



18 Exceptionally Useful Photoshop Shortcuts

Working with Photoshop can be quite time consuming for both beginners and advanced users. Once you've worked with it for a while, you begin to find that you're constantly going back and forth between the same menu items or palette buttons. If you're anything like me, you're switching tools so often that most of your time spent in Photoshop isn't even on the photo — it's messing with the vast array of editing tools. Fortunately there's a way to help streamline your Photoshop workflow.

Keyboard commands, or shortcuts, are simply a way to bypass a few mouse clicks when doing tool changes or tool property adjustments. They're a little awkward and cumbersome at first, but once you pick up a couple of commands on the keyboard you'll never go back. The whole idea is that while one hand is running the mouse, the other hand might as well be doing something too. This method of working with Photoshop can really decrease your time spent on the computer and give you more time to get behind the camera.

The following are 18 of my most commonly used shortcuts, broken out into three groups: simple, intermediate, and advanced. The simple commands are pretty easy to pull off, and they're heavily used. The advanced commands take a little coordination, and I don't use them quite as often. The intermediate commands are somewhere between the two. Again, these are MY most used Photoshop shortcuts. I'm also only showing the commands for Photoshop CS3 (thought CS2 should be almost identical) on a PC (sorry Mac users). So if you want to learn more about this topic, read to the bottom of the article for additional resources.

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Simple Photoshop Shortcut Commands

- **H** (Hand Tool) — When zoomed in to a portion of your photo, this command brings up the hand tool which allows for quick panning. Also, if the hand tool is active and you hold down the Ctrl key, you can zoom in without changing to the zoom tool. Likewise, if you hold down the Alt key, you can zoom out without changing tools.
- **Z** (Zoom Tool) — This command just brings up the zoom tool, which allows you to zoom in. Like with the hand tool, if you hold down the Alt key, it temporarily switches to the zoom out mode.
- **Ctrl + 0** (Fit on Screen) — This is a quick-and-dirty command to get the entire photo in front of your eyes. That's Ctrl + zero, not the letter "O".

- **B** (Brush Tool) — The brush is an extremely useful tool when working with masks, and I'm constantly using this command along with the hand and zoom tools.
- **Ctrl + Z** (Undo) — Very useful for the little mistakes we all make.
- **Tab** (Hide/Show Palettes) — Hiding the palettes gives you a little more working room, thus decreasing your need to pan and zoom while editing.

Intermediate Photoshop Shortcut Commands

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- **[** (Decrease Brush Size) — Quickly decrease your brush size to get into those tighter spots.
- **]** (Increase Brush Size) — Quickly increase your brush size for the larger areas.
- **Shift + [** (Decrease Brush Softness) — Decrease the softness of the brush by 25%.
- **Shift +]** (Increase Brush Softness) — Increase the softness of the brush by 25%.
- **1->0** (Tool Opacity) — I usually run my brush opacity around 5% or 10%, but some things require a bit more opacity. Just press one of the numbers from 1 to 0 and your tool opacity will change from 10% up to 100%. If you want finer control, press a second number quickly after the first, and you can get any percentage you want. So pressing 4 will get you 40% opacity, while pressing 4 then 3 will give you 43% opacity.
- **Shift + 1->0** (Tool Flow) — This works exactly like the opacity changer, but you just have to hold the Shift key down while you hit the numbers.
- **Ctrl + Tab** (Next Point on Curves Adjustment) — When using the curves adjustment dialog, you can place multiple points on the curve and adjust them accordingly. Sometimes you want to make very minor shifts in those points by nudging with the keyboard, but clicking on the point to activate it usually moves it to an undesired location. Use this command to switch focus from point to point without moving them around.

Advanced Photoshop Shortcut Commands

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- **Ctrl + Shift + N** (New Layer) — This will bring up the new layer dialog box and place a new layer on top of the active layer.
- **Ctrl + Alt + Shift + N** (New Layer No Dialog) — This command skips the dialog box and just places a new layer on top of the active layer.
- **Ctrl + Shift + C** (Copy Merged) — This works basically like the copy command, except you get a merged copy of the composite image sent to the clipboard. This command only works if you've made a selection on the image first (use Ctrl+A to select all),

- otherwise you'll get a copy of nothing. This is useful if you want to duplicate what you see on the screen into another image file or even another layer.
- **Ctrl + Alt + Shift + E** (Stamp Visible) — This is actually one of my favorite commands. First, I'll create a new empty layer on top of the stack. Then I'll select that new layer and use this command. It does basically the same thing as the copy merged command, except it places the copy right into the new layer. I use this for creating layer blends, sharpening, and any other type of editing that can't be done non-destructively.
 - **Ctrl + Alt + Shift + K** (Show Keyboard Commands) — If you forget any of these commands, or if you want to check on other commands, use this to bring up the help dialog on keyboard shortcuts.

These are only the Photoshop keyboard shortcuts that I commonly use during post-processing, but there are certainly a lot more of them that may be useful for you. Check out the Photoshop help topics for more information on this topic. In addition to that, I found a great resource at [Trevor Morris Photographics](#) where you can download PDF documents of all the shortcuts for each version of Photoshop all the way back to PS5, plus he has documents for Bridge and Camera Raw. I find that his documents are much easier to use than the Photoshop documentation.

So did I miss any critical photoshop shortcut commands? Which others do you find useful and use?

Update: We've added another [28 Exceptionally Useful Photoshop Shortcuts](#) post to the blog.

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