How to create shapes

With the shape tools in Adobe Photoshop Elements, you can draw perfect geometric shapes, regardless of your artistic ability or illustration experience. The first step to drawing shapes is to select one of the six basic shape tools. You can add shapes to any file you can open in Photoshop Elements.

In Photoshop Elements, shapes are vector graphics, which means they are made up of lines and curves instead of individual pixels. Vector graphics can be scaled to any size and printed at any resolution without losing detail or clarity. New shapes are created on their own shape layer, but a shape layer can hold more than one shape. The shape tools provide an easy way to create buttons, navigation bars, and other elements used on a web page.

Drawing basic shapes

The shape tools include the Rectangle, Rounded Rectangle, Ellipse, Polygon, Line, Custom Shape, and Shape Selection tools **(Figure 1)**. To activate the shape tools, open the Editor and press U or select a tool in the Tools palette. If necessary, press and hold the current shape tool in the Tools palette to choose a different shape tool.

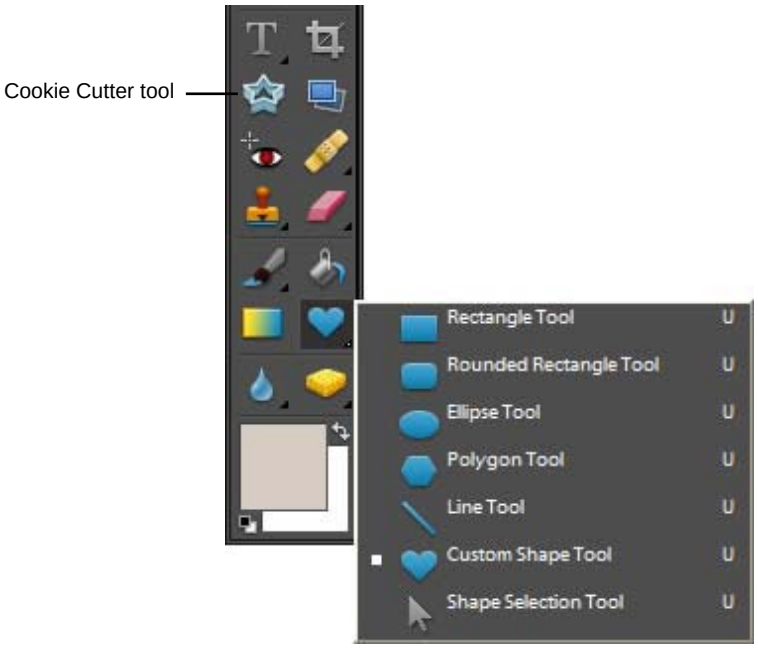

Figure 1 Shape tools

Shape Selection: Use the Shape Selection tool to select and move shapes. When using the Shape Selection tool, drag to move shapes, hold down Alt to copy the shape, or drag the selection handles to resize the shape. If you convert a shape to a bitmap element by simplifying the shape layer, the Shape Selection tool will no longer select the shape (use the Move tool instead).

Rectangle: Draws squares and other rectangles.

Rounded Rectangle: Draws rectangles with rounded corners.

Ellipse: Draws perfect circles and other ellipses.

Line: Draws perfectly straight lines and arrows.

Custom Shape: Draws a variety of objects, including borders, frames, animal shapes, music notes, and more.

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To draw a rectangle, square, or rounded rectangle:

1. Open the Editor in the Standard Edit workspace.
2. In the Tools palette, select the Rectangle tool or the Rounded Rectangle tool.

   Note: If the tool you want to select is not visible in the Tools palette, press and hold the current shape tool in the Tools palette, and then choose a tool from the list that appears.
3. In the options bar, open the Rectangle options and select options for the new shape **(Figure 2)**.

   Unconstrained: Lets you set the width and height by dragging to draw the shape.

   Square: Draws a perfect square.

   Fixed Size: Draws a rectangle at the exact size you type in the Width and Height boxes.

   Proportional: Draws a rectangle based on the ratio of the numbers you type in the Width and Height boxes.

   From Center: Draws a rectangle from the center of where you begin drawing (instead of from the upper-left corner).

   Snap To Pixels: Snaps edges of a rectangle to the pixel boundaries.
4. If drawing a rounded rectangle, select a radius for the corners of the rectangle **(Figure 3)**.
5. To choose a color from a list of color swatches, click the triangle in the Color menu in the options bar **(Figure 4)**.
6. Drag in your image to draw the selected shape (**Figure** 5).

   Note: New shapes are added to a new shape layer **(Figure 6)**.

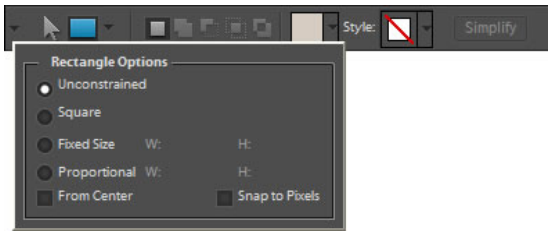

Figure 2 Rectangle options

Figure 3 Corner radius for rounded rectangle

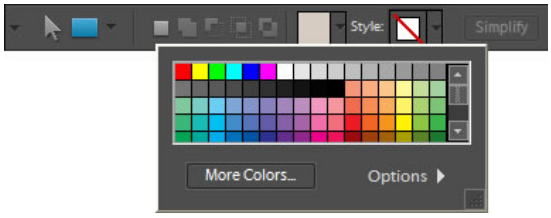

Figure 4 Color menu

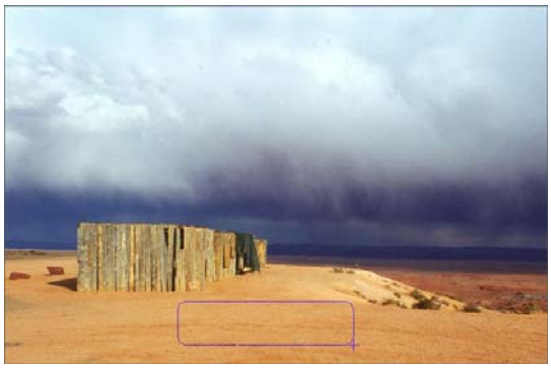

Figure 5 Drag to draw the shape

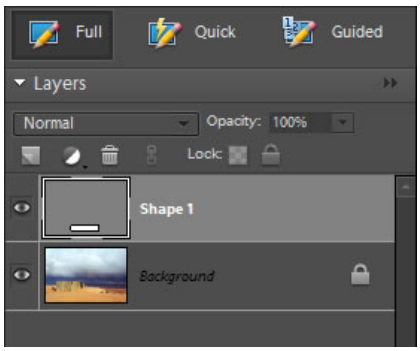

Figure 6 Shape layer

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To draw a circle or ellipse:

1. Open the Editor in the Standard Edit workspace.
2. In the Tools palette, select the Ellipse tool.

   Note: If the tool you want to select is not visible in the Tools palette, press and hold the current shape tool in the Tools palette, and then choose a tool from the list that appears.
3. In the options bar, open the Geometry options and select options for the ellipse **(Figure 7)**.

   Unconstrained: You set the size and radius by dragging to draw the ellipse.

   Circle: Draws a perfect circle.

   Fixed Size: Draws an ellipse at the exact size you type in the Width and Height boxes.

   Proportional: Draws an ellipse based on the ratio of the numbers you type in the Width and Height boxes.

   From Center: Draws the ellipse from the center of where you begin drawing (instead of from the upper-left part of the ellipse).
4. To choose a color from a list of color swatches, click the triangle in the Color menu in the options bar **(Figure 8)**.
5. Drag in your image to draw the ellipse (**Figure 9**).

   Note: New shapes are added to a new shape layer **(Figure 10)**.

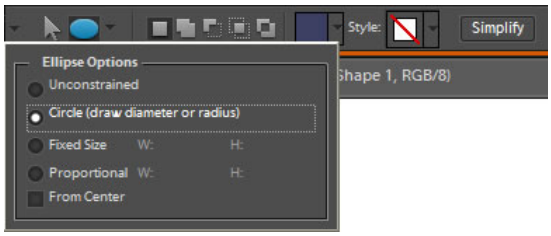

Figure 7 Ellipse options

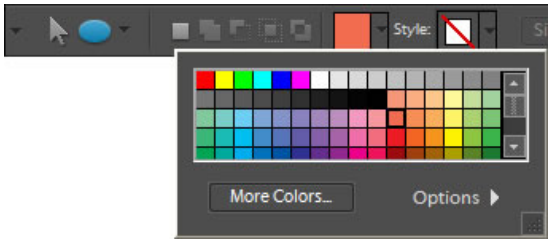

Figure 8 Color menu

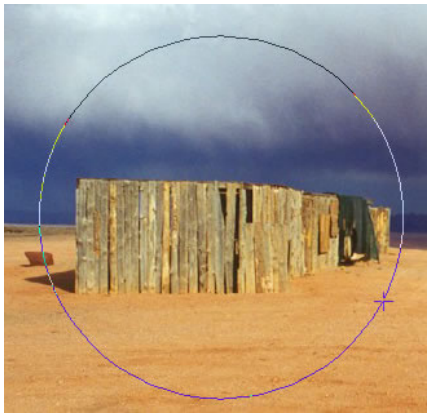

Figure 9 Drag to draw the ellipse

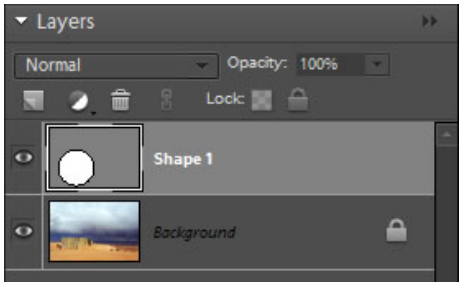

Figure 10 Shape layer

To draw a polygon or star:

1. Open the Editor in the Standard Edit workspace.
2. In the Tools palette, select the Polygon tool.

   Note: If the tool you want to select is not visible in the Tools palette, press and hold the current shape tool in the Tools palette, and then choose a tool from the list that appears.
3. In the options bar, open the Polygon options and select options for the polygon **(Figure 11)**.

   Radius: Specifies the distance from the center of the shape to the outer points of the shape.

   Smooth Corners: Draws rounded corners instead of sharp ones.

   Star: Draws a star instead of a polygon.

   Indent Sides By: Specifies a percentage by which to indent the sides of a star.

   Smooth Indents: Draws rounded indents instead of angled indents when drawing a star.
4. To choose a color from a list of color swatches, click the triangle in the Color menu in the options bar **(Figure 12)**.
5. Drag in your image to draw the shape (**Figure 13**).

   Note: New shapes are added to a new shape layer **(Figure 14)**.

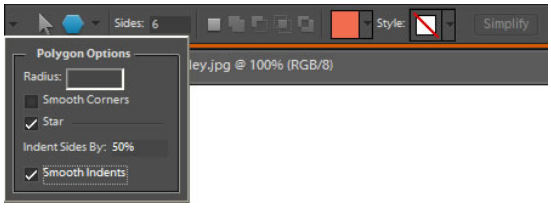

Figure 11 Polygon Options

Figure 12 Color menu

Figure 13 Drag to draw the polygon

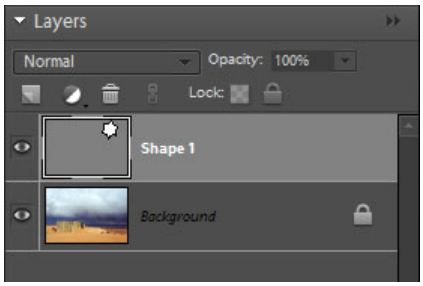

Figure 14 Shape layer

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To draw a line or arrow:

1. Open the Editor in the Standard Edit workspace.
2. In the Tools palette, select the Line tool.

   Note: If the tool you want to select is not visible in the Tools palette, press and hold the current shape tool in the Tools palette, and then choose a tool from the list that appears.
3. In the options bar, select a line weight and color **(Figure 15)**.
4. To draw an arrow, select arrowhead settings from the Arrowheads menu in the options bar **(Figure 16).**

   Start and *End:* Arrowheads can be added at either end (or both ends) of the line.

   Width and *Length:* Each dimension of the arrowhead is a percentage of the selected line weight.

   Concavity: Defines the amount of curvature on the widest part of the arrowhead, where the arrowhead meets the line.
5. Drag in your image to draw the line or arrow (**Figure 17**).

   Note: New shapes are added to a new shape layer **(Figure 18)**.

   You can also add arrows by using the Custom Shape tool.

Figure 15 Line weight and color

Figure 16 Arrowhead options

Figure 17 Drag to draw the arrow

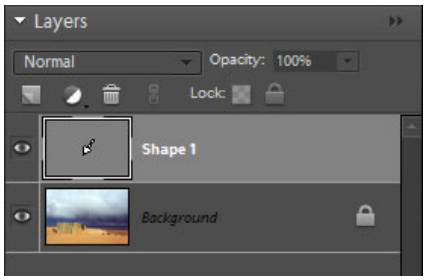

Figure 18 Shape layer

To add custom shapes:

1. Open the Editor in the Standard Edit workspace.
2. In the Tools palette, select the Custom Shape tool.

   Note: If the tool you want to select is not visible in the Tools palette, press and hold the current shape tool in the Tools palette, and then choose a tool from the list that appears.
3. In the options bar, open the Custom Shape picker and select a shape to draw **(Figure 19)**.

   If you don't see the shape you want, click the triangle in the upper-right corner of the window and select a new category of shapes **(Figure 20)**.
4. In the options bar, open the Custom Shape options and select options for the custom shape **(Figure 21)**.

   Unconstrained: Lets you set the width and height of a custom shape by dragging.

   Defined Proportions: Draws a custom shape based on its preset proportions.

   Defined Size: Draws a custom shape based on its preset size. Dragging will not resize the shape.

   Fixed Size: Draws a custom shape as a fixed shape based on the values you type in the Width and Height boxes.

   From Center: Draws a custom shape from the center of where you begin drawing (rather than from the upper-left part of the shape).
5. To choose a color from a list of color swatches, click the triangle in the Color menu in the options bar
6. Drag in your image to draw the selected shape.

   Note: New shapes are added to a new shape layer.

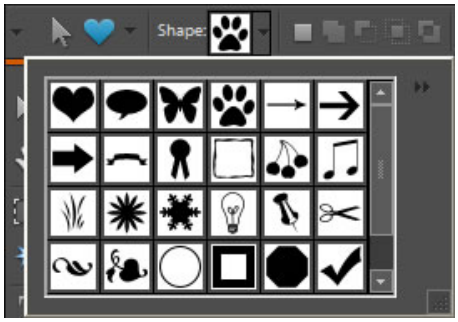

Figure 19 Custom shape picker

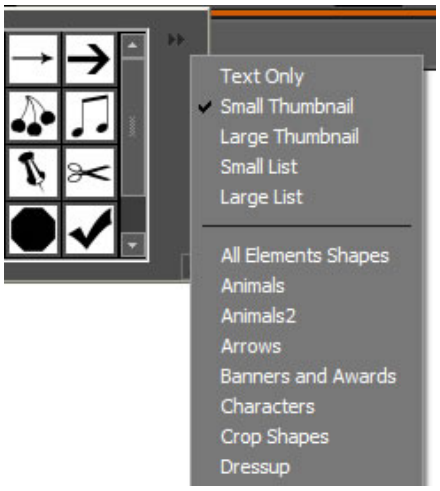

Figure 20 Custom shape library menu

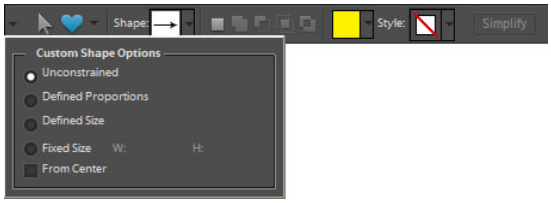

Figure 21 Custom shape options

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Selecting and moving shapes

Use the Shape Selection tool to select shapes with one click. The Shape Selection tool functions much like the Move tool. You can drag a shape to move it, hold down Alt (Windows) or Option (Mac OS) to copy (instead of moving), and drag the handles to resize the shape. If you convert a shape to a bitmap element by simplifying the shape layer, the Shape Selection tool will no longer select the shape (use the Move tool instead).

Figure 22 Shape Selection tool options

Selecting a shape:

1. To select the Shape Selection tool, do one of the following:
   - Press and hold the current shape tool in the Tools palette, and then choose the Shape Selection tool from the list that appears.
   - If another shape tool is active, click the Shape Selection tool in the options bar.
2. In the options bar, select Show Bounding Box **(Figure 22)**.
3. Click the shape to activate the layer that contains it. You can also click the shape layer in the Layers palette.
4. Click the shape again to select it.

   The shape's bounding box and selection handles appear **(Figure 23)**.

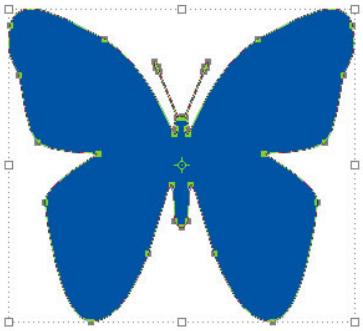

Figure 23 Selected shape

Moving a shape:

1. Select the Shape Selection tool and click to activate the layer that contains the shape.
2. Drag the shape to a new position.
3. Click away from the shape to deselect it.

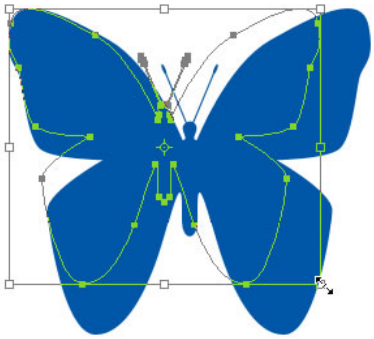

Figure 24 Resizing a shape

Resizing a shape:

1. Select the shape.
2. Position the pointer over one of the selection handles and drag to change the height or width of the shape. Drag a corner handle to change the height and width at the same time. Hold down Shift as you drag to maintain the shape's proportions as you resize it **(Figure 24)**.
3. Click the Commit Current Operation button (the green check mark) to complete the resizing **(Figure 25)**.

   Note: You can also undo the resizing by clicking the Cancel Current Operation button.

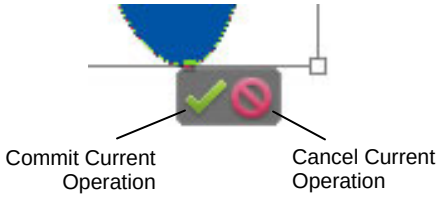

Figure 25 Commit or cancel the current operation

Overlapping and combining shapes

When you create a new shape by using the shape tools, the shape is added to a new layer. You also have the option of placing more than one shape on the same layer. When you do, you can use the small square buttons in the options bar to control how the two shapes interact **(Figure 26)**.

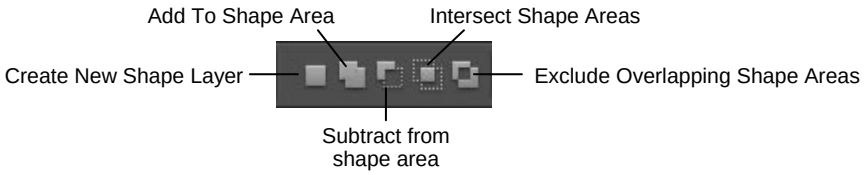

Figure 26 Options for shape areas

Create New Shape Layer: Places new shapes on a separate new layer automatically. This is the default setting.

Add To Shape Area: Adds an additional shape to the existing shape. The combined shape will cover the entire area of the shapes you drew using the Add option.

Subtract From Shape Area: Removes the area where shapes overlap. The rest of the shapes' areas are preserved.

Intersect Shape Areas: Shows only the area where shapes intersect. The other areas will be removed.

Exclude Overlapping Shape Areas: Removes the overlapping areas in the new and existing shapes.

Placing two shapes in the same layer:

1. Select a shape tool and add your first shape to the image.

   The shape appears on a new layer.

2. Select another shape tool (or use the same tool) to draw the second shape.

   Note: All shapes in the same layer are the same color. To draw a shape of a different color, place it on a separate layer.

3. Click the Add To Shape Area button in the options bar.

4. With the layer for the first shape still active, drag to draw the new shape **(Figure 27)**.

   Both shapes appear in the same layer **(Figure 28)**.

   Note: The two shapes can overlap without affecting each other.

   Note: To add a new shape to a shape that already exists, make sure the shape's layer is active. You do this by clicking the shape's layer in the Layers palette or clicking the first shape with the Shape Selection tool.

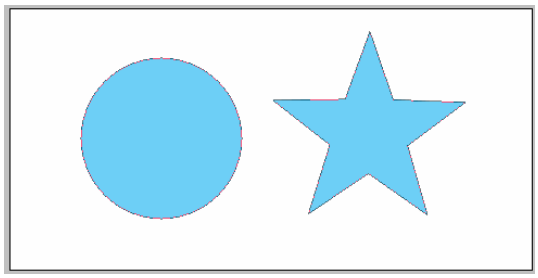

Figure 27 Two shapes drawn together

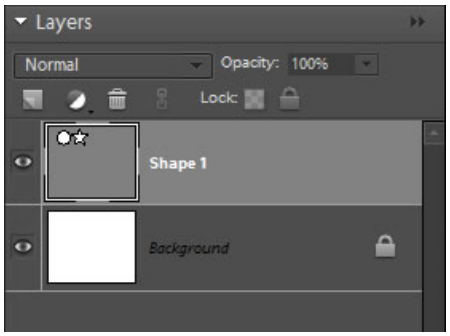

Figure 28 Two shapes in the same layer

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Subtracting an area from a shape:

1. Select a shape tool and add your first shape to the image **(Figure 29).**

   The shape appears on a new layer.

2. Select another shape tool (or use the same tool) to draw the area you want to subtract or remove from the first shape.

   You can use one shape tool to cut a hole in a shape made by another tool.

3. Click the Subtract From Shape Area button in the options bar.

4. With the layer for the first shape still active, drag over the first shape to remove an area of the shape **(Figure 30)**. Use the Shape Selection tool to make adjustments to the new shape, if necessary.

   Both shapes appear in the same layer and the second shape functions as a cutout from the first shape **(Figure 31)**.

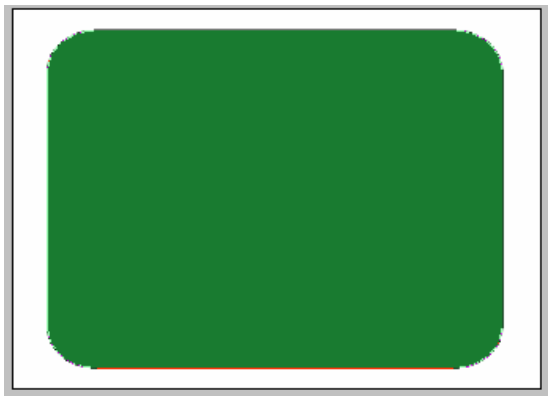

Figure 29 First shape drawn on a new layer

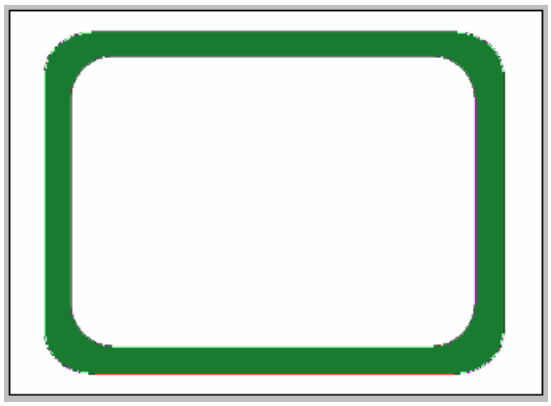

Figure 30 Second shape used to remove an area from first shape

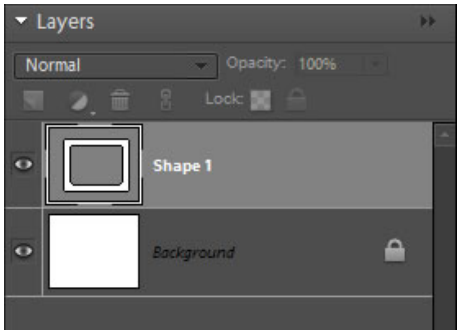

Figure 31 Two shapes in the same layer

Creating a new shape by intersecting two shapes:

1. Select a shape tool and add your first shape to the image **(Figure 32)**.

   The shape appears on a new layer.

2. Select another shape tool (or use the same tool) to draw the area you want to intersect with the first shape.

3. Click the Intersect Shape Areas button in the options bar.

4. With the layer for the first shape still active, drag to draw the second shape. Use the Shape Selection tool to make adjustments to the two shapes, if necessary.

   The area where the two shapes overlap defines the final shape **(Figure 33)**.

   Both shapes appear in the same layer **(Figure 34)**.

5. When you are satisfied, choose Select > Deselect Layers to see the final shape **(Figure 35)**.

   Note: The two shapes are still separate objects. To resize or manipulate the shapes as one, you need to combine them into a single shape.

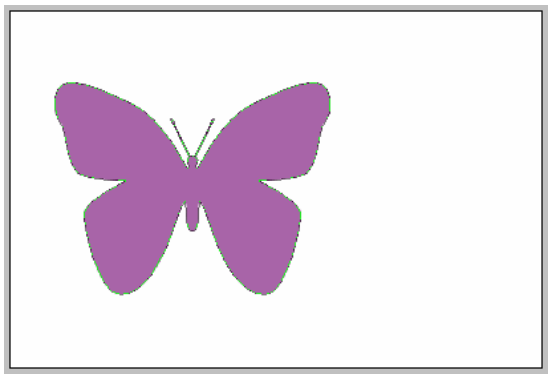

Figure 32 The first shape is on a new layer

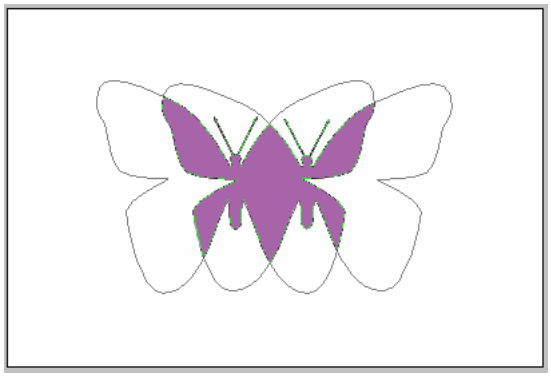

Figure 33 The intersection with the second shape defines the final shape

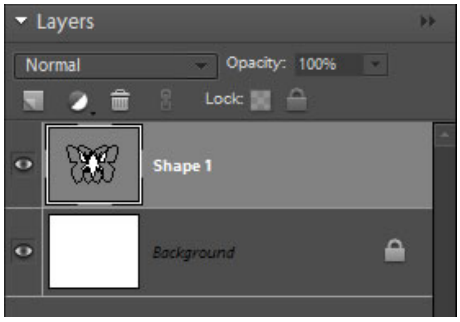

Figure 34 Both shapes are in the same layer

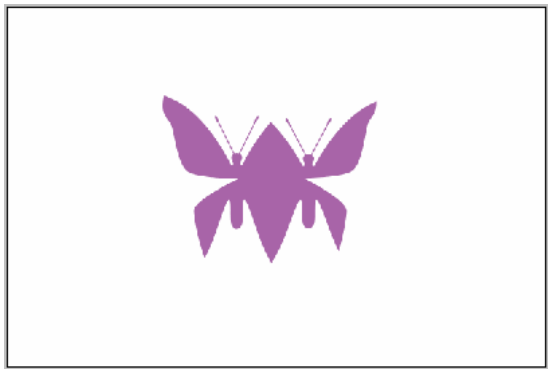

Figure 35 The final shape

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Combining shapes:

1. Use the Shape Selection tool to select two or more shapes in the same layer.
2. Click the Combine button in the options bar **(Figure 36)**.
3. The shapes now share the same bounding box and selection handles **(Figure 37)**.
4. Resize or manipulate the combined shape as desired **(Figure 38)**.

Figure 36 Combine shapes in the same layer

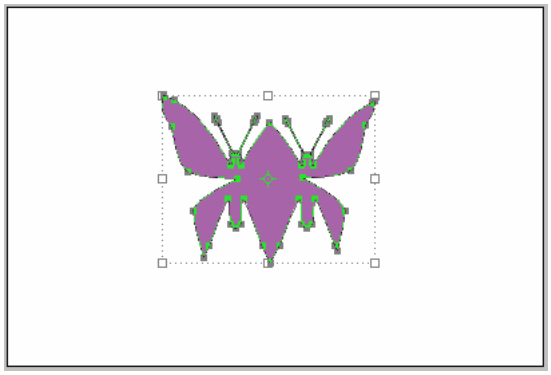

Figure 37 Combined shapes

Figure 38 Combined shapes can be sized or manipulated as a single shape

Using the Cookie Cutter tool

The Cookie Cutter tool creates the same shapes as the Custom Shape tool, but is designed to crop a portion of a photograph in the selected shape. You can use the Cookie Cutter tool to crop an image in the shape of a star, heart, flower, or other custom shape. You can also use the Cookie Cutter tool to apply artistic edges to an image by applying one of the shapes from the Custom Shape library.

Using the Cookie Cutter tool to create a photo edge:

1. In the Editor, select the Cookie Cutter tool in the Tools palette**.**
2. Select a shape from the Shape menu in the options bar **(Figure 39).**

   Note: To view more shape categories in the Custom Shapes library, click the triangle in the upper-right corner of the Custom Shapes menu.
3. In the options bar, open the Shape Options menu and select options for the Cookie Cutter **(Figure 40)**.

   Unconstrained: Draws the shape to any size or dimension.

   Defined Proportions: Keeps the height and width of the cropped shape in proportion.

   Defined Size: Crops the photo to the exact size of the shape you chose.

   Fixed Size: Specifies exact measurements for the finished shape.

   From Center: Draws the shape from the center (rather than from the upper left part).
4. You can also specify an amount to feather the edge of the selection **(Figure 41)**.

   Note: Selecting the Crop option crops the image so it is just large enough to fill the area of your shape.
5. Drag over the image to define the area you want to appear in the finished image **(Figure 42)**.

   Note: After drawing the shape, you can drag or resize the shape to fine-tune its position. When you have the size and position you want, commit the current operation.
6. Click the Commit Current Operation button (green check mark) to accept the position of the Cookie Cutter shape.

   The image is the shape you created and includes any options, such as feathering, you selected. **(Figure 43)**.

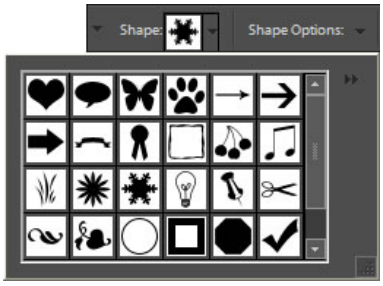

Figure 39 Cookie Cutter shapes

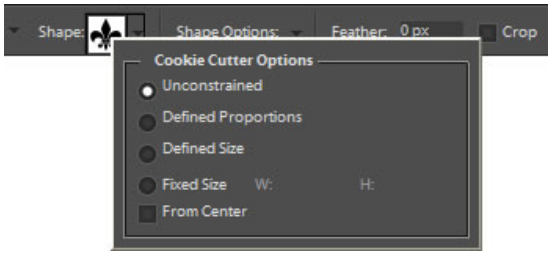

Figure 40 Cookie Cutter options

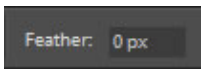

Figure 41 Feathering the edge of the selection

Figure 42 Drag to define the shape of the image

Figure 43 Feathered image

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Simplifying shapes

A shape you create in Photoshop Elements remains a vector graphic until you simplify the shape. You must simplify a shape before you can apply effects such as filters. When you simplify a shape, Elements converts the shape from a vector graphic to a raster or bitmap image. This is also called rasterizing the image.

After you simplify an image, your shapes have the same limitations on sizing as any other raster image. For example, you can make the shape smaller but cannot make the image larger than 100% without losing quality. When you simplify a shape, everything in the shape layer is affected.

It's a good idea to create the final shape as large as you plan to use it before simplifying.

In Photoshop Elements, a message informs you when the image must be simplified to use a feature or apply an effect. After the shape is simplified, you can edit it like any other raster image you open in Elements.

Simplifying a shape:

1. In the Layers palette, right-click (Windows) or Control-click (Mac OS) the layer containing the shape you want to simplify.

   The context menu appears **(Figure 44)**.

2. Select Simplify Layer from the context menu. **(Figure 44)**.

   All shapes in the layer are simplified, although there may be no visible change. Use the Move tool (instead of the Shape Selection tool) whenever you want to select a shape that has been simplified.

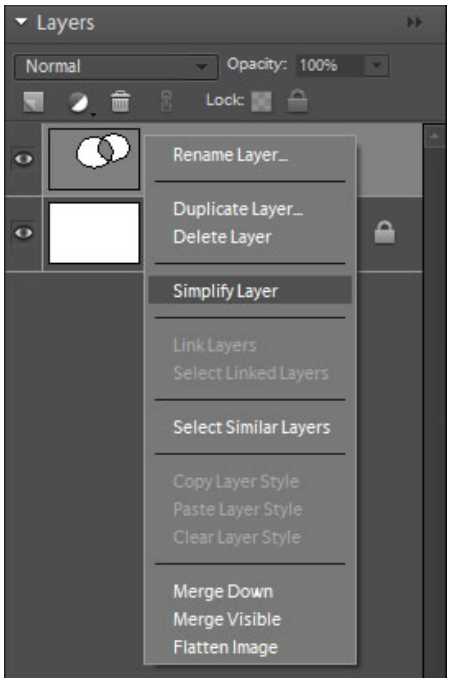

Figure 44 Layer context menu