Adobe® After Effects® CS6

DigitalClassroom™

A Complete Training Package!

- Full-color, step-by-step instructional book
- Video training from Adobe Certified Experts

Jerron Smith and the AGI Creative Team

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About Digital Classroom

Adobe® After Effects® CS6 lets you create artwork for a variety of uses. The animation and compositing tools of After Effects are second to none; allowing you to manipulate text, images, audio and video. After Effects provides you with the tools to express your creative ideas for video, film and broadband production. After Effects CS6 is also tightly integrated with other Adobe products such as Photoshop®, Illustrator®, and Premiere Pro®.

Adobe After Effects CS6 Digital Classroom is like having your own personal instructor guiding you through each lesson while you work at your own speed. This book includes 12 self-paced lessons that let you discover essential skills and explore the new features and capabilities of After Effects CS6 on either a Windows or Mac OS computer. Each lesson includes step-by-step instructions, lesson files, and video tutorials, all of which are available on the Digital Classroom website: *www.digitalclassroombooks.com/epub/aftereffectscs6*. This book has been developed by the same team of Adobe Certified Experts and After Effects professionals who have created many official training titles for Adobe Systems.

Prerequisites

Before you start the lessons in *Adobe After Effects CS6 Digital Classroom*, you should have a working knowledge of your computer and its operating system. You should know how to use the directory system of your computer so that you can navigate through folders. You need to understand how to locate, save, and open files. You should also know how to use your mouse to access menus and commands.

Before starting the lessons files in *Adobe After Effects CS6 Digital Classroom*, make sure that you have installed Adobe After Effects CS6. The software is sold separately, and not included with this book. You may use the 30-day trial version of Adobe After Effects CS6 available at the *adobe.com* website, subject to the terms of its license agreement.

System requirements

Before starting the lessons in *Adobe After Effects CS6 Digital Classroom*, make sure that your computer is equipped for running Adobe After Effects CS6, which you must purchase separately. The minimum system requirements for your computer to effectively use the software are listed below and you can find the most current system requirements at *www.adobe.com/products/aftereffects/tech-specs.html*.

Windows

• Intel® Core™ Duo or AMD Phenom® II processor; 64-bit support required

• Microsoft® Windows® 7 with Service Pack 1 (64 bit)

• 4GB of RAM (8GB recommended)

• 3GB of available hard-disk space; additional free space required during installation (cannot install on removable flash-based storage devices)

• Additional disk space for disk cache (10GB recommended)

• 1280×900 display with OpenGL 2.0–capable system

• QuickTime 7.6.6 software required for QuickTime features

• Broadband Internet connection required for software activation and access to online services

Mac OS

• Multicore Intel processor with 64-bit support

• Mac OS X v10.6.8 or v10.7
• 4GB of RAM (8GB recommended)
• 4GB of available hard-disk space for installation; additional free space required during installation (cannot install on a volume that uses a case-sensitive file system or on removable flash-based storage devices)
• Additional disk space for disk cache (10GB recommended)
• 1280×900 display with OpenGL 2.0–capable system
• QuickTime 7.6.6 software required for QuickTime features
• Broadband Internet connection required for software activation and access to online services

Starting Adobe After Effects CS6

As with most software, Adobe After Effects CS6 is launched by locating the application in your Programs folder (Windows) or Applications folder (Mac OS). If necessary, follow these steps to start the Adobe After Effects CS6 application:

Windows

1. Choose Start > All Programs > Adobe After Effects CS6. If you have the Creative Suite installed, you may have to select Adobe After Effects from within the Creative Suite folder.
2. Close the Welcome and Tip of the Day Screen when it appears. You are now ready to use Adobe After Effects CS6.

Mac OS

1. Open the Applications folder, and then open the Adobe After Effects CS6 folder.
2. Double-click on the Adobe After Effects CS6 application icon.

3 Close the Welcome and Tip of the Day Screen when it appears. You are now ready to use Adobe After Effects CS6.

Menus and commands are identified throughout the book by using the greater-than symbol (>). For example, the command to save a project would be identified as File > Save.

Fonts used in this book

Adobe After Effects CS6 Digital Classroom includes lessons that refer to fonts that were installed with your copy of Adobe After Effects CS6. If you did not install the fonts, or have removed them from your computer, you may substitute different fonts for the exercises or re-install the software to access the fonts.

If you receive a Missing layer dependencies warning dialog when you open a file, it is usually due to not having a necessary font installed on your system. If this occurs, press OK and After Effects will substitute a default system font. You can then change the default font to one similar to the one used in the lesson.

Resetting Adobe After Effects CS6 preferences

When you start Adobe After Effects, it remembers certain settings along with the configuration of the workspace from the last time you used the application. It is important that you start each lesson using the default settings so that you do not see unexpected results when working with the lessons in this book. Use the following steps to reset your Adobe After Effects CS6 preferences.

Steps to reset Adobe After Effects CS6 preferences

1 Quit After Effects.

2 Locate and rename the Adobe After Effects 11.0 MC Prefs file, as follows.

In Windows: Rename the Adobe After Effects 11.0 MC Prefs (for example to Adobe Effects 11.0 MC Prefs-old) in the Users/*(user)*/AppData/Roaming/Adobe/After Effects/11.0

In Windows 7, it is necessary to set hidden files to display in the folder and search options dialog box in order to see the AppData folder.

In Mac OS: Rename the Adobe After Effects 11.0 MC Prefs file in the Users/*(user)*/Library/Preferences/Adobe/After Effects/11.0 folder.

3 Start After Effects. It creates a new preferences file.

You can also reset preferences using a keyboard shortcut. When starting the application, press and hold Control+Alt+Shift (Windows) or Command+Shift+Option (Mac OS). When the dialog box appears asking if you are sure you want to delete the preferences file press OK. Note that you have a very short window for using this keyboard command, so do it immediately after starting the application.

Loading lesson files

The *Adobe After Effects CS6 Digital Classroom* includes files that accompany the exercises for each of the lessons. These files are available for download at *www.digitalclassroombooks.com/epub/aftereffectscs6*. You may download all the lessons at one time or you may choose to download and work with specific lessons.

For each lesson in the book, the files are referenced by the file name of each file. The exact location of each file on

your computer is not used, as you may have placed the files in a unique location on your hard drive. We suggest placing the lesson files in the Documents folder (Windows) or at the top level of your hard-drive (Mac OS).

Downloading and copying the lesson files to your hard drive:

1. Use your web browser, navigate to *www.digitalclassroombooks.com/epub/aftereffectscs6*. Follow the instructions on the web page to download the lesson files to your computer.
2. On your computer desktop, navigate to the location where you downloaded the files and right-click (Windows) the .zip file you downloaded, then choose Extract All or double-click on the .zip file (Mac OS).

Working with the video tutorials

The *www.digitalclassroombooks.com/epub/aftereffectscs6* site provides *Adobe After Effects CS6 Digital Classroom* book readers with video tutorials that enhance the content of this book. The videos use the popular Silverlight player for viewing on your desktop or notebook computer, or use iPad-compatible video if you are using an iPad to read an electronic version of this book. Most other ePub devices are not optimized for playing video, and you should use a notebook, desktop, or tablet computer for viewing the video tutorials if you are using a dedicated e-reader such as a nook, Kindle, kobo, or Sony e-reader. An internet connection is necessary for viewing the supplemental video files.

The videos enhance your learning as key concepts and instructions are discussed by the book's authors. The video tutorials supplement the book's contents, and do not replace the book. They are not intended to cover every item discussed in the book, but will help you gain a better or

more clear understanding of topics discussed in many lessons of the book.

Additional resources

The Digital Classroom series goes beyond the training books. You can continue your learning online, with training videos, at seminars and conferences, and in-person training events.

Training from the Authors

The authors are available for professional development training workshops for schools and companies. They also teach classes at American Graphics Institute including training classes and online workshops. Visit *agitraining.com* for more information about Digital Classroom author-led training classes or workshops.

Book series

Expand your knowledge of creative software applications with the Digital Classroom training series. Books are available for most creative software applications as well as web design and development tools and technologies. Learn more at *DigitalClassroom.com*.

Seminars and conferences

The authors of the Digital Classroom seminar series frequently conduct in-person seminars and speak at conferences, including the annual CRE8 Conference. Learn more at *agitraining.com* and *CRE8summit.com*.

Resources for educators

Visit *digitalclassroombooks.com* to request resources for educators, including instructors' guides for incorporating Digital Classroom books into your curriculum.

Lesson 1: Understanding Motion Graphics

This lesson provides an overview of the various types of motion graphics and digital video projects you can create in After Effects. It's filled with important information that you need to know to work effectively in this application. If you can't wait to get started using the program, skip over this lesson for now and jump ahead to Lesson 2, "Understanding the After Effects Interface." If you jump ahead, make sure you come back to review this lesson at a later time.

What you'll learn in this lesson:

- What types of content you can create in After Effects

• The properties of the video files you will be creating and importing into After Effects
• About the various broadcast and broadband standards that you can create content for

Starting up

This lesson includes useful background information. If you'd prefer to jump right into working with After Effects, you should move to the second lesson, which gets you hands-on right away.

Defining motion graphics

Adobe After Effects is an industry standard tool for creating motion graphics that are used for broadcast television, film, and other motion graphics and video productions. After Effects is used to create content that appears in presentation graphics and on mobile devices. It is a tool for storytelling, creating visually appealing motion graphics that integrate into any medium to enhance a presentation, story, image, or mood.

Television and video graphics

After Effects is an important tool for broadcast-design professionals. It is used to create original content for interstitial, lower thirds, bumpers, and show openings. Many video professionals consider it an essential tool in their daily work. In fact, you can see it at networks such as MTV, Spike, truTV, and the Food Network, where it's used to produce stunning, high quality graphics and motion design packages quickly and affordably.

Internet and mobile devices

The Internet and mobile devices are becoming a major entertainment medium. After Effects high-quality motion graphics are being widely used for online and mobile content. Video sharing sites, such as *Vimeo.com* and *YouTube.com*, provide content creators with access to a

wide audience, which creates additional distribution opportunities for individuals and organizations alike.

Desktop distribution and presentation graphics

Digital displays such as high-definition televisions, monitors, and projectors have created new venues for displaying motion graphics. After Effects is used to add impact to otherwise static slides, charts, and graphs. With the proliferation and affordability of high-definition televisions and other digital displays, many public venues such as: malls, retail stores, schools, and even military bases are using motion graphics to both inform and entertain.

Regardless of how you plan to use After Effects, you will find it to be a powerful, well-rounded tool that, with a little practice, can serve you well.

Digital video basics

If you want to, you can open After Effects and start creating graphics without any understanding of how video works. (If you really can't wait to get started, jump ahead to Lesson 2, "Understanding the After Effects Interface.") However, successfully producing graphics for video and other media requires that you understand a few technical requirements. If you don't understand these, you'll merely be pushing buttons and clicking checkboxes, so you should take a few minutes to at least get a foundation in digital video.

When working in After Effects, you will want to consider the final destination for your project. Will it be used on television, in video, on a mobile device? Knowing this information allows you to accurately create your After Effects content to match your intended destination. Projects for high-definition television differ from those for a portable device with a small-screen. Each of these media has its own standards for items, such as frame rate, aspect

ratio, and bit rate. Understanding these items saves you time and effort in the production process.

Understanding video formats

Some video formats are common for professional video production, while others are suitable only for broadband or small-screen purposes. There are two main standards used for broadcast television, a handful of competing standards for desktop and web video, and a series of device-specific standards used in mobile handheld devices. Technical standards, such as the ones touched upon here, are very complex, and a full description of each one is beyond the scope of this book. In general, regardless of the platform for which you are creating video content, there are three main properties to keep in mind:

Dimensions: This property specifies the pixel dimensions of a video file—the number of pixels horizontally and vertically that make up an image or video frame. This value is usually written as a pair of numbers separated by an x, where the first number is the horizontal value and the second represents the vertical value, such as 720×480. The term Pixel is a combination of the words *picture* and *element* and is the smallest individual component in a digital image. Whether you are dealing with a still image or working with video frames makes no difference; everything displayed on-screen is made up of pixels. The dimensions of a video or still image file determine its aspect ratio; that is, the proportion of an image's horizontal units to its vertical ones. Usually written in the following format: horizontal units:vertical units, the two most common aspect ratios seen in current video displays are 4:3 and 16:9.

Frame rate: This property specifies the number of individual images that make up each second of video. Frame rate is measured as a value of fps, which is an acronym that stands for frames per second.

Pixel aspect ratio: This property specifies the shape of the pixels that make up an image. Pixels are the smallest part of a digital image, and different display devices such as televisions and computer monitors have pixels with different horizontal and vertical proportions.

When producing graphics for broadcast television, you have to conform to a specific set of formats and standards. For example, you need to know whether your graphics will be displayed on high-definition screens (1080i, 1080p, 720p), standard-definition screens, or mobile devices because this affects the size that you must create your graphics at. Similarly, you need to know whether you're in a region that broadcasts using the ATSC (often still called NTSC) or PAL standards, as this affects both the size you can create your graphics at, and the frame rate and pixel aspect ratio you will need to use. If you are producing animation or video for the Web, you'll need to know the format that the distributing site will be using: Flash, Silverlight, h.264, or other, since certain video effects don't work well when exported to certain formats.

ATSC

In the United States, the ATSC, or Advanced Television Systems Committee, has issued a set of standards for the transmission of digital television. These standards have replaced the older, analog NTSC (National Television Standards Committee) formats. The standards embraced by the ATSC include standard-definition and high-definition display resolutions, aspect ratios, and frame rates. All broadcast video and graphics must conform to one of the ATSC standards. Information on the various ATSC standards is available on their website at *ATSC.org*.

High-definition television

While high-definition (HD) television technology has existed for decades, it wasn't until the beginning of the 21st

century that it came to the attention of the average American television viewer. The term HD is used to describe video that has a higher resolution than traditional television systems, which are called SD, or standard definition. There are two main high-definition standards for broadcast television—720p and 1080i—while many televisions, gaming consoles (Playstation 3, Xbox 360, and more) and Blu-ray disc players can support a third, 1080p. The letters p and I refer to whether the format uses a progressive or an interlaced display method. Interlacing divides each frame of video into two separate fields. When combined, these two fields form a single video frame that shows a single image. Progressive display forgoes fields and has each individual frame as its own unique image. In general, progressive displays are clearer and better defined, while interlaced displays require less broadcast bandwidth to be transmitted to the viewer. Most modern video cameras allow the user to choose whether to record in a progressive or interlaced format.

720p: The 720p format has a resolution of 1280 pixels wide by 720 pixels high and supports a variety of frame rates, from the 24 fps used by film, through the 30 fps that was part of the old NTSC standard, all the way up to 60 fps.

1080p and 1080i: The 1080 formats come in both progressive and interlaced versions and, like other modern digital standards; they support a variety of frame rates between 24 fps and 30 fps.

You will learn more about the differences between progressive display and interlacing later in this lesson.

Standard-definition television

Prior to the invention of high definition, there was only one standard in the United States, NTSC (National Television Systems Committee), which includes settings for both 4:3

and 16:9 aspect ratios. While technically it has been replaced by the ATSC standards, the term NTSC is still used by most video cameras and editing and graphics applications when referring to standard-definition, broadcast-quality video.

NTSC and NTSC widescreen: Graphics applications designed to produce content for broadcast, such as Adobe After Effects, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, and more, include pre-built settings for creating video projects called presets that correspond with the most commonly used broadcast standards. The NTSC presets include settings for both a standard (4:3) and widescreen (16:9) aspect ratio. They use the same dimensions, 720 × 480, but different pixel aspect ratios, and this is what accounts for the difference in shape. Devices that comply with the NTSC standard use a frame rate of 29.97 frames per second.

PAL

PAL, or Phase Alternating Line, is the standard for broadcast television used throughout Europe and much of the rest of the world outside of North America. PAL differs from NTSC in several key ways, including dimensions and frame rate. It uses a frame rate of 25 fps, which is closer to the 24 fps used in film and, like NTSC, it has both a standard and widescreen setting.

PAL and PAL widescreen: In applications such as After Effects, the PAL presets include both a standard (4:3) and a widescreen (16:9) aspect ratio. Much like their NTSC equivalents, they use the same pixel dimensions, in this case, 720 × 576, but each have different pixel aspect ratios.

Web and mobile device video: There is no single standard for video on the Web or on mobile devices, though there are only a handful of competing audio/video formats. QuickTime, Windows Media Video, Flash Video, Silverlight,

and H.264 are the main video formats. The QuickTime format is controlled by Apple Inc., and for years was the de facto standard for web-delivered video. The freely available QuickTime Player is compatible with both Windows and Mac OS and is used to view QuickTime Movie (.MOV) and other video file formats. QuickTime format video is also supported on some mobile devices; most notably the Apple suite of phones, iPods and iPads.

Windows Media Video, often simply called WMV, is the Microsoft standard made by the creators of the Windows operating system. A variation of WMV is used for Silverlight video, which is widely used by many professional media organizations, including NBC Sports for their live Olympics coverage and Netflix for streaming videos. Windows Media is also a supported format on some multimedia players and mobile devices, such as Windows phones.

Flash video is the native video format of the Adobe Flash platform, and as such, it is used for the distribution of much of the world's online video content. While the Flash player is widely installed on the desktop computers of Internet users, it is not as common on mobile devices. In fact, Adobe discontinued development of its mobile Flash Player and is recommending the use of HTML5 technology for mobile devices. Even before this, some organizations, companies, and other online content creators had begun to move their rich-media content away from Flash and onto other platforms, such as HTML5. In recent years, the dominance of flash video has been challenged by the natively browser-supported HTML5 video formats, h.264, and OGG Theora. H.264 is a standard for video compression derived from the MPEG-4 standard, created and patented by MPEG LA, while OGG Theora is its open source alternative. Mobile devices such as the Apple iPod, Sony PSP and Microsoft Zune, and some HTML5-compliant

browsers support variations of H.264, along with many mobile phones and third-party video playback applications, such as QuickTime Player, Flash Player, and the VLC Media Player.

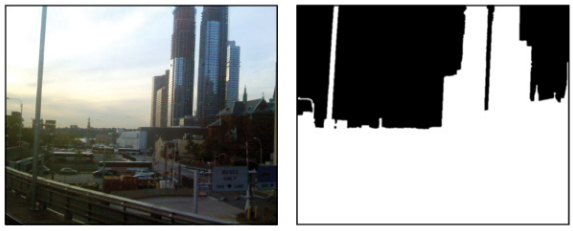
Understanding frame rate and resolution

Video is essentially a series of individual still images that are displayed very quickly, one after the other. The frame rate of video is measured by the number of frames recorded or played back each second, and it is denoted as fps, an acronym that stands for frames per second. Different video standards have different frame rates, and many video standards support a variety of different frame rates. As a comparison, American television is broadcast at 30 fps, PAL uses 25 fps, and film uses a frame rate of 24 fps.

If you have a background in graphic design, you may be familiar with the term *resolution*, which refers to the pixel density or the number of pixels in a given space. As such, in North America, resolution is denoted in pixels per inch or ppi. For example, images created for printing in high-quality magazines are usually 300 ppi, while images created for use on a web site usually have a resolution of 72 ppi. When working with video, ppi is not used to address resolution. When discussing video, the term *resolution* is used to refer to the pixel dimensions of an image: the number of horizontal and vertical pixels that make up the actual image. When creating graphics for the Web, these pixel dimensions determine the relative size of content to the overall video frame size.

If you need to create graphics in Photoshop, the default resolution for video graphics is 72 ppi. The same is true for web graphics.

Understanding transparency



In broadcast video applications, transparency is often referred to as alpha *or opacity.*

Graphics that are used in video are created using the RGB color mode. Each individual pixel is assigned a unique color value consisting of combinations of red, green, and blue. Each of these colors is saved to its own color channel. When colors are combined, the composite (a full color image) is created. In addition to the color channels of an image, some formats can also contain an additional channel that holds information about the areas of an image that are transparent. This channel is called the alpha channel. If you also work in Photoshop, you may already be familiar with alpha channels, although the meaning of an alpha channel in video is somewhat different. In Photoshop, any saved selection is called an alpha channel, and you can have up to 99 alpha channels. In After Effects, as in other applications designed to work with video, the term alpha channel refers specifically to the transparency of a still image or video file. Alpha channels use the 256 shades of gray to represent transparency. When looking at an alpha channel in most applications, black pixels represent those that are fully transparent, white pixels are fully opaque, and gray pixels represent semi-transparent areas. Only some image and video formats support saving alpha channels along with the other image information. Commonly used file formats that can include alpha channels are: Tagged Image File Format (.tiff), TARGA (Truevision Advanced Raster Graphics Adapter, .tga), QuickTime (.mov), and Flash Video (.flv and .f4v). Alpha channels are automatically created for the transparent areas of native Photoshop and Illustrator files when they are imported into After Effects.

You can create an alpha channel in Photoshop by creating a selection, saving it as an alpha channel in the Channels panel, and then saving the file in one of the image formats that support RGB and Alpha, such as PSD, TIFF, or PNG.

Congratulations, you have completed this lesson!

Self study

In this lesson, you learned about some of the technical details that affect decisions you make when creating your After Effects projects. As new video, image, and audio formats are developed and support for them is added to After Effects, you will also want to understand these emerging standards. Good sources to keep your knowledge levels up to date include the Adobe web site (*adobe.com*) and forums (*adobe.com/support/forums*). There are also a wide variety of print and online journals that serve all facets of the video and design market.

Review

Questions

1. What are the names of the two different standards that govern video for American broadcast television and European broadcast television?
2. What are the different frame rates for American television, European television, and film?
3. What are some of the areas where After Effects is used professionally?

Answers

1. ATSC (Advanced Television Systems Committee) is the name of the set of standards that govern American television and PAL (Phase Alternating Line) is the standard used in Europe.

2 American television uses a frame rate of 30 fps, European television uses a frame rate of 25 fps, and film uses a frame rate of 24 fps.

3 Television production, film, on-line video, mobile video, and presentation graphics are all areas where After Effects is used.

Lesson 2: Understanding the After Effects Interface

The After Effects interface can seem daunting to the beginning user. In this lesson, you will gain an understanding of the key elements of the interface and how to work with the various application panels.

What you'll learn in this lesson:

- Working with the main panels that are integral to using After Effects
- Previewing footage files and composition layers
- Customizing and saving panel layouts called workspaces

Starting up

You will work with several files from the ae02lessons folder in this lesson. Make sure that you have loaded the aelessons folder onto your hard drive from *www.digitalclassroombooks.com/epub/aftereffectscs6*. See "Loading lesson files" in the Starting up section of this book.

Understanding and working with menus

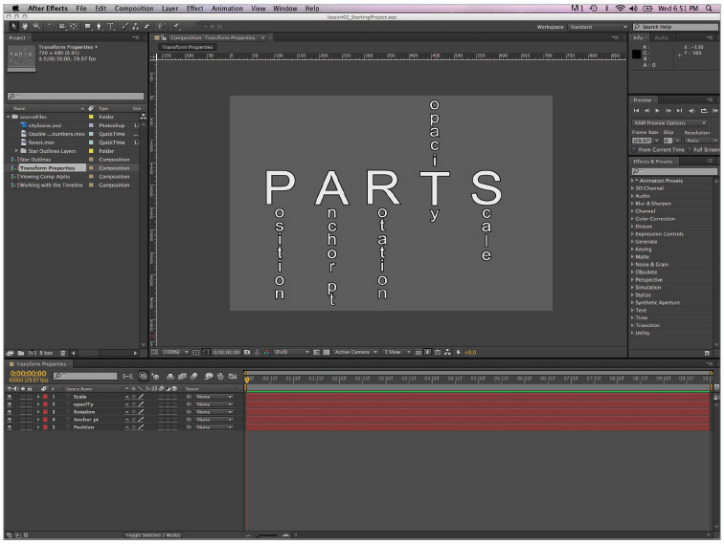
After Effects has nine menus on Windows and 10 on Mac OS, located at the top of the application window that combine with various panels to form the interface of the program. Some of the menu names may be familiar to you from other applications, while others may be new and unfamiliar. You'll start with the File menu to open an existing After Effects project.

Opening an existing After Effects project

Opening a project in After Effects is much like opening a file in any other software program. In this exercise, you will work with an existing After Effects project to help you understand the organization and structure of the interface, and you will soon create your own projects.

1 Choose File > Open Project. Navigate to the ae02lessons folder that you copied to your hard drive and open the file named lesson02_StartingProject.aep.

This project is composed of several different compositions that you will use to explore different aspects of the program interface.



When a project is opened, the application remembers the arrangement of the interface from the last time it was used and saved.

2 Choose File > Save As and, if necessary, navigate to the ae02lessons folder on your hard drive. Rename this file **lesson02_StartingProject-working.aep** and press Save.

Do not close this file; you will need it while working through the exercises in this lesson.

After Effects menus

The Mac OS includes an Application-specific menu, for commands for hiding and quitting the Application. For Mac OS users, this is also used to access the After Effects Preferences dialog box. The remaining menus are consistent for Mac OS and Windows users:

File

As in most other applications, you use the File menu for accessing key features of the program that deal mostly with creating new files, opening existing files, and importing or exporting files. In addition to these common commands, you will also find features for browsing files in Bridge, creating incremental saves and collecting files for output.

Edit

As in other programs, use the Edit menu to Copy, Cut, Paste, Delete, and perform other editing tasks with the content of your compositions. When working in Windows, this is where you can find the Preferences dialog box.

Composition

The Composition menu holds most of the commands you need to create, edit, and manipulate compositions. Each composition has its own independent timeline and is the space where all animation occurs. From this menu, you can create new compositions, adjust or preview comp settings.

Layer

After Effects places each separate media element on its own track, which is called a layer. You use the Layer menu to create new layers and edit the properties of existing layers.

Effect

After Effects is basically a motion graphics and compositing program. You use the Effect menu to apply layer effects in the application. These effects can be anything from simple color corrections and drop shadows to more advanced operations, such as chroma keying, particle generation, or explosive simulations.

Animation

The Animation menu contains commands to accomplish both common animation tasks, such as adding property keyframes to create animation, and

advanced tasks such as adding Easing to keyframes or Expressions to properties to automate animation tasks.

View

You use the View menu to control the Composition panel. From the View menu, you can zoom in and out, open new preview windows, and set the display properties for your composition.

Window

You use the Window menu to access the commands that control the After Effects interface. From this menu, you can choose your workspace and open or close the various panels found in the application interface.

Help

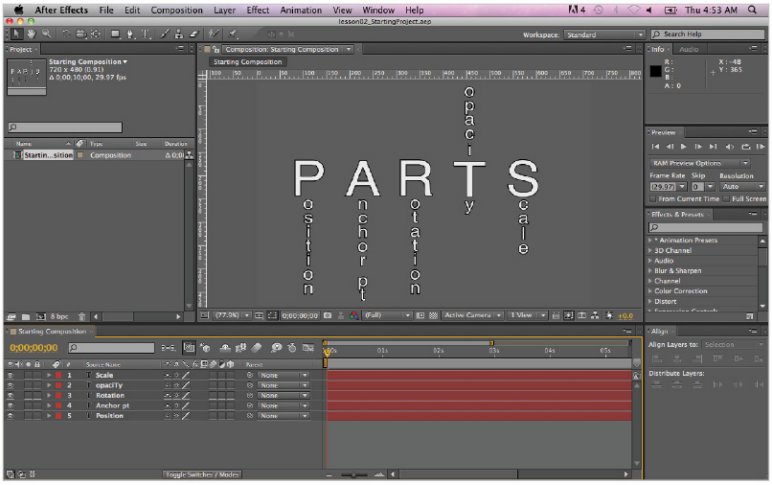
The Help menu gives you access to the help functions of After Effects. In addition to the standard After Effects Help command, you can also access specific references for the keyboard shortcuts and animation presets, as well as have After Effects check for program updates.

After Effects software versions

After Effects project files are not backwards-compatible, and files created in a newer version of the application cannot be opened using an older version of the software. When you open an older After Effects project file in a newer version, you receive a warning message and you have to use the Save As command to save the file in the newer format. Once a file is converted to the latest file format, you are not able to return to using an older version of the software for additional edits. For this reason, if several people are working on an After Effects project, they all need the same version of the software.

Understanding the After Effects panel system

By default, After Effects uses a docked, panel-based interface to organize the work area. The entire interface configuration is called a workspace, and After Effects includes a variety of pre-built workspaces to accommodate different working styles and tasks that you may need to accomplish. You can also set each panel to move or float, independently.



The default After Effects workspace is named Standard.

After Effects panels

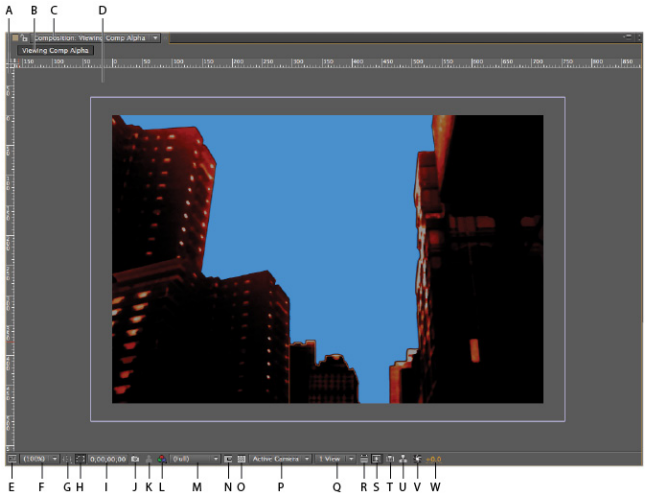
The After Effects interface is divided into panels, where you will do most of your work. Some panels are for previewing footage or animation, and others set options for the tools, while others are for creating animation. All the panels in After Effects are accessible through the Window menu. To help you better understand the panels, we've divided them into two groups: Primary panels, which you will use more frequently, and Secondary panels, which you will use less often.

Primary panels

Composition

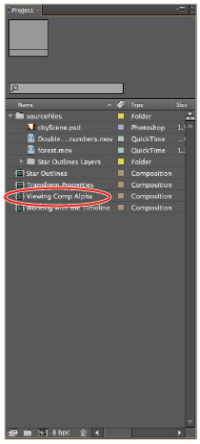
The Composition panel is one of the most important panels in After Effects. It is the preview window and the main animation space that you work in when building an After Effects project. You can build your animated projects in this panel, and it has features you can use to change how your composition previews. Perhaps you want to create, show, or hide guidelines. Or maybe you need to isolate the alpha channel of your composition so that you can see which areas are transparent and which are opaque. This can all be accomplished in the Composition panel. In this exercise, you will work with the Composition panel to change the

preview resolution of the display and learn how to reveal a composition's alpha channel.



***A.** Rulers Composition. **B.** Flowchart Selector. **C.** Selector. **D.** Composition. **E.** Always Preview Toggle. **F.** Magnification. **G.** Guide & Grid Options. **H.** Toggle Mask & Shape Path Visibility. **I.** Current Time. **J.** Take Snapshot. **K.** Show Snapshot. **L.** Show Channel and Color Management Settings. **M.** Resolution. **N.** Region of Interest. **O.** Toggle Transparency Grid. **P.** 3D View Pop-up. **Q.** Select View Layout. **R.** Toggle Pixel Aspect Ratio Correction. **S.** Fast Previews. **T.** Timeline. **U.** Composition Flowchart. **V.** Reset Exposure. **W.** Adjust Exposure.*

1 With the lesson02_StartingProject-working still open, look in the Project panel and double-click on the composition named Viewing Comp Alpha to make it active. This makes the composition visible in the Composition panel and also reveals the comp timeline in the Timeline Panel.



Double-clicking on any composition in the Project panel makes that composition active in both the Composition and Timeline panels.