Photoshop: Layer Masks

1. Layer mask allows you to vary the level of transparency across a layer.
2. Layer masks use white, black and all the shades of grey in between to control the transparency of a layer. Default layer mask is filled with white. White in layer mask means 0% transparent, that's 100% visible and equals 100% opacity. Black does exactly the opposite – makes layer 100% transparent, 0% visible, just like 0% opacity. Between black and white we do have 254 shades of gray that makes a layer more or less transparent. Neutral grey (the color exactly between black and white) means 50% transparent, 50% visible.
3. Mask commands, shortcuts and tricks:
   a. Add layer mask – press third button from the left at the bottom of layers palette.
   b. Delete mask – right click on the mask / "Delete Layer Mask"
   c. View mask – Alt (Option) + Left click on the mask
   d. Disable/enable mask – Shift + Left click on the mask
   e. Invert mask colors – Cmnd + I
   f. Move mask from one layer to another – select, drag and drop to the other layer
   g. Copy mask from one layer to another – Cmnd + Left click on the mask, then select the other layer and click "Add Layer Mask" button
4. To delete layer mask:
   a. Select mask > Properties > trash icon at bottom
   b. Ctrl Click Mask thumbnail > delete layer mask
5. Properties Panel
   a. With a mask selected, open the Properties Panel (Window > Properties). This is another way to access Mask options. It includes a Feather slider which will soften the edge of the Mask by specific number of pixels.
6. Unlink/Link Layer Mask
   a. By default, a layer or group is linked to its layer mask or vector mask, as indicated by the link icon ⇔ between the thumbnails in the Layers panel. The layer and its mask move together in the image when you move either one with the Move tool ⊹. Unlinking them lets you move them independently and shift the mask's boundaries separately from the layer.
      i. To unlink a layer from its mask, click the link icon in the Layers panel.
      ii. To reestablish the link between a layer and its mask, click between the layer and mask path thumbnails in the Layers panel.
7. For easier editing of a layer mask, you can display the grayscale mask by itself or as a rubylith overlay on the layer.
   a. In the Layers panel, do one of the following:

b. Option-click the layer mask thumbnail to view only the grayscale mask. To redisplay the layers, Option-click the layer mask thumbnail. Alternatively, click the eye icon 👁 in the Properties panel.

c. Hold down Option+Shift, and click the layer mask thumbnail to view the mask on top of the layer in a rubylith masking color. Hold down Option+Shift, and click the thumbnail again to turn off the color display.