

FIX PHOTOS FAST



with
ACTIONS



By Linda Sattgast

Actions: Fix Photos Fast! Actions Workflow—Photoshop Elements

Lesson 01: Panel Setup

Before you get started fixing photos, it's a good idea to arrange your Panel Bin, which is on the right side of the desktop. You'll need to be in the Expert mode to adjust the panels, so click on Expert at the top of your screen.

Panels can be accessed by clicking on the panel icons Adobe has placed below the Panel Bin, but for editing, you really need a custom set of panels.

- Click on the triangle next to the “More” menu and choose Custom Workspace.
- To view a panel, click on its tab.
- To delete a panel, click on its tab and drag it out of the Panel Bin onto your desktop. Click the close button.
- To create a second panel area along the side, click and drag a panel tab to the side until you see a vertical blue line. Let go of the mouse to dock it next to the first panel. I find this takes up a lot of space, however, so I don't often use this option.
- To create a new panel compartment within the original Panel Bin, click on the tab of a panel and drag it to the top or bottom of the Bin until you see a horizontal blue line.
- You can also create a new panel compartment between two other panels by dragging the tab of a panel between two other panels until you see the blue horizontal line.
- To access additional panels, either click on the More menu at the bottom of the Panel Bin or, in the Menu Bar, click on Window and select a panel.
- The panel will pop up on the desktop, usually along with other panels.
- To nest a panel with other panels, click on its tab and drag it over the tab of another panel until you see a blue outline around the entire panel. When you let go of the mouse, it will become part of the same panel compartment.
- You can double click on a tab to collapse the panel compartment. Click on a tab to expand it again.

Linda's Panel Arrangement

Starting with the original Custom Workspace, here's how I set up my panels for editing photos and working with actions in Photoshop Elements:

- Delete the Graphics and Favorites panels.
- Put the Histogram panel at the top. I'll be showing you in a later lesson how to use the Histogram panel to analyze your photo.
- Put the Layers panel under the Histogram panel, in its own compartment.
- Nest the History and Effects panels with Layers.
- Place the Actions panel wherever it works the best for you. When I'm using my regular computer desktop instead of a small recording screen, I often put the Actions panel in its own compartment at the bottom of the Panel bin.

- You can also let the Actions panel float on your desktop. The key is to put it wherever it will be the most effective.

In these class videos, you won't always see my panels in this exact configuration, and that's what's great about them. You can move them around at any time to make them more convenient.

Once you set up your own custom set of panels, you'll be ready to get started on these lessons!

Lesson 02: Load & Delete Actions

Loading and Deleting actions is easy in Photoshop Elements.

- Download the Fix Photos FAST.atn file from the classroom Download page.
- Open Photoshop Elements.
- In the Menu Bar choose Window > Actions to open the Actions panel. You'll already have some default actions listed in the Actions panel.
- To collapse an action set, click on the triangle next to its folder, and that will give you more room.
- Click on the icon in the upper right corner to open the flyout menu and choose Load Actions.
- Navigate to the folder on your computer that contains the Fix Photos FAST.atn action you downloaded and double click on the name of the action to install it.
- To delete a set of actions, click on the action set folder in the Actions panel to make it active and click the Trash can icon.
- Note: Alt clicking (Mac: Opt clicking) on the Trash icon deletes the action without bringing up the dialog box.
- To delete an individual action within a set, click on the action to select it, and Alt click (Mac: Opt click) on the Trash icon.
- To Reset your actions to the default settings, open the flyout menu and choose Reset Actions.

Load the Fix Photos FAST.atn action set now so you'll be ready to move ahead with these lessons!

Lesson 03: About The Actions

I've arranged the Fix Photos FAST actions to make it easier to find the action you want when you need it. I discuss what each action does in other videos. In this video I simply want to acquaint you with how I organized the actions so you can find them more easily.

If an action name is too long to see the entire name, click on the edge of the Actions panel and drag to the left to widen it.

Also, remember to use these actions on the original photo before you move the photo onto another document. The reason I want you to do this is because you'll often need to use more than one action on a given photo, so I've set up the actions in a way that allows you to use multiple actions without worrying about the state of the previous layer—whether it's partially transparent or whether it has a layer mask—these are the kinds of things that can trip an action up, so I built-in a safety net to avoid running into problems with those kinds of things.

If you do move a photo onto another document and then try to run the actions, the action will be applied to the entire document—so do your fixing first, and then move your photo, if needed.

Layer Actions

There are four action groups in the Fix Photos FAST action set. The first group is layer actions and there are only two—Merge Visible Layers and Flatten Layers. Use Merge Visible Layers when you want to take a single layer snapshot of everything you've done to the photo up to that point.

Use Flatten Layers if you want to flatten all the layers in the Layers panel into one layer.

We won't be using these two actions very much in this class, but they're handy to have when you're working on a

layered document, such as when you're compositing a photo page. The next three sections we'll use a lot!

Lighting

The next section of actions has to do with the lighting on your photo. Use these actions when you need to make your entire photo, or parts of your photo, either lighter or darker. I put the word Lighter or Darker at the beginning of the name so you would know what it does.

The action called **Contrast** both lightens and darkens your photo slightly to produce more contrast, so I simply used the name "Contrast."

There are several PLAY ALL actions scattered throughout the Fix Photos FAST action set. Run these actions to play all the actions of different strengths in a certain set and put each one on a different layer so you can choose the one you like the best. It's very convenient when you're not sure which strength your photo needs.

Color

The middle section of actions has to do with color in some way, either fixing unwanted color issues or improving the color.

Smooth and Sharp

The last section of actions will either smooth part or all of your photo, or it will sharpen part or all of your photo.

You'll notice that some actions have words in all caps in the name. I did this to make it easier to navigate through the actions and for your eyes to better notice certain actions.

One Final Note: All these actions only require Photoshop Elements to run except for one—the Reduce Noise–Noise-ware action. This requires a 3rd party plug-in that is not supplied with this class—it must be purchased separately. You do NOT need to purchase Noiseware to benefit from this class, and I have three other Reduce Noise actions that do work with the filters that come with Photoshop Elements. The reason I include the Noiseware action is because I personally prefer it over the Photoshop Elements Reduce Noise filters, and I use it exclusively for noise reduction myself, so I wanted to, first of all, be totally up front about my opinions, and I wanted to demonstrate it for you and that way you could make up your own mind about whether you want to purchase it or not.

If you decide you don't want to purchase anything additional, that's perfectly fine. You can use the three other noise reduction actions along with the PLAY ALL option, and they all work great with Photoshop Elements.

To delete the Reduce Noise-NOISEWARE action simply click on it to select it and click on the Trash icon. Click OK to the dialog box that comes up. If you ever want it back it will still be in the original action set which you can download again from the classroom.

So that's a quick introduction to the way I've organized the actions. These are very powerful actions that will quickly help you fix problems with your photos and help them look their best!

Lesson 04: The Fastest Method

When editing, most of us are looking for the fastest way to make our photos look good so we can get on with what we really want to do with our photos. There are three directions you can take when you begin editing a photo or a set of photos:

Method 1: Photoshop Elements Only

Open your photos in Photoshop Elements and use the tools and filters to edit your photos. This includes fixing things that can only be done by hand—for example, cloning an unwanted object out of a photo.

Photoshop Elements has some wonderful automated tools to help you fix your photos, so my advice is to use them!

I don't use the editing tools under Quick, however. For just a few versions, the Quick method of editing worked well, but then Adobe tried to "improve" it a few years ago, and I've found it less than helpful ever since, unless you just use the auto buttons, which you can access in the Enhance menu anyway, so my advice is to ignore Quick editing, but do use the shortcuts in the Enhance menu when you're in the Expert mode.

Auto Smart Fix: Try this to see if Photoshop Elements will automatically fix everything. Sometimes it works, or at the very least, it may get you part of the way there.

Auto Smart Tone: This is a great lighting and contrast enhancer that puts you in control. Move the pin in the grid toward the result you want based on the four thumbnails in each corner.

Of all the Photoshop Elements Enhance options, this one is my favorite, but it wasn't introduced until Photoshop Elements 12, so earlier versions won't be able to take advantage of this great Enhance menu item.

Auto Levels: It's best to ignore this one. It works against you more often than helping.

Auto Contrast: This gives a little bit of contrast, but I like the flexibility of my contrast action better.

Auto Color Correction: This will often improve or fix color problems. I've incorporated Auto Color into the **Fix Photos FAST** actions using the name Color Cast, because it is a helpful command.

The Enhance menu has a few other options you can explore, but the main point is that it never hurts to try an auto command to see if it works. If the photo still needs help, you can always augment with actions or start over with actions. In other words, mix and match to get the fastest photo edit that makes your photo look its best.

Method 2: Camera Raw

You can open and edit your photos in Camera Raw through either Photoshop Elements or Lightroom. Camera Raw has the advantage of being able to edit multiple photos at a time. (Watch my videos called Amazing Camera Raw to learn how to use it.)

Method 3: Fix Photos FAST actions

Open your photos in Photoshop Elements and edit them using the Fix Photos FAST actions, which is what we'll be discussing throughout most of this class. To show you how to use these actions, I filmed a set of videos for each major action focus—Lighting, Color, and Smooth & Sharp.

So which method should you use?

I like to ask the question: Which method will be faster? I always start with the fastest method. The auto commands in the Enhance menu or the Fix Photos FAST actions, will probably be the fastest, depending on your photo. If you have a group of photos that need similar edits, Camera Raw might be the best choice.

Some photos, though, work best going directly to actions. You'll learn by experience, which photos are the best candidates for starting with actions.

For example, some lighting problems respond much better to actions because of the multi-step solution provided in some of the actions. I especially see this in photos with a lot of dark and light contrast.

Also, it's usually best when you have a bad color problem to start with the Color actions.

And, finally, I like to handle blemishes, noise, and sharpening with actions.

So choose the fastest method to edit your photos, and give yourself a little bit of time to learn the different options, so you feel more comfortable making your choice.

Lesson 05: Why Action Layers?

In this video I want to tell you briefly about my workflow with actions so you know why I've set the actions up the

way I have and what you should feel free to change.

In the training videos you'll notice that I've set up the actions to put one action on each layer with the name of the action on the layer. If I use a lot of actions, I end up with a lot of layers.

I've done this as an organizational tool to use while I'm working on a photo. I can see at a glance which actions I've used, and I can decide whether to try a different action solution. I often toggle back and forth between two action alternatives to see which one I like better.

If you want to quickly see a before and after view of your photo, or any other step in your photo editing process, press Alt (Mac: Opt) and click on the visibility icon of the action layer you want to view. That will hide all the other layers but that one.

To reveal the hidden layers, repeat the shortcut on the same layer: press Alt (Mac: Opt) and click on the visibility icon of the visible layer.

You can easily delete action layers when they're on separate layers. If you run an action and don't like the result, simply press the Delete key. If you get a dialog box asking if you really want to delete the layer, click Don't Show Again, and then click OK.

Some earlier versions of Photoshop Elements don't allow you simply press Delete to delete a layer. If you have one of those versions, press Alt (Mac: Opt) and click on the Trash icon to instantly delete a layer.

Once you're done editing and are satisfied with the results, you can choose to keep the layers and save as a PSD or flatten the layers.

In routine editing, I do not keep the layers. I've added a **Flatten Layers** action to the Fix Photos FAST action set just for convenience, though you can, of course, access this command easily from the Layers panel flyout menu.

I do save the edited version as a JPEG copy so I can still access the original unedited photo, if I need to. I usually add the word "edited" to the end of the file name to save it as a copy and keep it alphabetically next to the original file.

Would you ever want to save all the layers? A few of you might. If you teach Photoshop or Photoshop Elements, it might come in handy, down the road, to know what you did to a photo. I keep some of the more interesting photos in PSD format with layers, just in case—mainly because I teach this stuff!

The only other time you might want to save the layers is on a special photo that you might want to revisit or tweak down the road. File space is cheap now, so why not?

To save in PSD format and keep the layers, choose File > Save As. Change the file name slightly—again, I usually add the word "edited,"—and choose Photoshop from the Format menu.

So that's the reasoning behind using action layers, but I officially give you permission to flatten your layers and save a JPEG copy of the image!

Lesson 06: Helpful Action Tips

There are five types of Fix Photos FAST actions.

1. Run without Stopping

The first type of action is the kind that runs without stopping. Click on the name of an action—not just the triangle that opens up and shows you the steps the action is going to take—but the actual name, and then click the play button. The action creates an effect and puts the name of the action on the layer, and that's all you have to do. Most of the Fix Photos FAST actions are this kind of action—very simple.

If the effect isn't enough, you can run the same action again. On occasion I'll even run an action three or four times! You can reduce the opacity of an action layer to dial in exactly the amount of effect you want. **Action Example—Color: Cooler**

2. Adjust a Setting

Some actions will open a dialog box where you must adjust a setting, such as a Levels or Hue/Saturation setting. You can choose to accept the default setting or make any changes you wish, and click OK.

Action Example—Color: Boost

3. Brush on an Effect

Some actions ask you to stop and brush on an effect using a layer mask and a brush. A dialog box tells you exactly what to do. The action will add a black layer mask to the action layer, change the Foreground Color Chip to white, and select the Brush tool, but it doesn't choose a specific brush or change the settings in Tool Options. You must be aware of brush settings and make sure they're good for your photo.

Action Example—Color: Whiter Teeth

4. Brush Away an Effect

The fourth type of action gives you the option to brush away some of the effect of the action using a layer mask. The action will automatically select the Brush tool, add a white mask to the action layer, and make the Foreground Color Chip black, but again, it won't change any settings in Tool Options, so be sure to check that before using the brush.

Action Example—Reduce Noise-Maximum

5. PLAY ALL Actions

A PLAY ALL action is included with some of the actions that have different strength levels. If you're not sure which strength will work best for your photo, run the PLAY ALL action. It creates a layer for each action and lets you choose which effect you like the best. The lowest strength layer will be visible. To see the other layers, click on the visibility icon of each layer.

Action Example—PLAY ALL Shadows/Highlights

Export Clipboard Message

If you get a message that says: Could not export the clipboard because it is too big to export, just click OK.

