

Industry Advice for CG Demo Reels

The following is a compilation of advice from former students of the Department of Visualization who are currently employed in the CG industry (Disney, PIXAR, DreamWorks, and Reel FX).

Compiled by Glen Vigus - Revised October 11, 2013

Opening title with name should be short and sweet (3 seconds) with contact information and title indicating area of interest: "John Smith - Lighting Reel"

SHOW YOUR BEST STUFF FIRST: You have approximately 10 seconds (or less) to get the recruiter and/or hiring manager's attention. Make them want to watch the rest of your reel.

Clearly indicate what you did in each segment of your reel. "you are showing this to professionals who are also visually trained. you are responsible for everything you show, keep it clean, clear and concise."

TEAMWORK: Showing your contribution to a group project is important. As one former student put it, "No one does all by themselves." Indicate your contribution to the project! Recruiters may see the same project again and again on different reels.

Have a reel breakdown with additional information. Post it as text and/or PDF online with your reel. When meeting with a recruiter, present them with a printed copy.
(Example: "Robot Race: (August 2013) group project; I shaded the robots in Renderman")

Don't worry about music. When most reels are viewed, the sound is muted. You are trying to get a job as a visual professional...not a sound editor. One former student pointed out that some people are starting to do voice-overs, talking about what they did in each shot. If a recruiter happens to have the volume up, they can hear you explain what you did and the challenges you overcame.

Go beyond class work: First time reels (for those trying to get internships) will more than likely include class assignments. But recruiters can get bored with seeing the same visual exercises over and over. Strive to show something new.

FEEDBACK...FEEDBACK...FEEDBACK : Don't keep your reel to yourself. A visiting recruiter should not be the first person to see your finished reel. Do not wait to the last minute to get a reel done. Put one together and show it to fellow students, faculty, contacts in the industry. Make revisions. If several people suggest dropping something from your reel, chances are you should.

CUSTOMIZE: Make your reel for a specific area of interest (lighting, rigging, etc.) and whenever possible, customize it for the studio you're applying to.

Get Permission: If you did animation work for a company or other studio (during an internship) make sure you have permission to use it in your demo reel.

Area Specific Advice

Layout Reel -Only need one or two shorts, or whatever segments show off your knowledge of "camera language" to tell a story.

Lighting Reels - It can be simple, but must be informative: Lighting studies - what look/lighting challenges were addressed. Show the finished "beauty shot" first, then present a breakdown of the shot, turning on each light (key, fills, ect.), building back up to the final shot. Include at least two animated segments that you lit, not just stills. Video and photography can also be included to demonstrate your comprehension of light. This varies from studio to studio.