Photoshop Layers Are Your Friends

One of the most important features in Photoshop is the layers. In effect, layers are similar to sheets of clear acetate stacked on top of each other. Components of an image may be placed on any layer. The components on one layer may be edited without affected other layers. Layers can be rearranged, moved, made invisible, or even deleted.

This document addresses the layers in Photoshop CS6, but the information is applicable for earlier versions of the program.

The Photoshop CS6 Layers Panel

Make sure the Layers Panel is displayed in the Photoshop workspace. If you have your Photoshop workspace set to Essentials, the panel will probably appear in the lower right corner of your screen. It is circled in the illustration on the right.

If it is displayed, click Window on the Menu bar. A drop down menu will be displayed.

Select Layers from the drop down menu. The Layers Panel will appear on the screen. Without an open image, the layers Panel will look similar to the one in the illustration on the right.

To demonstrate how layers work, you will create a new image and edit it.

Click File on the Menu bar. A drop down menu will appear.

Click New on the drop down menu. The New image control panel will be displayed. Fill in the data as shown in the illustration on the right.

Name the image demo.

Set the width to 300 pixels.

Set the height to 200 pixels.
Set the resolution to 100 pixels. This is appropriate for a Web project.

Set the background to White in the Contents section.

Click OK.

You workspace will now resemble illustration on the right.

The image will be open along with the Layers Panel and Tool bar.

The layers Panel will show only the background. The background is white. You could change the background color. However, doing so may cause problems later.

Click the small button in the upper right corner of the Layers Panel. A drop down menu will be displayed.

Select New Layer from the menu. The New Layer control panel will appear. That panel is shown on the right.

Set the Name to Color Background.

Leave the other data alone.

Click OK. The Layer Panel will now resemble the one on the right.

Note that the name Color Background is displayed in the Panel. Naming each layer reduces confusion. This is especially important when a lot of layers are used in a project.
Selected layers are highlighted in blue. A layer must be selected before you can edit it. One way to prevent accidentally editing the wrong layer is to always check the Layers Panel before taking any editing step.

**Click** the Foreground color button on the Tool bar. The Color Picker will appear.

In the hexadecimal specification box, **set** the hex code for the color ffffcc. This is a very pale yellow.

**Click** OK.

Select the Paint Bucket on the Tool bar.

**Make** sure the Color Background layer is selected on the Layer Panel.

**Place** your cursor over the image workspace.

**Click** your mouse button. The paint bucket will "pour" color filling the entire layer.

Note that the thumbnail box for the layer in the Layers Panel is now yellow.

**Make** a new layer using the steps outline above.

**Name** the new layer Disk.

**Select** the Elliptical Marquee tool on the Tool bar.

Make sure the layer named Disk is selected.
Draw an elliptical marquee in the workspace on the layer. The results will resemble those shown on the right.

Click the Foreground color button. The Color Picker will be displayed.

Set the hexadecimal color to 336633. This is a medium green.

Click OK.

Pour the color into the elliptical marquee with the Paint Bucket. The marquee is now filled with green.

Press Control + D on your keyboard to deselect the marquee. The Photoshop "marching ants" will disappear. A green disk will be displayed in your image.

Your image will now resemble the illustration on the right.

The Layers Panel will now look like the one shown here on the right.

You may now experiment with the Layers Panel to discover how to control the layers.

Click a Visibility button to make the layer visible or invisible.
Select a layer and then click the padlock buttons to lock, unlock, and control a layer so it cannot be accidentally changed.

Right click on a selected layer to discover what you layer options are. Included on the drop down list are duplicating a layer, merging layers, copying styles, and many more.

Left click on the Layers Options button in the top right corner of the Layers Panel to find additional choices.

Learning to use layers in Photoshop is an important step toward becoming a true Photoshop expert. Layers are a very valuable tool that will make your work easier and more productive.