

1) A reel submission has 5 parts:

- a) the reel**
- b) the cover letter**
- c) the resume**
- d) the reel table of contents**
- e) the reel submission form (if needed)**

Send them all. The cover letter can (and should) be brief. The resume should tell the company where you've worked, what you did when you worked, what kind of coursework you've had, and what tools, languages, and systems you can use. The reel's table of contents is essential (see #6, below). Don't force anyone to look at a website - when they're looking at reels, they're all greased and ready to go with reels, not websites. (Companies will look at websites if they're hiring you as a web designer.)

2) Your reel should be no more than 3-4 minutes. Just like a resume is no more than 2 pages unless you've been CEO or a senator. If you have a lot of great material...do a 3 minute version, and then refer to longer pieces on the tape/DVD afterwards. "For the entire short see the additional materials section...blah blah blah yakity shmakity." Don't do a "collage" of your work, with interleaved random clips from all your different work. No, no, no. No one will be able to figure out what's going on. DO give each piece the time it deserves, no more nor less, and just show it once. Keep it simple.

3) Nobody cares about music/soundtrack. Most places will turn off the sound. But sometimes, if they do listen to it, they can get really annoyed if they don't like your taste in music. Keep it basic or leave it off.

4) The Industry's favorite medium is now the DVD. But play it on a home DVD player (not just your computer) to ensure that it really works. Keep the menu page EASY: you don't want your audience to try and figure out what to hit to play your reel. If you send something that companies can't watch, you're at a huge disadvantage. Like, fatal.

5) Put your best work first. Lead TD's often have 10 - 20 reels to go through. They might watch the first minute, see if anything intrigues them. If so, they'll watch the other 2 minutes. If not, move on. Show your best, most impressive work first -- presumably the work you are specifically applying for. Make it clear on your reel, cover sheet, and resume what type of position you're applying for. Don't try to change your reel because our website says we only need, say, lighting TD's now, either. Say what you're good at and make your reel demonstrate that.

6) Title cards and a table of contents. Companies want to know what you did on this reel. Here's a shot of a Luxo lamp jumping over a ball. Did you model the lamp? Do the animation? Shade it? Light it? Render it? Write the story? Executive-produce it? The TOC should tell us what we're looking at, what YOU did on it, and what tools you used. "Sleeping ball: (June 2003) Group project; I shaded the plastic sphere in Slim/Renderman" is a good entry. "Group project; project used Maya, Slim, Renderman, and Perl" is less useful. Put this on a title card before the sequence and again in a separate printed TOC they can refer to. If you have two dozen entries, number the TOC and put numbers on the title cards, too -- most people may not know the difference between your "Sleeping ball" animation and the opus you call "Lazy Sphere". If you're feeling adventurous, put that information in the letterbox region at the bottom of the frame instead of on a title card - but make sure it's readable.

7) Include a title card at the beginning and end with your name, address, phone, and email. Including the position you're looking for is not a bad idea, either. The opening one doesn't need to be on too long, but the end one should last for a while. Don't make people desperately pause to get your email address. Put your name on the actual DVD, too. Reels can get separated from their cases and without a name on the reel or title card in the

content; it becomes a mystery companies don't have time to solve. Make sure you check the spelling on all of your title cards. Spelling mistakes here can hurt you just as much as on your resume. Considering there should be so few times where text appears, any mistakes will send the message that you don't care enough to check your work before you finalize it.

8) Show work that proves that you know what you did. If you've done a sequence, show it at several stages of production. If you've done shading, show the basic color pass, the procedural shading, the painting, and a lit version. If you wrote clever software, include real work that was done with the software, and include on the title card, like, "Implemented simulation of Segway dynamics" in addition to everything else you did. Don't show screen shots of people using the software or screen grabs of C++ code.

9) Be careful about putting still images set to music. The kind of employer that requires a demo reel generally isn't looking for someone with only fine art to demonstrate; if they want to see your fine art, they'll ask for your portfolio. The entire purpose of video is to capture things that *move*, so *show* them something that moves—animation, film shorts, whatever you've got that works.

10) Take the time to polish. It seems silly, but people get in such a rush to get the reel out the door, they lose sight of the big picture. THIS IS HOW YOU WILL GET A JOB. And since it's a job in a visual industry -- it should LOOK really, really good. Don't use clashing colors. Make sure your shaders are anti-aliased. Make sure your lights aren't blown out too bright. Make it clear what the audience is looking at. Don't use confusing fonts. Keep it clean and simple!

11) Tailor your work. Do careful research about the company and the job offered. A generic portfolio is no longer the right answer. Every place especially game houses will be different in what they are looking for. What is great for one place may not be at another. A line manufactured portfolio won't go very far. You must specifically tailor your reel to the tastes and needs of each place you plan to send it too.

12) Show it to other people and see what others are doing. Have other people critique it. Not necessarily the work on it, but the way you're presenting your work. (Though getting critiques of the work on it is a great idea, too.) Students should spend a good deal of time looking at online portfolios of other colleges (their competition) and studios. They need to carefully consider what they are going to put in their reel and be sure that it competes with others in their field. They must remember that only the best of the best work gets consideration these days and if their work doesn't really shine they won't make the cut.

13) If you really don't have stuff to put on a reel, don't send one. Well-presented still images can be as effective as moving pictures.

In Conclusion:

Before submitting 30 reels, do your homework. Some companies will request access to an online reel, and prefer correspondence over e-mail. Some don't want any e-mail contact at all! Others have online application forms built into their web pages, while larger companies tend to require a signed reel submission form before they will even look at your work. Make getting a job easier on yourself and find out as much as you can about the companies you are applying to before you submit anything.

Specialized Tips:

- **Animation** - show weight, balance, and timing. Basic motions like lifting, sawing, pulling, pushing, and interacting with scene elements as opposed to simply running, jumping, or walking.
- **Modeling** - reality is the key here. If it is a human it should look like a human. Show a sense of proportion and detail unless you're going for a stylized cartoon look.

Information gathered from Pixar, LucasArts, About.com, Siggraph, and Jeff Jackson