

## Using Layer Masks in Photoshop Elements

Although Photoshop Elements doesn't have layer masks (other than for adjustment layers), this doesn't mean we can't use them. Here's how...

### Blending two exposures

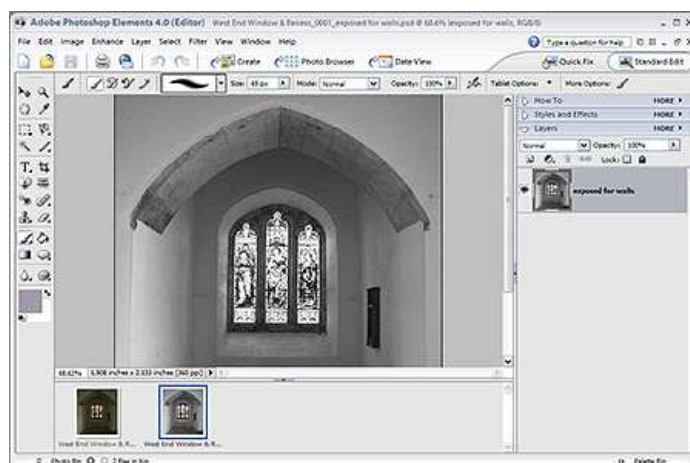
In this example, we'll use a layer mask to blend two exposures in order to produce a greater dynamic range than would otherwise be possible.



*Exposed for the interior then converted to monochrome*

*Exposed for the window glass*

### 1. Open the two images in Photoshop Elements



2. Copy the “window exposed” image on top of the “internally exposed” image

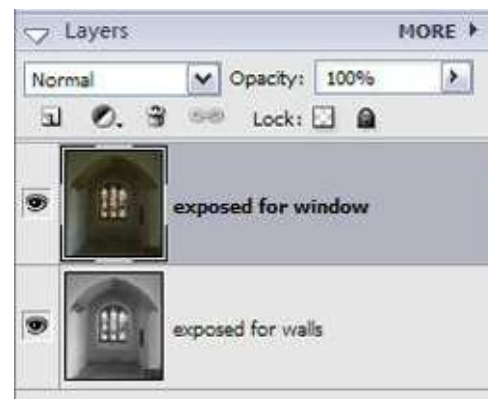
Choose “Window” > Images > Tile



Select the move tool.

While holding down the Shift key, drag the darker image on top of the lighter one.

The Layers Palette shows the two images in position.



Holding shift ensures that the moved image is in the centre of the other one.

3. Add a Levels adjustment layer *between* the two images.



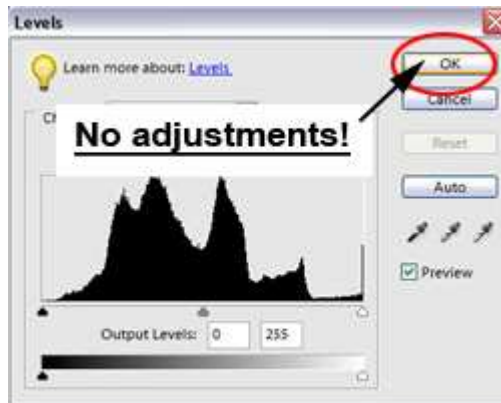
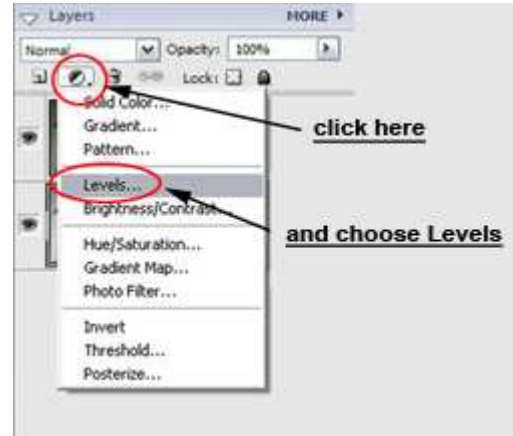
Click on the bottom layer to make it the active layer.

## Using Layer Masks in Photoshop Elements

To add a levels adjustment layer, choose

Layer > New Adjustment Layer  
> Levels

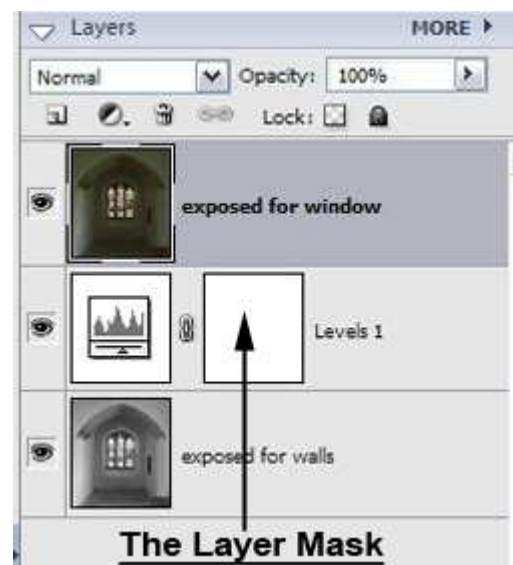
Or simply use the shortcut on the Layers Palette as shown opposite.



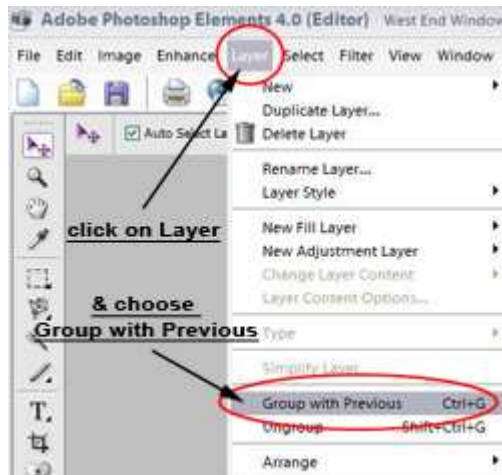
Do not make any adjustments!

Simply click OK.

We now have a layer mask to use, but two more steps are needed to make this work like a Photoshop layer mask...



## Using Layer Masks in Photoshop Elements



In the Layers Palette, make the top layer active by clicking on it.

Choose

Layer > Group with Previous

### 4. Using the layer mask



Grouping the layers in this way makes the mask affect the top layer only.

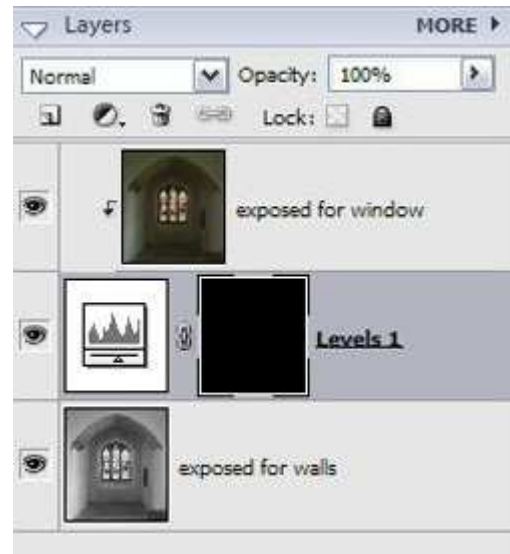
Filling the mask with black will hide the top layer completely.

The easiest way to do this is to first click on the mask thumbnail in the Layers Palette then hold down the Ctrl key while pressing the letter I (to Invert the mask colour).

Then we can reveal the windows by painting on the mask with white.

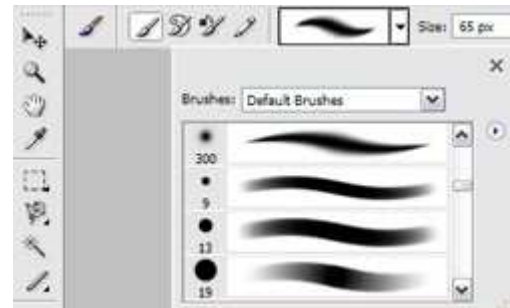
## Using Layer Masks in Photoshop Elements

Here the mask has been filled with black, hiding the top layer completely.



Check that the foreground colour is white.

Choose a suitable size paint brush



## Using Layer Masks in Photoshop Elements

---

Painting with white on the picture, with the layer mask active, doesn't actually paint the picture itself – it paints the mask!

White reveals the top layer.

Opposite you can see the white areas on the mask. These reveal the colour in the image itself.

You can turn the mask on and off by holding down the Shift key while clicking on its thumbnail.



You can get a better idea of the mask by holding down the Alt key and clicking on the mask thumbnail in the Layers Palette...

To get back to the normal view, simply click on the image thumbnail in the Layers Palette.



Viewing the mask in this way makes it easy to spot small defects.

Another advantage is that you can use

Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur

To soften the mask edges, if required.

### **Alternative solution**

If you want to use layer masks in Elements regularly, follow this link to find out how to add them to your Elements tools:

<http://graphicssoft.about.com/od/pselements/p/layermasks.htm>