

Doing difficult cutouts the easy way.

One of the things I get asked all the time is, “How do we do cutouts when the person has really crazy hair—especially when we want to place the person on a background on the page or in another photo?”

It is actually easier than you would think. Let’s say we want to cut out the photo of the young lady (Figure A) and place her on a black background. Here’s how we do it.

- Step 1: Choose the Quick Selection tool by pressing W or clicking it in the tool palette.
- Step 2: Decide what part of the photo will be the easiest to select. In this case, because we are starting with a white background, we will select that. If we were starting with something more difficult to select, we might select the subject instead.
- Step 3: Choose Select>Inverse to select the girl instead of the white background.
- Step 4: See how your selection looks by entering QuickMask mode. (Press Q to toggle it off and on.) This will turn the areas you have NOT selected to red. (Figure B) Don’t worry at this point if you still have some white areas in her hair. (Figure C) Toggle it off by pressing Q one more time.
- Step 5: With any of the selection tools still active, click the Refine Edge button in the Control Bar at the top of the screen. (Figure D)
- Step 6: When the Refine Edge Dialog box opens, it will probably look like this. (Figure E) Change the View On drop-down menu to On Black or On Layers if you are putting the cutout on another photo in the background. (Figure F) On Black it will look like this. (Figure G)
- Step 7: Remaining in the Refine Edge Dialog box, choose the Refine Radius Tool (Figure H) and begin painting in her hair. This tool is a brush so you can enlarge it by pressing] and reduce its size by pressing [. (These keys are just to the right of the P key.)
- Step 8: Don’t get worried that, as you use the brush in her hair, even more white appears to be added. As soon as you lift your finger off the mouse, the white disappears and, with it, the background color you were trying to eliminate. (Figure H)
- Step 9: Paint all around her hair to remove the white. If you still can’t get rid of it all, try changing the Edge Detection by turning Smart Radius off and on. When it is off, you can also try moving the slider to see if that helps. Every photo will be different.
- Step 10: When you have all the hair the way you want it, choose Output To: New Layer with Layer Mask. This will create a new layer and a mask to knock out the background.
- Step 11: After you have created the mask, the transparent area around subject may be huge. Cut it down by choosing Image>Trim and clicking Transparent Pixels to shrink it.

Save the file as a Photoshop Document (PSD) so that if you need to make changes later you can come back. Then choose File>Save As and save a copy of the document as a PNG. This will save it with a transparent background that you can upload to the Yearbook Avenue Image Library for use on pages with backgrounds.

If you are going to put another photo behind it as a background (Figure I), open that photo and drag or Copy/Paste your new cutout picture to the other photo with a background. Make sure it is on the top in the Layers Panel. □

