So, you've learned the basics of how to use Photoshop brushes. What now?

There's a whole lot of options for those brushes, actually! You can use Photoshop's brush options to change the orientation, shape, spacing, scattering, angle, etc of how those brushes are applied. This tutorial will show you a few of those options, as well as some examples of how they can be used to create patterns, etc.

This tutorial is suitable for any Photoshop user, from beginner to advanced. However, a more advanced user will understand all of the different brush options much more clearly. A beginner can still follow along, though. If you have trouble understanding my explanations of the different options, try them out for yourself and see what they do. Or, stick to the steps that I specifically tell you to do, and you'll see some changes in the brushes yourself!

1. Let's start with a fresh new "canvas." On the top menu, click File > New. Make it 500 by 500 pixels or whatever size you feel comfortable working with. The resolution should be 72 pixels/inch, the color mode should be RGB, and set the background contents to white. Click "OK."

Once this is open, make sure that your brush tool is selected in the tools palette. You can do this by hitting "B" on your keyboard. Previously, my tutorials having to do with brushes had you doing changes in what is called the "Brush Preset Picker" (the menu that comes up when you click on the thumbnail of your brush located just under the top menu). I did that because it was easier. But there is actually a brushes palette window.
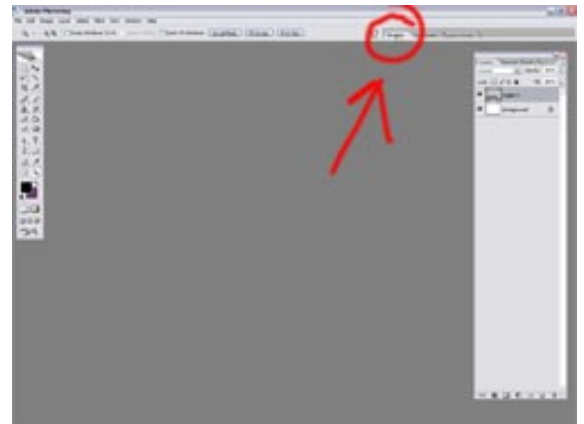
It is located in the upper right section of your Photoshop window, as seen in this screenshot. You can open it by clicking on the "Brushes" tab or by hitting F5 (Mac: F5). Go ahead and do that now.

(In later CS versions of Photoshop, it is actually attached to the side of that palette that is open by default on the right side of Photoshop. Look for the tab that says "Brushes" when you mouse over it.)

2. Click on "Brush Tip Shape," if it isn't already highlighted. You can find it in the list/menu on the left, as shown here.

We're going to be playing around with the brush settings here, but if you're worried about changing something permanently, don't be! See those lock icons next to each menu item? While they stay "unlocked" like they are here, you can change the settings all that you want without them staying in place. As soon as you select another brush, they will go away. For this tutorial, leave everything unlocked.
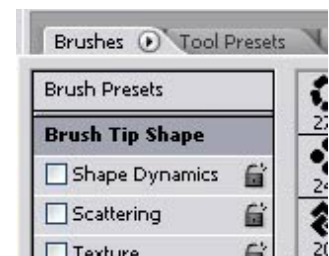
Down at the bottom right, you'll notice a setting called "Spacing" with a slider beneath it. Slide that arrow to the right and left and watch what happens in the thumbnail below. See how it's adding spaces, making it so that the brush isn't just one smooth stroke anymore?

3. Here's an example. The brush that you see here is from my Dingbats (Shapes) brush set. Notice the spacing between each flower shape?
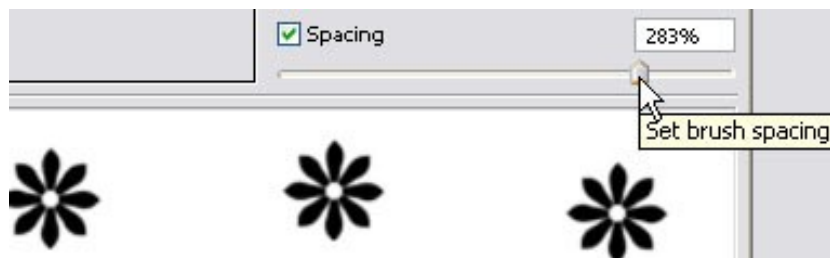

Get your brush spacing how you'd like it, choose a foreground color to paint with, and then move your brush across your canvas area, just to get a feel for how it works. Click and drag, just like you were making a regular brushstroke.

Change the spacing and try it again. Play around with it until you feel comfortable with this setting.

4.Now, what if you want to change the shape, size, or angle of that brush? That's what the next item down on the menu is for.

Click "Shape Dynamics." The options look like this. I'll go ahead and explain what each means.
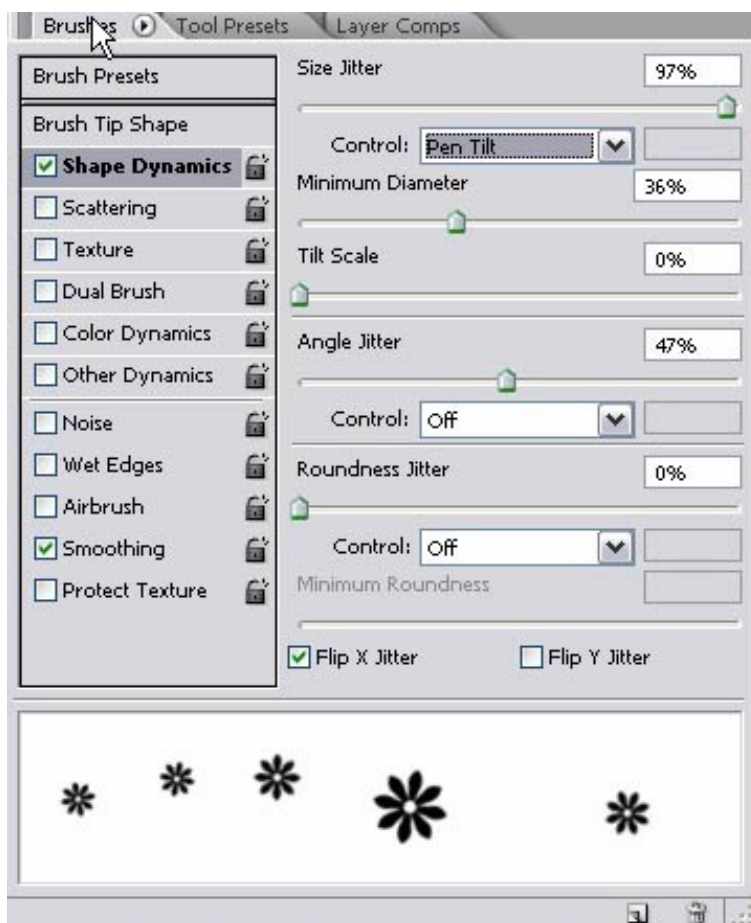
"Size Jitter" will change the size of the brush each time that one of those flowers is "painted" onto the canvas. Look at the thumbnail at the bottom of the window, and notice that they're all of varying sizes.

The "Control" section below that has various settings. It is asking you to stipulate what makes the size change.

- "Off" will make it entirely random.
- "Fade" will make it get smaller over a certain number of steps (that's what the textbox next to it is for).

(The next four options are all based on the "pen" that comes with a graphics tablet. If you don't have a graphics tablet that supports these options installed, you'll get a warning message when trying to select one of them.)

- "Pen Pressure" will cause the size to vary depending upon how hard you are pressing with your pen.
- "Pen Tilt" will cause the size to vary depending upon the angle that you're holding your pen in relation to the tablet surface.
- "Stylus Wheel" varies the brush size depending upon the position of your pen thumbwheel.
- "Rotation" will vary the size based upon the rotation of your pen.

- "Minimum Diameter" sets the minimum percentage that the brush will scale down in size.
- "Tilt Scale" will only be available when you've chosen "Pen Tilt" from the "Control" section above. It will change the height of the brush only, making it taller as the brush gets bigger.
- "Angle Jitter" is what changes the angle or orientation of your brush. Slide that arrow to the right, to somewhere around 80% (that's my favorite setting for this one – for some reason I don't like using 100%), then make another brush stroke on your canvas. I'm using a brush from my Bullets (Web) set in this example – see how the angle changes?

Angle Jitter has its own "Control" section.

- "Off" will make the angle change completely randomly.
- "Fade," "Pen Pressure," "Pen Tilt," "Stylus Wheel," and "Rotation" are all basically the same as the section above, but they're changing the angle of the brush instead of the size.
- "Initial Direction" bases the angle of the brush marks off the initial direction of the brush stroke.
- "Direction" bases the angle of the brush marks on the direction of the brush stroke. (I'll explain more about the "Direction" option later on – it's great for making "stitching" type brush strokes – like I used to write the title of this tutorial above.)

"Roundness Jitter" changes the roundness of each brush mark in a brush stroke. It has a "Control" section, all of the options of which we've already seen. I really don't use this one much, since it can really distort the shape of a brush. But then, that's what it's made to do. I just don't find much use for it.

If you have "Pen Tilt" selected under the control section of the Roundness Jitter, then you can specify the "Minimum Roundness," which basically just states exactly how much it can distort this image (the height vs width ratio).

Whew! That's a lot of options. I use "Size Jitter" and "Angle Jitter" MUCH more than anything else, so those are the only two I had you try out. But if you have the time, feel free to play around by changing each of the settings in turn and then making a brush stroke on your canvas to see what it does.

Here's a few examples of some things I made by changing the Size and Angle Jitters on some of my brushes.

Elements from our Paisley brush set, with a texture applied on the brown layer beneath.
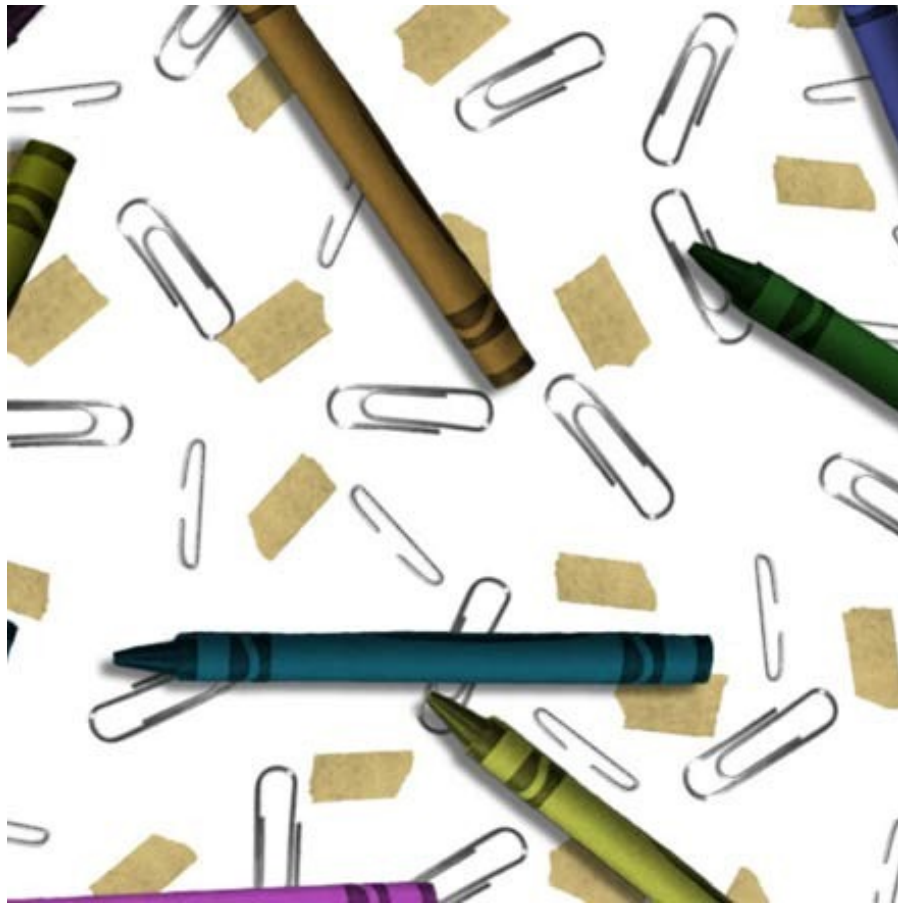
Brushes from our Office Stuff brush set, with color added on a layer beneath.

Brushes from our Dingbats (Shapes) brush set, with a pattern applied on the layer beneath. This image also has a bit of Roundness Jitter applied – notice the slightly distorted shapes.

5. The next item down on the menu is "Scattering," which does exactly what it sounds like it does.

Drag that top arrow to the right and watch the thumbnail at the bottom as the brush "scatters" all over the place. This setting is great for adding leaves to a tree using our leaves brushes, using the snowflakes from our holiday brushes to scatter snowflakes all over a sky, or something similar. This setting is NOT good if you have a specific place that you're wanting to place something.

Set the scatter percentage to around 500% and then click on your canvas, just once. As you'll notice, the brush didn't show up where you clicked. (If it did, it was a random fluke – try it again and it won't!) Now click and drag. See how the brush makes marks all over the place? It still follows the general direction of your brush if you have the scatter at a lower percentage. The "Control" options are just like they were earlier (pen tilt, etc).

"Count" will stipulate how many brush marks are applied after each spacing interval. For example, if you have count set to 5, but your scattering is at 0%, it's just going to paint the brush marks over one another 5 times.

Setting the "Count Jitter" percentage higher will just increase the variance of how much the "Count" number varies. If you have count set to 5 and a count jitter at 75%, it will paint the brush marks over one another 5 times sometimes, 3 times another, 7 times the next, etc etc. That number will vary more or less with the percentage that you set.

6. Those are the only brush options that I'll go over in detail, but I will give you a few more tips on some fun things to try on your own.

"Texture" will allow you to - that's right - add a texture to your brush strokes. The textures that will come up available will be whatever patterns you currently have loaded. You can change the blending mode of these textures, etc. under options from that menu.

"Color Dynamics" can help you change the color of the brush each time it makes a mark. This would work really well for that scattering of leaves that I mentioned earlier. If you set a light green as your foreground color and a dark green as your background color, the colors of the leaves will vary somewhere between those two colors, each time a leaf is painted. Wow, right?! You do that using the "Foreground/Background Jitter" control at the top. You can change the hue/saturation, etc also – those options are just beneath, still in the "Color Dynamics" menu.
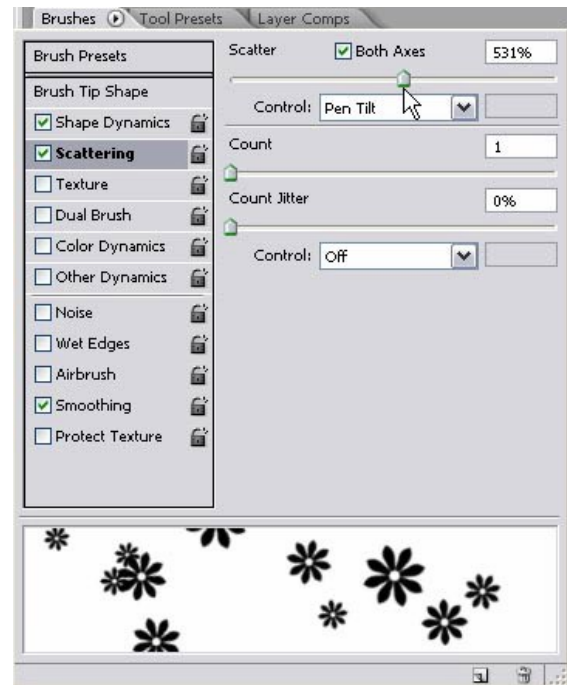
Leaves from our Leaves brush set, showing how Color Dynamics can work. Spacing: 340%, Size Jitter: 65%, Minimum Diameter: 26%, Angle Jitter: 85%, Roundness Jitter: 75%, Minimum Roundness: 56%, Scattering: 611%, Foreground/Background Jitter: 91%, Hue Jitter: 9%, Saturation Jitter: 22%, Brightness Jitter: 14%. All "Control" options set to "Off" – brush used: "leaf3"

6.Now for something a bit more specific. I'd like to explain how to use our Stitching brushes and these same brush options we mentioned to create something like this:

First of all, you need a single stitch. All of my stitching brushes consist of several stitches, so that won't do. I started out with just one of the stitches from the "hidden-stitch" brush, like this:

I have this single brush available as a brush "set", for those of you that want to follow along. You can download the single stitch .abr file here. (If you're not sure how to load up a brush set, please check out my tutorial on installing photoshop brushes.)

The settings that I used were as follows:

Notice the spacing is set to 321% (at the bottom – I pasted that on from the "Brush Tip Shape" options area).

The only thing that I have set on the Shape Dynamics section is that the "Control" for "Angle Jitter" is set to "Direction." That is the most important part of this example, because it is what causes the angle of the stitch to change according to which way you're moving the mouse over the canvas.

Load up the brush and set the brush settings as you see them here. File > New to create a fresh new canvas of about 500 x 500 pixels once again, 72 pixels/inch, RGB mode, with a white background like earlier.

The brush size that I'm using is fairly small – about 15 pixels in diameter.
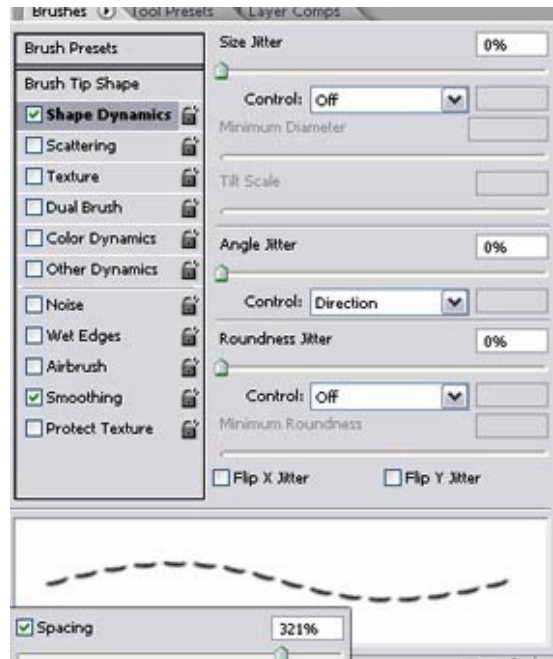
Now use the mouse to write your name. If you don't have a graphics tablet, this is easier said than done, I know. My first few digital paintings were done with a mouse, so don't worry – I feel your pain. If you don't have a tablet, and you're familiar with paths, you may want to look into using paths to do this. It will work just like if you were using a brush and painting it by hand – the direction of the stitching will follow the curvature of the path.

Graphics tablet or not, however, you get the idea. I used this technique to make the border around the title of the tutorial, as well as to write the words "Brush Techniques" – and of course, just above, to write my name.

6. As you can see, there's quite a few brush options. I only went into about half of them here (the ones that I tend to use the most).

I hope that this tutorial has helped to teach you something new about the wonderful world of Photoshop brushes!