With a little imagination and some simple effects, you can dramatically enhance your stories. Fortunately, iMovie includes a selection of commonly used effects to make your stories flow smoothly from scene to scene. These special effects make movies look more professional and can save you considerable time when adding a finished look to your movie. In this chapter, we will enhance our movies with some special effects, particularly Titles and Transitions. We'll cover these features together because they share similar interface concepts and, when used together, they clearly illustrate how the use of effects can drastically alter the style and tempo (and in many cases, the meaning) of your final project.

Special effects make movies look more professional.

The Silent Movie Time: 01:30 (NTSC)

| Appears At Door | Appears At Door | Is It You? | She Enters | Title Card #1 | Is It You?/1 | Title Card #2 | They Embrace | Cheek To Cheek | She's Happy | You're Exactly | Title Card #3 |

Use Effects Sparingly

Believe it or not, special effects won't improve your story; they will only enhance it. So if your work isn't compelling without the use of effects, it's not likely to improve once you add titles or transitions. Some moviemakers overdo it; it is the mark of an amateur to add too many titles and transitions. Try to use a bare minimum of effects in your movie. If you can't think of a good reason to use an effect, it probably isn't critical to the telling of your story.

Titles for Movies

In a movie theater, titles are often the first thing you see, and they can immediately establish the mood of a story. If you are a frequent moviegoer, you'll recognize the titles of a Woody Allen film, a straightforward set of text displayed against a black background. The lavish costume dramas of Merchant-Ivory films often include colorful fonts that allude to the fancy dress of the period. Titles can be more than just text; they can include special effects that, when combined with text, hint at the drama of the story to come. Perhaps you recall the prelude to *Star Wars*, with its opening titles drifting out into the infinite reaches of space and simultaneously introducing the first chapter of an ongoing saga.

How Titles Work in iMovie

With iMovie, you can add easily create professional-looking titles using a variety of customizable effects, letting you decide which font, color, or animation style is best for your movie. These title effects are "rendered" over your video footage by superimposing the text onto any images in the background. iMovie can render the title effects over your video clip, still pictures, or a solid black background. These rendered effects are presented to you on-screen in a "nondestructive" preview image, which means the text is never directly applied to the captured DV footage until you are ready to export your final movie. This way, you can change your mind at any time and edit or delete titles from your movie while retaining the original quality of your video images.

The Titles Palette

To activate the Titles palette, click the Titles button in the Effects menu. All of the features and functions you'll need to create title effects are included on this palette. These settings are not accessible from anywhere else in iMovie.

Choosing a Title Effect

iMovie includes an excellent selection of built-in title effects that you can drag and drop directly into the project timeline. While many of these settings can be customized, the predefined animations will save you considerable time and give your movie some outstanding and professional results. By choosing an animation style in the scrolling list of title effects, you can instantly see a thumbnail preview of a sample title in that style appearing over a clip of video. The footage used in the thumbnail is determined by the position of the playhead in the Clip Viewer. To preview a title effect over a different video clip, simply position the playhead in front of the clip in the timeline or highlight the footage in the Clip Viewer.

Setting the Duration of an Effect

You can adjust the time it takes to execute a title effect by using the slider at the top of the Titles palette. The shorter the duration, the faster the effect will appear and disappear. For cumbersome titles, vital pieces of information, or an extensive list of credits, it is best to set the duration for longer lengths, giving your audience a chance to read everything before the titles fade away.

The numerical value of the title effect duration appears in the bottom right corner of the thumbnail window. The length of the effect is expressed in seconds followed by frames. iMovie renders effects to the video clips in increments of 30 frames per second. For instance, an effect that is one frame short of 4 seconds will be displayed in the thumbnail window as 03:29. An effect that should last half a second should be set with the slider at 00:15 (or 15 frames).

The duration of a title is largely dependent on the clip it uses as a background; no effect can be set for a longer duration than the clip it is superimposed over.
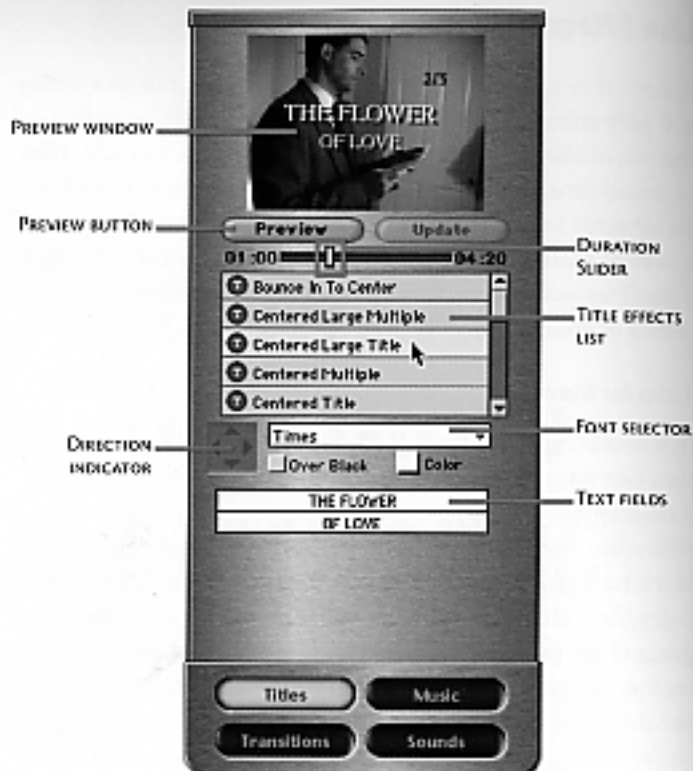
Custom Titles The Titles palette helps you create custom titles in a variety of styles. Its controls include settings for font color, effect duration, and the direction of the animation.

Setting the Direction of the Animation

The small arrows in the center of the Titles palette determine the direction in which your titles will animate. Some of the built-in effects do not offer this feature, and others are only slightly affected by changes in direction. You can experiment with the settings and preview the changes immediately in the thumbnail window.

Selecting a Font for Your Titles

You can instantly change the font (or typeface) of your titles within iMovie by using the pull-down list in the center of the Titles palette. The list that appears in this menu reflects all of the TrueType or PostScript fonts currently available in your System Folder.

The font you select for your movie titles will instantly lend a mood or personality to your story, so it's important to choose carefully. An elegant, scripted typeface may be ideal for a wedding or formal event, but using a more garish or modern font for the same footage might evoke a comical reaction from your audience. If your story has a science-fiction or high-tech theme, you could try contemporary fonts that seem computer-generated. Generally, you'll want to pick one font and stay with it throughout your movie. Although iMovie will allow you to use different fonts for each title you create, this practice may confuse your viewers, suggesting that the plot or location has suddenly changed. Consistency and clarity should dictate your typeface choices.

Legibility is also a concern. As a rule, it is better to use serif typefaces for title effects that have long sentences, multiple names, or words that require both uppercase and lowercase letterforms. Sans serif typefaces are ideal for short, bold headlines as well as for numbers or symbols.

Choosing the Color of Your Titles

Titles can be further customized through a selection of 16 colors. To access one of these color options, click the square swatch next to the word Color in the palette. Holding your mouse button down, drag your cursor to the desired color before letting go. Your color selection will appear as the default color until the next time you change it.

For experienced Macintosh users, the color choices may seem terribly limited. There is a good reason for this, however. Many of the bright custom colors you might commonly pick in computer applications would not appear correctly on a standard television set. While they might look vibrant and consistent on a computer monitor, many colors will pulsate or shift in hue when shown on TV. The iMovie color palette has been restricted to 16 colors that adhere to the National Television Standards Committee (NTSC) guidelines for broadcasting. These colors will help your movie retain a professional look that is consistent with the quality of digital video.

TITLES FOR WEB MOVIES

When choosing a title effect, you should think about where your movie will likely be seen. If you intend to show it to family and friends on a television set, then nearly all of the title effects included with iMovie will work superbly. However, if you wish to stream your movies over the Internet, you will want to avoid title effects that display text in small sizes, such as the Music Video or Stripe Subtitle options. When shown on a computer monitor at 320x240 pixels, these words will be illegible. Also, animated effects such as the Rolling Credits or Scrolling Block will ultimately compress better if they are displayed against a still image or a black background rather than over moving video. Also, effects that animate one letter at a time, such as the Flying Letters or Typewriter options, will put greater demands on the compression software. This ultimately translates to lengthier download times for your audience of online moviegoers.

How Transitions Work in iMovie

The selection of transition effects included with iMovie are rather sophisticated; they are comparable to effects used in professional video editing systems for decades. They can give your movies remarkable authority when used skillfully. Consider each transition effect carefully before applied, for each brings with it the power to alter the meaning of your sequences. Often these effects add important emphasis, but they can also ruin the flow of action between clips.

Unlike title effects, transitions are not "superimposed" over your video footage. They are the result of combining two video signals into a new clip, containing new frames created from the complex calculations performed during rendering. iMovie presents these Transition effects as "nondestructive" footage, which means your original source clips are never directly affected by the transition process.

The Transitions Palette

The built-in palette of transition effects is activated once you click the Transitions button in the Effects menu. Transition settings are only accessible from this palette and can be applied to any of the video or still image clips in the timeline. Transitions cannot be applied to other transition effects or to audio tracks, although the synchronized audio of your video clips may be altered during the application of transition effects.

Choosing a Transition Effect

Selecting a predefined effect in the Transitions palette is straightforward. Scroll through the list of available effects and double-click any selection to see a preview in the display window. The settings in the Transitions palette include all of the functions needed to control the style, duration, and direction of the effect.

Similarities Between Titles and Transitions

Much like the Title effects, transitions can be dropped directly into the timeline from the Effects menu palette. Many of the controls—including the duration slider, the direction tool, and the display buttons—work exactly as they do in the Titles palette. Likewise, when transitions are dragged into the project timeline, the existing clips will move to indicate the space the effect will occupy when dropped. Once applied, transitions will display a red status bar during rendering. As with titles, you can delete, restore, and update them using the controls demonstrated in the previous lesson.

Differences Between Titles and Transitions

Transitions do not appear in the timeline as typical video clips; they have a smaller, rectangular shape to distinguish them from the other elements in the Clip Viewer. Unlike title effects, transitions cannot be duplicated using the copy and paste functions. (However, you can use some palette settings to quickly repeat certain effects.)

Lesson: Adding Transitions to Movies

Transitions in iMovie are as easy as dragging and dropping, but their impact on your video footage can be much more complex. In this lesson, we've edited and assembled the movie footage without the use of transitions. The result is a movie with simple cuts and no frills. However, you will see how transition effects add a touch of grace and professional polish to these shots and create a visual tapestry that reinforces the suspense in the story.

Step One: Placing Transitions in the Timeline

This lesson features new movie footage from the "General Hysteria" project, located on the DVD-ROM disc. Although the soundtrack may seem slightly out of sync at first viewing, you will shorten the duration of the video footage by adding transition effects throughout the lesson. A sample of the finished movie, "General Hysteria.mov," can be found in the QuickTime Gallery folder on the disc. Begin by closing your previous project and opening the Adding Transitions folder.

1 Choose Open Project from the File Menu. Locate the "Adding Transitions" Folder, and select the "General Hysteria" project.

General Hysteria Time: 02:32 (NTSC)   Clip Selection: Opening Sh

02:12 Opening Shot   06:04 Heard Something   04:00 First March   01:28 Dunes   04:00 Stop For

▲ **2** With the "General Hysteria" project now open, position the playhead at the start of the timeline (or simply highlight the first icon in the Clip Viewer). Play the movie to see how it looks with no transitions.

3 Click the Transition button in the Effects menu to reveal the palette options. Scroll down the style list in the Transitions palette, and choose Fade In from the list.

4 Set the effect duration to 01:02 by adjusting the slider control at the top of the palette.

To preview the effect, make sure you have selected the first clip in the project timeline. Once the clip is highlighted, you can press the Preview button in the Transitions palette to see the effect displayed at the top of the palette.

Preview
Update
00:10 — 04:00
Cross Dissolve Slow
Fade In
Fade Out
Overlap

Titles Music
Transitions Sounds

General Hysteria Time: 02:32 (NTSC) Clip Sel

01:10 06:04 04:00 01:
Opening Shot Heard Something First March

▲ **5** Drag the Fade In transition from the style list, and place it in front of the first clip in the timeline.

01:10
Opening Shot

◄ **6** To see the Fade In transition in the Preview, select the triangular effect icon in the timeline, hold down the Shift key, and select the Opening Shot clip. Both clips will become highlighted and both will appear in the Monitor window. Press the Space bar to play the clips together.

7 Repeat this effect using the Fade Out style (with the same duration) and dragging the transition to the end of the timeline, placing it behind the last clip.

8 Next, scroll through the style list in the Transitions palette and choose Cross Dissolve.

9 Set the effect duration to 00:22 by adjusting the slider control at the top of the palette.

First March

10 Drag the Cross Dissolve transition into the timeline, and place it in front of the clip called "First March." Immediately, the red status bar will indicate that the clip is rendering.

11 Repeat the Cross Dissolve style for the next effect. Set the duration to 02:00.

Dunes

12 Drag and drop the transition into the timeline just in front of the clip called "Dunes."

◀ **13** Repeat the Cross Dissolve style once more, this time setting the duration to 02:04.

Stop For Drink

◀ **14** Place the transition in the timeline to the left of the clip called "Stop For Drink."

◀ **15** And finally, choose the Cross Dissolve Slow style, and set the duration to 02:12 by adjusting the slider.

Hands Up

◀ **16** Place this transition to the left of the clip called "Hands Up" in the project timeline.

After all effects have been rendered, press the Home key on your keyboard and then the Space bar to play the movie with these transition effects. Notice how the cross dissolve effects suggest a greater passage of time than the sequence without any transitions.