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Secrets of Terrific Type

Lesson 02-10: Baseline Shift—Photoshop Elements

Have you ever wished you could change something but you didn't know how so you stopped using that something because it wasn't working how you wanted? That was me before I learned about Baseline Shift. Before I knew about Baseline Shift, I would purposely not use certain fonts because I couldn't stand how the numbers or punctuation would line up compared to the rest of the characters. Take note of the number 3 and the number 9 below.

Today is 3-19-18.

The good news, is that there is a way to fix this! While PS makes it a much easier thing to fix, we can still fix it in PSE; we just have to do it the long way. But having a long way is still better than no way. So, before I show you how, let's make sure we understand just what Baseline is and why we might want to adjust it from time to time.

The Baseline of text is the imaginary line that your type rests upon. Often, you'll see tails of certain letters extend beyond the baseline such as small letter P.

The imaginary line type rests upon.

So, when we say Baseline Shift, this means the Baseline of your type is being adjusted up or down.

The most common thing that Baseline Shift is used for is to adjust the baseline of punctuation or numbers.

Let's take a look at how to do that in PSE.

Step One: Prepare the Workspace

I've already created a new document that is 12 inches by 12 inches at 300ppi with a white background.

Press the letter D to reset the Color Chips.

Get the Horizontal Type tool.

Before doing anything else, click on the Tool Options Menu and choose Reset Tool.

Step Two: Add Type

In the Tool Options, select the font Cherry Swash, set the size to 72 pts and use Center Alignment.

On the document, click once and type a phrase with both letters and numbers. I'm typing Today is 3-19-18. Click the checkmark to commit.

Today is 3-19-18.

Step Three: Add Guide

Notice how the number 3 has a baseline much lower than the letters. Let's add a guide to help us better see that.

So to do that, make sure your Rulers are showing by going to the Menu Bar and choosing View > Rulers.

Now, from the top Ruler, click and drag down to create a New Guide.

This will help us see that the number 3 and the number 9 both have a lower baseline than everything else.

Today is 3-19-18.

Step Four: Add Layer Mask

The way we can fix it in PSE is by using a Layer Mask.

So with your type layer the active layer in the Layer's panel, click on the Add Layer Mask icon.

Step Five: Hide Numbers

Get the Rectangular Marquee tool.

In the Tool Options, click on the New Selection icon, set the Feather to 0px and the Aspect to Normal.

On the document, click and drag out a selection that just surrounds the number 3.

Press Alt Backspace (Mac: Opt Delete) to fill the selection with black.

Press Ctrl D (Mac: Cmd D) to deselect.

Today is -19-18.

Now, on the document, click and drag a selection around the number 9.

Press Alt Backspace (Mac: Opt Delete) to again fill the selection with black.

And Again Press Ctrl D (Mac: Cmd D) to deselect.

Today is -1 -18.

Step Six: Type New Numbers

In the Layers panel, click on the Create a New Layer icon.

Get the Horizontal Type tool. Keep all the tool settings the same.

On the document, while holding down the Shift key, click once and type the number 3.

Today is -1 -18.

3

Get the Move tool.

On the document, drag the 3 so that it rests on the guide. Use the Arrow keys to nudge if necessary.

Today is 3-1 -18.

Now repeat those steps for the number 9.

Today is 3-19-18.

Ok, that looks better to me! Even though I think it's odd that the number 1 is so much smaller than the other numbers, I much prefer they have a common baseline.

For some of you, you might be thinking I'm being too picky about wanting my characters to all line up. And that's ok! It's totally your choice. If you like how the font is made and you don't want to change anything, that is completely up to you. But for as many of you that might think that, there are also some that have always wanted to be able to change that and now they can!

I want to show you one more example of when or why you might want to adjust the baseline. With many fonts, the punctuation may have a baseline that needs adjusting. Here's an example of what I mean. I wrote the same phrase as earlier using the Amastery Script font.

Today is 3-19-18.

Notice two things. First, the period is not resting on the baseline.

Today is 3-19-18.

Second, the dashes are actually quite high when compared to the numbers.

Today is 3-19-18.

So, I'm going to move both the dashes and the period down by using a negative baseline shift. Below, you can see the difference. I used the same method as before, the Layer Mask method, and now everything seems to line up properly.

Today is 3-19-18.

So let's ask a question. Are you going to be using Baseline Shift on a regular basis?

Well, that depends on you. If you're getting into designing items for pay, this is something you'll want to check regularly as you create your projects.

If you're a hobbyist who is like me and can be particular about the baseline being the same all the way across, you might use this method on the occasional basis.

If you're a hobbyist who isn't bothered by it, then Baseline Shift isn't something you'll have to worry much about.

I understand that it's a bit of a drag to have to fix the baseline using this method in PSE and I encourage you, if you're curious, to watch the PS versions of these tutorials if you're intrigued by the options found there. But, the great news is, we can still fix the baseline of our type in PSE, it just takes a little bit more work. And even if you don't see yourself using it very often, you can still have some fun with it! You'll see how in the homework so get ready to create a cool piece of word art using Baseline Shift!