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Creating a Border Background with Photoshop

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Example 1.1: Background image sample.

This tutorial will provide a basic introduction to creating a graphic left side border background for Web pages with plenty of screenshots and helpful tips along the way. **September 2007: Updated for Photoshop CS3 with all new CS3 screenshots and additional tips!** Although this tutorial is geared for making Web graphics with Photoshop CS3, it also works for Photoshop 5.5 and above. This tutorial will also work with PaintShop Pro 6 and above, too.

The following tools and dialog boxes are introduced and used while learning to create a left side border background Web graphic:

1. Layers: new layer, naming layers, selecting layers, duplicating layers, linking layers, merging layers, filling layers.
2. Marquee Tool
3. Paint Bucket tool, filling selections
4. Move Tool
5. Canvas Size Dialog Box - larger, smaller (clipping)
6. Color Picker, Web-safe Color window
7. Layer Styles: Drop Shadows
8. Save for Web Dialog Box: Saving an image file for Web use

I've written a lot of tips and details for this introductory tutorial. Whatever you're already familiar with, skip over to the next step.

TIP:

Once you've effectively learned how to use the tools explained here, you'll probably be able to create a background graphic in less than 10 minutes, from start to finish.

In addition, once you've made one that you like, you can use it as a template or guide, substituting colors, altering the drop shadow, changing the width of the border, and changing a number of things from the original background graphic, saving it with a different name to maintain your original file.

1. In Photoshop, open a new image with the following information (as shown in Example 1.2 below):

   Width=2400 pixels

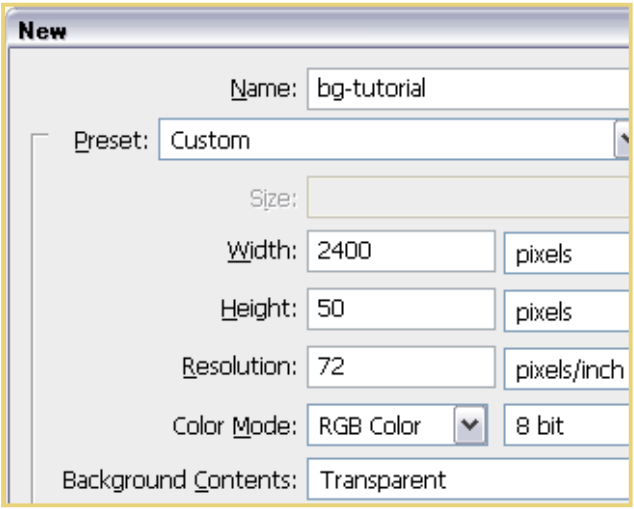
   Height=50 pixels

   Resolution=72 pixels/inch

   Mode=RGB Color, 8 bit

   Background Contents=Transparent

   Click on the image to view the full version.



   Example 1.2: Create New Image Window,

   Photoshop CS3

2. Since the image is so wide for the window, Photoshop typically reduces the image view. In this case the view was reduced to 25%.

   Let's go ahead and change the view to actual size.

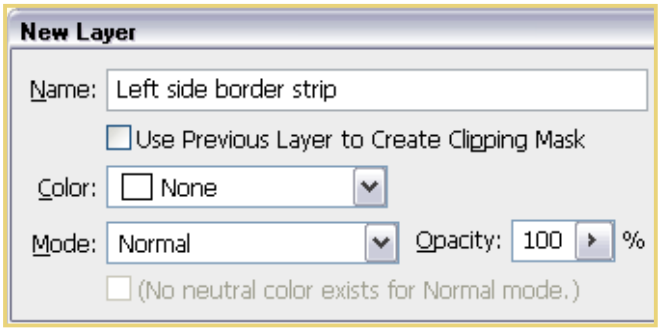
   From the drop-down menu, choose **View**>**Actual Pixels**, or from the keyboard, click on **ALT+Ctrl+0**(zero).

3. The next step is to create a new layer for the left side border strip. If you haven't worked with layers in Photoshop yet, these directions are simple. I encourage you to give it a try.

From the drop-down menu, select **Layers**>**New**>**Layer**. A **New Layer** window box will open.

Choose a descriptive name for your layer (I chose **Left side border strip**, as shown in Example 1.3 below).

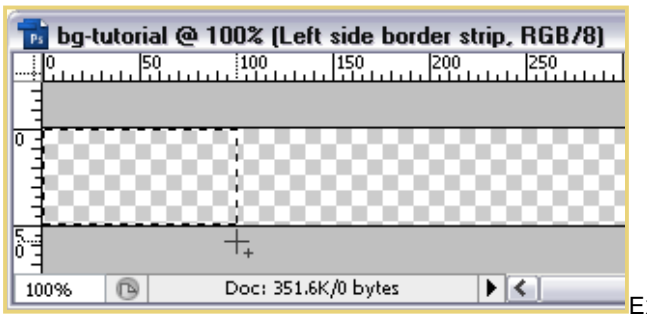
Click on the image to view the full version.



Example 1.3: Create New Layer Window, Photoshop CS3

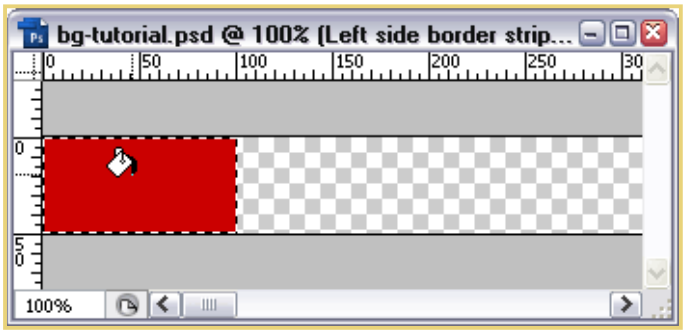
4. Now we're ready to create the left side border color strip. If your rulers aren't showing around the edge of your image, from the drop-down menu, select **View**>**Show Rulers**.

Select the square/rectangle marquee tool. Using the rulers as a guide, drag the marquee tool from the top left corner across to 100 pixels and down to the bottom of the image (50 pixels) as shown in Example 1.4 below.



Example 1.4: Create Rectangle Shape with Marquee Tool, Photoshop CS3

5. After choosing the color for your border (make sure it's the foreground color), pour your color into the selected area with the Paint Bucket tool, as shown in Example 1.5 below.

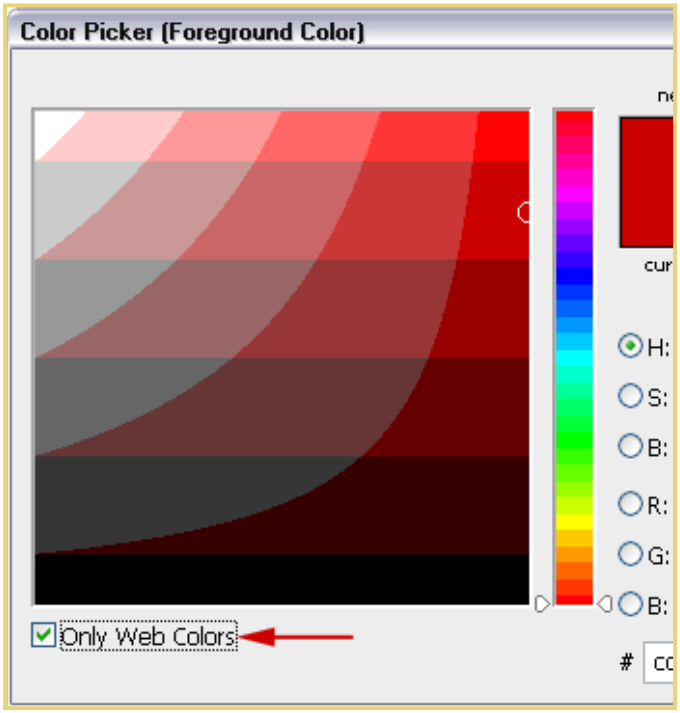


Example 1.5: Pour Color with Photoshop's Paint Bucket Tool, Photoshop CS3

New feature beginning with version 5.0:

You can choose web-safe colors or millions of colors if you wish by checking or unchecking the left corner checkbox, "Only Web Colors".

Click on the image to view the full version.



Example 1.6: Color Picker Window, Photoshop CS3

TIP:

Editor note March 2006: Using one of the colors from the Web-safe palette used to help prevent dithering or other unsightly color shifting problems on the Web due to the variety of monitors, browsers and computer systems. That's no longer much of an issue at all now, although it's still a good place to start.

Keep in mind that colors can still look different on the wide range of monitors out there, even though

today's monitors support millions of colors.

It's also important to consider people with color deficiencies and increasingly more people using mobile devices to access Web sites. Many mobile devices are in color, but there are still some out there with limited colors.

See WebsiteTips.com's **Color Tools** section for helpful color charts, swatches, and links to more on color, especially color choices for Web sites.

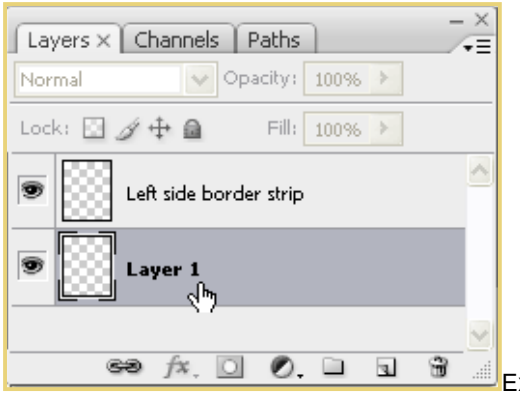
See also WebsiteTips.com's **Recommended Books on Color**.

6. I prefer to save my work as I go along, and this is a good time to save your image before we go any further. Save your image as a **.psd** file, which will retain your Photoshop layers.

TIP:

To help keep your files organized, it's a good idea to save your images to a separate image directory / folder within your Web site project directory. It can also be helpful to save your design-specific images to a separate directory from your other images. Over time files can add up, even for smaller Web sites, so organizing them from the start can be a big help.

7. Now we're ready to fill the text area. In the **Layers** palette, click on your other layer (probably labeled **Layer 1**), which we'll use for the background color as shown in Example 1.7 below.

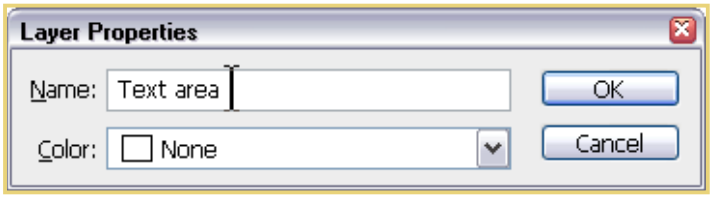


Example 1.7: Choose Layer 1, Photoshop CS3

Let's go ahead and label that layer '**Text Layer**' as shown in Example 1.8 below. From the drop-down menu, select **Layer**>**Layer Options**, or in the **Layers** palette box, right click with your mouse, and

choose **Layer Properties** from the pop-up dialog box.

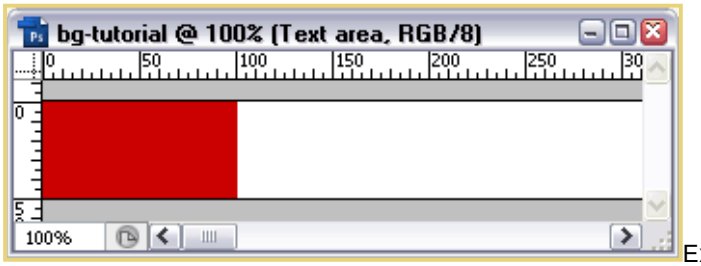
Type in the name for your layer as shown in Example 1.8 below, and click **OK**.



Example 1.8: Provide Descriptive Name For The Layer, Photoshop CS3

8. If your border area is still selected, deselect it now. From the drop-down menu, click on **Select**>**Deselect** or with your keyboard, click **CTRL+D**.
9. Fill the Text Layer with a color:

Making sure the foreground color on the toolbar is the color you wish for your text area, fill the layer.



Example 1.9: Text Layer Filled, Photoshop CS3

Save your image file at this point. You can either proceed to save it in **.png** format for your Web page (skip to **Saving Your Border Background Image File for the Web** below), or perhaps you'd like to **add a drop shadow** to it, as shown next below.

TIP:

When an entire layer is being filled there are *at least* a couple of ways to fill the text area:

- You can fill it with the Paint Bucket, as we did above for the border color, **- or -**
- From the drop-down menu, select **Edit**>**Fill**. In the **Fill** pop-up box, choose **Foreground Color** (or **White**, if you're using white).

Adding A Drop Shadow

There are many ways to add a drop shadow for a left side border. Let's try one of them with

Photoshop's built in layer styles.

1. Resize the canvas to a height of 100 pixels. To do this, from the drop-down menu, select **Image**>**Canvas Size** - or - press **Alt+CTRL+C** with your keyboard. In the **Canvas Size** window, adjust the settings as shown below and in Example 1.10:

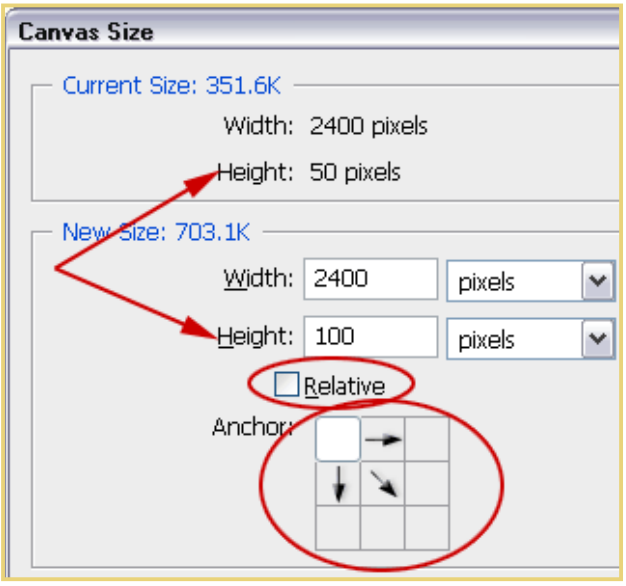
   Width: 2400 (no change)

   Height: 100 (this is changed)

   Relative: NOT checked

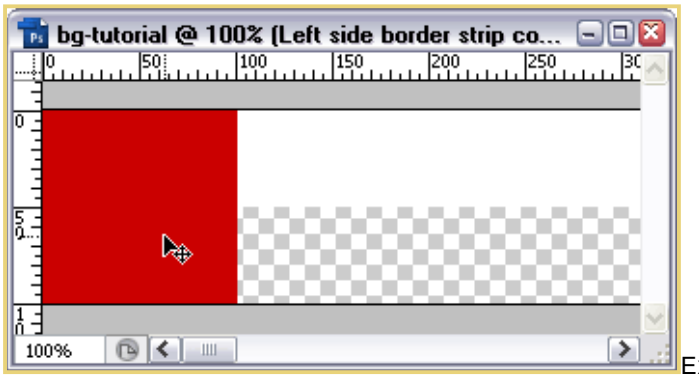
   Anchor: Click the small box in the top left corner, as shown below. This will keep your existing image in the top left corner, expanding the canvas below it.

   Click on the image to view the full version.



Example 1.10: Canvas Size Window, Photoshop CS3

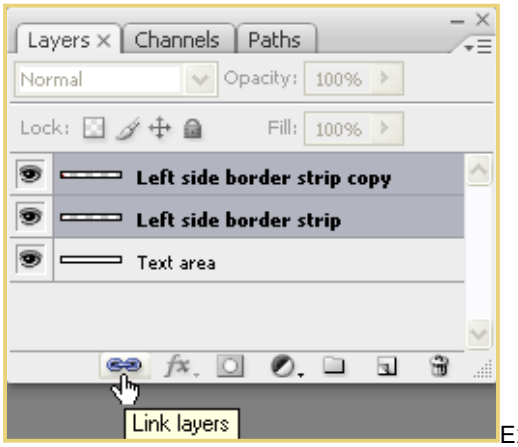
2. Duplicate the **Left side border strip** layer. To duplicate the layer, from the drop-down menu, select **Layer**>**Duplicate Layer**. A **Duplicate Layer** window will pop up, and you can provide a name, although Photoshop's default is the layer name with '**Copy**' added. Then click **OK**.
3. With the **Move** tool, move the duplicate layer straight down vertically to fill the lower part of the image area, as shown in Example 1.11 below.



Example 1.11: Moving The Duplicate Layer Down, Photoshop CS3

> **TIP:**
>
> Alternatively, you can press the **Down arrow** on your keyboard, keeping it pressed until the layer reaches the appropriate spot. The **Move** tool is usually faster and allows you to move the layer anywhere, while pressing the **Down** arrow moves the layer directly down accurately.

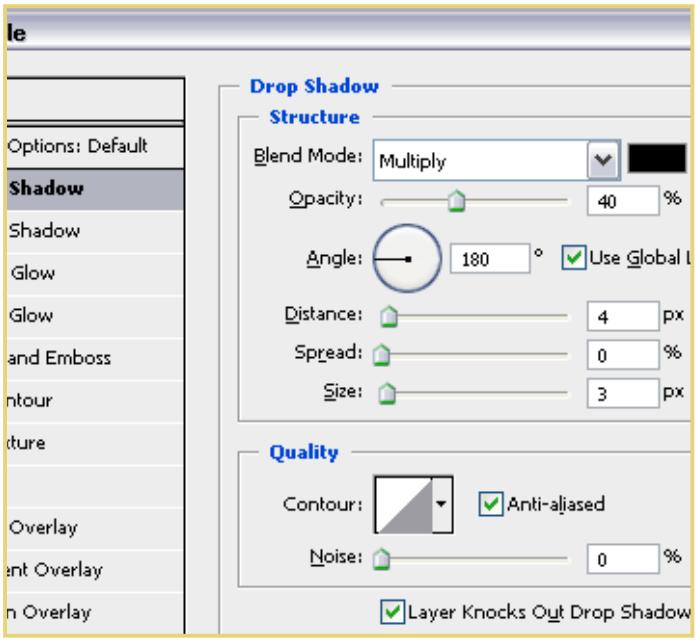
4. Link the duplicate border layer with the original border layer. To link these layers, in the **Layers** palette, press **CTRL** on your keyboard while selecting each layer. Then press the **Links** icon in the **Layers** palette (bottom left), as shown in Example 1.12 below.



Example 1.12: Linking Layers, Photoshop CS3

5. Merge the linked layers. From the drop-down menu, select **Layer**>**Merge Linked**. Or with the keyboard, click **CTRL+E**.
6. Repeat Steps 2 through 5 for the Text Layer.
7. Now we're ready to add the drop shadow to the red border background layer. Open the **Layer Style** window. From the drop-down menu, click **Layer**>**Layer Style**>**Drop Shadow**. Or from the **Layers** palette, **double click** on the **Left side border strip** layer.

Click on image below for full size version.



Example 1.13: Layer Style: Drop Shadow Dialog Box, Photoshop CS3

The angle of the drop shadow needs to be set at 180 degrees to be in the correct direction for the border. The other settings can be adjusted according to how you wish your drop shadow to appear, whether bold, subtle, or perhaps a different color.

The settings that I used for the example are shown in Example 1.13 above:

Blending Options: Default

Drop Shadow: Checked

Structure:

Blend Mode: Multiply

Opacity: 40%

Angle: 180 degrees

Distance: 4 px

Spread: 0%

Size: 3 px

Contour: (default, the angled box)

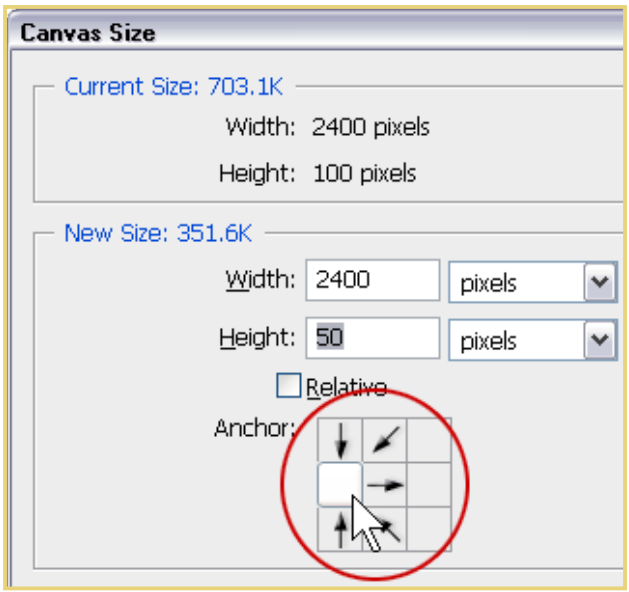
Anti-aliased: Checked

Noise: 0%

Layer Knocks Out Drop Shadow: Checked

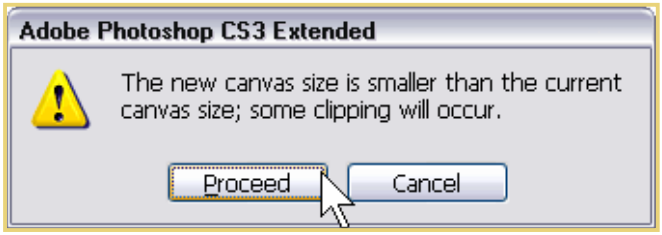
Once you've chosen your settings, click **OK**.

8. One of the final steps is to resize the canvas back to its original height of 50 pixels. Open the **Canvas Size** window. From the drop-down menu, click **Image**>**Canvas Size**. Change the **Height** to **50**, and for the **Anchor** setting, click on the far left middle small box as shown in Example 1.14. Click **OK**.



Example 1.14: Canvas Size, Photoshop CS3

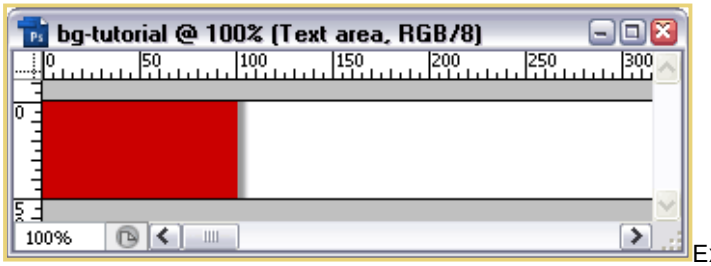
A warning message will pop up:



Example 1.15: Clipping Warning Message, Photoshop CS3

Click **Proceed**.

9. Save your image as a **.psd** file to retain the layers and the original image.



Example 1.16: Finished Border Background Graphic via Photoshop CS3

Saving Your Border Background Image File for the Web

Now it's time to save your border background as a **.png** file for Web pages.

1. From the drop-down menu, click **File**>Save for Web & Devices - or - press **Alt+Shift+CTRL+S** on your keyboard.
2. In the Save for Web dialog box, you can use the following settings to save your image in **.png** format, as also shown in Example 1.17 below.

PNG-8 (Optimized file format)

Adaptive (Color reduction algorithm)

No dither (Specify the dither algorithm)

Transparency: NOT checked

Interlaced: NOT checked

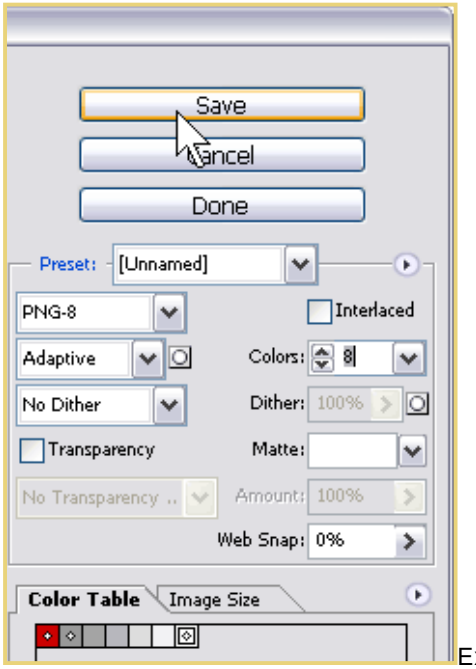
Colors: 8

Dither (grayed out, does not apply)

Matte: White

Web snap: 0%

Click on image below for full size version.



Example 1.17: Save for Web Dialog Box, Photoshop CS3

That's it. Now you're ready to use your new image for your Web site.

Important TIP:

In case you're wondering why the canvas needed to be resized to 100 pixels and then sized back to 50 later:

The drop shadow creates a bit of a rounded edge at the top and bottom. If we had made the drop shadow without resizing, the result would have been a repeated rounded off break every 50 pixels. By making the canvas larger, making the drop shadow, then reducing the canvas, we eliminate the unsightly rounded edge, resulting in a continuous drop shadow line down the page.

Alternatively, you could create a new image with the 100 pixel height, knowing you'll be adding a drop shadow, and then resize it to 50 pixel height when you're finished and ready to save it for Web use.

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