

1 Photoshop Panels and Tools

Photoshop is modular in its layout and it is infinitely customizable. In the default configuration, the panels are located on the right hand side, the tools are on the left and the options bar which displays the most useful parameters for a selected tool is across the top of the work area. There is also a standard menu bar at the very top of the application.

Workspaces

All of the program elements, with the exception of the menu bar, can be dragged around and docked with other panels to create your own custom work area called a workspace. There are a number of pre-set workspaces that can be selected from the right hand side of the menu bar, the default workspace is called “Essentials” and can be recalled at any time by clicking on the button. This is very useful because beginners will often accidentally close or collapse panels and can’t remember how to restore them.

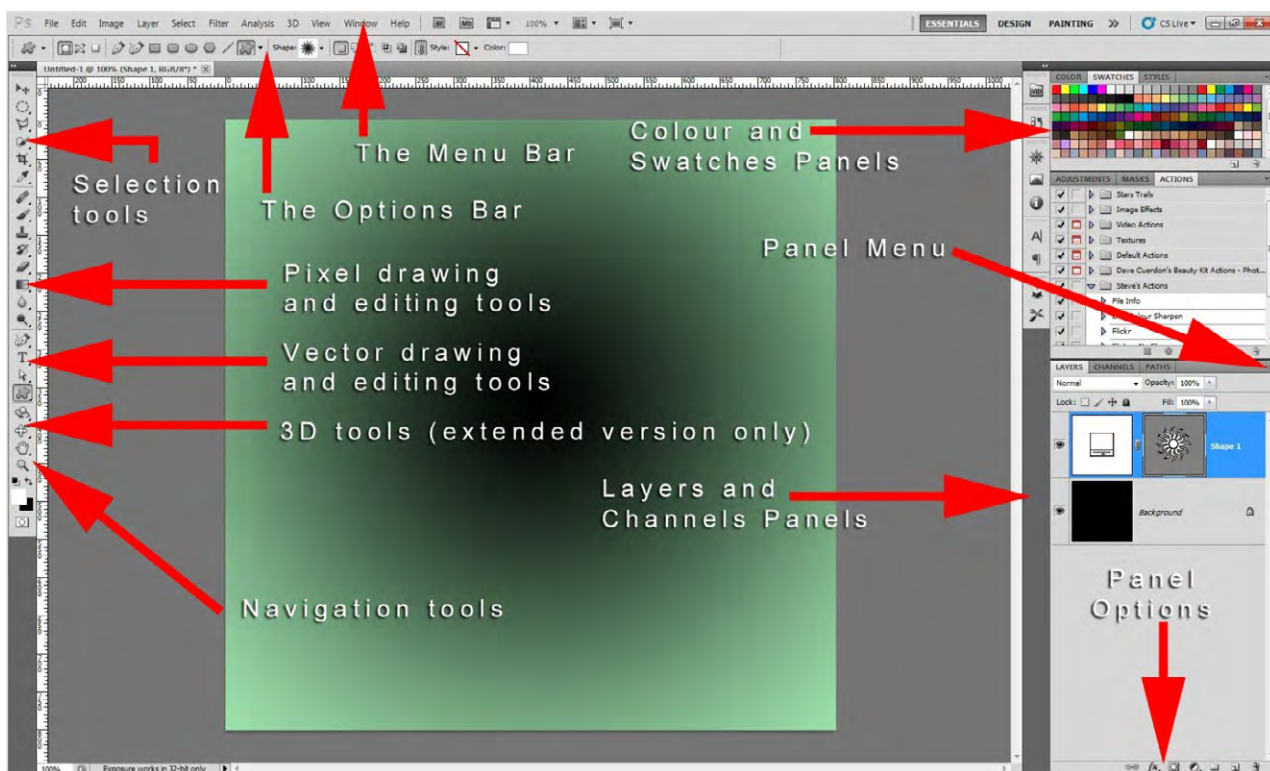


Fig 1.1 the default Photoshop workspace layout

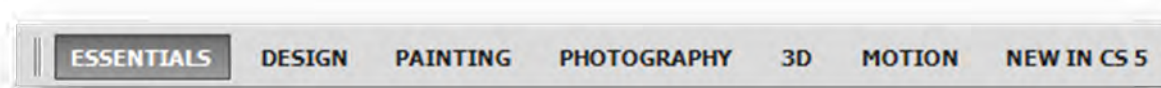


Fig 1.2 a close up of the workspaces available from the top right corner of the menu bar

If you cannot see all of the workspace options shown in fig 1.2, they can be accessed by clicking on the >> icon. Alternatively, they can be accessed from the Window menu > Workspace.

Each open panel has its own fly-out menu that contains commonly used functions. The menu can be accessed by clicking on the  icon at the top right of the respective panel

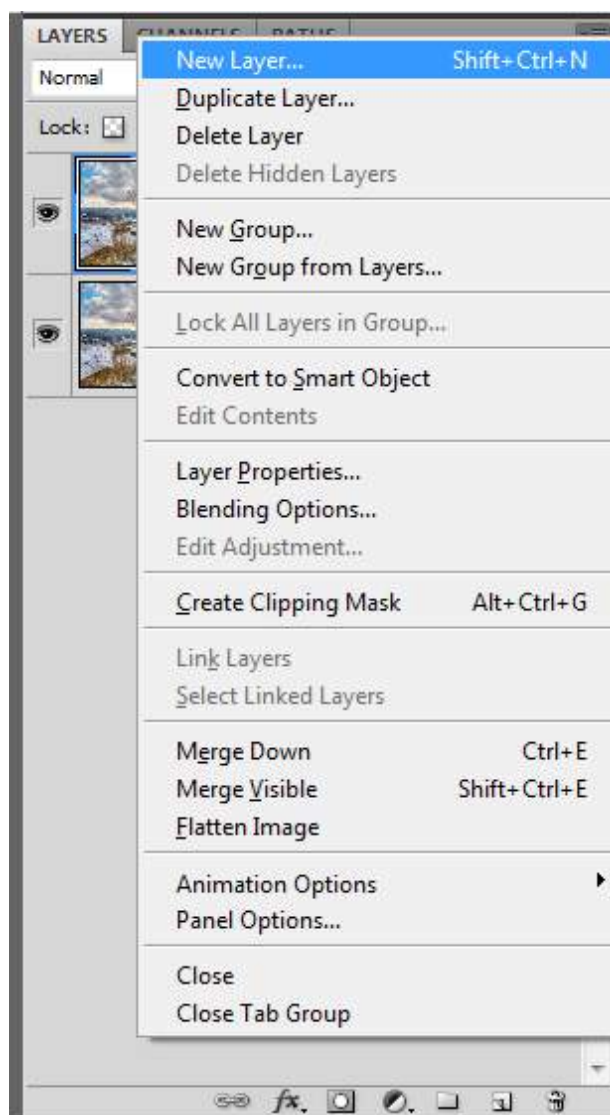


Fig 1.3 an example of a fly-out menu, in this case, accessed from the layers panel

Some panels are often represented by a strip of icons docked on the left hand side of the open panels. The full panel can be revealed by simple clicking on the icon. However, it is not always clear to beginners what these icons mean. The solution to this is to left-click with your mouse and drag on the left hand side of the icon strip. This will expand the icon strip to reveal the name of the function associated with that icon.



Fig 1.4 panel icons

The Tool Bar

The tool bar (or tool panel) is located by default on the left hand side of the work area. It contains mouse based tools that are used for editing and navigation in Photoshop. Most of the tool icons have a small black down-pointing arrowhead in the bottom right hand corner. This indicates that these are more tools that can be accessed by clicking and holding down the mouse button. Once the extended tools have appeared, you may release the mouse button and the tools will remain.

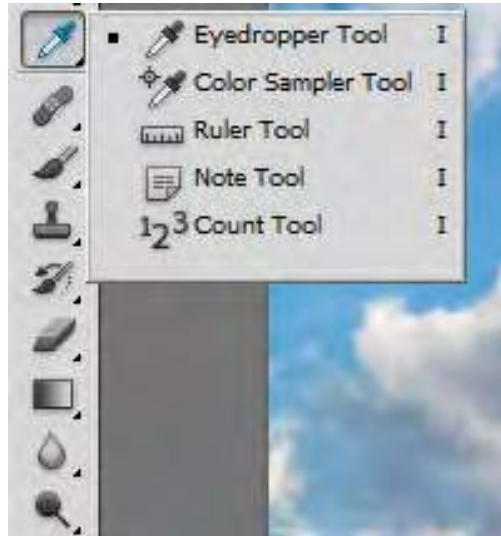


Fig 1.5 an example of multiple tools, available from a single tool icon.

The tools in the tool bar are loosely grouped according to their functionality. You may notice that there are small lines or spacers separating the groups of tools. The first group of tools are used for creating selections, the second group are the pixel editing tools, the third group are the vector editing tools and the final group are the navigation tools. At the bottom of the tool bar there is colour picker and very bottom is an icon that allows you to enter the quick mask mode for creating and editing selections.

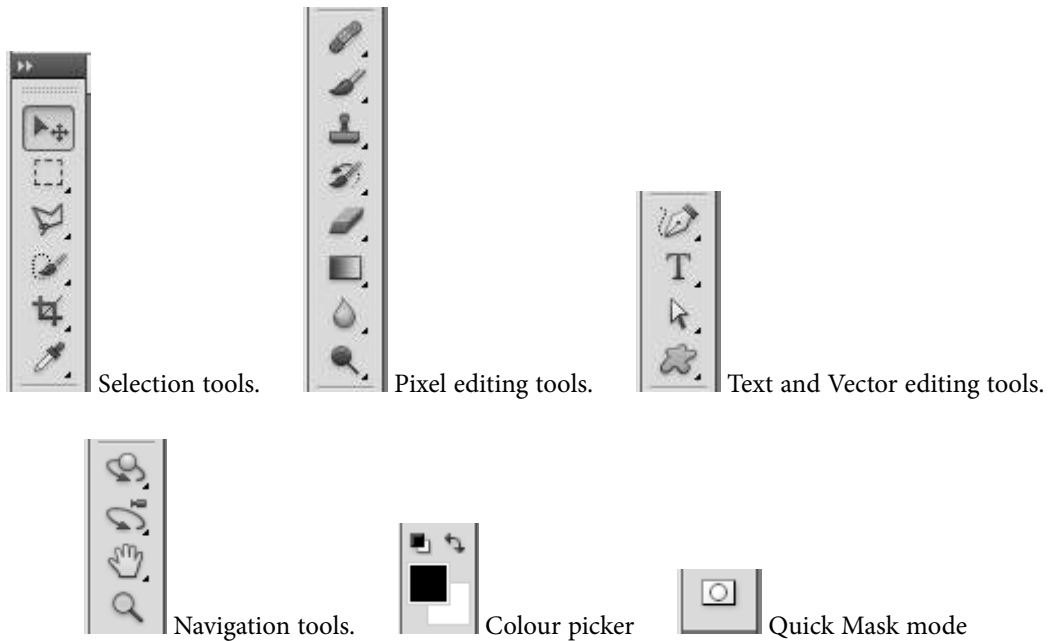


Fig 1.6 tool groupings

The Options Bar

The options bar is a context sensitive panel. Which is to say, that it changes depending on which tool is selected in the tool bar. It provides access the most important configuration settings for a particular tool. For example, in fig 1.7 the options bar has changed to provide the attributes associated with the Move tool. We have the show transform controls and a range of alignment options, which are faded in appearance, because in this case, no layer was highlighted in the layers panel.

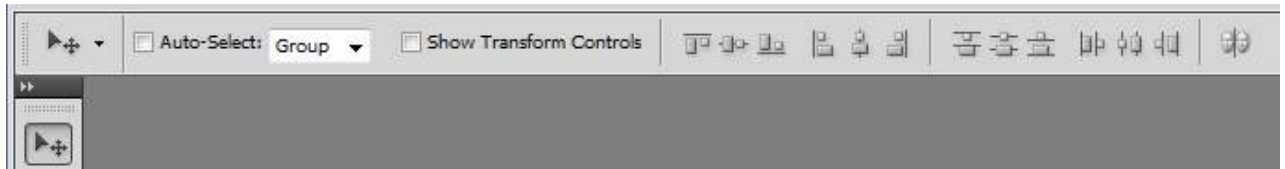




Fig 1.7 the options associated with the move tool.

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The Menu Bar



Fig 1.8 all of the menus and items located in the menu bar of the Photoshop standard edition

The menu bar contains many menu items and many sub menu items. The most important functions in the menu bar have been assigned keyboard shortcuts which are customisable from the Keyboard Shortcuts section of the Edit menu. Many of the functions in these menus are accessible from the Fly-out menus in the various panels. The option to work with keyboard shortcuts, the menu bar or the fly-out menu is one of personal choice and is down to your particular workflow, or may be determined by the type of input device you are using – mouse, graphics tablet or track pad etc.

We will cover many of the menu items in detail in subsequent chapters, and some of the more advanced menus in subsequent books.