

9 Organizing your Artwork with Layers

Lesson overview

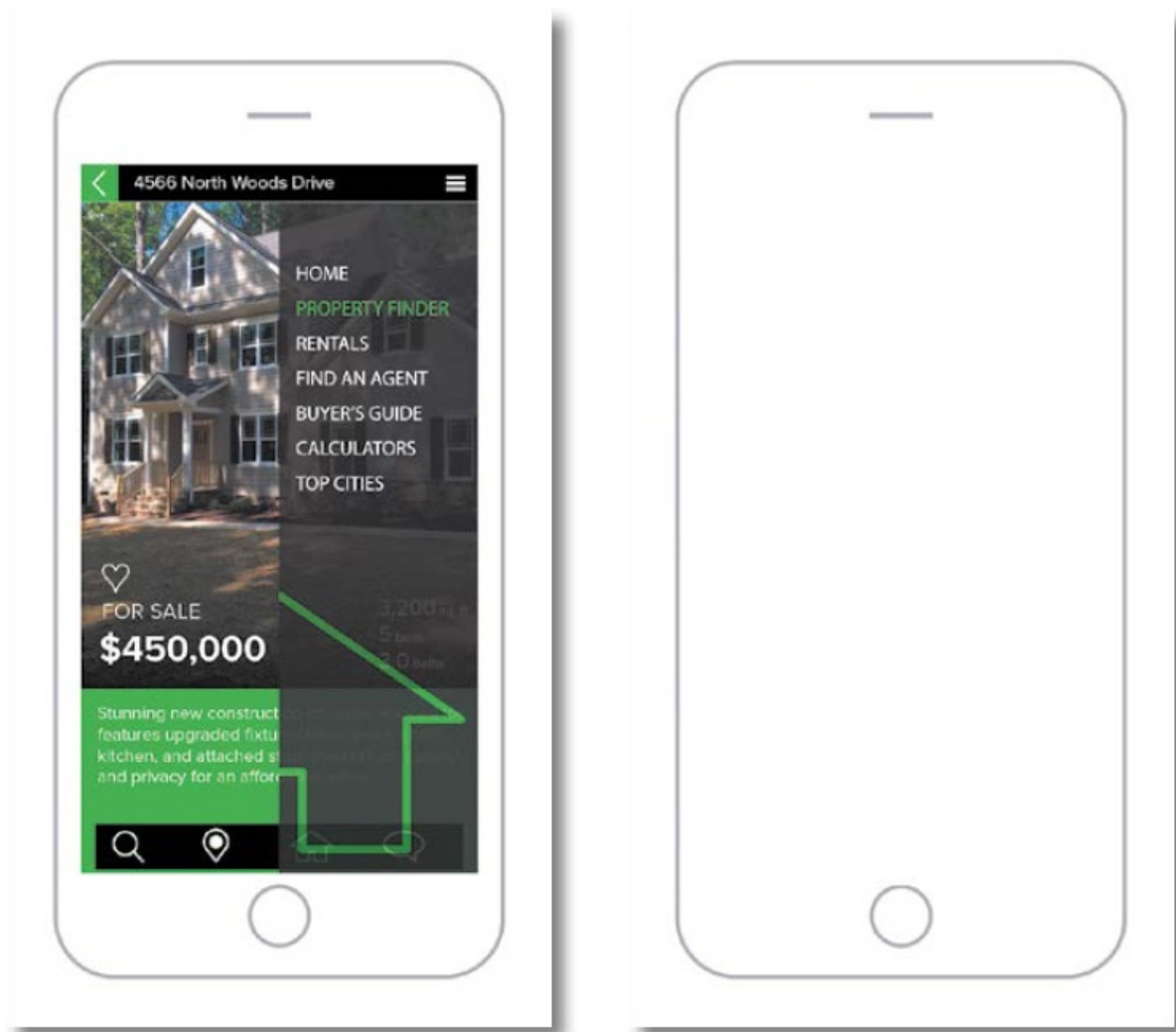
In this lesson, you'll learn how to do the following:

- Work with the Layers panel.
- Create, rearrange, and lock layers and sublayers.
- Move objects between layers.
- Merge layers into a single layer.
- Locate objects in the Layers panel.
- Isolate content in a layer.
- Copy and paste objects and their layers from one file to another.
- Make a layer clipping mask.
- Apply an appearance attribute to objects and layers.



This lesson takes approximately 45 minutes to complete. Please log in to your account on peachpit.com to download the lesson files for this chapter, or go to the “Getting Started” section at the beginning of this book and follow the instructions under “Accessing the lesson files and Web Edition.”

Your Account page is also where you'll find any updates to the chapters or to the lesson files. Look on the Lesson & Update Files tab to access the most current content.



Layers let you organize your work into distinct levels that can be edited and viewed individually or together. Every Adobe Illustrator CC document has at least one layer. Creating multiple layers in your artwork lets you easily control how artwork is printed, displayed, selected, and edited.

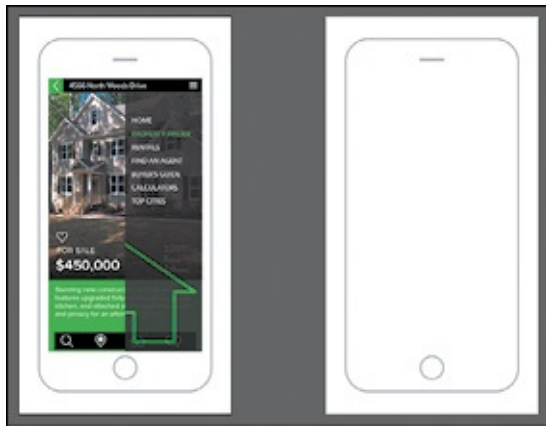
Starting the lesson

In this lesson, you'll organize the artwork for a real estate app design as you explore the various ways to use the Layers panel.

1. To ensure that the tools function and the defaults are set exactly as described in this lesson, delete or deactivate (by renaming) the Adobe Illustrator CC preferences file. See “Restoring default preferences” in the “Getting Started” section at the beginning of the book.

● **Note:** If you have not already downloaded the project files for this lesson to your computer from your Account page, make sure to do so now. See the “Getting Started” section at the beginning of the book.

2. Start Adobe Illustrator CC.



3. Choose File > Open, and open the L9_end.ai file in the Lessons > Lesson09 folder, located on your hard disk.
4. Choose View > Fit All In Window.
5. Choose Window > Workspace > Reset Essentials.

● **Note:** If you don't see Reset Essentials in the Workspace menu, choose Window > Workspace > Essentials before choosing Window > Workspace > Reset Essentials.

6. Choose File > Open. In the Open dialog box, navigate to the Lessons > Lesson09 folder, and select the L9_start.ai file on your hard disk. Click Open.

The Missing Fonts dialog box *may* appear, indicating that a font (ProximaNova) was used in the file that Illustrator can't find on your machine. The file uses a Typekit font that you most likely don't have synced with your machine, so you will fix the missing font before moving on.



7. In the Missing Fonts dialog box, ensure that Sync is selected for each font in the Sync column, and click Sync Fonts. After some time, the font should

be synced with your machine, and you should see a success message in the Missing Fonts dialog box. Click Close.

This will sync the Typekit font to your computer and ensure that the font shows as intended in Illustrator.

● **Note:** If you see a warning message in the Missing Fonts dialog box or cannot select Sync, you can click Find Fonts to replace the font with a local font. In the Find Font dialog box, make sure that Proxima Nova is selected in the Fonts in Document section, and choose System from the Replace With Font From menu. This shows all the local fonts that are available to Illustrator. Select a font from the Fonts In System section, and click Change All to replace the font. Do the same for Proxima Nova Bold. Click Done.

● **Note:** If the font is unable to sync, you may not have an Internet connection or you may need to launch the Creative Cloud desktop application, sign in with your Adobe ID, choose Assets > Fonts, and click Turn Typekit On. If you went through [Lesson 8](#), “[Adding Type to a Poster](#),” you would have this already turned on. For more information, visit <http://helpx.adobe.com/creative-cloud/help/add-fonts-typekit.html>.

8. Choose File > Save As, name the file **RealEstateApp.ai**, and select the Lesson09 folder. Leave the Format option set to Adobe Illustrator (ai) (macOS) or the Save As Type option set to Adobe Illustrator (*.AI) (Windows) and then click Save. In the Illustrator Options dialog box, leave the Illustrator options at their default settings and then click OK.
9. Choose Select > Deselect (if available).
0. Choose View > Fit All In Window.

Understanding layers

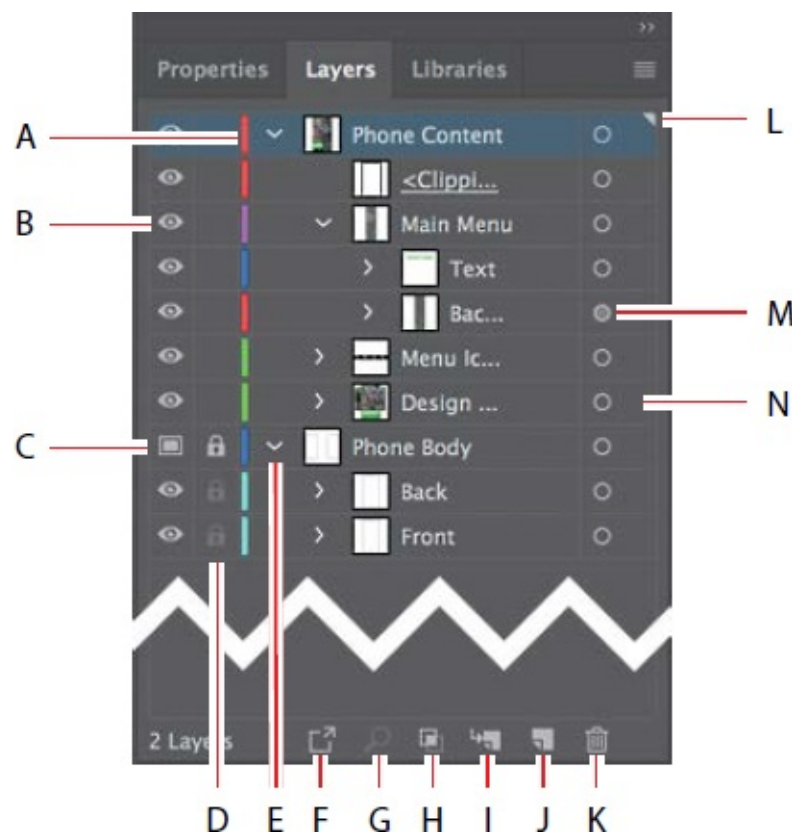
Layers are like invisible folders to help you hold and manage all of the items (some of which can be difficult to select or track) that make up your artwork. If you shuffle those folders, you change the stacking order of the items in your artwork. (You learned about stacking order in [Lesson 2](#), “[Techniques for Selecting Artwork](#).”)

The structure of layers in your document can be as simple or as complex as you want. When you create a new Illustrator document, all of the content you create is organized in a single layer. However, you can create new layers and sublayers (like subfolders) to organize your artwork, as you’ll learn about in this lesson.

1. Click the L9_end.ai tab at the top of the document window to show that document.
2. Click the Layers panel tab on the right side of the workspace, or choose Window > Layers.

In addition to organizing content, the Layers panel offers an easy way to select, hide, lock, and change your artwork's appearance attributes. In the following figure, the Layers panel is showing the content for the L9_end.ai file and won't match what you see in the RealEstateApp.ai file. You can refer to this figure as you progress through the lesson.

● **Note:** The figure shows the top and bottom of the Layers panel. The Layers panel in the Essentials workspace is very tall, which is why the figure shows a split in the panel.



- A. Layer Color
- B. Visibility Column (eye icon)
- C. Template Layer icon
- D. Edit Column (lock/unlock)
- E. Disclosure Triangle (expand/collapse)
- F. Collect For Export
- G. Locate Object

- H. Make/Release Clipping Mask
- I. Create New Sublayer
- J. Create New Layer
- K. Delete Selection
- L. Current Layer Indicator (the triangle)
- M. Target Column
- N. Selection Column

Creating layers and sublayers

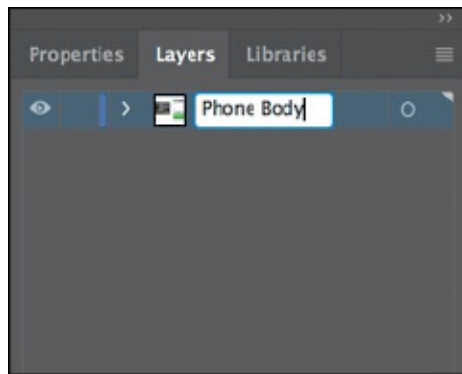
By default, every document begins with one layer, named “Layer 1.” As you create artwork, you can rename and add layers and sublayers at any time. Placing objects on separate layers lets you more easily select and edit them. For example, by placing type on a separate layer, you can focus on the type without affecting the rest of the artwork.

Creating new layers

● **Note:** How many layers you create, what you name them, and how content is organized within those layers varies depending on the project you are working on. For this lesson, I thought about what would make sense for layer organization, so you’re creating layers based on that. There is no “wrong” layer structure, but, as you gain more experience with layers, you’ll see what makes more sense for you.

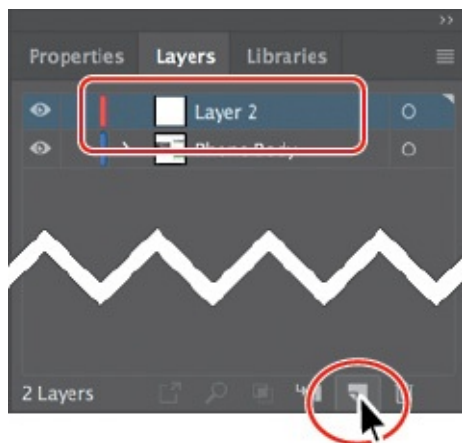
Next, you’ll change the default layer name and then create new layers using different methods. The idea for this project is to organize the artwork so you can more easily work with it later. In a real-world situation, you’ll set up layers before you begin working on the artwork or as you create your artwork. In this lesson, you’ll organize artwork with layers *after* the artwork is created, which can be a bit more challenging.

1. Click the RealEstateApp.ai tab at the top of the document window.
2. If the Layers panel isn’t visible, click the Layers panel tab on the right side of the workspace, or choose Window > Layers. Layer 1 (the default name for the first layer) is highlighted, indicating that it is active.



3. In the Layers panel, double-click directly on the layer name “Layer 1” to edit it inline. Type **Phone Body** and then press Enter or Return.

Instead of keeping all the content on one single layer, you’ll create several layers and sublayers to better organize the content and to make it easier to select content later.

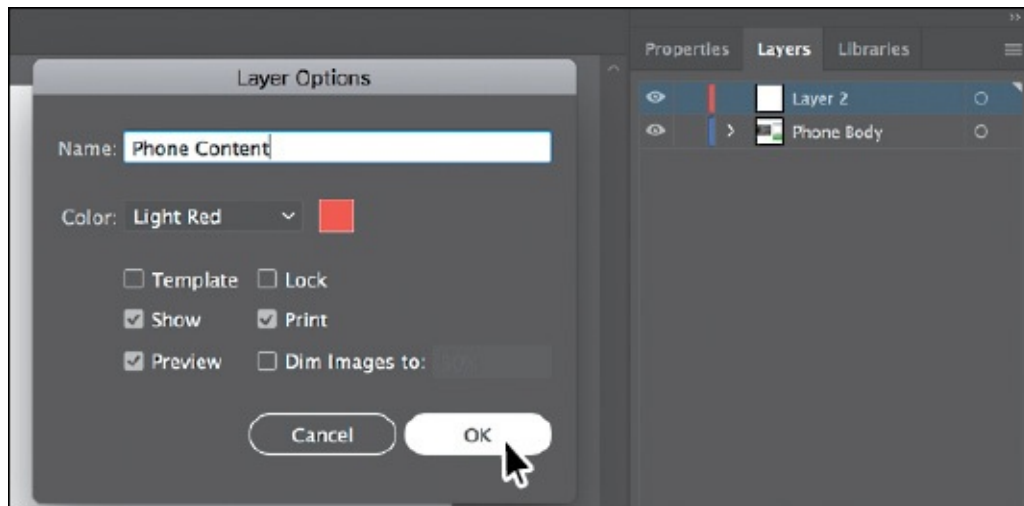


4. Click the Create New Layer button (■) at the bottom of the Layers panel.

Layers and sublayers that aren’t named are numbered in sequence. For example, the new layer is named Layer 2. When a layer or sublayer in the Layers panel contains other items, a disclosure triangle (▸) appears to the left of the layer or sublayer name. You can click the disclosure triangle to show or hide the contents. If no triangle appears, the layer has no content on it.

▶ **Tip:** You can easily delete a layer by selecting the layer or sublayer and clicking the Delete Selection button (🗑️) at the bottom of the Layers panel. This deletes the layer or sublayer and all content on it.

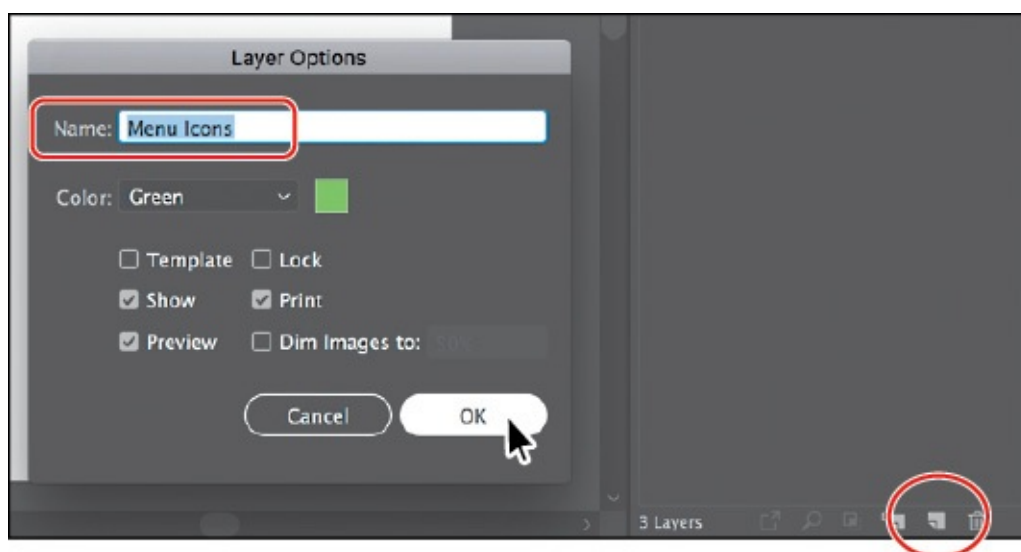
5. Double-click the layer thumbnail for Layer 2 (the white box) or to the right of the layer name “Layer 2” in the Layers panel to open the Layer Options dialog box. Change the name to **Phone Content**, and notice all the other options available. Click OK.



● **Note:** The Layer Options dialog box has a lot of the options you've already worked with, including naming layers, Preview or Outline mode, locking layers, and showing and hiding layers. You can also deselect the Print option in the Layer Options dialog box, and any content on that layer will not print.

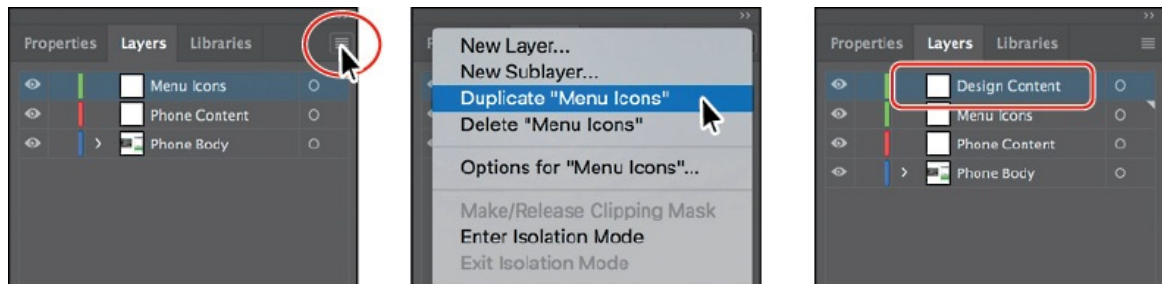
By default, the new layer is added above the currently selected layer (Phone Body, in this case) in the Layers panel and becomes active. Notice that the new layer has a different layer color (a light red) to the left of the layer name. This will become more important later, as you select content. Next, you will create a new layer and name it in one step, using a modifier key.

6. Option-click (macOS) or Alt-click (Windows) the Create New Layer button (📄) at the bottom of the Layers panel. In the Layer Options dialog box, change the name to **Menu Icons** and then click OK.



► **Tip:** Choosing New Layer from the Layers panel menu (☰) will also create a new layer and open the Layer Options dialog box.

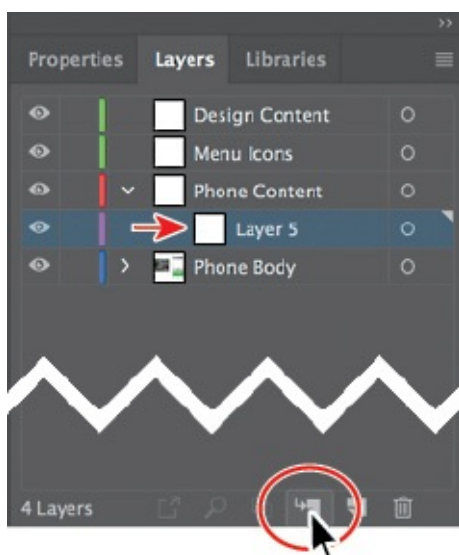
7. With the “Menu Icons” layer selected in the Layers panel, click the Layers panel menu (☰) and choose Duplicate “Menu Icons” to create a copy of the layer.
8. Double-click directly on the new layer name in the panel, and change it to **Design Content**. Press Enter or Return to accept the change.



● **Note:** The layer copy has the same layer color as the original layer (Menu Icons). In this lesson, that’s okay, but in the real world you may want to make the layer color different for each layer. This can be helpful when selecting artwork later.

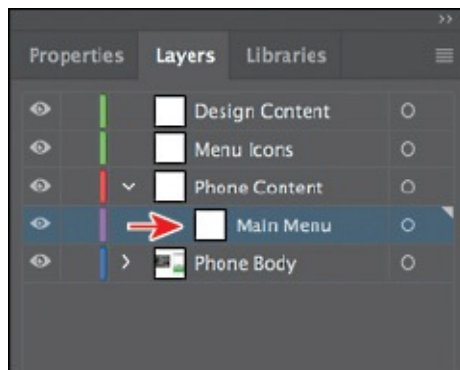
Creating sublayers

Next, you’ll create a sublayer, which is a layer nested within a layer. Sublayers can be useful for organizing content within a layer without grouping or ungrouping content.



1. Click the layer named “Phone Content” to select it and then click the Create New Sublayer button (☐+) at the bottom of the Layers panel.

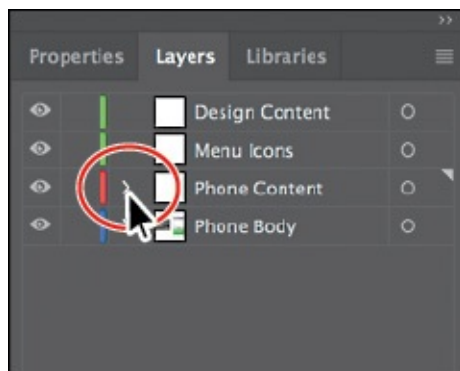
A new sublayer is created on the Phone Content layer and is selected. You can think of this new sublayer as a “child” of the “parent” layer named “Phone Content.”



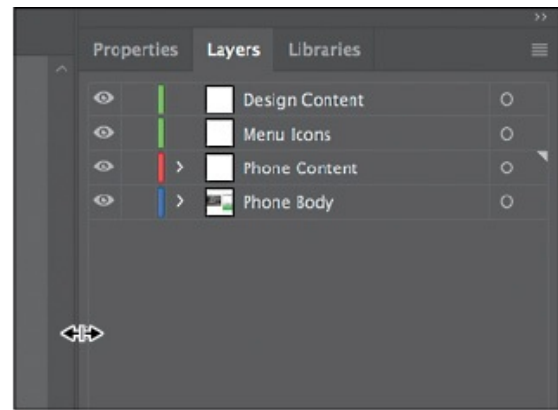
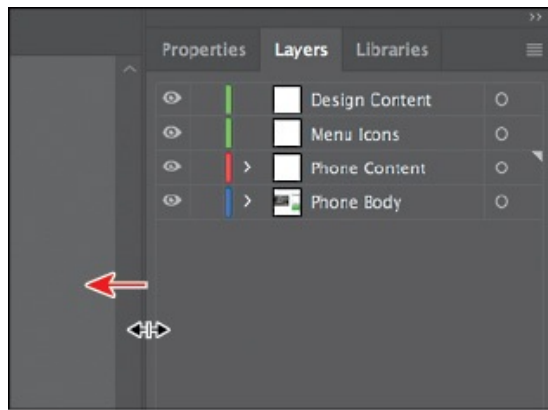
● **Note:** To create a new sublayer and name it in one step, Option-click (macOS) or Alt-click (Windows) the Create New Sublayer button or choose New Sublayer from the Layers panel menu to open the Layer Options dialog box.

2. Double-click the new sublayer name (Layer 5, in my case), change the name to **Main Menu**, and then press Enter or Return.

Creating a new sublayer opens the selected layer to show existing sublayers and content.



3. Click the disclosure triangle (☑) to the left of the Phone Content layer to hide the content of the layer.
4. Drag the left edge of the Layers panel to the left to make it wider.



Editing layers and objects

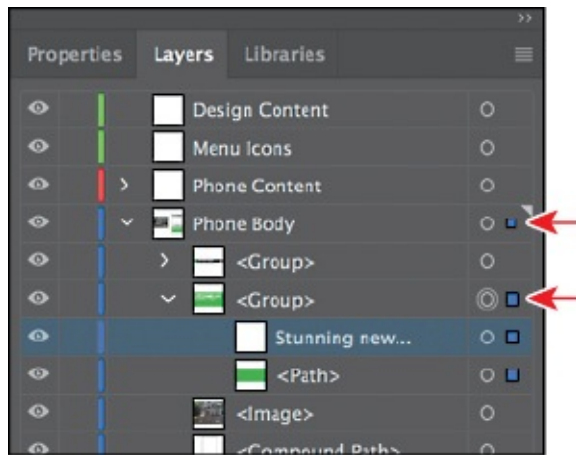
By rearranging the layers in the Layers panel, you can change the stacking order of objects in your artwork. On an artboard, objects in layers that are higher in the Layers panel list are in front of objects located on layers lower in the list, and each layer has its own stacking order as well. Layers are useful for a variety of reasons, including the ability to move objects between layers and sublayers to organize and more easily select your artwork.

Locating layers

When working in artwork, there may be times when you select content on the artboard and then want to locate that same content in the Layers panel. This can help you to determine how content is organized.

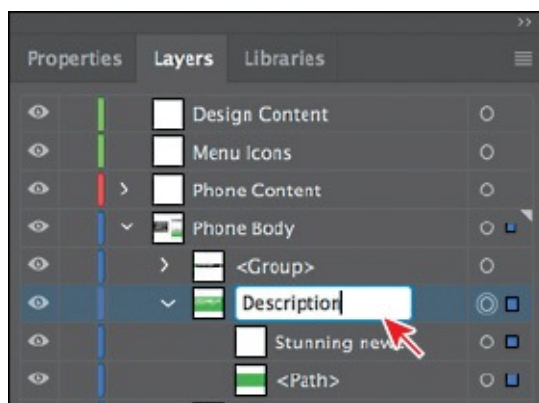
1. With the Selection tool (▢), click to select the green rectangle with text on it toward the bottom of the left artboard. Click the Locate Object button (🔍) at the bottom of the Layers panel to reveal the group of objects within the Layers panel.





Clicking the Locate Object button will open the layer that the layer content is on, and the Layers panel will scroll, if necessary, to reveal the selected content.

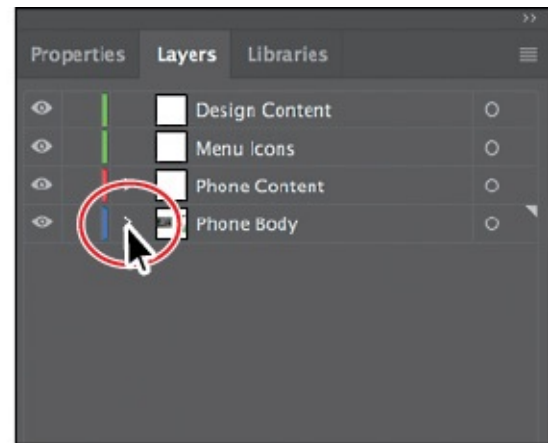
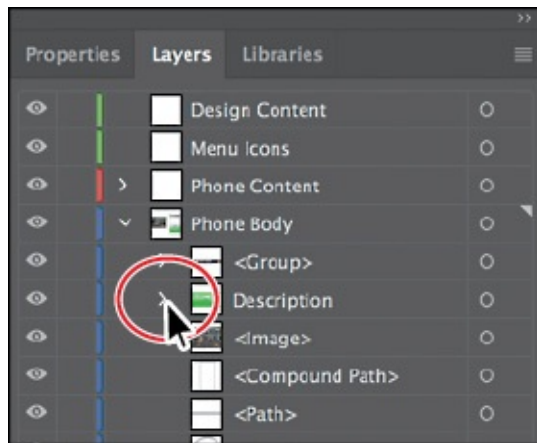
In the Layers panel, you'll see a selection indicator (■) to the far right of the layer that the selected content is on, the <Group> object, as well as the objects in the group.



2. In the Layers panel, double-click the <Group> text, and rename it **Description**.

When content is grouped, a group object (<Group>) is created that contains the grouped content. Look at the top of the Properties panel to see the word "Group" in the Selection Indicator. Renaming a group doesn't change the fact that it's a group, but it can make it easier to find in the Layers panel.

3. Choose Select > Deselect.
4. Click the disclosure triangle (▼) to the left of the Description group to collapse the group and then click the disclosure triangle (▼) to the left of the Phone Body layer name to collapse the layer and hide the contents of the entire layer.



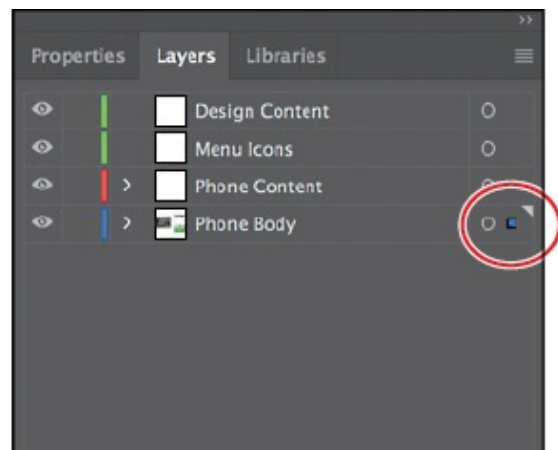
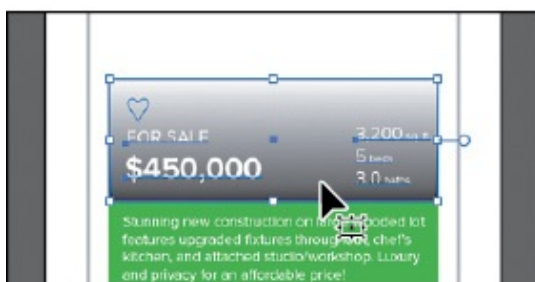
Keeping layers, sublayers, and groups collapsed is a great way to make the Layers panel less visually cluttered. The Phone Content layer and Phone Body layer are the only layers with a disclosure triangle because they're the only layers with content on them.

Moving content between layers

Next, you'll move the artwork to the different layers to take advantage of the layers and sublayers you've created.

1. In the artwork, using the Selection tool (⌘), click the text "FOR SALE \$450,000" to select a group of content.

In the Layers panel, notice that the Phone Body layer name has the selected-art indicator (the color square); it's circled in the figure.



Also notice that the color of the bounding box, paths, and anchor points of the selected artwork matches the color of the layer.

If you want to move selected artwork from one layer to another, you can either drag the selected-art indicator to the right of each sublayer or drag the selected-art indicator to the right of the layer name. That's what you'll do next.