Photoshop Elements 6 – Layers

One of the most powerful features of modern imaging software is the ability to work with layers. If an image is made of layers, we can work on the part that is in one layer without affecting the others. This is best understood by creating an image made of more than one layer.

Creating a Composite Image

First we will create an image made of layered components. Create a new blank 1024 x 768 image, 180 pixels/inch, with white contents. Save it as Composite_1.psd.

Open Grief.jpg and save as Grief_1.psd.

Use the Selection Brush to select the figure in Grief_1, but not the background. Feather the selection. Copy the figure and paste it into Composite_1.

Use the Move Tool to position the figure so it looks like the picture at the right. Note that the pasted figure “floats” above the white background when you move it. The figure has been pasted into the image as a new layer.

The Layer Palette

Click on the Palette Bin icon to display the Layers Palette.

You should see two layers in the Layers Palette on the right side of the screen – the blank white background and Layer 1, which contains the figure.
Click on Layer 1 in the Layers Palette so that this layer is selected. The selected layer is shown in dark blue on the palette.

The checkerboard pattern in the thumbnail image of the figure in Layer 1 indicates a transparent portion of the layer. Only the figure is opaque.

**The Eraser Tool**

You might notice that the right edge of the cloak in the figure is vertical and looks unnatural. Select the **Eraser tool**.

Configure the Eraser tool as a Brush and choose a small size – say 15 pixels.

Remove a little of the cloak to give a smooth and irregular edge.

*NOTE: If the Eraser tool does not appear to work, you probably have the Background layer selected rather than Layer 1.*
Fill Layers

A fill layer can be filled with a solid color, a gradient (in which the color gradually changes), or a pattern.

Let’s create a new layer that lies above the background and below the figure layer. We will fill this layer with an attractive pattern.

*Select the Background layer so that the new Fill layer will be added between the two existing layers.*

Choose **Layers, New Fill Layer, Gradient** from the main menu.

You will be asked to name the new layer. Click on **OK**.

In the **Gradient Fill** window, do the following:
1. Click on the **triangle pointing downward** next to the Gradient display to show the gradient possibilities.
2. Click on the **triangle pointing to the right** to display a menu of other gradient possibilities.
3. Choose **Simple** from this menu.

From the list of simple gradients, choose **Blue**.
At this point, your picture should look something like this.

If you look at the Layers palette, you will see that the image now has three layers. The central layer is the new fill layer you just created.

**Viewing Layers**

You can hide or show a layer by clicking on its eye icon in the layer palette. If the eye is not visible, then the layer will be hidden on the screen. If the eye is visible, then the layer will be shown on the screen.

Try this with one or more of the layers and watch what you see on the screen.

When you are through, make sure all the layers are shown.
Layer Opacity

Select Layer 1, which contains the figure.

In the upper right of the Layers palette, you will see an Opacity slider, which controls how much of underlying layers will show through a selected layer.

- Opacity = 100% means a layer is completely opaque so nothing in a lower layer will show.
- Opacity = 0% means a layer is completely transparent and no longer visible.

Change the Opacity of Layer 1 to 50%, which means that it will be 50% transparent. The figure now is slightly obscured by the gradient layer, which is showing through from below.
Adding Text Layers to an Image

Choose the Text tool with a 30 pt Vivaldi font. Italic is the only type available for Vivaldi.

The Anti-aliased button should be on. Anti-aliasing fills in the edge pixels on type to make the edges smoother.

Set the Foreground Color to white (FFFFFF).

Position the cursor in the upper right corner of the picture and enter “Adams Memorial.”

Choose the Text tool again, this time with 18 pt Vivaldi font. Position the cursor below the other text and enter “Augustus Saint-Gaudens.”

Position the text so that the picture looks something like this.
Text is added to an image in layers. With the addition of two text layers, our image now has five layers.

**Layer Styles**

Layers also have styles. *Choose the Move tool from the toolbox* and then select the “Adams Memorial” text layer. When the layer is selected, it will be surrounded by a dotted line with rectangles at the corners in the image.

Look at the Effects section of the Palette bin. Click on the Layer Styles icon (second from the left) and choose Drop Shadows from the drop-down menu. When you double-click on one of the Drop Shadows styles, you will see shadows under the text.

Try different ones.
Arranging the Order of Layers

You can change the order of layers from the Layers menu.

Select Layer 1, which contains the figure.

Choose **Layer, Arrange, Send Backward** in the main menu.
- What happens to the image when you do this?
- Look at the Layers palette. Has the figure really disappeared? Why can’t you see it?

You also can drag layers in the Layers palette.

Select Layer 1 in the Layers Palette. Click on Layer 1 and drag it up so that it is back above the Gradient layer. What happens to the image?

Deleting Layers

You can delete a layer by dragging it to the little trash can at the lower right of the Layers palette.

Try it with one of the layers.

*Use Undo or Step Backward in the Edit menu to undo any changes to Composite_2 you have made when you moved or deleted layers.*

Flattening an Image

Layers give Photoshop a lot to remember and can lead to large file sizes. If you are absolutely sure you are finished with an image, you may want to flatten the image, which combines the layers. If you have any doubt about needing the layers later, it would be a good idea to save the image under another name after flattening.

Choose **Layers, Flatten Image** from the main menu.

Save as Composite_3.psd.

Look at the Layers palette. How many are there now?

Look at the file sizes. Does the flattened image have a smaller file size than the image with layers?
Correcting Perspective Problems

Open the file Chicago.jpg and save it as Chicago_1.psd

If you take a picture of a building from ground level with a wide-angle lens, the buildings appear to lean toward the center. This is particularly apparent if you view the grid, as shown in the picture at the right.

View the grid and pull the corner of the image frame away from the image so you see gray around the picture.

Choose Image, Transform, Perspective from the main menu.

Transformations cannot be done on the background image, so you will be asked if you want to create a new layer. Click on OK.

Push one of the lower corners of the image horizontally into the image until the sides of the building are vertical when compared with the grid lines. When you push one side of the image, the other one is moved automatically.

Click on the check mark in the options bar to confirm the transformation.

NOTE: It is better to push the one of the lower corners in rather than pull out the top to adjust the perspective. Photoshop Elements does a better job of removing pixels than of adding them.
**Doing a Free Transform**

A perspective transformation usually leaves the building looking a little thin. After changing perspective, I have found it useful to choose **Image, Transform, Free Transform** from the main menu.

If you push in on the center rectangle on the top, it will “squash” the buildings vertically. A *small* amount of squashing makes the buildings look less unnaturally thin.

Finally, crop the image to make the right and left side vertical. You lose some of the sides of an image when you transform its perspective, but the buildings look a lot better after the transformation.

You also may need to sharpen the image slightly using the **Unsharp Mask**.
Practice Problems

1. Using Ben.jpg and Old_MainSpring.jpg, make this image shown below. The text layer is beveled with an inner ridge.

2. Open Street.jpg and make the following adjustments.
   - Correct its perspective
   - Sharpen the image
   - Increase the saturation of the image slightly to give it more punch

3. Make adjustments to the scanned image, SantAntimo.jpg. Include the following adjustments.
   - Correct its perspective
   - Remove dust and people that are in the picture.
   - Sharpen the image
4. Open *Famille.jpg* and make the following adjustments.
   - Brighten the shadows without changing the properly exposed sky. This may not take much adjustment to look OK.
   - Adjust the perspective
   - Change the saturation if necessary.
   - Sharpen the image
   - Crop the image to remove the telephone pole at the right.

5. Suppose that you work for an organization that is interested in downtown development and you need to convince a client to put a mural on the side of a building. You want to create an image that will illustrate what the mural would look like on the building. You have two digital pictures – one of the building (*Building.jpg*) and one of the mural (*Mural.jpg*). Use them to create a picture like this one, which straightens the building, crops the photo, and illustrates what the building will look like with a mural on its side.

This is not an easy problem. You may need to use the various **Transform** menu options to distort the mural to fit the building. You can use the **Eraser tool** to erase the top layer so the windows and cars show through from the background layer.