

Final Cut Pro Advanced Techniques

With RICHARD HARRINGTON



Richard Harrington

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, a popular speaker at conferences, and an instructor for Future Media Concepts. He is the author of *Photoshop for Nonlinear Editors* as well as a moderator for Creative Cow's Photoshop Forum. Richard can be reached at <http://www.rhedpixel.com>

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Are you as fast as you want to be? This rapid-fire session is for intermediate to advanced users looking to get ahead. Topics include customizing the keyboard, using composite modes, importing graphics, and working with third-party plug-ins. If you've never used Final Cut Pro, your head will be swimming; this is not for the meek. Richard Harrington, author of the best-selling book *Final Cut Pro 4 On The Spot*, teaches this course.

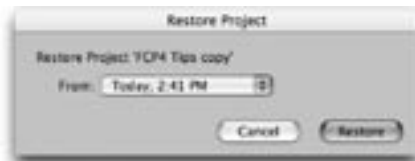
Looking for some new tricks? Here's some new ways to impress your clients and get things done more quickly. These tips were co-written with Abba Shapiro, a lead trainer for Apple. These come from our new book, *Final Cut Pro 4 On the Spot: Timesaving Tips and Shortcuts from the Pros*, published by CMP Books.

CYA

Ever have a project go bad? A file gets corrupt? Maybe the system crashed (OSX never crashes... it just has an undocumented close feature). Worse, you come back from lunch and the client is standing over your editing system. 'I just pushed a few buttons... really!'

It's okay, if the Autosave Vault feature is turned on. This great feature will back up your project automatically. You tell it how often to save, how many versions, and how many projects total can be archived. This is a great way to cover yourself against unexpected events.

If things ever go wrong, simply choose File>Restore Project. This way you can quickly access time stamped versions of your project. Use this the next time a producer pulls an 180° turn on you and wants to go back 3 hours in time.

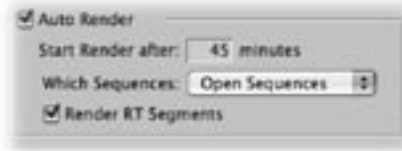


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Auto Render

We love this feature...but use it wisely. In the user preferences file there is a check box to have FCP automatically render your sequences after a certain amount of idle time. (You can set this anywhere from 1 to 120 minutes.) You can have it render all open sequences, current sequence, or all open except for the current sequence.

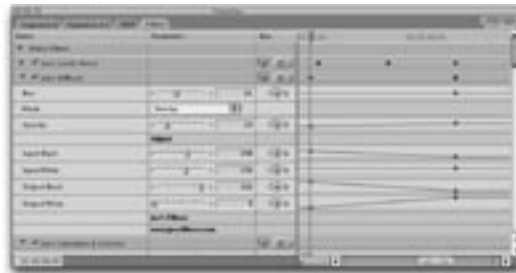


So what does this mean to you? Well, if you wander away for a cup or coffee...and get yanked into a meeting (or locked in a closet), your show could be rendered upon your return. This is very cool.

However you may not always want this to happen. Suppose you are just playing around with an effect or composite...If FCP keeps rendering every time you are idle...your hard drive could fill up with out of date render files pretty fast. So perhaps you would want to set your preferences to "all open except for the current sequence" to be safe. This is a cool and powerful tool...but like the magic wand in the sorcerer's apprentice...you could be up to you neck in water (or render files) if you aren't careful.

Big Effects

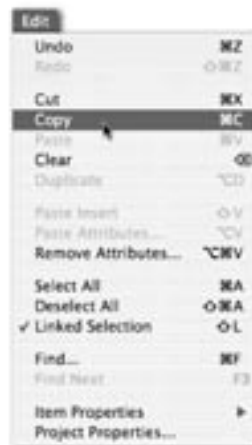
On a one-monitor system or laptop? Trying to keyframe filters in the viewer is tough. There's not nearly enough space to view effect parameters and Keyframes. You can scroll back and forth all day long and drag windows constantly.



The solution is simple. Grab the filters tab and dock it with the timeline. You'll now have plenty of room to modify the effect. When you load a new clip, the filters tab "re-docks" itself to the canvas. While the tearing of tabs is repetitive, the extra room will come in handy when keyframing advanced effects.

Stealing Effects

Thanks to Final Cut Pro's improved media management, you can now steal rendered effects from one sequence and place them in another. Perhaps you have a clip that has had several image effects applied to it, you can copy this to your clipboard and paste it into another sequence. As long as you do not composite anything on top of it, your render files should stick. Any transitions will just need the overlapping handles rendered.



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Film Look –Soft Bloom

On several occasions, there has been a crazy notion passed around that Digital Video signals can be somehow manipulated (mangled) in to a film-look. While we don't subscribe to this belief, it is quite possible to achieve a nicer look for your flat video images.

The trait that people often are trying to achieve with their "film-look" filters or recipes is an increase in Saturation (or intensity of color). This look can be easily accomplished in FCP using built in filters and features.



1. Select the clip (with the arrow tool) that you'd like to process using the "film-look."
2. Drag straight up while holding the option key pressed down. This clones the shot.
3. With the clone highlighted, apply a Gaussian Blur effect. Crank the filter up between a radius of 15 and 90 pixels. Don't worry if it looks awful.
4. Control + Click on the clip in your timeline and try different composite modes such as Overlay, Soft Light, or Multiply. In fact you may want to try all of the different modes to see which one you like. Depending on your source, you may want to use different modes,
5. Adjust the opacity of the top clip to taste.
6. If you need to color-correct the shot, nest it first.

Precision Preview

Wouldn't it be nice to preview your complex effects without actually rendering to disk? It's a pain getting your hard drive all cluttered with extra render files that eat up drive space. Well you have a solution, render to RAM.

The QuickView is a great way to view your sequence outside of the Canvas window. It caches frames into RAM as you play it.



- The QuickView has creates no render files, which is good for media management.
- If you preview an effect and like it, you will still have to render before you can do finally output. QuickView is for previewing only.
- You can choose Full, Half, or Quarter as your viewing resolution. Lower quality will speed up previews, but may impact certain effects that contain mattes or fine edges.
- Be sure you have specified which video to cache:
 - o Auto: chooses the Viewer or the Canvas, whichever is active.
 - o Viewer or Canvas: Caches from selected window.
 - o None: Disables preview (we know... silly choice).

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Filters as Transitions

Any filter can be used as a transition. You just need to combine it with a segment edit and layer the two clips. Throughout this chapter we'll refer to this as a Layered Transition Stack (LTS).



1. Place the Outgoing clip above the second clip in your timeline.
2. Adjust the edit points so the two tracks have at least 20 frames of overlap.
3. With your blade tool or add edit command, create segments that are precisely overlapped.
4. Apply a filter to one, or both tracks and experiment with the effect parameters (we'll show you more examples in the next few pages).
5. Use opacity keyframes on the top track, or a cross-fade on both tracks, to create a smooth transition between clips.

Power Blur #1

This creates a nice transition between two clips. It is particularly effective to signify a major transition in time or space... and can help if the handles of your clips are very short.

1. Overlap the two tracks with a Layered Transition Stack (LTS).
2. Apply a Gaussian blur filter to the top track.
3. Keyframe the track to start with a radius of 0.
4. Apply a second keyframe at the end of the track with a radius of 50 or higher.
5. Apply a fade to the track by keyframing the opacity. Optionally, you can apply the filter to the lower track to create a more complex transition.



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Gradient Wipe

The gradient wipe is the most useful transition inside Final Cut Pro. Don't be turned off by how the effect looks on its own, without an image dropped in the well it is useless. The effect creates a transition between two clips by using a luminance map. The transition will occur between the darkest and lightest areas in the map. Why is this so cool? You can create as many transitions as you like using graphic files. Make your own or download away. If you have any previous version of Final Cut Pro look in the extras folder. There are some really cool free samples to get you started.



Dynamic Trimming

Dynamic Trimming is all about being able to change an edit point on the fly. Literally, using the J-K-L keys (L being play, K being pause) you can have Trim Edit window open (this is the only place where Dynamic Trimming will work), press Play (L) and when you hit the K key to pause, the Trim is finished.

This new trim point can still be changed, retimed, etc, by using the JKL keys. Usually the timing is based on the audio

There are two usual cases.

One where you want to shorten or lengthen the first clip based on it's audio. This can be dialog or an interview and you just want to trim it to then end of a sentence or phrase. This is a Ripple edit (and can be on either side of the edit). When you use this, both Video and audio tracks are selected. Almost always you are Ripple (not roll) editing one side. The second instance is where you have the right piece of music and want to time the edit to a beat. I'm going to show JKL Dynamic Trimming in this regard will move the edit point left or right. Since it's a Roll edit both sides of the trim will be affected.

1) Looking at the timeline Clip 1 and Clip 2 are above my piece of music. Unfortunately they don't cut at the right point. I have made both tracks larger and added the waveforms (Command-opt-W) to see the waveforms.



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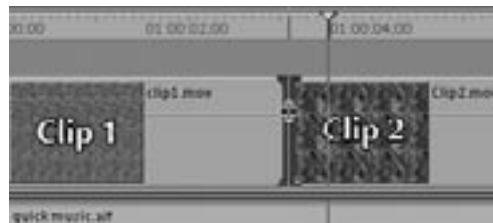
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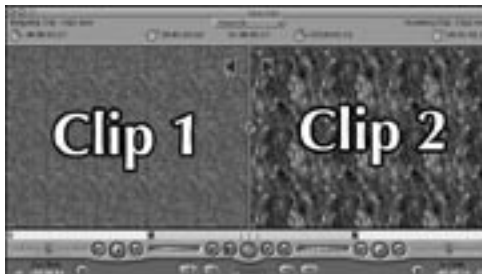
2) I have placed my position bar at the actual point where I want the cut to be. This may seem obvious in print – Often the point where I want things to actually cut may not be as easy to see in the waveform. They may only be able to be “heard” in the beat of the music. Many waveforms are often difficult to tell. I choose something easy to demonstrate in print.



3) I double click the edit point on track 1 to bring up the edit window.



4) With the Trim edit window up, I can now turn on Dynamic Trimming checkbox at the bottom of the screen. If I want to perform a Left Ripple Edit I move my mouse to the left side until it turns into a Left ripple icon. If I want to perform a Right Ripple Edit I move my mouse to the right side until it turns into a Right ripple icon. But in this case, I leave it at the default (which is what happens when you click in the middle of the two windows) – a Roll Edit.



5) Now comes the fun stuff. JKL causes the edit point to move back and forth. Use the J key to roll the edit behind the music. K key to stop it. Now press the L key and just listen. When it gets to the perfect point, press the K key. Your edit is finished and you can use the space bar to review if you desire. Use the K+L to play slowly forward or K+J to play slowly back. The up and down arrow keys will take you to the next editing point.



6) My completed adjusted edit is shown, right on the beat of music.

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Give Me a Beat

Have you got rhythm? Can you tap to the beat of a song with your foot? How about a finger? If so you can quickly edit a montage to music.

1. You may want to map the Add Edit command to a single keystroke without a modifier key. You can replace a key you do not use often for this new purpose. If not, the default combo is Ctrl + V.

2. In order to 'cut' the beat, you need a solid layer in the timeline. For this purpose we can use some Slug from the generator menu.

3. Edit the Slug filler into the timeline on an empty track and lock all other tracks.

Option Click on the lock icon for slug track to lock all other video tracks. Be sure to lock the audio tracks as well.

4. Slug duration is capped at 2:00:00, so you may need change the speed of the slug. Highlight the track and press Command + J and type in the new duration to match your music track. Changing the speed of the filler does not matter as we are going to replace it.

5. Move your cursor to the start of the audio track and press play.

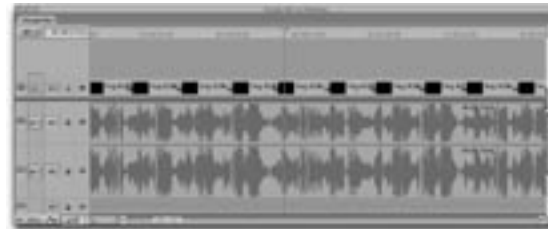
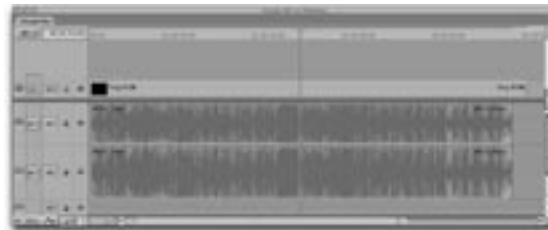
6. At each major beat or desired edit point, press the newly assigned key for add edit. The filler track will now be chopped up.

7. Filling in the holes is simple. Load the desired source material and place a single edit point to define the in or out point.

8. In the timeline, press the X key to mark your in and out point.

9. Press F10 to perform an Overwrite edit.

10. Repeat Steps 7 & 8 until the end of the Slug is reached.



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Rebuilding Permissions

This sounds like something from etiquette class. But this little activity can save hours of headache in throughout your systems. In the utilities folder in the applications folder...there is an application called "Disk Utility." Under the first aid tab there is a button to repair permissions. Select your drives and let it rip. You should run it a couple of times. It's amazing how so many of those little quirky problems will go away.



True Uber-Geekdom -- FSCK

If you are having system problems, and want to clean the disk, check partitions, etc...here's a way to fix problems without any third party applications.

Start up in single user mode and run....FSCK....what was that?

FSCK -- fsck stands for "file system check" and the -y you'll type, just says to go ahead and fix any problems it finds.



Here is the drill....

1. Restart your Mac.
2. Immediately press and hold the Command and "S" keys. You'll see a bunch of text begin scrolling on your screen. (Cool you are now a geek.) Soon you'll see the Unix command line prompt (#). Don't cry...it is still your MAC...you are just a true UNIX god...well pre-god.

Now that you're at the # prompt, here's how to run fsck:

1. Type: "fsck -y" (that's fsck-space-minus-y).
2. Press Return.
3. The fsck utility will do its magic, running some text across your screen. If there's damage to your disk, you'll see a message that says: "FILE SYSTEM WAS MODIFIED "

If you see this message—it found some problems and fixed them--repeat Steps 1 and 2 until that message no longer appears. It is normal to have to run fsck more than once -- the first run's repairs often uncover additional problems.

When fsck finally reports that no problems were found, and the # prompt reappears: Type: "reboot" to restart, or type "exit" to start up without rebooting.

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4. Press Return.

Your Mac should proceed to start up normally to the login window or the Finder.

On the Road Again

Once upon a time, we dreamed of a day when we could actually get sunshine in our edit suites. Thoughts of a window and some fresh air seemed nice, but SO far away. These days, we routinely get out of a dark edit suite and see the light of day (at such luxurious locations as Starbucks or Caribou Coffee).

How you ask? Offline RT. Many people write this technology off as not important. 'Why work at two different resolutions? It just means more work' But this is not the case. Offline RT is 1/8th the size of DV-25 and less than 1/40th the size of SD. On a 60 GB laptop you can easily get over 30 hours of media and still have room for most of your applications

1. Capture at your preferred high quality format (DV-25, DVCPRO 50, 8 bit -10 bit, HD, etc.)
2. With your Laptop powered down, plug-in a Firewire cable between your laptop and desktop.
3. Power-up the laptop while holding down the T key. This will place the laptop in Target Disk Mode...you'll see a huge bouncing Firewire icon as your desktop. Meanwhile, the laptop will appear as an icon on the primary machine's desktop. Your laptop now acts like an external hard drive that you can read and write too. (It's a really good idea to have your laptop plug into an electrical outlet...go ahead do it now; we'll wait)
4. Select all the shots and sequences in the Browser you want to move to your target disk.
5. Contextual -Click and choose Media Manager. A dialog box will appear giving you several options. There are several choices to make, but they are simple decisions.
6. From the Media area, choose to 'Recompress media referenced by duplicated clips.' Choose Offline RT NTSC or Offline RT PAL depending upon your footage format.
7. Since you intend to reference back to the high rez footage, DO NOT delete any unused media.
8. Likewise, you should base media file names on existing filenames.
9. Under the Project area, check the box to 'Duplicate the selected clips and place into a new project.'
10. Under the Media Destination area, specify a volume for the media to transcode to.
11. Click OK.



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The speed of this process is based upon the CPU speed of your computer...on a slower machine it can be timely, but the results are worth it. You'll get more layers of RT effects and zippier response from your machine. Edit away, see the world, drink lots of espressos...when you get back its a simple process to reconnect to the high-rez footage.

Power Log

Did you realize you can log faster than real time? Try these 3 tips to get your footage in fast.

1. Simply tap the L button multiple times to play the tape faster. With practice you can ramp your playback speed up and still understand the dialog. All of your logging controls still work.
2. Better yet, log while viewing. Tap I to mark an In point, then press F2 to simultaneously add the Outpoint and Log the Clip.
3. Uncheck the prompt box in the logging window. After you name the first clip, all subsequent clips will be progressively numbered or lettered.



Watermark

Have an approval copy that you need to send out? Want to make sure that people realize it is a draft, and not many for public display. Or have a new client that you want to make sure pays you? Mark the program as an Approval Copy, Private, Not For Public Showing, etc.

1. Create a new sequence that has the same settings as your show.
2. Drag your completed show into the Canvas Window and drop on the Overwrite Box.
3. Go to the Viewer and load the Text Generator. Adjust the text settings.
4. Edit the title on top of your video clip. Adjust the Opacity to approximately 15% and position at the bottom of the screen.

Under FCP4, this effect can be real-time if your processor is fast enough.



Converter

Compressor can be repurposed as a converter. Let's say you have a large collection of stock animations that are the wrong size, frame rate, etc. This is VERY likely when working with stock clips that you want to cut into a DV project. Simply create a preset that matches your sequence settings.

To Convert to NTSC DV.

1. In Compressor, call up the presets window by clicking on the Presets icon.
2. Add a New Preset by clicking on the Create a new preset button (the plus sign).
3. Specify QuickTime as the encoder.

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4. In the Settings area at the bottom, use the following settings.

ENCODER tab

a. Video

- DV/DVCPRO – NTSC
- Best Quality
- 29.97 Frames per second
- DO NOT limit the data rate.

b. Audio

- Compressor None
- Rate 48.000 kHz
- Size 16 bit
- Use Stereo

GEOMETRY tab

a. If the video is larger than 720 X 480, you must Crop it.

- For example, if the material is D1 (720 X 486) you need to crop 6 lines of information. Be sure to crop an even number of lines, such as 4 from the top and 2 from the bottom to keep field order intact.

b. If the video is not interlaced, such as 720 X 540 or 720 X 534, you can resize it.

- Set the Output size to 720 X 480

5. Name the preset and apply it to your clips. Submit the job and go do something else for a while.



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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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