

Layer Basics—Table Tutorial

Learning to use layers is a little bit like learning how to set a table. As a matter of fact, setting the table is exactly what you're going to do in this tutorial. To get started, head to the Missing CD page at www.missingmanuals.com and download the Table Tutorial folder, which contains 3 images:

- *table.png*
- *plate.png*
- *silver.png*

This tutorial is divided into two sections. Part One takes you through the basics of working with regular layers. Part Two shows you how to use Adjustment layers to change the color of your images.

NOTE: It'll be much easier to follow this tutorial if your images are in floating windows rather than tabs. Go to Window → Images → "Float All in Windows", and then choose Cascade or Tile for your view (Window → Images → Cascade or Tile).

Part One: Basic Layers

There are a million different reasons to use layers. You might want to apply fancy filters to a specific area or add text that, days or weeks later, you may want to edit. But almost everyone experiences their first giddy, layer-induced thrill when they learn how to use layers to combine objects from different photos into one image. That's what you'll learn how to do in this tutorial. Along the way, you'll find out how to put objects onto different layers and how to combine layers.

There are several ways to move layers from one photo to another to make a combined image. You can:

- **Use the Move tool.** Activate the Move tool and drag from one image window to another. Just be sure not to let go of the mouse until you get to where you're going.
- **Drag from the Project bin.** In Elements 8 (unlike Elements 6 and 7), you can drag a thumbnail from the Project bin into an image window, then use the Move tool to reposition it where you want it.
- **Copy and paste.** You can always just use the standard Windows shortcuts for copying (Ctrl+C) and pasting (Ctrl+V) to copy anything into a new photo. The trick is that you have to have an active selection or Elements won't copy anything.
- **Drag.** Without using any tools, you can drag layers from the Layers panel into the destination image.

So which method is better? It's up to you. In Elements 8, dragging from the Project bin is probably the easiest. The downside is that this technique doesn't work in every version of Elements, and it doesn't work in full-blown Photoshop at all. In this tutorial, you can use whichever method you like, but the instructions describe dragging from the Layers panel because that method always works, and it's also the technique that you may need a little help understanding at first. But you can substitute any of the other methods if you prefer.

1. **Start by opening *table.png* (see Figure 1).**

Before you get to work, position the Layers panel so you can see it and your image at the same time. (Chapter 1 explains how to organize your Elements workspace.) Take a look at the panel and notice that you have only one layer—the one named Background. It's time to start adding layers to your image.

2. **Find and open *plate.png*.**

Position *plate.png* so you can see it and the tablecloth image at the same time. Drag the image windows to resize them if you need to.

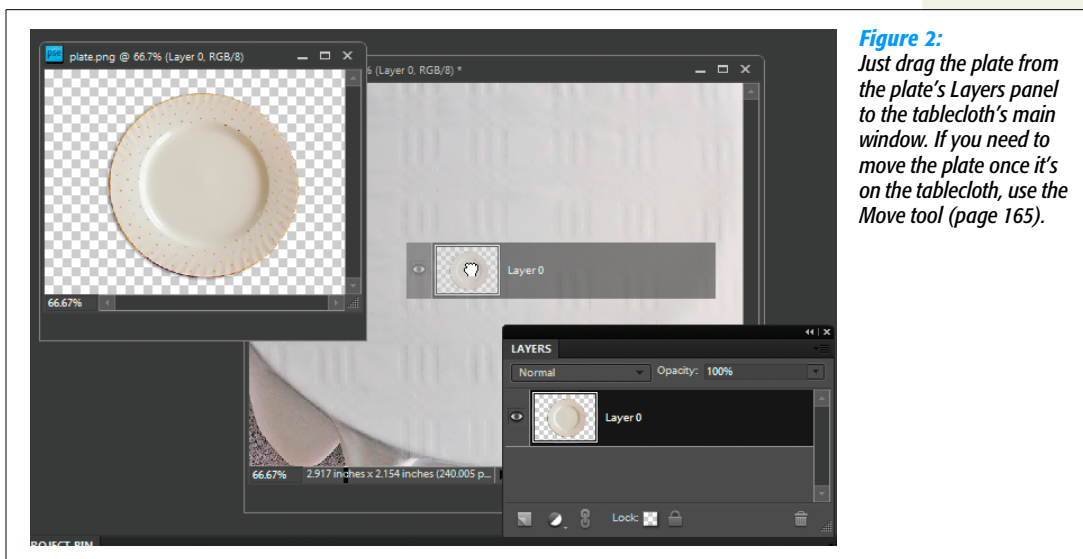
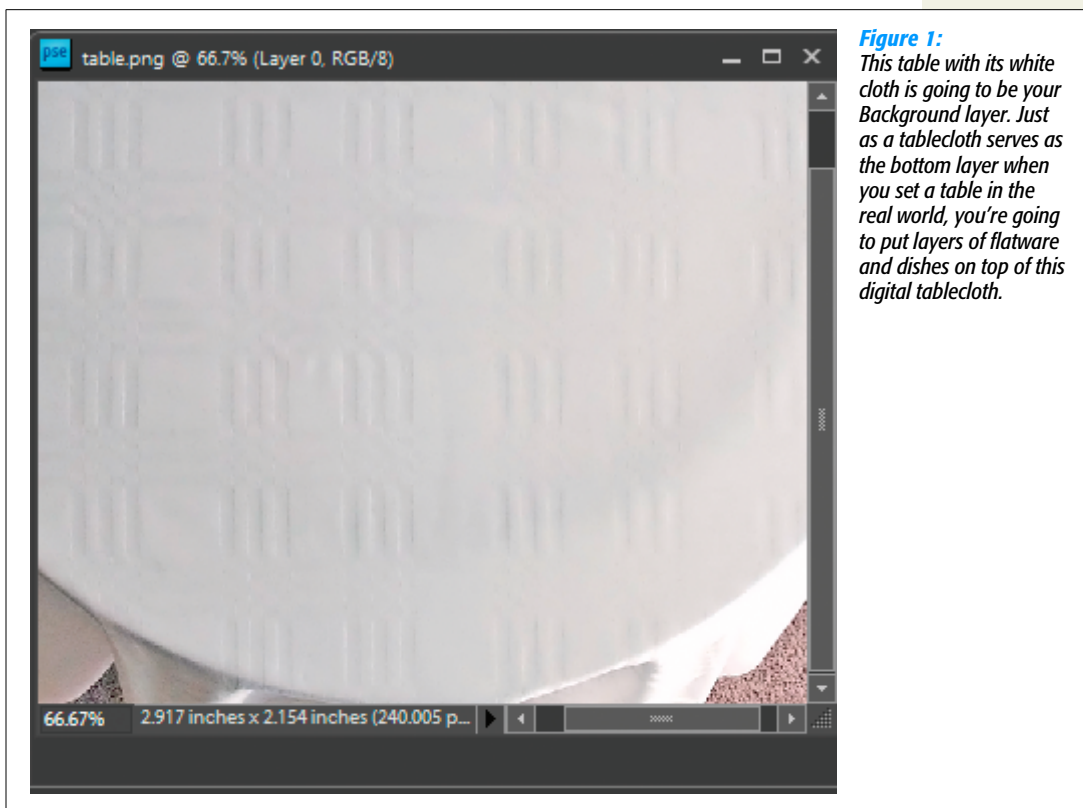
3. **Click on *plate.png* to make it the active window, if it isn't already.**

You can tell which window is active by looking at the Layers panel—it shows only the layers for the active window. If you see the tablecloth, you've got the wrong image active.

4. **Put the plate onto the tablecloth.**

In the Layers panel, grab the plate layer with your mouse and drag it onto the tablecloth image's window (not the tablecloth in the Layers panel), as shown in Figure 2.

See how you've created a new layer in the tablecloth image? (You can double-click the new layer's name in the Layers panel and give it a more descriptive name, like "plate," if you want. If renaming helps you keep things straight, do that for each layer you bring in.)



TIP: If you need to move the plate on the tablecloth, once you've let go of it, just click the Move tool, grab the plate, and put it where you want it.

5. **Now you need some silverware. Open *silver.png* and follow the same steps you performed for the plate.**

Oops. The silverware came in all bunched up on top of the plate, didn't it? The knife and spoon are too close to the fork, so you need to place the fork on a separate layer so you can adjust it independently.

6. **Split the fork onto its own layer.**

Be sure the silverware layer is the active layer before you start. Then select the fork and using the Marquee selection tool or the Lasso tool and then go to Layer → New → Layer via Cut. (You don't need to be especially precise when selecting the fork, since it's surrounded by transparency; just don't go into the knife area when you select the fork.) Look at the Layers panel. If you were successful, the fork is now on a new layer above the layer with the knife and spoon.

7. **Move the fork over to the left of the plate.**

Make sure the fork layer is active (click it in the Layers panel if it isn't) and use the Move tool to put it on the left side of the plate.

TIP: You can use the left arrow key if you want to be sure the fork stays perfectly in line with the knife and spoon. Just keep tapping the arrow key while the Move tool is active.

8. **Put the silverware back into one layer so it'll be easier to work with later.**

Make sure the fork layer is still active, and then go to Layer → Merge Down to combine it with the knife and spoon on the layer directly below it. When you finish this step, the fork, knife, and spoon are all on one layer again. Now anything you do will affect them all at the same time.

When you're done, you should see something like Figure 3. If you keep going with the next part of the tutorial, you'll get some practice using Adjustment layers and make your table photo a lot zippier in the process.

If you feel tutorialled out right now and want to start Part Two later on, save your image as a .psd file, which allows you to keep the layers intact.

Part Two: Adjustment Layers

A white plate on a white tablecloth with a white napkin is about as exciting as a Sunday afternoon nap. So now it's time to give your image some color to make it more interesting. You'll do this using Adjustment and Fill layers.

1. **If your image isn't open, start out by opening it.**

In the Layers panel, click the Background layer (the tablecloth) to make it active.

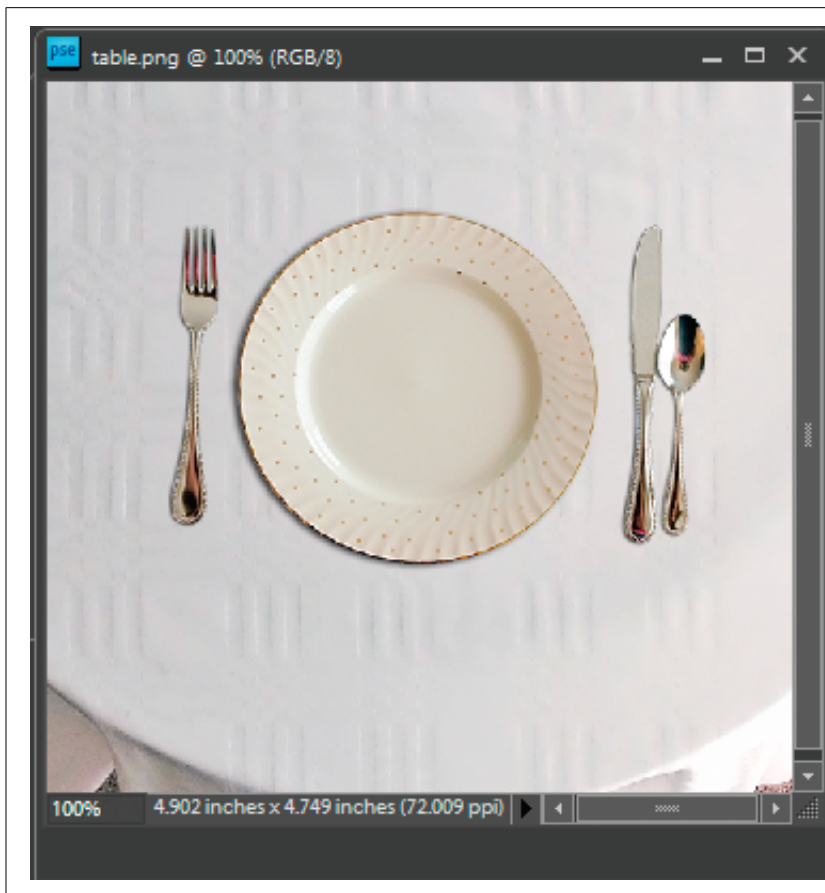


Figure 3: You should end up with something like this. (Your mom would be proud.) It's a pretty boring image, though, so in the next part of the tutorial, you'll learn how to jazz it up a little by giving it some color.

2. Hide the other layers.

You want to turn off the other layers so they don't get in your way. To do that, go to the Layers panel and click the little eye icon next to each of the other layers. Now the tablecloth layer should be the only visible layer.

3. Select the tablecloth.

Try the Magic Wand—you may have to up the tolerance a little or click more than once to select the whole tablecloth.

4. Give that bland tablecloth some color.

To start, click the New Adjustment/Fill Layer icon in the Layers panel and choose Solid.

5. Adjust the color of the new layer.

Move the Hue slider around until you get a reddish or pink tone, and use the Saturation slider to darken it to a vivid red. The new Fill layer appears right over the Background. Only the tablecloth changes, because your Adjustment layer covers just the area you selected.

6. The new layer is too opaque to look realistic, so reduce the opacity.

Use the Opacity slider to reduce the Fill layer's opacity until you can see the woven pattern through the color.

TIP: If you think the edges are too harsh-looking, try redoing the Fill layer and use a slight feather on the tablecloth selection—one or two pixels should do it.

7. When you like the result, go back to the Layers panel and turn the other layers back on.

Your new Fill layer is still right above the Background layer, below the other layers in the Layers panel. Now it's time to give the plate some color.

8. Use the Magic Wand to select the white part of the plate.

It may take a couple of clicks to get everything you want.

9. Create a Hue/Saturation Adjustment layer to color the plate.

Go back to the New Adjustment/Fill Layer icon again, just as you did in Step 4, but this time choose Hue/Saturation as your layer type.

10. Color the plate.

Turn on the Colorize checkbox in the Adjustments panel and then play with the sliders until you have a blue plate. (If the Adjustments panel doesn't show the Hue/Saturation controls, click the Hue/Saturation Adjustment layer in the Layers panel to bring them up.) When you're done, you should wind up with something like Figure 4.

That's it—you're done. You can keep adding objects to the picture if you want or edit or delete your new layers to change the color scheme whenever you like. Actually, you could have used Fill layers for both the plate and the tablecloth, or Adjustment layers for both. That's one of the great things about Elements: It gives you lots of different ways to accomplish the same task.



Figure 4:
When you've finished the Adjustment layer section of the tutorial, your boring table setting should be considerably more colorful, as shown here.