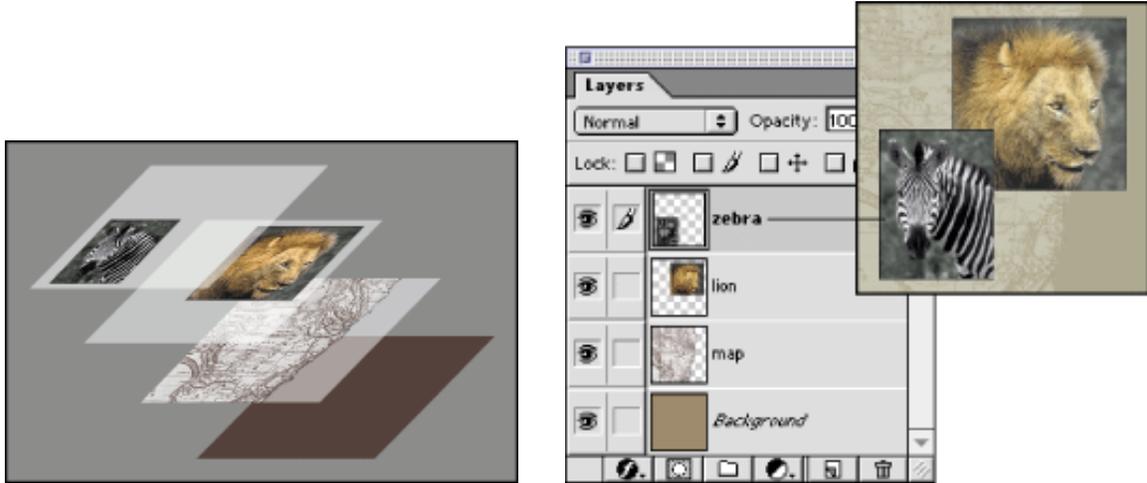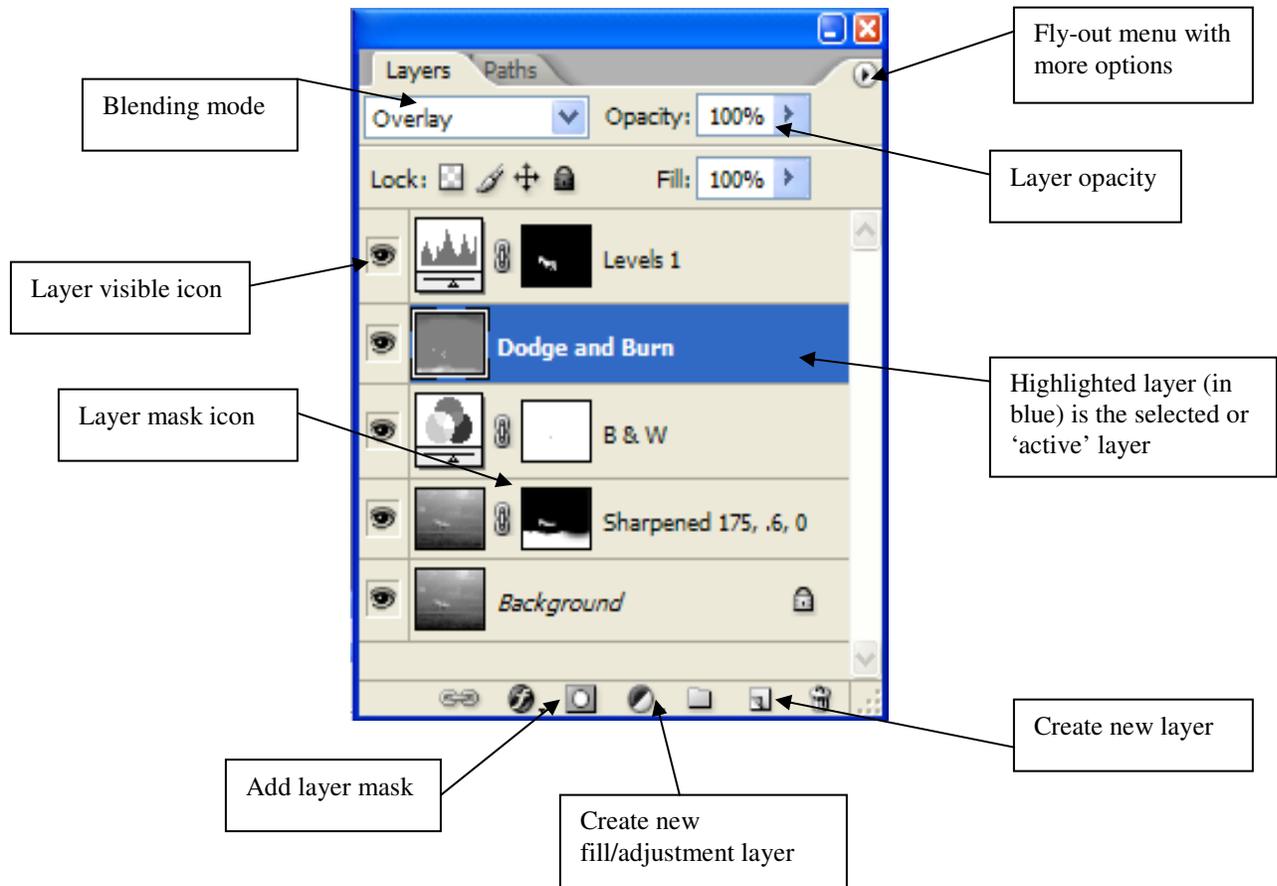# Introduction to Layers in Photoshop

Layers:

- Are an essential element of Photoshop and something every digital darkroom should be using.
- Allow you to optimize one part of your photograph without affecting other parts.
- Provides an Undo of everything from minor to major, complex changes, **even after closing the file**.
- Layers are like a stack of transparent sheets on which you can make changes that hide, reveal or otherwise affect the sheets lower in the stack.

Layers palette

Introduction to Layers in Photoshop

Rules for a frustration-free digital darkroom:
- Never change the background layer. This way, you can always get back to where you started.
- It is a good practice to duplicate the background layer (CTRL + J) as the first step when opening a file. This layer can be used for sharpening, etc.
- Try to use a separate layer for each change. This allows you to adjust the effect of each change separately or hide or delete each change individually.

Adjustment layers
Adjustment layers can affect the entire image or, if you want, just part of the image.

To create an adjustment layer that affects the entire image:
1. Select the adjustment or filter you want to perform from the menu: Layer/New Adjustment Layer, then Levels or Curves or Unsharp Mask, etc.
2. A quicker method is to click and hold on the New Adjustment Layer icon at the bottom of the layers palette. (With CS4, there are also icons on the Adjustments palette)

Multiple ways to create an adjustment layer that affects just part of an image:

a) Layer masks (preferred)
1. Create an adjustment layer appropriate for the change you need to make. Suppose you add a Levels adjustment layer.
2. With the new layer selected in the Layers palette, select the Add Layer mask button at the bottom of the Layers palette.
3. Use the Brush tool to "paint" or mask off the portion of the new layer that you don't want. Use black to hide portions of the layer you're on and reveal the layer(s) below. Use white to do the opposite. With this method you can always go back and change your mask by painting with white or black. If you change the mask, be sure you click on the layer mask icon on the associated layer. (Don't use the erasure to remove the portions of the layer you don't want. If you do, once you close the file, you'll never get those portions back. Using the Brush and painting with black or white, let's you change it forever.)

b) Making a selection to define the layer
1. Make a selection of the part of the scene you want to adjust. (Make sure the layer that is highlighted in the Layers palette has a photographic image on it; in other words, not another adjustment layer.)
2. Select the "Create new adjustment layer" icon in the Layers palette. A menu will be displayed. Select the type of layer you want to add (levels, curves, etc.). After clicking on the adjustment layer type you want, you should see a dialogue box for the appropriate adjustment parameters. A new layer will be shown in the Layers palette above the layer you had highlighted in step 1.