#### **Study Guide Overview:**

We have designed a variety of tools for students to prepare for the ACA exam. This document is designed to pool all of these tools together in one location so you can share them easily with your students.

#### **Top 10 Exam Tips**

- 1. Read carefully and follow the directions.
- 2. Focus on what you know. If you aren't confident with a task or question, mark it for review and move on.
- 3. Type in values so you are precise and save time. Make sure to hit enter or click off to make sure the value is entered.
- 4. The exam uses hex or RGB numbers so get used to typing these into the color dialog box.
- 5. Don't wait time rendering. If you want to preview an animation, scrub.
- 6. If you have to render, adjust the work area so you only have to render the specific part of the timeline.
- 7. Complete the entire task before clicking "Next"
- 8. Use After Effects for personal projects before taking the exam. This will give you real world practice.
- 9. Study the vocab, tools/buttons icons and panel interface.
- 10. Take the night before the exam off (no studying). Get plenty of rest that night. Each healthy on the exam day and go for a 10-20 minute walk before taking the exam.

#### **Certification Objectives**

All the exams are broken down into five objectives. You can download a pdf of the After Effects objectives at <a href="http://bit.ly/ae-objectives">http://bit.ly/ae-objectives</a>. I will use these objectives to organize the study guide.

## **Objective 1: Working in the Visual Effects and Motion Graphics Industry**

This objective covers critical concepts related to working with colleagues and clients, as well as crucial legal, technical, and design related knowledge.

**1.1 Target Audience:** *"a particular group at which a film, book, advertising campaign, etc., is aimed."* Google For motion graphics artist this means choosing media and animation styles that match the specific audience.

**1.2 Project Plans:** The key terms include *"Pre-production: shot list, script writing, storyboarding, design compositions or sketches, style guides, etc."* Practice using these tools to plan your projects!



**1.3 Copyright, permissions, and Licensing:** Review the following copyright terms, talk about how to get permissions/releases for your actors and locations. *"Creative Commons, public domain, intellectual property, derivative work, commercial use, attribution, work for hire, fair use/fair dealing, etc."* 

Creative Commons Licenses: <u>https://creativecommons.org/licenses/</u> Make sure to review these icons.

$\odot$	Basic Creative Commons: Often combined with the rest of the Icons. Example:
•	Attribution CC By: This license lets others distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon your work, even commercially, as long as they credit you for the original creation. This is the most accommodating of licenses offered. Recommended for maximum dissemination and use of licensed materials.
3	<b>ShareAlike:</b> This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work even for commercial purposes, as long as they credit you and license their new creations under the identical terms. This license is often compared to "copyleft" free and open source software licenses. All new works based on yours will carry the same license, so any derivatives will also allow commercial use. This is the license used by Wikipedia, and is recommended for materials that would benefit from incorporating content from Wikipedia and similarly licensed projects.
	<b>NoDerivs CC by-ND:</b> This license allows for redistribution, commercial and non- commercial, as long as it is passed along unchanged and in whole, with credit to you.
\$	<b>NonCommercial:</b> This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work non-commercially, and although their new works must also acknowledge you and be non-commercial, they don't have to license their derivative works on the same terms.
\$0	<b>NonCommercial-ShareAlike:</b> This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work non-commercially, as long as they credit you and license their new creations under the identical terms.
<b>\$</b> =	<b>NonCommerical-NoDerivs:</b> This license is the most restrictive of our six main licenses, only allowing others to download your works and share them with others as long as they credit you, but they can't change them in any way or use them commercially.



- **1.4 Key Terminology/Tools:** Review the following terms.
  - **Digital Video:** Frame rate, aspect ratio, safe zone, image and video resolution, file formats, video codecs, pixels, rendering, audio sampling rates, etc.
  - Color Management: White balance, color grading vs color correction
  - Audio: Audio levels, wave forms, decibels (how volume is measured), kHz (sampling rate)



- **1.5 VFX and Design Principles:** Review the following terms.
  - Composition: lighting, color, scale and perspective, working in 3D space, rotoscoping, etc.
  - **Design Principles/Guidelines:** space, line, shape, form, color, texture, emphasis/focal point, unity/harmony, variety, balance, alignment, proximity, repetition, rhythm, scale, movement, negative space, gestalt, etc.
  - Animation Principles: easing, squashing, stretching, anticipation, staging, straight-ahead action and pose to pose, follow through and overlapping action, slow in and slow out, arc, secondary action, timing, exaggeration, solid drawing, appeal, etc. \*I bolded the concepts that I really hammer in class.

## **Objective 2: Project Setup and Interface**

This objective covers the interface setup and program settings that assist in an efficient and effective workflow, as well as knowledge about importing digital assets for a project.

**2.1 Composition Settings:** The basic contain for all your animations will be a composition. You should have a solid understanding of how to **create and modify the composition settings**.





**Key Vocabulary:** frame rate, resolution, duration, dimensions, aspect ratio, presets, shutter angle (advanced tab), background color, naming compositions, lock/unlock aspect ratio, etc.



**2.2 Navigate, organize workspace:** This is a key one because it focuses on the interface! You should be familiar with the primary panels and their key buttons, the tools and how to change workspaces. Standard Workspace Overview: These are most of the core panels. You should be able to both identify them and match a definition.



### **Key Panels**

**Menu Bar:** The horizontal bar, located at the top of the screen below the title bar, containing drop-down menus.

**Tools Panel:** The horizontal bar, located at the top of the screen below the menu bar, containing all the tools and options.

**Project Panel:** The panel on the left that contains all your media and compositions. Get in the habit of keeping this organized!

**Timeline:** The panel typically on the bottom that contains all the layer information, modes and switches and keyframe information. **Vertically** it allows you to control the "arrangement" of how the media is stacked on top of each other. **Horizontally** it allows you to control when things happen in time.

**Composition:** The panel typically in the center that contains your visual media and where you will playback your animations.

Effects & Presets: The panel typically on the right that contains all the effects and presets. Learn how to use the "search" box to find things quickly for the exam.

**Effects Control:** This panel is not pictured but usually is nested with the Project Panel. It allows you to adjust effects once they are applied to elements within your composition.



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**Project Panel** 





#### **Composition Panel**

**Magnification:** This allows you to zoom in and out of the composition. I usually use the wheel on my mouse for this. **Grid and Guides:** This allows you to turn on the Title/Action Safe guide.

Mask and Shape Visibility: I usually leave this turned on so I can see the edges of my masks.

Resolution: This allows you to control the resolution of the play back (reduce if playback is choppy)

**Transparency:** This allows you to toggle transparency on and off. If it is on you will see the checked background, when it is off you will see the color you selected as the comp background.



#### **Character Panel**



**Effect Control Panel** 





The Effect Control panel is usually nested with the project panel. If you don't see it you can always open panels from the Window Menu.

**Reset:** This is great if you mess up and want to start over. **Reveal Arrow:** These are all over the After Effects interface. They allow you to reveal more options.

**Values:** Colored numbers indicate values that can be changed. I recommend clicking and typing values for the exam but you can also scrub these.

**Stop Watch:** If you see a stopwatch that means the value can be changed/animated over time.

**Drop Down Menus:** Many of the effect options can be accessed by a drop down menu.

### **Configure Application Preferences**

Mac: Preferences is under the After Effects Menu | PC: Preferences is under the Edit Menu

#### Key Preferences

Auto-save: I advise my kids to set this to "every 5 minutes"

Appearance: Let's you use a dark or light appearance to the interface

Grids & Guides: Let's you change the spacing and color of the grid and guides

Media & Disk Cache, Memory, Previews: These let you control how After Effects will manage the memory and file saving



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#### 2.3 Non-visible Design Tools

Navigation: Here are the essential navigation techniques Panning: Hold spacebar down to get the hand/pan tool Zooming: Use your mouse wheel | Shift + / will fit your view to the comp window Play/Pause: Tap space bar J/K: These jump forward and backward between keyframes Page Up/Down or Ctrl/Cmd + arrows: Move one frame forward or backward ~ (Tilde): Maximize the panel your mouse is over

Ctrl + ' Show/hide grid

#### Safe Margins

The After Effects safe margin guides come with both 4:3 and 16:9 safe guides. Each has a title and action safe margins.



#### 2.4 Import Assets

**Importing Layer Files:** When you import a layered file like Photoshop or Illustrator you need to pay attention to the import dialog options. *\*If you want to animate individual elements of an Illustrator file, make sure they are on their own layers!* 

Adobe Dynamic Link: Files that use dynamic link are embedded in a way that allows you to change one and see these changes reflected in the other document.

**Replace Footage:** If you move or rename a file that you have already imported it will break the link. If you see this icon in the comp or project panel, right click and "Replace footage" **Proxies:** This creates a low res proxy file that will speed up editing and swapped out for rendering.

Image Sequences: This allows you to import timelapse and stop motion sequences!





**Interpreting Footage**: This allows you to override After Effects best guess at setting each file's pixel aspect ratio, frame rate, color profile, and alpha channel type. I often need to do this with stop motion image seq. **Premiere Pro:** You can import all sequences, individual sequences and audio files from a Premiere Pro file.

## **Objective 3: Organizing Video Projects**

#### 3.1 Use the Timeline Mange Layers

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Current Time: This is a critical control especially on the ACA exam. It allows you to move to a specific point in time.
 Zoom bar/Zoom Control: Both of these allow you to zoom in/out of the timeline. I like using the -/+ keys to do this.
 CTI (Current Time Indicator): This shows you were in time you are viewing in the composition panel.
 Work Area: This controls the area that will be rendered. You can also use it to quickly trim your comp.

Marker Button: This allows you to add markers to the timeline. Double click them to edit a marker.

**Toggle Switches/Modes:** This allows you toggle between your switches and modes.



### **Close Up with Important Switches**

### **Close Up with Important Modes**



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**Blend Modes:** This allows you to blend the layer with other layers. You can also right click on the layer to change the blend mode of a layer. **Track Matte:** This is an invisible layer that is used to control the opacity of the layer directly beneath it.



**Close Up Switches** 



### Layer Types

•••	•	#	Layer Name	This is critical to be able to identify the layer type by the		
0	2	1	🖬 Camera 1	symbol. Luckily, most of them make sense!		
0	2	2	Spot Light 1	Adjustment: This is an invisible layer that you can apply an		
0		3	T Text Layer	effect to and it will affect all the layers below it.		
•		4	[Red Solid 1]	<b>Camera:</b> This lets you control the perspective of how the		
0		5	[Null 2]	<b>Light</b> : This allows you to control how light effects elements in		
0	5	6	🛨 Shape Layer 1	vour comp *3D		
•	> 🔳	7	🚦 Photoshop layer	<b>Text:</b> Layer that has text on it		
•	> 🔳	8	🔒 Illustrator layer	<b>Solid:</b> This is a solid color plane but you can apply effects to		
40	2	9	mp3	make them look cool.		
00	2	10	📄 Time	Null: This is an invisible layer that you can apply		
Description	s are	listed	I in the same order as	animation/effects and then parent it to other elements.		
the icons in	this i	mage	રે.	Shape: This is a layer with one or more shapes		
		•		<b>Photoshop:</b> This is a single layer from Photoshop		
*3D These types of layers will only				<b>Illustrator:</b> This is a vector layer from Illustrator		
interact wit	th lay	vers t	hat have the 3D	<b>Mpeg:</b> This is a video clip. Notice how there is a speaker icon		
switch turr	ned o	n!		indicating that it has sound.		

### Layer Tips

**Stacking Order:** Just drag layers up or down to adjust their stacking order. 1 is always the top layer. **Rename:** Select a layer and press "Enter/Return" to rename. You can also right click/Rename **Layer Color:** The little boxes next to the layer stacking number controls the color of the bar in the timeline. Just right click on the little box to change the color.

**Layer Properties:** Clicking the little arrow next to the little colored box will reveal/conceal the layer properties. **Layer Controls:** Make sure you understand the hide/show, mute, solo, lock/unlock controls!



**Selecting Multiple Layers:** Hold Ctrl/Cmd and click on the layers you want to select

**Pre-Composing**: Sometimes your timeline gets really busy so to simplify things you can combine layers into a new (nested) composition using the "Pre-Compose" function by selecting the layers and the right clicking.

**Render Order:** After Effects renders the layers from the bottom to the top.

New composition name:	Pre-comp 1
Move all attributes Use this option to intermediate com	s into the new composition o place the currently selected layers together into a new position.
Adjust composit	tion duration to the time span of the selected layers



### 3.2 Modify Layer Visibility using opacity, blending modes, and masks

**Layer Controls:** Make sure you understand the hide/show, mute, solo, lock/unlock controls!

**Opacity:** This is one of the basic transformation properties (T) and can be animated.

Blend Modes: This can be control in the mode options or right click

### Masking

This is a big part of After Effects. Here are some tips:

Layer/Mask/New Mask: If you want to add a mask that matches the

size of the layer it is easier to do it from the menu.

**Mask Tools**: If you select a layer and then use any of the shape tools or the pen tool you will automatically create a mask for the selected layer.

**Mask Properties:** Get comfortable modifying the mask properties. I often feature a mask to soften the edges.

**Mask Visibility Button:** Make sure that you have the Mask and Shape Path Visibility button turned on.

## Anatomy of a Mask



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	Ma	sks	
	~	Mask 1	Add ~ Inverted
		Ö Mask Path	
		Ö Mask Feather	യ 0.0,0.0 pixels
		Ö Mask Opacity	100 %
		Ö Mask Expansion	0.0 pixels



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## Objective 4: Creating and Modifying Visual Elements

### 4.1 Core Tools and composition

Most of the visual elements in my motion graphics are usually media I import but you can create complex visual elements using tools in After Effects.

### Shape Tips

**Deselect Layers:** To create a shape, make sure no layers are selected so you don't accidentally make a mask!

**Shape Layers:** When you create a shape it automatically makes a shape layer. 1 - Rename this to keep organized 2 - You can have multiple shapes one shape layer (open the layer to reveal them)

**Shape Modifiers:** Holding shift forces the shape to be proportional. Arrows will modify the polygon and star shapes.

**Shape Fill/Stroke:** The fill and stroke properties are on the Tool Bar. Type in color values! Click on the words Fill or Stroke to get more options.

### Fill: 📕 Stroke: 💻 2 px 🛛 Add: 🕑

**Shapes from Vector Layers:** I often convert my vector layers from Illustrator into shape layers. You can do this by right clicking or the Layer menu and then Create/Create Shapes from Vector Layer

**Pen Tool:** This is the most versatile tool for creating complex shapes. Make sure you practice making and modifying shapes and masks with the pen tool.



### Tips on Placing Assets into a Composition

Place Media into Comp: If you want the media centered in the comp, drag it to the timeline instead of the comp window.

**Fit To:** If you want the media to fill the comp, right click and select Transform/Fit to Comp Width or Height (If you select "Fit to Comp" your media will be distorted.

Align Panel: I use this all the time to align center objects in the comp or align multiple elements. If you don't see the Align panel, just go to the Window Menu to pull it up.

## 4.2 Add, manipulate, and animate text

#### **Text Tips**

**Point Vs Paragraph Text:** This is the same in all Adobe applications. Click and drag if you want to create a paragraph area that will automatically wrap. Single click if you want to create a single like of text. **Text on a Path:** You can attach your text to a path and then animate it using the mask path function. **Character Settings:** You should understand font, size, style, kerning, tracking, leading, scale, cap and script options.

**Paragraph Settings:** You should understand alignment, line length and spacing/indenting options.

#### **Animating Text**

**Preset Animations**: this is a great place to start. Try the "Browse Presets" from the Effects & Presets panel options button. This will open previews in Adobe Bridge.

**Transformation Properties:** Of course you can animate text using any of the basic transformation properties. **Text Animators and Selectors:** Reveal the text properties and click on the "Animate" arrow to add a text animator.



## 4.3 Trimming Footage

#### **Trimming Tips**

**Moving:** It is easy to move a layer on the timeline by simply clicking and dragging it right or left **Trimming:** You can either trim a layer with the **in/out points in the footage or layer panels**. You can also trim a layer by clicking and dragging the end of a layer (cursor will turn into a black double headed arrow) **Splitting Layer:** This is a great way to apply different effects or blend modes to a layer at different times. Move the CTI to specific time (use Current Time control to be precise on the exam). Select the layer you want to split and go to the Edit menu to select "Split Layer".

**Lift/Extract:** For those of you familiar with Lift and Extract from Premiere Pro you can use the Work Area and the Edit Menu to perform the same function as in Premiere.

### Layer/Footage Panel



Trimming Footage: If you double click on a video clip in the project panel it will open in the footage panel, where you can trim the clip by setting in/out points. You can also

## 4.4 Modify digital media within a project

#### **Transform Tips**

**Transform Menu:** Right click on layer or the visual element in the comp and select Transform/option to precisely transform. This is the best way to flip something.

**Transform Controls:** Just like the rest of the Adobe applications, use the Selection tool and the control handles to move and resize something. Hold **Shift** to keep things proportional.

Rotate Tool: You can use the rotate tool rotate an object around it's anchor point.

Pan Behind Tool: You can use the Pan Behind tool to change the anchor point.

#### Speed Tips

Time Menu: Right click on layer or go to the Layer Menu and Time to get to the speed/time options.

- Time Stretching: This is when you change the speed to an entire layer. Try the "Timewarp" effect.
- Time Reverse: This is a quick and easy way to reverse video or animation playback!
- Time Remapping: This allows you to use keyframes and easing control the playback speed and direction within a clip.
- Freeze Frames: Freeze the current frame for the duration of the layer

## 4.5 Basic Reconstruction

#### Auto Correction Tools

Stabilization: The "Warp Stabilize" effect is the best way to stabilize shaky footage

**Color:** There are tons of great color effects but my current favorite is the Lumetri Color effect. Go to the Effects/Color Correction/Lumetri Color option to apply it to a video clip.

**Color Correction:** I like using the "Basic Correction" section of the Lumetri Color effect. This is great to fixing white balance and tonal issues like exposure.



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**Color Grading:** I like using the "Creative - Looks" or "Curves" section of the Lumetri Color effect. This is great for giving your clips a specific "Look" or telling your story through color.

## 4.6 Add and modify effects and presets

## **Effects Tips**

Search: Use the search box in the Effects & Presets panel to quickly find an effect.

**Values:** Once you apply an effect to a layer you will need to change some of the properties. Click on the blue numbers to type in the exact values on the exam.

**Stopwatch:** If you see a stopwatch that means you can animate the values. I recommend using the effecs properties down in the timeline instead of the Effect Controls panel when you need to animate a value over time. Select the layer and press "**E**" to reveal the layers effects properties.

## **3D** Tips

**3D Layer Switch:** Make sure to turn on the 3D switch for any layers you want to have a camera or light effect, and if you want to extrude a shape or text.

**2.5 D:** Since After Effects comps may include video clips and other media that can't be extruded these will be 2D but can move through 3D space. Editors usually animate the camera vs animating these elements. **Camera Properties:** The cool thing about using a camera layer is that you can reveal the "Camera Options" in the timeline panel to act/orimete all the camera properties.

the timeline panel to set/animate all the camera properties like zoom, depth of field, focus distance, etc. **3D Controls:** Lights and Camera need to be positioned within 3D space so you will have three controls both in the transformation properties and in the comp window. These are the standard blue, red and green arrows you will see in any 3D program.



## **Composite Tips**

**Keylight:** This is a powerful chroma-key effect that is widely used in the industry. *\*Masking and Mattes have already been covered.* 

## **Adjustment Layer Tips**

**New Adjustment Layer:** Go to the Layer Menu and then New/Adjustment Layer. It will be added directly above which ever layer is selected.

Stacking Order: Adjustment layers all the layers below its stacking order.

Masking: You can add a mask to an adjustment layer so it will only affect area within the mask.



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## 4.7 Create and Modify Keyframes for motion graphics

### **Transformation Tips**

**Transformation Shortcuts:** You will need to access specific transformation properties so often that it well worth learning the shortcut for each transformation. \*see table below

Values: Make sure to type in values on the exam!

Easing: This controls the speed into and out of keyframes.

- Easy ease: ease into and out of keyframe
- Easy ease in: Slows down (decelerates) as it reaches a keyframe (bus pulling into the bus barn)
- Easy ease out: Speeds up (accelerates) as it leaves a keyframe (bus pulling out of the bus barn)

**Motion Paths:** This allows you to control the path of an object as it moves across a composition. **Spatial vs temporal interpolation:** You can control both the speed (temporal) and location (spatial) of a moving object. Right click on a keyframe and select Keyframe Interpolation

#### Working with Keyframes

Shortcut	Action
A - Anchor Point P - Position S - Scale R - Rotation T - Opacity	The Transform Properties Opens the transformation property of the selected layer *Hold shift and click on another one to add that property
Shift+Alt+Transformation letter Mac: Opt+Transformation letter	Opens the transformation property and adds a keyframe
J or K	Jump forward or backward on the keyframes
Hold Alt while dragging multiple keyframes	Adjust timing evenly across all the selected keyframes
U	Reveal keyframes on selected layers
F9	Easy ease

### **Graph Editor**

The graph editor is a powerful interface that allows an editor to fine tune animations using a graph.





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## **Objective 5: Publishing Digital Media**

#### 5.1 Prepare to publish (check for errors!)

Layer Management: Make sure to review your layers to ensure that the correct layers export. Text

- Spelling: There is no spell check in After Effects so carefully proof it.
- Title Safe Area: Make sure all text is within the title safe area

**Resolution:** You can easily check the resolution of a composition by clicking it in the Project panel and looking in the preview area.

#### 5.2 Export digital video to various file formats

**Native File (.aep):** Make sure to save your After Effects file. I recommend keeping your media and After Effects files together so you can easily archive the entire project.

Export Frames: You can easily export an individual frame or a series of still images.

**Photoshop Layers:** Move the CTI to the time you want to export and then go to Composition/Save Frame As/Photoshop Layers

### **Export Composition**

Rendering/exporting your video project into a new video file is the best way to share with a client. There are many ways to do this.

Render Queue: This is a quick way to render a comp.

- Render Settings: Make sure to review the options in this dialog box! This is where you set things like resolution and quality.
- Output Module: This is where you will set the file format and format options
- **Duplication (plus symbol):** This allows you to duplicate the comp in the render queue so you can export multiple versions with different settings.
- **Output To:** This is where you tell After Effects where you want to export to and the file name.

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) c	urrent Render				
Ren	nder 🔖 # Comp Name	Status	Started	Render Time	Comment
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**Premiere Pro Project:** This allows you to create a new Premiere Pro project with the current composition Dynamically linked.

Adobe Media Encoder: This will launch the Adobe Media Encoder and allow you to use all this powerful programs export functionality.

Adobe Dynamic Link: This is a cool way to embed Premiere Pro/After Effects files within each other!



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### **Archive Project**

After Effects will has function that allows you to automatically collect all the media you used in a project and create a new folder that contains a new .aep file and copies of all the media! File/Dependencies/Collect Files

# **Online Study Tools**

### **Quizlet Study Guides:**

My students use Quizlet to study for many of their classes so they asked me to build these study guides for them. Quizlet is a great way for your students to study independently, with a partner or in small groups.

- File Formats Quizlet
- Audio Terms and Tools Quizlet
- <u>Video Terms</u>
- Production Process
- <u>Copyright Quizlet</u>
- <u>Creative Commons Icons</u>
- <u>After Effects Tools</u>
- Layer Types and Controls
- Buttons
- Panels
- <u>Rendering</u>
- Animation Principles
- Workspaces

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Notes:







Notes:





