Making an animated GIF with Photoshop

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An animated GIF is similar to a static GIF image but instead it contains frames, similar to a movie, enabling the image to play as a short animation. Being a GIF it is possible to display it within a web page without the need for plugins or any special mark-up. It can be inserted into a web page in the same way as any other image.

Photoshop contains a Timeline panel with two options. One can be used to create or edit videos, using a timeline similar to those found in video editors and a second option that displays individual frames. It is the second option that is suitable for creating animated GIFs and is the one covered here.

A GIF animation can be created from a Photoshop document. The process involves creating the Photoshop document in the usual way, with all the elements required in the animation on different layers.
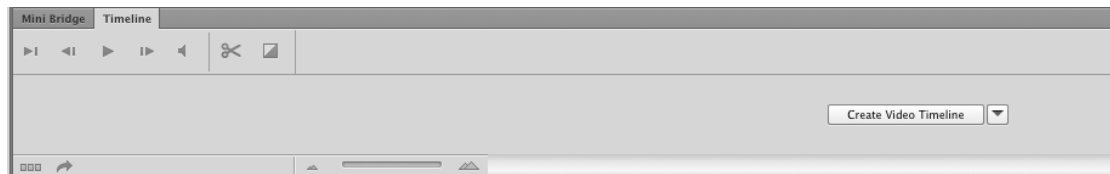
Create a Photoshop document
Create a new Photoshop file to the size required by your web project, setting the width and height dimensions in pixels and the *resolution to 72ppi.*

For the purposes of this exercise, a document set to 760 x 200px will be used. The animation will comprise of an image in the background that *fades* into view, then a message comprised of two pieces of text that *slide* into view from different sides.

The simplest way to achieve this effect is to create a Photoshop document with the required image elements, as they will appear once the animation is complete. Once the image is complete you will then be ready to go on to the next stage to develop the animation.
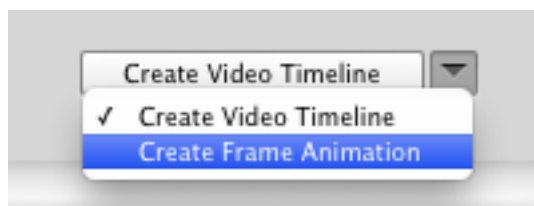
Set up the Timeline
To display the Timeline go to *Window > Timeline*. The Timeline appears at the base of the screen. By default, Photoshop displays the video editing timeline.
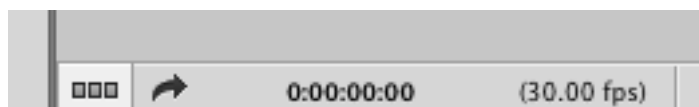
To create a GIF animation the Timeline needs to be changed to show *Frame Animation*. This can be done by one of two ways:

- In the Timeline panel there is a button that says Create Video Timeline. Click on the drop-down menu to the right and choose *Create Frame Animation.* The button now says Create Frame Animation. Click on this button.
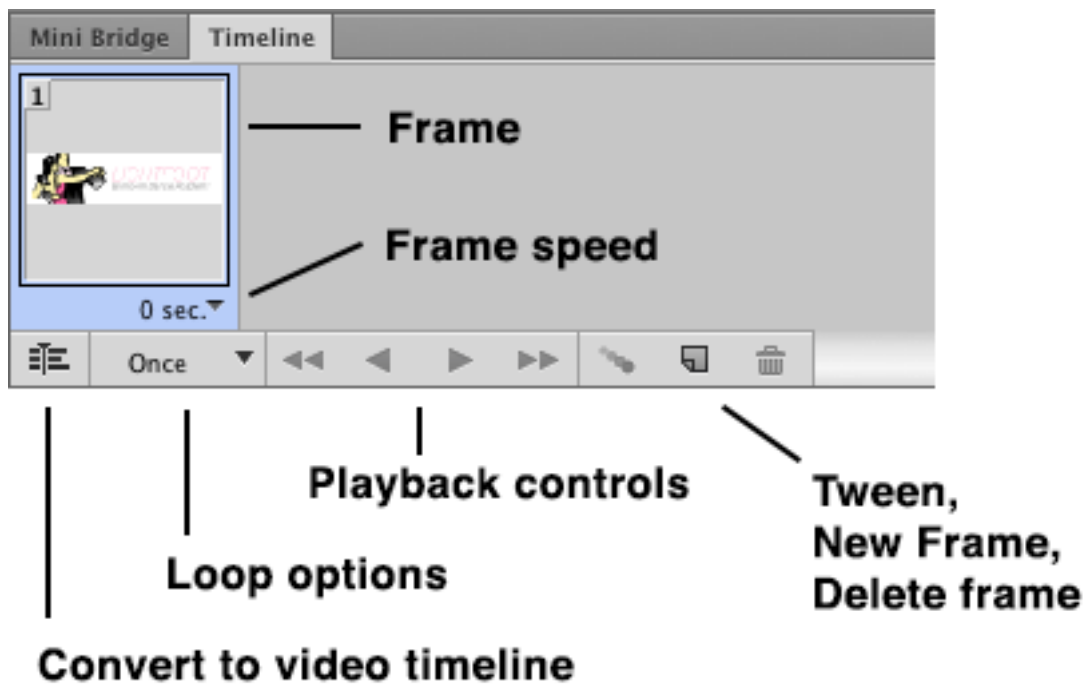

- If the Timeline panel is already displaying the video timeline then the Frame animation view can be selected by clicking on the *Convert to frame animation* button at the far left bottom of the Timeline panel.

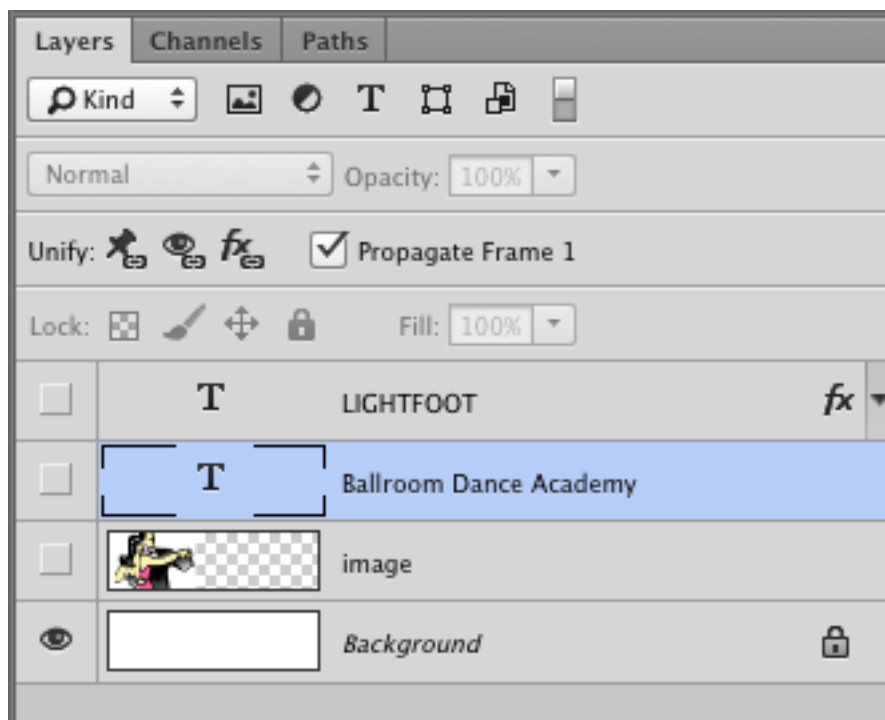**Convert to frame animation**

The Timeline will now show the first frame of the animation, containing a thumbnail of the Photoshop document. There will also be various controls present as in the following illustration:

- **Frame**
- **Frame speed**
- **Playback controls**
- **Loop options**
- **Tween, New Frame, Delete frame**
- **Convert to video timeline**

Create the animation

The animation will eventually comprise of *frames* in the timeline. What is seen in each frame is largely dependent on what layers are visible in the Layers palette. Turning the visibility on and off in the Layers results in what is seen in the currently selected frame.

As the animation begins with a plain background and then commences with the background image fading in, for the first frame, the visibility of all layers should be off except for the *Background* layer.
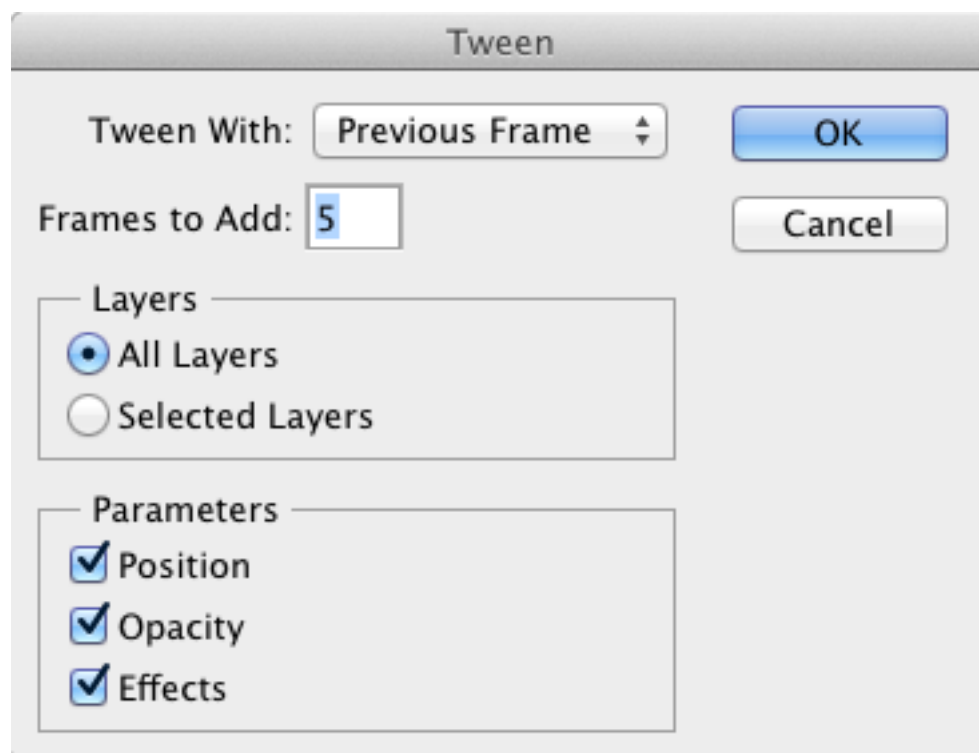
Once the layer visibility is sorted, click on the *new frame* button in the Timeline. This will duplicate the first frame as the second frame. This frame will represent the next step in the animation. In the Layers palette, turn on the visibility of the layer with the background image. In the Timeline, frame 1 will be plain and frame 2 will display the image.
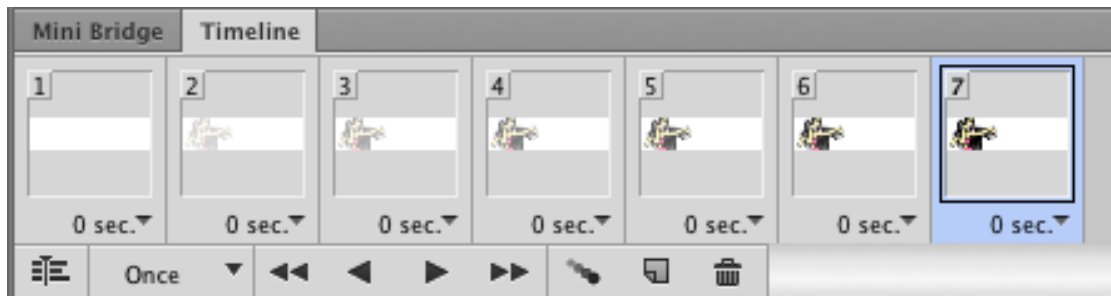

Tween
Click the play button in the Timeline and the movie plays but the transition is very sudden. The transition needs to be made smooth so the image *fades-in*. This can be done by using an animation technique called *tweening*. *Tweening*, or *tween*, is a term derived from the word *between*. Click on the tween button in the timeline and the Tween dialogue appears.

Choose *Tween With: Previous Frame* and decide the number of frames. The Layers and Parameters sections can be left as they are in the illustration. Click OK and extra frames will be added between the first and second frames.
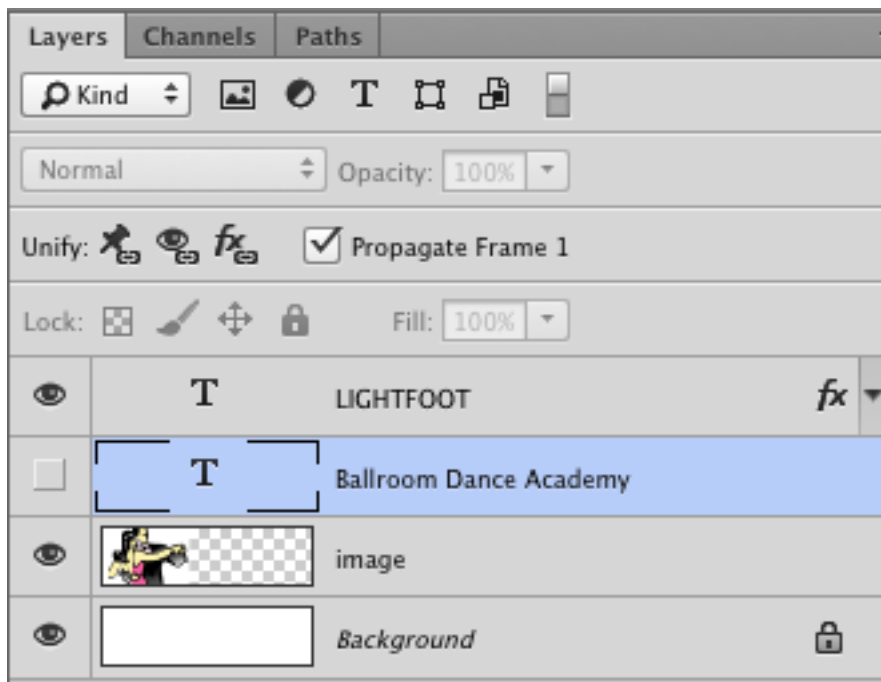
Click the play button and the fade-in will now be much smoother.
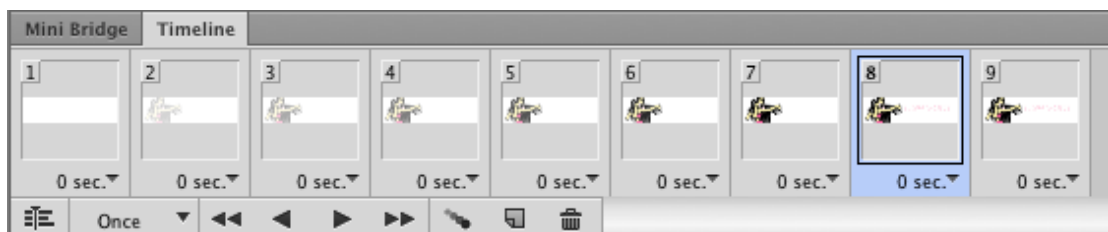
Text transition
In this step a text transition will be made. The transition will involve making the text slide in to place from outside the frame.

With the last frame in the timeline selected, *click on the new frame button*. Then, for this frame make the text layer visible in the Layers palette. Where the text is currently positioned is where it will be finally positioned.

Click on the new frame button. This will duplicate the last frame so the text now appears in two frames.

Select the penultimate frame in the Timeline.

Select the Move tool and, *with the text layer the selected layer in the Layers palette*, in the document window, move the text out of the frame so it is no longer visible. *When moving the text, hold down the Shift key. This will enable the text to be moved in exactly a horizontal or vertical direction.*

Click and drag text out of frame with Move tool whilst holding the *Shift* key

Click on the *tween* button in the Timeline to add the transitional frames between the last two frames. Make sure to choose the correct *Tween With:* option in the Tween dialogue (Tween With: Next Frame).

The result should be that the text slides into position.

Repeat this process for the second piece of text but this time, maybe try sliding it in from another direction.

Final adjustments
The timing for frames can be adjusted at the base of each frame in the timeline. To make all frames have the same time, select all the frames in the Timeline. This can be done in the Timeline by selecting the first frame and clicking on the last frame whilst holding the *Shift* key.

The number of times an animation plays can be set from the *loop options*.

Save the animation.
When finished, the animation needs to be saved as a GIF image. To do this go to File > Save for Web… In the Save for Web dialogue, choose the appropriate GIF optimization settings. Once this is done the animation will be ready to use in your web project.

Another word
When making a GIF animation it can be easy to have glitches in movement or transitions. This can be caused by inadvertently moving an object or adjusting something in the Photoshop document. Correcting issues such as this can be problematic and sometimes it is better to delete the affected frames or section and start over again.