PHOTOSHOP: 3.1 ALL ABOUT LAYERS

What are Photoshop Layers?

The layers panel is an incredibly powerful aspect of Adobe Photoshop because it gives you the ability to isolate individual pieces of content away from the rest of the composition, allowing you to work on individual elements within the overall project.

What are Layers used for?

Layers can be used for simple edits like adding text, or making adjustments, and can also be used for more advanced tasks like changing the background of an image, or moving an object. It can be used to alter the entire image, or a very small detail in the image. Layers also keep you organized by separating each edit you make. This allows you to go back to old alterations and modify or delete.

Where can Layers be found?

Your layers can be found in the Layers Panel, located on the left side of the program. If you cannot find your layers panel, go to Windows > Layers to make sure it is checked. Make sure your workspace is set to Essentials by going to Window > Workspace > Essentials. You can move the layers panel by clicking on the Layers tab, and drag it to where you want to place it.

How can you enable or disable layers?

You can enable or disable layers by clicking on the eye icon next to each layer. This is a good way of seeing how your overall image looks with and without the edits made it that layer. The disabled layers are not deleted, but will not be exported with your final image.

What is the Background layer?

When you import an image to Photoshop, Photoshop will name it Background. This means that any layers created will be on top of that layer. The Background is automatically locked, so you cannot move the background, nor can you change it’s opacity. However, if you click on the lock key next to it, it will then be able to be moved and modified.
What is blending mode?

You have the option to change the blending mode for each layer created. Blending mode refers to how the foreground pixels interact with the background pixels. You can change the blend mode by finding the blend mode dropdown menu in the layers panel above the layers.

Does the order of layers matter?

YES. The appearance of layers depends on the order of your layers in the layers panel. Layers are in order of foreground to background. Your original image is locked in the background.

How can you change the opacity of layers?

To make a layer more or less opaque, use the Opacity option in the Layers Panel option bar. Opacity ranges from 0-100%, 0% being completely transparent, and 100% being completely opaque.

How do you create or delete a layer?

When making an adjustment or creating text, a new layer for that edit will automatically be made and will be added to the top of your layers panel. To create a layer yourself, click on the New Layer button with this icon: to create a new layer. To delete a layer, select the layer and click on the trash bin icon next to the New Layer icon. These icons are located on the icon bar across the bottom of the layers panel.

To make changes to your image without destructing it, you can duplicate your Background by right-clicking it and selecting “Duplicate Layer”. Avoid making any changes to your Background layer.
How do you organize your layers?

You can organize your layers by creating bins, or folders, for categories of layers. You can do so by clicking on the folder icon to the left of the New Layer button. Drag your layers into the folder.

You can also label layers with colors to categorize them. You can do so by right-clicking a layer, and choose a color.

You can then filter your layers to look for a certain kind of layer, like text layers. You can do so by clicking on the filters next to “Kind” in the options bar of the layers panel.

You can also search your layers using other methods like searching by name or color, by clicking on “Kind” to drop down the search options.

How do you lock layers?

If you want to lock a layer so you don’t accidently move it or make changes to, find the Lock option in the Options Bar of the Layers panel. There are four icons that you can choose from to indicate what exactly you want to lock: lock transparent pixels, lock image pixels, lock position, and lock all. The layer must be selected in order to lock it.

What are Layer Masks?

Layer masks are used to cover up a layer in part or in full, making it invisible. This is a non-destructive way of removing part of a layer so that you can go back and retrieve those lost pixels once again. The destructive way of removing pixels is by using the eraser tool, or other tools that remove pixels. The layer mask is represented by the white box next to each layer. By selecting it, you can then use the brush tool (with the background color set to white, and the foreground set to black) to cover up part of the layer. White in a layer mask means 100% visible and black in a layer mask means 100% transparent. And gray in a layer mask means some level of transparency depending on how light or dark the shade of gray is.

For more on layer masks, see 3.2 LAYER MASKS.