USING CLIPPING MASKS – For all versions of Photoshop

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at kim@photosbykimhill.com.

This tutorial will show you how to transform a clipping mask to your photo or patterned paper when creating coffee table books, greeting cards, birth announcements and more.

First, open up the layered photoshop template and the photos you want to use.
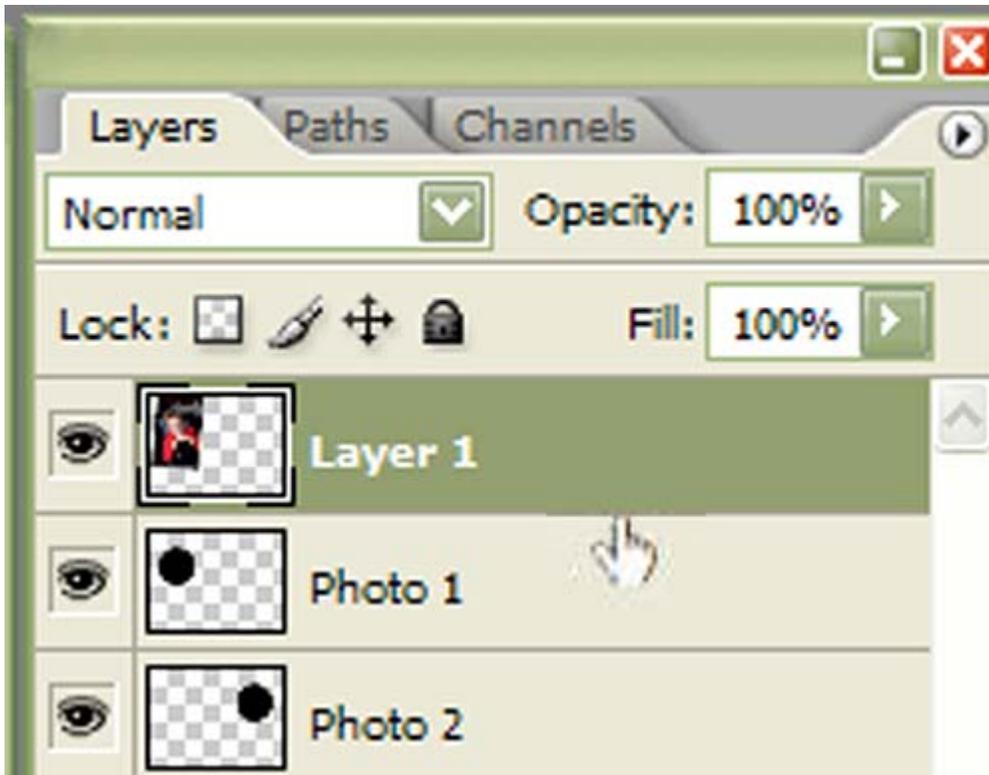

Drag the first photo you want to use on top of the template. Be sure the photo is at the top of the layers palette.
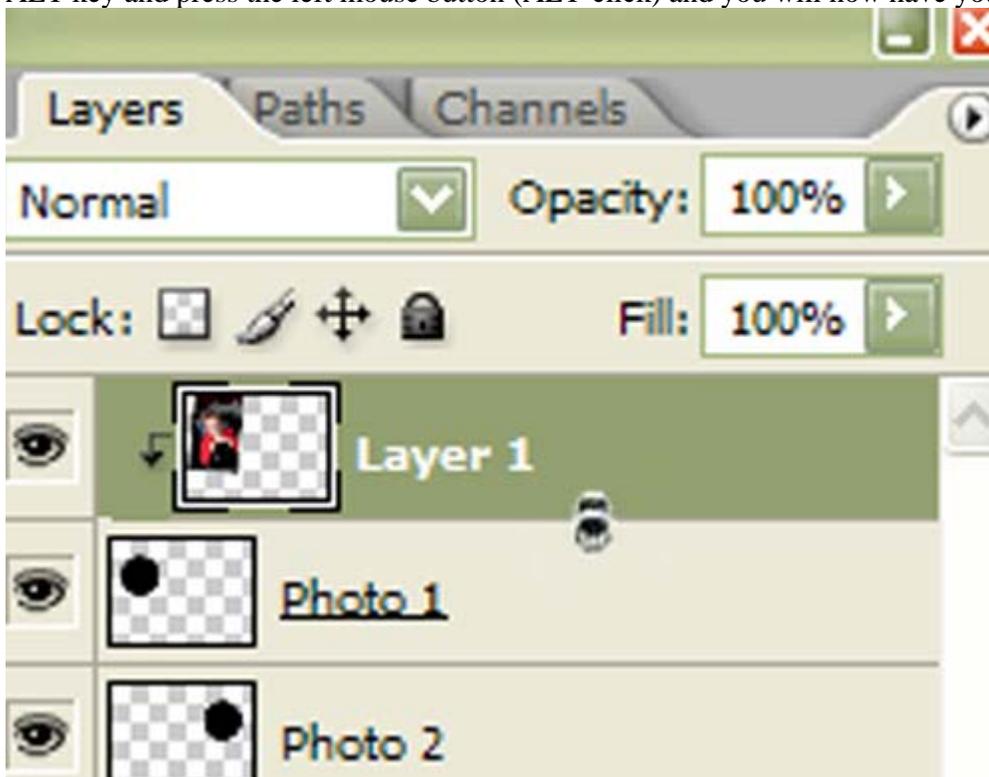

If your photo is not at the top of the layers palette, simply click on the photo layer and then hold the left button of your mouse while dragging the photo layer to the top of the stack. Once you get it to the top, release the left mouse button.
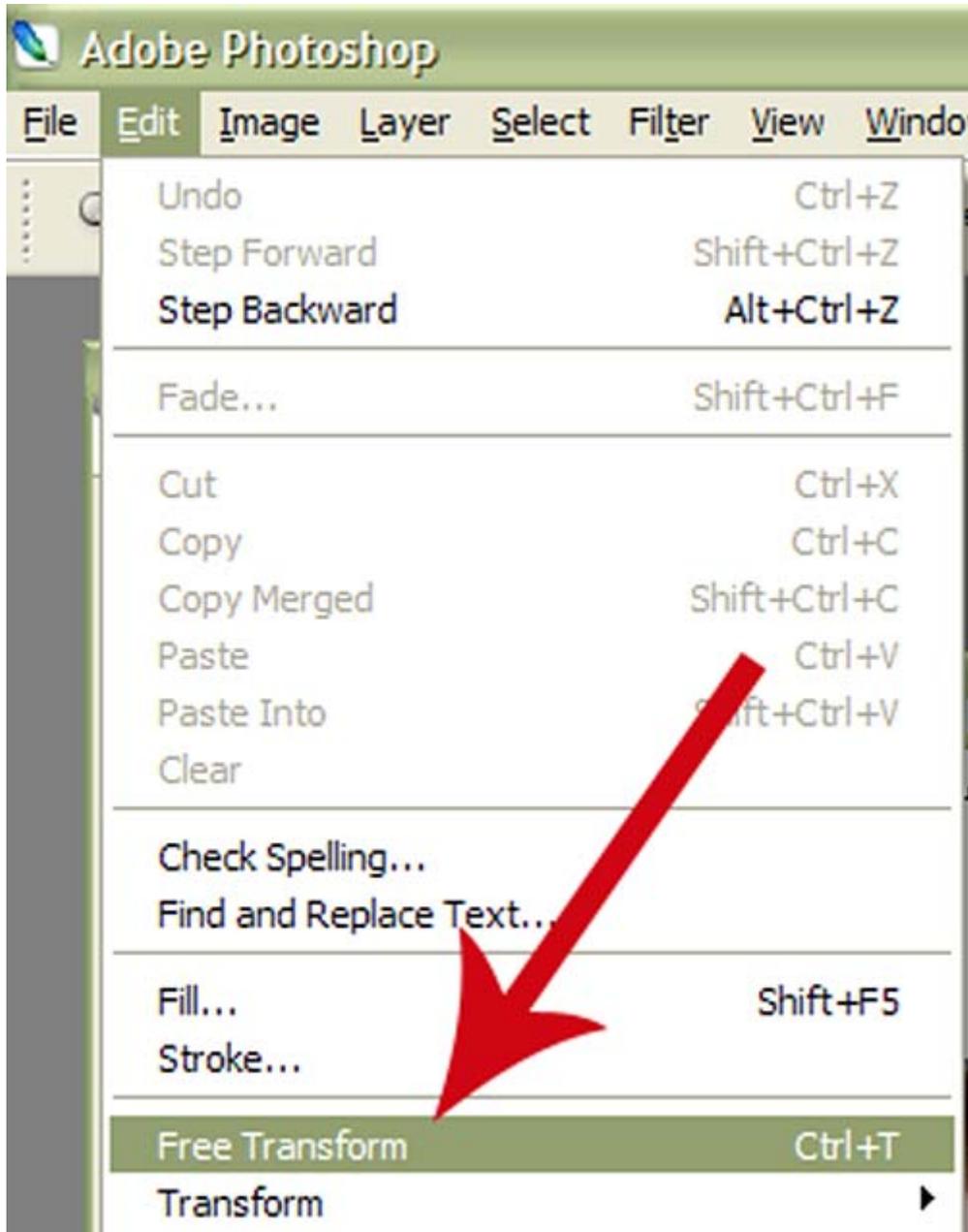
Next, you will clip the photo to the black photo opening known as a clipping mask. Position your mouse on the line that is between the two layers and you will see your cursor turn into a pointing finger like this:

Keep the mouse right there and press the ALT key and you'll see two small circles appear. Continue holding the ALT key and press the left mouse button (ALT-click) and you will now have your image clipped to the mask.

Next, you can adjust the size of the image to better fit the photo opening. To do this, go to the options bar at the top of the screen. Click on EDIT>FREE TRANSFORM.

You will now see a box with transform handles outlining your image. Whenever using the Free Transform function, be sure to hold down the SHIFT KEY so that your image resizes proportionately. If you don't do that, your image will look stretched. So hold down the SHIFT KEY, hover your mouse over one of the corners, then click the left mouse button and drag the image until it fits within the photo opening. Once it looks good, select the MOVE ARROW from the tool box and a pop-up window will ask if you want to apply the transformation. Click APPLY.

Repeat the above steps for each image you want to place. Then do the same for the background and accent strips. You can either flood fill those areas with solid paint colors or you can use textured papers and do the clipping mask steps for those areas as well.

Now let's save this as a layered PSD in the client folder so that you can come back to it and make changes if needed.

The last step is to merge everything together by going to LAYERS>MERGE VISIBLE. Be sure to save this as a JPG at quality of 12 for printing and save the flattened final version in a separate folder for printing.

You can purchase other layered photoshop templates from my shop at Resources 4 Photographers at or you can search the web for other sources. Have fun playing!!