

# 1. Getting to Know the Workflow

## Lesson overview

In this lesson, you'll learn how to do the following:

- Create a project and import footage.
- Create compositions and arrange layers.
- Navigate the Adobe After Effects interface.
- Use the Project, Composition, and Timeline panels.
- Apply basic keyframes and effects.
- Preview your work.
- Customize the workspace.
- Adjust preferences related to the user interface.
- Find additional resources for using After Effects.



This lesson will take about an hour to complete. Download the Lesson01 project files from the Lesson & Update Files tab on your Account page at [www.peachpit.com](http://www.peachpit.com), if you haven't already done so. As you work on this lesson, you'll preserve the start files. If you need to restore the start files, download them from your Account page.



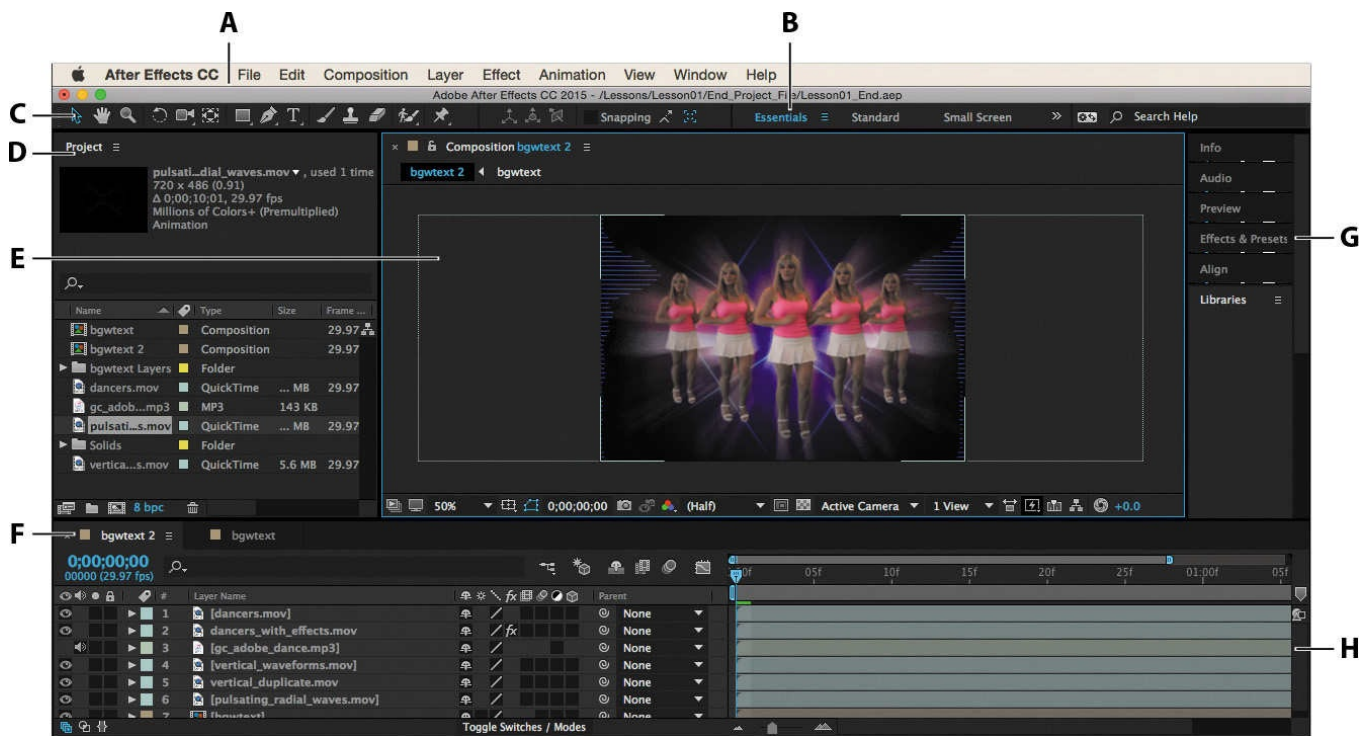
#### PROJECT: SEQUENCE FROM A MUSIC VIDEO

Whether you use After Effects to animate a simple DVD title sequence or to create complex special effects, you generally follow the same basic workflow. The After Effects interface facilitates your work and adapts to each stage of production.

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#### About the After Effects work area

After Effects offers a flexible, customizable work area. The main window of the program is called the *application window*. Panels are organized in this window in an arrangement called a *workspace*. The default workspace contains stacked panels as well as panels that stand alone, as shown below.



**A.** Application window **B.** Workspace bar **C.** Tools panel **D.** Project panel **E.** Composition panel **F.** Timeline panel **G.** Stacked panels **H.** Time graph

You customize a workspace by dragging the panels into the configuration that best suits your working style. You can drag panels to new locations, change the order of stacked panels, move panels into or out of a group, place panels alongside each other, stack panels, and undock a panel so that it floats in a new window above the application window. As you rearrange panels, the other panels resize automatically to fit the window.

When you drag a panel by its tab to relocate it, the area where you can drop it—called a *drop zone*—becomes highlighted. The drop zone determines where and how the panel is inserted into the workspace. Dragging a panel to a drop zone either docks it, groups it, or stacks it.

If you drop a panel along the edge of another panel, group, or window, it will dock next to the existing group, resizing all groups to accommodate the new panel.

If you drop a panel in the middle of another panel or group, or along the tab area of a panel, it will be added to the existing group and be placed at the top of the stack. Grouping a panel does not resize other groups.

You can also open a panel in a floating window. To do so, select the panel, and then choose Undock Panel or Undock Frame from the panel menu. Or, drag the panel or group outside the application window.

## Getting started

A basic After Effects workflow follows six steps: importing and organizing footage, creating compositions and arranging layers, adding effects, animating elements, previewing your work, and rendering and outputting the final composition so that it can be viewed by others. In this lesson, you will create a simple animated video using this workflow, and along the way, you'll learn your way around the After Effects interface.

First, you'll preview the final movie to see what you'll create in this lesson.

1. Make sure the following files are in the Lessons/Lesson01 folder on your hard disk, or download them from your Account page at [www.peachpit.com](http://www.peachpit.com) now:
  - In the Assets folder: bgwtext.psd, dancers.mov, gc\_adobe\_dance.mp3, pulsating\_radial\_waves.mov, vertical\_waveforms.mov
  - In the Sample\_Movie folder: Lesson01.mov
2. Open and play the Lesson01.mov sample movie in QuickTime Player to see what you will create in this lesson. When you're done, quit QuickTime Player. You may delete this sample movie from your hard disk if you have limited storage space.

## Creating a project and importing footage

When you begin each lesson of this book, it's a good idea to restore the default preferences for After Effects. (For more information, see “[Restoring default preferences](#)” on page 2.) You can do this with a simple keyboard shortcut.

1. Start After Effects, and then immediately hold down Ctrl+Alt+Shift (Windows) or Command+Option+Shift (Mac OS) to restore default preferences settings. When prompted, click OK to delete your preferences.

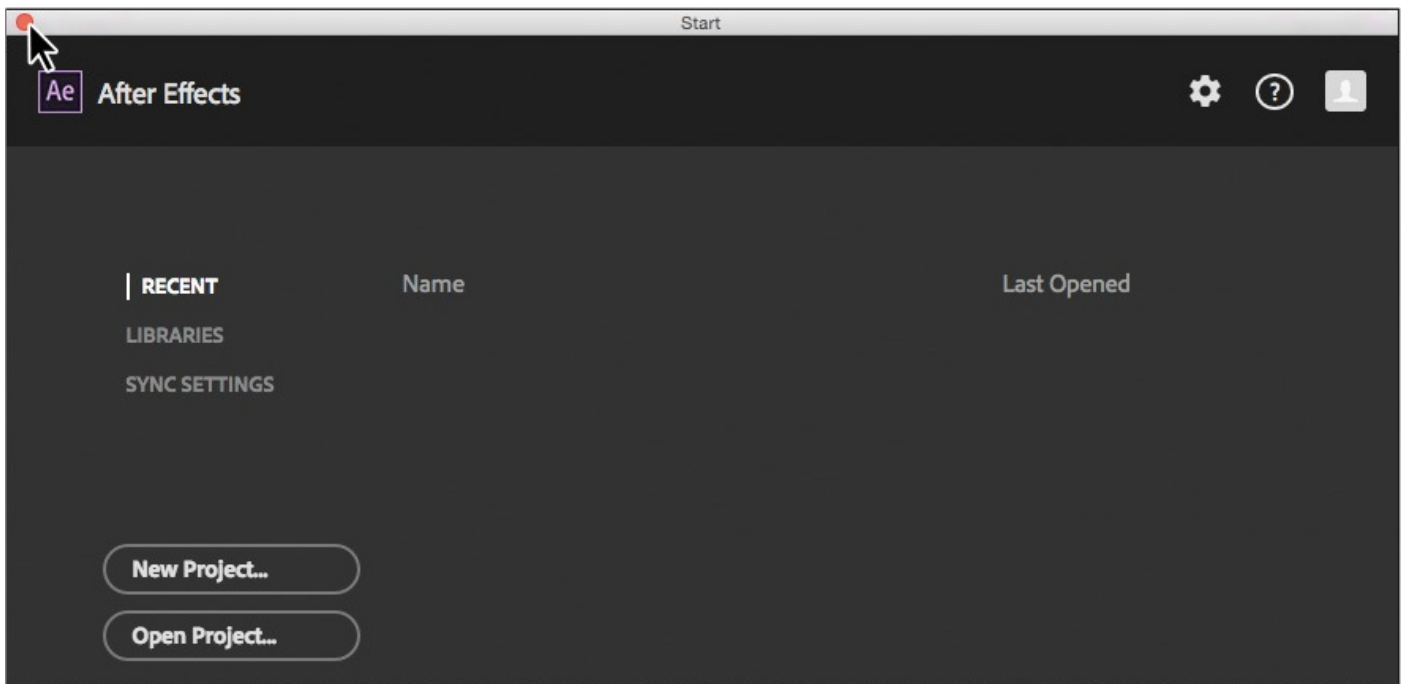
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### Tip

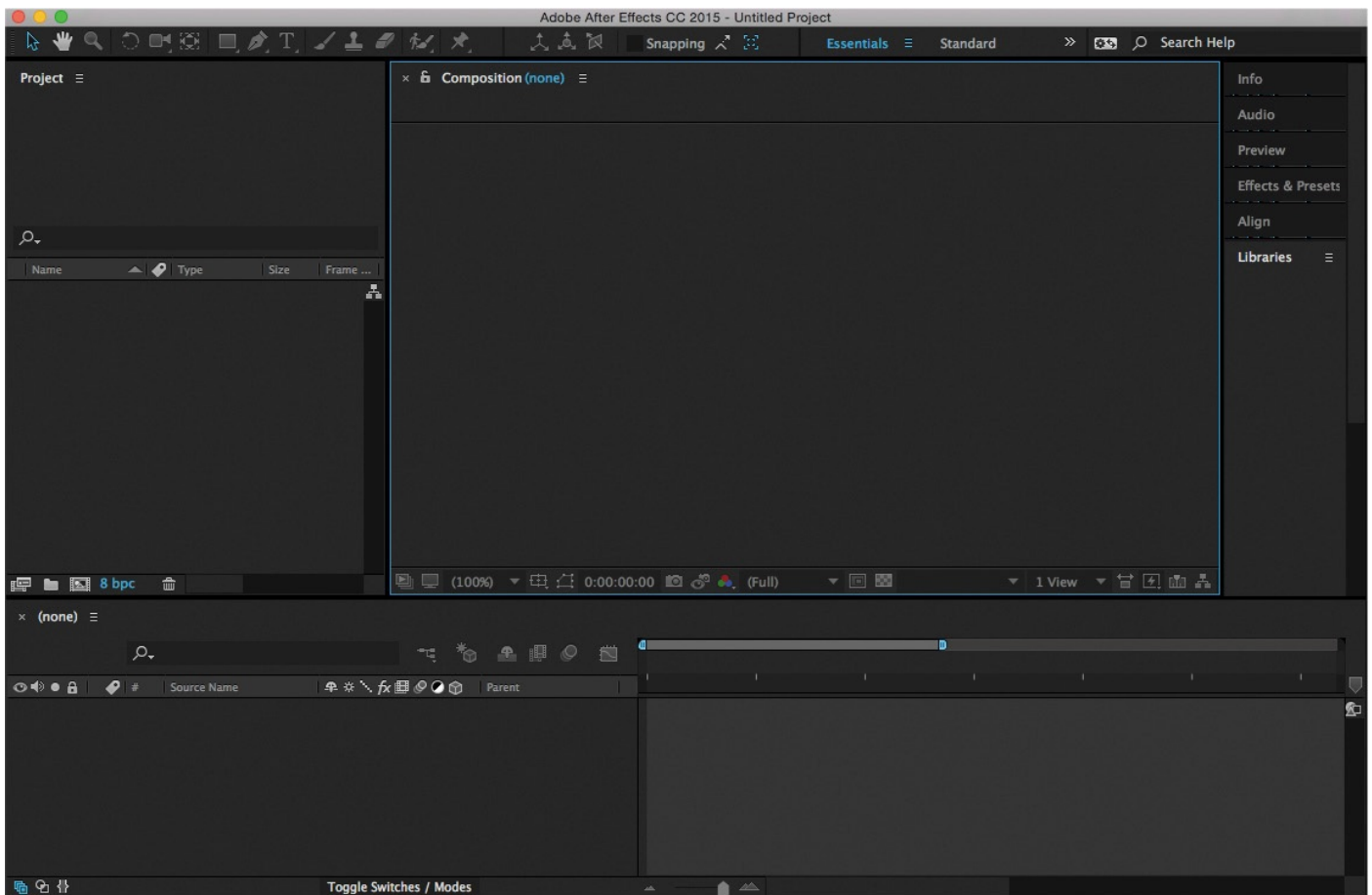
Restoring default preferences can be tricky in Windows, especially if you're working on a fast system. Press the keys after you double-click the application icon but before After Effects begins to list the files it's activating. Alternatively, you can choose Edit > [your Creative Cloud account username] > Clear Settings, and then restart the application.

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2. Close the Start window.



After Effects opens to display an empty, untitled project.



An After Effects project is a single file that stores references to all the footage you use in that project. It also contains *compositions*, which are the individual containers used to combine footage, apply effects, and, ultimately, drive the output.

When you begin a project, often the first thing you'll do is add footage to it.



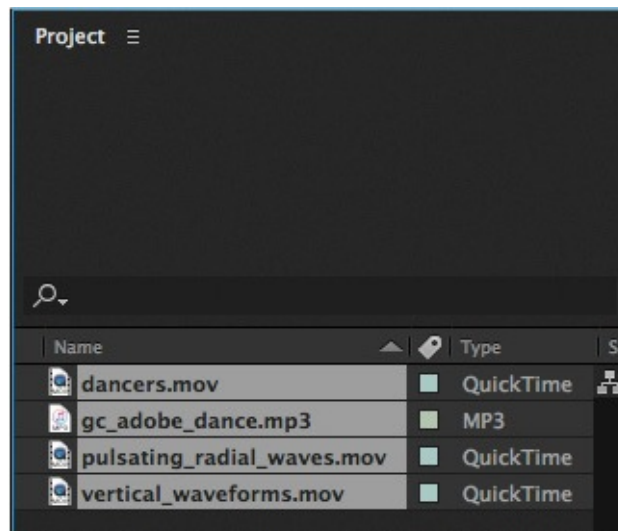
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### ► Tip

To quickly maximize a panel, position the pointer over it and press the accent grave key (`) —the unshifted character under the tilde (~) on standard US keyboards. Press the ` key again to return the panel to its original size.

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### 3. Choose File > Import > File.



### 4. Navigate to the Assets folder in your Lessons/Lesson01 folder. Shift-click to select the dancers.mov, gc\_adobe\_dance.mp3, pulsating\_radial\_waves.mov, and vertical\_waveforms.mov files (all the files except bgwtext.psd). Then click Import or Open.

A *footage item* is the basic unit in an After Effects project. You can import many types of footage items, including moving-image files, still-image files, still-image sequences, audio files, layered files from Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator, other After Effects projects, and projects created in Adobe Premiere® Pro. You can import footage items at any time.

As you import assets, After Effects reports its progress in the Info panel.

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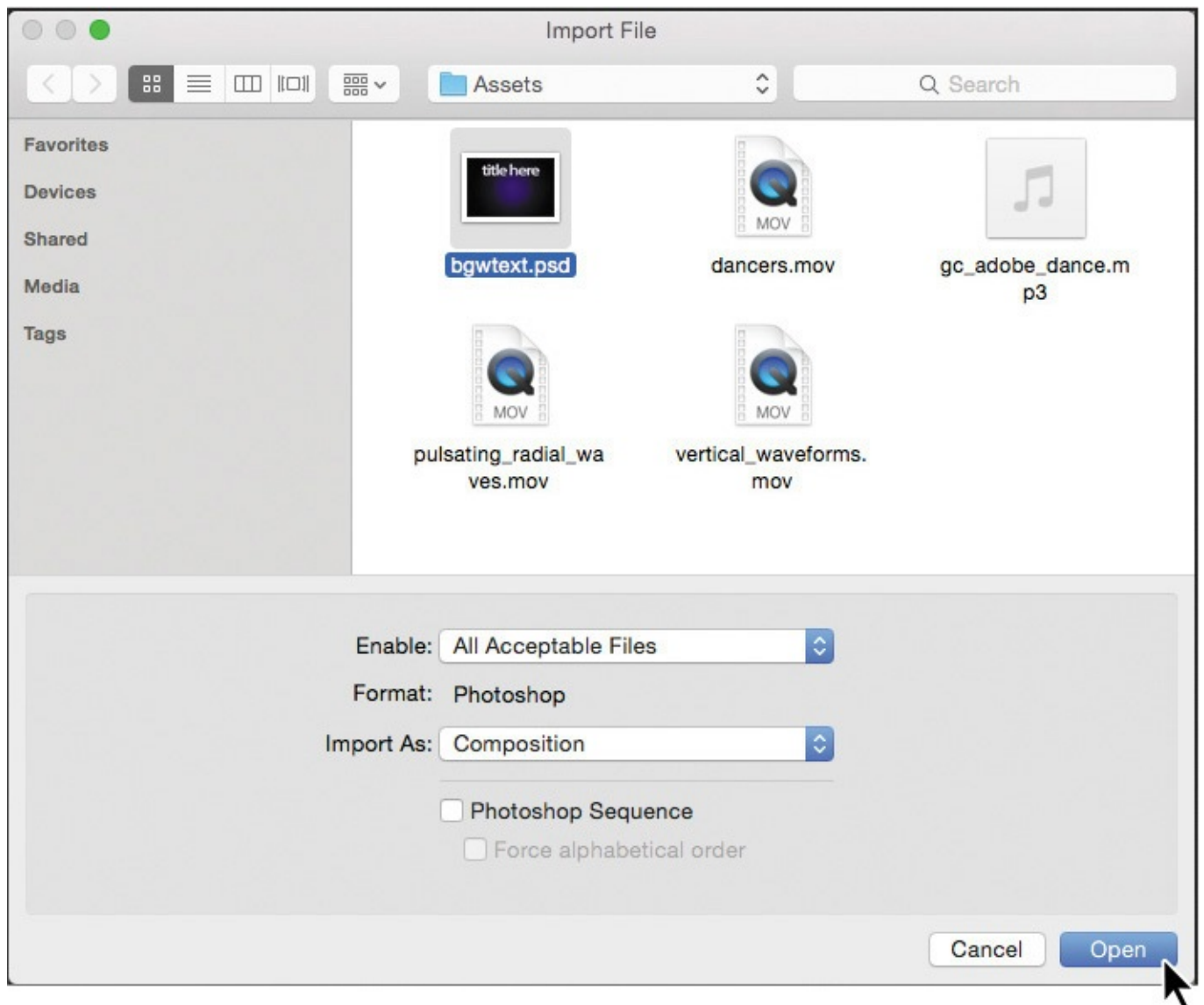
### ► Tip

You can also choose File > Import > Multiple Files to select files located in different folders, or drag and drop files from Explorer or the Finder. You can use Adobe Bridge to search for, manage, preview, and import footage.

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Because one of the footage items for this project is a multilayer Photoshop file, you'll import it separately as a composition.

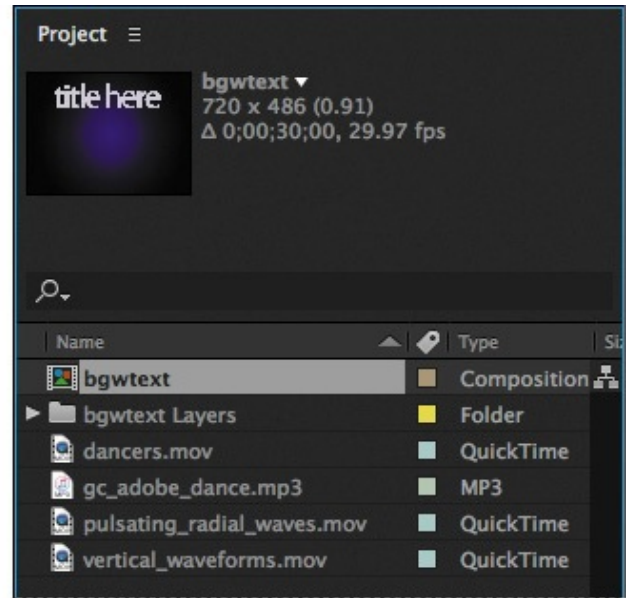
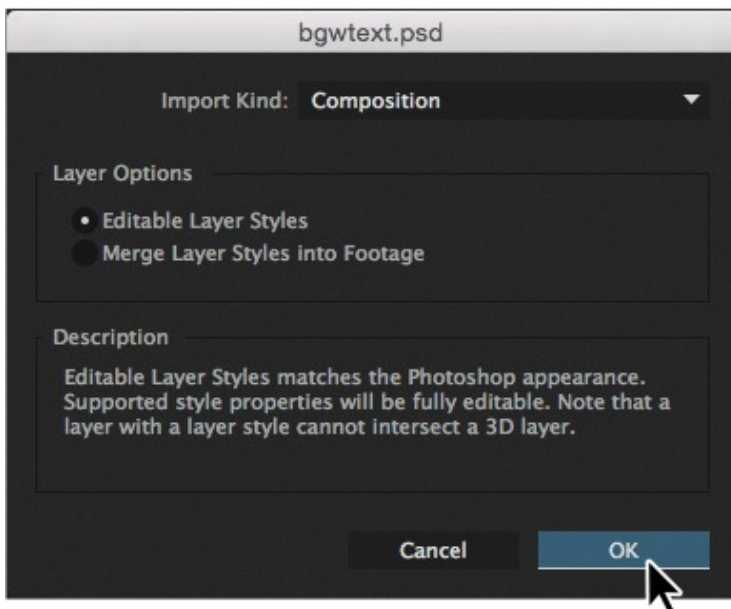
5. Double-click in the lower area of the Project panel to open the Import File dialog box.
6. Navigate to the Lesson01/Assets folder again, and select the bgwtext.psd file. Choose Composition from the Import As menu, and then click Import or Open.



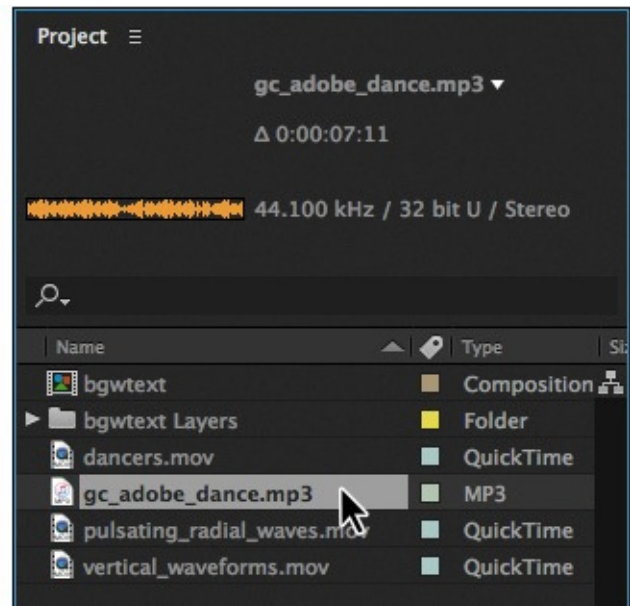
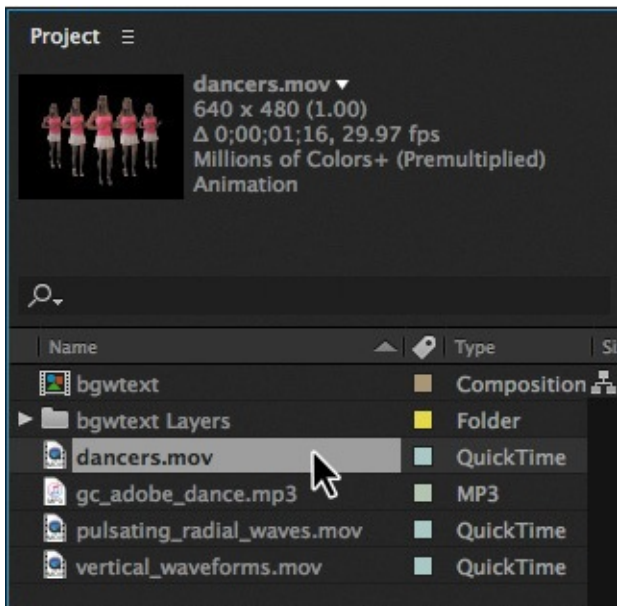
After Effects opens an additional dialog box that displays options for the file you are importing.

7. In the bgwtext.psd dialog box, choose Composition from the Import Kind menu to import the layered Photoshop file as a composition. Select Editable Layer Styles in the Layer Options area, and then click OK.

The footage items appear in the Project panel.



8. In the Project panel, click to select different footage items. Notice that a thumbnail preview appears at the top of the Project panel. You can also see the file type and size, as well as other information about each item, in the Project panel columns.



When you import files, After Effects doesn't copy the video and audio data itself into your project. Instead, each footage item in the Project panel contains a reference link to the source files. When After Effects needs to retrieve image or audio data, it reads it from the source file. This keeps the project file small, and allows you to update source files in another application without modifying the project.

If you move a file or if After Effects can't access its location, it will report that the file is missing. To find missing files, choose File > Dependencies > Find Missing Footage. You can also type **Missing Footage** into the Search box in the Project panel to look for the missing assets.



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## ► Tip

You can locate missing fonts or effects the same way. Choose File > Dependencies, and then choose Find Missing Fonts or Find Missing Effects. Or just type **Missing Fonts** or **Missing Effects** into the Search box in the Project panel.

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To save time and minimize the size and complexity of a project, you'll usually import a footage item once even if you're using it multiple times in a composition. However, you may sometimes need to import a source file more than once, such as if you want to use it at two different frame rates.

After you've imported footage, it's a good time to save the project.

9. Choose File > Save. In the Save As dialog box, navigate to the Lessons/Lesson01/Finished\_Project folder. Name the project **Lesson01\_Finished.aep**, and then click Save.

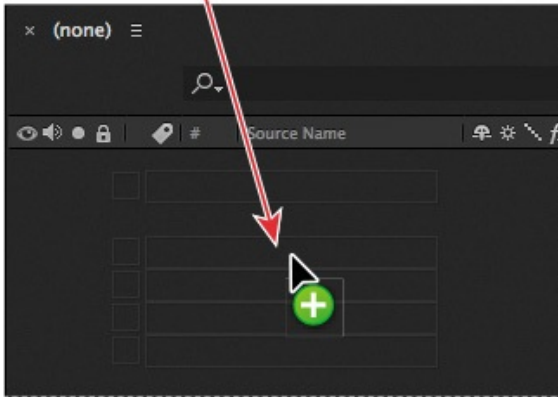
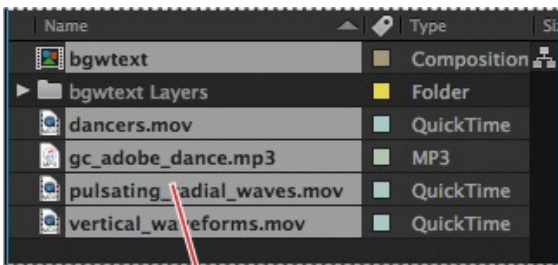
## Creating a composition and arranging layers

The next step of the workflow is to create a composition. You create all animation, layering, and effects in a composition. An After Effects composition has both spatial dimensions and a temporal dimension (time).

Compositions include one or more layers, arranged in the Composition panel and in the Timeline panel. Any item that you add to a composition—such as a still image, moving-image file, audio file, light layer, camera layer, or even another composition—becomes a new layer. Simple projects may include only one composition, while elaborate projects may include several compositions to organize large amounts of footage or intricate effects sequences.

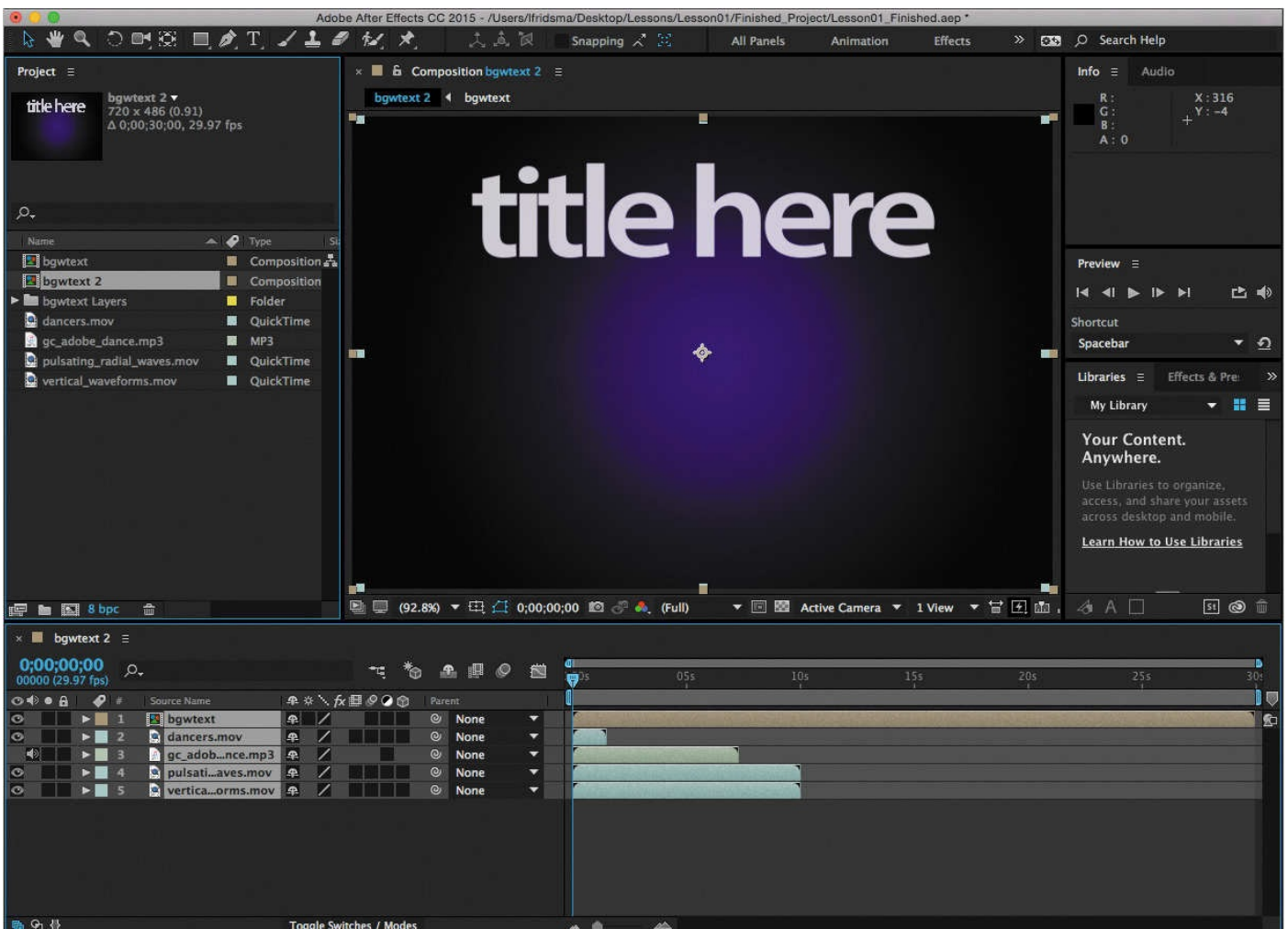
To create a composition, you'll drag the footage items into the Timeline panel, and After Effects will create layers for them.

1. In the Project panel, Ctrl-click (Windows) or Command-click (Mac OS) to select the bgwtext composition as well as the dancers, gc\_adobe\_dance, vertical\_waveforms, and pulsating\_radial\_waves footage items.
2. Drag the selected footage items into the Timeline panel. The New Composition From Selection dialog box appears.



After Effects bases the dimensions of the new composition on the selected footage. In this example, all of the footage is sized identically, so you can accept the default settings for the composition.

3. Click OK to create the new composition.

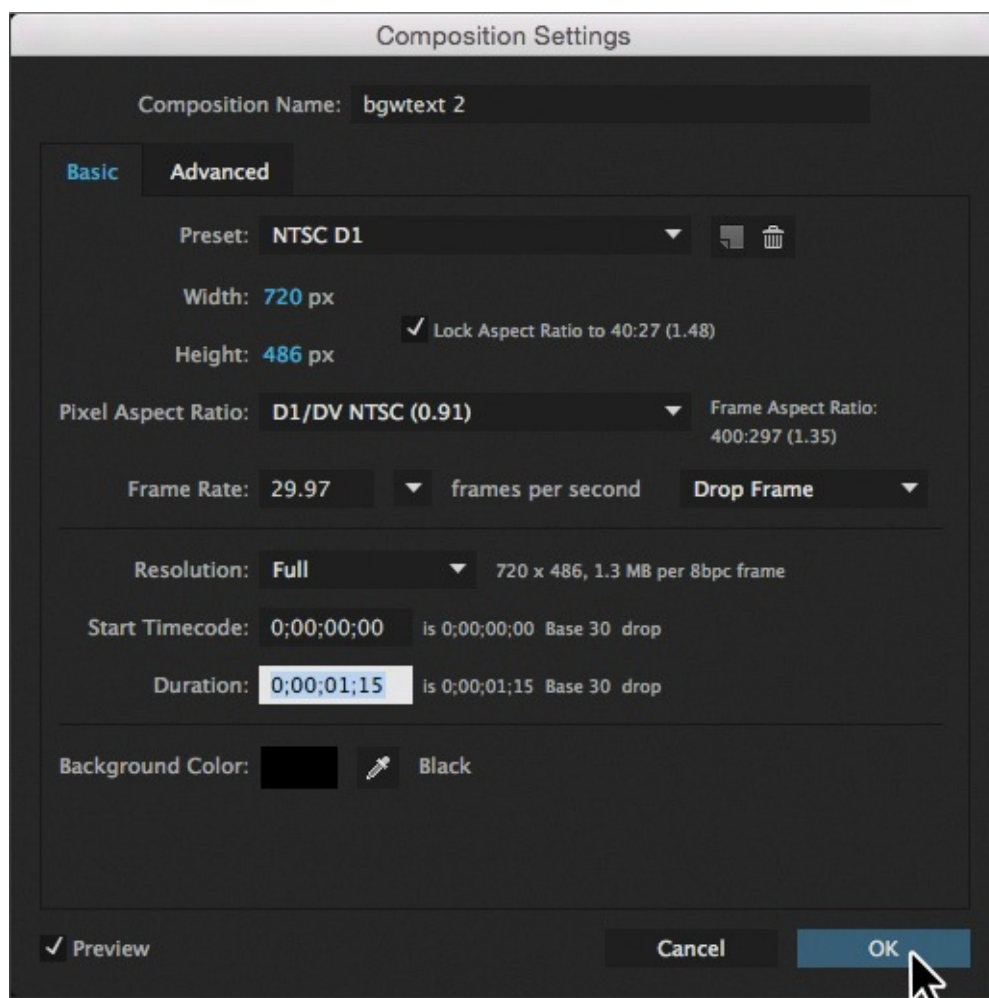


The footage items appear as layers in the Timeline panel, and After Effects displays the composition, named bgwtext 2, in the Composition panel.

When you add a footage item to a composition, the footage becomes the source for a new layer. A composition can have any number of layers, and you can also include a composition as a layer in another composition, which is called *nesting*.

Some of the assets are longer than others, but you want them all to appear only as long as the dancers are on the screen. You'll change the length of the entire composition to 1:15 to match the dancers.

4. Choose Composition > Composition Settings.
5. In the Composition Settings dialog box, type **1:15** for the Duration, and then click OK.



The Timeline panel displays the same duration for each of the layers.

In this composition, there are five footage items, and therefore five layers in the Timeline panel. Depending on the order in which the elements were selected when you imported them, your layer stack may differ from the one shown on the previous page. The layers need to be in a specific order as you add effects and animations, however, so you'll rearrange them now.

## About layers

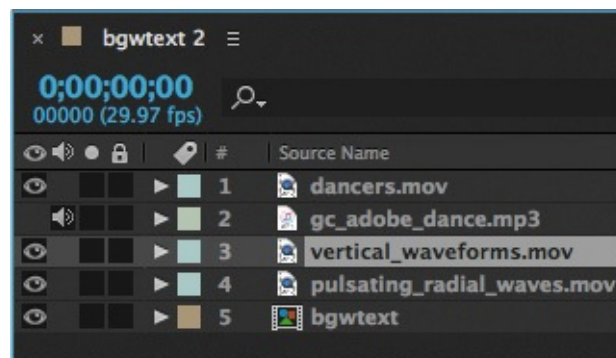
*Layers* are the components you use to build a composition. Any item that you add to a composition—such as a still image, moving-image file, audio file, light layer, camera layer, or even another composition—becomes a new layer. Without layers, a composition consists only of an empty frame.

Using layers, you can work with specific footage items in a composition without affecting any other footage. For example, you can move, rotate, and draw masks for one layer without disturbing any other layers in the composition, or you can use the same footage in more than one layer and use it differently in each instance. In general, the layer order in the Timeline panel corresponds to the stacking order in the Composition panel.

### Note

You may need to click a blank area of the Timeline panel or press F2 to deselect layers before you can select an individual layer.

6. Click an empty area of the Timeline panel to deselect the layers, and then drag bgwtext to the bottom of the layer stack, if it is not already there. Drag the other four layers so that they're in the order shown at right.



From this point forward in the workflow, you should be thinking about layers, not footage items. You'll change the column title accordingly.

7. Click the Source Name column title in the Timeline panel to change it to Layer Name.
8. Choose File > Save to save your project so far.

