



Make Your Own Custom Shapes and Library in PSE

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Wouldn't it be really cool if there was a way to create a set of shape templates in useful formations that could be sized and resized infinitely, without loss in quality. For instance, a set of tag shapes would be awesome or maybe some floral shapes, that could be sized up or down and filled with patterned papers.

Hey wait a minute. There already is a way! They are called vector shapes and they are a really great way to create and save commonly used shapes such as tags, photo corners, frames, floral shapes, arrows and more. The cool thing about vector shapes is that they can be sized and resized, saved and re-saved, and as long as they aren't flattened, or rasterized, they never lose their quality, as bitmap images (such as jpeg and png) do. Graphic designers use vectors a lot in advertising to produce highly-versatile images, that can be used in magazines as well as on billboards.

Both Photoshop and Photoshop Elements come ready with a bunch of shape files already installed. They are called .csh files, or Custom Shapes. Users of Photoshop can create these .csh files so they can be accessed easily and/or shared with other users of Photoshop or Photoshop Elements. These custom shapes are what you see when you use the Shape Tool in Photoshop Elements. However, .csh files cannot be created by Photoshop Elements.

But that doesn't mean that users of Photoshop Elements cannot create their own shapes or that they can't compile their own collections of vector shapes for easy access. I'm going to show you how. First, I want to show you how to use the existing shapes in Photoshop Elements, to create new vector shapes. Then I'm going to explain why and how you can create your own library of vector shapes.

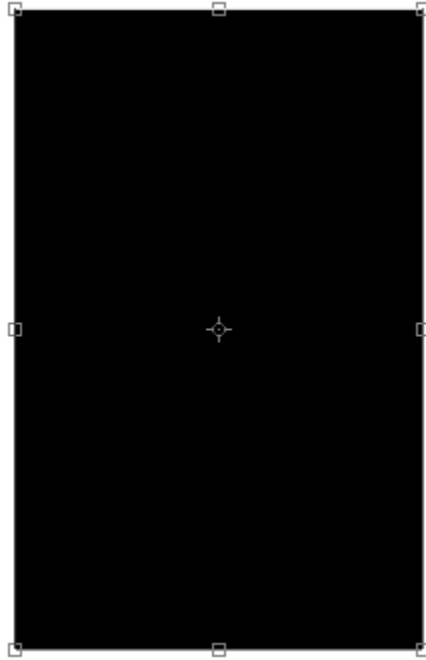
Creating Shapes in Photoshop Elements

Creating Shapes in Photoshop Elements is very simple once you get the hang of it. Plus it really adds to your options as you scrap your photos in PSE. Instead of searching for just the right tag, photo corners, or frame you can just create your own using your imagination and existing supplies.

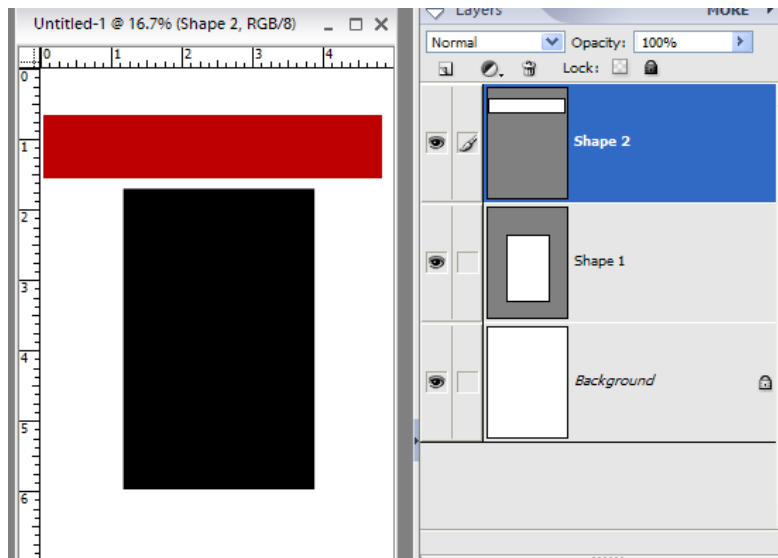
To create shapes in PSE, we start with the existing shapes. For this tutorial, I'm going to show you how to create a simple tag. (Before you go further, you may want to read Intro to Custom Shapes in Photoshop Elements, which will give you an overview of this tool in PSE.)

Simple Tag

1. First you want to select a shape from the existing options. Because I want to create a rectangular object, I'll start with the square shape tool. Use the mouse to drag out a rectangular shape like this. Now I'm going for a simple tag here, so I'm just going to lop of the corners at a 45 degree angle. Remember, I'm trying to create a custom shape here, a vector shape, *so we are not going to simplify this shape.*



2. Next, I'm going to create another rectangular shapes. Draw the next shape out long and narrow. To see what I'm doing, I usually change the color to a contrasting color by double clicking the image in the palette. My image looks like this now.



3. This new shape, the red one, is the shape I'm going to use to cut off the corner of the black shape. So I need to rotate it to a 45 degree angle.

Select the move tool from the tool box. Now select this shape on the canvas, and then click on the border, or one of the handles. This will bring up the resize Options Bar, under the general toolbars at the top. You'll see options to resize the shape as well as an option to adjust its position by angle. I've highlighted this option in the screenshot below.

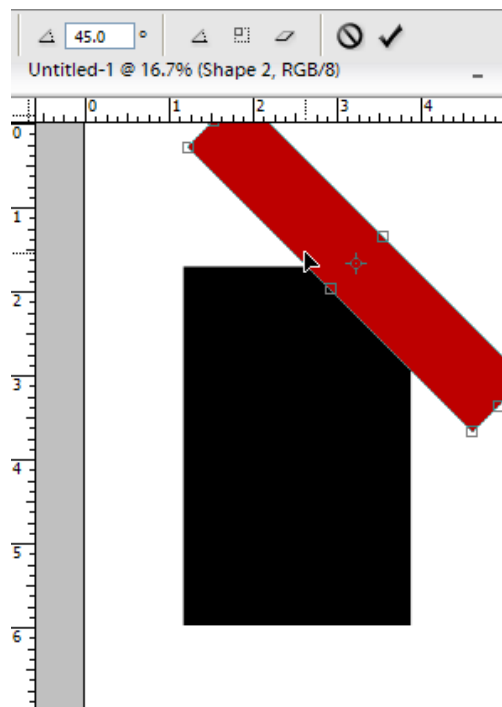


In the box for the angle, type in 45. Then click the check box on the right. This is the way it looks.

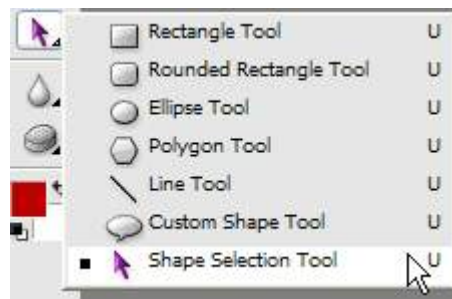
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You can see that the red shape has rotated to 45 degrees.

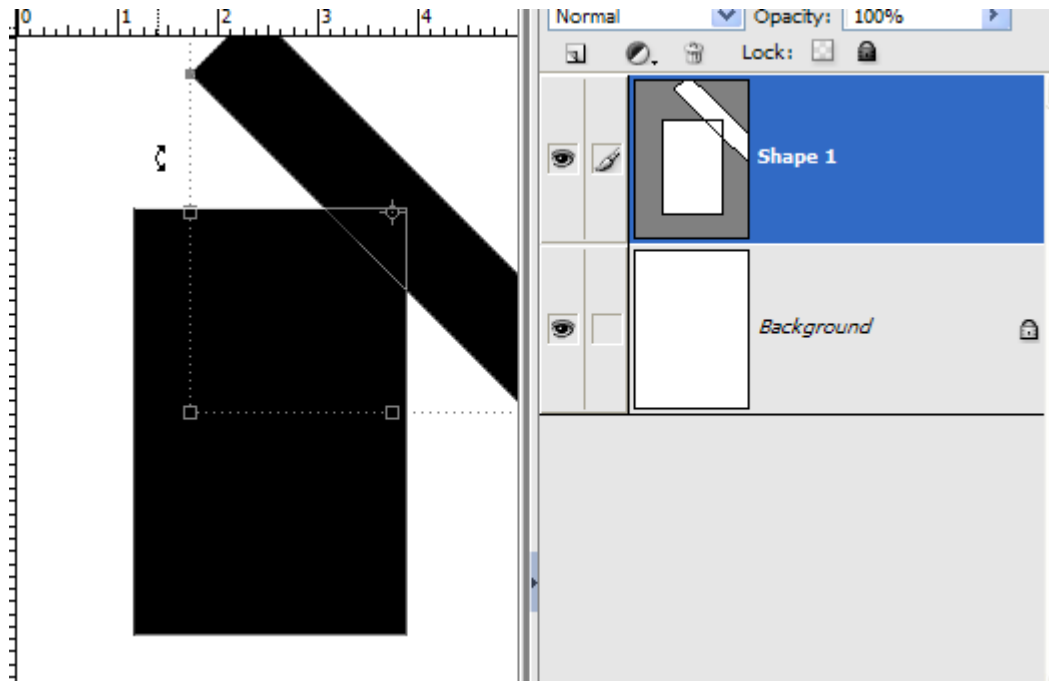
Now you're going to use the red shape to cut off the corner of the black shape.



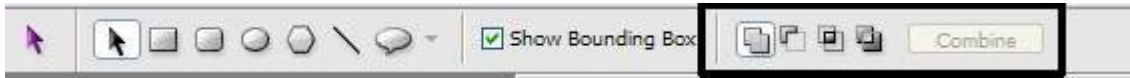
4. Before you proceed, choose the shape tool again in the toolbox. Hold the click over the tool, to get the fly-out menu. Choose the arrow. This is the Shape Selection tool. You'll use it a lot in this tut.



- Using the Shape Selection tool, select the red shape on the canvas, or from the layers palette. Choose Edit>Cut (or press Cntrl+X on the keyboard). This will put the red rectangle on the clipboard.
- Now, using the Shape Selection Tool, select the black rectangle. Choose Edit>Paste from the menu (or press Cntrl+V) to paste the red rectangle into the black rectangle. Notice the red rectangle takes on the properties and colors of the black one, so it's no longer red. This is what it looks like on the canvas and the layer's palette. The two object have *almost* become one.

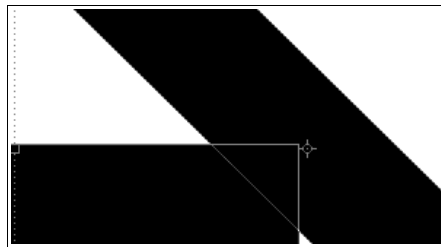


Now before we go further, let's observe something that happens with shapes in the Options Bar. When you have the Shape Selection Tool (the arrow) chosen and a shape selected, the Options Bar looks like this. Notice the new options.

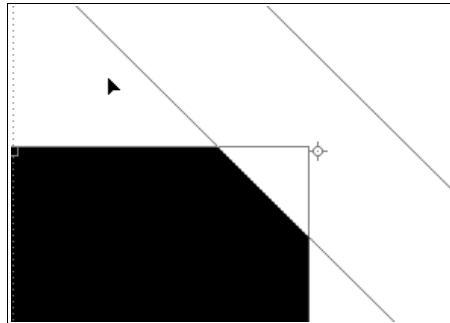


These new options are what allow you to cut out the shapes or add to the shapes. They change how the shapes interact. Let's go over them really quickly, from Left to Right. I've included screenshots of what happens to our sample when each of the options are chosen. Follow along to see it in real time.

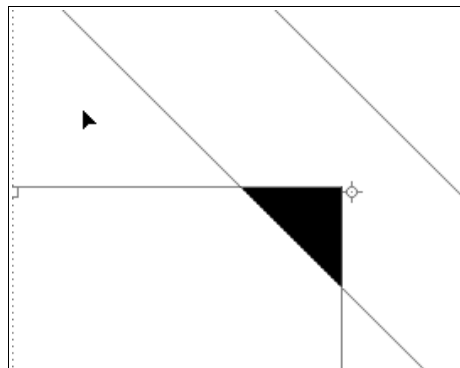
a. This option add the two shapes together.



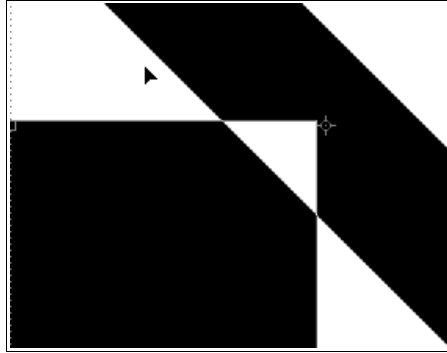
b. This option removes uses one shape to delete from another shape. (This is the one we're going to use.)



c. This option removes everything *except* where the shapes overlap



d. This option removes just the overlapping portion.



Remember, both of the shapes can still be resized, rotated and adjusted independently until you click “Combined.” After that, it becomes one shape.

Okay, we have drawn out two shapes now and we have copied one shape into the other. Now we are just going to clip that corner off.

7. With the Shape Selection tool, click the second angled shape to select it. Now in the Options Bar, Select the option that is second from the left.



You should see an immediate change on the canvas. The corner will disappear. Now it is okay to select **Combine**. Here's what we have so far.



8. Okay, now one corner is done. What about the other? That's easy. First let's duplicate our shape. Go to Layer>Duplicate Layer. In the next box, choose okay.

9. Choose the duplicate layer, which should be on top. Go to Image>Rotate>Flip Horizontal. This will flip that layer over so the the corner is facing the opposite way.

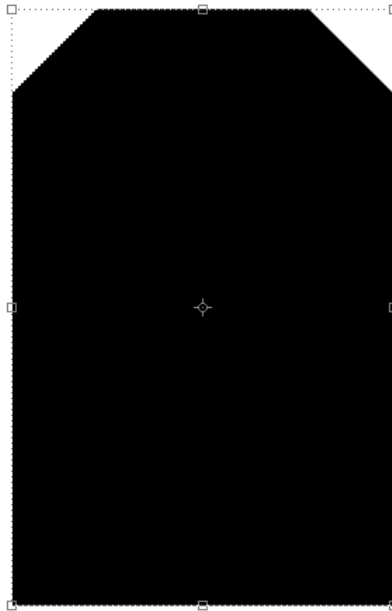
10. Make sure the Shape Selection Tool is chosen in the tool box. Use it to select the duplicate layer. Choose Edit>Cut (or press Cntrl+X).

11. Select the remaining layer, and Choose Edit>Paste (or press Cntrl+V). On the canvas, the rectangle appears to have returned with its corner intact. But we are not finished.

12. In the Shape Selection Option, choose the option that is third from the left. This is the choice that removes everything except where the shapes overlap. Click combine to finalize it.



13. Here is what we have now.



14. Okay, just one last little detail. We need to add a hole. We'll use the same principals to do that. So that I get everything centered properly I'm going to activate the grid, using View>Grid.

15. Using the Shape tool, Draw Out a Circle for the hole. Use the Move tool to align it properly with the tag shape.

16. Now use the Shape Selection Tool (The arrow under the Shape Tool) to select the circle. Choose Edit>Cut (or Cntrl+X).

17. Using the Shape Selection Tool, choose the tag shape. Now choose Edit>Paste (or Cntrl+V).

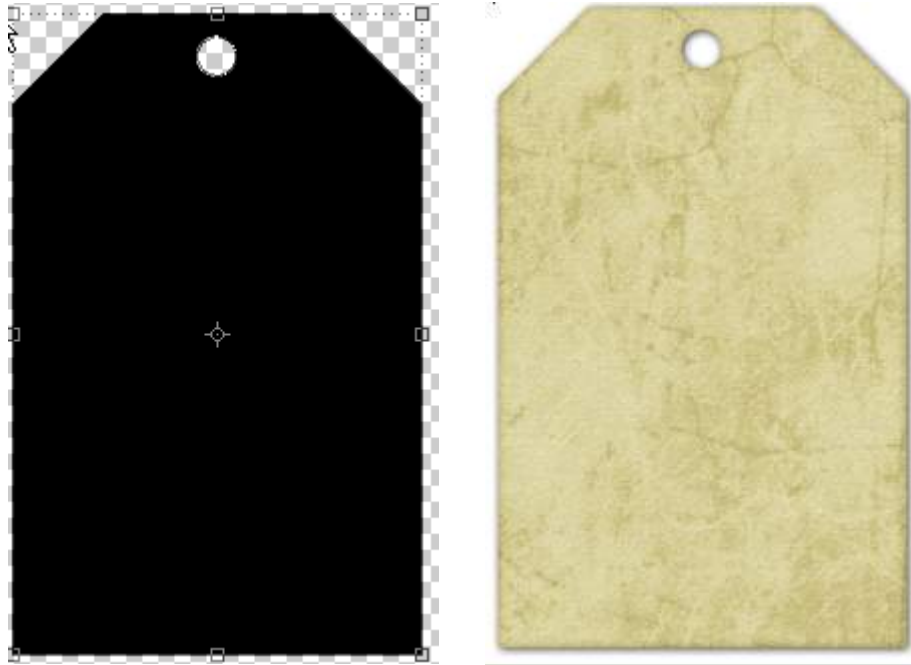
18. In the options bar, choose the option that is second from the left.



This will remove the hole, the area where the circle is. Choose Combine when you are finished.

Here is the finished product as well as a sampling of what you can do with this shape.

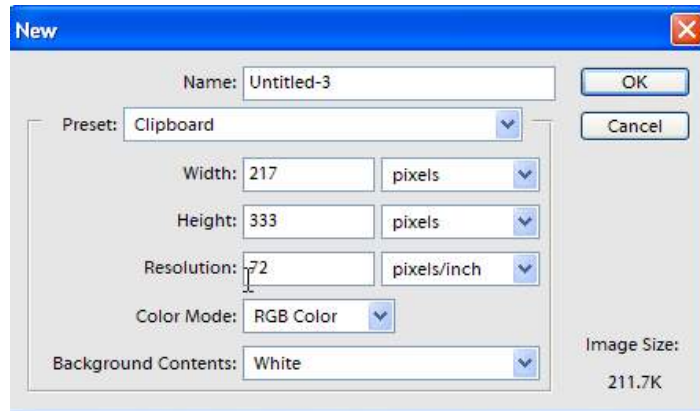
Remember, this shape is re-sizable over and over. So you can save it as a Vector Image for lots of versatility and uses.



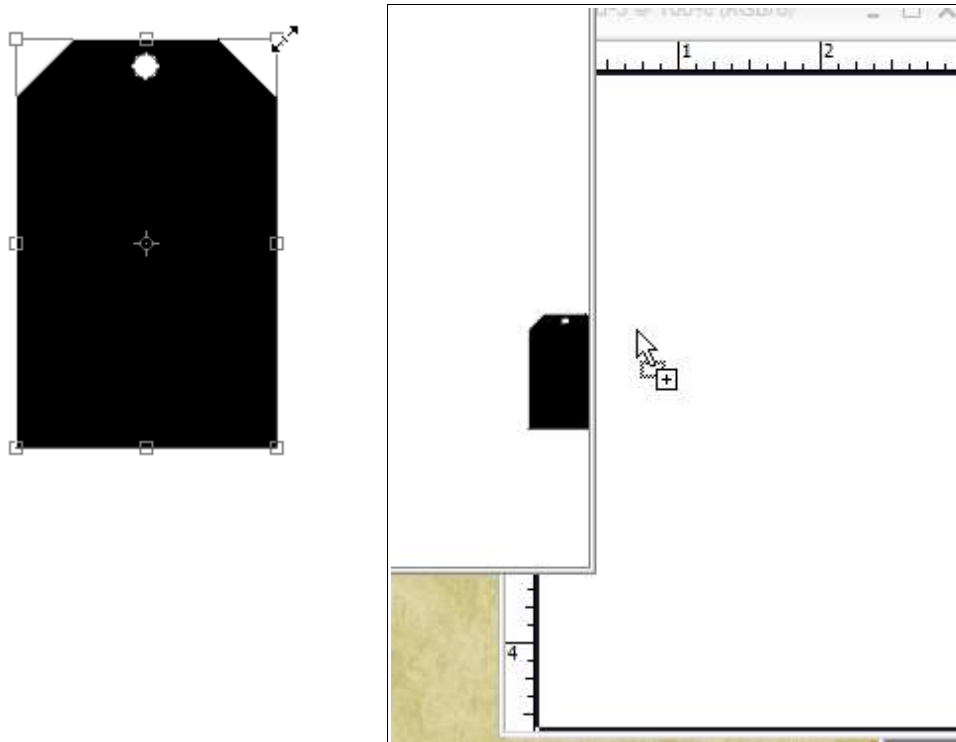
Starting Your Library

This is the perfect shape to begin your shape Library. We've already found that Photoshop Elements cannot create .csh files, so how are we going to have a shape library? Easy. Remember Vectors are not subject to the same rules as bitmap images are. You can size them up or down, without losing quality. You could put this shape on a billboard and there would be no pixelation at all. So here is what we are going to do.

Open a new file, by going to File>New>Blank File. From the Presets, choose a file. I chose the 4X6 but it really doesn't matter. For memory purposes, use a smaller size. Choose a resolution of 72ppi.



Now find your tag shape – it should not have been simplified, so it's still in Custom Shape form. Size it down, way down. Now drag it over to the blank canvas (4X6 at 72 ppi image.).



This will still look large on the 72ppi canvas so feel free to size it down further. Make it tiny – it won't matter. Now save it as a PSD document. This new document will be your tags library. You can begin similar libraries for frames, flowers, corners, etc. Because they are tiny and low resolution, they won't take up much room on your computer.

Here is a shot of my tags library. It is only 43 kbs. But because these are vector shapes, I can drag them onto a 300 ppi layout, resize it as large as I need it. That's just what I did in this layout with the circular tag, before grouping it with a paper, adding a shadow, text and a staple.

