13 tips for creating the best animation showreel

If you’re finishing university and looking for your first job in animation, visual effects (VFX), motion graphics or game development, then creating an excellent animation showreel to show potential studios, agencies and employers is key. Your showreel needs to offer something unique, show off your best work and be entertaining and engaging.

In this feature, co-founder of Blue Zoo Animation Studio – a film, TV and video production company in London – Tom Box and animation director Bader Badruddin share their dos and don’ts for creating the perfect, attention-grabbing animation showreel. Both Tom and Bader are also coaches of Blue Zoo’s online animation training programme, AnimDojo. We feature three showreels from the Blue Zoo team as examples, including character animator Sarah Caisely, Rose Timperely’s student reel and animator Oleksiy Popov.

For more: Best websites and online tools for learning animation.

1) Make it noticeable

Recruiters don’t have time to sit and watch every single showreel from start to finish so your has to be something that makes them sit up and take notice. Recruiters and animation supervisors are extremely busy, so making a first impression straight away is key. Showreels should be between one and two minutes long. This isn’t necessarily a hard and fast rule. If your content only fills 60 seconds, or perhaps even less, that’s OK. If you want to show more work, and you feel it will

help you stand out, you can always have more shots on a web page for a recruiter can sift through after to see more.

2) Put your best work first

Put the most pertinent, significant work, that which you're most proud of, at the front of the showreel. Time is short and you'll want to make an impact quickly. The old adage 'good first impressions' really counts here. If you leave your strongest piece until the end of your reel, there's a chance recruiters won't see it. But, you'll have an almost certain chance of catching their attention if that strong clip is at the front of your reel.

[embedded content]

Rose Timperley showreel, aka Rose Rainbow.

3) If you're unsure, leave it out

Gut instincts count for a lot in your everyday work, and so this should be the case when you're putting together snippets of those daily projects for a reel. You'll know almost immediately what it is you'll want to utilise and what you'll want to leave on the cutting room floor. But, what about those pieces of work that fall in between? Our advice; if you're unsure about the inclusion of a particular scene, there's probably a good reason for that so do yourself and your showreel a favour and leave it out.

4) Let the work speak for itself

Don't get too bogged down in elements that won't necessarily influence those you're trying to impress. It's easy to dedicate a lot of time to things like music and editing but in the end, the recruiter is only there to see your work. Your attention to detail will be overwhelmingly more important. If

music and editing aren’t your specialities, you shouldn’t try and make it out as though they are. Follow this guide when creating your showreel and leave music out. Let your work speak for itself.

5) Add your personality

Stand out from the crowd. It’s an age-old piece of advice and is certainly easier said than done. However, adding a little of your personality can go a long way to making those you’re targeting feel like they’re connecting with what it is you were trying to do with your work. Don’t just follow the basic tutorials or the expected showreel content of walk cycle, ball bounce, heavy lift, etc. Try to bring something from your own experience to the table. If, for example, you’re a skateboarder, why not animate some body mechanics using a skateboard. Perhaps you enjoy cooking. If so create a pantomime piece doing just that. Showreels with unique content always stand out and are easier to remember when thinking of potential candidates to hire.

[embedded content]

Animation reel from Sarah Caisley.

6) Tailor to the right industry

If you’re creating your own showreel, it’s right to assume you’ll have a pretty good idea as to where you want to go in your career already. If you want to break into the games industry, make sure your showreel is angled to demonstrate that. If you see yourself in VFX, target your reel accordingly. Playing to your strengths will also benefit your showreel here and, if needs be, think about creating multiple showreels for different disciplines and audiences.

7) Own your own work, not someone else’s

Be clear about what you did in any project you’re highlighting in your showreel. Was your work part of a team or group project? The last thing you want is to have your reel discarded because you and a friend both submitted the same project because you’ve made it difficult to deduce who did what. It’s also important to mention, although obvious, to never try to sell off someone else’s work as your own. The industry is small and word gets around quick. This is a sure fire way to have a very short career in a very competitive industry.

8) Be entertaining

Entertain your audience. Recruiters and animation supervisors we have spoken to all talk about similar things they look for in a reel and it comes down to a demonstrable ability to entertain an audience. If they find a funny moment that makes them laugh, or a character that emotes and shows a flair of life, that tends to stand out among other showreels that may be lacking that element. It’s not just about the acting. It’s about having the ability to delight your viewer. Always keep that in mind when putting together your reel.

9) You’re as strong as your weakest shot

Don’t be afraid to take out shots that don’t sell your skills. The best advice we can give here is to show your reel to colleagues and friends, even those who don’t work in the industry, and see how they react. If a shot feels off to them, and you hear it a couple of times, there is a good chance that shot won’t impress potential employers. It’s better to have a

short strong reel than one that includes work that could harm your employment prospects. You're only as strong as your weakest shot, always remember that.

10) Keep your title card simple

Title cards have one function; to introduce the showreel and yourself. Make sure that's all yours does. By keeping your title card simple and punchy, you're more likely to retain the attention of the viewer as the showreel commences to go headlong into your work. A good title card should display your name, contact details and your current role. By all means present it in line with your personal branding, if you have some, but there's no need to overcomplicate it.

[embedded content]

Animation showreel, May 2017 from Oleksiy Popov.

11) Use Vimeo over YouTube

When your showreel is ready to be seen, it's time to decide which video sharing platform to host it on. The industry standard tool here is Vimeo. There are some people who use Youtube, and there is nothing wrong with that. However, will feel a little strange for professionals to be viewing content on YouTube, especially for senior members of staff who might be hiring. YouTube doesn't necessarily reflect the engagement many professionals have with the industry. Most showreels, including studio showreels, are on Vimeo, so keep that in mind when hosting your work online.

12) Keep it professional

We shouldn't really have to say it but, just in case… Common sense dictates that you should not use any offensive or adult material in your showreel, so make sure you don't. The last

thing you want is to offend a potential recruiter with something you might find funny, but can be a bit risque and so affect the outcome of your application. Keeping your work professional will convey that you are a professional individual.

14) Show your aspirations

Your showreel should show people where you want to go, not where you've been. Let the video you'll be sending to studios engender your aspirations. Studio heads will appreciate whatever forward-thinking or innovative approaches you can bring to their company but really it's about demonstrating that you're not afraid to try new things and leave your comfort zone to experiment. By all means, celebrate what it is you've done but your showreel should also hint at the direction in which you want your career to go. Potential employers will learn a lot about you and whether you're a good fit for their studio this way.

Podcast

Listen in to the latest edition of the AnimDojo podcast below to hear more tips on how to create the best showreel.

Industry guests on the episode include experts from Aardman Animations and The Mill. Pick up more tips by listening in on the AnimDojo website.

https://www.digitalartsonline.co.uk/features/motion-graphics/13-tips-for-creating-best-animation-showreel/