



Game Development Using Unreal Engine

5th Grade Media Technology

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Introduction

1.1 History

In 1998, the game development studio Epic Games released a first-person shooter called *Unreal*. The game was a hit and it spawned other successful sequels such as *Unreal Tournament*; the grandfather of all First Person Shooter / Massive Online Games.

The same year the game was released, Epic Games decided to start licensing the engine it had built to create it, which it simply called the "*Unreal Engine*". Therefore other game development studios, instead of having to write their own game engines from scratch, could instead pay a fee to use this game engine that *Epic Games* had already built.

So this turned out to be a great business model for *Epic Games* and they continued to invest heavily in developing their game engine. So since 1998, newer versions of the engine have been announced; the latest (stable) version of it is, at the time of writing *Unreal Engine 5.5*, the major version 5 was released in 2022.

So, the Unreal Engine has been used to create countless numbers of blockbuster games and game series including the likes of *Fortnite*, *BioShock*, *Gears of Wars*, *Splinter Cell*, *Rainbow 6*, *Borderlands*, *Dishonored*, *Mass Effect*, the *Batman:Arkham* series and so forth.

The biggest disadvantage of the *Unreal Engine* was that, for a long time, it was too expensive for anyone but large companies and wealthy individuals. However, in 2015, Epic Games changed the licensing for the engine to make it completely free to download and use as well as open source. There was a catch, though: developers had to pay a 5% royalty fee on all sales over \$3000.

Recently *Epic Games* raised this amount to \$1 million dollars. As of today, if a developer makes over \$1 million dollars on a project created with the Unreal Engine, they must pay *Epic Games* a 5% royalty fee on any income earned beyond that first million.

Educational organizations are granted the engine free of charge.

1.2 Unreal Editor vs Unreal Engine

As this document's title suggests, it discusses development of games using the *Unreal Engine*. What this actually means is: The developed games are **using** the *Unreal Engine*, i.e. its runtime and frameworks.

During development, the developer uses a development environment called the *Unreal Editor*, which in turn provides the runtime as mentioned above.

1.3 Demo Game

This document contains the theoretical foundations of game development with the *Unreal Engine*. That is, it contains explanations in the various topics (as laid out in the table of contents) along with simple examples presented

where deemed appropriate.

However, accompanying this course an example game will be developed, which is discussed in a separate document.



Figure 1.1: Sample Game Screenshot

This game will be a simple first person platform game in which the character can walk, jump, look around, use items and so on, using the keyboard but also a game controller. It will be shown how to create an item collection system and implement game logic.

Topics like collisions, damage, "death" and how to interact with the game world are being discussed as well as how to create a *Heads-Up Display (HUD)* and creating and using menus.

1.4 Unreal Engine Installation

Firstly, the engine can be downloaded from [unrealengine.com](https://www.unrealengine.com).

In order to download and install the engine, the *Epic Games Launcher* is required, which can be downloaded from [Epic Games](https://www.epicgames.com). Hint: download the version for your platform; i.e. either *Microsoft Windows* or *macOS*. Also zipped packages for the *Linux* operating system are available, albeit installation is not as straight forward.

An *Epic Games* account is required, which can be created using the *Sign Up* link at the bottom of the web page. Notice: This course assumes *Unreal Engine version 5.5* is installed.

1.5 Unreal Projects

1.5.1 Project Management

Within the context of the *Unreal Engine* a project is simply the unit that stores all the information for an individual game.

Handling of projects is carried out by the *Unreal Games Launcher*; i.e. new projects can be created using the launcher, existing projects can be loaded using the launcher, existing projects, like projects downloaded from the net, can be opened using the launcher.

The launcher provides a number of templates, reflecting different game types.

1.5.2 Asset Management

In addition to handling games, the launcher also provides a section giving access to game asset libraries; at the time of writing, the new market place [Fab.com Market Place](#).

1.6 Levels

In the context of the *Unreal Engine*, *Level* can be defined as a collection of objects and their properties that together define an area of gameplay. Informally, levels are just the virtual location a section of game takes place in.

For a person used to play computer games, the concept is trivial, for non-gamers this idea is not necessarily that clear.

For the developer this has the concrete consequence that during development the *Unreal Editor* loads each level in turn or, in other words, developers work on one level at a time.

That being said, the *Unreal Engine* allows for insanely large environments, which are basically limited by hardware only.

1.7 Actors

Within the context of the *Unreal Engine*, an *Actor* is simply any object that can be added to a Level.

This object includes any object thinkable: Game assets, simple static meshes, etc. Actors can be visible or invisible, players sometimes can interact with an Actor, or not. So, again, an Actor is basically any entity that can be placed into, and moved around in, a Level within the Unreal Editor.

1.8 Meshes

Important Actors are so-called *Mesh Actors*. In this context, “mesh” is a 3D modeling term, and simply refers to a 3D object consisting of a mesh of vertices. So when a game is played, most of the objects in the game will be a meshes of sorts.

Static meshes refer to meshes with no moving parts. The *Unreal Engine’s Starter Content*, for examples, provide some Static Meshes in the form of furniture and some basic architectural objects.

Typically, the vast majority of meshes used in games are created in external 3D modeling applications, such as Maya, 3D Studio Max, Blender, etc and subsequently imported into the Unreal Editor.

1.9 Geometry Brushes

A *Geometry Brush*, often times simply called *Brush*, is simply an Actor used to represent 3D space; in *Unreal Engine's Place Actor's panel* there are box brushes, cone, cylinder, stairs, and so on. *Unreal Editor's Place Actors Panel* refers to them as *Geometries*.

Brushes very similar to a mesh, but there are a few key differences between meshes and brushes. Brushes are only used for basic geometric shapes while meshes can be crafted into objects with a high level of detail.

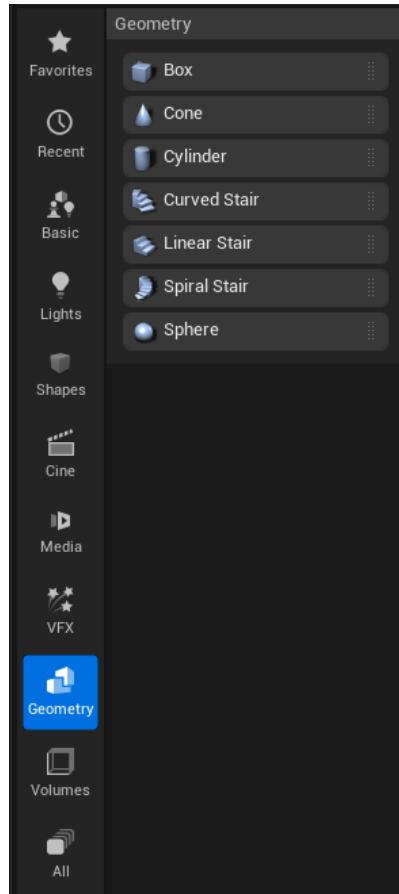


Figure 1.2: Geometry Brushes in Place Actor's Panel

Brushes are useful for quick level design but are less memory-efficient than meshes. Therefore, brushes are generally used to prototype Levels early on, and are then replaced with better-looking and better-performing meshes for the final project.

Notice, that both *Meshes* as well as *Geometry Brushes* can be applied a material.

1.10 Light Actors

In *Unreal Engine*, *Light Actors* represent visible light in the real world.

Thanks to a lot of complex, mathematical algorithms that the Unreal Engine uses, those will behave much like light does in the real world. It will make objects that it hits more visible, depending on the intensity of the light and the Material of the object.

It will reflect off the surface of objects and light up other objects indirectly. It will cast shadows if a visible, opaque object is in its path.

Light Actors are used to represent only the light itself, and not any of the objects from which the light emanates from. As an example, if a working flashlight shall be used in the game, a *Light Actor* could be combined with a *Static Mesh Actor* looking like a flashlight. The light actor would be placed at one end of the flashlight in a way so it looks like the light is emanating from the mesh.

1.11 Hardware Requirements

The *Unreal Engine* not only is a huge framework in itself. During development, not only the *Unreal Editor* is loaded into memory, but also the game, i.e. all its assets, content, game logic and so forth.

This also entails hardware acceleration of visuals, i.e. the engine relies heavily on graphics acceleration using *Graphics Processing Units (GPUs)*.

As a consequence, working with the *Unreal Editor* is not recommended on computers with low performance computers.

The official hardware recommendations issued by *Epic Games* notwithstanding, the following minimum requirements should be fulfilled:

- Minimum RAM: 16 GB
- GPU: dedicated, 4 GB GDDR. Computers and laptops without dedicated graphics acceleration are not recommended
- SSD: 100 GB free. The use of fast hard drives (SSD) is recommended. The installation requires around 60 GB of disc space. Notice: this reflects the bare minimum only. Unreal projects tend to grow rather large, since they contain not only the game logic, but also the game assets, which can grow very large.

Anecdotically, the author did some testing using the game described in the accompanying document. Here are the results:

- Desktop PC: High-End CPU, 64 GB RAM, 24 GB Nvidia 4090 > 120 FPS. Basically, not limited by hardware.
- Lenovo P52 Workstation notebook, Intel i7 8700, RAM 64 GB, Nvidia Quadro 4000 GPU, 6GB GDDR: > 60 FPS.
- Macbook Air M2, 24 GB unified RAM: < 15 FPS. Game is unplayable

The Level Editor)

2.1 Editor Overview

The level editor is the part of the *Unreal Editor* in which you place the object, position it, rotate it, alter its size or set its various other attributes.

Using the editor, it is possible to visualize the level in different ways, like:

- With lighting
- Without lighting
- Wireframe mode
- etc.

The main window of the Unreal Editor is the Level Editor itself. All of the other sub-editors will open in their own separate windows or tabs (The respective setting can be found in `Edit > Editor Preferences > General > Asset Editor Open Location`).

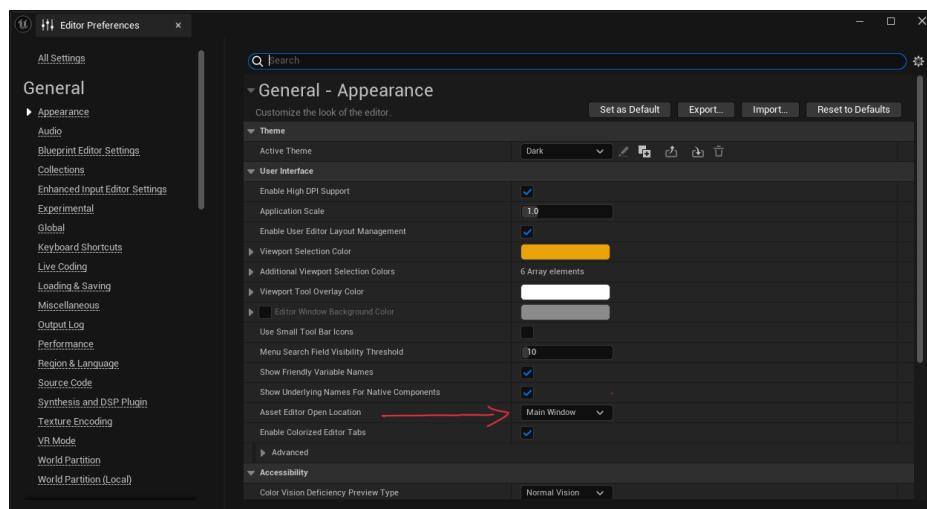


Figure 2.1: Open Asset Editor Location

For example, if a Material is double-clicked, it will open the Material Editor in a separate window/tab.

2.1.1 Editor Panels

The level editor consists of a number of panels:

Firstly, the large area in the middle is denoted as *Viewport*.

The thin strip above that is called “Toolbar”.

At the bottom of the screen, hidden within the “Content Drawer” is the “Content Browser”.

The rest of this strip is the “Bottom Toolbar.”

On the right side of the screen is the “Outliner” at the top, and below that, the “Details” panel.

These panels can be moved and resized and represent just the default layout of the current release and could change in future releases.

Of course, the students are free to alter the default settings as deemed; however, it is recommended to use the default settings unless stated otherwise since this is what this document assumes.

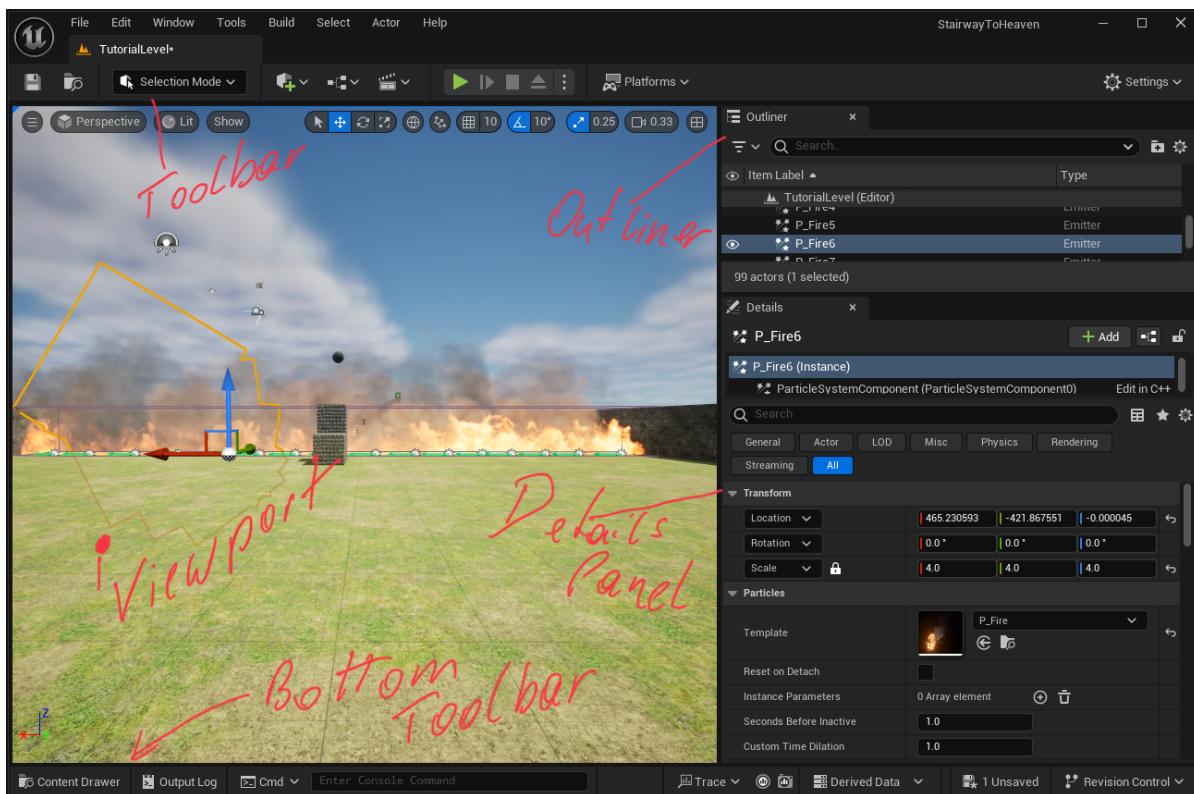


Figure 2.2:

Find an overview on what these panels are for below:

- **Viewport:** Provides a visual representation of the game. The developer sees the game world in the same fashion as the players, i.e. the environment created, characters and objects the player interacts with. In addition, objects used to provide the game mechanics, which are invisible to the player, can be seen and interacted with. These entail objects like cameras, event triggers or barriers invisible to the player.

Also, objects can be manipulated using the viewport.

- **Toolbar:** The Toolbar is a strip of buttons meant to provide quick access to common and/or important functions, such as saving, changing the editor mode, or playing the game.

- **Content Drawer**, which can be found in the *Bottom Toolbar*: Used for storing and organizing content that can be added to the game.
This includes, but is not limited to, content such as meshes, materials, music, sound effects, visual effects, and so forth.
- **Bottom Toolbar:** The Bottom Toolbar is a strip of buttons that give you access to information about the Editor and allow you to quickly change Editor settings. It includes:
 - **Content Drawer** (also called *Content Browser*) can also be used to import assets - like 3D objects created using third party tools like *Blender* - into the editor. Naturally, also assets downloaded or purchased from the internet can be imported into the editor using this.
 - **Output log:** Output Log will log everything that's going on in the Editor and will display warnings and errors.
 - **Command Editor:** This is a command line interface where used to issue commands to quickly change Editor behavior.
 - **Derived Data:** lets developers change setting and statistics about the editor.
 - **Derived Data Panel:** lets developers change setting and statistics about the editor.
 - **Source Control Panel:** In case the Project is connected to some kind of source control, such as GitHub or any other SCM tool, the *Source Control* menu will display the Project's status and allow you to take various actions relating to source control.
- **Outliner** is used to list and group the objects in your level in a way that makes them easy to find when you want to select and edit them.
- **Details Panel** Allows for developers to view and edit all project details

As can be seen, the *Unreal Editor* provides lots of controls over how the interface looks.

What's more, each individual panel can be resized or relocated. To accomplish this, developers simply need to click in an empty area of the edges between adjacent panels.

As already mentioned, it is recommended to use the standard layouts for this course.

To close a panel, click on the X on the right side of the panel's tab. Conversely, in order to open a panel, go to the menu bar, and under Window, select the panel you wish to open.

Panels that are on the side of the screen can be collapsed into the sidebar by right-clicking on the panel and select "Dock to Sidebar."

To permanently dock them again, it can be right-clicked to select **Undock from Sidebar**.

Finally, panel tabs can be hidden by right-clicking and choosing **Hide tabs**.

These custom layouts can be saved and loaded using **(Load/Save Layout)**

2.2 Select Editing Mode

The Level Editor has eight different editing modes.

To choose the desired mode, it simply can be selected using the dropdown in the Toolbar.

Alternatively, the mode can be selected by holding the Shift key and pressing the corresponding number key (1-8), depending on the desired mode.

Pressing Shift and the 4 key at the same time will spawn the fourth editing mode, which is Mesh Paint Editing Mode. **Shift + 5** is going to spawn the fifth mode and so forth.

However, since it is by far the most used mode, in this document the *Select Editing Mode* only will be discussed. This is the first mode, therefor it can be opened using **Shift + 1**.

The *Select Editing Mode* is the primary mode to place and manipulate actors in a level.

2.2.1 Adding Actors Using the **Create** Menu

One way of adding actors into a level is by clicking the **Create** button (the rectangular shape containing the **+**)

As an example, adding a cube to a scene is as simple as clicking **Create > Shapes > Cube**. Alternatively a shape can simple be dragged from the **Create** menu into the level to place is.

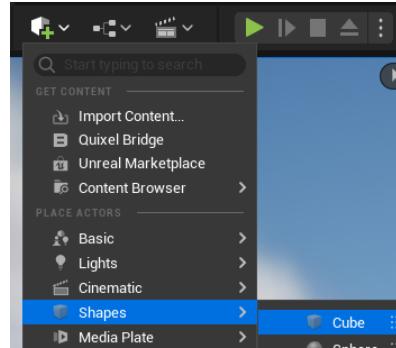


Figure 2.3: Create Menu

2.2.2 Adding Actors Using the Content Browser

Another way to add Actors to a Level is through the Content Browser. However, notice that there are a few key differences between it and the **Create** menu.

The Create menu is used for simple, common, generic actors, while the actors in the content browser tend to be more complex.

Furthermore, the list of Actors in the Create menu remains static.

2.2.3 Deleting Actors

Deleting an actor is a simple as selecting the actor followed by clicking the **Delete**-key.

Alternatively, right-clicking an actor and subsequently selecting **Delete** also does work.

2.2.4 Docking the *Place Actors Panel*

At the very bottom of the **Create** menu is a button that can be pressed to dock the menu as a panel called the **Place Actors Panel**. This is useful particularly in the early stages of level development, since actors can be placed right away, i.e. without clicking the **Create** button first.

This works just like the menu, except that it works using click and drag only.

2.2.5 Importing Actors (from) External

Naturally, not all assets, including actors, required during development are already in the projects; after all, games rarely use *Unreal Engine* provided assets only.

Hence, actors (as well as other assets) created outside of the *Unreal Editor* can be imported into the editor using the **Content Browser** by simply dragging and dropping.

2.2.6 Categories of Actors

The *Place Actors Panel* is divided into categories of different groupings of actors

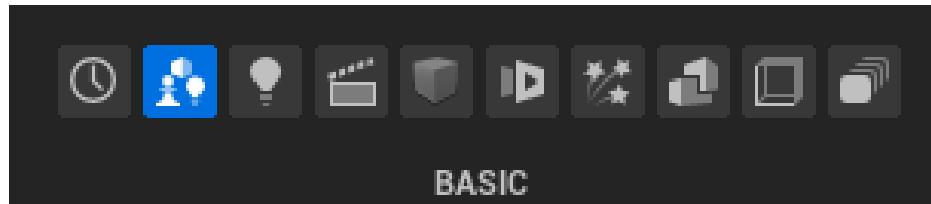


Figure 2.4: Categories of the Place Actors Panel

For starters, the “Basic” category – the “Basic” category simply contains the most commonly used actors.

To the left of the “Basic” category is the “Recently Placed” category. This will be a list of the user recently placed into a Level. This is useful when working with a small set of the same types of actors for a while. This way, the developer could just keep the *Recently Placed* category open and drag and drop everything from there.

To the right of the “Basic” category is the “Lights” category. As mentioned, a light in *Unreal Engine* is an Actor that is meant to represent the light projecting from some source.

Next is “Shapes” which contains Static Meshes in the form of some basic geometric shapes.

Next to the “Shapes” category is the “Cinematic” category. This has actors used for creating *Cinematics*, which is basically a rendered 3D video. In the context of gaming, these would be used, for examples, for game cutscenes.

Next up is “Visual Effects”, which, as its name suggests, contains actors that add a variety of effects to your level. More on this later in the document.

The “Geometry” category contains the *Geometry Brushes* that were briefly introduced earlier.

The “Volumes” category is used to define gameplay volumes. A Volume is a 3D area of space that is invisible to the player and serves a specific purpose depending on its type. For example, a *Blocking Volume* will prevent actors from being able to enter that volume, a *Pain Causing Volume* will cause damage to an actor who enters that volume, and so on.

And lastly is the “All Classes” category, which contains all the Actors from the categories mentioned above, plus some additional actors not found in any of the other categories, either because they are less common or just didn’t fit nicely into one of the other groups.

And so obviously, this list is somewhat long, and so this makes this search bar up here useful. So by typing text in this search bar, the user can quickly narrow down the results to what she is looking for.

2.3 The Viewport

This section will discuss how to navigate the viewport, as there is a number of options available; this document discusses three different ways of navigating.

In case the user intends to follow along, it shows its example using a new project:

- Create a new project.
- Select the empty project template, make sure that *Target Platform* is set to `Desktop`, *Quality Preset* is set to `Maximum`, and finally tick the `Starter Content` box.

- Give the new project a meaningful name.
- Finally, click **Create**.
- Navigate to **Content Drawer** > **Starter Content** > **Maps** folder.
- Open the **Minimal_Default** level (e.g. by double clicking it)

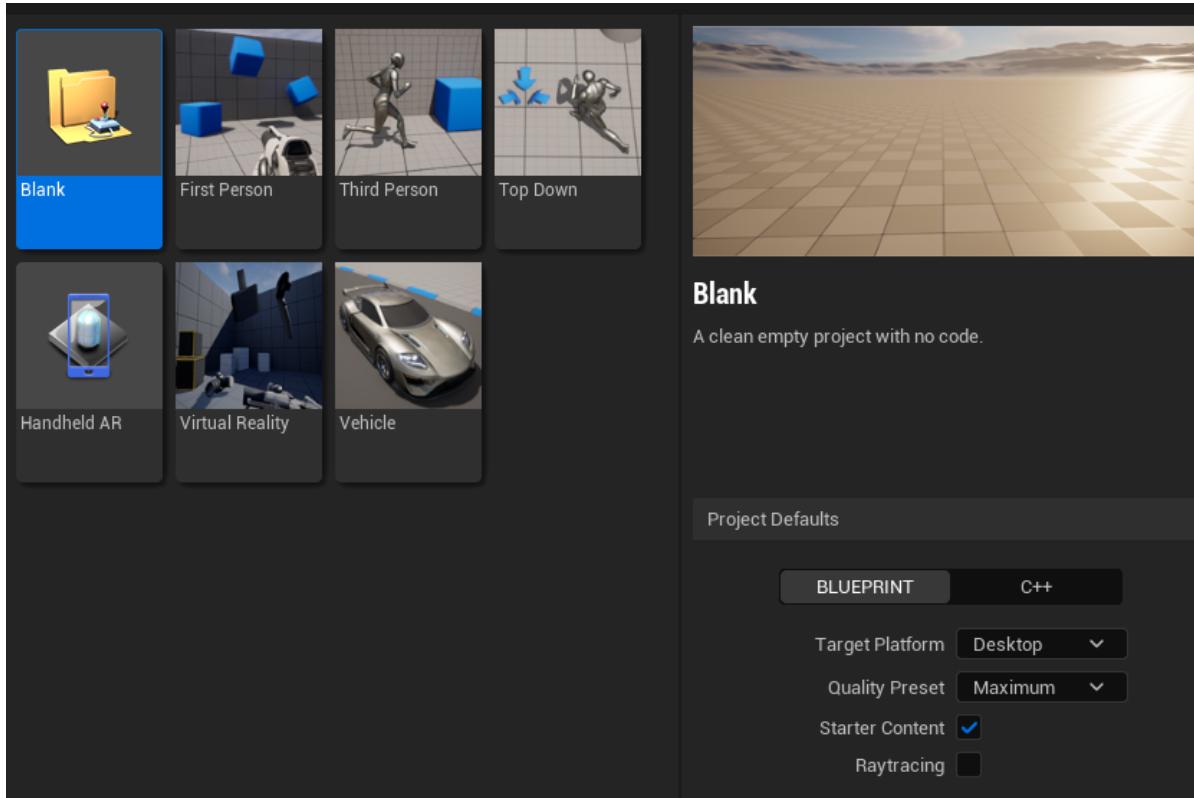


Figure 2.5: New Blank Project

This Level starts out with some of the meshes from the *Props* folder of the *Starter Content* already placed in the scene.

Pressing **F11** will switch to the full screen viewport mode.

2.3.1 Mouse Navigation

Left Mouse Button (**LMB**)

This mode uses the **LMB**; holding it down and moving the mouse around allows the camera to move forward or backwards as well as to rotate left and right.

Notice, that there is no way of moving up and down using this movement; it only allows traversing the x and y axes. It is also impossible to move right or left directly; it allows for rotating left and right only.

Middle Mouse Button (**MMB**)

For moving left and right, hold the **LMB** and the **RMB** at the same time and drag the mouse (this is equivalent to holding the **MMB**, depending on what mouse you've got available.). This allows to move directly left as well as right and up and down.

Right Mouse Button (**RMB**)

This won't move the camera along any axes, it only allows for camera rotation.

2.3.2 WASD Navigation

WASD navigation - i.e. navigating using the **W**, **A**, **S**, **D** keys for the movements *forward*, *backwards*, *left* and *right*, respectively. This mimics the way players use to navigate in first-person view games.

WASD works while holding down the **RMB**. This mode allows to rotate in arbitrary directions as well as moving as described using the WASD keys.

In addition, the camera can be moved up and down using the **Q** and **E** keys, respectively, while **Z** and **C** can be used to zoom the camera in and out, respectively. Notice, that zooming in and out is just temporarily; if the user lets go the **RMB**, the zoom level is going to go backwards to where it has been.

2.3.3 Focusing

Using the **F** key provides a powerful feature particularly useful with the third mode of navigation (discussed below). **F** focuses on the *currently selected* object. For example, selecting one of the chairs and hitting the **F** key is going to focus the viewport on this chair.

Notice, that this also works when the object is selected in the outliner. Double-clicking an object in the outliner has the same effect as using **f**, i.e. it focuses on the selected object. In smaller levels this feature does not make a big impression; however, in large levels this is very useful, since the viewport can be focused without the need for navigating a large level.

2.3.4 Maya Navigation

Maya Navigation, phrased after the famous 3D modeling app, is performed holding down the **Alt** key.

LMB Maya Navigation

Holding down **Alt + LMB** and subsequently dragging the mouse is going to *tumble* or *orbit* the camera around a point of interest. This point is not necessarily the selected object. However, if an object is focused on (**F**), the viewport focuses on this particular object. Now, using **Alt + LMB** will revolve the viewport around the object; a very useful feature.

RMB Maya Navigation

Holding down **Alt + RMB** while dragging the mouse will *zoom* the camera to or away a point of interest. Again, focusing on an object will lead to moving to or away from this selected object.

MMB Maya Navigation

Finally, **Alt + MMB** will cause the viewport to *pan* up, down, left and right.

Maya navigation, therefore, is particularly helpful because using it enables easy and free navigation around a level using *Maya Navigation* only.

2.3.5 Camera Speed

At times, the viewport camera speed seem either way to fast or much too slow.

The camera speed can therefore be adjusted using the camera speed slider, which can be found on the upper right corner of the viewport.



Figure 2.6: Adjusting Camera Speed

2.3.6 Widgets

In the *Unreal Editor*, actors can be manipulated using *translation*, *rotation* and *scaling* widgets.

These widgets can be found on the upper right section of the viewport; the widgets are also connected with keyboard commands.

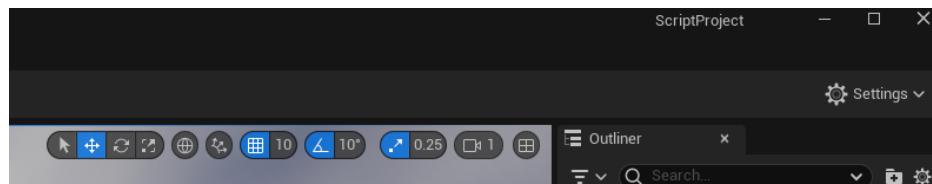


Figure 2.7: Translate, Rotate and Scaling Widgets

As can be seen in 2.7, some widgets are displayed in *blue*, indicating those are active. To activate a different widget, simply click on the widget desired to activate it. Alternatively, the respective widgets can be activated using the **Q**, **W**, **E** and **R** keys. While these keys seemingly appear in arbitrary order, they are in a row on the keyboard and activate the icons in the same order as they appear in the viewport.

The widget all the way on the left is selected, none of the widgets will be used.

To summarize, **Q** disables the widgets, **W** will activate the *Translation Widget*, **E** will activate the *Rotation Widget*, and **R** will activate the *Scaling Widget*.

Hint: Hovering over over an icon and it will tell what the widget does and how to activate it.

Translation

Selecting a chair and subsequently pressing **W** activates the *Translation Widget*. The three different colored arrows coming out of the chair are aligned with the X, Y, and Z axes of the Level. In order to move a chair in just one direction, left-click on one of the arrows, and use the mouse to move the chair back and forth in that direction.

For example, clicking red arrow, no matter what direction the mouse is dragged, the chair will only move this direction, along the X-axis. Similarly, if the chair is to be moved along the Y-axis, select the green arrow instead or the blue arrow for movement along the Z-axis.

Notice the connectors between every pair of axes. These are used if movement along **two** of the axes is required, but not on the third axis. Using mentioned connectors allows just that.

Holding down the **Shift** key while moving an actor will move the camera in parallel to the selected actor. This is useful if the actor is to be moved to a far location on the level.

The white sphere in the center allows for free movement along all three axes.

Holding down the **Shift** key during translation will create a copy of an actor.

Additinoal Hints:

In order to select multiple actors, the **Ctrl** key can be used.

Ctrl + D will create a copy of an actor.

Rotation

This is activated using **E**. Using the *Rotation Widget* enables rotating an actor around any of the three axes in space.

Similar to translation, holding down the **Shift** key during rotation will create a copy of an actor.

Scaling

This is activated using **R**. Using the *Scaling Widget* enables scaling of an actor around any of the three axes in space. Clicking on a connector rather than one of the axes will scale the object in the selected axes only.

Clicking the white cuboid in the center is going to scale the object uniformly in all three dimensions.

Similar to translation, holding down the **Shift** key during scaling will create a copy of an actor.

Changing the Pivot Point

The pivot is the point in space around which ab actor rotates. It is located at the center of the *Transformation Widget*, which, for this chair actor, is located

at the bottom-center of the actor by default. It can be changed by using **MMB**. Clicking and holding the *MMB* the pivot can be dragged to a new location. Now rotating the actor, it will rotate around the new pivot point. Notice, though, that this moves the pivot point temporarily only. I.e., deselecting the actor and selecting it again, the pivot point is back at its default location.

2.3.7 World Space vs Local Space

Let us assume a chair is rotated a bit here from its default rotation using the *Translation Widget*. Thereafter, the chair is translated, say, up the Z-axis, a bit. Then, if the icon to the left of the *Translation, Rotation and Scaling Widget* show an icon of the Earth, it means that these axes here are oriented to “world space”, i.e. no matter which way the chair is rotated, these arrows will always point in the same direction, aligned to the level coordinates, and thus the chair will always move in the same direction relative to the world.

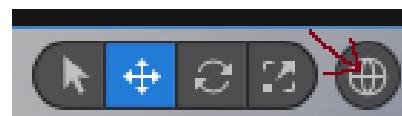


Figure 2.8: World Space Icon

However, this button or the shortcut **Ctrl + ‘** is clicked, this icon will change to a cube which means that the axes are now oriented to “local space”, in this case the local space of the chair. Notice: On keyboards using a german layout this does not work as intend, since the **‘** requires clicking the **Shift** key, followed by a white space character. Use the icon to switch between world and local space instead.

This setting does not apply, however, to the *Scaling Widget*. The *Scaling Widget* will always be in local space, and it won’t allow you to toggle when the widget is selected.

2.3.8 Snapping

[End] Snapping

Snapping is a way to perfectly align actors with one another within a level. There are several ways of doing this. The first method involves using **[End]**. An actor selected, pressing **[End]**, will snap that actor directly onto the nearest surface. This is immensely useful for aligning objects, especially for getting actors to sit directly on the floor or some surface.

Surface Snapping

Another way of using snapping is called *Surface Snapping*. Clicking the grid shaped icon on the top viewport will display a small pop-up enabling *Surface Snapping*. With *Surface Snapping* on, using the *Translation Widget* it will snap the selected actor to the surface of a nearby actor.

Notice, that this only works when moving the object in 3 dimensions. It doesn't work when moving actors around in just 1 or 2 dimensions at a time. In other words, the actor must be dragged using the white sphere in order for *Surface Snapping* to work.

There are several setting that can be adjusted regarding *Surface Snapping*:

The first setting is called *Rotate to Surface Normal* and it is set to *On* by default.

Let us assume that a chair was rotated a bit in a way that its bottom surface was no longer in alignment with the surface of the floor. If *Surface Snapping* is on, but *Rotate to Surface Normal* is off, the chair will snap to the floor, but it is not going to rotate to align with the surface. Conversely, with *Rotate to Surface Normal* on the chair will also be rotated so that its bottom surface is perfectly aligned with the surface of the floor.

The *Surface Offset* setting tells the editor how far away the surfaces of the two actors should be when they snap together. This setting can be used to let objects seemingly hover above the ground.

Vertex Snapping

This is used if there is a requirement to snap to actors together with precision.

To use *Vertex Snapping* in conjunction with the *Translation Widget*, pressing and holding **[V]** will cause several blue dots once the object are close together. Each of these dots is a vertex an actor can be snapped to.

There is a catch, though. Usually, pivot points (as well as the center points of actors) are in the middle of the object. Therefore, if two objects are to be snapped together at some surface, those are not necessarily helpful. In this scenario, temporarily moving the pivot points using the **[MMB]** may do the trick.

Now, moving a pivot point freely may not be precise in the first place. Luckily, this situation can be resolved. While still holding the **[MMB]**, **[Alt - V]** will snap the pivot to one of the actor's vertices. Now, with the pivot point set, **[V]** is going to snap the two actors together.

Grid Snapping

Grid Snapping is useful for aligning objects across distances. *Grid Snapping* is activated using the grid symbol in the upper part of the viewport, to the right of the translation, rotation an scaling widgets.

With *Grid Snapping* on, moving an actor is going to move the actor in increments as given by the grid.

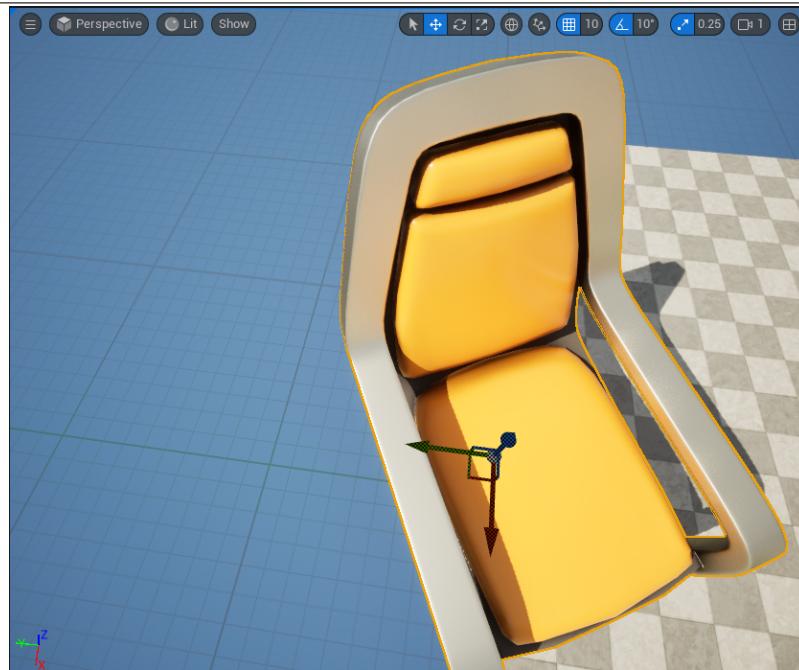


Figure 2.9: Grid Snapping Example

As depicted in 2.9, the now "snaps" to each line of the grid, making it impossible to move the chair any smaller amount than that given.

The grid size can be altered by clicking the number symbol to the right of the *Grid Snapping* icon.

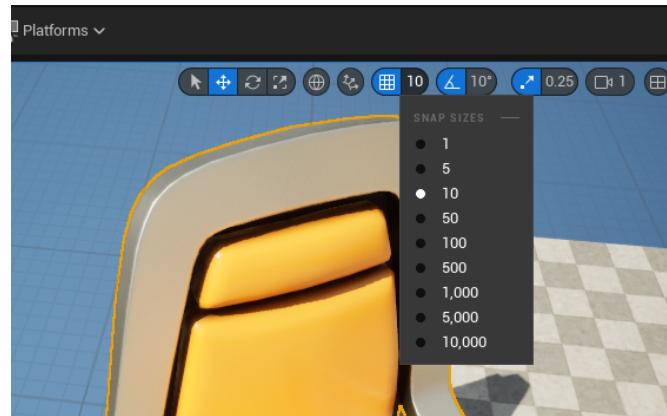


Figure 2.10: Adjusting Grid Snapping

Notice, that in *Unreal Editor* 1 grid unit is supposed to represent once *Centimeter* in the real world.

Snapping affects rotation as well, rotation increments will also apply.

Notice, that in *Unreal Engine* rotation is measured in degrees.

Similarly, snapping also works with *scaling*.

2.3.9 Level Viewing

There are different ways of viewing a level.

As mentioned earlier, [F11] toggles viewport full screen viewing. This mode is also known as *Immersive Mode*.

In addition, there is a number of different views available in *Unreal Editor*. These can be changed using the respective icon in the upper left section of the viewport.

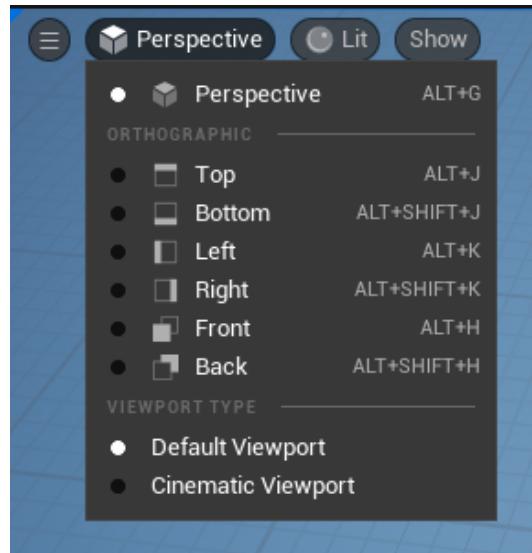


Figure 2.11: View Ports

2.11 shows that currently, the *Perspective View*, which is the default view, is selected. There are also views available, viewing the level from *Top*, *Bottom*, *Left*, *Right*, *Front* and *Back*.

Some of these view modes are intended to view subtle details regarding light. These are *Lit*, *Unlit* and *Wireframe*.

Lit is the default view mode of the *Level Editor* and is for viewing the Level with full lighting and rendering, similar to what the player will see in-game.

Unlit is for viewing the Level without the lighting having any impact on what is visible. Essentially, this allows to see the base colors of all objects without the effects of light or shadows affecting the color. Unlit is also useful for working in levels or areas of levels where the lighting would otherwise be too dark to easily see the level.

Wireframe is a three-dimensional model in which only the lines and vertices of an object are visible. Wireframe Mode basically allows to see just edges and vertices the level is composed of. This might be helpful for aligning objects, visualizing the structure of actors and provides a architectural view of the level.

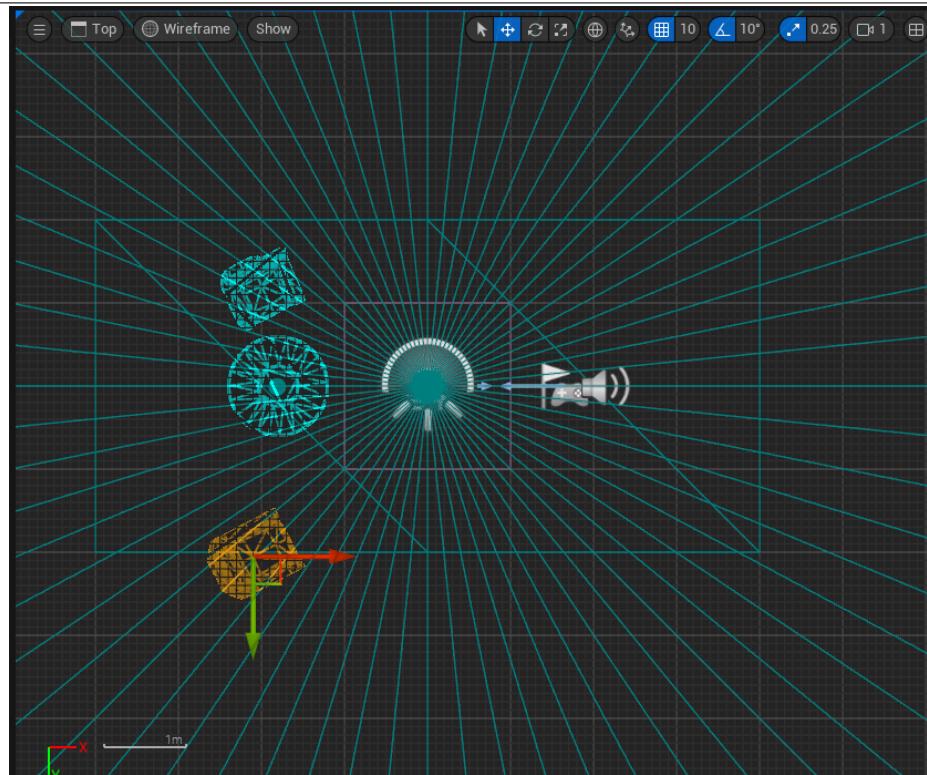


Figure 2.12: Wireframe Mode

To the left of the *View Modes* menu is a menu that allows changes between the default 3D perspective view of the level, to an orthographic view of the Level.

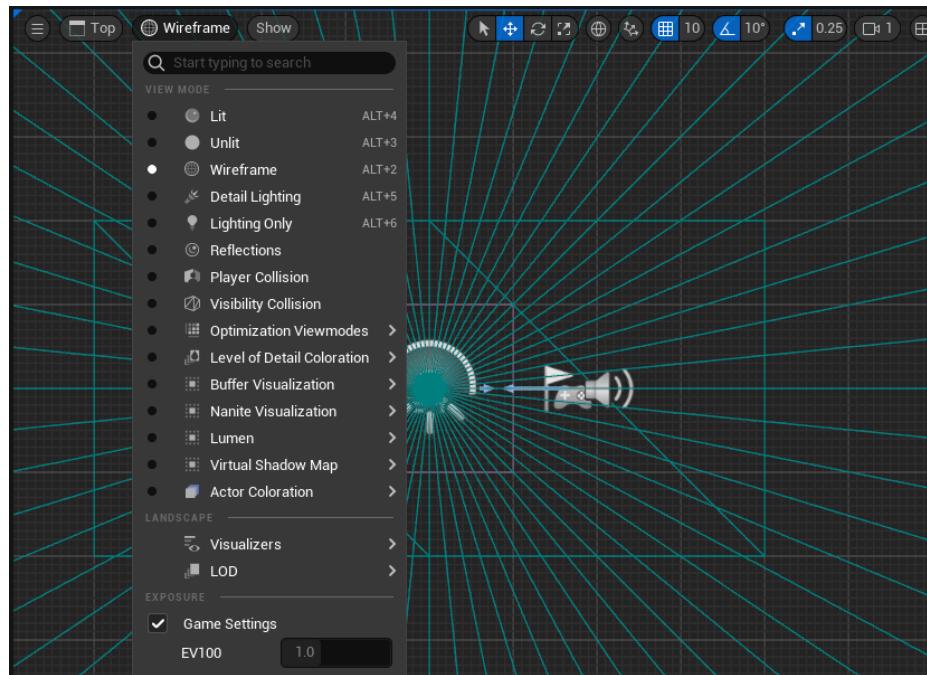


Figure 2.13: View Mode Settings

The several other views, which are all orthographic, share two common traits:

The first is that they default to a wireframe view mode, although this can be modified.

But the main thing about orthographic views is that they are meant to be 2-dimensional views, rather than 3-dimensional. For example, in the Top view, the vision is directly parallel with the Z-axis, so it is as if looking directly down at a level, and only seeing the X and Y axes.

And in Bottom view we are looking directly up at the level. The *Left* and *Right* views are looking down the Y-axis and only seeing the X and Z axes.

Finally, the *Front* and *Back* views are looking down the X-axis and only seeing the Y and Z axes.

Orthographic views are useful for aligning the objects in your level in just 2 dimensions at a time. And when paired with the wireframe view mode, the idea is to get a 2D architectural view of a Level.

Show Flags

To the right of the *View Modes* icon lies the related *Show Flags* icon. *Show Flags* are, in essence, checkboxes which tell the Editor whether or not show various types of actors or effects in the viewport.

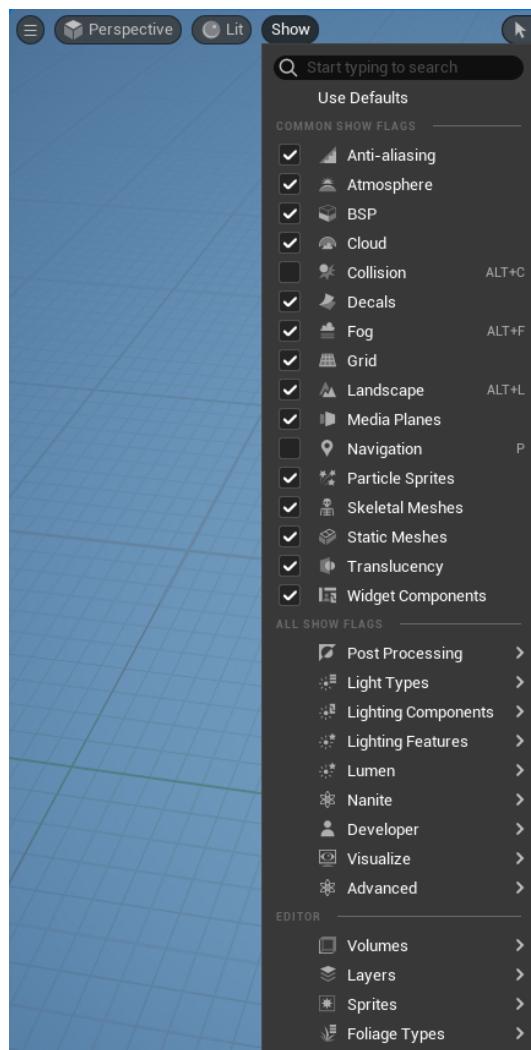


Figure 2.14: Show Flags

For example, unchecking the *Static Meshes* show flag, all of the static meshes in the level will disappear from the viewport. This doesn't delete the static meshes from the viewport, it only makes them invisible for the time being. It also doesn't make them invisible in the game itself, but only in the viewport.

Another feature similar to this is provided by the **G** key, which toggles the viewport in and out of game view. In game view, it will hide all Actors and icons that are invisible in-game. The PlayerStart actor, for example, will be hidden, along with the icons for *Light Actors*, etc.

Game View is meant to show the developer, in the Viewport, exactly what the player would see from that perspective in the game.

Viewport Options

Viewport Options can be found by clicking on this small button all the way in the upper left of the Viewport.

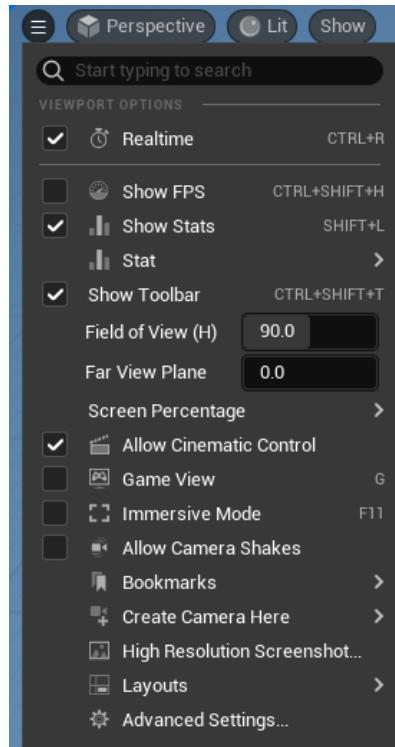


Figure 2.15: Viewport Options Menu

For brevity, only a number of options will be discussed here:

The first option on the menu is *Realtime*, which toggles realtime rendering of the viewport on and off. If this is enabled, effects and animations will not be active; i.e. only a static image will be rendered in the viewport.

Show FPS should be fairly self-explanatory.

The next option is *Show Stats*, which toggles the ability to display statistics in the viewport. With this on, if you go down to stat, you will find a large number of different stats available for display.

Bookmarks is used to bookmark viewport camera locations and rotations. It's easiest to just use the keyboard shortcuts but you can also use the menu if you wish.

To create a bookmark, press **Ctrl + any of the numbers between 0-9 on the keyboard**, and then to recall the bookmark, simply press that number. For example, to bookmark a particular camera position, press **Ctrl +1**. To return to that position, press **1**.

Create Camera Here will simply create a *Camera Actor* at the location and rotation that the viewport camera is currently in.

Advanced Setting is just another way of getting to the viewport section of *Editor Preferences*, where many more advanced options for fine-tuning how the Viewport functions can be found.

2.3.10 Piloting Actors

Sometimes it is useful when placing actors, especially *Camera and Light Actors*, to see from the perspective of the actor itself. This makes it easier to have the actor point at an exact location.

For example, if a light actor shall be placed in a level with the intention of it being placed directly above a different actor, the spot light can be piloted. Right clicking on a light, for example, will display an option to the right of an airplane icon saying *Pilot Spot Light*. Alternatively, with the light selected pressing **[Ctrl + Shift + P]** will do the same.

Now the developer can see directly in the direction of the light so it be directed much easier.

2.4 The Content Drawer

This section is going to provide an overview of the *Content Drawer*, sometimes also referred to as *Content Browser*.

By default, the *Content Drawer* is collapsed. It can be found on the bottom left margin of the *Unreal Editor* window; it also can be opened by using **[Ctrl + Spacebar]**. It will collapse automatically once it goes out of focus.

To keep it docked, the *Dock in Layout* icon may be used; to close it, the *X* icon in the tab may be used

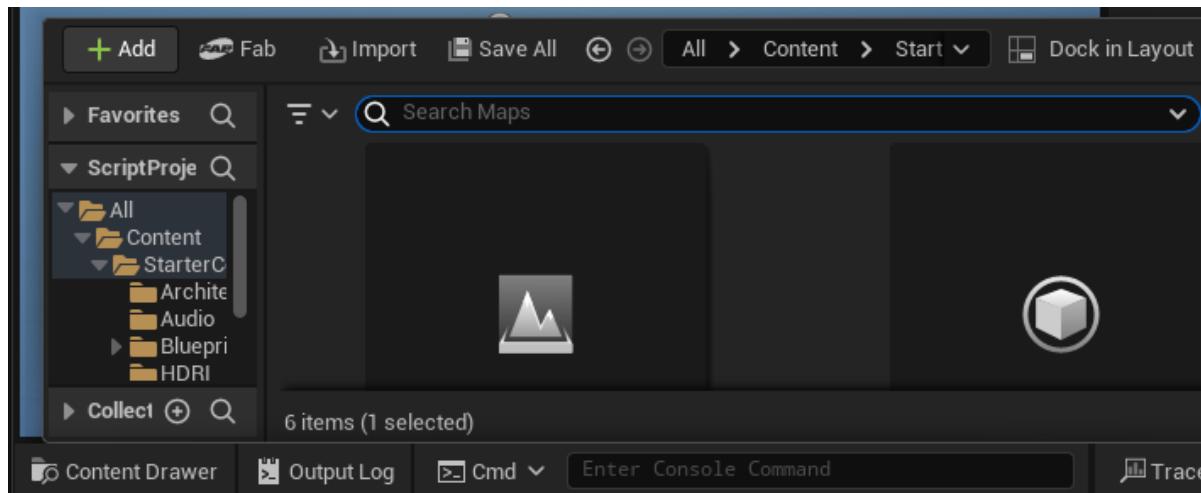


Figure 2.16: Content Drawer

The *Content Drawer* can be used to drag and drop content into the level, similar to the **Create** menu.

For example, to add a small bush actor into the level, one may open the *Content Drawer*, find **All > Content > StarterContent > Props > SM_Bush** and simply drag it into the level.

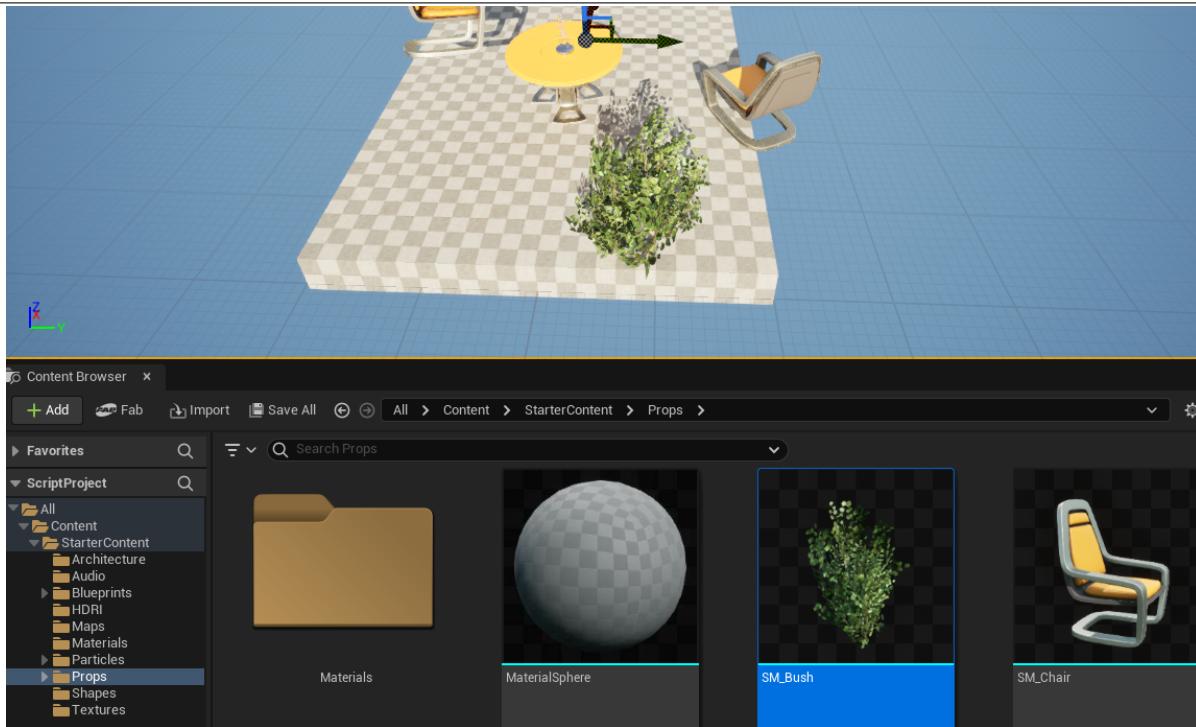


Figure 2.17: Content Drawer - SM_Bush Example

Looking at the sample's floor it is apparent that there is no material applied to it. A material can be applied, obviously, by dragging a material onto it, e.g. by selecting a material from the `StarterContent > Material` folder.

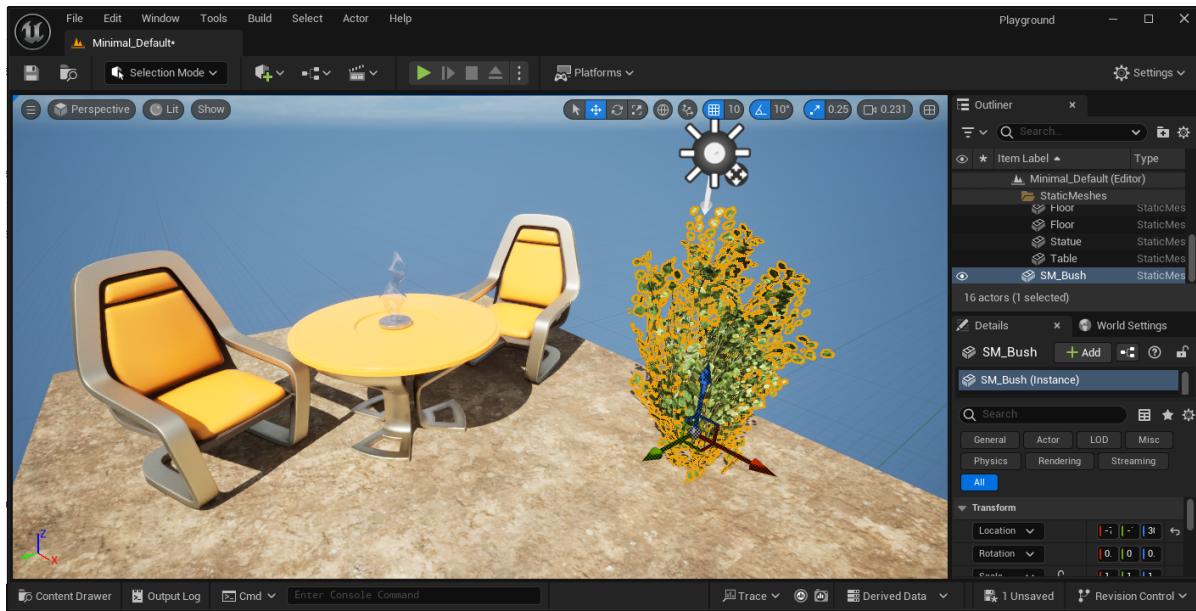


Figure 2.18: Material Applied to Floor

While the Create menu contains a list of generic, built-in actors, *Content Drawer* can be used to create actors, or to import in actors created outside of the *Unreal Editor*.

Notice, that the right part of the *Content Drawer* is referred to as *Asset Window*, since it contains a list of assets, while the left part - the one resembling the file system browser - is called *Sources Panel*.

In order to navigate large projects, a *Search Field* is included into the panel.

By default, the search option searches *File Names*; i.e. entering the term *image*, the search should find all files within the selected folder containing the word "image". It does not find assets that are of an image type.

To the right of the search bar sits a *filter* icon. This allows for filtering of search results based on the type of content that is searched for.

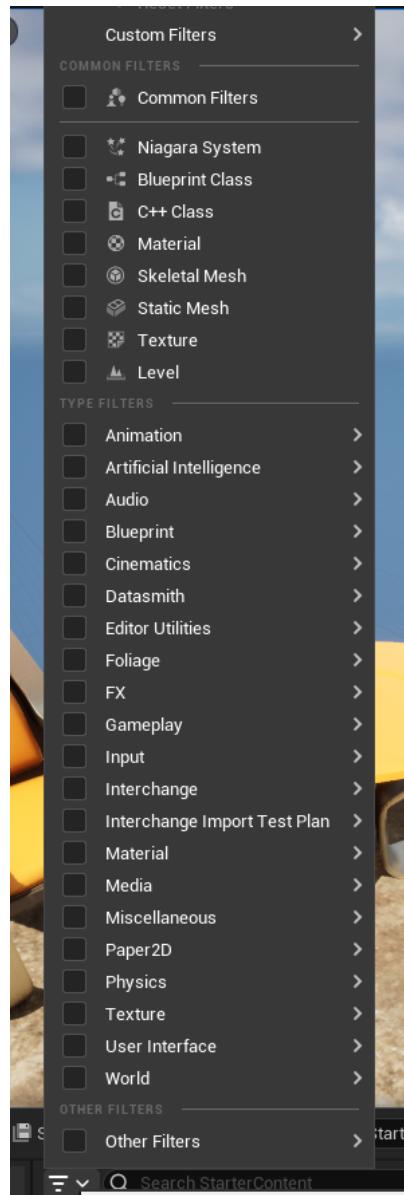


Figure 2.19: Search Filter

Notice there is a search field on top of the filters window, which can be used as well. Also note, that once a filter is set, an option *Reset Filters* appears, which can be used to remove all filters at once.

Search and filter functionality can be combined here. E.g. typing the word "la" will yield all filters containing the string "la" as well as a search for these characters. Ticking the desired type will shorten the list of matching objects significantly.

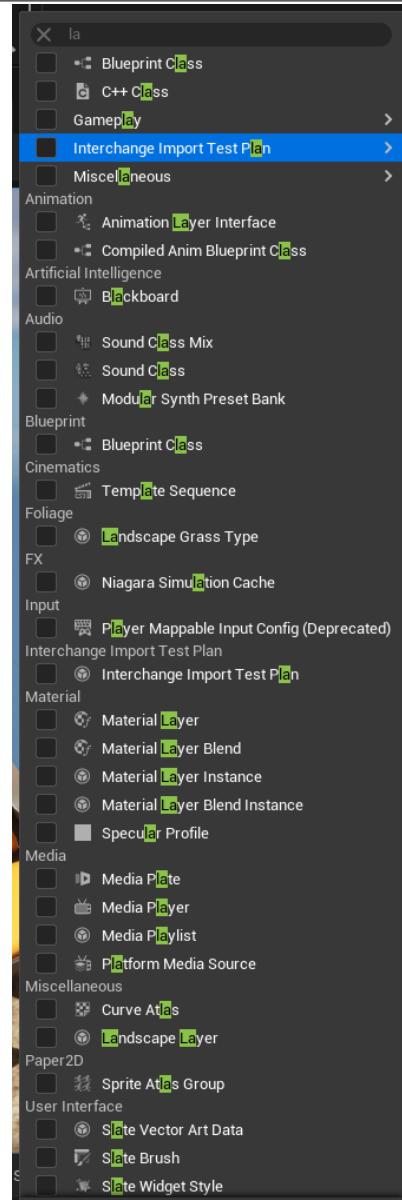


Figure 2.20: Filtering Example

At the bottom of the *Sources Panel* the *Collections Panel* is located. Collections can be used by to organize assets into groups. The advantage here is that these are logical collections:

Take the chair included into the starter content. Should this chair added to a group of "Yellow" objects or, rather, to a group of "furniture" objects? Basically, obviously, both. However, copying the chair is inefficient. Collections solve this problem by being logical groups, i.e. assets are not copied, just linked to.

New collections can be created by simply clicking the respective add (**[+]**) button. It is also possible to directly add an object using the search bar, since once an object has been found using the search, the **[+]** button appears to the right of the search bar. This, though, is a dynamic collection: not an object link is added, but the search is saved. I.e. the search is carried out each time the collection is navigated to.

2.4.1 Importing Assets

The *Content Drawer* can be used to add or import assets, i.e. from other project or external sources. At the time of writing, there are two basic options:

- The **+ Add** menu, which reflects the classic way of adding and importing of assets
- The **Fab** menu, which has been introduced very recently. It appears that this method of adding assets is in heavy development at the time of writing. Basically, it provides the means to directly add assets from the *Fab.com* platform. It is expected that *Fab* integration will be made much more comfortable in the near future.

For example, adding the assets as provided in the *First Person* template is as easy as **+ Add** **Add Feature or Content Pack** **> First Person > Add to Project**.

This way, also the assets of the *Starter Content* can be added, if the user didn't do so during project creation.

2.4.2 Saving Assets

It is important to note that added assets are not persisted by dragging them into the project. Those assets need to be saved first; which can be accomplished using **File > Save All** or the shortcut **Ctrl + Shift + S**.

2.4.3 Content Drawer Settings

The **Settings** menu of the *Content Drawer* can be used to adjust its settings as desired.

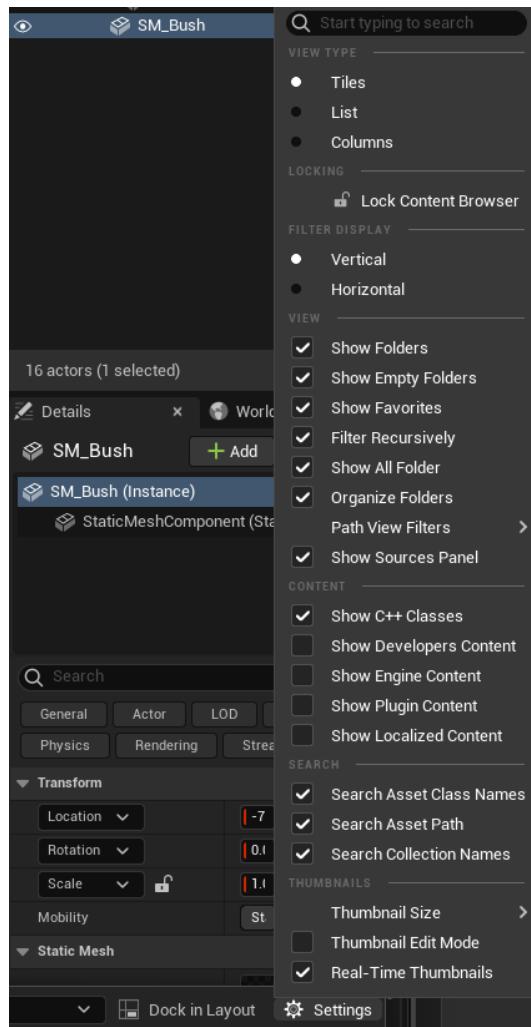


Figure 2.21: Content Drawer Settings

See [2.21](#) for details.

2.5 The Details Panel

The *Details Panel* is the context sensitive area to the right of the viewport, just below the *Outliner*. It displays lots of information about the selected actor, and most of it can be edited.

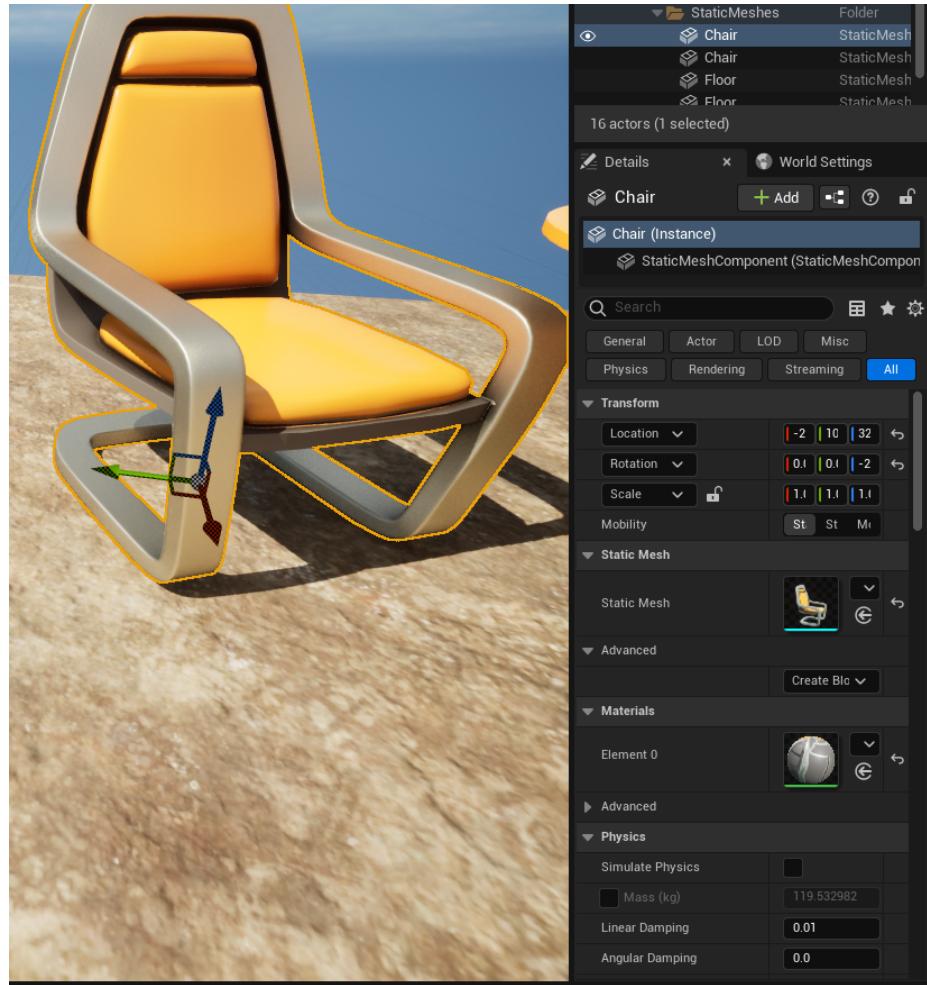


Figure 2.22: The Details Panel

At the top of the *Details Panel*, the name of the actor is displayed, and it can be edited of course.

To the right there are buttons for adding components to the actor besides as well as for creating a *Blueprints* for this actor. Below that, the component structure is depicted. More on *Blueprints* and *Components* later in this document.

Since the options within the *Details Panel* can become quite numerous, a search bar is included, enabling search for desired options.

The *Details Panel* mostly consists of properties of the selected actor, grouped into *Categories*.

A group of buttons, carrying names like *General*, *Actor*, and so on, can be used to slim down the number of options depending on the activated option.

2.5.1 Details Panel Settings

To the upper right the *Settings* menu for the *Details Panel* is located.

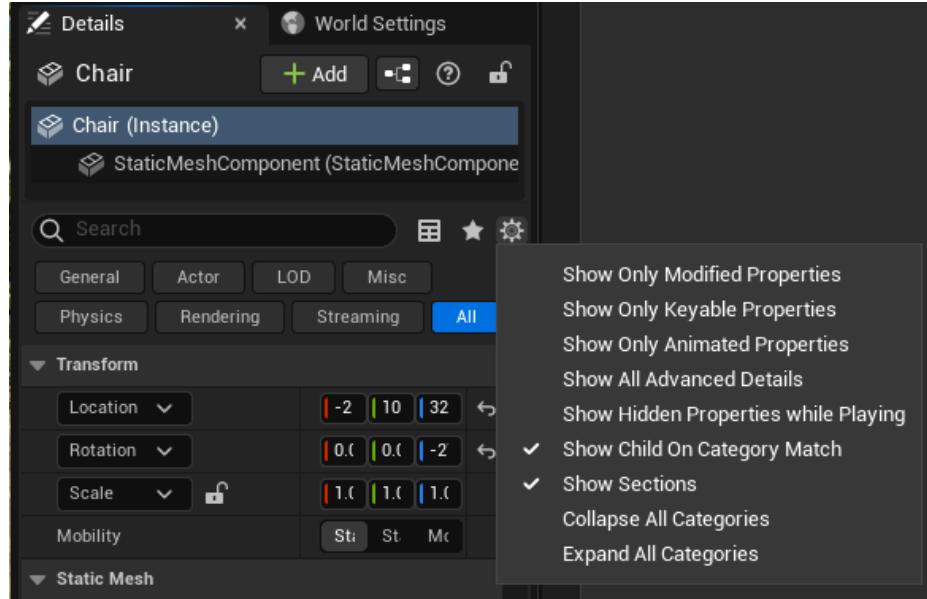


Figure 2.23: Details Panel Settings

Most of the settings - see [2.23](#) - seem self explanatory.

2.5.2 The Transform Category

The Details panel has a lot of functionality in it that is specific to the type of actor selected. However, the Transform category is common to all actors.

In section [2.3.6](#), transforming actors using the Translation, Rotation, and Scaling widgets have been discussed. However, there is another way of moving, rotating, and scaling actors, using the *Transform* category of the *Details Panel*.

Of course, the widgets are useful when placement and scaling do not need to be exact and level design is to proceed quickly. But for fine precision or when exact values are a requirement, the *Details Panel* may be used to insert exact values manually.



Figure 2.24: The Transform Category

Numbers can be entered manually or left-clicked and subsequently mouse-dragged left or right to de/increase the values, respectively.

As figure 2.24 shows, there is an additional setting present, denoted *Static*, *Stationary* and *Movable*.

Mobility is a setting that applies mainly to static mesh actors and light actors.

Static means that the actor will remain stationary the entire time, while *Movable* means that it is possible for the actor's location to change. To clarify, the "static" in "static mesh" refers to the fact that the mesh doesn't have any moving parts relative to itself, while the "Static" mobility setting means that the actor's location will never change.

These settings are used for efficiency. When *Movable* is set to *Static*, this means the actor will never move, therefore things like lighting can be computed beforehand.

With this set to *Movable*, this is impossible, therefore the game will be computationally more expensive. Note, though, that using *Nanite* (a new rendering technique) only works with *Movable* lights; since *Nanite* is very efficient, the recommendation for now is to use the *Movable* option by default.

2.6 The Outliner

By default, the *Outliner* is located in the upper-right of the *Level Editor*. Basically, it is an organized list of all the actors in a Level.

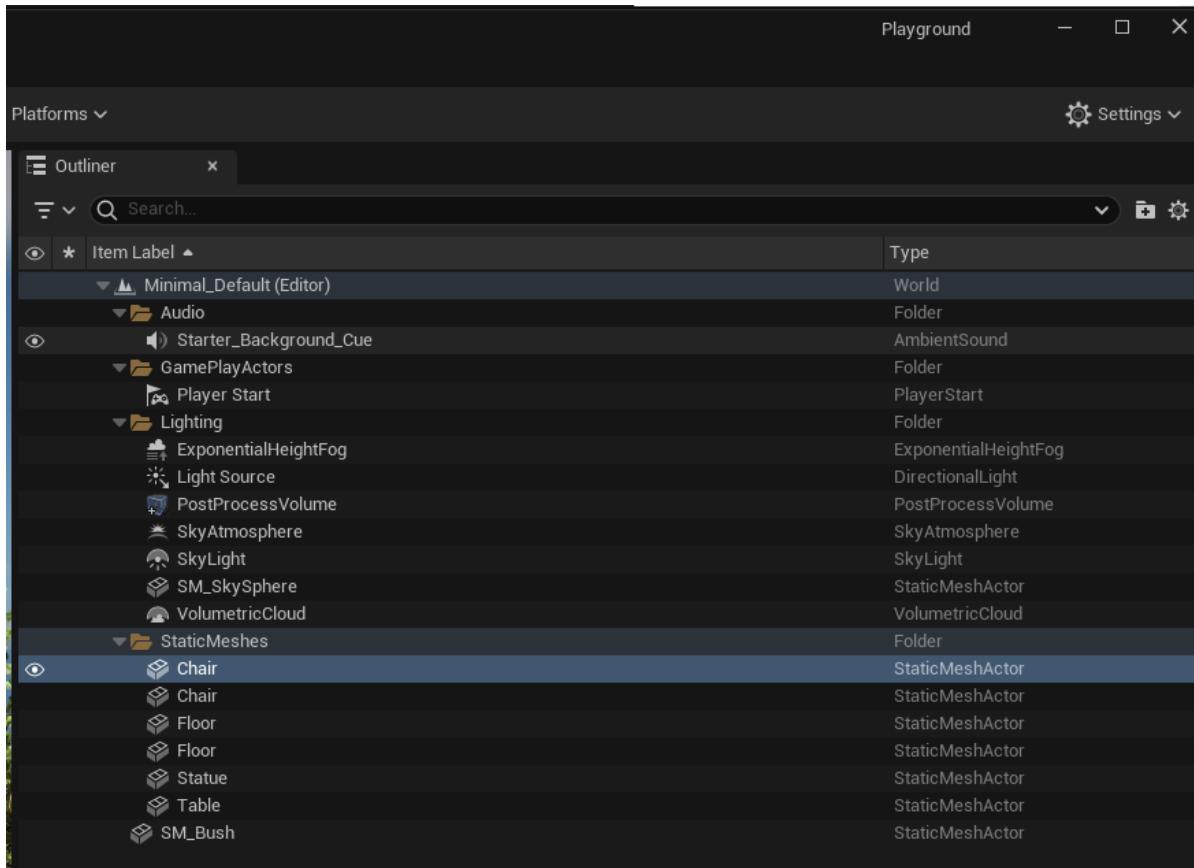


Figure 2.25: The Outliner

Clicking an actor in the *Outliner* is going to select it in the viewport (and vice versa). Double-clicking it or pressing **F** will focus on that actor. The actor can be renamed here as well.

To the left of each actor (below the eye symbol) the visibility can be set. Setting an actor invisible there (by toggling with the *LMB*) will make the actor invisible in the viewport. Note, that this only applies to the viewport;

the actor will still be visible when the game is played. This is useful when an actor is hidden by another actor or there is in general a lot of clutter present in the scene.

2.6.1 Attaching Actors

The *Outliner* can be used to attach actors to one another. In *Unreal Editor*, each actor can have a parent actor it is attached to. Simply dragging an actor onto a different actor will make that actor a child of the other actor; the relationship is denoted by the indentation. This is useful, as moving a parent actor moves all the attached child actors as well.

2.6.2 Grouping Actors

Actors can also be grouped, which is somewhat similar to attaching as discussed in [2.6.1](#), albeit without the parent-child relation.

To group actors, select all actors that are to be grouped and press **Ctrl + G**; this will formally group all the actors together. Groups are made visible by green brackets surrounding them. **Shift + G** will ungroup them. Alternatively, with an actor selected, right-clicking them, under **Groups > Ungroup** will also remove the group.

Grouping actors into folders also helps organizing them, a particularly useful feature in larger projects.

Also notice the search bar, which can be used to find actors as well.

Actors

In sections prior, it has been discussed what an actor is, how to place actors into a level, how to translate, rotate and scale them. In this chapter we will discuss different types of actors, how each type can enhance game levels in sophisticated and unique ways. An actor used to prototype levels will be discussed along with actors representing physical objects.

Also, actors that generate light, fog or define a volume of space will be discussed.

3.1 Static Meshes

A mesh is simply a 3D model of an object. There are two specific types of meshes that can be used as actors in *Unreal Engine*. These are the *Static Mesh* and the *Skeletal Mesh*.

A *Static Mesh* is a type of mesh that does not bend, deform, or change shape in any way. A *Static Mesh* can still move around on the screen, it just can't animate.

So, for example, a *Static Mesh* in the shape of a cube could be used to represent a cardboard box, hat box could slide across a surface, or fall off a table, or fly across the room... but it could not have flaps that open and close.

For objects with moving parts, *Skeletal Meshes* could be used. With a skeletal mesh, it is possible to define individual parts of the mesh and how those parts connect and move with one another.

There is a number of different *Static Mesh* actors in the `Create` menu. In the *Shapes* category, there are *Static Meshes* in the shape of cubes, spheres, cylinders, cones, and planes. Any one of these could be dragged into a level, positioned, rotated and scaled as desired.

Usually, though, meshes will be imported from external sources like a 3D modeling software or platforms like `Fab`.

3.1.1 Replacing Static Meshes

Sometimes during development, meshes shall be replaced by other meshes; maybe a better one or to replace a prototype with the real thing.

Of course, the hitherto used mesh could be deleted and the new one added to the level. However, this is not necessarily very efficient, since the actor may have *Blueprints* attached or have been customized in some other way.

Therefor, a better way would be to use the *Details Panel* to replace the *Static Mesh* that the actor is using. So in *Unreal*, the *Static Mesh* itself is actually a property of the *StaticMesh Actor*. Therefore, the developer could just select the actor, then go to the *Static Mesh* category of the *Details Panel* to replace the mesh being used by that actor. Notice, that there is a searchbar; for example, if the developer intends to change the chair for a couch, she could just click the *Static Mesh*, search for couch and select the desired mesh.

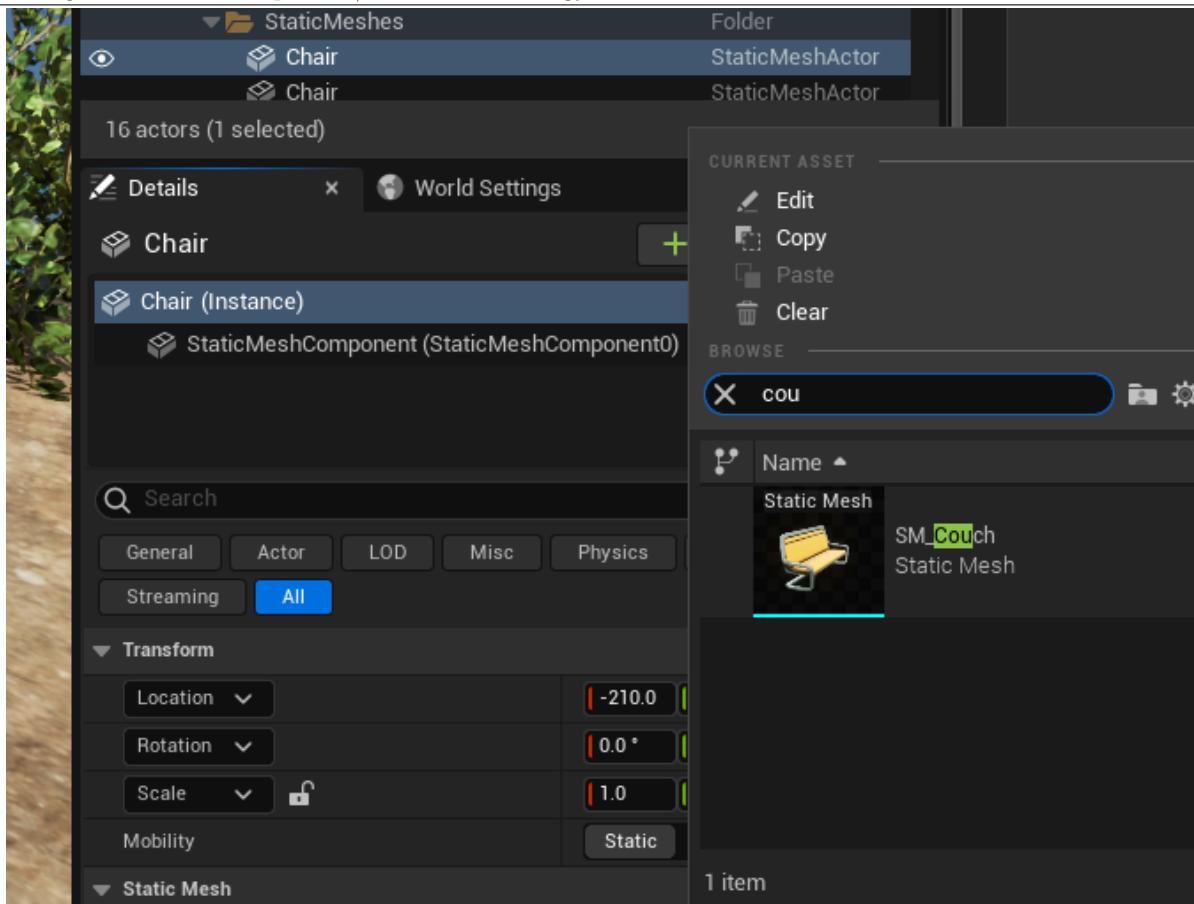


Figure 3.1: Replacing Static Mesh Component

The replaced actor will have the same properties the original had, including position, rotation etc. Technically, the actor has not been replaced; it was just the actors static mesh that changed.

Alternatively, selecting the couch in the *Content Drawer*, changing back to the *Details Panel* and clicking the icon details section will accomplish the same.

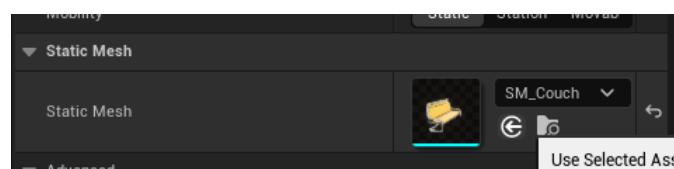


Figure 3.2: Change Mesh Arrow

3.1.2 Physics

By default, *Static Meshes* have physics turned off. For example, placing a cube inside a level, somewhere above the ground, and starting the game will not cause the cube to fall down to the floor.

There are several reasons for this. Checking the cube's details panel reveals the issues:

- The mesh is set to static. This tells the engine, that the actor will never change its position. Setting this to *Movable* enables, for example, to create *Blueprints* containing some movement logic telling the cube how to move.

- In the *Physics* section, *Simulate Physics* is not ticked. Selecting *Simulate Physics* will cause the cube to fall once the game is started.

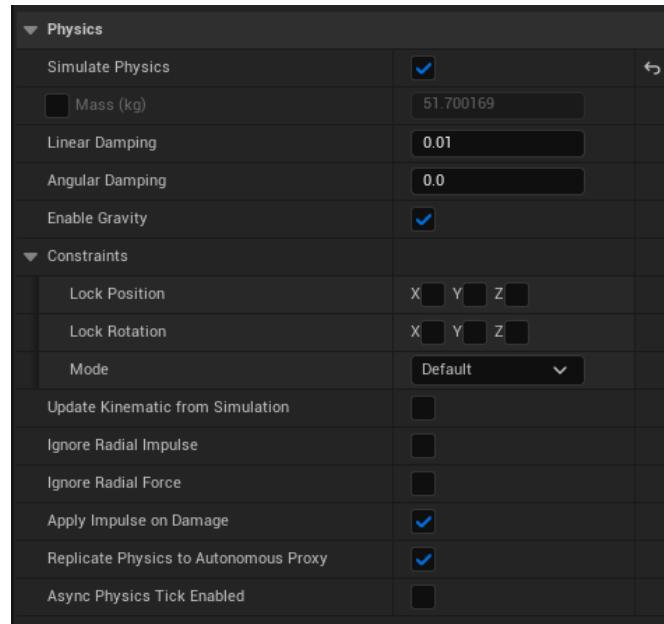


Figure 3.3: Physics Section of Details Panel

Notice (see 3.3) that other physical properties, like mass (measured in kilograms), could be set as well. Apparently, heavy objects will feature different behavior compared to light objects.

These properties are also taken into account if the actor is pushed, hit by a projectile, and so on.

The properties *Linear Damping* and *Angular Damping* refer to the amount of drag applied to movement and rotation, respectively. For objects lying on a floor, drag is equivalent to friction.

This is used, for example, to model block of ice featuring a small amount of drag, while rough rocks will of course feature a large amount of friction.

Similarly, an object with a small amount of *Linear Damping* will spin for a long time when hit by an object.

Also notice, that *Gravity* can be switched on and off separately, which is very useful in space simulation games.

The *Constraints* section locks position and rotation properties to the 3 axes; the *Mode* property can be used to select from some presets or to define a custom plane that doesn't run directly parallel to one of three main axes.

Finally, *Replicate Physics to Autonomous Proxy* is used in multiplayer games and should be checked if the server is in charge of keeping everything in sync, and unchecked if the clients are responsible.

3.2 Geometry Brushes

In the world of 3D modeling, a *Brush* or more precisely, *Geometry Brush* is simply a 3D area of space. So this is nearly identical to the understanding of what a Mesh is, but there are several key differences between Brushes and Meshes.

First off, Brushes are used for more basic shapes. E.g. in the *Place Actors* panel, in the *Geometry* category, the available Brushes are located. These consist of basic geometric shapes and as well as some Brushes in the shape of stairs.

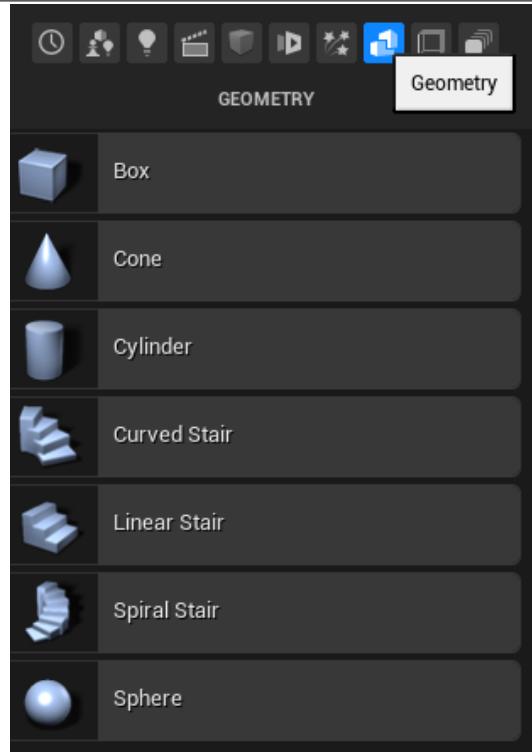


Figure 3.4: Geometry Brushes in the Place Actors Panel

Notice that there is also a *Shapes* category, which contains *Static Meshes* rather than *Geometry Brushes*. As stated earlier, meshes can be much more complex than this.

The meshes contained in *Starter Content*, have mostly been created in a 3D modeling program to take the shape of a chairs, couches and so on.

Geometry Brushes, Static Meshes and Memory

The second key difference is in how the Unreal Engine handles brushes and meshes in memory. Brushes are value types, while meshes are reference types, i.e. when brushes are copied, each copy increases the amount of memory required, whereas when meshes are copied, only a pointer to the object is stored.

Thus, meshes are much more memory efficient, hence are advantageous with regard to performance.

In other words, even though meshes look better and require less memory, brushes still have a reason to exist: brushes are easier for prototyping. I.e. brushes are often used to quickly prototype a level, only to be replaced later on by meshes.

It is not uncommon that initial versions of levels consist exclusively of brushes, whereas the shipped version of the game does not consist of any brushes at all.

3.2.1 Brush Types

Just as any actor, properties of brushes can vary wildly. There is one property, though, that is common to all *Geometry Brushes*: the *Brush Type*. Brushes can be either **additive** or **subtractive**.

As expected, an *additive* brush is one that adds geometry to a level. A *subtractive* brush, on the other hand, is going to remove from a mesh shape. This is useful, for example, to "add holes" to a shape, like windows or doors of a house.

In other words, if a subtractive brush overlaps an additive brush, the subtractive part will be removed from the additive part. This feature is one of the main reasons why brushes are so well-suited to quickly sculpting overall level design. By adding and subtracting geometry in this way, it is possible to sculpt the layout of a Level much

faster than it is possible when using meshes.

Once a brush is added to a level, it can be modified using the *Details Panel*.

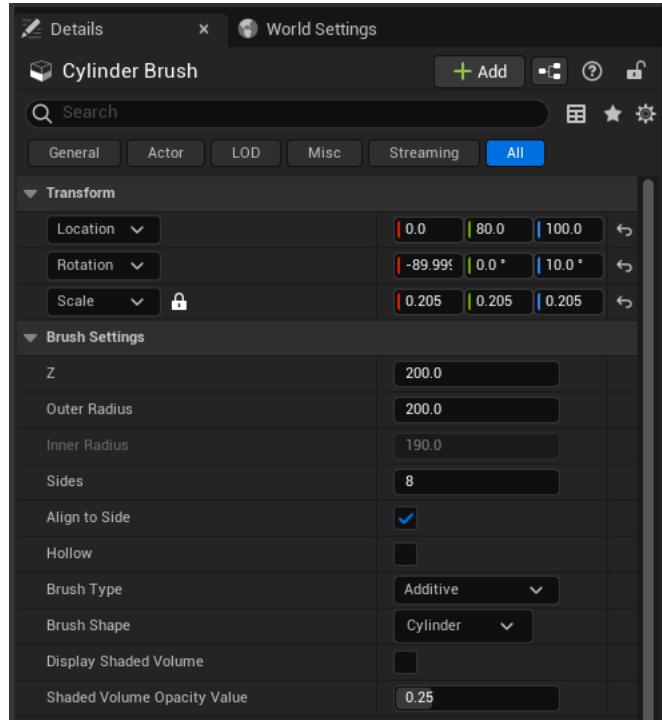


Figure 3.5: Geometry Brush Details Panel

As depicted in figure 3.5, the brush type can be set easily using the *Additive/Subtractive* pull-down menu. Note, that it is also possible here to change the shape of a brush; for example, a cone mesh could simply be swapped to a cylinder brush using the pull-down menu.

Some of the properties in the *Brush Settings* are dependent on the shape of the brush being used. For example, a *Box* brush will have X, Y, and Z properties denoting the length of the box in those dimensions. Adjusting those will change the size of the box. So the box brush has these X, Y, and Z properties, but the *Cylinder* and *Cone* brushes have their size determined by just a Z length, and an *Outer Radius* property.

So the Z denotes how tall the cone or cylinder is, and the *Outer Radius* is how wide around it is. For the Cone, this is the radius as measured at the base. For the Sphere brush, radius is the only property used to determine its size, and so on and so forth.

Note, that curved edges are not exactly curved. Rather, those "curves" are approximated by a series of flat sides. The more sides, the smoother the shape appears and the more the shape appears like curved to the human eye. The cylinder in figure 3.5 has its *Sides* property set to 8. Increasing this would make the cylinder appear more cylinder like, since curves appear more "curved".

The *Cone* and *Cylinder* brushes also have this property *Align to Side*. If this is checked, it will align the sides of the Brush with the Grid.

With that checked, this side of a Cone here is perfectly parallel to the Grid lines. But if this is unchecked, it won't necessarily align with the grid.

Another property of *Brushes* that is common to the *Box*, *Cone*, and *Cylinder* brush, is whether or not the Brush is Hollow. If this property is checked, instead of the Brush being solid all the way through, it will be hollow inside, and the brush will essentially be a shell, with walls of some thickness. For box brushes, this is set with the *Wall*

Thickness property.

Also check out the other, numerous properties of brushes.

3.2.2 Stair Shaped Brushes

Stair-shaped brushes have their own unique properties.

Linear Stair

These possess *Length*, *Height*, and *Width* properties, each affecting one of the three axes in space.

Adjusting the number of steps for the staircase will increase the stair's length. The *Add to First Step* property is essentially a *Step Height* property for the first step only.

Curved Stair

The *Curved Stair* has some of the same properties as the *Linear Stair*, such as *Step Height*, *Step Width*, *Number of Steps*, and *Add to First Step*. It also has some other properties as well that pertains to its curve. The first of these properties is the *Inner Radius*.

Spiral Stair

The *Step Height* property is a little different on the *Spiral Stair* than it is on the other two stairs. With the *Spiral Stair*, the *Step Height* won't affect how tall each step is, it will affect how much each step overlaps the step above and below it.

The *Num Steps Per 360* determines how many steps there are to make one full circle. Consequently, the *Num Steps* property sets the total number of stairs. So, for example, if both of these numbers are set to the same value, the stairs are going to wrap around exactly once. If the *Num Steps* is double the *Num Steps per 360*, the stair is completing exactly two full circles, and so forth.

3.3 Materials

While this chapter is named "Actors", technically materials are not actors. Rather, they are properties of mesh and brush actors.

Materials within the context of the *Unreal Engine* are assets that can be applied to surfaces of meshes and brushes to make them look like they are made out of substances. This also entails the look of surfaces. They do not, though, possess any physical properties like friction; these are properties of the mesh or brush itself.

To apply a Material to a surface, it must be selected *Content Drawer* and dragged into the level viewport, onto the surface desired.

There is a catch, though: if the mesh/brush consists of a multitude of surfaces, like for example a stair brush, applying material can be a tedious task, since the Material needs to be applied to each and every surface.

Therefor, there is a second option to apply materials: that is, by applying the material *first*, i.e. select the desired material in the *Content Drawer*, thereafter - with the material selected - drag the desired actor into the level. This way, the material will be applied to all surfaces of that actor.

To apply a material to *all* surfaces of an already existing brush, go to the **Details Panel** **Geometry** category, click **Select**, select *Select All Adjacent Surfaces* (**Shift + J**). Now all surfaces of this particular brush are selected, so now the desired material can be dragged and dropped from the materials content drawer.

Another way to apply a material to a surface is the **Details Panel** **Surface Material** category. This works similar to replacing the *Static Mesh* discussed earlier, e.g. by using the materials drop down menu:

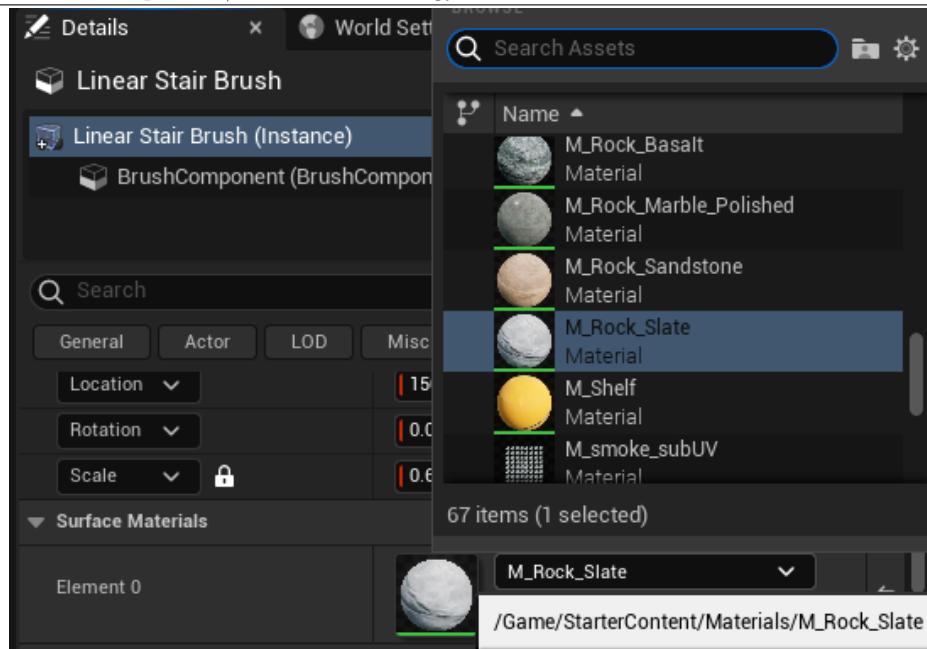


Figure 3.6: Details Panel Material Category

Another method is to select the material in the *Content Browser* and subsequently clicking the icon in the *Details Panel*.

3.3.1 Elements

Single meshes possess the ability to have different materials applied to different parts of it. When a mesh gets created in a 3D Modeling program, such as Maya or Blender, if it has different materials applied to different parts of its surface, once that Mesh gets imported into the Unreal Editor, each of those sections of surface become known as *Elements*. It is then possible to apply different materials to each element. If a material is imposed on an object in the viewport, this material will affect the given *Element* only. Now, if a brush containing different elements with different materials applied, this will be visible in the category.

3.3.2 Textures

Basically, *Textures* are what Materials are made of, i.e. a *Material* is made up of one or more textures, and each texture is just an image file that defines one of the properties of the material. While one Texture may be the actual colors of the material, another Texture maps its smoothness or roughness, and so on. This data is combined to form the composite Material. There is a dropdown showing the Textures that make up the currently applied Material, and if selected, it will open that Texture in the Content Browser.

3.4 Lights

In *Unreal Engine*, a light is an actor generating light within levels. Lights are not meant to represent an object producing light, like e.g. flashlights, lights only represent the light itself.

Therefore, in order to create said flashlight, the developer needs to create a mesh in the form of a flashlight, containing materials and all the things making up a decent object, and add the light actor to create the light itself.

There are 5 distinct types of light within *Unreal Editor*.

3.4.1 Directional Light Actor

The *Directional Light Actor* is used to emulate light coming from an extremely long distance away, such as outer space. All the light will hit the level at the same angle, meaning all shadows produced by this light will be parallel. This Actor is used primarily for sunlight and moonlight.

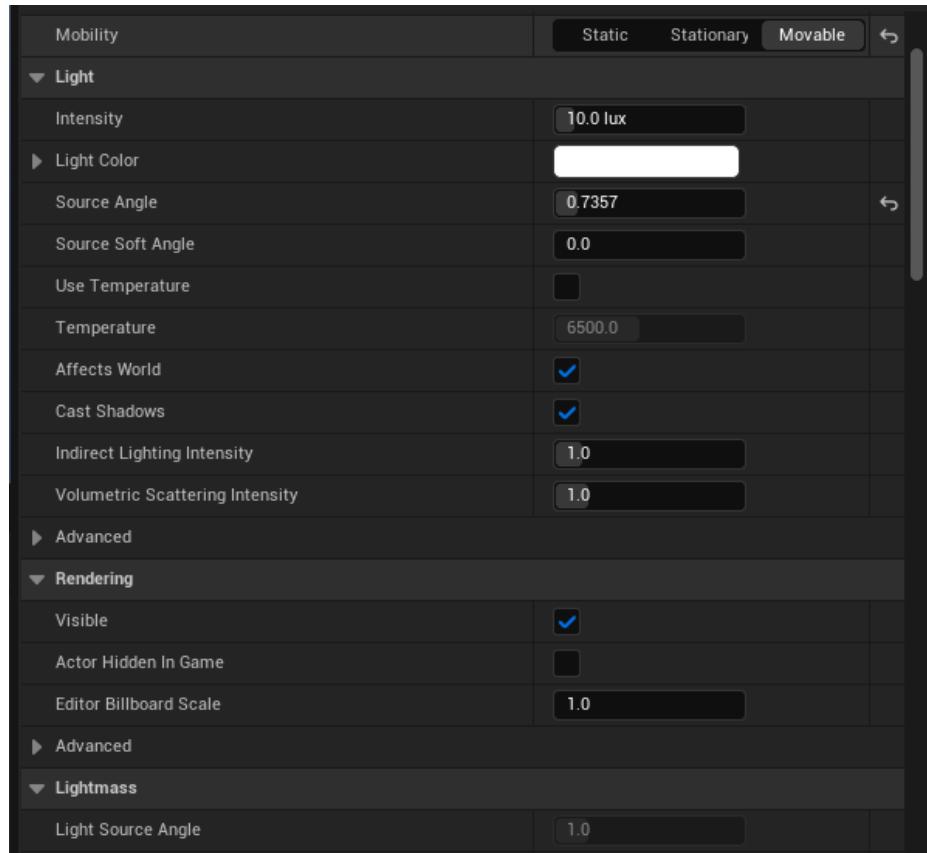


Figure 3.7: Light Properties

Intensity

Controls light brightness. If the intensity of a light is increased, the light get brighter and vice versa.

Color

The default light color is white, but it can be changed using the *Details Panel*.

Source Angle and Source Soft Angle

These basically affect how soft the shadows produced by the light are. The higher the value, the softer the edges of the shadows will be. The default value of 0.5357 for *Source Angle* is meant to represent how shadows should look in natural sunlight. These settings take advantage of raytracing technology.

Temperature

Sets the light temperature. By default it is not active, but it can be activated by ticking the respective box.

Cast Shadows

Shadows are computationally expensive, which is why they can be deactivated to improve the performance of a game. If the game world should be as realistic as possible, this should be enabled.

Indirect Lighting Intensity

In case light gets reflected off another surface, the reflected light is called indirect lighting and can also light up objects in the level. This property will determine how much this reflected light affects the other objects it shines upon.

Volumetric Scattering Intensity

This property applies to fog; when light passes through fog, it will scatter in various directions. The higher the *Volumetric Scattering Intensity*, the more the light will scatter.

3.4.2 Point Light Actor

A *Point Light* produces light emanating in all directions at the same time. This is useful for mimicking the light coming from a light bulb, or fire, for example.

It has many of the same properties that the *Directional Light* has, plus a few additional ones.

Attenuation Radius

This determines how far from the source the light will still affect objects; in the viewport, it is represented by a blue sphere (see figure 3.8 below). The higher the Attenuation Radius, the larger this sphere will be, and the farther the light will extend from its source.

Source Radius, Soft Source Radius, and Source Length

The light from a *Point Light* will actually emanate from a single point in the level. Now, if that light is placed above a shiny floor, there could be a reflection of the light source in the floor, in which case the reflection should resemble the light source. These three properties can adjust the size and shape the light source will appear in reflections.

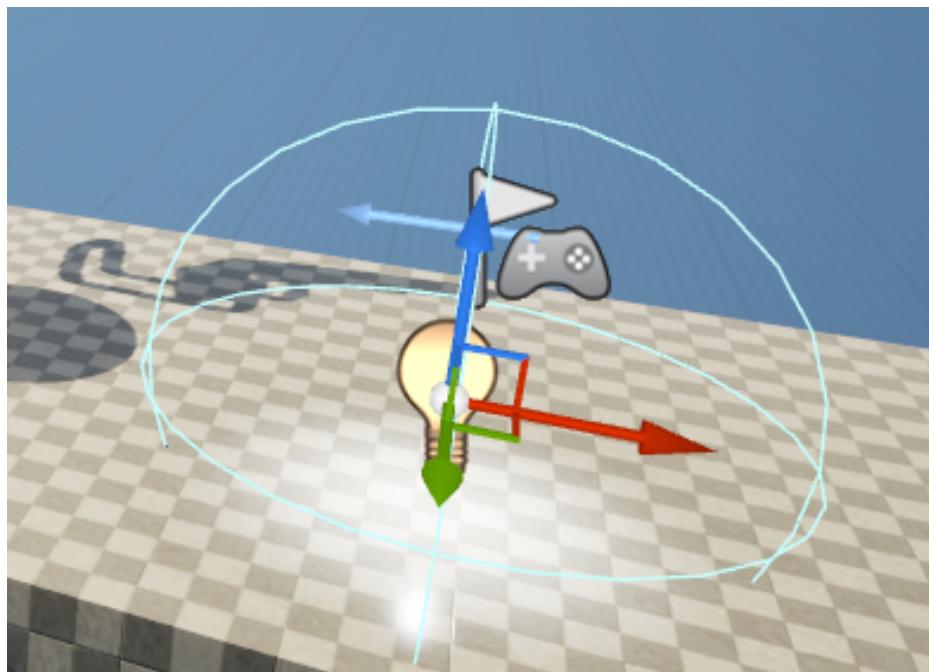


Figure 3.8: Attenuation Radius Sphere

3.4.3 Spot Light Actor

The *Spot Light*, on the other hand, will emit light in the shape of a cone. Therefore, this is like the light coming from a flashlight, or as the name suggests, a spot light, resembling the lights used in theaters.

The *Spot Light* is very similar to the *Point Light*, except that instead of shining light in all directions, it shines it in a specific direction, in a cone shape. Therefore, the *Spot Light* features all the same properties as the *Point Light*, with the addition of the following properties:

Inner/Outer Cone Angle

Within the inner cone of the *Spot Light*, the light will be at its brightest and will be just as bright at any spot within the inner cone. From the outer edge of the inner cone to the outer edge of the outer cone, the Intensity of the light will gradually fall off to nothing.

3.4.4 Rectangular Light Actor

Rectangular Lights, a. k. a. *Rect Lights*, projects light sources out of rectangular planes. The idea behind this is to simulate light sources resembling those that emanate from monitors, TV sets, smartphones or overhead lighting, etc.

The *Rectangular Light* features some unique properties as well. These are:

Source Width and Source Height

Used to denote the size of the light source.

Barn Door Angle and Barn Door Length

Used to emulate *Barn Door Angle* and *Barn Door Length* properties to emulate those kinds of effects.

Inner/Outer Cone Angle

Within the inner cone of the *Spot Light*, the light will be at its brightest and will be just as bright at any spot within the inner cone. From the outer edge of the inner cone to the outer edge of the outer cone, the Intensity of the light will gradually fall off to nothing.

Source Texture

Textures can be applied to a light, which in turn appears like as if it is being filtered through that texture.

3.4.5 Sky Light Actor

The *Sky Light Actor* is an actor meant to emulate light reflected off the atmosphere and other distant objects. The idea is: if a light comes from the sun or moon, a large chunk of that light approaches as direct sun- or moonlight, representing the *Directional Light Actor* discussed above. However, another chunk of that light hits particles in the atmosphere or clouds and subsequently get reflected off these objects. The *Sky Light Actor* represents that light that gets scattered in the atmosphere or reflected off of other objects. It therefore comes through as weaker, indirect, from all sorts of different angles. In simpler terms, it represents the faint glow of the atmosphere.

Properties unique to the *Sky Light* are:

Real Time Capture

If enabled, actors like the *Sky Atmosphere* or *Volumetric Clouds* will affect the *Sky Light*. Therefore if mentioned actors are present in the level, this property should probably be enabled.

Source Type

Just to recap: the Sky Light is used to represent the reflection of light from the atmosphere or far away objects in the sky such as clouds or mountaintops. And to determine at what distance this light should appear to emanate from, it needs to be defined at what distance the sky should be considered to start at. By default, this *Source Type* property will be *SLS Captured Scene*, which just means that the sky will be defined as any point that is the *Sky Distance Threshold* away from the *Sky Light* actor. Therefore, if the Sky Light actor is placed at the center of the Level, with a *Sky Distance Threshold* of 150,000, we are saying that the sky should begin 150,000 units from the center of the Level.

Real Time Capture

If enabled, actors like the *Sky Atmosphere* or *Volumetric Clouds* will affect the *Sky Light*. Therefore if mentioned actors are present in the level, this property should probably be enabled.

3.4.6 Mobility Settings

The light actor's mobility settings somewhat are at a transitional stage at the time of writing.

Basically, as all actors, light actors possess one of three mobility properties: **Static**, **Stationary** or **Movable**. That is,

- **Static**: cannot move, cannot change any other property at runtime.
- **Stationary**: cannot move, but it *can* change color, brightness or other properties at runtime. In particular, some of its vertexes may change, i.e. it can change, transform its shape.
- **Movable**: can move and change other properties at runtime.

As one may expect, the more flexible a light actor is with regard to movement, the more computationally expensive it becomes:

Static lights create static lighting, which means all of its calculations can be processed at compile time, which is why it requires little processing power at runtime.

The *Stationary* and *Movable* settings produce dynamic lighting, which means calculations must be performed at runtime, hereby requiring valuable performance that might be required elsewhere.

The issue is that hitherto, the *Static* setting was the way to go if at all possible.

That being said, as of *Unreal Engine 5.2*, a new lighting system called *Lumen* became standard.

Lumen is a super efficient, almost magic-like system, rendering dynamic lighting scary realistically while using very little processing power. Therefore, the new recommendation is to use the *Movable* setting by default.

There is a drawback, though, since *Lumen* does not support *Static* lighting. Hence, by default any light from light actors whose *Mobility* is set to *Static* will be ignored at runtime.

Also, building the lights is not a requirement any longer.

3.5 Atmosphere & Clouds

This section discusses actors that can help in adding realistic looking atmosphere and clouds to levels, since just adding a *Directional Light* is not sufficient to create realistic outdoor scenes.

For example, adding a *Directional Light* actor to a simple scene adds lighting, the scene, however, looks nothing like a realistic outdoor environment.

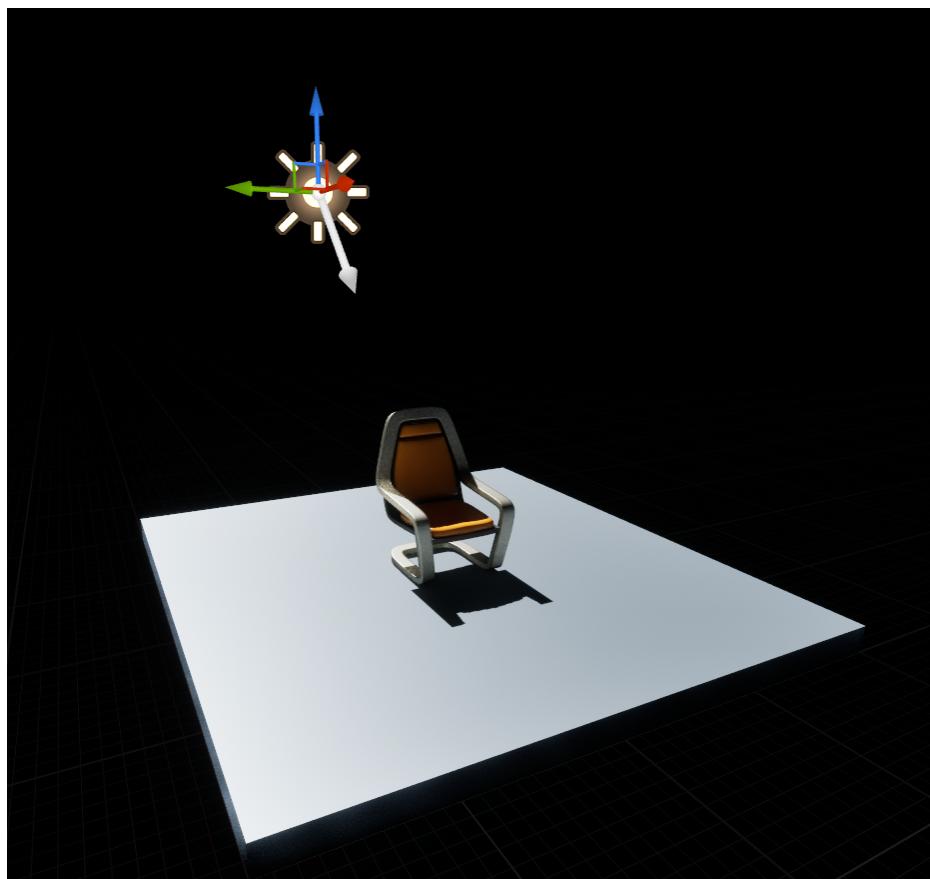


Figure 3.9: Directional Light Scene

If a *Sky Atmosphere Actor* is added (`Create > Visual Effects > Sky Atmosphere`), the same scene looks like this:

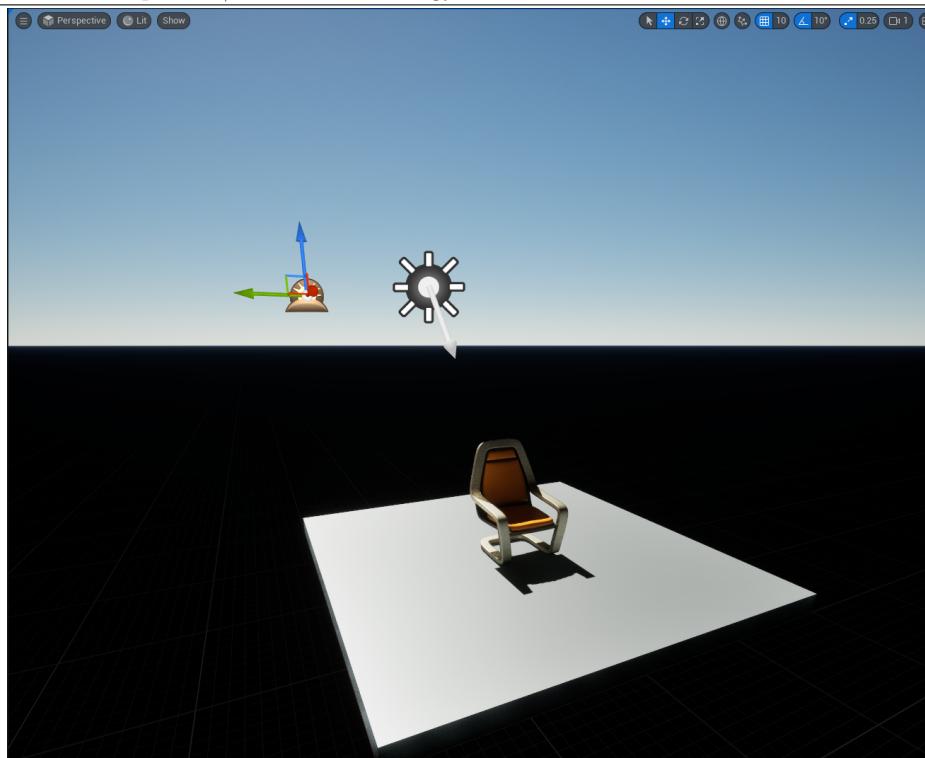


Figure 3.10: Scene: Directional Light & Sky Atmosphere

3.5.1 Creating an Atmosphere

This improves things a little, however, the scene still does not exactly look realistic. Note, that the sunlight in the scene actually is the *Directional Light*. Now, selecting the *Directional Light*, then checking the [Details Panel](#) [Atmosphere and Cloud](#) category, there is a property *Atmosphere Sun Light*, which is on by default. This *Directional Light Actor* will be linked to the *Sky Atmosphere* actor as long as this setting is activated. Notice, that there are properties affecting the *Directional Light* affecting the sun disk of the *Sky Atmosphere*.

For example,

- *Source Angle* increases the sun disc size
- *Rotation* changes the position of the sun in the sky. This is because rotation denotes the direction the rays of the sun hit the scene, and this in turn gives the position the sun has to be in order to match this direction (see figure 3.11). Alternatively, this can be accomplished hold down [Ctrl + L](#) and moving (i.e. dragging) the mouse. One cool thing about the *Sky Atmosphere* actor is that it will accurately render what the sky should look like at different times of the day. Therefore, if the Y-rotation of my *Directional Light* is set to 180 and the Z-rotation to 0, the sun disc will be located on the horizon and the sky and scene will look like a sunset.
- *Rotation*

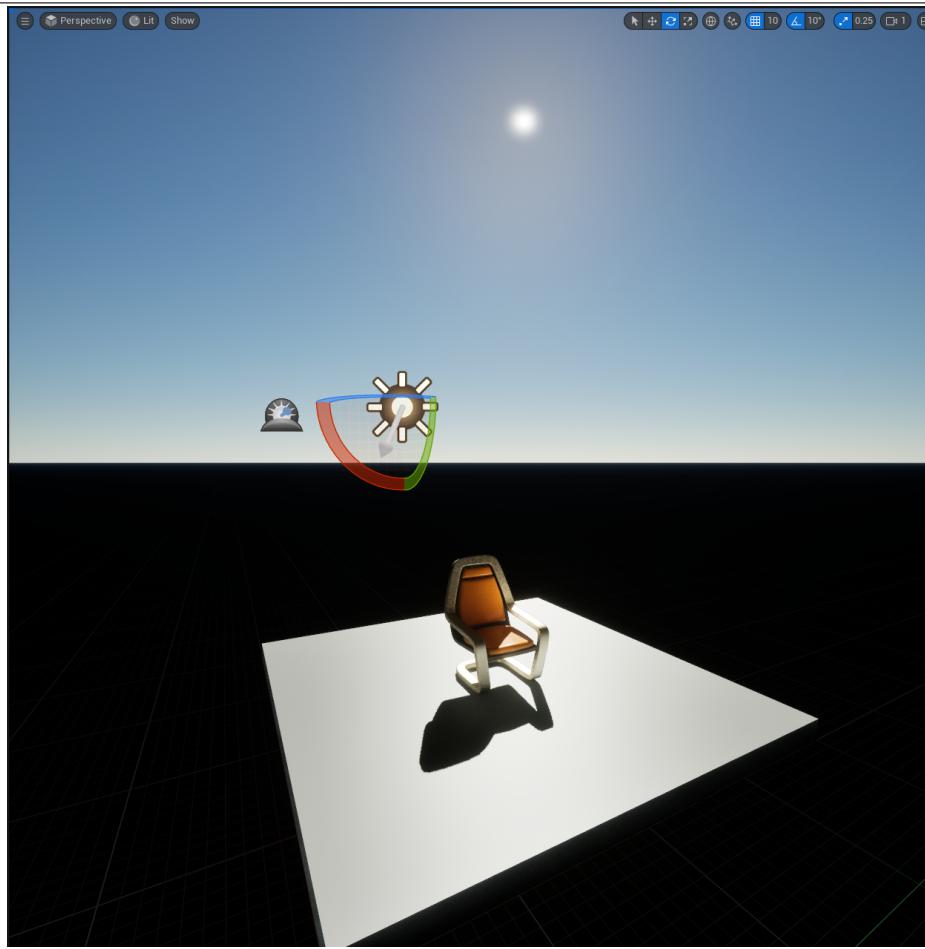


Figure 3.11: Rotation Changed Shadow

At the contrary, noteworthy properties of the *Sky Atmosphere* actore are:

- *Atmosphere Height* the height of the atmosphere, measured in kilometers. This actor allows for seamless transition from ground to outer space.
- *MultiScattering* This settings determines how much scatter, that is, light bouncing around in the atmosphere there should be, where 1.0 is the default.
- *Transform Mode* This defines where the bounds of the planet should be considered to exist, relative to the location of the *Sky Atmosphere* actor. If this is set to the default value, *Planet Top at Absolute World Origin* the surface of the planet, and thus the bottom of the atmosphere, will be considered to be at the world origin of the level, which is located at coordinates (0, 0, 0). If this value is set, moving the *Sky Atmosphere* actor has no effect on the location of the atmosphere in the level. If this is set to *Planet Top at Component Transform*, the surface of the planet, that is, the bottom of the atmosphere will be considered to be at the location of the *Sky Atmosphere* actor. Moving the actor will change the location of the atmosphere in the level. When this is set to *Planet Center at Component Transform* then the center of the planet, not the surface, will be considered to be at the location of the *Sky Atmosphere* actor.
- *Ground Radius* Defines the size of the planet, in kilometers.
- *Ground Albedo* Defines the amount of sunlight reflected off the surface of the planet. This also affects the light scattering discussed above.
- *Rayleigh Scattering*: The scattering of light in the atmosphere due to small particles, such as air molecules. This defines how the sky appears at sunset. Lower values mean a less dense atmosphere and thus less light is scattered and higher values mean a denser atmosphere and thus more light is scattered, affecting the colors of the sunset.

- *Mie Scattering*: Light scattering due to larger particles, such as dust or air pollution. In this type of scattering, light gets absorbed, causing the sky to appear hazy. The higher this value, the hazier the atmosphere will appear.
- *Absorption*: This is somewhat similar to the *Rayleigh* category, and basically you use the *Absorption Scale* property to set how much light gets absorbed in the atmosphere, and the *Absorption* property to set which color gets absorbed the most. This is just another way of controlling the overall color of the sky.

3.5.2 Creating Clouds

Clouds are created using the *Volumetric Cloud* actor. This actor can be found in [Create > Visual Effects > Volumetric Cloud](#). Noteworthy properties are as follows:

- *Layer Bottom Altitude*: Specifies the distance from the ground, in kilometers, that the clouds should begin to appear.
- *Layer Height*: Specifies the distance from the ground, in kilometers, that the clouds should stop appearing.
- *Material*: This gives the actor its flexibility. The overall appearance is determined by the material set in this category. *Unreal Engine* includes a default *Material* here, called *SimpleVolumetricCloud*; however, this can be changed to different materials.

3.6 Player Start Actor

In levels without an instance of this actor, the player is going to start off position (0, 0, 0). To assign a different starting spot, this actor is used. It is available in [Create > Basic > Player Start](#).

The *Player Start* actor can also be used to specify the direction the player should be facing when the Level starts, indicated by a light blue arrow (see figure 3.12).

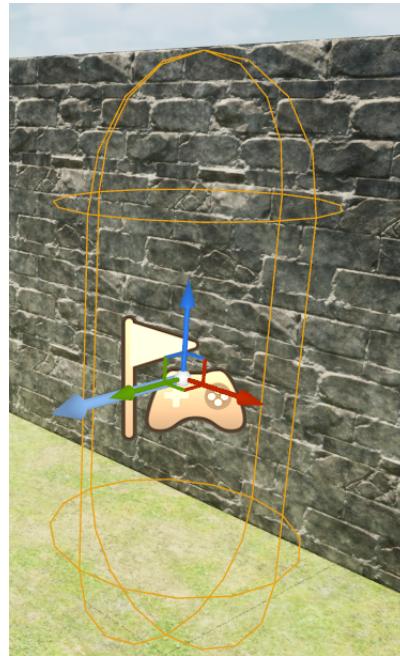


Figure 3.12: Player Start Actor

Hint: Usually, the game starts at the *Player Start* actor position. To temporarily change that to the current camera position, click the 3 dots to the right of the [Play](#) button and select *Current Camera Location*. This will cause the level to start at the currently active camera position.

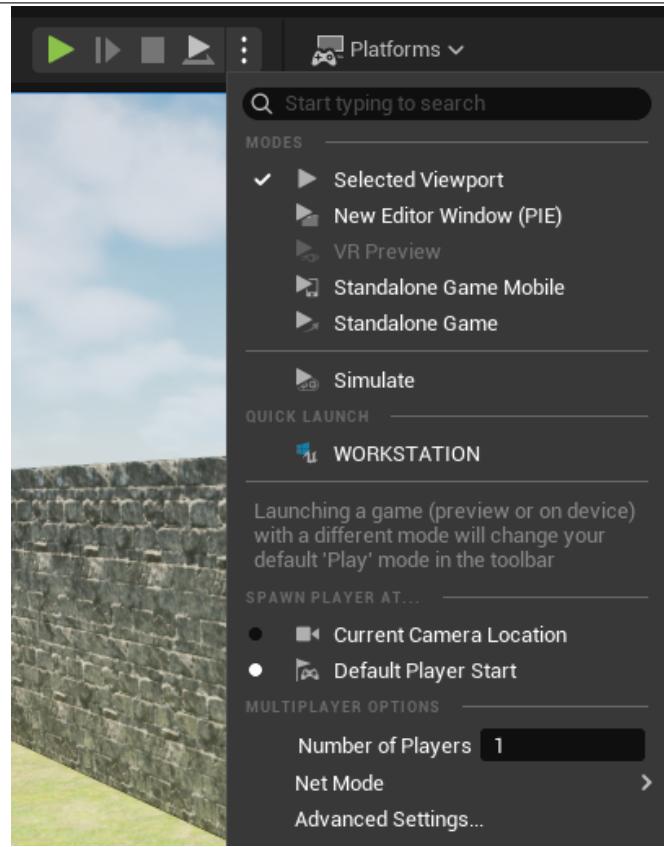


Figure 3.13: Player Start Menu

3.7 Components

Components are different objects or functionality that can be attached to actors. There are many different kinds of Components. Some of the types of *Components* are objects that are also used as actors on their own.

As an example, *Static Mesh* can be added as a Component to another actor. Or a light can be attached as a *Component* to another actor, combined representing a flash light.

Other *Components*, such as *Movement Components*, do not possess an own Actor type and are only used as *Components* on other actors. For example, a *Rotating Movement Component* attached to an actor will cause that actor to rotate, but would otherwise not be of much use on its own.

3.7.1 Adding Light Components

For example, a flashlight could be created by attaching a light onto a static mesh in the form of a flash light like so:

1. Drag a cylinder into the level. Scale and rotate it so it resembles the body of a flashlight.
2. Select the cylinder, **Details Panel** **Add**
3. A list of component is shown, grouped by category. Enter the term "light" into the searchbar.

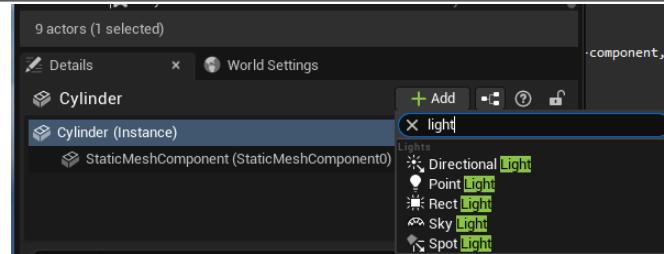


Figure 3.14: Add Light Component

3. Add a spot light to the cylinder.

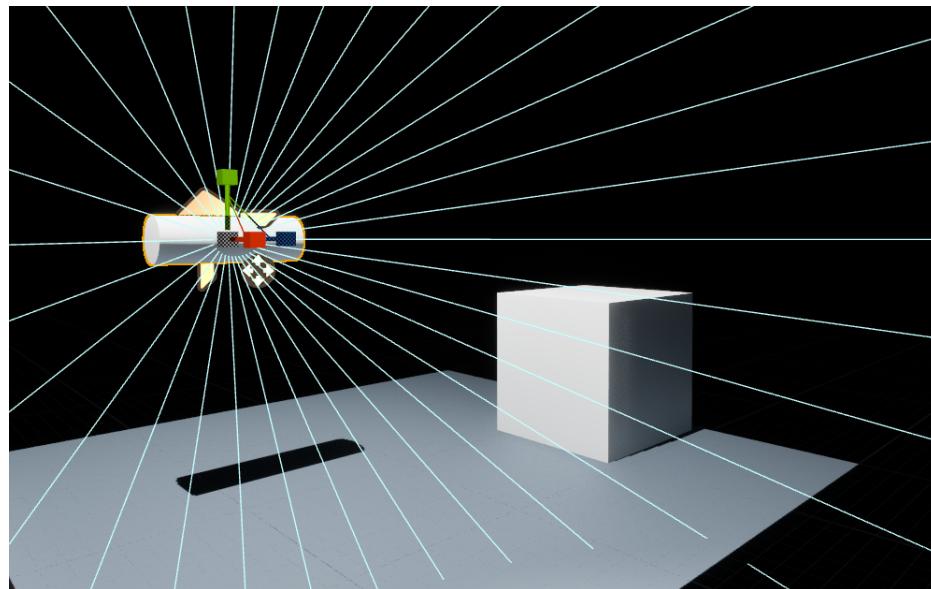


Figure 3.15: Mesh With Spotlight Component

The component is added to the cylinder, as indicated in the component structure of the *Details Panel*. Notice the spotlight became a child of the cylinder's static mesh component. Conversely, the cylinder's static mesh became the spotlight's parent component. This is an important idea. Now that the light became a child component, moving the parent, i.e. the cylinder entails that the child, i.e. the light, moves with it. It became attached.

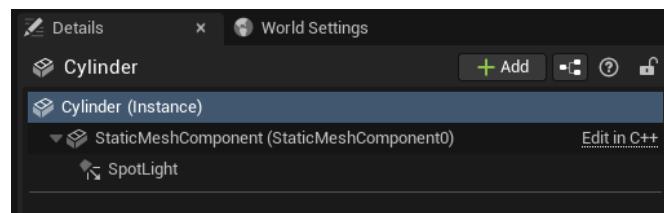


Figure 3.16: Cylinder with Spotlight Component

To add a component from the *Content Drawer*, click **Add**, add a generic *Static Mesh*; then in the *Details Panel*, replace the mesh as shown earlier.

3. Rotate the *Spotlight*, so it faces the "front" side of the flashlight.
4. Rename cylinder and spotlight to reflect its purpose.

3.7.2 Adding Non-Actor Components

Adding a non-actor component like a rotational movement to a mesh, like a cube, follows the same procedure.

E.g. to add a rotational movement to a cube, select the cube, set its *Mobility* to *Movable*, click **Add** in the components section of the *Details Panel*, select *RotatingMovement*. If the level is played, the cube will rotate.

With the movement selected, a number of properties regarding the movement can be set (see figure 3.17) .

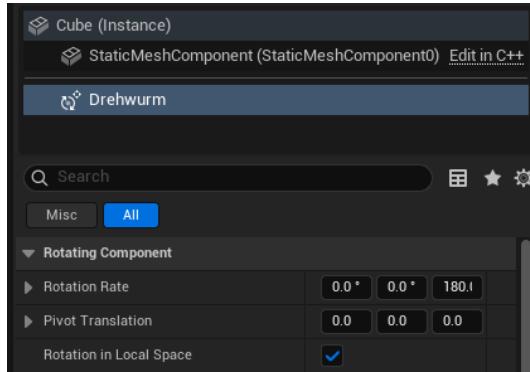


Figure 3.17: Rotational Movement Properties

Obviously, the rotation rate settings determine the rate of rotation around the 3 axes. Notice the *Pivot Translation* section. This can be used to set the pivot around the object is meant to rotate. If the pivot is set outside of the mesh, the object will revolve around this pivot point.

3.8 Volumes

In the *Unreal Engine*, a *Volume* is a 3D area of space that is invisible to the player and serves a specific purpose depending on its type. A variety of *Volumes* is available in the *Volumes* category in the **Create** menu.

Notice, that *Volumes* are *brushes*, therefore there are respective settings in each *Volume's* properties panel.

3.8.1 Volume Types

Find a list of noteworthy *Volumes* below:

- **Blocking Volume** Prevents actors from being able to enter that *Volume*.
- **Camera Blocking Volume** Just like a Blocking Volume but is meant to block only the Camera. This is useful in third-person games when the camera is supposed to keep out of certain parts of a level.
- **Trigger Volume** Probably the most important type of volume. They are used to trigger events when an actor enters or exits them. These events fire and can be handled using *Blueprints* or the *C++* programming language.
- **Pain Causing Volume** Causes damage to an actor. Notice, that an actor's *Pain Causing* property needs to be active for this to work. Also notice the settings *Damage Per Second*, *Entry Pain* as well as *Pain Interval*. These should be largely self-explanatory.
- **Kill Volume** Destroys actors entering.
- **Physics Volume** Allows for changes in physics within the volume. E.g. one could define the *Terminal Velocity*, various *Priority* settings, *Fluid Friction*, etc.
- **PostProcessVolume** This volume is used to tweak the rendering settings for just certain areas of a level.

Blueprints

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the concept of *Blueprints*. Basically, *Blueprints* kind of are the core of defines the *Unreal Engine*.

They are the engine's scripting and programming framework, designed to be extremely flexible, allowing for near unlimited creativity when defining gameplay and game mechanics. This is true even for non-coders, even though understanding programming concepts like object orientation and inheritance help in understanding the underlying concepts. This is because under the hood, *Blueprints* are nothing but a sophisticated UI wrapped around a *C++* framework. But again, programming skills are not required.

So far, this document dealt with game environments and the objects that live within this environment. That being said, without those objects interacting, games would turn out rather boring.

Blueprints are assets containing data and instruction; this is the element to deal with game concepts like player health, energy, scores and any other data structure the game mechanics required.

Therefore, *Blueprints* are what enforces the game logic.

There are two main types of *Blueprints* - The *Level Blueprint* and *Blueprint Classes*.

4.1.1 The Level Blueprint

A *Level Blueprint* is used to hold data and instructions used to affect the mechanics of a particular level. This may include elapsed level time, the number of assets a player collected, and so on.

This may include scripted events, like, for example, enemies spawned when a player character reaches a particular area of the level. I.e. anything that affects the whole level, regardless of player characters.

Also, events occurring just once inside a level might be handled best in the *Level Blueprint*.

Tutorial: Ending Game

In this tutorial it is shown how to use the *Level Blueprint* to end the game after 2 seconds.

- Open **Toolbar** > **Blueprints** > **Open Level Blueprint**
- Inside the *Level Blueprint Editor*, identify the *Event Graph*, the area of a *Blueprint* where the logic is scripted, using the UI.

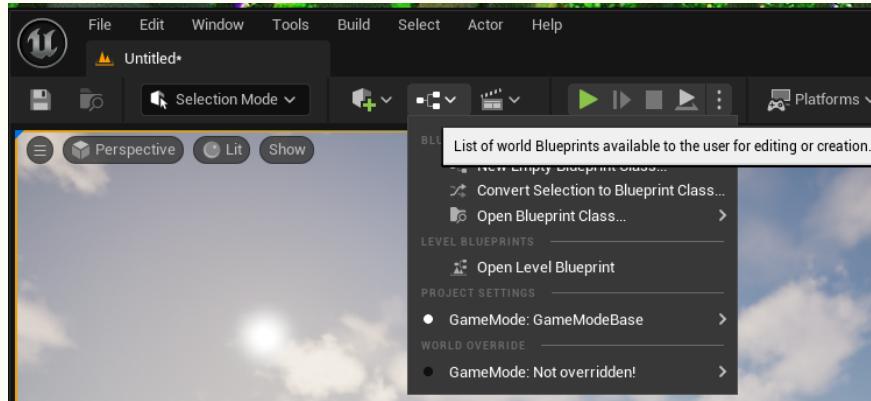


Figure 4.1: Blueprints Menu

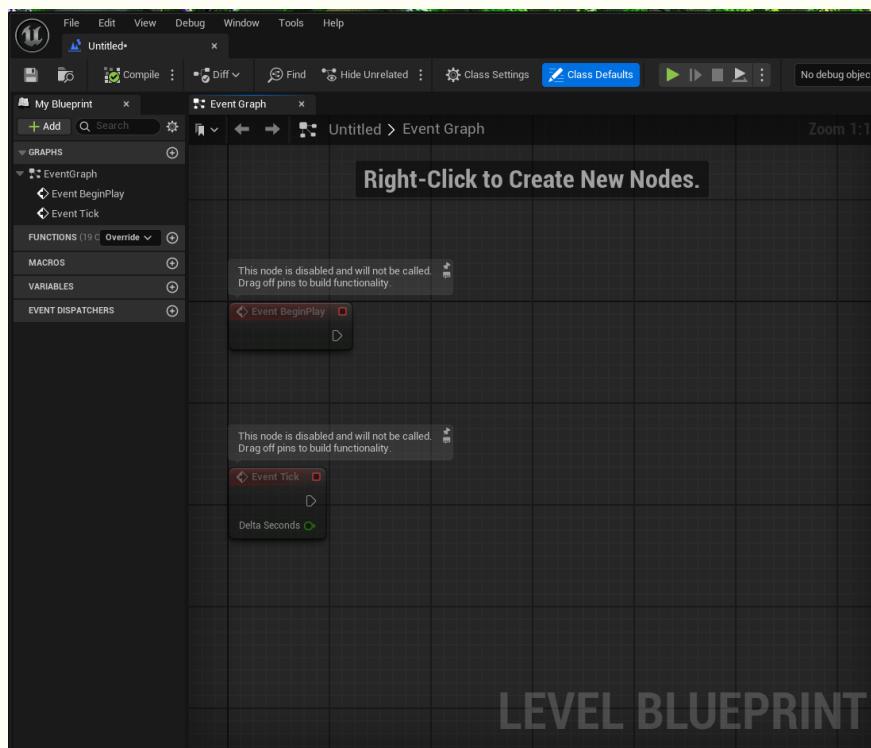


Figure 4.2: Level Blueprint Editor's Event Graph

By default, the *Level Blueprint* starts off with two nodes in the graph. These are common *Nodes* to start off with, which is why they're here by default. They are disabled at the start, so they are transparent, but they can be used right away by connecting them to another node.

The first node is the *Event BeginPlay* node. It will be activated by level start.

Tutorial: Ending Game

The top strip of an Event node will be the color red and it features an icon depicting an arrow inside of a diamond symbol. The second also an event node. The *Event Tick* node is a node that is activated on every tick of gameplay. Before every frame of the game is drawn on the screen, any logic connected to the *Event Tick* node will be executed.

This is useful, for example, in situations where certain conditions needs to be checked constantly, therefore when met will have an immediate effect on the game.

It will be shown how it is possible to end the game; however, in order to make this visible, a short delay of 3 seconds will be added; i.e. once the game starts, the *StartGame* event fires, calling the node in the *Blueprint*, which in turn will wait for 3 seconds before ending the game.

Unsurprisingly, to add this delay, a *Delay Node* will be used.

So to cause a delay in the execution of the logic, a *Delay Node* will be used. One way to create a new node is to **Right-Click** in any empty space in the graph, then select the node from the menu.

There is a whole plethora of nodes available to choose from, organized into categories; of course, there is a search box available to shorten things.

The *Delay Node* is a *Function Node*. *Function Nodes* are light blue and have an icon of a lowercase "f". In *Blueprints*, a function is a node that performs a specific task, basically it reflects the concept of *methods* from object oriented programming. Obviously, the task of the *Delay* function is to wait for a specified amount of seconds before passing execution on to the next node.

The icons on the edges of nodes are called *Pins*. Pins on the left side of a node are input pins and pins on the right side of a node are output pins. Pins with these white icons looking like a *Play* button are execution pins.

Clicking on a node and mouse-dragging off it creates a "wire", which can be connected to the input pin of another node, denoting a connection.

- **Right-Click** onto an empty spot in the *Level Blueprint Editor*, enter "*delay*", select the respective node.

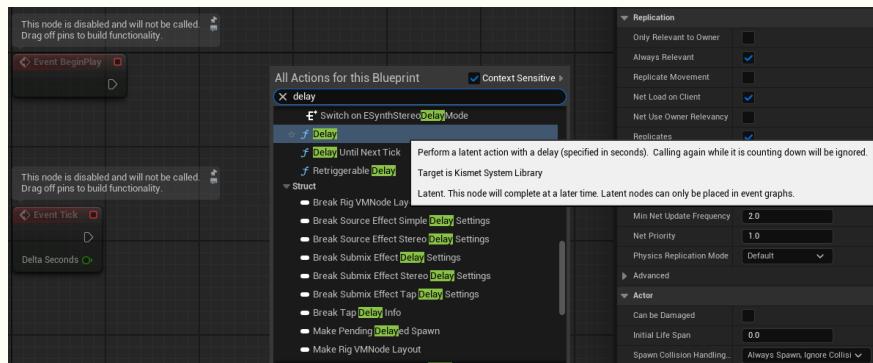


Figure 4.3: Add Delay Node

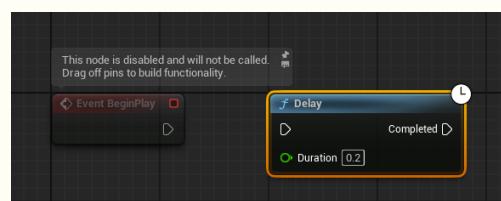


Figure 4.4: Delay Node Added

Tutorial: Ending Game

Now, the delay duration could be specified by entering the respective number in the node, or by connecting an different node that outputs a number. For now, the duration (3 seconds) will be hard coded inside the node. Just for clarification, notice that the delay node does **NOT** cause the game to pause. It just delays the execution of the execution path it is integrated with.

- **Click And Mouse-Drag** to connect from the *Event BeginPlay* node to the *Delay* node; connect to the *Delay Node Input Pin*.
- **Click And Mouse-Drag** from the *Delay Node Output Pin* onto the *Blueprint*. Let go, which should open die add node dialogue as before when **Right-Clicking**. Search for quit, then select *Quit Game*.

Notice, that the *Quit Game* node has some additional input pins; these are used in multiplayer game scenarios and can be used, for example, to quit the game of a particular player, e.g. when his character has been "killed".

There is also this *Quit Preference* setting where different behavior may be selected: *Quit* to have the application actually close as well as *Background* to make the application not actually close but just run in the background instead.

Finally, *Ignore Platform Restrictions* provides an option to override any restrictions relating to quitting games that might exist on the platform the game is running on.

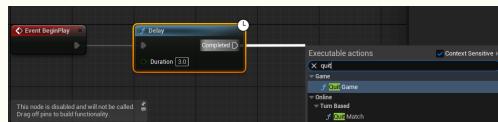


Figure 4.5: Connect with Quit Game

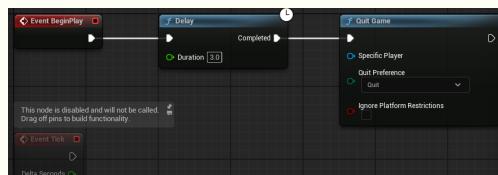


Figure 4.6: Quit Blueprint

- Click **Toolbar** **Compile**, save, exit the *Blueprint*.
- Run the game. It should sit idle for 3 seconds, then quit.

Finally, one note on *Comments*. *Comments* are a way of summarizing the functionality of *Blueprints*.

- Comments can be created by selecting the affected *Blueprint*, and either **Right-Click** **Create Comment From Selection** or pressing **C**.

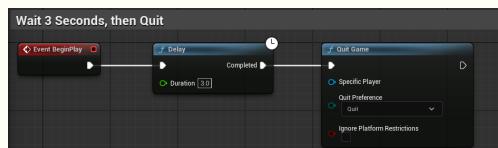


Figure 4.7: Comment Added

4.1.2 Blueprint Classes

Blueprint Classes are a way to turn any actor or asset into a *Blueprint*, allowing for objects with custom behavior and/or data. If this sounds familiar, there is a reason for that.

This does not only smell like *Object Oriented Programming* and/or *Inheritance*, it actually is. As mentioned above, *Blueprints* are just wrappers around a *C++* framework. And, that actually shall be taken literally: Under the hood, when manipulating objects using the *Blueprint Editor*, *C++* code is generated; which is the reason why there is the requirement to *compile Blueprints*: the generated *c++* code must be compiled before it can be run. Therefore, since the system is following *Object Oriented Programming* concepts, it seems quite natural that the *Blueprint* system works exactly the same, which is a good thing, as these concepts have been successful for a reason.

Plus these ideas are simple to understand as well as rather useful when it comes to game development as well.

Case study: Haunted House

If we were to build a haunted house, including a chair that mysteriously floats up and down, like it were possessed.

In this scenario, the player could try to shoot the chair with a gun, destroying the chair if hit with a sufficient number of projectiles. This could be achieved using *Blueprints*. More concretely, it could be achieved by creating a *Blueprint Class* out of the chair mesh.

Within this *Blueprint*, the chair movement could be specified, along with the chair's health (default value of 100). Each time the chair is hit, a predetermined value might be subtracted (say, 10); in case the health value deteriorates below 0, the chair shall be destroyed.

One benefit of this system, being derived from object orientation, is that once a *Blueprint Class* has been created, an arbitrary number of instances of this class can be instantiated; exactly like in object oriented programming. Keep in mind that after all, *Blueprint Classes* are nothing but *C++* classes, derived from a superclass (that would be, of course, the generic *Blueprint Class*).

Concretely, once the *Blueprint* is completed, it is available in the *Content Drawer*; so an instance of it can be dragged into the level as often as required. Each time this happens, a new instance of the haunted chair is created inside the level.

Each of the chairs would float up and down, starting from its initial position. Of course, each chair would possess its own health variable.

4.2 Variables

Just like in regular programming, *Variables* are used to store data. However, *Unreal* comes with its own set of data types (see figure 4.8).

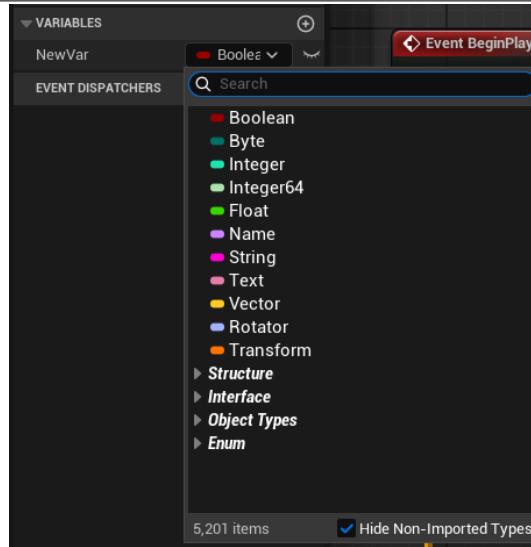


Figure 4.8: Unreal Data Types

Variables can be created within **Variables** sub-tab located in the right hand tab of the *Blueprint Editor*.

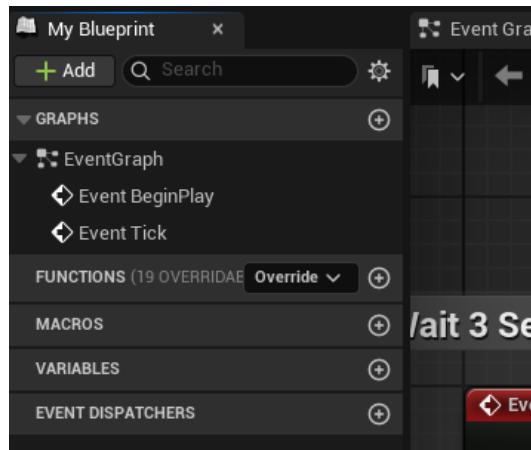


Figure 4.9: Variables

Clicking on the plus sign on that tab will create a new variable which can then be named as well as its data type selected.

Speaking of data types. *Unreal Engine* comes with a significant number of data types; unfortunately, discussing those is beyond the scope of this document.

Most of the data types resemble data types as known from programming languages like *C*, *C++*, *Java* or *C#*. A few of them, though, are rather unique or worth mentioning for other reasons:

- **Byte:** Takes the least amount of memory, therefore very efficient. Can be used to store a single number ranging from 0 to 255.
- **Text:** Used for, well, text. Its noteworthy because it features a localization feature. Use this if the values it holds may be translated into a variety of different languages.
- **Vector:** This data type is used to store three float values. So this is useful for defining points in space, RTG or other color values, or, frankly, or anything that is defined with three values.
- **Rotator:** Stores numbers that describe an object's rotation in 3D space.

- **Translator:** The Transform data type is used to hold data that describes an object's position, rotation, and scale in 3D space.

Tutorial: Ending Game. Part 2

Continuing the tutorial from the preceding section, the hard coded value denoting the delay duration is going to be replaced by a variable instead. The respective variable will be called *DelayDuration*. Its value is going to be of type *float*, matching the Data type of [Delay](#) [DelayDuration](#). Now, the data type is color coded, where the color *green* denotes *float*. That said, there is no need to memorize all the data type colors; simply hovering over a variable will bring up information about the variable (see figure 4.10).

To use the variable, drag it into the *Blueprint Graph*, what brings up a menu asking if a getter or setter should be used.

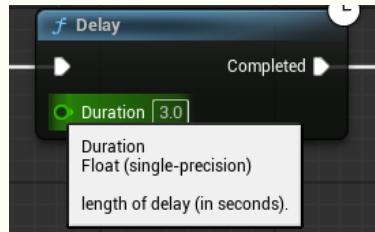


Figure 4.10: Additional Variable Information

- [Blueprint Editor](#) [Right Tab](#) add a new variable; name it *DelayDuration*. Set its type to *Float*.
- Drag the variable into the *Blueprint* graph, let go the [LMB](#), select *getDelayDuration*.
- Drag from the [DelayDuration](#) [Output Pin](#) and connect the wire to the [Delay Node](#) [Duration Pin](#)

Notice, that at this point, the variable has not been initialized, not even a proper initialization value has been set. To set this, with the variable selected, it is possible to set a default value in the respective *Details Panel*. Doing so will reveal that in order to set a default value the *Blueprint* must be compile first. Which makes sense, because the variable is not known to the *Blueprints* system prior to compilation. Therefore, the [Toolbar](#) [Compile](#) button is used to compile the *Blueprint*. Now, the default value can be set; its default in the *Details Panel* is 0.0.

- Select the *Delay Duration* variable. With it selected, head over to the *Details Panel*.
- Notice under the *Default Value* category, the system asks for compilation.
- Click [Toolbar](#) [Compile](#).
- Set the [Default Value](#) [Delay Duration](#) value to 3.0;
- [Toolbar](#) [Compile](#) again.
- [Play](#). Notice, that the game behavior did not change at all. However, the *Delay* node's *Delay Duration* now is set by a variable instead of being hard coded.

At this point, the delay duration is set by reading a default value from the variable. To set this duration after the game started, a respective setter can be used, this time setting the delay duration to 6 seconds:

- Drag from the *Delay Duration* variable and create a *get* node.
- Connect the *get* node's output pin with the *Duration* input.
- Drag a *Delay Duration* *set* node into the graph. Set its *Delay Duration* to 6.

Tutorial: Ending Game. Part 2

- **Right-Click** the *Event BeginPlay* output node and select *Break This Link*.
- Connect *Event BeginPlay* with the *Set* node.
- Connect the *Set* set node with the *Delay* node.
- **Compile** and save.

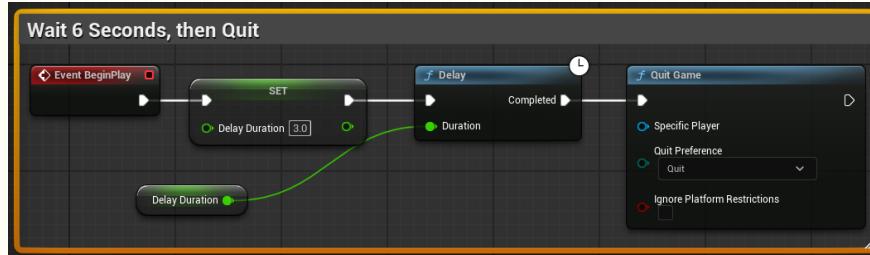


Figure 4.11: Blueprint: Wait 6 Seconds, then Quit

The default value of *Delay Duration* is still 3.0, but before the execution flow approaches the *Delay* node, the value of *Delay Duration* is getting changed to 6.0.

So far, so straightforward. Note some of the variable properties:

- **Description:** Obviously, used to describe what the variable is used for. Not so obvious is that once this is set (and compiled), this description will be used as tooltip when hovering over the variable.
- **Instance Editable:** If this is ticked, the variable appears in the *Details Panel* of the respective *Blueprint* class.
- **Category:** Used to group variables into categories. This is just used within the *Unreal Editor*. To create a new category, just write its name into the respective box; otherwise, use the drop-down to select the category.
- **Slider Range:** Allows to set a slider range.
- **Value Range:** Similarly, this allows to set the value range. Note, that the value range must include the slider range.
- **Replication and Replication Condition:** Used in multiplayer games; if *Replication* is set to *Replicated*, this means that the value is replicated over the network. The *Replication Condition* states under what conditions the value should be replicated.

4.3 Functions

In *Unreal Engine*, *Functions* are the equivalents of functions and methods used in regular programming languages. By extension, in *Unreal Engine*, a function is a specific node graph.

Tutorial: Welcome Message Function

In this tutorial it will be shown how to create a function that takes a name as input and outputs a welcome message including the given name.

- Go to the **Level Blueprint > My Blueprint** tab.
- Click **[+]** to add a function; name it *WelcomeMessage*.

Notice, that whenever a new function is created, the editor spawns the node graph for this functions and adds its entry node. In the *Details Panel* for this function, input and output nodes can be added.

For this function, a name - data type String - is required to be able to add it to the welcome message.

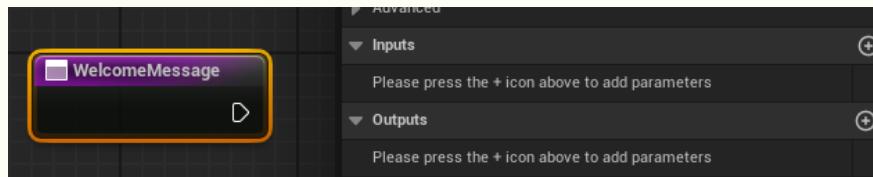


Figure 4.12: Function Details Panel - Add Input/Output

- Click **[Inputs > +]**, give it the name *FirstName* of type *String*.

Notice, an input pin has been added to the *Blueprint*.

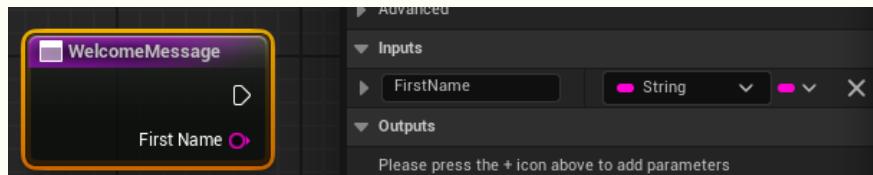


Figure 4.13: Input Pin Added to Function Node

- Click **[Outputs > +]**, give it the name *Message* of type *String*.

This creates a *Return Node*, which is of course derived from the concept of return types in regular programming.

- Right-Click to create an **Append** node, which is used to concatenate two strings together. The **Append** node is of course itself a function. Be careful though when selecting the node: typing *Append* into the search bar will yield multiple instances of an append node, as functions going by this name are used in a range of classes. So, make sure to look for the *String > Append* function.
- In the **A Node**, type *Hello, .*
- Connect **Welcome Message > First Name**, to the **B Node**.
- Click **Add pin**
- Type **Welcome to Game Development!**

Tutorial: Welcome Message Function

- Connect **Append** \gg **Return Value** to **Return Node** \gg **Message**

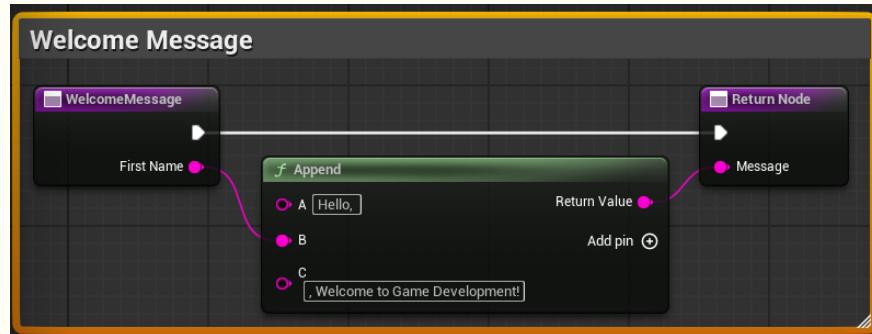


Figure 4.14: Welcome Message Function

- **Compile**, then save the *Blueprint*.

The function is now complete; it can now be called.

- Go back to the **Event Graph**.

Notice that the *Welcome Message* function can be found in the **[My Blueprint]** tab to the right. **Drag** it into the *Event Graph*. Alternatively, it can be found by **Right-Click**, then search for *WelcomeMessage*.

- Connect the **Event BeginPlay** node to the **Welcome Message**.
- From the **Welcome Message** \gg **Output Pin** drag a wire onto a free spot in the graph. Select a **Print String** node.
- Hard code "Mustafa Mustermann" into **Welcome Message** \gg **First Name**
- Connect **Welcome Message** \gg **Message** to **Print String** \gg **In String**
- Connect **Print String** \gg **Output Pin** to **Set** \gg **Input Pin**

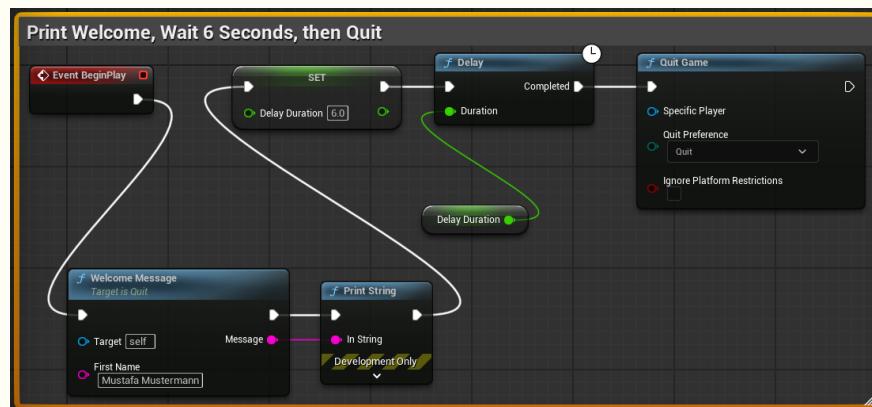


Figure 4.15: Welcome, Wait and Quit Blueprint

- **Compile**, then run the game

Now, as soon as the game starts, it is going to print "Hello, Mustafa Mustermann, Welcome to Game Development!" on the screen.

Notice the *Details Panel*, it features properties similar to variables, Like *Description*, also appearing as tooltips, or *Categories*.

Also note the *Keywords* property; this is used when searching functions. Adding keywords may increase visibility when searching.

4.4 Flow Control

Flow control functions can be found in the *Node Menu > Utility > Flow Control*. Most of the functions here actually do have their respective twin as known from conventional programming.

Noteworthy flow control nodes are:

- **Branch** node: The *Branch* node takes in a boolean value as its input and then continues execution either through the *True* output pin if the boolean value is true, or through the *False* output pin if the boolean value is false. This is equivalent to the *if statement*.
- **Until Next Tick**: Will cause a delay, but for a duration of just a single tick of gameplay.
- **ForLoop**: Equivalent to *For Loops*
- **ForLoopWithBreak**: Similar to *ForLoop*, except that it is possible to break the loop before it is finished.
- **Do N** node; abbreviation for *Do N Times*. Like *ForLoop*. However, this blocks execution once the *N* occurrences have been exceeded. For example, an event should happen every time a particular key is pressed. This works as long as the number of key strokes did not exceed *N*; thereafter, key strokes will be ignored. However, this can be reset using the *Reset Pin*
- **DoOnce**: Basically, this is a *Do N* node, where *N = 1*: The only difference is that this node can start off deactivated; i.e. it must be reset to become active.
- **DoOnce MultiInput**: Like *DoOnce*, just for an array of input / output pairs. If reset, ALL of the pairs become active again.
- **WhileLoop**: Equivalent to *While Loops* known from classical programming.
- **FlipFlop**: alternates between having execution flow out of the A pin or the B pin every time the node is activated.
- **Gate**: Can be set to Opened or Closed. When the gate is open, execution flow entering the enter pin will flow out of the exit pin. Conversely, when the gate is closed, any execution flow entering the node will stop there, and the exit pin will not fire. Any time execution flows into the open pin, it will open the gate and vice versa with the close pin. Toggle will do just that, it toggles the gate open/closed.
- **MultiGate**: Execution enters a single execution input pin, but it will flow out of only one of the execution output pins. Output will not flow out of ALL pins, rather, just one pin at a time, depending on the options chosen.

4.5 Accessing Actors From The Level Blueprint

In order to make good use of the *Level Blueprint*, it is required to access actors from within it, reading data, making decisions, manipulating actors or spawning events.

Tutorial: Accessing Actors From Level Blueprint

In order to get access to an actor within the Level Blueprint, that actor needs to be selected in the *Level Editor* when **Right-Click** in the *Event Graph* of the *Blueprint*.

- **Left-Click** the chair to select it
- **Right-Click** on an empty spot in the *Event Graph*, bringing up the events menu.

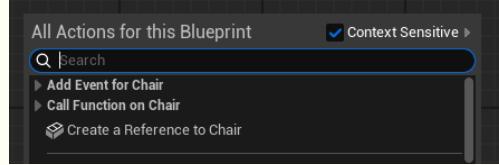


Figure 4.16: Content Sensitive Options For Selected Actor

Notice the options related to the chair on top of the menu. Here, events based on that actor may be called, functions may be invoked or a reference to the actor may be obtained. Note that for this to work, the *Context Sensitive* checkbox needs to be checked (see figure 4.16). Also note, that this is possible in the *Level Blueprint* only. This way, it is possible to access an actors properties. E.g. an actor's visibility could be changed, making it disappear.

- **Right-Click** to bring up the menu and search for *Set Visibility*. Notice, that context sensitivity must be deselected.
- Choose **Rendering > Set Visibility**

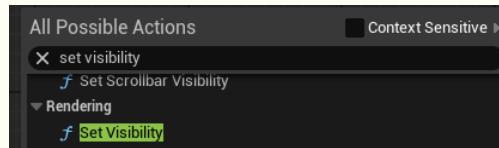


Figure 4.17: Choose Rendering > Visibility

- Connect **Chair > Output Pin** to **Set Visibility > Target Pin**. Note, that since visibility is a property of components, not the actors themselves, so this node is just getting the *Root Component* of the *Static Mesh Actor*, which is the *Static Mesh* component, so that that can be passed in as the target component for this node.

The **Set Visibility > New Visibility** variable determines if the component is visible; so if left unchecked, this means the component is *not* visible.

- Connect **Event BeginPlay** to a **Delay** node, set its delay duration to 3
- Connect **Delay > Completed Pin** to **Set Visibility > Input Pin**



Figure 4.18: Chair Disappears Blueprint

Tutorial: Trigger Box Blueprint

This tutorial shows how to spawn events from actors. In particular, using a *Trigger Volume*, events are created whenever an actor starts or ends overlapping with the volume. The chair disappears when the actor enters the level and reappears when the actor leaves the volume.

- Drag a `Create > Volumes > Trigger Volume` into the level. Name it *Chair Trigger*.
- With *Chair Trigger* selected, open the *Level Blueprint*.
- **Right-Click** to open the menu, navigate to `Add Event for Chair Trigger > Collisions > Add On Actor Begin Overlap`.
- Repeat with `Add Event for Chair Trigger > Collisions > Add On Actor End Overlap`.

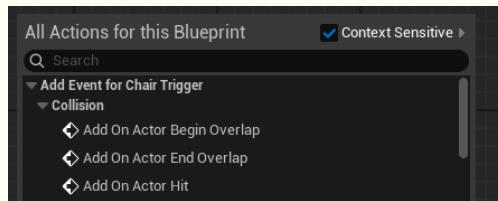


Figure 4.19: Adding Overlap Events

This way, there are not two events, one for entering the volume, one for exiting it.

- Connect `On Actor Begin Overlap (Chair Trigger)` to `Set Visibility > Input Pin`
- **Copy and Paste**
- Connect `On Actor End Overlap (Chair Trigger)` to the copied over `Set Visibility > Input Pin`
- Tick the copied over `Set Visibility > New Visibility`

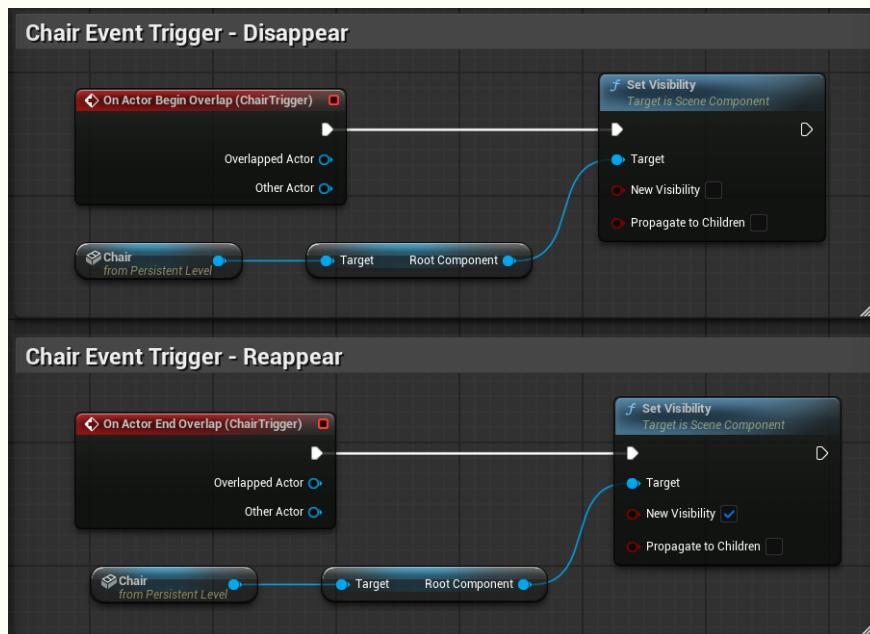


Figure 4.20: Trigger Box Blueprints

- **Compile**, save and run. Now, the chair disappears once the actor enters the volume just to reappear when leaving it.

4.6 Timelines

Timelines are used to create simple animations, such as changing the location, rotation or color of an object. *Timelines* define the position on a graph given a time period in order to define at which spot between two endpoints a value should be. For example, to define movement, a *Timeline* could specify that after 3 seconds the object should have move 6 meters in X-direction.

To add a new *Timeline* node, to a *Blueprint*, it is “Add Timeline...” from the bottom of the menu.

And you can give your different *Timelines* different names.

I’m going to name this one *TimelineLightIntensity*, because I’m going to use it to gradually adjust the intensity of a light source in my Level.

And now to edit this *Timeline*, I just need to double-click it to open it in the *Timeline Editor*.

The first thing I’m going to want to do is use this button here to add a new track to this *Timeline*.

A track is used to specify what value or values the *Timeline* should be outputting at any given point in time.

This first option on the menu allows you to add a new float track which is used to animate single float values.

The Intensity property of a light source is a single float value, so this is the track I want to create.

And I’m going to name this track “IntensityValue.”

So a track is represented by a graph.

The time, in seconds, from the start of the animation, is represented horizontally.

The value that is outputted is represented vertically.

So to specify what value should be outputted at what time, you need to add a key to the track.

To add a key, hold down Shift on the keyboard and left-click in the graph.

To change the placement of this key, I can either left-click on it and drag it to where I want, or I can use these boxes to enter the X and Y values manually.

And if I want to move around the graph, I can right-click and drag the mouse, and if I want to zoom in-and-out, I can use the scroll wheel of the mouse, just like in a *Blueprint* graph.

Okay, so I want my light to start out completely dark at first, or, in other words, have an Intensity of 0.

So I’m going to set my first key to be at time 0, which represents the exact moment the animation starts.

And, as I said, I want it to start out completely dark, so I’m going to specify that at time 0, I want the value outputted to be 0 as well.

And now, I want it to stay dark for a second before the light turns on, so I’m going to add another key, set its time to 1, and set its value to 0.

And now, I want the Intensity of the light to gradually increase until it reaches a certain amount.

And I want it to reach this maximum amount halfway through the time remaining in the animation.

So the length of the animation can be set up here.

Right now, it’s set at 5 seconds, and my last key is at 1 second, so there are 4 seconds left in the animation.

So I’m going to add another key, and I’m going to set it’s time to 3 seconds.

Okay, and this moved the key off the screen, so I’m going to click in an empty part of the graph to deselect all keys, and then click this button here which will zoom in or out to fit all the keys on the screen horizontally.

And, as I said, halfway through the animation, I want the Intensity of the light to peak, so I’m going to set the value of this key to 200.

Unreal Engine measures the Intensity of the Point Light in candelas, and 200 candelas is plenty bright for this demonstration.

Okay, so that moved the key way off the screen, so I’m going to click this button to fit

all keys on the screen vertically.

Okay, and now at this point, I want the Intensity of my light to start decreasing, until the light is essentially off again.

So, I'm going to add one more key, and I'm going to set it's time to 5, which is the very end of this timeline, and I'm going to set it's value to 0.

And then I'm going to click the Zoom to Fit Horizontal button again.

Alright, so this line here, known as the curve, represents what value the Timeline node will output at any given time during the animation.

At the start of the animation, the Timeline node will output zero and it will continue to output zero for the first second.

Then, for the next two seconds, it will gradually output a higher and higher value, until at 3 seconds into the animation, it is outputting a value of 200.

Then for the next 2 seconds, this value gradually decreases, until it reaches zero again.

Alright, and this value gets outputted from this pin over here on the Timeline node.

For each track you create, it will create a new output pin on the Timeline node that will output the value for that track.

So what I want to do is to connect this pin to a node that will set the Intensity property of my light.

So I'm going to go back to the Level Editor, and I'm going to drag a light into the Level, and I'm going to name it MyLight.

And with it still selected, I'm going to go back into the Level Blueprint, and I'm going to right-click in the graph, and with Context Sensitive checked, I will have the ability to "Create a Reference to MyLight".

So now, I'm going to drag off this pin and create a "Set Intensity" node.

This node will set the Intensity of whatever light is connected to it, to the value specified by its New Intensity pin.

So I'm going to connect the output of the track I made to this pin.

And I'm going to connect the Update execution pin to the Set Intensity node.

The Update pin will fire for every tick of gameplay while the Timeline is playing.

And finally, I'm going to connect the Event BeginPlay node to the Play execution pin of the Timeline.

Okay, so now, when the Level begins it will cause the Timeline to start playing.

So then for the next 5 seconds, which is the length of the Timeline, for each tick of gameplay, the Update pin will fire, causing the Set Intensity node to fire.

And each time the Set Intensity node fires, it will receive a different value from the track based on that track's curve and the current playback point of the Timeline.

So let's see how this looks.

So when the Level first starts, it's completely dark, and then the light gradually gets brighter until it reaches its peak intensity, then it grows dimmer until it goes out completely.

And the whole thing takes exactly 5 seconds.

Alright, so that's the basics of how Timelines work.

You create a curve on a track to output different values across time, and then use those values to update some property during each tick of gameplay.

So now, let's look at some of the options we have available when working with Timelines, so that you don't screw up your Timeline as bad as Marty McFly did.

So I used this float track to change the Intensity property of a light.

But I could have used it to change any property that is defined by a single float value.

If I wanted to create a track to change a vector value such as an object's location, I would use this button to create a vector track.

And by gradually changing an object's location over time, I can create a simple movement animation.

Okay, and then this button here is used to create an event track, which can be used to specify at what points in time certain events should fire.

This button is used to create a color track which can be used to gradually turn one color into another color.

And then this button here can be used to add an already existing curve to a new track.

So you can save curves you create and use them again later.

So if I right-click in the graph, I can select “Create External Curve” to save this curve I made as an asset in the Content Browser.

And then if I selected that curve asset in the Content Browser, and clicked this button here, it would create a new track and add that curve to it.

If I want to add an existing curve to the current track, I need to select the curve in the Content Browser, and then click this arrow here in the track I want the curve added to.

If an external curve is already loaded here, you can click on the magnifying glass to select it in the Content Browser.

And then clicking on the X button will convert this to an “Internal Curve” again so that it can be edited.

Alright, so now I’m going to add a second track to this Timeline, and then you’ll notice that when I pan or zoom one of the tracks, it will do the same thing on the other track, and that’s because both these tracks have Synchronize View checked.

If I uncheck this, the tracks will now pan and zoom independently.

And then, if you want to change the order that the tracks are listed, you can use these up and down arrows here.

And then back up here, to the right of the track buttons, there are a few options you can set for your Timeline.

Again, you can set the length of the Timeline here.

And then to the right of that is the “Use Last Keyframe?” option.

If this is unchecked, the very last tick of the animation will be ignored.

This is useful when looping to prevent skipping in the animation when the loop starts over.

If the AutoPlay option is checked, the Timeline will begin playing as soon as the Level begins, even if it’s not connected to the Event BeginPlay node.

With the Loop option checked, the animation will start over from the beginning once it reaches the end.

The Replicated option will cause the animation to be replicated across all clients during a multiplayer game.

The next option is “Ignore Time Dilation.”

So “time dilation” is a feature of the Engine where you can slow down or speed up time in your game.

So with this option checked, the Timeline will ignore any time dilation settings and just play at normal speed.

And then finally is the “Tick Group” option.

So again, the Timeline will output a value during every tick of gameplay.

The Tick Group option allows you to specify when during this tick the next value should be outputted, and there are four Tick Groups to choose from.

You can choose to have the value outputted before any of the physics data for the next frame is updated, while that data is being updated, after all the physics data has been updated, or after almost everything else in the frame has been updated.

Alright, so now I’m going to go over the pins of the Timeline node itself.

So when the Play pin fires, the Timeline will start playing from its current position.

So let’s say the Timeline starts at zero, and the Play pin fires, and then 2 seconds into the animation the Stop pin gets executed.

At that point, the animation will pause at the 2 second mark.

If the Play From Start pin was executed, the animation would go back to the zero-second mark and play from there.

But if the Play pin was executed at that point, the animation would continue playing from the 2-second mark.

The Reverse pin will cause the animation to start playing in Reverse from its current position, and the Reverse from End pin will move the animation to the end and then start playing in Reverse from there.

The Set New Time pin will move the animation to whatever time is specified in the New Time

pin.

The Finished pin fires when the animation is complete.

And then the Direction pin will contain an Enum value of either Forward or Reverse, based on which direction the Timeline is playing at that particular moment.

Alright, so now I'm going to close out the lecture by going over something called a Lerp node, which is commonly used in conjunction with Timelines.

So Lerp stands for Linear Interpolation and its node can be found in the Math category of the node menu.

And actually there are different Lerp nodes based on the type of values you are working with.

I'm currently working with float values in this example, so I'm going to select the Lerp node under the Math>Float category.

Ok, so how do Lerp nodes work?

The basic idea is that you enter a starting value in pin A and an ending value in pin B. Then you enter a value between 0 and 1 into the Alpha pin.

This number represents a percentage, so 0 represents 0

50

So if you imagine value A as the starting point of a line, and value B as the ending point of a line, the percentage you enter will tell you what the value is at that point on the line.

So, for example, if this Alpha pin has a value of 0, this node will output the value in pin A. If the Alpha pin receives a value of 1, the node will output the value in pin B. If the Alpha pin receives a value of 0.5, the node will output the value that is exactly halfway between the values of A and B, and so on.

So to give you some examples with actual values, I'm going to set the A pin to be 0 and the B pin to be 4.

Ok, so now, with A set to 0 and B set to 4, if I enter a value of 0 for the Alpha, the Return Value pin will return a value of 0, because 0 is 0

If I enter a value of 1 for the Alpha, this node will return a value of 4, because 4 is 100

If I enter a value of 0.5 for the Alpha, the node will return a value of 2, because 2 is 50

And if I enter a value of 0.25 for the Alpha, the node will return 1, because 1 is 25 0 and 4.

Ok, so that's how Lerp nodes work.

Now let's look at one example of how they can be used, particularly how they can be used in conjunction with Timeline nodes to give you a little more flexibility.

So right now, I have this light which is going from a minimum Intensity of 0 up to a maximum Intensity of 200.

But what if I wanted the player to be able to change these values in the game?

Like have the character interact with some control dials that can set the minimum and maximum brightness of the light?

Well right now, there's no way to do that because I have those values hardwired into my Timeline curve.

But I can solve this problem by using a Lerp node.

Instead of hardwiring the values in the Timeline, I will create variables for these values that will be plugged into the A and B pins of the Lerp node.

And the Timeline, instead of its curve representing absolute Intensity values, will instead represent the percentage of the Intensity to be used.

So its values will range between 0 and 1 and its output will be connected to the Alpha pin of the Lerp node.

Ok, so first I need to create the variables.

So I'm going to create a float variable called Minimum Intensity.

And another float variable called Maximum Intensity.

I'm going to set the Default Value of Minimum Intensity to 0.

And I'm going to set the Default Value of Maximum Intensity to 200.

And I'm going to connect those variables to the A and B pins of the Lerp node.

And now I'm going to go back into the Timeline Editor, and I'm going to change the value of the second key to 1, so that the curve now goes from 0 to 1, and then back down to 0.

And now I'm going to connect the Track pin of the Timeline node to the Alpha pin of the Lerp node, and connect the Return Value of the Lerp node to the Set Intensity node.

So now the Timeline node will output values from 0 to 1, and back down to 0, which will cause the Lerp node to output values from 0 to 200 and then back down to 0.

And so now, if I run this again, it should do the same thing as before.

Okay, so both of these examples do the same thing.

The first is a little more straightforward, a little easier to understand, while the second example gives you a little more flexibility over the values being used.

So whichever method is best will depend on the situation.

Alright, and that will conclude the lecture on Timelines.

Input

Collisions

User Interface

Audio

Packaging & External 3D Content

Procedural Landscape Creation

Multiplayer

Programming Using C++

Animation

Cookbook

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