

BSc and Diploma in Computing and Related Subjects

Creative computing II:
interactive multimedia
Portfolio creation

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BSc(Honours) in Computing and Information Systems

BSc(Honours) in Creative Computing

Diploma in Computing and Information Systems

Diploma in Creative Computing

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Preface

Building a portfolio is an important part of the Creative Computing degree. The material and ideas presented in this pamphlet are not examinable. However, the processes described are invaluable as part of your development of your own portfolio.

At the end of the degree, as well as a qualification, you should have a portfolio of work that demonstrates your own abilities and creativity. Each student's portfolio will be unique. What this pamphlet will help you to do is to develop that portfolio, which showcases your own works. Although you don't need a portfolio in order to get this degree, a portfolio is what will make you stand out among others who also have a degree. You should be building your portfolio continuously through the years you are studying, and this should not stop when you have completed your degree. Your portfolio will become an essential component of your professional CV as your career develops.

Learning how to build a good portfolio is an essential skill which takes a considerable amount of effort. It is up to you what you put into the portfolio. There is, however, one truth: the effort you put into it will come back to you in years to come, in the shape of fulfilment and success.

Sarah Rauchas

Creative practice

Building a portfolio of work

‘Learn to see, and then you’ll know there is no end to the new worlds of our vision.’—Carlos Castaneda

The work you produce during your studies is not merely a means to get a pass from a tutor or assessor. The work you create, and the portfolio of work that you build, will represent you in front of peers and professionals. The choice of techniques, tools and subject matter may influence how you are perceived in the future and what opportunities you are given. Remember that you are paving the path for your future with each piece of work, and you will only be seen to be as good as your portfolio.

Regardless of which country you come from, it is likely that you will be facing a great deal of competition from other creative individuals operating in the industry. When considering a career in a new cultural milieu, the competition is likely to increase by several levels of magnitude. It is essential that you approach each project with this in mind.

Keeping your eyes open

‘The voyage of discovery lies not in finding new landscapes, but in having new eyes.’—Marcel Proust

In order to develop your creative process to a high standard and quite aside from any study tasks you are given, you should be constantly observing, interpreting and generating ideas for projects. Your environment is full of creative potential and it is important to keep your eyes open to new creative opportunities.

Self-initiated projects are key to your development as a creative individual. They enable you to develop a unique and personal creative method and the working discipline necessary to carry your ideas through to completion. They allow you to invest your work with emotion by choosing subject matter about which you are well-informed or feel passionate. They help you generate a greater selection of work for future interviews. Finally, and most importantly, they are crucial for building confidence in your creative judgement and critical capacity.

Noting ideas on paper

‘Conditions for creativity are to be puzzled; to concentrate; to accept conflict and tension; to be born everyday; to feel a sense of self.’—Erich Fromm

Make sure to note your ideas as they appear, even if at the time you don’t know how to execute them immediately. Some may flourish into fully-fledged projects and some may lay dormant for quite some time. Even if they exist only as a sketch on paper, ideas are never wasted: they may influence further thinking on your part, or you may refer back to them later when you discover new links and opportunities.

Sketches and notes become a record and a means of your evolving thought processes and creative development as you progress through your career. You will find them to be an invaluable source of reference in years to come.

Developing an idea within its cultural context

‘Unless ideas are massaged into reality they evaporate.’—Alan Fletcher

Your idea is the result of the observations you have made about a particular environment, behaviour or system. When developing it, you will need to bear in mind the context in which you created it. Make sure you are aware of why this idea is worth developing and who is likely to benefit from it. The moment you decide to realise an idea it begins to occupy a space in the cultural landscape which surrounds you.

- Ask yourself how different audiences may perceive your work. It will help you define its cultural position and its intellectual potential.
- What do you ultimately want to achieve with your work? Do you want to change, facilitate or question the way people use tools or the way they perceive a subject?
- How will your work benefit your audience? Which area of their lives is your project enhancing?
- Who has attempted to resolve this problem in the past? How does their work compare to what you are trying to achieve?
- Make sure you create several prototypes in order to test your idea. Thoroughly research the user’s response.
- Identify successful stages of your development process. They not only help you find the best solution, but also build awareness of the correct methodologies and influence future processes.

Executing your concept to a professional level of finish

Your idea will never communicate properly unless you invest in a high level of execution. Your audience will get their first impression from the visual appearance of your work, and this will influence any subsequent judgement. The initial visual impact is the headline of your project.

If you thoroughly test the work’s usability, there is a greater chance of winning the audience’s delight in dealing with your work or responding to it in novel ways. Your technical accomplishment provides the structure for the successful deployment of your idea.

Whatever format you choose for your project, and regardless of the level of technical complexity, remember that you are communicating an idea first and foremost. The visual and the technical treatment are means to put your idea across; to ‘massage the idea into reality’. Your concept is the substance of your project.

Ensuring your work is well-resolved

Having invested a great deal of time and effort into your thought process, and the development and execution of your ideas, your projects ought to contain information about most of the following elements:

Context:

- the social, cultural or ethical context you have chosen to operate within
- the particular audience your work is communicating to
- the way you have chosen to communicate to your audience.

A critique:

- your own approach towards the subject
- a summary of all of the relevant points you wish to make
- reference to anything that you have read or seen that has influenced your thinking.

An aim or objective. Your work may be:

- raising awareness of certain issues you have discovered
- offering solutions to identified problems
- initiating a debate.

Your idea and any initial prototypes:

- a clear concept or system you have developed around your idea
- an indication of your awareness of any similar work that has been published in your field of interest
- knowledge of your target audience and its requirements.

Your finished piece:

- a fully-operational demo (especially if your demo involves user-interaction)
- well-developed graphic elements
- well-considered usability.

Discovering opportunities for innovation

‘Disciplined creativity—the intensive in-depth exploration of an issue, subject, problem. The inclusion of common sense and uncommon insights. . . relevance and appropriateness. . . infusing the whole through a vision, both literary and visual, with results that surpass one’s expectations for innovative and imaginative solutions.’

Louis Dorfsman on Saul Bass, from *Six Chapters in Design*, Chronicle Books, 1997, p. 14.

It is commonly thought that it is impossible to identify the source of creative excellence. However if you regularly:

- follow cultural and social happenings
- keep informed on recent achievements by creative personalities

- observe, interpret, note
- experiment, play, produce
- test, adjust, replay

you will generate the right conditions for innovative and imaginative solutions.

Take a look at the following examples:

‘On vacation, Edwin Land took some pictures of his daughter. She asked why she couldn’t see the results right then and there, so he started thinking about overcoming his daughter’s dissatisfaction. Within an hour he had developed the concept of instant photography, and you know the rest of the story.

Like many church choir singers, Art Fry put slips of paper in his hymn book so he could find selections quickly, but the slips sometimes fell out. Taking his dissatisfaction back to his job, he developed 3M’s Post-it notes.

Teflon wasn’t invented, it was an accident. However, its application to myriad products was possible because a curious chemist didn’t throw away the accident but rather played with it to learn more about its properties, and discovered it could solve certain problems better than any other substance.’

[from: ‘A Process For Creativity’ by William J Altier, http://www.winstonbrill.com/bril001/html/article_index/articles/1-50/article22_body.html]

In my experience of teaching in Art and Design institutions in London, such as Goldsmiths, Royal College of Art and Wimbledon School of Art, I have witnessed some of the most individual and unique ways in which students develop their creative processes. Most will involve at least some of the following:

Taking notes on a daily basis

Some students will devote a few minutes each day to noting down all of that day’s observations, and some sketch and write virtually all the time. Most of them develop a habit of regularly taking notes and are able to refer back to them to get the sense of their own progress and direction.

Keeping a small sketchbook or camera to hand

Often students rely on having a camera to hand, in case they see something they wish to record, and they carry a small sketchbook in case they come up with an idea they wish to note down. In the absence of a sketchbook, ideas are often drawn on any paper surface: leaflets, beer mats, transport tickets and, most famously, paper napkins.

Devoting a day to a field trip

If you are researching a particular subject, it is often worthwhile immersing yourself in it. This may involve spending a day walking or travelling, and actively observing and recording anything you see related to it. You may choose an environment that is directly related to your chosen subject matter, or a museum or art gallery where artists have barely touched upon it. Either way, your day will involve a clear focus and high levels of concentration which may bring you to new levels of understanding of the subject.

Keeping well informed

Most students keep track of cultural events and technological developments by regularly visiting exhibitions, reading reviews and attending art and technology events. The latest cultural developments and technological innovation can have a great impact on the student's thinking and on how they execute their ideas.

If you persist and concentrate intensely, the moment will come. Your heightened awareness together with your honed and tested methodology will also enable you to assess the quality of your work more accurately, and to locate its position and its importance within its field of application and cultural spectrum.

Continuous development

'The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant.'—Albert Einstein

There is no substitute for continuous development of your creative faculties. After a while, observing and noticing interesting detail in your environment becomes second nature: your observations constantly feed back into your work and the source pool of your creativity expands. The process of transforming what you see into tangible results becomes intuitive. Answers to creative puzzles appear more rapidly. Critical judgement of your own work comes more easily. You develop into an individual with strong creative intuition.

Presenting your portfolio

Your portfolio tells a story about you, your creative process, your ideas and your ability to provide a professional degree of finish. It is a means of communicating your ideas and emphasising your achievements.

While it is important to record and document all the work that you produce, this collection of material, which forms your archive, should not be confused with your portfolio. Your portfolio has a more specific job to do in each situation in which it is presented. You should think very carefully about its content and how you wish to be seen in view of your aims and objectives.

The following questions will guide you through the process of assembling your portfolio:

Why do you need a portfolio?

You may be seeking work experience or employment; you may be applying for a postgraduate degree; you may be looking for freelance work. For any potential professional post you will have to present your work at a professional standard. For further education you will have to show evidence of research and original thinking. In all eventualities, a combination of dedicated research, original thinking and a high level of execution will guarantee a good assessment and give you an advantage in the face of competition.

Which are your strongest pieces?

It is always better to have fewer pieces of good quality, rather than a vast quantity of poorly-finished or partially-resolved work. Consider the strength of the idea, how well has the idea been interpreted and the level of execution of your work. You may want to test the impact of your work on your friends and colleagues and assess their

reaction. You will soon find out which elements of your work have the ‘wow’ factor.

Which projects best represent your creative personality?

Think carefully about how you wish to be perceived by potential tutors, employers or clients. If you wish to be noted for a particular skill or talent, make sure there is a clear emphasis on this in your portfolio.

Has each project been presented accurately and clearly?

Think carefully about how to represent each individual project. Each project ought to have a specific structure or a narrative which communicates the main ideas, aims and objectives clearly and succinctly. Some projects may benefit from a stronger narrative, some from a more conceptual approach to the explanation of your work.

What presentation format is the most appropriate to communicate your work successfully?

Apart from ensuring a good quality of execution, the impact of your project will depend on how you choose to communicate it. For example, if your finished piece is an installation, there may be different options on how it is presented. You could decide to do it via a live performance (this also constitutes your portfolio) or a video with potentially thousands of hits on You-Tube. It all depends on who the client is and what type of professional engagement you are aiming for.

An online portfolio is essential, particularly if your work consists mainly of applications and electronic artwork. The benefits of having an online portfolio are:

- many people are able to view your portfolio simultaneously
- you can show your work to people in remote locations
- you can include links to any sites which have published or commented on your work.

Take a look at how some well-known creative personalities and visiting lecturers at Goldsmiths present themselves:

Andrew Shoben at <http://www.greyworld.org/>

Chrysostomos Neseolos and Alex Swain at <http://www.company-london.com/>

Remember that your presentation can take any format that allows you to communicate your work in the most effective way.

Notes

