



the house of curves & studio soi's
tips for students

during study

Emote.

If your film is funny or moving or both, people will want to see it. If it isn't, they probably won't.

Test first.

Before you animate your shots, test your character in every extreme pose and face shape, as well as key poses from your film. Can you get subtlety? Does it respond well?

Bring the eyes to life.

Observe how the professionals adopt the basic 'inverse shaded iris trick' as a way to get focus in your characters eyes.

Music as stimuli.

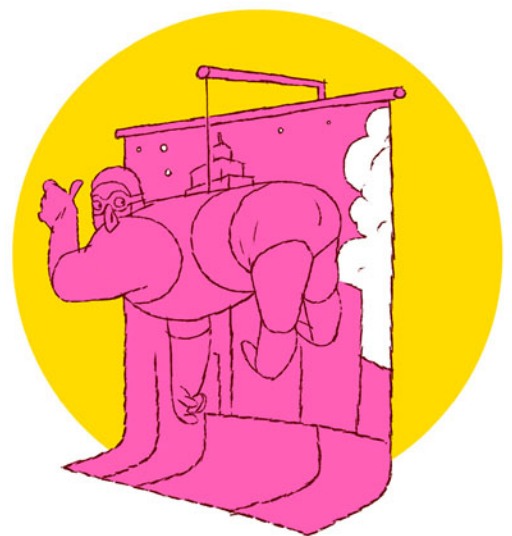
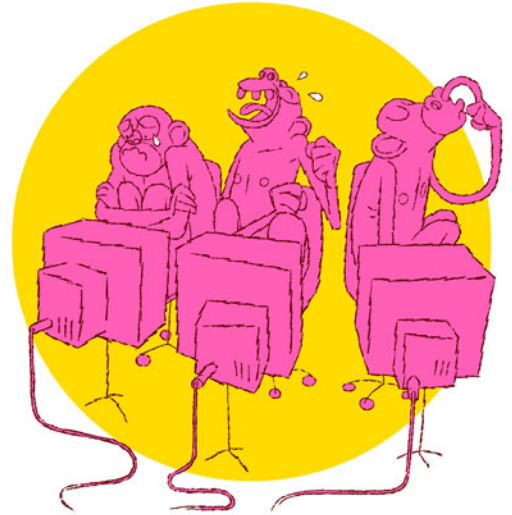
If you look at the Supinfocom classic Overtime, you'll see that musical numbers are great fun to animate to, and could stand out amongst conventional showreels.

Animate without lag.

When you press play in your timeline, your rigs must play though at realtime. If not, hide the complex models whilst you animate.

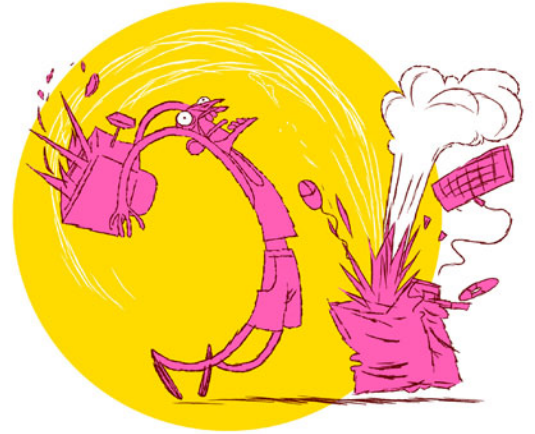
Halve your workload.

Instead of modelling and texturing everything, could you create a matte painting to set off your characters?



Count to 10.

Crashing computers and corrupt scenes are a fact of 3D. Temper tantrums are not acceptable in a studio, are you the loudest in the room?



Your camera isn't just another viewport.

Real cameras are clunky things with certain limitations that filmmakers hone. They are not floaty and keyframeable.

Learn the lingo.

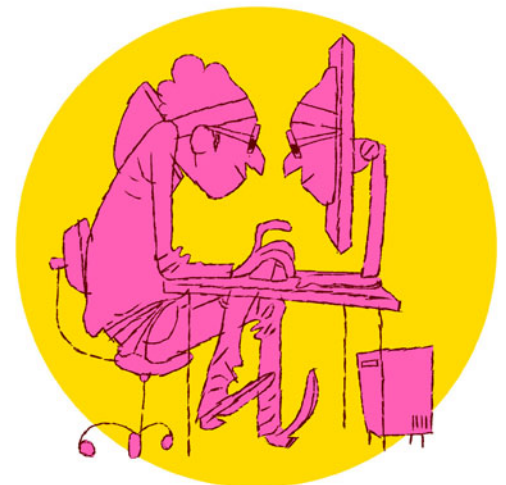
“My camera animates in Z over 100 frames using an angle of view of 54.43 Maya degrees” could be better put “my camera dollys forward for four seconds using a 35mm lens”.

Know what you're good at.

If you can't write a script, find a writer. If you can't edit, find an editor. If you want to be an animator... only animate.

Inject yourself into your characters.

Recognise how closely the personalities of Chris Landreth, Tim Burton, the Wachowski Bros & Nick Park are reflected in their films.



Study the classics.

There's more to film than Toy Story and Shrek. Study 40's classics, hong kong action films, musicals, modern drama, you get the picture.

Stand out.

Get inspiration from what the auteur animation studios are doing right now. Not all reels need to look like the stereotypical CGI feature.

Scuff up your work.

Flickr is your online textures library. CGI can look a whole lot better when textured with elements such as rust and dirt etc.

Save multiple versions of scenes.

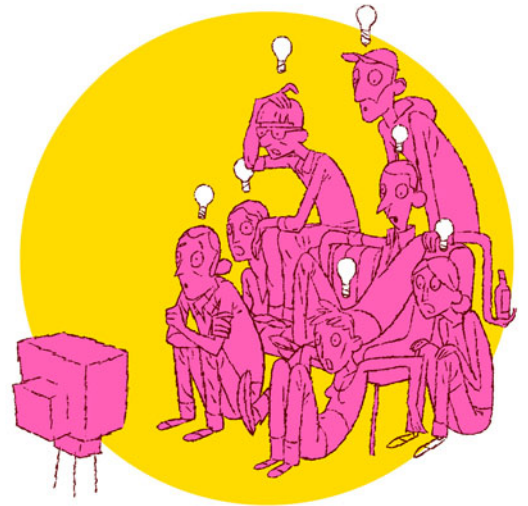
disk space is cheap, and you can delete all the old versions you don't need later. Saving over the top of one master file will lead to tears.

Elaborate on your animation.

A twenty frame walk cycle shows competence but not flair. Make your character slip, trip, break into a run, come to a stop etc.

Pick your battles.

Luxo Jnr & Gollum are both CGI classics. From a technical standpoint, consider that a Luxo-type pipeline might be an easier mountain to climb.



Stay organised.

Always imagine the scenario of you being absent at key moments of production. Are your filenames recognisable to others?



Some theory can be useful.

Disney's twelve principles, the Weta workflow, or maybe Laban dance movement? Following some established core techniques may help.

Be discerning.

Put yourself with the best people for your joint projects, not the pal that you met on the first day of uni.

3D or not 3D?

Copying an existing product or sculpture is a great learning tool for TD's. Render yours next to the original and play 'spot the fake'.

Be impressive.

If industry people visit, meet them on time, have good questions ready, show interest. It'll be remembered.



Commit 110%.

There are good students at good schools everywhere working hard on their amazing films. What are you doing tonight?



Don't attempt it all.

Avoid hair, feathers, muscles etc unless you're developing your own system as a TD, in which case, don't try to apply this to a ten minute epic.

Rotoscoping exercise.

Find video footage of a creature that's the nearest to your character, copy its movement frame for frame and put this on your reel as an exercise, but splitscreen it.

Animators.

Get stuck in and use free rigs available online. Or use a semi-automated rigging system.

Centre centre.

Build your elements in the centre of your software, standing on the ground. Freeze the transform and rotational axis to zero, and the scalings to one. It makes it easy and efficient when importing/exporting your assets.

You're in this together.

Students scream for resources, tutors get poor class attendance. Find some middle ground.



getting work

Look employable.

If scruffy is your 'look', then make it seem intentional and, at the bare minimum, wash.

The salary question.

It's really not good form to ask what one might expect to earn as a first question to speakers at festivals.

Be ahead of the game.

Get some production work whilst you study, it strengthens the reel and pays for the cigarettes.

Book the DVcam.

It looks really impressive and unique to incorporate a nicely filmed background plate for your character to interact with.

Show some depth.

Having figure drawing, sculpture etc isn't essential if your showreel is impeccable, but stepping away from CG may give you some alternate perspective.

Find a proper critic.

Family and friends need not apply.



Don't run from running jobs.

It's a good way to learn how production works, and find the department that suits you.



Gimmicks are a gimmick.

People have sent in food, gifts and other things along with their reels. This tactic doesn't (usually) work.

Set off your work.

'Ambocc' renders of models look great as turntables, plus a fade-through to a wireframe overlay is a perfect way to show off your neatly modelled meshes.

Insist on sound recording facilities.

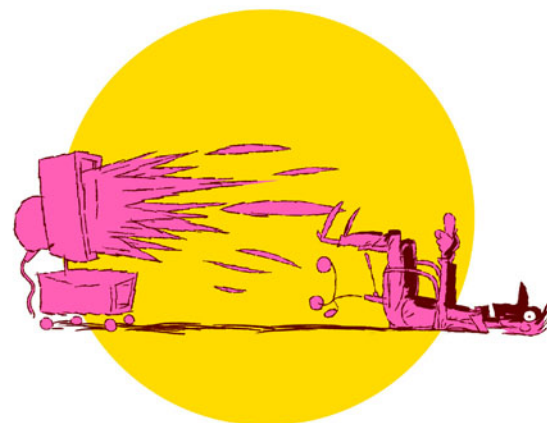
Some moans, groans and giggles recorded directly into your PC doesn't cut it.

Time to buy chrome balls.

As a TD looking for effects work, you should have HDRI examples on your reel.

Dial it down.

Avoid using explosive music that might make your prospective employer spill their coffee at 10am.



Be selective in your showreel.

Then there's no need to excuse anything in an interview. No-one wants to hear 'oh don't look at this bit'.

Be a brand.

A showreel title of white arial against a black background is dull, without overdoing it, add some flair.

A clear resume.

Echo the branding from your reel. stick to a clear a4 page, Swimming certificates not applicable.

Your own exclusive mentor.

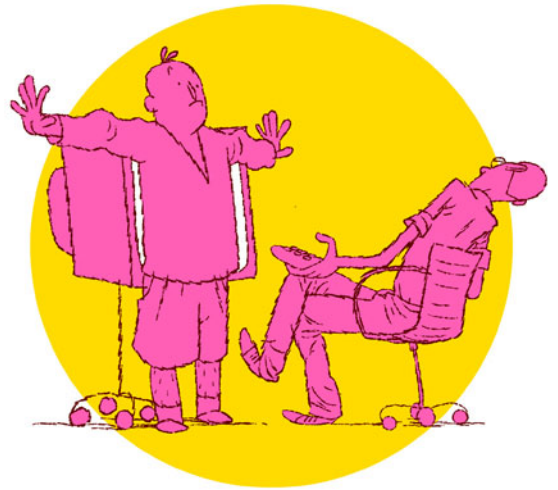
Find an industry mentor that isn't the busy superstar who may not have time to invest in you, by isolating a favourite shot from a movie, find out who animated/lit/rendered it in the credits and get in touch.

Be contactable.

Make sure you put your contact details at the start and end of your reel, in a clear readable font.

Don't get too 'Glenn Close'.

Approaching industry people at conferences is fine. Emailing questions is fine. Stalking is not fine!

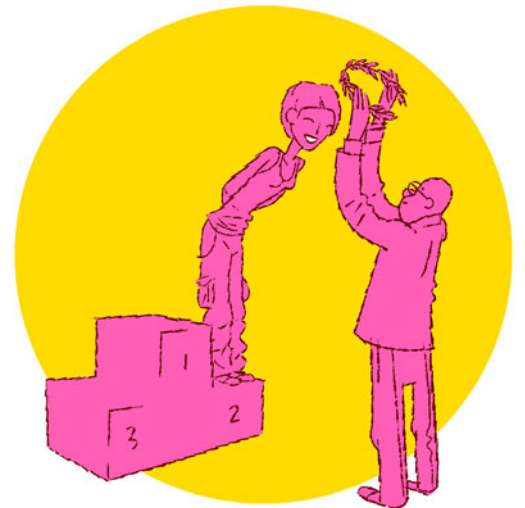


Be honest.

Let employers know exactly what you did. Consider having a version of your film with subtitles.

Previz your film.

Fix your story at a very blocky level, and then attack your key sequences first as final renders. If you find yourself out of time, then you at least have a great story as previz with some great animation edited amongst it.



The uncanny valley.

Unless you're generating a still image, avoid attempting photoreal humans, the pro's are still struggling.

Research your interviewer.

Find out what they've done, where they started etc. When the room goes quiet you'll have something to discuss, plus egos love to be massaged.

Maintain quality control.

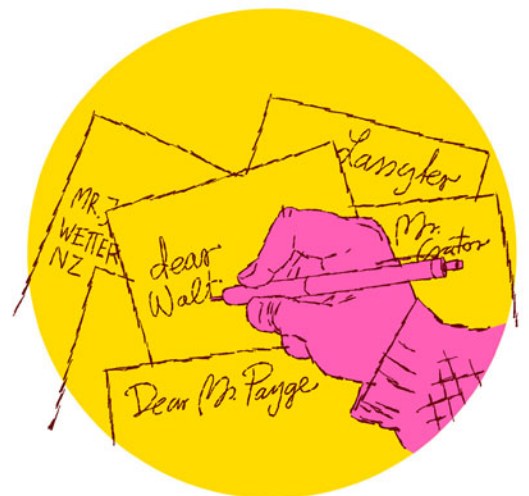
Prospective employers will be happy to look at a showreel online, but have a professional home for it. There are better quality video sharing sites than YouTube.

De-nerd.

Although geek is the new chic, email addresses like 3d_lol_kittenz@hotmail.com doesn't really sell you. john@johnsmith.com might be more appropriate. Buying a domain name with email is relatively cheap.

Do your research.

A sure way to not get the job is spelling the name of your contact wrong. If you don't know who you are meeting, call HR and ask.

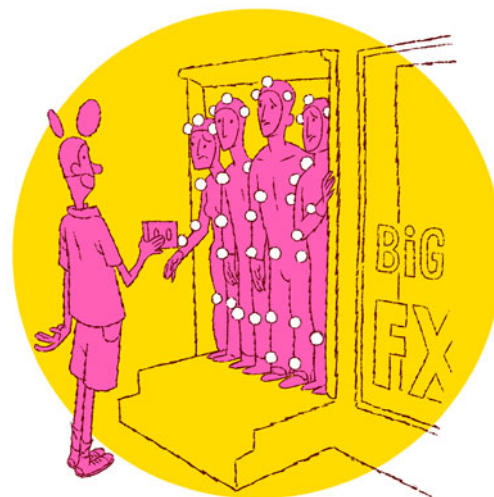


Target your work.

Your showreel should reflect the work you ultimately want to do.

Compatibility is key.

Test your DVD reel on machines other than your computer. Try a regular player, on a PC and Mac etc.



Adopt the standard.

Using current and popular software gives you an edge because from an employers perspective, you can hit the ground running. If your software of choice is more niche, have a basic understanding of something more standard.

Google before you ask.

99% of your questions are answered online. Use search engines, the software's own help section or sites like highend3D and CGtalk. There are tons of free tutorials you can follow, but try to ascertain whether it'll teach you techniques that are in line with the industry standard.

Show under the hood.

Short, behind the scenes excerpts are useful within a reel to show off your rigs, models, influences and concept work.

Keep the showreel short.

Two minutes of your best is much better than every test you've ever done.



the house of curves & studio soi's tips for students

about our pdf supplement.

'We created this document to accompany a double sided poster that was issued free with Imagine Magazine in September 2008*. The idea to make such a poster has been brewing over many years of listening to industry panels at festivals all giving a relatively united account of what students should be doing to get the most out of their courses. This combined with talking to students and college professors about the some of the troubles they faced led us to start a list that we worked on over the course of a few weeks. We thought 100 tips should cover it. We came up with 136! For the sake of impact we knuckled the tips down to 20 for the poster. And this pdf highlights about 60 of the ones we think are the most useful. We hope that it proves a useful companion to students working on their animated masterpieces.'

Andrew Daffy and Matt Estela, *The House of Curves*

special tHoC thanks.

This poster/pdf would not have been possible without the absolute freedom and support granted by Frank Grimshaw, Editor of Imagine Magazine. Also it wouldn't have looked this good by a mile without the absolute dedication, the masterful craft and the harsh critique(!) of Jakob Schuh of Studio Soi.

credits.

Poster/pdf by Andrew Daffy and Matt Estela.

Illustration by Jakob Schuh from Studio Soi.

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Endorsed by Tony Smith from Staffordshire University.

Skillset information.

Get personal advice about your animation career:

Contact Skillset Careers on 08080 300 900 (England and Northern Ireland)

0800 0121 815 (Wales)

www.skillset.org/careers

*A high res version of the poster is available at www.thehouseofcurves.com/poster

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