

CS 446/MDST 375: 3-D ANIMATION AND SPECIAL EFFECTS

PROJECT 3: SECOND TEAM VIDEO

Goal: Work in teams to create a short video piece.

Due: The work for this project is broken into several stages:

- Assigned: Wednesday 24 October
- Critical review due: Friday 2 November
- Checkpoint 1: Friday 9 November
- Checkpoint 2: Monday 26 November
- Video due: Friday 7 December
- “Making Of” video due: Friday 14 December

Synopsis: You will work in 5-person interdisciplinary teams to create short videos using computer generated 3-D animation and/or live-action special effects. There are almost no restrictions on length or content. As part of this assignment you will edit a “making of” video documenting the process, pitfalls, and people involved in your video. During the first week, you will also hand in a critical review of videos from Project 2. This project has two “checkpoint” dates when you will demonstrate and be graded on your progress to that point.

Details: Grading criteria and additional explanation for each of the subtasks:

Critical Review: One point of this course is to encourage critical thinking about our chosen medium: animated video shorts. Thinking critically about your first group video, and the productions of other groups, will also improve your next effort. Therefore in lieu of the expose assigned in Project 2, you will each do a critical review of 3 videos as an individual assignment. One of these videos must be from your own group; one should be that of the following group number (i.e., members of Group 2 during project 2 should review Group 3’s video, while members of Group 5 should review Group 1’s video); the final review is at your discretion.

Your reviews should address artistic and technical success (or lack thereof) in the following categories: modeling, animation, lighting, rendering, audio/soundtrack, composition, editing, concept, and story. You needn’t write an elaborate prose epistle – a brief outline or a few sentences on each factor will do, as long as your point comes across. Be concrete; illustrate your point with particular shots from the video whenever possible.

Finally, describe (1) where you would advise the creators of the video to spend their efforts if they had an additional two weeks to work on it, and (2) how you would advise them if they had no additional time, but could go back two weeks before the assignment was due. I particularly expect a thoughtful answer to these questions for your own project.

Critical review necessarily involves criticism, and you should be honest in your opinions. However, there is nothing to be gained by excoriating the creators of the video. Don't use the review to show how clever you are (this is a common failing of movie and book reviews in student newspapers). Just give constructive criticism that points out flaws but also suggests corrections. Your reviews will be anonymized and shared with the creators of the videos. You will be graded on the thoughtfulness and pertinence of your review, not on writing style.

Checkpoints: This project lasts six weeks, compared to four for the previous project, so we have two checkpoints. For the first checkpoint you should turn in hard or electronic copies of your production schedule, concept, script, storyboard, and preliminary 3-D models. Your story reel, a shot-by-shot rough render in which each shot starts as a still (from the storyboard or Maya) and gradually gets replaced by playblasted animation, should be coming along. You should probably have at least rough audio on the story reel; this is particularly important for music, which affects the timing of other shots. Again, the checkpoints are to motivate you to work hard and avoid bogging down in the details—don't spend a week deciding on a concept, or perfecting a particular effect in Maya. For both checkpoints you will be graded on your progress.

Final video: The only restriction on content is that your piece be more-or-less PG rated, as before: nothing that I couldn't show to prospective students and their parents. If you have valid artistic reasons to include potentially questionable content, we can talk about it. As before, grading of the final video piece will be based on creativity of concept and technical sophistication of execution: timing, lighting, camera work, composition, shading, animation, editing, etc. A jury of outside experts will critique the video, perhaps publicly as part of the final presentations.

“The Making Of”: Since we have much more time on the schedule, Project 3 will require an actual documentary video instead of a presentation. You can have some fun with this, but the basic goals remain: to document the process of creating your video, to illustrate some of the technical behind-the-scenes work, and to showcase the contributions of each group member. The video can include interviews, raw footage, rough renders and storyboard images, footage or images of the group in action, breakdown of shots by layer, and anything else that might give insight into the making of your final video. The documentary will probably be longer than the video itself, and will not be graded on presentation or editing, just content. Narration is optional. As you work on your video, remember to keep your sketches, scripts, and storyboards around, along with raw footage and rough renders. You should also take some pictures or video of the group in action, of any tools that programmers write, of any live-action filming you might do, etc.

Grading: The critical reviews are individual assignments; otherwise, every group member receives the same grade on the project.

- Critical review: 15%
- Progress at the first checkpoint: 15%
- Progress at the second checkpoint: 20%
- Final video and “making of” documentary: 50%

The final video and documentary are graded together, since the documentary will help demonstrate the behind-the-scenes efforts and contributions of group members. It goes without saying, however, that the video itself is the more important of the two.