

Special Effects with After Effects

With RICHARD M. HARRINGTON



Richard M. Harrington

Author's Bio/Description

A certified instructor for Adobe, Apple, and Avid, Rich is a practiced expert in motion graphic design and digital video. His producing skills were also recognized by AV Multimedia Producer Magazine who named him as one of the Top Producers of 2004.

Rich is a member of the National Association of Photoshop Professionals Instructor Dream Team, and a popular speaker on the digital video circuit. He is also an instructor at the Art Institute of Washington and the American University in Washington, D.C.

Rich is an internationally published author. His book, Photoshop CS for Nonlinear Editors, was the first of its kind to focus on Photoshop's application in the world of video. He is also a contributing author for Final Cut Pro On the Spot, After Effects On the Spot, Broadcast Graphics on the Spot, After Effects at Work, and The Photoshop World Dream Team Book, Volume 1.

A Masters Degree in Project Management fills out Rich's broad spectrum of experience.

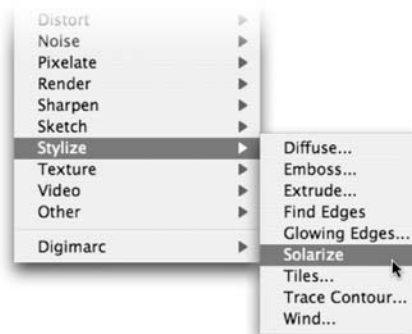
RHED Pixel – www.rhedpixel.com

Photoshop for Video – www.PhotoshopforVideo.com

Some Effects to Spark Your Creativity

While effects should only be used as a spice to good design, they still can be fun and essential to the overall project. Effects can catch your audiences eye as well as set you apart from the competition.

In this chapter we unlock several popular looks using built-in tools. These techniques are all fast and you should be able to record them as actions or animation presets. Be sure to not stop here, the techniques used in these effects can be easily modified into new and exciting looks as well. Jump into the effects pool and see how things turn out.



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Film Look in After Effects

There are several solutions for achieving a realistic film look... most involve the use of third-party filters. While we believe in and support third party filters, we thought we'd share a way that uses only built in tools.

1: Add your clip into a new comp. The easiest way to do this is to drag your shot onto the new comp icon at the bottom of the project window.

2: Duplicate the shot by pressing Cmd+D (Ctrl+D).

3: Apply a blur filter to the top layer. Fast Blur, Gaussian Blur, or Box Blur are all good options. Adjust the blur so it is fairly heavy.

4: With the top layer still selected, press Shift+= to cycle through your blending modes. Different modes may be required due to your original source material. Stop when the saturation and blooming matches your artistic goals. Press Shift+- to move backwards through your blending modes.

5: Choose Layer>New Adjustment Layer.

6: Now add the grain by choosing Effects>Noise & Grain> Add Grain. Adjust the Softness, Intensity, and Size of your grain to taste.

7: Add a Black Solid by choosing Layer>New Solid or pressing Cmd+Y (Ctrl+Y).

8: With the Black Solid selected, switch to the Toolbox and double-click on the Rectangular Mask Tool to add a new mask.

9: Select the mask for the black solid by pressing MM to call up mask properties. Set the following values: Invert (check on), Pixels 35 (adjust to taste), Mask Expansion - 10 (adjust to taste).

10: Make the shot broadcast safe by adding a new adjustment layer at the top of your stack, then apply Effect> Video> Broadcast Colors.



Cartoon Look

Need to pull off that cel-animated look? Try this technique .

1: Add your clip into a new comp. The easiest way to do this is to drag your shot onto the new comp icon at the bottom of the project window.

2: Duplicate the shot by pressing Cmd+D (Ctrl+D).

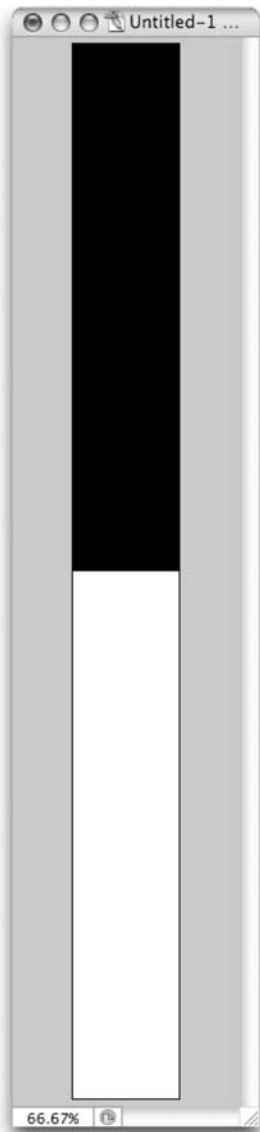
3: Apply the Find Edges effect by choosing Effect>Stylize>Find Edges.

4: Change the blending mode and opacity of the layer. You may also want to add a Fast Blur effect to smooth out your results.

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Realistic Scan Lines

This effect is a cliché... yet nothing says 'high-tech' like some scan lines. As an added bonus... make it green and glowy (like the Matrix)... clients love that. No really they do (PLEASE make it stop). But since bad taste won't change your deadline... lets at least learn the fastest way of pulling of this effect.

- 1:** In Photoshop, make a new document that is 10 pixels tall and 1 pixel wide.
- 2:** With the Rectangular Marquee, select the top five pixels.
- 3:** Fill with a color of your choice or black (how boring).
- 4:** Choose Select>Inverse then fill with a second color or white.
- 5:** Choose Select>All.
- 6:** Create a pattern by choosing Edit>Define Pattern. Give the pattern a descriptive name such as scanlines (again, how boring).
- 7:** Create a new document that matches your video frame size.
- 8:** Choose Edit>Fill and select Pattern. Navigate to the pattern you created.
- 9:** Soften the image slightly by blurring it at a low value.
- 10:** Save your Scan Lines as a file for Import into After Effects.
- 11:** Import the scan lines into After Effects and place it over your footage.
- 12:** Adjust its blending mode to taste (remember Shift+= is a fast way to experiment). You may want to lower the opacity as well.
- 13:** Place an Adjustment Layer on Top and apply a blur such as Effect>Blur>Fast Blur.
- 14:** Blend the blurred layer to taste slightly to create a glow. Setting it to Soft Light at 40% Opacity often works well.

If you're Keanu-loving client insists, add second adjustment layer.

- 15:** Apply the Colorama effect by choosing Effect>Image Control>Colorama.

16: Under the Output Cycle, choose Ramp Green (RGB creates a nice Infrared Effect and Fire can create a nice old-school amber monitor look).

17: Change the Colorama layer's blending mode to Hue (or experiment with others).

18: Take the red pill (or blue... your choice).



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Bad Boy Cop Blur

Often times you'll have someone in your shot that you need to obscure (such as an underage individual or maybe a bystander who you didn't get clearance on). This technique works in both Photoshop and After Effects.

- 1:** Duplicate your footage or background layer.
- 2:** Apply the Mosaic effect. In Photoshop, choose Filter>Pixelate>Mosaic... and adjust to taste. In After Effects, choose Effect>Stylize>Mosaic (increase the number of blocks)
- 3:** Apply a layer mask or vector mask to the top copy around the face on the mosaic layer
- 4:** Feather your edges on your mask and expand the edges as needed.
- 5:** If the person moves, you'll need to key-frame the mask in After Effects.

As a side note, cop blurs can be used to help hide cultural differences. For example, take your stereotypical bad gangster rap video. In the US, we're quick to cover up any nudity. The same video at MTV Europe, they're worried about obscuring the guns in the frame. Rich says he likes European thinking much better sometimes.



Zoom Lines in After Effects

Need to pull the same zoom effect in After Effects? Here's how.

- 1:** Add your clip into a new comp. The easiest way to do this is to drag your shot onto the new comp icon at the bottom of the project window.
- 2:** Duplicate the shot by pressing Cmd+D (Ctrl+D). Name the layer Rays.
- 3:** Desaturate the duplicate layer by choosing Effect>Image Control>Hue/Saturation. Set the Saturation Slider to -100.
- 4:** Starting with AE 6.5, the Cycore Effects are bundled on your install disc. Choose Effect>Blur>CC Radial Fast Blur. If this is not an option, choose the regular Radial Blur and be prepared to go walk



down the street for a cup of coffee. Adjust the Center and Amount of your effect.

- 5:** Adjust your Levels on the Blur Layer by Choosing Effect>Adjust>Levels. Pull your Black and White Input sliders in towards the edges of your Histogram. This will increase contrast.
- 6:** Experiment with different blending modes and opacities. You may want to adjust the gray slider on the Levels effect to tweak the rays' intensity.

7: To limit the effect, duplicate your original source layer, name it Mask and place it on top. If you have a lot of motion in the shot, you'll

need to keyframe a mask and roughly roto-scope the shot with a soft edge. If the shot is fairly static, just double click it to load in the footage window and use your Eraser tool.

- 8:** Change the Track Matte of the Rays layer and set it to Alpha Inverted using the Matte layer.

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Glass Bug

Need to create a network jelly bug? Those semi-transparent logos that sit in the corner and look like they are made from glass?

1: Split your logo or bug up into as many layer as you need so the pieces are clearly separated.

2: Be sure you have transparency in the objects.

3: Place a reference photo or frame grab below the

4: Apply a Bevel and Emboss layer style as well as a slight drop shadow. Keep the Bevel thin and crisp.

5: Adjust the Fill command for the layer, which will lower the original fill, but preserve the opacity of the effects. You can do this from the Blending Options: Custom area of the Styles dialog box or from the top of the layers palette.

6: Turn off all layers except the bug. If you have Photoshop CS 2, run the Alpha Channels from Visible Layers action (part of the Video Actions set). Skip to step 11.

7: Make a new (empty layer) and select it.

8: Choose Layer>Merge Visible while holding down the Option (Alt) key. You will get a merged copy that is perfectly registered with the layers below

9: Cmd+Click (Ctrl+Click) the new layer's thumbnail in the Layers Palette to load the Selection.

10: Switch to the Channels Palette and click the Save Selection as Channel button to create an Alpha Channel.

11: Save the file as a PICT, Targa, or PNG-24.

12: Import into After Effects or your NLE. You should tell it that the graphic is pre-multiplied with White to get the cleanest edge.



Scribble

This effect is a great way to color over a layer or fill it with something that looks a lot like lico-rice ropes gone mad. Okay so the description might make you think it's not very useful, but it's a surprisingly versatile effect and another way to create write-on effects or animated fills on letters.

1: In order for the effect to work you need a mask. You can create it manually, or better yet, try the Auto-trace command (Layer> Auto-trace). Be sure to click the Preview box to see your results before creation.

2: Apply the results to a new layer.

3: On the resulting mask layer add the scribble effect by choosing Effect> Render> Scribble.

4: Adjust the angle, curviness, stroke width and spacing.

5: Keyframe the Start or End to create an animated fill.

6: If desired change the Wiggle Type and Wiggles/Second.

7: Set Composite to On Transparent

8: If desired, you can also use this layer as a track matte to wipe another layer on.



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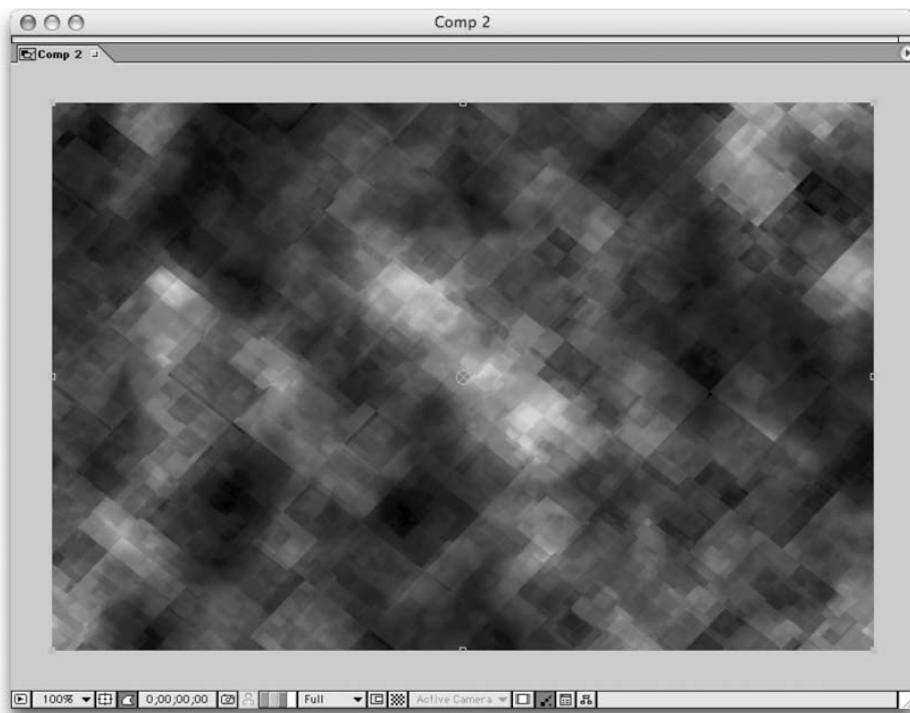
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Instant BG- Fractal Noise

Everyone can use motion backgrounds! Here's a technique to make some from scratch within After Effects..

- 1:** Create a new comp sized for your tape format.
- 2:** Add a new solid by pressing Cmd+Y (Ctrl+Y).
- 3:** Choose Effect>Noise & Grain>Fractal Noise.
- 4:** By default it looks like Photoshop's cloud filters... try switching the fractal type and noise type for dramatic results.
- 5:** Adjust Contrast, Brightness and Transform properties to taste.
- 6:** Set a keyframe for evolution at the start and leave it set to 0 (zero). Go to the end of your composition and add a second keyframe. Set this to a whole number if you'd like to create a seamless loop. Be sure to check the Cycle Evolution box under Evolution Options.
- 7:** If you'd like greater movement, use the Offset Turbulence command under the Transform option. Add two keyframes, one at start and finish. Double click one of the keyframes to modify it. Switch to Percentage of Composition and change the value from 50 (which is centered) to 150 (which is one full offset cycle).



- 8:** To add some depth, you can duplicate the layer and modify its fractal and noise type. Then blend the two layers.
- 9:** Add an adjustment layer with a Fast Blur effect applied. Blur heavily and then blend to produce highlights.
- 10:** Add another adjustment layer with either a Colorama or Tint effect to colorize the layer. Then blend as desired. Be sure to adjust the Output cycle on the Colorama effect.

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Write It On

It's pretty easy to get your text and other graphic elements to have that 'written on' look. Whether you are using your own hand-drawn graphics, scanned artwork, or computer generated art, the technique is pretty much the same.

- 1:** Place a new solid above your artwork by pressing Cmd+Y (Ctrl+Y)
- 2:** Set the solid to 50% opacity so you can see your art below it
- 3:** Use the pen tool to trace over it. Add as few points as possible, and add them in the order that you would draw the piece on.
- 4:** Add Effect>Stylize>Write On effect and set its Paint Style to 'On Transparent'
- 5:** Select the solid layer and press M and select Mask Shape.
- 6:** Press Cmd +C (Ctrl+C) to copy the mask.
- 7:** Press E to reveal the effects on the layer, then twirl down the 'Write On' effect and select 'Brush Position'
- 8:** Press Cmd+V (Ctrl+V) to paste the mask position as keyframes



- 9:** Play the animation to see it draw on. You may need to increase the brush size to see it.
- 10:** Increase the brush size until it covers your artwork.
- 11:** Decrease the Brush spacing to .001
- 12:** Drag the end keyframe to slow the animation or speed it up. You'll notice that the inner keyframes are pasted as roving keyframes so they'll adapt automatically.
- 13:** Set your artwork/text layer's track matte as the Alpha Matte of the Write on layer. It should now reveal the layer beneath it.

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Adding Complexity to a Design Via Layering

Beginning designers often forget about the framing of their images. They forget what's 'on top' of their imagery. Photography pros often vignette their images with darkened edges to enhance the focus on what's 'inside' the picture. This same theory can be applied to motion graphics.

Here are the typical 'top-layers' that can also be combined for your work.

Add a Grain Layer.

Beginners are often afraid to lose the crystal clarity of what they worked so hard on – but often – it's that unreal sharpness that gives them away as amateurs.

- 1:** Add an adjustment layer to the top of your image.
- 2:** Use the above technique but choose Effects>Noise & Grain> Noise.
- 3:** Adjust the blending mode and opacity of the adjustment layer to get the right balance.

Darkened Edges Layer (or Power Window)

This is typically a very dark colored layer (never pure black – instead always use a more organic super-dark blue, burgundy or dark brown to fit your art instead)

- 1:** In After Effects, create a new solid layer that is filled with a dark color of your choice.
- 2:** Apply an oval mask or a rectangular mask (your choice).
- 3:** Set the mask to 'Subtract' and feather the edges.
- 4:** Adjust the blending mode of the layer itself. Usually multiply or color burn with a reduced opacity works best.

Soft Glow Layer

As a quick polish, you can stylize your footage by adding a specular highlight adjustment layer.

- 1:** In After Effects, create a new adjustment layer.
- 2:** Add a fast blur to the adjustment layer. Try Effect>Blur>Fast Blur or CC Radial Fast Blur.
- 3:** Choose a healthy radius for the blur such as 15 or higher.
- 4:** Set this layer's blending mode to Soft Light, Overlay, or another blending mode of choice.
- 5:** Adjust the opacity to taste.

By Jayse Hansen, <http://www.xeler8r.com>



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Acknowledgments: Jayse Hansen, Marcus Gelduld

Web site Info: www.rhedpixel.com, www.photoshopforvideo.com

Contact Info: RHED Pixel for production services, Creative Cow for technical questions.

For more - check out Broadcast Graphics On the Spot and After Effects on the Spot

