



Shadows 101: Using Drop Shadow Styles in Photoshop Elements 6

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In this tutorial, I'm going to show you the ins and outs of using Layer Styles in Photoshop Elements 6. Specifically, I'm going to show you to use the Drop Shadow Styles, learning how to apply the styles and then how to adjust the settings so that they are appropriate for the object. If you would like to learn how to install new styles into Photoshop Elements 6, please see the tutorial, [Install Layer Styles in Photoshop Elements 6](#).

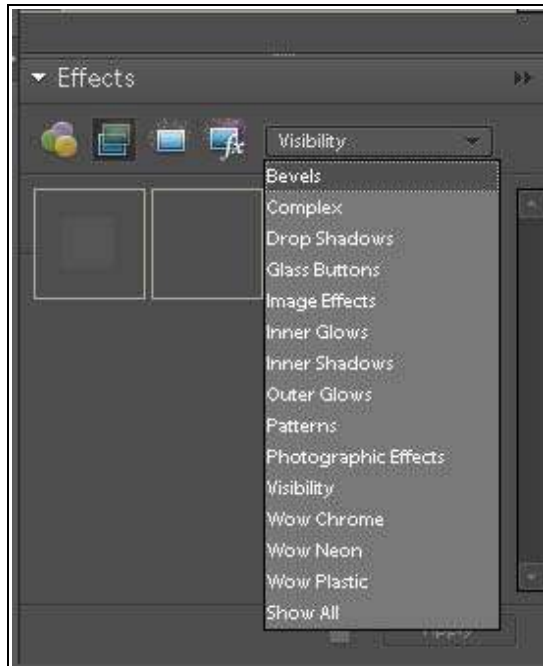
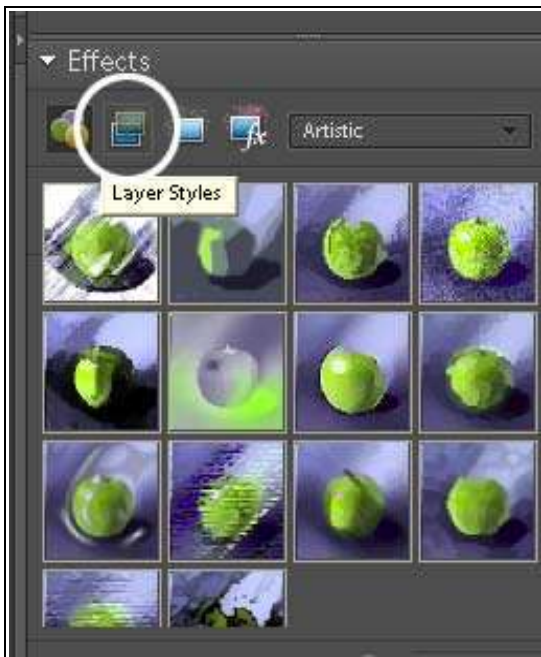
The Effects Palette

Before we get started, we need to make sure the Effects Palette is visible in the workspace of Photoshop Elements (PSE). The Effects Palette contains filters and photo effects (known as actions in Photoshop CS3) as well as Layer Styles.

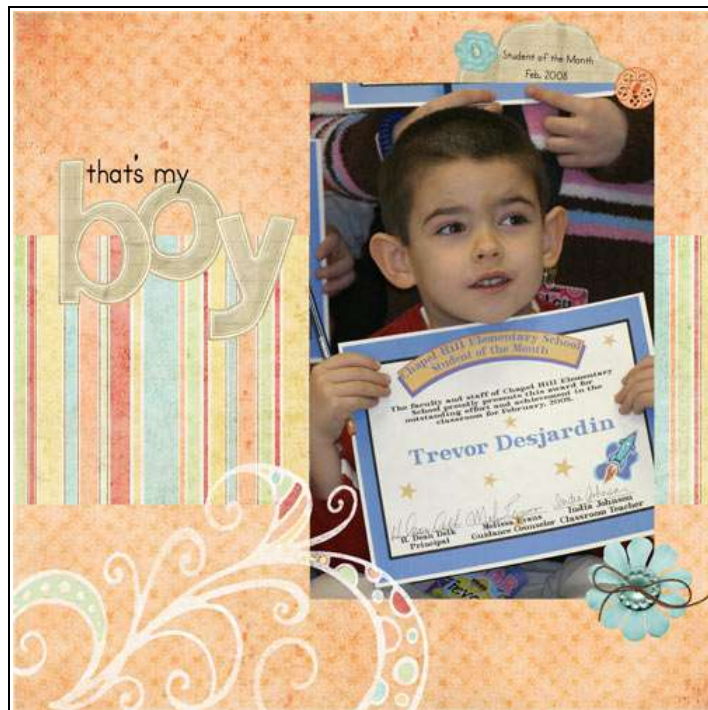
- To view the Effects Palette, in the toolbar choose Window and make sure that Effects is checked.
- Now your Effects Palette should be visible in the Workspace.
- If for some reason, the Effects Palette does not appear in the palette bin along the right side of the workspace you can drag it there. Click the Effects tab and drag it over to the Palette Bin. You can also place it at the top or bottom of the Palette Bin by dragging it up or down.



Now, we need to make the Layer Styles active within the Effects Palette. To do this, click the icon that is second from the left. To see a list of all the available layer styles, click the drop down menu on the right side of the Effects Palette. For this tutorial, we'll be working with Drop Shadows, so choose this from the selections.



Now we are going to learn to apply these layer styles and then adjust the layer styles appropriately. For demonstration purposes, I am going to use this layout, which looks rather flat and non-dimensional. That is because I haven't applied shadows to any of the layers. We are going to apply drop shadow layer styles to papers, photos and embellishments.



Applying a Drop Shadow Style to a Layer

Let's start by adding a drop-shadow layer to each of the appropriate layers. In my case, this includes the photo, the flower, the striped background paper, the title alpha, and the paper label behind the photo.

- Select a layer in the Layers Palette. Now go to the Effects Palette.
- If you haven't already, choose Drop Shadows from the dropdown menu.
- Choose a shadow. I've chosen the Low Shadow, fourth from the left. Double click the style to apply it. In the Layer Palette, you will see an “fx” icon appear in the layer. You will also see the effect on the canvas.

For all layer styles, the procedure is the same: Choose the layer in the Layers Palette; Choose the Style; Double Click the Style. The “fx” icon indicates layers with a style applied.

Double-click style to apply it to a layer



A layer with a layer style applied will display an "fx" icon.

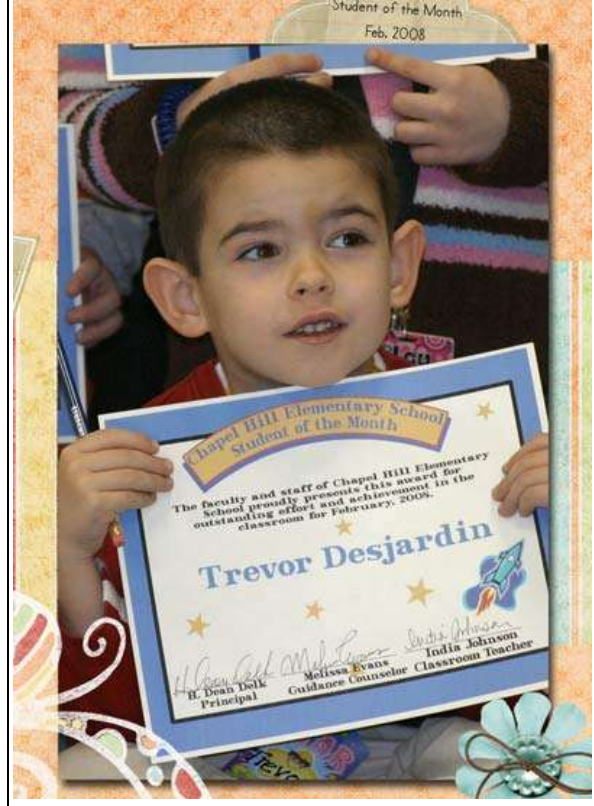


Here, in the screenshot to the right, you can see the shadow layer style applied to the photo on the canvas.

Next, you will apply this same layer style to other necessary layers on the layout. Just choose any layer that needs a shadow in the Layer Palette and double click a shadow style to apply it.

Trust me, at first the shadows won't look right. But we'll adjust those in just a moment.

You can see on the canvas where the Shadow Style has been applied.

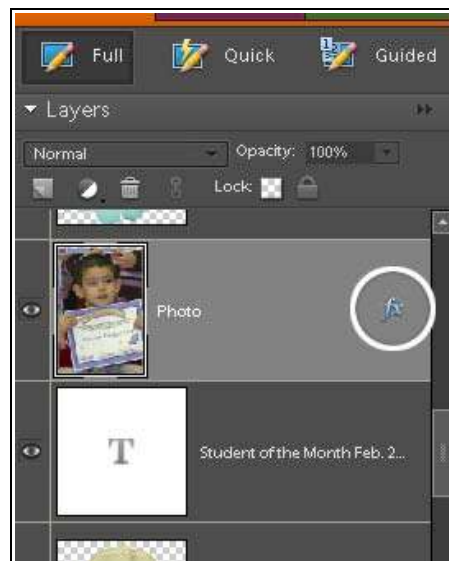


Adjusting Drop Shadow Styles

Now that we've applied the shadow layer style, we are going to learn how to adjust it. No matter which layer style you are working with – whether it is a bevel, a shadow or a special effect - the process of adjusting it is roughly the same, assuming you can adjust it. Some styles are not editable in PSE.

To adjust a layer style, we must first open the Styles Settings. Remember that little “fx” icon that appeared in the layer palette, within the layer. No? Here's what it looks like, in the image to the right. Double click this icon in the Layers Palette. It will open the Styles Setting.

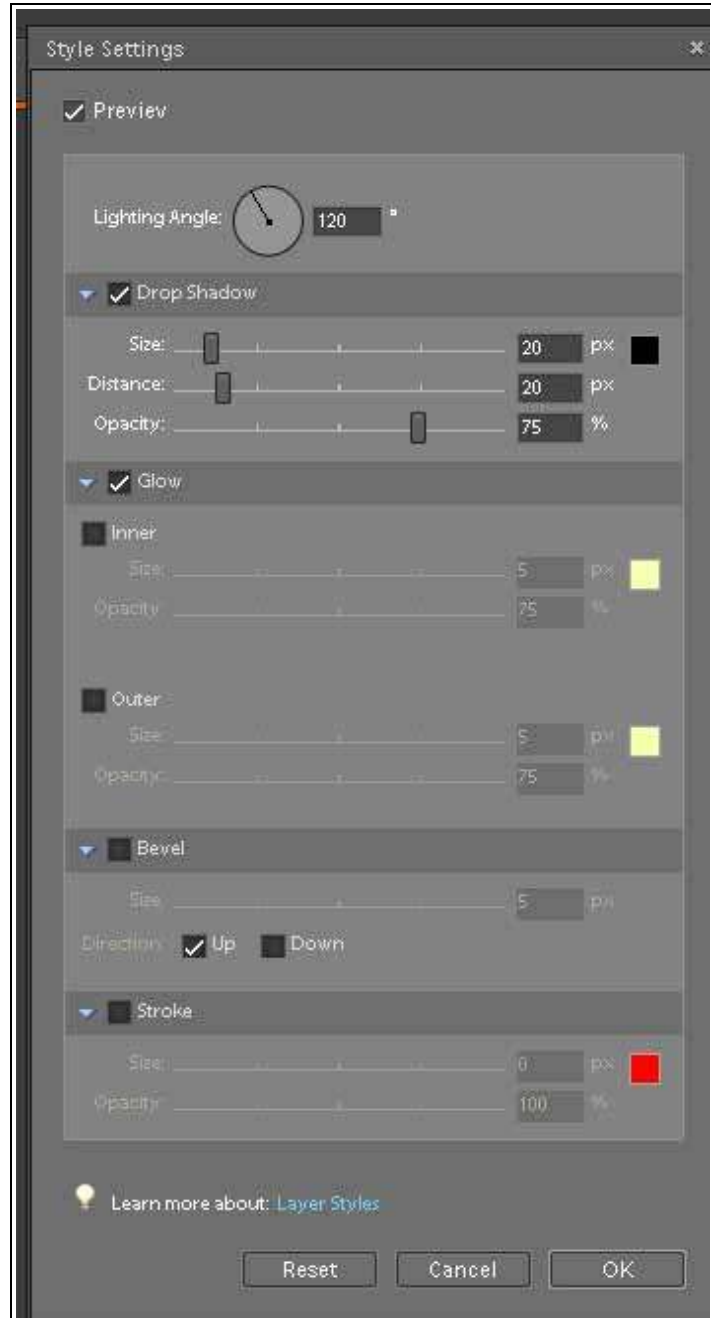
Now bear with me just a moment: While I give you a brief overview of the Style Settings. This includes more than the Shadow Styles, but it will be a good explanation.



A Detour into Style Settings

Before we go further, let's take a look at the Style Settings options.

- **Preview:** Check this if you want to see the effects and changes on the canvas.
- **Lighting Angle:** This option affects certain styles that give the illusion of depth, such as Drop Shadow and Bevel. It indicates from which direction the light falls. The default is 120 degrees. I usually leave it at the setting.
- **Drop Shadow:** Check this if you want the layer to have a drop shadow. Use the settings below it to adjust the shadow.
- **Glow:** Check this to apply a glow. You can opt to apply a glow within the bounds of the layer and/or outside the bounds of the layer. You can also adjust the size and opacity of the layer and the color of the glow.
- **Bevel:** Apply a dimensional bevel to the edges of the object. A simple setting with a lot of bang for your layout. But use it wisely.
- **Stroke:** Applies a stroke to the edges of a layer in a color of your choosing. This stroke is simply an outline around the layer.

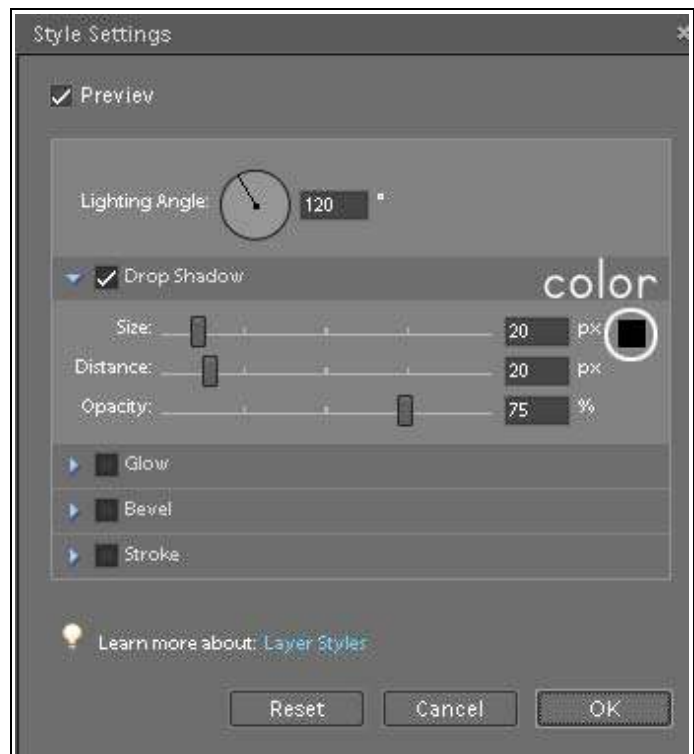


The cool thing about the Style Settings, is that it allows you to apply all the displayed styles, and adjust these styles, simply by checking and unchecking the boxes and using the provided options. While it doesn't give you complete control over the styles, as PSCS does, it does give a lot of options to choose from.

Back to Adjusting Shadow Styles

Okay, now that we've opened the Style Settings by double-clicking the “fx” icon in the Layers Palette, and now that we've had a brief overview of the Style Settings, let's get back to business.

In the last step, we opened the Style Settings for the Photo Layer to adjust the Drop Shadow Style. You can adjust a number of settings for the Drop Shadow, including the color of the shadow, the size, distance and opacity. Let's talk about these settings as they relate to digital scrapbooking and the illusion of dimension. It helps to zoom in a bit to look at the canvas closely as you work and adjust these settings.



- **Color:** Pretty self-explanatory. Click the box to choose a shadow color.
- **Distance:** This affects how far the layer appears to be from the background and the layers beneath it on the canvas. For flatter layers, this will usually be a small number. For more dimensional items, such as flowers, it may need to be a bit larger.
- **Size:** This one really should be called softness or spread. At a low setting the edges of the shadow will appear hard and less spread-out; At higher settings it will be softer, more spread out. Again, for flatter objects that are close to the background the size should be fairly low. For objects that are thicker or those that are further from the background, the setting should be higher
- **Opacity:** This one is fairly self-explanatory. It adjusts how transparent the shadow is. Objects that are closer to the background will be less transparent and need a higher percentage. Those that are further from the background will need more transparency, thus a lower percentage.

(BTW, if you are wondering why I put distance before the others in the explanation above, it's because I always adjust distance first.)

Working with shadows takes a little practice. However, if you study how shadows appear in real life, you will begin to understand how to apply them in Photoshop Elements.

When working with shadows, I usually put objects in one of three categories.

- **Flat Objects:** These are object that lie flatly against the page and have little to no depth. Examples are photographs, background papers, and journaling blocks.
- **Medium Dimensional Objects:** These are objects that lie flatly against the page, but have depth. Examples are buttons, photo anchors, small paper flowers, and some frames.

- **Highly Dimensional Objects:** These are objects that appear to come up off the page, wholly or in parts. Examples are big blossoms, folded or curled ribbons, loose fibers.

The thing to remember is that an object might appear in any of these categories. While we think of papers as being flat, if it is crumpled and curled it is no longer a Flat Object. It is now a Medium Dimensional Object. In the same way, some buttons may be Medium Dimensional Objects, while others may be Flat or even Highly Dimensional. So think about the intended use of the object as well as how you want the image to appear on the canvas. Shadows are all about visual illusion, creating the illusion that an object has dimension.

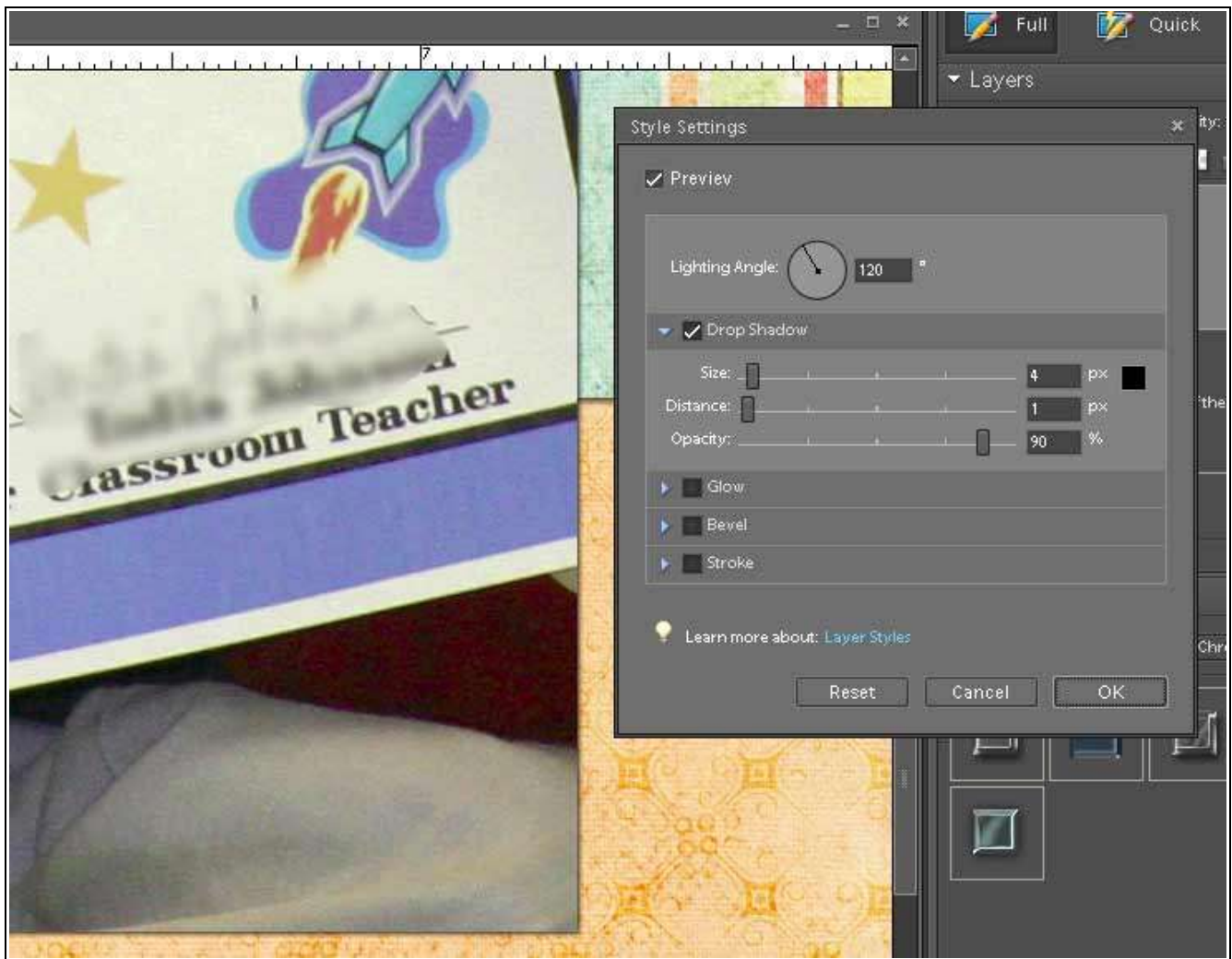
Here are some sample settings as well as how they appear on canvas in my sample layout.

Flat Objects

Distance: Choose a low setting, as a flat object will be lying close to the page.

Size: Again choose a low setting. The shadow should appear a bit soft, but not too spread out.

Opacity: In this case the shadow will not be very transparent. Instead it will be dark. Choose a high percentage setting for the opacity. Here's a screen shot of what I've used for the photo in my layout.



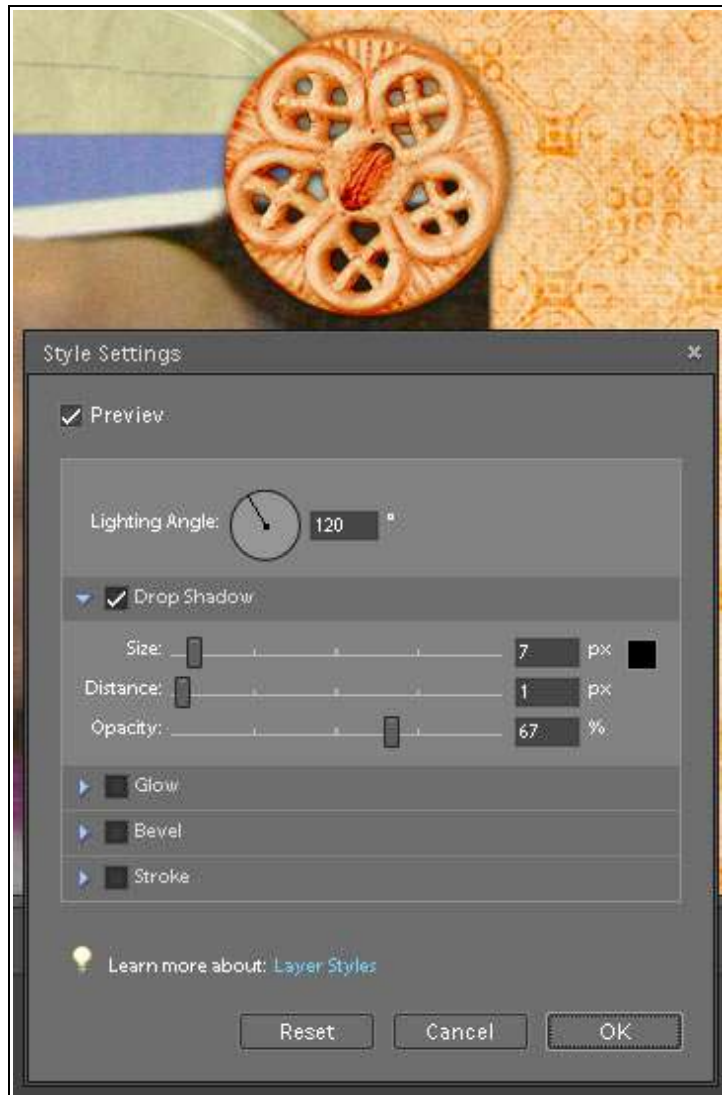
Medium Dimensional Objects

Distance: Choose a low setting. Remember this kind of object is lying flat against the page, but has depth, which will be reflected more in the size and opacity of the shadow.

Size: Choose a slightly higher setting than used with a Flat Object. This kind of object will have a shadow that is more spread out.

Opacity: This time the shadow is soft and more transparent. This helps give the illusion of depth for the object so you'll need to set it at a lower percentage.

In this example the button is a little flat. So I've given it very little Distance and only slightly more Size than the photo. I have adjusted the opacity to 67 percent. This lower opacity, helps to give the impression that the button is a bit thicker.



In this example the button is thicker, so I've given it more size, to soften the shadow and I've reduced the opacity just a bit more.

Again all these adjustments, help create the illusion of depth.

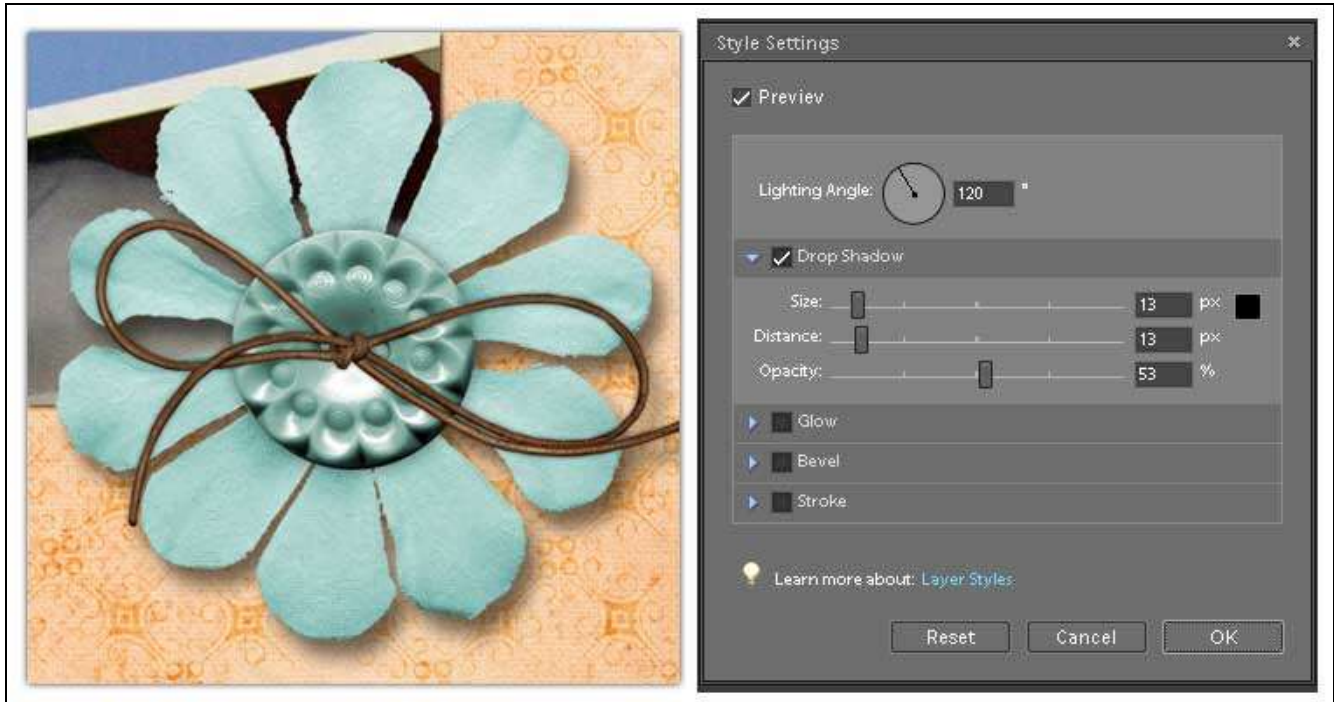


Highly Dimensional Objects

Distance: The edges of a Highly Dimensional Object will often float above the page. Think of a blossom, where the petals may come up off the page. So the distance between page and object needs to be greater.

Size: An object like this will also have a shadow of greater spread. So the shadow Size will need to be greater number. This along with the shadow Opacity will help maximize the illusion of depth and “roundness.”

Opacity: This kind of shadow will be quite transparent. So set the opacity at a low percentage.



Note: It would be remiss of me to fail to mention this. The best way to add shadows to a highly dimensional object is to make a custom shadow. Why? Because a Highly Dimensional Object often has a shadow that varies in transparency. In the buttoned flower above, it's safe to say that in real life the middle of the button is closer to the page while the edges are further away. So ideally, you want to have the transparency to be darker in the middle and get more transparent as it moves away from the middle. To complicate matters further, there will be dips and raised parts throughout the object that might effect the appearance of the shadow. That said, using Drop Shadow Layer Styles have worked pretty well in this instance.

Finished Product

Here is my finished layout, complete with shadows. You can see what nice shadows can do for a layout when they are applied appropriately. Besides adding shadows to the photo, buttons and flower, I also added shadows to the title alpha, the label behind the photo and the background striped paper, using the same methods I've described. Pretty nifty huh?

