



Demo reels: What it takes  
to get noticed



# Demo reels: What it takes to get noticed

## **1. Start and end with your strongest pieces**

There's no guarantee that your demo reel will be watched for more than a few seconds, so be sure that the first piece is your strongest piece. Likewise at the end, you should leave them wanting to see more and with something to remember you by.

## **2. Include only your best work**

While this might sound like common sense, it's easy to overlook. A demo reel is only as strong as your weakest piece. As you create new work, you need to constantly re-evaluate what is in your demo reel and replace weaker pieces with stronger pieces.

## **3. Tailor your reel to your dream job**

If you want to be a character animator but your demo reel is full of character models, then your potential employer is not likely to hire you as an animator - no matter how great those models might be. If you don't have enough content to put on your reel for the position you want, take the time to create some.



#### **4. Know your strengths and focus on them**

This works close with tailoring your reel to the job you want, but it's important enough to point out that you don't need to show your potential employer that you can do everything under the sun. Your demo reel should reflect your strengths.

#### **5. Keep it short and simple**

A typical demo reel should be between one and two minutes. If you have more content than that, start eliminating some of the weaker pieces to make room for your absolute best. Do more with less.

#### **6. Label your reel inside and out**

When creating your reel, make sure to include your name and contact information at the beginning and end of the reel itself. If you are submitting a physical disc (such as a DVD), be sure to label this with your name and contact information as well. If a potential employer wants to contact you, they should know how to do so from any item you submit.

“Most studios are accustomed to receiving demo reels and post exactly what format they need them to be submitted in on their site.”

### **7. Make your demo reel easy to play**

Your potential employer shouldn't need any special codecs or software installed just to play your reel. Remember that in many studios the person who is making the first round of reviews for demo reels may not be a CG artist with a powerful workstation. Your reel needs to be able to play on any operating system. Test it on as many computers as you can to make sure it works without any errors.

### **8. Check the company's guidelines**

Most studios are accustomed to receiving demo reels and post exactly what format they need them to be submitted in on their site. Take the time to make sure that your submission falls within their guidelines. If you cannot follow along with directions for submitting a demo reel, should a potential employer trust you with following the directions for a complex work of art?

### **9. Only include work you have approval to use**

If you've done work that is under an NDA or some other not-for-public agreement then the rule is simple: don't include it on your reel. If you have a project that you cannot show on your reel but you want to show what you are capable of doing, take the time to recreate the effects in a personal project that you can show publicly.

### **10. Bring a copy of your demo reel, shot breakdown and printed resume or necessary documents**

While it's likely that the people interviewing you have already seen your demo reel, it's also possible that one or more of the people involved in the interview have not seen it. Bring an easily-playable copy of your reel to any interview just in case.

Cover letters are very important, even though they are often overlooked, and can be the deciding factor that determines if your reel is even watched. The cover letter should be specific to the position that you're applying to and should include a quick snapshot of your skills, experiences and which software and technical skills are your strengths.

### **11. Only include work you created, group work is OK**

You certainly don't want to include work that you didn't do in your reel, but that doesn't mean that you should only include work that you did by yourself. In most studios, you'll be working as part of a team, so if you've worked on team projects those can show your potential employer that you can successfully integrate into a team. In cases like this, you'll need to make sure to let them know what parts of the project you worked on.



“A demo reel is judged not by its outward appearance but by the greatness that it contains.”

**12. Don't worry about the music if it doesn't add to your reel**

Adding your favorite track to spice up your demo reel might seem like a great idea, but you run the risk of the viewers not liking it. Also note that some viewers won't have the audio on. The only universally acceptable audio for a CG demo reel is audio that is directly relevant to your work. For example, lip syncing.

**13. Don't call or email a studio... constantly**

The larger a studio is, the more demo reels they receive and review. Be respectful of the time of those who

are looking at your work by refraining from constant calls and/or emails. Until they reach out to you, keep learning and working to make your reel even better. Let your good work get you noticed, not an annoying abundance of calls and emails.

**14. Don't worry about fancy packaging**

You aren't being hired for doing the fancy packaging, so rather than focusing on that, focus on making the content of the demo reel stand apart from the rest. A demo reel is judged not by its outward appearance but by the greatness that it contains.



## **TAILORING YOUR REEL FOR A SPECIFIC JOB**

### **Aspiring concept artists**

Pay close attention to the composition, timing and cuts of your shots. Study cinematography as that will help you compose your shots.

The goal of a concept is to have it modeled in 3D, so it's a good idea to go the extra mile and include orthographic views for your character concepts.

### **Aspiring modelers**

Creating your own concepts is great, but your focus is building those concepts in 3D not creating them. Feel free to use designs that have been done by professional artists. If the design is abstract, be sure to include the concept art, and make sure you include wireframes to show your models' topology.

Even though you won't be animating your characters, take the time to learn how they would move and behave. This will help you as you build your character.

### **Aspiring technical directors**

Don't try to rig your character to do everything. Stick to building a solid rig that is effective for how your character needs to move.

Get feedback from an animator on how your character should move and build the rig accordingly.

### **Aspiring shading artists**

Nothing in the real world is absolutely perfect. Take the time to add rust, dirt and scratches into your scenes.

Photographs can make great textures, but just about anyone can apply a photograph to a model. Instead, show that you can paint your own textures.

“Not all compositing has to be visible right away. In fact, the best composites are the ones that don’t stand out.”

### **Aspiring lighting artists**

Don’t use Photoshop to cover up bad lighting. Lighting is best shown by moving your camera around the scene so it’s not a still image.

Your lighting shouldn’t just let us see what’s in the scene, it should set the mood of a scene. Try creating different moods of the same scene to show off your ability to change the mood through lighting.

### **Aspiring animators**

Rather than quick shots of random animations, try creating a couple vignettes to tell a story.

Take the time to get to know your character well. Learn about your character’s likes, dislikes and how your character would react to the situation. Then animate accordingly.

### **Aspiring compositors**

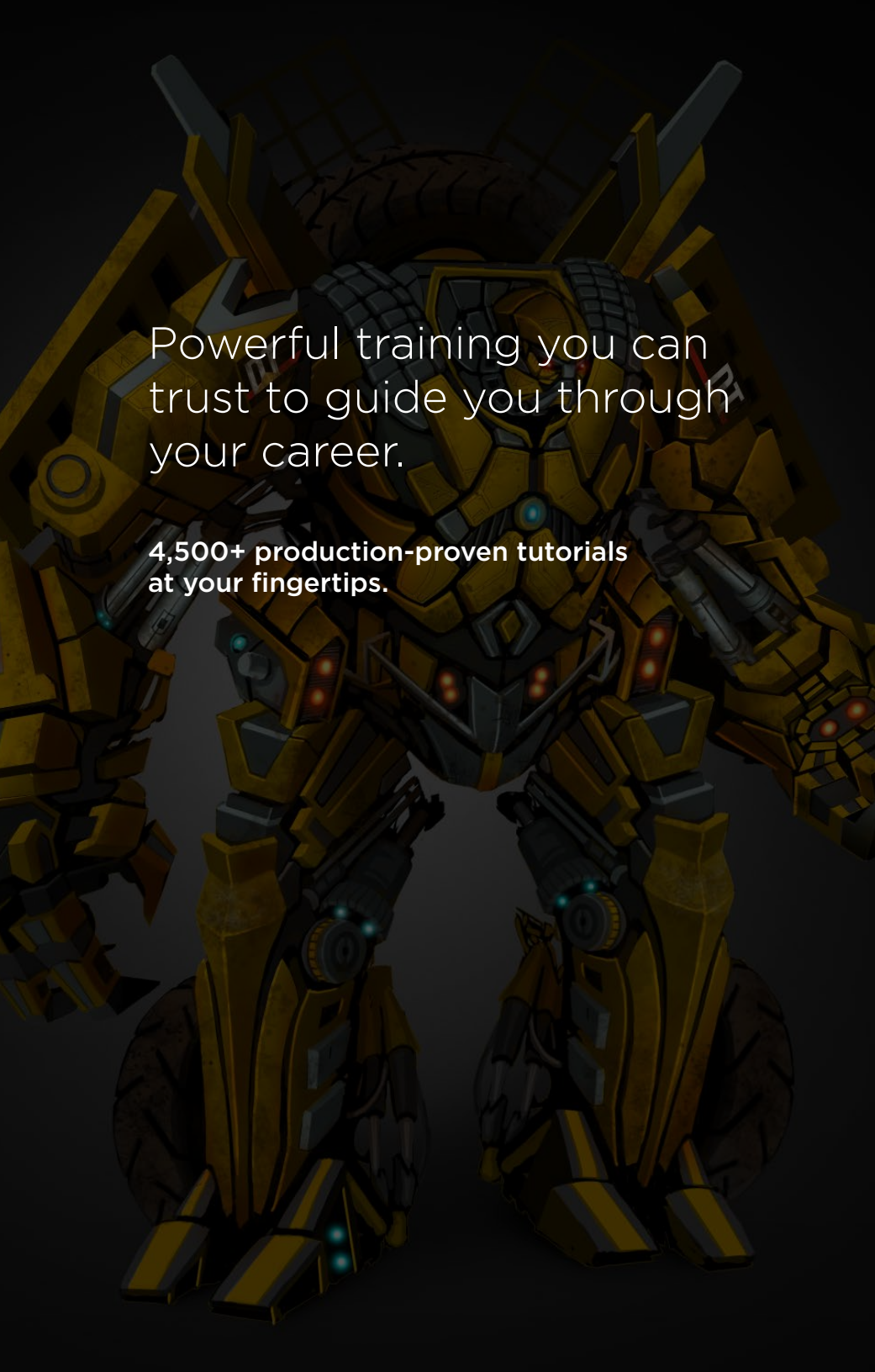
Not all compositing has to be visible right away. In fact, the best composites are the ones that don’t stand out. Include before and after shots so it’s easy to tell what you’ve changed.

### **Studios and companies want to help you improve your demo reel**

Remember that it’s always a good idea to check with the company that you are submitting your demo reel to before working on it, so you can tailor your reel to their specific requirements. Studios and companies will also often have resources for creating your demo reel. Here are some great resources on building assets and creating your demo reel:


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