



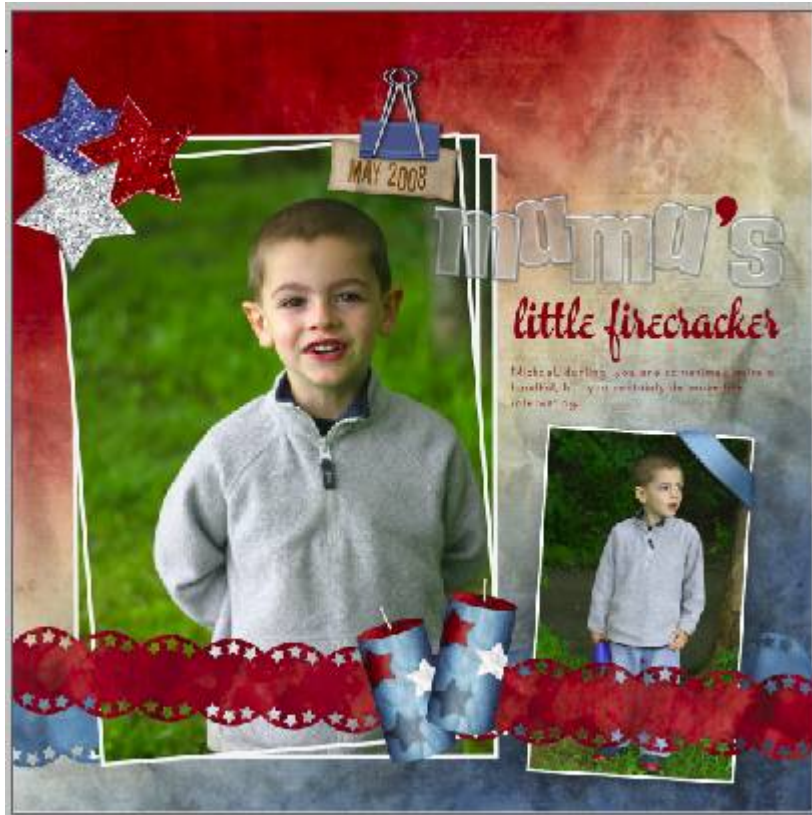
## Making Acrylic Shadows in Photoshop Elements 6

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These days digital acrylics are a popular choice for elements. They're subtle, dimensional and just look cool over your favorite photos or papers. But these like other elements need shadows, and I'm going to show you how to do that in this tutorial. For an example, I'm using this layout with a title of acrylic letters. Now the letters don't have a shadow, but I'll show you how now.



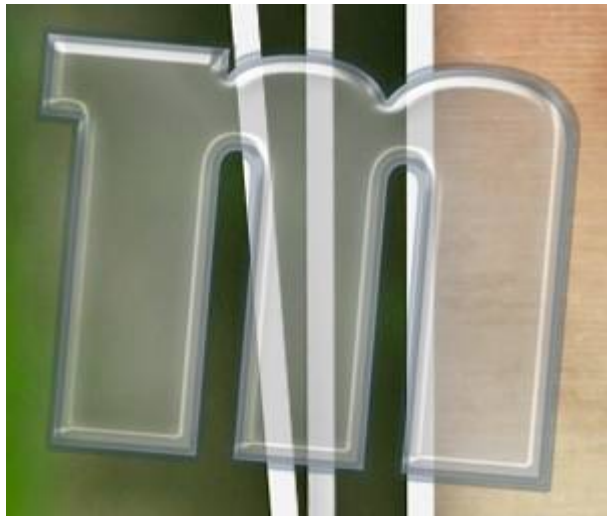
For now I'm going to hide all but one of the letters, so that we can easily see what is happening without distractions.

The usual, most convenient way of adding shadows in PSE is to use a drop-shadow layer style. The problem with acrylics is that this shadowing is often too dark for the transparent or partly-transparent element. The resulting image does not really look as transparent as it should. See the screen shots below to compare a non-shadowed element to one that has a drop-shadow layer style applied to it.

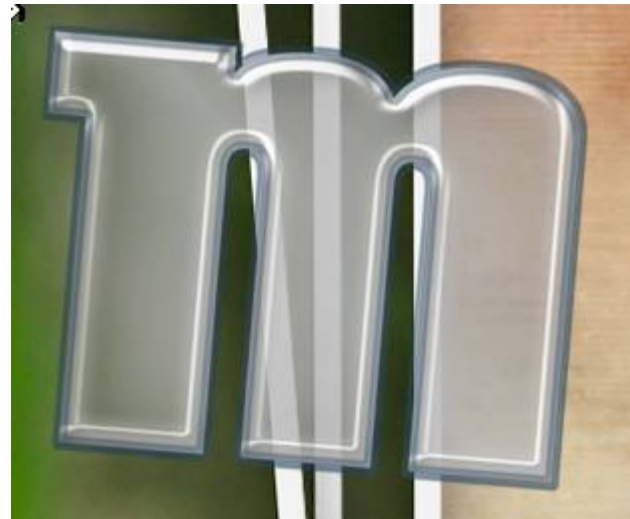
The good news is that we can still use the ease of layer styles for these shadows along with a duplicate layer and a layer style you may not have encountered before – the visibility style.

1. First, make sure your acrylic element is chosen in the layers palette. I'm working with the letter 'm' in my title. We are going to duplicate this layer. Go to Layer>Duplicate Layer or select Cntrl +J on the keyboard. Now you have an identical layer above the original. You will notice that the acrylic is a little less transparent than it used to be on the canvas. We'll fix that in a moment.

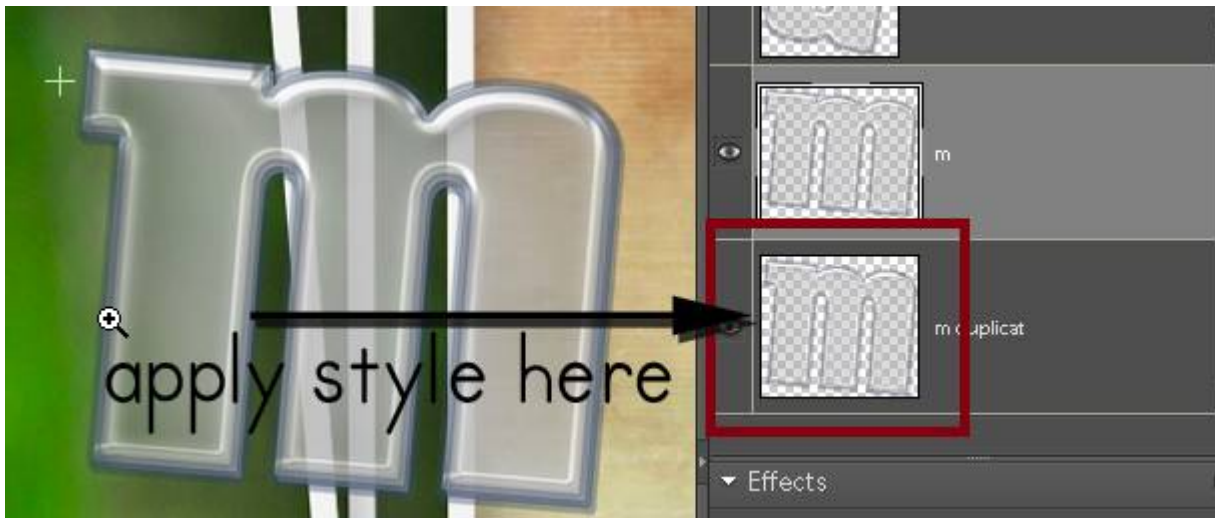
**Before:**



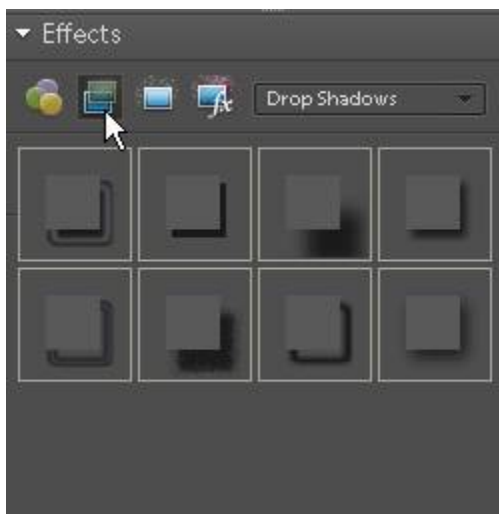
**After:**



2. Now we are going to add the drop shadow style to the *bottom* of these two layers – see the screen shot below.



Make sure the bottom layer is selected in the layers palette. Now Find the Effects Palette. This should be beneath the layers palette. If you can't see it select Window>Effects. Now on the palette select the option that is second from the left on the top of the palette. This is the Layer Styles Option. See the screen shot to see what I mean. Now from the drop down box, select Drop Shadows. Apply a shadow to the element by double clicking or choosing a style and clicking apply.



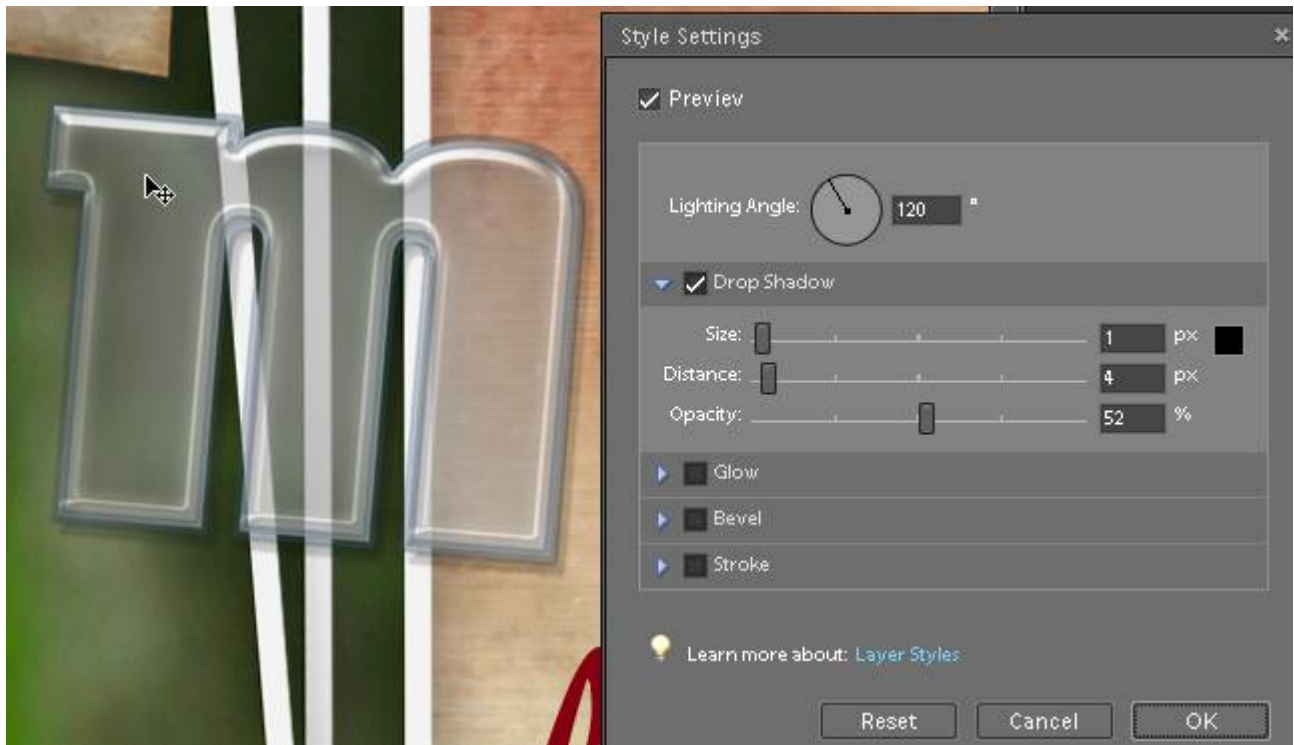
Because this is a transparent element that lies close to the page, we want a light shadow. But because it is dimensional, it also needs a bit of distance. I used the Low Shadow – fourth from the left in the screen shot but experiment to find a good choice for you. Double click the style to apply it. Now we'll adjust it.

3. In the palette, find the layer that you've applied the style too. It will have a blue fx icon beside the layer title as in the screen shot on the right. Double click this icon to open the layer style settings.

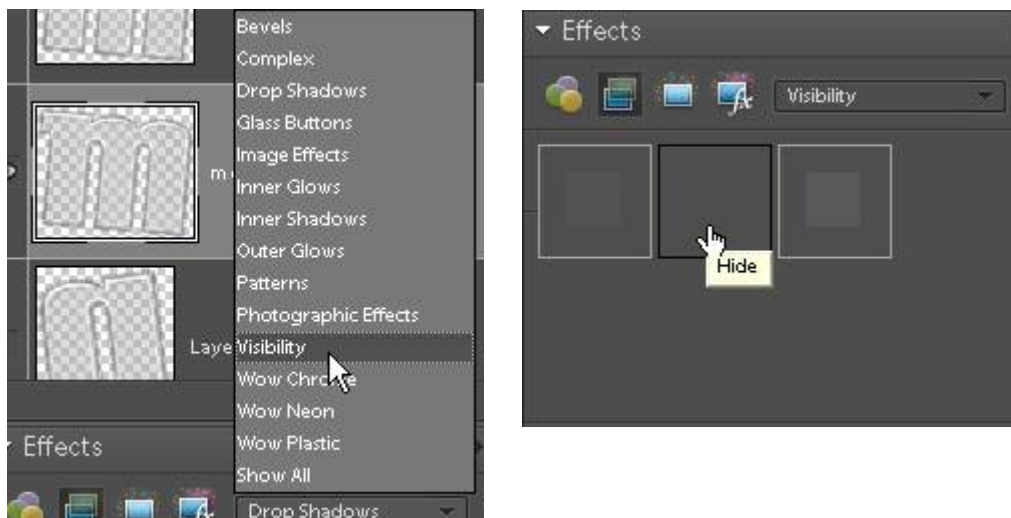


4. Use the style settings to adjust the shadow the way you like. You can see my settings below. Adjust the opacity of the shadow according to how opaque the element is. A mostly transparent item will have almost no shadow, while a slightly opaque one like this one will have a darker shadow. You can also choose a color, gray or black for the shadow. Choose OK when you are done. You can see my settings below.

**Size: 1 Distance: 4 Opacity: 53**



5. Now for the magic. This is a layer style often ignored by digital scrapbookers but is really a wonderful tool to use with other layer styles. Under the Effects Palette/Layer Styles Option, click the drop down menu and choose visibility. Choose the Middle Effect, Hide as in the screen shot below. This is a layer style that hides only the layer – not the layer style. So the letter M disappears, while the shadow stays in place.



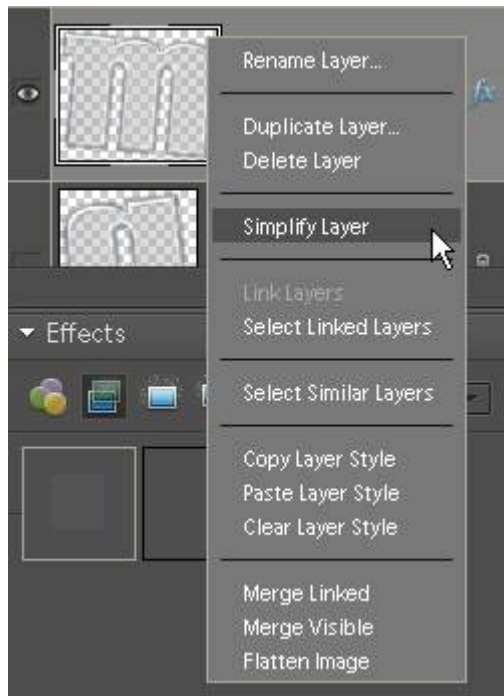
In the screen shot below, both of the letters have been duplicated and both have identical shadow styles applied to them.

However, on the 'm,' the duplicate layer also has a hide visibility style applied to it and the 'a' does not. You can see the difference.



You can also play with this technique a bit to get other effects. Try this:

1. Select the duplicate, invisible layer. Right click and select simplify.

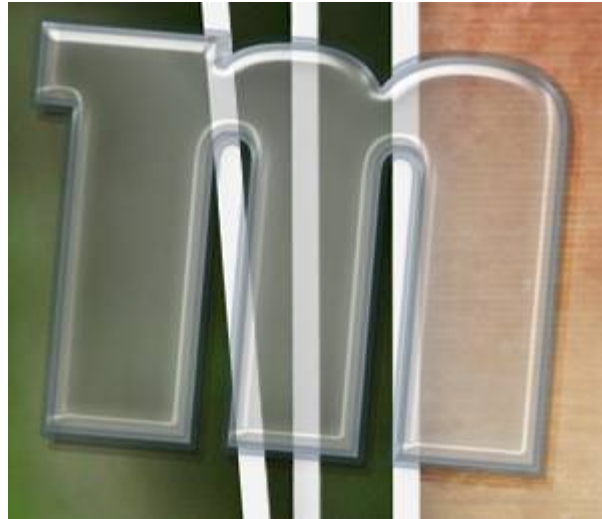


Now use a blending mode to change the way the shadow looks against the background. Overlay is sometimes a good choice of blending mode for shadows, but you may also try multiply, color burn or linear burn.

Original



Overlay Blending Mode



Here is my layout before and after the shadows have been added. If you would like you can also adjust the opacity of the duplicate layers after you've used the hide visibility style.

