

Introduction

Adobe recently paid billions of dollars to acquire Macromedia and few would disagree it was because of Flash. Sure, Macromedia had some other fine products, but the huge success and continued momentum of Flash made Macromedia so attractive. If you think you're coming to Flash late let me assure you the brightest days for Flash are yet to come.

Adobe is not exaggerating when it says that Flash CS3 Professional is the “most advanced authoring environment for creating rich, interactive content for digital, web, and mobile platforms.” You only need to visit a few sites that use Flash to understand how compelling it is. Using graphics, animation, sound, and interactivity, Flash can excite, teach, entertain, and provide practical information.

More than half a billion users already have the free Flash player (which is needed to view Flash movies). As of the writing of this book more than 80% of computers connected to the Internet not only had Flash, but have the latest version: Flash Player 9. The fact that Adobe continues to distribute this software so effectively means that the potential audience for Flash content is huge and continues to grow.

The tools needed to create Flash movies are within your reach. After you purchase Flash, the only investment you need to make is time learning. You can even download Flash from www.adobe.com and use it for 30 days before having to purchase it. It's exciting to watch people go from fiddling with Flash to making entertaining movies. Imagine a great musician picking up and learning an instrument in a matter of days. It really is that amazing. If you're motivated, with just a moderate time investment, you'll feel as though a powerful communication tool has been given to you.

Flash is so unique that sometimes the less experience you have, the better. If you have pre-conceived ideas about what Flash is or how you're supposed to use drawing tools, it might be best to try to forget everything and start fresh. This book is organized in such a way that you should start seeing successes quickly. With each task, you'll prove to yourself that you're acquiring knowledge and skills.

I don't need to give you a pep talk because you'll see for yourself. In just a few one-hour lessons, you'll be creating drawings that you may have thought you weren't capable of. After that, in a few more hours, you'll be making animations. Finally, after 24 one-hour lessons, you'll be unstoppable. I know this. I've taught Flash to hundreds of students, and invariably even those who may not have fire in their eyes at first will recognize the power Flash has given them and that they can hone their Flash skills over time. Where you take your skills is up to you, but you'll get a great foundation here.

You may not feel like a pro overnight, but you will feel that you have a powerful communication tool in your control. When you can't wait to show others your creations, you'll know you're on your way. Get ready to have some fun.

What's New in This Edition

This is the 5th edition of this book! In order to prevent the material getting stale, I actually change quite a bit in each revision. Unlike many other dramatic software upgrades, Adobe Flash CS3 Professional is not *that* different than the version that it replaces (Macromedia Flash 8). However, the way people use Flash and Flash usage in general has definitely broadened significantly. It's not just "Flash" anymore, but the "Flash Platform." New technologies such as Apollo and the Flex Framework have attracted a new set of developers all delivering Flash content. Also, Flash is now part of the Adobe family of products—and as much as anything else, the CS3 upgrade is about integrating with Adobe.

This edition of my book reflects the widening interest in Flash by actually narrowing its focus! That is, instead of trying to cover everything (and possibly failing to do justice on some topics) The focus is on animation, graphics, and delivering to the web. The new Photoshop and Illustrator import features are arguably the biggest new additions to CS3—so, naturally, they're covered in detail here. And, because Flash video has never been more popular, you'll spend a whole hour exploring video, including the new full-screen mode.

Perhaps the biggest difference in this book over previous editions is how I cover ActionScript (the Flash programming language). If there was one common criticism of previous editions of my book, it was that things got difficult when reaching the ActionScripting chapters. This was difficult to address because ActionScripting *can* be difficult for many readers but if I leave out ActionScript you'll be unable to do some of the really cool stuff I know people want to build. A good way to straddle this dilemma is to concentrate on Components—ready-built and self-contained objects that include advanced code, but also keep you insulated from that code. So, instead of having three chapters ("hours") on ActionScript and one on Components, this edition of the book has one chapter on basic ActionScript and then two on using the Components. I should also note that while ActionScript isn't getting any less complex, it is getting much more consistent. So, what you learn in the introductory ActionScript chapter applies to the rest of the code you see pop up in the book. Also, I've created an ActionScript primer that's available with the rest of the appendixes online.

An even stickier topic has arisen due to the fact there is now a new version of the Flash programming language—ActionScript 3.0 (or AS3). You'll see AS3 in most of the code samples that appear in this book. But in some cases I show how to perform a task using AS2. First, realize that for *every* example in this book I've included both an AS2 and AS3 version online. While AS3 is a much cleaner version of the ActionScript language, it's also much less forgiving. Programmers actually like the strictness of AS3. But I suspect many intermediate Flash users will prefer to do things the "old way" (in AS2) because they can successfully make moderately complex tasks work or because they'd rather dig into AS3 at a later date. I guess

my point is that you shouldn't get hung on up which version of ActionScript appears here. I've tried to make the examples as lucent and consistent as possible...and remember you can download alternative versions for everything you see in this book.

The one thing that hasn't changed in this edition is the goal—namely, to get you started in Flash by developing good foundation skills. I know it's easy to pick up bad habits in Flash and you'll definitely get started on the right foot with this book.

Who Should Read This Book

New users to Flash should read this book first. I suppose if you've been doing Flash for a while and want to step back to make sure you're headed on the right direction, you could find some gems throughout the book—but, for you, it might be tough to re-learn the basics. If you're someone who can pick up and learn stuff on your own, you might think you don't need a book like this and, honestly, you might be right. But I think—even for you—this book moves quickly enough and provides tons of hands-on tasks to build that it's worth investing the time to read 24 hour-long chapters.

I often get asked to recommend books for particular topics. Something like, “what's a good book for learning XML in Flash?” or “what's a really good ActionScripting book?” But, even when I'm tempted to suggest my book, I think the first question should be “what kind of learner are you?” If you learn by doing, this is a good book for you. This book teaches by making you do stuff.

In contrast, it's easy to say who should not read this book. If you're looking for any of the following Flash topics I can safely say they're not covered here: writing class files in ActionScript 2.0 or ActionScript 3.0, developing content for mobile phones, using Flex Builder, building true 3D environments in Flash, integrating with back-end web servers, or using Apollo. I feel like adding asterisks to many of these because some topics are actually mentioned the book—but at best I'm only going to show you door to these more advanced topics.

How This Book Is Organized

This is a hands-on tutorial book. It's not a project-based tutorial, however, because each task explores a single topic. Occasionally, you'll find a series of tasks that build upon one another. Generally, I'll introduce a topic then, as quickly as possible, jump straight into a task where you get your hands dirty.

At the end of each hour I've included a Question and Answer section with common questions I've either heard from students or things that I think could be confusing to new users. There's also a quiz at the end of each hour. The goal of both the Q&A and quizzes is simply to provide an additional way to learn. There are lots of different ways to learn and these questions simply exercise a different part of your brain.

The book as a whole is organized in a linear manner. Later hours rely on the knowledge you acquire in earlier hours. The 24 hours are broken into four parts:

- ▶ Part I: Assembling the Graphics You'll Animate in Flash

Here you'll concentrate on getting the graphics looking exactly as you intend. It may seem like a lot to spend 25% of the book on static graphics, but the time is well spent as it will make your animations look better, too.

- ▶ Part II: Animating in Flash

This is where you get to start moving things! You learn everything from frame-by-frame animation to tweening and special effects.

- ▶ Part III: Adding Interactivity and Video

In this part of the book you take a big step into writing instructions so that your Flash creations change based on the user's input. Also, video is covered here.

- ▶ Part IV: Putting It All Together for the Web

While it's fun to create things inside Flash, you'll probably want to put your creations online so your friends, family, and customers can see it. This part of the book shows you how, plus you'll learn some fine-tuning adjustments to optimize performance and download speeds.

What's on the Book's Website

I've uploaded the finished source files for every task in the book. The starting point is www.phillipkerman.com/teachyourself.

This way, if you have trouble you can both see what the finished project looks like and investigate how it was built. I've also included media files such as images, audio, and video necessary to complete a few of the tasks. (Though, I should note it's always more fun if you use your own content provided you have something to use.)

There are also three appendixes available on Sams website. To download the appendices, register your book at www.sampublishing.com/register.

- ▶ Appendix A, "Shapes You Can Make in Merge Drawing Mode," includes walkthroughs of how to draw many common shapes.
- ▶ Appendix B, "Resources" is where I point you to many community websites and third-party companies providing products to supplement Flash.
- ▶ Appendix C, "ActionScript Primer," includes a crash course in ActionScript. It picks up where the book leaves off (that is, it's not a prerequisite).