Making Difficult Selections

Example used for this tutorial is to replace a blank sky in a landscape that has several trees against the sky.

Method 1 – High contrast adjustment layer
1. With the Background layer selected, create a new Levels Adjustment layer.
2. Move the black point and white point slider towards the middle to increase the contrast. You are trying to give the area you want to replace, a much higher contrast than the area around it. Click OK to close the Levels dialogue.
3. Using the magic wand with the Contiguous option turned off on the toolbar, click in the area you want to replace. In this case, the sky.
4. Now switch to the replacement sky image and select the portion you want and copy it (Edit/Copy or CTRL + C).
5. Switch back to the first image and choose Paste Into from the menu. You can reposition the new sky as needed with the Move tool. You may also need to rescale the sky to fit into the selection area (Edit/Transform/Scale).
6. This may leave a halo around the foreground. To tweak it, make the sky layer's **mask** active and open Levels. Moving the white point (or highlight) slider will push the sky into the foreground and reduce the halo. The black point (or shadow) slider will pull the sky away from the foreground.

Method 2 – Using Color Range
1. On the Background layer choose Select/Color Range from the menu.
2. The Select dropdown allows you to select a range of colors from the image automatically but it isn't very useful. Instead, leave it on Sampled Colors.
3. There are 3 eyedroppers in the Color Range dialogue. The first one is selected by default.
4. Using your mouse, move the eyedropper to area of the preview image you want to select. For this example, click in the sky. You'll see the preview change.
5. If all the area you want to select is not white, click on the "plus" eyedropper and using it, click on the remaining non-white area in the preview image that you want to select. Continue to click on the appropriate spots until the sky is white in the preview.
6. You can move the Fuzziness slider to increase or decrease the selection (similar to the Tolerance setting for the magic wand.) It determines how "fuzzy" the edges of the selection will be. It is best to leave the Fuzziness slider as low as possible and use the plus eyedropper to add more to the selection.
7. Once you have the selection you think you want, click OK to close the Color Range Dialogue.
8. Using the magic wand with the Contiguous option turned off on the toolbar, click in the area you want to replace. In this case, the sky.
9. Now switch to the replacement sky image and select the portion you want and copy it (Edit/Copy or CTRL + C).
10. Switch back to the first image and choose Paste Into from the menu. You can reposition the new sky as needed with the Move tool. You may also need to rescale the sky to fit into the selection area (Edit/Transform/Scale).

11. This may leave a halo around the foreground. To tweak it, make the sky layer's **mask** active and open Levels. Moving the upper-right slider will push the sky into the foreground and reduce the halo. The upper left slider will pull the sky away from the foreground.

Method 3 – Using Channels
1. In photo with the foreground you want, open the Channels palette. Select Red, Green and Blue one at a time and chose the channel with the most contrast (usually Blue).
2. Make a copy of that channel by dragging it to the new channel icon on the bottom.
3. With the new channel selected bring up Levels. Click on the Black Point eyedropper and click in a dark area to force all of it to black.
4. Then click on the White Point eyedropper and click on the sky to force it to white. Close Levels. **Later, when you use this channel to make a selection, the black area will be masked <u>out.</u>**
5. With a black or white brush, touch up the image. Your aim is to eliminate any white or black spots where you don't want them. Use a hard edged brush if you've got straight lines like architecture in the photo.
6. CTRL+click on the new channel to load it as a selection. Click on the top (RGB) channel in the Channels palette.
7. Feather the selection by .5 (maybe as high as 1 or 2 for hi-res files). Close the Feather dialogue.
8. Now switch to the replacement sky image and select the portion you want and copy it (Edit/Copy or CTRL + C).
9. Switch back to the first image and choose Paste Into from the menu. You can reposition the new sky as needed with the Move tool. You may also need to rescale the sky to fit into the selection area (Edit/Transform/Scale).
10. This may leave a halo around the foreground. To tweak it, make the sky layer's **mask** active and open Levels. Moving the upper-right slider will push the sky into the foreground and reduce the halo. The upper left slider will pull the sky away from the foreground.