How to create layer comps

Designers often create multiple compositions or “comps” of a design layout to show clients. You can create comps out of your image’s layers by using the Layer Comps panel. Using this panel, you can create, manage, and view multiple versions of a layout in a single Adobe Photoshop CS6 file.

A *layer comp* is a snapshot of current layer visibility, position, and appearance. Layer comps capture the document as it currently appears.

- Layer *visibility* refers to whether a layer is showing or hidden.
- Layer *position* refers to the layer’s position in the Layer panel, above or below other layers. In your documents, content in upper layers appears over content in lower layers.
- Layer *appearance* refers to whether a layer style is applied to the layer. It also refers to the layer’s blending mode. For more information on layer styles and blending modes, see Photoshop Help.

When you create a layer comp, you can choose to capture one, two, or all three of these attributes.

Layer comps are best employed with images that have many layers. You will find it much easier to create layer comps if you are in the habit of giving layers meaningful names, such as “image_main” or “border” or “blue background.” When you give layers names, you can more easily identify them later.

To create a layer comp:

1. Open a file with multiple layers in Photoshop.
2. Choose Window > Layer Comps to display the Layer Comps panel (**Figure 1**).
3. Click the Create New Layer Comp button at the bottom of the Layer Comps panel.

   This creates a new comp that shows layers as they currently appear.

   The New Layer Comp dialog box appears (**Figure 2**).

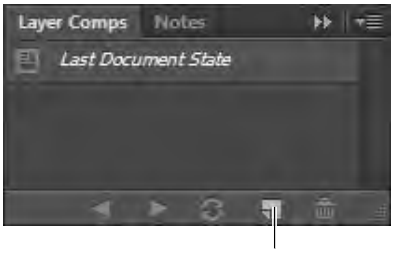

Figure 1 Layer Comps panel

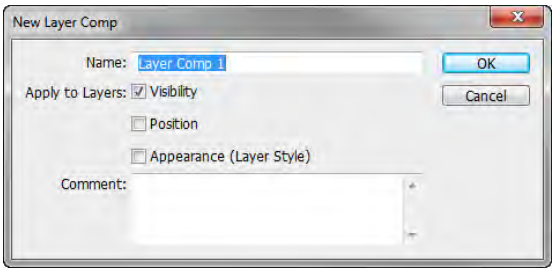

Figure 2 New Layer Comp dialog box

4. Type a name for the comp and add descriptive comments.
5. Select Visibility, Position, and Appearance (Layer Style).

   Selecting all three options ensures that the layer comp will appear exactly as you want it to appear.
6. Click OK.

   The current state of the layers has been saved as a layer comp. This means that the image's current appearance has been saved as a layer comp (**Figure 3**).
7. Using the Layers panel, make changes to the image: hide some layers, show others, or add more images. Your goal is to make the image appear significantly different than it appears now so you can save a different layer comp (**Figure 4**).

   Note: To show or hide a layer, click the Eye icon to the left of it.

   Next you're going to create a new layer comp by saving the changes you just made in the Layers panel.

Figure 3 Original layout layer comp

Figure 4 Layers panel with layers selected for purple background highlighted

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8. Repeat steps 3–6 to save your changes as another layer comp. In **Figure 5**, the new layer comp is called "Purple background version."
9. In the Layer Comps panel, click the left column next to the layer comp you first created (**Figure 6**).

   When you do so, the Apply Layer Comp icon appears next to the layer comp, indicating it is selected.

   The image changes to the first layer comp (**Figure 6**). You can now easily toggle between Layer Comps to compare changes.

   Observe that layer visibility has now changed in the Layers panel.

Figure 5 Purple background version layer comp

Figure 6 Selecting a layer comp

Updating layer comps

After you've created them, you can also update layer comps.

To update a layer comp:

1. Select a layer comp in the Layer Comps panel.
2. Open the Layers panel and make changes to layer visibility or position.

   Once you make changes to the Layers panel, the Apply Layer Comp icon disappears from the selected layer (**Figure 7**). The layer comp has not yet been updated, and the document's current layer visibility is different from that saved in the layer comp.
3. Click the Update Layer Comp button to save your changes.

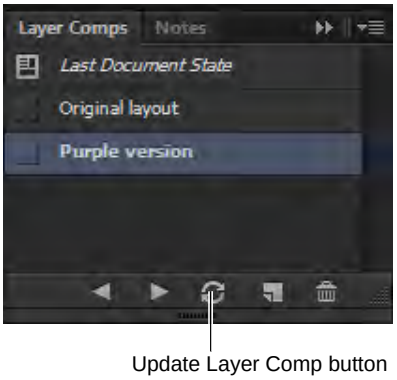

Figure 7 Layer Comps panel

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Exporting layer comps

You need to export your layer comps in a form your clients can view. Photoshop generates a different PDF document for each layer comp.

To export multiple layer comps as PDF documents:

1. Choose File > Scripts > Layer Comps To Files.

   The Layer Comps To Files dialog box appears (**Figure 8**).

2. Click Browse to set a location on your system for the output file.

   The Choose Folder (Windows) or Choose A Folder (Mac OS) dialog box appears.

3. Click OK (Windows) or Open (Mac OS) to set the destination.

4. In the Layer Comps To Files dialog box, enter a name for File Name Prefix.

5. Deselect Selected Layer Comps Only.

   This ensures that all of the layer comps in the Layer Comps panel will be included in the PDF.

6. From the File Type drop down menu, select PDF.

7. Click Run.

   Photoshop creates individual PDF files according to your specifications in the location you indicated. A success message appears when the file creation is complete.

8. In your system, open the folder containing the PDFs.

9. Double-click a PDF file to open it (**Figure 9**).

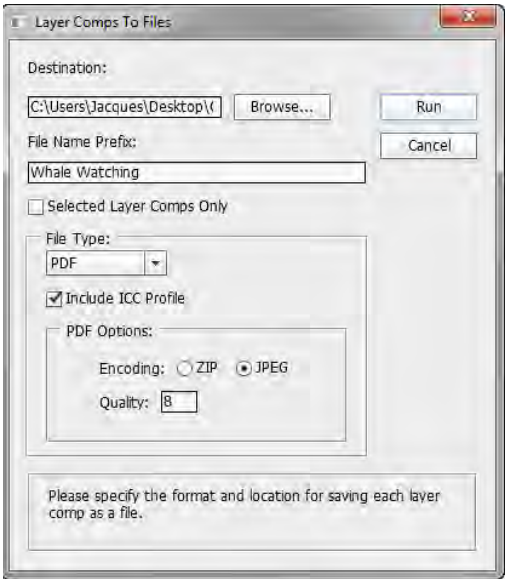

Figure 8 Layer Comps To Files dialog box

Figure 9 PDFs output to selected folder

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