



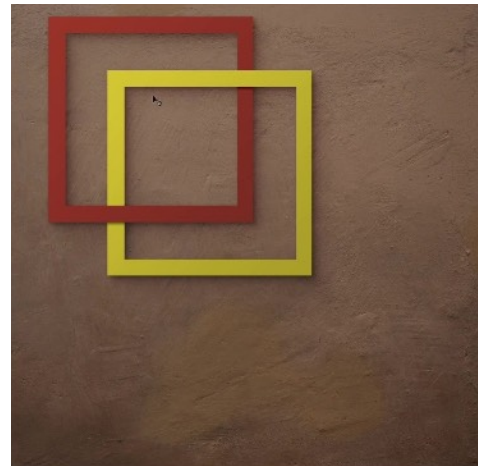
Advanced Layer Tips

We're going to work through advanced layer and blending mode techniques in Photoshop by building one complex image. I want you to see how these features work together, even if you don't think of yourself as an advanced user. If a concept is hard to follow, skip that part and keep going. You'll still get something useful from the rest.

Constructing the Unique Project Document

We're going to build a project that breaks the usual layer stacking order, so elements look like they're both above and below each other at the same time. I get that look by changing layer properties and blending modes until the arrangement shouldn't be possible with a normal stack.

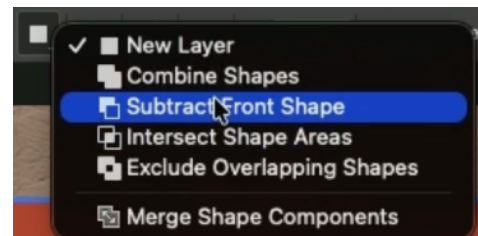
- The project uses an orange shape, a yellow shape, and a textured background, each on its own layer.
- I want one shape to look like it's on top in one area and underneath in another, which layers don't do on their own.
- I also change the shadows so their softness and intensity shift based on how close the objects are and where they overlap.



Building the Base Shapes

I start by making the base shapes. I use the shape tool to draw squares, then combine them into one shape with a hole in it. That's a practical use of path operations on shape layers.

- I draw a square with the shape tool, holding Shift so it stays proportional.
- I draw a second square to mark the area I want to cut out.
- I cut that second square by choosing Edit>Cut and paste it with Command-V into the first shape layer, then use the Subtract path operation in the options bar to punch the hole.
- I line the shapes up horizontally and vertically with the alignment tools in the options bar.



Layer Duplication and Color Variation

Once the base shapes are in place, I duplicate layers and change their colors.

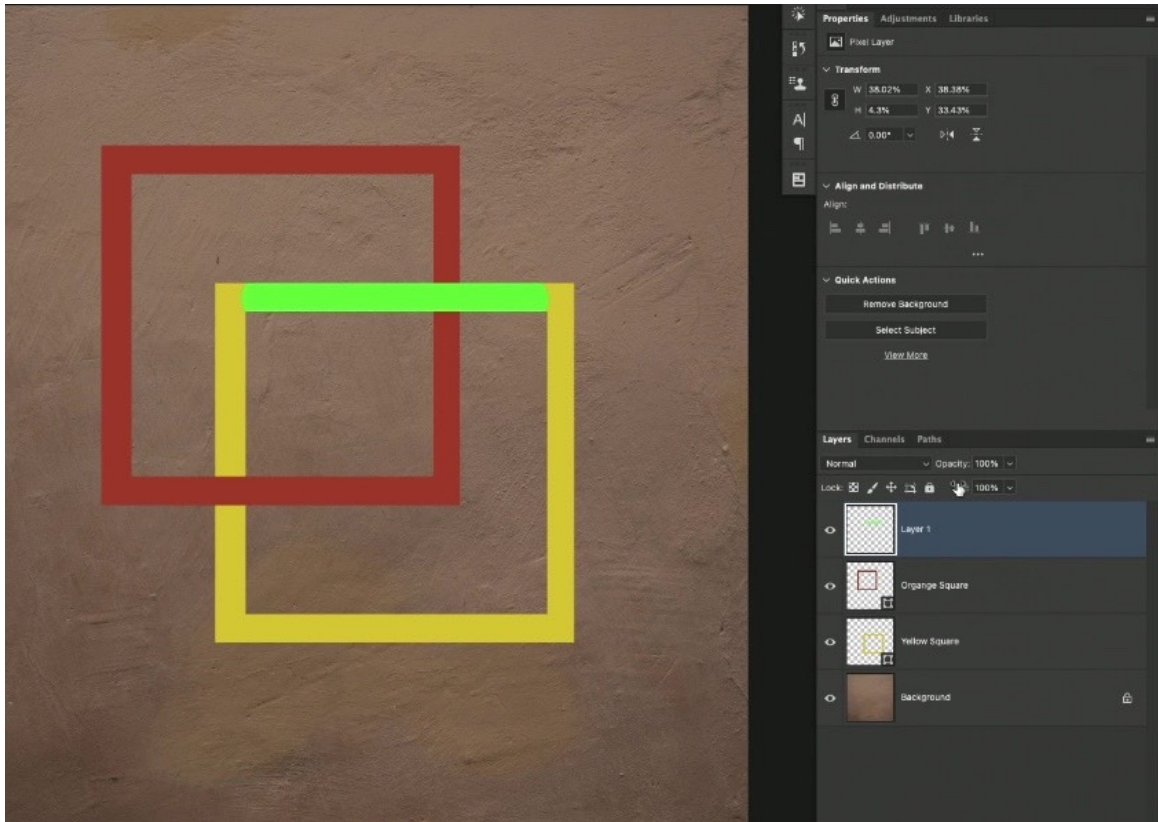
- Hold Option (Alt on Windows) and drag the shape layer with the Move tool to duplicate it.
- Double-click the new layer's thumbnail in the Layers panel and pick a new color from the color picker.

Creating the Illusion of Intertwined Shapes

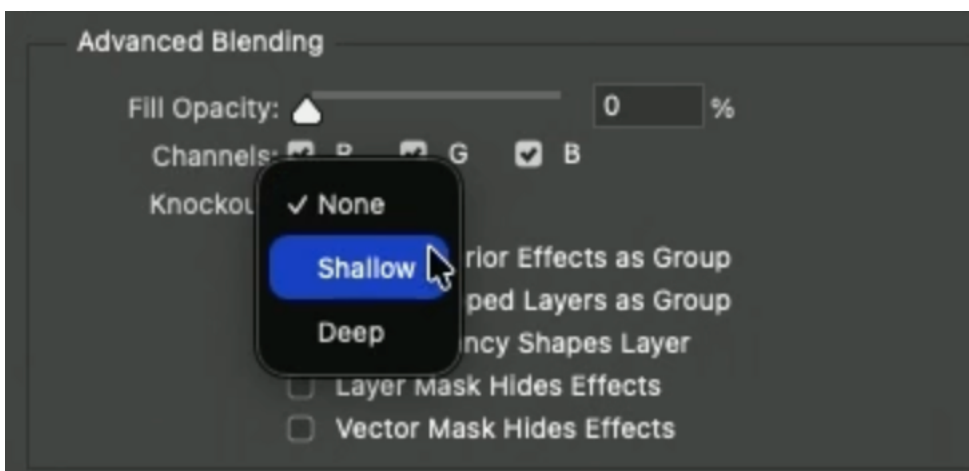
A big part of this lesson is making the orange and yellow shapes look like they weave through each other. I do that with a new empty layer, a selection, and some paint.

- I add a new empty layer above the existing shapes.

- Command-click (Control-click on Windows) the yellow shape's layer to load it as a selection.
- With a hard-edged brush, I paint inside that selection on the empty layer. I hold Shift to keep the painted edges straight.



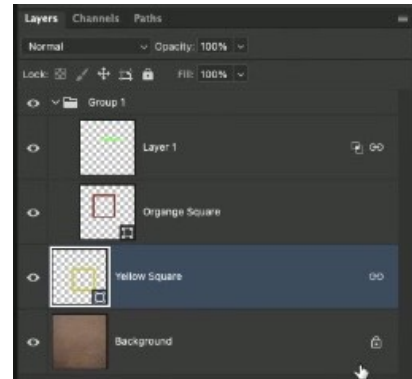
- I drop that layer's Fill to zero so the paint itself disappears.
- Then I double-click to the right of the layer's name and set Knockout to Shallow. That invisible paint punches a hole through layers in the same group, so the orange shape looks like it's tucked behind the yellow one in that spot.



Linking Layers for Unified Movement

To keep the painted cutout locked to the yellow shape, I link those layers.

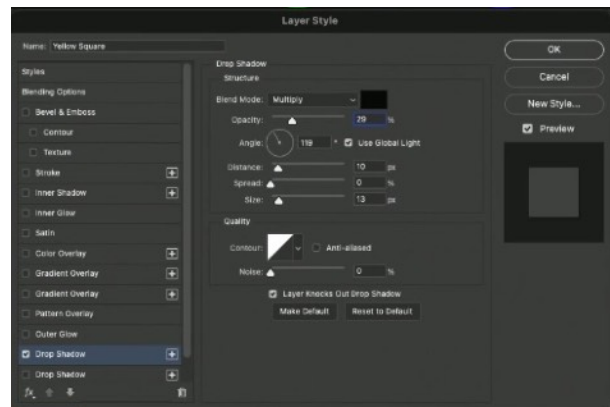
- Select the painted cutout layer and the yellow shape layer.
- Click the link symbol at the bottom of the Layers panel. Now when I move one, the other comes with it and the illusion holds.



Adding Realistic Lighting and Shadows

Next I add directional lighting and more believable drop shadows.

- **Gradient Overlay for Lighting:** I add a gradient overlay to each shape and the background. I use Multiply with a black-to-white gradient and pull the opacity down so the light feels like it's coming from the upper left.
- **Advanced Drop Shadows:** For a more natural shadow, I stack multiple drop shadows on a layer. Each one gets a slightly different distance and size, with different opacities, so the edge softens as it fades out.
- **Recreating Overlap Shadows:** Where the shapes overlap I want a crisper shadow. I duplicate the orange shape, put that copy above the yellow shape, and limit its drop shadow to the overlap with a clipping mask and a layer mask.



Bonus Techniques: Color Burn and Global Light

A couple of extras for the shadows and the lighting direction.

- **Color Burn for Shadows:** Try Color Burn instead of Multiply on shadows when you want more of the texture underneath to show through.
- **Global Light for Consistency:** Turn on Use Global Light. Change the angle on one drop shadow and every other shadow using Global Light follows, so the light direction stays consistent.