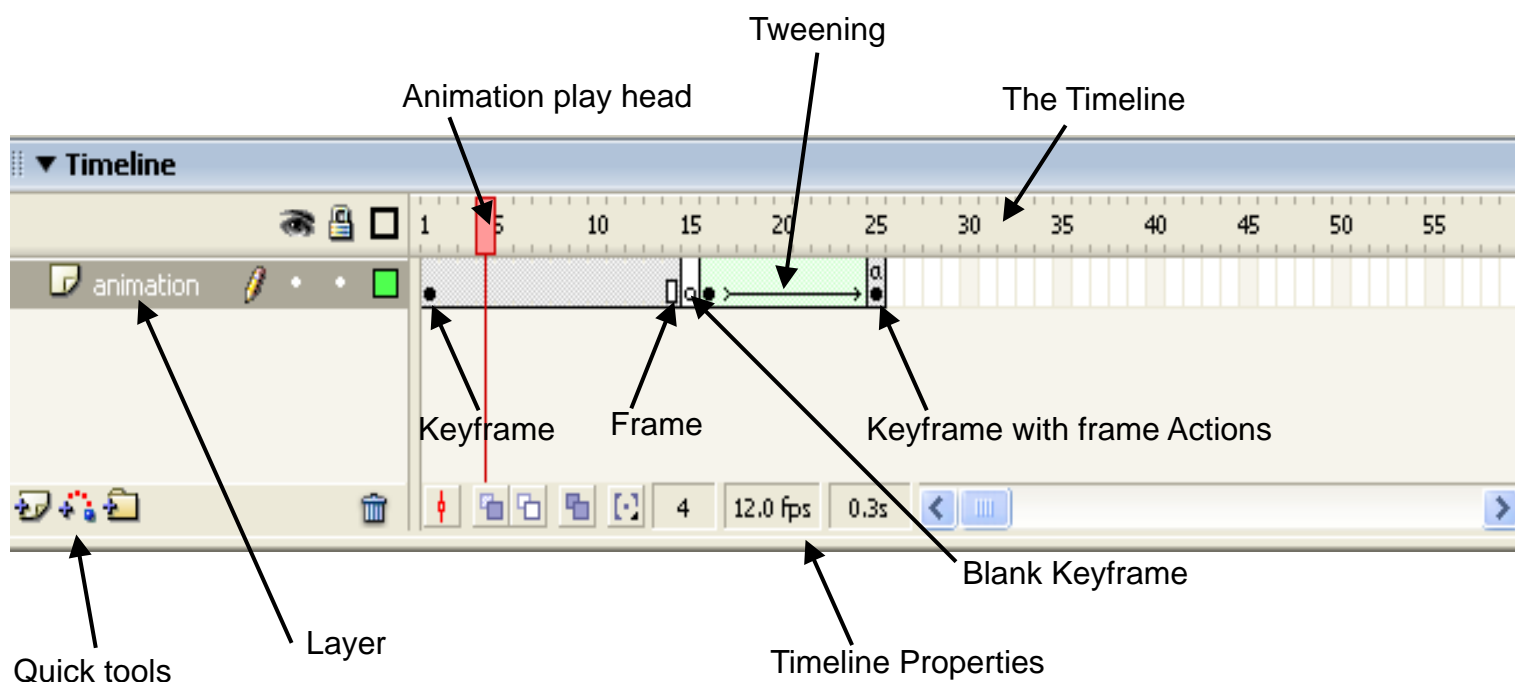


Introduction to Flash - The Timeline



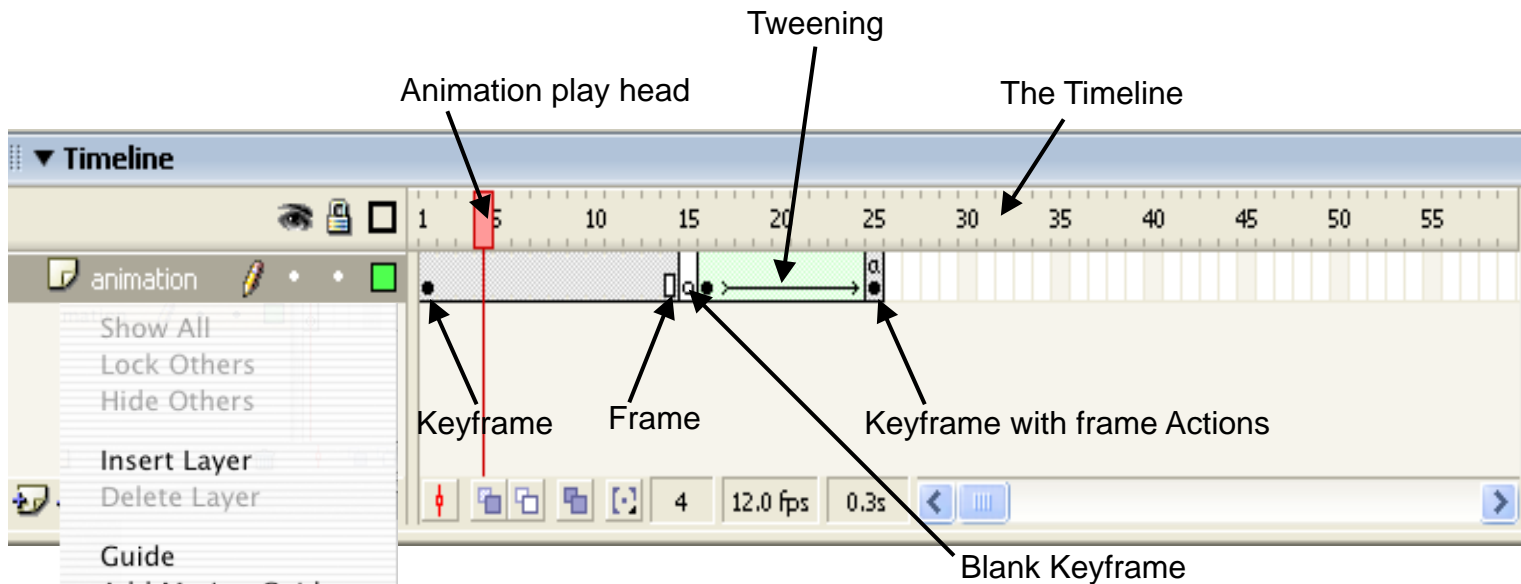
As Flash's main job is to animate the objects you draw and import I thought it would make sense to spend a little bit of time looking at the Timeline. During the tutorials you will discover more about each of these elements but knowing where they are and what they look like will give you an idea about their functionality.

Firstly as with any package that involves drawn objects, we tend to use Layers to distinguish one element from another. Flash is no exception. It is a good habit to have Layers for each object although this is not always necessary. It is good practice, and will save you time in the end. As you can see from the illustration we have 1 Layer and double clicking on the name, by default "layer 1..2.." etc, you can rename your layers to make them more meaningful. Next to the name of the layer you have a number of dots which correspond to the symbols above them. The dot below the symbolic "eye" allows you to "turn off" the layer and make it invisible, the padlock allows you to "lock" a layer so you cannot change or pick up its contents, this can be great for fiddly animations. Lastly clicking the coloured square allows you to remove images and look at the screen as a "wire frame". Reducing everything to two dimensional shapes can sometimes help when an animation goes wrong.

To the bottom of the Timeline you will also see the Quick links, these are designed to speed up the selection of regularly used processes, such as create a new layer, create a path, create a layer folder and obviously the trash can to delete layers.

Moving along to the Timeline Properties you can see a number of options that allow you to customise your view of the animation. From the left you can position the play head shown as a red block running through playing animation. The next four relate to Onion Skinning, not something we will look at during these tutorials, but is a technique for spotting mistakes and lining up detailed animated sequences.

The 3 boxes of figures are more important, the first box is the frame number you are currently working on and the last box the actual length of the animation at the selected point. In this case 0.3 seconds. Which brings us onto the middle box, this is the frame rate setting. By default 2D animation runs at 12 frames per second (12fps), Film at 23fps and computer games at 64fps. This can be changed, to do this see the Introduction to drawing in Flash tutorials.



The rest of the Timeline relates to the actual animation taking place. Each Layer having an independent set of frames which allow for simultaneous animation to take place. To help you through some of the elements you will grow to understand I have created a set of typical frame types just to show you what they look like and what they represent. Firstly we have the most common a Keyframe. This represents something is physically showing on the Stage or Working area, it may be a drawn object, imported image or button but it is there and ready to be animated.

The next section of what looks like gray nothingness ending is a small white rectangle is a series of Frames, this signifies an object is visible in the layer but it is stationary.

Next is the single frame with a white circle, referred to as the Blank Keyframe signifying that at this point in time on this layer nothing exists. This Blank Keyframe can be a nuisance and crops up occasionally without you meaning to so be aware of them and make sure they are meant. If you did not mean to delete everything from that point you can undo by going to Edit > Undo or right click on the Blank Keyframe and choose Clear Keyframe from the options.

The last set of Frames illustrates one form of Tweening or Animation in Flash. All animation starts with a visible object, therefore a Keyframe, then a set of frames where the animation is occurring, shown by a coloured set of frames with an arrow running from start to finish, culminating in a final Keyframe where the object is at its intended finishing point, another Keyframe.

The only extra element here is an "a" above the final Keyframe, this is to illustrate to you that programming exists although programming is not necessary to create an animation you will need to be aware of the "a" symbol toward the end of these tutorials.

The only last point to make about the Timeline is the Layer options, accessed by right clicking on the Layer name these allow you to add some further effects to your animation which will be introduced throughout the subsequent tutorials.