How to Use Layers

Layers are like stacked transparent sheets on which you can paint or place images, shapes, or text. You can see through the transparent areas to the layers below. You can work on each layer independently, experimenting to create the effect you want. You can adjust a layer’s color and brightness, apply special effects, change its opacity, and change its stacking order. If you want to experiment with color, filters, or other adjustments, you can place an adjustment or fill layer above the image and see the affects without making any changes to the layer that contains your image. To remove the effects, simply delete the adjustment layer.

Each layer remains independent until you combine or merge it. The bottom layer of every new Elements file is called the Background, and it is always locked. If you want to move the contents of the Background layer or change its opacity, you must first convert it to a regular layer.

To manage the layers in a file, use the Layers palette (Figure 1). If the Layers palette is not visible, open the Window menu and select Layers.

![Figure 1 Layer palette](image)
Adding, Naming, and Deleting Layers

You can add a new layer in several ways. When you click the Create a New Layer button in the Tools palette, a new layer is placed above the current or active layer. You can open the Layer menu and choose New > Layer. When you add new text or create a shape, a new layer is created automatically. Or, if you copy a selection from one layer and choose the Paste command, the pasted content is placed on a new layer. To create an exact copy of a layer, use the Duplicate Layer command on the Layer menu.

It’s a good idea to replace temporary layer names with more descriptive names. You can remove a layer by selecting it on the Layers palette and clicking the Delete button.

To add, name, and delete layers:

1. Open an image in the Editor and select the Full Edit tab. The Layers palette is open on the right. If it is not, choose Window > Layers. When you open a photograph, it is automatically placed in the Background layer.

2. Click the Create New Layer button (Figure 1). A new blank layer is added above the active layer. It has a temporary name, such as Layer 1 (Figure 2).

3. Double-click to select the temporary layer name, and then type a new, more descriptive name for the layer, and press Enter (or Return) (Figure 3).

4. To delete a layer, click the layer in the Layers palette to make it the active layer, and then click the Delete Layer button in the Layers palette.
Arranging and Editing Layers

The stacking order determines whether a layer appears in front of or behind other layers. To rearrange layers, drag them to a new level in the Layers palette.

Keep in mind that a layer obstructs the view of what is directly below it. Sometimes you will want a layer to be partially transparent. You do this by adjusting the layer’s opacity.

As you continue to add new layers, it can be helpful to temporarily hide certain layers so you can see the effects of the layer or have an unobstructed view of objects below them. You can hide and show a layer by using its visibility button (eye) in the Layers palette. When you achieve the results you want, you can merge two layers, making them a single layer. To protect a layer from being accidentally edited, a good idea is to lock them by using the Lock button in the Layers palette. Type and shape layers are locked by default and cannot be unlocked without first simplifying the layer.

To move a layer:

In this example, a shape layer has been drawn over a block of text. The shape is intended to go below the text to help the text stand apart from the background image (Figure 4).

1. Select the layer you want to move by clicking its thumbnail in the Layers palette.
   Selecting the layer makes it the active layer.

2. Drag the layer up or down to its new position (Figure 5).
   In this example, the black rectangle shape is moved between the background image and the text (Figure 6).
To show and hide layers:
By default, layers are visible and the visibility indicator (eye) appears to the left of the layer’s thumbnail in the Layers palette (Figure 7).

1. To hide a layer, click the eye beside the layer’s thumbnail in the layer’s palette (Figure 8).
2. To show the layer, click the eye again to turn it back on.

To lock a layer:
By default, the background layer is locked.

1. To lock a layer, select the layer and select the Lock check box in the Layers palette (Figure 9).
   A padlock icon appears to the right of the layer’s name in the Layers palette (Figure 9).
2. To unlock the layer, select it and deselect the Lock check box in the Layers palette.
To merge layers:
By default, the background layer is locked.

1. Select more than one layer by holding down the Ctrl key and clicking each layer in the Layers palette.

2. Open the More menu in the Layers palette, and choose Merge Layers (Figure 10).

The layers are blended together to form a single layer (Figure 11).

Figure 10 Merging layers

Figure 11 Merged layers
Using Adjustment Layers

Adjustment layers let you experiment with the color, brightness, contrast, and tone of your images without actually making any edits to the photograph. Simply apply and make changes to an adjustment layer, and the changes affect all layers below it. Adjustment layers are also a good way to apply a quick photo filter. Once you create an adjustment layer and get the exact settings you want, you can reuse the layer and apply it to other photographs.

A fill layer applies a solid color, gradient, or pattern. Fill layers do not affect the layers below them. However, if the fill is a solid color or pattern, the layer will hide whatever is below it, so if you want the fill layer to act as the background to an image, place the image above the fill layer.

To create an adjustment layer:

1. In the Layers palette, select the topmost layer you want to affect.
   
   **Note:** To confine the adjustment to a specific area, you can select the area you want to adjust.

2. Click the Create Adjustment Layer button in the Layers palette (Figure 12).

   The first three options add fill layers. The remaining eight create adjustment layers (Figure 12).

3. Select an adjustment option.
   
   **Note:** In this example, the Photo Filter adjustment was selected.

4. In the dialog box, specify options and click OK.
   
   **Note:** With the Preview check box selected in the dialog box, you can see how your settings will affect the underlying layers (Figure 13).
To create a fill layer:

1. In the Layers palette, click the Create Adjustment Layer button in the Layers palette (Figure 14).

   The first three options add a Fill layer. The remaining eight create adjustment layers (Figure 14).

3. Select one of the first three Fill options.

   Note: In this example, the Pattern fill was selected.

4. In the dialog box, specify options and click OK (Figure 15).

5. If the layer is not where you want it in the layer stack, drag it there. For example, you can place it below an image or other objects to create a background.