

Combining two fonts is an effective way to convey style. Combining five fonts is just bad taste. (Image courtesy of Hemera Photo Objects.)

Using textures (here, climbing rope) is a great way to add life to your graphics. (Grand Canyon footage by author; climber and rope by Hemera Photo Objects.)

LOWER-THIRDS WITH SERIOUS BADONKADONK

A 10-STEP HOW-TO. BY RICHARD HARRINGTON

You're nearly finished with your video. You've picked the perfect groove, you've edited to perfection, and it's time to give credit where it's due. No, there's no need to tell your mom how much you love her (at least not in your video). But you need to ID all those freakers, shredders, rippers, and gapers. After all, it's important to let folks know who's talking the talk and walking the walk.

Proper use of titles and lower-third graphics help your audience follow the action. Titles and lower-thirds establish the credibility of your on-camera interviews. If you apply a few simple rules, lower-thirds can even add to the overall style of your video. Don't freak when I say "rules." Think of them as things to break whenever you feel like it.

To build titles and lower-thirds, I recommend Adobe Photoshop. Although there are several other tools out there, none have as big a user base or as many options. Think of Photoshop as a flexible friend; it's great

at getting you out of tight jams and creative bottlenecks. All of these tips will work with Photoshop 5.5 or later versions (and most are timeless, working with all versions).

#1 – Build it right

You have to get things started, so might as well do it right. The first step to awesome titles is to build them the right size. If your graphics get formatted incorrectly, they'll have to be resized by your video software. This usually results in shakes, jitters, and strobing (while this may make for a good

Saturday night, you won't want that stuff in your video).

The right size for graphics is a popular arguing point among video pros. The issue is that Photoshop 7 (and earlier) uses square pixels—the standard pixel for computer graphics. Most video sources use a D-1/DV pixel, which is rectangular in shape, or non-square. Don't worry—it's a short-term problem, as you can use nonsquare pixels with Photoshop CS (aka Photoshop 8).

To make things easier, Photoshop 7 (and newer) has built-in templates. Use them.

Table 1

FORMAT	SQUARE PIXEL SIZE	NONSQUARE PIXEL SIZE (PHOTOSHOP CS ONLY)
NTSC DV/DVD	720 x 534 pixels	720 x 480 pixels (.9 PAR)
NTSC D-1/601	720 x 540 pixels	720 x 486 pixels (.9 PAR)
Widescreen NTSC DV/DVD	864 x 480 pixels	720 x 480 pixels (1.2 PAR)
Widescreen NTSC D-1/601	864 x 486 pixels	720 x 486 pixels (1.2 PAR)
PAL D-1/DV	768 x 576 pixels	720 x 576 pixels (1.07 PAR)
Widescreen PAL Standard or DV	1024 x 576 pixels	720 x 576 pixels (1.42 PAR)

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The sizes Adobe recommends work just fine and I've never had any problems with their dimensions. If you're using an older version of Photoshop, just input the numbers listed in **Table 1** manually. Be sure to set your graphic to RGB mode to ensure full compatibility with your editing system.

#2 – Make a template

There's one more important step to getting your graphic started. We need to add guides for the title-safe area. This is the area where text is guaranteed to show up on a TV's screen. Why not put type edge to edge? No two TV sets are alike—the edge on one may be invisible on another. Making title-safe guides is straightforward, and you can even save these steps as an Action if you want to have quick access to them later.

Step 1. Create an empty document, sized for your editing system (see Table 1) or use a Photoshop preset.

Step 2. Create a new (empty) layer and name it Safe Title Area.

Step 3. Select All by pressing Cmd+A (Ctrl+A).

Step 4. Scale the active selection to 80 percent by choosing Select>Transform Selection, and then typing in "80" in the Options bar for width and height. Press Return (Enter).

Step 5. Load red as the foreground color. Then choose Edit>Stroke and specify 4 pixels centered. This is the title-safe area.

Step 6. Lock the Safe Title Area layer by clicking on the Lock icon in the Layers palette.

Step 7. Save your work.

#3 – Pick a cool font

Now that we've got most of the technical junk out of the way, let's have some fun. Other than music, nothing says more about the character of your video than the fonts you use. Be sure to allow enough time (and possibly \$\$\$) to pick a cool font. There are several options to consider when picking a font.

Serif versus sans serif: Serifs are the little hooks on type. Serifed type (think Times) uses thick and thin strokes. Sans serif (think Helvetica) uses even-weighted strokes. Sans serif usually reads better for video. If using serif fonts, look for a bold or black version and avoid lines thinner than 3 pixels.

Style: Write down 10–20 words that describe your video. Get input from your friends or client (if you're doing this for money) too. Use these words for guidance when looking at fonts.

Free or paid: Free (and overly cheap) fonts often have partial character sets. This may be an issue if you need special symbols (such as &, ™, ©, or ®). You get what you pay for, but don't worry, several independent font foundries sell great fonts for less than \$25 per font.

Keep it in the family: Some fonts belong to families (regular, bold, black,

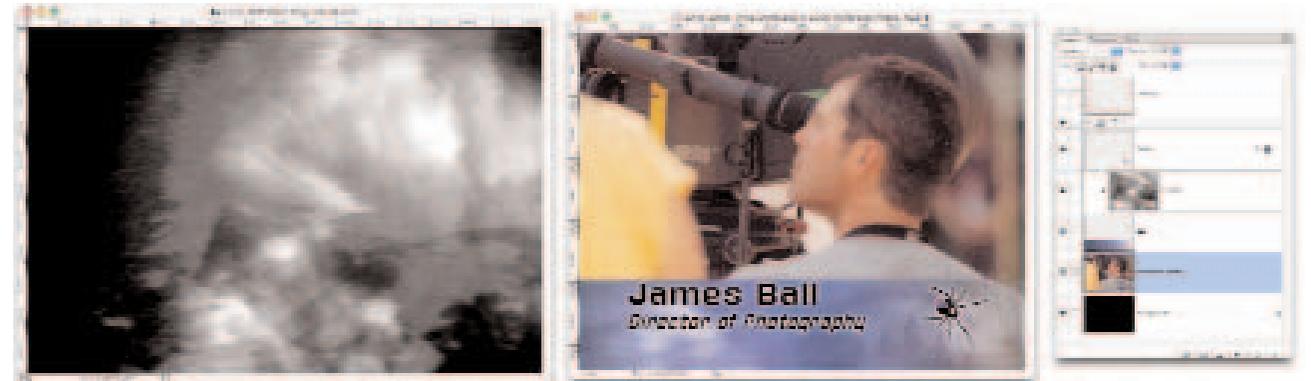
Cool Fonts

www.chankarmy.com
www.acidfonts.com
www.fontalicious.com
www.fontlab.com
www.apollo26.com
www.girlswhowearglasses.com/fonts.html

italic, etc.). This is useful, as you can use one font family and mix styles. This leads to a consistent design in your titles. If you want to mix fonts, *never* use more than two fonts in a title graphic.

Format: Many fonts come in different formats. Macs have historically used PostScript while PCs have used TrueType. Macintosh OS X can now read many PC TrueType fonts with no problem. A new format, OpenType, is also starting to pop up for sale.

Kerning: Some professional fonts have had the spacing between characters carefully tweaked. This balancing is called pair kerning. If your type appears improperly balanced, you will need to kern it. Move between characters using the left and right arrows. Hold down the Option key (Alt key) and press the left and right arrows to tighten or loosen pair kerning.



Use of texture makes bossier looking bars. This tutorial can be found in my book *Photoshop CS for Nonlinear Editors* (CMP Books, 2004).

FAST
EASY
QUICK
FLEXIBLE

Layer styles let you create awesome effects. Just exercise a little taste and keep them in check. While hot peppers are good, a pizza is better. Season to enhance.

#4 – Use good color

Can you match your own clothes in the morning, or when you walk through a room, do people point? By now you've likely figured out a few color basics (or have strategies that work). Here are a few more tips.

Avoid highly saturated colors. Bright reds and yellows can cause problems in video.

Use contrasting colors. If you were to use a color wheel, these would be colors opposite each other. If you want to use three colors, draw a triangle on the color wheel. Digital Anarchy sells a great product called ColorTheory that makes it easy to pick color combinations for two or more colors.

Pick up the Pantone book on color trends. This book offers interesting color combinations that always seem to end up the latest fashion. Mix light and dark colors to maintain contrast. Dark on dark and light on light are very hard to read.

Use a contrasting edge on your type (such as a shadow or glow). This will improve readability.

#5 – Make it layered

If all you ever do is draw a box and put some words on it, you're so 1983. Video graphics these days use multiple layers and transparency to achieve good looks. I can go on for hundreds of pages on layering techniques (see *Photoshop CS for Nonlinear Editors* [CMP Books, 2004]). Here are some down and dirty tricks to take you to a higher level.

Use photos of textures in your bars. I often take pictures of light reflections, lighting, water waves, and so on and mix them with my graphics to add a natural depth. Simply place the texture above your bar and press Cmd+G (Ctrl+G) to group it. The texture is now applied just to the bar area below.

Use blending modes to achieve better looks. Blending is perhaps Photoshop's coolest feature. Although you can pick them from a list in the Layers palette, I find it easier just to experiment. Highlight the layer you want to blend, pick the move tool (V), then press Shift++ or Shift+- to cycle through blend modes. Experiment; have fun—trust me, it works!

Use layer masks to blend layers together. Use black-and-white gradients on your layer masks to create smooth transitions in mixing layers. Fill an empty layer above your bar with a solid color or gradient. Tint your bar by setting this layer to the Color or Hue blending mode.

#6 – Layer styles are your friend

Although everyone knows about filters, many miss layer styles (or effects in older versions).

These realtime effects combine good looks with speed and flexibility. When building titles, they are the way to go. You can use styles for shadows, glows, bevels, textures, and more. Best of all, they are stored within the document and can be easily modified.

If your edit system supports layered files, you'll have to flatten your layer styles if you want to import the PSD document. I usually do this on a copy of the project so I can go back to the original and make changes. The following steps can be saved as an Action. Highlight the styled layer; then record the following Action.

Step 1. Create a new layer and name it Flat. (It will be created by default right above the selected layer.)

Step 2. Press Option+[(Alt+[) to select the layer below to be flattened.

Step 3. Link to the layer named Flat.

Step 4. Choose Merge Linked from the palette's submenu.

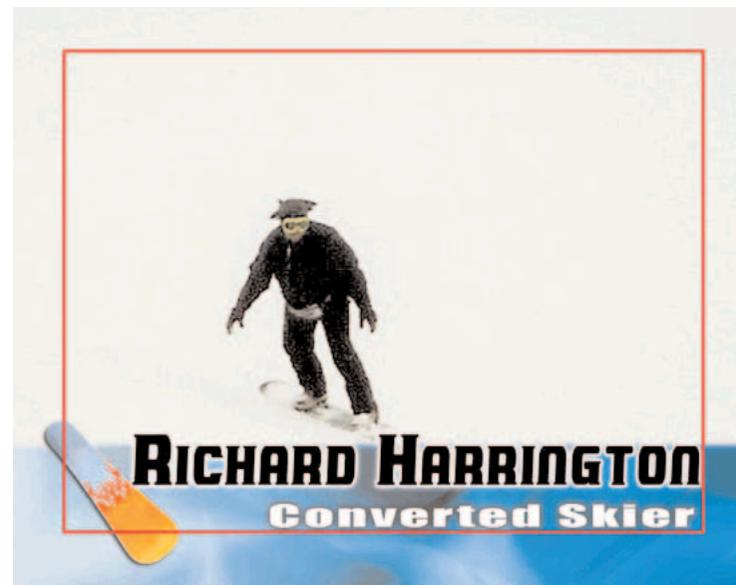
Step 5. Press Stop. (You can choose Option [Alt]+Merge Linked instead for targeted flattening.)

#7 – Make it readable

Video type needs to be big. When you're sitting less than two feet away



Use the Warp text command or Type on a Path to arc the words. Feel free to be experimental and creative. (Image courtesy of Hemera Photo Objects.)



The author and his K2 Fat Bon enjoying Blackcombe. But more important, putting an edge on your text makes it more readable.

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from your computer screen, 20-point type looks great. When you're sitting 20+ feet away from the television, it's worthless. Use bigger type. Here's a simple test.

Step 1. Choose View>Actual Pixels.

Step 2. Press the F key twice to go to Full-Screen mode.

Step 3. Press Tab to hide your palettes.

Step 4. Stand up from your computer and look at it from the far corner of the room. How's it look?

Step 5. Press the F key and tab to return to normal.



Photoshop CS adds new blending modes.

Table 2

FORMAT	NONSQUARE PIXEL SIZE
NTSC DV/DVD	720 x 480 pixels
NTSC 601	720 x 486 pixels
Widescreen NTSC DV/DVD	720 x 480 pixels
Widescreen NTSC 601	720 x 486 pixels
PAL Standard or DV	720 x 576 pixels
Widescreen PAL Standard or DV	720 x 576 pixels

#8 – Make it legal

While watching late-night TV, you may hear the type on some commercials. Video graphics need to fall within a certain range of brightness, otherwise that video information can bleed over to the audio track.

Step 1. Add a Levels adjustment layer to the top of your layer stack. You can access these from the bottom of the Layers palette.

Step 2. Set the output levels to 16 and 235. This clamps your video graphic to the broadcast legal limit for NTSC.

Step 3. If you have a choice, import with 601 levels to your edit system. Otherwise, just import the graphics.

#9 – Make it see-through

Okay, you're almost done. You just need to save the graphic for your edit system. The best way to make sure everything comes in properly is to use a single-layer graphic with an alpha channel. Depending on your edit system, you may need a PICT file or a TARGA file (check your owner's manual).

There are several methods for creating alpha channels. In my opinion, this is the fastest and easiest.

Step 1. Turn off all layers that you don't want in the final graphic (including the background or placement image). Create a new (empty layer) and highlight it.

Step 2. Hold down the Option (Alt) key and choose Merge Visible. A composite layer is now created.

Step 3. Turn this layer off by clicking on the Eye icon.

Step 4. Hold down the Cmd (Ctrl) key and click on the layer name in the Layers palette. The marching ants should encircle the layer.

Step 5. Switch to the Channels palette and click on the Save Selection as Channel

button. Only have one alpha channel per document or your NLE will get confused.

Step 6. Choose File>Save As to Save A Copy as a PICT or TARGA with an alpha channel included. Photoshop 7 users who need TARGA files should download the free update to fix a bug with transparency.

#10 – Make it fit

It's going to seem like we've come full circle. Remember that whole square/nonsquare problem? We need to resize our document so it properly displays in our NLE. Several video systems do this step for you, but they don't scale as cleanly as Photoshop. Proper sizing will mean fast imports and more realtime effects. If you are using Photoshop 7 or earlier, you will need to resize your pixels. Photoshop CS users can crack a cold one, as their work is done.

Step 1. Open up the PICT or TARGA file you just saved. This is a good chance to double-check that the alpha channel was properly stored.

Step 2. Choose Image>Image Size.

Step 3. Make sure the Constrain Proportions box is unchecked. Type in the correct nonsquare pixel size for your file using the values in **Table 2**.

The bottom of the hill

I hope you had fun on the ride. There's still more for another day. Chill with these 10 steps for a while and see how things work out. Next time, I'll show you how to animate your lower-thirds. **X**

Richard Harrington is the author of *Photoshop CS for Nonlinear Editors* (CMP Books, 2004), co-author of *After Effects on the Spot* (CMP Books, 2004), and co-author of *Final Cut Pro 4 On the Spot* (CMP Books, 2003). His company, RHED Pixel, creates motion graphics and produces video and multimedia projects.