

# Interface Suggestions for Final Cut Pro

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I ran a contest in the June, 2007, issue of my monthly newsletter, inviting readers to send in their ideas for improvements to the Final Cut Pro interface.

This idea grew out of an interview I did with Richard Townhill, senior director for product management of Apple's Pro Applications, at NAB 2007. During it, I asked why Apple has been so reluctant to change the Final Cut Pro interface. Richard replied: "You change Final Cut Pro's interface at your peril." As we had other things to discuss that were more important, I didn't pursue his comment. But I thought about it a lot since then.

I realized that, as editors, we live in the Final Cut Pro interface hours and hours every day. Big new features are nice, but it's the small interface details that can make our jobs a delight — or drive us nuts.

Hence, the contest. The rules were simple:

- An interface change is something involving color, position, size, or shape of an existing Final Cut Pro element, screen, dialog or feature.
- An interface change is NOT having Final Cut do something new, but how an existing feature looks or works.
- I'll summarize everyone's opinions and send them to the ProAps team at Apple as well as publish them in my next newsletter or website.
- Remember, NO feature requests.
- Please limit your list to 10 items
- Write clearly and pleasantly -- remember, we want to impress Apple with our passion, not bludgeon them with it.

I got hundreds of suggestions from dozens of people. I reviewed every single one. I removed the few feature requests that crept in, and sorted them into categories. I was struck that there were almost no disagreements and that many people suggested the same improvement.

On Wednesday evening, June 27, I presented all these suggestions in a written report and handed it to Paul Saccone and Brian Meaney, who are part of Apple's Final Cut team at the June meeting of the L.A. Final Cut Pro User Group.

I am posting them here so you can read the results for yourself.

## Table of Contents

<i>Comments from Contributors</i>	2
<i>A Cautionary Comment</i>	3
<i>Audio</i>	4
<i>Browser</i>	4
<i>Buttons</i>	5
<i>Capture, Import, and Export</i>	6
<i>Display</i>	6
<i>Effects, Keyframes, &amp; Rendering</i>	8
<i>Markers and Labels</i>	10
<i>Operations</i>	10
<i>Preferences</i>	11
<i>Text</i>	11
<i>Timeline</i>	11

## Comments from Contributors

Please, Mr. Townhill, don't ever stop trying to make the Final Cut Pro workspace a more welcoming, more comfortable, more efficient place to come to every morning.

Most of these small improvements aren't going to be the kind of thing the marketing department can boast about in a press release ("And, in this newest version of Final Cut, it's much easier to tell which window you're actually working in!"), but that's still no reason for not making it so. Astounding new capabilities are great, but for many of us more humble users, all the new high-end features on the planet will never make up for not sweating the details -- it's the basic, meat-and-potatoes stuff done RIGHT -- and always being improved -- that makes a "Pro" App truly worthy of that name.

*John Bertran*

Final Cut Pro is the hub of it all and they should make it as good as they can. And that means fixing stuff that has needed fixing for years. This product could really be a PRO product with a little time and effort. Then maybe Apple could go to FCP User Group meeting without wishing they were any place but there. And we would hear something other than "not in this release" or "no".

*Richard Randolph*

I recently downloaded a beta version of Adobe's Premier Pro CS3 and was amazed to discover that almost every point I've listed has been answered along with several other advanced features I have yet to see in FCP. I'm already familiar with a lot of Adobe apps, so what I want to know is, in your humble opinion, what should keep me from making the switch this summer?

*Richard Ramont*

I hope Apple is listening. I do love FCP!

*Stuart Mannion*

I have noticed that all of the Pro Apps don't have a consistent look, i.e, Final Cut Studio, mainly Color; Shake, and Logic. Shake, Color and Logic have the same interface color, but different than Final Cut Studio. I would prefer that at least Color should have the same interface as the rest of the Final Cut Studio Apps. Being that Color is the new app in the suite it looks as though it was literally just thrown in, like a mis-fit. I think that Apple should borrow some of Adobe's interface techniques by trying to maintain some level of consistency across the entire suite, but go further by establishing some level of interface consistency with Final Studio 2 and the other pro Apps, mainly the interface color. If anything, maybe give the user the control of changing the interface color of the apps in Final Cut Studio 2, and the other pro apps, like we can in Aperture.

*Andre Ficklin*

### **A Cautionary Comment**

I was very pleased to hear the reluctance of the Apple exec to change the interface because I've just had to upgrade to Office 2007 and Microsoft appears to think nothing of changing just about everything.

The Office 2007 upgrade has positively halted my productivity. So far, I continue to have moments in each day when I am saying to myself, "I know exactly how to do the thing I want to do and I've done it a hundred times. I wondered where it has been hidden?" It's not that things are fundamentally hard to do in Office 2007. It's just that virtually everything is changed.

Too many folks inside high tech getting tired of things and want change for the sake of having more interesting work to do. Thank God that Apple has some respect for the investment that exists on the part of users. They continue to evolve the user interface, but they do a superb job of managing that evolution for the minimum disruption.

*Jim McQuaid*

## Audio

- Magnify audio waveforms vertically, like Avid.

*Frank Wit*

- Either make the Master Audio gain in the mixer apply only to the project (a feature request), or provide an indicator in the Timeline window that shows when the main audio gain has been changed (i.e. Soundtrack Pro).
- Make the audio meters a bit wider and taller to make them easier to read.

*Larry Jordan*

- There should be a better GUI for audio filters/effects.

*Richard Ramont*

- LARGER / FATTER audio meters with more detail. Maybe lay the present skinny ones sideways on the top of the timeline (I know...sounds familiar...but it works)

*Joe Morelli*

- Ability to enlarge audio meter.

*Michael Grimm*

- My biggest interface request for FCP would be to improve the interface for the audio filters. I come from a live sound background and I know what all the filters are used for. But I hate using the EQ or compressor in FCP b/c I have no visual feedback of what is being adjusted.

I don't want to send my project to Soundtrack just so I can use a compressor that shows me how much gain reduction is happening. Or so I can use an EQ with a graphical interface. I usually end up sending my stuff out to ProTools because that's the program that works the way I think.

*Dave Smith*

- Make the audio meters work during log and capture!!!

*Michael Statholoupos*

## Browser

- In the Browser...can we get the existing clips in Icon View have the ability to preview (play) clips right in the browser? This is a handy little Avid thing that I miss.
- In the Browser, can we get a column that displays how many times a clip has been used in a Sequence? This is a priceless After Effects item. This may sound like a "Feature Request" but I think it's an important interface item that's missing. I figured I would give it a shot.

*Joe Morelli*

- Continuously variable icon size. Like Motion.

*Michael Grimm*

- When viewing in the browser in icon view, allow us to make the icons a custom size...sometimes large isn't large enough!

*Michael Stathopoulos*

- The ability to print Browser windows with the thumbnail is very high on my list of things that would help make my job easier. Exporting to a spreadsheet works in a pinch, but being able to print what I see in my Browser and having that thumbnail would be even better. Again, this might be bordering on feature request, but it's just interacting with & printing information that's already there...it's a fine line.

*Deb Eschweiler*

- BIGGER bin frame icons for higher rez displays. More fluid sizing, please, up to really Extra-large.
- And spacing of custom-arranged frames to invisible grid without destroying sequence of frames.
- Thumbnail column in List view doesn't enlarge either.

*Loren Miller*

## **Buttons**

- Option to have the button bars as separate palettes. If you have a large button bar it interferes with having several timelines open.

*Michael Stathopoulos*

- Make the buttons in the button bar more colourful and larger and/or be able to have them in a floating window.

*Evan Fisher*

- Ability to save favorite effects and filters as buttons like the buttons now on every box. (I use favorites A LOT. My list is about 40).

*Charlie Wilson*

- Buttons that change color should not go from a medium gray to a medium dark gray, or a medium dark gray to a medium dark green. They don't need to use radioactive orange, but I would like something a bit more, um, visible.

*Larry Jordan*

- A one-click button to "Play Timeline from Start" (like the Return key in Logic).

*John Bertran*

- The 'Select everything on the track' button should default to selecting all tracks to the end (ie. 'tttt' should instead be 't').

*Stuart Mannion*

## Capture, Import, and Export

- Have the Preview button in the Clip Settings tab default to checked.

*Bob Cusumano*

- When auto-conforming/digitizing a lot of tapes, the tape list should automatically scroll down as you're progressing through the list, so you can easily see where you are and what tapes are needed next.
- The timecode of the tape deck should be displayed in the capture interface.

*Emyr Jenkins*

- Either calculate the file name, as in the Log & Capture window, or don't calculate the file name, as in the Log & Transfer window. Pick one.

*Larry Jordan*

- Batch export should contain an option for including markers.

*Richard Ramont*

- I'd like to be able to see more data when capturing, either in the Capture window or in my Browser. I'd like duration of current clip, or timecode In/Out of current clip in the Capture window, or the ability to see my Browser info and have it update as the capture process is happening. I'd like something that lets me know where I am in the current clip so I can make easier decisions if I need to dump out of a capture for some reason. I'd like to know at a glance if it's 2 minutes for the current clip to complete, or if it's going to be 15 minutes.
- I'd like to see all the Exports options default to the last used, or make it an option in the User Preferences. Default to last used could be marked off or on.

*Deb Eschweiler*

## Display

- Being able to select different label colors would be nice, but nicer would be two different kinds of labels. The first would be global clip labels (as they are now) and clip specific labels. The Clip specific labels would be for individual clips in the timeline edit. That way you can label one, and ONLY one clip in the timeline without labeling it's "master clip" the same.

*Matthew Rogers*

- Either a line above a clip or a symbol to represent filters applied to a clip, Similar to the color coding the timeline has for render status.
- Timeline clip thumbnails show IN as well as OUT points. (Discreet Edit used to have this.)
- Overlay text in the Viewer 4 times bigger please.
- Type size in Individual bins independent of type size in the project list.

*Simon Bronson*

- Allow us to set the size of video displayed in the Viewer and Canvas

*Andrew Zepina*

- Ability to make the font in timecode dialog boxes bigger, please!

*Charlie Wilson*

- A floating time code window, that can also have other selections in it, which can all have adjustable font sizes. The time code window in the timeline is killing me, what is it 6 points?

*Andrew Zepina*

- A streamlining of the viewer and canvas control area at the bottom more horz (like AVID, sorry) to give more vertical real estate.
- Ability to see if filters or how many (by number) are active on a clip in the timeline.
- Cleaner way to apply the same transition to many. The method you outline in your tutorial by dragging up to canvas (add with transition) only works sometimes even with proper handles.
- Here's a biggie with me since this is the one thing that really throws me. When you move the play head somewhere else, or click in the timeline, IT STOPS. Or there is a way in prefs to choose.
- When dragging wireframes near corners of canvas or viewer, sometimes I end up grabbing the whole box size instead and have to reposition. Make the box sizer only work with a option or command key.
- A way to force all renders. The real time preview on some stills just doesn't look good, and I have to add a .l change in rotation to force a render.

*Charlie Wilson*

- Clearer Indication of the Active Window. A user-definable indicator to clearly highlight which window (Browser/Viewer/Timeline/Canvas) is currently active -- like a selectable color for the active title bar (or even framing the entire window) -- instead of the current medium-grey vs. light-grey all against a grey background (hardly the most dynamic visual cue).

*John Bertram*

- Color scheme -darker like Shake, custom colors for time-line tracks. FCP's gray look is tiring on the eye.

*Howard Silver*

- Text in any dialog, such as Reconnect Media, should be readable sitting two feet away from a 23-inch Cinema Display.

*Larry Jordan*

- How about a little indicator at the top of the timeline showing what the last clip edit was. (I.e. an arrow showing that I just dragged a clip two frames). This will be very helpful in showing up when I've moved something by accident or what just happened.

*Stuart Mannion*

- No more small, dark grey type on slightly-less-dark-grey backgrounds. Unreadable. Imagine if all your emails looked like this. Even the slightly more contrasty look of Motion, combined with its bolder type, is an improvement.
- Customizable fonts in all tabs, timelines, browsers, etc.
- Custom colors for timeline segments and background. REAL, BOLD, colors, not the water-color pastel colors that FCP uses for its minimal customization of buttons, etc.

*Michael Heldman*

- The entire interface should have scalability for those without the world's greatest eyesight or the world's biggest monitors.

*Ky Azlein*

### **Effects, Keyframes, & Rendering**

- Keyframes at the in and out points of a clip should snap to those positions when you make changes to a clips duration or add a transition.

*Eric Peacock*

- A "Disclose All" Option for Filter Info -- make the disclosure triangles under the Viewer's Filters tab behave the same as disclosure triangles in any List-View Finder window: wherein Option-Clicking reveals not only that folder's contents, but the contents of any sub folder as well. This would make Option-Clicking the disclosure triangle next to "Video Filters" reveal ALL stats for ALL the filters in the stack; right now only the first filter in the list does so, with the others all remaining in whatever state they were last left.

*John Bertram*

- Still clips should be infinite in length

*Richard Ramont*

- Play a sound when rendering is finished.

*Willard*

- A "render's done" and an "export's done" audio notification would be superb. This perhaps borders on feature request...but I'd like to think it's supplementing the visual interface with "aural interface." This also could be an On/Off in the User Preferences.

*Deb Eschweiler*

- When dragging keyframes around in the viewer give us a key to lock them to movement on one axis only. This bugs me when I'm dragging a keyframe and it accidentally jumps up or down as well.
- Put the generator menu, 'text', 'bars and tone' etc., somewhere much easier to find. I looked for them for ages the first time.

*Stuart Mannion*

- Consistent filter parameter range. 0-1, 0-5, 0-255. Pick just one.

*Michael Grimm*

- The ability to copy-and-paste keyframe info. This will save any editor loads of time.

*Michael Heldman*

- If the 2 thin lines on top of the timeline that show render status were a bit bigger with slightly more obvious colours they would be easier to see and go part way to indicating that a clip had an effect added, but an indication that a clip has a filter or more than one filter would be good.

*John Ramsden*

- Change the drop-shadow default settings to Offset = 1.5, Softness = 30, and Opacity = 90.
- Bezier control points should NOT be the same size and color as motion path dots. And they should be big enough to grab easily.
- Keyframes should be selectable individually or in groups

*Larry Jordan*

- In the Viewer Time Graph the Blue Keyframe indicators do nothing else. I should be able to:
  - a) MOVE a Blue to move an entire column of keyframes for each parameter (like Timeline capability).
  - b) DUPLICATE by Option-dragging a Blue to a new frame, which I can then edit.
  - c) DELETE an entire column in each parameter group by Select-Delete on a Blue indicator.

*Loren Miller*

- Frame Positioning: Any "motion" setting that has center point (cross hairs): When you change the center point, it should automatically drop in a keyframe. Currently if you use the crosshairs to move video it doesn't put a keyframe unless there's already one been put in at that point or somewhere else.

*Mark Underkofler*

- Option to allow keyframes to remain where they are as you slip a clip. Maybe holding down command while you slip keeps the keyframes stationary.

*Michael Stathopoulos*

- I love keyframing in FCP. I do a ton of 2D animation with text, video, PSD files, etc. And I actually prefer to do it in FCP than AE. But here's what they need to fix:

They need to fix the refresh or redraw function within the motion tab of the viewer window. When I keyframe I often set one point no problem, but when I attempt to DRAG a second keyframe everything turns into hash. It does not always happen, but it's so annoying to have to click away to another tab and then back to the motion tab in order to see what is really going on with the keyframes position.

*Joshua Martelli*

## Markers and Labels

- A "Delete All markers" command that actually deletes all markers. Now that command only deletes markers from selected clips where the playhead happens to be -- I still can't find a way to delete markers from ALL selected clips, regardless of the playhead position.

*John Bertram*

- Markers should be selectable and draggable both up and down the Timeline.
- Allow label colors to be changed.

*Larry Jordan*

- Provide different colors for each type of marker.

*Richard Randolph*

- Color a sequence in a bin without coloring the sequence itself (ugly).

*Willard*

- More than 5 labels.

*Michael Grimm*

- Set Markers on the fly during capture (like when taking live feeds)

*Charlie Wilson*

- Markers should have their own section of the timeline (i.e. Soundtrack) so that they are easily moved forward or backward. Maybe pressing a key (option) would allow you to split the marker in half and drag it out to extend the markers.

*Michael Stathopoulos*

- The Thumbnails shouldn't be tinted the color of a label that's been applied to a clip - it makes it very hard to see the image in the thumbnail.

*A. Hanawalt*

## Operations

- A Proper Undo History. (Please!) If the Final Cut app can "remember", say, 10 levels of Undos (or whatever that user pref is set to), then why can't it display an Undo History palette, with brief descriptions of each Undoable action - a la Adobe Photoshop? The fact that even FCP's Edit Menu just says "Undo" and "Redo" -- with no attempt to say what exactly it is you're about to Undo or Redo, is really kind of sad.

*John Bertram*

- A window that tells if other users on the network (SAN) are in the same project.

*Willard*

- More visible highlight for active window.
- Show more than 4 Recent Projects. Like DVDSR.

*Michael Grimm*

- Allow to select the files to reconnect from the list instead of skipping until you reach the right file

*Tarsis Arroo*

- After thinking about it for a week I'd love an easier keyboard command to deselect all clips on the timeline rather than "Shift Apple A"

*Stuart Mannion*

### **Preferences**

- When opening a project and you are asked to reset the scratch disk, Why oh why cannot once you have selected the first destination, to assume you want the next three buttons to go to the same place. If you must send the autosave, waveform etc., to somewhere else, give you an option to do so. Normally I will want to save all the info in my external hard drive, so when I have to copy it to another drive just drag the folder and all goes with it.

*Bill Darst*

- AUDIO-VIDEO AND SEQUENCE PREFS SHOULD FOLLOW THE PROJECT, not the computer.

*Michael Heldman*

### **Text**

- In Lower Third text, Give an alignment box, left, center or right. Currently everything is flush left.
- Text tool: A way to set a default text font. A simple "Make Default" button would suffice.
- Auto centering. As you type in the text should remain centered top to bottom. Currently it starts centered and types down. You then have to recenter with cross-hairs. FCP doesn't have the worst CG but it's in the top ten of being the worst.

*Mark Underkoffler*

### **Timeline**

- Allow us to change the colors of tracks, like Avid.

*Frank Wit*

- Allow tracks to be named.

*Larry Jordan*

- Ability to name tracks. Like STP.

*Michael Grimm*

- A scrolling Timeline that moves with the playhead.

*Frank Meek*

- The option to Auto Scroll the Timeline while in Play. (Likewise, too, for an audio waveform displayed in the Viewer.)

*John Bertram*

- Enlarge the playhead triangle so you can grab it more easily.

*Richard Day*

- Better Track Labeling options. I've always wanted a way to apply both text labels AND color codes to Timeline Tracks (in the left-side info pane). For example, so I can add the label "Dialog" to tracks A1 and A2, "Narration" to tracks A3 and A4, "Music" to tracks A5 and A6, etc, -- and then even color-code groups of tracks for quick reference.

*John Bertram*

- I'd like to be able to customize the colours of bins and individual clips using the Apple colour picker for more choices.

*Evan Fisher*

- Color coding the timeline track would be a huge help, and not with the pastels they use now, they need to use real bright and deeper colors.
- Allow me to change the stacking order of tracks by dragging.

*Andrew Zepina*

- Match to Source (Shift-F) should:
  - 1) Open the window or bin window containing the source clip-- even from a freeze frame!
  - 2) Highlight the clip for easy find.This used to work, it could even dig into and disclose multilevel bins and reveal the source clip. I remember it well. It isn't new. It went away. Bring it back!

*Loren Miller*

- In the Timeline...can we get the ability to blacken the gray areas surrounding the tracks?

*Joe Morelli*

- Make Timeline sequence tabs color code-able as well (like Browser icons -- which need more colors, by the way), AND let me change their left-to-right order simply by dragging.
- An Option/Preference for the Timeline window that makes it the active window automatically whenever you drag a clip onto it.

*John Bertram*

- If you can jump the playhead to a clip, you should be able to jump a clip to the playhead.
- There should be an easier way to see if a filter or effect is applied to a clip without turning on Timeline keyframe editing and making all your tracks excessively tall.

*Larry Jordan*

- A time code track that can be positioned in the timeline (for example: when I cut a show I split the video and audio tracks by putting the timecode track in the middle it makes it so much easier to whip around the timeline.

*Andrew Zepina*

- I would really like a big timecode window with the current time, in - out time, remaining time and total duration of a sequence.

*Willard*

- Provide a keyboard shortcut to make compression or chapter markers.

*Tarsis Arroo*

- How about - hold down 'shift' to turn pointer into a hand (when over top bar of timeline) to drag timeline along.
- While were at it, in this same mode dragging up and down zooms the timeline in and out.

*Stuart Mannion*

- Interface Color (help...please...oh yes). Please offer an option / preference to change the deadpan Quicktime grays to a nice combination of dark charcoals or options more soothing on the eyes (after all...I'm staring at that interface for many hours everyday). How about offering multiple choices of themes for color / button & skin texture & layout / etc? It just hurts to look at everyday. I would like to put a little FUN in those loooooong edit sessions and look forward to launching FCP instead of dread it. The layout of the interface in general is just ice cold & not conducive to creative editing / compositing. How about customizable (moveable) Button Bars on the Timeline / Browser / Viewer / Canvas? I personally would like the button bars on the bottom of the Browser / Viewer / Canvas rather than the top. I would love to have a highly customizable "Interface Editor" in Final Cut Pro with the ability to change colors of tracks, window backgrounds, shapes / appearance of buttons, etc.

*Joe Morreli*

- Allow us to "group" several audio and video clips together in the timeline.

*Michael Statholoupos*