

The Workspace – The Main Panels

Good organization of your workspace will not only make work more enjoyable, but it will help you work more efficiently. Importantly, when beginning to learn Photoshop and Elements, it will also help reduce frustrating errors. It's worth spending time to arrange your main panels and clear unnecessary clutter.

Note: Panels are also sometimes referred to as windows. For the sake of simplicity I will just refer to them as panels.

The 4 key panels that you will use all the time are; Tools, Navigator, Layers, History. By default, particularly in Photoshop, there are also other panels and panel groups open. You don't need these open all the time and if, as most users, you are using a single screen, you should really maximise your screen space. I recommend arranging the four main panels as follows; the Tools panel at the left edge of the screen and the other 3 panels at the right edge the screen.

In addition, whenever you select a tool, its options are displayed in the Options Panel (also called Options Bar). In Photoshop this is displayed horizontally across the screen above the image window. In Elements it is shown at the bottom of the screen.

I recommend closing all other panels not mentioned above. They are not needed most of the time and are therefore visual clutter and can easily lead to errors. Any panel can easily be opened at any time, as needed (which for many of them, especially in the beginning, is not that often).

Tools Panel

The Tools panel is on the left side of the screen by default. I recommend leaving it there. During the course we will use several of these tools. You will need this window open all the time.

Navigator Panel

The Navigator panel is used for navigating around your image. When you begin to learn Photoshop or Elements, this can be very helpful. When you become more familiar with Photoshop and Elements and learn other methods, you won't need this as much.

It's important to work accurately, especially when editing small areas and details in an image. To work accurately, it's necessary to zoom in, sometimes a lot. When you are zoomed in you can only see a part of the image.

Navigator allows you to zoom in and out. When you are zoomed in and can't see the complete image, the Navigator panel shows you the portion of the image you have visible, represented by the red box. To pan around the image, click and drag the red box around your image.

Zoom in by clicking the icon at the right end of the slider. Zoom out by clicking on the icon at the left end. Or click and drag the slider left or right.

Note: an excellent alternative for zooming in and out is the mouse scroll wheel. I strongly recommend using this. This can be set in Edit > Preferences > General. Tick the box to “Zoom with Scroll Wheel”.

Layers Panel - *The Layers panel is the most important panel.*

Layers are a vital tool in image editing and you will be using them all the time. I recommend making the layers panel large enough to be able to see all your layers without having to scroll. This will reduce errors caused by working on the wrong layer, which can be confusing, especially for beginners. Layers are so important, they get their own Layers handout. Please see it for more details on using this most essential of Photoshop tools.

History Panel

The History panel works very much like an undo tool, (although it can also do a lot more than this). It shows all the steps that you have taken in your image, helpfully naming the tool used in each step.

Just like Undo in Microsoft Word and other programs, you can undo the last step, or many steps and go backwards and forward many steps. Note, there is an Undo option on the Edit menu, but the History panel makes things easier by naming the tool on each step taken.

This is useful for comparing what you’ve just done to how the image was before. If things go wrong, step backwards through the History states to find the last one where things are ok.

Options, or Tool Options Panel

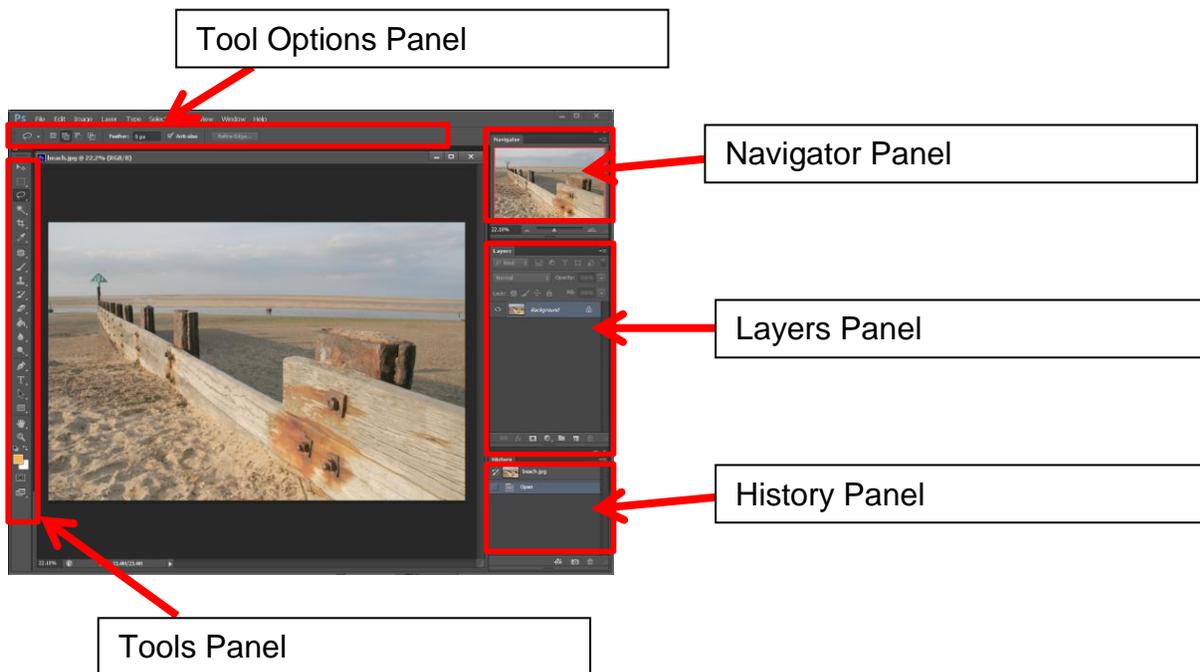
Most tools have options and settings, that need to be selected or changed, according to the editing task, image and area of image to be edited. This is such an important part of using tools effectively and different options will be discussed as we progress through the course

Tab key to show/hide panels

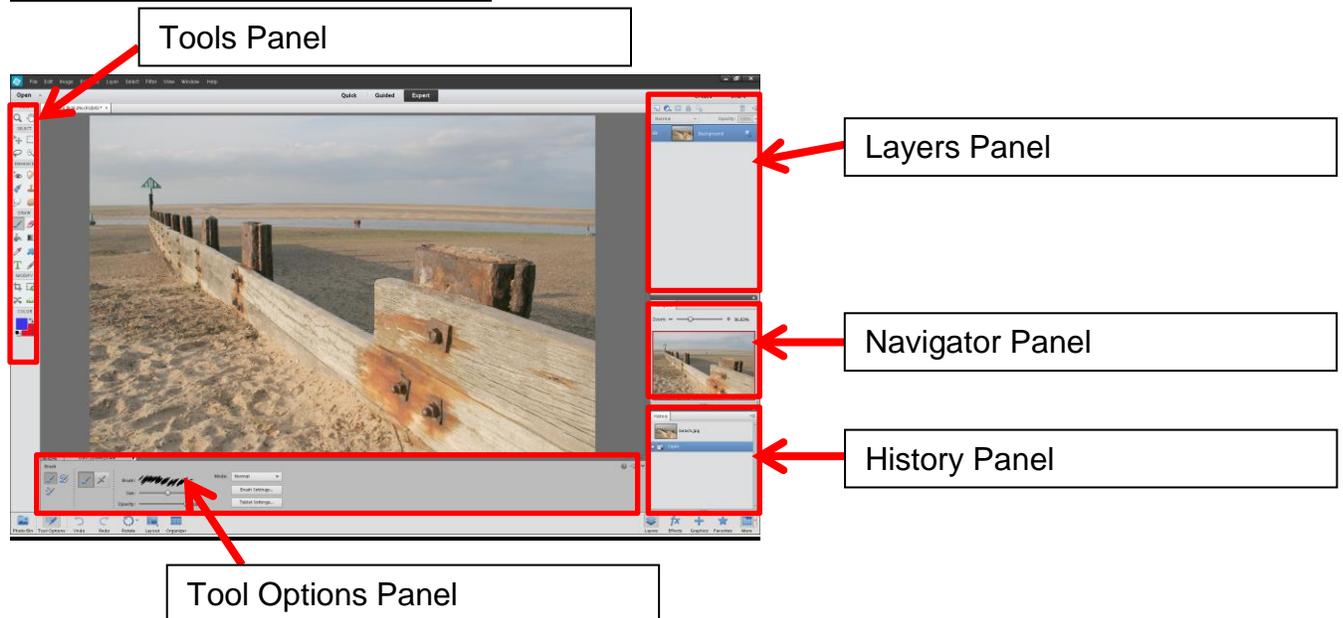
Depending on the size of your screen, such as laptops, things can look cluttered. You can hide all the panels by pressing the Tab key on the keyboard – just above the Caps Lock key. Pressing Tab again will show the panels.

Photoshop Recommended layout

This screenshots shows a recommended layout.



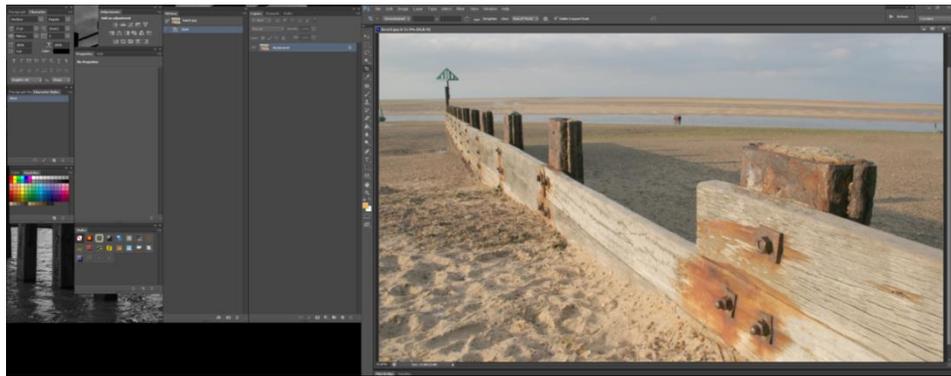
Elements Recommended layout



2 Screen layout

If you work on a desktop and have a spare screen and space for it, put it to good use.

Put all the panels on the second screen, maximising image space on your largest screen. If, as I do, you spend a lot of time editing images, you will appreciate this.

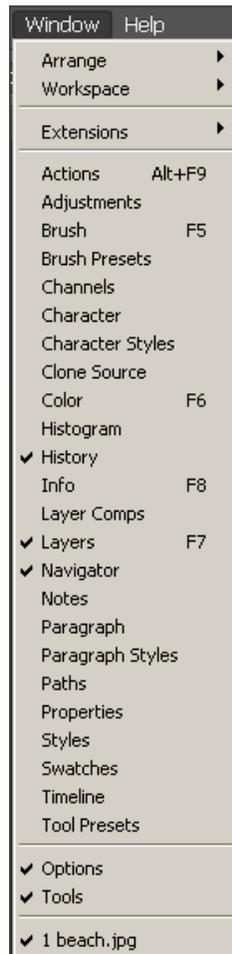


This screenshot shows a two screen arrangement, 22" on the left and 24" on the right. As well as having more room for the image, the panels can also be larger.

On my 24" screen I only have the tools panel running down the left side and the entire rest of the screen is the image window.

All my panels are on the left screen and because I have more space available, I can have more panels open. However if I was working on one screen, I would only have the main panels open that I've recommended.

Window Menu for missing panels



You can open any panel from the Window menu, so if a panel is not visible, check the Window menu. The screenshot below shows the complete list of panels in Photoshop CS6. Elements may be missing a few of these, but most are not needed most of the time in either program.

Ensure that the Options and Tools panels are open, shown by ticks in the screenshot.

Open images are shown at the bottom of the list. This screenshot shows that one image is open; beach.jpg (bottom of the screenshot).

Positioning the Panels

Click on the Panel Tab – the part that names the panel. Click and drag (keep the mouse button pressed), the panel away from the panel group. Then click the X in the top right corner to the panel group.

When you have detached the Navigator, Layers and Undo History panels from the Panel Bin, hide the Panel Bin.

Click the top bar of each Panel in turn and drag to your desired location. Then resize by clicking and dragging the bottom of the panel.

On the right side of the screen, I suggest having Navigator on top, Layers in the middle and Undo History at the bottom. Allocate most space to the Layers panel. The Navigator window can be fairly small and the Undo History panel doesn't need to show all History States.

Resize and position your windows to align at the right side of the screen and utilize all the space from top to bottom of the screen.

Note that for this to work in some versions of Elements, you will need to tick the Save Panel Locations tickbox in Preferences (see above).

Project Bin - Elements

This area is at the bottom of the screen and shows your open images. It also performs various other functions, but most of the time you won't need these, so I recommend hiding this to enable more space. See Preferences for an option to automatically hide this. You can show it at any time if desired.