected for editing.

Brush sign instead of the mask indicates that the layer itself is selected.

You can switch to the layer mask by clicking over it.

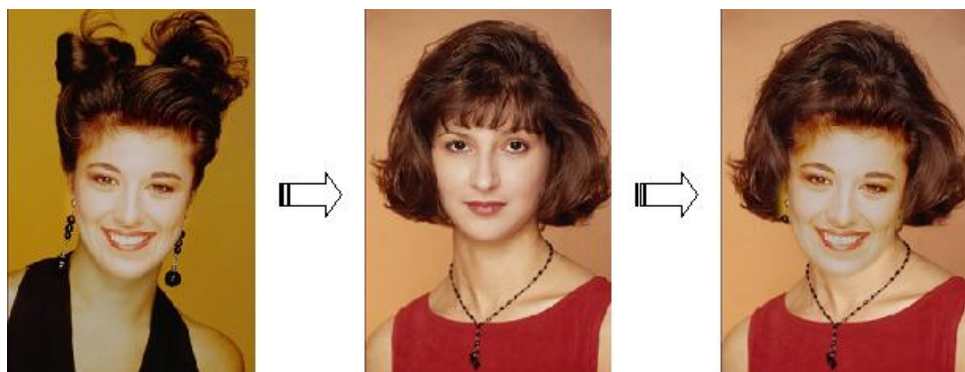
Now fill the mask with black to make it completely transparent. Ctrl+Backspace fills the entire layer with the foreground color (in this case the foreground color must be black).

Now use brush to configure the mask. Paint over the area that must be seen. It is the face in this example.

Note: in Photoshop 6.0 the default foreground color for layer masks is white and the background color is black. It was the opposite in versions 5.0 and 5.5. Erasing an area made it opaque. In later versions work with layer masks became more natural.

If the painted area happened to be too large, it is easy to correct with the help of Eraser tool.

See the girl's face change in pic. 3.



Pic.3. Creating collage with the help of layer mask

The following operations will make the whole working process easier:


- to view the content of a layer mask, Alt-click over its thumbnail. To hide the mask, repeat this action;
- to disable layer mask, Shift-click over its thumbnail. Repeated click will enable the mask. (see pic.4);



Pic.4. Disable layer mask

- to create a layer mask, Ctrl-click over the layer thumbnail;
- to load selection, Ctrl-click over the layer mask thumbnail;
- a layer mask is linked to the layer image, however, this link may be easily removed by clicking over the link icon. The layer image unlinked from its mask can be moved independently as well as the mask itself. Besides that, right click over the layer mask thumbnail brings up a menu containing the following items:
 - Set Selection To Layer Mask;
 - Add Layer Mask To Selection;
 - Subtract Layer Mask From Selection;
 - Intersect Layer Mask With Selection;
 - Layer Mask Options... calls the dialog to set color and transparency for the layer mask;
 - Discard Layer Mask;
 - Apply Layer Mask - transparent (i.e. black) areas on the mask are deleted;
 - Disable Layer Mask.

Layer mask helps to blend images using Gradient tool. For example, there are two photos of a forest road. One of them shows autumn, the other one displays summer. With Photoshop it is easy to blend them.

First of all, use clipboard to copy each image to a separate layer. Then click Add Layer Mask on the Layers palette to create a mask on the top layer. Staying on the mask, press G to select Gradient tool ( in the toolbox). Make sure it is a linear black to white gradient.

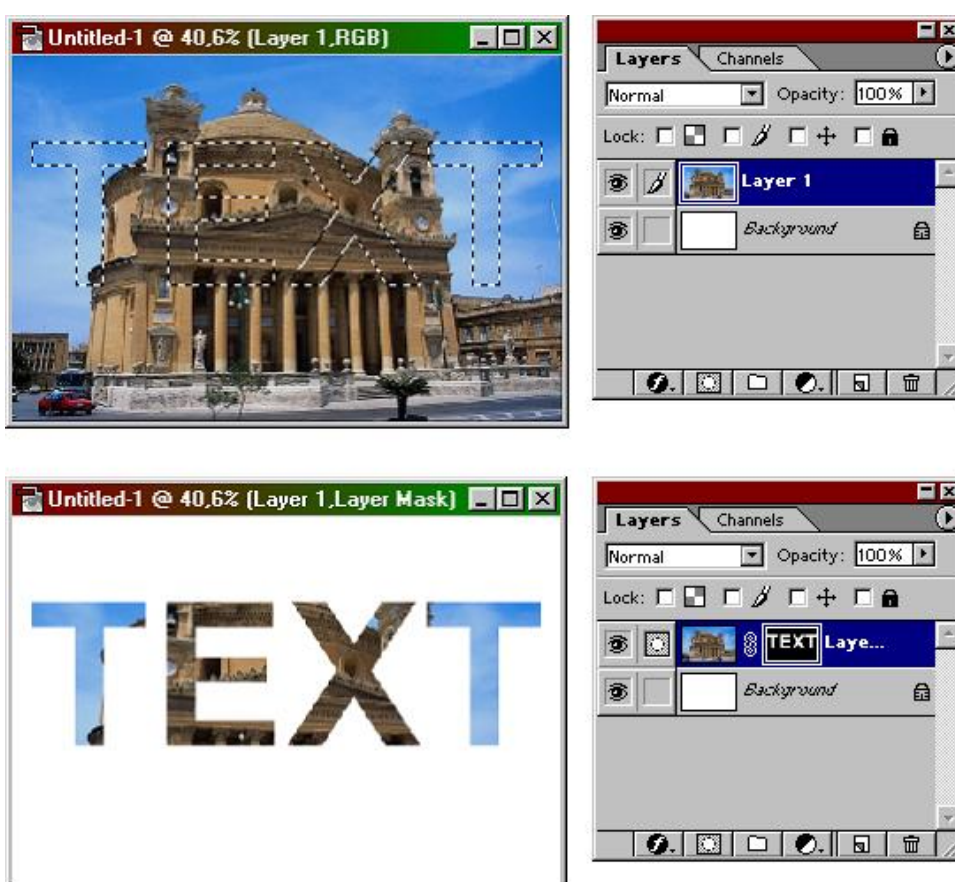
Now hold the Shift key to draw an ideally straight vertical line starting from about one third of the image from below (see pic.5).



Рис.5. Create gradient on layer mask

Note: A layer mask is only able to display shades of gray. When a colored gradient is used, the mask itself will still show a black to white gradient. Any drawing tools, filters, and selections can be applied on a layer mask. You can work with the mask as with regular grayscale image, and create masks of any complexity.

Layer masks also allow such a wide-spread effect as type filled with an image. Create a new empty document with clear white background and then copy a picture to a new layer. Select the Horizontal Type Mask Tool in the toolbox. Now type the desired text and click Add layer mask at the bottom of the Layers palette. Type will be filled with the image. (see pic.6).



Pic.6. Using layer mask to fill text with image

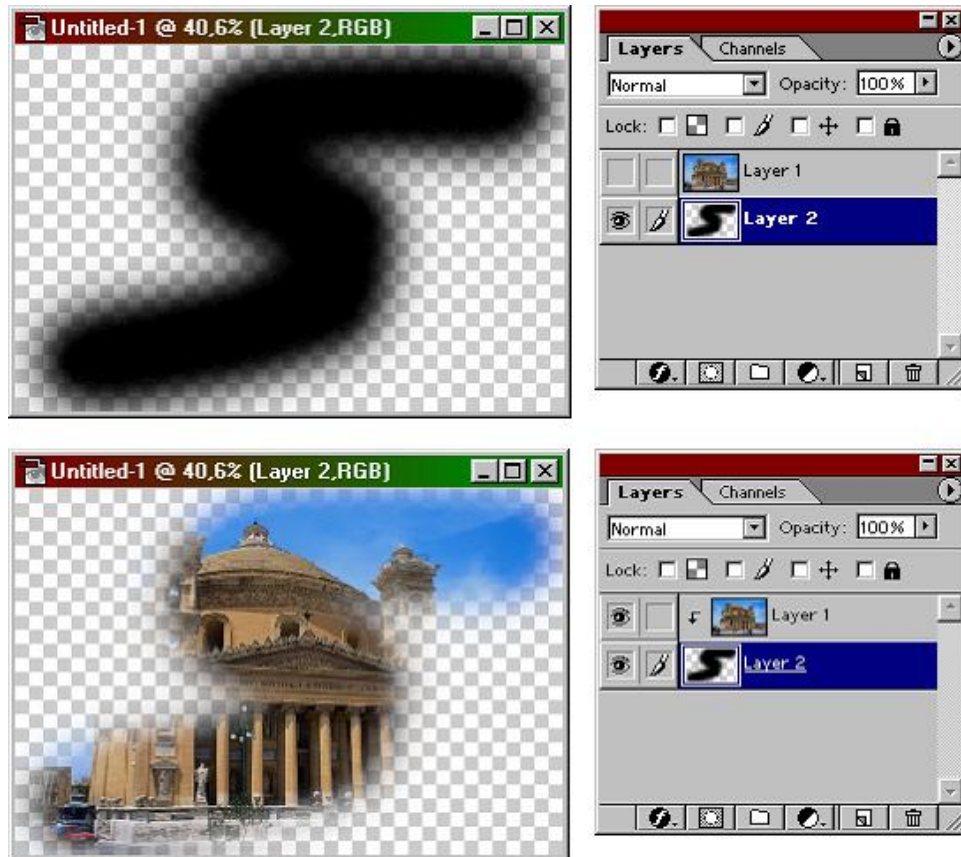
Creating clipping masks

There is another way to create transparent masks. It is uniting several layers into so called clipping mask. Transparent areas of bottom layer are converted to mask that covers all unnecessary parts of the image located on the top layer. If the bottom layer contains no transparent areas, the effect is impossible. The advantage of clipping masks is that *all* the overlying layers can be seen.

To create a clipping mask, at least two layers are required:

- copy a ClipArt picture to the clipboard;

- create a new document (*File | New*) with transparent background contents;
- create another layer (*Create New Layer* on *Layers* palette);
- insert picture from the clipboard (**Ctrl+V**);
- switch to the bottom transparent layer and paint any area with the brush tool;
- holding down the **Alt** key position the pointer over the line dividing two layers in the *Layers* palette (the pointer changes to two overlapping circles), and click (see pic.7).



Pic.7. Creating clipping masks


Note, that after a clipping mask is created, only the transparent areas of the bottom layer are visible. On the other hand, all the layers added to clipping mask will be visible according to the mask.

To remove a layer from a clipping mask, hold down **Alt**, position the pointer over the line separating two grouped layers in the *Layers* palette (the pointer changes to two overlapping circles), and click.

Creating a layer mask

Place two images on different layers of a Photoshop document. Switch to the top layer and create a layer mask. Paint an area of arbitrary shape on the mask.

 [Carrera.jpg](#)

 [stonehenge.tif](#)

The video clip below illustrates the implementation of basic aspects discussed in

the corresponding chapter of this tutorial.

Disabling a layer mask

Place two images on different layers of a Photoshop document. Switch to the top layer and create a layer mask. Paint an area of arbitrary shape on the mask. Disable the layer mask using the *Layers* palette menu. Enable the mask.

Remove the layer mask without applying the changes

Place two images on different layers of a Photoshop document. Switch to the top layer and create a layer mask. Paint an area of arbitrary shape on the mask. Delete the layer mask dragging it to the Trash button at the bottom of the *Layers* palette. Click *Discard* in the next dialog.

Remove the layer mask and make changes permanent

Place two images on different layers of a Photoshop document. Switch to the top layer and create a layer mask. Paint an area of arbitrary shape on the mask. Delete layer mask dragging it to the Trash button at the bottom of the *Layers* palette. Click *Apply* in the dialog window. Watch the effect.

Unlink a layer from its mask

Place two images on different layers of a Photoshop document. Switch to the top layer and create a layer mask. Paint an area of arbitrary shape on the mask. Unlink the layer from its mask clicking over the link icon in the *Layers* palette. Select the *Move tool* and move the layer mask. Undo the action pressing **Ctrl+Z**, and move the image. Watch the effect.

Using gradient tool on a layer mask

Place two images on different layers of a Photoshop document. Switch to the top layer and create a layer mask. Select the *Gradient* tool and draw a line on layer mask. Watch the effect. Experiment with different types of gradient on the layer mask.



The video clip below illustrates the implementation of basic aspects discussed in the corresponding chapter of this tutorial.

Creating text filled with image

Create a new document with white background. Place a picture on a new layer. Select the *Horizontal Type Mask Tool* in the toolbox. Click over the picture and

type the desired text. Click *Add layer mask* on the *Layers* palette. Watch the effect.



[Base_plate.tif](#)

The video clip below illustrates the implementation of basic aspects discussed in the corresponding chapter of this tutorial.

Applying clipping mask to create text filled with an image

Copy an image to the clipboard and create a new document with transparent background contents - *File* | *New* . Click *Create New Layer* on the *Layers* palette. Insert image from the clipboard - **Ctrl+V**. Switch to the bottom transparent layer, select the *Text* tool, and enter the desired text. **Alt**-click over the line separating layers on the *Layers* palette. Watch the effect.



[Base_plate.tif](#)

The video clip below illustrates the implementation of basic aspects discussed in the corresponding chapter of this tutorial.

Tests



Layer Masks in Photoshop

(Check up the knowledge in this theme)

1. How is a layer unlinked from its mask?

Question:

Answer:

- By clicking  at the bottom of the *Layers* palette
- By clicking  at the bottom of the *Layers* palette
- By clicking the link icon between the layer and mask thumbnails on the *Layers* palette
- By choosing *Disable Layer Mask* from the *Layer* menu

2. Which tools can be applied on a layer mask?

Question:

Answer:

- All Photoshop tools
- Drawing tools only
- Only *Brush* and *Gradient* tools
- All Photoshop tools except vector drawing tools

3. What does the layer mask define?

Question:

Answer:

- Transparency of the layer
- The areas available for editing
- The transparent areas
- Layer mask allows placing several images on the same layer

4. What happens when painting in black on a layer mask?

Question:

Answer:

- Painted areas become opaque on the layer
- Painted areas become transparent on the layer
- Image areas are deleted
- Nothing happens

Table of contents

Info	1
Themes	2
Layer masks.....	2
Creating clipping masks.....	6
Example: Creating a layer mask.....	7
Example: Disabling a layer mask	8
Example: Remove the layer mask without applying the changes.....	8
Example: Remove the layer mask and make changas permanent.....	8
Example: Unlink a layer from its mask.....	8
Example: Using gradient tool on a layer mask.....	8
Example: Creating text filled with image.....	8
Example: Applying clipping mask to create text filled with an image.....	9
Tests	10
Layer Masks in Photoshop.....	10