How to use layers in Photoshop

Photoshop *layers* are like sheets of stacked paper. You can see through transparent areas of a layer to the layers below. You move a layer to position its content, like sliding a sheet of paper in a stack. You can also change the opacity of a layer to make content partially transparent. You use layers to perform such tasks as compositing multiple images, adding text to an image, and adding vector graphic shapes. You can apply a layer style to add a special effect such as a drop shadow or a glow.

A new image has a single layer. The number of additional layers, layer effects, and layer sets you can add to an image is limited only by your computer's memory and your imagination.You work with layers in the Layers panel.

Layers panel overview

The Layers panel lists all layers, layer groups, and layer effects in an image (**Figure 1**). You can use the Layers panel to show and hide layers, create new layers, and work with groups of layers. You can access additional commands and options in the Layers panel menu.

Figure 1 Photoshop Layers panel

Show/hide, move, nest, and lock/unlock layers, groups, or layer effects

You can manage and organize layers easily in the Layers panel. Do one of the following to manipulate layers:

- Click the eye icon next to a layer, group, or layer effect to hide its content in the document window. Click in the column again to redisplay the content. You can also drag through the eye column to change the visibility of multiple items in the Layers panel.

- Drag a layer or group up or down in the Layers panel. Release the mouse button when the highlighted line appears where you want to place the layer or group.
- Click the New Layer Group button to create a folder group. Nested layer groups help you organize and manage layers. You can use groups to arrange your layers in a logical order and to reduce clutter in the Layers panel. You can nest groups within other groups. You can also use groups to apply attributes and masks to multiple layers simultaneously.
- You can lock layers fully or partially to protect their contents. For instance, you may want to lock a layer fully when you finish with it. You may want to lock a layer partially if it has the correct transparency and styles but you are still deciding on positioning. When a layer is locked, a lock icon appears to the right of the layer name. The lock icon is solid when the layer is fully locked and hollow when the layer is partially locked. (**Note:** Locked layers can be shown or hidden, but cannot be moved around in the Layers panel.)
- Add, delete, or duplicate layers by choosing the appropriate item in the Layers panel menu.

Filter and search layers

If you are working on a file with many different kinds of layers, it may be helpful to locate specific layers by using the filter and search options available in the Layers panel (**Figure 2**). Use one of the following options to filter layers:

- *Kind*, filter layers for images, adjustments, type, shape layers, and smart objects
- *Name* use the text search field to find named layers
- *Effect* filter by layer effect types such as Bevel & Emboss or Drop Shadow
- *Mode* filter by layer blending modes such as Normal, Color Dodge, or Overlay
- *Attribute* filter by layer aspect such as Visible, Locked, Masks, or Effects
- *Color* filter by layer color, including Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Violet, or Gray

Turn layer filtering on or off by using the toggle button.

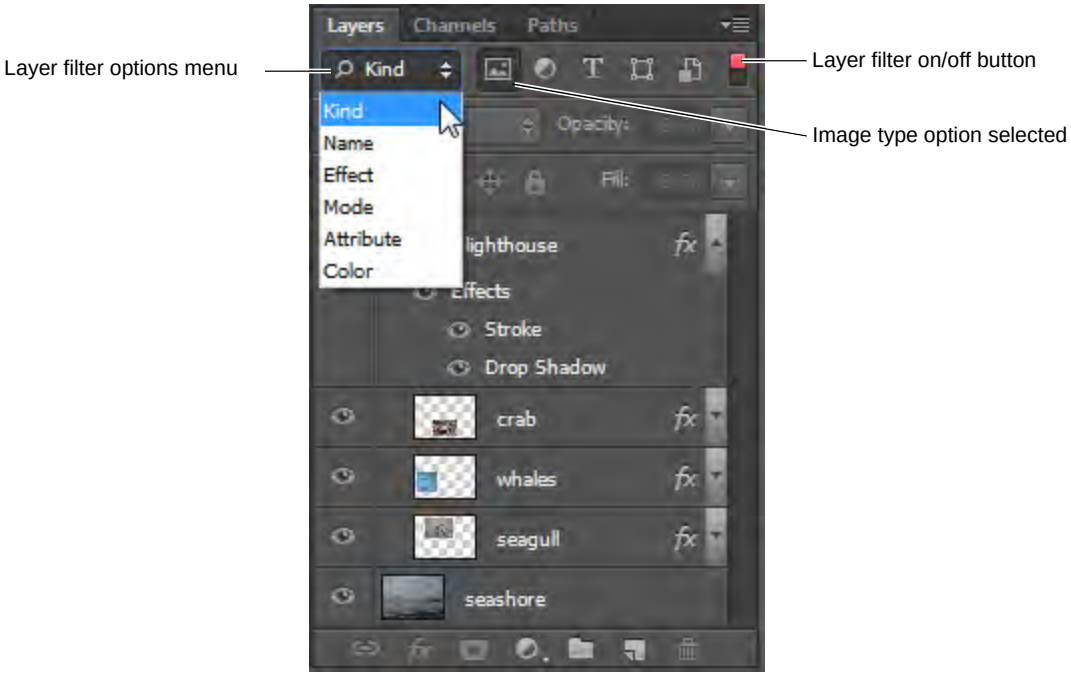

Figure 2 Filter and search options in the Layer panel

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To create a composite image:

1. Open an image you wish to use as a backdrop for a composite image.
2. Double-click Background in the Layers panel, or choose Layer > New > Layer From Background.
3. In the New Layer dialog box (**Figure 3**), name the layer, and click OK .

   The background layer is converted to a regular layer.
4. Click the Layers panel menu (**Figure 1**), choose New Layer, and click OK (it is not necessary to name this new layer).
5. Ensure that the new layer is selected in the Layers panel.
6. Choose Layer > New > Background From Layer.

   Note: The new Background layer assumes the background color assigned in the toolbar. You can modify this as needed.
7. Select the backdrop image layer (in this example, the layer with the seashore landscape).

   Note: Clicking the eye icon beside the image thumbnail shows and hides the selected layer.
8. In the Layers panel, enter a value in the Opacity text box or drag the Opacity pop-up slider (**Figure 4**).

   Note: Hover over the Opacity text to activate the pop-up slider.
9. Open an image you wish to use as the second layer of the composite image.
10. Select the Move tool (**Figure 5**) or hold down Ctrl (Windows) or Command (Mac OS) to activate the Move tool.
11. Hold down Alt (Windows) or Option (Mac OS), and drag the selection you want to copy and move.

    When copying between images, drag the selection from the active image window into the destination image window. If you have nothing selected, you will copy the entire active layer. As you drag the selection over another image window, a border highlights the window where you can drop the selection (**Figure 6**).

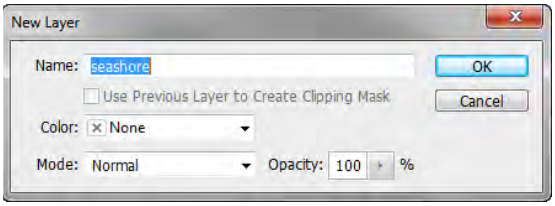

Figure 3 New Layer dialog box

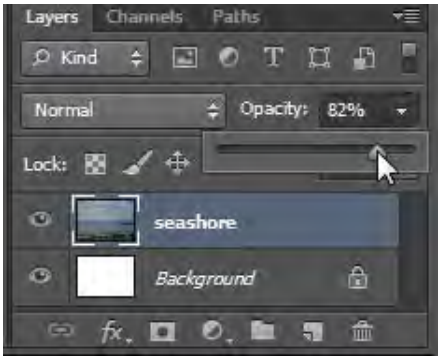

Figure 4 Opacity slider

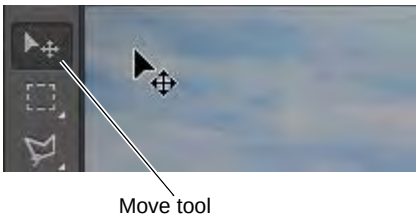

Figure 5 Select the Move tool

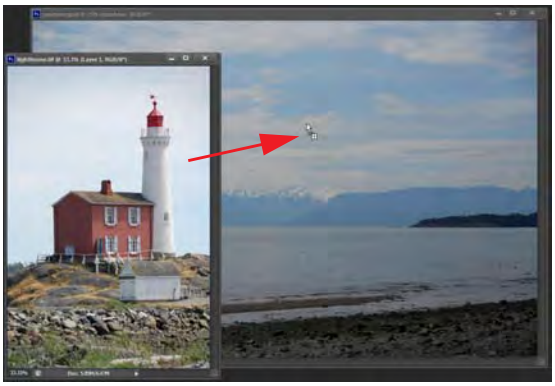

Figure 6 Drag an image to create a new layer

12. Double-click the layer name in the Layers panel, and enter a new name.

13. (Optional) Continue to add a variety of effects—such as drop shadows and strokes—to change the appearance of the layer's contents (**Figure 7**), as well as to add more layers to your image.

Figure 7 Drop shadow and stroke applied to layer

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