Motion Graphics Techniques - Lesson 11 Notes

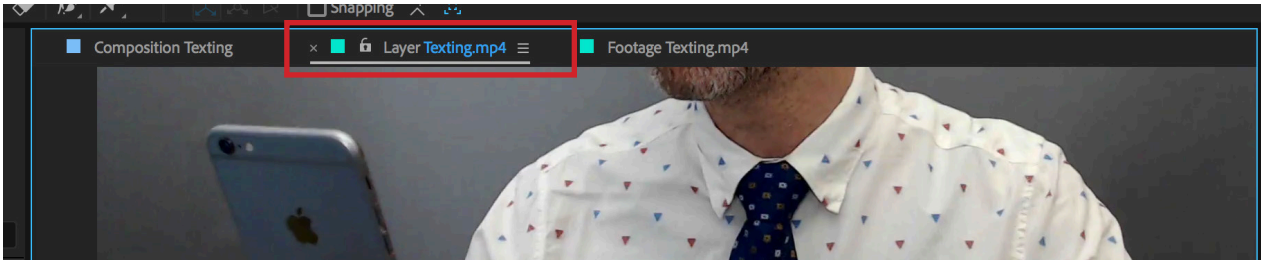
Tracking in After Effects

On the right track

Tracking video is an essential component of visual effects, and it is important that you have a basic understanding of it to work in Motion Design. In this lesson we're going to work with the built-in Tracker in After Effects, and stick to the basics. If you love tracking and want to know more, check out Mocha for AE.

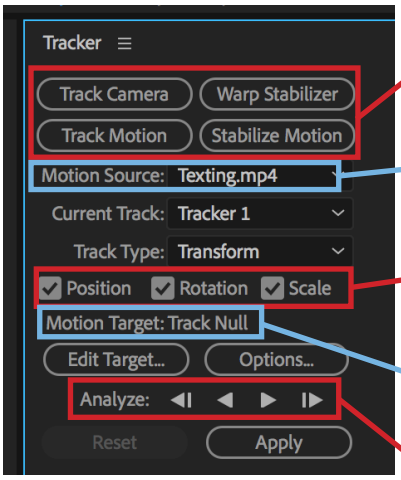
The Layer Window

In order to use the Tracker, you need to access it through the footage's Layer Window. If you double-click the footage layer the Layer Window will open, and then you can go to Window > Tracker to open the Tracker panel. This panel will only be active when you have the footage layer selected, otherwise the buttons will be grayed out.



The Tracker Panel

The Tracker Panel is where you set the track type, as well as assign the target of the tracker information and even press the buttons to analyze the footage. It's a fun panel - don't be afraid of it!



The Tracker is home to four tools: Track Camera, Warp Stabilizer, Track Motion and Stabilize Motion. **We are only talking about Track Motion.**

Motion Source: The name of the footage you are tracking.

If you need to track by Position, Rotation and Scale, make sure these boxes are checked. Position only gives you a one-point tracker.

Make sure to set a Motion Target in the composition, usually a Null Object.

Press these easy buttons to set the tracking keyframes in either direction.

Press Apply when the track is to your liking, and the data will be transferred to the target Null that you set up in your composition. In your homework you will be working with two different Track Types: Transform and Perspective Corner Pin. The latter is extremely helpful when tracking all four corners of something on screen, like a TV monitor or a tablet.

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Track Point Details

Trackers are made up of two boxes and a central point defined by a cross. Each of these is important to the process.

Each Track Point has a specific number, since you can have as many trackers as you want for any piece of footage. This is Track Point 1.

Outside Box: This represents the range of where the object you're tracking might fall on screen in the next frame.

Inside Box: This defines the group of pixels you want to track.

Center: This is the exact point where the Null Object "Target" will line up.

Analyzing Footage

Use the Analyze Forward and Analyze Backward buttons to start working on your track. Pay careful attention to your track points and make sure they are staying well-connected to their on-screen targets. Otherwise you will need to stop the analysis and delete out the keyframes that aren't working. NOTE: To adjust the Track Point once you start analyzing do not move the center point but instead adjust the boxes around it.

Many Trackers, Many Nulls

The footage that I have provided is fairly optimal for tracking, and should be really easy to work with. This is not always the case with footage you get when working professionally. One issue that comes up is when the tracking mark you're working with goes off screen in the middle of a shot, and maybe then comes back on screen later. It's good to remember that you can have multiple trackers for any piece of footage, and if something you're tracking goes off screen you can always start tracking a new point with another tracker to cover the gap. Depending on the way it's set up you might be able to assign the same null object as the target of both trackers, or you might need to parent Null One to Null Two for the same result.