

Final Cut Express 4 vs. iMovie '11

An application experience by John R. Carter, Sr.
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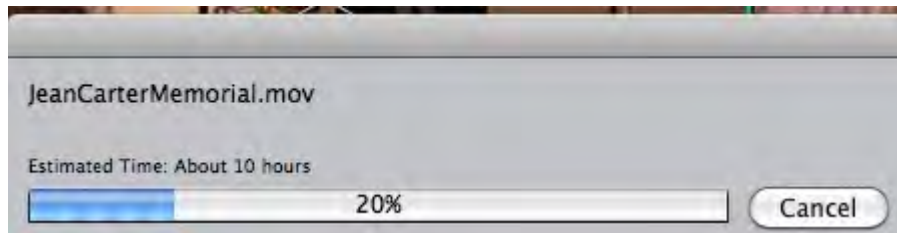


I thought I would play around a bit with Final Cut Express 4 (FCE). Let me preface this with I have taken one online course (<http://www.creativelive.com>) on Final Cut Pro (FCP) many months ago, and I tried unsuccessfully since then to do anything useful in FCE. I also took a college course on iMovie a few years back. I normally work with iMovie. So in effect, I'm a beginner with FCE.

In this session with FCE, I imported 16 .MOV files that I used in an iMovie '11 project (34GB total - straight from my Canon 60D). I added some transitions (much more difficult to do than with iMovie). I tried to add a title (as a video transition) at the front but gave up in disgust (couldn't figure it out - using a transition is actually the wrong way to add a title or credits). I did manage to insert a text frame (as a transition) at one point (simple with iMovie, fairly complex with FCE). All this took several hours of going back and forth between video tutorials and the user manual to learn the processes that are much simpler (to me) in iMovie. All this fuss with FCE reminds me that because FCE has many more features than iMovie and many options in those features, FCE is really something that a professional video editor would appreciate, but since professional video editors prefer FCP, I guess FCE is more for the advanced amateur.

When I used iMovie, the total time to import the same 16 files, create the transitions, add a menu, title, and credits, all took a couple of hours, and then it took about one hour to export to iDVD and less than 10 minutes to burn a DVD. The resulting DVD was just under one hour.

Back to FCE: I decided to create a .MOV file from what I had done so far using Quicktime conversion (one of two Quicktime export choices), and this is what I saw next:



And that's after I had left it alone for more than one hour. Several hours later, the estimated time was 16 hours and 25% complete. And every time I looked, the estimated time was greater than before. I let it run overnight and it was finished in the morning.

The final size of the .MOV file came to 10GB. Not quite small enough to upload to YouTube.

The tutorials that Apple provides on FCE make it look so very easy and quick. But since those tutorials are an overview, they leave out some very important detail for beginners. A friend of mine who uses Final Cut Pro tells me that Lynda.com is the best place for video tutorials. One of the Apple tutorials shows how to use LiveType (an external app that comes with FCE) as the way to create titles and text to import into an FCE video sequence. With iMovie you don't have to use an external app to do the same thing (even though your options for creating text are very limited with iMovie). The number of features and options in LiveType (which includes LiveFont) stagger my imagination.

To create a DVD with an iMovie project (the simplified process), you click on Share in the menu and select iDVD, wait for iDVD to open, choose a theme, and burn the DVD. You could also do it the same way that it is done with FCE.

To create a DVD with an FCE project (the simplified process), you first export the sequence to a Quicktime .MOV file, launch iDVD, create a new project in iDVD, choose a theme, drag and drop the .MOV file into iDVD, and burn the DVD. For this project, because I didn't create chapters in FCE (never bothered to figure that one out, but it's very easy and straightforward to do in iMovie), there were no chapters in the menu of the iDVD project. Importing this project from the 10GB .MOV file took 1.5 hours. The final one-hour 1080p HD movie fit on a single-layer DVD-R (about 4.5GB space used of the 4.7GB available), and that is comparable to the result with iMovie and iDVD – but with no error messages.

There are two comments to make here about iMovie. The first is that the estimated time to [finalize](#) the iMovie project (a process that is not available in FCE, and it is only an option in iMovie) was initially 32 hours, and it failed after just a few hours. The error message said nothing to explain the cause. And again, with iDVD I was unable to save the project that was shared from iMovie (another obtuse error message). There is ample disk space and ample RAM on my iMac, or so I suppose. Anyway, to burn additional DVDs of that project means opening the iMovie project, exporting to iDVD, and burning the DVD. The second comment is that when I exported the iMovie project to iDVD, I got an error that something needed to be fixed, but I couldn't figure out what it was. When I then tried to burn that movie with iDVD, I

got another error message that the length of the menu was too long, and again couldn't figure out why or how to fix that. The movie burned anyway and worked perfectly, menus and all.

All that said, I'm sure that after what seems to be a steep learning curve with FCE, I will be able to quickly create fancy movies - maybe after another year of tinkering.

I read somewhere online that the amount of disk space needed by FCE is much less than what iMovie needs, and that could be seen as an advantage.

Lots of stuff to learn yet.

So, which is better, **Final Cut Express 4** or **iMovie '11**? 'Better' is relative to both price and ability to use one application as opposed to another. FCE is way more expensive and requires a lot more learning, but learning the basics of FCE isn't much more complicated than learning everything about iMovie. Keep in mind that iMovie is a stripped down version of FCE, and FCE is a stripped down version of FCP. The idea is to sell *up*. Start with iMovie, discover that you want to do more, move up to FCE, discover that you want to do more, move up to FCP - and you're finally up there with the professionals. But I'm sure that with FCP you'll want a quad processor in a full tower with 16GB of RAM and two 30" monitors.

I think I'll go back to learning more about GIMP. I recently ordered [GIMP 2.6 for Photographers](#) and [Canon EOS 60D: From Snapshots to Great Shots](#). These should keep me busy for a while.

John Carter