

DaVinci Resolve: The Ultimate Step-by-Step Editing Guide

1. Introduction and Overview

DaVinci Resolve is considered the **best free editing program for beginners**. This guide provides a step-by-step tutorial covering all important aspects necessary to create content for social media, YouTube channels, or brand commercials.

The tutorial is detailed and timestamped, making it advisable to bookmark the video to revisit sections. The goal is to provide the ultimate guide for DaVinci Resolve.

Practice and Assets

Practice is one of the best ways to develop a skill. All footage used in this shoot is linked in a Google Drive so users can follow along. A **free YouTube video editing starter pack** is also available, which includes assets like:

- LUTs
- Transitions
- Film burns
- Light leaks
- Sound effects
- A bunch of other video editing essentials.

Although the focus video is a social media reel, everything covered will completely transfer to YouTube videos or any type of content.

Initial Layout Coverage

The tutorial will first cover the layout of DaVinci Resolve to locate important features. Along the bottom of the screen, there are **seven different pages**. This multiple-page structure is often a source of confusion or intimidation for beginners, as each page has its own layout, tools, and learning curve.

The primary focus is the **Edit Page**.

Page	Purpose
Edit Page	Where 90 to 95% of the edit happens. Allows cutting clips, key framing, sound design, and adding effects from one place.

2. Setting Up the Edit Page

Importing Footage

To import footage, ensure the **Edit Page** is selected.

1. **Locate Media Pool:** Navigate to the **Media Pool** section in the top left.

2. Import Method 1 (File Menu):

- Go to **File**.
- Go to **Import**.
- Go down to **Media**.
- Select the file (e.g., A-roll folder, clip A0017055) and hit **Open**.
- *Quick Note:* If a "change project frame rate" notification pops up, hit **Change** for now.

3. Import Method 2 (Drag and Drop):

- Pull up the location of the footage on the computer.
- Drag the organized folder into the **small little rectangle** inside the Media Pool.
- This transfers the folder structure directly into DaVinci Resolve, keeping footage organized.

The Timeline Section

The **timeline section** is located at the bottom of the Edit Page and is the most important part of the page.

1. Drag a selected clip from the Media Pool down to the timeline.

2. Playback Functions:

- Drag the **playhead** across the video to scrub through the clip; the video plays in the preview window.
- Play/Pause: Hit **Spacebar**.
- Play at 2x Speed: Hit **L** (hitting **L** again plays faster).
- Pause: Hit **K**.
- Rewind: Hit **J**.

3. Timeline Navigation:

- **Arrow Keys:** Use the **up arrow** key to navigate to the beginning of the clip. Use the **down arrow** key to navigate to the end of the clip.
- **Zoom Slider:** Allows zooming out or zooming into the timeline.
- **Detail Zoom Button:** Zooms into where the playhead is located.
- **Full Timeline View Button:** Zooms out to view the full timeline in the window.

4. Trimming and Extending:

- Go to the beginning or end of the clip, click, hold, and drag in to **trim**.
- Drag out to **extend**.

5. Cutting and Deleting:

- **Blade Tool:** Select the clip, then select the **blade tool**. Drag the tool over the playhead and click to cut the clip into two sections.
- **Select Tool:** Acts as the pointer, allowing users to drag and move clips around.
- **Deleting a Clip:** Use the select tool, choose the clip to delete, and hit the **delete** button.
- **Keyboard Shortcut for Cut:** Select the clip and hit **Command + B** (makes a cut quickly).
- **Ripple Delete (Gap Removal):** Select the blank space/gap on the timeline and hit **delete**. This moves the whole timeline to the left.

- **Quick Trim/Ripple Delete Shortcuts:**

- To delete the start of a clip and move the rest to the timeline beginning: **Command + Shift + Left Bracket ([])**.
- To delete the end of a clip and move the next clip over: **Command + Shift + Right Bracket ([])**.

The Inspector Panel

When a clip is selected, the Inspector panel opens up. This is where adjustments to the clip itself are made.

Tab	Section	Function
Inspector	Video	Adjust zoom (in/out), rotation, and position.
Inspector	Audio	Adjust the volume (increase/decrease).
Inspector	File	Rename the clip (e.g., to "talking head audio").
Metadata	N/A	Tells information about the file itself.
Mixer	N/A	Pops up a window to adjust audio levels. To close the mixer window, ensure the Mixer tab is grayed out.

The Preview Window

The middle section is the **Preview Window**, which displays the information from the timeline.

- **Zooming with Mouse:** If using a mouse, scrolling in on the scroll wheel zooms in. The zoom occurs relative to the cursor's location.
- **Fit View:** If highly zoomed in, hit **Z** on the keyboard to return to the fit view (full size).
- **Older Version Navigation:** In older versions (before 20), to move around the screen while zoomed, press and hold the middle mouse button.

Timeline Playback Resolution

If the computer is lagging, the quality in the preview window can be reduced to help rendering speed.

- Path: **Playback > Timeline Playback Resolution** > Choose between **Full**, **Half**, or **Quarter**.
- **Note:** Changing this setting **does not affect the export quality**; the video will still export at full resolution.

3. Project Settings (Master Settings)

Project settings are found by clicking the **gear icon** in the bottom right.

While DaVinci Resolve has many settings, the focus should be on: **Timeline Resolution** and **Timeline Frame Rate**.

Setting	Details

Setting	Details
	The resolution of the timeline. Common resolutions are:
Timeline Resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1920 x 1080: Standard HD. (Recommended for older computers as it requires less power). • 3840 x 2160: Ultra HD (4K timeline). (Requires more computer power).
Use Vertical Resolution	Toggles the resolution (e.g., from 1920x1080 to 1080x1920) for vertical content like TikTok, YouTube Shorts, or Instagram Reels.
Timeline Frame Rate	DaVinci Resolve locks this setting once editing begins. The rate should be the same as the frames per second (FPS) that the footage was shot in (e.g., 23.976 fps footage should use 23.976 fps timeline frame rate).

Playback

Frame Should be exactly the same as the timeline frame rate.

Rate

After setting, hit **Save**.

UI Management

- **Dual Viewer Mode:** DaVinci Resolve 20 introduced an updated dual viewer mode (preview on left, timeline on right), especially for vertical timelines.
- **Single Viewer Mode:** To switch back: **Workspace > Single Viewer Mode**.
- **Reset UI Layout:** If the layout becomes messy: **Workspace > Reset UI Layout**.

4. Level One Basic Edit

The Level One edit focuses on a popular **talking head video** style, mirroring a YouTube video.

4.1. Framing and Color Correction

Framing the Clip:

1. In the Inspector (Video), use **Zoom X** to increase the size until unwanted elements (like a light) disappear.
2. Adjust **Position X** to move the subject slightly horizontally.
3. Adjust **Position Y** to move the subject slightly vertically. Changes should be subtle.

Color Correction (Color Page): The next step is color correction, requiring a jump to the **Color Page**. The clip used is a log clip (gray and flat), which is ideal for pumping in color. The quickest approach is applying a corrective LUT.

Installing and Applying a LUT

1. On the Color Page, go to the **LUTs** tab up top.
2. Click the carrot dropdown next to the folder icon.

3. Select the camera brand (e.g., **Sony**).
4. Right-click **Sony** and choose **Reveal in Finder** (to open the installation folder).
5. Drag the LUT file (e.g., Sony LUT file, starting with CCT) into the open Sony folder.
6. Close the Finder windows, right-click the Sony tab in Resolve, and hit **Refresh**.
7. Double-click the imported LUT (e.g., CCT file) to apply it instantly.

Making Small Color Tweaks

To make small tweaks after applying the LUT:

1. Go to the dropdown next to the curve window and select **Color Wheels**.
2. The main wheels are **Lift, Gamma, Gain, and Offset**.

Wheel	Controls	Definition	Analogy
Lift	Shadows	The dark parts of the video.	Base of the mountain.
Gamma	Midtones	Skin tones or natural light.	Middle of the mountain.
Gain	Highlights	The bright parts of the video.	Top of the mountain.
Offset	Everything	Moves all tones together.	The whole mountain.

Adjustments are made by clicking and dragging on the dial (left to decrease, right to increase). Changes should be very small/subtle. To fix white balance, drag the wheel towards orange, blue, magenta, or green.

4.2. Audio Adjustments

Return to the Edit Page. Open the **Mixer** tab to see audio levels.

- **Recording Advice:** It is advised to record audio on the lower side rather than the higher side; if audio is too high and clips, the data is hard to recover. If recorded low, it can be brought up. The sweet spot range is around **-12**.

Method 1: Normalize Audio Levels

1. Right-click the clip (Control-click on a trackpad).
2. Go to **Normalize Audio Levels**.
3. Select **True Peak** on the dropdown.
4. Set the level to **-1**.
5. Hit **Normalize**.

Method 2: Manual Adjustment

1. Go to the **Audio** section in the Inspector.
2. Manually increase the volume slider (e.g., 20.7).

Adding Compression (Fairlight Page):

1. Go to the **Fairlight Page** (bottom tab).
2. On the right-hand mixer tab, go to **Dynamics** and double-click the box.

3. Turn on **Compressor**. The compressor equalizes audio by making loud sounds quieter and quiet sounds louder, preventing massive swings.

4.3. Cutting Dead Space

The next step is to cut out dead space and remove mistakes (gaps often occur when reading a script).

1. Locate the beginning line, select the clip, and use the **Blade Tool** or **Command + B** to cut.
2. Use the **Selection Tool** to select the unwanted part, and hit **delete**.
3. **Remove Gaps:** Select the blank space and hit **delete** (Ripple Delete) to move the entire timeline to the left.

4. Keyboard Shortcuts for Efficiency:

- To delete the beginning section and move the clip to the start: **Command + Shift + Left Bracket**.
- To delete a middle section (e.g., a mistake) and bring the next clip forward: Cut at the start and end of the mistake, select the mistake clip, hit delete. Select the resulting gap, and hit delete again.
- Alternatively, use **Command + Shift + Right Bracket** to delete the end of the selected clip and pull the subsequent clip over.

5. **Refining Clips:** Zoom in and drag the ends of clips to shorten them and remove tiny gaps, increasing pacing for a more natural sound.

4.4. Punching In Every Other Clip

Punching in involves slightly zooming in on alternating clips to create a dynamic look that suggests a second camera was used.

1. Select the **second clip** on the timeline.
2. In the Inspector (Video), slightly increase the scale using the zoom function.
3. Adjust the position (Y) to ensure the **eyeline** of the subject matches the previous clip to avoid a jarring effect.

4. Copy and Paste Attributes:

- Select the customized clip and hit **Command + C**.
- Hold down **Command** and select all other clips that should have the punch-in effect (e.g., the 4th, 6th clips).
- Hit **Option + V** (Paste Attributes).
- Check the boxes for **Position**, **Zoom X** and **Y**, **Color Correction**, and **Audio Attributes**.
- Hit **Apply**.

4.5. Adding B-roll

B-roll Definition: Visuals that illustrate the story being told in the A-roll (main footage).

1. **Import B-roll:** Drag the B-roll folder into the Media Pool rectangle.
2. **Timeline Hierarchy:** Video placed on a track above another track takes priority and covers the video below it.
3. **Setting In and Out Points (Recommended Method):**

- Double-click the B-roll clip in the Media Pool preview window.
- Locate the desired starting point and hit **I** (In-point).
- Locate the desired ending point and hit **O** (Out-point).
- Drag the selected section from the preview window onto the timeline.
- *Note:* Dragging the entire long clip onto the timeline and then cutting it is messy and inefficient.

4. **Deleting B-roll Audio:** Hold down **Option**, select the audio track of the B-roll clip, and hit **delete**.

5. **Adjusting B-roll:** B-roll may need punching in (zooming) to focus on key elements (e.g., a logo).

6. **Color Grade B-roll:** If B-roll is log footage, go to the Color Page, apply the LUT, and adjust exposure (e.g., use **Offset** to increase total exposure if it's too dark).

7. **B-roll Strategy:** Identify key moments in the talking head video and add visual context using B-roll.

4.6. Speed Changes and Rotation

Slow Motion:

1. Right-click the clip.
2. Go to **Retime Controls** (or use shortcut **Command + R**).
3. Use the dropdown and select **Change Speed**.
4. Set the speed (e.g., **50%**).

Rotation:

1. Select the clip, go to Inspector (Video).
2. Adjust the **Rotation Angle** (e.g., enter **90** to rotate the clip 90°).
3. Use **Zoom X** to scale the clip as needed.

4.7. Creating a Before and After Transition

This effect uses a subject snapping their fingers to trigger a visual change.

1. Identify and drag in the first snap section (e.g., bad lighting) using In/Out points.
2. Identify and drag in the second snap section (e.g., good lighting) using In/Out points.
3. Locate the precise frame of the snap (use right/left arrow keys for frame-by-frame).
4. Cut the clips (**Command + B**) exactly on the snap frame.
5. Align the two snap cuts precisely in the middle.
6. Extend the second clip out to cover the rest of the talking head line.

4.8. Adding Transitions and Effects

Adding transitions to every clip can be distracting and is often a beginner mistake.

Applying Built-in Transitions (e.g., Push):

1. Go to the **Effects** tab.
2. Navigate to **Toolbox > Video Transitions**.
3. Locate **Push** under **Motion**.
4. Drag the transition over the cut between clips.

Customizing Transitions:

1. Click on the transition clip to select it.
2. **Duration:** Adjust the duration in seconds or frames (1 second = 24 frames in this timeline). A faster transition might be 12 frames (0.5 seconds) or 6 frames.
3. **Preset (Direction):** Adjust the direction (e.g., Push Left, Push Up).
4. **Motion Blur:** Increase the motion blur to make the transition look professional (prevents a simple sliding look).
5. **Ease:** Set to Ease In, Ease Out to create a smooth animation.

Applying External Transitions (e.g., Arrow Transition):

1. In the Media Pool, right-click and select New Bin. Name it transition.
2. Import the transition video file (e.g., CCT arrow transition) into the bin.
3. Right-click the track area and select Add Track to create a new video track above the A-roll.
4. Drag the transition clip onto the new track.
5. **Timing:** Find the frame where the transition completely covers the frame. Cut the clip (Command + B).
6. Find the frame where the image starts to become exposed again. Cut, delete the middle section, and move the two halves together.
7. Align the resulting transition cut with the cut point between the A-roll clips.

Pasting Transitions: Copy a customized transition (Command + C) and paste it onto a cut (Command + V). Then, adjust the direction (e.g., Push Up).

4.9. Adding Captions

Adding auto captions is available only in the **Studio version** (paid) of DaVinci Resolve.

Manual Captions (Free Version):

1. Right-click the track area.
2. Select Add Subtitle Track.
3. Play the video, right-click the subtitle track, and click Add Subtitle.
4. Type the corresponding text.
5. Use cut points on the subtitle track to match the timing of the speech.

Customizing Captions:

- **Track Customization (Applies to all captions):**
 1. Click on a caption.
 2. Go to the Track tab in the Inspector.
 3. Adjust: Font, Size, Color (text color), Stroke (lining around the text), Drop Shadow, or Background.
 4. The background feature is useful for customization.
- **Individual Caption Customization:**
 1. Select the specific caption.
 2. Go to the Caption tab.
 3. Check the box: Customize Caption.
 4. Now, changes (like size) only apply to that single caption.

Automatic Captions (Studio Version):

1. Select all talking head audio clips.
2. Go to **Timeline > AI Tools > Create Subtitles from Audio**.
3. Use default settings and hit **Create**.
4. Edit the timing of the resulting captions by extending or trimming the subtitle clips (treating them like video tracks) to close gaps.
5. **Timing Note:** Captions should be easy for the viewer to read; adjust cuts to ensure proper phrasing (e.g., separating phrases).

Animating Subtitles (DaVinci Resolve Studio 20):

1. Go to **Effects**.
2. Under **Titles > Subtitles > Animated**.
3. Drag a preset (e.g., **Statement**) onto the **track header**.
4. Adjust size and position via the Inspector **Track** tab.

4.10. Adding Music

1. In the Media Pool, create a **New Bin** called **music**.
2. Import the music track into the new bin.
3. Drag the music track down to an audio track (e.g., A2).
4. **Rename Tracks:** Double-click the track name (e.g., Audio 1) and rename (e.g., **Talking Head Audio, Music**).
5. **Adjust Volume:** The music track is usually too loud. Select the music track, go to **Volume** in the Inspector, and generally set it to around **-25.5**.
6. **Mixer:** Use the Mixer to view the relative levels of the music and talking head audio.
7. **Mute/Solo:**
 - **S** (Solo): Only hear that track.
 - **M** (Mute): Cannot hear that track.
8. **Timing the Music Drop:** Locate where the music "drop" comes in (often a strong beat). Select the music track and hit **Command + B** to cut the beginning section. Delete the beginning section and drag the rest of the music track to the start of the timeline.
9. **Fading Out Music:** Drag the end of the music track to the end of the video. Use the **white dot** at the top corner of the audio clip to taper out the music (fade out).

5. Delivery (Exporting)

1. Go to the **Deliver Page** (spaceship icon).
2. Give the video a **Name** (e.g., "Dainci Resolve").
3. Select a **Location** (e.g., desktop).
4. Export settings generally look good as default: **QuickTime H.264**.
5. **Exporting Subtitles/Captions:**
 - Go down to **Subtitle Settings**.
 - Check **Export Subtitle**.
 - Set **Format** to **Burn into Video** (this ensures captions appear on the final video).
6. Hit **Add to Render Queue**.
7. Hit **Render All**.

6. Advanced Edit

The advanced edit focuses on techniques to make the video more engaging, especially in the intro/hook for short form content.

6.1. Creating an Engaging Intro with Custom Text and Graphics

1. **Preparation:** Delete initial captions to make room.
2. **Add Text:** Go to **Effects** > **Titles** and drag in **Text** (Basic Text).
3. **Customize Text:** Type the desired text (e.g., "DaVinci Resolve"). Set font (e.g., Arial), size (e.g., 60), and boldness.
4. **Add Background:** Select a color (e.g., white). Increase opacity. Adjust height and width. Change text color (e.g., black).
5. **Add Graphic:** Import a logo graphic and drag it onto a new track. Scale and position the graphic.
6. **Add Pop Transition:** Go to **Video Transitions** and search for **Pop Wobble**. Drag the Pop Wobble transition onto the beginning of the text clip and the graphic clip.
7. **Layering Fix:** If the B-roll clip is below the text/graphic layers, the text will show over the B-roll. Drag the B-roll clip **above** the text and graphic layers.
8. **Duplicating Text:** Select the existing text layer, hold down **Option**, and drag it to duplicate.
9. **Staggering Text:** Select all text layers. Use the right arrow key to move subsequent clips over a few frames (e.g., five frames each) to stagger their entry, a classic professional technique.

6.2. Keyframes and Animation Curves

Keyframe Definition: You set a starting point (e.g., small text) and an ending point (e.g., big text), and the software animates the movement between those points.

Zoom-In Animation Example:

1. Go to the beginning of the clip.
2. In Inspector (Video), click the keyframe buttons next to **Zoom** and **Position** to set the starting point.
3. Move the playhead to the desired end point of the animation.
4. Place a second keyframe, and adjust the **Zoom** (increase size) and **Position**.
5. Playing back now shows the video slowly zooming in.

Smoothing Animation with Curves: The animation is initially a linear straight line. To smooth it out:

1. Go up to the **Keyframes** tab (this opens the keyframe animation window).
2. Select all the keyframes (points).
3. Click the **Keyframe Curves** button (a curved line icon). This adds a curve pattern, creating a smoother, more natural motion to the animation.

6.3. Cloning/Cutout Effect (Advanced Masking)

This technique involves cutting out the background of a subject.

Preparation:

1. Select the main clip and drag it up two video tracks.

2. Hold **Option** and duplicate the clip onto the track directly above it.
3. Hold **Option**, select the audio track of the duplicated clip, and delete it.

Masking the Subject (Top Clip):

1. Select the top clip and go to the **Color Tab**.
2. In the node area, right-click and select **Add Alpha Output** (adds a blue dot).
3. Click, hold, and connect the blue output dot to the blue dot on the main node.
4. Go to the **Window Section** and select the **Pen Tool**.
5. Ensure you are on the **First frame**.
6. Use the pen tool to draw a detailed mask around the subject (can zoom with the scroll wheel).
7. **Tracking:** Click the tracker button and hit the track forward button. This tracks the subject's motion (works best with low motion).
8. **Blending:** Go back to the Window section (on the first frame) and increase the **Softness** slightly to blend the mask edge with the background.

Adding Background and Repositioning:

1. Move the cutout subject clip (top layer) up one more layer.
2. Create a **New Bin** called **Background** and import a background image/video.
3. Drag the background onto the track layer **below** the cutout subject.
4. Select the cutout subject clip (top clip). Use Inspector (Video) to adjust **Position Y** and **Position X** to move the subject (e.g., down into a corner).

Fading the Clone In (Opacity Keyframes): To make the clone appear smoothly rather than harshly:

1. Select the clone clip (top layer).
2. Go to the first frame. Go to **Opacity** in the Inspector, click the keyframe tool, and set Opacity to **zero**.
3. Tab over three frames (1, 2, 3).
4. Set Opacity to **100** (this automatically sets the second keyframe). This creates a smooth fade-in.

6.4. Overlays (Film Burn)

Overlays like film burns are a popular online trend.

1. Import the film burn overlay (e.g., from the free editing pack).
2. Set In/Out points (I/O) around the main flare-up.
3. **Timing the Transition:** Find the frame where the **full frame gets covered up by light**. Cut there (**Command + B**).
4. Find the frame right before the light breaks out. Cut there, delete the middle section, and move the two ends together.
5. Align the midpoint cut with the transition point on the timeline.
6. **Blending:** Select the overlay clips. Go to **Composite** in the Inspector and set the blend mode to **Screen**.

6.5. Adding Sound Effects (SFX)

Sound effects are essential for leveling up videos from good to great by emphasizing key moments.

1. Import SFX: Import the sound effects folder (e.g., CCTSFX) into the Media Pool.

2. **Create Track:** Create a new audio track (e.g., A3) and rename it **Sound Effects**.
 3. **Placement and Timing:** Drag the sound effect (e.g., **pop**) onto the SFX track. Time the SFX to the **apex moment** of the animation. Turn off the magnet (snapping) temporarily for more accurate timing.
 4. **SFX Volume:** Adjust the volume of the sound effect (e.g., to **-10**).
 5. **Whoosh SFX:** For transitions/slides, time the big sound peak of the **whoosh** to the **middle of the motion**.
 6. **Adding Multiple SFX Tracks:** If sound effects overlap on a single track (e.g., a pop covers a whoosh), add more audio tracks (**Right Click > Add Tracks** > Audio tracks: 2).
 7. **Duplicating SFX:** Hold down **Option** and drag the sound effect to duplicate it easily.
 8. **Creative Use (Boing/Crickets):**
 - For dramatic moments (e.g., clone popping in), use a funny sound effect like **boing**.
 - Cut the music track (**Command + B**) right when the sound effect comes in. Delete the music silence, and snap the rest of the music back in on its beat drop.
 - Add low-level ambient sounds (e.g., **crickets** at -25.5 volume) for comedic effect.
-