

# Introducing Flash

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People throw the term Flash around a lot, which makes sense as Flash is used in many places in the digital world. It's used to create everything from interactive websites to premium video experiences to all kinds of games that you've probably played either on your desktop computer or on your mobile device. However, there are some important distinctions to understand between Flash the authoring tool and the end products that it can create. So, let's first talk about Flash the authoring tool. This is of course a piece of software that you pay for and install on your computer and is what you're watching this course to learn about.

Here on my screen I've already got the Flash software opened and it's showing what's called the start page. I'm going to create a new Flash document, as if I was going to create a new project, by clicking ActionScript 3.0 underneath the Create New heading. Now, don't worry about the other types of documents here, we'll worry about those later. For now I'm just going to click on ActionScript 3.0 and Flash opens up a new black document. This is our source Flash file, our authoring document where we'll create all of our content and animation.

I'm going to go to the File menu and then Save As. And save my document with the name of Test. Notice the file extension of .fla for the source file. So as you build your flash piece, you probably want to test it out and see how it's working. A way to do this is to press Ctrl + Enter on your keyboard or Cmd + Enter if you're on a Mac. You'll want to memorize that keyboard command because you're going to use it constantly. Now when I do this, Flash publishes the fla file into a format ready for the world. Now of course, there's not much to see yet in our blank project, but at least we have a published file called test.swf, or SWF. SWF stands for Small Web Format. And you can recreate your SWF file as you develop your project for testing and preview purposes as much as you want. Now let's say you want to deploy your project to a website. That SWF file is the actual thing that you would upload onto your server. You'll need some other accompanying files when you're ready to deploy that SWF out to the web. And we'll talk more about that in the section about publishing.

But the important thing is that by hitting Ctrl + Enter, we've jumped from Flash, the authoring tool, to Flash the SWF file which can be deployed out to the world. So, say you've uploaded your swf file to website. For someone to actually be able to view the SWF on their computer, in a browser on the web, the Flash player plug-in has to be installed in their browser. The SWF file won't play in a browser unless the plug in is installed. And you're probably familiar with this already. When opening a browser or while browsing the web, you may have been asked to download the most recent version of the Flash Player which you can get on the Adobe website. And one huge benefit of the Flash Player is that the vast majority of internet users, like 99%, already have some version of it installed on their computer. And it's been this way for a long time.

Let's check out some history on Wikipedia. On this page, I'm going to scroll about halfway down to the section about release history. I'm interested in this bit about Macromedia Flash Player Four that came out in May of 1999. This was of course before Adobe acquired Macromedia. The most important thing here is that the install base of the Flash Player reached 92% of all internet users at this time. So the

market penetration by Flash Player is great and it has been that way for a long time. You can rest assured that your content when viewed on a desktop will be viewable by a lot of people.

So what about the latest and greatest. As of the recording of this movie Flash Player 11.7 is the most recent version. Looking at this statistics page on [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com), you can see that more than 400 million connected desktops update to whatever the newest version of the Flash Player is within 6 weeks of release. Now that and other methods are how the most updated version of the player gets adopted. So with the quick adoption rate for whatever the latest version of the player is, you can be assured that older versions of the Flash Player have adoption rates in the high 90s.

If you want to target the newest version of the player, the code necessary to detect an older version and then prompt the user to get the new one can be generated by Flash for you when you publish. And it's up to you as the developer to choose what version of the Flash Player you want to target when publishing your swf. You should research your audience. For instance, it's not uncommon to have an audience that's a group within a corporation which has a tightly controlled IT environment. Employees might not be allowed to download things to their work computers without IT's permission. So in that case, you might not want to choose the very latest version of the player.

You should choose whatever version the company is using. There's nothing wrong with targeting an older version of the player to best suit your audience. In Flash, if you open up this target dropdown on the right hand side. You can see that you could choose to target a version as old as Flash Player 10.3. Another reason Flash is a good choice for delivering content on the web is that it looks the same across all browsers. Have you ever built something in HTML, tested it in IE, Firefox, and Safari and noticed that it looks different in some or all of the browsers? Well now you have to spend your time making it look the same instead of focusing on building your next project.

That doesn't happen with Flash. You aren't targeting a browser with your SWF, you're targeting the player. It's Adobe's job to make sure that the player plugs into the browser and works well. Your job is just to develop the content that appears within the player. As long as someone has the Flash player installed, your content is going to look consistent. That's one reason the Flash player has been used in so many places across the web, including sites that feature video. Indeed, video can be easily converted to play in the Flash player and there's a quick way that you can tell if content you're viewing is using the Flash platform. I'm going to go watch a video on YouTube, and I'm going to right-click on the video. You'll see right here we have the option to see about the Adobe Flash Player 11.7. Now, you may or may not have all of the other options shown here, but those bottom three, settings, global settings, and about Adobe Flash Player, are a surefire way to tell that you're viewing something using the Flash platform. So you might be thinking okay, great.

This is true for the web when you're looking at a flash swift file from a computer with a browser. But how about mobile and tablets? You may already know that Apple devices like iPhone and iPad have never played Flash content through a web browser. That's more of a policy decision by Apple than a technological limitation. As of November 2011, Adobe stopped making updates to the Flash player for non-Apple mobile devices like Android. So, if you want to build for users that are going to be looking at your content in the specific case of using a browser on a mobile device, you should probably not

use flash. That being said, let's make a distinction here. Say you've used your iphone to buy an app from the Apple app store, or a game from Google play.

The chances are good that your app was developed and deployed in Flash. Indeed, going back to the Statistics Adobe Web page, more than 20,000 apps in mobile markets, like the Apple App Store and Google Play, are built using Flash technology. But those absent games aren't just a(UNKNOWN) file like view web browser. In this case it's Flash content being published from Flash to the Adobe Air platform. Adobe Air is basically what allows you to install a game or an app on a mobile device, or onto a computer as a piece of software for that matter.

Flash and a related software called Flash Builder, can both easily publish as Adobe Air files. So to summarize, if you want to publish a strait .swf file to be viewed on the web, through the browser, on a desktop or a laptop, this video training is the right place to be to learn the fundamentals of Flash. If you want to build things that will ultimately deploy as an air project, maybe as an app or a game to be sold in the android or the apple store or a program you want people to be able to install on their computer. This is still the right place to be.

The fundamentals of offering a flash presented here pertain in both cases. Just remember that Flash Player is not widely supported for mobile browsers. So you'll need to have non-Flash content if your target audience is going to be viewing your stuff in the specific case of a browser on a mobile device. Some companies have a Flash and non-Flash version of their content and detect what platform a user is on so they can be directed to the appropriate version. Topics like HTML 5 and JavaScript could be a great place to start if needing a non flash alternative effects you. That being said, once you've got some flash basics down if flash development for mobile in particular is an interest of yours there are a number of other courses here in the lynda.com library that focus specifically on techniques for that, so check them out.

So now, let's continue on with our journey of learning Flash.