

Maya FBX Plug-in Guide

*Maya FBX plug-in
(for Maya version 7.0)
August 2005*

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Installation

The Maya FBX plug-in is used by Maya to import, export, and convert files using the *.fbx* file format. This document describes how to install the Maya FBX plug-in on Windows®, Mac® OS X, and Linux systems.

The Maya FBX plug-in is bundled with Maya and is installed automatically; this procedure is included so you can upgrade your Maya FBX plug-in with later versions.

Important

Verify that the version of the Maya FBX plug-in that you are installing is appropriate for the version of Maya you are running. Plug-ins run correctly only on the version of Maya for which they are created, and Maya will reject a plug-in created for a different version.

Windows installation

The Maya FBX plug-in is available for Windows 2000 and Windows XP.

- 1** Download the *.zip* file from the Alias website (<http://www.alias.com/glb/eng/community/downloads.jsp>).
- 2** Double-click the *.zip* file and extract the files to the C:\Alias\Maya7.0\bin\plug-ins\ directory.
- 3** Start Maya and navigate to Window>Settings/Preferences>Plug-in Manager.
- 4** Activate the Loaded column on the *fbxmaya.mll* to load it.
- 5** Activate Autoload to have Maya load the Maya FBX plug-in automatically at start-up.

Removing the Maya FBX plug-in from Windows

- 1 In Maya, deactivate the Loaded column and the Autoload option in the Plug-in Manager.
- 2 Exit Maya.
- 3 Delete *fbxmaya.mll* from the `Maya7.0\bin\plugins` directory.

Macintosh installation

The Maya FBX plug-in is available for MacOS X.

- 1 Download the *.sit* file from the Alias website (<http://www.alias.com/glb/eng/community/downloads.jsp>) to your desktop.
- 2 Double-click to extract the Installation disk image.
- 3 Double-click the package icon to start the installation.
- 4 Enter your login password to continue the installation when prompted.

Note

You must obtain administrator privileges to continue installation.

The Welcome window appears.

- 5 Click Continue to start the installation process.
- 6 Select the destination disk where Maya is installed and click Continue.
- 7 Click Install (or Upgrade). A progress bar indicates the time remaining of the installation; when the progress reaches 100%, the Finish button is activated.

- 8 Click Finish to exit the installation program.

Note

*The is installed in the following directory:
<Macintosh Drive>/Applications/Alias/maya7.0/
Maya.app/Contents/MacOS/plug-ins.*

- 9 Start Maya and navigate to Window>Settings/Preferences>Plug-in Manager.
- 10 Activate the Loaded column on the fbxmaya.lib to load it.
- 11 Activate Autoload to have Maya load the Maya FBX plug-in automatically on start-up.

Removing the Maya FBX plug-in from Mac OS X

- 1 In Maya, deactivate the Loaded column and the Autoload option in the Plug-in Manager.
- 2 Exit Maya.
- 3 Locate the fbxmaya.mll plug-in. This file is found in the <Macintosh Drive>/Applications/Alias/maya7.0/Maya.app/Contents/MacOS/plug-ins. directory.
- 4 Delete the fbxmaya.lib file.

Linux installation

- 1 Download the *.rpm* file from the Alias website (<http://www.alias.com/glb/eng/community/downloads.jsp>).
- 2 Type the following command to install the Maya FBX plug-in:

```
% rpm -U fbxmaya70-6.5.0-0.i386.rpm
```

The plug-in is installed to the following directory:

1 | Installation

`/usr/aw/maya7.0/bin/plug-ins/`

Note

You must obtain administrator privileges to continue installation.

- 3** Start Maya and navigate to Window>Settings/Preferences>Plug-in Manager
- 4** Activate the Loaded column on fbxmaya.so to load it.
- 5** Activate Autoload to load the Maya FBX plug-in in Maya automatically at start-up.

Removing the Maya FBX plug-in from Linux

- 1** In Maya, deactivate the Loaded column and the Autoload option in the Plug-in Manager.
- 2** Exit Maya.
- 3** Log into your system as root
- 4** Uninstall the distribution by entering the following command:

```
% rpm -e fbxmaya70
```


2

Importing and Exporting

This section describes how to export scenes from Maya using the *.fbx* file format, and how to import scenes into Maya.

It also includes a list of the Maya features supported by this version of the Maya FBX plug-in and MotionBuilder software.

Exporting from Maya to an *.fbx* file

Note

Trimming insignificant weights on deformed models speeds up the transfer of data. Use Maya's Skin>Edit Smooth Skin>Prune Small Weights command to do this.

- 1 Open the scene to import in Maya.
- 2 Select File>Export All. A file browser appears.
- 3 Select Fbx as the file type.
- 4 Use the file browser to locate where you want to export your *.fbx* file.

2 | Importing and Exporting

- 5 Type the name of the .fbx file in the File Name field, and click Ok. The FBX Exporter window appears (figure 2-1). For more information about the options in the FBX Exporter window, see "FBX Exporter window options" on page 7.

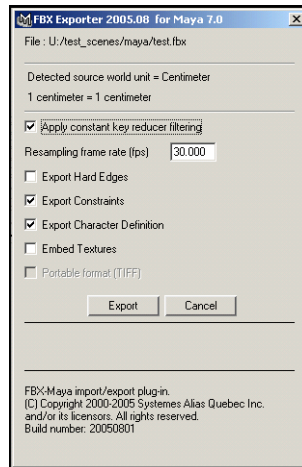


figure 2-1: FBX Exporter window

Note:

When creating Blend Shapes, always set the Timeline to the first frame, especially if there is animation. The Blend Shapes must stay at zero before export.

- 6 Click Export. The exporter window shows the progress of the export process.
- 7 Open the file.
- 8 If you are using MotionBuilder, when you are finished, bake all layers onto a single layer. For information on what MotionBuilder functionalities can be imported into Maya, see "What's supported in MotionBuilder" on page 14.
- 9 Import the new file back into Maya.

FBX Exporter window options

Once you select an FBX file to export from Maya, the FBX Exporter window appears (figure 2-2). The FBX Exporter window contains the following export options:

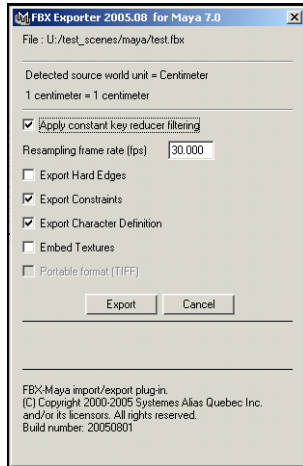


figure 2-2: FBX Exporter window

Option	Description
File	Shows the path of the file selected for export.
Units	Shows the units of measurement used by the software and its conversion factor.
Apply Constant Key Reducer Filtering	Deletes redundant keyframes.
Resampling Frame Rate	Sets the rate at which the exporter produces keyframes when it needs to resample data. Resampling is needed when the interpolation of the Maya animation curve cannot be accurately represented by curves in MotionBuilder, MotionBuilder Professional, and Alias MoCap.

2 | Importing and Exporting

Option	Description
Export Hard Edges	Duplicates polygon edges and normals to create the effect of hard edges.
Export Constraints	<p>When this option is disabled, all the constraints defined in the Maya scene are ignored by the exporting process and are not present in the <i>.fbx</i> file.</p> <p>The default setting is active.</p>
Export Character Definition	<p>When this option is disabled, the Character definition in the Maya scene is not exported to the <i>.fbx</i> file.</p> <p>This option is only available in the Maya FBX Plug-in for Maya 7.</p>
Embed Textures	Copies the texture and material files associated with the file into the <i>.fbx</i> file, saving them from being referred to from the hard disk.
Portable format	If Embed Textures is activated, use this option lets you convert your textures into <i>.tiff</i> format, which makes the textures be readable on other platforms.
Export	Starts the export process.
Cancel	Closes the FBX Exporter window, without performing any action.

Importing .fbx files into Maya

Note

Trimming insignificant weights on deformed models speeds up the transfer of data. Use Maya's Skin>Edit Smooth Skin>Prune Small Weights command to do this.

- 1** In Maya, select File>Import. A file browser appears.
- 2** Select Fbx as the file type.

Note

If FBX is not selected as the file type, MAC OS X systems run the image viewer "FCheck" program instead of loading the file.

- 3** Locate the .fbx file that you want to import.

2 | Importing and Exporting

The FBX Importer window appears (figure 2-3).

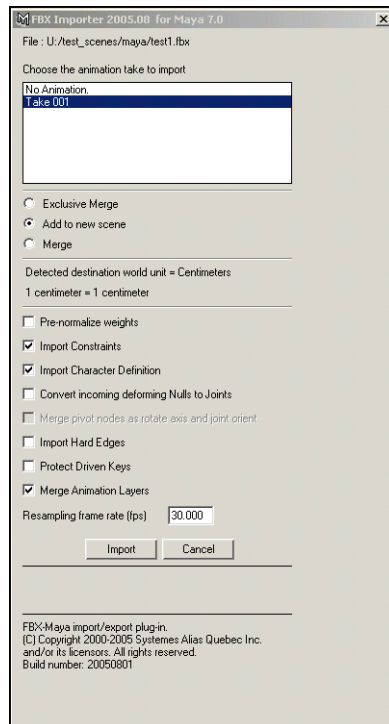


figure 2-3: FBX Importer window

- 4 Activate any options that apply to your scene. For information about the options in the FBX Importer window, see "FBX Importer window options" on page 11.
- 5 Click Import.

FBX Importer window options

Once you select an *.fbx* file to import into Maya, the FBX Importer window appears. The FBX Importer window contains import options:

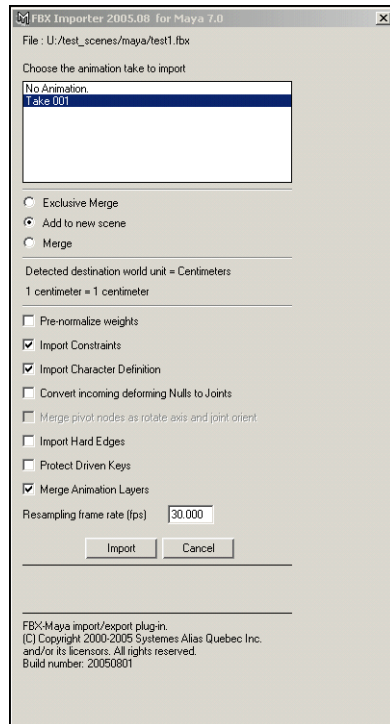


figure 2-4: FBX Importer window

Option	Description
File	Shows the path of the file selected for import.
Take window	Displays the takes saved with the scene. Click a take to select it for import. You can only select one take at a time.

2 | Importing and Exporting

Option	Description
Exclusive Merge	<p>Transfers animation into nodes that exist in both the current Maya scene and the <i>.fbx</i> file.</p> <p>No new nodes are created.</p>
Add to New Scene	<p>Imports your data into a new scene.</p>
Merge	<p>Merges the imported <i>.fbx</i> file to the current scene by creating any node without its equivalent in the scene.</p> <p>Nodes with the same name but not of the same nature, for example, sphere and bone, are replaced.</p> <p>Nodes with the same name and nature only have their animation replaced.</p>
Pre-Normalize Weights	<p>Activate this option if you notice unusual skin weighting, so it conforms the <i>.fbx</i> file's weights to Maya's conventions.</p> <p>Depending on the size of your scene, this process can take several minutes.</p>
Import Constraints	<p>When this option is disabled, all the constraints defined in the <i>.fbx</i> file are ignored by the importing process and are not present in the Maya scene.</p> <p>The default setting is active.</p>
Import Character Definition	<p>When this option is disabled, the Character definition in the <i>.fbx</i> file is not imported into the Maya scene.</p> <p>This option is only available in the Maya FBX Plug-in for Maya 7.</p>

Option	Description
Convert Incoming Deforming Nulls to Joints	<p>Converts deforming nulls into Maya bones.</p> <p>This option was originally provided because Maya did not support null elements (that is, transform nodes that are not joints,) within a bone hierarchy).</p> <p>While Maya now supports this, in some cases this option improves the skinning behavior.</p>
Merge Pivot Nodes as Rotate Axis and Joint Orient	<p>This option is only enabled when using older <i>.fbx</i> files.</p> <p>Assigns the rotation transformation of the null (or joints) elements in the hierarchy that are used as pre and post-rotation to the joint orient and the rotate axis of the original node.</p> <p>The pre-rotation and post-rotation nodes are then deleted. Older files created with the Export Pre/Post Rotation as Nulls option are merged back to the original Maya Setup.</p>
Import Hard Edges	<p>Merges edge duplication previously created by the FBX export action "Export Hard Edges" to create Maya hard edges.</p> <p>This undoes the FBX export action "Export Hard Edges" on page 8.</p>
Protect Driven Keys	<p>Stops any channels with driven keys from being overwritten by the incoming animation.</p>
Resampling Frame Rate (fps)	<p>Sets the rate at which the importer produces keyframes when it needs to resample data.</p> <p>Resampling is needed when the interpolation of the Maya animation curve cannot be perfectly represented by curves in MotionBuilder, MotionBuilder Professional, and Alias MoCap.</p>
Import	<p>Starts the import process.</p>

Option	Description
Cancel	Closes the FBX Importer window, without performing any action.

What's supported in MotionBuilder

MotionBuilder supports the following Maya functionalities:

- Full Body IK
- NURBS and Polygons
- Skeletons
- Cluster deformations, Smooth and Rigid bindings
- User attributes
- File textures
Texture mapping is converted as UV Maps. Texture placement and rotation is supported.
- Pivots
- Lights
Intensity value, animation, as well as color value and animation is supported.
- Cameras
Squeeze ratio, Near and Far plane values, Aperture width, Height, FOV, and Focus Length.
- Simple materials
Phong type materials are supported.
- Blend Shape deformations

Supported, provided that the target is not deleted. Blend Shape channels must already have at least one key set when an *.fbx* file is merged back. Blend shape weights are ignored on export, and are not changed on import.

Note

The Maya FBX plug-in only supports Blend Shapes that have a “Deformation Order” that is upstream, that is, Before, FrontOfChain or Default.

What’s not supported in MotionBuilder

- Procedural textures
- Trims or NURBS Booleans
- Deformers
Deformers other than clusters, or Smooth or Rigid binding, are not supported.
- Subdivs
- Curves
Curves show up as nulls (locators) in MotionBuilder software.

- Groups
You can instead parent the geometries.
- Use File Textures and Polygon projections
Bake (Hypergraph>Convert to File Textures) any procedural textures (Grid, Ramp, and so on) that have a UV rotation (Place 2D texture node).
In MotionBuilder software, the UV rotation has a corner pivot instead of Maya’s center pivot.

Known limitations

This section lists the known limitations of the Maya FBX plug-in:

- Scaling and rotation on clusters may not behave as expected.
- Maya constraints that have prefixes in their names do not export correctly. Try to remove the prefix of any Maya constraints.
- The Visibility FCurve adjusts itself to contain a value of only 0 or 1. Also the FCurve is converted to Constant (step) interpolation. Therefore, any value above 0 is considered as 1 (visible) and any value below or equal 0 is considered 0 (invisible).

When exporting, if the Tangent type is Slow or Fast, the Maya FBX plug-in resamples FCurves. They are also resampled if the OutTangent is Linear and the InTangent is different, or the OutTangent is Flat, Smooth, or Fixed and the InTangent is not Flat, Smooth or Fixed.

- Nurbs display precision is supported and exported as StepU and StepV parameters in MotionBuilder software. Both U and V are assigned the same value; as in Maya, its value is unique. Values of the Precision parameters are clamped to a maximum of 15 (the software's limit).

Note

When importing, the larger value between StepU and StepV is used.

- When Shape objects (used in the Blend Shape) have the same name as other objects in the scene, the name-clashing solver can behave erratically. Avoid this by using different names for models.
- Maya's Ambient lights are not supported and are exported as Null objects. Area lights are exported as a Point lights.
- The Maya FBX plug-in is only capable of processing upstream Blend Shape deformer, for example, the Default, Front of Chain, and Before modes.

- MotionBuilder Animation Layers are not supported in Maya.
- You cannot redirect animation from one character to another (known as “character retargeting” in MotionBuilder,) in Maya.
- Full Body IK does not respect joint limits.
- The renaming strategy is used for two scenarios, multiple instances with the same name, and Upper/Lower case conflicts.

Multiple instances that have the same name:

In this case, a symbolic code is used. The Maya FBX plug-in can read older files, although it no longer writes them this way.

The new suffix is then: `_ncl1_X` (where X is the instance number).

Upper/lower case conflicts.

In this case, the suffix is more complex as it has to keep track of which character was/is upper/lower case so it can convert it back on import/merge.

The following suffixes are used to indicate the case:

Indicates case:

`_ncl2`

Marks characters that were originally upper case and have become lower case:

`_ulXXXX`

Marks characters that were originally lower case and have become upper case:

`_luXXXX`

Where XXXX is an integer number that represents the character position in the string (bitwise). For example, `_ul5` indicates that the first and third characters in the string have been changed from upper to lower case. A suffix can be made of the combination of `_ul` and `_lu` sub-suffixes.

What's new

The following section contains the new features, bug fixes, bugs, and limitations of the Maya FBX plug-in in this version:

- Added Full Body IK import/export between MotionBuilder and Maya FBX Plug-in. This includes multiple pivots and floor contacts.
- MotionBuilder control rig animation is now imported and exported without the need to bake on the skeleton. Old Control rigs (for example, from MotionBuilder versions previous to 6.0) are supported, as well as new Control rigs from MotionBuilder version 6.0 or later.
- Added support for Multiple IK Pivots.
- F-Curve Constant Tangent Type for IK Reach are supported.
- MotionBuilder Automatic Cubic Parameters for F-Curves are converted to User Tangents when importing into Maya.
- Effectors animated using quaternions in MotionBuilder are now also animated using quaternions when brought into Maya.
- Setups including Control rigs are supported.

3

Maya MEL Scripting

This section contains scripts required for scripting with Maya MEL commands.

All of the Maya FBX plug-in's MEL commands begin with the FBX prefix. When error conditions are encountered, they will display error messages in the Script Editor window. The MEL commands that are registered by the Maya FBX plug-in are listed in the Plug-in Manager information dialog box.

Note

To use the following MEL commands, the Maya FBX plug-in must be installed on your computer.

FBXExport -f [filename]

Exports the specified file. If FBXExportShowUI is True, the Export dialog box is shown.

FBXExportShowUI -v [true | false]

True

Displays the Export dialog box each time user clicks File > Export or uses the FBXExport MEL command.

False

Never displays the Export dialog box. The only way to have the Export dialog box displayed again is to set this flag to “True” by using this MEL command or by checking the appropriate check box in the Batch dialog box.

FBXExportHardEdges -v [true | false]

True

Duplicates all vertices in the scene's meshes for each polygon connected to them. The vertices' normals are set accordingly, depending on whether they are connected to a hard or smooth edge.

Note	<i>This function allows MotionBuilder to display hard edges.</i>
-------------	--

If two vertices are located exactly at the same position, a warning is issued, as this causes unpredictable results when FBXImportHardEdges is set to True.

FBXExportApplyConstantKeyReducer -v [true | false]

True

Filters FBX animation FCurves through a Constant Key reducer. This eliminates constant keys on a FCurve and helps to reduce the size of resampled FCurves, especially Scale.

False

Setting this command to False ensures that the animation data is not filtered.

FBXExportEmbeddedTextures -v [true | false]

True

Saves all textures in the FBX file. This command performs the same action as the Embed Textures option in the FBX Exporter window.

FBXImport -f [filename] -t [take index]

Imports the specified file. If FBXImportShowUI is True, the Import dialog box is shown.

The file imported is the one accessible for take querying after the execution of the command.

FBXImportShowUI -v [true|false]

Once FBXImportShowUI is set to False, the user interface does not appear until FBXImportShowUI is set to True.

There are two possible states:

True

Shows the Import dialog box each time you click File>Import or use the FBXImport MEL command.

False

Hides the Import dialog box. The only way to show the Import dialog box again is to set this flag to “True” with this MEL command or by checking the corresponding check box in the Batch dialog box.

FBXImportMergeBackNullsPivots -v [true|false]

True

Assigns the rotation transformation of the null (or joints) elements in the hierarchy that are used as pre-rotation and post-rotation to the joint orient and the rotate axis of the original node.

The pre-rotation and post-rotation nodes are then deleted.

The look-up is done by name as the pre-rotation node's name contains the “__Pre_” suffix, while the post-rotation node's name has a “__Post_” suffix.

Use this function only when the scene was exported using the FBXExportReplacePivotsByNulls script set to True.

Note	<i>When the import mode is set to Exmerge or Merge this option is automatically set to True.</i>
-------------	--

FBXImportHardEdges -v [true | false]

True

Merges back all vertices located at the same exact position as a unique vertex. The Maya FBX plug-in then determines if the edges connected to each vertex are hard edges or smooth edges, based on their normals.

Use this function when FBXExportHardEdges is set to True on export.

FBXImportConvertDeformingNullsToJoint -v [true | false]

Converts deforming nulls into Maya bones.

True

Transforms all null elements into joint nodes.

Note	<i>This option was originally provided because Maya did not support null elements (that is, transform nodes that are not joints,) within a bone hierarchy.</i>
	<i>While Maya now supports this, in some cases this option improves the skinning behavior.</i>

FBXImportMode -v [exmerge | add | merge]

This command has three possible states:

Exmerge

Merges the imported *.fbx* file to the current scene in the following way:

Nodes of the same name and nature have only their animation curve replaced. No new nodes are created.

Add

Creates a new scene prior to the file import.

Merge

Merges the imported *.fbx* file to the current scene in the following way: any node without its equivalent in the scene is created. Nodes with the same name but not of the same nature, for example, sphere and bone, are replaced. Nodes with the same name and nature only have their animation replaced.

FBXRead -f [filename]

Reads the specified *.fbx* file without importing anything into Maya. The file is instead stored in a buffer. This command is used for take querying.

Once read or imported, use the commands `FBXGetTakeCount`, `FBXGetTakeName`, `FBXGetTakeIndex` for take querying.

Note

The file you are reading must match an existing file name, otherwise the file in the buffer is destroyed if you attempt to read or import a non-existent file.

FBXGetTakeCount

Returns the number of takes saved in the file stored in the file buffer.

Load a file into the file buffer using the `FBXRead` command.

FBXGetTakeIndex [take name]

Returns the index of the first take named as the parameter in the take array. This command uses the file stored in the file buffer.

Load a file into the file buffer using the FBXRead command.

FBXGetTakeName [index]

Returns the name of the take at the specified index in the take array. This command uses the file stored in the file buffer.

Load a file into the file buffer using the FBXRead command.

FBXGetTakeComment [index]

Returns the comment attached to the take at the specified index in the take array. This command uses the file stored in the file buffer.

Load a file into the file buffer using the FBXRead command.

FBXGetTakeLocalTimeSpan [index]

Returns the local start and local stop time of the take at the specified index in the take array. This command uses the file stored in the file buffer.

Load a file into the file buffer using the FBXRead command.

FBXGetTakeReferenceTime Span [index]

Returns the reference start and stop times of the take at the specified index in the take array. This command uses the file stored in the file buffer.

Load a file into the file buffer using the FBXRead command.

FBXBatchDialog Box

Displays the Batch dialog box. This box contains all the import and export controls displayed by the Import dialog box and the Export dialog box, plus a check box to enable or disable those user interfaces.

The Batch Dialog box must be opened from the script editor. Since you must use this MEL command to disable the import/export user interfaces, you can call it again when you want to re-enable the import/export user interfaces.

FBXResamplingRate -v [float]

Sets the rate at which the exporter produces keyframes when it needs to resample data.

Resampling is needed when the interpolation of the Maya animation curve cannot be perfectly represented by curves in MotionBuilder.

FBXExportConstraint (-v true|false)

Causes all the constraints defined in the Maya scene to be ignored by the exporting process, and excluded from the *.fbx* file.

FBXImportConstraint (-v true|false)

Causes all constraints defined in the *.fbx* file to be ignored by the importing process and excluded from the Maya scene.

FBXExportCharacter (-v true|false)

Causes the export of Character definition in the Maya scene to be excluded from the *.fbx* file.

Note

This option is only available in the Maya FBX Plug-in for Maya 7.

FBXImportCharacter (-v true|false)

Causes the import of the Character definition in the *.fbx* file to be excluded from the Maya scene.

Note

This option is only available in the Maya FBX Plug-in for Maya 7.