2D ANIMATION DEMO REELS

Introduction
Demo reels are the only way that you can show your modeling, animation, editing, and motion graphics skills to potential clients, employers, and advanced training institutions. But what is a demo reel?

Content and purpose
A demo reel, whether for a student, a beginner in the profession, or a large effects studio, shows examples of work as an entertaining and informative video. It’s generally between one and three minutes long (longer for large studios). Its purpose is to show what you do, how you do it, what you’ve done, and by implication what you’re capable of doing. Ken Maruyama of Sony Imageworks has some good tips here.

A student/beginner demo reel
We’re not concerned here with highly professional demo reels, only those that are intended to help an individual get clients and interviews. Pixar provides an excellent guide here.

A demo reel of this type will show examples of finished work along with how that work was made. If you collaborated with others during its making it will credit them; this shows you can work successfully in a team. Its style and professionalism will show your editing and design skills (you may need help on this) just as your web site does the same.

So you’ve collected all your work in one place, probably as part of your resume folder. Look through it and find the best work. This should go at the start of your demo reel to catch people’s attention. The second best work should be at the end, to close on a high point. A range of regular work should be in the middle. Whatever you worked on with someone else, credit it. Whatever you brought in from outside sources - music, models, images - attribute it. No-one expects you to know and do everything, but they do expect honesty. An unattributed element in your demo reel will likely not only be recognized but may lead to a cease-and-desist notice - and at worst to a plagiarism law action.

Music should be elevator style, with no distinct beat. If you do want music with a beat, however, make sure it’s synchronized with the cuts between scenes as well as the action. Be careful about putting copyright music on a public site such as Vimeo or YouTube; it will be recognized by bots. Look around open source music sites such as the Free Music Archive.
Save the elements of your demo reel as image sequences; that way you have the maximum editability for custom versions for particular clients or job opportunities. Christine Li has two excellent examples of this on her website.

**Title and credits**

These should be simple images, held for five seconds each. Again, look at Christie Li’s demo reels. They have all the information required, in a simple and readable form. This should be your web site, your name, what you do, and your email. For a targeted, non public email such as one prepared for a particular job, the title/credit frame should also include your phone number and possibly your address.

**Breakdown sheets**

A breakdown sheet is a list of what went into a scene. You don’t need to do this for a public demo reel, but for a formal application to studios like Pixar it’s a requirement. A breakdown sheet is a written document, most likely a PDF unless they specify otherwise, that references a number overlaid on each scene in your demo reel. It adds to the minimal detail in the reel. A breakdown sheet can include:

- what you did to create the scene
- collaborators’ names and contact details
- online resources used
- the client, the project, date, and duration
- client contact details (with their agreement)
- links to online use of the final product
- software used with version numbers and non standard plug-ins
- problems encountered and how they were solved

Remember, collaboration is good. Being upfront about what you used will increase an employer’s confidence (however for private clients you want to appear all-competent; an important distinction).

**And finally**

Even if you’re intending to be a part-time or independent animator, the time may come when you’re offered or want a fully time job. Credit scores are the first and easiest thing for a potential employer to check; keep yours as good as you can. Maintain a professional social media profile and add a LinkedIn account with contacts and recommendations from clients and collaborators. Also keep track of what work of yours appears on the web as part of clients’ web sites; again, this is proof of experience and good professional standing.

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