

Exercise Booklet

Ten hands-on drills — one per skill class. Each rehearses the full skill of the week (both halves of its summer pair) so its project deliverable comes easily. Paired to the 16-week Fall roadmap.

10

EXERCISES

5

PROJECTS

~45

MIN EACH

1

PER SKILL

One exercise per skill lecture, with a whole week to build on it. Each ladders into that project's milestone. Week 14 is Thanksgiving break — no class.

Before You Start — File Naming

Use one consistent name for every exercise so projects, renders and versions stay organized and easy to grade.

LastName_Ex##_ProjectName.aep

LastName — yours

Ex## — two digits (01–10)

ProjectName — PascalCase

The rules

- Name the first composition `Main` in every project.
- Save the project as `Pittman_Ex01_MoveAndFeel.aep` (example for Exercise 01).
- Render the movie with the same base name: `Pittman_Ex01_MoveAndFeel.mov` (or `.mp4` via Media Encoder).
- For saved versions, append a numeric suffix: `Pittman_Ex01_MoveAndFeel_001.aep` (and likewise for renders).

Contents

Project 1 Kinetic Typography Quote

Ex 01	Move It, Feel It	Week 1 · Keyframes
Ex 02	Reveal & Animate Type	Week 2 · Text Animation

Project 2 Cinematic Reveal

Ex 03	Cut & Reveal	Week 4 · Masking
Ex 04	Correct, Then Grade	Week 5 · Color Correction

Project 3 Composite Shot

Ex 05	Composite the Key	Week 7 · Compositing / Keying
Ex 06	Through the Type	Week 8 · Track Mattes

Project 4 Tracked 3D Title

Ex 07	Depth & Light	Week 10 · 3D Layers
Ex 08	Lock & Match-Move	Week 11 · Motion Tracking

Project 5 Motion Reel + Brand Spot

Ex 09	Roto & Occlude	Week 13 · Rotoscoping
Ex 10	Wiggle, Loop & Rig	Week 15 · Expressions

Rendering Your Movie

Two ways to export. For final output, use **QuickTime · H.264**. Always name the render to match its project (see the naming page).

From After Effects — Render Queue

1. Composition ► Add to Render Queue (**Ctrl/Cmd + M**).
2. Click **Render Settings**: Quality = Best, Resolution = **Full**, Time Span = **Length of Comp** (or **Work Area Only** for a section).
3. Click **Output Module**: Format = **QuickTime**; Format Options ► Video Codec = **H.264**.
4. Click **Output To** and name the file `LastName_Ex##_ProjectName.mov` inside your project folder.
5. Click **Render**.

From Adobe Media Encoder

1. Composition ► Add to Adobe Media Encoder Queue (AME opens with your comp).
2. Set **Format**: QuickTime for an H.264 `.mov` (or H.264 for an `.mp4`).
3. Set **Preset**: pick a **YouTube** or **Vimeo** preset (e.g., “YouTube 1080p Full HD”) for upload-ready settings.
4. Click the blue **Output File** name and save it per the naming convention.
5. Click the green **Start Queue** (play) button.

Work area · resolution · range

- **Work Area vs. entire comp**: set the work-area start with **B** and the end with **N** (the bar atop the timeline). In Render Settings, **Time Span** chooses **Work Area Only** vs. **Length of Comp** — render the whole comp for these exercises unless you only need a short section.
- **Full resolution**: set Render Settings ► Resolution = **Full** for every final render, and drop to a lower resolution only when you need a faster test preview.
- **Range in Media Encoder**: AME uses the comp's work area for the range, so expand the work area to full (or drag the in/out points on the source in AME) before you export.
- **Preferred final format**: QuickTime · H.264 for handoff and grading; the YouTube / Vimeo presets also output H.264 as an `.mp4` already sized for upload.

PRACTICE GOAL Touch all five transform properties in an on/travel/off animation, then make it feel good with easing, anticipation, follow-through and the Graph Editor.

SET UP New project. No external assets.

- 1 New composition, 1920×1080, 30 fps, 10 s; name it **Main**.
- 2 Draw a shape layer (rounded rectangle or star); rename it “Card”; center its anchor point (Layer ► Transform ► Center Anchor Point in Layer Content). Reveal P / S / R / T.
- 3 **Animate on (0–1 s)**: at 0:00 set Position off-screen left, Scale 50%, Rotation –15°, Opacity 0% (stopwatch all four); at 1:00 set center, 100%, 0°, 100% — all five transform properties in play.
- 4 **On-screen journey (1–9 s)**: keyframe a path that stays in frame — e.g., 3:00 up-right at Scale 115%, 5:00 down-left at Rotation 20°, 7:00 drifting back, 9:00 settled at center.
- 5 **Exit (9–10 s)**: at 9:00 (center) → 10:00 slide off-screen right and Opacity 0%.
- 6 Select all keyframes and apply Easy Ease (F9); preview — note where the motion still dead-stops.
- 7 Open the Graph Editor and smooth the 1–9 s journey so it flows continuously instead of stopping at each waypoint.
- 8 Add **anticipation** to the entrance: a small keyframe just before the entrance move that nudges the card the opposite way first (a windup).
- 9 Add **follow-through** to the exit: let the card overshoot slightly past its target, then settle back.
- 10 Switch to the Speed Graph and shape the velocity so the fast parts are fast and the ends ease; remove any divots.
- 11 Press U to reveal all keyframes; verify the three phases (on 0–1, journey 1–9, exit 9–10).
- 12 RAM-preview the full 10 s, then **save & render** (see naming page). Versions: `_001` , `_002` ...

FREE TUTORIALS & REFERENCES

[Jake In Motion – AE Beginners Tutorial 2025](#)

[Jake Bartlett – How To Use the Graph Editor](#)

[Adobe Help – Animation Basics](#)

DONE WHEN

The card animates on with all five transform properties, travels while on-screen, and exits — with easing, an anticipation windup and an overshoot/settle smoothed in the Graph Editor.

FILES

`Pittman_Ex01_MoveAndFeel.aep` → render `Pittman_Ex01_MoveAndFeel.mov` · versions
`Pittman_Ex01_MoveAndFeel_001.aep`

PRACTICE GOAL Create and style a title, reveal it and inspect a preset, then animate per-character with a Text Animator + Range Selector, timed to a beat.

SET UP New project. No external assets.

- 1 New composition, 1920×1080, 30 fps, ~6 s; name it **Main**.
- 2 With the Type tool, create a text layer — a short title (e.g., a name or “MOTION”).
- 3 In the Character panel set font, size, tracking and fill color; in the Paragraph panel center-align and place it in frame.
- 4 **Simple reveal:** animate Opacity 0 → 100 over ~0.5 s plus Position sliding up ~30 px into place; Easy Ease both.
- 5 Reveal Source Text, set a Source-Text keyframe, and change the word later in the timeline to see a text swap.
- 6 Open Effects & Presets ► Animation Presets ► Text and apply one (a character fade-up or typewriter); press U and retime its keyframes to ~1 s.
- 7 Now build a per-character animation: on a new (or duplicate) text layer, click **Animate ► Position** to add a Text Animator with a Range Selector; set the Position offset (e.g., Y = -100).
- 8 Keyframe the Range Selector's **Offset** across the word so characters animate in sequence.
- 9 Add a second property to the same animator (Animate ► Opacity = 0%) so each character fades as it moves.
- 10 Open the Range Selector's Advanced options; set Shape to “Ramp Up” and raise Ease High/Low for smoother motion.
- 11 Time the Offset keyframes so the word lands on a beat (~1 s); Easy Ease them.
- 12 Optional: draw a rectangle mask on the text layer and keyframe Mask Path to wipe the word on (a light intro to masking).
- 13 Press U to review keyframes; refine spacing/timing, add a short readable hold, then **save & render**.

FREE TUTORIALS & REFERENCES

[Fun Kinetic Typography Animation](#)
[Kinetic Typography #5 \(no plugins\)](#)
[Adobe Help – Animation Basics](#)

DONE WHEN

A styled title reveals cleanly, one preset is inspected, and a word animates on per-character with eased, beat-timed motion.

FILES

Pittman_Ex02_RevealAnimateType.aep → render Pittman_Ex02_RevealAnimateType.mov · versions
Pittman_Ex02_RevealAnimateType_001.aep

PRACTICE GOAL Draw and combine masks (modes, feather, expansion, opacity), then animate a Mask Path wipe-on reveal.

SET UP New project. Solids work fine; plus a short word/title to reveal.

- 1 New composition, 1920×1080, 30 fps, 5 s; name it **Main**.
- 2 Add a dark full-frame solid (background); above it add a bright/colorful solid (or a photo) named “Reveal.”
- 3 Select “Reveal”; with the Pen tool, click points to draw one closed mask (a rough oval) — only the inside shows.
- 4 Press M for Mask Path; draw a second overlapping mask on the same layer.
- 5 Change the second mask's **Mode** between Add, Subtract and Intersect — watch how the two combine.
- 6 Press F for Mask Feather (≈ 60 px); press MM and adjust Mask Expansion and Mask Opacity (≈ 70%); toggle “Inverted” to compare.
- 7 Now animate a reveal: add a text layer with a short word, and with the Rectangle/Pen tool draw a mask that fully covers it.
- 8 Press M; at 1:00 set a Mask Path keyframe with the mask covering the word.
- 9 Go to 0:00 and drag the mask's edge past the start of the word so nothing shows — a left → right **wipe-on**.
- 10 Easy Ease both Mask Path keyframes (F9) and add a little Mask Feather so the wipe edge is soft.
- 11 Optional write-on: apply Effect ► Generate ► Stroke to a mask path and check “Paint on Transparent” for a drawn-line look.
- 12 Press U to verify all mask keyframes; add a readable hold, then **save & render**.

FREE TUTORIALS & REFERENCES

[Cinecom – Complete Beginner's Guide to Masking](#)
[How to Mask in After Effects](#)
[Dansky – Beginner's Guide to Masking](#)

DONE WHEN

Two masks combine via different modes (with feather, expansion and opacity), and a title wipes on via an animated, feathered Mask Path.

FILES

Pittman_Ex03_CutAndReveal.aep → render Pittman_Ex03_CutAndReveal.mov · versions
Pittman_Ex03_CutAndReveal_001.aep

PRACTICE GOAL Balance a shot on an adjustment layer reading the scopes, then build a cohesive look (HSL secondary + vignette) and match a second shot.

SET UP New project. One flat/under- or over-exposed clip or photo (free from Pexels/Pixabay), plus a second clip to match.

- 1 New composition from the footage (or 1920×1080, 30 fps); name it **Main** and add the footage.
- 2 Add an Adjustment Layer above it (Layer ► New ► Adjustment Layer) and apply Effect ► Color Correction ► Lumetri Color.
- 3 Open Window ► Lumetri Scopes; set it to Waveform (or Parade) to read levels objectively.
- 4 In Lumetri ► Basic Correction set White Balance (WB eyedropper on a neutral, or Temperature/Tint).
- 5 Adjust Exposure and Contrast so the waveform spreads from near-black to near-white without clipping; recover with Highlights/Shadows/Whites/Blacks.
- 6 Toggle the effect on/off to compare — neutrals/skin should look natural with no hard clipping.
- 7 Now **grade**: in Lumetri ► Creative choose a Look/LUT and dial Intensity to taste.
- 8 Use the Color Wheels (Shadows/Midtones/Highlights) to split-tone — e.g., cool shadows, warm highlights.
- 9 Open HSL Secondary; key one color (sky, a shirt) and shift only that range; refine the key (Denoise/Blur) so it's clean.
- 10 Add a Vignette (Lumetri ► Vignette) to draw the eye inward.
- 11 Bring in a second clip/photo; copy the Lumetri effect (or the whole adjustment layer) onto it and tweak to match; confirm both sit at similar levels on the scopes.
- 12 Toggle before/after (not crushed or over-saturated), then **save & render**.

FREE TUTORIALS & REFERENCES

[How To Color Correct In After Effects](#)

[Cinematic Color Grade](#)

[Adobe Help – Color Correction effects](#)

DONE WHEN

The shot is balanced (WB, exposure, contrast) on an adjustment layer and verified on the scopes, then given a deliberate look (HSL secondary + vignette) and matched to a second shot.

FILES

Pittman_Ex04_CorrectThenGrade.aep → render Pittman_Ex04_CorrectThenGrade.mov · versions

Pittman_Ex04_CorrectThenGrade_001.aep

PRACTICE GOAL Build a layered composite (blend modes, pre-comp, adjustment layer, glow), then key a green-screen subject into it and ground it.

SET UP New project. A background clip/photo, one light/texture element, and a free green-screen clip.

- 1 New composition, 1920×1080, 30 fps, 5 s; name it **Main**; add a background clip/photo.
- 2 Add a light/texture element on top (stock light leak, smoke, or a Fractal Noise solid); cycle its Blend Mode (Screen, Add, Overlay) — note how blacks drop with Screen/Add.
- 3 Reorder layers to see stacking; lower the top layer's Opacity to taste.
- 4 Select the related layers and Pre-compose (Ctrl/Cmd+Shift+C); rename the pre-comp.
- 5 Add an Adjustment Layer on top with a subtle Lumetri or Curves to unify everything beneath; add a Glow (Effect ► Stylize ► Glow) on a bright element.
- 6 Now key a subject in: add a green-screen clip above the background.
- 7 Apply Effect ► Keying ► Keylight (1.2); use the Screen Colour eyedropper on the green.
- 8 Set View to “Screen Matte”; adjust Clip Black / Clip White until the matte is solid (no gray holes or fringe); return to “Final Result.”
- 9 Add a garbage mask to crop rig/edges; reduce spill (Keylight despill or Advanced Spill Suppressor).
- 10 Scale/position the subject so it sits believably in the plate.
- 11 Add a contact shadow: duplicate the subject, fill black, flip/squash beneath the feet, blur, lower opacity.
- 12 Add an adjustment layer with Lumetri to color-match subject to background; check the edges, then **save & render**.

FREE TUTORIALS & REFERENCES

[Green Screen Keying with Keylight](#)

[Pull a Green Key Like a Boss](#)

[Adobe Help – Keying](#)

DONE WHEN

A layered composite (blend modes, pre-comp, adjustment layer, glow) holds together, and a clean, spill-free key sits in the plate — grounded with a contact shadow and color-matched.

FILES

Pittman_Ex05_CompositeTheKey.aep → render Pittman_Ex05_CompositeTheKey.mov · versions
Pittman_Ex05_CompositeTheKey_001.aep

PRACTICE GOAL Reveal a fill through alpha and luma track mattes, then put footage inside type, animate it, stack mattes, and compare Set Matte.

SET UP New project. A footage/photo “fill”, bold text, and a shape/gradient you make in AE.

- 1 New composition, 1920×1080, 30 fps, 5 s; name it **Main**; add a footage/photo “fill” layer.
- 2 Above it, draw a shape layer (ellipse) — the matte; enable the Track Matte column and set the fill's TrkMat to “Alpha Matte” of the shape.
- 3 Switch to “Alpha Inverted Matte” to flip it; compare.
- 4 Make a grayscale gradient layer as a matte and set a fill to “Luma Matte” — brightness drives transparency; try “Luma Inverted” to compare.
- 5 Now put footage inside type: create bold, large text (one word) above a footage clip and set the footage's TrkMat to “Alpha Matte” of the text — footage plays inside the letters.
- 6 Add a contrasting background layer below.
- 7 Animate the text (Scale up or a Position drift); the footage-in-type follows; Easy Ease.
- 8 **Stack a second matte:** pre-compose footage + text, then add a wipe-shape track matte over the pre-comp for a reveal.
- 9 **Compare Set Matte:** on a separate fill, apply Effect ► Channel ► Set Matte and pick the text as the source — it needn't be directly above.
- 10 Note when each is better (track matte = adjacency/simple; Set Matte = reuse one matte on many layers).
- 11 Press U to check keyframes; add a readable hold, then **save & render**.

FREE TUTORIALS & REFERENCES

[ActionVFX – Beginner's Guide to Alpha & Luma Mattes](#)

[Envato Tuts+ \(David Bode\) – Alpha & Luma Mattes](#)

[Motion Array – Alpha & Luma Track Mattes](#)

DONE WHEN

A fill is revealed through alpha and luma mattes, footage plays inside animated type, and you've stacked a matte and compared Set Matte.

FILES

Pittman_Ex06_ThroughTheType.aep → render Pittman_Ex06_ThroughTheType.mov · versions
Pittman_Ex06_ThroughTheType_001.aep

PRACTICE GOAL Push layers into Z with a null-driven camera for parallax, then light the scene with real shadows.

SET UP New project. 3–4 solids/photos/shape layers as “cards.”

- 1 New composition, 1920×1080, 30 fps, 6 s; name it **Main**; add 3–4 “card” layers.
- 2 Confirm the renderer (Classic 3D is fine); enable the 3D switch on each card and give each a different Z Position.
- 3 Add a Camera (Layer ► New ► Camera); choose Two-Node; use the Orbit / Track tools to see parallax.
- 4 Add a Null, make it 3D, parent the camera to it, and animate the null over ~3 s (a cleaner rig); Easy Ease.
- 5 Exaggerate a card's Z to strengthen the parallax during the move.
- 6 Now light it: add a Light (Layer ► New ► Light); choose Spot and turn on Casts Shadows.
- 7 On each 3D layer open Material Options; set Casts Shadows = On and tune Accepts Lights / Shadows.
- 8 Position the light to throw visible shadows between the depth-separated cards.
- 9 Add an Ambient light to lift the shadows so they aren't pure black; adjust Specular/Shininess for a subtle highlight.
- 10 Optional (Advanced 3D renderer): enable the camera's Depth of Field for a soft background.
- 11 Tune light intensity and color for mood; preview, then **save & render**.

FREE TUTORIALS & REFERENCES

[3D Camera: Complete Guide](#)

[School of Motion – Working with Cameras](#)

[Video Copilot – free tutorial library](#)

DONE WHEN

Layers sit at different Z depths with a null-rigged parallax camera move, and lights cast real shadows across the depth-separated scene.

FILES

Pittman_Ex07_DepthAndLight.aep → render Pittman_Ex07_DepthAndLight.mov · versions
Pittman_Ex07_DepthAndLight_001.aep

PRACTICE GOAL Track a feature to attach a graphic and stabilize a clip, then match-move text into a moving shot with the 3D Camera Tracker.

SET UP New project. A clip with a high-contrast feature, a shaky clip, and a handheld clip with parallax (free stock).

- 1 New composition from a clip with a clear high-contrast feature; name it **Main**.
- 2 Window ► Tracker; select the footage; click Track Motion; place the track point on the feature and size the feature/search regions.
- 3 Track forward; scrub to verify the point sticks (reposition if it drifts).
- 4 Add a text/graphic layer; set the Tracker's "Edit Target" to it; Apply (X and Y) — the graphic now follows the feature.
- 5 On a shaky clip, apply Effect ► Distort ► Warp Stabilizer; set method to Subspace Warp and tune Smoothness; compare stabilized vs. original.
- 6 Now match-move: new comp from a handheld clip with parallax; apply Effect ► Perspective ► 3D Camera Tracker and let it analyze/solve.
- 7 Hover the solved points to find a ground plane; right-click ► Create Text and Camera.
- 8 Position/scale the new (track-parented) text so it sits on a surface; scrub — it should lock to the scene as the camera moves.
- 9 Adjust the text's orientation to lie on the ground (or a wall).
- 10 Optional: Animation ► Track in Boris FX Mocha; track a planar surface and compare with the 3D Camera Tracker.
- 11 Add a subtle shadow/grade so the element sits in the plate, then **save & render**.

FREE TUTORIALS & REFERENCES

[Surfaced Studio – Motion Tracking basics](#)

[School of Motion – 6 Ways to Motion Track](#)

[Surfaced Studio – Mocha AE for Absolute Beginners](#)

DONE WHEN

A graphic is tracked onto a moving feature and a shaky clip is stabilized, and text is match-moved into a moving shot via the 3D Camera Tracker.

FILES

Pittman_Ex08_LockAndMatchMove.aep → render Pittman_Ex08_LockAndMatchMove.mov · versions

Pittman_Ex08_LockAndMatchMove_001.aep

PRACTICE GOAL Isolate a subject with Roto Brush 2 (refine, freeze, re-background), then hand-roto so an element passes behind the subject.

SET UP New project. A clip of a subject moving against a busy background, plus an element to place behind it.

- 1 New composition from a clip with a clear moving subject; name it **Main**.
- 2 Double-click the layer to open the Layer panel; select the Roto Brush tool and paint a stroke down the center of the subject.
- 3 Add/subtract strokes (Alt/Option to subtract) until the boundary hugs the subject on the current frame.
- 4 Propagate forward (Page Down / spacebar); fix drift with small corrective strokes where the edge slips.
- 5 Open Refine Edge; brush hair/soft edges and tune the matte (Feather / Shift Edge). (*AE 2026: note the AI Object Matte for faster selection.*)
- 6 Freeze the matte to lock the work; add a new background behind the cutout.
- 7 Now make an element pass **behind** the subject: duplicate the subject layer and draw a Pen mask around it on the top copy.
- 8 Animate the Mask Path every few frames to follow the subject — rough pass, then refine; add Feather / Shift Edge.
- 9 Place a new element (graphic/text/solid) on a layer BETWEEN the background and the masked subject copy.
- 10 Confirm the subject covers the element where they overlap — the element reads as behind; animate it passing behind.
- 11 *Alternative:* use Mocha AE to track a planar region and drive the roto more efficiently.
- 12 Clean up edge chatter; lower the element's opacity/grade to integrate, then **save & render**.

FREE TUTORIALS & REFERENCES

[Roto Brush – Easy Background Removal](#)
[Remove Your Background with Rotobrush](#)
[Adobe Help – Roto Brush and Refine Matte](#)

DONE WHEN

The subject is isolated with Roto Brush 2 (refined, frozen, re-backgrounded), and an element convincingly passes behind a hand-roto-scoped subject.

FILES

Pittman_Ex09_RotoAndOcclude.aep → render Pittman_Ex09_RotoAndOcclude.mov · versions
Pittman_Ex09_RotoAndOcclude_001.aep

PRACTICE GOAL Drive layers with wiggle/time/loopOut and a slider, then build a one-null control rig with production expressions.

SET UP New project. A few shape layers, plus a simple icon/shape to rig.

- 1 New composition, 1920×1080, 30 fps, 5 s; name it **Main**; add a few shape layers.
- 2 Alt/Option-click the Position stopwatch and type `wiggle(2,30)` ; preview the jitter.
- 3 On a second shape's Rotation, Alt-click and type `time*60` for a continuous spin.
- 4 On a third layer, set two Position keyframes, then Alt-click Position and add `loopOut()` to repeat.
- 5 Use the pick whip: Alt-click a property, then drag the pick whip to another layer's property to link them.
- 6 Add Effect ► Expression Controls ► Slider Control to a null; pick-whip the wiggle amount to the slider so you can dial it.
- 7 Now build a rig: add a control Null named “CTRL” with Slider Controls (e.g., “Bounce,” “Fade”).
- 8 **Inertial bounce:** keyframe a layer's Position, then add an inertial-bounce expression (from the references) so it overshoots and settles.
- 9 **Auto-fade:** link a layer's Opacity to the “Fade” slider so one control fades it in/out.
- 10 **Counter:** add a text layer; Alt-click Source Text and drive a number (e.g., `Math.round(time)`) or a slider.
- 11 Pick-whip several layers to CTRL so one panel drives the whole rig; combine keyframes + expressions on one property (keyframed base + wiggle/loop for life).
- 12 Name and comment the controls; test by dragging the sliders (fix any red errors — watch semicolons and case-sensitive names).
- 13 Portfolio prep: gather your best exercise outputs and note which ≥6 skills you'll combine for the final reel; then **save & render**.

FREE TUTORIALS & REFERENCES

[LoopOut + Wiggle Expression](#)

[School of Motion – Getting Started with Wiggle](#)

[Adobe Help – Expression examples](#)

DONE WHEN

wiggle, time and loopOut drive layers via a slider, and a one-null rig with production expressions (bounce, auto-fade, counter) drives multiple layers — combined with keyframes.

FILES

`Pittman_Ex10_WiggleLoopRig.aep` → render `Pittman_Ex10_WiggleLoopRig.mov` · versions

`Pittman_Ex10_WiggleLoopRig_001.aep`