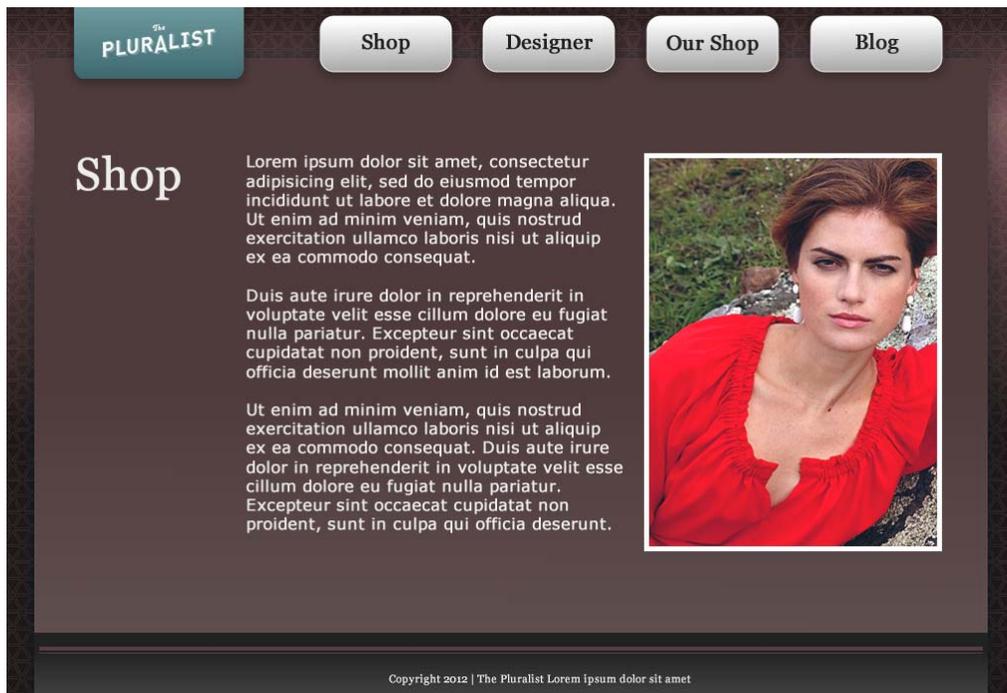


# How to create design and layer comps

A *comprehensive artwork* (*comp* for short) is a design proposal presented by the designer to the client for approval. Web design comps provide a rough visual draft of the overall user interface (including graphics, interface design elements, navigation system, and main content areas) before specific content is placed (**Figure 1**).

Photoshop provides an ideal prototyping environment, seamlessly converting design comps into real-world widgets, websites, and applications. Photoshop's Layer Comps panel lets you develop multiple versions of a design layout to show clients.



**Figure 1** Design comp

## The web design process

The typical web design process may be comprised of several stages, including any of the following:

1. *Brief* provides a statement of technical, design, and idea goals for the web project.
2. *Research* involves a range of investigative activities including a review of related web designs, analysis of competitor sites, user flows, personas, market analysis, use cases, and more.
3. *Brainstorming* is a conceptualizing stage based on the brief and research stages in which many ideas are generated in a short amount of time.
4. *Creative solution* follows the brainstorming phase in which briefs, research, and ideas are combined to create a clear design direction. This stage can include technical specifications, information architecture diagrams, functioning wireframes, and design comps. This stage is often *iterative*, a repeating process in which problems are solved, designs are presented to clients for feedback, website functionality is developed and tested, and revisions are made.
5. *Production* fully realizes the web project. Design comps are finalized and integrated into the wireframe prototype, and the web project is scaled up to full production.

As you can see, the design comp is an important piece of the web design process from the creative solution right to the production stage.

Consider the following questions as you plan and build your design comp for a web project.

### Organizing content

How you organize content on a page highlights important features and elements of your web project. Important elements might be higher in the page, larger in size, or in stronger colors. Include rough descriptions of navigation, copy layout, graphic allocation, key headers, and other elements that appear on a screen. Identifying common structures between pages helps visitors understand they are in the same site as they navigate from page to page.

- Will your page banner be on each page? If yes, is it in the same place? Is it the same size?
- What font will you use for titles or headings on your content pages?
- What color will you use for titles or headings on your content pages?
- What font will you use for descriptions on your content pages?
- What color will you use for descriptions?

### Navigation

For visitors of your website or application to understand the content, you must provide clear navigation. Visitors need to know where they are in a site, where they need to go, and how to get back to where they came from. Having a consistent layout grid helps orient visitors and keeps them from feeling lost. Using consistent buttons, links, and graphics on each page maintains a sense of place. As visitors move from page to page, provide familiar visual cues and navigational aids.

Here are some questions to answer:

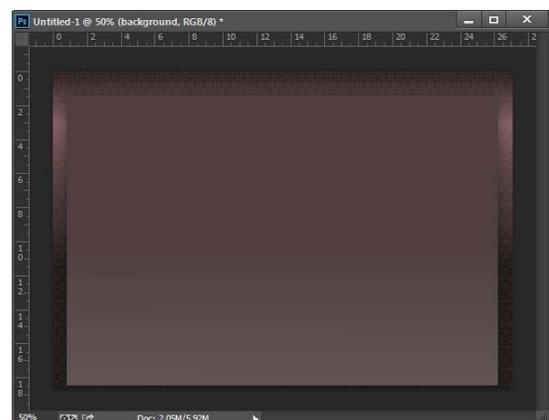
- Where will you place the navigation bar on the page?
- What content will be on the navigation bar?
- Will the navigation bar be on every page?
- How will your navigation bar help visitors know which page they are on?

## Creating a design comp with Adobe Photoshop

The following steps describe a typical process to follow when using Photoshop to create a design comp. The design comp process described here uses previously-prepared files including a background image, logo, text, and a photographic image.

*To create the canvas and import files:*

1. Start Photoshop and create a new document using the dimensions for your web project.  
  
For example, you might choose 1024x 700 pixels, which is the same size as the background image.
2. Choose File > Place.  
  
The Place dialog box opens.
3. Navigate to a background image you want to use, and click Place.
4. To accept the placement of the image, press Enter or Return to apply.  
  
The background image is placed on the canvas (Figure 2).



**Figure 2** Background image

5. Choose File > Place.  
The Place dialog box opens.
6. Navigate to a logo file and click Place.  
The logo image is placed on the canvas.
7. To move the logo, drag the selection to a new position.  
If you want to scale the logo, drag a handle on the bounding box. Press Shift as you drag a corner handle to scale proportionately. When positioned over a handle, the pointer becomes a double arrow (**Figure 3**).
8. To accept the placement of the image, press Enter or Return to apply.
9. Choose File > Place.  
The Place dialog box opens.
10. Navigate to a photograph file and click Place.  
The image is placed on the canvas (**Figure 4**).
11. To move the logo, drag the selection to a new position.  
To scale the logo, drag a handle on the bounding box.
12. To accept the placement of the image, press Enter or Return to apply.
13. Select File > Save, name your file and save it as a PSD in the Save As dialog box.



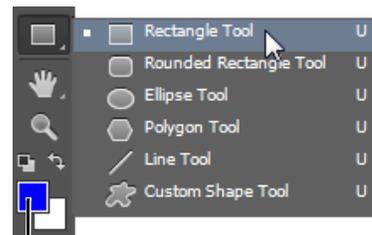
**Figure 3** Scale an image



**Figure 4** Placed photograph

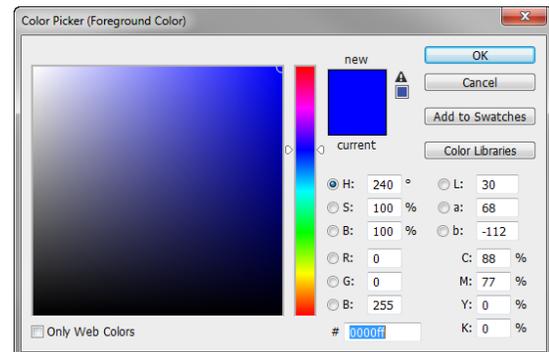
*To use drawing tools, fills, and the alignment panel:*

1. From the Tools panel, select the Rectangle Tool (**Figure 5**).
2. Double-click the upper color selection box in the tool panel.  
The Color Picker dialog box opens (**Figure 6**).
3. Choose a color in the Color Picker, or enter a value in the HEX number field.  
Alternatively, you can use the Eyedropper tool to sample from the active image.
4. Drag to draw a rectangle shape at the bottom of the canvas.  
This rectangle will become the web page footer. Next, you will draw the buttons for the design comp.
5. From the Tools panel, select the Rounded Rectangle tool.
6. Use the color picker to set a color for the shape.



Upper color selection box

**Figure 5** Tools panel



**Figure 6** Color Picker dialog box

7. Drag on the canvas to draw a rounded rectangle suitable for use as a button roughly in the position you want it to be placed.

A width and height dimension box helps you set the correct button size (**Figure 7**).

8. With the rounded rectangle still selected, choose Layer > Duplicate.

The Duplicate Layer dialog box opens (**Figure 8**).

9. Click OK.

You will rename the objects in the Layers panel later.

10. Repeat the Duplicate Layer action so that there is a total of four buttons. Duplicates of the selected object appear stacked one on top of another. The most recently duplicated object becomes the selected object.

11. Make sure Smart Guides are visible and active. If not, select View > Show > Smart Guides, and then select Show Smart Guides and Snap To Smart Guides.

12. Select the Move tool from the tools panel and drag a rounded rectangle over to the right until the Smart Guides appear (**Figure 9**).

Smart Guides help you align shapes, slices, and selections. They appear automatically when you draw or drag a shape.

13. Arrange the remaining shapes in a row between the first and the last rounded rectangle.

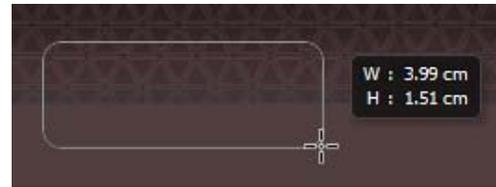
Don't worry about the spacing, you'll take care of that in the next few steps.

14. Click in the Layers panel to select a layer containing another button shape (**Figure 10**).

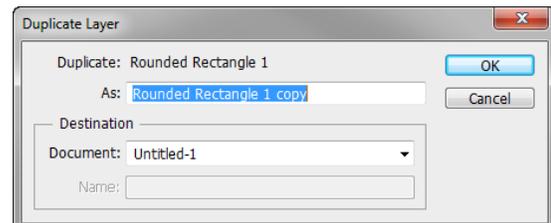
If the Layers panel is not open, choose Window > Layers.

15. Use the Move tool and selecting layers to place the remaining shapes in a row between the first and the last rounded rectangle.

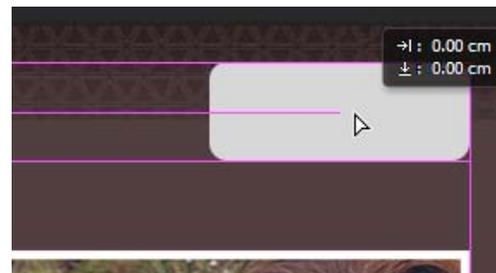
Don't worry about the spacing, you'll take care of that in the next few steps.



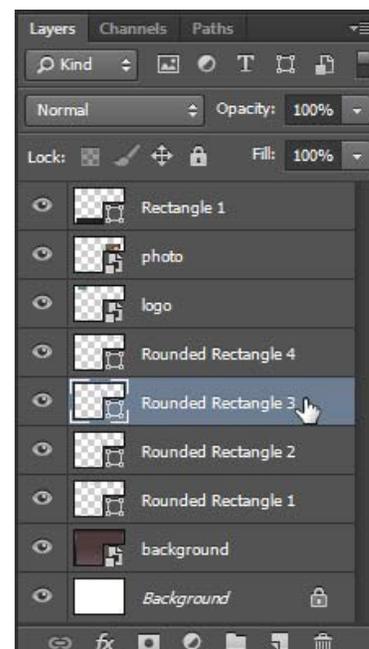
**Figure 7** Drawing a rounded rectangle



**Figure 8** Duplicate Layer dialog box



**Figure 9** Aligning objects using Smart Guides



**Figure 10** Layers panel

16. Shift-click the four rounded rectangle shapes in the Layers panel.
17. In the Move tool Control Panel, click the Align Vertical Centers button and the Distribute Horizontal Centers buttons.  
  
The rounded rectangle shapes are vertically aligned and spaced evenly on the canvas.
18. In the Layers panel, double-click on each of the newly-created shapes and give them a more descriptive name (Figure 12).
19. Select File > Save.



Figure 11 Drawing a rounded rectangle

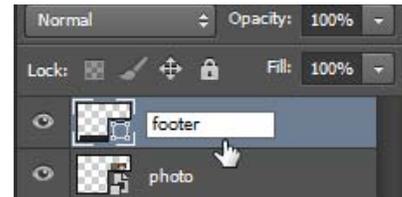


Figure 12 Renaming in the Layers panel

*To use text tools:*

1. Select the Text tool from the Tools panel.
2. Click on the canvas just below the logo to create an auto-sizing text block.

An *auto-sizing text block* expands horizontally as you type and shrinks when you remove text. Auto-sizing text blocks are created by default when you click on the canvas with the Text tool and start typing.

3. Set the text characteristics in the Control panel (Figure 13) such as Font Family, Style, Size, and Color. For example, you might use a serif font for a page title.
4. Type a page title for your design comp.
5. Use the Move tool from the tools panel and drag the text to the right until the Smart Guides appear and help you to align the title.
6. Select the Text tool from the Tools panel and drag on the canvas below the title and beside the photograph to create a fixed-width text block (Figure 14).

A *fixed-width text block* allows you to control the width of wrapped text. Fixed-width text blocks are created by default when you drag to draw a text block using the Text tool.

7. Change Font Family to sans serif style, make the text size smaller and confirm the text is left aligned.
8. Add placeholder text to simulate two or three paragraphs of text.
9. To move the text block, select it in the Layers panel and drag it with the Move tool. To resize it, drag a resize handle.

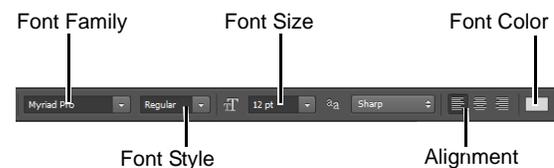


Figure 13 Properties panel, text mode



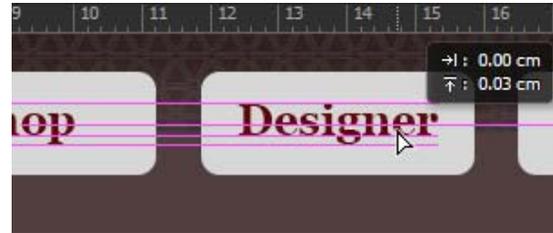
Figure 14 Drag with Text tool to create a fixed-width text block

**10.** Select the Text tool.

You will create the labels for the buttons.

**11.** Click on the first rounded rectangle to create an auto-sizing text block.

**Note:** Confirm in the Layers panel that your button text is placed above the button shapes. If not, select the text layer and drag it above the shape.

**12.** Change the font back to a serif-style font and increase the size slightly, style to bold and select a different text color.**13.** Type a button title.**14.** Select both the text and button shape in the Layers panel and use the Control panel to set the alignment to centered horizontally and vertically, or use Smart Guides to help align the text to the shapes.**15.** With the text block and the rounded rectangle still selected in the Layers panel, choose Layer > Group Layers.**16.** Repeat steps 13 to 15 to create three more navigation buttons for the remaining buttons (**Figure 15**).**17.** Create a text block at the bottom of the page, over the dark-gray footer rectangle and add some footer text.**18.** Select File > Save.

**Figure 15** Use Smart Guides to align text and objects

## How to create layer comps with Adobe Photoshop

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 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 16).
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.

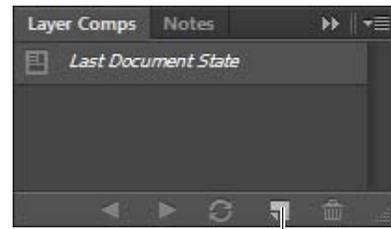
The New Layer Comp dialog box appears (Figure 17).

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 18).



Create New Layer Comp

Figure 16 Layer Comps panel

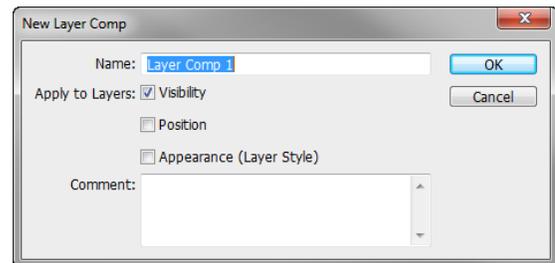


Figure 17 New Layer Comp dialog box

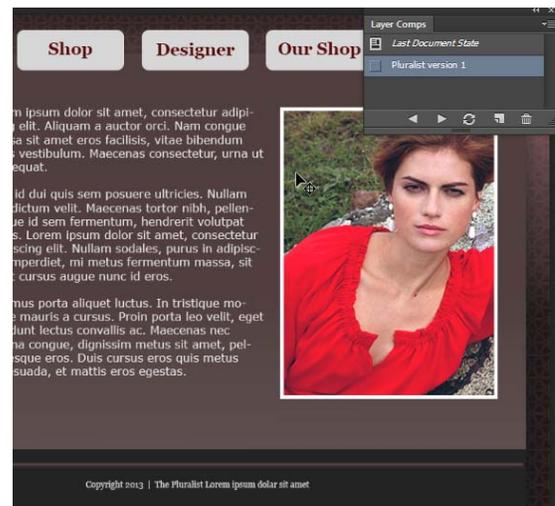


Figure 18 Original layout layer comp

- 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 19).

**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.

- Repeat steps 3–6 to save your changes as another layer comp and provide a descriptive name for the new comp.
- In the Layer Comps panel, click the left column next to the layer comp you first created (Figure 21).

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. You can now easily toggle between Layer Comps to compare changes.

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

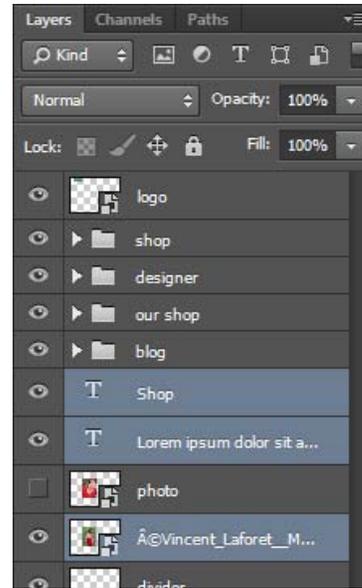


Figure 19 Layers panel with layers selected



Figure 20 Blue background version layer comp



Apply Layer Comp icon

Figure 21 Selecting a layer comp

## Updating layer comps

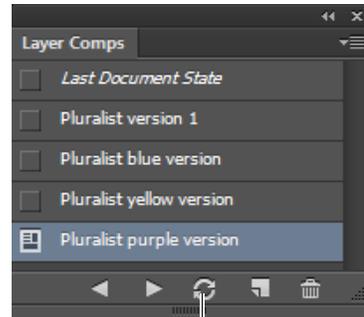
After you've created them, you can also update layer comps.

*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 22). 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.



Update Layer Comp button

**Figure 22** Layer Comps panel

## 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.

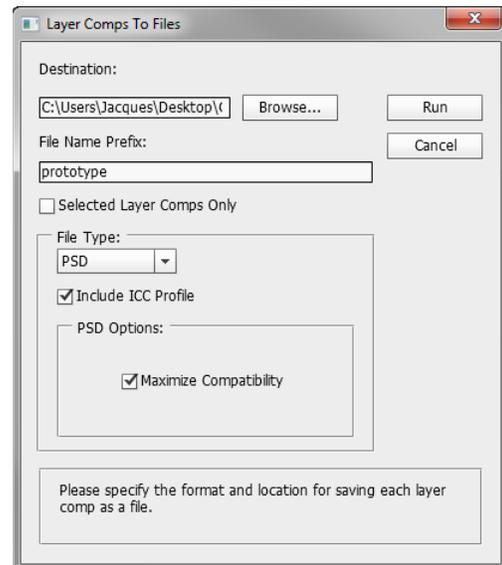
The Layer Comps To Files dialog box appears (Figure 23).

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.



**Figure 23** Layer Comps To Files dialog box

8. In your system, open the folder containing the PDFs.
9. Double-click a PDF file to open it (**Figure 24**).



Figure 24 PDFs output to selected folder