

4 Smart Objects

Smart Objects allow editing of a document without altering the original file in any way. You can think of them as a protective container and nothing can damage your file once it's been placed inside of the Smart Object. Smart Objects are incredibly flexible as they allow Filters to be applied non-destructively and the filter can be re-opened at any time and the settings changed. This is great if you are a designer and a client want you to make certain changes – you can simply re-open the filter that's attached to the Smart Object and apply the required alterations.

If you have a complex design, you can place groups of layers inside a Smart Object and process the independently. It is also possible to place several Smart Objects inside another Smart Object (this is called nested Smart Objects) in order to perform tasks that would be impossible (or very difficult) to do in any other way. For example, applying multiple stroke Layer Styles (see the section on Layer Styles,) to Type layers.

To convert a layer to a Smart Object, go to the Layer menu and choose Smart Objects > Convert to Smart Object. Alternatively, you can also convert a layer to a Smart Object from the flyout menu in the top right-hand corner of the Layers panel, fig 4.1.



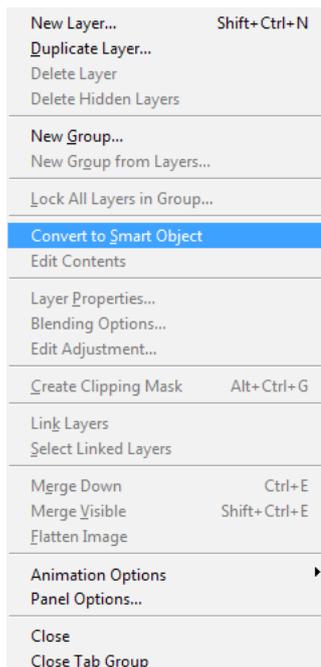


Fig 4.1 the “Convert to Smart Object” function in the Layers panel flyout menu

In fig 4.2 a Type layer has had two Outer Glow Layer Styles applied to it. Without using Smart Objects it would be much trickier to achieve this exact effect and would involve multiple layer and transformations. In this case all that was required was to add a blue Outer Glow Layer Style. Convert the layer to a Smart Object and then apply a red Outer Glow to the new Smart Object.

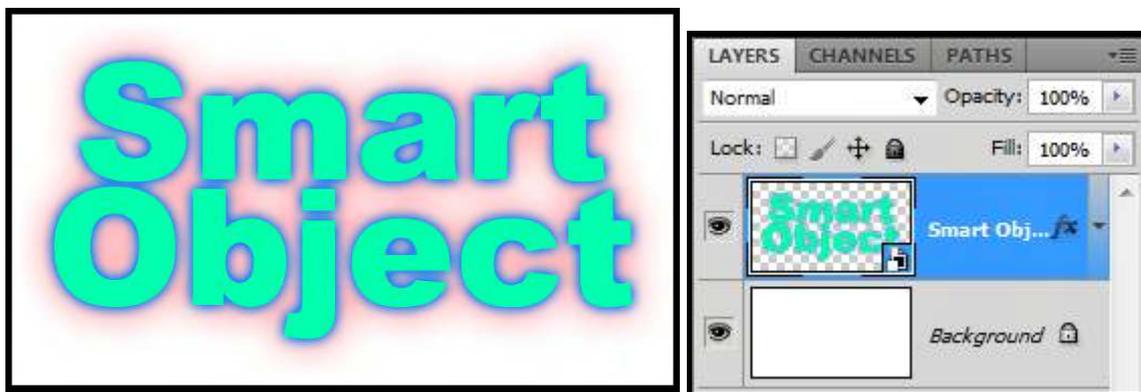


Fig 4.2 a double Layer Style effect. The Smart Object layer is indicated by the small icon in the bottom right of the layer.

Smart Filters

If you apply a Filter from the Filter menu to a Smart Object, it will appear in the Layers panel as a Smart Filter. The layer will take on the appearance of the applied Filter but the original file contained with the Smart Object will remain unchanged.

In fig 4.3, the Stained Glass filter has been applied to the Type layer Smart Object from the previous example.

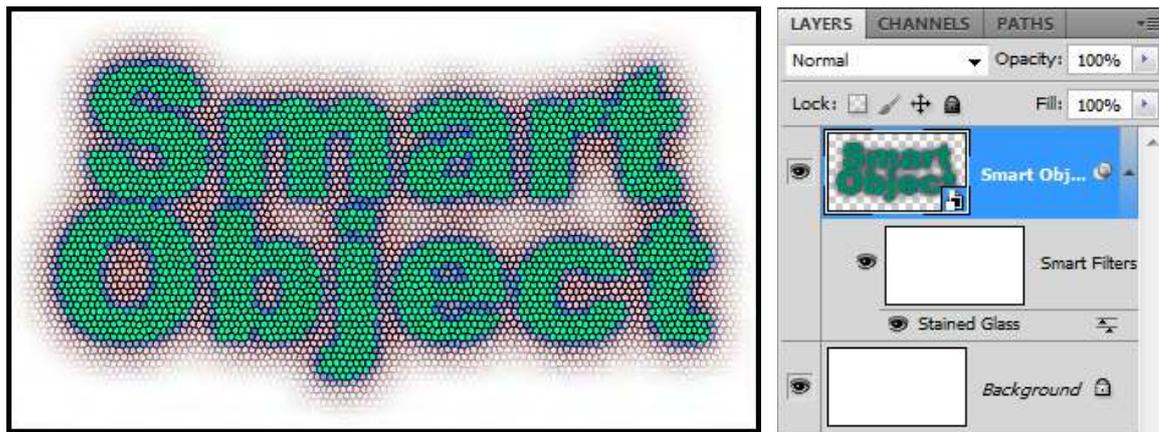


Fig 4.3 the Stained Glass Filter applied as a Smart Filter.

A very useful feature of Smart Filters is the ability to change the Blending Options of the Filter. By clicking on the  icon on the Smart Filter Layer in the Layers panel, you can alter the way in which the Filter interacts and blends with the Smart Object. In fig 4.4, the blend mode for the Stained Glass filter has been changed from Normal to Linear Burn to increase the contrast and colour strength of the filter. If the effect of changing the blending mode is too strong, it can be reduced by changing the opacity setting in the Filters Blending Options.

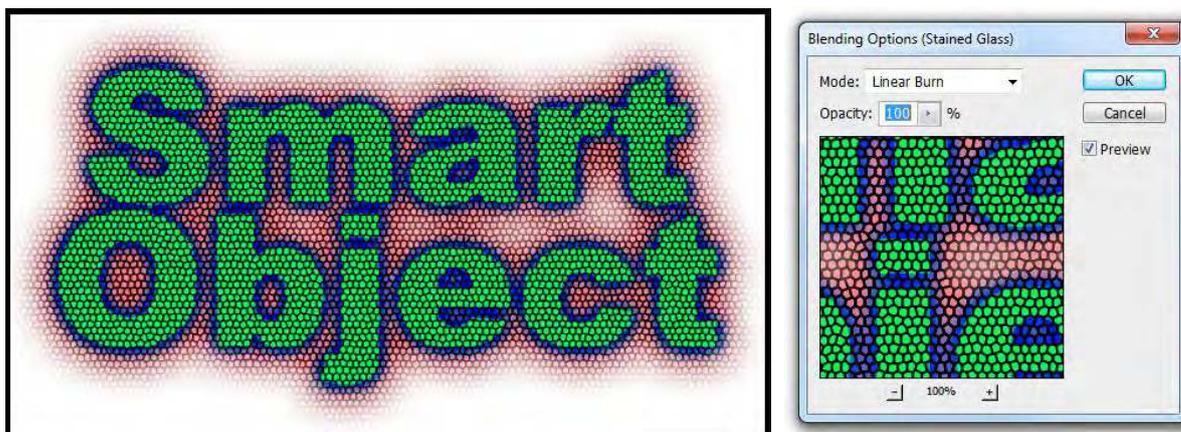


Fig 4.4 altering the effect of a Smart Filter by changing its Blending Options.

Editing the Contents of a Smart Object

To edit the content of a Smart Object, double click on its thumbnail image in the Layers panel. The contents will open as a new document. Change the contents of the new document and then SAVE and close it. The Smart Object in your original document we automatically be updated to reflect the changes that you have made, fig 4.5. All Layer Styles and Smart Filters will remain intact.

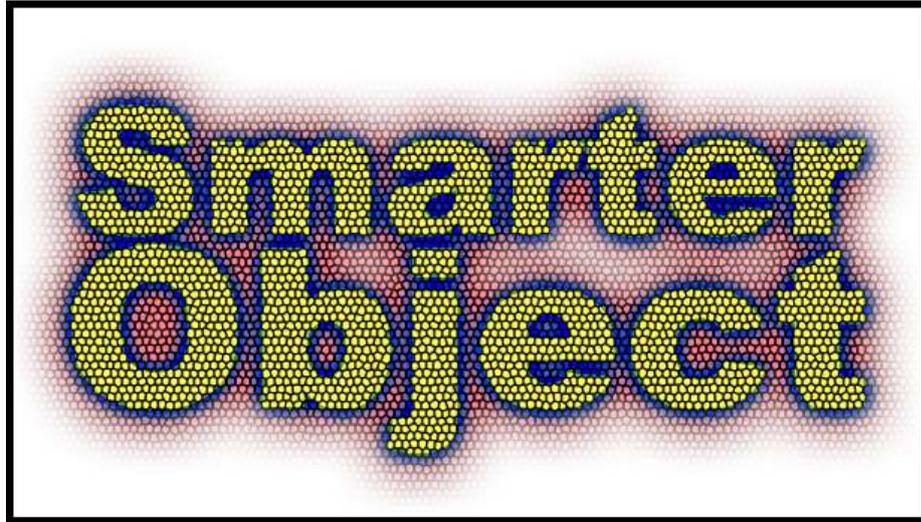


Fig 4.5 the contents of the Smart Object have been edited and then saved. An updated version of the Smart Object is automatically displayed.

Transformations

Every time that you make a transformation (see previous Chapter), the object is re-drawn, and so reduces in quality. If you have designed a logo that you wish to use on several sized documents such as a poster, letterheads and business cards, you will find yourself using the transformation functions to scale the logo to fit the different documents. To avoid degrading the logo as you make the transformations, place the Layers that make up the logo inside a Smart Object. When Smart Objects are transformed the original artwork remains unchanged and safe. The Smart Object merely uses its contents as a reference to produce the scaled version.