

Adobe Photoshop

Combine masks with clipping paths

In Adobe® Photoshop®, masks provide you with a powerful tool for controlling color changes, filters, and effects by isolating and protecting areas of an image. But did you know that you can also work with vector paths to dynamically control what's shown in an image?

When you draw a shape using vectors, you're actually creating a color layer that's clipped by the paths. The layers underneath can either show through the clipping path or be blocked by the clipped shape.

This Web tip will show how to work with both masks and clipping paths to control what's shown in your image.



1. Start with a background.

Open a Photoshop file or create a new one. You'll be using this file as the background for your final image.

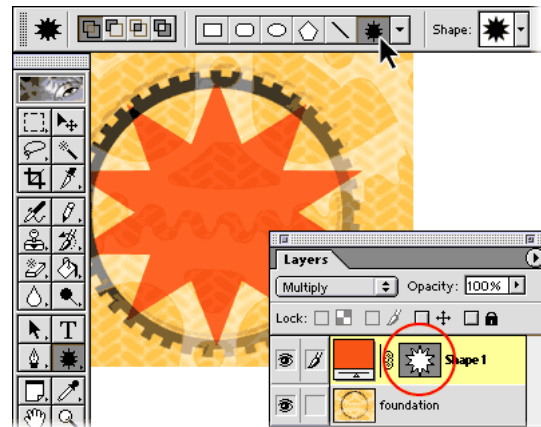


2. Add a vector shape.

First, create a vector shape. Vector shapes can be scaled to any size without losing clarity or detail.

Select a shape tool and pick a color from the toolbox. Make sure the Create new shape layer option is selected in the tool options bar. Drag over your background image to create a vector shape. Notice that adding a shape automatically creates a new layer. In the Layers palette, you'll see thumbnails of the color layer and the clipping path. Like mask thumbnails, the white area indicates what shows in your image and the black area indicates what's blocked. You can choose a blending mode to define how the clipped layer will combine with the background image. With the vector shape layer selected, choose a mode from the Blending Mode pop-up menu.

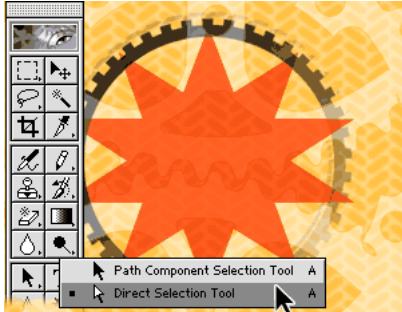
For our vector shape, we selected the custom shape tool and the 10-point star from the Shape pop-up palette, and then dragged to create a star shape. Then we chose Multiply for the blending mode because it allows the background layer to show through.



3. Modify the shape.

If you want to modify your vector shape, use the path component selection tool or the direct selection tool to move or modify it. We lengthened and repositioned the points on our star.

Note that modifying a shape changes the clipping path. You can instantly change what shows in your image by modifying the shape of a clipping path.

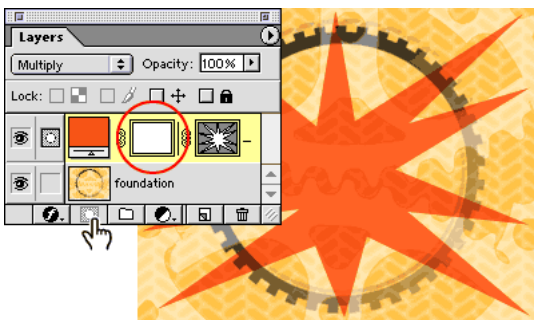


4. Add a raster mask to the vector layer.

Now that you have your vector shape and blending mode, let's apply an effect or a filter to the layer. But before we do that, there's a step that's very helpful in controlling the effect or filter.

While clipping paths and masks can reveal or block layers in an image, masks additionally allow you to dynamically specify opacity. So to control the level of opacity in your effect, color change, or filter, you must create a mask. Unlike paths, which are vector, masks are raster (commonly called bitmap).

With the vector shape layer selected, click the Add a Mask button at the bottom of the Layers palette. A blank square appears next to your vector mask thumbnail. This square represents the raster mask that will control the opacity of your effect. The clipping path still determines the shape of the area that shows through.



5. Apply an effect or filter.

Now that you created the raster mask, you can apply an effect or filter to the vector shape layer.

We used the gradient tool for our effect. With black as our foreground color, we selected the Foreground to Transparent fill from the Gradient pop-up palette in the options bar. We then chose the radial gradient and dragged outward from the center of the star shape.



6. Add a visual element for a selection.

Now that you've learned how to control an effect or filter using a vector shape, let's see how to use a selection mask to control an effect or filter.

First create a new layer and add a visual element that will sit on top of the background. If you want the background to show through, make sure the visual element you're adding is on a transparent background.

We used a photographic image of an oil can for our visual element.



7. (Optional) Modify the visual element.

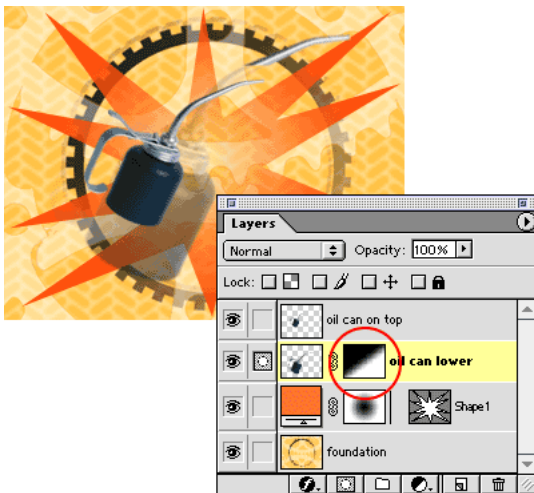
You can always modify your visual element before making the mask.

We duplicated our oil can. With the oil can layer selected, we chose Layer > Duplicate Layer. A copy was created on top of the original oil can layer in the Layer palette. Then we selected the original oil can layer and chose Edit > Transform > Scale. Manipulating the corner handles of the bounding box, we enlarged the oil can. Then the move tool was used to offset the enlarged image.

8. Create a mask from your visual element.

With your visual element layer selected, click the Add a Mask button at the bottom of the Layers palette. A mask is automatically created based on the selected shape of your visual element.

The enlarged oil can layer was used to create our mask. We selected the gradient tool in the toolbox with a Foreground to Transparent option and a Linear Gradient. The gradient tool was dragged across the enlarged oil can. The raster mask restricted the gradient effect so the enlarged oil can became only partially visible.

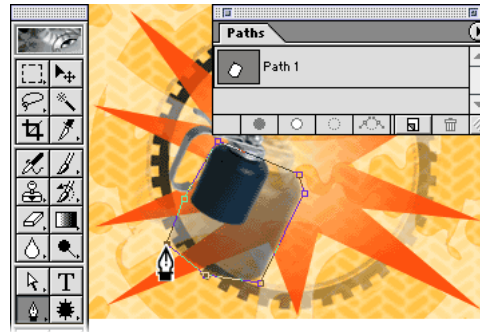


9. Create a path.

To further control what shows in the visual element layer, you can add a clipping path.

Choose Window > Show Paths to make the Path palette accessible. Draw a path with the pen tool. (You can also create a work path with the shape tool by selecting the Create new work path option in the tool options bar.)

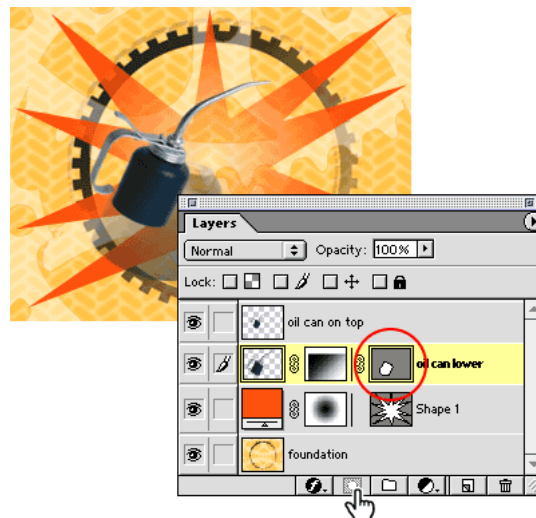
Since we didn't want the entire enlarged oil can to show, we created a path just around the bottom of the can. We then used the direct selection tool to modify the path's shape, and the path component selection tool to move the path.



10. Add a clipping path to a layer.

Return to the Layers palette with your visual element layer selected. Choose Layer > Add Layer Clipping Path > Current Path. The path you created (in Step 9) shows its clipping path thumbnail in the visual element layer. The clipping path defines how much shows in this layer.

For the final touches to our image, we adjusted the look of the oil can by creating an adjustment layer to alter the Hue/Saturation. Then, we experimented with offsetting the top three layers of our image.



11. Experiment with masks and clipping paths.

Masks and clipping paths give you the power to control how the different layers, filters, color changes, and effects show in your image. With masks, you can vary the opacity level of an effect, and with clipping paths, you can easily modify the vector shape—instantly changing what’s revealed or blocked in your image. Of course, there’s a lot more that masks and clipping paths can do, and you’ll discover new ways to create exciting images as you experiment with these tools.

