

CS125 Introduction to Computer Animation
Fall 2009

Final Project: Preproduction

Due date	What is due	% of FP grade
5 M Oct	Pitch stories in class	0
W Oct 14, 10am	Project groups chosen; Story draft due. Email to bjm	5 for this and rewrite below
M Oct 26, 10am	Story rewrites due. Email to bjm	
W Nov 4, 10am	Project written proposal with shot breakdown Email to bjm	5
Week of Nov 9	Create visuals and meet with Barb outside class TBD	5
W Nov 18	Formal project presentations and critique in class Handin to fp_present	5

Goals and introduction

In this stage of your final projects, you will be forming groups, working on story, creating a shot breakdown, and presenting your preproduction materials to the class. The goal is to get your group to the point where you are ready to start production.

Pitch stories in class

This step is optional. Students who wish to pitch a story will tell the story to the class verbally. It is also recommended that you write it in a paragraph and email it to the class as well, so we have a record of the stories that are pitched.

When pitching your story, you should pare the story down to the essentials. Do not give detailed information about the setting, characters, or shots that you've imagined. The essence of the story is different from the telling of it, whether the telling is verbal, written, or visual. At this point we only want to know *what happens*. If your story takes more than about two minutes to tell, either it is too complex, or you have added too many details.

If you don't have a complete story, you can tell what you have, or tell *about* your story.

If your concept is non-narrative or abstract, you will have to use words the best you can to describe what you are imagining. If you choose this route, you can describe more about the visuals than if you are telling a narrative.

Groups chosen and story draft

Read *Ideas for the Animated Short*, Ch. 2. (under Lectures on website)

Final project groups may have 2, 3, or 4 members. For this deadline, you will submit a document that includes

- list of your group members
- a one-sentence synopsis of your story
- a written telling of your story or non-narrative idea

You may include a few more details about the character(s) and setting than you did in the oral pitch, but we are still mostly focusing on *what happens*. Remember the classic hero myth structure that we discussed in class:

1. A character wants something badly that can be universally understood by your audience (hint: figure out what will happen if she doesn't get it)
2. An inciting incident calls her to action
3. She meets with conflict(s) until there is a crisis
4. She must now face her worst problem and make a choice or perform an action to succeed or else fail. This is the moment of transformation or when the lesson is learned. (Hint: the worst problem is often caused by a character flaw; sow the seeds of the flaw early in the story)
5. Ending: celebration of success or reflection on defeat

In a short film, everything in this structure must be simplified. The “want” has to be small. The inciting incident should happen within the first 15 seconds or so. The conflicts must be small. The heart of the story will be the crisis and this is where you probably want to spend more of the storytelling time. The ending can be short, but you *must* have an ending.

If your group is choosing a non-narrative concept, you must still describe what happens. How do the visuals change over time to build and maintain interest? Without structure, an abstract piece is more like a screensaver – it keeps going with no apparent beginning, middle, or end. Describe what elements change: forms, colors, rhythm, pace, texture, balance of composition, complexity?

Story rewrites

Your group will receive feedback on your story. The rewrite should address the issues flagged in the feedback. Nothing else is needed for this deadline.

Written proposal

Read David Mamet, *On Directing Film* excerpt and *Ideas for the Animated Short* Ch 7 Storyboarding (under Lectures on website).

The written proposal will expand on details of the story to include information about character, settings, motivation, shots, and art direction. The proposal should include the following

- Group members
- One sentence synopsis of story
- Written telling
- Shot breakdown
- Characters and their major traits; may include backstory
- Setting description
- Art direction description

The first three items can come from your previous handins after addressing any outstanding issues.

Shot breakdown: You should spend significant time on this step. First break down the story into scenes, and then into beats (small events). Consider the goal of each beat, and this will suggest the shot(s) needed to achieve the goal of the beat. Your story should be simple enough by this point that your entire piece will have about 1-5 scenes, and about 10-30 shots. Your success at this step will directly impact the success of your project.

Characters: The plot will arise from the character's personality. The character description should be as specific as possible. The universals lie in the specifics. I.e. we can't relate to generic descriptions, only to specific ones.

Setting: The choice of location and props should be determined by the story and characters. The setting and props should be simple (because you have little time), but be specific because the details are necessary to support the story.

Art direction: Describe the look you would like to achieve with your animation. You might suggest the level of realism, or discuss elements from a known style from which you are borrowing, or describe the overall mood.

For every decision you make, you should ask "Does this help tell the story?" If it doesn't, think about what you could change to make it more supportive.

Create visuals

Read *Ideas for the Animated Short*, Ch 8, Staging.

Your group will meet with Barb outside class time TBD to go over your *visual* material. To this point, most of your preproduction work has been verbal. This is the stage where you translate your verbal ideas into visuals. At this meeting your group will present storyboards, character designs (if appropriate), set designs, art direction designs, and any accompanying reference material. We will discuss issues that arise out of this work.

Formal Presentation

The last step in preproduction is presenting your project ideas and visual to the class. All visual material *must be scanned* so that we can project it in class. A typical presentation starts with a group member describing the premise of the story (e.g. from the past project, Reverie, “A bored boy is kicking a soccer ball. When the ball hits him in the head, he travels through a series of daydreams that take away his boredom.”)

If the character is unusual, you might show character designs at this point; otherwise, you will probably want to do a storyboard pitch like the Toy Story one we saw on the first day of class. A good pitch requires practice: you must know both the story and the storyboards inside and out.

Next, show the visual designs and any reference images.

Finally, you will show a schedule with deadlines that breaks down the work into phases of the production pipeline and shows who will be responsible for the pieces. We will discuss this in more detail in class, but be sure to leave a few days at the end for rendering. We recommend you use a Google calendar, spreadsheet, or other online organization method so that all members can easily update the project.

Other class members should be prepared to ask questions and make comments after each presentation.

In order to make the presentations go smoothly in class, hand in your materials to **fp_present** (only person per group needs to do this). You can also store materials online (Google docs, Picasa, etc.) and access that way.

You will be evaluated on both the content and form of the presentation.