5 Layers

Layers

Beginners to Photoshop often have a problem with the concept of layers and how they can be made to interact with one another. They can be partially hidden using layer masks, they can be blended together in several different ways, they can be re-ordered, renamed, linked, grouped, clipped, duplicated and flattened.

So what are layers? Layers are simply stacks of images, objects or text. Layers are very powerful because they allow us to edit and move individual image components without affecting other elements within the scene. Let's look at an example of a layered document, fig 5.1.
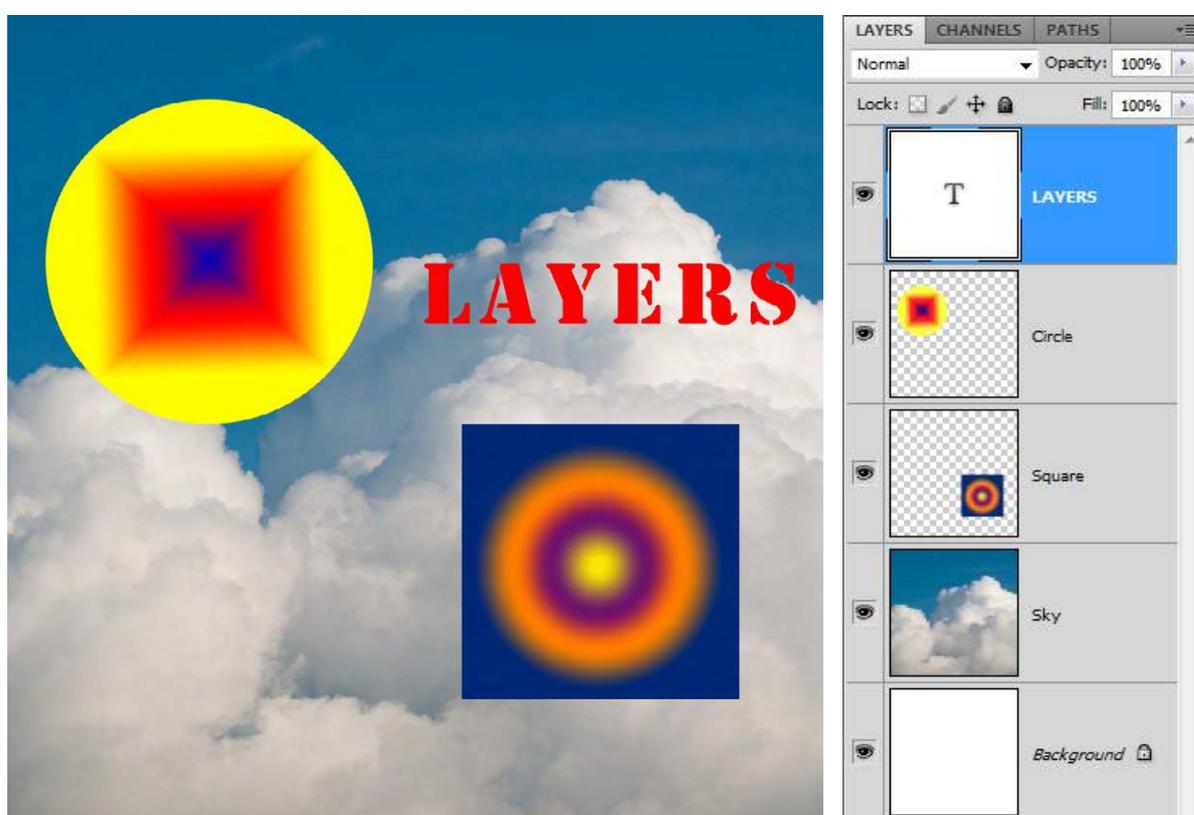

Fig 5.1 a layered Photoshop document and the corresponding Layers panel.

In the image of the Layers panel, fig 5.1, we can see that there are a total of 5 layers. From the bottom upwards, there is a Background layer, an image of the Sky, a layer containing a Square, a layer containing a Circle and a Text layer which contains the word "LAYERS". We can see 4 of the 5 layers; the background layer is completely covered up by the Sky layer. The two shape layers and the Text layer do not completely cover the Sky layer because they are surrounded by transparency which allows the underlying layers to show through. Transparency is represented in the Layers panel as a chequer-board pattern and is apparent in this example, in the Square and Circle layers. Finally, the Text layer is a special kind of layer and although text is always surrounded by transparency, it does not show in the Layers panel.

Aligning and Moving Layers

To move the contents of a layer, select the Move tool which is located at the top of the Tools panel, fig 5.2. You must then highlight the layer you wish to move by clicking on it in the Layers panel. Once the layer is selected it will appear blue, fig 5.3. With a layer selected, you can use the Move to click and drag the layer into a new position.
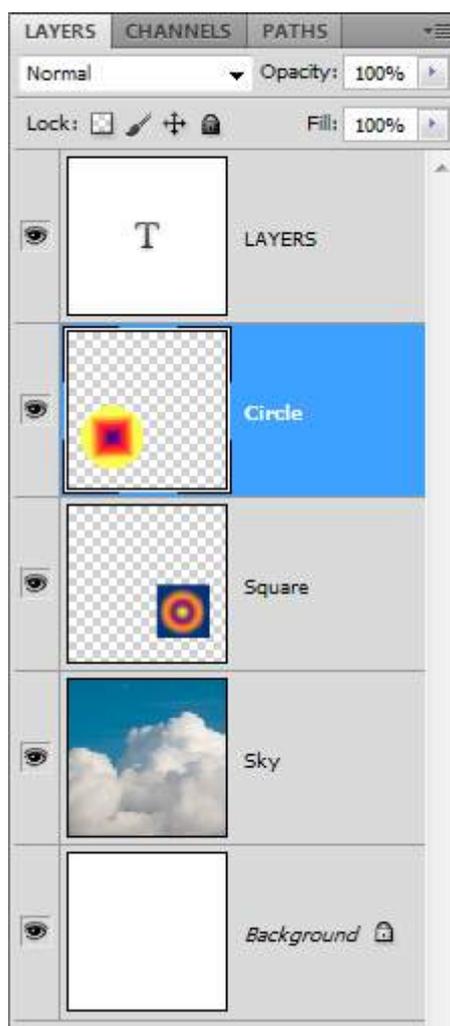

Fig 5.2 the Move tool

Fig 5.3 the "Circle" layer is selected, as indicated by the blue highlight.

Multiple layers can be selected by choosing a layer and then holding down the Shift key and clicking on different layer. All of the layers between the two selected layers will be highlighted in blue, fig 5.4. Non-adjacent layer can be selected by Ctrl/Cmd-Click (PC/Mac) on the required layers.
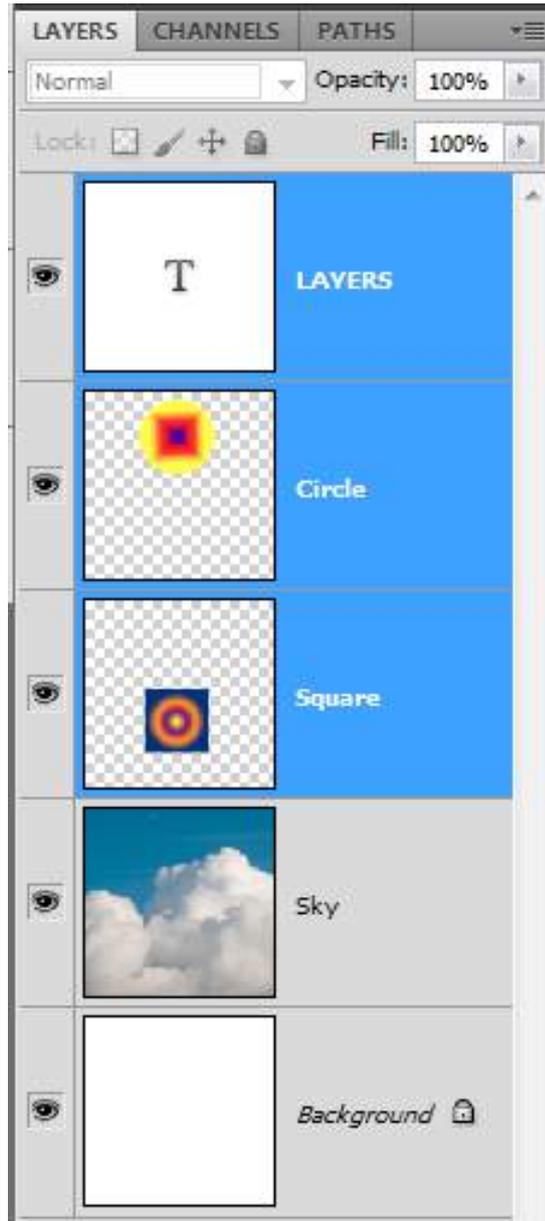
Fig 5.4 by clicking on the Text layer and Shift clicking on the "Square" layer, all layers in between the two selected points have been selected.

With several layers highlighted, multiple layers can be moved simultaneously. However, they will maintain their relative positions to one another. If you wish to change the position of the layers so that they are aligned with one another, you can use the Alignment tools that are present in the Options bar once the Move tool is selected, fig 5.5.
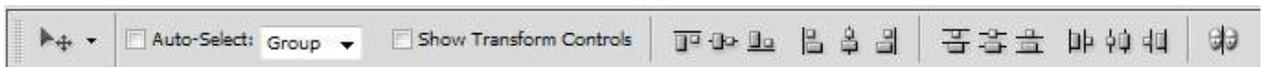

Fig 5.5 the Align and Distribute functions are available once the Move tool is chosen in the Tools panel and multiple layers are highlighted in the Layers panel.
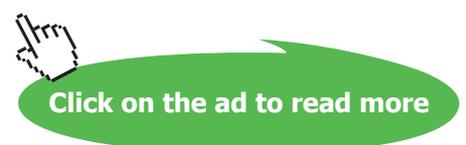
Download free eBooks at bookboon.com

Align top edges

Align vertical centers

Align bottom edges

Align left edges

Align horizontal centers

Align right edges

Distribute top edges

Distribute vertical centers

Distribute bottom edges

Distribute left edges

Distribute horizontal centers

Distribute right edges

Download free eBooks at bookboon.com

Layer Interactions

The manner in which the individual layers in a document may interact with each other is editable in a number of ways. The most basic interaction is Opacity. By default the Opacity of a layer is 100%, but this can be adjusted by moving the slider that appears when you click on the right pointing arrow at the side of the Opacity value, fig 5.5. Alternatively, you can just position your cursor over the word "Opacity" and drag to the left to reduce the value, and to the right to increase it.
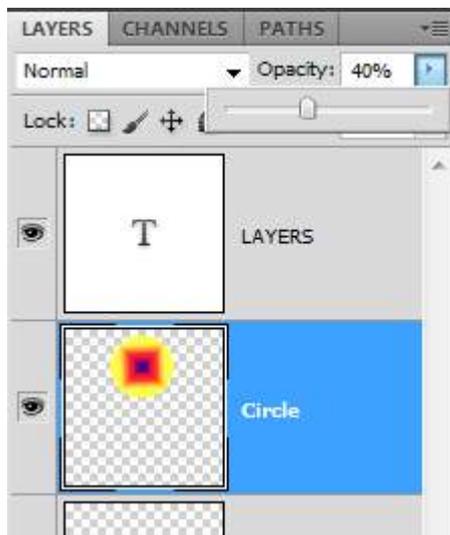

Fig 5.5 the Opacity of the "Circle" layer has been lowered to 40%.

When we reduce the Opacity of a layer it allows any layers that may be below the altered layer, to be partially visible, fig 5.6.
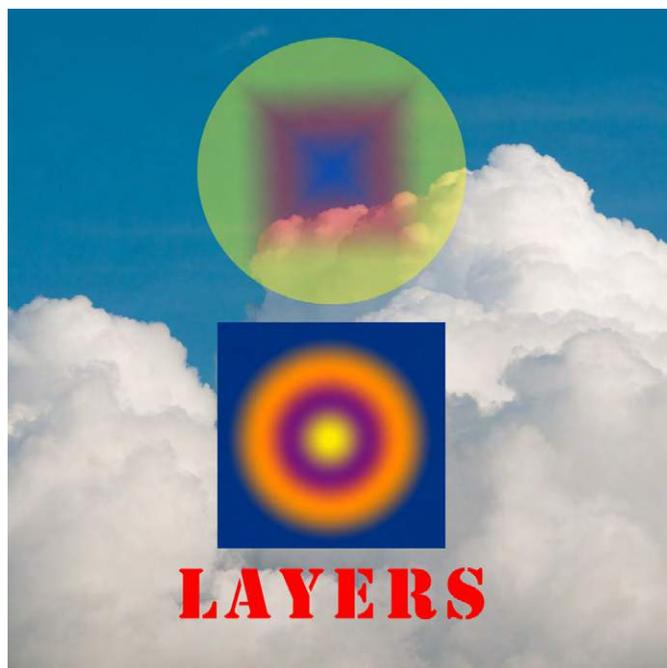

Fig 5.6 the reduced Opacity of the "Circle" layer allows the underlying layers to show through.

Download free eBooks at bookboon.com

Blend Modes

Layer can also interact with one another by using Blend Modes. They allow one layer to affect underlying layers in a number of different ways. We will be taking a look at the Blend Modes in more detail in the second book in this series. However, to help you to understand in broad terms what their function is, similar modes are grouped together, fig 5.7. You can alter a layers blend mode by clicking on the down arrow next to the word Normal in the Layers panel.
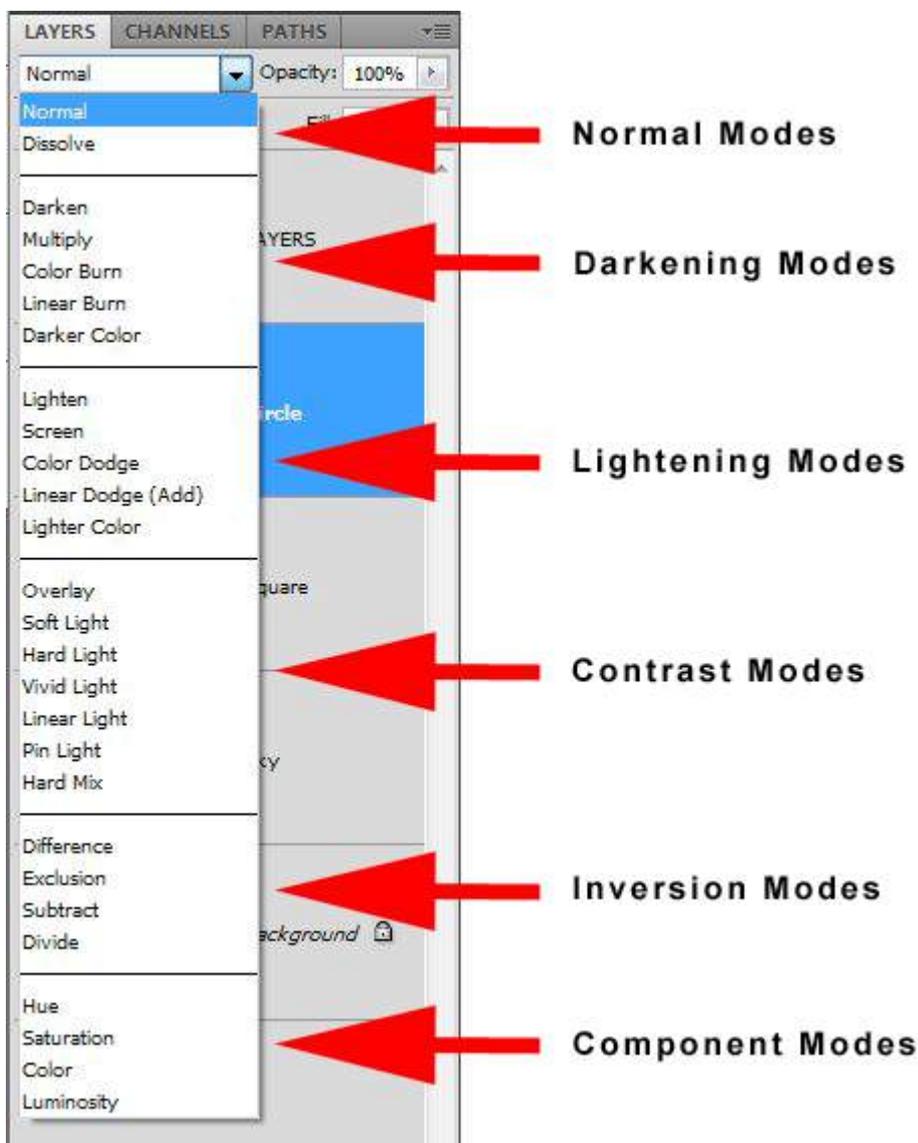

Fig 5.7 the Blend Mode groupings that can be found in the Layers panel.

Naming Layers

It can be very easy to lose track of which layer is which if you have a many layered document. It is a good idea to get into the habit of naming your layers as you create them. To rename a layer simply double click on the mane of the layer in the Layers panel and type in the new name.

T Text Layers

Adding a text to an image is very simple and can be done in two ways.

- Select the Type tool from the Tool panel and click in the image where you would like the type to appear. A flashing cursor will appear and you can commence typing.
- If with to create a column of text for a magazine layout, choose the Type tool, but instead of just clicking, click and drag to create the text box. Now when you type, it will be contained within the box.

You will notice that when you type a new type layer appears in the Layers panel so there is no need to manually create a new layer when you wish to add text. We will take a look at more advanced text functions and formatting in subsequent books.

Shape Layers

When you choose one of the Shape tools, fig 5.8, the default setting in the associated Options bar is to create what is known as a Shape layer. In the same manner as the Type tool, Shapes layers are created automatically when you start to draw with one of the tools, provided that the Create Shape Layer icon is selected in the Options bar – the first selected icon from the left in fig 5.9.
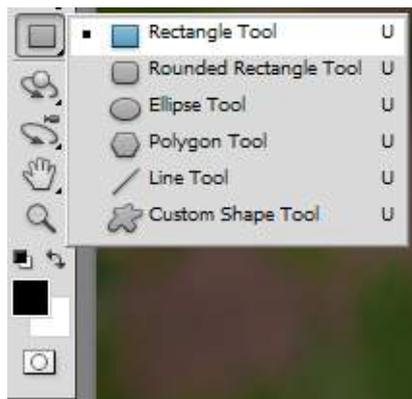
Fig 5.8 the various Shape tools available.

Fig 5.9 the default Shape options – to create Shape Layers.

Shape layers consist of a solid colour layer with a vector mask, fig 5.10. A vector mask is like a stencil, only allowing the colour to be seen where the shape has been drawn. The colour of a shape can be changed at a time by double clicking on the coloured thumbnail icon in the layers panel. The icon will reflect the currently chosen colour. As you double click the Colour Picker dialogue box will appear, fig 5.11, allowing you to choose any colour you wish.
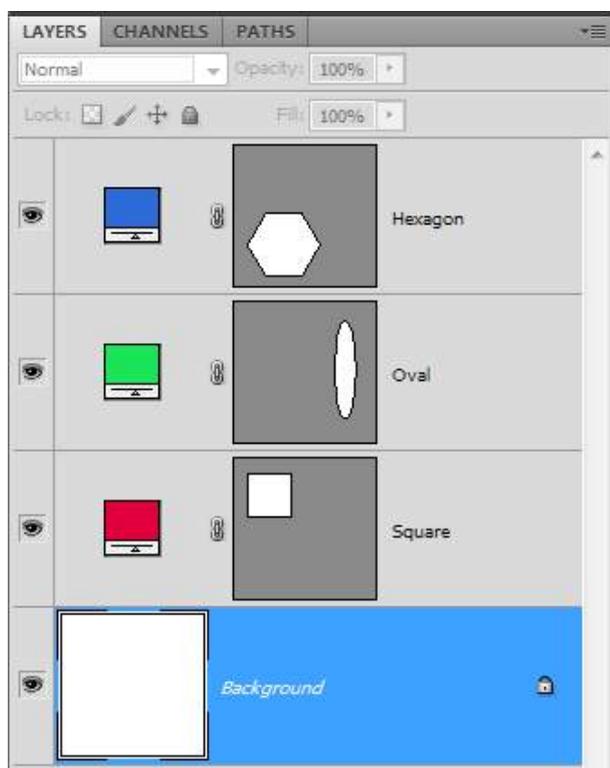

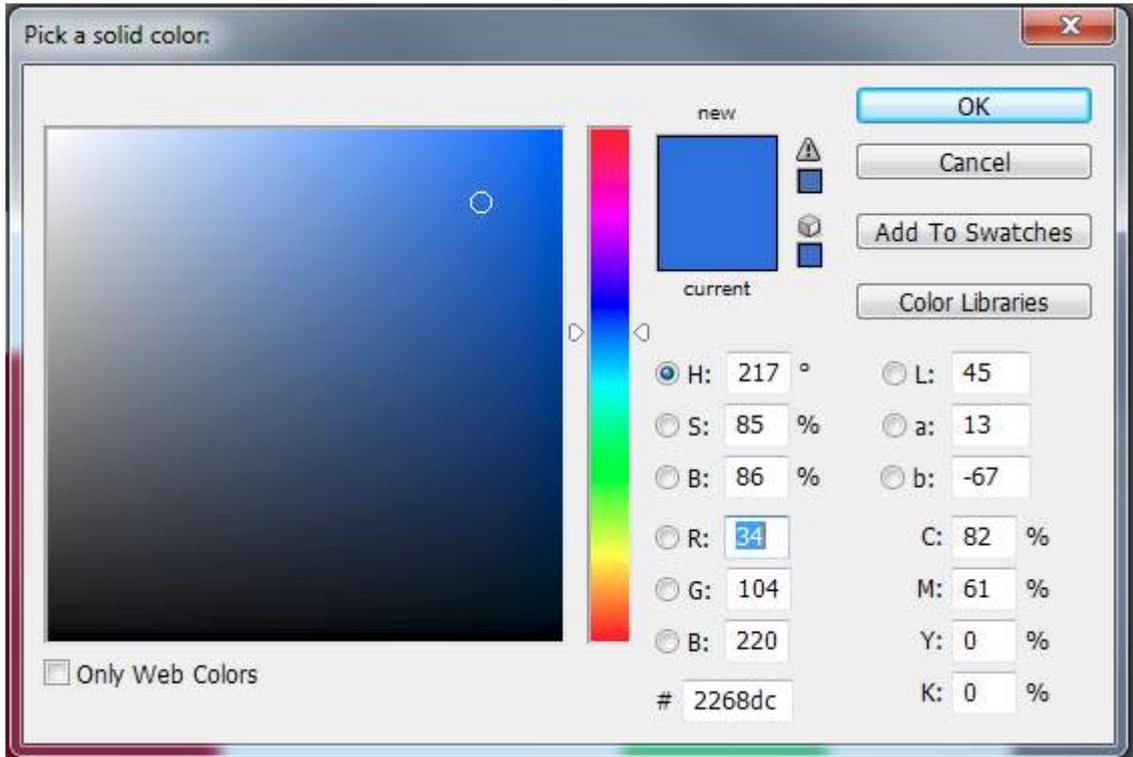**Fig 5.10** Shape layers created using the shape tools

Fig 5.11 the Colour Picker – use the slider on the right to choose a colour and then click inside the main box to specify the saturation and luminance values for that colour.

Download free eBooks at bookboon.com