


Image Editing: Using the Layer via Copy Technique

Layer via Copy:

There is one great technique that will allow any selection you make or even a complete layer to be copied directly to a new layer. This will then make it possible to apply independent control of the layers content. Including changing Layer Opacity, Blend modes or to use Adjustment layers or Layer Masks without affecting original image pixels. The technique makes use of the 'Layer via copy' option found under the Layer menu **Layer > New > Layer via Copy** (Photoshop & Elements 2 and 3) or even better by using the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+J** (Windows Photoshop & Elements 3) **Cmd+J** (Mac). Simply press and hold the Ctrl key and press the 'J' key shortcut is a great time saver.

When could you use this technique? You may find that an area of sky has blown-out highlights and needs to be repaired. Obviously we could use the Clone tool, Healing tool or Patch tool (Version 7 & CS) to make necessary repairs. The advantage of using the Ctrl+J [Cmd+J Mac] technique and copying the repair patch to a new layer means no original pixels are affected. Naturally we could use the Clone tool to clone to a new blank layer using the 'Use All Layers' option but this is not possible to do using the Healing (possible in CS) or patch tools in Photoshop 7. Incidentally Photoshop 8 CS now provides this feature for the Healing brush but not the Patch tool. There are some very important considerations that should be made during the process and these have been clearly outlined in the step-by-step procedure below. We will use the repair to a sky as an example, but the Layer via Copy technique can be used to copy any image element or as a perfect method of separating a selected part of an image so it can have independent controls applied to it. You can also make excellent use of this technique when you choose to make a tight accurate selection around an image element, which is then, feathered and copy/pasted to a new transparent layer, using Ctrl+J (Win) or Cmd+J (Mac).

1. Open the image that you want to apply this technique too or one you are currently working on.
2. Identify the area of damage e.g. a burnt out region of sky.
3. Always make sure you are making a selection on image pixels. Select the Lasso tool and drag a rough selection around the damaged area. We do this to trace a temporary selection template that we then be use to find a suitable clone source and allow for an overlap.
4. When you make the rough selection, ensure you leave enough space or free pixels around the damaged area to allow for sufficient feather to be applied e.g. 10 to 20 pixels. This will then ensure the repair patch will blend seamlessly. The exact feather amount to use will be dependant on the image resolution. For high resolution images use higher feather values
5. Check that the Move tool is **not** currently selected, and then use the cursor movement arrow keys to move the selection template over to an area of image you want to use as a repair source. To speed up the process hold down the Shift key and press an arrow key to move 10 pixels at a time. Pressing the arrow key alone moves one pixel at a time.
6. Once good source material has been located simply hold down the Ctrl key (Win) Cmd key (Mac) and then press the letter 'J' key. **Ctrl+J** (Win) or **Cmd+J** (Mac).
7. The area currently selected will be copied to the computer Clipboard, then automatically Pasted to a new layer. Note the new layer will appear above your *Background* layer or current active layer. To do this via the Layer menu, **Layer> New> Layer via Copy**.
8. Now that the repair patch is on its own layer you can select the MOVE  tool either from the Toolbox or by pressing the shortcut 'V' key on the keyboard.
9. Now use the cursor arrow keys or click and drag the patch into place over the damage pixels. If you applied sufficient feather the repair should be seamless. If you didn't give sufficient free space around the patch to allow for the feather, then some damaged pixels may show though. Hence being careful how far out from the damage your selection is. Reduce the opacity of the new layer by 1% or 2% to help further blend the repair if found necessary.