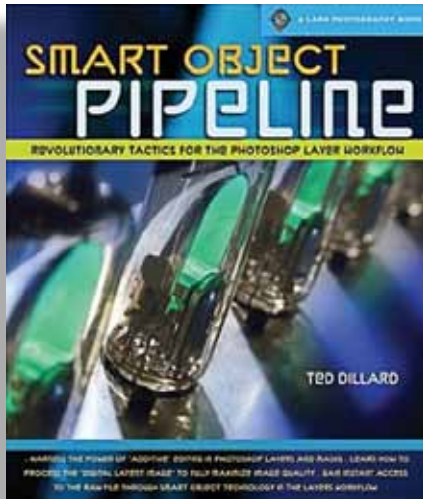


# Smart Object Pipeline: Revolutionary Tactics for the Photoshop Layer Workflow

Donna Kamper

The “Workflow” in this book refers to importing images as Smart Object layers to create *Photoshop* images. In this workflow the images are always RAW images (think digital negative). Few if any adjustments are made in *Photoshop* itself. Everything is done by editing the individual layers (as RAW images) inside the Adobe Camera RAW (ACR) interface, then combining the layers to create the final image.

There’s a lot of information about how to use various *Photoshop* components and features scattered throughout, to the point of confusion. The volume has copious illustrations (many span two pages) with full-color examples, screen shots, sidebars with extra information, definitions and tips. The text is set to 12pt using an 18pt leading (1.5 line spacing) which takes up space on the page and is very easy to read. The main problem I had was discovering what the “*Photoshop* Layer Workflow” actually is.



The book is divided into two sections. Once I got through all the full-page photos, two- and four-page “Geek Zone” inserts and sidebars, what this workflow consists of and how to put it to use finally filtered through. The actual steps take up about twelve pages at the very end. Not that all the other information is useless, it just got in the way.

Why go to such lengths to fill the space? After reading the volume through, I think I have the answer. The six steps that make up his “*Photoshop* Layer

Workflow” would make a great article on Smart Objects – but the truly pertinent information doesn’t really justify a book.

There is a serious drawback to this method. Using multiple RAW files as Smart Objects in a single image creates a huge file. The author addresses this in the last paragraph of the next to last chapter, noting: “If I do this for every image I shoot, I’m going to be buried in data and storage...I do this for only the images that I feel are my most important.”

However, in his introduction he says “I don’t I [sic] feel this is a process that is only for the advanced user. I’ve started beginner classes right out with RAW file processing, Layers, Masks, and Smart Objects, and they pick it up faster than the old way, telling me that it is, indeed, a great way to work.” In other words, you decide which “workflow” works for you.

I should also note the book (©2009) was written for version CS4. When CS5 was released in April 2010 much of the RAW conversion engine was rewritten. The author uses four pages to briefly touch on the update, then refers you to his website (which seems intermittently attended).

I dare say most *Photoshop* users have only a vague understanding of what a Smart Object is. It was my hope that this book would be one I could recommend to everyone. But if you don’t know why you should use Smart Objects, this book isn’t likely to entice you into using them. If you’re an intermediate *Photoshop* user and really want to learn about Smart Objects, the information is out there. But to learn exactly what they are and why you might want to use them, you need to keep looking.

**About:** *Smart Object Pipeline: Revolutionary Tactics for the Photoshop Layer Workflow*

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# Smart Objects - an explanation

Donna Kamper

Any layer (text, pixel, shape or image) in a Photoshop image can be converted to a “Smart Object” by choosing “Convert to Smart Object” from the menu. Content that is “placed” in an image (imported as a new layer) is automatically imported as a Smart Object.

Why use Smart Objects at all? Once the content of a layer becomes a Smart Object, it’s essentially an encapsulated image in its own right. This gives it both certain advantages and disadvantages.

For instance, import an image as a layer and size it down. Pixels are discarded. Change your mind and size it up, the result can be ugly. Those pixels don’t come back. Convert the layer to a Smart Object after import, size it down and up again without worry. Smart Objects don’t lose pixels.

Another advantage: any filter run on a Smart Object becomes editable. For instance, run the Gaussian Blur filter on a “normal” layer, click **OK** and that’s it. The amount of blur can’t be adjusted or undone. Yes, you can back up with UnDo, but only a limited number of UnDo’s are available. If that happens, or the image has been saved (wiping out the UnDo History), there’s no way to change the effect other than starting over. You do still have your original image, right?

But running Gaussian Blur on a layer converted to a Smart Object converts the filter to a Smart Filter, similar in appearance and action to an Adjustment Layer. As long as that layer is intact, a Smart Filter can be turned off, turned back on, or rerun to add more or less of the effect.

As far as disadvantages, the major one is size. Essentially each Smart Object layer is another image that may have its own filters and adjustment layers. If the Smart Objects consist of large-format RAW images – you can see where this is going. File size can grow exponentially.

Retouching tools (think Healing Brush, Clone Stamp) in particular, don’t work. You can’t erase on a Smart Object layer. Instead you open the Smart Object in a separate image window and make the changes there. Once editing is complete, Save and Close that window and the edited version appears in the master image.