

Introduction to Adobe After Effects

Ashley Hall & Helena Moore



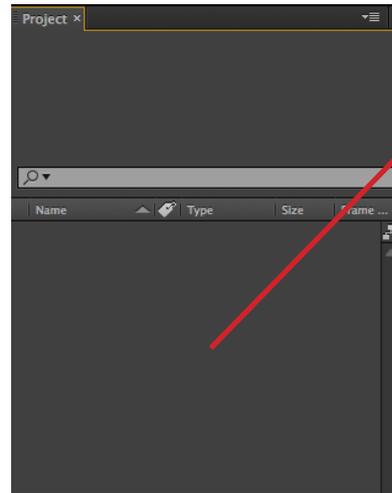
How to... Freeze Time

Step 1

Import your footage into After Effects.

You can do this three different ways:

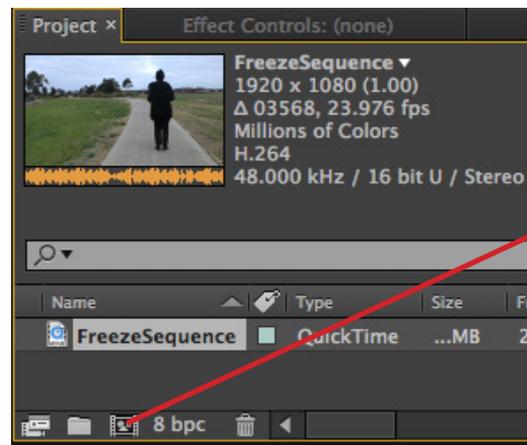
1. Via File > Import.
2. Double-click on the 'Project' window.
3. Drag the file into After Effects and drop it onto the 'Project' window.



Step 2

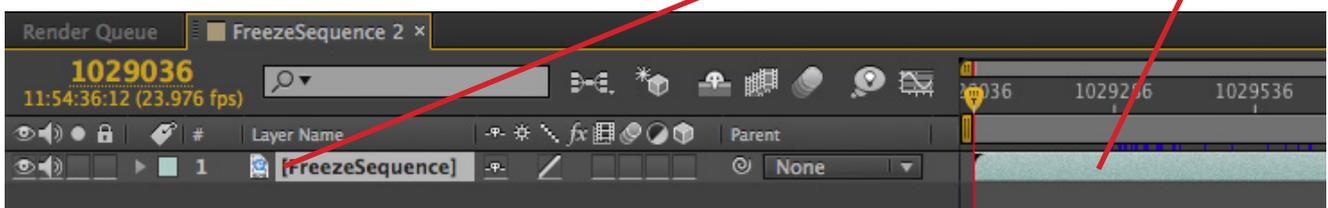
Your file should now be visible in the 'Project' window.

Select the video file and drag it over the small film icon at the bottom of the 'Project' window to 'Create a New Composition'. You should see it appear as a layer in the composition window (bottom left of screen) and the timeline (across the bottom of the screen).



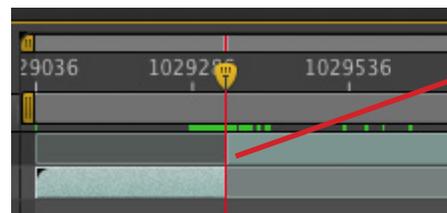
Layer

Timeline



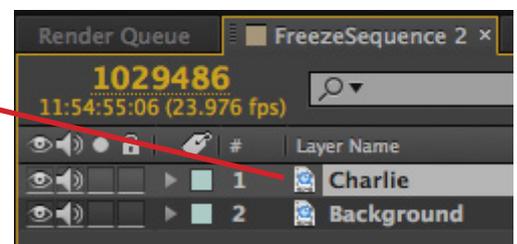
Step 3

Scroll along the timeline until you reach the point at which you want to freeze time. Split the clip at this point to create two separate layers (shift + cmd + d).



You should now have one layer which is your footage up until the freeze and a second layer which is the footage that will overlap. Right click layers to rename them.

Rename each layer



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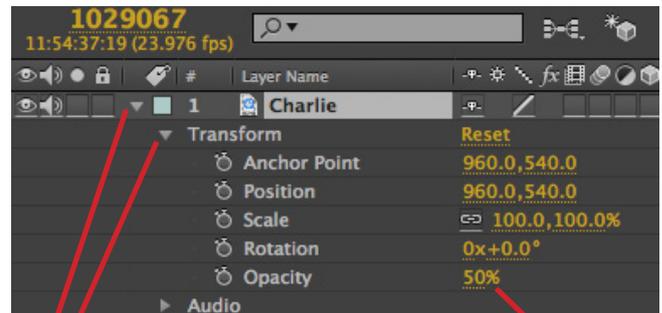


Step 4

Drag the top layer so that it overlaps with the background layer. Then use the triangle toggles to open up the layer and 'Transform' options.

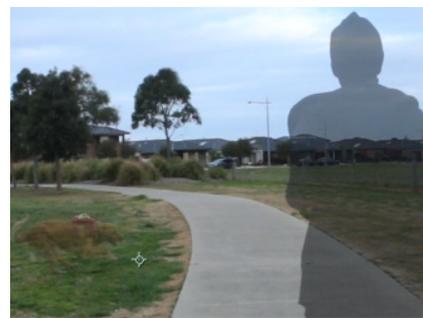
Change the opacity of the top layer by either clicking on the yellow percentage and typing, or clicking and holding on the yellow percentage and dragging the mouse left or right.

So that both layers can be seen at the same time, set the top layer's opacity to 50%, allowing the background layer to be seen underneath.



Toggles

Change opacity



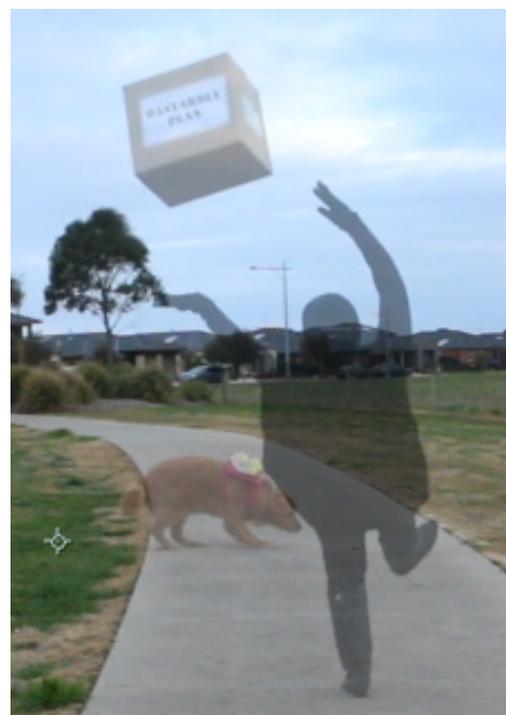
Background layer is now visible under top layer

Step 5

Drag the played along the timeline until you reach the spot that you want to freeze. Then shuffle (drag) the position of the top layer so that you can see where overlaps will occur.

This is so that when the time freeze is created, there aren't any objects or limbs blocking important parts of the other footage (e.g. you don't want to freeze a box in the exact position that will block another character's face).

In this example, I want the box to freeze up in the air, so there's no risk of blocking anything of importance.



The only overlap will be when Charlie moves behind me, which is what is supposed to happen. The box doesn't pose an issue at that height.

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Step 6

And now, to quote Arnold Schwarzenegger in his greatest acting role to date, “a freeze is coming”.

With the background layer selected, move the playhead to the point at which you want to freeze time.

I have toggled on the ‘Solo’ option on the background layer by pressing the empty box underneath the dot icon on the left of the layers panel. This is basically a quick way to hide everything else while you work on a particular layer.

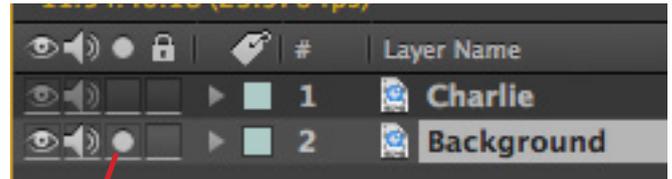
Right-click the footage on the timeline to open a menu. Under the ‘Time’ option (6th from top) select ‘Enable Time Remapping’. You will see that a ‘Time Remap’ property has appeared under the background layer and is already toggled ‘on’ (the stopwatch icon already has a line in it). A keyframe will have been added at the beginning of the background footage on the timeline.

The playhead should still be sitting at the freeze point, so click the diamond to the far left of the layer to add a second keyframe. Then press ‘page down’ to move the playhead one frame along the timeline and add a third keyframe.

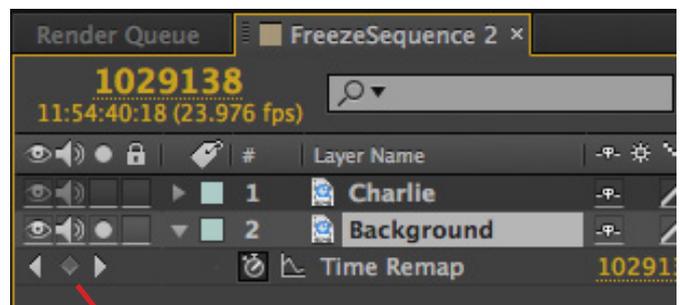
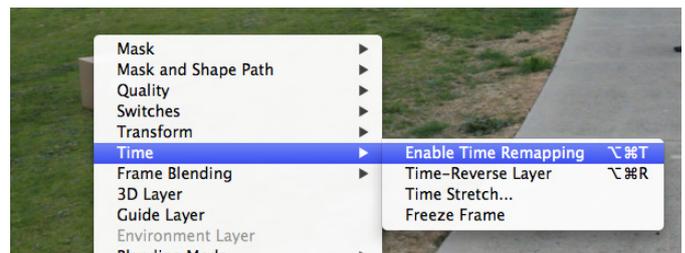
Finally, move the playhead to the end of the background footage and add a fourth keyframe.



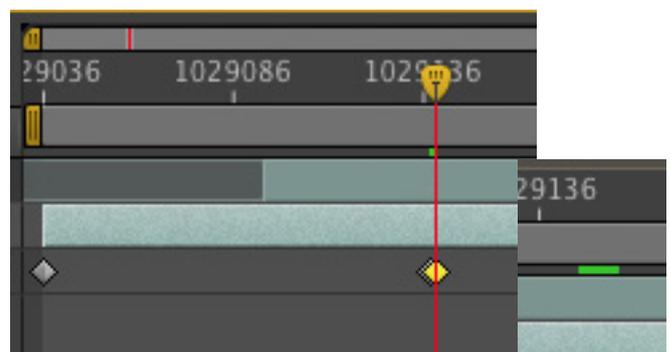
Right-click here.
Come on. Do it.



Solo... no relation to Han



Click to add keyframe



Keyframes 1, 2 and 3...

Close-up of keyframes 2 and 3, only one frame apart

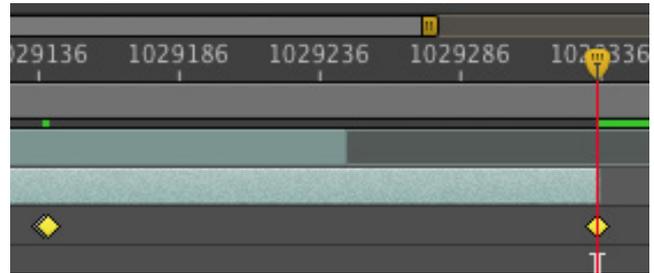
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Step 7

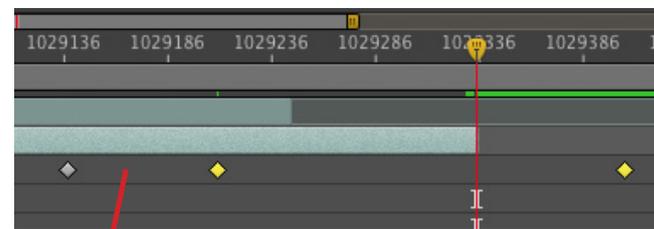
Select keyframe 3 (click on the diamond in the timeline, directly under the footage), hold shift, then select keyframe 4. Both keyframe diamond should turn yellow to indicate that they have been selected.



Keyframes 3 and 4 selected...

Click and hold one of the keyframes and then drag it across to the right. Both keyframes should move together. Click and drag the end of the background footage to extend the clip out until the final keyframe.

...and moved together



Frozen section... just let it go...

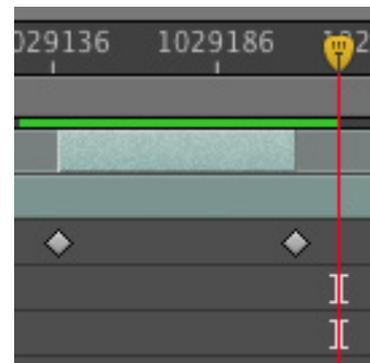
The gap that has now been created between keyframes 2 and 3 is your area of frozen time, which you will see now if you drag the playhead across it.

Step 8

Toggle the 'Solo' option again to make both layers of footage visible. Then move the playhead to the beginning of the time freeze (keyframe 2).

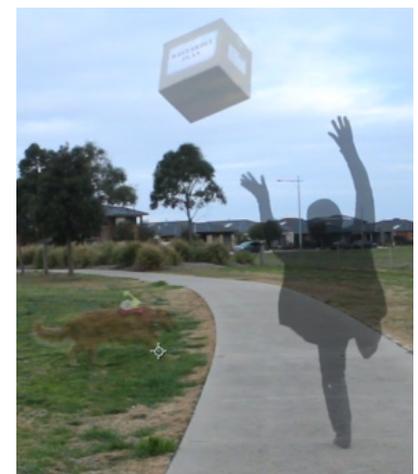
Drag the top layer of footage so that it begins when the time freeze does. Move the playhead to the end of the time freeze (keyframe 3). Click and drag the end of the top layer of footage to trim the clip so that it only plays for the duration of the frozen time.

Depending on the duration of your moving footage, you may need to extend the length of the time freeze - do this by selecting and then moving keyframes 3 and 4 together as before.



The top layer of footage is now exactly the length of the time freeze occurring between keyframes 2 and 3

In this example, Charlie begins to run across the screen as soon as I freeze. The freeze ends when he reaches me.



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Step 9

Now we need to create a mask to essentially 'cut-out' the footage surrounding the frozen image. This will leave only the frozen image visible, so that all the other footage behind it can be seen, even at full opacity.

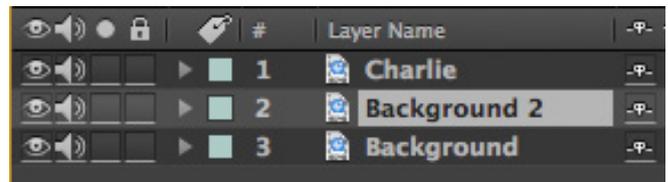
First, select the background layer and duplicate it (cmd + d). Right-click the duplicated layer to rename it as 'foreground' and then drag it upwards so that it becomes the top layer. Because this layer is at 100% opacity it will hide everything else underneath.

You should now have three layers: the foreground, the middle (footage that will move behind the frozen image) and the background.

Select the 'foreground' layer and then press the '~' key (next to '1') to make the footage full-screen. Zoom in and out of the footage by pressing 'cmd +' or 'cmd -'. Select the 'Pen' tool by pressing 'g' or by selecting it from the row of tools across the top of the screen (look for the pen icon).

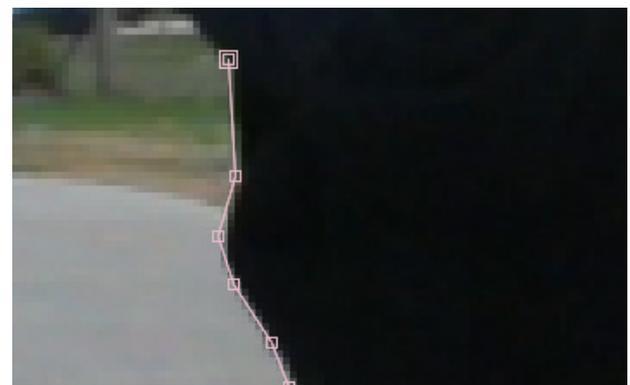
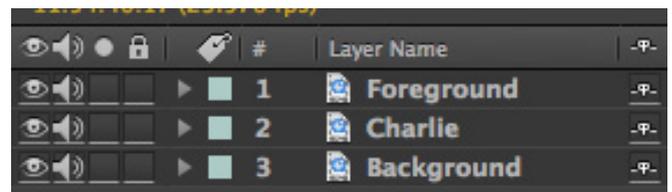
Use the pen to progressively click around the outline of the frozen image.

Once the entire image has been outlined, click '~' to exit full-screen. You will now be able to see the frozen foreground image at 100% capacity with the rest of the layers also visible around/underneath it.



Duplicated layer...

... renamed and moved to the top



Outlining with the pen tool



Bottom/background and middle layers of footage visible with cut-out of frozen image at 100% opacity over the top

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Step 10

Drag the playhead to the beginning of the time freeze (keyframe 2) and trim (drag) the start of the foreground layer so that it begins in the same place. Do the same for the end of the time freeze.

The frozen foreground figure should now run for the exact duration of the the frozen time period.

Bring the opacity of the middle layer back up to 100%. We're almost done!



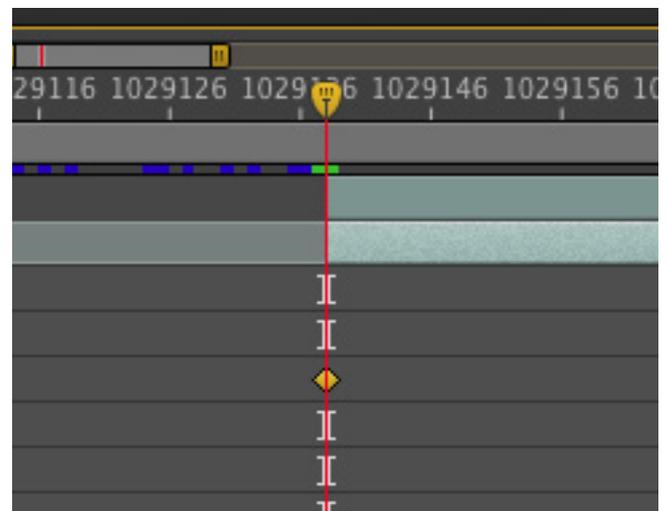
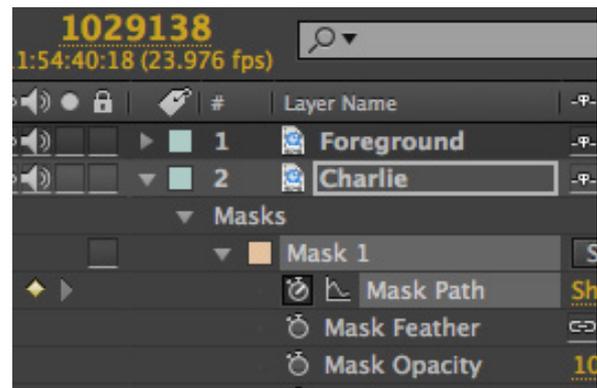
Step 11

The last step is to create a mask around the moving image in the middle layer, so that the background layer essentially becomes a plate shot for the sequence.

Move the playhead back to the first moment when the overlapping movement appears - in this example, it's when Charlie first enters the frame.

With the middle layer selected, use the 'Rectangle Tool' (Q) located at the top of the screen to roughly select the area around the figure (i.e. Charlie).

Toggle to open up the middle layer, then under 'Masks' > 'Mask 1' click the stopwatch to turn on 'Mask Path'. A keyframe will be created under the playhead and the rectangle will now work as a mask to isolate the figure. It's essentially the same technique used to isolate the frozen figure, but this time we don't have to be as neat!



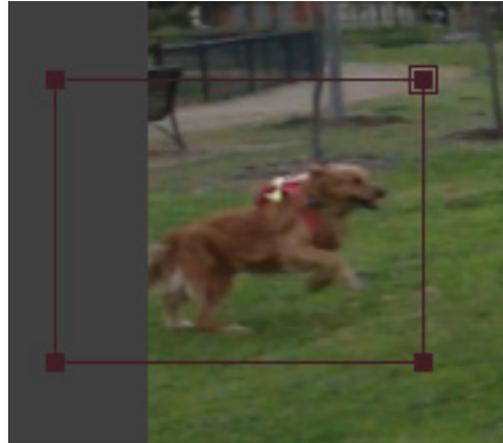
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Step 11

Press 'V' to switch back to the 'Selection Tool' and then scroll the playhead gradually along the sequence until the figure has moved outside the rectangle. Click and hold the rectangle in the corner of the shape (the cursor should change to a black pointer, rather than a white one) to drag it across the figure again. If the shape isn't dragging properly, try selecting the specific mask layer first.



Each time the rectangle is moved, a new keyframe will be added in the timeline.

Repeat until the figure has moved all the way across the screen.

Your time freeze is now complete, so just sit back and marvel at your brilliance!

