

HOW TO ADD TRANSPARENT TEXT WITH LAYER EFFECTS

In this tutorial, I show you an easy way to add transparent text to an image using layer effects in Photoshop. In a previous tutorial, I showed you how to create transparent text using Photoshop's Blending Options. But layer effects can give you more interesting and creative results because there are so many effects to choose from!

The trick to creating transparent text with layer effects is knowing how to make the text itself transparent while keeping your layer effects visible. So once we've added our text to the image, I'll show you how to hide the text without hiding your strokes, drop shadows, glows or any other effects you've applied! Let's see how it works.

I'm using [Photoshop CC 2020](#) but you can follow along with any recent version.

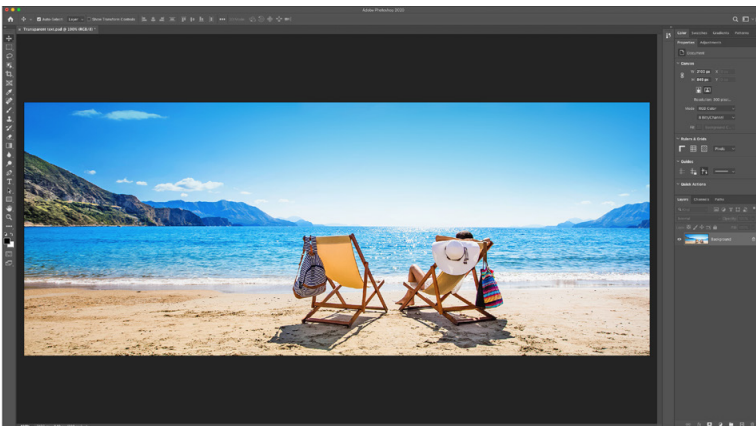


Here's an example of what the transparent text effect will look like. Your result will depend on which layer effects you use:

Let's get started!

The final transparent text effect.

Step 1: Open your image



Start by opening your image into Photoshop. I'll use [this image](#) from Adobe Stock:

The original photo.
Credit: Adobe Stock.

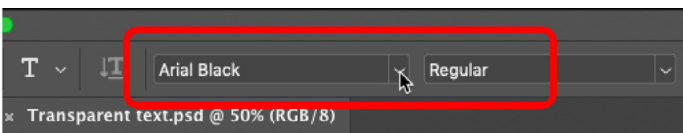
Step 2: Select the Type Tool



To add your text, select the **Type Tool** from the toolbar:

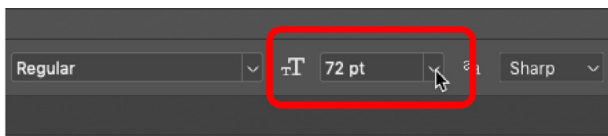
Selecting the Type Tool.

Step 3: Choose your font



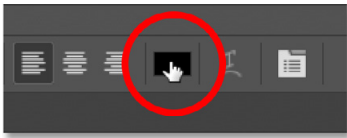
Then in the Options Bar, choose your font. Any font will work, but larger, thicker fonts work best. I'll keep things simple and go with Arial Black:

Choosing a font.



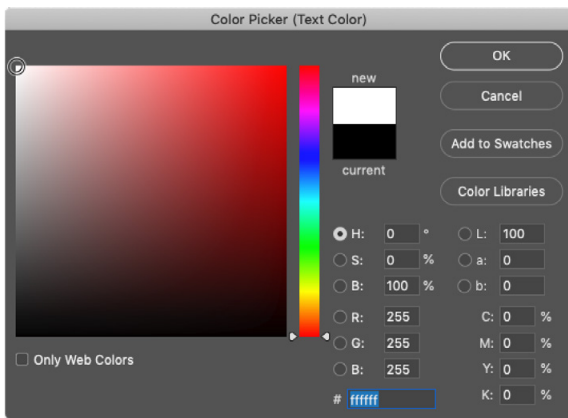
Set the type **size** to **72 pt** so we're starting with the largest preset size:

Setting the type size.



And then choose a color for your type by clicking the **color swatch**:

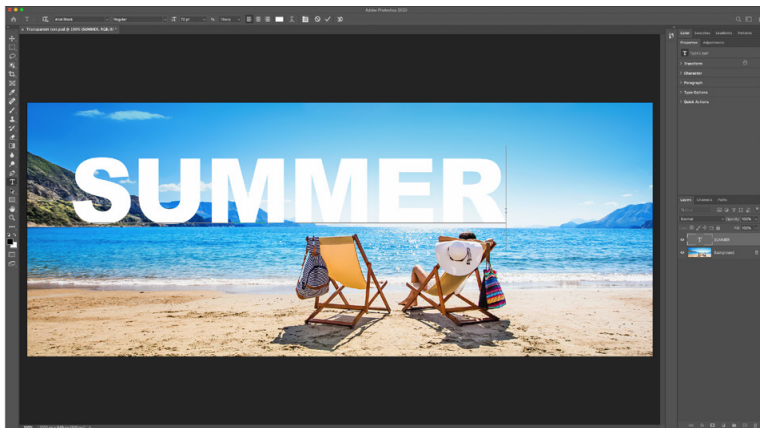
Clicking the color swatch.



Since we'll be making the text transparent, the color doesn't matter. But choose one that's easy to see as you're adding the text to the image. I'll choose white. Click OK when you're done to close the Color Picker:

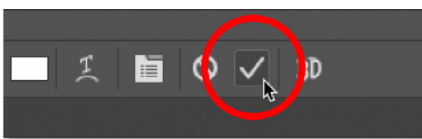
Setting the type color to white in the Color Picker.

Step 4: Add your text



Next, click in the document and add your text. I'll type the word "SUMMER":

Adding the text to the document.

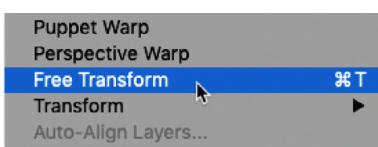


To accept it, click the **checkmark** in the Options Bar:

Clicking the checkmark.

Step 5: Resize and reposition the text with Free Transform

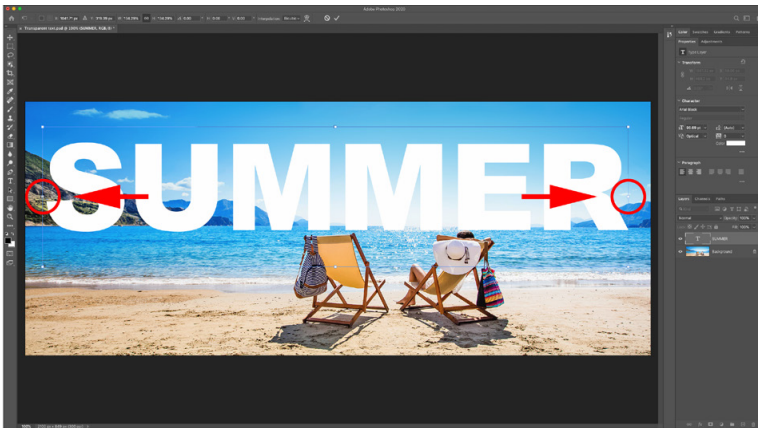
To resize the text and move it into place, we'll use Photoshop's Free Transform command.



Go up to the **Edit** menu in the Menu Bar and choose **Free Transform**:

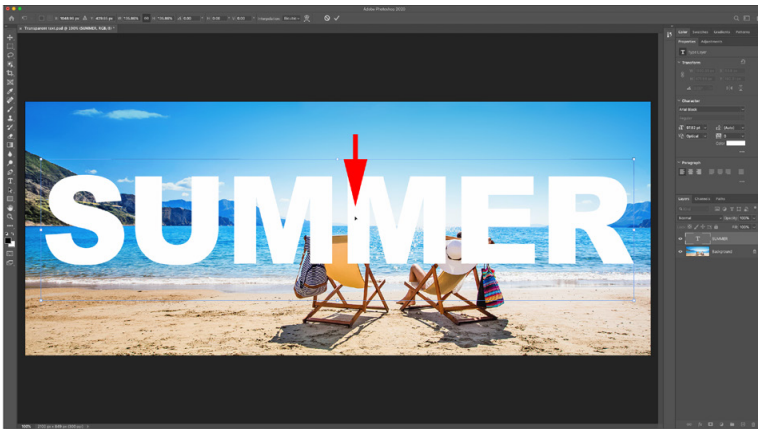
Going to Edit > Free Transform.

Then to resize the text, click and drag any of the handles. As of Photoshop CC 2019, Free Transform automatically locks the aspect ratio of the text as you drag. But if you're using an earlier version of Photoshop, press and hold the **Shift** key as you drag to lock the aspect ratio in place.



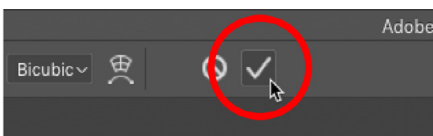
Here I'm dragging the left and right side handles outward to make the text larger:

Resizing the text by dragging the Free Transform handles.



Then to reposition the text, click and drag inside the Free Transform box. I'll drag down to center my text in front of the image:

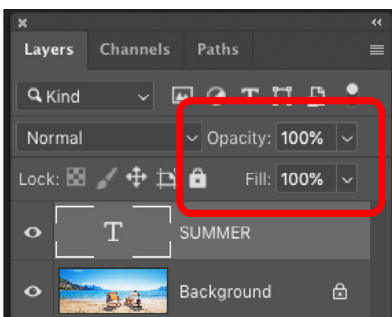
Dragging the text downward to center it.



To accept it and close Free Transform, click the **checkmark** in the Options Bar:

Clicking the checkmark to close Free Transform.

Step 6: Lower the type layer's Fill to 0 percent



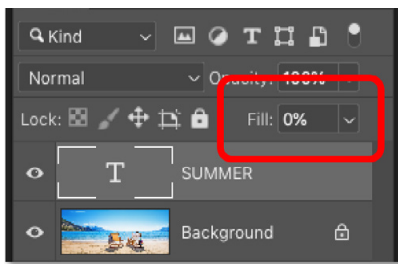
So now that we've added the text, how do we make the text transparent? There's two ways to do it. One is by lowering the layer's **Opacity** value, and the other is by lowering the **Fill** value. Both options are found in the upper right of the Layers panel:

Both Opacity and Fill can be used to make a layer transparent.

Layer opacity vs fill

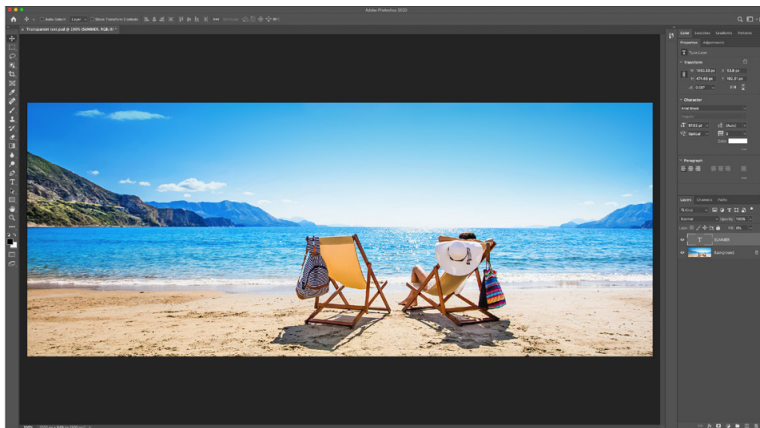
The difference between Opacity and Fill is that Opacity affects both the layer *and* any layer effects you've applied. So if we lower the Opacity to 0 percent, both the text and the effects will become transparent, which is not what we want.

But the Fill value affects only the layer itself. Or in this case, only the text. It does not affect things like drop shadows, strokes or other effects you've applied to the text.



So to make your text transparent, lower the **Fill** value down to **0 percent**:

Lowering the Fill to 0 percent.

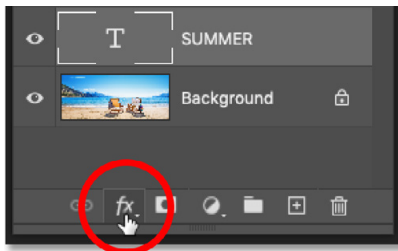


With the Fill value lowered, the text disappears:

The result after lowering the type layer's Fill value.

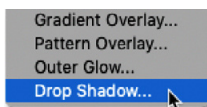
Step 7: Add a Drop Shadow to the text

Now that our text is transparent, we can use layer effects to reveal the shapes of the letters. For example, let's add a Drop Shadow.



In the Layers panel, click the **fx** icon at the bottom:

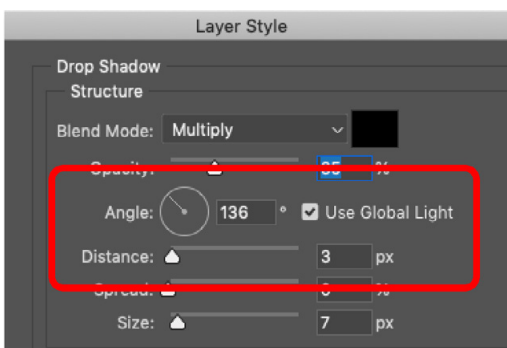
Clicking the layer effects icon.



And choose **Drop Shadow** from the list:

Choosing "Drop Shadow".

Angle and Distance



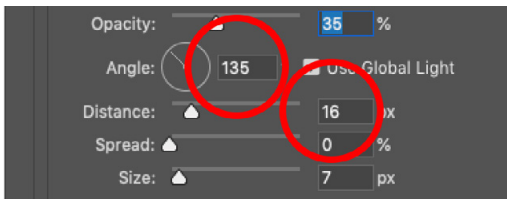
The options for the drop shadow open in Photoshop's Layer Style dialog box. Start by adjusting the **Angle** and **Distance** of the shadow:

The Angle and Distance options for the drop shadow.



The easiest way to adjust the Angle and Distance values is to simply click and drag inside the document. And notice that even though the text is transparent, the shadow is still hidden behind it, revealing the letters:

The drop shadow reveals the transparent letters.

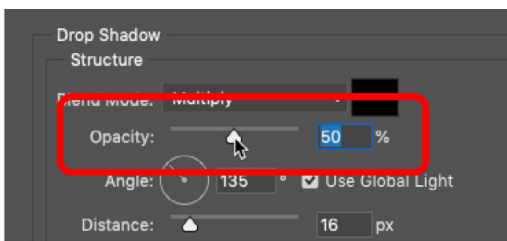


You can also enter specific values in the dialog box. I'll set my **Angle** to **135 degrees** and the **Distance** to **16 pixels**. The values you need will depend on your image:

Setting the Angle and Distance.

Opacity

Use the **Opacity** slider to adjust the transparency of the drop shadow. I'll darken the shadow by increasing the opacity to **50 percent**:



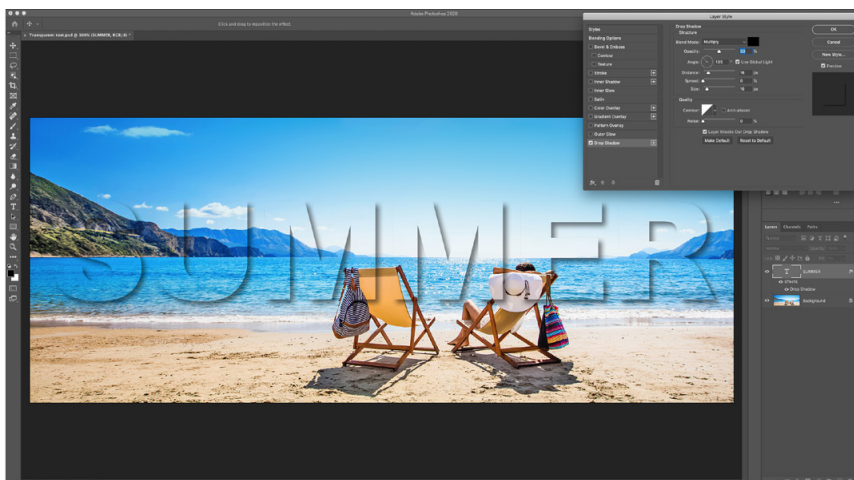
Increasing the drop shadow's Opacity value.

Size

And you can soften the shadow edges by increasing the **Size** value. I'll increase mine to **16 pixels**:



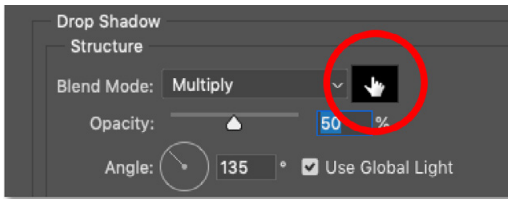
Softening the drop shadow edges by increasing the Size.



Here's my result so far:

The drop shadow reveals the transparent text.

Color



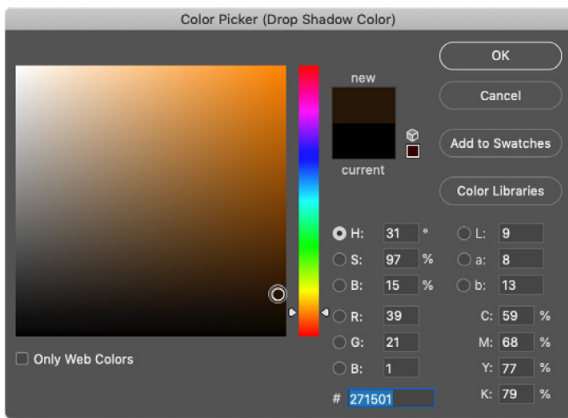
The default drop shadow color is black, but you can change it by clicking the **color swatch**:

Clicking the drop shadow's color swatch.



And then choosing a new color, either from the Color Picker or by sampling a color from the image. I'll click to sample a color from the sand:

Clicking on the image to sample a new color for the drop shadow.



And then in the Color Picker, I'll choose a darker, saturated version of that color. Then I'll click OK to close the Color Picker:

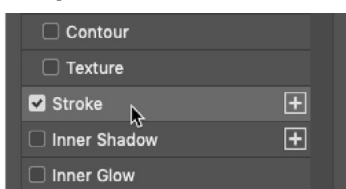
Dark, saturated colors work best with drop shadows.



And here's the result. Just by adding a drop shadow, we can already see our transparent text:

The first layer effect is added to the text.

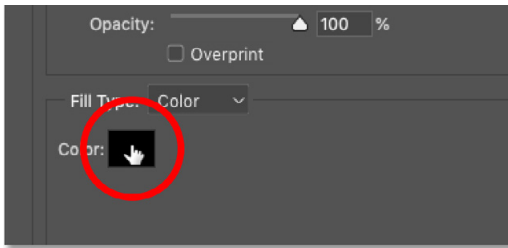
Step 8: Add a Stroke around the text



Let's add a couple more effects. Still in the Layer Style dialog box, choose **Stroke** from the column on the left. We can use a stroke to add a border around the letters:

Adding a Stroke layer effect.

Color



Choose a color for the stroke by clicking the **color swatch**:

Clicking the stroke color swatch.

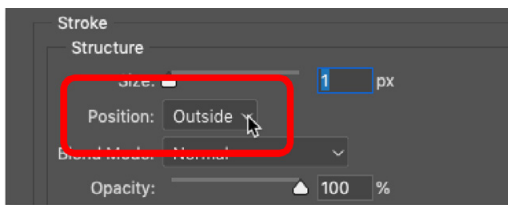
Then, just like with the drop shadow, choose a new stroke color either from the Color Picker or by sampling a color from the image.



I'll choose something close to white by sampling a color from the brightest part of the sand. Then I'll click OK to close the Color Picker:

Sampling a new stroke color from the image.

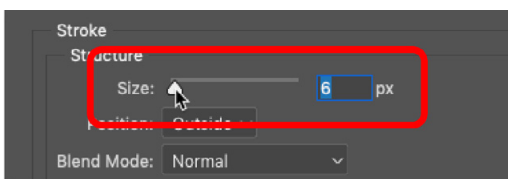
Position



The **Position** option moves your stroke to either inside the edges, outside the edges or centered on the edges of your text. I'll choose **Outside**:

Setting the position of the stroke.

Size



Then set the width of your stroke by dragging the **Size** slider. I'll increase the size to **6 pixels**:

Setting the size of the stroke.



And here's my transparent text with both the drop shadow and the stroke applied:

The stroke makes it even easier to see the transparent letters.

Step 9: Add a Gradient Overlay

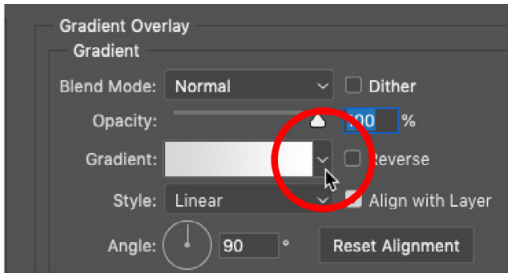
The third and final effect we'll add is **Gradient Overlay**. By adding a gradient and then changing the gradient's blend mode, we can increase the contrast of the image inside the text.



Choose Gradient Overlay from the left column:

Adding a Gradient Overlay effect.

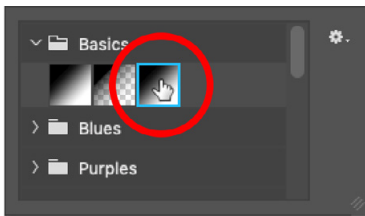
Step 10: Choose the Black, White gradient



Then choose a gradient by clicking the arrow next to the gradient swatch:

Choosing a different gradient.

Select the **Black, White** gradient by double-clicking on its thumbnail.



In Photoshop CC 2020 and later, gradients are grouped into folders. You'll need to twirl open the **Basics** folder to find the gradient:

Selecting the Black, White gradient.

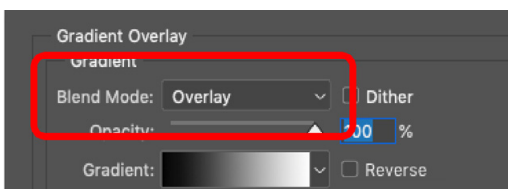


The gradient will temporarily block the image from view:

The initial result with the Gradient Overlay effect.

Step 11: Change the gradient's blend mode to Overlay

Then to blend the gradient with the image, change the gradient's **blend mode** from Normal to **Overlay**:



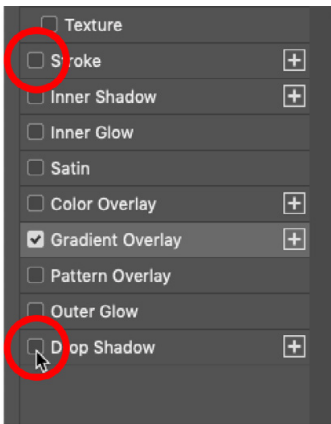
Changing the blend mode to Overlay.



And now the contrast of the image inside the text is stronger than the surrounding image:

The transparent text with the Gradient Overlay effect applied.

Turning off the other layer effects



To see the Gradient Overlay effect more clearly, turn off the Stroke and Drop Shadow effects by unchecking them:

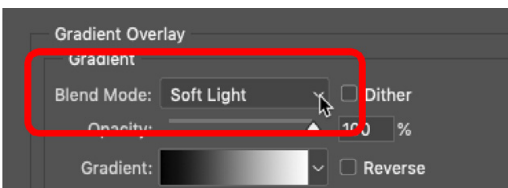
Unchecking the Stroke and Drop Shadow.



And now we see how the contrast is bringing out the letters:

The effect using only the Gradient Overlay effect.

Trying the Soft Light blend mode



If the contrast is too strong, as it is with my image, try the **Soft Light** blend mode instead:

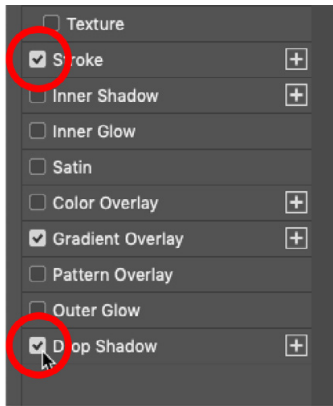
Changing the gradient's blend mode to Soft Light.



Soft Light creates a similar but less intense result:

The result after changing the gradient's blend mode to Soft Light.

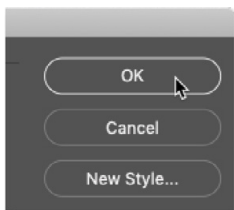
Turning the other effects back on



To turn the Stroke and Drop Shadow back on, click again inside their checkboxes:

Turning on the Stroke and Drop Shadow.

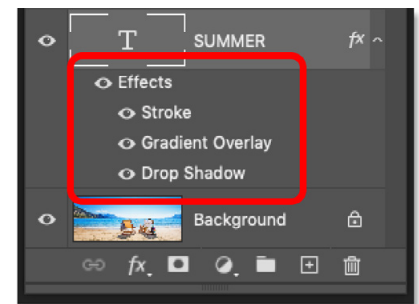
Step 12: Close the Layer Style dialog box



At this point, you can try adding other layer effects, or you can accept what you have by clicking OK to close the Layer Style dialog box:

Clicking the OK button.

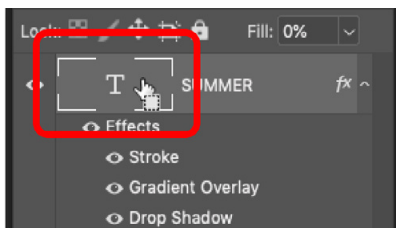
In the Layers panel, the effects we've added to the text appear below the type layer. You can click the **visibility icon** beside an effect's name to toggle the effect on and off. Or you can double-click directly on the name to re-open the Layer Style dialog box and edit the effect if needed:



The layer effects applied to the text.

Step 13: Select the text

So we've learned how to create transparent text by lowering the Fill value of the type layer and then adding layer effects. But we can enhance the effect even further by lightening, darkening, or adding a color to the surrounding image. To do that, we first need to select the area around the text.



In the Layers panel, press and hold the **Ctrl** (Win) / **Command** (Mac) key on your keyboard and click on the type layer's **thumbnail**:

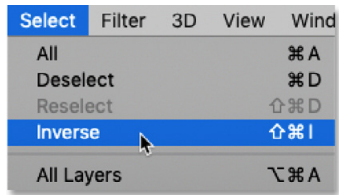
Clicking the type layer's thumbnail.



This loads a selection around the letters:

The text itself is selected.

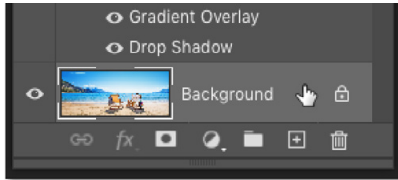
Step 14: Invert the selection



Then to select everything *except* the text, invert the selection by going up to the **Select** menu and choosing **Inverse**:

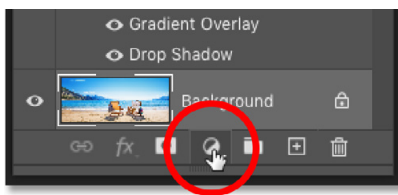
Going to Select
> Inverse.

Step 15: Select the image layer



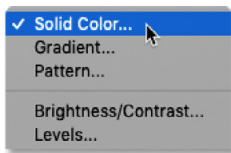
Back in the Layers panel, click on your image layer to select it:

Selecting the image layer.



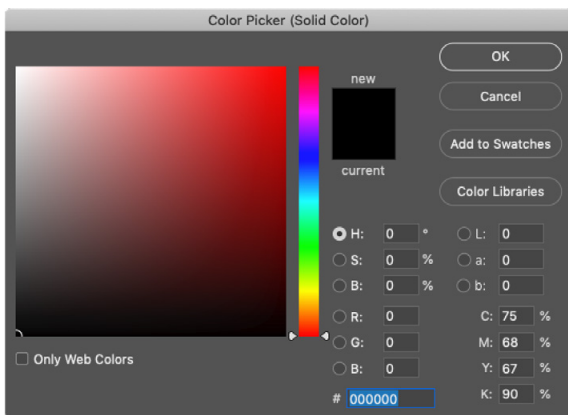
Then click the **New Fill or Adjustment Layer** icon:

Clicking the New Fill or
Adjustment Layer icon.



And choose a **Solid Color** fill layer:

Adding a Solid
Color fill layer.



In the Color Picker, choose a color for the fill layer. I'll choose black for now, but I'll show you how to change the color in a moment. Click OK when you're done:

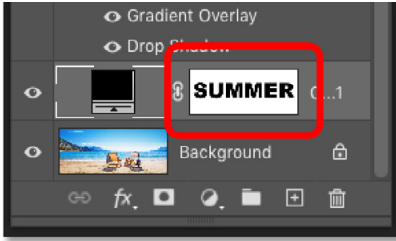
Choosing a color for the fill
layer from the Color Picker.



And the color now fills the areas surrounding the text:

The result after adding a
black Solid Color fill layer.

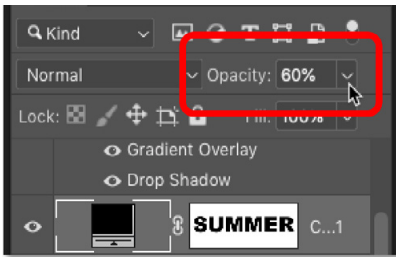
In the Layers panel, the fill layer appears between the image and the type layer.



And the reason that the fill layer is not affecting the image inside the letters is because Photoshop used the selection we made to create a layer mask, as we see in the **layer mask thumbnail**. The white areas on the mask are where the fill layer is visible, and the black areas are where it is hidden:

The layer mask controls the visibility of the fill layer.

Step 16: Lower the opacity of the fill layer



To blend the color with the image, lower the **Opacity** of the fill layer. I'll lower mine to 60 percent:

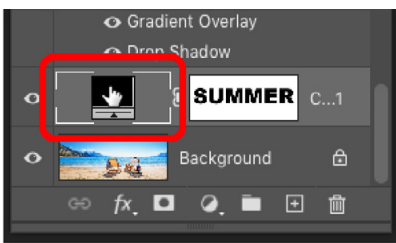
Lowering the opacity of the fill layer.



With the opacity lowered, the image shows through the fill layer. And since my fill color is black, it creates a darkening effect:

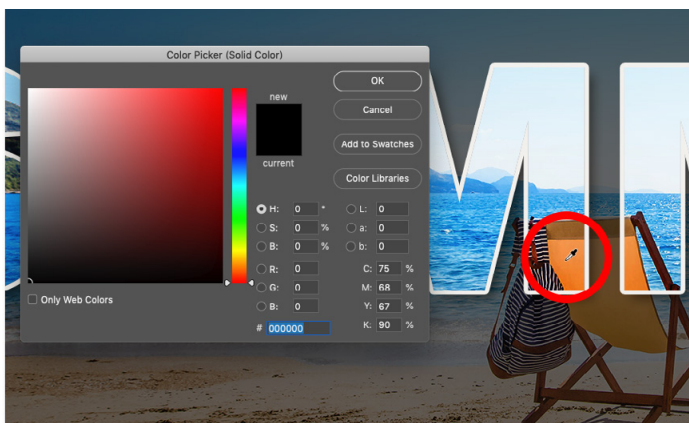
The result after darkening the area around the transparent text.

How to change the color of the fill layer



To try a different color, double-click on the fill layer's **color swatch**:

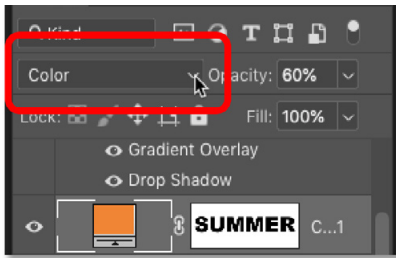
Double-clicking the color swatch.



And then choose a new color, again from the Color Picker or from the image. Since I've been sampling colors directly from the image, I'll choose orange by clicking on the back of the chair. Then I'll click OK to close the Color Picker:

Sampling a new fill color from the image.

Changing the fill layer's blend mode



And since I chose an actual color this time, I'll change the **blend mode** of the fill layer from Normal to **Color**:

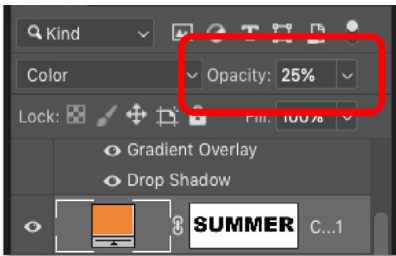
Changing the fill layer's blend mode to Color.



The Color blend mode restores the original brightness of the image and blends only the color:

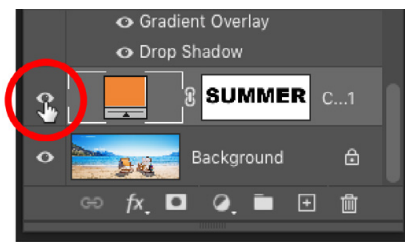
The result with the new fill color and blend mode.

Lowering the fill layer's opacity



Finally, I'll reduce the intensity of the color by lowering the **Opacity** of the fill layer to around **25 percent**:

Lowering the fill layer's opacity.



You can toggle the fill layer on and off to compare the effect with the original image by clicking its **visibility icon**:

Clicking the fill layer's visibility icon.



And here, with the color now more subtle, is my final result:

And there we have it!

The final effect.

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