

Photoshop Mastery

Taking Photoshop to the next level

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

Finding the Key to Photoshop's Lock Icons

Photoshop has featured Lock icons at the top of the Layers palette for some time, but not everyone puts them to good use or even knows what to do with them. Let's explore these often-overlooked features and see how they can quickly make you a more efficient Photoshop user.

At the top of the Layers palette, you'll find the four Lock icons; from left to right, Lock Transparent Pixels, Lock Image Pixels, Lock Position, and Lock All, respectively. Let's look at each one individually.



Lock Transparent Pixels

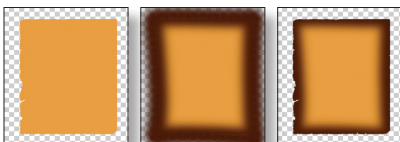
The Lock Transparent Pixels icon (also known as Preserve Transparency) prevents the transparency of an area from changing. When viewing only the active layer, if you see any hint of a checkerboard pattern (indicating that an area is transparent), the checkerboard's visibility will remain unchanged when the Lock icon is turned on. This feature doesn't limit what edits can be made to the layer; it simply can't make an area more or less transparent. Let's look at some ways to use this feature:

- If you apply a Gaussian Blur filter with the Lock Transparent Pixels icon turned on, it will blur the contents of the layer without causing the edge of the image to fade into the underlying image.



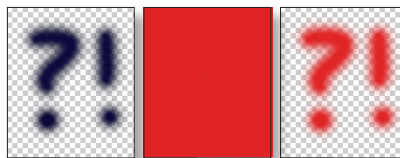
Original (left), blurred (middle), and blurred with Lock Transparent Pixels turned on (right)

- When painting, you'll only be able to affect nontransparent areas, which will prevent you from getting "overspray" onto the underlying image.



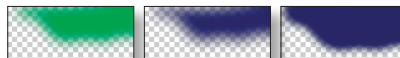
Original (left), paint added (middle), and painted with Lock Transparent Pixels turned on (right)

- You'll also find a Preserve Transparency checkbox in the Fill and Stroke dialogs, (found under the Edit menu). This can be useful when you've painted on an empty layer and later want to change the color of the paint that you applied. The normal Fill command would fill the entire document, but with Preserve Transparency turned on, it will only fill the areas that already contain information, which will effectively change the color of the paint on that layer. You can also use the Preserve Transparency feature when using keyboard shortcuts to fill an area. Just add Shift to the standard Option-Delete (PC: Alt-Backspace) and Command-Delete (PC: Control-Backspace) keyboard shortcuts.



Original (left), filled with red (middle), and filled with red using Preserve Transparency (right)

A common misconception is that locking the transparency on a layer is the same as selecting the layer's content before filling an area, but there's a subtle but significant difference between the two ideas. When a soft-edged area is selected, filling the area multiple times will cause it to build up density and become less and less transparent at the edges. On the other hand, locking the transparency will maintain the density of the soft edges no matter how many times you fill the area.



Original (left), 10x with selection (middle), and filled 10x with Preserve Transparency (right)

Lock Image Pixels

When you click on the Lock Image Pixels icon, you cannot change the general appear-

ance—you won't be able to paint, adjust, or apply filters to the layer. I like to use this feature when working with layer masks.

Masked layers contain two areas where you can apply paint (the layer and the mask). Switching which layer is active will always cause Photoshop to make the image on your layer active instead of the mask (unless you click directly on the mask in the Layers palette)...unless you lock the pixels on that layer. Photoshop will then make the mask active when switching layers, which will prevent you from making unwanted changes to the image.

Lock Position

Clicking on Lock Position prevents you from moving, scaling, or rotating a layer. I find this feature especially useful when using the Auto Select Layer feature (up in the Options Bar when the Move tool is active).

When Auto Select Layer is turned on, clicking-and-dragging across an area will cause all the layers that contain information in that area to become selected in the Layers palette (assuming you start by clicking in an empty area or an area that only touches the Background layer). Locking the position of layers prevents those layers from becoming selected when using the Auto Select Layer feature—a lifesaver when your document contains many small elements that shouldn't be moved.

Lock All

With this icon selected, you cannot change any setting related to a layer including the blend mode, adding layer styles, or changing the opacity of the layer. ■

Ben Willmore is author of Photoshop CS2 Studio Techniques and Photoshop CS2: Up to Speed, and co-author of How to Wow: Photoshop for Photography. Find out more about Ben by visiting his blog at www.WherIsBen.com.