Setting-up the workspace
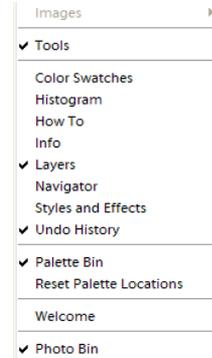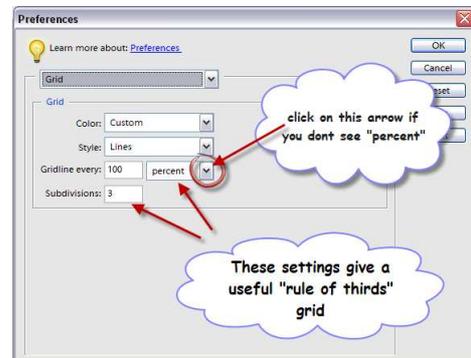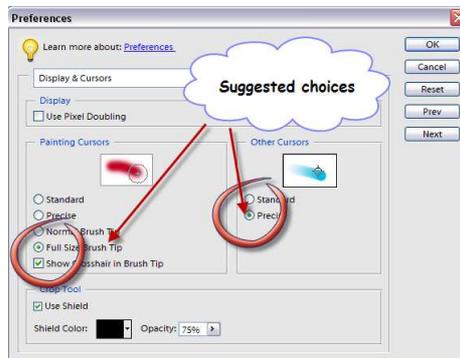
Choose Edit > Colour settings. The best option is either of the two shown below.

Choose "Window" from the menu bar. The set-up shown below is fine for most general image editing.

Choose Edit > Preferences > Display & Cursor. These are good settings to use.

Choose Edit > Preferences > Grid. Having a 3 x 3 grid works well if you want to check your image composition.

Cropping and straightening images

If your horizons are not straight, simply select the straighten tool from the toolbox (see over), then drag a line along the horizon. Elements will then straighten it up for you.

When you've straightened the horizon, you will end up with some unwanted white space around you image. Just choose the crop tool then click and drag out the crop you want. Once you've got it in the correct place, just click the green √ or press enter to confirm the crop.

You can choose from a range of preset Aspect Ratios or just enter your own sizes into the boxes shown opposite.

For a fixed crop size, just enter the numbers into the boxes.
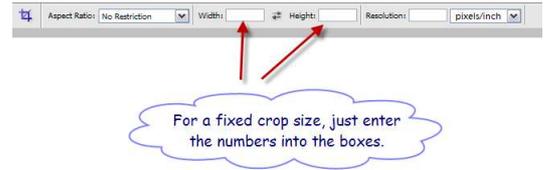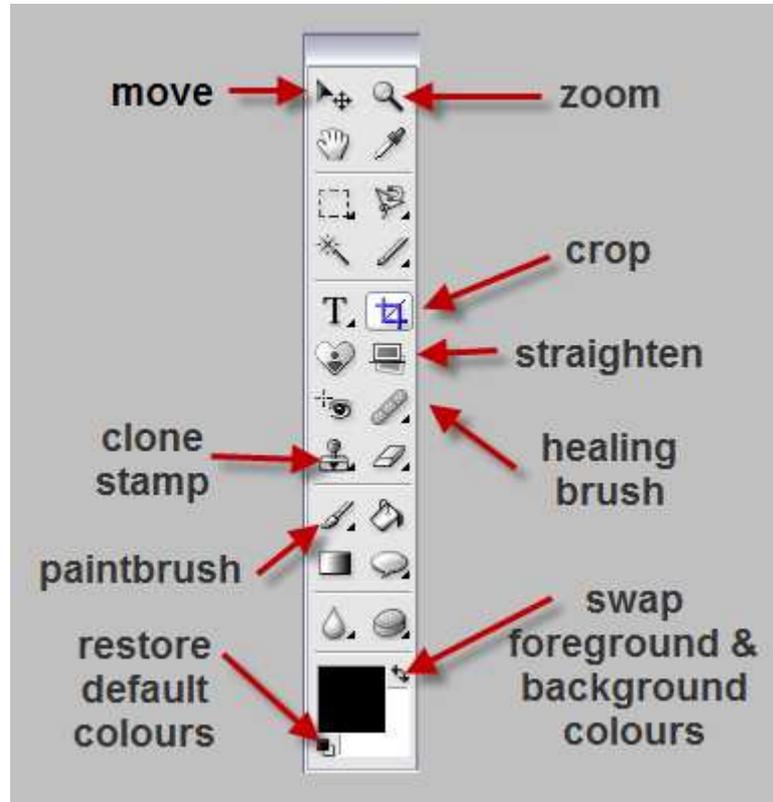
The tool box

If you move your mouse over any tool in the tool box, its name (and key shortcut) will be shown.

Some tools are hidden under others. The tiny triangle to the bottom-right of the tool icon shows where these are.

Whenever I finish with any tool, I always press "v" on the keyboard to switch to the move tool. It's safer that way!

Transforming an image.

If you want to transform an image, e.g. to correct converging verticals, just choose
Image > Transform.

If you get a warning about "transformations should be applied to layers" simply click OK to accept it.
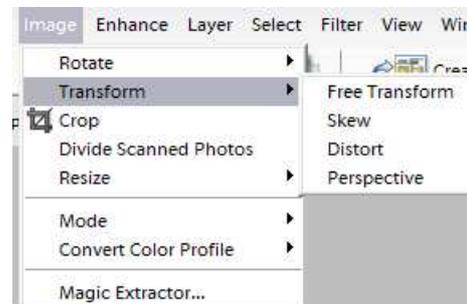
Healing and cloning

If your digital camera has a dirty sensor you will have unwanted marks on your images. These are easily fixed (usually) with the spot healing brush tool.
Just select this tool (there's also a hidden healing brush that works more like the clone stamp) then click on the spot to make it go away. If only it worked on acne too!

The clone stamp tool is intended for copying areas of a picture to another area. It needs a bit of practise to get used to.

With the clone stamp selected, hold down the Alt key and click on the area you wish to copy from. Now move to the area you wish to copy to then click again.

Get out of jail

Three useful hints:

1. if you hold down the Ctrl key and press the letter Z, it will always undo the last thing you did.
2. while you have a document open for editing, the History palette keeps track of what you're doing. To go back, simply click back through the history to the point you want.
3. the safest way to work is always to use the layers palette and make adjustments in layers. So, to clone, first make a new empty layer Layer > New then clone onto that. Then should you make a real mess, simply throw away this layer.

NB History only stays active while a file is open. Once you close down, it will be lost. That's why layers are a safer bet.

Dealing with exposure and colour balance.

The Levels Adjustment is a great way of sorting-out your image. A simple adjustment in levels can make a big difference.

Although you can get at levels using Enhance > Auto Levels, it's not the best way to do it.

Using a Levels Adjustment layer
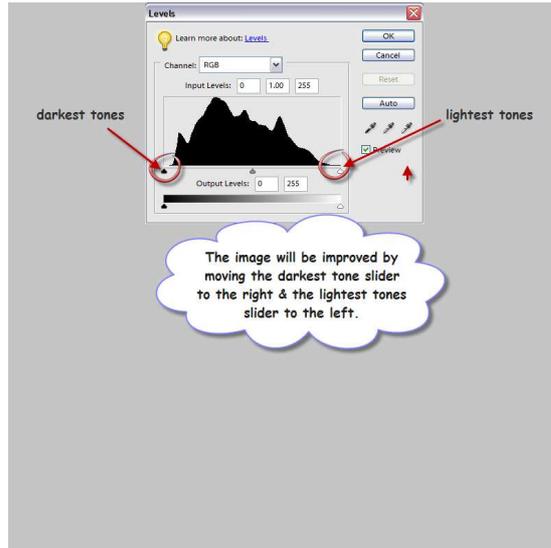
Choose Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Levels.

If there are gaps at either end of the histogram, just drag the sliders inwards.

If the image is too dark or too light, use the middle slider.

Colour balance

Sometimes it helps to set the colour balance by using the eye droppers that go with the levels adjustment. Use the left-hand dropper to set an area to completely black. The right-hand dropper will set an area completely white. If you have a neutral grey colour in your image, the middle dropper can be used to set that.

Black and White

This is one area where options are severely limited in Elements. However, you can still get a decent print using the correct method which is to choose Image > Mode > Grayscale. A further levels adjustment will often help to give the image more presence.

Once you've got your image into B & W, you may want to tone it. Choose Image > Mode > RGB colour (it will still look B & W) then add a Hue and Saturation Adjustment Layer: Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Hue/Saturation.
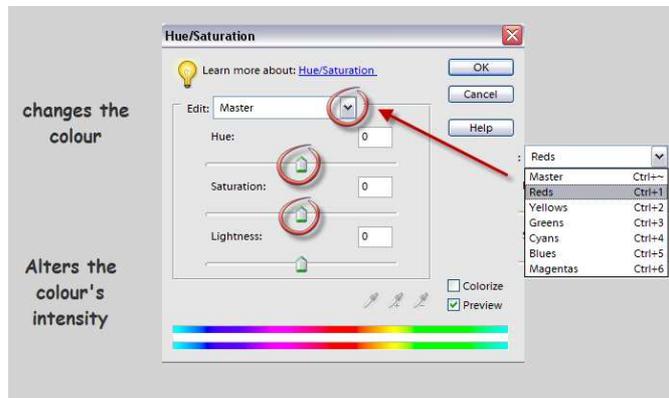
Enter values of Hue=40, Saturation=11

& tick the Colorize box for a nice sepia effect.

Or experiment to your heart's content.