

Custom Shadow Mastery 1 | Module 4

Video 04-01 Cluster Shadows

In module three we zeroed in on custom shadows for individual elements. Our shadows were quite proper and didn't get too wild most of the time. Something happens, though, when you get groups of elements together in a cluster.

Suddenly the most timid shadows get bold and decide to make a collective statement. In fact, when you add the right shadows to a group of elements, they not only pop off the page, they look like they're stacked several inches high! You feel like you could reach out and touch them.

In this lesson I'll teach you how to create a cluster and add both regular and custom shadows to the elements to create a bold look. I'm going to use elements from the Module 3 downloads so you can follow exactly what I do for this one lesson, but after that, I expect you to look through your own kits to create your own clusters. After all, this is an exercise in creativity, so I eventually want you to step out and try your own clusters.

Floral Inspiration

One fun activity I did before I started my own clusters was to enter the term "flower arrangement" into a search engine set to images so I could see professional arrangements. This gave me ideas and inspiration before I started working on my own clusters.

Prepare Your Workspace

When you're ready to start your cluster, create a new 12x12 document with a white background at 300 ppi using RGB color. Use 12x12 even if you plan to eventually move the cluster to a different size page. This will give you plenty of room to work.

Step 1: Build The Base

Find elements that would make a good base for your cluster. Possible items include

- string
- ribbon
- leaves
- flourishes
- anything long
- elements you can duplicate to make a line

Move several elements onto your page and begin to arrange them in a line or a circle or a triangle—however you plan for your design to end up. A line is probably the easiest, so if you're not at all sure of what you're doing, try using a line.

I started with a curled ribbon. Then I added evergreen branches, and that was my base.

Step 2: Decide On Your Main Focus

Most clusters use flowers and leaves, but you could also use something else.

- clock
- photo
- sticker
- other element

I usually have one item that is fairly large which I position above everything else. For this cluster, I used one of the flower downloads from Module 3. I decided to select the buds and cut them from the flower layer and put them on their own layers.

You can also use more than one of the same flower, but if you do that, you would generally vary the size.

Step 3: Fill Out Your Cluster

Click on the layer below your top focus item or items and begin to fill in your cluster with other elements that go well with what you have so far. Use your imagination here! I like to overdo rather than skimp, because I can always delete or hide elements later.

Here's what I used:

- berries
- blue flowers (I used a white berry to create the flower centers.)
- frame
- ribbon
- a second ribbon between the flower layers
- a star

I also tried some other elements that I didn't end up keeping, so don't be stingy about trying things out. Elements are very easy to delete!

Step 4: Add A Global Drop Shadow

The next step is to add a global drop shadow to all the elements at once. Just as an aside, some of my layers have a layer mask to hide part of the element. You may need to do the same on some of your elements, or you can use the Eraser tool, but I like to retain my options by using a layer mask.

I like to start by adding a global drop shadow to all the layers. You could add drop shadows one by one, but I prefer to pick a medium shadow and apply it to all the layers, and then adjust individual layers as needed.

- Make sure you've installed my Drop Shadows-21.asl layer style, so named because there are 21 preset shadows in the set. See below for instructions on how to install layer styles, if you don't know how.
- In the Layers panel, click on the layer just above the background layer and Shift click on the top layer to select all your cluster layers.
- In Photoshop Elements, get the Effects panel (Window > Effects). Click on Styles, open the menu and choose Drop Shadows 21 from the list. Double click on the shadow icon of your choice to add a drop shadow to all the layers.
- In Photoshop, get the Styles panel (Window > Styles) and click once to add the style.

Step 5: Adjust The Shadows

- Get the Move tool and make sure Auto Select is checked in Tool Options. That way you can click on an element on your document, and its layer will be selected in the Layers panel.
- If all your layers are selected, you'll need to click once on the Background of your document to deselect them, and then click on an element that needs a drop shadow adjustment.

- For example, the filmstrip frame is very thin and should have a very small drop shadow, so I can click on it to select it and choose a different drop shadow preset.
- Continue to make any adjustments you want to any of the elements, either making the shadow higher or lower.

Step 6: Add Custom Shadows

After adding and adjusting regular drop shadows, decide whether any of the elements would look better with a custom shadow.

- To get rid of a shadow layer style, click on the element with the Move tool to select it.
- Right click (Mac: Ctrl click) on a layer and choose Clear Layer Style. You can also select more than one layer and Right click to delete the style on all the selected layers at once.
- Once you've removed the regular shadows, create your own custom shadow or shadows.

Finished Cluster

Here's my finished cluster. I adjusted all the shadows and added a piece of background paper and some diamonds I created myself, and this is how it turned out.

For my cluster I deleted the drop shadow on the larger blue ribbon, the small green ribbon, and the star, and I gave them each a custom drop shadow.

Clusters generally use a mixture of regular and custom drop shadows. For my clusters, most of the elements have regular drop shadows, which actually saves a lot of time, but then I choose certain elements and substitute a custom shadow to give it that extra punch!



If you were to scrutinize this cluster closely, you might see a shadow that isn't perfectly displayed like it would be in real life, but remember, you're creating art, so you have artistic license! I try to get reasonably close to a real shadow look, but I don't get nit-picky about it. What you're after is an overall impression of depth and beauty.

So now it's your turn. Select a kit, build a cluster, and try my method for adding regular and custom drop shadows!

How To Load Layer Styles

Photoshop Elements 11 or later

- Open the Effects panel (Window > Effects).
- Click on the Styles Tab at the top of the panel.
- Click on the icon in the upper right corner of the Effects panel to get a flyout menu. Choose Load Styles.
- Navigate to the folder on your computer that contains the Drop Shadow-21.asl style set and double click on it to load it.

Photoshop:

- Open the Styles panel (Window > Styles)
- Click on the icon in the upper right corner of the Styles panel to get a flyout menu. Choose Load Styles.
- Navigate to the folder on your computer that contains the Drop Shadow-21.asl style set and double click on it to load it.
- You may be asked if you want to replace the current styles or append them. Choose append and click OK.

Photoshop Elements 10 and Earlier

- Download the Drop Shadows 21.psd workaround document and open it in Photoshop Elements.
- Get the Move tool and check Auto Select Layer in the Options Bar.
- On the document, click on a shadow icon you want for your cluster to select its layer in the layer panel.
- In the Layers panel, Right click (Mac: Ctrl click) on the selected layer and choose Copy Layer Style.
- Click on your cluster document or scrapbook page to make it the active document.
- On your document use the Move tool to click on the element that needs a drop shadow.
- In the Layers panel Right click (Mac: Ctrl click) on the highlighted layer and choose Paste Layer Style.
- To add the layer style to more than one layer at a time, in the Layers panel, click on one layer and Ctrl click (Mac: Cmd click) on any additional layers. Then you can paste the layer style on one of the selected layers to add the style to all the layers.

Is It Time To Upgrade?

Styles and Actions are difficult to install in Photoshop Elements on versions prior to Photoshop Elements 11. You can find newer versions of Photoshop Elements online for as little as \$40 to \$50. Do yourself a favor and upgrade. You'll wonder why it took you so long!

Video 04-02 Divided Shadow

What do you do when one shadow, even a custom shadow, doesn't work? Take this ribbon, for example. Logic tells me that the part of the ribbon over the frame should have a smaller shadow than the part that is over the background. Why? Because the frame is thicker and stands up higher than the background.

So how do we create a ribbon that works for both scenarios? We do it by cutting the ribbon shadow in half. Here's how:

- Create a custom shadow manually, or use my custom drop shadow action to create one for you on a layer below the ribbon.
- For the blur Radius, use the amount of blur you would use for the shorter shadow distance, in this case, the frame. I used 4 pixels.
- With the custom drop shadow layer the active layer, Ctrl click (Mac: Cmd click) on the thumbnail of the frame layer to get a selection outline.
- Since part of the ribbon is still outside the selection outline, get the Rectangular Marquee tool.
- In Tool Options, choose the Add to Selection icon. Feather should be 0 and Aspect should be normal. (Photoshop: Style should be Normal.)
- Click and drag a selection outline inside the frame to include the center of the frame.
- You should still be on the ribbon custom shadow layer.
- Press Ctrl Shift J (Mac: Cmd Shift J) to cut the ribbon inside the selection outline and put it on its own layer.



Adjust Each Shadow Separately

- Get the Smudge tool and manipulate the ribbon over the frame. It should remain closer to the ribbon.
- In the Layers panel, click on the remaining ribbon custom shadow layer to make it the active layer.
- Choose Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur. Move the Radius slider to the right to make the shadow more blurry, since it's further from the background. I used 6 pixels. Click OK.

- Use the Smudge tool to adjust the shadow.
- You may even want to lower the opacity of the second shadow layer slightly. I lowered my opacity to 35%, but this will depend on the distance and the background paper.



Video 04-03 Cluster Pages

Once you know how to create yummy clusters, you can use them to create pages that are richly artistic. They're the kind of pages you recognize instantly.

- The elements tend to be larger than many other pages.
- The clusters are richly shadowed giving the page a 3 dimensional look.
- There is often a dreamy look.
- You rarely see a lot of photos on pages like these, and often the photos are small.
- Often the paper shadows are larger than other kinds of pages.
- Most of all, you feel like you could reach out and touch them!

Let's take a look at some examples. I'll start with the cluster I created in the first video of this module—the cluster made with elements from the Module 3 downloads. Since the cluster had such a Christmasy feel about it, I used the Vintage Yuletide elements by Susie Roberts to create a wonderful nostalgic feel.

Christmas Play 1

- The paper has a fairly high drop shadow.
- The clusters are large and richly shadowed.
- The page has a nostalgic feel.
- The photo appears to be floating above the cluster.



Christmas Play 2

I thought I'd play around with this same cluster and try a slightly different design, but this time I included a frame behind the photo. If you zoom in to the photo and cluster, it really looks 3 Dimensional.

Christmas-Play-1 and 2 Credits

Paper: Being me by Eva Kipler and Cardstock Nautica by Susie Roberts

Overlays from the following kits by Susie Roberts: Christmas Overlays, Vintage Yuletide Stickers, and Vintage Yuletide Brushes

Tag from Vintage Yuletide Torn Tags by Susie Roberts

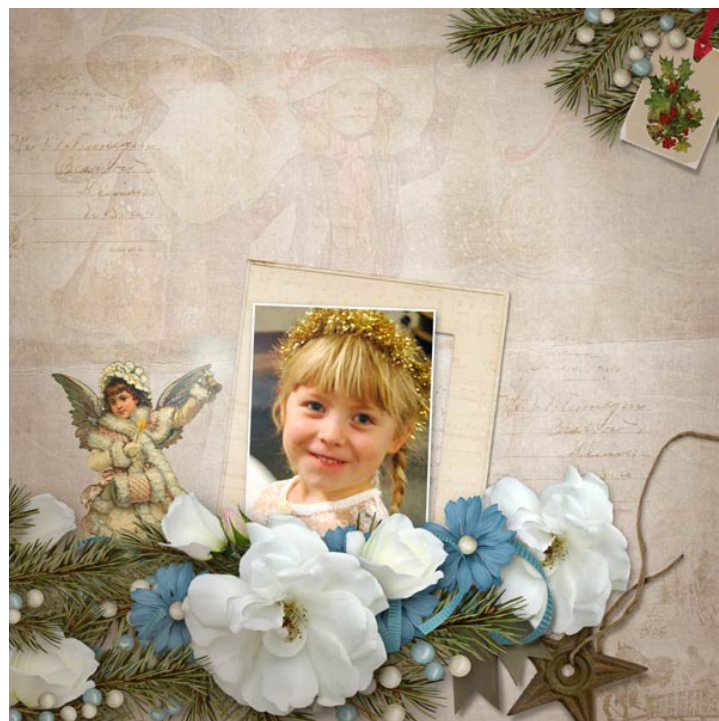
Branches and berries from Christmas Lights by Julie Billingsley

Ribbon from Legacy of Love by Kristin Cronin-Barrow and English Garden by Jenny Binder

Blue flowers from Celebrate by Julie Billingsley

White flowers from Cherish This Moment by Digital Scrapper Designs

Star from In His World by Veronica Spriggs



Kittens

This is a great design to do with a banner. The clusters go all along the curved line. If you zoom in and look at the elements more closely, you get a feeling of depth.

You can also see the bows I put on our kitten's heads for their Christmas Day portraits.

Kittens Credits

Elements from Christmas Wishes by Kristin Cronin-Barrow
Banner from Dad's Day by Digilicious (banner)
Photo ribbon wrap from Come Out and Play by Amanda Heimann
Background paper from ArtPlay Palette Family by Anna Aspnes
TravelMates Postcard Overlays by Susie Roberts
Paris overlay from Mother Is A Verb by Krystal Hartley
Love Stamp from Rule my World by Irene Alexeeva
Diamond scatter by Linda Sattgast



Easter

Cluster pages don't all have to be nostalgic or vintage looking. This kit by Penny Springman is bright and cheery, and the elements are not realistic flower type of images, but they work for clustering just as well. This was perfect for this photo of my kids coloring Easter eggs.

You can even use stickers stacked on a cluster, like the cute chick. I made a corner cluster as well.

Easter Credits

Hop Along by Penny Springmann
Stitching from All Stitched Up by Susie Roberts
Diamond Scatter by Linda Sattgast



Kathleen

This is my mother at about five years of age. This page shows that you don't need a lot of elements to have a great effect. My corner cluster is very simple with some custom shadows and some regular shadows, and my photo cluster is also fairly simple.

Kathleen Credits

Paper: Recollection by Joanne Brisebois
Love Letter from Everlasting Love by Studio Manu
Leaves from Mother is a Verb by Krystal Hartley (recolored)
Flowers from Two Hearts by Anita Designs and Legacy of Love by Kristin Cronin-Barrow
Twine from Summer Passport by Syndee Knuckles
Frame, stamp, and ribbon from Perfect Harmony by Digilicious
Twig and grommet ribbon from Duty, Honor, Country by Etc. by Danyale
Font: Orator Std



Leah1

This is my mother-in-law during World War 2. I kept this page pretty simple.

- It has a popped up paper with a high shadow.
- It has elements showing under the page.
- Most of the design is along one side.
- I cut the valentine heart shadow into two parts to get the closer shadow on the paper and the more distant shadow on the right side.
- I gave the photo a high floating look, which isn't unusual in pages like this.
- I also used the photo as an overlay on the paper.

Leah1 Credits

Kit: Everlasting Love by Studio Manu
Photo stack from Photographie by Joanne Brisebois



Leah 2

Here's another great tinted photo of my mother-in-law. I wanted the page to feel rich and vintage, which I accomplished through the colors and elements. I can't think of a better compliment to someone than to take the time to gather pretty papers and elements and create a page that makes you stop and enjoy the photo.

Leah2 Credits

Love You always by Amanda Rockwell
Everlasting Love by Studio Manu
Ribbon from Timeless Classic by Julie Mead
Stamp from Musicality by Susie Roberts



Now it's your turn to do the same for a special someone in your life, or maybe of yourself. You deserve the best, too!