

# REEL TALK

HOW TO  
CREATE  
THE PERFECT  
SHOWREEL  
ADVICE FROM  
THE INDUSTRY  
EXPERTS



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Whether 2D or 3D VFX is your passion, or you're the next big Animator or Games Artist, this handy guide will take you through the showreel do's and don'ts to ensure you create a standout reel. For students and professionals alike, creating the perfect showreel is a big deal! It's your one chance to demonstrate your skills to the creative studios.

So here's a little help.... There's so much to consider when deciding what to include and what better way to find out than to ask the experts themselves! We have spoken to recruiters and artists from **Framestore**, **The Mill**, **DNEG**, **Creative Assembly**, **Blue Zoo** and **Bithell Games** to get first-hand advice on what they look for in a showreel and the best way to grab their attention.





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# TOP **10** TIPS

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## **Make it achievable**

Start planning your reel and be realistic in what you can achieve.



## **Title cards**

First things first, make sure the studios know who you are and how to contact you when your reel impresses them.



## **Start strong**

A recruiter or studio is going to make a decision from the first 30 seconds, don't give them an excuse to cut your reel short – put your best work upfront.



## **Get original**

The word is spaceships are over, why not film your own footage or design a unique asset. Stand out from the crowd with something that isn't overused in reels.



## **Quality over quantity**

Don't try and include every piece of work you've ever produced...



## **Don't dilute it**

Focus on your strengths and make sure these stand out in your reel!



**The most important part of your application is your showreel, that is what is going to get you a job. Only include your best work, your bad work is just as memorable. Only show us work that you're confident is going to get you a job. Think about the studio that you're applying to and make sure that your portfolio is relevant to that studio.**

**Harriet Edge-Partington,**  
Talent and Recruitment Manager,  
**Union Visual Effects**

### **Stay in tune**

A silent reel isn't any fun, but don't try and make a music video. Find a track that compliments your reel. Keep the pace right and fit it to the theme. Remember free credit music is better than paying out any royalties!

9



10

**Go out with a bang**  
Leave that lasting impression. Finish on a strong image to make your reel memorable.

8



### **Keep it short and sweet**

Two minutes max. The studios aren't going to watch anything longer and you can showcase your skills in this time. Short, succinct and brilliant!



### **Document and demonstrate**

Reference your work so it's clear what you've created. Demonstrate with breakdowns on how you've executed your ideas.



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# WHAT DO RECRUITERS SAY?



Showreels will often go through the hands (and eyes) of the studios' Talent team before they reach the Hiring Manager. We have asked recruiters from the industry for their top advice on building a showreel, plus they also touched on some of the softer skills required to prep you for the all important interview and to be successful in the job.



I am often asked what we look for in a portfolio/showreel but very few people ask me what other skills they might need to get a job with us. I have made it a bit of a mission lately to address that. Skills such as; the willingness to act on constructive feedback, to work effectively in a team, to problem-solve and of course communicate coherently are so important. The success of the visual effects industry isn't just down to people operating Maya! It's down to people who were curious, innovative, creative, who kept learning and improving their skills and who worked together to solve challenges. The interview is your chance to show us what you can do beyond the showreel so don't waste it!

**Amy Smith,**  
Head of Talent,  
**Framestore**



REEL  
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...with **Garreth Gaydon**,  
Commercial Director from  
**Created** (formerly Global  
Head of Talent at **The Mill**)

REEL  
TALK



...with **Emma Smith**,  
Head of Talent from  
**Creative Assembly**

REEL  
TALK



...with **Syntyche Bio**,  
Senior Recruiter from **Digital  
Domain** (formerly Recruitment  
Manager from **Framestore**)

# IT ISN'T ALL ABOUT YOUR SHOWREEL

Getting your showreel in the hands of a recruiter is only the first step of the process. Demonstrating your soft skills in an interview and when you begin work, is crucial to forging a successful career in the industry. **Here are a few tips from us...**



## **Demonstrate your passion**

It should drive your work and shine through in your showreel and interview.

2



## **Grow with the critic**

Accept any feedback as an opportunity to learn and grow from it.

3



## **Team work**

Be considerate of other people's work, collaboration is key in this industry.

4



## **Be honest**

Know your strengths and weaknesses and be honest about them.





**It's all in the detail**

This industry requires a high sense of organisation and great attention to detail.



**We all make mistakes**

Don't be afraid to make mistakes but make sure to learn from them. Build your resilience.



**Creativity and problem solving**

Bring something new to the table. Be creative in the solutions that you come up with.



**Communication is key**

Good communication with your co-workers and clients is key to the smooth development of projects.



**Stay humble**

You are not the finished product, always try and learn from others.



**Ask questions**

You have plenty to learn and the more you ask, the faster you'll learn.

# RENDERING YOUR REEL

“

Your showreel is going to be the first impression you give someone, so it's important to only show your best work. At Escape Studios we have industry experts come in on a regular basis who are looking for students with a keen eye for detail, whether that is in modelling, texturing, shaders or look development. You need to demonstrate that you can model the details as well as texture the details that can't be modelled, whilst making it all look real. They want to see that you're passionate about the job, so it's best to put a series of stunning pieces together, rather than just a few test renders.



**Jonathan McFall,**  
3D VFX Tutor,  
Escape Studios





## REEL TALK

...with **Chris Cook**,  
CG Build Supervisor from  
**DNEG** (formerly Lead  
Modeller at **Framestore**)

# THE VFX PIPELINE

## Pre-Production

- > Previs
- > Storyboarding
- > R&D

## Production

## Post-Production

- > **3D Generalist**
- > **Modelling**
- > **Rigging**
- > **Texturing**
- > **Lighting**
- > **Technical Direction**
- > **Matchmoving**

- > Effects Animation
- > Character Animation

- > Grading
- > Rotoscoping
- > Rig Removal
- > Keying
- > Digital Compositing

- > Motion Graphics

## Finishing

## Launch

3D



# 2D OR NOT 2D

“

It's important to demonstrate a variety of the fundamental skills in your showreel – roto and rig removal techniques are crucial and for composited shots, less is more. It's better to have a few items integrated seamlessly, rather than too much stuff just to fill a frame. Make sure you clearly show the main steps of your techniques and remember, showing your best work makes a strong reel.



**Davi Stein,**  
Technical Trainer,  
**Industrial Light & Magic**  
(formerly Head of 2D  
VFX, **Escape Studios**)



THE DO'S AND DON'TS  
OF YOUR 2D SHOWREEL





## REEL TALK

...with **Stirling Archibald**, Visual Effects Artist from **Electric Theatre Collective** (formerly Freelance Composer)

## **THE VFX PIPELINE**

### **Pre-Production**

- > Previs
- > Storyboarding
- > R&D

### **Production**

### **Post-Production**

- > 3D Generalist
- > Modelling
- > Rigging
- > Texturing
- > Lighting
- > Technical Direction
- > Matchmoving
- > Effects Animation
- > Character Animation
- > **Grading**
- > **Rotoscoping**
- > **Rig Removal**
- > **Keying**
- > **Digital Compositing**
- > Motion Graphics

2D

### **Finishing**

### **Launch**

# CRAFT YOUR CHARACTERS

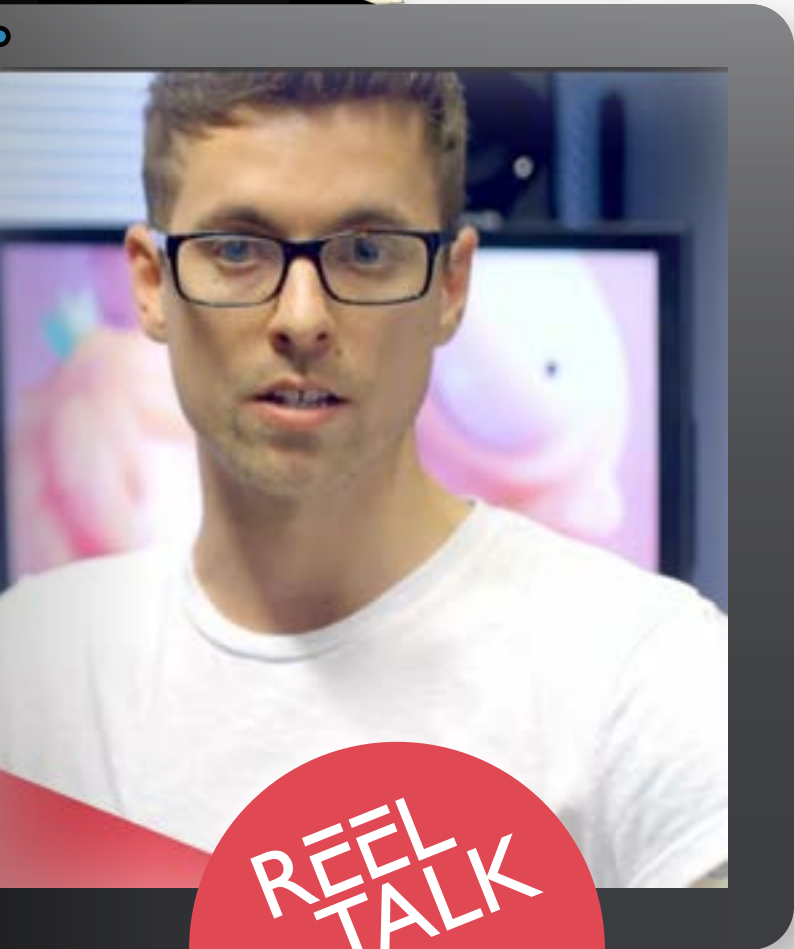
“

Your demo reel is the key to finding work in the industry. I would advise Animators to customise their reel to suit the needs of each individual studio. In other words, don't have a 'one size fits all' showreel, make sure you re-edit your reel to suit the job you are applying for! Spend the time on a polished reel so you can be ready to go at a moment's notice.



**Alex Williams,**  
Head of Animation,  
**Escape Studios**





## REEL TALK

...with **Will Cook**,  
Animation Director  
from **Blue Zoo**

# THE VFX PIPELINE

## Pre-Production

- > Previs
- > Storyboarding
- > R&D

## Production

## Post-Production

- > 3D Generalist
- > Modelling
- > Rigging
- > Texturing
- > Lighting
- > Technical Direction
- > Matchmoving
- > **Effects Animation**
- > **Character Animation**

- > Grading
- > Rotoscoping
- > Rig Removal
- > Keying
- > Digital Compositing

- > Motion Graphics

## Finishing

## Launch

ANIMATION

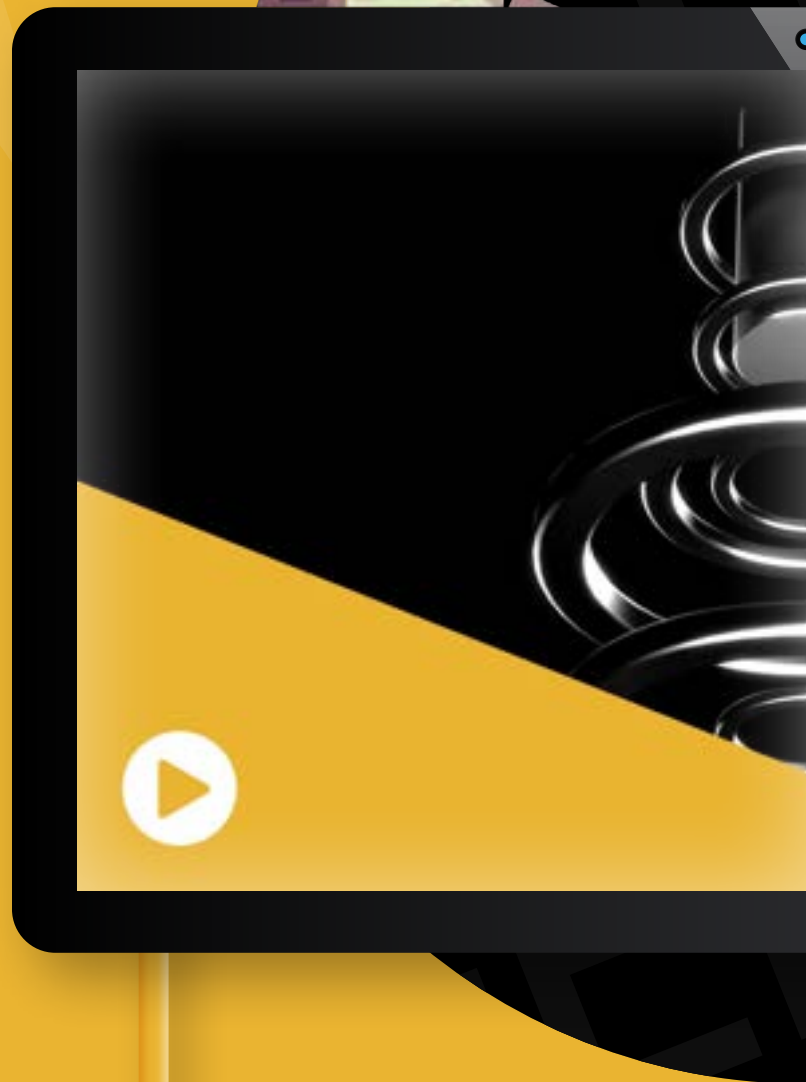
# GET THINGS MOVING

“

Keep your showreel short. Employers and recruiters are busy and may be swamped with 50-100 reels per job. They're busy and will turn it off if you bore them. A well edited 40 seconds is better than 90 seconds which tests patience. Try to avoid repeating projects. Is your reel full of ideas? Narrative? Is it engaging? Is it fun? Does it not only show you're technically competent but that you're creative? Motion design draws in lots of skill sets (design, typography, editing, audio) you want to show you have a good handle on all of these skills. Start strong, end strong and leave them wanting more.



**Adam Bennett,**  
Motion Graphics Tutor,  
**Escape Studios**







Escape Studios  
Motion Graphics  
students showreel

## **THE VFX PIPELINE**

### **Pre-Production**

- > Previs
- > Storyboarding
- > R&D

### **Production**

### **Post-Production**

- > 3D Generalist
- > Modelling
- > Rigging
- > Texturing
- > Lighting
- > Technical Direction
- > Matchmoving
  
- > Effects Animation
- > Character Animation
  
- > Grading
- > Rotoscoping
- > Rig Removal
- > Keying
- > Digital Compositing

### > **Motion Graphics**

### **Finishing**

### **Launch**

MOTION  
GRAPHICS

# LET'S GET UNREEL

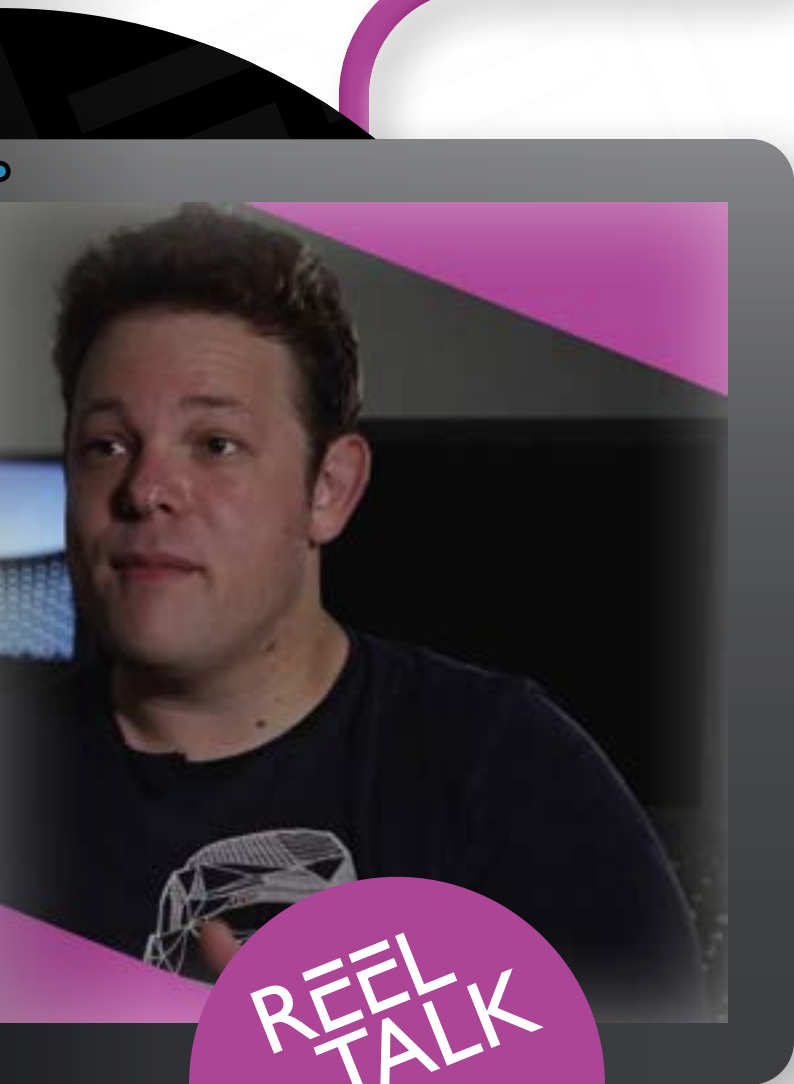
“

Keep your showreel compact – a small well executed scene is just as impressive as a huge environment and much easier to complete. Ensure you show breakdowns of your work including wireframes, texture flats and high poly sculpts.



**Tom Harle,**  
Games Tutor,  
**Escape Studios**





## REEL TALK

...with **Mike Bithell**,  
founder of **Bithell  
Games**

## **THE GAMES PIPELINE**

### **Pre-Production**

- > Concept Art



### **Post-Production**

- > Environment Art
- > World Creation
- > Assets/Prop Creation
- > Lighting
- > Modelling
- > Visual Effects
- > Texturing/Materials
- > Character Creation
- > Rigging
- > Animation
- > Art Direction



### **Testing**



### **Launch**



# ESCAPEE TOP TIPS

Our Escape Studios alumni (dubbed Escapees) have gone on to work for some of the biggest studios in the world and you'll find them behind many Oscar and BAFTA nominated films, award winning TV shows and games, and thousands of commercials. We've asked some of them for their top tips on how to build the perfect showreel and how to make the most of your time at Escape Studios to work on it.

**Tailor your showreel to the job you apply for.** The difference between standing out and being cast aside could be something as simple as adding or dropping specific shots for a given role. **It doesn't have to be perfect.** Something as simple as a high quality playblast does more than some fully rendered scenes. No lighting or environment is necessary if your performance is clear, polished and visible. **Show references for comparison.** If you make an obscure movement which is true to a reference, not only does it demonstrate attention to detail but it is also hard to penalise your reel for irregular motion."

**Ash Ellis,**  
3D for VFX Escapee  
Matchmove/Tracking Artist  
at **Worldwide FX**

**Keep your showreel short, simple, and specific.** Only use your best work for your showreel. Don't put too much visual effects in one shot. Show the skills you need for the department you want to work for (if you apply for an Animator job, show your animation skills)."

**Markus Truninger,**  
3D for VFX Escapee  
Freelance 3D Artist

"It's often hard to resist the urge to try new and exciting things and it's very important to become **the master of your domain, so try and stay focused!** Sometimes it's not all about raw skills, but also being able to **"sell your product"**, and there is no better selling point than the **confidence and passion** one puts into their work. Your potential employee is going to notice that energy, zeal, and wit, thus realising how valuable of a person and asset you're going to be for the company. Nothing's more important than **showcasing what you love doing.** Go now, and make something great!"

**Niccolo Temperanza,**  
Game Art Escapee  
3D Artist at **Factory 42**

**Make it visual.** Your reel is an opportunity to sell yourself, it will be first seen by a recruiter that might not have technical knowledge. Make it look nice and tidy, create passes that are visually interesting and self explanatory. **Be clear.** Mention specifically what you have done, use overscan text on the reel and a good explanation on the video description. **Don't worry about the software, worry**

**about the quality.** There are a huge variety of industry tools, no one expects you to know them all. Focus on achieving a quality shot with the tools you feel more comfortable with."

**Pol Escalé,**  
3D for VFX Escapee  
Lighting Artist at  
**SAUVAGE.TV**

"Don't be afraid to **create your own original content** to show off your creativity and skills, your individuality will help you stand out from the rest. Avoid adding pieces you've created from tutorials, people in the industry can spot this. **Keep your showreel short and sweet.** My first motion design showreel was just under 25 seconds, you just need to captivate people with the best of what you've done so far, don't feel you need to pad it out to make it a minute long or more."

**Teresa Tang,**  
Motion Graphics Escapee  
Freelance Motion Graphics  
Designer and Animator

# REEL TALK

...with **Shanae Bedford**,  
VFX Escapee



Secret Misty Forest, third year undergraduate Games students



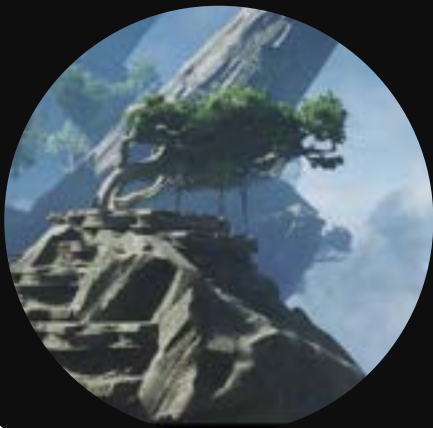
# ESCAPEE SHOWREELS

**It all started with a showreel...**

See what our Escapees crafted to land their jobs in the creative industries.

## **GAMES\***

**Niccolo Temperanza,**  
3D Artist at **Factory 42** (formerly  
Environment Artist at **Warcave**)



## **2D**

**Giulio Spatola,**  
Composer at  
**Jellyfish Pictures**

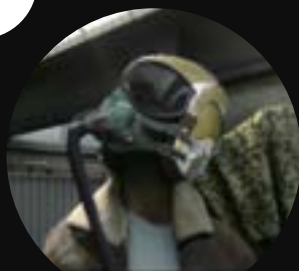


\*Games portfolios tend to be more varied than visual effects and animation ones and are often presented through ArtStation rather than as a showreel. See Niccolo's ArtStation at [artstation.com/niccolotemperanza](https://www.artstation.com/niccolotemperanza) to see more of his work.



### **Animation**

**Melissa Coarezza,**  
Technical Animator at **Milestone s.r.l**  
(formerly Animation Artist at **MPC**)



### **3D**

**Pol Escalé,**  
Lighting Artist at **SAUVAGE.TV**  
(formerly Layout Artist at **MPC**)



# ESCAPE STUDIOS' REEL DEAL

At Escape Studios, we want you to be studio ready when you leave us. That doesn't just mean teaching you the most recent techniques or the best software currently used on the market, but also making sure that you have what it takes to create the perfect showreel and be ready to kill it in the interview room and land your dream job.



1 Graduate from our undergraduate and postgraduate degrees with a showreel or portfolio ready to help you find your first job in the industry.



2 Graduate from our short course degrees with the skills needed to complete a showreel to find your first job.



3 Our undergraduate programmes all include a module dedicated to the creation of your showreel as well as helping you work on your CV.



4 The group and individual projects that you'll work on as part of your course will allow you to work on a great variety of shots that can be added to your reel.







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If you want your reel to stand out even more, you can join an additional short course and specialise yourself in a specific software, technique or discipline. Our alumni get an exclusive 10% discount on any additional course they join.



We have a close community of students who all support each other which means that you'll benefit from the invaluable feedback of your peers, just like in the studio.



8

Get taught by industry-experienced tutors who also run showreel clinics at renowned VFX and Games events across the country.



7



6

Get the opportunity to attend 'Evening With...' events with industry experts in our campus.



5

We offer an AfterCare package for a selection of our courses, which includes showreel feedback from a tutor, review of your CV and cover letter and support with job applications.

# REEL TALK CHECKLIST

Now you've read all our top tips to creating the perfect showreel, why not use our handy check list to help you get your showreel ready? You can download the pdf version of the guide and edit it to tick the checklist boxes as you go.

