

An iMovie User's Primer on Final Cut Express

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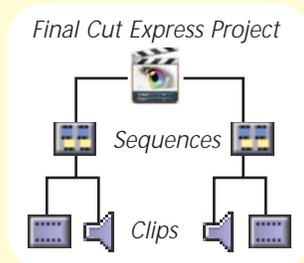
If you love iMovie but feel you've reached the limits of what it can do, Apple now offers Final Cut Express, a powerful digital video editing application for a fraction of the price of Final Cut Pro.

Look for *Final Cut Express for Macintosh: Visual QuickStart Guide*, by [Lisa Brenneis](#), coming soon from [Peachpit Press](#). In the meantime, here are some tips to help you get up to speed with Final Cut Express.



Understanding Project Structure

Each iMovie file is its own project, containing one movie. In Final Cut Express, the hierarchy is slightly different. At the ground level are *clips*, which represent any media and can be edited in numerous ways. To assemble the clips into a movie, you create a *sequence*, which is the collection of clips and how they're arranged together. Clips and sequences are wrapped up in the *project*, which contains and keeps track of all the clips, edits, transitions, etc. that comprise your work. Unlike iMovie, which uses one sequence per project, Final Cut Express projects can have multiple sequences.



Interface with Your Interface

At first glance, Final Cut Express's interface appears far more complicated than iMovie's. The trick is to match the two programs' terminology.



iMovie

1 Monitor (Edit Mode)

Monitor (Camera Mode)

Shelf

Timeline Viewer

Transitions, Titles, and Effects palettes

Audio palette



Final Cut Express

2 monitors: Viewer (for editing clips), plus the Canvas (for viewing Sequences)

Capture window

Browser

Timeline

Effects tab of the Browser

Audio tab of the Viewer

Nonlinear Non-destructive Editing 101

When you edit video digitally on a nonlinear editing system like iMovie or Final Cut Express, constructing an edit involves constructing a *playlist*. A playlist is a set of instructions to play a certain bit of Media File A, and then cut to a bit of Media File B, and then play a later bit of Media File A, and so on. The full length of each captured media file is available to the editor from within the edited sequence. That's because the clip is nothing more or less than a set of instructions referring to an underlying media file. You never actually cut or delete footage.

When you play back your edited sequence, it only looks as if it's been spliced together; the software actually assembles it on the fly. Since you're viewing a simulation of an edited sequence, and the full length of each captured file is available at the edit point, if you want to extend a shot, the software simply rewrites the playlist to play a little more of Media File A before switching to Media File B. In Final Cut Express, you do this by modifying the clip's length in your edited sequence.

Non-destructive editing is key to editing in a program like Final Cut Express, which lets you use your media source files multiple times across multiple projects, or to process the same source file in a number of different ways. Having many instances of a clip all referring to the same media file saves disk space and offers you flexibility throughout your editing process.

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Capturing versus Importing

It's hard to miss iMovie's large Import button when you want to transfer footage from your DV camera into the program. Final Cut Express gives you two ways to *capture* (a slightly more accurate term than "import") your video. Choose Capture from the Window menu, or type # -8 to open the capture window; then use one of these methods.

- **Capture Now:** To capture all your footage in one mass grab, use the Now button under the Capture section. Press the Play button in the Viewer area to the left, then click Now to start capturing. This is much like iMovie's Import button but without the capability to auto-sense scene breaks during import. (Later you can choose DV Start/Stop Detection from the Mark menu to set markers at scene breaks.)
- **Capture Clip:** For a more precise approach, use In and Out points to define a section of footage, then capture single clips using the Clip button. First, use the Transport controls to locate the start of the video section you want to capture. Click the Mark In button (or press the I key) to set the In Point. Then go to the end of your section and click the Mark Out button (or press the O key). Now that your clip is defined, click the Clip button. You will be asked to name the clip and provide an optional note. When you click OK, Final Cut Express rewinds the camera's tape back to the In Point and captures the footage up to the Out Point. When finished, the captured clip appears in the Browser.

Tips:

- In iMovie, clicking the Capture Now button automatically starts playing your camcorder. In Final Cut Express, you use the Transport controls in the Capture window to start playing the tape, then click the Now button.
- Final Cut Express wants to create frame-accurate video files, so it's sometimes stringent about how you capture footage. If you're getting errors due to dropped frames or broken timecode (and frame-accuracy isn't critical for your project), do this: choose Preferences from the Final Cut Express menu and uncheck the "Abort capture on dropped frames" and "Abort capture on timecode break" options.

Get your copy of *Final Cut Express for Macintosh: Visual QuickStart Guide* and save up to 30%!

Simply go to www.peachpit.com and enter coupon code PW-43AA-MCDB at checkout.

Adjusting Audio Levels in FCE

iMovie users are often frustrated by being limited to one audio level per clip; you can fade your audio in and out, but you can't fade under. So if you have some background music playing, say, and then someone in your video starts speaking, you can't smoothly lower the music so it doesn't compete with the dialog. It is possible to kluge something together using external audio editing tools, but in Final Cut Express the process is simple. Here's how you lower your music track's volume to background level:

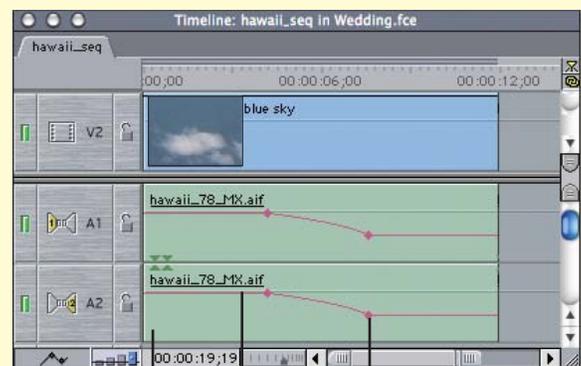
1. In the Timeline, click the Clip Overlays button (it looks like a tiny graph in the lower left corner) to display the audio level of each audio track.
2. Select the Pen tool from the Toolbar (or press P).
3. Click on the pink audio level line where you want the music to begin to fade under; a tiny diamond appears.

Congratulations! You've just added a keyframe, a kind of an edit point that signals a change—in this case, a change in audio volume.

4. Click a second point on the line where you want the music volume to reach background level.
5. Switch to the Selection tool (or press A).
6. Grab the line to the right of the second point and drag it about halfway between the original level and the bottom of the track.

Now, when you play back your music track, the volume drops smoothly when the playhead reaches the first point and evens out when it reaches the second point.

Want the music to fade up when your dialogue ends? Add two more points to the audio level line where you want the fade up to start and drag the line back up to its original volume. Hey! You're mixing!



Audio track Audio level line Keyframe