

The Problem



The task is to make an accurate cut-out of this masked figure at the Venice Carnival. The normal selection tools can be tried. For example, the top edge of the cloak might be selected using the Polygonal Lasso Tool to draw a straight line along the edge. But, once we get to the curved section, this technique won't work unless we do a "dot-to-dot" with hundreds of points!

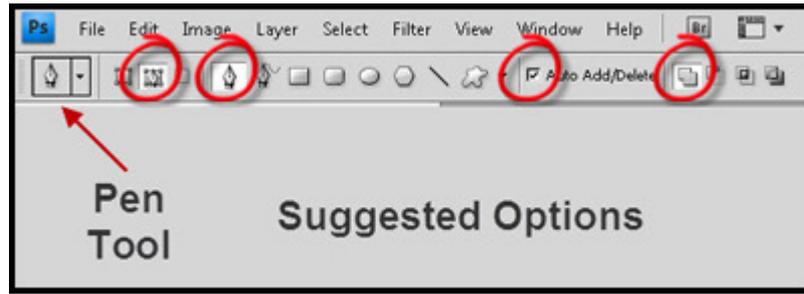
What we need is an "intelligent" tool that recognises a curve and can trace it accurately. The good news is that we have ... the Pen Tool.

This tutorial is an introduction to using this very versatile tool to make complicated and precise selections where there is a clear edge.

Getting started

It's a good idea to practise on a simple shape until you get the hang of it!

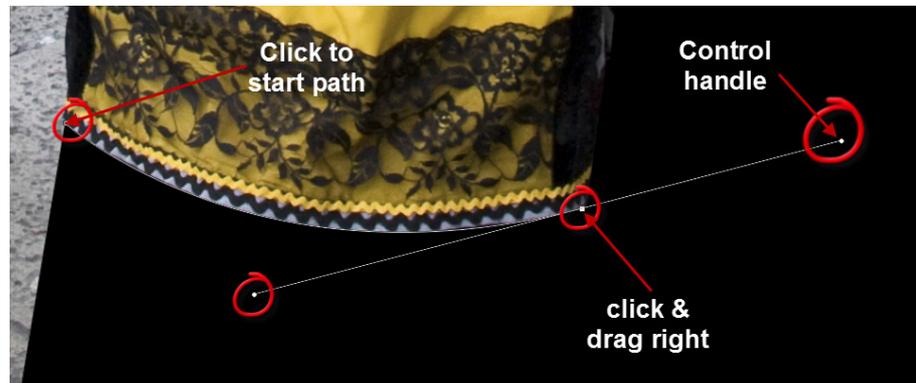
An Introduction to using Photoshop's Pen Tool



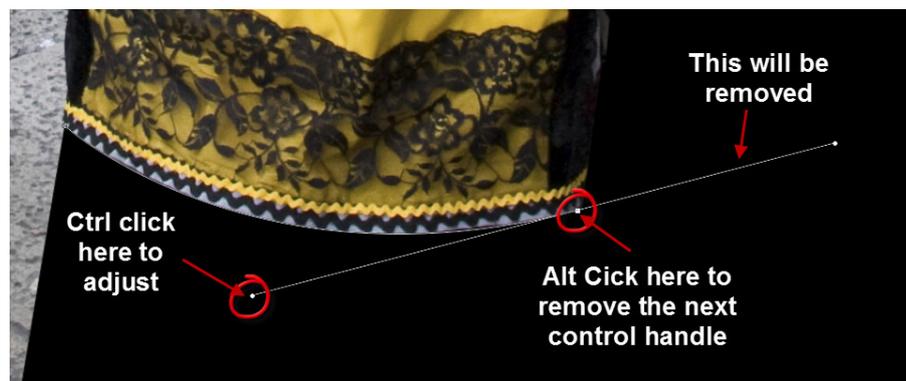
Choose the pen tool and check that the options shown above are selected.

Tracing a path

- Click on one end of a straight line, then click at the other end. A straight line path is drawn between these two points.
- Now click further on to add another point, but **keep the mouse button pressed as you drag the mouse**. This will produce a curve, depending on the angle and distance of the mouse movement.



- You will also see Control Lines (these form a tangent to the curve you have made.) At each end of these lines is a Control Point. These are used to fine-tune the curve.



- To adjust a control handle, simply click and drag the control point while holding down the Ctrl key on your keyboard. You can also move the added path point by dragging while holding down the Ctrl key.



- As you move around a shape, you don't need the second control handle that is added each time. This is easily removed by clicking on the relevant path point while holding down the Alt key.
- Continue to trace round the shape in this way. When you get back to the starting point, the pen tool cursor will show a tiny circle. If you click on the first point, the path will be closed.

Viewing the Path



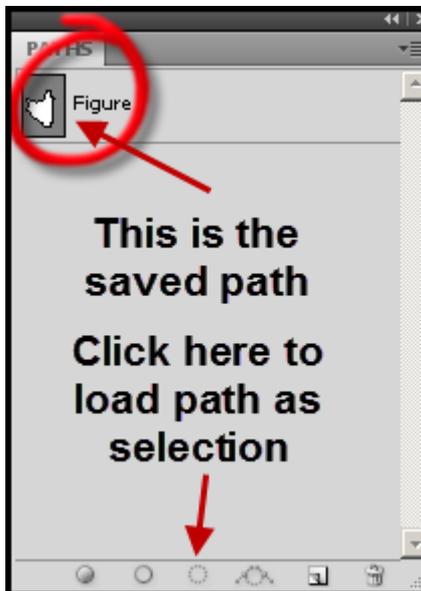
On Photoshop's Menu Bar, choose

Window > Paths

The paths palette will open and you'll see a thumbnail showing the path you have drawn.

It's a good idea to double-click on the path name so that you can rename it - as I have here.

Making a selection from the path



The final step to produce the selection is to click on the icon at the bottom of the Paths palette:

The path will be saved with your image and can be re-edited at any time; making this the most flexible way to make a complex selection.

Video tutorial

There's plenty on "You tube" - here's a link to one:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGVsn-X2GxI>

