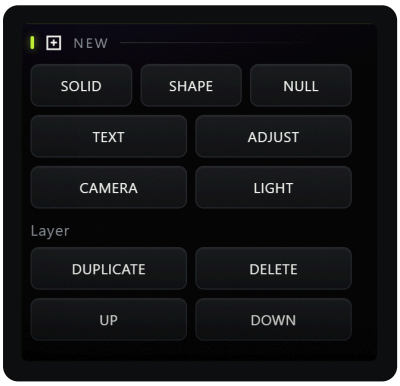
APHEXAR

How to use the Dock

Every module, what it is for, and the one thing about each that is not obvious. The panel is laid out in the order you actually work, so reading it top to bottom is the same as building a shot.

THE ORDER THE PANEL IS IN

`New` → `Anchor` → `Place` → `Comp` → `Switches` → `Track matte` → `Timeline` → `Keyframes` → `Curve` → `Effects`



01 NEW

Make the layer, then manage it.

Seven layer types, then duplicate, delete and reorder — everything you do to an empty timeline before anything is animated.

`Solid · Shape · Null`	The three you reach for constantly
`Text · Adjust`	Adjust makes a full-comp adjustment layer
`Camera · Light`	Added at the centre of the comp
`Duplicate`	Leaves the *copies* selected, not the originals
`Up · Down`	Move the selection one step through the stack

WHY DUPLICATE SELECTS THE COPIES

The next thing you do is almost always to the new layer. Copies also come out in the same order as the originals rather than mirrored.

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02 ANCHOR

Move the pivot without moving the layer.

Nine positions. Click a cell and the anchor point goes there.

`Real content bounds`	Measures what is actually drawn
`Keep the layer in place`	Compensates Position so nothing jumps

THE BIT THAT MATTERS

On a text or shape layer the layer itself is comp-sized, so “centre” in most scripts lands nowhere near the text. With **Real content bounds** on, it measures the ink instead — that is the difference you will feel first.

And **keyframed Position survives**: every key is offset by the same amount rather than flattened to one value.

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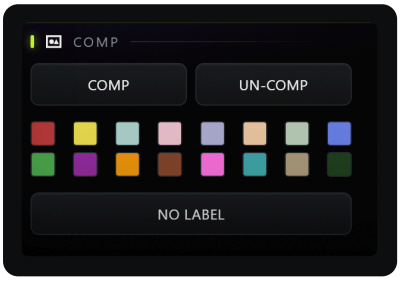
03 PLACE

Move the layer, not the pivot.

The same nine cells doing the opposite job: top-left puts the layer's top-left corner in the comp's top-left corner. `Margin` insets it from the edges.

> **TELLING THE TWO GRIDS APART**
>
> Anchor shows a solid layer outline with a pivot dot. Place shows a dashed comp frame with a small plate pushed into the corner.



04 COMP

Group, ungroup, colour-code.

`Comp`	Pre-compose the selection — After Effects' grouping
`Un-comp`	Bring the layers back out into the parent
`Swatches`	All sixteen label colours, plus No label

> **UN-COMP REFUSES ON PURPOSE**
>
> It will not un-nest a pre-comp that has effects, masks, a blending mode, opacity under 100, time remapping, or that is used in more than one place. Un-nesting any of those *changes the render*, so it stops and says which one rather than quietly giving you something different.

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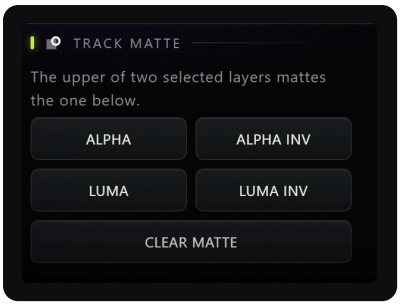
05 SWITCHES

Layer switches, and the composition masters beneath them.

`Solo · Shy · Guide`	Per layer
`M.Blur · Adj`	Per layer
`Hide shy`	The comp master — *this* is what collapses them
`M.Blur (comp)`	Without this, layer motion blur renders nothing
`3D all`	Every layer in the comp, never just the selection

> **THE PAIRING THAT CONFUSES EVERYONE**
>
> Marking layers shy does nothing visible until the composition is told to hide shy layers. Same with motion blur. The panel warns you when you set one without the other — that is why the masters sit directly underneath.

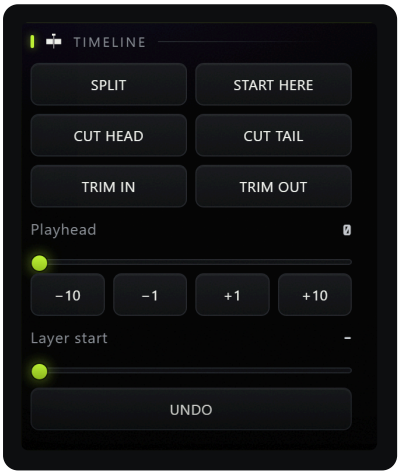


06 TRACK MATTE

Select two layers. The upper one mattes the lower.

`Alpha · Alpha inv`	Cut by transparency
`Luma · Luma inv`	Cut by brightness
`Clear matte`	Removes it from the selection

> **IT SORTS THE PAIR FOR YOU**
>
> After Effects reports selected layers in the order you *clicked* them, not stacking order — so clicking the lower one first would matte the wrong way round. The Dock sorts by position instead.

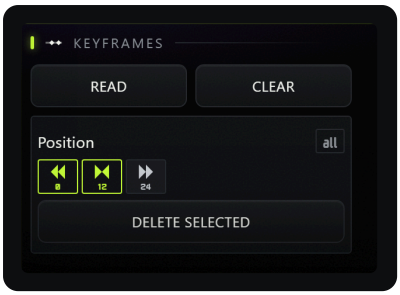


07 TIMELINE

Cut, trim and move in time.

`Split`	Ctrl+Shift+D — keeps both halves
`Cut head · Cut tail`	Splits and *deletes* one side
`Trim in · Trim out`	Reversible — nothing is destroyed
`Start here`	Slides the layer to begin at the playhead
`Playhead`	Slider plus ±1 and ±10 frame steps
`Layer start`	Moves the selection; multiple layers slide as a block

> **TRIM OR CUT?**
>
> Trim shortens and can always be dragged back out. Cut genuinely removes. For most editing, trim is the safer reflex — use Cut when you actually want two separate pieces and only need one.



08 KEYFRAMES

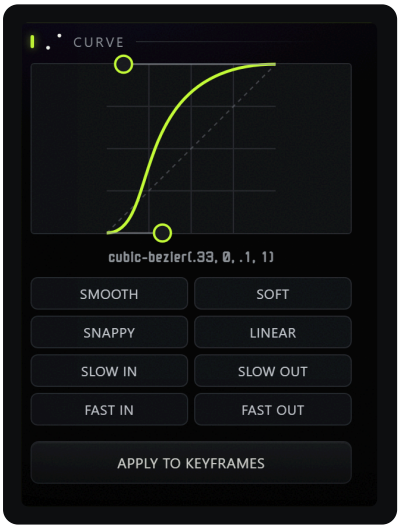
Pick keys here instead of hunting the timeline.

`Read` lists every keyframed property on the selection. Each key is drawn as its real After Effects shape, so a key here looks like the key there.

◆ `diamond`	Linear
`hourglass`	Bezier — the Easy Ease shape
`square`	Hold
`circle`	Auto bezier

Each half is drawn from its own side, so a linear-in, ease-out key shows as half diamond, half hourglass — exactly like the timeline.

> **IT DRIVES THE SELECTION**
>
> Ticking a key selects it in After Effects, so **Curve** below acts on precisely what you picked. `Delete selected` removes those keys from that property.



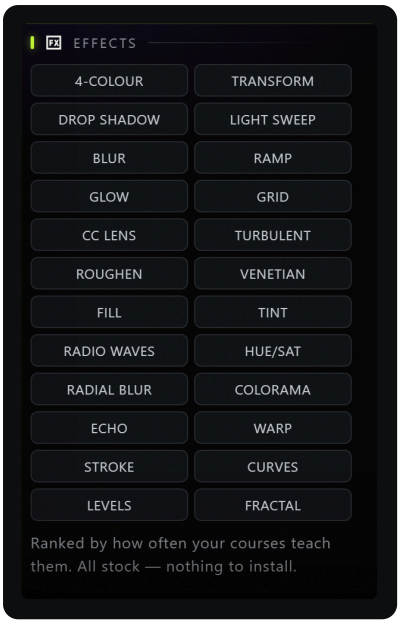
09 CURVE

A real easing editor. The paid tool on most toolbars.

Drag both handles or take a preset, then **Apply to keyframes**. It works across every selected key on every selected property at once.

`Smooth · Soft`	General-purpose eases
`Snappy`	Quick departure, long settle
`Slow in · Slow out`	Ease one end only
`Fast in · Fast out`	Leave or arrive hard
`Linear`	Removes the ease

> **THESE ARE GENUINE CUBIC-BEZIERS**
>
> The read-out is the same `cubic-bezier(x1, y1, x2, y2)` used in CSS, and the slope at each end is exactly what the name says:
>
> `start = y1 / x1` `end = (1−y2) / (1−x2)`
>
> Small slope is slow, large is fast. The dashed diagonal behind the curve is linear, for comparison. Handles drag past the box so overshoot is drawable.



10 EFFECTS

Twenty-four effects, ranked by how often they are actually used.

Not a guess and not a top-ten from the internet. These were counted from seventy-six effect breakdowns taken from real course lessons, most-used first — and every one ships with After Effects, so there is nothing extra to install.

> **IF AN EFFECT SEEMS TO DO NOTHING**
>
> Check the renderer. **Advanced 3D silently disables effects** on 3D text and shape layers — Classic 3D does not. The Dock warns you when it spots that combination, because otherwise it looks like the effect simply failed.

> **TWO HABITS WORTH KEEPING**
>
> **Save before you run anything that edits a project** — this panel and every other script. Every action here lands as a single undo step, and there is an Undo button in the Timeline section.
>
> **Read the strip at the bottom.** Every action says what it did, and every refusal says why and names the layer. If a button appears to do nothing and the strip stays silent, that is a bug worth reporting.

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