

Getting Into the Games Industry... 3D Artist

Getting into the games industry can be a difficult process, so I've put together some helpful tips to get you pointing in the right direction.

Firstly try to decide what role you think you'd like to start off with. The roles are broken down into a few broad categories...

Art

Code

Production

Audio

Quality Assurance/tester

For this guide, we'll have a look at the Junior 3D Artist role. Just to be sure that we are all of the same understanding, in this guide a Junior 3D Artist is the 1st role that most artists will get in the industry and it will involve basic modelling and texturing, file conversion, collision volumes, adding nodes to assets and any other job that the other artists would rather not do. It's the simple stuff, which is the perfect training ground for any budding artist.

Step 1 – Educational goals

OK, so you've set your sights on 3D modelling. If you're still at school or college, you'll want to structure some of your course choices towards art and possibly 3D or games, depending on what's available. If you're not currently a student of any kind, you should still do the same. Find a life drawing class or something in your area, that you can do once a week to help you to improve your drawing and visual communication skills and also your observational ones. If you're lucky enough to be on a university course – see what's available, and sign up.

If you're lucky enough to be on a university course, make sure it's the right one, and make sure that you'll get everything you need out of it. What I mean by this is that there are a great many different courses out there, have a look at the 3rd year students work and degree shows – if what they are producing isn't what you're looking to produce (great skills, killer portfolio) find out why, if you're on the wrong course, see if you can switch to the right one – there are some great ones out there. I personally know lecturers at Derby and Bournemouth University – if you're not sure, go and see what they're doing and you'll see what I mean.

Step 2 – Quest for Knowledge

Whilst you're studying on your courses or whilst you're working in the evenings, make sure that you are looking in the right places and reading the right tutorials. One of the best places for advice and help are forums, there are a great many out there including...

Polycount - <http://www.polycount.com>

Game Artisans - <http://www.gameartisans.org/forums/index.php>

CG Society - <http://forums.cgsociety.org/>

I even founded one myself which can be found at <http://www.3d-for-games.com/forum/> which is specifically aimed at helping people from all over the world to get into the games industry.

Once you've found the right forums, log on, say hello, and introduce yourself. Get involved and see what's going on, make your favourite one your home page and keep on top of the latest news and views, and start living the dream.

Step 3 – Skills

Once you've seen what's out there, you'll want to get started with the software, if you haven't already. Take a trip to www.autodesk.com and click on the Products tab and it'll take you to the products page. There you'll be able to click on 3dsmax or Maya and download a 30 day trial copy. You can also check out the free software options at <http://students.autodesk.com>

You'll also need to get a copy of Adobe's Photoshop – which is the industry standard for games artists. Adobe can be found here at <http://www.adobe.com>

OK, so you have your software, now you need some decent tutorials. As you're already an active forum member by now, you'll have some buddies and they'll point you in the right direction – If you kinda skipped part of step 2, get yourself on a forum. If you can't choose, come and talk to me on <http://www.3d-for-games.com/forum/> I'll be happy to help you out.

Part of self study will probably mean that you'll buy some books and DVD's or people may ask you what you want for xmas and birthdays, so seize these opportunities to get some great materials.

Amazon is a great resource for books, check out <http://www.amazon.com> (or whichever is specifically for your country) and type in some searches for 3dsmax, or Maya. You'll find that there are simply hundreds of books out there, and unfortunately, they're not all great.

The 3 main things that you need to focus on are

- a) What is it teaching?
- b) How well was it reviewed?

c) Is it supported?

What its teaching is important as you want a good understanding of the basics, with a few more advanced tutorials in there to challenge you once you've found your feet. For example, you'll want to avoid rendering in Mental Ray, until you've got your modelling skills up to scratch. You'll probably want to avoid the 3dsmax bibles, as you can find all of that information for free by pressing the F1 key from within 3dsmax or Maya.

How it is reviewed is a good indicator to what other people think. If it has 20 reviews that are 1 star out of 5, than it's probably one to be avoided, on the other hand though, if it has 20 reviews that are 5 stars out of 5, then it's probably well worth a look.

If it's supported, is a fairly new concept as authors and publishers have now started to support their books video training with websites and forums. Read through the back cover and reviews to find the best ones.

There are also some other good resources for video training which can be a lot easier to digest. For beginners, Focal Press has just released a number of great professional videos in bite-size chunks which can be bought 1 at a time, which can be found here <http://www.focalpress.com/eresources.aspx>. There is always www.youtube.com too but these are usually much lower quality. Try to avoid the high end Gnomon series for now as they are aimed at the seasoned professional, at least until you've mastered the basics, they can be found at <http://www.thegnomonworkshop.com> if you want to see what's available.

Step 4 – Portfolio

Finally, we're on to the portfolio part of the process. The bottom line is to include only your very best work. If you have only five good pieces of work, then that's all that should be in your portfolio. Padding your portfolio out with everything you have ever done not only reduces the overall quality of your portfolio, but also advertises every single mistake you've ever made—not what you want to be doing.

So, be strict and include only work that you believe to be flawless. Ask yourself, "Is this the best I can do, or are there any small improvements that I can make?" If there are, do them; it's really important not to rush getting this together.

A rushed portfolio can hold you back for many years. If you've included only your very best work so far, you may have only a few renders. As you flick through them, the small number of pieces may be the catalyst you need to buckle down and produce some more work. If not, it should be. If your portfolio is brimming with everything you've ever done, you won't feel the same sense of urgency, so try to be aware of what you *really* have, and what you need to do about improving it.

If you're sending your work in to studios via email or disc, or if you're compiling a printed portfolio, you must put your very best work first. In a lot of cases, a reviewer might look only at the first couple of pieces, so you have to blow them away with the very first piece. If you don't, you'll be in the trash—it's as simple as that. You can organize your work as simply as a

set of images, or a movie, but keep it simple. Finding and downloading strange codecs to view someone's work really puts me off. A lot of people present their website portfolio, but clearly labeled folders of JPEGs work just as well.

Then, show it to your forum friends, they will help you to improve your work, offer suggestions and give you the confidence to step out proudly with your finished portfolio and apply for all those jobs.

If you have any questions about this or anything else, you can find me at <http://www.3d-for-games.com/forum/> just log on and ask away – everyone is welcome.

Good luck – Andrew Gahan