# Your Photoshop is in My After Effects

*With RICHARD HARRINGTON*

Richard Harrington is a certified Project Management Professional, Adobe Certified Expert and Instructor in Photoshop and After Effects, and Apple-certified instructor in Final Cut Pro and Motion. Additionally, he has completed Avid's Master Editor Workshop and the Avid Certified Instructor Program.

His visual communications company, 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 CS for Nonlinear Editors and as well as a moderator Creative Cow's Photoshop and Motion Forums.

Be sure to check out Rich's websites for more resources:
- **Raster|Vector Blog:** http://www.rastervector.com
- **Photoshop for Video:** http://www.photoshopforvideo.com
- **RHED Pixel:** http://www.RHEDPixel.com
- **Motion Control 3D:** http://www.motioncontrol3D.com

## It's Like Photoshop... With a Timeline

After Effects is an incredibly deep and elaborate program.  This means it will take a (long) while to master.  Fortunately there are many similarities between Photoshop and After Effects.  Learning this similarities will make the program easier to use.
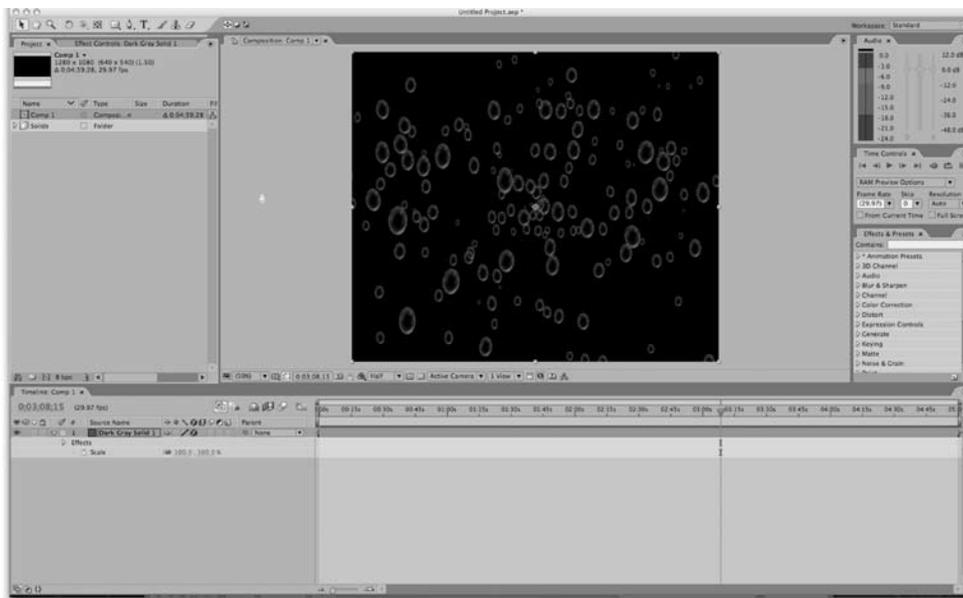


## Mastering AE's interface

So you want to be fast? Don't think of After Effects as a tool; think of it as a creative extension. Over time, you'll gain confidence with all the controls. You want to be able to make the interface "disappear," which will allow you to reach "inside" the computer and create. Great designers know that the more brainpower they can put toward their graphics (not graphic system), the better the results. Although learning an interface may not be as "fun" or "sexy" as a good effect, it's infinitely more important. Don't skimp on learning AE's interface.

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## Get Your Toolbox Out

Need access to your tools? To change tools on the fly try these shortcuts:

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



## A Working Canvas

By default, After Effects presents you with a black background in the comp window. While this is often useful, it may not work in all situations. Sometimes a contrasting background color may be needed when adjusting shadows or dark tones. Choose Composition>Background Color or press Cmd+Shift+B (Ctrl+Shift+B) to pick a new color. This color is temporary, and is not included in the render. It will be replaced with black when the comp is rendered.

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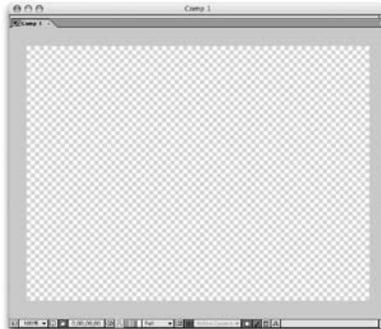


## Opening Your Tool Chest

There are several palettes in After Effects, more than you'll usually want to deal with at once. To access the palettes, go to the Window menu or press the following shortcuts.

| | |
|---|---|
| Cmd/Ctrl 1 | Show/Hide Tools |
| Cmd/Ctrl 2 | Show/Hide Info |
| Cmd/Ctrl 3 | Show/Hide Time Panel |
| Cmd/Ctrl 4 | Show/Hide Audio |
| Cmd/Ctrl 5 | Show/Hide Effects Palette |
| Cmd/Ctrl 6 | Show/Hide Character Palette |
| Cmd/Ctrl 7 | Show/Hide Paragraph Palette |
| Cmd/Ctrl 8 | Show/Hide Paint Palette |
| Cmd/Ctrl 9 | Show/Hide Brush Palette |

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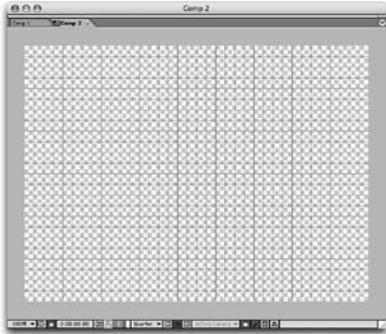


## Grids

Grids can be useful when laying out your design freehand. To turn grids on, choose View>Grid or press Cmd+' [Single Quote] (Ctrl+'). Even more useful is the ability to turn on Snapping to the grid by pressing Cmd+Shift+' [Single Quote] (Ctrl+Shift+'). To adjust grid options, go to the preference menu and set frequency.

## Using Rulers

Rulers are useful for checking the position of elements in your composition. Choose View>Show Rulers or Press Cmd+R (Ctrl+R) to bring them out. Once they're out, rulers can unlock a lot of useful features.



• You can adjust the rulers' center point by clicking in the upper left corner of the Comp window. Click and drag to reposition the rulers.
• You can drag guides from the rulers for use in your composition.
• You can turn Snapping on for guides, by pressing Cmd+Shift+; [semicolon] (Ctrl+Shift+;).
• To toggle guide visibility, press Cmd+; [semicolon] (Ctrl+;).
To lock guides in place, press Cmd+Option+Shift+; [semicolon] (Ctrl+Alt+Shift+;).
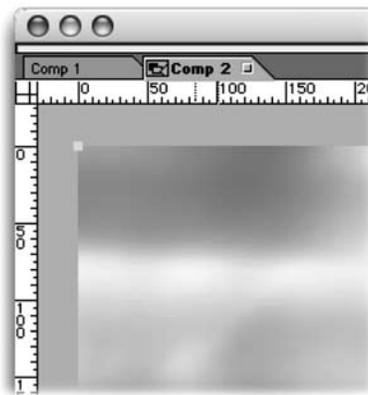


## Get a Hand on Things

Need to pan around the comp window or timeline? Activate the hand tool by pressing the spacebar. This is a temporary switch. Adjust the viewed portion on the timeline or comp window, then release the spacebar

## I need Shades...

Most compositing Applications, such as Shake and Combustion, ship with the interface set to 50% gray. This makes it easier to make complex judgments about color and contras. After Effects 6.5 now gives you the ability to adjust the brightness of windows and palette backgrounds
**Step 1:** Choose Adobe After Effects > Preferences > User Interface Colors (Edit > Preferences > User Interface)
**Step 2:** Adjust the User Interface Brightness slider to adjust brightness.



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## Change the Channel

When doing complex effects or color correction, it is often important to check the channel view of your footage. You can do this by clicking on the small strips of red, green, blue, or white (for the alpha) at the bottom of the comp window. These views can also be toggled from the keyboard. Press the following keys to switch between channel views:

• To show the red channel, press Option+1 (Alt+1).

• To show the green channel, press Option+2 (Alt+2).

• To show the blue channel, press Option+3 (Alt+3).

• To show the alpha channel, press Option+4 (Alt+4).

To toggle back, press the same keyboard shortcut again.

## Reality Show

If you view your comp window at a custom size, you may have redraw errors. Simply put, the computer is a lot better at showing you what 100 percent (or 50 percent or 200 percent) looks like than say 63.27 percent. Computers are efficient at dividing or multiplying by two. If you are doing detail work such as keying, glows, or particles, you'll want your Comp Window's magnification to be 100 percent. To quickly zoom in, try the following shortcuts in the Comp window:

• To zoom 100 Percent, press / [forward slash].

• To zoom 100 Percent and resize the Comp window, press Option+/ [forward slash] (Alt+/).
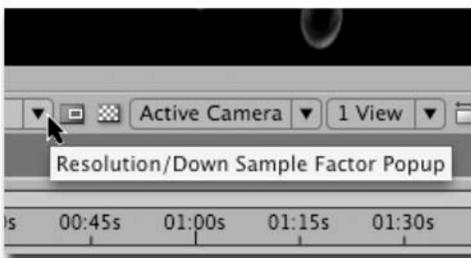
## Speeding up the Comp Window

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

• For Full Resolution, press Cmd+J (Ctrl+J).

• For Half Resolution, press Cmd+Shift+J (Ctrl+Shift+J).

• For Quarter Resolution, press Cmd+Option+Shift+J (Ctrl+Alt+Shift+J).

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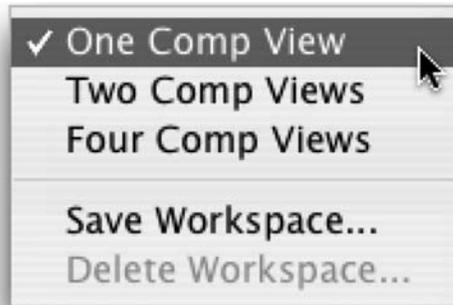
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## Clean Up Your Workspace

Have a few too many toolboxes open? Don't worry. You can quickly hide all floating toolboxes by pressing the Tab key. If you'd like to get rid of all floaters except the Tools palette, press Shift+Tab. This shortcut works in most other Adobe applications as well.

## Clean Your Room

Looking for a fast way to get your windows back in shape? Maybe you've lost a window off-screen as well? Not a problem… simply choose Window>Workspace>One Comp view to return to the default layout.

✓ One Comp View
Two Comp Views
Four Comp Views

Save Workspace…
Delete Workspace…

✓ RHED Pixel  MOCO

One Comp View
Two Comp Views
Four Comp Views

Save Workspace…
Delete Workspace…

## Build Your Own Room

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

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

## I Lost My Effect

Those darn Effects categories! Where is Change Color, anyway? Adjust, Image Control? Stylize? Next time you're searching for an effect, don't click the Effect Menu and search through the categories. Instead, choose Window>Effects, or press Cmd+5 (Ctrl+5). A handy effects search engine will pop up.

In the text box at the top, start to type the name of the effect you want. If you type D, the window will list all effect names that contain the letter D. If you type Displace, the window will list Displacement Map, Turbulent Displace and Time Displacement. To apply an effect to the selected layer, double-click its name. Or, drag the effect from the Effect window and drop it on any layer in the Timeline or Comp Window.

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## A Bigger Preview

Want to take your RAM previews full screen? By clicking the Full Screen box in the Time Controls palette, After Effects will do just that. When the RAM Preview is started, the screen goes black and the preview is loaded. Press the spacebar to start the preview mid-load. To exit, press the ESC key.



## A Smaller Preview

Wouldn't it be nice to focus only on what you care about? You can do just that in the AE world. Why preview the entire comp window when it is much faster to look only at the part of your composition that interests you. Here's how.



**Step 1:**. Enable the Region of Interest by clicking on the small icon next to the resolution menu in the comp window.

**Step 2:**. Drag out the area you'd like to see.

**Step 3:**.When starting a preview, only the highlighted area is seen.

**Step 4:**.To exit, click on the Region of Interest icon again.

**Step 5:**. Using Region of Interest has no impact on your rendered file.

## A Longer Preview

Using a RAM preview in After Effects is great as it's a quick way to preview your work.  Great that is until you run out of RAM!  In After Effects 6, when you run out of RAM, AE must purge frames from the buffer.

After Effects 6.5 changes this though and helps speed up your workflow.  Now when the RAM cache gets full, frames are cached to your hard drive.  Don't worry though, you can set a cache limit and the cache is emptied when you quit AE.



To set up disk caching:
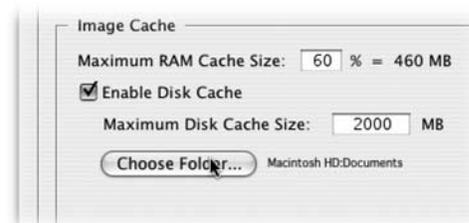
**Step 1:**. Choose After Effects>Preferences>Memory & Cache (Edit>Preferences>Memory & Cache)

**Step 2:**. Check the checkbox to Enable Disk Cache.

**Step 3:**. The Choose Folder dialog box automatically opens and you need to specify where to write the cache.  For best results place the frames on a local drive, but if possible, not the same drive as your source footage.

**Step 4:**. Specify an amount for Maximum Disk Cache Size in megabytes (the default is 2000 MB.)

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## Send it Out

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

You can set Video Preview preferences by choosing After Effects > Preferences >Video Preview  (Edit > Preferences > Video Preview).  Choose one or more of the following interaction types.
Previews: Both RAM preview and standard (spacebar) preview load on the external monitor. Choose Mirror on Computer Monitor to if you want to see the preview simultaneously on the computer screen and the external monitor, however mirroring reduces performance.
Interactions: Interactive previews such as scrubbing and dragging in the Composition window on the external monitor. Interactive previews are always mirrored.
Renders: Each frame is shown the external monitor during a render.  All renders are also mirrored.

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

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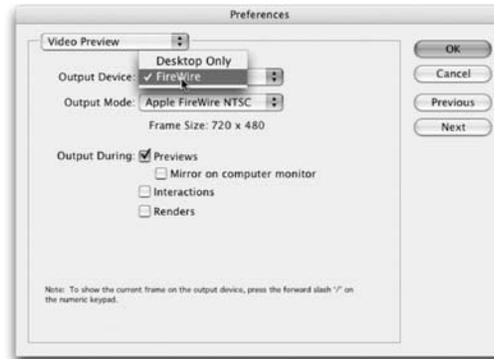
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## A Closer View

Need to get a better look at your Timeline? You can quickly zoom in and out from the keyboard. Press = (equal sign) to Zoom In. Press – (minus sign) to Zoom Out.

Need an even closer view of your Timeline? The tightest view you can have is a frame level view. Why bother adjusting the Zoom slider, or even tapping the = key multiple times when you can toggle between a frame level view and your current zoom level by tapping the ; (semicolon) key.

## Back to Keyframes

You just finished previewing your comp and it looks great, except for that one layer. A couple of quick tweaks to its keyframes and it would be perfect. You'll soon get tired of twirling down through each effect just to get to your keyframes. The fast way is to press U to toggle your Uber Animating Keyframes' view. Because we need all the help we can get, we think of this short-cut as U for User Keyframes.
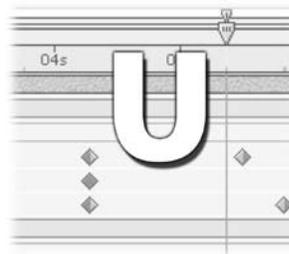
## The Fundamentals of Animation

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

Press A to Twirl down the Anchor Point.
Press P to Twirl down the Position.
Press R to Twirl down the Rotation.
Press S to Twirl down the Scale.
Press T to Twirl down the Opacity. (Think transparency.)
The following modifier keys also come in handy.
Hold down the Shift key to display additional properties after selecting the first.
Hold down the Option key to display a property and add a keyframe at the Current Time Indicator.
On a PC, hold down Alt+Shift+ the shortcut letter (A, P, R, S or T) to achieve the same action.
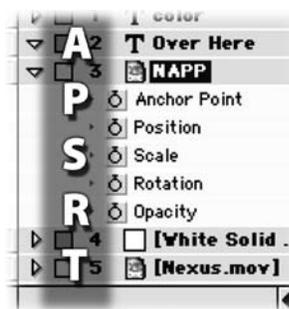
## Get Those Keyframes

Need to select multiple keyframes? Here are a few tips to make it easier.
Select all keyframes associated with a property by clicking on that property's name in the timeline.
Add to that selection by Shift+Clicking on additional properties.
Lasso visible keyframes in the Timeline window.
Select all visible keyframes by pressing Cmd+Option+A (Ctrl+Alt+A).
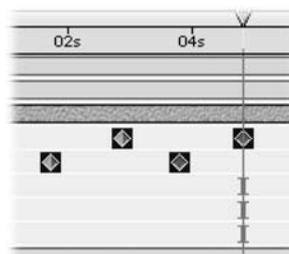
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## Lost Your Way

If you've ever been zoomed in on your Timeline, you know how easy it is to misplace the Current Time Indicator. You could Zoom the Timeline back out to find it, or scroll left or right as you search. But there's an easier way. (You knew we'd say that). Press D to scroll your Timeline View to the Current Time Indicator.
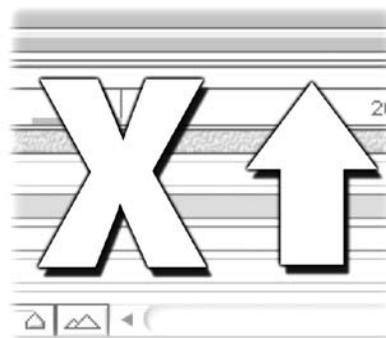
## Get on Top

Next time you need to work on a layer, try these two shortcuts.

On the numeric keypad, type the number of the layer you want to work with. For digits greater than 9, be sure to type the numbers quickly with no gap.

Press X to Scroll the selected layer to the top of the Timeline view.

## What's in a Name?

A layer can have two names, the one it comes in with, and the one you give it. Why is this useful? It all boils down to you keeping control. Perhaps you have added a footage item five times into your composition. If every layer was called Shot 1, you might get confused. We would.
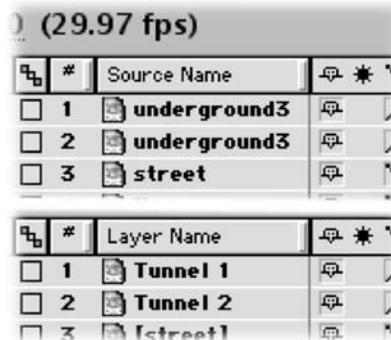
**Step 1:** Highlight the layer to rename it.

**Step 2:** Press Return (Enter).

**Step 3:** Type the new name.

**Step 4:** Press Return (Enter) to apply the name, or click on another layer.

If you'd like to toggle between all of the Source Names and the Layer Names, click the name field at the top of the timeline.

## Keys to the Locks

You are your own worst enemy, so protect your comp. Want to avoid accidentally deleting or modifying a layer? Lock It! You can quickly lock a selected layer by pressing Cmd+L (Ctrl+L). But what if you change your mind? You can't use the same shortcut because locked layers cannot be selected. Here's what to do instead. Press Cmd+Shift+L (Ctrl+Shift+L) to Unlock All Layers.

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## Make your Point (In- or Out-)

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

Place the Current Time indicator at the desired time.

• To Set the Time In, press the [ (left bracket) key.

• To Set the Time Out, press the ] (right bracket) key.

Using this method, you can set either an in- or an out-point, but not both.
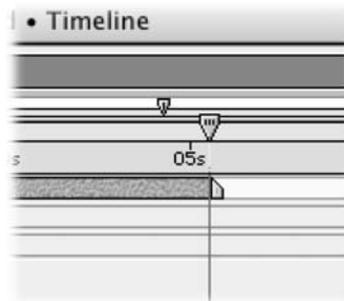
## Making Two Points (In- & Out-)

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

**Step 1:** Place the Current Time indicator at the desired time.

**Step 2:** To set the Time In, press the [ (left bracket) key. This will move the in-point to the Current Time indicator. If you'd like to trim earlier material, press Option+[ (Alt+[ ) to Time Trim the in-point.

**Step 3:** Move the Current Time indicator to the desired end time.

**Step 4:** To set the Time Trim for the out-point, press Option+] (Alt+]).
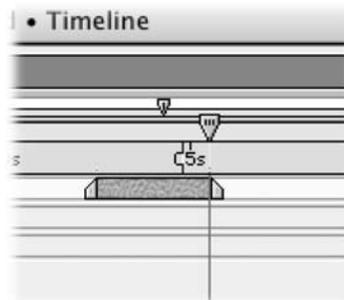
## Get Me Out (Or In)

Need to quickly move to the start (or end) of a layer? Press I to jump to the in-point of a layer, or O to jump to the out-point. Remember though, if a layer starts or ends outside of your composition's time range, you won't see the playhead (content) in After Effects.

## Go Back to Start

Want to send multiple layers to line up at the beginning of your composition? Press Option+Home (Alt+Home) to get selected layers to line up. Remember you can Shift+Click to select a range of layers or Cmd+Click (Ctrl+Click) to select noncontiguous layers.

## On Top of the Deck

While dragging layers around is often a valid option, it's not the fastest way to put a layer at the top of an 80–layer composition, especially if it's near the bottom. There are several keyboard shortcuts that will come in handy.

• To bring a layer to the front, press Cmd+Shift+] (Ctrl+Shift+]).

• To bring a layer to the back, press Cmd+Shift+[ (Ctrl+Shift+[).

• To move a layer one spot closer to the top, press Cmd+] (Ctrl+]).

• To move a layer one spot farther back, press Cmd+[ (Ctrl+[).

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## Pick a Layer, Any Layer

Want to quickly pick a layer to work with? Just type its number on the numeric keypad. Type a single digit for layers 1–9. For higher levels, type the layer number such as 1 and 5 for 15.

## Getting Around the Keys

Need to move between your keyframes? Press K to move forward one keyframe. Press J to move back one keyframe. These shortcuts work with all visible keyframes, not just those on the selected layer.

## A Better Timeline

There are several Optional Panels available in the timeline. If you'd like to add or subtract headings, simply Control click on any column heading, and pick from the list. If you don't like the column order, drag them left or right to new positions.

## Get to the Modes

Want quick access to your mode switches? To toggle between them, press F4. This shortcut works whether or not the Timeline window is selected. If you'd like to leave the modes out permanently, contextual click on the Timeline columns, and choose Modes.
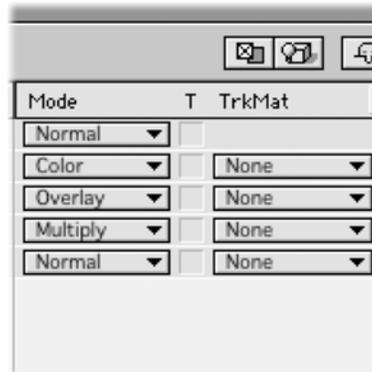
## Making Blend Modes Easy

Part of the reason beginners pass on blending modes is that they are hard to use if you don't know which one you want. Find an obscure list; scroll down (forever) only to discover you need to pick a different one. There's a much better way to experiment.
Highlight the layer or layers you want to blend.
Press Shift+= (Shift Plus Equal) to scroll through the list.
To move backward, press Shift+– (Shift Plus Minus) to return to a passed blending mode.

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## Incoming!

Finally, the left hand knows what the right hand is doing. When you import a Photoshop file as a Comp, all of its blending modes come in properly. Both After Effects and Photoshop made some compromises. Photoshop CS adds the Hard Mix mode, while After Effects modified its Color Burn, Color Dodge, and Difference. The 'old' modes are still there in AE; they are just preceded with the word Classic (in case you weren't feeling old enough already).

## Outbound

So modes work on the way in, but if you want to write a layered PSD file out (Composition>Save Frame As> Photoshop Layers), there are a few modes that are not supported. After Effects will substitute the closest equivalent if you've used the following modes.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Dancing Dissolve | > | Dissolve |
| Classic Color Burn | > | Color Burn |
| Add | > | Linear Dodge |
| Classic Color Dodge | > | Color Dodge |
| Classic Difference | > | Difference |
| Stencil Alpha | > | Not supported |
| Stencil Luma | > | Not supported |
| Silhouette Alpha | > | Not supported |
| Silhouette Luma | > | Not supported |
| Alpha Add | > | Not supported |
| Luminescent Premul | > | Not supported |

## 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.