

# The Many Uses of ALE

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ALE is the file format used by Media Composer to easily import/export clip based metadata. Because it is a text-based format, it is easy for anyone to read, edit, and create logs for Media Composer workflows. It is essentially a TAB based format with a header section at the top, making it fairly easy to use in applications like FileMaker and Excel.

As flexible as the file format can be, the importing and merging of ALE files is pretty strict:

## **Import:**

- Frame Rate of Global Header section must match project type.
- Make sure all events are in ascending order, there have been times where this has caused an import to fail, when all else looks correct.
- Overlapping timecodes for the same source can cause issues with dupe detection and list generation.
- The import process does not like custom columns to have all "CAPS". They will get changed to first letter to be uppercase, and rest lower as in "Caps".
- If you want the metadata to be added to Avid's standard (native) columns, the spelling must match exactly, including uppercase and lowercase.
- If using Tape as a source column, it cannot exceed 32 characters or it will be truncated (Media Composer limitation).
- Other custom columns are limited to 128 characters when importing (bin limitation).

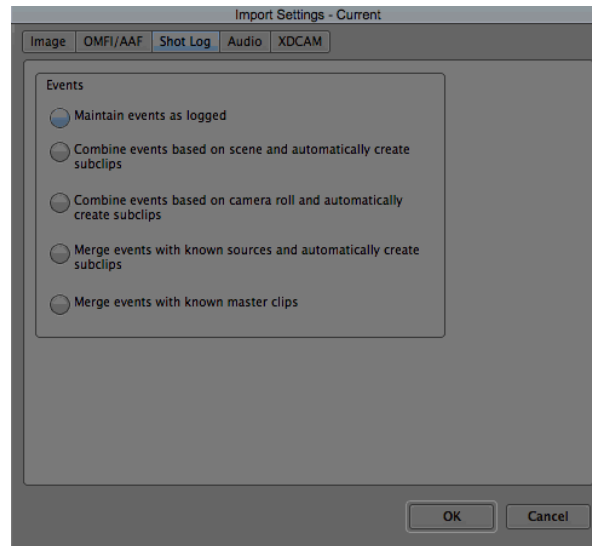
## **Merging:**

- The same Global Header matching project type applied for merging.
- Merging new or additional information can only be done on masterclips (no subclips, group, sync, etc.)
- A merge will not happen on a clip unless the following fields are an exact match for the two source tracking methods:
  - Tape, Start and End
  - Source File, Start and End
- All other fields must match exact spelling, uppercase/lowercase in order to be updated or changed.

Media Composer v7.0.3 introduced a very welcome change to the ALE merging that allows ONLY the information in the ALE to affect metadata on an existing clip or clips.

In previous versions, all existing metadata would get deleted and only what was in the ALE got added. This allows for many more workflows to be enabled when updating existing sources for ongoing projects. This feature slipped in without a whole lot of people being aware of the change and therefore cannot take advantage of this powerful new functionality.

But the ability to merge an ALE file is where many timesaving techniques can be done and there are several “merge” options in the Shot Log import tab to enable each of these.



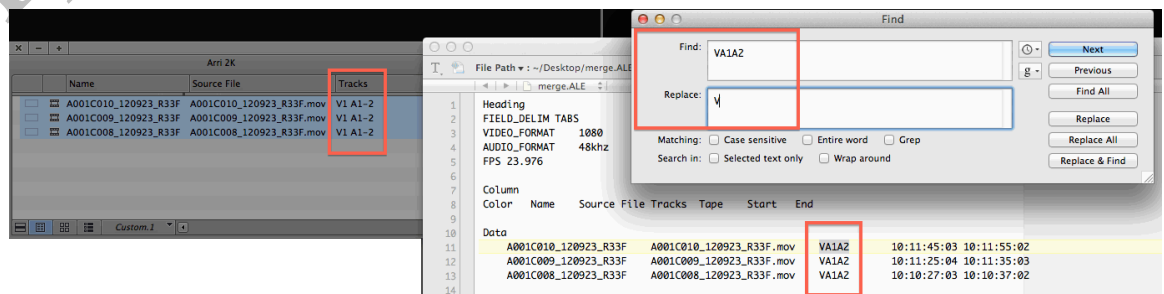
- **Maintain events as logged:** This selection will always create new master clips in the bin with no media affiliation. If there is media in the Avid MediaFiles folder that matches Tape, Start and End, a relink operation can work. In my experience, this works fairly well for picture relinking, but picture and sound (VA) clips have had trouble with audio staying linked over the course of editorial. Your mileage may vary.

Another use for this is the ability to easily create Tape sources for file-based formats using the batch import process on master clips created by the ALE import. I sometimes call this a reverse ALE merge as the ALE is imported first, then the media is imported into the masterclips. One thing to keep in mind is that the essence (source media) will always be the duration of the master clip as defined in the bin. An extreme example would be a master clip with a 10 second duration, and you batch import a 5 second video file into it, the 5 second clip will now be time-stretched to 10 seconds with the last 5 seconds being a freeze frame. The reverse is also true; a longer source clip will have frames dropped.

- **Combine events based on scene and automatically create subclips:** This one, and the following options based on Camera were originally designed for film to tape transfers or Tape based sources where a master clip could be a combination of takes and this button used the Scene column as the common field from which to create subclips. In a file-based world, this rarely happens, as each clip is most likely the same scene/take.
- **Combine events based on camera and automatically create subclips:** This has the same behavior as previous, but uses the Camera column as the field on which to create subclips. Again, in file-based world, this particular merge function is not really used anymore.

The following two options are the ones users will find the most use for with different merging operations.

- **Merge events with known sources and automatically create subclips:** In this case, “known source” is either Tape or Source File as defined in the ALE file. If both columns are found, the user will be prompted to choose the one to use. This one is useful for the following types of operations:
  - Creating V or A only subclips from master clips. There are times where you have a bunch of clips that you want to subclip into V or A1 or A1A2 subclips and loading each one into the source monitor, deselecting tracks, creating subclip, potentially removing .sub from the clip name, etc. can be tedious if you’re dealing with many clips. This is easily done by exporting an ALE file of the selected clips, and using a text editor to do a find/replace operation on the file. For example, changing “VA1A2” to “V”. Sometimes this can be done via a modify, but this method still allows you to do a match-frame on source to get back to the original master clip and all its original tracks, should they be needed.
  - Someone has created a log from long recordings with IN-OUT points and additional information like clip names, comments, and descriptions. In this method, every event logged in the file from the same Tape or Source File will become a subclip.



File Path: ~/Desktop/merge.ALE

```

1 Heading
2 FIELD_DELIM TABS
3 VIDEO_FORMAT 1080
4 AUDIO_FORMAT 48khz
5 FPS 23.976
6
7 Column
8 Color Name Source File Tracks Tape Start End
9
10 Data
11 A001C010_120923_R33F A001C010_120923_R33F.mov V 10:11:45:03 10:11:55:02
12 A001C009_120923_R33F A001C009_120923_R33F.mov V 10:11:25:04 10:11:35:03
13 A001C008_120923_R33F A001C008_120923_R33F.mov V 10:10:27:03 10:10:37:02
14

```

Arri 2K

Name	Source File	Tracks	Start	End
A001C010_120923_R33F	A001C010_120923_R33F.mov	V1 A1-2	10:11:45:03	10:11:55:02
A001C009_120923_R33F	A001C009_120923_R33F.mov	V1 A1-2	10:11:25:04	10:11:35:03
A001C008_120923_R33F	A001C008_120923_R33F.mov	V1 A1-2	10:10:27:03	10:10:37:02
A001C008_120923_R33F	A001C008_120923_R33F.mov	V1	10:10:27:03	10:10:37:02
A001C009_120923_R33F	A001C009_120923_R33F.mov	V1	10:11:25:04	10:11:35:03
A001C010_120923_R33F	A001C010_120923_R33F.mov	V1	10:11:45:03	10:11:55:02

The subclips created via the merge also get all the metadata from the original master clip attached to the clip. If any of the clips Names were changed in the ALE file, then the subclips would reflect that as well:

Arri 2K

Name	Source File	Tracks	Start	End
A001C010_120923_R33F	A001C010_120923_R33F.mov	V1 A1-2	10:11:45:03	10:11:55:02
A001C009_120923_R33F	A001C009_120923_R33F.mov	V1 A1-2	10:11:25:04	10:11:35:03
A001C008_120923_R33F	A001C008_120923_R33F.mov	V1 A1-2	10:10:27:03	10:10:37:02
32-2PU	A001C008_120923_R33F.mov	V1	10:10:27:03	10:10:37:02
32-2	A001C009_120923_R33F.mov	V1	10:11:25:04	10:11:35:03
32-1	A001C010_120923_R33F.mov	V1	10:11:45:03	10:11:55:02

One thing to note is that if the master clips had a clip color applied, the resulting merged subclips do not inherit the clip color, nor can clip color be maintained in an ALE export/import process. Hopefully that will be addressed in a future version.

- Merge events with known master clips:** Although the wording here can be a little confusing, it has the same advantages as the previous merge functionality, but will update the existing master clip, and not make new clips. The merge still needs to have an exact match with Tape or Source File column in order to merge new or changed metadata into the “known” existing master clip. If the same modified ALE file was merged with this setting active, the resulting bin would now look like:

	Name	Source File	Tracks	Start	End
<input type="checkbox"/>	32-1	A001C010_120923_R33F.mov	V1 A1-2	10:11:45:03	10:11:55:02
<input type="checkbox"/>	32-2	A001C009_120923_R33F.mov	V1 A1-2	10:11:25:04	10:11:35:03
<input type="checkbox"/>	32-2PU	A001C008_120923_R33F.mov	V1 A1-2	10:10:27:03	10:10:37:02

And with the changes in v7.03, the merge on master clips is no longer destructive to existing metadata, making this functionality even more powerful than before and opening up new streamlined workflows when working in a collaborative setting.

It is the little things that make Media Composer such a powerful tool meeting many different workflows and the ALE format has long been a very important part of that process. But, the ALE format can only log master clips, be merged on master clips, and only provides for clip-based metadata. In today’s file-based workflows, logging is happening during production, as filename and timecode are known at time of creation enabling new and useful metadata from the set. The ALE format needs to evolve into a more flexible format with an XML schema that not only allows for clip-based metadata, but the ability to batch import and process, markers, spanned markers and associated metadata for those spans to keep up with its own reputation of being the best in metadata management.