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TIP

Search for Presets

If you know a word in the name of a preset you want to apply, enter it in the Contains field of the Effects & Presets panel. For example, type “inset” and you will see the Adobe presets which can convert a full-frame footage layer into a picture-in-picture inset, including the subfolders they reside in.

Adobe’s Presets

In addition to being able to save and apply your own presets, After Effects ships with hundreds of ready-made presets for you to explore, employ, and tweak for the task at hand. They are great for beginners who need to crank out work quickly or for veterans who are in need of inspiration. They’re also a great learning tool: Apply a preset, type UU to reveal what parameters the preset added or changed, and reverse-engineer it to learn how a particular trick was done.

We’ll start our study by using Adobe Bridge (originally discussed in Chapter 1) to help us explore and apply presets, then focus on a pair of our favorite categories: Text and Behaviors.

Browsing Presets

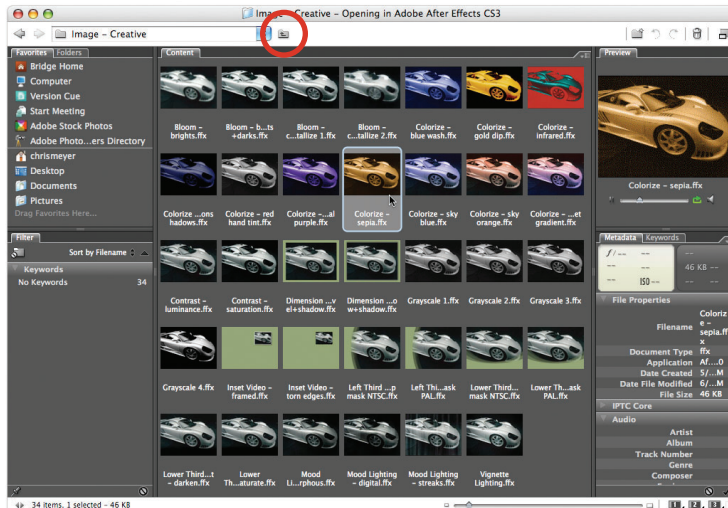
In this next exercise, we will explore some of the provided presets, choosing one to tint the first clip in an edit, and another to transition the second clip on over the first.

Step 1: Open [Ex.04a] and select the second clip (AB_RetroTransportation.mov). Choose Browse Presets from either the Animation menu or the Effects & Presets Options menu. This will launch Adobe Bridge: a central application for exploring and importing media.

Step 2: You will be taken directly to the Presets folder, where you will see a selection of subfolders that correspond to the subfolders listed under Animation Presets in the Effects & Presets panel. Double-click

Image – Creative to open it. This subfolder contains a number of colorization presets, lighting effects, masks, and other tricks. Select individual presets to view them in the Preview panel. Select one of the mood lighting presets near the bottom, and you will see the preview animates.

Step 3: Double-click the preset named **Colorize – sepia.ffx**. You will be returned to After Effects, and this preset will be applied to your selected layer. Hmm...this old postcard look isn’t quite what we had in mind. No problem: Undo (making sure the second layer is still selected) and switch back to Bridge by pressing Command+tab on Mac (Alt+tab on Windows). This time double-click **Colorize – sky blue.ffx**. Now this more subtle effect will be applied.



Step 3: Select a clip, then choose Browse Presets either from the Effects & Presets panel or the Animation menu. This will launch Adobe Bridge. Double-click the **Image – Creative** folder and explore some of the presets inside. Double-click a preset to apply it; click the “go up” button (circled here) to move to a higher folder level.

Step 4: There are many different categories of presets. Select layer 1 – **AB_Transportation.mov** – and press I to locate to its in point. Rather than keep this hard cut, let's select a transition to more gracefully move into the second cut. Switch to Bridge and click on the Go Up folder icon along the top of its application window. Double-click one of the **Transitions** folders, and preview a few of the choices available. Once you find one you like (we used **Transitions – Dissolves > Dissolve – vapor.ffx**), double-click it for this preset to be applied in After Effects. RAM Preview to check the result.

Quick Tasks

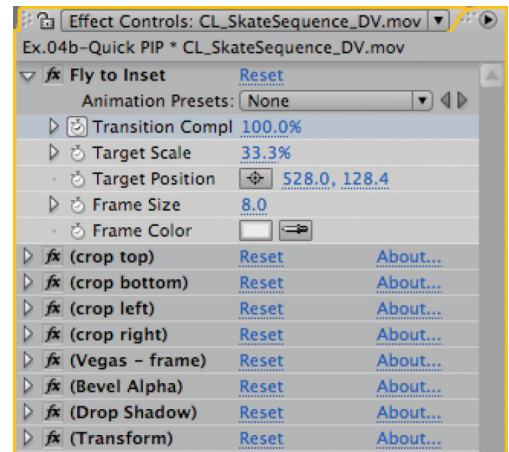
To get a better idea of the breadth of presets provided, open comp [Ex.04b*starter] which contains an edited skateboard montage. Say you wanted to place this clip in a picture-in-picture box, then fill the background with some abstract texture. Select the clip **CL_Skatesequence_DV.mov** and choose **Animation > Browse Presets**. This will take you back to Bridge and place you at the top level of the **Presets** folder. Double-click **Transitions – Movement**, then double-click **Fly to Inset.ffx**. Once you are returned to After Effects, RAM Preview: The full-frame video will animate down to a third of its original size in the upper right corner of the frame, with a border and drop shadow already applied.

Press F3 to open the Effect Controls panel: Some of Adobe's presets have special controllers that make it easier to keyframe or modify a preset that relies on a series of effects. If the names of some effects are surrounded by parentheses, the intention is that you can leave these alone and edit just the top effect. In this case, most of the parameters you need – transition completion, size, position, and the color of the frame – are included in the custom effect controllers named **Fly to Inset**.

Now for that background. Move the time indicator to some point after the transition has completed, and be sure to press F2 to deselect all layers. Return to Bridge, navigate to the **Backgrounds** subfolder, and browse the available choices. Double-click one you like. Since you didn't have a layer selected, After Effects will create a new solid for you and apply the preset to it. Drag this solid below **CL_SkateSequence.mov** and preview the result! All that's left is for you to place your keyed "talking head" commentator on top (Chapter 26). Our version is in [Ex.04b_final].

Expression Containers

Presets also remember Expressions – pieces of JavaScript code that tie parameters together – applied to the properties you copy, which makes presets a great tool for saving and re-using expressions. Expressions are covered in user-friendly depth in Chapter 35; the biggest gotcha here is if you save a preset with an expression that refers to another effect, layer, or comp by name, After Effects will complain when you apply this preset if it cannot find the same name it is looking for. You can usually just relink the expression to make After Effects happy again.



Some presets come with custom controllers to make them easier to modify. If the names of effects are in parentheses, focus on the controller effect at the top of the Effect Controls panel.

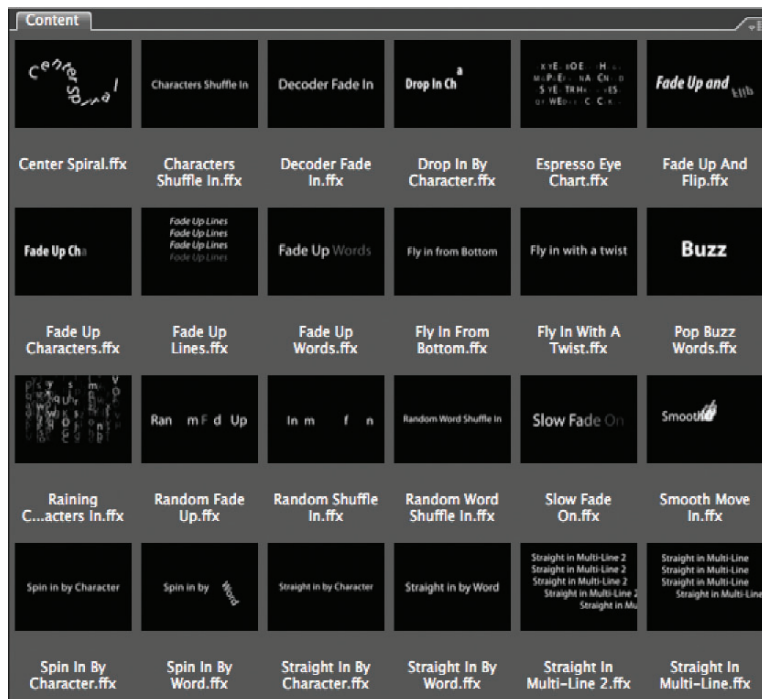


[Ex.04b_final]: Adobe's animation presets make it easy to place video in a picture-in-picture inset and add an abstract background. Skateboarders courtesy Creative License; commentator courtesy Photron.

TIP

Exchanging Presets

Adobe has posted over 300 additional Shape and 3D Text presets for After Effects CS3 on its Exchange web site: Visit share.studio.adobe.com and go to the After Effects section.



Step 1: You can also browse text presets using Adobe Bridge.



Step 3: The **Raining Characters In** preset is an interesting combination of animation, randomized text, and the Echo effect.

Text Presets

Back in Chapter 20, we covered After Effects' powerful but complex text engine. Fortunately, After Effects comes with hundreds of Text Animation Presets that you can use (as well as learn from!).

Browsing, applying, and modifying a text preset is no different from working with any other animation preset. Close any previously opened comps, then open [Ex.05]. It contains some text for you to play with. (We duplicated the same layer several times and turned off the Video switch for the duplicates; the idea is if you find a preset you like – or make a hopeless mess – you can turn off one layer and use one of the duplicates.)

Step 1: Select the first layer, then choose Browse Presets from either the Animation or Effects & Presets Options menu. This opens Adobe Bridge, placing you in the **Presets** folder. Double-click the **Text** subfolder, and you will see another group of subfolders showing the many different categories of text presets (hey, there are over 300 of them; better than throwing them all into the same folder!). If you feel like playing, go ahead and spend some time opening different subfolders and previewing their animations.

Step 2: Navigate to the **Animate In** subfolder and double-click the **Fade Up Characters** preset. You will be returned to After Effects and this preset will be applied to your text layer. RAM Preview: The characters fade in one by one in a softened “typewriter” fashion.

Step 3: Undo to remove the preset and return to the original text, then press Home to return to 00:00 (remember: presets apply their keyframes starting at the current time). Return to Bridge and double-click **Animate In > Raining Characters In**. (If you don't need to preview it first, you can also locate and apply it from the Effects & Presets panel.)

RAM Preview: This is a far flashier preset that randomizes the characters, drops them in from the top of the composition, and echoes them as they fade up. To figure out how it was done, type U to see which parameters are animated, or UU to check which parameters have been changed from their default values.

Step 4: Many of the text presets provided by Adobe – such as the **Raining Characters In** preset – employ effects in addition to animating type. The Effect Controls panel should have opened when you applied this preset; press F3 if it isn't visible. In this case, a Text Animator slides the characters down into position and offsets the characters used, while the Echo effect adds to the complexity. Move to 02:05 on the timeline and turn off the Echo effect by clicking on the stylized “fx” in the Effect Controls or Timeline panels to see the underlying text animation.

Step 5: Since Animation Presets create normal keyframes, you can customize them any way you like by editing those keyframes – for example, by moving them closer together to speed up the animation, changing their values, adding eases (Animation > Keyframe Assistant > Easy Ease), or deleting keyframes or effects that aren't needed or desired. In the case of the **Raining Characters In** preset, the type doesn't start appearing until 01:00. Press U to reveal its keyframes, select the Offset keyframes and drag them back to start at 00:00.

You can also change the underlying Source Text at any time by double-clicking the layer and replacing the text. You may need to temporarily turn off any Text Animators so you can see the text clearly: This can be done by twirling open their layers and clicking on their respective “eye” icons in the Timeline panel.

Experiment with applying more text animation presets. Remember that presets add to properties and keyframes already applied; applying a preset does not delete one you applied before. For instance, try applying a preset from the **Animate In** folder at time 00:00, then later in time apply a preset from the **Animate Out** folder. (If you make a big mess that you can't Undo out of, you can turn off the layer you are working with in [Ex.05] and use one of the duplicate layers instead.)

TIP

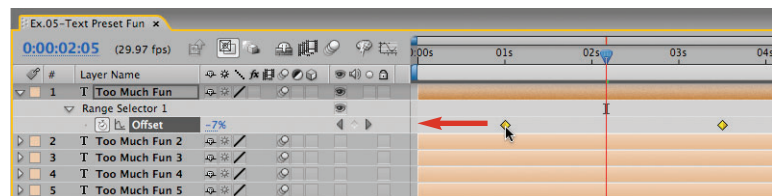
Mo' Blur

Most text animations look better with motion blur (Chapter 8), although it will take longer to render.

GOTCHA

The Click That Refreshes

If you drag preset files into the **Presets** folder while After Effects is open, they will not immediately appear in the Effects & Presets panel. Select Refresh List from the panel's Options menu.



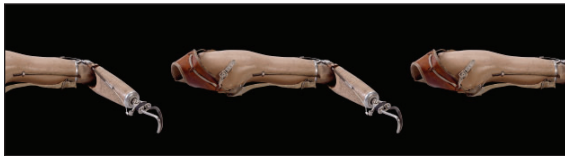
Step 5: Animation Presets create ordinary keyframes that you can edit as needed. Here we're sliding the Offset keyframes to start at time 00:00.

Saving Text Styles

When you're saving a text animation as a preset, selecting the Source Text property will save the settings from the Character and Paragraph panels. This is a good way to store “style” templates for font, size, color, and so on. However, be aware that saving Source Text will also save – and later apply – the underlying text as well. If you want to save just the text *animation* so you can apply it to different text in the future, select only the text Animator groups (plus the More Options section if used) when you save the animation preset. You will note that nearly all of the text presets Adobe provides save the Animators, but not the Source Text. In addition, if you don't have a layer selected when you apply a text preset, dummy text will be created for you; simply double-click the new layer to replace the source text.

Bad Behavior

The Wiggle and Scale Bounce Behavior animation presets do not get along with any layer that is continuously rasterized, including all text and shape layers. If you enable the Continuous Rasterization switch for a layer that has one of these Behaviors attached, they will transform around the upper left corner instead of their anchor point.



The Autoscroll behaviors duplicate a layer and can animate it horizontally or vertically. Arm courtesy Classic PIO/Medical.



The Fade Out Over Layer Below behavior automatically fades the layer on top based on the length of time it overlaps the layer underneath.

Behaviors

One of our favorite categories of presets is Behaviors. These use a combination of effects and expressions to automatically animate a layer without the need for keyframes – instead, you set general values such as “move the layer in this direction at this speed.” Try them out for yourself:

Step 1: Close all comps, then open [Ex.06a] and select the CM_bike-wheel layer.

Step 2: In the Effects & Presets panel, clear out the Contains box, twirl open **Animation Presets > Presets**, and twirl open **Behaviors**. Double-click **Rotate Over Time** to apply it.

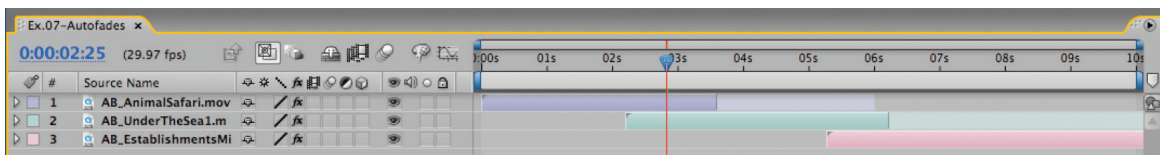
RAM Preview; the wheel will slowly rotate. The Effect Controls panel should have opened when you applied this preset (if not, press F3); at the top is a custom Rotate Over Time effect control. Edit its Rotation value and preview again.

Step 3: Some behaviors can be combined. For example, double-click **Behaviors > Fade In+Out – frames** to add it to the wheel. RAM Preview; the wheel will fade in and out at the ends of the comp without having to set any opacity keyframes. Go ahead and edit the Fade In and Fade Out Durations in the Effect Controls panel.

Step 4: With the Effect Controls panel active, type Command+A (Control+A) to select all effects and press Delete. Then apply **Behaviors > Wiggle – rotation**. RAM Preview; now the wheel rocks back and forth randomly, without having to apply The Wiggler (Chapter 5) or write your own wiggle expression (Chapter 35).

Feel free to experiment with applying behaviors to other layers! For example, add **Drift Over Time** to one of your text layers in [Ex.05] so that your title doesn't have to stop moving after it's animated on. In [Ex.06b], select layer 1 and try out the **Autoscroll** behaviors; RAM Preview to see an endless succession of arms marching across your screen. Undo to delete this preset, and apply **Wigglerama** instead to make it reach about the frame. Then open [Ex.06c] and add **Opacity Flash – random** or **Scale Bounce – random** to its spheres for automatic “nervous” animations.

In addition to the **Fade In+Out** behaviors where you can define the fade times in frames or seconds, the **Fade In** and **Fade Out Over Layer Below** behaviors automatically adjust their fade times based on how much a layer overlaps the next one in the timeline – this is demonstrated in [Ex.06d]. We show you how to create your own variation on this idea at the end of Chapter 35B – check out *Just a Fade We're Going Through*.



Brainstorm

Ever reach a mental block on how to make a piece of footage look more interesting? Or ever become daunted by the number of parameters an effect has, or not know where to start? Or maybe you already have a look you like, and just need to create some variations on that theme.

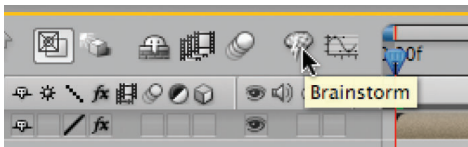
This is where Brainstorm – a new module added in After Effects CS3 – comes in. What it does is take any effects, keyframes, and other parameters you have selected (including Transforms and Layer Effects); randomize their values; and present you with nine variants to look at. If you see something you like, you can apply it to your current composition, save it to a duplicate comp, or use it as a “seed” for more exploration. Or, discard them all and keep generating new ideas until you find one you like. As with many things concerning effects, it’s best to see it in action, so close your previous comps and let’s jump in:

Step 1: Open [Ex.07a] and RAM Preview – this comp contains footage of a camera panning by a bank of sunflowers.

Step 2: Let’s say you’ve heard that there’s this Cycore effect – Flo Motion – that works like a cross between a kaleidoscope and black hole, but you’ve never used it. So select the layer **Sunflowers** and apply Effect > Distort > CC Flo Motion.

Nothing happened! At its defaults, CC Flo Motion does not distort the image. You could start experimenting with its parameters... or you can sit back and let After Effects do the heavy lifting:

Step 3: Make sure the effect CC Flo Motion is selected in either the Effect Controls or Timeline panel. Then click on the icon in the Timeline panel that looks sort of like a brain with a thunderbolt coming out of it – this is Brainstorm (please suppress your groans).



A dialog will open with nine copies of your comp, distorted in various ways. (The first cell contains your original comp, as it is the “seed” for the variants.) Click the Play button or tap the spacebar; After Effects will start rendering motion previews of each variant. It will be slow; after all, it’s rendering the comp nine times for each frame! After a couple of seconds have rendered, press space again and these will start playing back in real time. Press space again to stop playback.

TIP

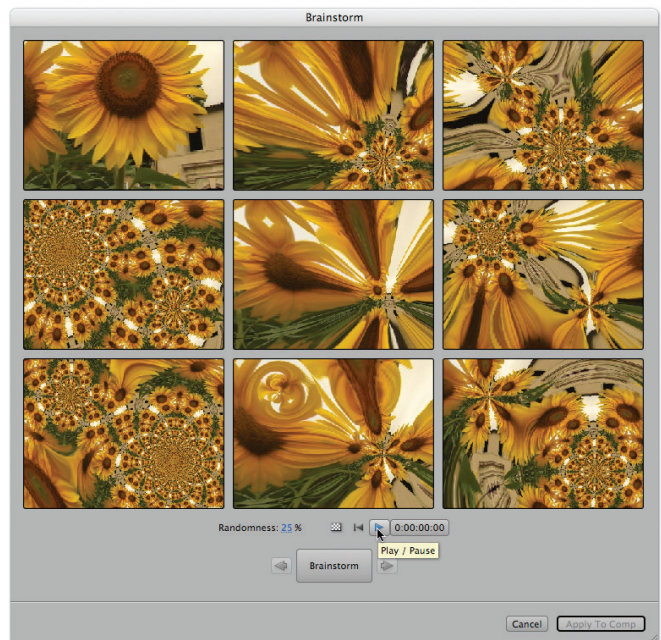
Brainshapes

Brainstorm works particularly well with shape layers and effects. We explore this more in Chapter 30.

FACTOID

Random Masks

Brainstorm cannot randomize a mask path. But it can still create variations on Mask Feather, Opacity, and Expansion.



Step 3: Select the items you want randomized, click the Brainstorm icon in the Timeline panel (above left), and a new window will open showing nine variants on your composition (above). Footage courtesy Kevin Dole.