

# STEVE CAPLIN'S **A** TO **Z** OF DESIGN

## K: Keyboard shortcuts

Steve Caplin walks us alphabetically through the concepts essential to success for any jobbing or aspiring designer.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Steve Caplin** is a designer and illustrator working for a range of national newspapers. His best-selling *How to Cheat in Photoshop*, now in its fourth edition, is published by Focal Press.  
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### Efficiency in Photoshop is all about

economical use of your time. The less time you spend dragging the cursor between menus, palettes and tool bars, the more time you will have to concentrate on your work. There's only one real solution to this: mastering Photoshop's keyboard shortcuts. Here are some of the essentials.

### TOOL SHORTCUTS

Many of the shortcuts for switching tools are intuitive: B for Brush, M for Marquee, L for Lasso, P for Pen, E for Eraser, I for the Eyedropper, G for Gradient, W for the Magic Wand. But you'll need to learn R for Smudge, Blur and Sharpen, O for Dodge and Burn, U for Shapes and V for Move.

Several of these tools have variants, and you can cycle through them by holding shift as you press the keystroke for that tool: shift-R, for example, will switch between Smudge, Blur and Sharpen. There's also a useful

shortcut with the Dodge and Burn tools, since you frequently want to use them in combination with each other: holding alt when either tool is selected will give you temporary access to the other one.

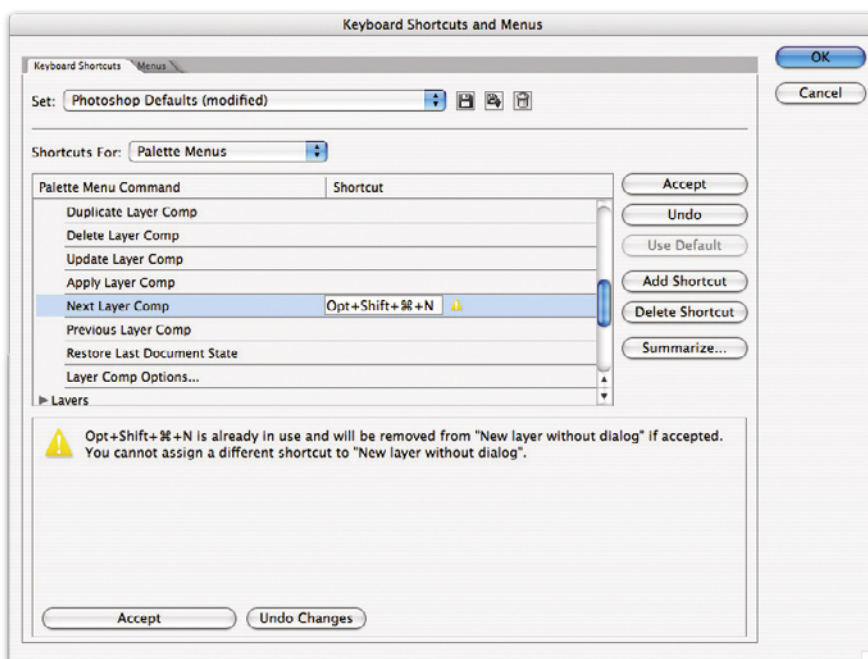
This notion of temporary access also applies, most usefully, to the Move tool: holding the command key when any other tool is active will allow you to grab and move layers without having to switch tools. But you will have to switch to the Move tool if you want to use it to select multiple layers (holding shift as you click on them), or to 'drill down' to select any layer beneath the cursor (holding control as you click, to get a pop-up menu showing all the layers).

When using any of the painting tools – the Brush, Dodge and Burn, Smudge and so on – you can change the pressure of the tool with the numeric keypad: press 3 for 30%, 5 for 50% and so on, up to 0 for 100%. You can also get intermediate values by pressing two keys in rapid succession: pressing 4 then 5 will give you 45% pressure, for instance. When the Move tool or one of the selection tools are active, pressing these keys will change the opacity of the current layer.

When working with selection tools, use keyboard controls to set how the selections are drawn. So with the Marquee, hold alt after you start to drag a selection, to draw from the centre out, rather than corner to corner; hold shift to constrain a rectangle to a square, and an ellipse to a circle. If you hold modifier keys before beginning to draw selections, you produce different behaviours. Holding shift will add to an existing selection, and holding alt will subtract from it; holding both shift and alt will produce an intersection of the old and new selections.

When painting with the Brush tool, holding shift will constrain the movement to

◀ **If you try to define a keyboard shortcut that's already in use, Photoshop will warn you of any possible conflicts.**



vertical and horizontal. If you press shift before painting, it will paint a straight line between the two click points. Pressing the control key with any tool will pop up a contextual menu relevant to that tool; with the Brush tool, control pops up a Brushes palette, and pressing shift control will pop up a menu allowing you to change brush mode.

### WORKING WITH TEXT

Pressing T will switch to the Text tool. To change the font of a whole text block, don't click in it: with the text tool active, press the Return key, which takes you to the Font field in the Options bar. Here you can select a font by typing the first few characters of its name; press the up/down cursor keys to select the next and previous font. Pressing Tab will take you to the next field, where you can use the same technique to choose the weight – generally B for Bold, I for Italic, and so on. To change text size, select it and use shift command with the > and < keys to make it bigger and smaller.

### WORKING WITH LAYERS

Use shift with the [ and ] keys to select lower and higher layers in the stack; use command with these keys to move the layers themselves up and down. Holding command as you click on a layers thumbnail in the Layers palette will load up its pixels as a selection.

There are several shortcuts for changing layer modes, mostly intuitive. Hold command and shift and press H for Hard Light, M for Multiply, S for Screen, N for Normal. You can also cycle through all the layer modes by pressing command shift + and -.

With a selection active, command C will copy the contents of the current layer. Using command shift C, however, will copy a merged selection of all visible layers. And while command V will paste a clipboard selection, shift command V will paste it inside

any active selection, creating a layer mask.

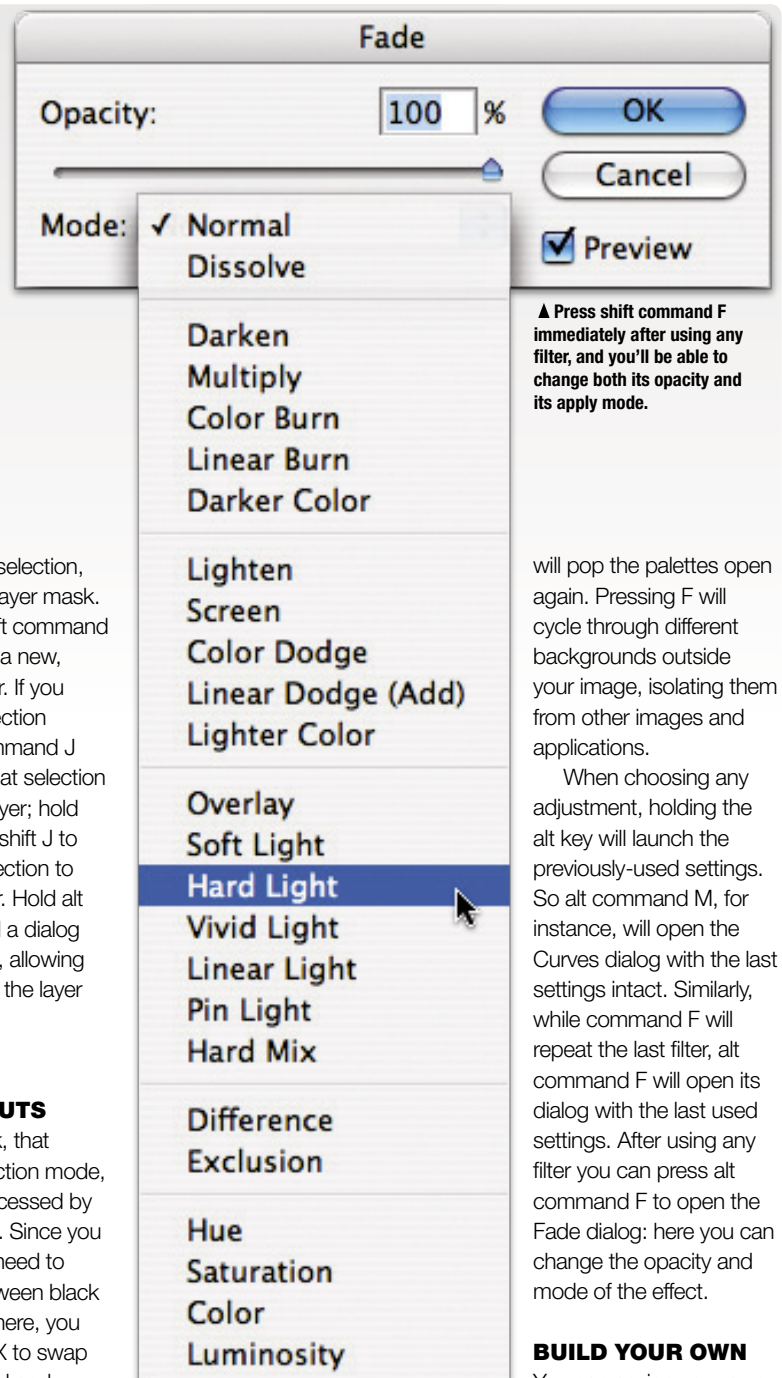
Use shift command N to make a new, empty layer. If you have a selection active, command J will copy that selection to a new layer; hold command shift J to cut the selection to a new layer. Hold alt as well and a dialog will pop up, allowing you to give the layer a name.

### OTHER SHORTCUTS

QuickMask, that useful selection mode, is easily accessed by pressing Q. Since you frequently need to switch between black and white here, you can press X to swap background and foreground colours – and press D to set them to their default black and white.

Holding different modifier keys can alter the behaviour of well known shortcuts. You probably know that command T will launch Free Transform mode; you may not be aware that pressing shift command T will repeat the last-used transformation, while alt shift command T will repeat it and duplicate the layer or selection upon which it was applied.

Pressing Tab will hide all the palettes in Photoshop, allowing you to see just your image. In CS3, you can press shift Tab to hide all but the Toolbar and Options bar; and sliding the cursor to the edge of the screen



will pop the palettes open again. Pressing F will cycle through different backgrounds outside your image, isolating them from other images and applications.

When choosing any adjustment, holding the alt key will launch the previously-used settings. So alt command M, for instance, will open the Curves dialog with the last settings intact. Similarly, while command F will repeat the last filter, alt command F will open its dialog with the last used settings. After using any filter you can press alt command F to open the Fade dialog: here you can change the opacity and mode of the effect.

### BUILD YOUR OWN

You can assign your own keyboard shortcuts to just

about any menu, palette or tool command using the Keyboard Shortcuts menu. This can be useful if, say, you regularly use the Shadows/Highlights adjustment, or if you find that pressing alt D to feather a selection conflicts with showing and hiding the Dock; you can also define shortcuts for such routine tasks as flipping a layer, and so on.

It's easy to navigate through the dialog and define your own shortcuts, although you must be careful not to use any key commands already in use. It's also worth knowing that the control key is not used in any existing shortcuts: add this to the mix, and you can be sure to have a unique shortcut.