Popular Photo editing/ processing Software

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This brief overview of the most popular Photo editing software packages is limited to the most popular programs used by photography enthusiasts and professionals. The Overview is intended to assist beginners to understand enough to make a decision about what they need to use now and in the near and far future. There are many such programs available, but these are the most common ones which a beginner may hear about when learning the basics of photo editing/ post processing for photography. The descriptions and comments are the author's impressions alone and beginners are encouraged to talk to many fellow enthusiasts and professionals about what will work best for their own photographic ambitions.

Feature	Photoshop	Lightroom	Ps Elements	MS Photos
Cost AUD 2020	$15/month incl. LR	$15/month incl. PS	$150 Outright	Free
For Beginners	Maybe	Yes	Best	Easiest
Basic edits	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Selective Basic	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Selective advanced	Yes	Many	Yes	No
Layers	Yes	No	Yes	No
File management	No	Best	Yes	No
Text	Yes	No	Yes	Drawing
Many files	Limited	Best	Limited	No
Support Tutorials	Best	Very Good	Good	No
RAW ile support	Yes via ACR plugin	Yes	Yes	No

Microsoft Photos
This software comes with Windows 10 and is a basic editor. A really decent place to start if you have not purchased any more serious software yet. It only does global changes to the image (with the exception of spot fix and red-eye), but includes a small range of filters (effects or pre-sets). Also includes a vignette slider. You can draw on an image and make albums. Cannot resize an image, control jpg quality or compression and only saves as jpg. Also does basic video editing, but I have not investigated this yet.

Apple Photos
This software comes with Apple/ Mac systems and is a basic editor – though more capable than the Windows equivalent. A really decent place to start if you have not purchased any more serious software yet. I am not a macOS user, so I have not tried this software yet, but from a brief google search it is a basic editor in the same class as Microsoft Photos, perhaps slightly more features and tools than MS.

Adobe Photoshop Elements - PSE (includes organiser)
PSE is a simplified version of Photoshop, but not cut down in the usual sense that it disappoints in any way. It includes the great majority of features that PS does, but with many fewer options. The fewer options act to simplify the software for beginners rather than overwhelming them with too many choices. It even has a choice of quick, guided and expert layouts for the main screen.
I have been using this software for about 10 years and have only found about 3 features/ tools which are "missing" which I might be interested in using occasionally. Combined with the Adobe Camera Raw Plug-in (ACR) it has allowed me to do some very pleasing work in the creative photography field which I enjoy. The most powerful feature of PSE is the ability to use Layers and masking and blending those layers to make impressive digital compositions with full use of text if desired. PSE also includes an Organiser for file management (which Photoshop does not – need to utilise Bridge or Lightroom).

Adobe Camera Raw (Plug-in, needs Photoshop or PSE, already in Lightroom)
ACR is a piece of free software which allows the user to convert and manipulate files from many cameras in the RAW file format (different for each manufacturer, but almost all recognised by ACR). A RAW file has all of the information captured by the camera, and therefore the maximum detailed data which you chose to capture during the shoot. (A JPG file from a camera has been processed within the camera and discards some of the original information in order to "enhance" the image and make the file smaller.) ACR is a plugin for PSE and Photoshop, which means that when you open a RAW file in those programs, they launch ACR in a new window and allow you to do all the basic edits before ACR converts and imports it for further editing back in the main program. ACR software is built into Lightroom's development module and forms the core of its editing features. ACR as a plug-in is intended for global edits only.

Adobe Lightroom
Lightroom is becoming the preferred software for professionals as it specialises in handling many files very efficiently. Professionals tend to do similar edits to tens or hundreds of images at a time (rather than concentrating on a unique edit of a single image for entering into a competition for example). Lightroom excels at this as well as helping you locate that image "*with George in the boat and the mountain in the background*".
In regard to editing an image, Lightroom is great at doing global adjustments to images, has some handy tools for doing some selective edits such as dodging and burning, but does not specialise in doing composite images and cannot do Layers or add free text (beyond what is in the metadata).
It is predominantly a data base which records the location of each image (on your computer) and a recipe for how to adjust the image (edits) when you are ready to share it (Export – as a print, or file for a particular use). It is important to understand that if you move an image file without telling Lightroom (say through Windows explorer) Lightroom will not be able to track where it went to and your edits created in Lightroom will not work unless you put the file back where Lightroom thought it was. If you want to reorganise/ move your files you can do this within Lightroom and all will be well.
Lightroom is specifically designed to work very well with Photoshop (or PSE). It has an automatic feature which allows you to move the image (with current Lightroom edits) into Photoshop, do some edits in Photoshop which are not possible in Lightroom, then return the updated image back to Lightroom where you can export it and/ or track it in Lightroom. You could think of Photoshop (or PSE) as a super plug-in for Lightroom when used in this way.

Adobe Photoshop
Widely considered as one of the most powerful software packages for editing and combining images. It was originally intended for graphic artists (not just photographers) and can create and do just about anything with any digital image. This software is targeted at people who know what they are doing and offers an astounding array of features and a mind-blowing set of options for many of the features. Beginners often find this level of complexity daunting to say the least.