



Advanced After Effects & Photoshop

With RICHARD HARRINGTON



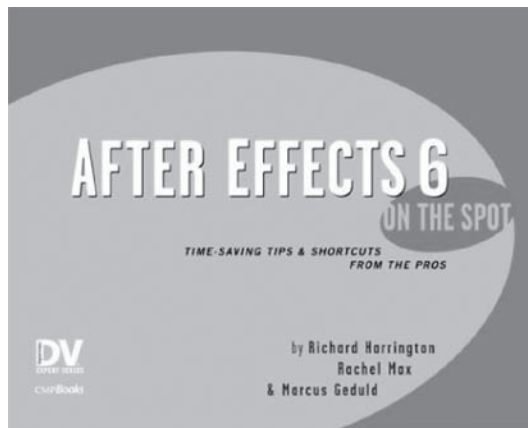
Richard Harrington President, RHED Pixel

Richard Harrington is a certified Project Management Professional, Adobe Certified Expert in Photoshop and After Effects, and Apple-certified instructor in Final Cut Pro. Additionally, he has completed Avid's Master Editor Workshop and the Avid Certified Instructor Program. His visual communications consultancy, RHED Pixel, creates motion graphics and produces video and multimedia projects. He is a faculty member at The Art Institute of Washington and American University, a popular speaker at conferences, and an instructor for Future Media Concepts. He is the author of *Photoshop CS for Nonlinear Editors* and as well as a moderator Creative Cow's Photoshop Forum. Richard is an accomplished video producer, having been named to AV Multimedia Producer's List of Top Producers for 2004 and winning a Cine Golden Eagle Award.

Photoshop & After Effects

Simply put, Adobe Photoshop and After Effects are an excellent pair. These two applications allow Motion Graphics Artists and Video Editors to create great looking animations. Mastering Photoshop is an important step in mastering After Effects. In fact, 80% of my After Effects work is completed in Photoshop. With the introduction of Photoshop CS and After Effects 6.5, a new level of interoperability is possible.

What you'll find here are a series of tips on using these programs together. These are excerpted from a new book called *After Effects on the Spot* (published by CMP Books). Special thanks to Rachel Max and Marcus Geduld who tackled this challenging, yet fun, task with me.

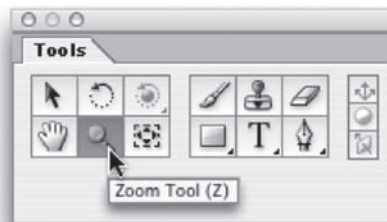


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Get Your Toolbox Out

Need access to your tools? To change tools on the fly without clicking (or even seeing) the Tools Palette, try these shortcuts:

- V Selection Tool
- W Rotation Tool
- C Toggles between Orbit Camera, Track XY Camera and Track Z Camera Tools
- H Hand Tool
- Z Zoom Tool
- Y Pan Behind Tool (Also works as Trim)
- Cmd+B Cycles between Brush, Clone Stamp, and Eraser Tools
- Ctrl+B Eraser Tools
- Q Cycles between Rectangular and Elliptical Mask Tool
- Cmd+T Cycles between Horizontal and Vertical Type Tools
- Ctrl+T Type Tools
- G Cycles between Pen, Add Vertex, Delete Vertex and Convert Vertex Tools





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Speeding up the Comp Window

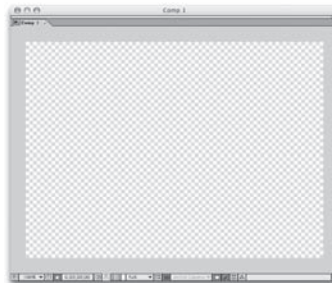
Lowering the resolution of the Comp window can dramatically speed up previews. For example, switching from Full Resolution to Half Resolution speeds up previews four times (as it reduces both the width and height in half). In fact, previewing at half quality with the comp window set to 50 percent often provides a perfectly acceptable preview. To switch preview resolution quickly,

- For Full Resolution, press Cmd+J (Ctrl+J).
- For Half Resolution, press Cmd+Shift+J (Ctrl+Shift+J).
- For Quarter Resolution, press Cmd+Option+Shift+J (Ctrl+Alt+Shift+J).



No Canvas

If you are a Photoshop user, you might be more comfortable working with a transparency grid instead of a colored background. In the submenu of the Composition window, choose Transparency Grid to set the comp window to transparent. When you render the file, After Effects will fill the transparency with black.



Build Your Own Room

You've configured your windows perfectly. Every palette and the time controls are exactly where you want them. The timeline has just enough room. Now save that window arrangement.

1. Choose Window>Workspace> Save Workspace.
2. Name the workspace and click OK.
3. It now appears at the top of your Workspace list.
4. After modifying a workspace, save it again with the identical name, and when prompted, choose Yes to overwrite the old workspace.
5. Workspaces are saved in, and become part of your user settings when you quit After Effects.
6. To delete a workspace choose Window>Workspace>Delete Workspace.



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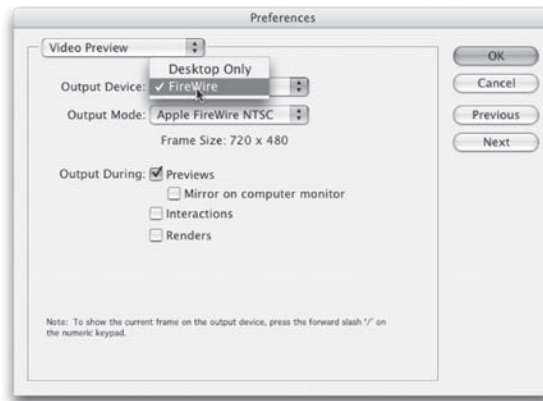


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Send it Out

Mac users previously had the ability to preview their AE comps over Firewire or a video card, now with the release of AE 6.5, PC users can too! Plus Adobe has enhanced the ability of the preview all around. It is possible to preview the contents of a Layer, Footage, or Composition window on an external video monitor.



You can set Video Preview preferences by choosing After Effects > Preferences > Video Preview (Edit > Preferences > Video Preview). Choose one or more of the following interaction types.

Previews: Both RAM preview and standard (spacebar) preview load on the external monitor. Choose Mirror on Computer Monitor to if you want to see the preview simultaneously on the computer screen and the external monitor, however mirroring reduces performance.

Interactions: Interactive previews such as scrubbing and dragging in the Composition window on the external monitor. Interactive previews are always mirrored.

Renders: Each frame is shown the external monitor during a render. All renders are also mirrored.

You can toggle video output by pressing forward slash '/' on the numeric keypad. This is a great way to turn this handy feature on and off.

Healthy Parent/Child Relationships

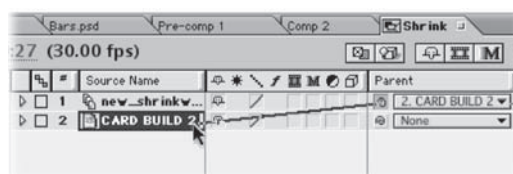
There was once a time in AE where you had to precompose and/or nest layers to group them but no longer! A parent layer assigns its transformations (all except opacity) to its child layer. The child is still independent of the parent though, and can have its own animations applied.

Think of it like your right arm (or left, if you prefer). Your fingers can wiggle on their own, yet they are parented to your hand. If the hand moves, the fingers move. Likewise, the hand is parented to the arm, if it were to swing outward, the hand (and fingers) would follow. And lastly, the arm is parented to your body. Where the body goes, the arm goes, and hence the hand, and likewise the fingers. One parent can control many layers but a child can only have one parent.

If you don't see a Parent Column in the timeline, contextual click on the top of any column and choose Columns>Parent.

Use the Pickwhip to drag and select, or manually choose a parent by clicking on None.

If you are assigning a parent to many layers, select multiple layers and select a



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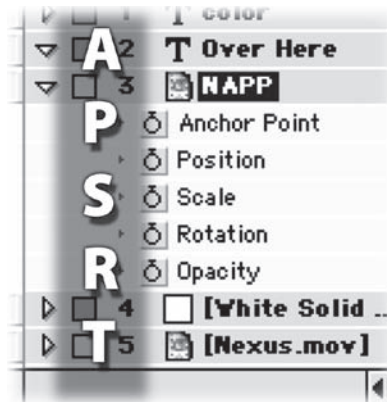
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parent for one of them. The parenting will be applied to all selected layers. Parenting cannot be animated. If you want to stop parenting at any time, you need to split the layer, and assign None as a parent to the split.

The Fundamentals of Animation

There are five key components to animating a layer in After Effects. Fortunately, Adobe put these properties at your fingertips.

- Press A to Twirl down the Anchor Point.
 - Press P to Twirl down the Position.
 - Press R to Twirl down the Rotation.
 - Press S to Twirl down the Scale.
 - Press T to Twirl down the Opacity.
- (Think transparency.)



The following modifier keys also come in handy.

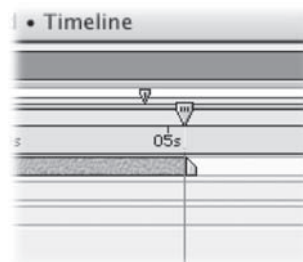
- Hold down the Shift key to display additional properties after selecting the first.
- Hold down the Option key to display a property and add a keyframe at the Current Time Indicator. On a PC, hold down Alt+Shift+ the shortcut letter (A, P, R, S or T) to achieve the same action.

Making your Point (In or Out)

Need to move the in point or out point of a layer? No problem. You can avoid numeric entry all together and harness the power of the keyboard.

1. Place the Current Time indicator at the desired time.
2. To Set the Time In, press the [(left bracket) key. Or, To Set the Time Out, press the] (right bracket) key.

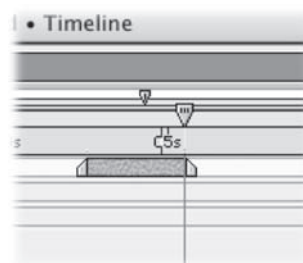
Using this method, you can set either an in or an out point, but not both.



Making Two Points (In and Out)

Want to set both your in and out points for a layer? This can easily be accomplished in the Timeline Window.

1. Place the Current Time indicator at the desired time.
2. To set the Time In, press the [(left bracket) key. This will move the in-point to the Current Time indicator. If you'd like to trim earlier material, press Option+[(Alt+[) to Time Trim the in point.
3. Move the Current Time indicator to the desired end time.
4. To set the Time Trim for the out point, press Option+] (Alt+]).



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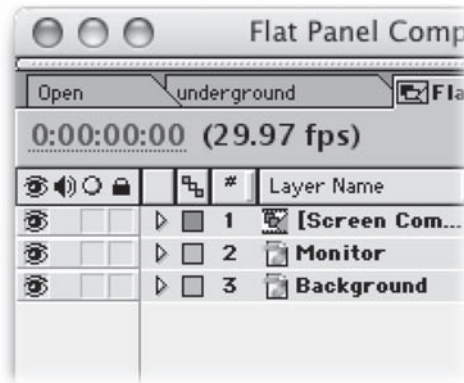
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Boxes Inside of Boxes

When you go on a trip, do you just throw everything into your suitcase? Your toothbrush and toothpaste in the same compartment with your swimsuit, running shoes, dress shirts? If you do, I'm sure you've had a few surprises after the gorillas have thrown your bags around a bit. The organized traveler uses several small bags and pouches to keep belongings intact and looking their best. The same holds true in After Effects.

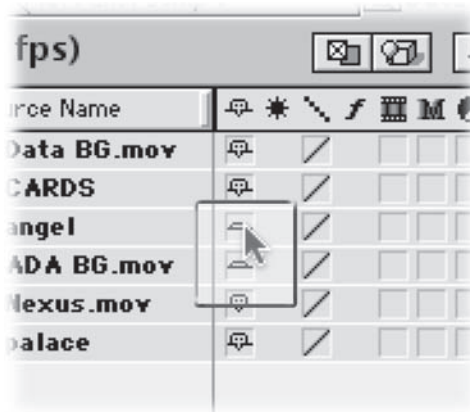
If your timeline has more than 20 layers, you should really consider organizing it better. Pre-composing allows you to take several layers and put them into a new composition. They still live in your timeline, but are far easier to manage and track. To Pre Compose, simply highlight the desired layers and press Shift+Cmd+C (Shift+Ctrl+C).



It's OK, Be Shy

Have a lot of layers in your timeline? Of course you do, you're smart and talented enough to be reading this advanced book. Wouldn't it be nice to make a little more room in your timeline to see things? Harness the Shy layers feature to dramatically cut down on vertical scrolling.

1. To designate a layer as shy, click on the little "Kilroy" icon on each layer you want to hide.
2. At the top of the timeline click the Shy (Kilroy) icon.
3. All shy layers will disappear from the timeline view. They will, however, continue to affect the composition, and their results will show up in the Comp Window.
4. At any time, you can reveal all shy layers by clicking on the Shy icon at the top of the timeline.



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Mighty Mouse

Whether you run on a Mac or a PC, you need a two-button mouse with a scroll wheel to get the most out of After Effects 6.5. Powerful navigation shortcuts are now at your fingertips.

- The mouse wheel will scroll vertically in the Composition, Layer, or Footage Windows.
- Hold the shift key to scroll horizontally in the Timeline and Project windows.
- Hold the Option (Alt) key down to zoom around your mouse point in the Composition, Layer, or Footage windows. In the timeline, this shortcut lets you zoom in time.
- The Option (Alt) key will also zoom you around a selected track or mask point.
- You don't have to have a window active, just hover over the window you want to pan, tilt, or zoom.

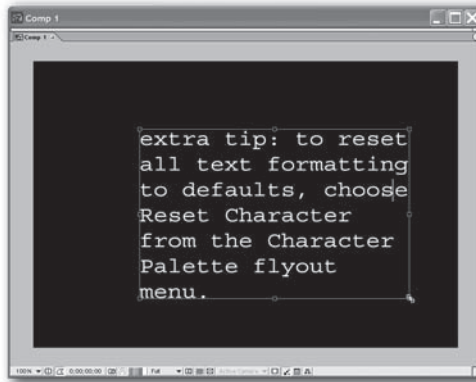


Point Text vs. Paragraph Text

When wielding the Type tool, you can create a text layer in one of two ways. Either click in the Comp window (to create Point Text), or hold the left mouse button down and drag in the Comp window (to create Paragraph Text).

Point Text treats each line you type as a separate block of text. New lines will only be created when you press the Return (Enter) key.

Paragraph Text wraps text around to the next line when your type reaches the edge of the current line. The edge—the text's bounding box—is defined by how far you dragged the mouse when you created the paragraph text layer. You can resize the bounding box (for Paragraph Text only) by selecting the text using the Text tool, clicking to place a cursor within the text, then dragging on one of the sizing handles around the perimeter of the bounding box. Shift-dragging a sizing handle will constrain the proportions of the bounding box. Make sure you don't accidentally drag a sizing handle with the Selection tool, or you'll scale the text, not its bounding box.



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The Kerning Shortcut

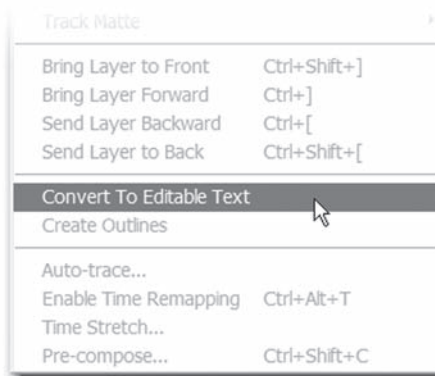
Kerning means adjusting the spacing between pairs of letters. When font sizes are large, you'll often notice that the space between some letters seems wider or narrower than the spaces between other letters.

To even up the spacing, you can kern by placing your cursor between two letters, holding down the Option (Alt) key, then pressing the Left Arrow key to move the letters closer together or the Right Arrow key to move letters further apart. Since you can also use the Left and Right Arrow keys (without the Option or Alt key held down) to move the text cursor, you can quickly make many kerning adjustments by moving the cursor with the Arrow keys and adding in the Option (Alt) key when you want to kern.



Editing Photoshop Text in AE

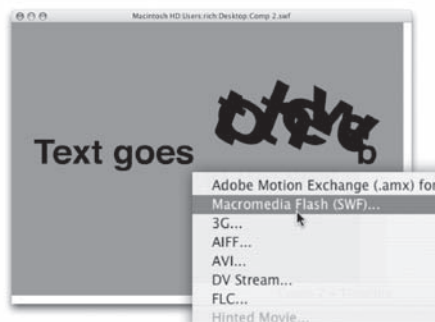
If you've imported a Photoshop Text layer into After Effects, you can edit its text without going back over to Photoshop. Select the layer, and choose Layer>Convert to Editable Text from the menu. This will only work with Photoshop Text layers—not flattened or rasterized layers.



Web Geeks Rejoice!

After Effects offers awesome text animation possibilities. It also offers SWF output... however text was always rasterizes, which increased file size and prevented user scaling. With the release of AE 6.5, text layers can now be exported as vectors when going to SWF.

1. Choose File>Export>Macromedia Flash (SWF).
2. Raster filters, motion blur and Fill Over Stroke are will still go out as rasterized type.



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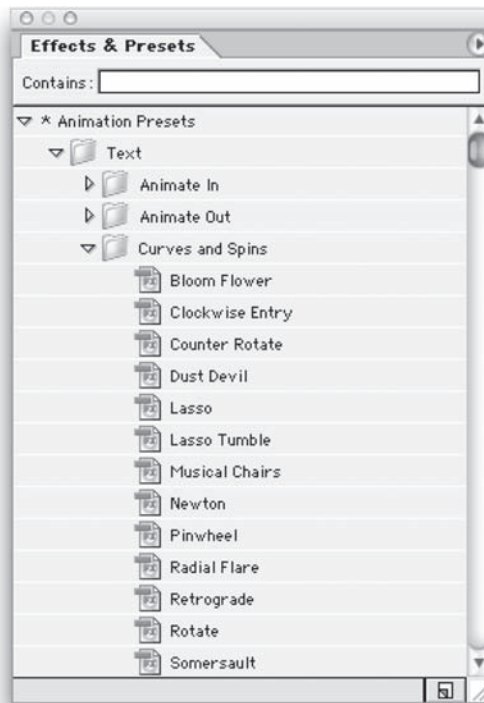
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Easy Typer

Apparently the folks at Adobe noticed that a lot of customers were saying awfully nice things about Apple's LiveType. Sure AE's text engine is as (or maybe more powerful). But the folks at Apple sure had the usability thing down.

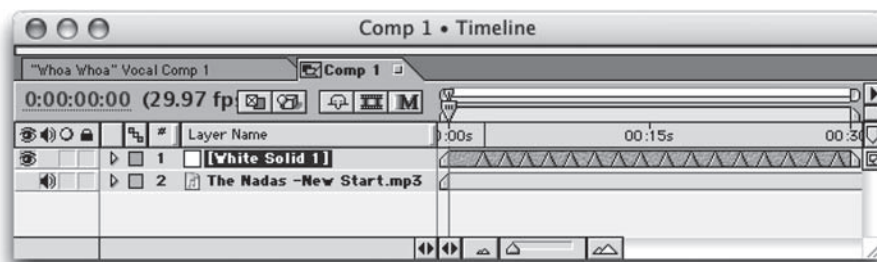
Fortunately AE 6.5 does a shout back and tries to win this battle. You'll find over 250 professionally-designed text animation presets. These can streamline the design process, but don't replace it. Presets can be used as a starting point, and then modified. In fact you can save modified presets or your own creations and build up your library.

1. You can view the available presets by calling up the Effects & Presets palette.
2. To apply a text preset, just drag and drop it on top of a text layer in your Timeline or Comp window.
3. You'll find an extensive (and inspiring gallery) inside the After Effects 6.5 online Help.



Tap Out the Beat

This is our favorite way to sync keyframes to an audio track. If you can tap your finger to



the music, you can achieve better keyframing.

1. Add a Solid Layer to hold your keyframes by pressing Cmd+Y (Ctrl+Y). Leave this layer selected.
2. Set your preview area for the segment of audio you'd like to keyframe.
3. Be certain the Audio button is highlighted in the Time Controls Window.
4. Start the RAM preview.
5. To add a Layer Marker, press the Multiply symbol (*) on the numeric keypad. Continue to tape out each audio event you'd like to sync to. When the Preview is finished, all of the Layer Markers will appear.
6. To move between markers, use the J and K keys to move left or right respectively.

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Cool Transitions: Gradient Wipe

Our favorite transition is the incredible Gradient Wipe. After Effects can use any gradient layer as a “transition map.” Create or modify a gradient in Photoshop first. You can combine gradient layers, blend modes, and filters to create an interesting map.

1. Import the gradient map into After Effects.
2. Add the gradient to your timeline but leave its visibility off. Make sure the gradient layer is the length of your composition.
3. Apply the Gradient Wipe (Effect>Transition>Gradient Wipe) to the intended layer.
4. Define the Gradient Layer source.
5. Turn up the Transition’s softness for a smoother transition.
6. Start the transition 100 percent complete, and then set a second keyframe to 0 percent where you want the transition to end.

When you play back the comp, you’ll notice that the light areas on the gradient make certain corresponding pixels on the image layer vanish first; black areas cause other pixels to vanish last; gray pixels cause corresponding image pixels to vanish in the middle of the transition.

Generally, you will need a stack of three layers in your Timeline when applying Gradient Wipe. You’ll need the two images (or videos) you’re transitioning between, and the gradient layer. It doesn’t matter where the gradient layer sits in the stacking order, because you’ll be turning its visibility off, but the other two layers should be stacked in order of what you want to see first and what you want to see second (first above second). Apply the gradient wipe to the first image. Don’t apply it to the gradient!

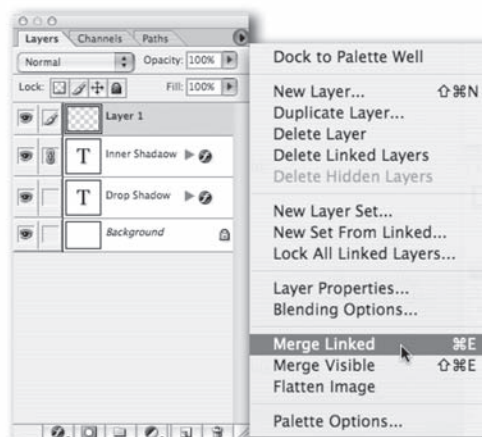


Mobile Style

Layer Styles (formerly Layer Effects) do not like to travel. This is a common problem as there is not a single application out there that correctly interprets layer styles outside of Photoshop.

In order to import successfully, you need to flatten them. Using a technique called Targeted Flattening, we can create a merged layer and preserve an editable layer within the same document. This gives you the best of both worlds, proper imports, and room for future revisions.

1. Save your document under a different name by using File>Save As. This is an extra precaution against accidentally deleting your work. (We usually rename it Document Name for AE.psd)
2. Create a new (empty) layer and link it to the stylized layer that needs processing.
3. Leave the empty layer highlighted. While holding down the Option key (Alt key), choose Merge Linked from the Layers Palette submenu. This merges the layers to the target layer, but leaves the originals behind.



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4. You should have a flattened copy on the target layer. Rename this flattened layer so you can easily locate it later. We recommend including the words FLAT in your layer name for ease of use.
5. Repeat for all layers and save your work. This method will produce a layered document, which will import properly.

Unsupported Styles

If you want to import Photoshop layer styles, be aware of the following limitations.

Unsupported Styles:

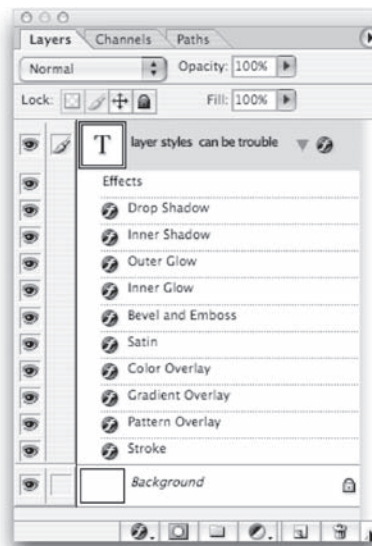
- o Gradient Overlay
- o Pattern Overlay
- o Stroke
- o Satin

Styles that are Imported as Effects Comps:

- o Bevel
- o Inner Shadow
- o Inner Glow
- o Color Overlay

Styles that create effect layers and animate intuitively:

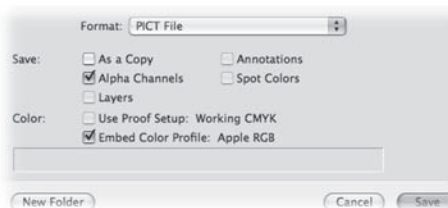
- o Outer Glow
- o Drop Shadow



PS Alpha Channel (Multiple Layers)

If you have a multi-layered Photoshop document, things are a little trickier. But creating an alpha channel is still an essential part of getting clean keying of graphics.

1. Turn off the Visibility icon for all layers that are not part of the graphic you want to key.
2. Create a new layer and highlight it. Hold down the Option key (Alt) and choose Merge Visible from the Layers palette submenu. A new layer is created from the existing layers.
3. Cmd+Click (Ctrl+Click) on the layer's thumbnail icon to make an active selection. Then turn the visibility icon off for the merged copy.
4. Switch to the Channels palette and click on the Save Selection as Channel icon.
5. Save your file as a PICT or TARGA with Alpha Channel using the previously described method.



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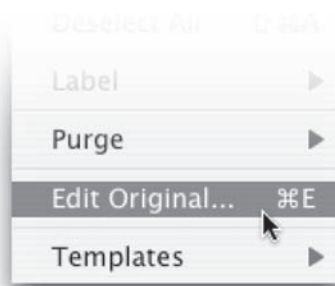
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Editing the Original

Need to tweak the original file? Get ready for the best shortcut ever invented!

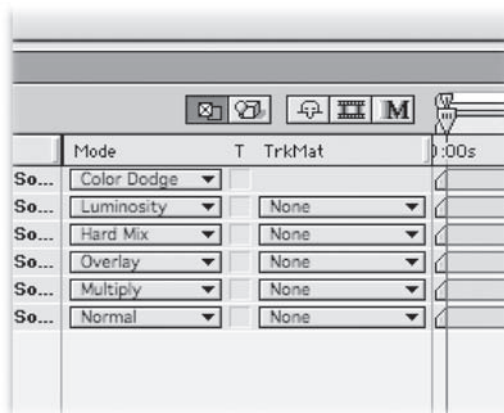
1. Select a file either in the project window or timeline window
 2. Go to File>Edit Original or press Cmd+E (Ctrl+E) to open the file in its source program. The program will launch if not already open. This works particularly well for Adobe native applications.
 3. Tweak your file and save it
 4. AE should update the layer but if not choose it in the Project window and context click (right click or control click) and choose Reload Footage. Alternatively you can force AE to scan for changed footage by hitting Cmd+Option+L (Ctrl+Alt+L).
- If you are having trouble finding your footage in the project window, context-click on the layer in the timeline window and choose Reveal Layer Source in Project Window.



Making Blend Modes Easy

Part of the reason beginners pass on blending modes is that they are hard to use if you don't know which one you want. Find an obscure list; scroll down (forever) only to discover you need to pick a different one. There's a much better way to experiment.

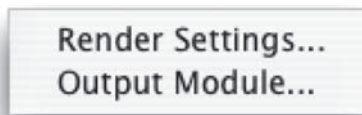
1. Highlight the layer or layers you want to blend.
2. Press Shift+= (Shift Plus Equal) to scroll through the list.
3. To move backward, press Shift+- (Shift Plus Minus) to return to a passed blending mode.



Be Consistent

Want consistent results? Use templates. After Effects comes with several built-in templates that addresses several of the more common production needs. After Effects offers both render setting templates (for establishing quality, resolution, and duration) and output module (for defining file formats). If these built-in options don't do it for you however, you can easily create your own.

1. Choose Edit > Templates> Render Settings... or Output Module....
2. Click New to create a new setting or Duplicate to modify a copy of an existing setting.
3. Modify the settings to match your needs. When finished click OK.
4. If you'd like, you can choose one of your settings to be the default.



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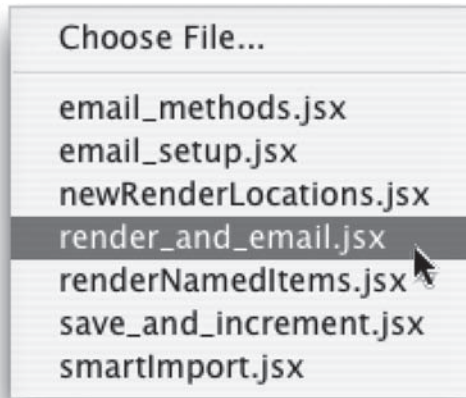
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The Most Important Email All Week

After Effects 6 now supports scripts. One of those scripts can actually render a file then email you upon completion. If you're a tech geek, the gears in your head are already spinning. Most pagers and cell phones can receive text messages via the Internet. Just think, the leash has been cut!

1. Open up your General Preferences and be sure that the Allow Scripts to Write Files and Access Network box is checked.
 2. Add your files to the Render Queue like normal.
 3. Choose File > Run Script > render_and_email.jsx, you will now be prompted for your email settings.
 4. Enter server smtp address: such as mail.mac.com, click OK
 5. Enter the reply to address: such as the email you want to use to send the message.
 6. If your server required log-in (most do), click YES and enter your ID and password. Click OK.
 7. Enter the recipients email address. Click OK
 8. An email with the subject AE Render complete will be sent when the queue is finished.
- How cool is that?



Want to keep in touch?

The Creative Cow website (<http://www.creativecow.net>) offers several free forums and tutorials. With a distinct slant towards video professionals, the Photoshop/Illustrator forum offers a great place to look for ideas or troubleshooting advice.



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