

INSTRUCTOR EDITION

FLMC 1331 · VIDEO GRAPHICS & VISUAL EFFECTS I · FALL

Instructor Teaching & Grading Guide

Teaching notes for the 15-meeting semester course — an objective and talking points for each skill, the common pitfalls to catch early, and **how to grade every exercise and project**: what good work looks like at a glance.

16

WEEKS

15

CLASSES

10

SKILLS

10

EXERCISES

Pair with the student roadmap, exercise booklet and Canvas pages. Those carry the skills matrix, milestones, exercises, links and rubric; this edition adds what to say, what to watch for, and how to score.

How to Teach This Course

One class a week, then a full week to build. Watching isn't learning — the in-class exercise makes students *do* the skill before they apply it to the project.

Class model

One ~2.5–3 hr class per week: teach the skill with a live demo, run the week's short **in-class exercise** together, then start applying it to the current project. The homework is the deliverable, not a throwaway.

Critique cadence

A quick share-out in each skill class; a full **critique at every project wrap-up** (Weeks 3, 6, 9, 12) and the final showcase (Week 16). Model specific, kind, actionable feedback before students give it.

Pacing & support

Rotoscoping (Wk 13) and Expressions (Wk 15) are the hard skills — the **Thanksgiving break (Wk 14)** conveniently gives capstone work time between them. Budget roto and render time; offer one revision per project.

Assessment at a glance (suggested)



Projects 1–4 at 10 / 10 / 15 / 15%, the final portfolio reel at 35% (scored on the rubric; portfolio-ready = 80+), and participation, homework & the in-class exercises at 15%. Adjust to your program.

Software

Any recent After Effects works; a free trial covers about a week, the student plan is cheapest ongoing. AE 2026 adds the AI Object Matte — handy for the rotoscoping week.

Assets & habits

Point students to Mixkit, Pexels and Pixabay (plus free green-screen clips). Teach ~10 shortcuts in Week 1, insist on tidy project folders, and budget render/roto time before deadlines.

Integrity

Require licensed or royalty-free footage, music and fonts, credited sources, and disclosure of any AI-generated elements per program policy.

How to Grade

Two things are graded differently: the in-class exercises are light, formative practice; the five projects are the summative, rubric-scored work.

Grading the exercises

Treat each drill as a quick **pulse check**, not a rubric item — it counts toward participation. Did they hit the exercise's **“Done when”** line? Is it named and rendered correctly? Use the **“Exercise — what to look for”** box on each skill page below as your checklist. Completion + the key technique = full marks; give one specific fix to carry into the project.

Grading the projects

Score each project on the 7-criterion rubric (1–4 per row), multiply by the component weight, and total.
Portfolio-ready is 80+ (averaging level 3.2), which sits right at the A/B boundary; below 65, ask for a rework. Re-grade after any revision — the higher score stands.

Feedback that works

Be specific, kind and actionable — name the moment, the fix and why. Skim the level-4 targets before you grade so your comments point at the next level. Keep exercise feedback to one takeaway; save fuller notes for the project critiques.

Rubric quick reference — what earns a 4

The full 1–4 rubric is on the student roadmap; reward these level-4 targets when scoring the final reel (and use them as the bar for each project).

Criterion	Weight	Portfolio-ready (level 4) — what to reward
Animation Principles & Timing	20%	Polished, purposeful timing; anticipation & follow-through throughout.
Technical Execution	20%	Flawless — no chatter, slip or stray keyframes anywhere.
Compositing & Integration	15%	Seamless — a viewer can't tell the elements were separate.
Color & Finishing	15%	Distinctive, controlled look that elevates the whole piece.
Concept & Creativity	15%	Original, memorable idea executed with strong design taste.
Technical Breadth	10%	8+ skills woven in naturally, each earning its place.
Delivery & Craft	5%	Spec-perfect master file, ready to upload anywhere today.

Breadth check: the final reel should put at least **6 of the 10** skills to meaningful use — six clears the bar, eight-plus is portfolio-ready territory. Reward skills that serve the idea, not a gratuitous checklist.

Skill 1 Keyframes

In-class exercise · Ex 1: Move It, Feel It · Week 1

Objective: Animate all five transform properties and make motion feel natural with easing.

TALKING POINTS

- Set the anchor point first — it's the pivot for scale and rotation.
- Two keyframes make an animation; teach U to reveal all keyframes.
- Easy Ease + the Graph Editor turn robotic motion into natural motion.
- Separate ideas: the motion path (spatial) vs. the speed (temporal).

COMMON PITFALLS

- Leaving everything on linear keyframes — the #1 beginner tell.
- Anchor point in the wrong spot → objects swing oddly.
- Setting keys without moving the playhead (overwriting, not adding).
- Over-keyframing instead of fewer, well-eased keys.

EXERCISE — WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- All five transforms actually used in the on-phase (Position, Scale, Rotation, Opacity + a centered Anchor Point).
- A real on / travel / exit structure across the 10 s, not one move.
- Open the Graph Editor: the journey flows, it doesn't dead-stop at each waypoint — no default linear keys.
- An anticipation windup before the entrance and an overshoot/settle on the exit.

Skill 2 Text Animation

In-class exercise · Ex 2: Reveal & Animate Type · Week 2

Objective: Build lively, readable text with animators and presets, timed to a beat.

TALKING POINTS

- Source-text keyframes vs. Text Animators / Range Selector — when to use each.
- Browse Presets builds confidence fast; then rebuild one by hand.
- Per-character animation with Offset; ease the selector, not just position.
- Readability first — leave hold frames so people can read.

COMMON PITFALLS

- Over-animated text nobody can read; everything moving at once.
- No read/hold time — text flies off too fast.
- Forgetting to ease animators (they feel linear by default).
- Timing that ignores the beat or voiceover.

EXERCISE — WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- A styled, readable title (font, tracking, alignment set on purpose) — not default type.
- Both a simple manual reveal and a per-character animator (Range Selector Offset keyframed so letters sequence).
- The selector is eased (Shape / Ease High-Low), not linear; motion lands on a beat with a readable hold.
- They inspected a preset (pressed U to see where it placed keys).

Grading Project 1 · Kinetic Typography Quote (10%)

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

HOW TO SCORE

Reward eased, weighted motion (open the Graph Editor), readable type with genuine hold frames, and timing that sits on the beat. Dock for linear keys and unreadable, all-at-once text.

Skill 3 Masking

In-class exercise · Ex 3: Cut & Reveal · Week 4

Objective: Create, feather and animate masks for reveals and selective effects.

TALKING POINTS

- Pen tool, mask modes (Add / Subtract / Intersect), feather and expansion.
- Animate the Mask Path by keyframing vertices for reveals and write-ons.
- A mask lives on a layer — clarify how that differs from a shape layer.
- Toggle mask/shape path visibility so students see what they're editing.

COMMON PITFALLS

- Confusing masks with shape layers.
- Too many vertices → wobbly, hard-to-animate paths.
- Keyframing the wrong property instead of Mask Path.
- Hard edges where a little feather would sell it.

EXERCISE — WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Two masks combined via different modes on one layer, with feather, expansion and opacity all adjusted.
- An animated wipe-on keyed on the Mask Path (press U to confirm) — not on Position.
- Eased Mask-Path keys with a soft, feathered wipe edge.
- Reasonable vertex count — the path isn't wobbling from too many points.

Skill 4 Color Correction

In-class exercise · Ex 4: Correct, Then Grade · Week 5

Objective: Correct exposure and white balance first, then grade for a cohesive look.

TALKING POINTS

- Correct first (exposure, WB, contrast), then grade — order matters.
- Work on an adjustment layer so the grade is global and non-destructive.
- Read the scopes (waveform / parade) instead of trusting the monitor.
- Curves and HSL secondary for targeted, controlled adjustments.

COMMON PITFALLS

- Over-saturating and crushing blacks — the 'filter' look.
- Grading per-layer instead of on an adjustment layer.
- Trusting an uncalibrated screen; ignoring scopes.
- No consistent look across shots.

EXERCISE — WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Correction lives on an adjustment layer (not baked onto the clip); WB neutral, levels spread on the waveform without clipping.
- A deliberate look (Creative/LUT + color wheels) plus a cleanly-keyed HSL secondary and a vignette.
- A second shot matched to the first — scopes sit at similar levels.
- Toggle test: before/after reads as corrected, not crushed or over-saturated.

Grading Project 2 · Cinematic Reveal (10%)

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

HOW TO SCORE

Reward a reveal that reads as intentional and a cohesive, non-'filter' grade held across the whole clip. Dock for crushed/over-saturated color and a grade that changes shot to shot.

Skill 5 Compositing / Keying

In-class exercise · Ex 5: Composite the Key · Week 7

Objective: Layer and key elements so they blend believably into a scene.

TALKING POINTS

- Blend modes, layer order and basic pre-comps for organization.
- Keylight flow: garbage matte → key → spill suppression → refine edge.
- Match color and light between subject and background; add a contact shadow.
- Use an adjustment layer to unify the whole composite.

COMMON PITFALLS

- Green spill and chewed edges from over-keying.
- No color/light match → subject looks pasted on.
- No grounding (contact shadow) → floating subjects.
- Skipping the garbage matte on messy footage.

EXERCISE — WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- The layered half: blend modes used meaningfully, a pre-comp for organization, an adjustment layer unifying, a glow.
- A clean Screen Matte (solid, no gray holes or fringe) with spill suppressed — no green edges.
- Subject scaled/placed believably, grounded with a contact shadow, and color-matched to the plate.
- A garbage mask where the footage needs it.

Skill 6 Track Mattes

In-class exercise · Ex 6: Through the Type · Week 8

Objective: Use alpha and luma mattes for reveals and footage-inside-type.

TALKING POINTS

- Alpha vs. luma matte; link the matte to the fill (the 2023+ Track Matte column).
- Footage-inside-type is the classic demo — instantly motivating.
- Track Matte vs. the Set Matte effect — when each is better.
- Pre-comp when stacking multiple mattes to keep things clean.

COMMON PITFALLS

- Matte not linked / in the wrong position relative to the fill.
- Confusion that the matte layer is used, not shown.
- Wrong alpha-vs-luma choice → unexpected results.
- Losing track of mattes after pre-composing.

EXERCISE — WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- A fill revealed through both an alpha (shape/text) and a luma (gradient) matte — inverted variants tried.
- Footage playing inside animated type via a track matte.
- A stacked matte (pre-comped fill+text + a wipe matte) that stays clean.
- A Set Matte comparison with a sentence on when each tool is better.

Grading Project 3 · Composite Shot (15%)

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

HOW TO SCORE

Reward believable integration — clean edges, a grounding shadow, matched light — and a working footage-in-type title. Dock for green fringe, floating subjects and a pasted-on look.

Skill 7 3D Layers

In-class exercise · Ex 7: Depth & Light · Week 10

Objective: Move layers in Z and add a camera and lights for depth and parallax.

TALKING POINTS

- Enable the 3D switch; Z position and the 2.5D parallax idea.
- One-node vs. two-node (point-of-interest) cameras and basic moves.
- Lights plus material options: Casts Shadows / Accepts Lights.
- Pick the right renderer (Classic vs. Advanced) for the task.

COMMON PITFALLS

- Forgetting to enable 3D; confusing Z position with scale.
- Two-node cameras spinning wildly around the point of interest.
- Lights with no shadow-casting layers set → flat result.
- Performance crawl from heavy 3D plus shadows.

EXERCISE — WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Cards at genuinely different Z depths (not just scaled) showing real parallax on the move.
- A null-driven camera (camera parented to an animated null), not hand-flown.
- A Spot light casting visible shadows between the cards (Material Options Casts/Accepts on).
- An Ambient fill so shadows aren't pure black.

Skill 8 Motion Tracking

In-class exercise · Ex 8: Lock & Match-Move · Week 11

Objective: Track motion and stabilize, then attach elements convincingly.

TALKING POINTS

- Track Motion vs. the 3D Camera Tracker vs. Mocha AE — pick the tool.
- Warp Stabilizer for shaky footage; manage method and smoothness.
- Good footage tracks better: contrast, parallax, locked exposure.
- Attach via a track null, and verify the track before applying.

COMMON PITFALLS

- Trying to track low-contrast or motion-blurred footage.
- Applying a bad track without checking the points.
- Over-stabilizing → warping / 'jello' artifacts.
- Attached elements sliding because the track drifted.

EXERCISE — WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- A 2D track that sticks — the graphic follows the feature without sliding.
- A stabilized clip that isn't warping or 'jello'-ing.
- A 3D Camera Tracker solve with text on a ground plane that locks as the camera moves, correctly oriented.
- Scrub the whole clip: the element stays put (a Mocha comparison is a bonus).

Grading Project 4 · Tracked 3D Title (15%)

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

HOW TO SCORE

Reward motion that holds without slip or jitter across the whole clip and a depth cue (camera/light) that sells it. Dock for sliding elements and over-stabilized warping.

Skill 9 Rotoscoping

In-class exercise · Ex 9: Roto & Occlude · Week 13

Objective: Isolate a subject with Roto Brush (and manual masks) and refine the edges.

TALKING POINTS

- Roto Brush 2 flow: paint → propagate → Refine Edge → freeze.
- AE 2026's AI Object Matte makes one-click selection much faster.
- Manual mask roto frame-by-frame for tricky shots; work in passes.
- Patience and edge work (hair, motion blur) make or break it.

COMMON PITFALLS

- Not freezing the matte — slow re-propagation and lost work.
- Expecting one pass to be perfect; ignoring Refine Edge.
- Choosing roto where a clean key or mask would be easier.
- Underestimating how long roto takes — budget the time.

EXERCISE — WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- A clean isolation that holds across frames, corrected where the edge drifts, with Refine Edge on hair/soft edges.
- The matte frozen and a new background placed behind the cutout.
- An element placed between background and subject so it clearly passes behind, with a hand-animated mask following the subject.
- Scrub test: no edge chatter; the element reads as genuinely occluded.

Skill 10 Expressions

In-class exercise · Ex 10: Wiggle, Loop & Rig · Week 15

Objective: Automate and link animation with simple, useful expressions, then build a rig.

TALKING POINTS

- The pick-whip writes code for you; start with wiggle() and loopOut().
- Link properties with the pick-whip; drive them with Slider / null controls.
- Introduce time, and combining keyframes with expressions.
- Keep it simple; name controls and add a comment.

COMMON PITFALLS

- Syntax slips (a missing semicolon or bracket) and red-banner panic.
- Referencing layer names that later change → broken expressions.
- Over-engineering when a keyframe would do.
- Forgetting expressions are case-sensitive and need exact names.

EXERCISE — WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- wiggle(), time and loopOut() all working on different layers with no red errors.
- At least one property driven by a Slider Control via the pick-whip.
- A one-null 'CTRL' rig with sliders (bounce, fade, counter) driving multiple layers.
- A property that combines a keyframed base with an expression; controls named and reusable.

Grading Project 5 · Motion Reel + Brand Spot (35%)

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

HOW TO SCORE

Score on the full rubric; portfolio-ready is 80+. Reward a cohesive, intentional piece where each of the 6+ skills earns its place. Dock for a gratuitous 'skills checklist' with no through-line.