



The Fundamentals, Custom Shadow by Jen White

Learn the details of what makes a good custom shadow from beginning to end.

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There are two basic steps to every custom shadow you build.

- **Step 1 is to build** the custom shadow.
- **Step 2 is to transform** the custom shadow.

In this step-by-step manual, you will find:

- Step 1, Option 1: Build a Shadow Manually
- Step 1, Option 2: Build a Shadow With an Action
- Step 1, Option 3: Build a Shadow With Create Layer (PS Only)
- Step 2, Option 1: Transform a Shadow With Warp
- Step 2, Option 2: Transform a Shadow With Smudge

If you'd like to follow along with this tutorial series:

- Download the FND-CustomShadow-Worksheet in the classroom.
- Download the DS2024-CustomShadow action in the classroom.
- Watch the videos in the classroom.

Custom Shadow Step 1, Build the Custom Shadow



Custom Shadow Step 2, Transform the Custom Shadow





The Fundamentals, Custom Shadow

Step 1, Option 1: Build a Shadow Manually

Step 1, Option 1: Build a Shadow Manually

When using Photoshop Elements, this is my preferred way to create a custom shadow. Once you have the steps memorized, it doesn't take long, but it does offer the most control over what your shadow looks like.

Open and Duplicate the Worksheet

- Open the FND-CustomShadow-Worksheet.psd file (File > Open) from the download link above.
- In the Menu Bar, choose File > Duplicate (PS: Image > Duplicate).
- In the dialog box, click OK. Close the original worksheet. The duplicate worksheet should now be active.
- In the Layers panel, click on the bottom Photo/Paper Clipping Mask layer to activate it.

Add a Color

- Press the letter D to reset the Color Chips to the default of black over white.
- In the Layers panel, hold down the Alt key (Mac: Opt key) and click and drag a duplicate layer below.
- Double click directly on the name of the duplicate layer and rename it CUSTOM SHADOW.

NOTE: If the CUSTOM SHADOW layer has a layer style applied, you'll want to clear the style by clicking and dragging it to the Trash icon.

- Press Shift Alt Backspace (Mac: Shift Option Delete) to fill the duplicate layer's pixels with black. You will not see a change on the document.



Add Spacing

- Press Ctrl 0 (Mac: Cmd 0) to fit your document to the viewing window.
- Get the Move tool.
- Press the Down Arrow key 5 times and the Right Arrow key 3 times.



Add Blending

- In the Layers panel, set the Opacity to 40%.
- Set the Blend Mode to Multiply.



Add a Blur

- In the Menu Bar, choose Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur.
- In the dialog box, set the Radius (blur) to 5 px and click OK.

TIP: If the blur is not being reflected on the document, click on the Visibility icon of the CUSTOM SHADOW layer to hide and reveal it again.

You are now ready to go to Step 2 to transform the custom shadow.



The Fundamentals, Custom Shadow Step 1, Option 2: Build a Shadow With an Action

Step 1, Option 2: Build a Shadow With an Action

Use this option for building a shadow if you want to save time and like to use actions.

Open and Duplicate the Worksheet

- Open the FND-CustomShadow-Worksheet.psd file (File > Open) from the download link above.
- In the Menu Bar, choose File > Duplicate (PS: Image > Duplicate).
- In the dialog box, click OK. Close the original worksheet. The duplicate worksheet should now be active.
- In the Layers panel, click on the bottom Photo/Paper Clipping Mask layer to activate it.

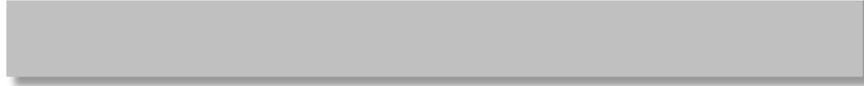
Install the Custom Shadow Action

- In the Actions panel (Window > Actions), click on the flyout menu and choose Load Actions.
- Navigate to the DS2024-CustomShadow.atn file you downloaded. If you still need to download it, you can find the link at the top of this manual. Click Open.

Play the Custom Shadow Action

- In the Actions panel, open the DS2024-CustomShadow folder and click on the DS2024-CustomShadow action to activate it.
- Click on the Play icon.
- After the action has rendered, click OK.

You are now ready to go to Step 2 to transform the custom shadow.



The Fundamentals, Custom Shadow Step 1, Option 3: Build a Shadow With Create Layer

Step 1, Option 3: Build a Shadow With Create Layer (PS Only)

When using Adobe Photoshop, this is my preferred way to create a custom shadow. This option does not work in Photoshop Elements.

Open and Duplicate the Worksheet

- Open the FND-CustomShadow-Worksheet.psd file (File > Open) from the download link above.
- In the Menu Bar, choose File > Duplicate (PS: Image > Duplicate).
- In the dialog box, click OK. Close the original worksheet. The duplicate worksheet should now be active.

Create a Shadow Layer

- In the Layers panel, Right click (Mac: Ctrl click) on the layer style (FX icon) of a layer and choose Create Layer.
- Click on the Custom Shadow layer to activate it.

You are now ready to go to Step 2 to transform the custom shadow.

NOTE: Every effect associated with the layer style will be given its own layer. So if you had a stroke and a shadow applied, the stroke will be on its own layer and so will the shadow.





Step 2, Option 1: Transform a Shadow With Warp

NOTE: This option is not available in Photoshop Elements 2021 and earlier.

Open and Duplicate the Worksheet

- Open the FND-CustomShadow-Worksheet.psd file (File > Open) from the download link above.
- In the Menu Bar, choose File > Duplicate (PS: Image > Duplicate).
- In the dialog box, click OK. Close the original worksheet. The duplicate worksheet should now be active.

Build a Custom Shadow

- Use one of the options from Step 1 to build a custom shadow.
- In the Layers panel, click on the custom shadow layer to activate it.



Transform the Custom Shadow Using the Bounding Box

- Press Ctrl T (Mac: Cmd T) to get the Transform options.
- On the document, hold down the Ctrl key (Mac: Cmd key) and click and drag on a corner handle of the bounding box.
- Click the checkmark to commit the change.



Transform the Custom Shadow Using Warp

- Press Ctrl T (Mac: Cmd T) to get the Transform options.
- In the Tool Options, click on the Warp mode icon.
- On the document, click and drag on the control points, control handles, and/or bars to warp the shadow.
- To start over, click the X to cancel the warp and start again.
- To commit the warp, click on the checkmark.





Step 2, Option 2: Transform a Shadow With Smudge

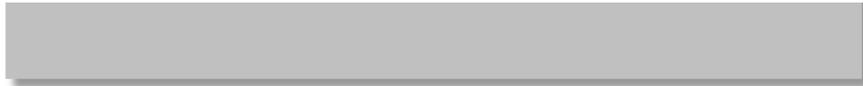
This option can be very helpful when transforming the shadow of something that is not linear or that has small details.

Open and Duplicate the Worksheet

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- In the Menu Bar, choose File > Duplicate (PS: Image > Duplicate).
- In the dialog box, click OK. Close the original worksheet. The duplicate worksheet should now be active.

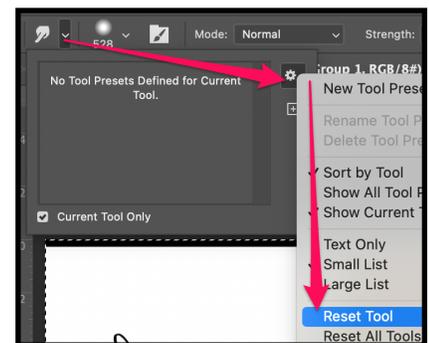
Build a Custom Shadow

- Use one of the options from Step 1 to build a custom shadow.
- In the Layers panel, click on the custom shadow layer to activate it.



Smudge the Custom Shadow

- Get the Smudge tool. It's nested with the Blur tool and the Sharpen tool.
- In the Tool Options, click on the menu (•••) and choose Reset Tool. (PS: Click on the Tool Preset Picker, then click on the Settings icon, and choose Reset Tool. See the screenshot.)
- On the document, hover your cursor over the shadow. Press the Left Bracket key to increase the size of the brush until it's larger than the area you want to smudge. Mine is about 1200 px.
- Click and drag slightly to smudge the shadow.



TIP: Be patient. Sometimes the shadow takes several seconds to render.

- If you don't like the results, press Ctrl Z (Mac: Cmd Z) to undo and smudge again.

