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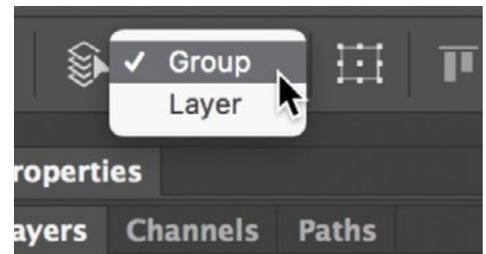
Layer Tips & Tricks

# Layer Tips & Tricks

**How to quickly target layers** We can change which layer is active by clicking on its thumbnail in the Layers panel and we can change their stacking order by dragging them up and down in the Layers panel. However, there are faster methods for doing both of these things and they don't require the Layers panel to be visible. This can be convenient if you ever use the Tab key to hide the side panels in order to make your image fill more of the screen.

With the Move tool active, when you click and drag in your document, you will be moving the layer that is currently active. If you'd like to target a specific object to make its layer active, hold down the Command key (Ctrl on Win) and when you click the mouse button, it will target the top-most layer that contains pixels beneath your cursor.

Note that this feature may work differently if you have Layer Groups in your document, and it will depend on the setting that can be found in the Options Bar when the Move Tool is active. If you have the dropdown menu set to Layer, then Command+clicking will target the top-most layer beneath your cursor. If you have the dropdown menu set to Group, it will target an entire group (if there is a layer contained within a group beneath your cursor).

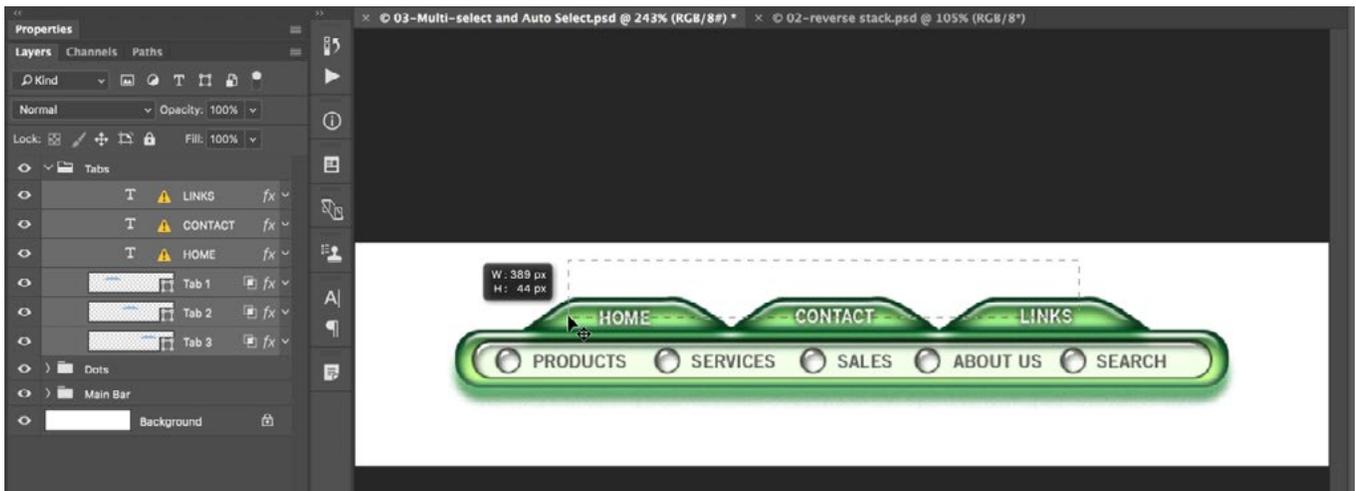


**This setting in the Options Bar will determine whether Command+clicking will select a layer or a group.**

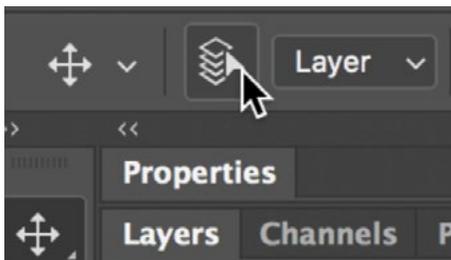
If there is more than one layer that overlaps beneath your cursor and you would like to target one of the underlying layers, right-click on that area in your document (or hold down Control while clicking on a one-button mouse) to get a little menu that lists all of the underlying layers and allows you to choose one to make it active.

Now let's say that you want to quickly select more than one layer using the method described above. First select one layer by holding down the Command key (Ctrl on Win) and clicking on an object in your document to activate its layer. Then, hold down the Shift and Command keys together (Shift+Ctrl on Win) and click on another layer in your document. Adding the Shift key will tell Photoshop to add to what's already selected.

Here is another method of selecting multiple layers at once. With the Move Tool active, start with your cursor in an empty area within the document (empty meaning checkerboard or the background layer). Then, hold the Command key (Ctrl on Win) and click and drag over objects in the document. A box that looks like a selection marquee will serve as your guide so that you can see what you're selecting. Every layer that contains pixels inside this box will become selected in the Layers panel. If a layer was selected accidentally, you can deselect it by holding the Shift and Command keys while clicking again on the object in your document window.



Here, we are holding down the Command key and dragging a rectangle out in the document. Every layer that contains pixels within that rectangle will be selected.



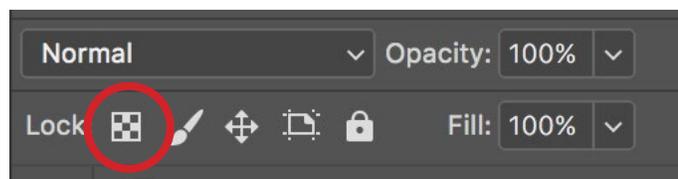
The Auto-Select Layer icon in the Options Bar (in some versions, this appears as a check box with text).

**Auto-Select Layer** With the Move Tool active, the Auto-Select Layer setting will be available in the Options Bar. It may appear as text with a check box or it may appear as an icon on the left side of the Options Bar. If you turn this setting on, every time you click and drag within your document, the layer directly under your cursor will be activated and moved automatically (without holding down the Command key). I, personally, find this setting to be frustrating so I keep it off.

**Changing the layer stacking order** To move a layer up or down in the layer stack, you can drag the layer thumbnail to the position you desire within the Layers panel. If you don't want to work in the Layers panel, however, there is a faster method. With the layer you want to move active, hold down the Command key and then use the left and right bracket keys ( [ ] ) to move the layer up and down in the layer stack. If you add the Shift key while holding Command+ [ , the layer will be sent to the bottom of the layer stack (not below the Background layer though) and if you add the Shift key while holding Command+ ] , the layer will be moved to the top of the layer stack. To reverse the order of several selected layers, go to the main menu and choose Layer > Arrange > Reverse.

**Duplicate a layer multiple times** To quickly duplicate the active layer, use the keyboard shortcut Command+J (Ctrl+J on Win). Alternatively, you can hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) while using the Move Tool to drag out a duplicate of the active layer. This allows you to quickly make multiple duplicates of an object and place them in different areas within your document. While using the Move Tool, if you add the Shift key, you'll only be able to move the layer perfectly horizontally or vertically.

**Preserving transparency** Any transparent areas in a layer will be represented by a checkerboard pattern in the layer's thumbnail in the Layers panel. If you know that you would like to make changes to the areas of the layer that actually contain pixels but you don't want those changes to affect the transparent areas, you can lock the transparency by clicking the checkerboard icon at the top of the Layers panel. This will lock the transparent areas so that they can not be affected by the Brush Tool or any other tools. In the example here, the layer contains a soft-edged, red swirl in the middle of the document.



**The Lock Transparency setting at the top of the Layers panel.**

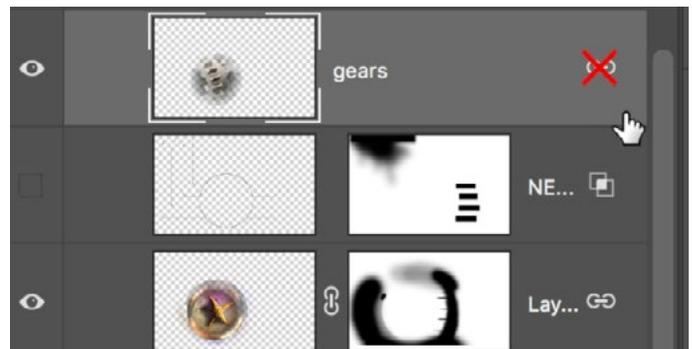
After locking the transparency for this layer, I painted with blue on the layer and the only areas affected were the areas that contained the swirl. The brush did not affect any of the transparent areas.

Now let's look at how we can preserve transparency while using a fill command. To fill a layer with your foreground color, use the keyboard shortcut Option+Delete (Alt+Delete on Win). If you would like this command to preserve the transparent areas and only fill the areas containing pixels, add the Shift key. (Shift+Option+Delete on Mac, Shift+Alt+Delete on Win)

**Linking layers** When you link multiple layers together, they will move as one unit when you reposition or rescale them. This can be convenient when you have a complex document where the layers you want to link are not close to each other in the Layers panel and don't have their visibilities turned on at the same time. To link multiple layers, first select the layers you want linked and then click the little link button at the bottom of the Layers panel. You'll see a link icon appear next to the thumbnails for all the linked layers. If you'd like to temporarily unlink one of the layers, hold down the Shift key and click on the link symbol for the layer you want to unlink. You'll see a little red X appear over the icon indicating that it's temporarily unlinked.



To link layers, first select the layers and then click the Link icon at the bottom of the Layers panel (above). To temporarily unlink a layer, hold Shift and click the link symbol to the right of the layer's name. (right)

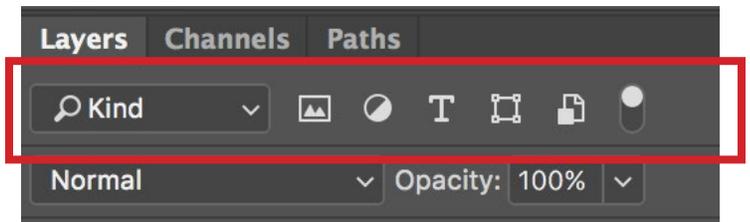


**Locking Layers** If you know that you'll never want to move a layer, you can lock its position by clicking the move icon next to the Lock options at the top of the Layers panel. I will often times do this with my retouching layer that is always directly above my background layer (which contains my original image) because I know that the retouching needs to stay perfectly positioned over the image layer.

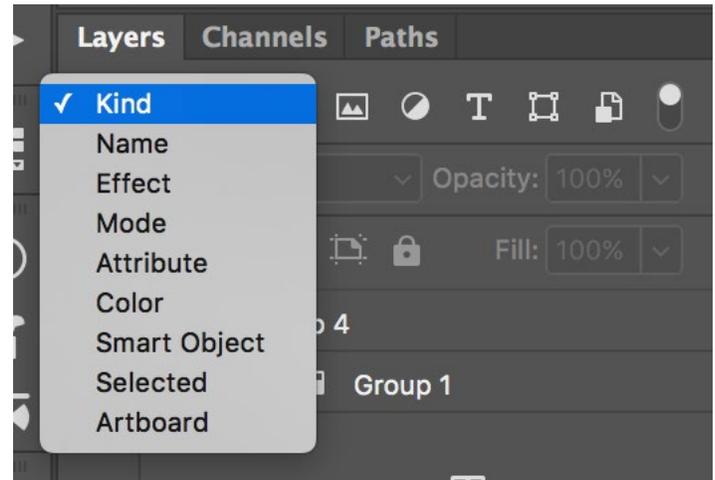


The setting to lock the position of the active layer.

**Filtering Layers** When you have a complex document that contains many, many layers, it can be difficult to locate a particular layer in the Layers panel. To make that easier, you can use the Filter bar at the top of the Layers panel to search for layers based on certain criteria. From left to right, the icons will filter by layers that contain pixels, adjustment layers, type layers, shape layers and Smart Object layers. You may also use the dropdown menu to search your layers based on different types of criteria such as Effect, Mode, Color, Name, etc. When you have one of these filters applied, the little red switch icon in the filter bar will turn red, indicating that you're limiting the number of layers you're looking at. If you no longer want to limit the number of layers you're seeing, click the little switch and all of your layers will become visible in the Layers panel again.

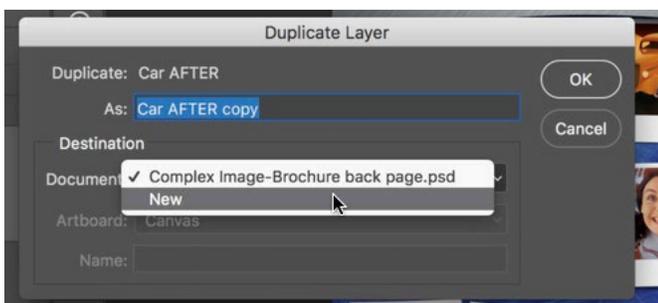


The filter bar at the top of the Layers panel.



The dropdown menu can be used to filter your layers based on certain criteria.

**Isolating a layer into its own document** You can take a single layer from a multi-layer document and copy it to its own, separate Photoshop document. To do this, hold down the Option key (Alt on Win) and drag the layer to the New Layer icon at the bottom of the Layers panel.



The Duplicate Layer dialog box.

at the bottom of the Layers panel. The Duplicate Layer dialog will pop up and you can use the Document dropdown menu to determine whether the layer will be duplicated to a New document or to another document you have open in Photoshop. If you choose to duplicate the layer to a new document, you'll have

the option to give the new document a name. When the new document appears, it will be the same size as the document you duplicated the layer from. If you'd like to get rid of any empty space around the layer, go to the main menu and choose Image > Trim.

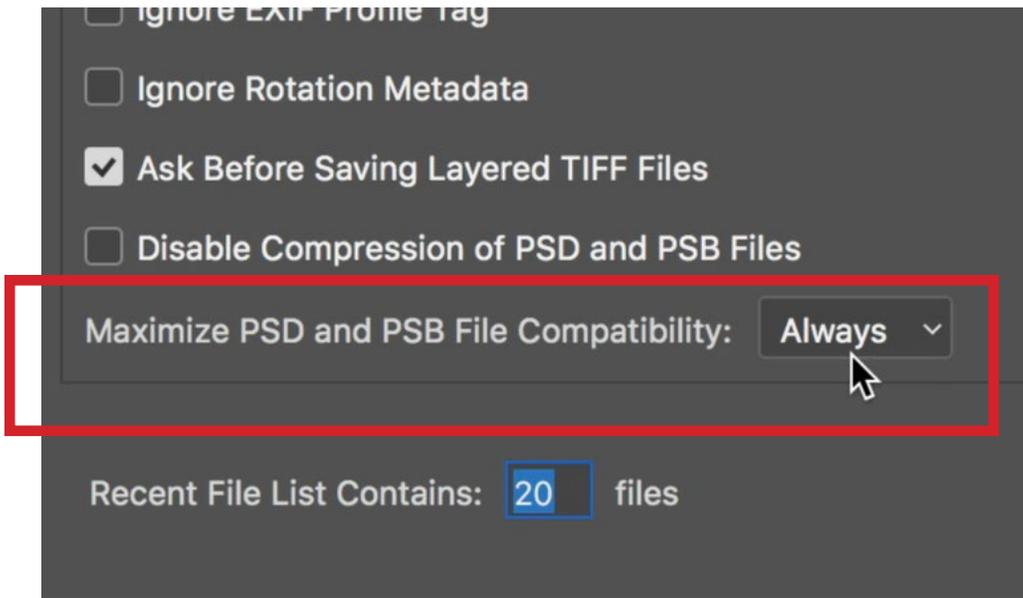
**Removing transparency in a layer** There are a few different things you could do to a layer that would result in unintended transparency. Let's say you want to make that layer perfectly opaque again. Duplicate the layer multiple times by using the keyboard shortcut Command+J (Ctrl+J on Win). Keep using this shortcut until you can no longer see through the layer. Then select all copies of the layer within the Layers panel and go to the main menu and choose Layer > Merge Layers. Alternatively, you can use the keyboard shortcut Command+E (Ctrl+E on Win).

**Delete hidden layers** If you ever finish your work with a document and end up with several hidden, unused layers, it might be a good idea to delete these so they don't increase your file size. To do this, click on the little side menu in the top right corner of the Layers panel and choose Delete Hidden Layers.

**How to quickly toggle visibility** When I'm trying to figure out what content/objects are contained in the layer I'm working on, I will turn the layer visibility on and off repeatedly so that I can see what disappears and reappears. To quickly toggle the visibility of the active layer, use the keyboard shortcut Command+comma(,) (Ctrl+comma on Win).

**Open a flattened version of a PSB file** If you have a Photoshop file that exceeds four gigabytes, the file format will be PSB instead of PSD and that stands for "Photoshop Big." It is not practical to send someone a file of this size, and it's even inconvenient to open a PSB file because you will get a progress bar in Photoshop. Let's say you'd like to send a flattened, smaller version of this file to someone else. A convenient way of doing this would be to hold down Shift+Option and double-click on the file thumbnail within Bridge. A Photoshop dialog will appear asking you if you want to "Read the composite data instead?" Within a layered file, there is also usually a flattened version of the file and Photoshop is asking if it should open that flattened version. If you click OK, it will open that version and you can save it out as a smaller, flattened file. If you click OK and end up with an error, it means that the Maximize Compatibility setting was not turned on for

that file. It is this setting that tells Photoshop to include a flattened version of the image within the file and allows programs like Lightroom to display the image. To make sure the Maximize Compatibility setting is on, go to the main menu and choose Photoshop > Preferences > File Handling and make sure the “Maximize PSD and PSB file compatibility” check box is turned on.



The Maximize Compatibility setting within the File Handling section of the Preferences dialog.