Digital Asset Development: Lab Session 6 – Adobe Premiere Pro CS6

Introduction

In this week's lab you will learn key video editing techniques in Adobe Premiere Pro CS6. Premiere is a complex professional level application, so you will not be discovering all of its features in a single session. However, the basic mechanics of video editing are fairly straightforward once you understand the main concepts, so after this lab you should be well placed to further explore Premiere's feature set. These exercises are also very relevant for the video element of module assignment 1.

The main topics covered in this session are:

- Setting up a video project file in Premiere
- Setting marker points in the source monitor
- Multi-track editing in the timeline
- Applying transitions between clips
- Applying video effects
- Using adjustment layers
- Adding titles to video
- Exporting a video sequence from Premiere

To practice in Premiere you will need some video clips. Download (and unzip) the zipped folder *sample_clips* from the Moodle page. This holds a set of short animation pieces (they come from a previous student assessment). They are mostly in AVI format, but have a variety of pixel resolutions (from 720x576 up to 1920x1080) and frame rates (between 24 and 30 frames per second).

Setting up a Premiere Project

On starting up Premiere you are prompted to either open an existing project or create a new one. Clicking the New option brings up the New Project dialogue. This has options defining how your project displays video and audio streams. Leave these at the defaults, which are sensible for most situations, choose a name and location for your project file, and click OK. This leads to a second window that allows you to specify settings for your video sequence. This is an important step, largely because you can't alter these settings once the project is created. If you decide at some point you wish to alter the sequence settings you need to start a new project with new settings, and copy and paste your project contents into the new version. Clearly it is best to get it right first time!

The New Sequence dialogue shows a large set of available presets for digital video. What is suitable for a given project depends on the desired output format, but may also be influenced by the settings of the clips that will be used to make the sequence. Given the variety of such settings in our collection of sample clips, we will choose a compromise somewhere in the middle. Open the HDV listing and choose the HDV 720p25 preset. This specifies a pixel resolution of 1280x720 at 25 frames per second. It is by no means an ideal solution, but will give you the opportunity to observe some of the issues involved in combining clips from disparate sources.

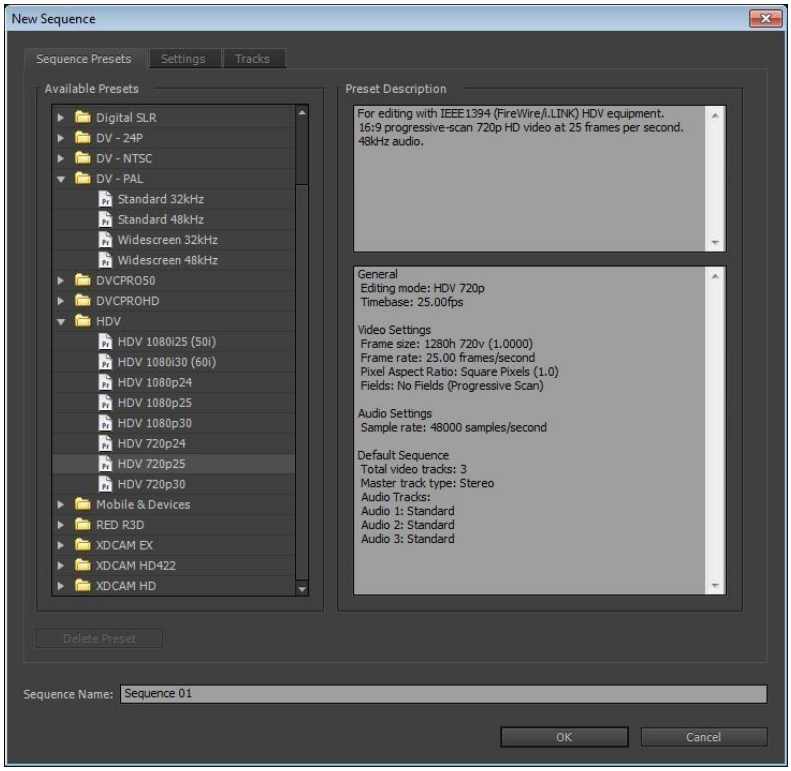

Fig 1: the New Sequence window in Premiere with the HDV 720p25 preset chosen

When you click OK, Premiere will take a couple of seconds to set up your project sequence, before bringing up the standard interface layout. You can now import your clips – go to File > Import (or use the Ctrl-I shortcut), and navigate to the location of the unzipped folder. The quickest way of importing is to select the folder and choose import. The folder now appears in the Project panel. In this context, the folder is referred to as a *bin*. It is good practice to organise your project files into bins according to their type (eg. audio, titles,…) or subject matter. You can create additional bins by right-clicking in the Project panel and choosing New Bin. Double-clicking a bin opens it as a separate panel, allowing you to inspect the clips individually.

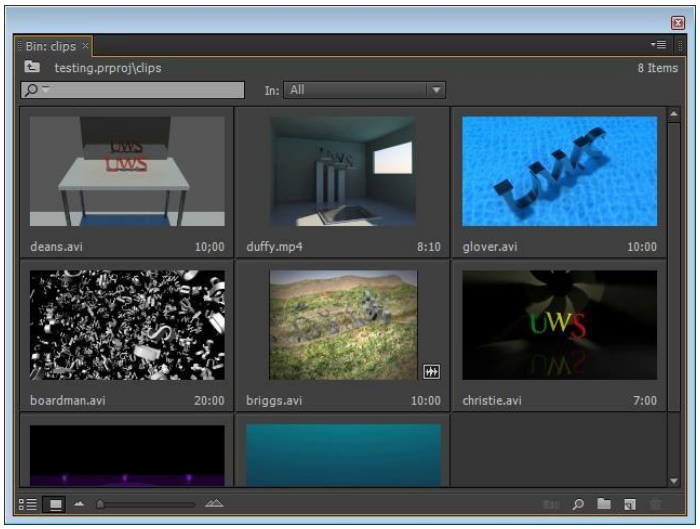

Fig 2: the bin of sample clips

Trimming Clips in the Source Monitor

Double-click one of your project clips to open it in the Source Monitor panel. The Source Monitor allows you to preview a clip and set marker points. The main transport controls under the monitor should be self explanatory. The curly bracket icons to the left of those are used to mark In and Out Points – pressing the left curly bracket will add an In Point marker to the currently-displayed frame. Markers define the extent of a clip once it is added to the sequence timeline. Note that adding markers will have no effect on the original video file that is being referenced. Similarly, any edits, effects or transitions added in the timeline do not alter the original clip data.

Use the monitor controls to trim your clip by marking In and Out Points. Note that the markers appear on the monitor time slider, and the clip length at the lower right of the panel changes to reflect your edits. You can carry on resetting your markers until you are happy with them.

Editing in the Timeline

Once you have finished editing the clip in the Source Monitor you can bring it in to the main sequence timeline. This panel consists of a number of video and audio tracks, usually defaulting to three of each. You can add or delete tracks, though having much more than the default makes the timeline very crowded. The tracks can be expanded vertically by clicking the arrow in their header. By default Video 1 and Audio 1 are the active tracks. Note that video tracks stack rather like Photoshop layers – data on a higher placed track in the panel will overlay data on a lower layer (there is no such precedence for audio tracks).

Click in the Source Monitor preview frame and drag your clip to track Video 1. You will probably get a warning message at this point telling you that the sequence and clip settings don't match. We have already decided that we'll just have to live with this issue, so choose the Keep Sequence Settings option, first unchecking the "warn me in future" box.

Note that the duration of the clip on the timeline corresponds to the trimmed version rather than the original length. Preview the clip by hitting the spacebar or using the Program Monitor controls. Notice that you can also scrub the playhead back and forth on the timeline to get a quick preview of the footage. You may find that your clip is either too large or too small for the monitor – if so, don't worry for now – we will deal with this later.

Select a second clip from your clip bin and drag it to the timeline (if you like, you can trim it first in the Source Monitor and drag it from there). Drop the new clip just after the end point of the first one – it should snap into place with no gap. If it doesn't then drag it left so the ends join. Playing back the sequence you should see an instantaneous cut between the two clips.

We have seen what happens when you add a clip to an empty section of the timeline. What happens if you want to drop a clip into an occupied section? There are two possibilities. The default behaviour is for the clip to *overwrite* the existing content, while the alternative is that the clip is *inserted*, moving the existing video to the right.

Drag the playhead so it is just after the start of the second clip on your timeline. Then take a third clip from the bin, drag it to the Video 1 channel and drop it on the playhead. The new clip now

covers the time period previously covered by the rest of clip 2 (depending on their relative lengths there may be some footage left over at the end of the sequence). This is the overwrite option. Press Ctrl-Z to undo the last action, then repeat the process, but hold down the Ctrl key when dropping the new clip. A set of right-pointing arrows appears when you do this, indicating that an *insert edit* is taking place. If you scroll right along the sequence you will see that all the footage in the existing clip is still present, but with the new clip inserted in the middle.

Move the playhead all the way back to the start of the sequence. Now drag a fourth clip to the timeline, but this time drop it onto the Video 2 track. When you place a clip onto track 2 it covers the underlying footage. Note that if you drop the clip onto Video 2 while pressing the Ctrl key the footage on Video 1 is still shifted to the right.

Click and drag on the right hand end of the clip on track 2, dragging it leftwards. Viewing in the Program Monitor shows that this has the effect of trimming the end of the clip. Similarly, you can drag the start of the clip rightwards to remove the start of a clip – in this case you need to hit the Enter key to build a render of the sequence in order to see the correctly trimmed version.

Experiment with arranging clips on the timeline, using multiple tracks, trimming and making insert/overwrite edits, until you are comfortable with how these tasks are accomplished.

Adding Transitions

Cutting directly between clips as you have done thus far is a standard editing method in much of film and video production, but it is not the only creative option available. Sometimes it is desirable to provide a less abrupt switch between items on the timeline via the use of *transitions*. A transition blends two adjacent video or audio clips, most commonly using *dissolve* or *wipe* effects. Some transition types, such as a fade to black (or other colour), have a standard use in video editing, such as to signal the end of a scene. Other types can be quite intrusive or corny and should not be used unless for a specific purpose. Transitions that last too long, or are overly showy, tend to detract from the video content.

Transitions are accessed through Premiere's Effects panel. When using them, it is a good idea to change the workspace layout. Go to Window > Workspace and choose Effects. The panel layout should switch to one where both the Effects and Effects Controls panels are visible (this will also be handy for the next section).

Zoom in on the timeline so the cut between two clips that you wish to apply the transition to is centred in the visible area. Then go to the list of categories in the Effects panel and select Video Transitions. This gives a variety of transition types, most of which are fairly self-explanatory. Find the Cross Dissolve option on the Dissolve menu, drag it across to the timeline and drop it on the dividing line between the two clips for which you wish the transition to apply. In theory, the transition should straddle the cut, covering the same duration on both sides of the divide. In practice, it tends to behave differently only appearing on the right of the cut. Don't worry – this is easy to fix. Click on the transition in the timeline, go to the Effect Controls panel and change the Alignment setting to

Centre at Cut. Note that you can alter a transition's duration in this panel (you can also do so in the timeline by dragging on its endpoints).

The section of the timeline covered by the transition now has a red bar along the top. You will notice when you view the clip using the Program Monitor controls that the two clips appear to fade into each other as expected. However, this is a preview render – to see the fully rendered transition you need to hit Enter on the keyboard to build your timeline sequence. When this process is complete the red bar will turn green and you can see the end result.

Pick other cuts within your sequence and experiment with applying different transition types to see which ones you like. In each case you'll need to rebuild the sequence to check to see the transition appears correctly.

Applying Effects

With the Effects panel active, it is a good time to explore the range of visual effects we can apply to a timeline clip. The Video Effects heading in the panel can be expanded to show a very wide array of possibilities. Many of these are conceptually similar to filters or adjustments that can be applied to images in Photoshop – for example, altering the colour balance or applying noise. To apply an effect, simply drag it from the panel and drop it on the clip in the timeline. Experiment with applying effects of different types to the clips in your sequence – if you don't like the results, just undo the action to remove the effect. Many of the effects have associated settings that control how they affect a clip – for example, choosing the Levels effect brings up a substantial list of editable parameters.

There are a small number of fixed "effects" which are available by default for any clip. When a clip selected, these properties become visible in the Effects Controls panel. Among them are Motion (which is treated as an effect and can be used to animate a clip's position, rotation and scale) and Opacity. We will see how the Effects Controls panel can be used to vary a clip's opacity over its duration, making it fade in gradually.

Select any clip in the timeline, and go to the Effects Controls panel. This panel divides into two parts – on the left is a list of effects, and on the right is a kind of mini-timeline. This right-hand area is where we can animate a property of a clip using keyframes. If you have room, you can drag the dividing line in the panel leftwards to expand this timeline area. In the main sequence timeline, move the playhead to the start of the clip you wish to apply the effect to (hold down the Shift key to allow the playhead to snap in place). Then click on the triangle next to the Opacity listing on the left side of the Effect Controls panel to reveal its attributes. The value of the opacity will be set at its default of 100%. Note that the small stopwatch icon next to the Opacity attribute is already active – this means that animation is enabled by default for this property. Type a new value for opacity, or drag leftwards on the attribute to alter its value. The change should be visible in the Program Monitor preview.

Now go back to your clip in the timeline and Shift-drag the playhead to the end of the clip. Change the opacity attribute in the Effect Controls panel back to 100%. This automatically adds a keyframe in the mini-timeline on the right side of the panel. Hit the Enter key to rebuild the sequence and see your fade-in effect in action.

Experiment with animating other kinds of effects. Note that when effects are added to a clip they become editable in the Effect Controls panel once the clip is selected. Not all effects have animation enabled by default, so you may need to click the effect's Toggle Animation stopwatch icon to activate this feature.

Note that scale is also an editable property for all clips, meaning that you can use the Effect Controls panel to resize clips so they fit your sequence frame size. In this case you don't need to set keyframes as you aren't animating the attribute. This method can't alter the clip's aspect ratio, so you may not achieve an exact fit to the sequence frame.

Adjustment Layers

Applying effects to individual clips is a powerful facility, but we may often need to use an effect across a whole section of video spanned by a number of clips, potentially on different tracks. Rather than waste time adding effects to each clip separately, we can use an *adjustment layer*. This works in a roughly similar way to adjustment layers in Photoshop, affecting all the underlying material.

We will create an adjustment layer that will allow us to apply effects to the entire sequence. First, ensure there is an empty video track above all those currently containing clips (if not, select Sequence > Add Tracks to create a new video track). Then choose File > New > Adjustment Layer. In the popup dialogue, check that the layer settings match those for the project – this is important as it allows layer effects to be applied correctly. Click OK, and the layer should now be visible in the Project panel (you might need to alter the workspace to find this!).

Drag the layer into the empty track on the timeline. It defaults to a standard duration (150 frames), but can be extended to cover the whole sequence by dragging the ends. You can now apply effects to the layer as if it was a single clip. Go back to the Effects panel, choose a Posterize effect, and apply it to the layer. Rebuild the sequence to see the results. Experiment with applying other effects using the adjustment layer.

Adding Titles

Premiere allows you to create title graphics, usually text-based, that can be overlaid onto a sequence. Titles come in three types – static, rolling and crawling. The latter two have built in movement and are designed for vertically and horizontally scrolling text respectively. We will only cover static titles here – you can investigate the other types in your own time.

To create a title graphic, go to Title > New Title > Default Still, and click OK to accept the title settings. This opens the title creation interface, which consists of a set of panels surrounding a display area which will show the frame corresponding to the current playhead position (see Fig 3). The main tools for creating titles are at the top left. Click on the T icon to add text to the title. Note that the T with the down arrow next to it allows you to type text vertically, while the tools below allow other options such as typing along a path. There are also a range of tools for drawing shapes as part of a title graphic. You should experiment with these later. With the normal Type tool active,

click on the point in the frame you want your title to appear and start typing. Note that in this mode you need to hit Enter in order to start a new line.

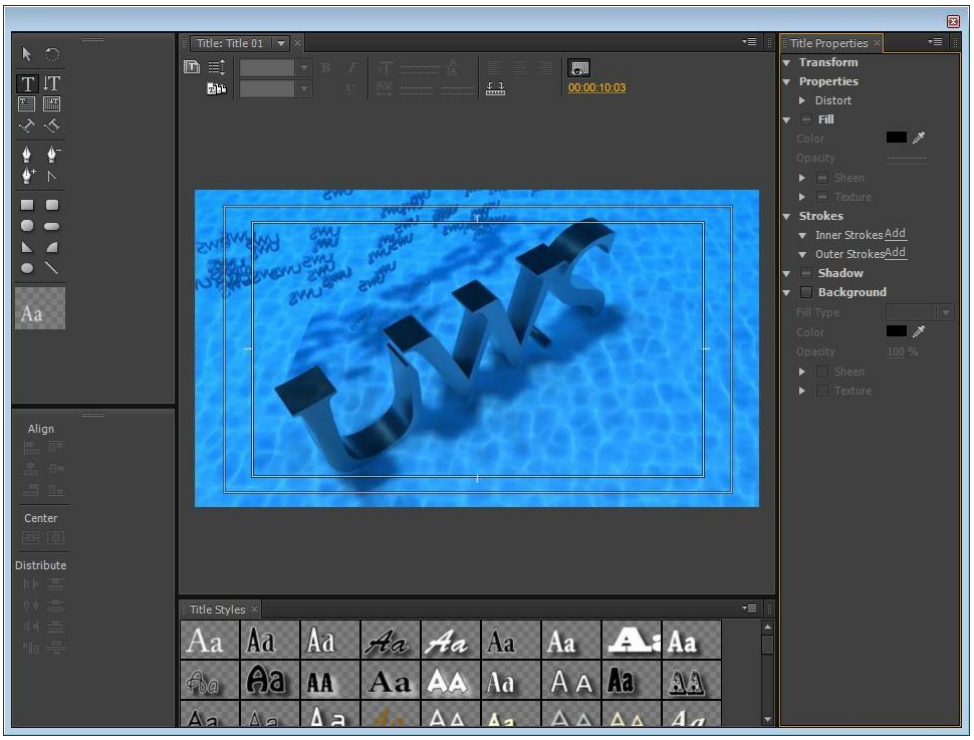

Fig 3: the title creation panel

Once you have typed your title text you can use the various formatting options. Click the selection arrow icon above the Type tool to go into select mode, and click on your title text. The Title Properties area now fills with a range of settings and parameters that control the appearance of the text. Experiment with altering the colour, size, font type and other effects available. You can also pick from an array of presets in the Title Styles panel. Note that if you wish to reuse a formatting style you have created, you can make it into a preset by clicking the dropdown menu at the top right of the Title Styles panel, choosing New Style and assigning it a suitable name. This applies the current property settings to the new style.

Once you are happy with the title, close the panel and switch back to the project panel where your title should now be available to use. Static titles behave pretty much like any other clip, and can have effects and transitions applied as described above.

Exporting a Sequence

Your Premiere project file (*.prproj*) that you began at the start of these notes is simply a list of references to clips, along with details of edits, effects, transitions and other data relevant to the project. To create video output, we need to export our sequence. This is simply done using File > Export > Media. This brings up a dialogue window with a range of options for export formats and other settings. A good default in many cases is to tick the Match Sequence Settings box and see what the output looks like. A more sophisticated approach is to select a format and preset that matches as

closely as possible your desired output platform. Identifying the best options can be as much an art as a science and requires a degree of experience.

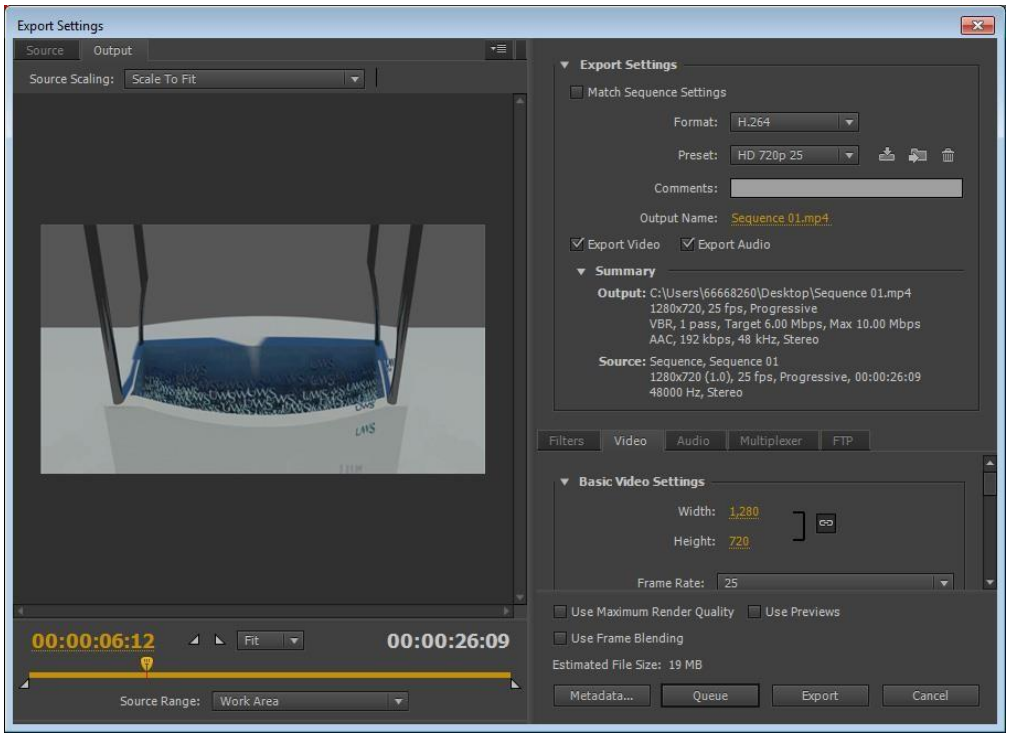

Fig 4: exporting a sequence from Premiere

Further Work

So far we have not looked at how still images work within Premiere. In fact, they can be treated as clips in their own right, behaving in the same way as static titles once they are imported into a project. As an exercise, start a new project, import a series of still images and create a slideshow, applying transitions between the stills and adding other visual effects and titles as you see fit. You could also add an audio soundtrack – see last week's notes if you need a reminder on this topic.