

Photoshop: Basic techniques

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This handout covers typical techniques for processing Photographs.

Always save your work as you go along as a .psd (Photoshop) file.

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Adjustments: Overview

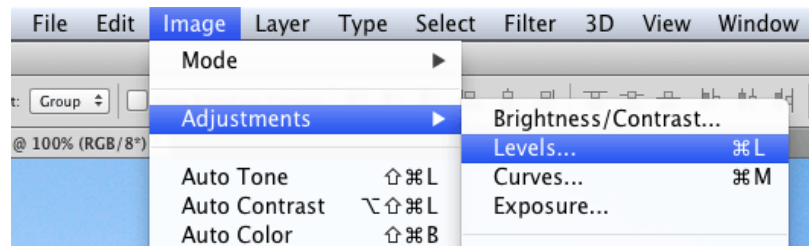
Broadly speaking, Adjustments in PS refer to affecting the colour and contrast of an image. There are two ways to apply Adjustments: *destructive* and *non-destructive*. Destructive refers to the adjustment being applied directly to the image, physically altering the pixels. Non-destructive refers to an adjustment being applied in a way that does not alter the pixels. This second method allows altering or refining of the adjustment at a later time, whereas the first method is fixed once applied.

Adjusting the contrast of an image with Levels

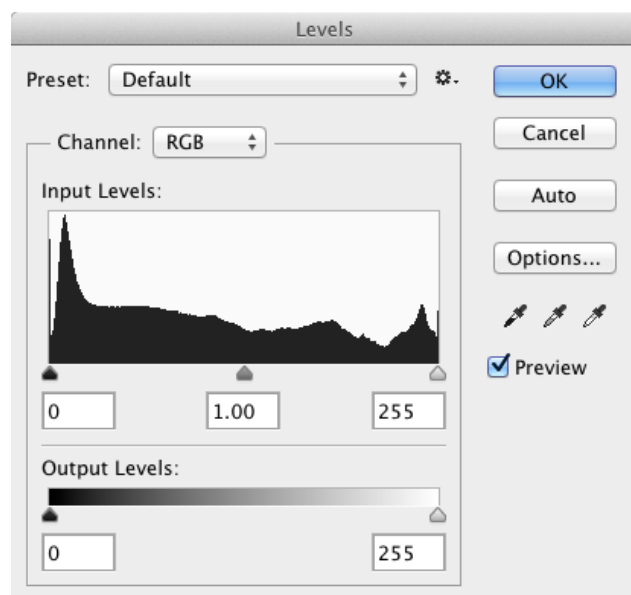
There are many ways to adjust tonal contrast with PS. Here we look at one technique and two ways to apply it.

Direct to the image (known as Image Adjustment)

Go to Image > Adjustments > Levels...

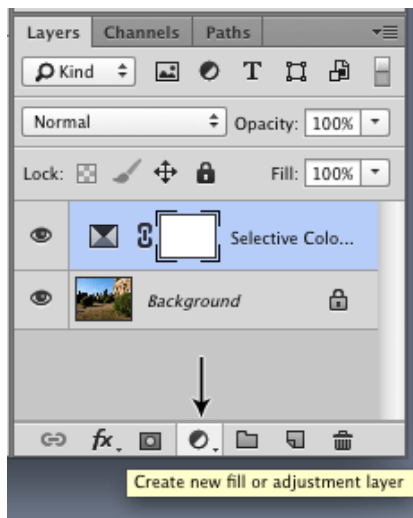


This opens the Levels dialogue. The central area displays a histogram with three sliders beneath. Move the sliders to the right to darken or to the left to lighten the image. Click OK when done.

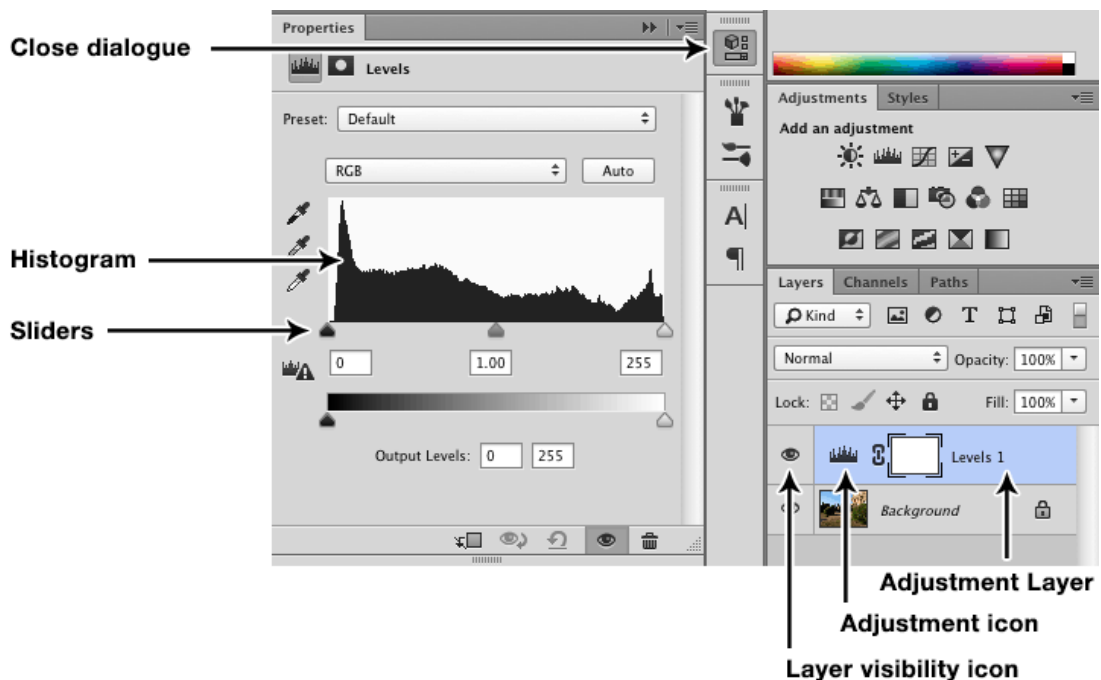


As an Adjustment Layer

At the base of the layers palette click on the Adjustment Layer icon and choose Levels.



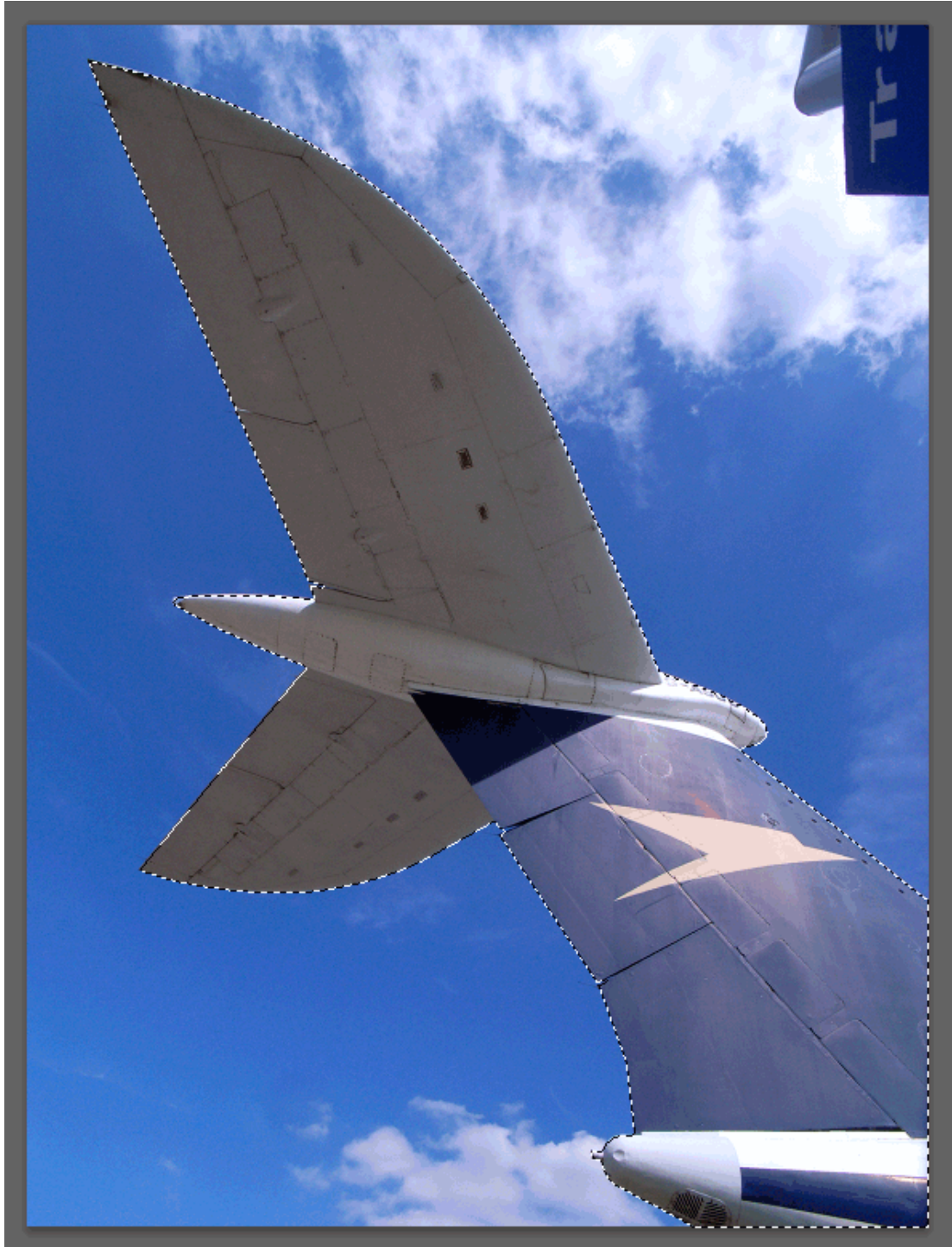
The Adjustment appears as a layer in the Layers palette. The effect of this layer can be turned on and off by clicking on the layer visibility icon. The Levels dialogue can be opened again by double clicking on the Levels Adjustment icon in the Adjustment Layer.



Targeting an area with an adjustment

Often you may find that you will need to make an adjustment within a specific area of an image. This requires making a selection of the area you wish to adjust (the making of selections is not covered here).

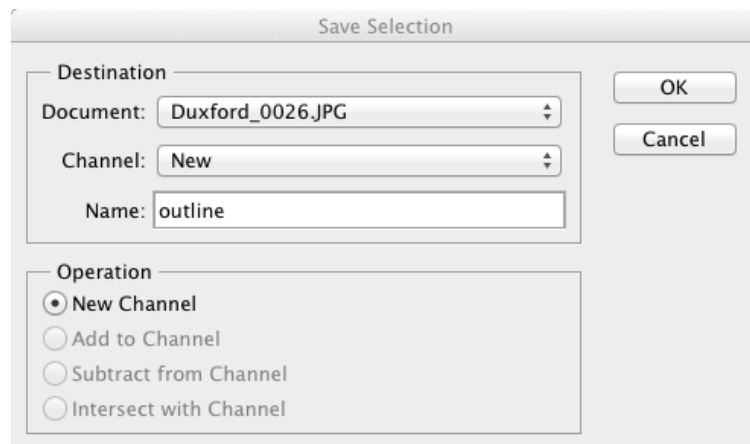
Make a selection of the area you wish to adjust.



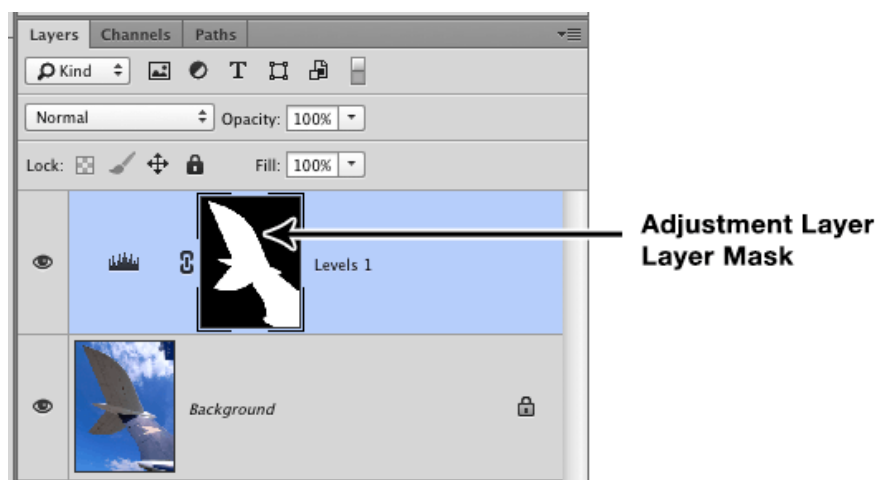
'Marching ants' showing selected area

Save the selection by going to Select > Save Selection...

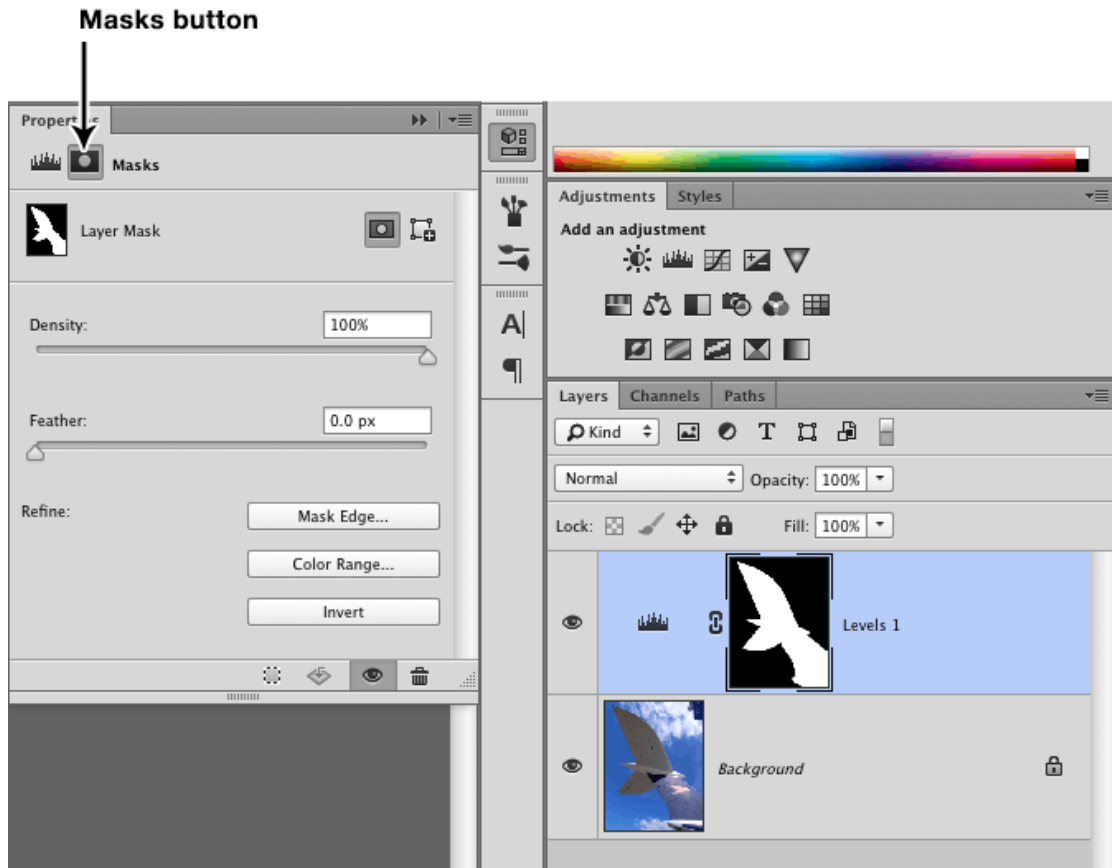
Give the selection a name. This will enable you to reload that selection, if needed, without having to make it again.



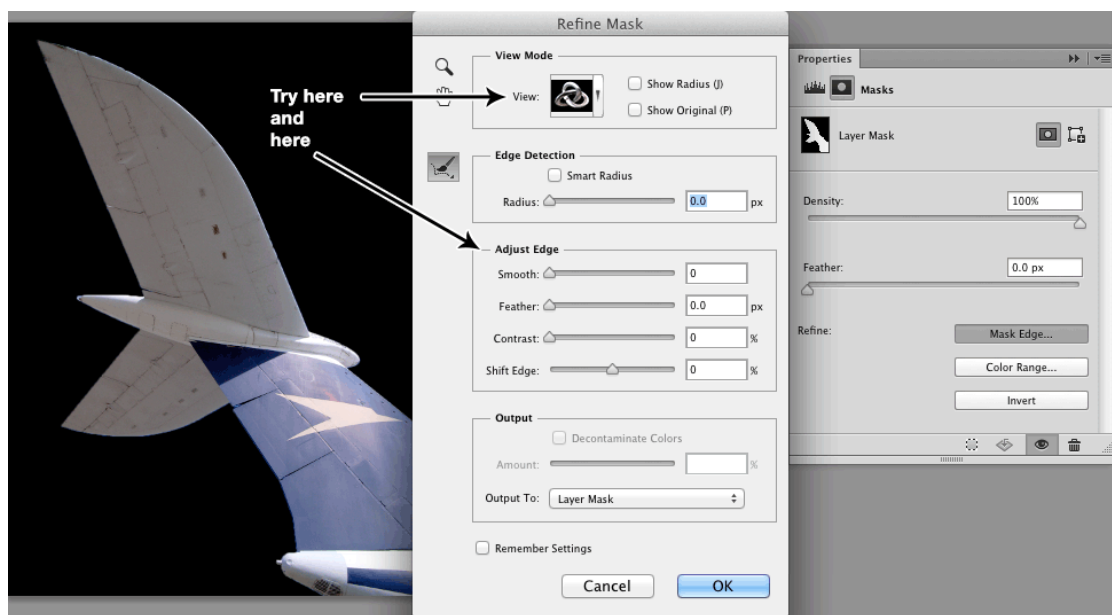
With the selection active in the document, Choose an Adjustment Layer (for instance, Levels) and the selection is converted to a Layer Mask. The mask protects areas outside of the selected area from being affect by the Adjustment.



If required the mask can be adjusted, for instance give it a softer edge to make it more sympathetic to the area being adjusted. To do this, make sure the Mask thumbnail in the Adjustment Layer is selected, as in the illustration above (click on the mask if it is not), and click on the Masks button in the Layer Adjustment dialogue.

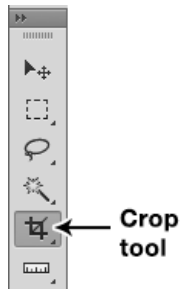


There are a few options here. Try adjusting the Feather amount (just by a few pixels). This softens the edge of the mask. Alternatively click on Mask Edge. This opens the Refine Mask dialogue. The main areas to concentrate on here are View Mode, clicking on View: and changing to the option to black or white for those colour backgrounds. Then try Adjust Edge, which enables you to adjust the edge of the mask.

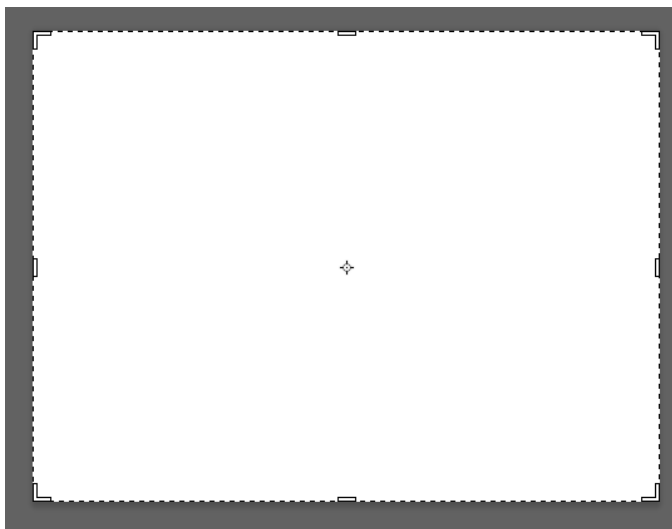


Cropping an image

Select the Crop tool from the Tools palette.

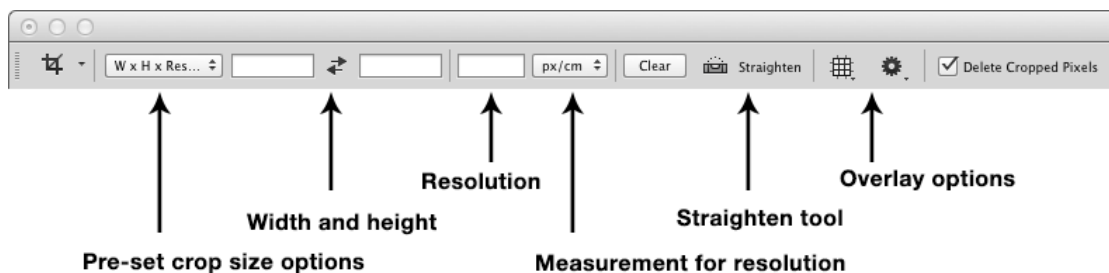


This displays the Crop marquee around the image.



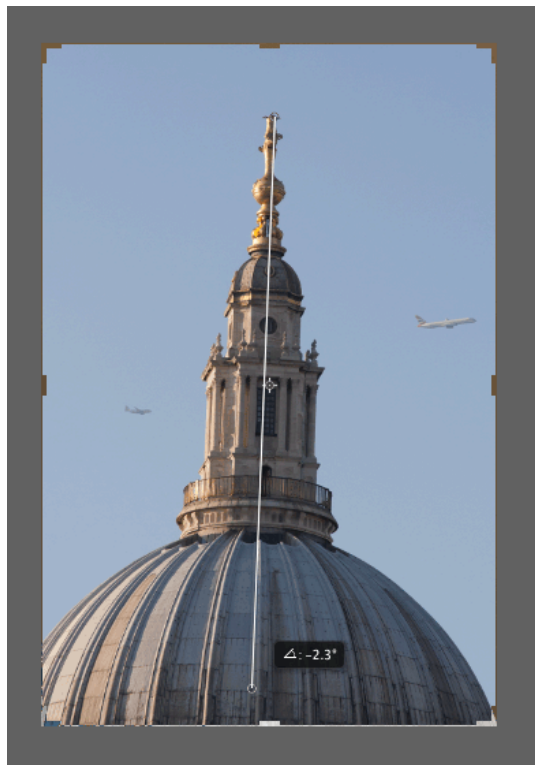
Move the edges of the Crop marquee to the desired position. To crop the image using the same aspect ratio of the image, hold down the Shift key whilst moving a corner of the Crop marquee. The image will move up, down, left and right, enabling it to remain centred on the screen. This can be a little disconcerting at first. Click and drag within the marquee to move the image within the crop area if required. When finished, hit the Return/Enter key to assign the crop. Pressing the Esc key before assigning the crop will reset the Crop marquee.

The Options panel for the crop displays options for the crop tool.



Straighten an image with the Crop tool

Select the Straighten tool and within the Crop marquee draw a line parallel to an aspect of the image that should be vertical or horizontal.



Line drawn with Straighten tool

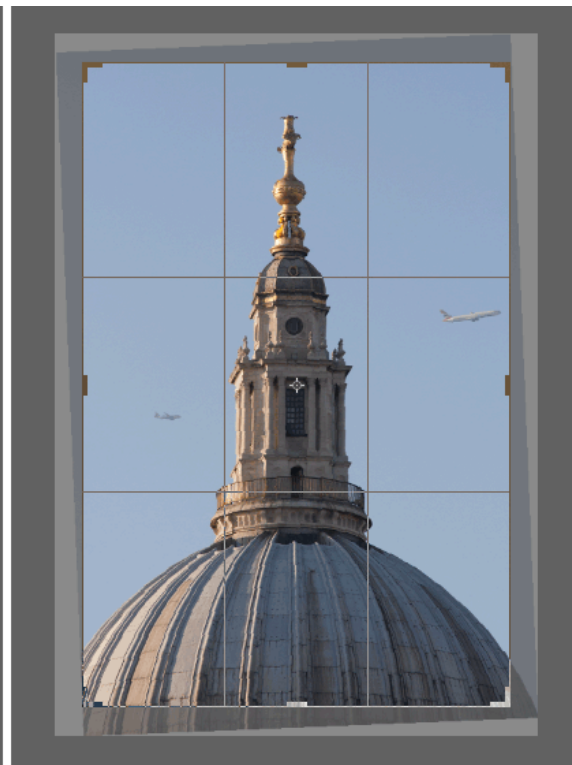


Image straightened

An alternative method is to straighten the image visually by rotating the Crop marquee. Position the cursor outside of the marquee. The cursor turns into a double-headed arrow. Click and drag to rotate. A grid appears to aid alignment with vertical or horizontal axes.

