Shadows can add depth to your project. This is the most basic way to add a shadow to an animated character. Its simplicity does have its limitations, however. In this chapter you will learn more advanced shadow techniques with greater flexibility, but some may not be supported in older versions of the Flash player. Depending on your target audience and your client's technical requirements, you may need a technique that will allow you to publish to older player versions. This is one such technique.

1. For the best result, place your character animation inside a symbol. This is commonly referred to as "nesting". The next step is to simply copy the symbol of your character using Ctrl+C. Create a new layer and move it below the character layer. Paste the copy of the symbol using Ctrl+V into this new layer.

4. With the Free Transform tool still selected, click and drag horizontally outside the bounding box in between the handles to skew the shadow.
2 Next, apply a tint to the symbol instance you just pasted. The tint needs to have a strength of 100% to completely hide the character’s details. The color of the tint should also be a darker color value than the background.

3 Position the shadow instance and with the Free Transform tool, scale it vertically to suggest some perspective of it being cast against the ground.

5 You may want to scale your shadow slightly smaller to suggest more depth. Play around with its position relative to the original character for the best results. Because the shadow symbol is a duplicate of the original animated character symbol, it will also animate in sync with the character. This will result in a convincing shadow effect. Since you have not used any special filters, this shadow effect is supported by all versions of the Flash Player.
SEPARATION BETWEEN CHARACTER and background can be critical to the overall impact of your animations. There are several ways to approach adding shadows for characters but, with animation, the approach can seem a bit daunting at first. Flash CS5 makes this as easy as possible with the use of Filters.

Filters can only be applied to Movie Clips. If your animation is not in a Movie Clip, you’ll need to remedy this by selecting the entire range of frames and layers and then Copy Frames from the right-click context menu.

Create a new Movie Clip symbol from the Library panel. Select the first frame of this symbol and, from the right-click context menu, select Paste Frames.

If you have a complex background, set the opacity to around 30–40%. This will allow the background values to show through the shadow itself for a realistic effect. I usually spend most of my time adjusting the angle and distance of the shadow relative to my light source. Test your movie to see the Movie Clip and shadow animation.

For this example we will take a look at the Drop Shadow filter in its purest form. The technique that follows this one will provide a cool way to use the same filter that adds more depth and perspective.
3 Drag an instance of this Movie Clip to a new layer on the main Timeline. Delete all the original frames and layers as they are no longer needed. Select your new Movie Clip instance and from the Properties panel select the Drop Shadow filter from the Filters section.

4 Adjust the amount of blur, opacity, angle and distance to achieve your desired results. You can also select the color of the shadow by clicking on the swatch color.

6 Select the Hide object feature to hide the Movie Clip. The drop shadow will remain on stage. Test your movie to see just the shadow animation. Experiment with some of the other options, such as Knockout and Inner shadow. You can also click the little lock icon next to blur to remove the X and Y constraint. Apply more blur to X or Y for even more interesting results.

HOT TIP

Adjust the strength of the shadow to suggest more or less contrast between our character and wall. Less strength (less opacity) will suggest a softer light, such as an overcast day. Higher strength (more opacity) will suggest a stronger light, such as a very sunny day.
So far we’ve looked at how to add a drop shadow filter to an animated character using a Movie Clip and the Filters feature. But the drop shadow can be a little limiting in some situations. To place a character in an environment that has more depth and perspective to it, the drop shadow will not work very well since it tends to flatten the perspective. You may need a shadow that provides the illusion of perspective and depth.

1. Select your Movie Clip instance and copy it using Ctrl+C/Cmd+C. Create a new layer below it and paste it in place using Ctrl+Shift+V.

2. Lock the top layer to avoid editing it. Select the instance in the layer below it and, using the Free Transform tool, edit its center point so that it is positioned on the bottom edge.

5. With the symbol still selected, apply a Drop Shadow filter to it.
3 Scale the symbol downward by dragging the handle in the top center. Notice that the center point positioned on the bottom edge limits that edge from scaling.

4 Next, skew the symbol by dragging in between the handles outside the top edge.

6 The “cheat” to this technique is to select the Hide object feature. Now all you’ll see is the Shadow filter itself.

7 Play around with the options provided. You can adjust the amount of blur, opacity, quality, angle and distance. You can even change the overall color of the filter itself.

HOT TIP

Filters were introduced in Flash 8. Therefore the oldest player version to support filters is Flash player version 8. You cannot publish to Flash player version 7 or older and expect any filter effects to be included. Flash will warn you if your publish settings are set to a player that does not support filters. Plan ahead as much as you can. If your client requires an older player, then avoid filters.