Creating a Basic Drawing

In this section I'll outline some of the basic steps involved in producing drawings on computers, shown in the illustrations below (Figure 2-19)

1: Creating a rough preliminary sketch
2: Fading the rough sketch to make it less prominent so that you can trace over it
3: Tracing over the rough sketch
4: Removing the rough sketch, to leave only the finished drawing

Along the way I'll also introduce you to:
Creating layers
Enlarging and reducing the size of the image on the screen
Erasing

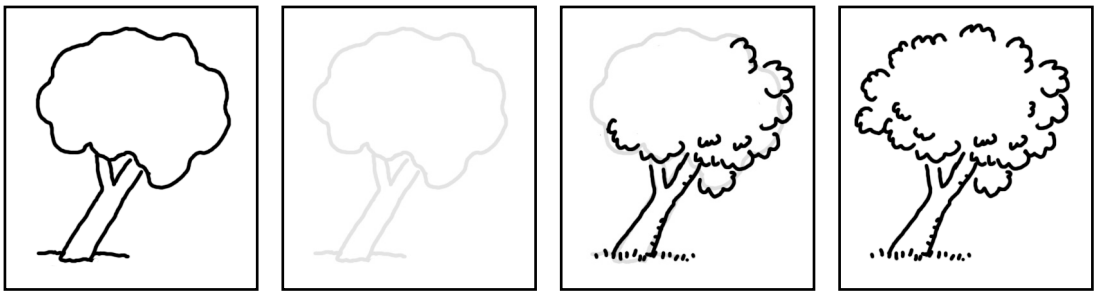

Figure 2-19 The basic stages of producing an image, from rough sketch to final artwork.

In the previous section I explained how to create basic marks in Elements.

Now I'll show you how to join the marks up in order to create a proper drawing.

You can do this on the same sheet on which you created the lines previously, or you can open a new file and start afresh. If you're opening a new file follow the opening instructions from the previous section, using the same settings, but giving your file a different name, such as My First Drawing.

Creating a Rough Sketch on a New Layer

In the previous example I explained how to make marks directly onto the white surface of your document, just like drawing onto a sheet of paper.

There is however a more convenient way of drawing, which is to draw onto separate sheets that you place above that original surface. These sheets are the digital equivalent of sheets of clear plastic film, or if you prefer, totally transparent tracing paper, and they're called layers.

Normally it's best to work on these layers rather than directly onto the original white surface, which is known as the background layer, because it makes it *much* easier to alter and manipulate your image later on.

To create these transparent layers, you need to open the Layers palette, which is shown in Figure 2-20 (A palette is a type of panel that displays information or options concerning your work).

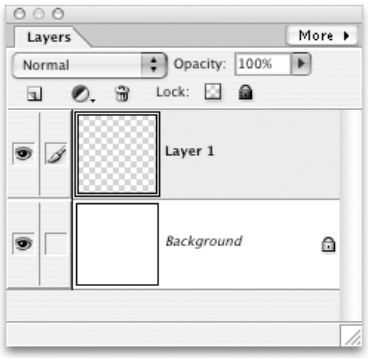

Figure 2-20 The Layers palette.

The following description of how to open the Layers palette may seem rather long and convoluted, but this is because in this early stage of using Elements the programme isn't configured for optimum use. You'll only have to do the next bit once, after which the Layers palette will reopen automatically every time you open Elements.

When you first open Elements the Layers palette is found in the Palette Bin, which was the panel that you removed from the right hand side of the screen earlier (in order to remove clutter from your screen).

It's possible to take the Layers palette out of the Palette Bin and have it on the screen on its own, which takes up much less space and which also allows you to move the palette

to different parts of the screen rather than having it permanently anchored to the edge.

To remove the Layers palette from the Palette Bin you need to first return the Palette Bin to the screen (temporarily). To do this, go to the menu bar, to Window>Palette Bin.

In its original configuration, the bin contains three different palettes: the How To palette, the Styles and Effects palette, and the Layers palette. Each palette has a coloured title bar along the top with the name of the palette in it.

Press the cursor on the title bar of the Layers palette. While still pressing, drag the cursor over to the middle of the screen (Figure 2-21). This will drag the palette with it and remove it from the bin.

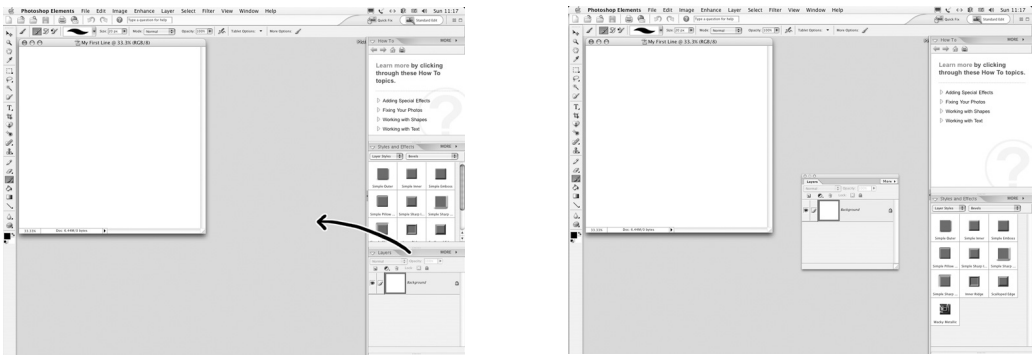

Figure 2-21 Removing the Layers palette from the Palette Bin.

Then, in the palette itself, click on the word More in the top right corner. This will open a list of options (Figure 2-22). Click on the top option in the list, titled Place in Palette Bin, which will have a tick next to it (Clicking when the tick is present deselects the option).

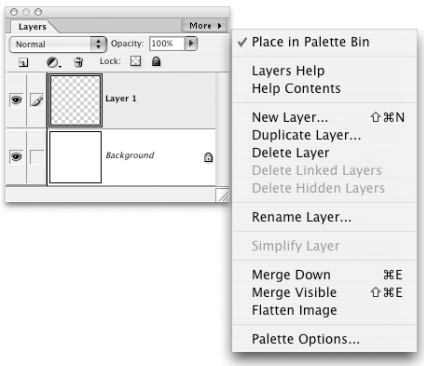

Figure 2-22
To remove the Layers palette from the Palette Bin, open the More submenu and click on the words Place in Palette Bin to remove the tick.

To close the Palette Bin again (in order to increase your usable screen space), go to Window>Palette Bin. The bin will disappear, leaving the Layers palette on the screen (because it's no longer in the bin).

You can move the Layers palette round the screen by pressing and dragging on the bar along the top of the palette (which has circular or square buttons at one end – don't actually press on these buttons as they alter the palette in other ways). If you want to increase or decrease the size of the palette, press and drag the bottom right corner of the palette, which has a triangular knurled 'thumb grip' on it.

Now that you have the Layers palette open you can use it to create a new transparent layer onto which to draw your image.

Go to the row of icons near the top of the Layers palette (Figure 2-23). The one at the left hand end looks like several sheets of paper above each other, with the corner of the top one turned up (to show that there are sheets beneath it). This is the New Layer button.

Figure 2-23 The buttons in the Layers palette, with the New Layer button indicated.

Click this button to create a new layer.

In the Layers palette a new layer appears, called Layer 1 (Figure 2-20).

The small panel next to the layer's name, by the way, is a thumbnail representation showing the image that's on the layer. This will have a checkered effect on it (unless this effect has been turned off), that's there to show that the layer is transparent.

The new layer is placed directly above the original white surface, the background layer, although it won't be obvious by looking at the image area on your screen because the new layer is invisible (being transparent). When you draw now, your drawing will be on the new transparent layer rather than on the original white surface.

To produce a drawing, create a rough version of a very simple image on the new layer. Make the image as simple as you like, especially if you haven't got used to the feel of drawing on a computer screen yet. I've chosen to draw a tree, which is basically a squiggly shape with a few lines coming out of the bottom, shown on the next page in Figure 2-24.

Figure 2-24
A simple rough sketch.

This drawing is just a very basic sketch. But it can act as the starting point for a better and more detailed drawing.

Trace and Improve

The best way to improve on your basic sketch is to trace over it, as you would with a conventional drawing, adding extra detail or making modifications (Figure 2-25). The new, traced version should be done on another new layer, similar to the one on which you drew your original sketch.

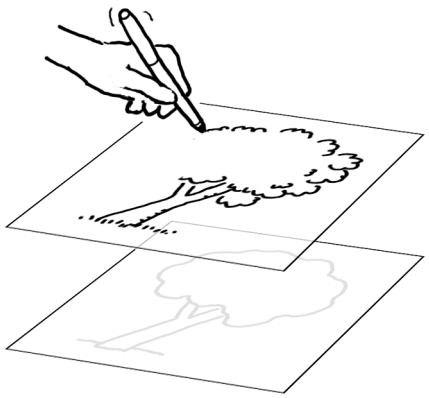

Figure 2-25 Tracing over the rough sketch on a new layer to create an improved version.

Create your new layer by again clicking the New Layer button at the top of the Layers palette (Figure 2-23), as you did to create the layer for the original sketch. The new layer will be called Layer 2.

The new layer is automatically placed above the previous one, ready to be worked on.

You want to trace over your rough sketch with a black line, but there's a slight problem, in that the lines of the original sketch are already black, and tracing over one black line with another one is very difficult, as it's hard to differentiate between the two lines. The solution to this problem is to make the lines of the rough sketch fainter so that they don't distract from the new lines.

Here's how to do this.

First, look at the Layers palette, where you'll see that the panel for the new layer that you've just created is highlighted in a different colour to the other layers in the palette. This shows that this layer is 'active', and is the one that will be affected by whatever action you do next. Before you do any work on this new layer though, you want to do something to the layer that contains your original rough sketch (making the lines on it fainter), so you need to make that layer active instead. Do this by going to the Layers palette and clicking on the panel for the layer containing the original sketch (called Layer 1). That layer will then become highlighted, indicating that it's the active layer.

In order to make the lines of the sketch fainter, go to the top of the Layers palette, where you'll see a box labelled Opacity. The box will be showing a setting of 100 percent.

Press on the arrow on the right of the box, and a panel opens (Figure 2-26).

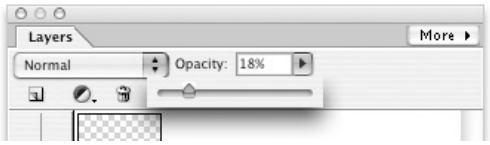

Figure 2-26 The Opacity control.

This panel is a representation of a slider control, such as the ones you find on some audio equipment for adjusting the volume. Press on the pointer at the end of the slider, and drag it to the left while holding the cursor down. As you move the pointer the opacity of the layer decreases and the image on it fades. Stop when the image is quite faint. The new opacity is indicated in the box. A value of between 10 and 20 percent is probably about right, but the exact setting isn't critical.

Now, to draw your improved image, you need to go back to the new blank layer that you created above the original sketch (otherwise you'd be drawing on the same layer as the rough sketch).

To do this, go back to the Layers palette and click on the name of the new layer (the top one). It will become highlighted, indicating that any work that you do now will be done on that layer.

Getting a Closer Look at Your Image

In order to draw an improved version of your rough sketch you may find it useful to magnify the image on the screen so that you can see it in more detail.

To do this, in the toolbox click on the icon near the top that resembles a magnifying glass (Figure 2-27). This is the Zoom tool.

Figure 2-27 The Zoom tool button, shaped like a magnifying glass.

In the Zoom tool's options bar tick the check boxes labelled Resize Windows to Fit and Ignore Palettes (Once you've set these you may seldom want to change them again).

Move the cursor onto the image, where it becomes a magnifying glass with a plus sign inside it (If it has a minus sign inside it instead, you should change it to a plus sign before you use it, as explained on the next page.

Place the magnifying glass over part of the image that you'd like to look at more closely, and click.

The image is enlarged, centred on the spot where you clicked (Figure 2-28).

To enlarge the image more, click again.

To make it larger still, click again, and so on.

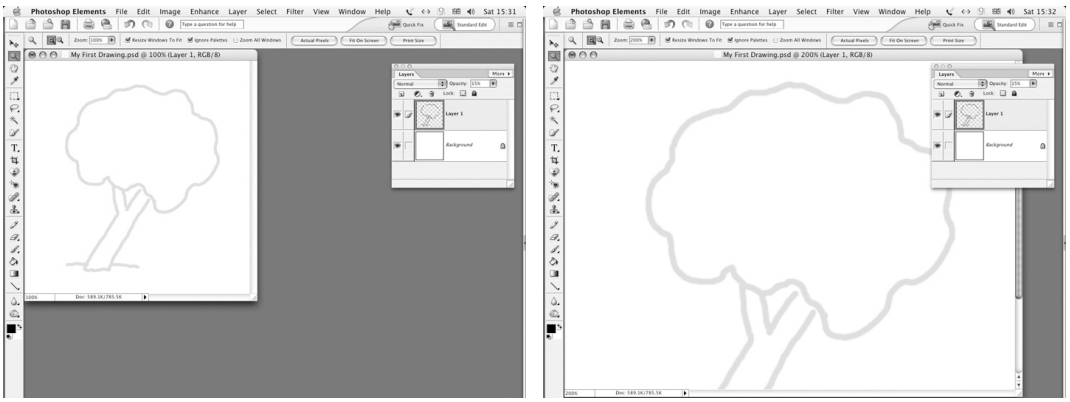

Figure 2-28 Enlarge the image on the screen using the Zoom tool.

When you've magnified the sketch it may be too big for it all to be seen on the screen at once.

You can move the image round the screen, revealing parts that are hidden, by using the Hand tool (Figure 2-29).

Figure 2-29 The Hand tool, for moving images to reveal parts that are out of view.

Select the Hand tool in the toolbox, then press and drag on the image to move the image on the screen.

After zooming in to take a close look at your image, you'll probably want to reduce the size again, by zooming out.

At the left hand end of the Zoom tool's options bar you'll see two adjacent symbols representing magnifying glasses – one with a plus sign in it and one with a minus sign (Figure 2-30). Click on the one with the minus sign. Now, when you move the cursor back onto the image the cursor will appear as a magnifying glass with a minus sign inside it, which indicates that when you click the cursor the image will get smaller.

Figure 2-30 The buttons that allow you to change between zooming in and zooming out.

The Zoom tool will stay in whichever mode it's set at, zoom in or zoom out, until you specifically change it.

(Zooming in and out can be done using much quicker methods than those described here, once you're more familiar with the programme, as described at the end of Chapter 4.)

The whole image window (the frame immediately surrounding the image) can be moved to different parts of the screen by pressing and dragging the cursor on the window's title bar, which is the strip immediately above the image, containing the name of the file that you're working on. Avoid clicking on the little squares or circles in the corners of the title bar, as these are specific controls for closing or resizing the window.

Figure 2-31
Trace over your first sketch with an improved version.

Now that you've used the Zoom tool to magnify your sketch (if necessary), you can trace over the image to produce a more accurate drawing.

The line that you draw will be black, so it'll be easy to distinguish from the fainter line of the sketch on the layer below it. If the line you're drawing appears faint, it means that you're accidentally drawing on the original sketch layer by mistake, so change layers.

Erasing Mistakes

While you're tracing over your sketch, your lines will almost inevitably veer off course, requiring parts of them to be removed. To remove the whole of the last stroke that you made, click the Undo button (the left pointing arrow in the shortcuts bar, Figure 2-17) as described earlier. If however you only want to remove part of a line, or you want to remove a line that you drew a lot earlier, you can 'rub out' the offending line using the Eraser tool in the toolbox (Figure 2-32), using an action similar to a conventional eraser.

Figure 2-32 The Eraser tool.

If the Eraser's button in the toolbox includes a pair of scissors or a star at the top left (meaning that a specialized eraser is occupying the tool's space), open the tool that's there and go to its options bar, where you should click on the first button in the row of three eraser buttons (Figure 2-33) to choose the standard Eraser. This is yet another task that you may hardly ever do again, as the specialized erasers aren't used very often.

Figure 2-33
Select the normal Eraser in the options bar if it isn't selected already.

The Eraser works in very much the same way as the brush that you're using to draw your lines, with similar controls governing how it works.

Before you use the Eraser you need to choose its shape and size (Again, this is something that's much quicker to do using other techniques once you're more familiar with the programme, so don't get too frustrated if you feel that everything seems just a bit too fiddly right now).

In the options bar click in the panel with the curved line, which represents a stroke of the Eraser (It's exactly the same as the panel in the Brush's options bar represents a brush-stroke). At the top of the palette that opens is a panel labelled Brushes. Click the panel and choose Default Brushes from the pop-up list that appears, if it's not already selected (The list is labelled Brushes because the Eraser is essentially a brush that removes colour instead of applying it).

Choose an eraser from near the top of the list. I'd recommend maybe the sixth one along, which is a round one with the number 19 next to it.

You can change the size of the eraser by entering a different value in the Size panel, just as you can with the Brush tool.

Put the Mode setting in the options bar to Brush, and the Opacity to 100%.

Then you can start erasing simply by holding down the button on your mouse, or by pressing on your graphics tablet, while passing the eraser over the areas of the image that you want to remove.

If you're using a graphics tablet you can use the eraser simply by using the 'wrong' end of the pen, without having to change tools in the toolbox.

If you erase more than you intended to, use the Undo button to reinstate the work.

Making a Layer Invisible

While you're working on your new improved drawing you may find that the original rough sketch slightly distracts from your judgement of the drawing's progress, as the rough sketch interferes with the drawing despite the fact that it's relatively dim.

To remedy this you can make the layer containing the rough sketch temporarily disappear from view, so that it doesn't confuse the rest of the image.

Do this by going to the Layers palette and clicking on the icon that looks like an eye (Figure 2-34) in the panel of the layer that you want to hide (in this case Layer 1).

Figure 2-34 To hide a layer from view, click its eye icon in the Layers palette.

The eye icon disappears when you click it, leaving the square that contained it empty. Clicking on the empty square will make the eye return, along with the image on the layer.

Removing a Layer

When you've finished tracing your drawing you can throw away the rough sketch that you've traced over.

To do this, go to the Layers palette and select the layer with the rough sketch on it, by clicking inside the panel containing the layer's name.

Hold the cursor down inside the panel and drag the panel up towards the trashcan shaped icon in the row near the top of the Layers palette (Figure 2-35). When the cursor is over the trashcan the icon will become highlighted. Then release the cursor.

Figure 2-35
To remove a layer from your document drag the layer's panel in the Layers palette into this trashcan.

The rough sketch disappears, and you're left with only your finished drawing. Here's mine in Figure 2-36.

Figure 2-36
The finished drawing with the rough sketch removed.

And that's it!

You can now draw on a computer. Have a coffee break while you take it all in.

Again I must apologize for some of the fiddling around that you've had to do, altering controls so that they're in their most useful settings. This is almost inevitably necessary when you use a new programme, but it has the compensations that you'll rarely have to alter them again, and that the programme now works more efficiently for your purposes. If you were to now repeat the exercise above you'd find that you could do it in a fraction of the time.

If you're new to computers, and you found the whole business a bit complicated, it's most likely because you're not used to the various computer conventions involved, and it all just seems a bit alien. This will pass as you become more familiar with the programme. Using a computer is a bit like riding a bike. With a bike, to begin with you can't understand how anyone can balance on the thing at all, then after a little practice you can hurtle along without holding onto the handlebars (of course you should never do this in real life). If you find it difficult riding a bike, ignore this analogy.

Altering Images

In this section:
How to manipulate parts of an image once the image has been created. This includes:
Moving
Duplicating
Changing the size
Rotating

Along the way, you'll learn how to rename layers, select parts of an image, cut and paste, duplicate a layer.

Moving Parts of an Image

Moving Parts of an Image That are on Separate Layers

The use of layers extends far beyond the functions described in the previous section, where they were one layer was used for creating a basic sketch and another for the finished artwork.

One of their main uses is to hold separate parts of a piece of artwork so that the individual parts can be worked on or altered independently.

Here's a simple example of this practice, where the different elements of an image on separate layers are moved relative to each other (Figure 2-37).