

Basic Layers—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, click over to the “Missing CD” page (at www.missingmanuals.com) and download the Table Tutorial folder.

You’ll find three images inside the folder:

- *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 You need to get your screen view out of Maximize mode before you can work easily with multiple images. Go to Window → Images → Cascade so that you can easily overlap image windows while you work through this tutorial.

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 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.

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

Before you get to work, position the Layers palette so you can see it and your image at the same time. (See Chapter 6 for more on how to organize your Elements workspace.) Take a look at the palette and notice that you have only one layer now—the one named Background.



2. Now it's time to start adding layers to your image. Find and open *plate.png*.
3. Position *plate.png* so that you can see it and the tablecloth image at the same time.

Drag the image windows to resize them if you need to.

4. 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 palette—it shows only the layers for the active window. If you see the tablecloth, you've got the wrong image as the active one.

5. Put the plate onto the tablecloth.

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

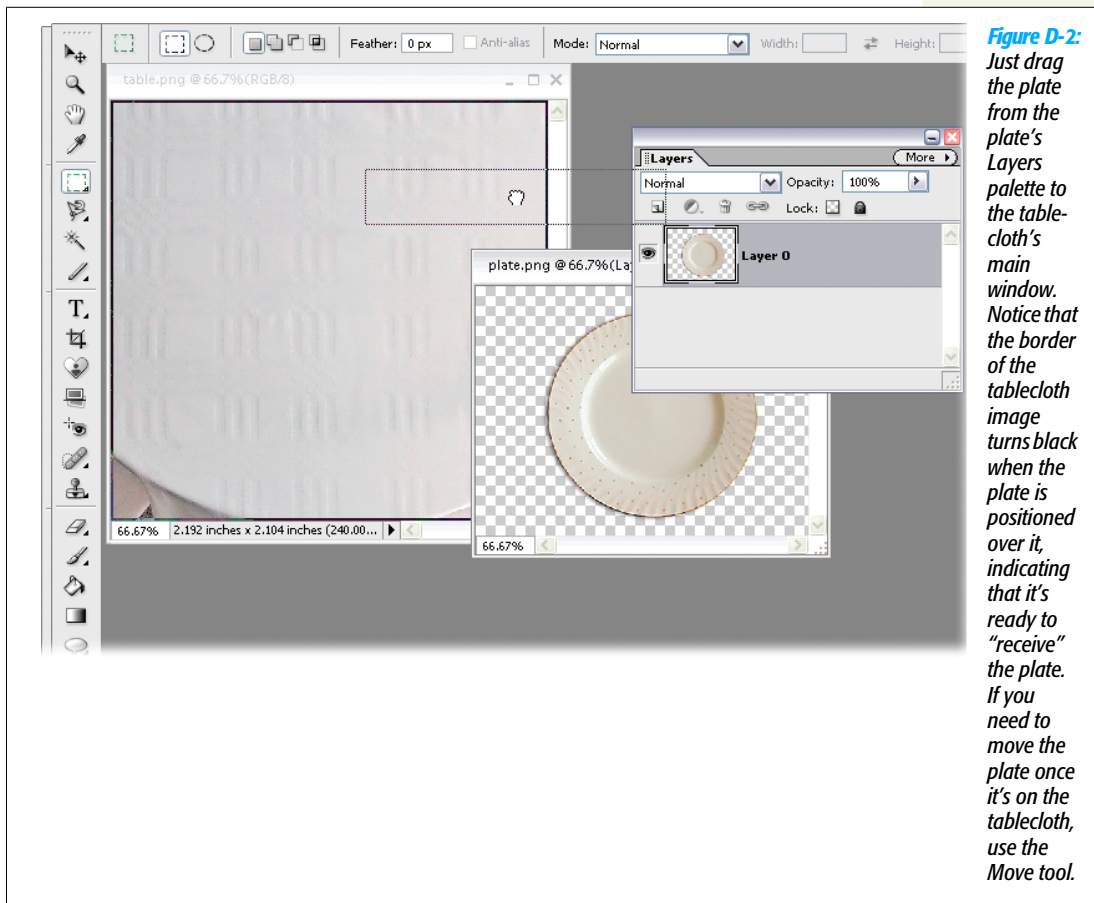


Figure D-2: Just drag the plate from the plate's Layers palette to the tablecloth's main window. Notice that the border of the tablecloth image turns black when the plate is positioned over it, indicating that it's ready to "receive" the plate. If you need to move the plate once it's on the tablecloth, use the Move tool.

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

6. Now you need some silverware. Open the *silver.png* image 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.

7. Split the fork onto its own layer.

Be sure the silverware layer is the active layer before you start.

Select the fork and go to Layer → New → Layer via Cut. Select the fork by using the Marquee selection tool or the Lasso tool. 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 palette. If you were successful, the fork is now on a new layer above the layer with the knife and spoon.

8. Move the fork over to the left of the plate.

Make sure the fork layer is active (click it in the Layers palette if it isn't) and use the Move tool to move it over to 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.

9. Put the silverware back into one layer so it will 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 D-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 will allow 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 by using Adjustment and Fill layers.

1. If your image isn't open, start out by opening it.
2. In the Layers palette, click the Background layer (the tablecloth) to make it active.
3. 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 palette and click the little eye icon next to each of the other layers. Now the tablecloth layer should be the only visible layer.

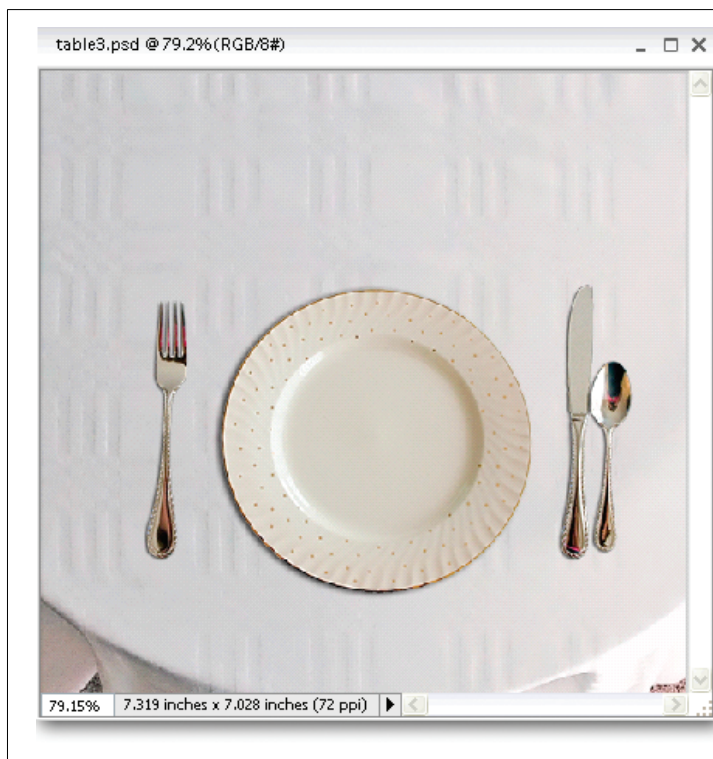


Figure D-3:

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

4. Select the tablecloth.

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

5. Give that bland tablecloth some color.

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

6. 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.

7. It's 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.

- When you like the result, go back to the Layers palette 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 palette. Now it's time to work on putting some color into the plate.

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

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

- 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 5, but this time choose Hue/Saturation as your layer type.

- Color the plate.

Turn on the Colorize checkbox in the Hue/Saturation dialog box and then play with the sliders until you have a blue plate. You should wind up with something like Figure D-4 when you're done.

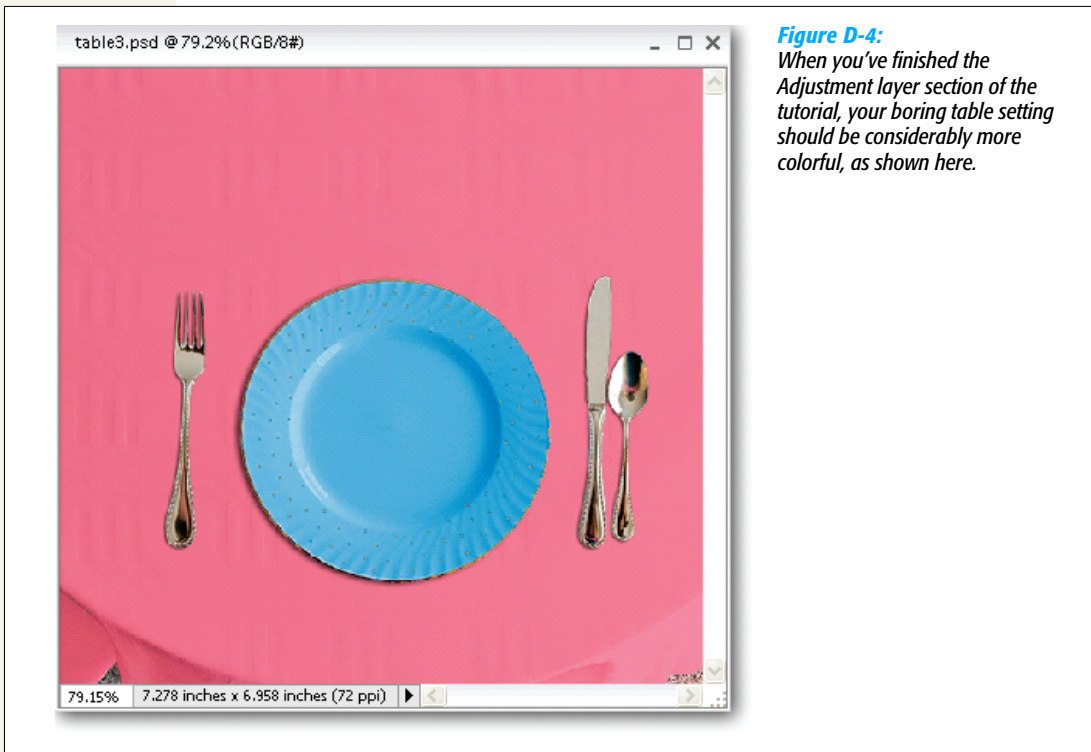


Figure D-4:
When you've finished the Adjustment layer section of the tutorial, your boring table setting should be considerably more colorful, as shown here.

That's it—you're done. You could 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, if you want. That's one of the great things about Elements: it gives you lots of different ways to accomplish the same task.