

Introducing skinning in Flex 4

One of the main themes for the Flex 4 (codename: Gumbo) release is "Design in Mind", and skinning is a big part of that theme. Flash Player is the delivery mechanism for some of the most creative work to be found on the web today. However, Flex applications have gained a reputation for looking too similar to each other, as many developers choose to use the Flex default look and feel (known as Halo) as opposed to applying extensive styling or skinning.

Flex 4 makes it easier to completely change the look and feel of an application. The new skinning architecture builds on top of other changes in Flex 4 and provides a clean separation between the logic and visual elements of a component. Because of this, none of the components in Flex 4 contains any information about their visual appearance. All of that information is contained in the skin file, and thanks to FXG and the new states syntax, the new skin files can be completely written in MXML, making them easier to read and write, as well as easier to access with tools.

In this article, you'll learn about the improvements to the skinning architecture in Flex 4. By writing a basic skin for a button, you'll learn a little bit about FXG and the new states syntax. Next, you'll learn about the contract a component and a skin use to interact with each other through the process of skinning a slider. Lastly, you'll delve into skinnable components as you create a new component ripe for skinning.

Note: Throughout this document, the term Halo components refers to components originally included in Flex 3. The term Spark components refers to the new set of components in Flex 4.

1. Writing a simple button skin

FXG is a declarative markup language for vector graphics built to take advantage of Flash Player. With the new markup, it is easy to create a custom button. For this button, start with a simple rectangle with text inside of it.

Sample1.mxml

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<s:Application xmlns:fx="http://ns.adobe.com/mxml/2009" xmlns:s="library://ns.adobe.com/flex/spark">
  <s:Group verticalCenter="0" horizontalCenter="0">
    <s:Rect id="rect" radiusX="4" radiusY="4" top="0" right="0" bottom="0" left="0">
      <s:fill>
        <s:SolidColor color="0x77CC22" />
      </s:fill>
      <s:stroke>
        <s:SolidColorStroke color="0x131313" weight="2"/>
      </s:stroke>
    </s:Rect>

    <s:Label text="Button!" color="0x131313"
      textAlign="center" verticalAlign="middle"
      horizontalCenter="0" verticalCenter="1"
      left="12" right="12" top="6" bottom="6" />
  </s:Group>
</s:Application>
```

If you're familiar with Flex 3, you'll be familiar with the syntax above, though you might not be familiar with the specific components used. The Group container is the basic, chromeless container in Spark. Rect is a new FXG graphic primitive, and it's what you'd expect—a rectangle. The last

component in the document, Label, is a new text component in Spark. The MXML reads just like a description of the component—it's a rectangle with rounded corners that has a 1-pixel dark-gray stroke and a green fill with some text in the center.

One of the great things about FXG is that not only is it much easier to understand than programmatic drawing instructions, it is also much more toolable because of the structure of XML. For more info about FXG, see the [FXG specification](#).

Converting your Button graphic to a Button skin

So far, the MXML document is just static artwork with no interactivity. It doesn't yet take advantage of the new skinning features in Flex 4. For that, you need to hook it up to the Button component and use it as a skin. To create a skin file for Spark, create a new MXML file with `Skin` as the root tag. Then, copy in the graphics code from above:

ButtonSkin1.mxml

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<s:Skin xmlns:fx="http://ns.adobe.com/mxml/2009" xmlns:s="library://ns.adobe.com/flex/spark"
alpha.disabled=".5">

  <!-- states -->
  <s:states>
    <s:State name="up" />
    <s:State name="over" />
    <s:State name="down" />
    <s:State name="disabled" />
  </s:states>

  <!-- border and fill -->
  <s:Rect id="rect" radiusX="4" radiusY="4" top="0" right="0" bottom="0" left="0">
    <s:fill>
      <s:SolidColor color="0x77CC22" />
    </s:fill>
    <s:stroke>
      <s:SolidColorStroke color="0x131313" weight="2"/>
    </s:stroke>
  </s:Rect>

  <!-- text -->
  <s:Label text="Button!" color="0x131313"
    textAlign="center" verticalAlign="middle"
    horizontalCenter="0" verticalCenter="1"
    left="12" right="12" top="6" bottom="6" />
</s:Skin>
```

You'll notice there is one more addition in the file states. I will discuss them a little later.

With your skin file complete, you need to associate it with a Button component. Every skinnable component in the Spark architecture is associated with a skin via the `skinClass` CSS style that can be set either through style sheets or inline via MXML. In this case, I'll use the latter:

Sample2.mxml

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<s:Application xmlns:fx="http://ns.adobe.com/mxml/2009" xmlns:s="library://ns.adobe.com/flex/spark">
  <s:Button verticalCenter="0" horizontalCenter="0" skinClass="ButtonSkin1"
    click="trace('I\'ve been clicked!')" focusIn="trace('focus...on me?')" />
</s:Application>
```



Figure 2. The sample2 button

You've now hooked up the button to a new skin file. The Button component contains all the behavioral logic for the button. It adds the event listeners, dispatches new events, figures out what state the component is in, and so on. The skin doesn't have to deal with any of that and just defines the visuals of the component.

However, the Button doesn't look any different than the static graphic you first created. The button is interactive, but it doesn't appear that way. This is because you haven't yet defined how the button looks in different states.

2. Introducing the skinning contract

A static skin is pretty boring. For something interesting, the skin must be able to interact with the component and vice versa. These two elements interact with each other through the skinning contract. There are three pieces to this: skin states, data, and parts (see Figure 3). On one side, the component defines these three different pieces, and on the other side, the skin reacts to them.

Skinning Contract		Slides by Ely Greenfield
	Defined by the Component	Defined by the Skin
▪ Data	<pre>[Bindable] public var title:String</pre>	<pre>text="{hostComponent.title}"</pre>
▪ Parts	<pre>[SkinPart] public var upButton:Button;</pre>	<pre><s:Button id="upButton" /></pre>
▪ States	<pre>[SkinStates("up")] public class Button{</pre>	<pre><s:State name="up" /></pre>

Figure 3. The skinning contract comprises data, parts, and states.

Defining skin states

Each skinnable component in Spark has a set of skin states. You can change the appearance of your skin based on what skin state the component is in. For a Button, there are four basic skin states: `up`,

over, down, and disabled. You can modify the skin to have a different appearance in each of these states (see Figure 4).

ButtonSkin2.mxml

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<s:Skin xmlns:fx="http://ns.adobe.com/mxml/2009" xmlns:s="library://ns.adobe.com/flex/spark"
alpha.disabled=".5">

  <!-- states -->
  <s:states>
    <s:State name="up" />
    <s:State name="over" />
    <s:State name="down" />
    <s:State name="disabled" />
  </s:states>

  <!-- dropshadow for the down state only -->
  <s:Rect radiusX="4" radiusY="4" top="0" right="0" bottom="0" left="0" includeIn="down">
    <s:fill>
      <s:SolidColor color="0"/>
    </s:fill>
    <s:filters>
      <s:DropShadowFilter knockout="true" blurX="5" blurY="5" alpha="0.32" distance="2" />
    </s:filters>
  </s:Rect>

  <!-- border and fill -->
  <s:Rect id="rect" radiusX="4" radiusY="4" top="0" right="0" bottom="0" left="0">
    <s:fill>
      <s:SolidColor color="0x77CC22" color.over="0x92D64E" color.down="0x67A41D"/>
    </s:fill>
    <s:stroke>
      <s:SolidColorStroke color="0x131313" weight="2"/>
    </s:stroke>
  </s:Rect>

  <!-- highlight on top -->
  <s:Rect radiusX="4" radiusY="4" top="2" right="2" left="2" height="50%">
    <s:fill>
      <s:LinearGradient rotation="90">
        <s:GradientEntry color="0xFFFFFFFF" alpha=".5"/>
        <s:GradientEntry color="0xFFFFFFFF" alpha=".1"/>
      </s:LinearGradient>
    </s:fill>
  </s:Rect>

  <!-- text -->
  <s:Label text="Button!" color="0x131313"
    textAlign="center"
    verticalAlign="middle"
    horizontalCenter="0" verticalCenter="1"
    left="12" right="12" top="6" bottom="6" />
</s:Skin>
```

ButtonSkin2.mxml



Figure 4. The four skin states of the Button

Based on what skin state it is in, the component looks different because of how you've defined the skin. This skin file is taking advantage of the new *dot syntax* for states. This is a new feature in Flex 4, which makes writing state modifications much more clear and concise. The syntax is `property.stateName="value of that property in that state"`. For example, `alpha.disabled=".5"` means that when the button goes into the `disabled` skin state, the skin will change the alpha to 50%. In the `over` and `down` states, I've defined a different fill color with `color.over="0x92D64E"` `color.down="0x67A41D"`.

With the new state syntax, there's an `includeIn` and `excludeFrom` property on every MXML component. The drop shadow in the button skin is only included in the `down` state, which gives it a nice pressed look. Also, to jazz up the skin, I've added another rectangle to highlight the top of the button in all states.

Note: For more info on the enhanced state syntax in Flex 4, check out the [new states syntax specification](#).

Playing around with the button is an interactive experience as the button changes its visual appearance based on its skin state. One thing you will notice, though, is that the component's text is hard-coded to "Button!". In the next section, you'll see how to hook up the skin to display the component's data, in this case, the Button's `label` property.

Grabbing data from the component

I recommend that you always put `HostComponent` metadata in your skin. The `HostComponent` metadata points to the component you're skinning, and it is required to access the component from the skin. When defined, your skin has a `hostComponent` property that points back to the component. In your Button skin, you can use this `hostComponent` property to bind to the `label` property of the button.

ButtonSkin3.mxml:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<s:Skin xmlns:fx="http://ns.adobe.com/mxml/2009" xmlns:s="library://ns.adobe.com/flex/spark"
alpha.disabled=".5">

  <fx:Metadata>
    [HostComponent("spark.components.Button")]
  </fx:Metadata>

  <!-- states -->
  <s:states>
    <s:State name="up" />
    <s:State name="over" />
    <s:State name="down" />
    <s:State name="disabled" />
  </s:states>

  <!-- dropshadow for the down state only -->
  <s:Rect radiusX="4" radiusY="4" top="0" right="0" bottom="0" left="0" includeIn="down">
    <s:fill>
      <s:SolidColor color="0"/>
    </s:fill>
    <s:filters>
      <s:DropShadowFilter knockout="true" blurX="5" blurY="5" alpha="0.32" distance="2" />
    </s:filters>
  </s:Rect>

  <!-- border and fill -->
  <s:Rect id="rect" radiusX="4" radiusY="4" top="0" right="0" bottom="0" left="0">
    <s:fill>
      <s:SolidColor color="0x77CC22" color.over="0x92D64E" color.down="0x67A41D"/>
    </s:fill>
    <s:stroke>
      <s:SolidColorStroke color="0x131313" weight="2"/>
    </s:stroke>
  </s:Rect>

  <!-- highlight on top -->
  <s:Rect radiusX="4" radiusY="4" top="2" right="2" left="2" height="50%">
    <s:fill>
      <s:LinearGradient rotation="90">
        <s:GradientEntry color="0xFFFFFFFF" alpha=".5"/>
        <s:GradientEntry color="0xFFFFFFFF" alpha=".1"/>
      </s:LinearGradient>
    </s:fill>
  </s:Rect>

  <!-- text -->
  <s:Label text="{hostComponent.label}" color="0x131313"
    textAlign="center"
    verticalAlign="middle"
    horizontalCenter="0" verticalCenter="1"
    left="12" right="12" top="6" bottom="6" />
</s:Skin>
```

When the button is declared, the text in the skin will be based on the `label` property.

Sample4.mxml:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<s:Application xmlns:fx="http://ns.adobe.com/mxml/2009" xmlns:s="library://ns.adobe.com/flex/spark">

    <fx:Style>
        @namespace s "library://ns.adobe.com/flex/spark";

        s|Button {
            skinClass: ClassReference("ButtonSkin3");
        }
    </fx:Style>

    <s:layout>
        <s:VerticalLayout />
    </s:layout>
    <s:Button label="Button #1" />
    <s:Button label="Button #2" />
    <s:Button label="Button #3" />
</s:Application>
```

The main application declares three buttons. Each button uses the same skin file, `ButtonSkin3`, because of the CSS type selector defined. However, each button has a different label. Because the skin now pulls the `label` property to display the text, the buttons look as you'd expect, with different text (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. The buttons now display their own labels.

You've seen two of the three parts of the skinning contract, states and data. Skin states are a way for the component to drive interactions while the skin defines the look and feel of the component in those states. Data, the user-settable properties on the component, can be pulled into the skin through the use of `HostComponent` metadata and the `hostComponent` property. In the example above, the skin pulls data (the `label` property) from the `Button` component. The other way to hook up the data is by using the skin parts mechanism to push data in to the skin part.

3. Skinning contract continued: skin parts

Skin parts make up the third part of the skinning contract. Each skinnable component in Spark has a set of skin parts that help define the component. In the case of a scrollbar, there are four skin parts: the increment button, the decrement button, the track, and the thumb. In the case of a `Button`, there is just one skin part, the `labelDisplay`. This is a part that the `Button` component asks for. In the `Button` skin above, rather than binding the text to `{hostComponent.label}`, if you give the text component an id of `labelDisplay`, the `Button` will recognize this skin part and push the `label` property down into the skin.

ButtonSkin4.mxml:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<s:Skin xmlns:fx="http://ns.adobe.com/mxml/2009" xmlns:s="library://ns.adobe.com/flex/spark"
alpha.disabled=".5">

  <fx:Metadata>
    [HostComponent("spark.components.Button")]
  </fx:Metadata>

  <!-- states -->
  <s:states>
    <s:State name="up" />
    <s:State name="over" />
    <s:State name="down" />
    <s:State name="disabled" />
  </s:states>

  <!-- dropshadow for the down state only -->
  <s:Rect radiusX="4" radiusY="4" top="0" right="0" bottom="0" left="0" includeIn="down">
    <s:fill>
      <s:SolidColor color="0"/>
    </s:fill>
    <s:filters>
      <s:DropShadowFilter knockout="true" blurX="5" blurY="5" alpha="0.32" distance="2" />
    </s:filters>
  </s:Rect>

  <!-- border and fill -->
  <s:Rect id="rect" radiusX="4" radiusY="4" top="0" right="0" bottom="0" left="0">
    <s:fill>
      <s:SolidColor color="0x77CC22" color.over="0x92D64E" color.down="0x67A41D"/>
    </s:fill>
    <s:stroke>
      <s:SolidColorStroke color="0x131313" weight="2"/>
    </s:stroke>
  </s:Rect>

  <!-- highlight on top -->
  <s:Rect radiusX="4" radiusY="4" top="2" right="2" left="2" height="50%">
    <s:fill>
      <s:LinearGradient rotation="90">
        <s:GradientEntry color="0xFFFFFFFF" alpha=".5"/>
        <s:GradientEntry color="0xFFFFFFFF" alpha=".1"/>
      </s:LinearGradient>
    </s:fill>
  </s:Rect>

  <!-- text -->
  <s:Label id="labelDisplay" color="0x131313"
    textAlign="center"
    verticalAlign="middle"
    horizontalCenter="0" verticalCenter="1"
    left="12" right="12" top="6" bottom="6" />

  <!-- transitions -->
  <s:transitions>
    <s:Transition>
      <s:CrossFade target="{rect}" />
    </s:Transition>
  </s:transitions>
</s:Skin>
```

`label` no longer binds to the host component. Instead, I gave it an id of `labelDisplay`, which is a part that `Button` is looking for. The `Button` component takes care of hooking up the data for you and pushes its `label` property into the `labelDisplay`.

In addition to assigning a label element skin part, I've also added a simple `CrossFade` transition in the skin. The skin file is where all the visual aspects of a component are defined, including transitions. In this case, any time the button changes states, you'll get a nice fade transition between the states.

Skinning a slider

Skin parts are not just for pushing data from the component into the skin, the component can also use them to hook up behaviors. To see this more clearly, consider the slider control. The two main parts for a slider are the track and the thumb. In this case, the component isn't pushing any data into the skin parts to be displayed, but it's adding event listeners to these parts and performing some layout of the thumb based on the `value` property of the component. For instance, when the track is clicked, the component updates its `value` property and positions the thumb appropriately. In addition, there's a dynamic skin part, `dataTip`, which is used when dragging the thumb to display popup information. The example shown in Figure 6 is a simple, modified slider.

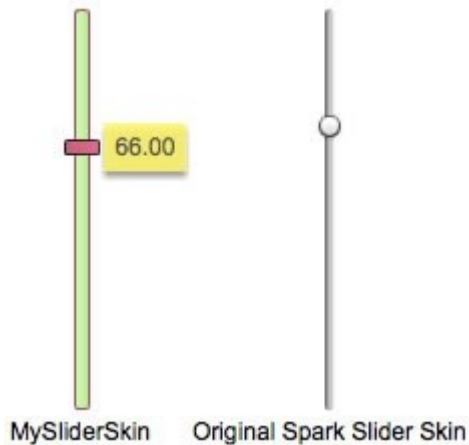


Figure 6. The modified slider (left) and original slider (right).

To build this, your skin file must declare the three skin parts: `thumb`, `track`, and `dataTip`.

MySliderSkin.mxml

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8"?>
<s:Skin xmlns:fx="http://ns.adobe.com/mxml/2009" xmlns:s="library://ns.adobe.com/flex/spark"
    minWidth="11" minHeight="100"
    alpha.disabled="0.5">

    <fx:Metadata>
        [HostComponent("spark.components.VSlider")]
    </fx:Metadata>
    <s:states>
        <s:State name="normal" />
        <s:State name="disabled" />
    </s:states>

    <fx:Declarations>
        <fx:Component id="dataTip">
            <s:DataRenderer minHeight="24" minWidth="40" x="20">
                <s:Rect top="0" left="0" right="0" bottom="0">
                    <s:fill>
                        <s:SolidColor color="0xFF46B" alpha=".9"/>
                    </s:fill>
                    <s:filters>
                        <s:DropShadowFilter angle="90" color="0x999999" distance="3"/>
                    </s:filters>
                </s:Rect>

                <s:Label id="labelDisplay" text="{data}"
                    horizontalCenter="0" verticalCenter="1"
                    left="5" right="5" top="5" bottom="5"
                    textAlign="center" verticalAlign="middle" color="0x555555" />
            </s:DataRenderer>
        </fx:Component>
    </fx:Declarations>

    <s:Button id="track" left="5" right="5" top="0" bottom="0"
        skinClass="MyTrackSkin" />
    <s:Button id="thumb" left="0" right="0" width="18" height="8"
        skinClass="MyThumbSkin" />

</s:Skin>
```

Once defined in the skin, the component is in charge of hooking up these skin parts. It adds event listeners on the thumb so you can drag the thumb around the track. It also positions the thumb based on the value. Take a look at the sample source code to see `MyTrackSkin` and `MyThumbSkin`. There you'll see more examples of FXG in action. Notice that the thumb skin as defined has a completely different shape than the default Spark skin thumb.

The `dataTip` skin part is dynamic—it's a part that the component is in charge of creating and laying out. In this case, as you drag around the thumb, the `dataTip` pops up and is positioned to the right of the thumb. Because of the skinning contract, the skin can just define the skin parts, and the visual aspects of them, without having to worry about attaching any behavior to these parts. All of that hook-up logic is handled in the component.

Note: Many of the built-in components in Flex 4 use skin parts to not only attach behavior to the parts but also to push down data into the skin parts. The other way to get data in the skin is to pull them through the `hostComponent` property.

When creating a skin for a component, not all of the skin parts are required. For example, `VSlider`'s `dataTip` skin part is not required. If it's not there, no data tip will show up.

4. Creating a skinnable component

The skinnable Spark components aren't doing anything special behind the scenes. They have data properties and advertise the skin parts and skin states they need through metadata. They also hook into a few key methods for managing the lifecycle of skins and skin parts. You can easily create a new skinnable component that does the same thing.

To demonstrate this, you can create a simple NoteCard component, which can be used to display notes on screen. In the example shown in Figure 7, the application has created multiple notes filled with random quotations.



Figure 7. NoteCard component instances.

The main application just creates a NoteCard with a random quote and rotates it a little bit. The interesting part of the application is the NoteCard class, which extends the `spark.components.supportClasses.SkinnableComponent` class and hooks in to the skinning lifecycle methods.

NoteCard.as:

```
package
{
import flash.events.MouseEvent;
import mx.core.IVisualElementContainer;
import spark.components.Button;
import spark.components.supportClasses.SkinnableComponent;
import spark.components.supportClasses.TextBase;

[SkinState("normal")]
[SkinState("disabled")]
public class NoteCard extends SkinnableComponent
{
    public function NoteCard()
    {
        super();
    }

    [SkinPart(required="true")]
    public var labelDisplay:TextBase;

    [SkinPart(required="false")]
    public var closeButton:Button;

    private var _text:String;

    public function get text():String
    {
        return _text;
    }

    public function set text(value:String):void
    {
        if (_text == value)
            return;

        _text = value;

        if (labelDisplay)
            labelDisplay.text = value;
    }

    override public function set enabled(value:Boolean) : void
    {
        if (enabled != value)
            invalidateSkinState();

        super.enabled = value;
    }

    override protected function getCurrentSkinState() : String
    {
        if (!enabled)
            return "disabled";

        return "normal"
    }

    override protected function partAdded(partName:String, instance:Object) : void
    {
        super.partAdded(partName, instance);

        if (instance == labelDisplay)
            labelDisplay.text = _text;

        if (instance == closeButton)
            closeButton.addEventListener(MouseEvent.CLICK, closeButton_clickHandler);
    }
}
```

```

override protected function partRemoved(partName:String, instance:Object) : void
{
    super.partRemoved(partName, instance);

    if (instance == closeButton)
        closeButton.removeEventListener(MouseEvent.CLICK, closeButton_clickHandler);
}

protected function closeButton_clickHandler(event:MouseEvent) : void
{
    event.stopPropagation();

    IVisualElementContainer(parent).removeElement(this);
}
}
}

```

This component declares data properties, skin states, and skin parts. For the data, NoteCard has a public `text` property. Also, NoteCard has two skin states, `normal` and `disabled`, declared with the `SkinStates` metadata on top of the class. This tells the skin that it needs to implement these two states.

NoteCard also has two skin parts, as declared via the `SkinPart` metadata. The `SkinPart` metadata goes right above the name of the skin part. In this case, `labelDisplay` is a required `TextBase` skin part, and `closeButton` is an optional `Button` skin part.

Because the skin is loaded up at runtime, when the component first starts up, you aren't guaranteed to have a skin at all. You also aren't guaranteed to have all of the skin parts, especially if they are optional. It is the framework's job to hook up the part declared in the skin to the component property definitions and to inform the component that they are ready through the skinning lifecycle methods.

Implementing skin states on the component

To hook up the skin states, you override `getCurrentSkinState()` to return the state your skin should currently be in. In this case, it'll either return `"normal"` or `"disabled"`. When some event causes your skin state to invalidate, the component should call `invalidateSkinState()`.

NoteCard.as

When the `enabled` property gets set, the setter calls `invalidateSkinState()`. This informs the skin that its state needs to change, and `getCurrentSkinState()` will be called.

Hooking up skin parts to the component

To hook up the skin parts, there are two primary methods you should override, `partAdded()` and `partRemoved()`. These methods tell you when a particular skin part is added and when one is removed. Parts can get added or removed when a skin is loaded up, a skin is swapped at runtime, a part comes online because it was deferred and may only exist in certain states, or a dynamic part was newly created. When the part gets added, you should take the opportunity to push any data you want down into it and hook up any event listeners. When the part gets removed, you should do the opposite.

NoteCard.as

In `partAdded()`, when the `labelDisplay` is hooked up, I push the `text` property into that skin part.

Also, in the `text` setter, I check to see if the `labelDisplay` is present and hooked up—and if it is, I make sure to keep the `text` property of the `labelDisplay` synchronized with the component. In `partAdded()`, I add a click event listener to the `closeButton` skin part. In `partRemoved()`, I make sure to remove that same click event listener.

As a `SkinnableComponent`, that's all you need to do to participate in this powerful skinning mechanism. When someone creates a skin for this component, they need to implement the skin states and hook up to the skin parts in order to get the desired behavior. The chalkboard skin shown in Figure 6 can be found in the sample source files, and even though this is a simple component definition, you can completely change the look and feel of it by using a different skin. That's the true power of skinning.

Note: When creating skinnable components, you might have to decide whether certain behavior belongs in the component or in the skin. There's no clear, hard line you must follow. Do whatever makes your job easier. As a general guideline, however, everything defining the look and feel of the component should be in the skin file, declared in MXML. On the other hand, if multiple skins want that particular behavior, then it might be a good idea to put that behavior in the skinnable component. For example, the positioning of the thumb in a slider is done in `VSlider` and `HSlider`, not in the skin.

Where to go from here

Skinning in Flex 4 has undergone a major revision. There's a clear separation between the component and its skin. The component contains the data, behavior, and core logic for the component, while the skin defines the look and feel of the component. The component is written in ActionScript and the skin in MXML, which is possible thanks to FXG and the new states syntax. These two pieces, the component and the skin, communicate with each other through the skinning contract. Because they are separate files, new skins can easily be swapped in to completely change the look and feel of the component.