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Flash MX 2004 Tutorials

Flash Animation

- Flash Symbols
- Animation Basics
- Flash Graphic Tips
- Advanced Buttons
- Sound in Flash Buttons
- Cool Flash Effects
- Flash Text Basics

Flash Actionscript

- Flash Custom Cursor
- Start/Stop Movieclips
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Flash Symbols

In this Tutorial you'll learn the basic concepts of Flash symbols, symbol types (graphics, buttons and movieclips), creating and using them.

What is a Flash Symbol?

A symbol is a reusable object used/created in Flash. A **Symbol** can be reused throughout your movie or imported and used in other movies. There are three types of symbols: Graphics, Buttons, and Movieclips.

A copy of a symbol used in the movie is called an **Instance**, which can have its own independent properties (like color, size, function, etc.) different from the original symbol. All symbols used in a flash movie are stored in the **Library** from where you can drag-and-drop new instances of the symbols into your movie. When a symbol is edited all of its instances get updated, but changing the properties, effects or dimensions of an instance of a symbol does not affect the original symbol or other instances.

Importance of using Flash Symbols

Using flash symbols is very crucial to the file size of your Flash movie. The Flash file size depends largely on the size of all the graphics and texts used in the movie (both symbols and non-symbols) - here the major advantage of using symbols is that **a symbol's size is taken into consideration only once** even if it is used a hundred times - this is the true power of Flash. Unused symbols in your library are not counted in the size of your movie.

Important Tip: Get used to using symbols in flash right from the beginning and name them neatly for easy maintenance. It is a very tough job optimizing your file size

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Our **Guide to Flash 'n' ASP** should interest you!

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if you don't use symbols from scratch!

The Three Types of Symbols

Graphic symbols are reusable static images that are used mainly to create animations. Any drawn vector/plain text/imported bitmap, or combinations of these, can be converted into a single piece controllable object: as a graphic symbol. They have only one frame in their timeline.
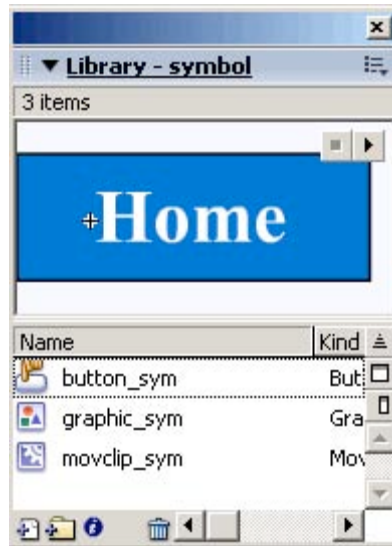
Button symbols are used for timeline navigation - They add interactivity to the movie and respond to mouse clicks, key press or rollovers/rollout, and other actions. You define the graphics associated with various button states (Up/Over/Down/Hit), and then assign actions to the instance of a button. They have 4 frames in their timeline - one each for the up, over and down states, and one to define the hit area of the button.

Movieclip symbols are reusable pieces of flash animation - consisting of one or more graphic/button symbols - thus they are flash movies within your flash movie. They have their own non-restricted Timeline (any number of layers and frames - just like the main timeline) that plays independent of the main movie's Timeline. The best thing about using movieclips is that you can control them from actionscript - you can change their dimensions, position, color, alpha, and other properties and can even duplicate and delete them.

The three symbols appear in the flash library as shown in the above image. Let's look at how to create these symbols now.

A. Creating Graphic symbols in Flash

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1. Any drawn vector/plain text/imported bitmap, or combinations of these can be converted into a graphic symbol.

2. First create/import the object to be converted into a graphic, either by drawing the vector or importing the bitmap onto the stage (Ctrl + R).

3. Select one or more objects which have to be grouped together as a single graphic and then press F8 (Modify-->Convert to Symbol).

4. Select the Graphic Behavior and name the symbol, say 'graphic_sym'.

5. To edit it at a later point, double-click the symbol in the library or any of its instance on the stage to switch to its symbol-editing mode as shown below.
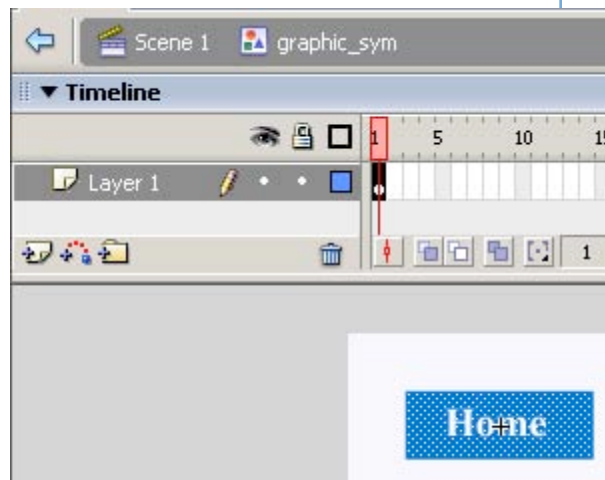

Fig: Symbol-editing Mode of graphic_sym

6. Make the necessary changes and click Scene 1 to exit from the symbol editing mode.

B. Creating a Simple Button in Flash

1. Buttons can be created in a similar manner to a graphic symbol, but by selecting the Button Behavior for the symbol and name the symbol say, 'button_sym'.

2. Double-click the instance of 'button_sym' on the stage to switch to its symbol-editing mode. The Timeline header changes to display four consecutive frames labeled Up, Over, Down, and Hit as shown below.
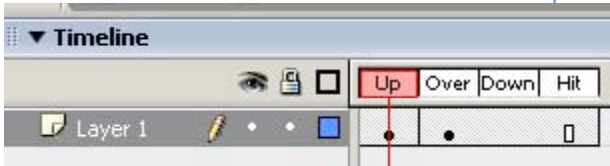
Fig: Symbol-editing Mode of completed button_sym

3. The first frame displays the drawn vector/plain text used for creating this button, now insert a Key frame (F6) in the frame labeled Over (Flash automatically duplicates the contents of the Up frame).

4. Now change the color of the object in the Over frame to create a rollover effect in the button.

5. Insert frames (F5) for the Down frame and the Hit frame (only defines the area of the button that responds to user action and is not visible at runtime).

6. Save your work and test the Movie (Ctrl + Enter). That's it your simple button is ready!

C. Creating Movieclip symbols in Flash

1. You can create a Movieclip by first saving drawn vectors/plain text/graphic symbols/button symbols, or combinations of these, as a movieclip symbol (select them, press F8 (Modify-->Convert to Symbol), choose Movieclip Behavior and name the symbol, say 'movieclip_sym').

2. Double-click the instance of 'movieclip_sym' on the stage to switch to its symbol-editing mode and create an animation sequence either using Tweened Animation / Frame-by-Frame Animation.

Fig: Symbol-editing Mode of completed movieclip_sym

3. The above figure shows the Timeline of the Movieclip symbol. Click Scene 1 to exit from the symbol editing mode.
4. Save your work and test the Movie (Ctrl + Enter). That's it your movieclip is ready! Its that simple.

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