LOOKING FOR A JOB IN CG?

PLURALSIGHT PROVIDES TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED

Your demo reel is perhaps the most important thing that will be reviewed by a potential employer. With the possibility of landing your dream job or your first job in the industry, cutting corners is something you simply can't afford. Enjoy the process, and let it help you push your skills while doing the work you love!

If you're a student and have yet to find opportunities to work on professional projects, what can you put on your demo reel? This is one of the most asked questions among students. One of the biggest and most daunting challenges an aspiring artist will face is attempting to assemble a demo reel that not only shows who they are as an artist, but also sells a potential employer on the idea that they want to hire you over someone else.

What should you put on your demo reel if you are still a student? A demo reel could be, quite literally, your business card, resume, and initial interview all wrapped up into a singular item. Yes, a demo reel submission can include a copy of your resume or business card. But if you're a student, the odds are good that the resume will probably be pretty short due to not yet having any actual industry experience.

1. THINK LIKE A PROFESSIONAL.

The question begs to be answered: What does an aspiring visual effects artist put on his or her demo reel without having any professional work experience to pull from?

The best route to take is this, always approach every student project with the mindset that you're a professional artist and this is for an employer.

Don't be satisfied with each project until you know it's your very best work. Also, with each project, begin to hone in on your chosen specialty. Whether that's lighting, sound, 3D, or so forth, spend your spare time focusing on furthering your knowledge within a chosen specialty.

When your professors assign projects or other work, always go the extra mile to not just satisfy the project requirements, but make it worthy of what you would think a professional artist would do. Try to think like an artist and never take shortcuts, and each project will become better than the last.

2. LOOK FOR GROUP PROJECTS.

The odds are good that students' professors will be looking to assign group projects or final projects for various courses. Always be on the lookout for these types of projects and try to incorporate them into your specific area of study.

If you're studying to be a compositor, look for film students who want to work on a short film. That way, you now gain some good-looking footage to utilize in a composited set of shots for their project.

If you're training to be an animator, look for projects that have modelers and riggers included. That way, you can focus all your time and efforts on animating. Suddenly, instead of spending weeks modeling and rigging just to prepare for animation, you can jump right into animating instead. This is beneficial for both sides. The other students gain shots that show their modeled and/or rigged character actually moving around, and you will have gained a really nice character – and it's rigged to fully animate and show off your skills as an animator.

3. TRY FREELANCE WORK.

The world of visual effects has shifted dramatically over the last 10 years. So much more studio work has become cloud-based. This is to your advantage as a student.

As you progress through your degree, you might come to a point where you could find a studio looking for off-site freelance artists. Suddenly, you have a potential opportunity to work on an actual professional project while still in school. And if later someone requests a demo reel, you now have student projects geared directly toward your line of work.

Of course, with any work that you sign up for, ensure you're capable of carrying it out to the degree of quality the potential employer requires, all the while achieving any deadlines they set. But, if you're able to pick up off-site freelance work, however small the project, you suddenly have actual professional work to put on your demo reel (and resume).

Now, you not only have student projects that you focused directly within your area of expertise and training, but you also have actual professional projects to utilize for your demo reel! By combining your professionally minded student projects with various actual off-site freelance projects, you'll be well on your way to creating a demo reel of reputable quality as a graduating student and budding visual effects artist.

4. KEEP GROWING AS AN ARTIST.

As you progress with your training as an artist, always focus your thoughts, time, and efforts into creating professional projects. No matter how big or small the project, try to illustrate your area of expertise to the best of your ability. Have a generalized knowledge of all areas of the visual effects pipeline, but at the end of the day, spend the bulk of your studies within your specific field of focus.

If you want to be a modeler, spend time

modeling. If you want to be a rigger, spend time rigging. If you want to animate, spend time animating. If you want to light, spend time lighting. If you want to composite... well, the list goes on, but you get the point.

This all starts with your demo reel. Create projects that look like professional projects, and this will get you one step closer to that first big gig after graduation! Remember, if you think like a professional, you will succeed as a professional. If you create professional-looking demo reel pieces, then you will have a professional-looking demo reel. But it always needs to be focused on the area that you are specializing within. That's the key.

At the end of the day, if you were sitting in a demo reel review and you had to compare two student reels, would you pick the one that looks professional or the one that clearly looks like a bunch of non-focused student projects?

I think you know the answer.

Now go out there and create some awesome art! ∎

ADDITIONAL TIPS

MAKE IT EASY FOR THEM
Keep your portfolio simple, quick, straightforward, and high resolution. The individuals looking to hire you don't have a ton of time on their hands and just want to view your work.

LESS IS USUALLY BETTER
Often you want to show off all the work you have collected and done within the last couple years and show your wide array of abilities. Oftentimes this seems like a good idea, but actually it fights against you. You are only as good as your worst piece in your portfolio. Less work is OK if the quality is high. Making a more concise and smaller portfolio will allow employers to see your potential quickly and efficiently, and no one is going to say, "Wow this person has no work," as long as the work they see is great!

GET EXPOSURE
Get as much exposure as you can as an artist. Post on forums, post on YouTube, post on Vimeo, post on whatever site will allow you to publicly display your work. It not only gives you the opportunity for feedback, but also makes your work more recognizable and more popular as an artist. Google yourself and see how you come up. Make it so if anyone Googles you, they immediately can find you and the work you want to be seen.

BRANDING AND MARKETABILITY
With so many people looking for work within the digital art realm, every artist needs to know how to not only make amazing artwork, but also how to market themselves. Establish an identity, make a logo, and decide on a color palette that transcends your portfolio, your business cards, your demo reel, and everything you put online. Brand yourself, and make your work easily recognizable at a glance. When someone sees artwork online and immediately recognizes the artist based on the work and the presentation, there is real power in that.

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NEXT ISSUE

These are some of the exciting topics that will be covered in the March.April 2017 issue of *Computer Graphics World* magazine.

- **TELEVISION EFFECTS –**
  How studios are pushing creative boundaries on the small screen.

- **REAL TIME –**
  Using real-time gaming technology for unique TV animation.

- **CREATING CHARACTERS –**
  Incorporating the latest modeling and animation techniques in feature films.

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  Keeping ahead of the curve in the classroom.

- **SPECIAL FOCUS ON HARDWARE –**
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