

+ COMPOSITING REEL

QC CHECKLIST

What's inside?

A Handy Guide to a Production-Ready Demo Reel



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5 **Golden Rules** for Reels

5 simple rules shared by the VFX community and supervisors for entry level artists. They shouldn't be treated as set in stone, but as guidance for making more informed choices.



Mini **Decision Tree**

We all know the rule of starting with your best shot and ending with an even better one, but is it always valid? This mini decision tree can help you organize your reel's content based on the actual shots you have available.



5 **Essential Mindsets**

This already sounds like "guru fluff", and I thought the same at first, but I can swear that attitude is often more important than your skills, and it's what we tend to pay the least attention to.



Title Card **Blueprint**

A practical guide to stronger opening/closing title cards.

5 Golden Rules for Reels

A successful reel should fulfill three main objectives: define who you are and how to get in touch with you, show which shots you can handle independently, and highlight any commercial projects or creative/technical strengths that could be useful.

1 It doesn't need to impress; it needs to convey competence.

When we're entering the professional world, we often tend to think of our demo reel as something meant to impress the viewer, almost like a short film submitted to a competition, but that's not its purpose. The real goal is to show what we can do independently and how well we can do it. Whoever is watching should be able to think, *"Okay, we've got about 50 screen replacement shots, and this person seems to handle them well... they could be useful to us!"* The "wow" shots will come with time, but at the beginning, what really matters is clarity and precision, even in shots that aren't super flashy!



2

Simple, well-executed shots are better than complex shots that feel unfinished.

We all know it: between a tracking marker cleanup and a CG creature composited into a live-action plate, the second one looks like the more promising shot for a reel.

The problem is that we might show much more skill and precision with a perfect cleanup than with a superficial CG integration.

Does that mean that if I have a CG integration shot, I should throw it away? Of course not, but it depends on the quality of the assets used (lighting, shading, render) and on the care put into the integration. When we're just starting out and don't have much production experience, we tend to work on personal projects to fill in our portfolio, and the material we use isn't always high-level. So before adding it to your reel, ask yourself: *"Does it have a cinematic, professional look, or does it feel more like a personal creative experiment?"*

There's nothing wrong with the second option, but it's better to keep it in the "maybe" pile and come back to it later.

3

Make it last just long enough to show what you're capable of.

1 minute, 2 minutes, 1 minute and 45 seconds... there's no definitive answer on this topic.

What everyone does agree on, though, is that if you're making it longer by adding weak shots or repetitions, then something is wrong.

It doesn't matter if a reel is under 1 minute, in fact, the people reviewing candidates often have to watch dozens of reels a day, so being concise is appreciated, as long as everything needed to show your skills is there, without unnecessary padding.

4

The fundamentals always win over more advanced techniques.

What this means is that it doesn't matter much if you know what the *DeepSample* node does if you don't know how to do a proper 2D track.

The fundamentals are the core set of skills and techniques that compositing is built on, and an entry-level reel should show very solid fundamentals, such as:

ROTO, MATTE EXTRACTION, 2D and PLANAR TRACKING, 2D and 2.5D TRANSFORMATIONS, PAINT & CLEANUP, PLATE INTEGRATION (proper color matching, etc.), **BASIC KEYING, FUNDAMENTALS OF LENSES AND PHOTOGRAPHY** (basic familiarity with concepts like focal plane, exposure, f-stop, etc. is enough).

5

If you've shown a technique twice, that may already be too much.

Speaking of repetition: we often have many shots that showcase the same kind of technique. This also happens in production, when we're assigned batches of shots from the same sequence.

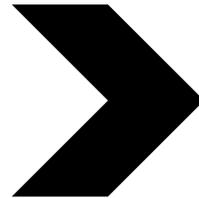
You don't necessarily have to keep only one, but as a general rule, after two solid shots showing the same thing, it's better to avoid further repetition. And if one of those two works better than the other, then go ahead and drop one.

Everything you include in your reel should add something, say something new, and if it doesn't, it becomes unnecessary filler.

Kill your darlings!



Let's put the
5 Golden Rules
into practice



Mini
Decision Tree

Rate each shot (1–5) on Quality, Readability, Variety, Complexity + Breakdown.
Get a shortlist and a suggested reel order.

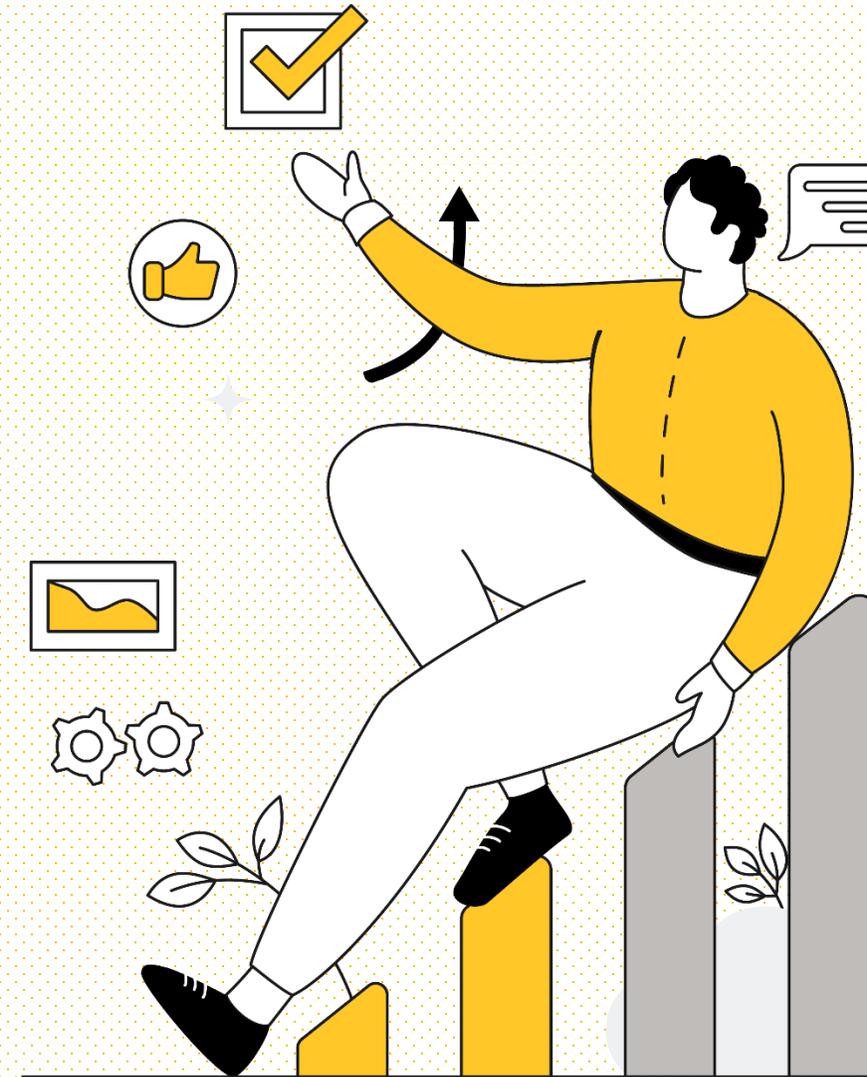
Link on the next page

Open the **Mini** **Decision Tree**

Pick up 8-12 shots and access the online tool. Make your own personal copy. It works with Google Sheets, but if you prefer working offline, you can download it as an .xlsx file.

Open in browser > Make a Copy

Open the Tool



5

Essential Mindsets

Every time people talk about mindset, I tend to be a bit skeptical, as if results depended exclusively on the skills we have. In reality, though, there are useful frameworks we can internalize to approach our daily work with more confidence and peace of mind. And when we manage to stay positive, we make room for creative thinking and well-considered choices.

1 Not feeling the smartest person in the room can be your superpower.

This has probably happened to you too, and the situation is more or less this: first day at work, first experiences in a studio, and you feel like a complete idiot. In fact, the slowest person in the whole office. It's a terribly uncomfortable feeling, but the good news is that it's completely natural. The counterintuitive part is that you shouldn't suppress it. You should use it!

If you don't feel good enough, fight those negative thoughts and that anxiety by asking your colleagues how you can become good enough. They've been in your exact same position too. Ask questions, get informed, be a bit of a pain in the neck (without overdoing it!) for your buddy, and you'll feel a renewed sense of control.

Growth begins when you face the anxiety of feeling like you might not make it.



2

Your ego should be kept in check, but never erased.

When it comes to creative work, it's easy to identify with what we do. A shot moves in the right direction thanks to our precision in executing the notes and our creative flair, but this is exactly where it's important to find the right balance between *"I got the shot to this point"* and *"I understand that the final word isn't mine."*

Of course, we can and should express our views and opinions when we believe they can help achieve a better result, but we still need to remember that we're working on someone else's vision, and we have to respect it. An ego clash helps no one, it just raises everyone's stress levels.

3

The shots you work on aren't really yours.

This point is directly connected to the previous one. The shots assigned to us are, in essence, marked "return to sender." Sometimes we work on them from start to finish, other times we inherit work that someone else has already started and spend some time on it, but the key point is that they don't belong to us. This is especially important to internalize when reassignments are expected. It's essential to learn how to limit emotional attachment to your shots and start thinking of them as fluid entities that come and go, ones we leave our mark on and then pass forward.

4

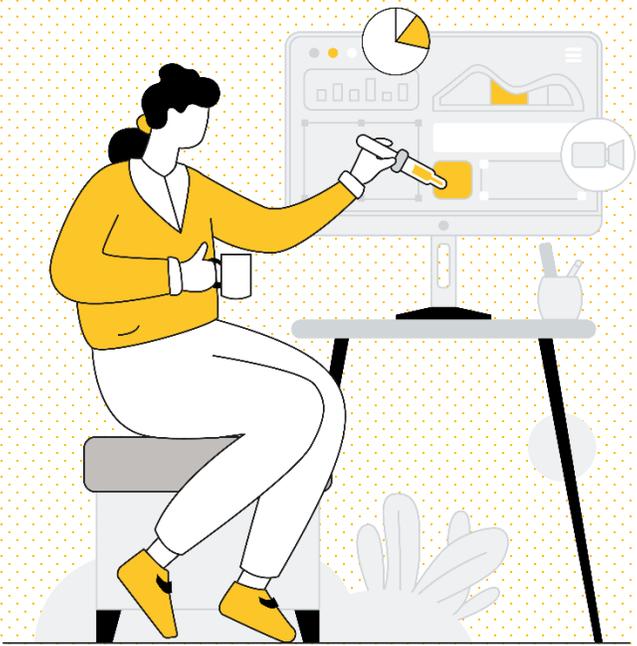
Being a “yes-man” can lead to devastating “no-nos.”

Part of our job is meeting other people’s requests, but if we are not able to set boundaries and estimate timelines realistically, we risk overloading ourselves with tasks and delaying deliveries. It is important to avoid saying, “*Yes! I can do it!*” if we are not truly sure. Instead, it is essential to prioritize clear communication that sets limits with polite “*no’s*,” rather than giving in to people-pleasing, which will only create delays and stress in production. Saying no to a request that we know we cannot fulfill is not a lack of initiative or laziness, but a sign of professional maturity.

5

What we do is truly a team effort.

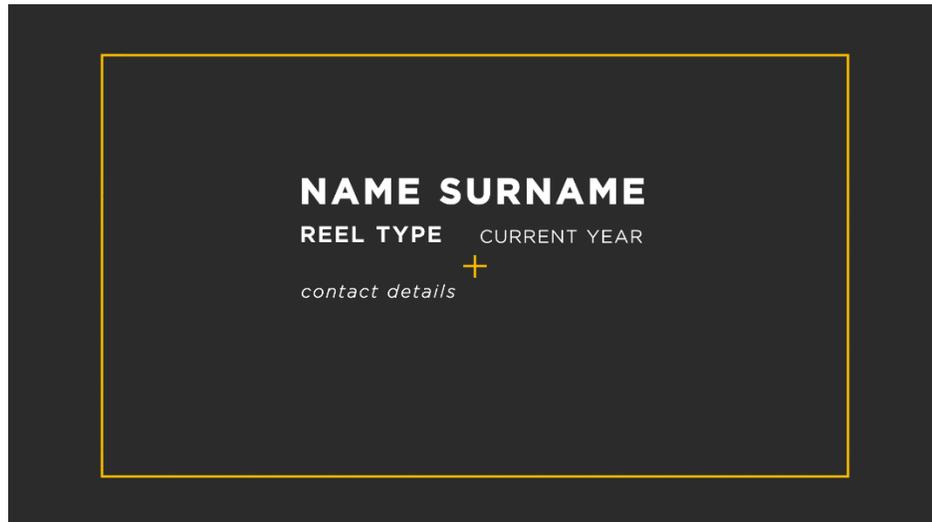
VFX is not an individual sport. As much as we may feel like the ultimate drivers of the final result, in reality excellence is only possible thanks to the collective work of the different departments. This is an important point, because it helps us understand that the compositing department, or simply the office we work in, is not an isolated compartment, but is in constant communication with all the other areas within the same pipeline. Maintaining open communication is a great way to avoid getting stuck when problems arise with renders, plates, and the tools we are working with.



Title Card

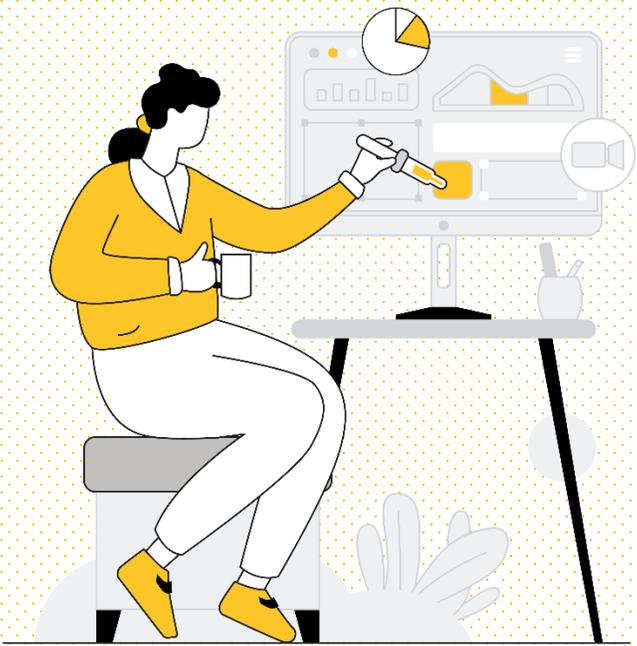
Blueprint

Let's make sure everyone knows who you are, what you do, and how to contact you.



The title card is your calling card at the beginning and end of your reel. Its purpose is to make clear who you are, what kind of reel you are presenting (compositing reel, generalist reel, etc.), and how to contact you to discuss potential opportunities. On the side, you can see a typical example. The layout of the content is up to you, as long as:

- The content includes: first and last name, reel type, the year the reel was updated (usually the current year), and your contact information.
- The text stays within the safe area (shown in yellow).
- You avoid serif fonts and prefer more readable sans-serif fonts.
- You avoid long blocks of text and keep the title card on screen only long enough to be read, normally a couple of seconds.



Title Card

Blueprint

Let's make sure everyone knows who you are, what you do, and how to contact you.

Clean and Readable

Exactly like the first golden rule for an effective reel, the same principle applies to the title card: *"less is more."* You often see reels that try to grab the viewer's attention with complex title card animations, but unless you are presenting a motion design reel, it is better to avoid elaborate animation, which would likely be sped up or skipped altogether so people can get to the core of your reel. What matters here is making it clear, in the shortest possible time, who you are, what you are about to show, and how to contact you if you are considered for the position you are applying for. That's it. A static card with a simple fade in and fade out is more than enough. Some people also include software logos in the title card. That is not necessarily wrong, as long as it does not make what you want to show visually difficult to read.



Thanks for reading!

Now build a reel that feels production ready

Want hands-on feedback?

If you'd like a structured review and a clear action plan,
check out:

Reel Rescue

Shot Clinic