

Creative Storyboards and Animatics

With RICHARD HARRINGTON



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 adjunct faculty member at The American University, a popular speaker at conferences, and an instructor for Future Media Concepts. He is the author of Photoshop for Video and Broadcast Graphics on the Spot and as well as a moderator for DV Magazine's Photoshop for Video Forum.

If you work in video or film, the storyboard is king when it comes to communicating your vision. In this class you'll learn ways to enhance storyboards in Photoshop such as coloring and shading techniques. You'll then see how to dissect the shots for animation. We'll then move the shots into After Effects where we can work on timing and action (even camera angles). Finally the shots will be edited together and placed on a DVD for the client to view. If you work in advertising, film, or video, then this class is for you.



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The Role of the Storyboard

Storyboards play an essential role in the production of film and television. Storyboards originated at the Walt Disney Studios during the early 1930's. The practice was soon widespread and crossed over into live-action films in the 1940's.

While storyboards share much with the world of comics, they have a language of their own. They serve as a way for a filmmaker or video director to plan the story. They also help to pre-visualize a sequence to help the client or participants understand a scene. Storyboards are extremely popular in the advertising world as they help to convey important information before the expense with shooting is incurred.



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When to Use an Animatic



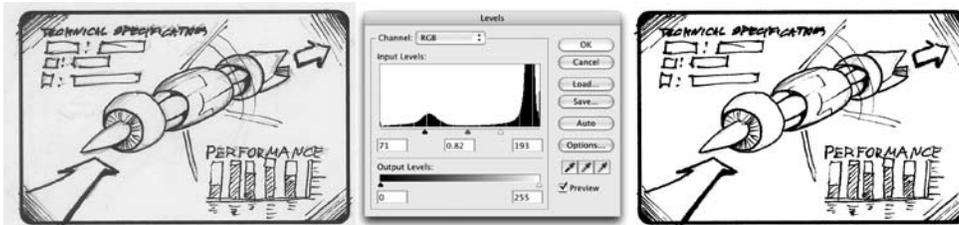
After the storyboard, an animatic may become necessary. Animating the storyboard, as well as editing the panels together with music and dialog can have a better understanding of the scene. Through this process, important details can be discovered about the scene. For example, is the dialog working? Is the pacing right for the scene? Will the commercial spot time out properly?



Creating an animatic is a fairly straightforward process. A storyboard must first be converted into a multilayered Photoshop file. It can then be colored and enhanced in Photoshop. The files can then be imported into Adobe After Effects for basic animation. Once animated, each scene can be rendered as a movie file. These can be edited together in a nonlinear editing package and intercut with music and dialog.

Cleaning up the Drawing

Many storyboards are drawn by hand. Some artists choose to draw them directly into a computer using a tablet such as those made by Wacom. Most artists still draw traditionally using pencil and paper. These scanners will need to be cleaned up in order to work well for video. Very thin lines will tend to flicker on a television set, so you will need to thicken them.



Step 1: Scan your storyboard at size at least 300 ppi.

Step 2: Add a Levels Adjustment Layer (Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Levels).

Step 3: Adjust the Black and White Input sliders to restore proper contrast to the image.

Step 4: Click OK to apply the adjustment layer. When satisfied, flatten the file to permanently apply the adjustment.

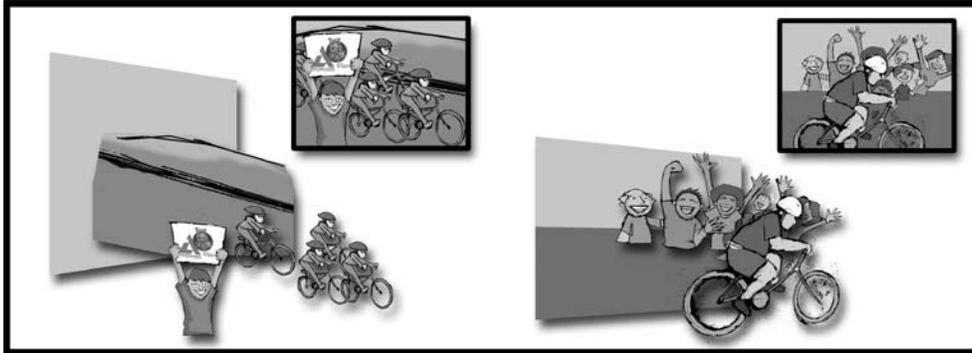
notes

Creative Storyboards and Animatics

With RICHARD HARRINGTON

Prepping the File for Animation

When first sketched, your storyboard will likely be a flattened file. This will need to be turned into a series of layered PSD files. This can be achieved through selectively duplicating and cloning parts of the image.



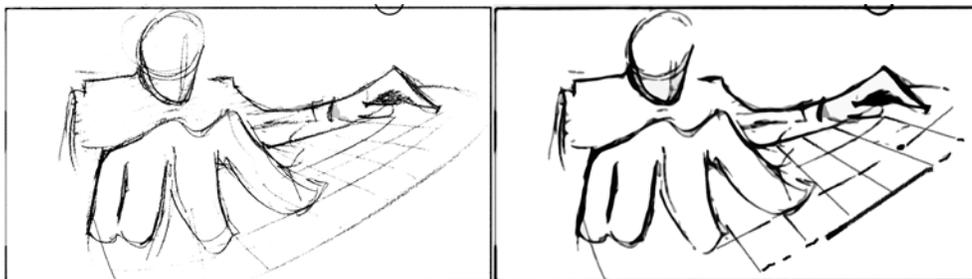
Step 1: Crop the first panel of the storyboard and Save and name the file.

Step 2: Undo the Crop and repeat for the additional panels of the page.

Step 3: Analyze each panel to determine motion in the slide. If you did not draw the elements as distinct drawings, you will need to break the graphic into separate pieces.

- Try using the pen tool or magnetic lasso to make accurate selections.
- After making a selection you can press Cmd+J (Ctrl+J) to copy the object onto a new layer.
- You may need to use the Clone Stamp tool to fill in missing items after performing a copy.
- For best results, isolate storyboard elements as separate drawings and re-composite them within Photoshop.

Enhancing the Storyboard with Line



The panels of your storyboard can be enhanced within Photoshop. To thicken the lines in your drawing, harness Photoshop's flexible Brush engine. By enabling options such as Scattering, Texture, and Wet Edges, realistic strokes can be created. You'll also find useful brush presets that will work. The Dry Media Brushes and Thick Heavy Brushes are particularly well suited. It is also a good idea to isolate each brush stroke to its own layer when drawing. This will preserve initial flexibility. These several strokes can then be merged when you are satisfied with the effect.

Another approach is to slightly blur the line drawing. You can then run a Levels adjustment and pull the Black Input Slider to the right to thicken the line. You should then experiment with

notes

Creative Storyboards and Animatics

With RICHARD HARRINGTON

the Artistic and Brush Stroke Filters to enhance the lines.

Enhancing the Storyboard with Color and Gradients

Video has difficulty dealing with high-contrast ratios. Proper use of gradients exploits video's greatest weakness. A gradient is a gradual blend between two or more colors. These gradual transitions work very well on video, even after duplication to lower-quality consumer tape stock or being broadcast.

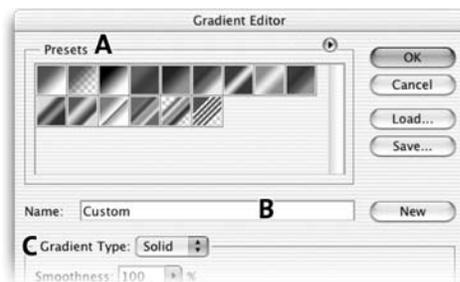
Gradient Editor

All gradients are edited using the common Gradient Editor. To access it, click on the thumbnail of the gradient that is loaded in the pop-up window or the Options bar.

Presets (A) You have several presets to choose from. If you want to load additional preset gradients, access them from the submenu (triangle icon). You can choose to replace the existing gradients, or append (add-on) to the loaded gradients. You can also load gradients that live outside the presets folder by clicking the Load button. There are several gradients available online, as well as with this book's DVD. You can also choose to save your own creations. The best place to store them is inside your Presets Folder (Application Folder>Presets>Gradients). This way they will appear in the submenu for faster loading.

Name (B) For ease of recall, gradients can be named. If you are having a particularly boring day, express yourself here.

Type (C) There are two gradients to choose from: Solid and Noise. Solid gradients involve color and opacity stops, with gradual blends in between. Noise gradients contain randomly distributed colors within a specified range. Each has a different interface and will be discussed separately.



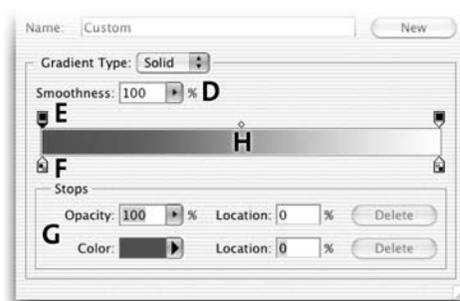
Solid Editor

Smoothness (D) Controls the rate at which colors blend into each other. It can be gradual or steep.

Opacity stops (E) Gradients can contain blends between opacity values as well. To add another stop, click in an empty area on the top of the gradient spectrum. To adjust a stop, click on it, and then modify the opacity field.

Color stops (F) The simplest gradients contain only two colors, but who said clients were simple? Often you may choose to use several colors (or even repeat colors) to achieve a desired effect. Double-click on the color stop to access the Adobe Color Picker.

Stop Editor (G) Selected gradient stops can be adjusted numerically. You can edit the opacity, color, and location (0–100%, read left to right.)



notes

Creative Storyboards and Animatics

With RICHARD HARRINGTON

Midpoint (H) Between stops are midpoints. By default, the midpoint is halfway between two stops. However, it wouldn't be Photoshop if you couldn't tweak it.

Noise Editor

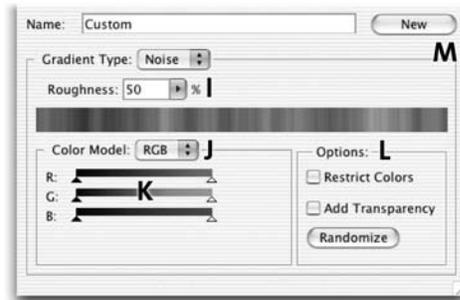
Roughness (I) Noise gradients use a roughness setting to determine how many different colors are used to create noise. Use the , (comma) and . (period) keys to cycle through your gradient presets.

Color Model (J) You can choose between three models: Red-Green-Blue, Hue-Saturation-Brightness, or L*a*b.

Color Range Sliders (K) Adjust the range of colors available to the gradient.

Options (L) You can choose to restrict colors (which has no apparent affect for broadcast safe colors). You can also introduce random transparency. To create a new gradient, click on the Randomize button. Every time you click, a new gradient will be generated.

New Button (M) To add a gradient to the Presets window, type a name into the name field. Click the New button, and an icon will be added in the Presets window. This new gradient is not yet permanently saved, but stored temporarily in the Preferences file. If this file is deleted or damaged, or if you change presets, the new gradient set will be lost. You must click the Save button and navigate to the desired folder. Be sure to append the file name with .grd to inform Photoshop that it is a gradient set.



Gradient Tool

The Gradient Tool can be used to manually draw gradients on a layer. To access the Gradient Tool, select it from the toolbar, or press G. The Paint Bucket shares the same well as the Gradient Tool, so if you can't find the Gradient Tool, press Shift+G to cycle through your tools.

The Gradient Tool can use any gradient created from the gradient editor or from the Presets menu. To select a gradient, choose from the available ones in the Options bar. You can also load preset libraries or manually load gradients by accessing the palette's submenu. To access the gradient editor, double-click a Gradient icon.

You now must choose between five options to build your gradient:

Linear gradient (A) Shades from the starting point to the ending point in a straight line.

Radial gradient (B) Shades from the starting point to the ending point in a circular pattern.



notes

Creative Storyboards and Animatics

With RICHARD HARRINGTON

Angle gradient (C) Draws the gradient in a counterclockwise sweep from the starting point.



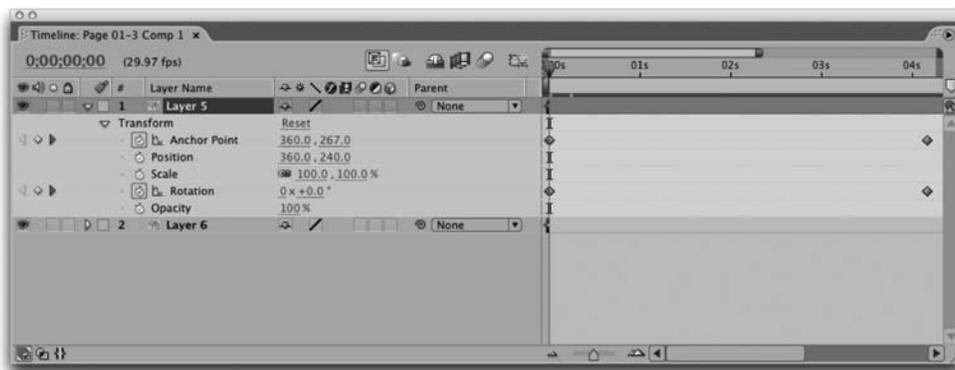
Reflected gradient (D) Draws a linear gradient symmetrically on both sides of the starting point.



Diamond gradient (E) Draws the gradient in a diamond-shaped pattern outward from the starting point.

Essential Animation Principles in AE

When creating the animatic remember that you don't just show the pictures, static and full-screen? Rather you are recreating the camera angles and movement that may be in the final production. This will require all of the important parties in the production to collaborate. In order to create motion within the animatic, you will need to harness the five animation properties of After Effects.



- **Anchor Point** – This is the point at which the object rotates or scales. You will often need to adjust the anchor point of the object and move it to a more 'natural' rotation point (such as the waist, a joint, a hinge, etc.). The easiest way to adjust Anchor Point is with the Pan Behind tool.
- **Position** – This is where the object is located along the X, Y, or Z-axis.
- **Scale** – This is the size of the object on the screen. Remember, scaling an object larger than 100% will create pixelization in raster objects.
- **Rotation** – An object can be rotated around its anchor point. It can also be rotated along its X, Y, or Z-axis.
- **Opacity** – The lower an object's opacity, the more you can see through it.

Step 1: Import your layered PSD files into After Effects as a Composition. You can then double-click on the Composition icon to open it and see all of the layers to animate.

Step 2: Adjust the size of the composition by pressing Cmd+K (Ctrl+K). Choose a document preset that matches your output format (NTSC DV for example will also work for DVD output). Set the duration to match your needs, plus add a little pad. After Effects will correctly interpret your Photoshop files as square pixels, unless you've sized them to a standard video size.

notes

Creative Storyboards and Animatics

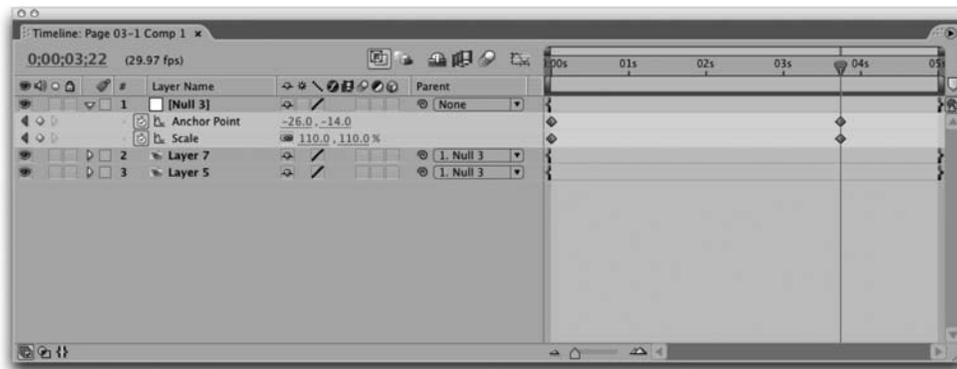
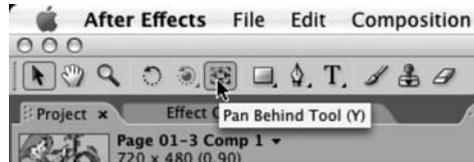
With RICHARD HARRINGTON

Step 3: Adjust the Anchor Point of each layer using the Pan Behind tool (Y). Drag each Anchor Point to a natural origin for Rotation.

Step 4: Twirl the disclosure triangle down next to the Layer's name. Then click again next to the Transform category to see all 5 animation properties.

Enable the stopwatch for any property that you want to keyframe. You must add two keyframes to any property that you want to animate.

Step 5: Add keyframes for the initial position of the layer. Move the Current Time Indicator to the end of the short (determined by the script or director) and adjust the ending position.



Step 6: If you will want to simulate a zoom, press S for Scale to access the scaling controls. Do not enlarge your image beyond 100 percent for best results. You can also add Rotation keyframes (R), if that is desired. In order to scale all of the layers in unison add a new Null Object to the composition. All of the layers can be parented to the Null Object (via the parent Column). Then scale the null to affect of the dependant layers.

Step 7: (Optional) Use your animation assistants to add Ease on the rotation and anchor point key frames. If you own the production bundle, click on the word Scale to highlight both key frames. From under the key frame assistants, choose Exponential Scale. This powerful assistant will accurately simulate the ballistics of a camera zoom.

Step 8: Double-check that your quality switches are all set to Best and add your comp to the render queue. When all shots are loaded, click Render.

Creative Storyboards and Animatics

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Is there More?

Yes.... I can't teach you all of the intricacies of editing and DVD authoring in a workbook handout. But these topics are well covered by several authors and resource sites. All you need to do to finish the animatic is important you're rendered footage and combine it with a "temp" or "scratch track," read of the narration and music. When the edit is complete, you can then export a self-contained movie and bring it into your DVD authoring application to create a DVD.

Be sure to check out Rich's websites and podcasts for more resources:

- Raster|Vector Blog: <http://www.rastervector.com>
- Photoshop for Video: <http://www.photoshopforvideo.com>
- RHED Pixel: <http://www.RHEDPixel.com>
- Photoshop for Video podcast
- Understanding Adobe Photoshop podcast
- Final Cut Help podcast
- Photoshop CS3 Sneak Peek podcast

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