Download site for Photoshop Elements Mask:

Follow the instructions to download the mask application appropriate for your version of Elements.

After opening Elements:

Open the Styles and Effects pallette, Select "Effects" in the Left window and "Layer Mask" in the right window.

Review the instructions - there are two methods of creating the layer to be masked:

DuplicateLayerAndMask - duplicates the current active layer and adds a mask layer

"**MaskCurrentLayer**" - adds a mask layer to the current active layer..

Instructions for making a mask.

The instructions are not quite right. The layer mask tool creates a layer for the mask, but not the mask itself. That is, having an active selection won't create a mask when you double click "MaskCurrentLayer" (as I was trying to do in class). Here's the necessary steps:

1. Click on "DuplicateLayerAndMAsk" - A blank white "mask layer" thumbnail will appear adjacent to the picture thumbnail

2. There are Three methods to create the mask:

A. Paint the mask directly

Click on the "Mask Layer" layer thumbnail to make it active. (The layer will have a blue outline and the small square adjacent to the eye will display a white bulls eye.

Select a brush, be sure the foreground color is "Black" and paint on active layer (The painted area will appear on the thumbnail, but not on the picture, so it may be difficult to judge where the mask actually appears. To correct, change the brush color to white and paint over the black as needed.

B. Make a selection using any of the selection tools

Click on the picture thumbnail (a brush will appear adjacent to the eye), then make your selection in the active layer, using any combination of the selection tools.

Save the selection: (>Selection >Save Selection...) and name it.

Now, click on the Mask Layer thumbnail to make it active and fill the selection:

>Edit>Fill Selection... and select Foreground (Black) color. The mask will appear in the Mask Layer thumbnail. As in method A, you can paint the mask to modify it using black to add and white to subtract, but it may be difficult to determine where to paint.

C. Paint a mask on a new layer and transfer it to the Mask Layer

Add a new layer (>Layer >New >Layer...) and name it.

Fill the area in the new layer to be masked using a brush and/or load a selection, then fill the selection as in Method B. After filling, delete the previously loaded selection.

"Tweak" the filled area using a black or white brush. Using a soft brush allows you to feather the edge of the mask and see how it's going affect the picture directly.

Use the magic wand (set tolerance to 128) to select the filled area. Save the selection and name it. (Note: If the selection has a soft edge, the marching ants will be at the 50% transparent line, but the selection actually includes all partly transparent pixels in the filled area.)

Hide the new layer by clicking on the eye. It's no longer needed, but if you decide to modify the mask later, it is still available.

Now, click on the Mask Layer thumbnail to make it active and fill the selection: >Edit>Fill Selection... and select Foreground (Black) color.   The mask will appear in the Mask Layer thumbnail but this time it's fully edited.

Summary:

Method C requires an extra step to create the mask but enables the greatest degree of visual control to get the mask exactly right.