

# Shape Gradients

Most people know about gradients, start with black at the top of the page, fade to white, and get shades of gray in between. That's the simple definition.

**Gradient History:** The early gradients were backgrounds, top half black, and bottom half white, and blurred so that there was no definite line between the two blocks. Gradients were added to Photoshop over time, and along the way there were plug-in packages that included gradients.

**Gradient Overview:** Photoshop has five gradient options: Linear, Radial, Angle, Reflected, and Diamond. The gradient editor lets you select multiple color settings, and you're able to save out swatch files to backup for future use. There's one option that's not listed here, and that is the subject of this paper, Shape Gradients.

**Step 1:** Yes, I know you can use a plug-in package, for making shape gradients, but if you're reading this, you want more than just a plug-in, you want the knowledge. Relax, it's very simple, then I will show some interesting variants, based on Photoshop's new and improved dynamic brushes. So anyway, Step 1 is make a new file 1 inch square at 300 dpi.

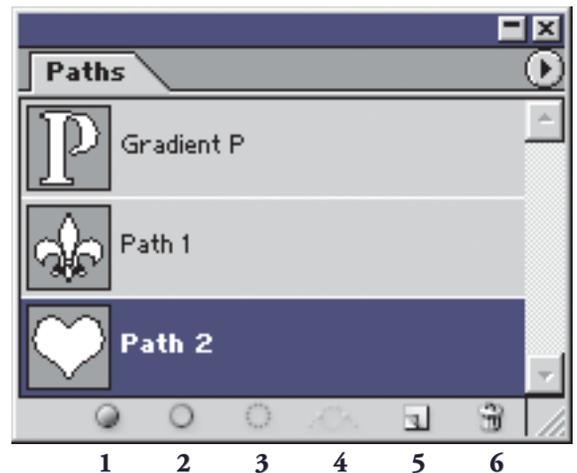
**Step 2:** Use the type tool to place a letter, I used the letter P for Photoshop, and I chose AGaramond Bold. Any font would have worked here, a shapely serifed font was chosen to show off the technique for the purposes of teaching.

**Step 3:** Make a character path. Quite easy with Photoshop 7, Layer > Type > Create Work Path. Rename the Work Path to "Gradient P." The letter P needs to be rasterized, you may not work with it until it is converted to a graphic, Layer > Rastorize > Type.



Step 1: Make a new file.

Step 2: Place a letter. Notice here the body of the letter P, the serifs add shape, giving the P extra corners and style.

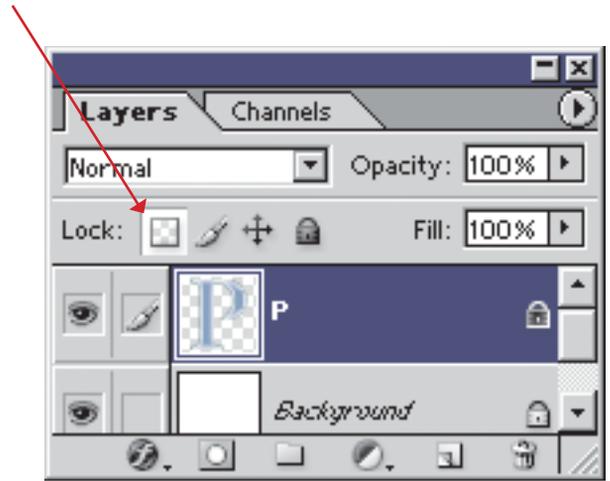


Step 3: Layer > Type > Create Work Path, from the overhead menu. This creates a vector path of the letter. From Left to right, the icons at the bottom of the palette are:  
1. fill path 2. stroke path 3. make selection from path  
4. make path from selection 5. new path icon 6. trash path icon.  
Several paths can be stored in a file. They don't add much to file size of an image.

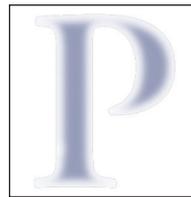
**Step 4:** Lock layer transparency for the P. You want to paint the inside the letter only. Select a light blue color and change the color of the letter, Edit > Fill > Foreground color. Activate the path by clicking with the mouse cursor. Select white as your foreground color, select the brush tool, use a 35 pixel brush, check the Air Brush option in the overhead palette, and stroke the path with the paintbrush. The outside of the letter turns white. For the next step, select a dark green color, and a 9 pixel brush and stroke the path once more. The result is a shape gradient.

**Painting Notes:** Brush size will depend on the size of your image, using as many or as few colors as you choose. If instead of blue, white and green, you had used blue, yellow and red, you would see blending to create green and orange, as seen in Example 2. Don't be afraid to experiment with color and brushes.

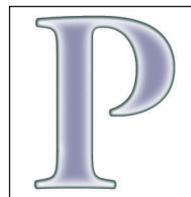
**Step 5:** Filter > Noise > Add Noise, input 2 and check Monochromatic. This step is optional, but if you have any trouble with white banding when you print the file, this step will eliminate it.



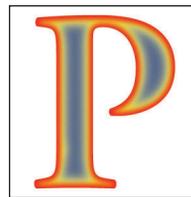
**Lock Layer Transparency.** The checkered square, only locks the transparency of a layer. The brush only locks the layer from being by brush tools. The arrow block prevents the layer from being moved. The lock icon locks everything. If you'll notice the difference between the lock on the background layer, and the lock on the P layer. The P layer has a partial lock the background has a full lock.



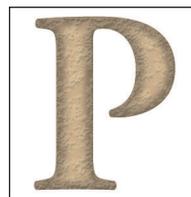
**Step 4:** Stroke the path. A soft brush blends the paint color to the background. Notice the variation in the thick and thin lines of the letter, and the serif corners seem to carry a hint of blue into the corners.



Selecting a smaller brush and changing color finishes Example 1 for use on a web page or an object for print.



**Example 2:** Using primary colors of blue, yellow and red, the gradient creates green and orange through color blending.



**Example 3:** This sample uses a simple 2 color gradient. A new layer was made, and painted with the leaf brush in the default brush set. Layer effects were added to the leaf layer only for a textured effect.

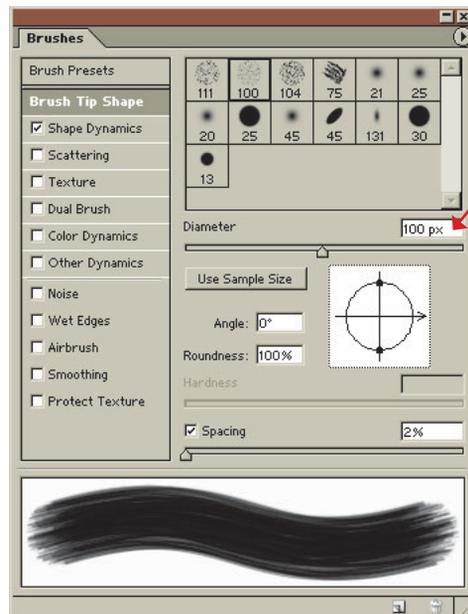
**Using Vector Shapes:** Before placing a Vector Shape in the file, go to the paths palette and click the new path icon. It will be named Path 1 by default, rename if desired. Once you have a new path in the paths palette, select a Vector Shape and place it on the art board. Because you're drawing the shape on a designated path, you don't have the layer fill that is normally associated with a Vector Shape. Make a new layer from the layers palette before you start painting the shape.

Use the fill path icon to give the shape a base to paint on. Then lock the layer transparency from the layers palette, and continue by stroking the path with the paint brush and various colors.

**Using Dynamic Brushes:** Truth be told, if you use a dynamic brush feature, it may not look like a true gradient, but that's not going to stop anyone from experimenting, now is it? Maybe I want the gradient to look wavy. Or maybe I want to use a picture brush to create in interesting border. Use layer effects for making textured gradient patterns. Have fun.



This shape was painted the Round Bristle brush from the Thick Heavy Brushes swatche file. The 100 pixel diameter of the brush too large, so the diameter was changed to about 35 for the path stroke. The nature of the brush added highlights to the graphic. The second color was painted on at 50%, and a little noise was added for texture.



The new Brush Palette gives the user an expanded variety of options to paint with. Customize brushes with scattering, opacity, size, and coloring. Mix and match options to create unique effects for web and print material.



The heart graphic was created using layers while stroking the path. To do the same, start with 4 layers. Fill the shape with a light color on Layer 1. On Layer 3, command/control click Layer 1 to load layer transparency. Also make sure the path is turned on. Now the marching ant effect look like marching ants that are following a path. The Special Effect Brushes were loaded to the brush palette, and the flower brush was chosen, and resized to 32 pixel stroke. A darker red was chosen, and the path stroked. Control/Command click Layer 3, and make a work path from Layer 3 Transparency, rename to Layer 3 path. Go to Layer 2, Control/Command click Layer 1, and stroke Layer 3 path with a normal 20 pixel brush, layer opacity was reduced to 50%. Go to Layer 4, and stroke with a small brush.

Once you are finished, you may flatten the image and put it in print or on web page. Having both path and selection active at the same time is another way of preserving transparency for a layer or to keep a brush stroke from spilling over into an area that's already painted.



This graphic was created with a layer for each path stroke. This method was used to get an even stroke around the decorative flower brush that was used. Seen here, the composite of all the layers.



Layer 1: The path was filled with a solid color for the base.



Layer 3: Was stroked using the flower brush from the Special Effect Brushes swatch file. Load layer transparency, and create a work path. Rename path to Layer 3 path.



Layer 2: Load Layer 1 transparency, activate Layer 3 path, and stroke Layer 3 path. The active selection prevents the paint from spilling over to unwanted areas.



Layer 4: Load Layer 1 transparency, activate shape path, and stroke.