Elements vs. Photoshop CSx

What Elements can do

Elements includes what most people need in an image-editing program. You can remove red-eye; adjust colors, lighting, contrast, shadows, and highlights; create composites from multiple photographs; and perform most other standard image-editing tasks. It also offers a filing system to help you manage and sort photos.

The application itself takes up a fair amount of hard drive space and requires decent system resources, but not as much as the full version of Photoshop. It's also significantly cheaper than Photoshop. And because it's aimed at consumers, the interface is easier to learn and relies on wizards and step-by-step processes to guide you.

Typically, Elements can be purchased for around $79. Because it is so inexpensive compared to Photoshop, there are no upgrade prices. You have to buy the next version each time you want to upgrade.

Elements 9 new features

- Unclutter and repair photos - Remove unwanted elements with the enhanced Spot Healing Brush which is like Content Aware Fill in CS5. Also, fix old or torn photos so you can make new prints.
- Guided Edits help you create pop art, reflections, portrait effects – not in Photoshop CSx
- Match the style of a favorite photo automatically - Photomerge Style Match analyzes the stylistic qualities of one photo then automatically applies those qualities to another photo.
- "Out of Bounds" photo capability with Guided Edits – not in Photoshop
- The Recompose tool has been added (similar to Content-Aware-Scale in Photoshop CSx). This lets you resize photos without losing important visual elements like people or buildings. Normally when scaling an image, the result includes squatty or lengthened objects in the photo. Recompose identifies important objects in the shot and scales everything around them, resulting in a resized image with correctly proportioned objects. See below:

- (Create tab) Print calendars, scrapbook pages, cards and photo books with your home printer – not in CSx.

Elements vs. Photoshop CSx

- (Share tab) Quickly share photos and videos on Flickr, Facebook*, Shutterfly, SmugMug –Facebook, Flickr and Photoshop.com are the only online uploading sites available in CS5.
- Layer masks
- Organizer is now available for a Mac as well as Windows computers
- Panorama tool is improved (File>New…)

Additional features that are not available in Photoshop:

- Cookie cutter tool - crops a photo into a shape that you choose
- Smart brush tool - apply tonal and color adjustments to specific areas of a photo
- Drop-in frames, backgrounds, and artwork
- Additional Photomerge modes, like Group Shot, Scene Cleaner, Faces
- Quick Fix mode
- Photo creation templates for photo books, greeting cards, calendars, Web galleries, and more.

Most Photoshop-compatible Plug-ins and Filters will also work with Photoshop Elements.

Photomerge can also be used to enhance facial features by using elements from other images. An example of this would be extracting the eyes, mouth and nose from one photo and inserting those features on another photo. This also works to insert (or remove) other people into a shot in case someone was left out of a picture and you want to correct the mistake.
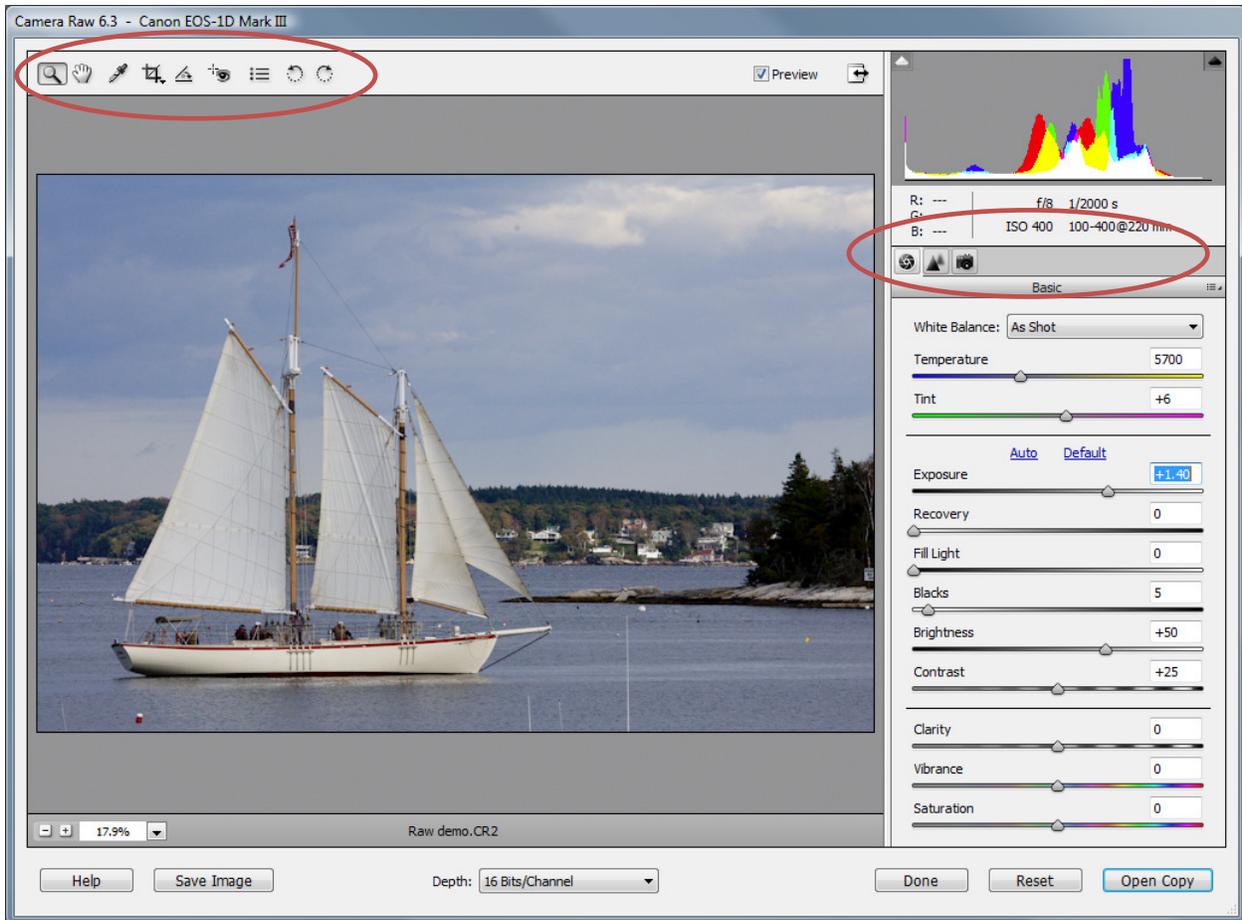
People Recognition - The Auto Analyzer automatically tags images that contain faces. Once this process is complete, you can begin identifying people in the photos. The program will learn what people look like and will start making suggestions about who is in each photo. Eventually it will actually find groups of photos of a particular person and allow you to batch tag them to save time.

Photoshop.com provides every licensed Photoshop Elements 9 user with 2GB of online storage space. This space can be used to share your projects or to use the new multi-machine synchronization tool. This lets you access and edit photos located on other computers.

Limitations in Elements

- Limited flexibility and manual control with adjustments
- 16-bit support is much more limited
- Actions – Pre-made actions are available and you can download others but you can't create your own actions.
- Adobe Camera Raw is limited to many fewer controls (in circles below):
  - Missing adjustment brush, gradient, Targeted adjustment, curves, HSL/Grayscale, split toning, effects, etc.

Elements vs. Photoshop CSx

Hidden features in Photoshop Elements

Some of the missing features in Elements, such as quick masks, can be simulated through other tools in Elements. Some of the tools are actually hidden and only accessible through actions created in the full version of Photoshop. Many add-ons and tools have been created that will allow Elements to use some of these features. Some of these add-ons can be downloaded for free. (Elements Plus can be purchased online for $12)

Additional features in Photoshop CS5

- Additional raw converter features – adjustment brush, several more tabs, etc.
- More tools and features work with high-bit (16-bit and 32-bit) images
- In the features and tools that are shared with Elements, the Photoshop version usually offers more advanced options for fine tuning and control.
- Some adjustment layers (curves, color balance, selective color, channel mixer, vibrance)
- Automatic lens correction
- Layer Comps, and Quick Mask mode
- Smart Objects, Smart Guides (help with aligning two or more elements in the image)
- Lens Blur Filter
- Vanishing Point Tool
- Puppet Warp

Elements vs. Photoshop CSx

- Pen tool and paths panel
- Mixer brush and bristle tips painting tools
- Editing History Log
- Text on a path, advanced text formatting
- Advanced Layer Style manipulation
- Advanced Color Management
- Advanced Web features (rollovers, slicing)
- Recording custom Actions (for batch processing)
- Customizable tool presets, keyboard shortcuts, and menus
- Requires a robust system to run on, with about 2 gigabytes of memory at a minimum, and benefits considerably from even more memory and an advanced video card.
- Automated HDR processing
- Channels Panel
- CMYK and LAB color modes

Typically, Photoshop can be purchased for around $600. Upgrades are usually every other year. They are not required but usually cost around $199 if desired.

Here are the major reasons you might want Photoshop CSx.

Control
If you like having control over every aspect of your image adjustments, you won't find that in Elements. You'll have to go to Photoshop CSx. Photoshop CSx has more adjustment techniques available and for those features it shares with Elements, Photoshop usually goes about five steps deeper in options available.

Compositing
If you like making panoramas or working with HDR images, Photoshop goes further and does more than Elements.

Custom Automation (Batches)
Photoshop Elements has some great basic tools for processing multiple files at once. With Elements you can rename files, resize images, convert files, apply "Quick Fixes" and add watermarking or captions to multiple images at once. This covers about 90% of the batching tasks people use. However, you are limited with just these options. With Photoshop, you can create your own automated "actions" to apply to anything you want. Photoshop does the work for you. You could work on something else or walk away, come back later and it would be done.

Advanced Website Development:
The Slice tool in Photoshop allows you to "cut up" your web page into the major sections. With the slice tool, you draw lines around the major sections you want as graphics and you can name each section and apply alt tags all within Photoshop.

Another reason you would want to consider Photoshop CS4 or CS5 is for creating animated gifs. There is a palette window called Animation where you can show or hide layers for

individual frames in an animation. You can also control the frame rate and compression settings for your animated gif.

Summary

In short, Elements is an easier-to-use application with bright, easy-to-find intuitive buttons and simple instructions. Most everything is automated for the novice but manual adjustments can be made by the advanced user and save $500. If advanced photo editing is required with nearly limitless possibilities, then Photoshop CSx is what you need.   If you are a student, even taking a single class, you can purchase Photoshop at a steep discount.