

Fall

16-Week Roadmap

One class per week across the semester — ten core After Effects skills, one per class, built into five portfolio projects. More weekly homework time per skill than the summer intensive.

16

WEEKS

15

CLASS MEETINGS

10

CORE SKILLS

5

PROJECTS

One ~2.5–3 hr class per week plus project homework. Free tutorial links and a progress checklist are at the back. Week 14 is Thanksgiving break — no class.

How This Course Works

The same ten skills as the intensive, re-paced for a full semester: one skill per class, with a whole week of homework to actually build with it.

The weekly rhythm

- **In class:** one skill — concept plus a live demo — then start applying it to the current project.
- **Homework (the week between classes):** push the project forward using that skill; the deliverable, not a throwaway exercise.
- **Wrap-up classes:** every project ends in a dedicated critique-and-finish class before it's submitted.

The 15-meeting structure

- **1 intro** (folded into the Week 1 Keyframes class) + **10 skill classes** + **4 project wrap-ups** + **1 final showcase**.
- **Week 14 is Thanksgiving break** — no class — which lands as dedicated capstone work time between Rotoscoping and Expressions.
- That leaves **15 class meetings** across the 16 calendar weeks.

Before Week 1 — set up

Kit & assets

- After Effects installed (student plan or trial).
- Free practice assets: Mixkit, Pexels, Pixabay; search “free green screen” clips for keying.
- One tidy project-folder structure: **/footage /comps /exports /assets**.

Habits that compound

- Learn ~10 shortcuts early (Space, U, P/S/R/T/A, Ctrl/Cmd+D).
- Keep one versioned project + reel folder across all five projects.
- Note one “win” and one “stuck-point” each week to review.

Semester Calendar

Fifteen meetings across sixteen weeks. Skill classes in white, project wrap-ups in teal, the final in amber, and the Thanksgiving break greyed out.

Week	Class	Project	Homework focus
Week 1	Course Intro + Keyframes	P1 kickoff	Set up project template; start quote timing
Week 2	Text Animation	Project 1	Build the kinetic type
Week 3	Project 1 Wrap-Up	P1 due — Kinetic Typography Quote	Submit Project 1
Week 4	Masking	P2 kickoff	Build the mask reveal
Week 5	Color Correction	Project 2	Grade the clip
Week 6	Project 2 Wrap-Up	P2 due — Cinematic Reveal	Submit Project 2
Week 7	Compositing / Keying	P3 kickoff	Pull a clean key
Week 8	Track Mattes	Project 3	Footage-in-type title
Week 9	Project 3 Wrap-Up	P3 due — Composite Shot	Submit Project 3
Week 10	3D Layers	P4 kickoff	Build the 3D scene
Week 11	Motion Tracking	Project 4	Track & attach the title
Week 12	Project 4 Wrap-Up	P4 due — Tracked 3D Title	Submit Project 4
Week 13	Rotoscoping	P5 kickoff	Roto a subject for the reel
Week 14	Thanksgiving break — no class	Capstone work time	Keep building the reel
Week 15	Expressions	Project 5	Add expression-driven motion
Week 16	Final Class — Showcase	P5 due — Motion Reel + Brand Spot	Deliver the capstone

The 10 Core Skills at a Glance

Ordered by difficulty and real-world demand — foundational, high-ROI skills first so everything afterward has something to stand on.

#	Skill	Class	Difficulty	Time	Demand/ROI	Why it pays off
1	Keyframes	Wk 1	1/5	4–6 hrs	5/5	The atom of all animation — every other skill is built on keyframes.
2	Text Animation	Wk 2	2/5	5–8 hrs	5/5	Titles, lower-thirds and social content are the bread-and-butter of paid AE work.
3	Masking	Wk 4	2/5	4–6 hrs	4/5	Underpins reveals, compositing and rotoscoping — a transferable skill used everywhere.
4	Color Correction	Wk 5	3/5	6–10 hrs	5/5	Every project gets graded; good color instantly raises perceived production value.
5	Compositing	Wk 7	3/5	8–12 hrs	5/5	Combining elements convincingly is the core of VFX and high-end motion work.
6	Track Mattes	Wk 8	3/5	4–6 hrs	4/5	The trick behind footage-in-text, reveals and countless design moves — quick to learn.
7	3D Layers	Wk 10	4/5	8–12 hrs	3/5	Adds depth, parallax and camera language — a clear differentiator on a reel.
8	Motion Tracking	Wk 11	4/5	8–12 hrs	4/5	Match-moving graphics onto live footage is a premium, well-paid VFX capability.
9	Rotoscoping	Wk 13	4/5	10–15 hrs	3/5	Tedious but essential for serious VFX; patience here separates hobbyists from hireable artists.
10	Expressions	Wk 15	5/5	15–25 hrs	4/5	An efficiency multiplier: automate animation, build rigs once and reuse forever.

Difficulty and ROI are typical for beginners and will vary with background. Each project revisits earlier skills in new contexts.

Kinetic Typography Quote

Weeks 1–3 · 15–20 seconds · worth 10%

Make things move — and make them feel alive.

Week 1 Keyframes + Course intro & setup

Difficulty 1/5

Time 4–6 hrs

Demand 5/5

Interface and workspaces, compositions and layers, the five transform properties, setting your first keyframes and RAM/playback preview — then Easy Ease, the Graph Editor (speed vs. value graphs), spatial vs. temporal interpolation, motion paths, and core animation principles like anticipation and follow-through.

Week 2 Text Animation

Difficulty 2/5

Time 5–8 hrs

Demand 5/5

Text layers, the Character & Paragraph panels, source-text keyframes, simple reveals and the built-in text Animation Presets — then Text Animators and the Range Selector, per-character animation, timing type to a beat, and revealing text with masks.

Week 3 Project 1 Wrap-Up — Critique, finish and submit the kinetic typography quote.

PROJECT MILESTONE · KINETIC TYPOGRAPHY QUOTE · 15–20 SECONDS

Animate a favourite quote using eased keyframes and text animators, loosely synced to a music beat. Goal: smooth motion with zero robotic linear movement.

MUST DELIVER

- A single comp, 1080p, exported as H.264 MP4
- At least three distinct text-animator moves
- Every keyframe eased — no default linear motion

Cinematic Reveal

Weeks 4–6 · 10–15 seconds · worth 10%

Control what the viewer sees, and how it feels.

Week 4 Masking

Difficulty 2/5

Time 4–6 hrs

Demand 4/5

The Pen tool, mask shapes, mask modes (Add / Subtract / Intersect), feather, expansion and mask opacity — then keyframing the mask path, mask reveals, text write-on effects, and combining multiple masks on a single layer.

Week 5 Color Correction

Difficulty 3/5

Time 6–10 hrs

Demand 5/5

Lumetri Color, adjustment layers, Levels & Curves, white balance, exposure and contrast, and reading scopes — then building a 'look', secondary HSL color, creative LUTs, matching shots, and finishing touches like vignettes.

Week 6 Project 2 Wrap-Up — Critique, finish and submit the cinematic reveal.

PROJECT MILESTONE · CINEMATIC REVEAL · 10–15 SECONDS

A masked title or logo reveal over color-graded background footage, unified by one cohesive look. Goal: a clip that already feels 'finished'.

MUST DELIVER

- One animated mask reveal driving the title
- A deliberate color grade (before/after screenshot in your notes)
- Consistent look across the whole clip

Composite Shot

Weeks 7–9 · 10–15 seconds · worth 15%

Combine elements so the seams disappear.

Week 7 Compositing

Difficulty 3/5

Time 8–12 hrs

Demand 5/5

Blend modes, layer order, pre-composing, adjustment layers as composite tools and integrating light/glow elements — then green-screen keying with Keylight, spill suppression, edge refinement, and placing a subject convincingly into a new plate.

Week 8 Track Mattes

Difficulty 3/5

Time 4–6 hrs

Demand 4/5

Alpha vs. luma mattes and the track-matte dropdown, using a shape or text layer to define what shows through — then footage-inside-type titles, animated mattes, stacking mattes, and when to reach for the Set Matte effect instead.

Week 9 Project 3 Wrap-Up — Critique, finish and submit the composite shot.

PROJECT MILESTONE · COMPOSITE SHOT · 10–15 SECONDS

Key a green-screen clip (or a free stock subject) into a new environment and add a footage-inside-type title. Goal: a believable composite, color-matched and grounded.

MUST DELIVER

- A clean key with refined edges — no green fringe
- One track-matte title (footage showing through text)
- Color/light match between subject and background

Tracked 3D Title

Weeks 10–12 · 10–15 seconds · worth 15%

Add the third dimension and lock it to reality.

Week 10 3D Layers

Difficulty 4/5

Time 8–12 hrs

Demand 3/5

Enabling 3D, Z position, the camera layer, one- vs. two-node cameras, basic camera moves and the Classic vs. Advanced 3D renderer — then lights and shadows, material options, and building a convincing parallax scene from flat 2D layers.

Week 11 Motion Tracking

Difficulty 4/5

Time 8–12 hrs

Demand 4/5

The Track Motion panel, tracking position / scale / rotation, applying tracks to a layer and stabilising shaky footage with Warp Stabilizer — then the 3D Camera Tracker, planar tracking with the free Mocha AE, and attaching text or objects so they lock to a moving shot.

Week 12 Project 4 Wrap-Up — Critique, finish and submit the tracked 3D title.

PROJECT MILESTONE · TRACKED 3D TITLE · 10–15 SECONDS

Track a handheld clip and attach 3D text or a graphic that sticks convincingly to the scene. Goal: motion that holds without slipping or jitter.

MUST DELIVER

- A solved track (3D Camera Tracker or Mocha)
- 3D text/graphic that stays locked to the surface
- At least one camera or light interaction for depth

Motion Reel + Brand Spot

Weeks 13, 15–16 · 30–60 seconds · worth 35%

The finishing skills that read as 'professional'.

Week 13 Rotoscoping

Difficulty 4/5

Time 10–15 hrs

Demand 3/5

The Roto Brush 2 workflow, selection propagation, Refine Edge for hair and motion blur, and freezing the matte — then frame-by-frame mask roto, Mocha planar roto for tricky shots, edge cleanup, and placing an element behind a moving subject.

Week 15 Expressions

Difficulty 5/5

Time 15–25 hrs

Demand 4/5

What expressions are, the pick-whip, wiggle(), loopOut(), time, linking properties and Expression Controls — then production-ready expressions (inertial bounce, auto-fade, counters), combining expressions with keyframes, and portfolio integration.

Week 16 Final Class — Showcase — Showcase, critique and submit the capstone reel. Week 14 is Thanksgiving break — no class, dedicated project work time.

FINAL PROJECT · MOTION REEL + BRAND SPOT · 30–60 SECONDS

Your portfolio centrepiece — a short reel or fictional brand spot that combines at least six of the ten skills into one cohesive, intentional piece. This is what you submit against the rubric.

MUST DELIVER

- Uses ≥6 of the 10 skills, meaningfully (not gratuitously)
- At least one working expression and one tracked/composited shot
- Graded, sound-synced, correctly exported, 30–60s runtime

Syllabus & Grading

Assessment runs through five projects plus participation; the projects grow in weight as the work gets more ambitious, and the capstone counts most.

10%	10%	15%	15%	35%	15%
PROJECT 1	PROJECT 2	PROJECT 3	PROJECT 4	FINAL (P5)	PARTICIPATION

10%	Project 1 — Kinetic Typography Quote (rubric score × weight)
10%	Project 2 — Cinematic Reveal (rubric score × weight)
15%	Project 3 — Composite Shot (rubric score × weight)
15%	Project 4 — Tracked 3D Title (rubric score × weight)
35%	Final — Motion Reel + Brand Spot (rubric score × weight; the portfolio centrepiece)
15%	Participation, Homework & Critique (weekly completion, critique attendance, peer feedback)

Grade scale

- A 90–100 · B 80–89 · C 70–79 · D 60–69 · F below 60.
- A project that is portfolio-ready (80+) lands at the A/B boundary.
- Adjust to your institution's scale.

Suggested policies

- **Revision:** each project may be revised once within a week of feedback; the higher score stands.
- **Late work:** –10% per class late unless arranged; the capstone has a firm deadline.
- **Assets & integrity:** use only licensed/royalty-free footage, music and fonts; credit sources; disclose AI-generated elements.

Final Project — Grading Rubric

Score the Week-16 reel against each criterion from 1 (Beginner) to 4 (Portfolio-Ready). Weighted score = $\Sigma (\text{level} \div 4 \times \text{weight})$; maximum 100. Portfolio-ready at 80+.

Criterion (weight)	1 · Beginner	2 · Developing	3 · Proficient	4 · Portfolio-Ready
Animation Principles & Timing 20%	Linear, mechanical motion; constant speed; no weight.	Some easing, but timing is uneven or generic.	Confident easing and spacing; motion has weight and intent.	Polished, purposeful timing; anticipation & follow-through throughout.
Technical Execution 20%	Visible jitter, chatter, broken keys or messy masks.	Mostly clean, with a few rough or unstable moments.	Clean keyframes, tidy masks/roto, stable tracks.	Flawless execution; no chatter, slip or stray keyframes anywhere.
Compositing & Integration 15%	Elements look pasted on; wrong scale, no grounding.	Readable composite but edges or lighting give it away.	Believable integration; matched edges and contact.	Seamless — a viewer can't tell the elements were separate.
Color & Finishing 15%	Flat or clashing color; no deliberate look.	A grade exists but is inconsistent across shots.	Cohesive, intentional grade; scopes are legal.	Distinctive, controlled look that elevates the whole piece.
Concept & Creativity 15%	No clear idea; random effects strung together.	An idea is present but design choices are generic.	Clear concept with coherent type, layout and palette.	Original, memorable idea executed with strong design taste.
Technical Breadth 10%	Fewer than 4 of the 10 skills used.	4–5 skills used, some only superficially.	6–7 skills used meaningfully in service of the idea.	8+ skills woven in naturally, each earning its place.
Delivery & Craft 5%	Wrong settings, render errors, audio out of sync.	Plays back, but codec/runtime/sync need work.	Correct export, resolution and frame rate; audio in sync.	Spec-perfect master file, ready to upload anywhere today.

Breadth check: your final piece should put at least **6 of the 10** skills to meaningful use. Six clears the bar; eight or more is portfolio-ready territory.

Lesson Links

Free videos and official Adobe guides for every skill — tap any title to open it. Adobe Help links are the most stable; bookmark them first. Links were current at publication.

Keyboard Shortcuts Setup

- [The 10 BEST Shortcuts for Beginners — YouTube](#)
- [TOP 17 Shortcuts \(Must Know\) — YouTube](#)
- [30 Essential Shortcuts + cheat sheets — School of Motion](#)

Keyframes Skill 1 · Wk 1

- [After Effects Beginners Tutorial 2025 — Jake In Motion](#)
- [How To Use the Graph Editor — Jake Bartlett](#)
- [Animation Basics \(official\) — Adobe Help](#)

Text Animation Skill 2 · Wk 2

- [Fun Kinetic Typography Animation — YouTube](#)
- [Kinetic Typography #5 \(no plugins\) — YouTube](#)

Masking Skill 3 · Wk 4

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

Color Correction Skill 4 · Wk 5

- [How To Color Correct in After Effects — YouTube](#)
- [Cinematic Color Grade — YouTube](#)
- [Color Correction Effects \(official\) — Adobe Help](#)

Compositing Skill 5 · Wk 7

- [Green Screen Keying with Keylight — YouTube](#)
- [Pull a Green Key Like a Boss — YouTube](#)
- [Keying \(official\) — Adobe Help](#)

Track Mattes Skill 6 · Wk 8

- [Beginner's Guide to Alpha & Luma Mattes — ActionVFX](#)
- [Alpha & Luma Mattes \(David Bode\) — Envato Tuts+](#)
- [Alpha & Luma Track Mattes — Motion Array](#)

3D Layers Skill 7 · Wk 10

- [3D Camera: Complete Guide — YouTube](#)
- [Working with Cameras — School of Motion](#)
- [Free Tutorial Library \(Basic Training\) — Video Copilot](#)

Motion Tracking Skill 8 · Wk 11

- [Motion Tracking Basics \(+ files\) — Surfaced Studio](#)
- [Mocha AE for Absolute Beginners — Surfaced Studio](#)
- [6 Ways to Motion Track — School of Motion](#)

Rotoscoping Skill 9 · Wk 13

- [Roto Brush: Easy Background Removal — YouTube](#)
- [Remove Your Background with Rotobrush — YouTube](#)
- [Roto Brush & Refine Matte \(official\) — Adobe Help](#)

Expressions Skill 10 · Wk 15

- [LoopOut + Wiggle Expression — YouTube](#)
- [Getting Started with Wiggle — School of Motion](#)
- [Expression Examples \(official\) — Adobe Help](#)

Reel & Brand Spot Inspiration Final · Wk 16

- [2025 Motion Graphics Showreel — YouTube example](#)
- [Best Motion Graphics Brand Ads — Yum Yum Videos](#)
- [8 Steps to an Epic Demo Reel — School of Motion](#)

Mocha AE (planar tracking) and the Roto Brush are included free inside After Effects — no extra purchase needed.

Progress & Mastery Checklist

A skill is “mastered” only when you can do it from memory, without a tutorial open. Tick each box as you go.

Skill	Watched tutorials	Guided practice	Used in a project	Mastered
1. Keyframes	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Text Animation	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Masking	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Color Correction	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Compositing	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Track Mattes	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. 3D Layers	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Motion Tracking	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Rotoscoping	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Expressions	☐	☐	☐	☐

Project Milestones

Project	Started	Completed	Self-reviewed	Got feedback
Project 1: Kinetic Typography Quote	☐	☐	☐	☐
Project 2: Cinematic Reveal	☐	☐	☐	☐
Project 3: Composite Shot	☐	☐	☐	☐
Project 4: Tracked 3D Title	☐	☐	☐	☐
Project 5: Motion Reel + Brand Spot	☐	☐	☐	☐

Goal for the semester: all 10 skills at “Mastered”, five projects shipped, and a final reel scoring 80+ on the rubric.