



## How to Use and Create Photoshop Actions

Promoting Better Photography

[Home](#) [Forums](#) [Tips](#) [Photoshop Actions](#) [Photoshop Elements Actions](#) [SF Store](#) [Galleries](#) [Home Pages](#) [Our Team](#) [Links](#)

### How to Use and Create Photoshop Actions (Just the Basics)

by Adrienne Cleveland (all rights reserved)

This Tip is intended to be a very basic introduction for people wanting to learn how to use actions in Photoshop.

We offer [Photoshop actions](#), including some [freebies](#), and this tip will tell you how you can record your own.

Using Photoshop actions can make your life easier and help you edit your photos more quickly. Basically, actions are nothing more than a series of normal Photoshop operations recorded so you can run them in sequence quickly, without having to remember just what steps to do, and in what order.

[The Actions Window](#)

[Loading Actions](#)

[Running Actions](#)

[Checkmarks and Rectangles](#)

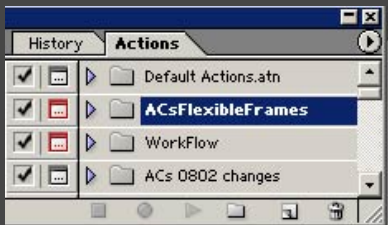
[Toggling Dialogs On and Off](#)

[Recording/Creating Actions](#)

#### The Actions Window

Here's what the Photoshop Actions Window looks like. If you don't see it when you have Photoshop open, you can make it visible by choosing Window/Actions from the main Photoshop menu.

In most cases, **you don't want to click either the checkmark or the rectangle** on the left side of the window (see [Checkmarks and Rectangles](#) below)

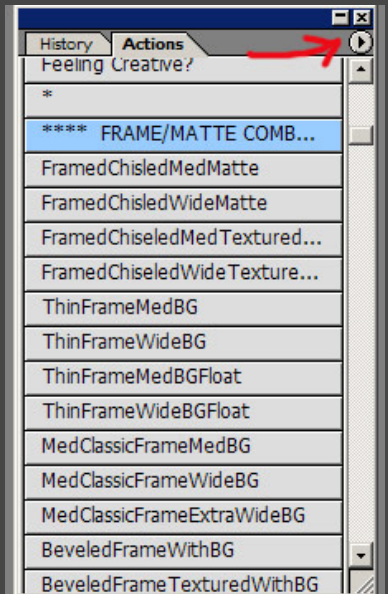


#### Button Mode

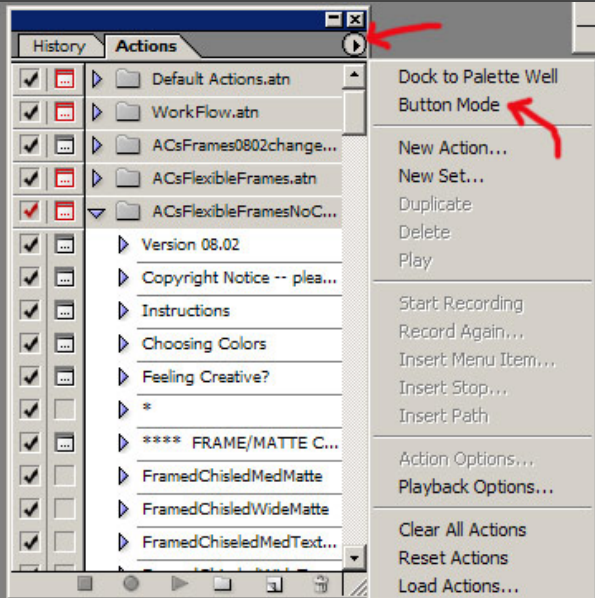
Actually, there is one other way the Photoshop Actions Window can appear, if you are using "Button Mode."

In this mode, all the actions appear as buttons. You can switch between modes using the menu that pops up when you click the little right-arrow in the upper-right corner.

Button Mode may sound like a good idea, but in practice it can be very confusing, especially if you have a lot of actions, so we recommend that you turn it off.



To turn Button Mode on or off, just click "Button Mode" in the menu to check or uncheck it.



[The Actions Window](#)

[Loading Actions](#)

[Running Actions](#)

[Checkmarks and Rectangles](#)

[Toggling Dialogs On and Off](#)

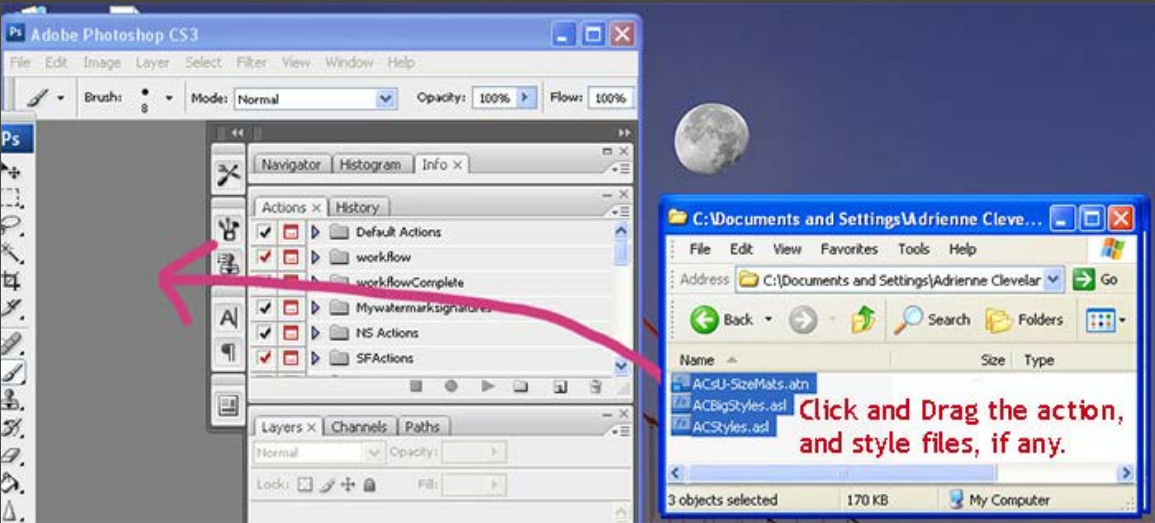
[Recording/Creating Actions](#)

Loading Actions

Method 1: Drag-and-Drop

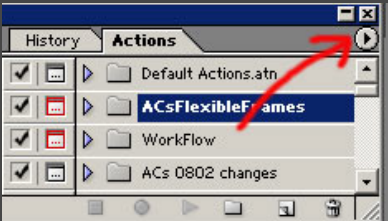
One easy way to load a Photoshop action is to use drag-and-drop with your mouse:

- 1. Open Photoshop and open the folder that contains the Photoshop action that you want to load, and position the two windows side-by-side (see screenshot below).
- 2. Click the action file (the one ending in ".atn") and while holding down the mouse button, drag the action to the Photoshop window. If you need to load style files, you can drag them in the same way.
- 3. Release the mouse button. You will now find the action in Photoshop's Actions palette.



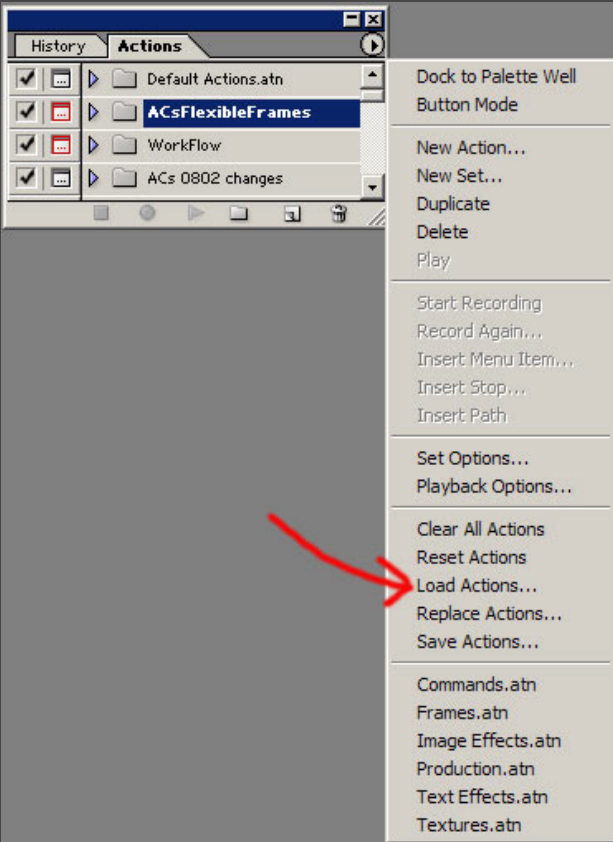
Method 2: Using the Photoshop Actions Menu

Another way to load an action is to use the menu in the Actions window. To open the menu, click the arrow in the upper right corner.



Then select "Load Actions..." and browse to the folder on your hard disk where you have placed the action (.atn) file.

If you need to load style files, use the menu in the Styles window in a similar fashion.



[The Actions Window](#)

[Loading Actions](#)

[Running Actions](#)

[Checkmarks and Rectangles](#)

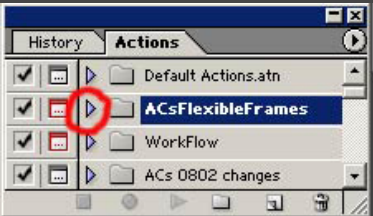
[Toggling Dialogs On and Off](#)

[Recording/Creating Actions](#)

**Running Actions**

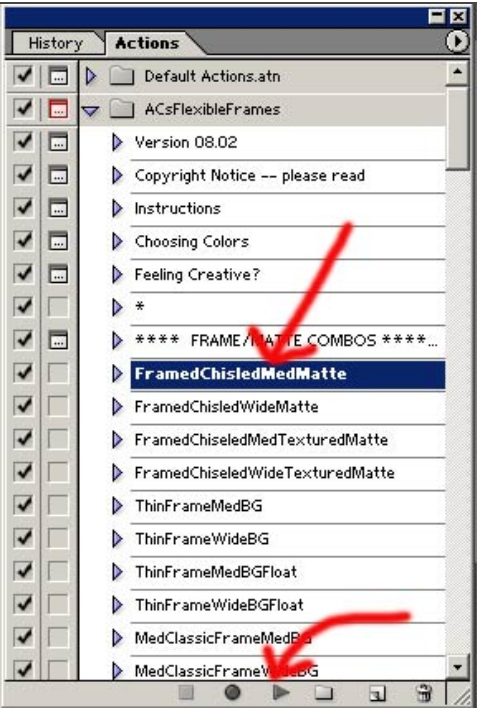
Let's assume that we want to run one of the frame actions from ACsFlexibleFrames.

First, if the action set is closed, as it is in this screen shot, you need to click the arrow to the left of the action set name to open the set.



Now that the set is open, you select the action you want to run by clicking on the name of the action, for example "FramedChiseledMedMatte," which will highlight the name. Then click the "Play Selection" button at the bottom of the Actions window (it's a right arrow).

The action will run, and your photo will be matted and framed.



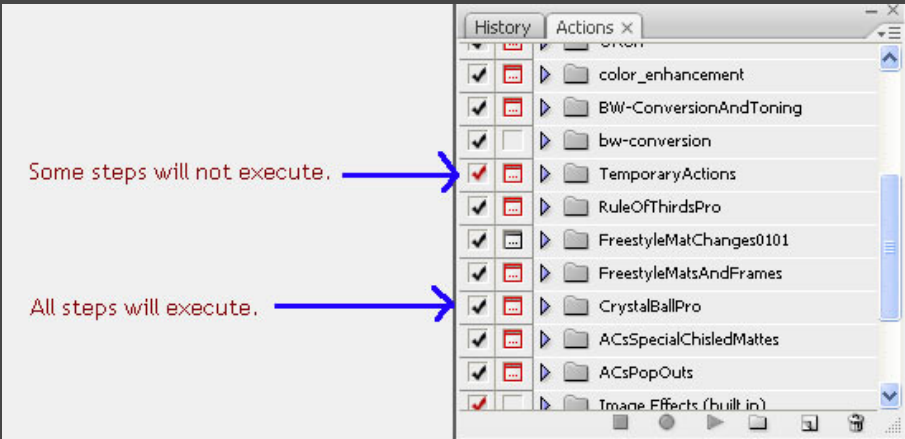
[The Actions Window](#)    [Loading Actions](#)    [Running Actions](#)    [Checkmarks and Rectangles](#)    [Toggling Dialogs On and Off](#)    [Recording/Creating Actions](#)

Checkmarks and Rectangles

You can see that all of the actions above have checkmarks, and a few of them have icons in the rectangles to the right of the checkmarks. What do these mean?

Checkmarks

- A checkmark to the left of a step in an action means that the step will execute when the action is run.
- A black checkmark to the left of an action name or an action set name means that **all** steps inside will execute.
- A red checkmark to the left of an action name or an action set name means that only **some** steps inside will execute.

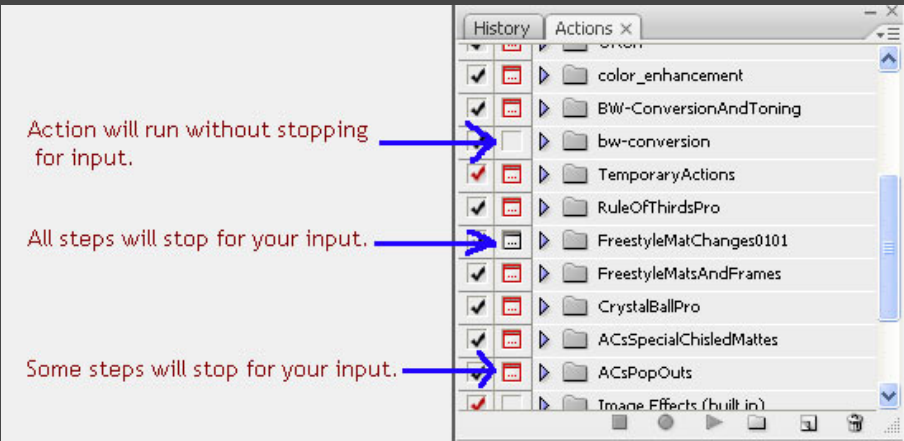


Rectangles

- An icon in the rectangle to the left of a step in an action means that the step will stop for your input when

the action is run.

- A black icon in the rectangle to the left of an action name or an action set name means that **all** steps inside will stop for your input.
- A red icon in the rectangle to the left of an action name or an action set name means that only **some** steps inside will stop for your input.



Again, in most cases, **you don't click the checkmarks or the rectangles**. We'll see when and how to use them when we record our own action below.

If you inadvertently click the rectangle beside the name of an action or action set, it will add or remove the icons from every step inside, and usually that is not a good thing. If you do that, and you have a good copy on disk, you can always reload the action from disk.

If you want to "turn off" a step in an action, you can uncheck it. If you uncheck an action set or action instead of a step, it turns off everything inside -- again, that's usually not a good thing.

**Toggling Dialogs On and Off**

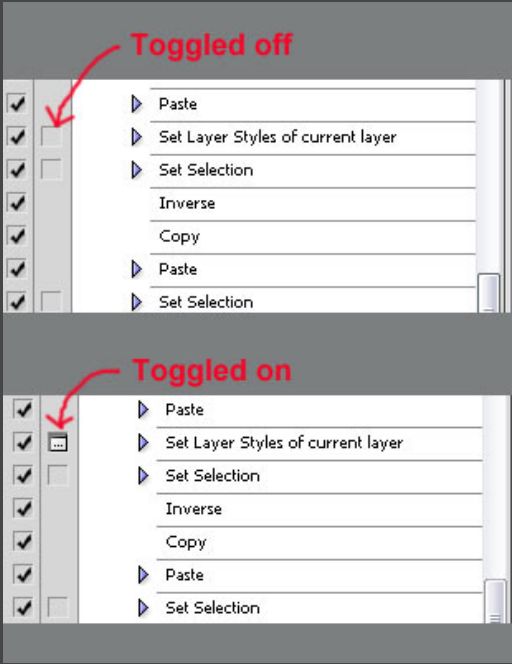
If you want to manually control input to a single step in an action, first you need to "open" up the action by clicking the arrow just to the left of the action name. This will open the action so you can see all the steps inside.



Once the steps are visible, you can toggle on the dialog for a step by clicking the blank rectangle beside the name of the step.

When a dialog is toggled on, when you play (run) the action, it will stop for your input when it gets to that step.

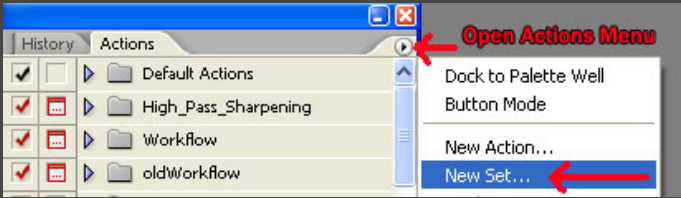




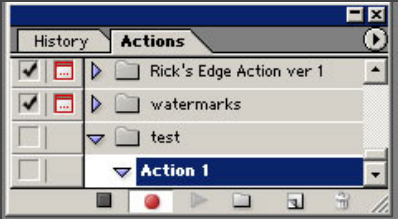
- [The Actions Window](#)
- [Loading Actions](#)
- [Running Actions](#)
- [Checkmarks and Rectangles](#)
- [Toggling Dialogs On and Off](#)
- [Recording/Creating Actions](#)

Recording/Creating Actions

If you have a series of steps you perform often, you might want to record your own action. To do that, first decide if you want to put it in an existing action set or if you need to create a new set. To create a new set, open the Photoshop Actions Window menu, and select "New Set."



To record an action, open the Photoshop Actions Window menu and select "New Action," specify a name and select the Action Set you want to place it in, and then click the "Record" button. Notice that the small circle at the bottom of the Actions Window is now red. Now perform all the steps you want to record, and when you are done, click the square to the left of the red circle to stop recording.



Re-recording a Step to Change the Default Values

The easiest way to re-record a step in the action is to first turn on the dialog for the step (see [Toggling Dialogs On and Off](#)), and then run the action until it stops at that step to show a dialog box.

When the action shows the dialog box, click "Cancel," and then select "Record again" from the Actions window menu.

Once you have the step recorded the way you want it, you can turn off the dialog again.

A Simple Example

For a (very) simple example, let's assume that you want to record an action that will resize a landscape-oriented photo for the web and sharpen it. Let's assume that you always want your photos to be 600 pixels wide, but that you want to control the amount of sharpening for each photo.

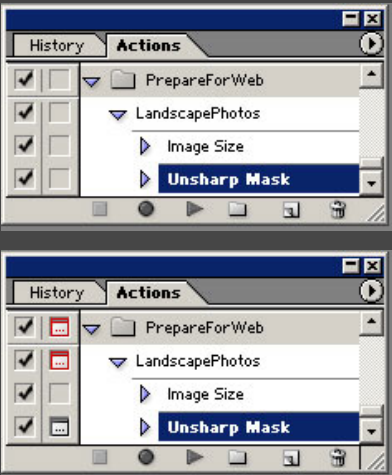
1. First, open a photo to work on.
2. If you don't want to put this action in an existing action set, create a new one (in this case, "PrepareForWeb").

3. Start recording your action (in this case, "LandscapePhotos").
4. From the main menu, use "Image/Image Size" to resize the photo and then use "Filter/Sharpen/Unsharp Mask" to sharpen it.
5. Stop recording.

Your action now looks like this. Unfortunately, it always sharpens the same amount, and you wanted to be able to control the amount of sharpening for each photo. Here's where that rectangle to the left of the Unsharp Mask step will help.

Click the rectangle to the left of the Unsharp Mask step to put an icon in it, and the next time you run the action, it will show you the Unsharp Mask dialog, where you can set the amount of sharpening.

Notice that clicking the rectangle put a dark-framed icon beside the Unsharp Mask step, and it also put red-framed icons beside the action name and the action set name. A red-framed icon means that some, but not all, of the steps inside an action or action set will stop for user input.



When you're done with an action, it's a good idea to use the Actions Window menu to save a copy to your hard disk.

We have many [Photoshop Actions](#) available here at Shutterfreaks: some free, and some for sale.

For more information about Photoshop, check out [our Tips page](#) and [our Links page](#).