the
pen

learning to love your pen tablet by Renee Pearson

There's nothing more freeing than working with a digital tablet and pen. The extra options provided by the pressure sensitivity of the pen, along with the intuitive sense of using "electronic pencil and paper" can make designing with this tool faster than using a mouse. Want to make your own swoosh brushes? Just grab your pen and draw! Adding handwritten titles and journaling is just a pen tap away. Aside from these everyday uses, though, here are other techniques you can use.

is mightier than the **mouse**

get comfortable

While somewhat intuitive, using a pen and tablet does take a little practice. We're used to navigating with a mouse, so it takes a bit of *un*learning to become comfortable with the pen. If you try this exercise, recommended by Wacom, you'll be surprised how quickly using a pen becomes second nature.

1 In your image editing program, open a new document with a white background.

2 Turn on the grid and turn off the snap to grid function. **A**

3 Select the **Brush** tool from the toolbox and choose a **hard round 13 pixel brush.**

4 Now, draw a series of circles inside the grid. Don't worry if you're not precise, just draw. **B**

5 When you've drawn 3 or 4 rows of circles, go back and draw Xs inside each circle. **C**

You've just experienced something called *absolute positioning*. That means your pen tablet is mapped to the area of your monitor. If you tap your pen in the upper right corner, the cursor will appear there. If you drag it to the left, the cursor will follow. You don't have to lift and reposition your pen like you might with a mouse.

Continue to practice until you're as comfortable with the digital pen as you are with—well, a real pen!
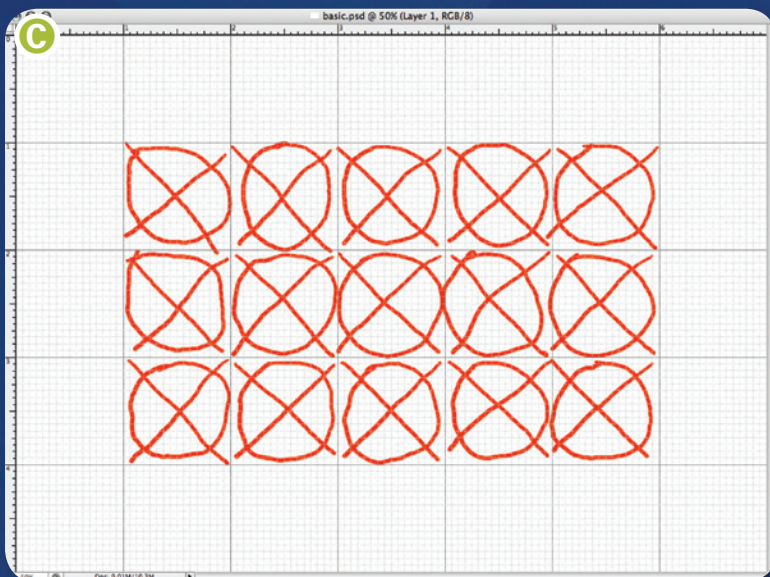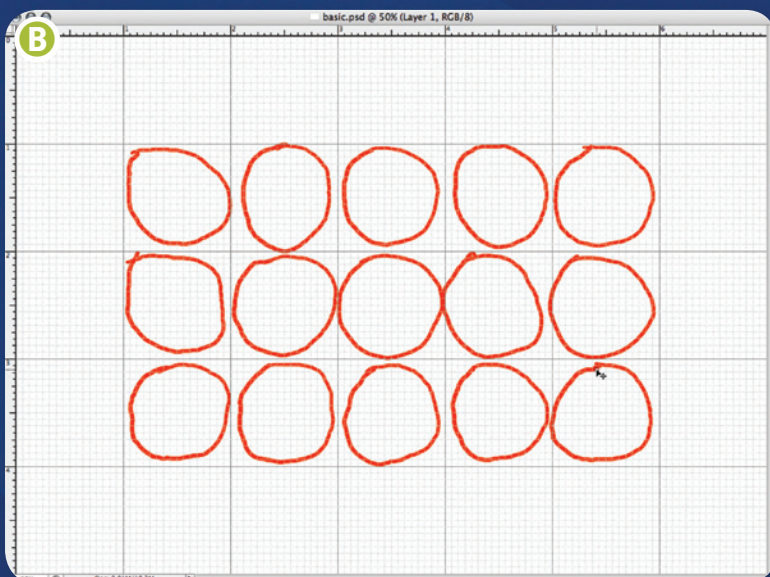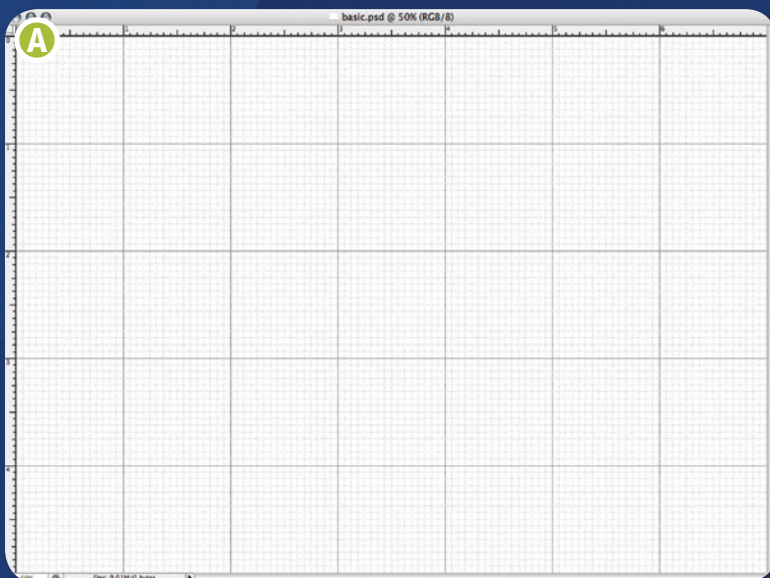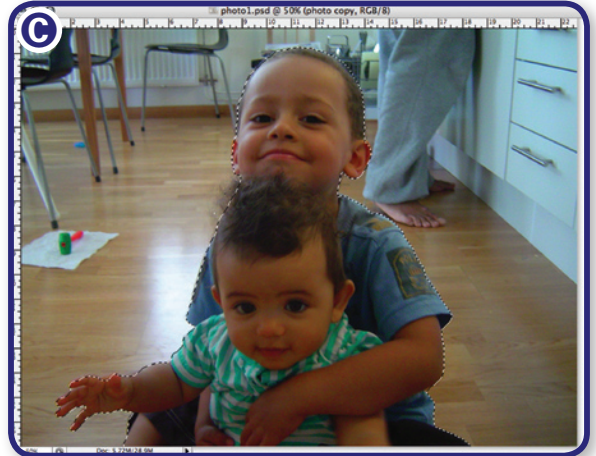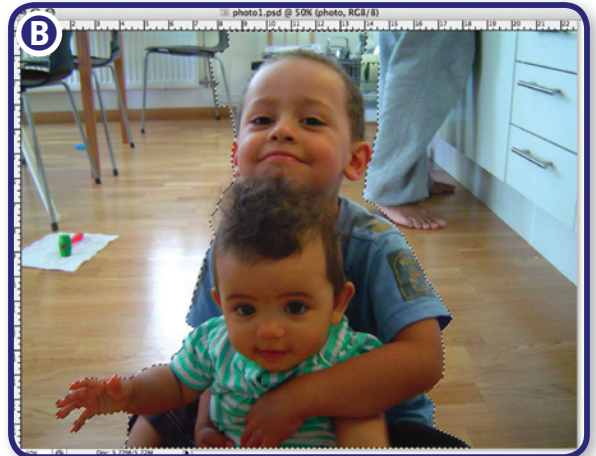
make accurate selections

As powerful as selection tools are, making precise selections is even easier with pen in hand. If you rely on the **Marquee Selection** tools in Photoshop and Photoshop Elements, your mouse is more than up to the task. But if you have more complex selection needs, combining a few advanced selection tools with a pen makes accurate selections a snap. Try this technique to sharpen up your selections.

The selection brush approach. How many times have you wanted to extract a portion of a photo from its background? Not fun, even with the **Magic Extractor** tool in Photoshop Elements. But with your pen you can make quick work of extracting from even the busiest backgrounds.

Here's a composite photo of my grandchildren. To create it, I duplicated the original photo and converted the background photo to black and white. Then I used my pen to extract the kids from the background. **A**

1   Select the **Quick Selection Tool** (Photoshop) or **Selection Brush Tool** (Photoshop Elements) from the toolbox.

2   Adjust the size of your brush depending on the detail you need to select, then begin "brushing" by dragging your pen inside the area of your photo you want to extract. At this point, don't worry if you're selecting areas outside your target. You'll correct that in a moment. **B**

3   When you've captured the entire area, switch to the **Subtract from selection** option and drag to remove the extraneous areas. **C**

4   When you're satisfied, choose **Select** > **Inverse** then press the **Delete** key to remove the excess. Your extraction is complete! **D**

colorize photos

Colorizing black and white photos in Photoshop and Photoshop Elements is a favorite digital photo technique. Colorizing with a pen is as natural as painting with a brush.

1 Open a black and white photo or convert a color photo to black and white.

2 Select **Image** > **Mode** > **RGB Color**.

3 Select the **Brush** tool from the toolbox and choose a soft round brush.

4 Change the brush **Opacity** to 10%.

5 Load the **Foreground color** in the **toolbox** with a color of your choice.

6 Using the pen, begin dragging inside the area of the photo you want to colorize. Use broad strokes and be sure not to lift the pen as you drag. Every time you lift the pen then paint again, you're adding another "coat" and the color will darken. **A**

Sometimes, coloring "inside the lines" is a challenge. If your image looks something like mine, no need to worry. Here's another place where your pen shines. It has a built-in eraser! The pen's eraser is located exactly where you'd expect it—at the other end of the pen!

7 Flip the pen now and use the opposite tip to erase any stray brush strokes. The eraser's size is determined by the size of the **Eraser** tool in Photoshop or Photoshop Elements. **B**

8 Load the **Foreground color** with a new color and continue colorizing your photo.

Tip: If you're colorizing different areas of your photo using a variety of colors, create a new layer for each color. You'll have more flexibility, and erasing strays will be easier. C
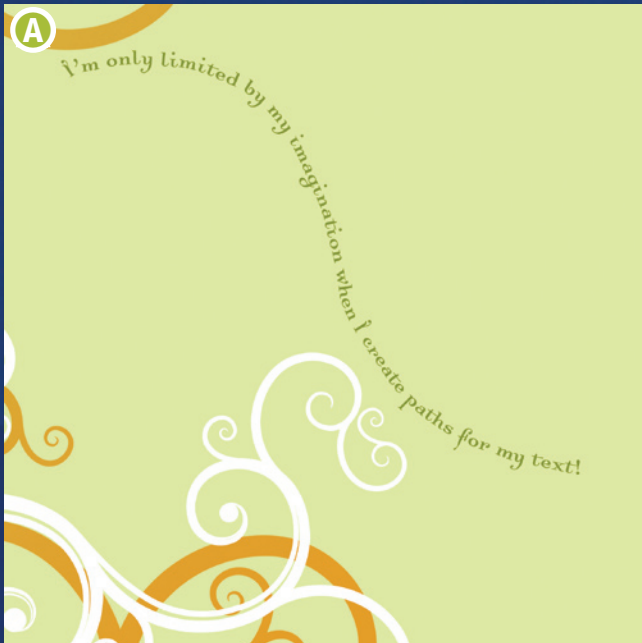
create a path for text

We've all seen layouts with beautiful curvy text. The process is called text on a path, and you can quickly create your own text paths using a pen and tablet. **A**

1 In Photoshop, select the **Freeform Pen** tool from the toolbox and make sure the **Paths** option is selected in the **options bar.**

2 Using your pen, drag to create the shape you want your text to follow. **B**

3 Switch to the **Horizontal Type** tool and position the pointer at the beginning of the path and click. An insertion point appears on the path.

4 Begin entering the text. **C**

5 When you're done, click another layer to see your text without the path line. **D**

A
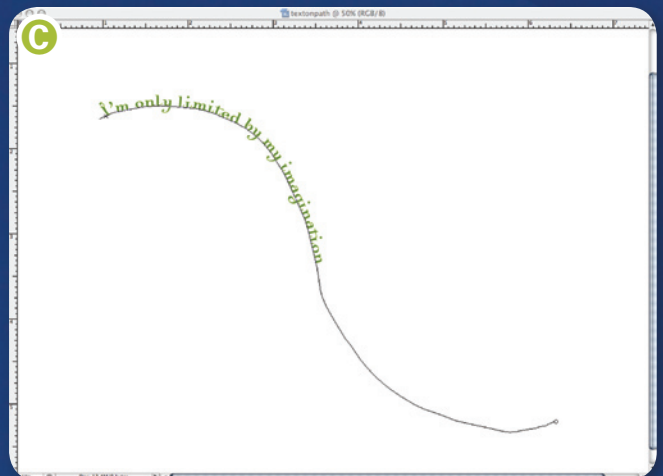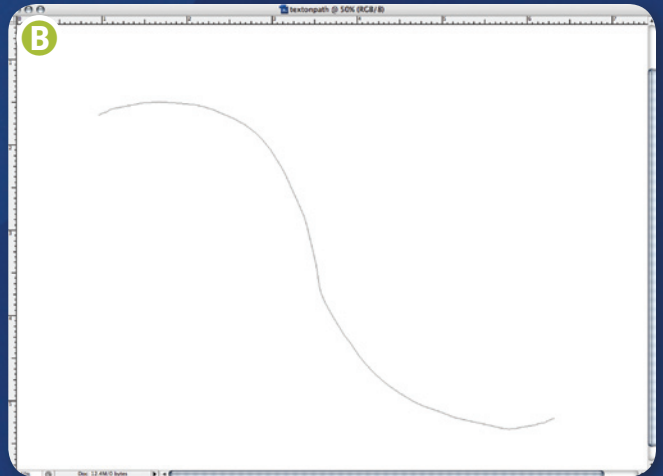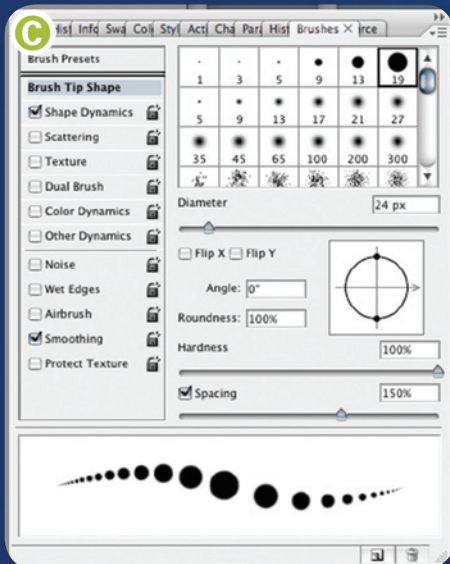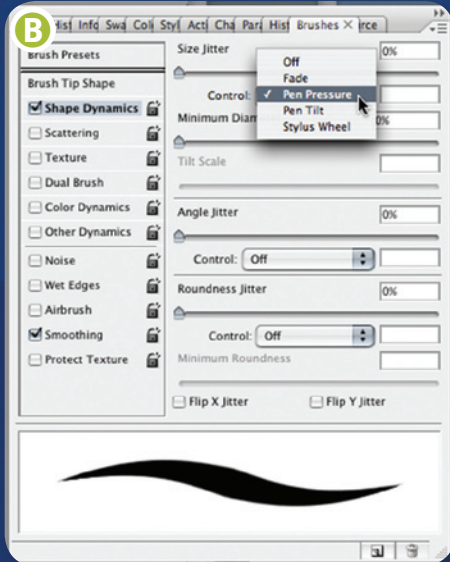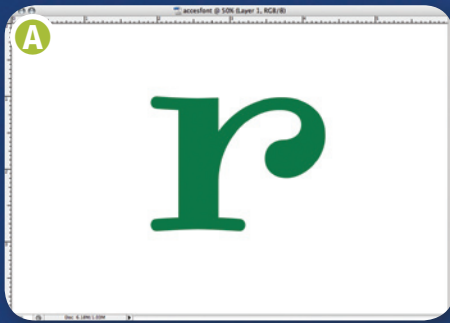
accessorize a font

I'm not much of a doodler, but I do like to dress up my fonts from time to time using my pen and a basic Photoshop brush.

1 Start with a single text character. **A**

2 Fill the **Foreground color** box with white.

3 Select a hard round brush.

4 In Photoshop, open the **Brushes palette.** In the **Shape Dynamics** palette, change the **Size Jitter Control** to **Pen Pressure. B** Then, increase the **Brush Shape Tip Spacing** until the brush sample is dotted instead of smooth. **C**

(If you're using Photoshop Elements: Click the **Tablet Options** arrow in the **options bar** and select **Size.** Then, click the **More Options** button in the **options bar** and change **Spacing** to 150%.)

Setting the **Size Jitter Control** to **Pen Pressure** allows you to control the size of the brush strokes with your pen. The size will be controlled by the pressure you apply using the pen. Light pressure will give you a thinner line. Heavy pressure will give you a thicker line up to the brush diameter setting.

5 Use the pen to add squiggly dotted lines to the character. Try varying the pressure on the tablet as you draw to affect the size of your drawings. Remember, if you don't like your doodles just flip your pen and erase them! **D**

While this article focuses on the digital pen, there are other features, like programmable buttons on the tablet that are useful as well. And you don't have to give up your mouse because most pen tablets come packaged with one. I encourage you to review your pen tablet's user guide to make sure you're taking full advantage of its features and capabilities.

Find more pen-tablet tips and techniques from Renee at *digitalscrapbooking.com*.

B

C

D

To create the exercises in this article, Renee used the Wacom Bamboo Fun pen tablet. Wacom offers a variety of pen-based input devices and is a leading manufacturer of pen tablets, interactive pen displays and digital interface solutions. For more information on the Bamboo Fun tablet and other products by Wacom, check out their website at *wacom.com*.