

How to use Movie Maker 2

[Windows Movie Maker 2](#) is a great video editor for the Windows XP user. It is capable of importing video off a digital camcorder so that you can edit your own movie on your computer. The program comes bundled with a large selection of movie effects, transitions, and titling options. Even with these great effects, however, the program's greatest strength is its ease of use ... Microsoft has done an excellent job of creating a program that video novices can pick up quickly.

It's fortunate that the program is so easy to learn, as traditionally, [editing video](#) on a home computer has been rather complicated. Even with a straightforward program like Movie Maker, the process can still be daunting for the complete novice, as there are many different video formats that you can capture and save into. And, unfortunately, advanced tasks such as creating video for DVD or CD are not documented very well within the program.

So, to truly learn Movie Maker and the little nuances of [video editing](#), there are several routes the new videographer can take, and the one you choose will depend upon your learning style, budget, and the amount of free time you have.



Install the program and "figure it out":

With any other program, I would say this is a bad choice. However, Movie Maker is so straightforward that you can probably figure the program out entirely through experimentation. This is especially true if you have any past experience with computer video ... you'll find Movie Maker to be a pleasant program to work with and easy to understand.

However, if you are a complete video novice, you may run into some early roadblocks with this method. For example, the first step to creating a video is to [capture video](#) from your camcorder onto your hard drive. Many people run into problems during this step, though the program makes it easy. Movie Maker lets you capture in several different video formats, and if you don't have any background in digital video, you won't know which one to choose. So you might need some instruction ...



Reading articles and the help file:

Microsoft has set up a pretty decent Movie Maker help site, and the built-in help file is well made. There also exist several sites (like this one) with helpful articles on Movie Maker and digital video in general. If you are an "audio learner," reading articles and help files like these may be the best way for you to learn.

I recommend locating several different sources for this information... as every website has its own agenda. Even Microsoft has their own bias, and tries to convince you to use their own "[Windows Media Video](#)" compression on all your movie files. However, as you'll find out by reading through the articles on this site, WMV is not always the best format to use.



Online video training:

If you learn visually, the fastest way to learn a new program like Movie Maker is by actually watching the program being used. This "[watch and learn](#)" approach is especially useful for video editing software because there are a lot of techniques (like trimming, cutting, and scrubbing video clips) that are difficult to describe in text.

You'll have a hard time finding an instructor or class on Moviemaker as the program is not yet very common. If you can't find a class or tutor, you can try watching an online video course on Movie Maker 2 ... [such as the one offered at this site!](#) I know, this is a shameless plug for MightyCoach, but screen capture video is really a great way to learn Movie Maker quickly, as you can actually watch and listen as an instructor uses the program before your eyes.

To be fair, though, classes and online video training are not for everyone. If you have a lot of computer experience (and a little background in digital video) than this type of "real-time tutoring" may go too slowly for you.

Whatever method you choose, Movie Maker 2 is a great program and very easy to pick up. It's possibly the simplest and most user-friendly video editor available today.

Capturing video in Movie Maker 2 ... which format to choose?

Transferring video from a digital camcorder and capturing it onto your hard-drive can be difficult. That's because [digital video](#) creates enormous file sizes that can be difficult to save onto your computer's hard drive. Until recently, video capture was the hardest step for the home video maker as it was fraught with hardware conflicts, system crashes, and dropped frames ... and tended to progress toward splitting headaches.

Fortunately, Microsoft's latest video editing software, Movie Maker 2, makes the capture process relatively painless. This is due in part from the [Windows XP](#) operating system and its built-in native support for capturing digital video and digital pictures. On top of that, Moviemaker's capture wizard is simple, straightforward, and a huge boon for the amateur video maker who wants to jump into computer video and not worry about the idiosyncrasies of capturing. .

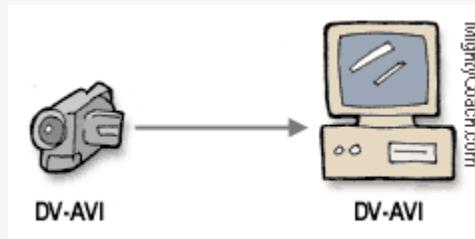
However, before you [capture video](#) in Movie Maker 2, you have to answer an important question:

What format do you want to capture into?

You see, Movie Maker lets you capture in both the traditional DV-AVI format, and also in its own WMV format. Each has its own merits, so I'd like to tell you more about each of these formats so you can make an informed decision.

The DV-AVI format

The first format you capture into is DV-AVI. This format, also known as DV or "digital video" is the video compression format that your camcorder captures onto tape. Thus, when you film a video, your camcorder saves the video information onto magnetic tape as a series of "0s and 1s" in the DV-AVI format. This digital format is great, as the video is saved at an outstanding resolution of 720x480 pixels running at 30 frames per second. In other words, you are getting video that is potentially higher quality than a commercial DVD. DV-AVI is the capture and editing format of choice for all other video software programs and any video-related software will recognize and work with this format.



However, the digital video format is not without its problems ... the major inconvenience being the huge file sizes. You see, DV-AVI video takes up a lot of space. Each minute of video takes up a whopping 200 megs of space on your computer's hard-drive. That means an hour tape will occupy about 13 gigabytes of hard-drive space ... that's a lot of space!

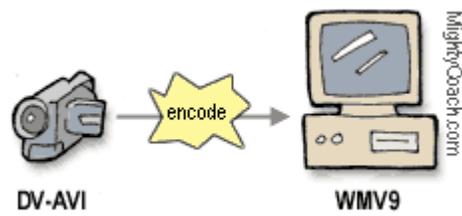
Because the format is so big, many older home computers have problem capturing and saving the video fast enough, resulting in "dropped frames" whenever the computer's hard-drive slows down below a critical level. Fortunately, almost all computers running Windows XP are fast enough to capture DV-AVI video, so this isn't really an issue. Still, if you don't have much hard drive space available you're going to run into problems. Most intermediate and advanced video users have extra hard-drives to save and backup their video projects, though this isn't necessary for the beginner.

Windows Media Video 9

Movie Maker 2 offers you the ability to capture your video into its own "wmv9" format. The windows media format is set as the "recommended" default setting when you first attempt a capture ... partly from Microsoft's desire to dominate the video market with its own proprietary video format.

That's not to say that WMV is bad ... quite the contrary, this video format is great, and saves your video into incredibly high-quality video that takes up 1/10th the space as DV. In fact, the quality of WMV9 is so good that some movie theatre companies are switching to digital projectors, dumping their old fashioned film projectors, and projecting their movies from WMV9 files. The compression level of WMV9 is incredible and allows you to backup and create collections of videos on your computer, just like you might already do with your MP3 audio collections.

However, the WMV9 format has its own problems which may turn you away from the format for capturing video. When first capturing your camcorder movie through a firewire cable, to save the movie into WMV your computer has to "re-encode" the video into the WMV9 format "on the fly". Even if you set the compression level to highest quality, you are going to loose some of your video image quality through the encoding process. You ALWAYS loose image quality when you re-encode a video, no matter how high your settings are set ... that's the nature of video compression.



The other problem with the format, is that it's Microsoft's proprietary format, and no other program uses or recognizes WMV9. That means you're stuck using Movie Maker for editing. On the other hand, you were probably going to use Movie Maker 2 anyway.

So which one do you choose?

If you are going to capture a short section of video from your camcorder, say ... less than 10 minutes (or if the video quality must be the highest quality), I recommend sticking with the original DV-AVI format. If you are hard-pressed for hard-drive space, or must capture a long amount of tape, the WMV9 format is just fine. However, if you *do* go with WMV9, I recommend not using the "recommended" setting for capture. Go ahead and set the capture quality level to the absolute maximum (called "high quality" at 720 x 480) as you should always start with the highest quality source video before you begin editing.

Improving capture performance in Movie Maker 2

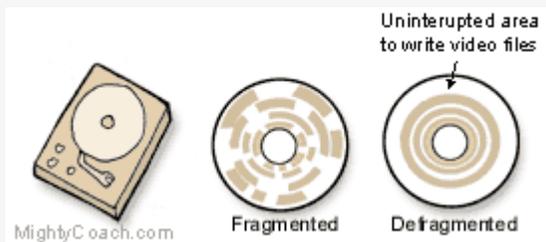
Capturing video onto your computer's hard drive can be frustrating. That's because digital video from your camcorder is very large (a single minute takes up 200 megs of space) and not every system can handle the sustained capture speeds needed to transfer your movie over a FireWire cable and onto a hard drive.

Fortunately, if you are running Movie Maker 2 then you already have Windows XP installed on your computer. Most computers that come bundled with Windows XP are already powerful enough to capture, even if they have slow processor speeds. For example, I commonly capture and edit video on my 600mhz laptop XP computer and never run into any problems with video capture.

However, if you *do* run into problems during capturing, there are several things you can do to speed up your system:

1. Defragmenting your hard drives

Defragmenting a drive is an easy performance enhancer, and you should defragment regularly. You see, a hard drive is really a circular platter (kind of like a CD). Data is written onto this platter in a circular pattern, and each hard drive platter can only hold a set amount of data. Data is constantly written and erased throughout this entire platter, and any single file may be broken up into many little sectors throughout the disk. This isn't normally a problem, though it can slow your system down over time as it takes longer to find and open files.



However, this can be a major problem with large video files, as these files will have to be split into smaller fragments as they are being written, and this slow-down can make your drive prone to dropped frames. When you defragment your drive, all the broken fragments are placed together, so that your hard drive has a large "physical area" of available space to write your video to.

2. Get a faster hard drive

The main hurdle to capturing big video files is the speed of your hard drive. You see, when you stream video onto your computer through a firewire cable, the digital video is written onto your hard drive as large a DV-AVI file. This stream runs at a constant 200 megs per minute and if your hard drive slows down while this stream is running, you will lose some of your video and get "dropped frames". These dropped video frames are bad, as all the video after that will be out of sync.

While most hard drives run very fast, some are faster than others, and they do slow down at times. To avoid hard drive "hiccups" you should close down any background programs, and you may need to invest in a faster 7200 rpm hard drive.

3. Partition your Drive as NTFS

If your hard drive shipped with [Windows XP](#), it should already be partitioned as NTFS. To check, find your drive inside of "My computer" and right-click on it with your mouse. If your drive is partitioned in the older Fat16 or Fat32 format, than this is your most likely culprit for capture problems. The older partition structure isn't optimized for video capture, and won't let you capture video files over a certain size (2 or 4 gigs).

4. Get a second hard drive

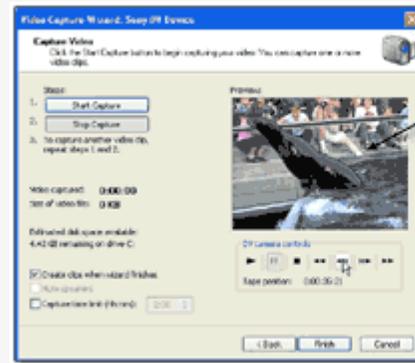
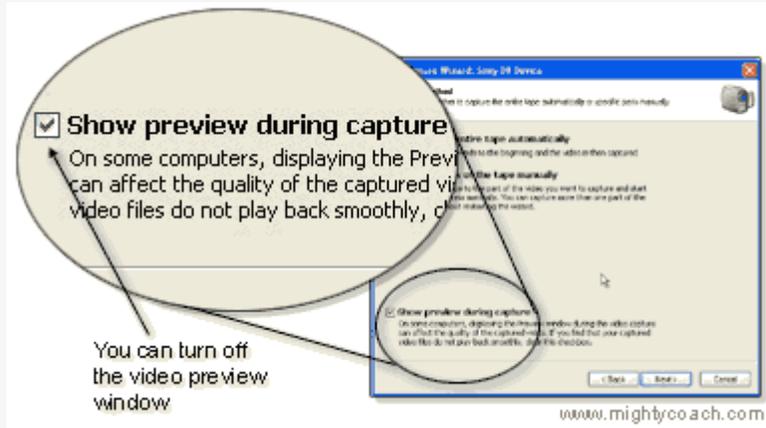
You can greatly improve your editing system by adding another hard drive that is used solely for video capture, and most professional editors have systems with many drives. This way, your computer can use your main drive to handle running programs, and the second drive strictly for video capture. If you do a lot of editing, you'll need another drive anyway, as your videos will quickly fill up all your available storage space.

5. Use the Windows Media Codec

If you can't get rid of dropped frames when capturing in the DV-AVI format, you can always try capturing in Movie Maker's WMV9 codec. Because this format generates small file sizes, you are not going to run into dropped frames from an underperforming hard drive. However, the compression itself might be tasking on your CPU because encoding video takes a lot of processing power. Most of the time, you can capture video at the highest setting (high quality 720x480) without any problems.

6. Turn your preview monitor off

When you capture video, you can watch the video capture on your computer inside Movie Maker's preview monitor. However, generating this "preview video" is tasking on your system and it really isn't necessary as you can watch your captured video directly on your camcorder's LCD screen. You can turn the preview mode off inside the capture wizard.



7. Decrease your monitor display settings

Try setting your display to a lower resolution (1024 x 768 is Movie Maker's minimum recommendation but you can go lower if you need to) and decrease your color depth to 16 million (or "high color").

As you can see, there are many things you can do to tweak your system for maximum performance and some are cheaper than others. Fortunately, once you get your video onto your computer, you are pretty much home free as it doesn't take a lot of processing power to actually edit the video.

The correct way to save Movie Maker 2 project files.

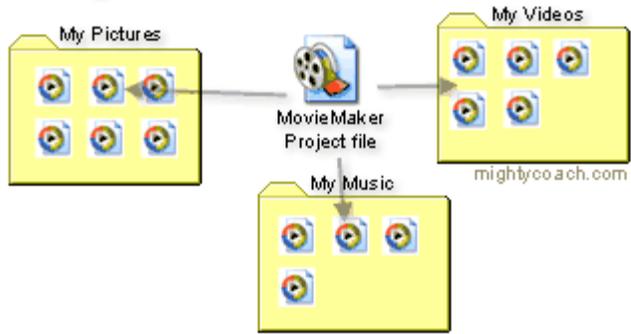
There is a correct way to save your [Movie Maker projects](#), and you should know how before you start editing for the first time ... especially if you ever want to back up your video project, transfer it to another computer, or re-edit your project in the future.

When you first save a project in Movie Maker 2, the program generates a "movie maker project file" on your computer's hard-drive. You can name and save this project file anywhere you want, though Movie Maker will attempt to place it within your "My Movies folder."

But what exactly IS this project file??

The project file is a "linking file" that keeps track of every item in your home movie. This includes every video clip, music song, picture, and voice track ... the project file knows where each of these items are located on your computer, how they are laid out on the movie timeline, and what effects and transitions should be applied to each.

"Linking" to files ...



However, these video objects are not actually "embedded" within the project file. If you examine the project file itself, you'll see that it is only 1 meg in size ... while your movie may contain several gigabytes worth of video files. That's because the project file only "links" to the actual multimedia files. Because of this, you really need to organize all your files if you ever want to re-edit your project.

Why is this?

Suppose that sometime in the future you decide to give your computer a "spring cleaning" and reorganize some of your media files. You can damage a project if you inadvertently move or delete a file that is used in one of your videos. The next time you open up your video project, Movie Maker won't find the media file "where it expected to find it" and your project will be forever ruined.

To avoid this problem and keep your project intact, I recommend creating a new folder for each of your video projects. You should then save every movie element into this folder **before** you import them into Movie Maker. This folder should include your captured video, background music, pictures, voice narration, and the project file itself. With all your files together like this, there is no chance of a file being inadvertently deleted or moved. Plus, this method allows you to easily transfer your entire project to another computer (or backup onto an external hard drive) ... all you have to do is copy and paste this single folder.

Don't underestimate the importance of organization when it comes to [editing video](#). Unless you stay on top of things, your hard drive can quickly become cluttered with random video clips and pictures, and you won't know what's safe to delete. Organizing each of your movies into its own folder will save you a lot of trouble and heartache down the line.



Editing within Movie Maker 2 ... how to remove unwanted "junk" video

The most useful aspect of computer video editing is that you can weed out all the "junk video" that finds its way into everyone's home movies. I don't know about you, but I believe that 95% of home movies are incredibly boring ... mostly because you have to sit through hours of inane film in order to get to the few minutes of interesting material. I've found that the audience attention span for my own "fantastic" home movies is very short ... so I now try to keep all my own movies under 5 minutes long.

There are many kinds of "junk video" that you might want to remove from your home videos ...

1. Zooming

Overzealous use of the camcorder's zoom function is the number one sign of a beginning videographer. Zooming tends to make your audience sea-sick and should only be used for framing shots (i.e. Zooming between recorded scenes). Fortunately, you can edit these zooms right out of your videos and only show the wide establishing shots followed by close-up shots.

2. Preparing to speak

If you are filming a narrator or filming a family member, there's always that couple of seconds where they say "Ok ... is the camcorder running?" Now you can cut that part out and start right with your interview.

3. Stillness

Good video needs motion ... action ... something happening. For example, if you are filming a birthday and it takes your small child two minutes to open his birthday present, consider cutting out the middle 1.5 minutes. Your audience wants to see the motion ... your child's delight at seeing the present, and the triumph of getting it open. Unless the child gets an exciting paper-cut, the rest of the video is unnecessary.



There are several ways to get rid of junk video, and a [video editing](#) program like Movie Maker 2 makes it easy.

1. "Manual capture" only the video that you actually want

When you transfer digital video from a camcorder to your computer, Movie Maker gives you the option of "manually capturing" your video, letting you decide exactly what sections of your tape you want to transfer. This allows you to capture ONLY the parts of your video tape that you want in your finished movie, thus saving you a lot of precious hard drive space. While Movie Maker gives you the option of capturing an entire video tape, I rarely do this because 75% of my video is "junk" that I never want to watch again.

2. Cutting clips in half

Movie Maker allows you to "cut" your video clips in half. This is a great way to get rid of large chunks of "junk film." You cut your clips in two different places within the program ... both in the preview monitor, and also while working on the timeline. Simply find the location you want to cut and click the "cut button" located under the preview monitor.



Cutting clips is great way for getting rid of large areas of video (or breaking up clips that you want to place at different places on your timeline). The only problem with cutting is that you must stay organized -- if you cut 30 separate video clips, you'll end up with a whopping 60 video clips in your video collection and that can be hard to sort through.

3. **Trimming the ends of clips**

For the finest control, you can trim the ends off your clips by setting the exact "in and out" points of each video clip. While working on the timeline, simply "drag the ends" of each clip to the exact point that you would like it to start and stop. You can accomplish very fine control of each clips start/stop points by trimming ... especially if you zoom in on each clip using the magnifying glass.



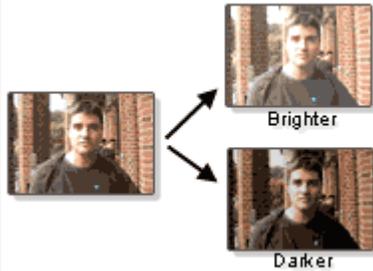
As you can see, deleting unwanted film is very easy to accomplish within an editing program like Movie Maker 2. This gives you much more freedom when you actually film ... as now it's OK to film your kids' entire 2 hour soccer game. You can always edit out the junk (those other pesky kids) using your computer. After all, film is cheap, and you never when you're going to film that surprise goal!

Video effects in Movie Maker 2 ... which ones are actually useful, and how to apply them.

Movie maker 2 comes preinstalled with a number of video effects that you can add to your movie clips. These effects are numerous and easy to apply. Despite the large assortment of effects, you'll find yourself using certain effects more often, and some of them not at all. Here are some of the most useful effects and some uses you might not have thought of.

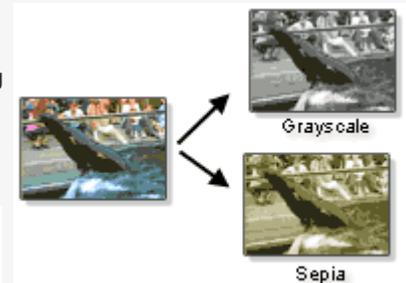
1. **Brightness Increase and Decrease**

These brightness effects are very useful for fixing your video's exposure levels. If you filmed an indoor scene that looks too dark, you can simply brighten the video with the brightness effect. If your video still isn't bright enough, you can repeat the effect several times until you get the look you want.



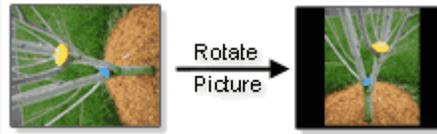
2. **Grayscale and Sepia Tone**

Both of these effects remove the color from your film, and the sepia effect gives your film a pleasant "yellowed old photograph" look. You can use these desaturating effects to make your movie look classy (like those black and white DeBeer's diamond commercials) or to create a "flashback" or "dream sequence" scene within a larger home movie epic.



3. **Rotation effects**

There are several rotation effects, but they are not useful for video. However, they work great for photographs, and allow you to align your photos properly. If you hold your digital camera sideways (to get those full-body pictures) these rotation effects allow you to rotate your pictures in the proper direction so you can create "video slideshows" of your picture collections.



These rotation effects allow you to rotate your pictures in the proper direction so you can create "video slideshows" of your picture collections.

4. **Slow down and speed up**

These two effects can be useful for creating comedy "movies." For example, you could make a fake kung-fu movie with your kids and use the speed-up effect to create rapid-motion fighting scenes. Likewise, the slow-down effect could be used to create the clichéd "slow motion punch" that is common in American action movies. You could also use the speed up effect to make funny slapstick comedies ... like the British "Benny Hill" skits.

There are many other effects available within Movie [Maker](#), though they aren't as useful as the ones mentioned here. Some of the effects, like the artistic watercolor effects, seem to be included simply for the "wow" factor. One effect that Movie Maker is sorely missing is the "reverse video" effect, which is unfortunate as there are many special effects you can perform by reversing film.

How to apply effects

To apply effects to your film you need to open up the [Video Effects](#) collection. You can preview each effect in the preview monitor by double clicking on the effect thumbnail. To apply the effect to a video clip, simply grab the effect and drop it onto the clip in the storyboard.

Another way to apply effects is by right-clicking on the clip and choosing "Video effects." This mode allows you to see exactly what effects are being used. This view is useful if you have to add or remove multiple effects to your clip.

Transitions in Movie Maker ... how to use them more effectively.

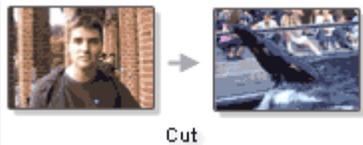
Movie Maker 2 comes with a huge selection of [transitions](#) that you can place between your video clips. There are 60 transitions to choose from, ranging from simple fades to complex geometric shapes.

When first presented with such a plethora of transition options, you may be tempted to use them judiciously throughout your video. For a home movie, that's fine, as your audience will probably enjoy them. However, if you are trying to create a "[professional looking](#)" video, you may want to go easy on the transitions ... after all, you don't see any transitions in movies or TV shows.

Actually, there are a few transitions that you will see in movies and film, but they are subtle and you probably don't notice them ...

1. The "Cut"

This isn't really a transition, but a switch in movie clips ... when one clip ends, the next one immediately begins. The timing of cuts is very important and there are many funny and amazing things you can do with careful timing. Fortunately, Movie Maker makes it easy to cut your scenes by allowing you to "trim" the ends of your video clips.



2. The fade

The fade is the most useful (and most used) transition. It is simply a cross-dissolve between two scenes, and in movies typically occurs when the story changes locations.



3. The wipe

This effect is used less often than the fade, but implies the same thing ... a change in location. This effect is more obvious than the fade, and the audience is supposed to "notice" the effect. The wipe denotes a major change in location ... and even a change in time. In a movie like "The Gladiator" or "[Conan the Barbarian](#)" the wipe might be used to show the main character changing over time ... wiping between clips of the character aging and getting stronger.



The audience should be focused and engrossed with the movie and not with your transition effects. So, it's important to keep your transitions "transparent" or "invisible" by using them sparingly.

An exception to the rule

One place that you might want to use fancy transitions, is in a photo slideshow. Movie maker lets you import pictures from your digital camera and lay them on your timeline as a "video slideshow." You can even add music or a descriptive voice track over these photos.

Because photos are static and non-moving, transitions are great because they add "motion" to your movie. A photo slideshow is one place that you can get away with those crazy transitions and still create a video that looks professional.

Other ways to transition ...

There are other ways to create "transitions" between scenes that don't rely on your computer but careful planning. If you ever want to see a movie with clever transitions, rent the 80's action movie "Highlander." The main character in this movie (a 1,000 year old sword master living in New York) has constant "flashbacks" to his youth in medieval Scotland. To transition to these flashbacks, the director uses only clever editing. In one scene, the camera will zoom in on the character's eyes while he drives his car, cut, then zoom back from his eyes while he is in the middle of an ancient sword fight. In another scene, the camera pans over to his office aquarium and moves up to the aquarium water's surface ... then the scene cuts to

the water surface of a medieval lake. Clever stuff ... but it takes a lot of preplanning!

Rules are meant to be broken, and the above transition recommendations are only observations. If you want to use crazy transitions in your video ... go right ahead! After all, you are the creative genius behind your film!

Add music to your video using Movie Maker 2

A music background can really spice up a home movie. Music is easy to apply on your computer with a program like Movie Maker 2. In fact, this program has an audio track specifically for music ... all you have to do is import a song and drop it onto the music track in the timeline. It's really easy.

After your song is in place, you can trim the end of the song (so that it is the same length as the video) and adjust the volume so it doesn't drown out your video.

You can use any song for your video, and some are perfect for home videos. Some of these include:

- **The Bear Necessities** (Disney's [Jungle Book](#)) -- great for the zoo or any video with animals
- **Under the Sea** (Disney's Little Mermaid) -- perfect for the beach or water sports
- **Yellow Submarine** (Beatles) -- water sports or the aquarium
- **I want to ride my bicycle** (Queen) -- kids on bikes
- **Born to be wild** -- the ultimate driving music
- **The Little Rascals** -- useful for any kid movie (they just released a "little rascals" soundtrack that you can find at [Amazon.COM](#))

Where can you find these songs? Moviemaker 2 can import most sound formats, including MP3 songs ... If you already own a CD with a song you like, you can always import that song onto your computer using Windows Media Player. If you need royalty free songs, you'll need to find a royalty free CD collection or online buy-out music (these are typically expensive, though).

A simple background music can turn a dull, monotonous video into a snappy musical montage ... you just need to find a song you like and stick it in.

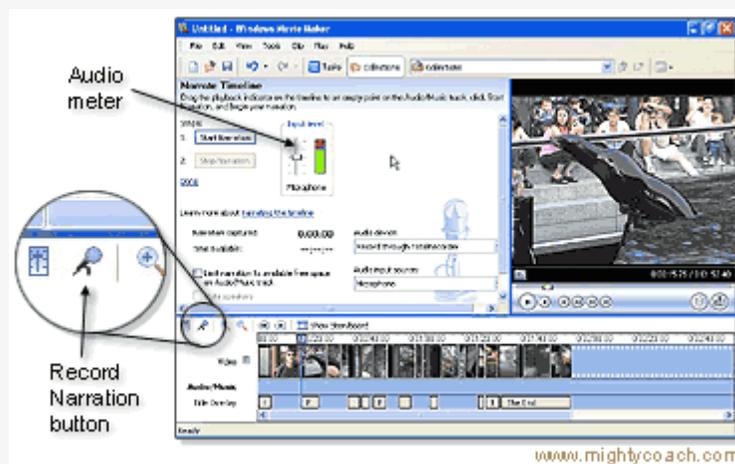
Recording a narration in Movie Maker 2

Movie Maker 2 makes it really easy to record a voice narration over your movie. The program even has a built-in recording wizard that allows you to record over a microphone while you watch a preview of your movie.

This feature is very useful, and allows you to quickly narrate descriptive videos. For example, if you are selling a house, you could film all the rooms and later record a running commentary to go with it. Another great use for a voice track is in creating picture slideshows. You could take pictures from your digital camera, lay them on the MovieMaker timeline, and then record a narration for your "slideshow!"

To use this function, you're going to need a microphone. Fortunately, most cheap desk microphones work fine for voice recording. For the best results, you may want to invest in a headset mic – the earphones will give you real-time feedback of what your voice sounds like. This allows you to enunciate clearly and correct for voice-popping and inadvertent mouth noises.

To use the voice track wizard, simply press the "Narrate timeline" button located to the left of the timeline. When you click this button, the narration wizard will pop-up and give you some recording options. Most of these are pretty obvious ... you can click "show more options" to see more recording choices. You'll need to pick your recording device (your sound card) and plug a microphone into your computer's microphone-in jack.



Inside the pop-up wizard is a microphone level bar that moves up and down as you speak. If this bar does not appear to be moving, your microphone may not be set up properly. Setting up a microphone for the first time can be frustrating, but here are the major things you should check.

1. **Your microphone isn't set as the "recording device."**

You may need to go into your sound properties panel, and make sure that your microphone is set as your recording device. You can also do this within Movie Maker's recording wizard.

2. **The "microphone boost" is on or off.**

If you find that your microphone sounds distorted or is too loud/soft ... your microphone boost may be on or off. You can find this option under sound properties under the advanced settings button. You can try altering this option, also called "Mic 20dB up," to get the best sound quality.

3. **The sound isn't loud enough.**

Make sure that you are getting good sound levels within the MovieMaker voice wizard. Try to get the sound meter near the red, but not to the topmost red bar ... if your sound is set to high, your voice will distort. You can also increase the voice track volume after you lay it down in your timeline.

Once you've got your microphone working, you can record your narration. The narration wizard will play your movie, and you can record your dialogue while watching the movie preview. When you are done talking, click "stop." The wizard will try to save the voice track file onto your hard drive ... you should save this audio file inside your project's main folder to keep your files organized.

Moviemaker 2 will automatically import your narration into your collections. To place it in your movie, simply drag the audio-clip onto the timeline. You can then move or trim the ends of the voice track, and change the volume level with the volume button.

The "narrate timeline" option is done very well in Movie Maker, and this is one function that Movie maker 2 does better than competing products.

Next:

The multiple audio track problem - using both a narration and music

If there was one thing I would change about Movie Maker 2, then it would be the way it handles audio. You see, while it is very easy to add a music or voice narration to your movie ... it is very hard to add BOTH a music and voice track to the same movie. That's because Movie Maker only comes with a single audio track, which means you have to choose between one or the other.

However, if you really need both audio tracks, there are a couple of tricks you can do ... though each of these workarounds has its own problems.

Method One: Render your movie twice

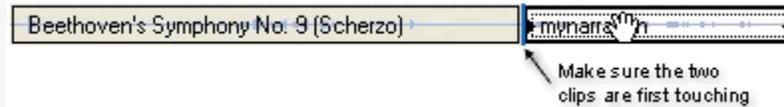
One method you can try is to render your movie twice. After adding your first audio clip (background music), you can export your movie as a high-quality video file. Next, you can create a new Movie Maker project and import that video file as one big video clip (don't let Movie Maker automatically split the file into multiple clips!). You can then lay this video clip onto the video timeline and place your other audio material into the "now empty" audio track.

The problem with this method is that your movie goes through an extra encoding step and loses some quality during this process. However, if you keep your export settings really high this degradation won't be noticeable. Another problem with this method is that you have to "complete" your video before you can export the first file. However, this rendering method does give you a blank audio track and allows you to perform fine placement of many audio elements. If you are going to create a complicated video with music, voice track, and sound effects, than this is the route to chose.

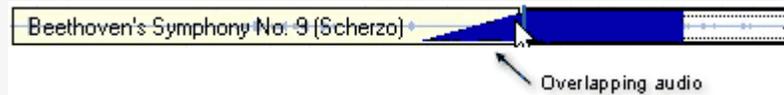
Method Two

Another way to create two audio tracks is to superimpose them. MovieMaker allows you to superimpose two audio clips using the same timeline track ... though the method for doing this is not obvious.

First, lay down your music clip on the timeline. Then, lay your second audio-track on the timeline AFTER the first one. To superimpose the two, you first have to move the second clip so that its starting edge touches the end of the first audio clip.



Now, pick up the second audio clip again and move it to the left. You'll see a blue "triangle" form over the first audio track ... that means they are superimposing.



Unfortunately, there is a problem with this method. If you try to "completely superimpose" both audio clips, (so they both start at the beginning of the movie) the second clip will try to jump in front of the first one. It's really hard to get that second audio clip to start where you want it.

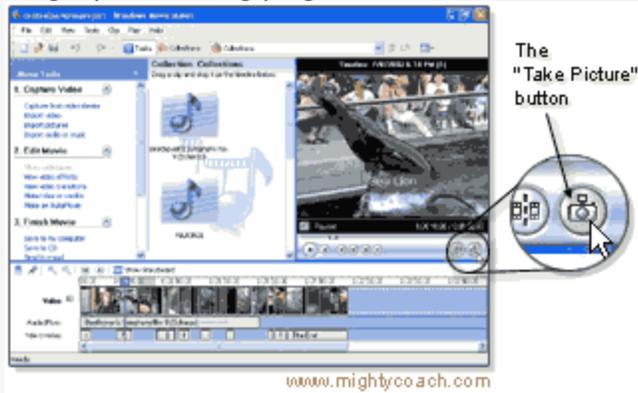
As you can see, running two audio tracks in Movie Maker 2 is problematic. However, in the program's defense, MovieMaker is meant to be a simple video editor. If find yourself needing multiple audio and video tracks that run concurrently, you may be better served with a professional editing package like Adobe Premiere. Movie Maker 2 is meant to be an easy-to-use program, so they've simplified much of the interface to accommodate novice users.

How to take a snapshot of your video within Movie Maker 2.

Movie [Maker](#) comes with a really nifty feature ... the program lets you take "snapshots" directly from your movie! This means you can go to any point within a video clip, capture a freeze frame picture, and save this image to your computer's hard drive.

There are many uses for these snapshots ...

- You could e-mail "hi-light pictures" of your video to friends and family. Not everyone can receive or view .wmv videos, so these pictures are a great alternative (and they don't take as long to download).
- You can use the snapshot feature to transform your camcorder into a low-resolution "digital camera." Simply point your camcorder at your subject and later you can go through your video and take virtual snapshots directly off the captured video. I don't have a digital camera so I use this method to take pictures of items I sell on EBay ... while the resulting pictures aren't good enough for printing, they are fine for WebPages.
- You can also use these video pictures to create title slides. I like to find an interesting video scene that seems to "symbolize my movie" and capture a snapshot of it. Then, I'll import this picture back into my project and turn it into a "title picture" by adding an introductory title animation on top of it. You could also add a title directly to the picture using a photo-editing program.



The actual process of taking these snapshot is quite easy. While viewing a video clip in the preview monitor, pause the clip at an appropriate spot, and click the "[Take Picture](#)" button under the preview monitor. Movie Maker 2 will then ask you where you'd like to save the picture. By default, Movie Maker will try to save your picture in your "My Pictures" directory.

If you plan on actually using this picture in your current project, I recommend saving the picture into your project's own directory. This will keep everything organized and keep all your projects files together where you can find them. (you can find out more about this organization structure in [this article](#))

If you run into problems capturing pictures this way, this may occur because you don't you're your hardware acceleration turned on. You can check this by going into your display settings, clicking on the troubleshoot tab, and setting your acceleration all the way up.

Turn your Artwork or Photos into a "video slideshow" using Movie Maker 2.0

If you have a series of images on your computer, say, from a digital camera, you can turn these pictures into a video. Movie Maker 2 has a storyboard mode that makes it really easy to turn your photos into a "[video slideshow](#)." Simply import your photographs and drop them onto the storyboard in the order you prefer.

After you've placed your pictures, you can do a bunch of great things to your photos to spice up your video presentation:

1. **Rearrange your pictures.**

The storyboard shows little thumbnails of your pictures – this makes it easy to rearrange, move, and delete pictures from your movie. Just click on the thumbnail with your mouse, and drag it into position.

2. **Rotate your pictures.**

Some of your pictures may be rotated wrong (if you held your camera sideways for a vertical photo). Fortunately, Movie Maker has a series of rotation video-effects that will fix this. Simply open up the [Video Effects](#) collection, and drag the rotation effect onto your picture in the storyboard to make it right-side-up.

3. **Fix your pictures.**

The video effects that come bundled with Movie Maker will all work on your pictures as well. That means you'll be able to perform basic photo manipulation ... for example, you could lighten or darken your pictures if they aren't exposed properly.

4. **Add transitions.**

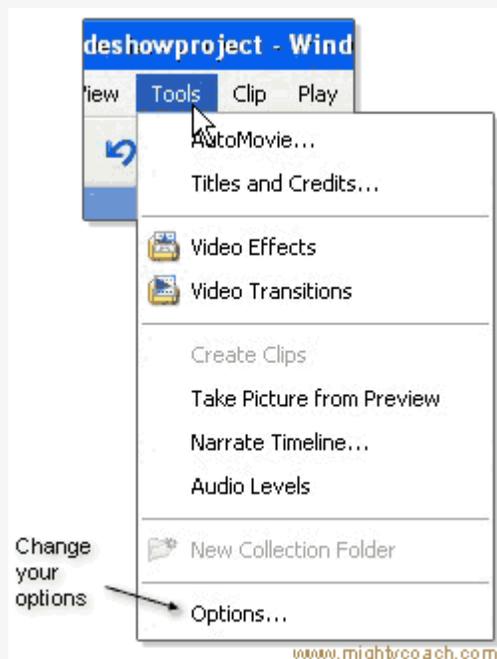
You can add transitions between each of your pictures by dragging the transition effects onto the storyboard. Most of the included transitions are rather "over-the-top," but they look great with pictures.

5. **Add music or a voice track.**

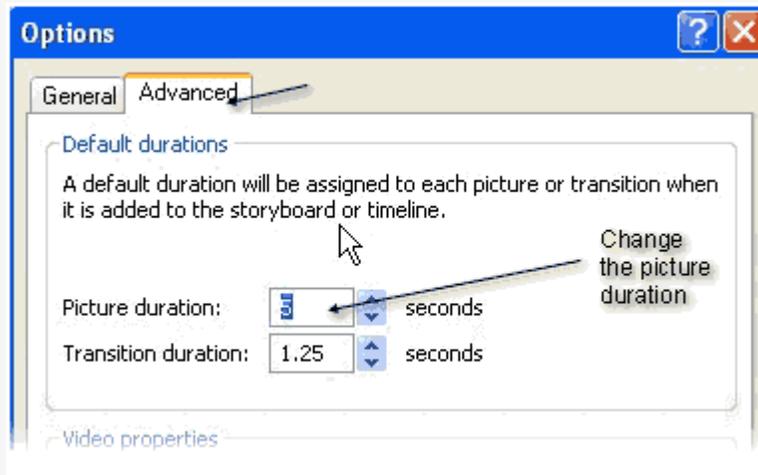
You can easily add a music track, or narrate your photo video. You'll need to do one of these things because your movie won't have any sound otherwise.

There is one thing you should keep in mind when laying your pictures onto the timeline ... and that is picture duration. By default, when you place a picture on the timeline it will stay on the screen for 5 seconds before moving to the next picture. When you start add transitions (which take time, themselves) this time drops down to around 3 seconds. This may not be enough time for you, especially if you are trying to narrate your slideshow, so you may need to change the timing of each of your photos.

1. By going into the timeline view and "trimming" each picture. Simply grab the beginning or end of each picture and drag it to the desired length.



2. By changing your timing options. You can change the default 5-second duration to any length of time you like ... you could even set your duration very short in order to make your own "stop motion" movie. Simply go to the menu bar, and click **[tools – options]**, then click on the advanced tab and change this setting. Note that this duration change only effect new pictures as you lay them on the storyboard ... and won't effect the pictures you've already placed into position.



Making better intro titles in Movie Maker 2.0

There are many ways to make an introductory movie title within Movie Maker 2 ... and in fact, the program has a series of title animations just for this function. Some of these animations are quite good ... fades, fly-ins, outline effects, they all look professional.

The only problem with the introductory titles in Movie Maker is that you have little choice in backgrounds. All the title animations let you choose a background color, but that's it.

Fortunately, there are several things you can do to spice up your introductory title clip:

1. Use a picture as a background

You can import a picture or background image into your project, lay it down at the beginning of your movie, and create an introductory title on top of this picture. This can give a nice effect, and really spices things up. You might also want to place a fade transition between this title background clip and the next video clip in your movie.

You can find appropriate background images online ... just run a Google search on desktop backgrounds or PowerPoint backgrounds.

2. Use a looping video as a background

Along the same lines, you don't have to use picture as your background. You can actually download looping video backgrounds off the internet and use these as a backdrop to your title animation. You can download some of these video backgrounds from [MainConcept](#) ... after unzipping them, simply import the video into your collections and drop it onto the timeline. If the video doesn't last long enough, you can copy it and place multiple copies end-to-end. Finally, place your animation on TOP of this looping video.

3. Create a title picture

Another option is to not use any title animations at all ... but to create a title picture to place at the beginning of your movie. You can create a title picture within any photo editing program like Photoshop (Photoshop elements is cheaper) or [PaintShop Pro](#). If you don't want to buy new software, you can try editing a background image inside of MS Paint, but you'll find it difficult to add text using this Windows program.

I use this method the most for my videos ... usually I'll take a snapshot from my movie and find a fancy textured background online. Then I'll combine these within Photoshop and add a text title. Finally, I'll import this picture back into Movie Maker to use as a title.

As you can see, there are many methods for improving your introductory titles. I usually don't go to this trouble for end credit titles though, as the end credits built into Movie Maker are quite acceptable.

Exporting your movie ... which format it best?

At last. You've sweated and toiled, and have completed your video. You've placed all your clips on your timeline, carefully arranged and trimmed them with transitions and video effects ... and you may even have added a music track. Now it's time to export your movie so that you can share it with your friends and family. .

But what format should you export to??

This is a good question and the answer is not exactly obvious. When you first run the "save movie to computer" wizard, you are going to be faced with several exporting movie formats. You'll have to choose between the native DV-AVI, or one of the huge selection of WMV formats. Each has its advantages and problems.

While you can save your video into many smaller formats appropriate for emailing and web viewing, you should export at least one copy of your movie into a high-quality format (either DV-AVI or the highest WMV format). You may need this high-quality video in the future for recording to CD or making a DVD, and it's always nice to have a high quality copy of your movie available in case you accidentally destroy or delete your project. For the highest quality, I generally recommend two settings:

1. The DV-AVI format

Movie Maker can encode your final movie into standard DV-AVI format. This is the compression format that the digital video on your camcorder is recorded. The format is great, as the quality is outstanding and it can go through many generations of editing before degrading. However, videos saved in this format are very large ... every minute of video takes up 200 megs of space. That's some pretty big file sizes and you can fill your hard drive quickly. However, if you can spare the space, I highly recommend saving into this format ... it is the most compatible video type, and it will give you the best results for burning DVDs.

2. WMV9 format

While they aren't labeled as such, every other export setting in Movie Maker is actually their own WMV9 format. The WMV9 video encoding format is also great format that generates fantastic quality at very small file sizes. Unfortunately, the format is very proprietary, and hardly any programs can open them. You're going to have a hard time sharing movies in this format with your friends unless they also run [Windows XP](#) and are willing to download the latest decompression codecs.

You might want to save a copy in this format anyway, though, as the compression is so fantastic that you can keep a large collections of video on your computer without swamping your hard drive.

So which format do you choose?

It depends upon what you need to do with your video. I generally do the following after completing each video ...

1. Save a DV-AVI copy to my computer
2. Save a WMP9 copy to my computer at the absolute HIGHEST setting ("high quality" at 720x480)
3. Backup my entire project folder onto an external hard drive or DVD-R (as data, not DVD video)

If you back up your project properly, it doesn't matter what format you save into ... you can always re-open your project and re-export your movie into whatever format you like.

My opinion on this subject ...

It is unfortunate that Movie Maker will only export in these two formats – this is most likely an attempt to dominate the digital video arena with its own WMV9 format. Fortunately, you can save your movie into DV-AVI format, and if you need to encode into other formats (such as MPEG-1, QuickTime, or reel media) you can always re-encode this DV-AVI movie.

Movie Maker - saving video to CD-R, CD-RW.

At some point you may want to export your movie to a CD-Rom. For example, you might want to back up your final movie or mail your movie to friends so that they can watch your movie in high quality.

Microsoft was kind enough to include a "Burn to CD" wizard directly within Movie Maker. To access it, simply go to the task menu and click the "Save to CD" link. A CD-writing wizard will pop-up and you can choose what format of video you'd like to save to CD.

However ... you might not want to use this built in CD burner function!

You see, for some reason Microsoft decided to limit the output options within the "save to CD" wizard. There are less video formats to choose from ... you can't choose the highest WMV9 settings, but have to make do with a lower quality setting. I don't know why they did this.

If you do want to burn your video to CD-ROM at the highest available WMV9 setting (you'll fit about 30 minutes of video onto a CD using the "high quality" setting), you need to export the video file to your hard drive first. You can then copy this file onto a CD using burning software like Roxio or [Nero](#).

Or, you could just use [Windows XP's](#) built-in CD-writing ability. Simply hi-light the video file with your mouse, then click "Write to CD" in the left handed menu bar. The file will be copied into a virtual "ready to be burned" queue. When you are ready to actually burn the final CD, go to My Computer, click on the CD-Writer drive, and click "burn CD."

Turn your Movie Maker 2 video into a DVD

You can create a DVD movie from your edited [Movie Maker 2](#) project. DVD movies are great because they allow you to watch your movie in high-resolution on your television screen. The disks are portable, so you can take them to friend's house for viewing and are much easier to store and mail than VHS tapes. Plus, the DVD media itself is much more stable than magnetic tape, so your precious video will stay intact for years.

However, creating a DVD can be a complicated task ... possibly more complicated than learning Movie Maker to begin with. The process is certainly more expensive ... you'll have to buy a [DVD writer](#) (around \$300 dollars) and good quality DVD blank disks cost \$4-10. However, thanks to entry-level DVD software like [Sonic MyDVD](#), the task is not that hard ... especially if you arm yourself with a little knowledge before you begin.

Choosing a writer:

The recordable DVD format has not completely matured, and there are still several competing writing formats to choose from. Among these are the DVD-R, DVD+R and the DVD-RAM format used by Panasonic. Each of these formats has their own advantages and compatibility issues ... though the first two (DVD-R and DVD+R) will play on most home DVD players.

I use the cheap Pioneer A04 DVD-R writer to create DVDs. This is a pretty standard drive and is very popular, but you may want to spring for the slightly more expensive Sony 500 drive that allows you to write to many different DVD formats. Make sure your drive comes bundled with [DVD creation](#) software ... my Pioneer included Sonic MyDVD (which is the same software that Microsoft's Movie Maker website recommends).

Choose your media

Unfortunately, all DVD disk media is not created equal, and you'll find that certain brands (Memorex, TDK, Pioneer) have different compatibility with different desktop DVD players. You can research the compatibility levels online, but from my own experience, [Verbatim DVD-Rs](#) have the highest compatibility on the many DVD decks I've tested. You may be able to find really cheap DVD brands (such as Princo or Ritek) though I've had mixed results with these disks ... I've gotten bad batches and my video tends to skip near the end of long disks (at the edge of the disk).

Exporting your Movie Maker Video

In order to build your DVD, you need to export your final Movie Maker project as a video file. Because most DVD creation software don't recognize the WMV format, this means you'll have to export as DV-AVI. Keep in mind that this format is very bulky (about 200 megs per minute) so if you are creating a 1.5 hour DVD, you better have a bunch of hard drive space available.

Now ... according to Sonic and the Movie Maker website, the latest version of [Sonic MyDVD](#) is supposed to recognize the .WMV format, so this may be another output option for you. However, the resulting video quality won't be quite as good as DV-AVI unless you knock the quality settings to the maximum during export (use the "high quality" setting).

Build your DVD

The next step is to create or build your DVD within your creation software. This process is different for every program, so I won't go into detail here as these programs have "creation wizards" to guide you. I've had experience using MyDVD and DVDit (both Sonic products) and DVD complete. Each of these programs allows you to import your DV-AVI video, create menus, and write your finished DVD to your burner.

Choosing DVD creation software

- [Sonic MyDVD](#) – very easy and quick. I often use it to make quick DVDs. The built-in MPEG compression could be a little better, though.
- [DVD Complete](#) – A little harder to use, but more options to customize. I like it, but find MyDVD more convenient.
- [Sonic DVDit PE](#) – Much harder to use, but very customizable. I use this (in conjunction with PhotoShop) for creating professional DVDs, as the program will let me create and import my own backgrounds, buttons, and graphics.
- [Nero 6 Ultra Edition](#) – Includes full video editing, DVD playback, slideshow creation including audio, backup including multiple modes, and StartSmart project launcher.

Write your DVD

All of the DVD creation programs are able to burn your DVD directly within the software. Keep in mind that the writing process itself can be time consuming because there is a lengthy encoding step involved. You see, DVD's don't save video in the DV-AVI format. Instead, they use a non-proprietary video format called MPEG2. Unless you use an intermediate program to re-encode your movie, the DVD program will have to convert your DV-AVI video into this MPEG2 format before it saves it to your DVD disk. If you are writing an hours worth of video, expect your computer to take at least that long to convert and write that data ... and possibly much longer. This step always takes me a while (even on my zippy 3ghz desktop)