3DF and Maya Survival Guide

These are some tips on doing well in 3DF (and Full Sail in general), as well as the safest and most productive ways to work with MAYA.

MAYA TIPS:

Work LOCALLY, save GLOBALLY. All of your work, saving and rendering should be done on your WORK DRIVE. Copy all of your files to the work drive, then open MAYA. Save to the work drive. Render to files on the work drive. Working, saving, rendering and accessing assets across a network can yield unpredictable (ie undesired) results. (lost work, corrupted files).

Set your projects. The first thing you do, once you open MAYA, is set your project. MAYA creates all kinds of files and it has its own system of filing. If you do not set your project, MAYA will send your materials where it believes it should go (ie undesired).

SAVE OFTEN. Periodically, especially when we are first learning to use MAYA correctly, we accidentally do things that sabotage our work. Once a file is lost or corrupted, there is very little chance of being able to retrieve it . Saving your work about every 15 minutes is practically an industry standard. Save and save often. When you save, save incrementally (ie give each saved file a new name or number). This will help insulate you against possible corrupt files. If a file goes bad on you, you can open a previous version that is only 15 minutes behind (work-time) your current position. That way, you loose very little time and work.

BACK UP YOUR WORK. At the end of the day, copy your files from the work drive to your student drive, a jump drive and a CD. That way, if files become corrupt or lost, you still have your materials. Drives get wiped, files get accidentally deleted. Many students share the same computers that you do. Not all of them fully understand how to operate them at a professional level. Assume the worst.

3DF TIPS:

TAKE NOTES. I don't care who you are, you will never remember every little trick, technique or hot key for everything in MAYA. MAYA is the most complicated application you have ever used. I have used MAYA for several years and I still learn new things about it every day. If you have your notes, you can refer back to them if you have a question in lab that cannot be answered by the help docs or by any materials in the 3DF folder. Every class in Full Sail, from here on out, will build on one another and get more and more complex. There is very little, if any, going over materials or information that has already been addressed. If you have your notes you can answer your own questions in the event you missed something or are having trouble grasping a concept, in the event you are at home or in Open Lab, with no Lab Instructors or friends to ask questions to.

READ THE HELP DOCS. Press F1 on your keyboard (when MAYA is open). It is the MAYA help docs button. All you have to do is type in the button name, function, tool or action that you have a question about and it will define in two sections. the upper window (in orange) contains definitions of the key words typed in. The lower window (in blue) contains a series of tutorials that will guide you through the proper use of any and all keys, tools and actions. There are step by step instructions and great images to illustrate the proper techniques involved.

ASK QUESTIONS. As previously indicated, I have used MAYA for several years and still learn something new every day. Asking questions doesn't mean that you are unintelligent. MAYA (or anything for that matter) is about both intelligence and experience. Until you have been shown how to do something, how could you possibly know how to do it. Once you have experience, you will better understand. Greater understanding will lead to better work and better work will lead to a job. So don't be afraid to ask a question, chances are someone else wants to know what you do and they also have reservations about asking questions.

HELP EACH OTHER. You are not each other's competition. You are each other's greatest ally. There are many areas of specialty in MAYA. Some of you will excel in one aspect of MAYA and be dreadful in others. You may be good at modeling, a classmate is struggling with modeling. Help them out, offer suggestions. They might turn out to be a whiz at rigging and bail you out in that capacity. Everyone will find their niche and do their best to perfect it. Ultimately, you may need to rely on their growing talents to help you out with your future projects. Then, look at that, a great, mutually successful work relationship has just been established. These are foundations of the Computer Animation workplace.

HAVE FUN. Computer Animation should be fun. You will find that your best (favorite) projects are the ones that you were the most excited about. You will work harder and the result will be better, on projects that you have some enthusiasm for. Find out what gets you excited and try to incorporate that into your projects. It will make the time more enjoyable and go by more quickly. Once you are working in the real world, you will have to make what your employer wants you to make, not what you want to make (because they are paying you). So enjoy this while you can, it's all about you now.