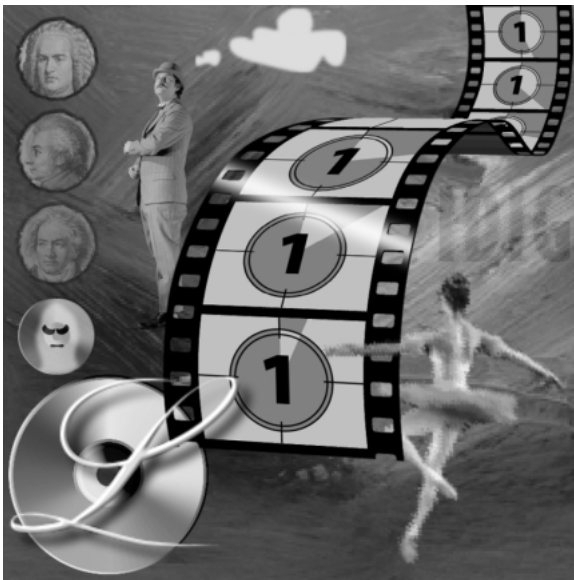


Getting to Know the Work Area



This first lesson introduces you to some basic concepts and features of After Effects.

In this lesson, you'll take a look at some basic features of After Effects while viewing a completed project—an inviting opener for a promotional videotape being produced for a performing-arts center. This opener includes music provided by the fictional client as well as backgrounds and textures originated by you or culled from your stock library. During this lesson, you will examine windows, features, and the files that you'll use in Lesson 2, “Ballet Special Bumper,” when you actually create a movie.

This lesson covers the following topics:

- Identifying and organizing palettes and windows
- Identifying, color coding, and sorting source material
- Altering resolution, quality, and zoom settings
- Working with the Composition and Time Layout windows
- Navigating through time
- Playing and previewing a composition
- Identifying layer switches
- Displaying layer properties

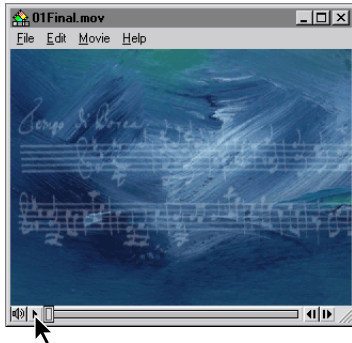
It should take approximately 1 to 2 hours to complete this project.

Viewing the final project

Before you create any project in this book, you'll take a look at the finished movie, 01Final.mov.

To watch the QuickTime movie, you need to have the MoviePlayer application installed on your computer. You'll be using MoviePlayer to view many of the QuickTime movies you create in Adobe After Effects. See “Installing QuickTime 3.0 (or later) and MoviePlayer 2.1 (or later)” on page 4.

1 Double-click the 01Final.mov file in the 01Lesson folder to open the final QuickTime movie, and then click the Play button in the Time Controls palette or press the K key on your keyboard.



This project was created entirely from still images that were imported into After Effects and animated. The musical manuscript overlays the painted background and pans from right to left while type zooms in and rotates a quarter turn. Finally, a sequence of composer images is displayed, with a harpsichord accompaniment.

2 When you are finished, exit from the MoviePlayer application.

Video terminology

Before using After Effects, you should familiarize yourself with the following terms:

Alpha channel Color digital images often consist of three channels, one composed of red information, one of green information, and one of blue information (called RGB for short). In addition, a computer image or footage may have a fourth, invisible channel that defines transparent areas for the footage item or layer that contains the channel. With imported items, an alpha channel provides a way to store both the footage and its transparency information in a single file without disturbing the footage item's other color channels. Each After Effects layer contains one alpha channel, which can accommodate an alpha channel included with a footage item.

Footage item The source material for a movie. A footage item can be a movie, a still image, or an audio file. In After Effects, a footage item is a pointer to a file stored on a hard disk.

Frame In video, film, and digital movies, a single picture or image. In video, a frame is composed of two fields of 525 lines (NTSC) or 625 lines (PAL or SECAM), which are interlaced and displayed sequentially.

Frame rate The speed at which film or video frames are captured or displayed. The frame rate (or time base) used for video in North America is 30 fps; therefore, one second of footage contains 30 frames. (The NTSC, or National Television Standards Committee, broadcast video format is actually 29.97 fps.) Many countries use the PAL (Phase Alteration Line) or SECAM (Système Électronique Pour Couleur Avec Mémoire) video standard with a 25-fps frame rate. Film plays at 24 fps.

SMPTE Timecode The SMPTE (Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers) timecode standard used to identify each frame (and the duration) of a file in terms of Hours:Minutes:Seconds:Frames. With a frame rate set to 30 frames per second, a file duration of 00:06:51:15 indicates that the footage plays for 6 minutes and 51 seconds and 15 frames (15 frames being 0.5 second).

Getting started

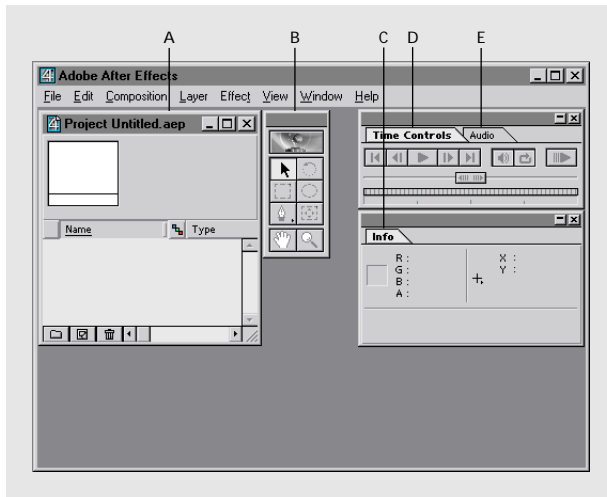
Every After Effects movie starts as a project—a collection of moving images, still images, and audio that you organize into *compositions*. In the compositions, the elements are organized along a timeline. The concept is similar to working with page-layout software. You import and arrange the elements of your project within the compositions that you create.

In this introductory lesson, you will open both a new project and a project that has already been constructed, and explore palettes and windows.

1 To ensure that the tools and palettes function exactly as described in this lesson, delete or deactivate (by renaming) the After Effects preferences file. See “Restoring default preferences” on page 6.

2 Start the After Effects application. An untitled Project window appears.

After Effects opens with all palettes displayed, along with the Project window in the left corner. To display a specific palette, you can select it in the Window menu or open it directly with a command key. To display or hide all palettes, press Tab.



*A. Project window B. Toolbox C. Info palette
D. Time Controls palette E. Audio palette*

- The *Project* window contains links to all the elements of your project, such as moving images, still images, and audio.
- The *toolbox* contains tools for moving elements, rotating layers, magnifying images, and creating and editing masks. To open or close it, press Ctrl+1 (Windows) or Command+1 (Mac OS).
- The *Info* palette provides important feedback as to color values, pixel coordinates, in and out times, and other information. To open or close it, press Ctrl+2 (Windows) or Command+2 (Mac OS).
- The *Time Controls* palette gives tape-deck-like control over time in your projects. To open or close it, press Ctrl+3 (Windows) or Command+3 (Mac OS).
- The *Audio* palette gives fader-like control over the audio levels of a layer. To open or close it, press Ctrl+4 (Windows) or Command+4 (Mac OS).

3 Choose File > Open. Select the 01Proj.aep file in the 01Lesson folder. If you are prompted that some files have changed, click OK.

Your screen now shows some additional windows, such as the Composition window and its Time Layout window. You'll learn more about these windows later in this lesson.

You will explore this project while familiarizing yourself with the After Effects program's rich feature set. Don't be afraid of making a mess!

Arranging windows and palettes

Palettes help you monitor and modify artwork. By default, the Time Controls palette and the Audio palette are grouped. You can group other windows and palettes in this way. To show or hide a palette as you work, choose the appropriate window or palette name from the Window menu. If the window or palette name has a checkmark on the menu, choosing it conceals the entire group.

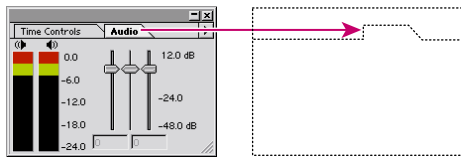
You can reorganize your work space in various ways. Try these techniques:

- To hide or display all open palettes and the toolbox, press Tab.
- To make a palette appear at the front of its group, click the palette's tab.



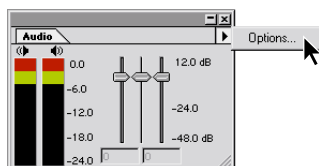
Click the Audio tab to move the palette to the front.

- To move an entire palette group, drag its title bar.
- To rearrange or separate a palette group, drag a palette's tab. Dragging a palette outside of an existing group creates a new group.



Palettes are grouped (left). Click and drag the palette tab to separate a palette from the group (right).

- To move a palette to another group, drag the palette's tab to that group.
- To display a palette or window menu, position the pointer on the triangle in the upper right corner of the palette or window, and hold down the mouse button. (Not all windows and palettes have such a menu.)

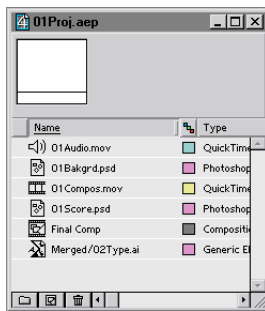


- To change the height of a palette (except the Time Controls or Info palette), drag its lower right corner.
- To collapse a group to the palette titles only, click the minimize/maximize box (Windows) or the resize box (Mac OS). Or double-click a palette's tab. You can still access the menu of a collapsed palette.

Note: *If you're working with a second monitor, you may want to drag the Composition window to this additional monitor. Press **Ctrl+Shift+** (Windows) or **Command+Shift+** (Mac OS) to resize a 640 x 480 composition to fill a second monitor.*

Project window

The Project window in the upper left corner of the screen contains links to all of the source material used in this project, as well as all of the compositions that have been created. Each icon indicates the type of source material—a Photoshop image, an Adobe Illustrator file, a QuickTime movie, an audio file, or a composition.

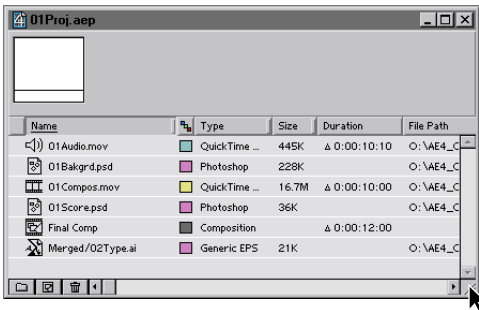


An After Effects project does not actually contain any of the source material you use to create a movie (with the exception of simple solid-color shapes). Instead, the project points to the original source material wherever it is stored. For this reason, it is important not to delete the source material after you create a project, and to be careful about moving source files.

A project contains all of the information needed to create a movie, such as how all the source material is organized over time and how it is modified by the various features After Effects offers.

When you select an item in the Project window, a thumbnail of its image is shown in the upper part of this window, and additional information, such as its size, duration, and how many times it is used in the Project, is shown to the right.

1 Resize the Project window by dragging the resize box in the lower right corner to the right, so that you can see more of the information in the window.



2 Single-click the Score.psd footage item, which is an Adobe Photoshop file.

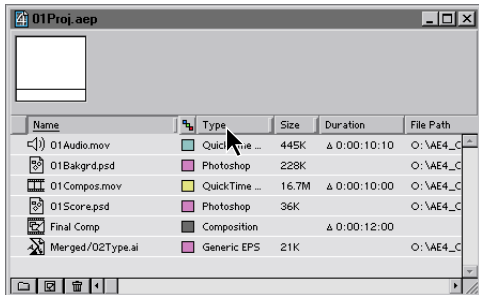
Notice that a thumbnail appears, showing the item's dimensions as 490 pixels wide by 155 pixels high. It has a color depth of millions of colors. The + indicates that an alpha channel (transparency information) is included with the image. The word *premultiplied* indicates the type of alpha channel in the image. Note too that Score.psd is listed as being used one time in the project.

3 Single-click the footage item named Final Comp, which is a composition. It contains all the elements of the final movie for this project, and its Composition and Time Layout windows are currently open.

Examine the thumbnail that appears at the top of the Project window. This item is identified as having a size of 320 x 240, a duration of 0:00:12:00 (12 seconds), and a frame rate of 30 frames per second (fps).

4 Select the other footage items, and examine the thumbnail information for each one.

5 Click Type in the Project window, and notice how the Project window re-arranges itself.



6 Also notice the colors used to quickly identify file type. Type color is a preference you can set. After Effects default colors match the default colors of Adobe Premiere. Click Name again to return the list to alphabetical order by name. You can sort source material by any category heading by clicking the category name just above your list of sources.

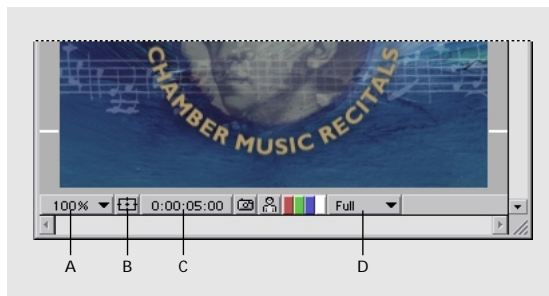
7 Right-click (Windows) or Control-click (Mac OS) a category name and then choose a name to show or hide it. An underline in the menu shows the current sorting method. You can also resize a column by dragging the right edge of the heading.

8 Return the Project window to its original size by using the resize box in the lower right corner of the window.

Composition window

The Composition window is where you create a composition (or comp), arranging the different footage items as layers, and animating the layers by using the myriad options that After Effects offers. Think of the composition as a stage where you assemble the actors and control their movements.

There are a number of menus, toggles, and informational displays along the bottom of the window that are of interest. You'll take a brief look at some of these controls now. More detail will be provided throughout the rest of the lessons in this book.



*A. Magnification menu B. Safe-zones icon C. Time display
D. Resolution menu*

Magnification

The Magnification menu controls the zoom level at which you are viewing the displayed composition. If you are working with a 320 x 240 project, this should be currently set to 100%.

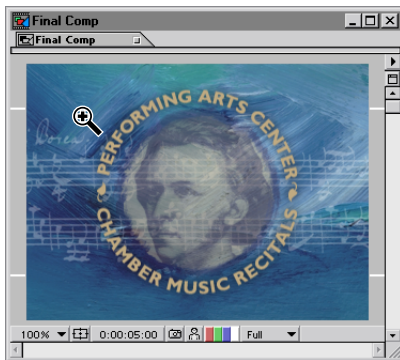
1 Click the Magnification menu, and select 50%. The magnification of the image is reduced.

Changing the magnification changes the viewing size of the pixels in the window and does not affect the actual image data.

Notice that the entire image shrinks in size, but the Composition window itself stays the same. You now see the gray working area outside the frame of the composition. The Score.psd layer is partially positioned in the gray area outside the displayed image area. This item moves across the image area during the composition.

2 Return the magnification to its original setting (100%). You can also use the period and comma keys to zoom in and out.


3 To select the zoom tool, click the magnifying glass icon in the lower right corner of the toolbox. As you move the pointer over the image in the Composition window, it will change to a magnifying glass with a + in the middle.



4 Click anywhere in the Composition window, and notice that the image zooms by a factor of 2 and centers on the point where you clicked.

5 Hold down the Alt key (Windows) or the Option key (Mac OS). Notice that the + inside the magnifying glass turns into a – (minus sign) signifying that the tool will zoom out. Click in the window again, and notice that the image zooms out.

6 Select the selection tool in the toolbox.

 *To magnify the view in the Time Layout window, see “Magnifying the Time Graph” on page 82.*

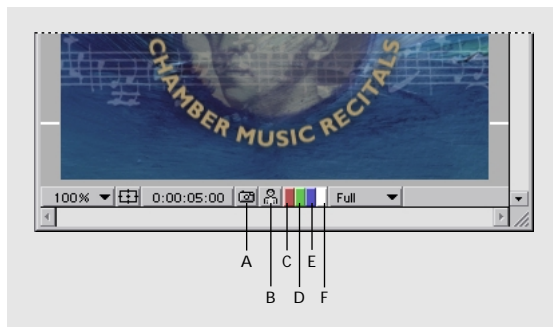
Time display

The Time Display shows the current time in the composition. The time is displayed in the Composition window in SMPTE timecode—hours:minutes:seconds:frames. In this case, the Time Display shows 0:00:05:00, or 5 seconds into the composition. Clicking the Time Display in any window will bring up the Go To Time dialog box, which you use to move to different points in time in the composition. For more on SMPTE timecode, see “Video terminology” on page 33.

Window snapshots

When you want to compare one view to another in any window, you can take a *snapshot* of one view and temporarily replace the window image with the snapshot.


- 1 Click the Take Snapshot button to take a snapshot.



A. Take snapshot **B.** Display snapshot **C.** Red channel
D. Green channel **E.** Blue channel **F.** Alpha channel

- 2 Press the Home key on your keyboard to move to the beginning of the composition. The Composition window displays the footage items as they appear at that point in time.
- 3 Position the pointer over the Display Snapshot button and hold down the mouse button to display the snapshot in the window temporarily.
- 4 Choose Edit > Undo Time Change to return to the original time (05:00).

After Effects automatically names the Undo function to clarify what you are about to Undo. AfterEffects provides 99 levels of Undo. The default number is 20, but you can set the number of steps you would like to Undo by choosing File > Preferences > General.

 To redo a command, select Edit > Redo or use the keyboard shortcut **Ctrl+Shift+Z** (Windows) or **Command+Shift+Z** (Mac OS).

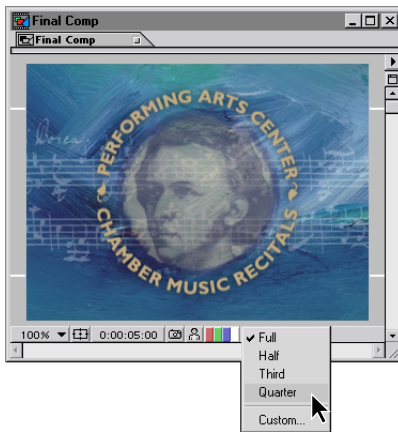
Color and alpha channel display

You can preview the color channels of an image in grayscale by positioning the pointer over a button and holding down the mouse button (see the previous illustration). The white Channel Display button lets you preview the alpha channel. (In this example, there is nothing defined for the alpha channel, so it appears completely empty.) To see channel information in the appropriate color (for example, red for the red channel and so on), hold down the Alt key (Windows) or the Option key (Mac OS) as you hold down the mouse button.

Resolution

Just to the right of the channel display icons is the Resolution menu. Full is currently selected in this menu.

- 1 In the Resolution menu, choose Quarter.



Resolution affects the actual number of pixels being processed to display an image in the Composition window. The image now appears jagged since only every fourth pixel (both width and height) is being processed. This allows After Effects to process the composition up to 16 times faster. If screen updates are taking too long, try working with a lower resolution.

You can match the magnification to the resolution. This is especially important when you will be using RAM Preview, described later in this lesson.

- 2 Choose 25% from the Magnification menu to match the frame size to Quarter resolution.

- 3 Double-click the zoom tool in the toolbox to return the magnification to 100%.
- 4 In the Resolution menu, choose Full.
- 5 To switch back to the pointer from the zoom tool, select the selection tool in the toolbox.

As you work in After Effects, you might notice that the pointer cycles from black to white. This indicates that After Effects is processing commands and updating the display. If you see too much of the cycling arrow, reducing the resolution will help you work faster.

Note: You can still choose menu items and resize windows while the pointer cycles.

Another indication that After Effects is processing and updating your work is the panel to the right of the Resolution menu. A moving bar in this panel indicates activity.

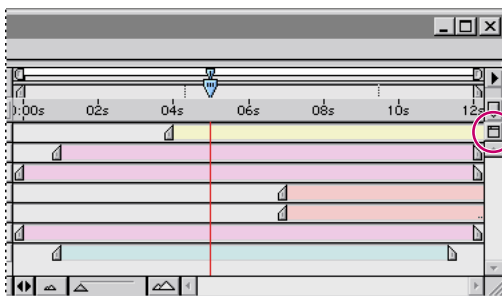
Time Layout window

Every Composition window has an associated Time Layout window with the same name. Whereas the Composition window is used to position items in space, the Time Layout window allows you to position items in time and control the way they change over time.

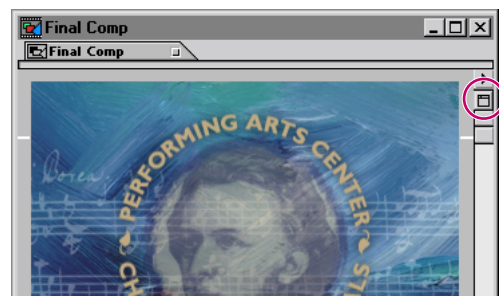
If you close the Time Layout window or the Composition window, you can open either one again by clicking the Comp Family button above the right scroll bar in either window. You can also press the \ (backslash) key to do this.

💡 *If you closed both windows, you can reopen them by double-clicking the Final Comp footage item in the Project window.*

- 1 Close the Final Comp Composition window.
- 2 Click the Comp Family button above the right scroll bar of the Time Layout window. The Final Comp Composition window reappears.



Opens corresponding Composition window



Layers

A composition usually contains multiple items. Each item in a composition is referred to as a *layer*. A layer consists of only one item, be it a Photoshop image, a QuickTime movie, an EPS file, an audio file, or another composition.

You can identify which layers are used in this composition by reading their names along the left side of the Time Layout window. Miniatures of the icons used in the Project window identify the media type of each layer, as well as the color used to label it and the corresponding duration bar in the Time Layout window. Each layer also has a number that represents its stacking order. Number 1 is on top, and so on.

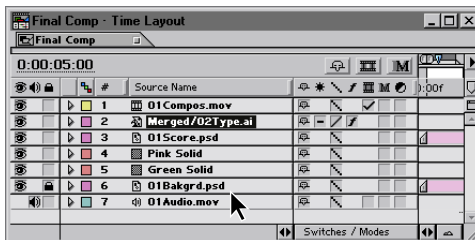
Try these basic techniques in the Time Layout window when working with layers:

- To select a layer, click the layer name.
- To deselect a layer, click another layer name or click in an open area of the window.
- To display or hide outlines of layer properties, click the triangle to the left of the layer name.

Layer ordering

Layers are stacked in the Time Layout window in the same order they are stacked in the composition, from top to bottom. This is important for arranging how layers appear in relation to other layers.

- 1 Resize the Time Layout window by using the resize area in the lower right corner.
- 2 Select the Merged/Type.ai layer (layer 2) and drag it down until a horizontal bar appears below the layer named Bakgrd.psd (layer 6).



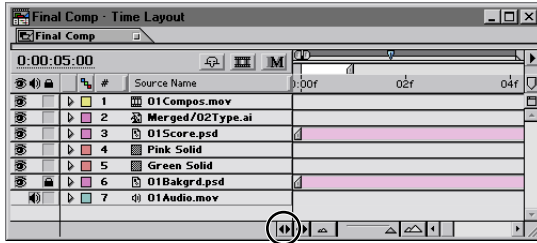
Notice how the Merged/Type.ai layer disappears in the Composition window. It is now underneath, or behind, the background layer that fills the entire composition.

- 3 Choose Edit > Undo Layer Reordering.

Time graph

Before examining the Layer Switches panel and the Transfer Modes panel next to the layer names, you'll collapse the panel and take a look at the layer time graph.

- 1 Click the double-triangle icon in the Time Layout window to collapse the Layer Switches panel.



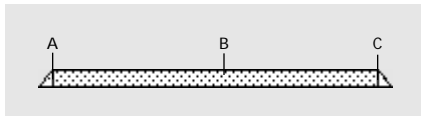
Window expansion icon

The time graph, which currently shows increments of two seconds, displays the status of the layers through time, from left to right.

In After Effects, time is displayed in SMPTE timecode, hours:minutes:seconds:frames. The blue current-time marker indicates the point in time displayed in the Composition window.

- 2 Notice that the current-time marker is set at 0:00:05:00 (5 seconds). The layers that you see in the Composition window represent what you see at the 5-second point in your composition. The time in the Time Layout window matches the time displayed in the Composition window.

Each layer has a *duration bar*, which represents the length of that particular layer. The left end of the duration bar is the *In point*, where the layer starts in time, and the right end of the bar is the *Out point*, where the layer ends in time. There are triangular handles at each end, but the actual In or Out point is the edge of the duration bar.



A. In point B. Duration bar C. Out point

- 3 Notice that the Merged/Type.ai layer's In point is at 1 second and that the Compos.mov layer's In point is at 4 seconds.

Since both the Merged/Type.ai and the Compos.mov layers fade in, you may not see them in the Composition window until a few frames after their In points.

4 Drag the blue current-time marker all the way to the left, to time 00:00. Notice how the Merged/Type.ai and Compos.mov layers disappear from the Composition window, because they do not come into the composition until later in time.

Layer switches

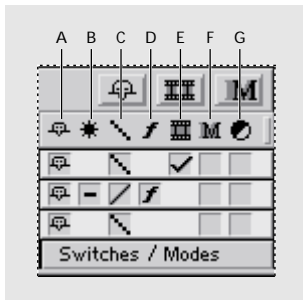
Now that you've had a general overview of the Time Layout window, let's take a look at some of the details.

1 Click the window expansion icon at the bottom of the Time Layout window to display the Switches panel.

After Effects provides many ways to display layers inside a composition. Most of the Switches that control these options are arranged in columns to the right of the layer names. Three additional switches are located to the left of the layer names. You'll take a brief look at the switches before moving on to the next lesson.

Switches in the Layer Switches panel

The Layer Switches panel contains seven switches that can be set for each individual layer. Above these switches are three more switches that interact with the layer switches.

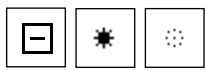


A. Shy **B.** Collapse **C.** Quality
D. Effect **E.** Frame Blending
F. Motion Blur **G.** Adjustment Layer



Shy switch: When set, and the Hide Shy Layers button is also selected, layers will be hidden in the Time Layout window.

- 1 Click the Shy switch to the right of the Merged/Type.ai layer name. The icon should change to a box with a line, with no person inside. (You cannot see the little person peering over the wall.)
- 2 Click the Shy switch next to the Score.psd layer in the Time Layout window.
- 3 Now that you have selected a couple of layers to make shy, select the Hide Shy Layers button in the top section of the Switches panel in the Time Layout window. Notice that both Layers now disappear from the Time Layout window, but no change occurs in the Composition window.
- 4 Deselect Hide Shy Layers; notice that the layer reappears in the Time Layout window. You use the Shy switch to cut down on clutter in your Time Layout window.



Collapse Transformations/Continuously Rasterize switch: This switch performs one of two functions, depending on the type of layer. It either maximizes the resolution of images passed through from other compositions, or it continuously rasterizes EPS files. You'll explore this option in a later lesson.



Quality switch: Layers can be represented in draft quality and best quality. These two states are represented by icons that include a dotted backslash, and a solid forward slash, respectively.

- 5 Try resetting the quality for some of the layers. Most of the time you will want to work in Draft mode, for faster screen redraw.



Effects switch: A box appears under this column if one or more effects have been applied to a layer.

In this example, a drop shadow effect has been applied to the Merged/Type.ai layer, so a box with an *f* appears next to the layer name. You can turn layer effects off and on for a given layer by clicking its Effects switch box.

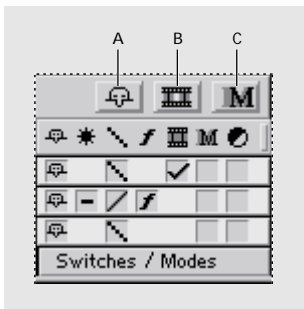


Frame Blending switch, Motion Blur switch: These two switches provide controls for blending and blurring effects that will be discussed in future lessons.





Adjustment Layer switch: A box appears under this column if an adjustment layer has been applied to a layer. You can turn off the adjustment layer by clicking this box.


The Time Layout window has three additional buttons that interact with the layer switches:



- A. *Hide Shy Layers*
- B. *Enable Frame Blending*
- C. *Enable Motion Blur*

 *Hide Shy Layers:* As you just saw, this button makes the layers set to Shy disappear from the Time Layout window; they will still appear in the Composition window.

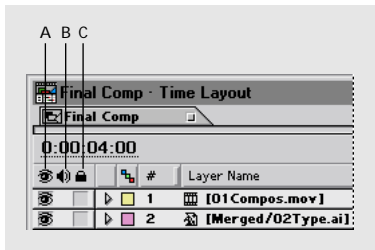
 *Enable Frame Blending:* This option calculates Frame Blending for the layers with this switch selected.

 *Enable Motion Blur:* This button calculates Motion Blur for the layers with this switch selected.

Most of these switches may be overridden when you actually render a movie from this composition. This lets you work more quickly at lower quality and with certain effects turned off, and then automatically turn them all back on when you render the final movie.

Video, Audio, and Lock switches

The Audio, Video, and Lock switches are located in a panel to the left of the layer names.



- A. *Video switch*
- B. *Audio switch*
- C. *Lock switch*



Video switch: If a layer has any image information (most layers do, except an audio-only source), this switch displays the layer in the Composition window (open eye) or hides it (closed eye). If no eye icon is present, the layer contains no image information.

1 Click the eye icon of the Merged/Type.ai layer. Notice that the layer disappears from the Composition window. The layer name remains in the layer list in the Time Layout window. Click the box below the eye icon to redisplay the layer.



Audio switch: If a layer contains audio or is an audio-only source, this switch turns the audio on (speaker icon inside a box) and off (empty box). If the layer has no audio, no box will appear. If a footage item contains audio, and you do not want to use it in your movie, click this switch to turn it off.

2 Click the Audio switch in the Audio.mov layer.



Lock switch: When the Lock switch is set, you cannot select or alter the properties of this layer.

3 Click the Bakgrd.psd layer and notice that the Lock switch is black and that the layer cannot be selected. To unlock the layer, simply click the Lock switch.

Layer properties

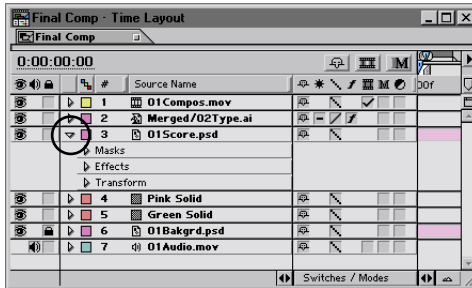
So far, you have been concentrating mainly on display and rendering-related functions. Now it's time to get to the core of After Effects—layer properties. Each image layer may have a variety of properties assigned to it, including the following: Masks, Mask Modes, Mask Feathers, Anchor Point, Position, Scale, Rotation, and Opacity. Changing these properties over the course of time is the key to creating animation in After Effects.

In the final movie you noticed that Merged/Type.ai increases in scale over time, as well as rotates a quarter turn. Several of the elements fade in, or change their opacity. All this animation was achieved by changing layer properties.

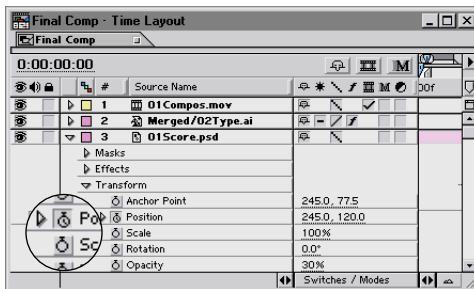
Let's take a quick look at how properties are displayed.

1 In the Time Layout window, select the layer named Score.psd. Notice the small triangular arrow to the left of the layer name; it should be pointing to the right.

2 Click that triangle to expand the outline and view the properties underneath. With the triangle pointing down, you should now see the labels *Mask*, *Effects*, and *Transform*, with triangles next to them.



3 Click the triangle next to Transform. Notice that the remaining layer properties, Anchor Point, Position, Scale, Rotation, and Opacity, appear. Their current values are also displayed underneath the layer's switch settings. (You may need to expand your Time Layout window to see everything.)



The stopwatch icon to the left of each of the properties is used for setting keyframes. When the stopwatch icon is turned on it shows watch hands on its face indicating that the layer has been animated (that it changes over time).

4 Click the triangle again to collapse the Transform outline.

5 Click the triangle next to Score.psd to collapse the layer outline.

6 Find the layer named Audio.mov, click the triangle next to it, and then click the triangle next to Audio. You'll see two properties, one named Levels and another named Waveform.

7 Click the triangle next to Audio.mov again to collapse the outline.

As you can see, displaying all of the properties for a layer can take up a lot of space on the screen. It's possible to display only specific properties for a selected layer by using the keyboard shortcuts. These shortcuts open one property at a time. To view more than one property, you can add and subtract properties by holding down the Shift key as you select their key equivalents. Subtracting a property does not remove it but only hides it from view.

8 Select the Score.psd layer, and then press the P key on the keyboard. The Position property appears.

9 Press the T key on the keyboard. The Position property disappears, and the Opacity property appears.

10 Press the Shift and P keys on the keyboard. The Position property appears in addition to the Opacity property.

See your After Effects Quick Reference Card for a complete list of the available keyboard shortcuts.

11 Experiment with other shortcuts.

You'll explore the other elements in the windows throughout the lessons in this book.

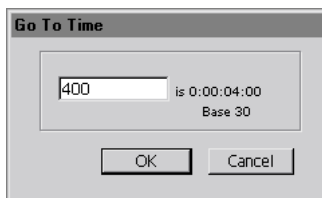
Navigating through time

After Effects provides a number of ways to move through time in your compositions.

1 Drag the blue current-time marker to a new location on the time graph. The Composition window reflects the change.

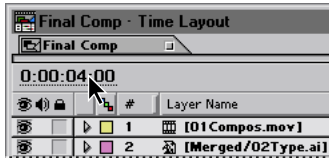
2 Click the 02s (2-second) mark in the time ruler. The current-time marker jumps to the point in time where you clicked. Once again, the Composition window reflects the change.

3 Choose View > Go to Time or press Ctrl+G (Windows) or Command+G (Mac OS). In the Go To Time dialog box, type **400** (4 seconds, 0 frames—you don't need to type the colons between the numbers), and click OK.



The current-time marker moves to 04 on the time graph, and the Composition window changes to reflect the new position in time.

Wherever you see a time display, such as the one in the Time Layout window or in the Composition window, you can click it to display the Go To Time dialog box.

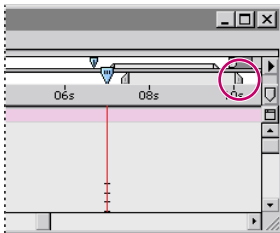


- 4 Click the time display in the Time Layout window, type **800**, and then click OK to move the current-time marker to 8 seconds.
- 5 Try navigating through time by clicking the time display in the Composition or Time Layout windows, or by moving the current-time marker.
- 6 Press the Home key to return to the beginning of the composition.

Setting a work area

Setting a work area is useful for limiting the amount of composition that will be previewed or rendered. The work area is defined by the markers (triangles) that are at the left and right ends of the time ruler. You will experiment with the work area now.

- 1 To set the start of the work area, drag the left triangle to the desired time in the Time Layout window.
- 2 To set the end of the work area, drag the right triangle to the desired time in the Time Layout window.

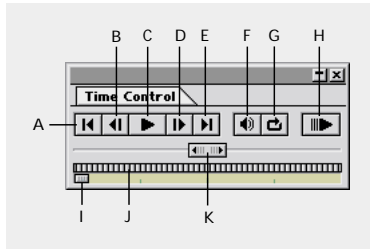


Work-area markers

You can also press the B key on your keyboard to begin the work area at the current time, and press the N key to end the work area at the current time.

Previewing the composition

After Effects provides four different methods of previewing a composition: RAM Preview, standard preview, manual preview, and wireframe preview.



*A. First Frame B. Frame Reverse C. Play
D. Frame Advance E. Last Frame F. Audio
G. Loop H. RAM Preview I. Time indicator
J. Jog control K. Shuttle control*

Standard preview

This type of preview does not play the composition in real time, nor does it play any audio in the composition.

- 1 Click the Play button in the Time Controls palette. After Effects plays each frame of the composition.
- 2 Click the Pause button to stop the playback.
- 3 Set the resolution to Quarter using the menu at the bottom of the Composition window.
- 4 Click the Play button. Notice that the lower resolution allows the composition to play faster.
- 5 Click the Pause button, and then choose Full from the Resolution menu in the Composition window.

Depending on the speed of your system, the number of layers in the composition and the complexity of any effects applied, playback using the Time Controls palette can vary in speed. In order to preview motion in real time, you need to build a wireframe preview or a RAM Preview.

Manual preview

You can use the shuttle and jog controls to manually preview a composition.

In addition to previewing, you can use buttons in the Time Controls palette to navigate through a composition and examine individual frames. The Frame Advance, Frame Reverse, First Frame, and Last Frame buttons are all used for navigation.

- 1 Click the Last Frame button to move to the end of the composition.
- 2 Drag the Shuttle control slightly to the left to move slowly backward in the composition.
- 3 Now drag the Time Indicator toward the middle of the Jog control to move to that position in the composition. For finer control, drag inside the Jog control itself.
- 4 Click the First Frame button to go to the beginning of the composition.

About RAM Preview

This option plays a preview of the frames (including audio) at the frame rate of your composition or as fast as your system allows. The number of frames previewed depends on the total number of frames requested for the preview and the number it can render. RAM Preview previews only the span of time you specify as the work area. Before you preview, check which frames are designated as the work area.

—From the Adobe After Effects User Guide, Chapter 6

RAM Preview

The only way to view your composition in real time with all the effects applied, other than *rendering* a movie, is to use RAM Preview. (Rendering processes the composition's layers, settings, and effects, turning it into a finished QuickTime movie. You'll render a movie in upcoming lessons.)

The number of frames you can preview with RAM Preview is dependent upon the amount of RAM in your system. With RAM Preview, you can also preview audio, provided the Audio button is selected and audio is enabled in the Time Layout window. For optimal results when using RAM Preview, the resolution and magnification must match. For example, use Half resolution with 50% magnification.

- 1 Drag the current-time marker to about 00:60, and then press the N key to set the end of the work area to that time.
- 2 Click the RAM Preview button in the Time Controls palette.

After Effects builds a preview of the work area, displaying a red bar at the bottom of the time ruler to show the progress. The preview plays when it's finished. By default, the Loop button is selected, which causes the preview to play continuously in a loop. Click the RAM Preview button or press any key to stop the preview.

3 Click the Loop button to deselect it, and this time press the 0 key on your keyboard's numeric keypad to start RAM Preview. The preview plays once and stops.

You can also build a preview using every other frame, which is useful if your system doesn't have enough RAM for a full preview.

4 Shift-click the RAM Preview button to build a new preview using every other frame. Notice that it takes half the time to build the preview.

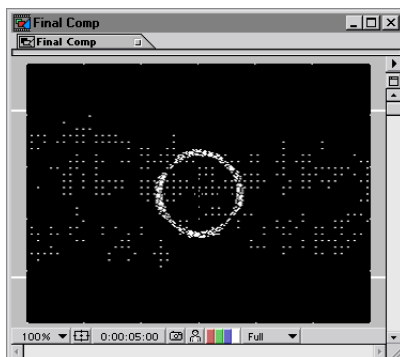
5 Click the Audio button to deselect it, and then press the 0 key on the numeric keypad again. The preview plays without audio this time. Click the Audio button and the Loop button again to select them.

Wireframe preview

In a *wireframe* preview, each layer in your composition is represented by an outline of either the layer, or of an alpha channel or mask, if one is present. Because only outlines are used, this preview method is the quickest way to generate a preview of motion only.

1 Press the Home key on your keyboard to return to the beginning of the composition, and then deselect all layers.

2 To view a wireframe preview, press Alt+0 on the numeric keypad (Windows) or Option+0 on the numeric keypad (Mac OS). Watch the Info palette as After Effects prepares the preview.



- 3 Press any key to stop the preview.

Rendering a movie

When you have finished assembling and editing an After Effects composition, you can create several different types of output.

You will begin rendering projects in a later lesson.

- 1 Choose File > Exit (Windows) or File > Quit (Mac OS).
- 2 Click No (Windows) or Don't Save (Mac OS) to close the file without saving changes.

Now that you have become familiar with some of the windows and palettes in After Effects, you are ready to begin creating movies with animation, video, and sound.