Photoshop vs Photoshop Elements: Which should you buy?

We compare the grand master of creative software against its younger, more stripped-back Adobe alternative. Which one gives creative professionals better value?

Photoshop Elements was first released by Adobe in 2018, positioned to the creative community as a Photoshop for beginners.

While there are stripped-down versions of Photoshop CC out there for iPhone and Android such as Photoshop Express, Photoshop Mix and Photoshop Fix, Photoshop Elements 2019 is the first of its sort for desktop and carries the same one-off, no subscription usage as its mobile alternatives.

But how does the new app compare against the mac daddy of Photoshop in terms of usefulness for your art and design, and which one will save you money?

While many creatives already use Photoshop, there are those using Corel or Affinity software who may be ready to check out the Adobe hype for themselves and would like to know if it’s worth subscribing to the original Photoshop or not and instead pay for something simpler.

With this in mind we’ve compared below current versions of Photoshop Creative Cloud 2019 and Photoshop Elements 2019 to check out what tools are unique to each – and just how useful they would be for both a designer and artist.

How can I compare Photoshop CC and Photoshop Elements for free?

The best way to compare the two programs is to try their free trial versions. You can download Photoshop CC free here for a seven day trial on your desktop only. This is a full version of the software so you'll be able to try everything out before you decide to buy (which you can do so here on the Adobe site) or not.

You can also try Photoshop out as part of the full Creative Cloud suite for seven days.

Is there a trial version of Photoshop Elements?

You can trial Photoshop Elements for a generous 30 days with a download at this link.

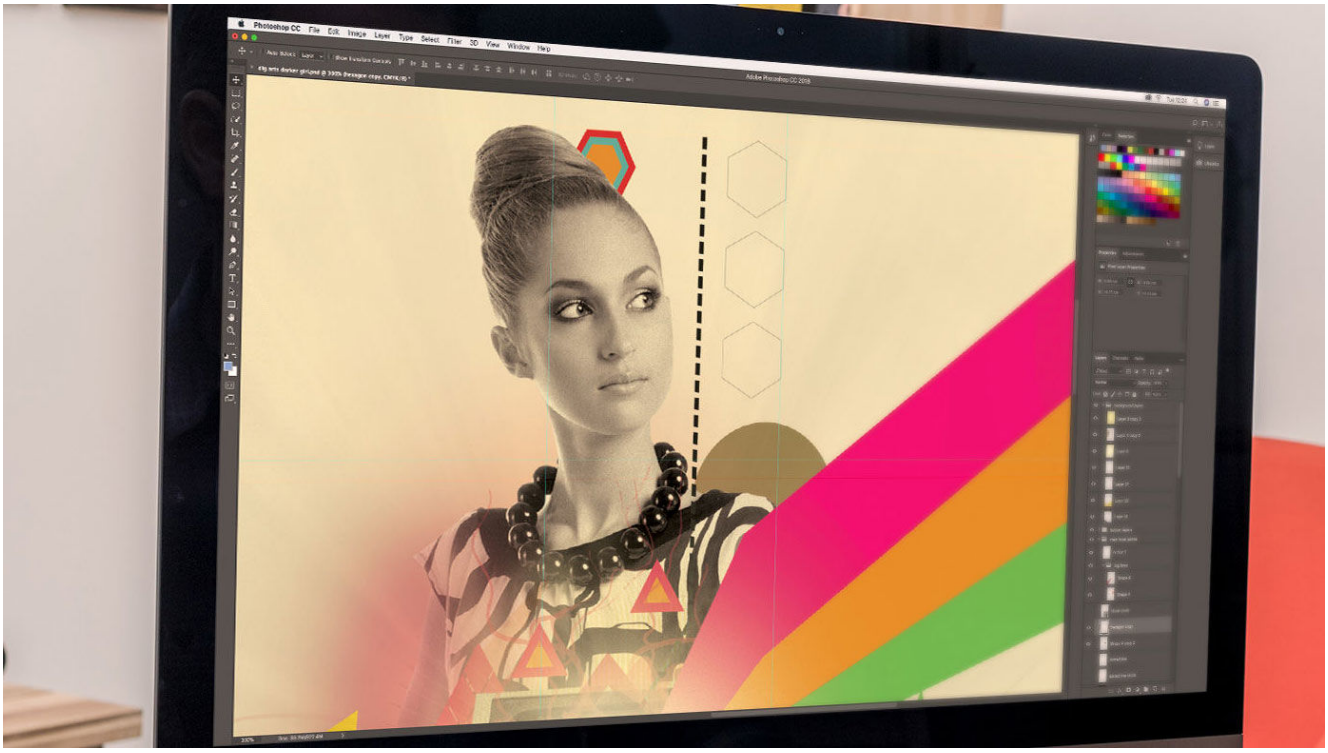
The trial also includes the bonus of using Premiere Elements for the same amount of days, which might be of interest for budding video editors or pros looking to change software and buy the full fat Adobe Premiere for their work (check out a buy link to both Premiere Elements and Photoshop Elements here).

Do I need to buy an Adobe Creative Cloud subscription with Photoshop?

You can buy Photoshop for a single app subscription for the price of £19.97/US$19.99 per month without opting into the full Adobe CC suite of creative software.

Alternatively, the standard Photography Plan at £9.89/$9.99 per month gets you Lightroom CC, Photoshop CC and Lightroom Classic (for desktop) with 20GB cloud storage.

Lightroom – or Adobe Photoshop Lightroom in full – seems like another good Photoshop alternative if you're looking to spend less, but going for the Lightroom Plan subscription is the exact same price as the Photography Plan just mentioned.



Is Photoshop Elements in Adobe CC?

Photoshop Elements 2019 only comes as a one-off payment for £86.56 after VAT/US$99.99 total.

There is no subscription and no Adobe CC option to be aware of.

If you wish, you can buy a bundle of Photoshop Elements and Premiere Elements here for £130.36/US$149.99 as a one-off saving of $50/£43.

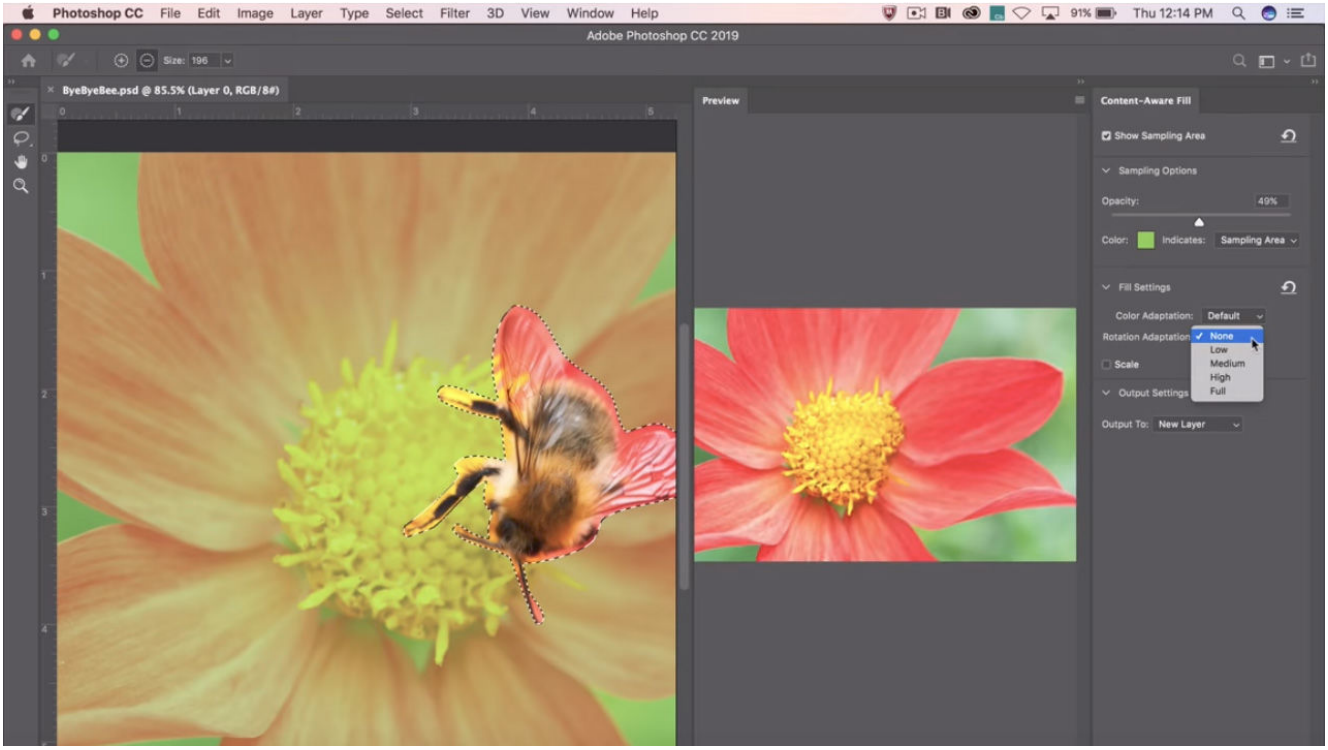
What are the advantages of Photoshop CC?

As a professional artist or designer, you're probably using either Photoshop, Procreate, Corel or Affinity in your

workflow.

If you’re looking to switch to Photoshop, you will find all the benefits of other major creative apps along with AI-infused capabilities.

If you choose Photoshop instead of Photoshop Elements you’ll have the useful Pen tool for making Curve selections and more, along with the now AI-powered Patch tool for removing unwanted elements from photos.



It also supports CMYK – useful for designers who work across both print and digital – and can import videos which can be easily trimmed and exported into GIF format.

There’s also the ability to record Actions, saving you time if a lot of your work revolves around repeated procedures for animating, resizing and more.

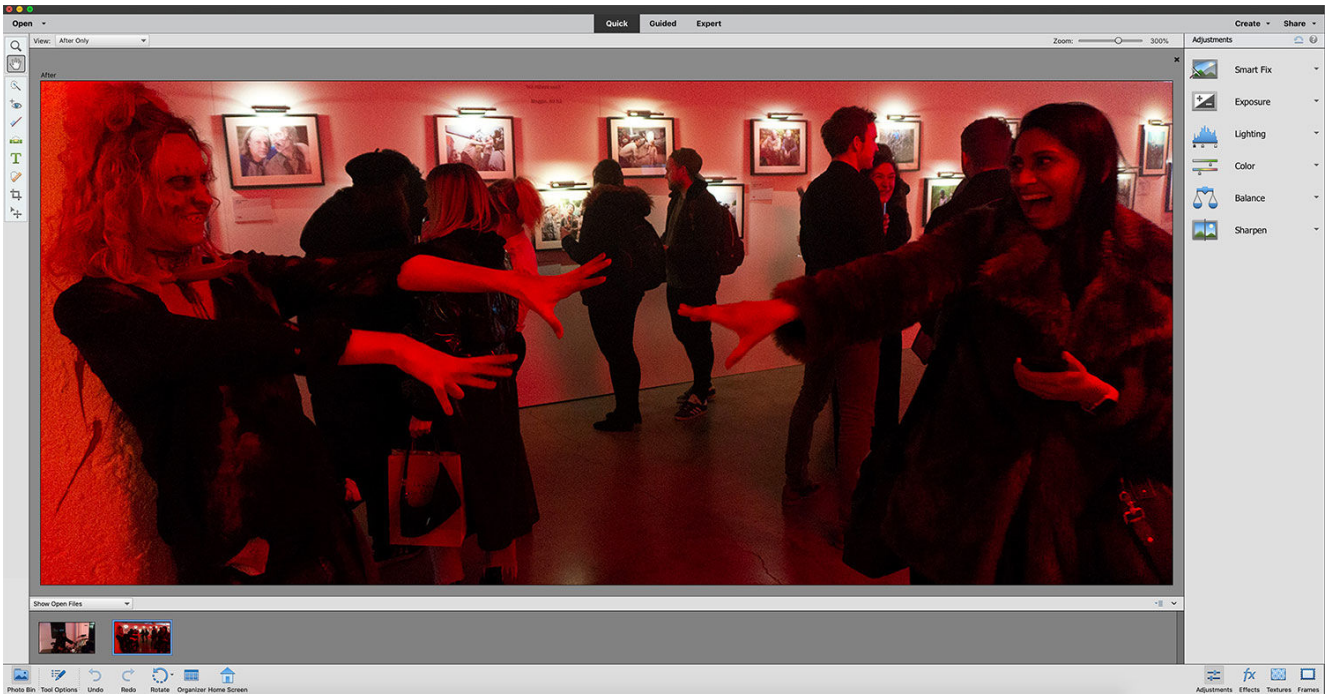
What are the advantages of

Photoshop Elements?

Photoshop Elements 2019 may not have the features just mentioned, but the software does have some tricks up its sleeve.

First up, Elements on-boards beginners well with Quick shortcuts and Guided tools, both on access in the interface at all times. This may not mean anything for seasoned designers, but for an artist who simply wants to smarten up an image it can be a great way to save time and learn a few tricks.

Pros looking for more can hit the Experts tab in the Elements interface, which is where the stripped-back Photoshop that Elements represents awaits you.



Clicking around, users will find a few things Photoshop is without: an Organiser to tag and sort your work, plus templates, filters and template Actions to instantly change your image (but note you won't be able to record any of your own Actions to add to the library).

One of the best Elements features missing from Photoshop is Photomerge Scene Cleaner, which lets you combine several

photos of the same scene into one, removing unwanted elements like passing pedestrians from the background.

Perhaps the biggest advantage of Elements though is that there’s no subscription.

Should I buy Photoshop or Photoshop Elements?

As a serious artist designer, you should be buying Photoshop. If you’re a intermediate or beginner raised on Adobe Illustrator then Elements would be a wise investment if you just need a few of Photoshop’s capabilities for your workflow.

Either way, we recommend you download trial versions of both apps to see what’s best for you.

What’s a good/free alternative to Photoshop Elements?

As mentioned before, Lightroom is a simpler alternative to Photoshop, but Adobe’s pricing means you can buy both it and Photoshop as a bundle for the exact same fee per month. Lightroom is a sub-brand of Photoshop, after all.

If the idea of a subscription is what’s put you off any of the Photoshop family until now, then your best course of action is to invest in Affinity Photo for the current sale price of £38.99/$39.99 on desktop and £15.99/$15.99 on the iPad.

The app is just as beloved by the creative community as Adobe’s offerings – if not more so – and unlike Photoshop is already developed for the iPad with all the capabilities of its desktop version (although Photoshop for the iPad is allegedly coming at some point this year).

For a free option, try out Gimp.

Read next: Adobe CC buying guide

https://www.digitalartsonline.co.uk/features/creative-software/photoshop-versus-photoshop-elements-which-should-you-buy/