



INTRODUCTION TO GRAPHICS

Automating Processes Using Actions

Information
Sheet No. PS625

Note: the following project is extracted from David Nagel's excellent web tutorials. His demonstrations are invaluable to any serious Photoshop user as he clearly explains (and comments) on what he is doing and generally provides logical and thorough information and illustrations of what the operator is doing during each step of the process.

Recording selection transformations as Actions

At some point you're going to run into a situation that requires you to create effects requiring multiple selections and apply these to multiple images. Maybe you want to break up a bunch of images into pieces for use in a collage. Maybe you want to create border effects on a range of images automatically. Maybe you want to create selection-based actions for generating title-safety guides. Whatever the reason, it's a horrifying prospect for the sheer volume of repetitive work. But the process can be automated in Adobe Photoshop using Actions.

Before you get started, you should know that this is a time-intensive process. But it's easily worth it if you need to repeat these steps on multiple images. Let's assume, for the purposes of this tutorial, that you want to chop your image into a 4 x 4 grid, which involves 65 basic steps (a starting step plus four steps per rectangle in our 4 x 4 grid). I'm not going to show every single step, but just the basic techniques

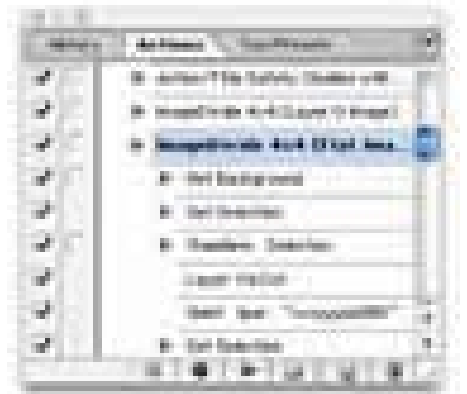
needed for you to produce your own selection-based numeric transformations. If this isn't what you want to do, well, at least you'll learn the principles involved. At the end of this article, I'll provide you with some prerecorded Actions for generating title and action safeties using this method and also for chopping up an image into 16 parts, which you can examine and attempt to dissect at your leisure.

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Setting up your Action

If you're unfamiliar with Photoshop Actions, they're designed to allow you to automate repetitive tasks by recording your steps on one image and then being able to apply these steps to subsequent images. It's likely in many cases that you'll need to create multiple versions of your Actions to accommodate different file types. (For example, you may need to create separate Actions for images containing backgrounds versus standard layers.) You won't need to rerecord the Action in its entirety to do this, but you will need to duplicate your Action and then modify it. We'll get to that at the end of this tutorial.

To begin, open up a base image that's somewhat representative of they types of images to which you'll later be applying your Action.



Then open up your Actions palette. Click the New Action Set button at the bottom of the palette to create a new Action set, and then click the New Action button to create your first Action. When you do this, the little Record button will become activated automatically. (Note that if you're not ready to start recording your Action, you can click the Stop button to stop recording at any time without adversely affecting the outcome.)

Now you're ready to start recording your Action.

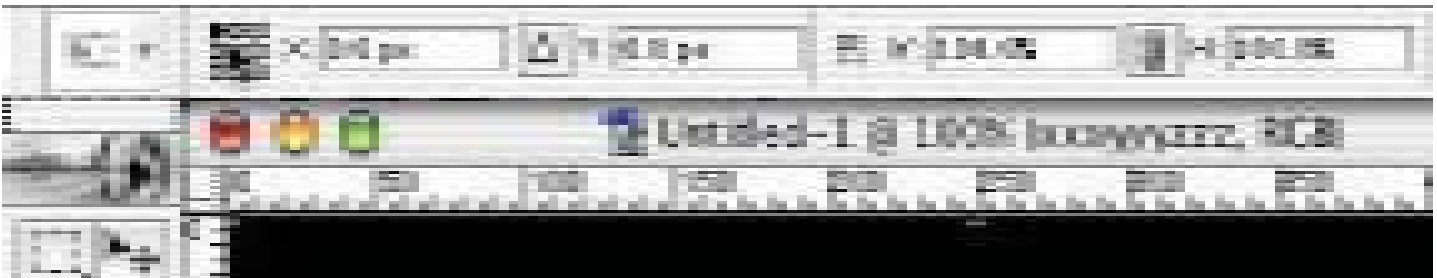


As a preliminary Action step, open up your Layers palette, select your background layer (or Layer 1, if it's not a background layer), and rename it with a unique name, such as "xxxxyyyzzz." Depending on what kind of image you're working with, this step will be recorded as either "Set current layer" or "Set Background."

This is important because, in our recorded Action, we're going to have to switch back to our starting layer frequently, and, in order to make this work, the starting layer needs an identifiable name.



2. Choose Select > Transform Selection.



3. Up in the Tool Options palette, switch the Reference Point Location to the top left dot. (This is critical to a proper transformation.)

4. Then, also in the Tool Options palette, type in the percentage of your transformation, in this case 25 percent width and 25 percent height.

5. Hit the Enter key, and you have your 25 percent selection properly positioned in the top left corner.

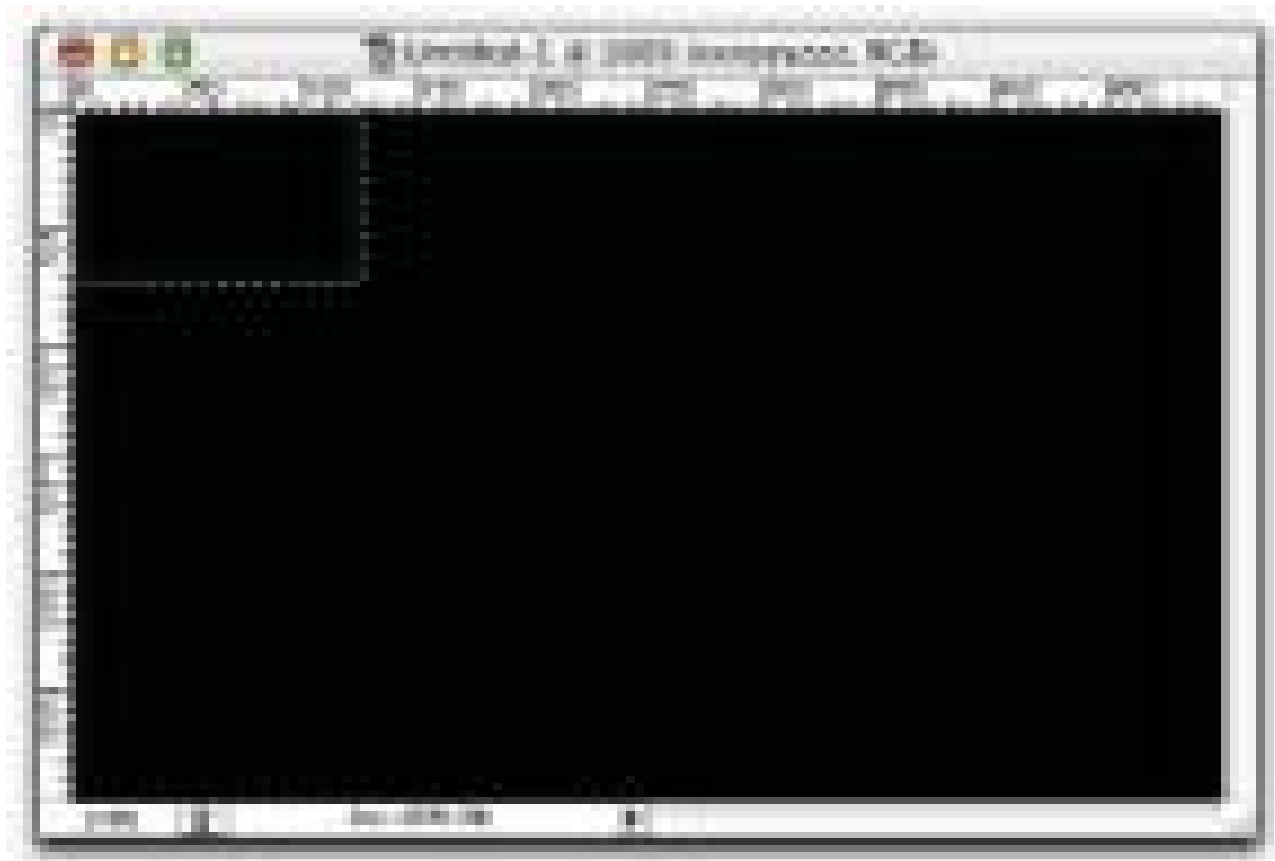
6. You want to do something with your selection. In this case, I'm going to use it to generate a new layer so that each chunk of my image will be place onto a separate layer. So I'll choose Layer > New > Layer via Copy. This actually copies the contents of my selection and places them onto a new layer without affecting the underlying layer.

7. And, finally, go to go to your Layers palette and reselect the base layer (xxxxyyzzz).

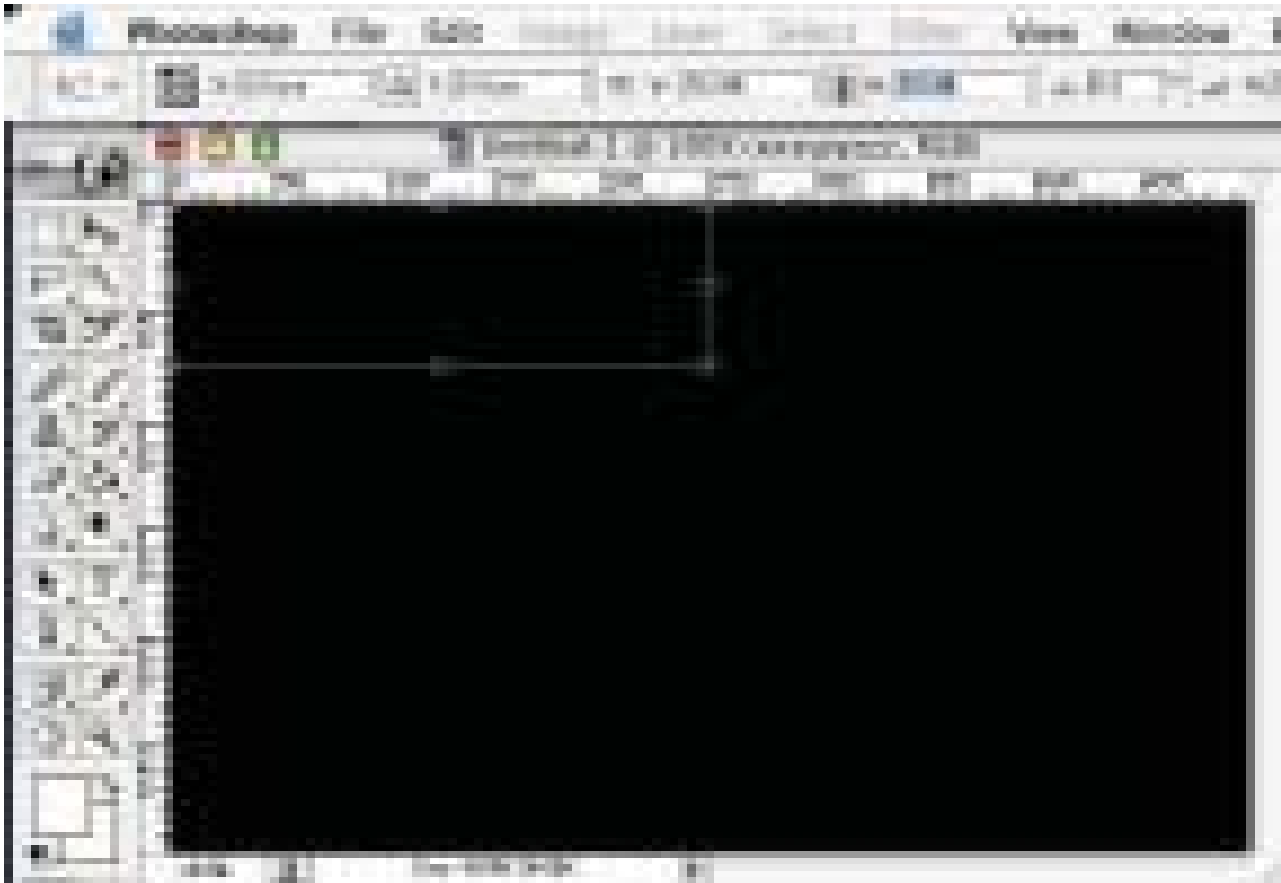


So now, looking at your Actions palette, you should have five recorded steps: renaming the layer, selecting all, transforming the selection, creating a new layer from the selection and, finally, going back and re-selecting the base layer in your Layers palette.

Next we'll move on to the next section over to the right. The big difference here is in how you perform the transformation. So first select all, and then choose Select > Transform Selection. Then follow these steps.



1. Once again, select the top left dot in the Reference Point Locator.
2. Enter a width of 50 percent and a height of 25 percent. Do not hit Enter yet.
3. Now switch the Reference Point Locator to the top RIGHT dot and change the width to 25 percent. Pretty funky, eh?
4. Hit the Enter key to accept the transformation.
5. Choose Layer > New > Layer via Copy.
6. Reselect your base layer in the Layers palette.



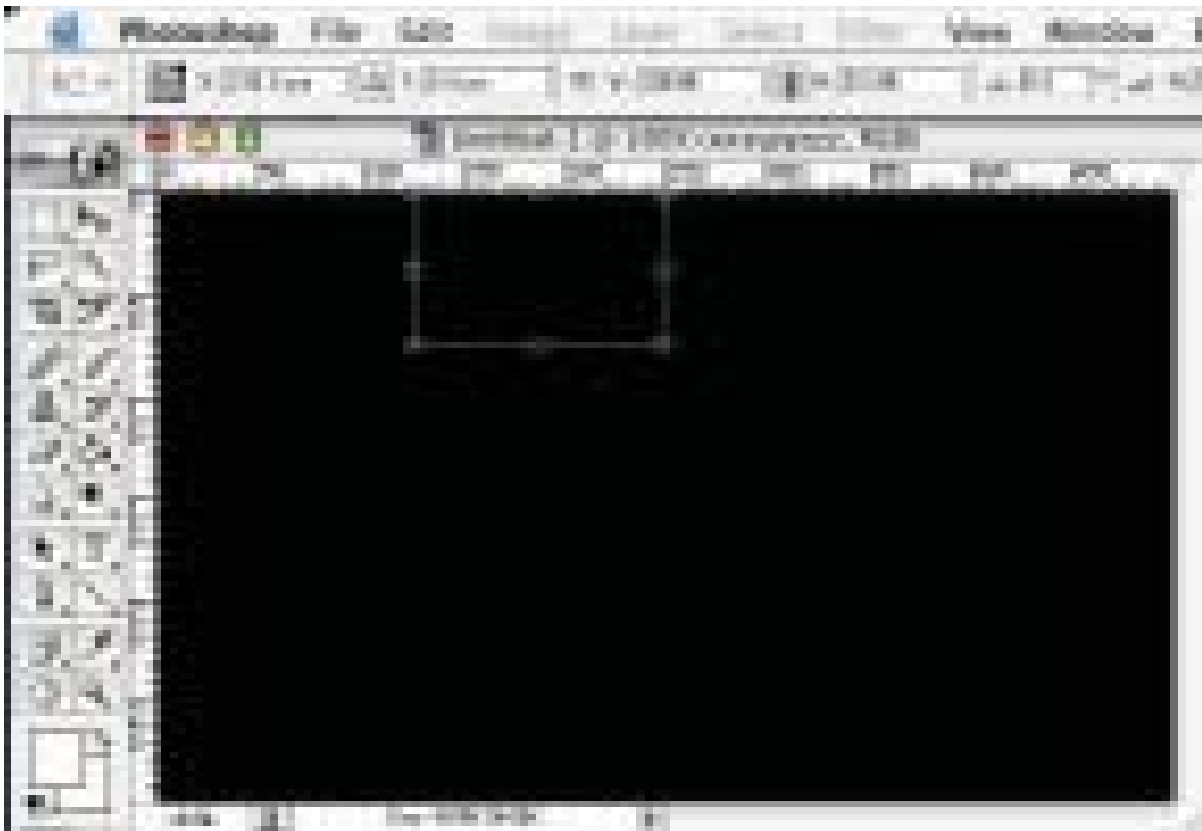
4. Create your new layer from the selection.

5. Don't forget to reselect your starting layer (xxxxyyyzzz) again once you're done with this step.

So hopefully at this point you can see what's involved with each step of the process and can fill in the blanks for completing this task. Go through the process section by section, selecting all, then transforming the selection, making sure to set the Reference Point Locator properly in each case so that you're selecting the proper chunk of your image to copy to a new layer. At the end, choose File > Save As, and save your image in the file format you want, but absolutely do not change the base name of the file. (This restriction is for the purpose of attendance-free automation later on.)

When you're done, you'll wind up with 66 steps--one for changing the name of your starting layer, four for each of the layers you create in this process and one for saving the image.

When you're done, press the Stop button in your Actions palette, and you're ready to go.



Applying your Action

So now you have your Action. What can you do with it? Well, of course, you can open up a new image and apply your Action to it by selecting the Action in your Actions palette and hitting the Play button at the bottom. Or you can use it to batch process a bunch of images. If you're unfamiliar with batch processing custom Actions in Photoshop, here's how you do it.

1. Choose File > Automate > Batch.
2. Choose your Action set and the specific Action you want to run. (In this case, I'm choosing the Action I just created.)
3. In the Source section of the Batch dialog, choose the folder containing the images you want to batch process.
4. In the Destination section of the Batch dialog, choose the output folder (preferably a different folder from the source folder, just in case).
5. Also in the destination section, you might want to change the name of your output file to differentiate it from the original. In my case, I'll use the original file name, then I'll add "-chopped" (indicating that the image has been chopped up), followed by the file extension. So my final file name will be something like "image1-chopped.psd."
6. Then hit the OK button.

If you included the "Save As" command in your Action, Photoshop should churn through your images without interruption. If you didn't, you'll be presented with a Save dialog for each image that's processed.

Label	Address	Field Name
2	00	Register 00/Action 00
2	01	Register 01/Action 01
2	02	Register 02/Action 02
2	03	Register 03/Action 03
2	04	Register 04/Action 04
2	05	Register 05/Action 05
2	06	Register 06/Action 06
2	07	Register 07/Action 07
2	08	Register 08/Action 08
2	09	Register 09/Action 09
2	0A	Register 10/Action 10
2	0B	Register 11/Action 11
2	0C	Register 12/Action 12
2	0D	Register 13/Action 13
2	0E	Register 14/Action 14
2	0F	Register 15/Action 15
2	10	Register 16/Action 16
2	11	Register 17/Action 17
2	12	Register 18/Action 18
2	13	Register 19/Action 19
2	14	Register 20/Action 20
2	15	Register 21/Action 21
2	16	Register 22/Action 22
2	17	Register 23/Action 23
2	18	Register 24/Action 24
2	19	Register 25/Action 25
2	1A	Register 26/Action 26
2	1B	Register 27/Action 27
2	1C	Register 28/Action 28
2	1D	Register 29/Action 29
2	1E	Register 30/Action 30
2	1F	Register 31/Action 31

