Photoshop Panels provide access to various tools, commands, options, and other items used while making edits to images or other documents. This guide provides details on Managing Panels and covers subjects including a brief description of each Panel, customizing Panel layouts, customizing Panel contents, and so forth. This guide does not cover details on using the items in the Panels. That will occur during the presentation portion.

THE PANEL AREA

By default, Photoshop panels are displayed in columns in the panel area, along the right side of the interface. The examples and screenshots in this guide are based on the panels found in the default Essentials Workspace. You can load a different workspace by clicking on the Choose a Workspace icon at the far right of the Options Bar. The choices will include the preconfigured workspace options provide by Adobe and any custom workspace(s) you have saved. Each workspace option will display different arrangements of panels, but the concepts presented below will still apply.

In the screenshot below the Libraries Panel occupies the column on the far right. The next column to the left (the Main Panel Column) contains three groups of nested panels (two panels in the top group, two panels in the middle group, and three panels in the bottom group). The next column to the left is a narrow (collapsed) column that contains a panel group with two additional panels.

Note: The rest of the interface in this screenshot has been darkened to highlight the panel area.
Photoshop's panel area, on the right.

**The Main Panel Column**

In this example the *Color* panel is active (selected) in the group at the top of the **Main Panel Column**. In the middle group, the *Properties* panel is active, and in the bottom group the *Layers* panel is active. Each panel has a *tab* with the panel name displayed.
The Color, Properties, and Layers panels are active, hiding the contents of the other panels.

Panel Groups
As illustrated above, the Color, Properties and Layers panels are in groups with other panels. The Color panel, at the top, has a Swatches tab to the right of it. The Properties panel has an Adjustments tab beside it. And the Layers panel has two other tabs, Channels and Paths. These arrangements are panel groups. A panel group can contain two or more individual panels, allowing multiple panels to fit within the space of a single panel.

Only one panel of a given group can be active (selected) at a time. The contents of an active panel (the tools, options, etc.) are displayed while the contents of other panel(s) in the group are hidden behind it. The currently open panel in any group is known as the active panel and the name of the active panel appears brighter than the others.
Switching Between Panels In A Group
To switch between panels in a group, click on the desired tab. For example, on the left, the Color panel is active, with the Swatches panel hiding in the background. Clicking on the Swatches tab opens the Swatches panel and sends the Color panel to the background.

Changing The Order Of Panels In A Group
To rearrange the order of panel tabs in a group, click and hold on a tab, then drag it left or right. Release your mouse button to drop the tab into place. Example: Drag the Properties tab to the right so the Adjustments tab is listed first in the group, with the Properties tab second.

Moving A Panel Tab Into Another Group
To move a panel tab from one group to another, click and hold on the tab, then drag the tab into the new group. A blue highlight border will appear around the destination group, indicating where Photoshop will drop the tab when you release your mouse button.
Blue highlight box around the group.  

Adjustments tab relocated.

Example: The Adjustments panel tab is now in the same group as the Color and Swatches tabs, and the Properties panel is now all by itself (un-grouped).

Moving A Panel Out of a Group
A panel tab can be moved out of a panel group by dragging until a blue highlight bar appears. (When dropping panel tabs into groups the blue highlight will be a border around the destination group. When dropping panel tabs outside of groups the blue highlight will be a bar.)

Dragging the Color panel out of a group.  

The Color panel un-grouped.
Creating New Panel Groups
By using the techniques described above you can create any number of new panel groups containing any combination of panel tabs.

Panels have three states: Active panels are displayed in the panel area with their contents available, Open panels have their tabs displayed but the contents are hidden, and Closed panels do not have their tabs displayed in the Panel area. Panels that are closed must be opened before they can be moved or grouped. If a panel is rarely used it can be opened (details next), moved and/or grouped, then closed again. When that panel is subsequently opened it will appear in the panel area where you dropped it.

The Window Menu
As stated above, panels that are closed must be opened before they can be moved or grouped. To do so, use the Window drop-down menu, located in the Menu Bar along the top of the screen. The Window Menu contains a list of all available panels – active, open, and closed.

Access the Window menu in the Menu Bar.

Clicking on any panel name in the list makes that panel active (contents available). A checkmark appears beside any active panels’ name. If you select a panel that is currently closed it will become open (tab will be displayed) and active (contents available).

The Window menu lists all available panels – Active (checked), Open, and Closed.
Collapsing And Expanding Panel Groups
A panel group can be **collapsed** so that only the tabs along the top of the group are displayed, hiding all tab contents. This temporarily frees up space in the panel area. To collapse a panel group, **double-click** on any tab in the group. **Example:** double-clicking on the Swatches tab collapses the group, hiding the contents of both the **Swatches** panel and the **Adjustments** panel, leaving just the tabs visible.

Surrounding panel groups will expand to fill up the extra space:

Double-click any tab to collapse.

Single-click any tab to expand.

Click **once** on any tab in a collapsed group to **expand** the group and make the panels visible again. **Example:** Click once on the Swatches panel, and the panel group is once again visible. The Color panel, below the group, has reverted back to its smaller size.

Closing Panels and Panel Groups
Single panels and/or panel groups can also be **closed** to free up space in the panel area. There are two methods that can be used: 1) select the menu icon in the top right corner of the panel and choose **Close** from the menu, or 2) **right-click** (Win) / **Control-click** (Mac) directly on a **tab**.

Select the menu icon.

Right click on a tab.
Selecting the **Close** command.

Selecting **Close** will close the *active* panel without closing any other panels in the group. Selecting **Close Tab Group** will close the entire panel group.

A *single panel* that has been closed can be **re-opened** by selecting that panel from the **Window Menu** (see above), and a *panel group* that has been closed can be re-opened by selecting any of the panels in that group from the **Window Menu**. Photoshop remembers the panel layout, so when a panel or panel group is re-opened it will appear in the panel area at the previous location. This is referred to as *sticky* behavior.

**Collapsing And Expanding Panel Columns**

Another option to free up space on the screen is to **collapse** an entire panel column. Clicking the **double-arrow** icon in the upper right will initially collapse the panels so that only their name and icon are visible:

To collapse a panel to *just* icons, hover your mouse cursor over the already collapsed panel edge (or over the **dividing line** between two columns) and drag until only the icons are visible. When only icons are visible a panel name will appear when the cursor hovers over the icon (*If Show Tool Tips* is enabled in Photoshop's Preferences).
To expand a column back to full size, click again on the **double arrow icon** in the top right corner:

The main column collapsed to just icons.             The main column back to full size.

These methods to collapse/expand or close/open panels and panel groups can be applied whenever you need to free up space for the document window as you work.

**Reset Panels Back To Default Layout**
You can reset panels back to Photoshop’s default layout by clicking the **Choose a Workspace** icon, just above the panel area, then choose the **Reset** option from the menu. This resets the current workspace (Essentials in this example) back to the default layout.

Clicking the **Choose a Workspace** icon.  Choosing "**Reset Essentials**".