

Zone Mask

Prototype — Notes for Testers

Zone Mask — prototype for comment

What this is

This is a working prototype, not a finished tool. It explores a way of selecting part of a photograph by its brightness — using the Ansel Adams zone system — and then restricting that selection further by position, so an adjustment lands only where you want it. Nothing is saved and nothing is exported yet; the purpose is to find out whether the idea is understandable and useful before it is built into a proper tool. What I would most like to know is whether the zone idea makes sense to you, and whether the Intersect option does what you would expect.

Try it in this order

1. Open the page. A test image loads automatically — a grey gradient, eleven zone bars, and a strip of colours along the bottom.
2. Leave the View set to Mask. Drag the Target Zone slider from 0 to X and watch the magenta selection travel across the gradient. The caption under the slider names each zone.
3. Set the Target Zone to V (middle grey). Now drag the Width slider. Notice the selection widening to take in neighbouring zones, and narrowing to pick out just the one.
4. Switch View to Grey. This is the same selection shown as the mask itself — white is fully selected, black is not selected, greys are partly selected.
5. Switch View back to Mask, then load one of your own photographs (button, or drag it onto the picture).
6. Choose a zone that matches something you want to change — for example Zone VII or VIII for bright sky, Zone III for shadow detail.
7. Now move to the Adjustment panel and pull Saturation down. Switch View to Result. The change should appear only in the zone you selected.
8. Set the Spatial Mask to Brush, then scribble roughly over one area of the picture. Do not try to be neat.
9. Set Combine to Intersect. The adjustment should now apply only where your rough stroke AND your chosen zone overlap — the edges are trimmed for you.
10. Switch Combine back to Add to see the difference. Add applies the change wherever either the zone or the brush reaches; Intersect only where both do.

TIP — The point of Intersect is that you do not need a steady hand. Scribble loosely over a sky and let the zone mask decide which parts of your stroke actually count.

Every option on screen

Image

Control	What it does	Why it is there
Load Image	Opens a picture from your computer.	So you can test the masks on your own photographs, not just the test image.
Drop area	Accepts a picture dragged onto the page.	A quicker route than the file picker.

Zone (Ansel Adams)

Control	What it does	Why it is there
Target Zone	Chooses which brightness zone to select, from 0 (pure black) to X (pure white).	The zone system is a photographer's vocabulary for brightness. Naming the zones makes the selection meaningful rather than abstract.
Zone description	Names the selected zone in plain words, such as "textured shadow".	So the numbering teaches you what each zone actually looks like in a picture.
Width	Sets how many neighbouring zones feather into the selection.	A single zone is often too narrow to be useful. Width lets the selection soften outward without becoming a blunt instrument.

Mask Shape

Control	What it does	Why it is there
Strength	Sets how fully the selected zone is masked.	Lets you apply a change gently rather than at full force.

Spatial Mask (second mask)

Control	What it does	Why it is there
None	No second mask; the zone selection applies across the whole frame.	The starting point, and useful when the tones alone define what you want.
Gradient	Selects progressively across the frame in a straight line.	The natural fit for skies, foregrounds, and anything divided by a horizon.
Radial	Selects outward from the centre.	For subjects, faces, and vignette-style work.
Brush	Lets you paint the selection by hand.	For areas no gradient can describe. Combined with Intersect, it removes the need for accurate brushwork.
Position	Moves the gradient or sets the radius of the radial.	Places the mask where the picture needs it.
Softness	Sets how gradually the mask fades.	A hard edge looks artificial; softness controls how invisible the transition is.
Angle	Rotates the gradient.	Horizons are rarely horizontal in every picture.
Brush Size	Sets the diameter of the brush.	The only brush control provided, deliberately — the mask is meant to supply the precision, not your hand.
Clear Brush Strokes	Removes everything you have painted.	So a poor attempt costs nothing.

Combine

Control	What it does	Why it is there
Add	Selects wherever either the zone mask or the spatial mask reaches.	The conventional behaviour, included so you can compare it against Intersect.
Intersect	Selects only where both masks overlap.	The idea being tested. It is what allows a rough brush stroke to affect only the tones you targeted.

Adjustment (through mask)

Control	What it does	Why it is there
Hue	Shifts colours around the colour wheel.	Present so the mask visibly does something. A mask you cannot see working is impossible to judge.

Control	What it does	Why it is there
Saturation	Strengthens or mutes colour.	The clearest way to see exactly where a mask reaches.
Lightness	Brightens or darkens.	The adjustment most often wanted in dodge-and-burn work.

View

Control	What it does	Why it is there
Mask	Shows the selection painted onto your picture.	The most intuitive view — you see which parts of your own photograph are selected.
Grey	Shows the mask on its own, white through black.	Precise but abstract; for judging exactly how strong the selection is everywhere.
Result	Shows the adjustment applied through the mask.	The proof of the whole idea — the change landing only where it should.
Overlay Colour	Switches the mask overlay between magenta and red.	Magenta is the default because it almost never occurs in a real photograph, so it can never be mistaken for part of your picture.

What to look out for

- Painting redraws the whole picture with every movement. On a large photograph the brush will feel slow. This is known and would be solved before it became a real tool.
- There is no undo. Clear Brush Strokes is the only way back.
- Nothing can be saved or exported yet. This prototype is for judging the idea, not for producing finished pictures.
- Because a spatial mask depends on where things are in the frame, results from this technique could never be saved as a LUT. That is expected, not a fault.
- The brush has one size control and nothing else, on purpose. If that feels too limited, that is exactly the sort of thing worth telling me.

How to feed back

Please send your thoughts to [Photoedithelp.com](https://photoedithelp.com). Screenshots are welcome. The most useful feedback is where something confused you, where you expected a control to do something it did not, and anything you wanted to do but could not find a way to.