

Tip: The Benefits of Using a Graphics Tablet – Glenn Pure

Some photo editing tasks involve using brushes or tools that are applied using a mouse – for example, clone stamp and healing brush tools in Photoshop. Similarly, selecting irregular-shaped objects in an image, such as birds, also involves a freehand selection using a mouse. But ***accurately and smoothly controlling where the mouse moves can be challenging*** unless you have exceptional fine motor control of your hand.

There is a better alternative: a graphics pad or tablet. This can be used to more easily and accurately control the cursor or brush. Like a mouse, these devices can be plugged into a USB port on your computer. Graphics tablets consist of a drawing pad and a separate electronic ‘pen’. The cursor or brush is controlled by moving the pen on the pad. Why is this better than using a mouse? Mainly, because ***it’s much easier to make accurate and smooth movements***. This is no surprise as it relies on fine motor skills we’ve learnt since childhood for writing and drawing.

Another less known advantage is that ***the ‘pen’ is pressure sensitive***. For example, when using brush tools in Photoshop, pressing harder on the pen will result in the brush increasing in size. Photoshop tools that use a brush include the Healing Brush tool, which is very useful for cloning out distracting objects, and the Quick Selection tool that helps automate the selection of irregular objects. In both cases, applying more pen pressure increases the size of the area affected up to the brush size currently set for that tool. This can be a considerable time saver – after all, most of us would rather be out with the birds instead of in front of our computers.

On the more vexed subject of what to buy, go for the largest pad size you can afford, but certainly not less than 15 x 20 cm (6 x 8 inches). As for brands, stick with the more well-known makers which include Wacom and Huion. There also appears to be some strong emerging manufacturers. Look for online reviews or comparisons before buying and check for compatibility with your operating system. I bought a 15 x 20 cm Huion from China on ebay for around \$50. Expect to pay considerably more at normal retail outlets in Australia. Mine came with a battery-powered pen but I was unsure at the time whether that was a wise move. However, I’ve had it for almost a year and am still using the same AAA battery in the pen. The pen tips are plastic and will wear with use but are replaceable. Mine came with a couple of spare tips but I’m still using the original one.



It seems the pen isn't just mightier than the sword!