

Continued Personal Development

COMP150 - CPD Report

1608351

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1 Introduction

Within the games industry I am particularly interested in the development of accessible games for children with special educational needs. For instance, *AbleGamers* [1] and *SpecialEffect* [2] are two charities dedicated to supporting people with disabilities to play videogames; funding research into assistive gaming technology and supporting game developers in improving their inclusivity. As explained by the founder of *AbleGamers*, Mark Barlet; *"I believe that there is nothing more powerful for people with disabilities than the freedom that only videogames can provide. It is an art form that allows us all to run, jump, and be whatever we want to be."* [1]. Helping to develop more accessible games for children with physical or learning disabilities will require creativity, the ability to problem-solve and the ability to stop and listen to feedback from clients. Having reviewed my work this semester, I have highlighted five areas, important for a future career in programming for games, that I need to address. These are; proficiency in one or more programming languages, managing independent study, maintaining concentration, interpersonal skills within a team and public speaking.

2 Programming Proficiency

For a future career as a games programmer, proficiency in C++ and at least one other programming language is a fundamental requirement. However, as I have had little experience in programming languages, I need to dedicate more time to this. We are now transitioning to C++ and it is important I practice the nine hours of programming recommended for our course. To achieve this, planning a manageable time-table may be beneficial. Over the Christmas break, I plan to make use of the work through lessons on Pluralsight [3], familiarise myself with Unreal Engine [4], complete the three assigned worksheets and read "*Programming: Principles and Practice Using C++*" [5]. In the new term, implementing a timetable for independent study, improving concentration in lectures and practising pair or mob programming, should help me develop a firmer grounding in C++.

3 Managing Independent Study

As mentioned above, I need to dedicate more hours to programming practice. I have found it difficult to maintain consistent hours for independent study and to successfully prioritise my workload. In the games development industry, being able to meet deadlines and recognise which tasks need action first is an important skill, helping ensure working software is produced on time. Planning a timetable around my other commitments should help me feel more in control. I tend to have better concentration in the early evening, so I aim to assign these hours to study. Since I have not studied full-time for a significant period, this semester was overwhelming at times. I found it difficult to prioritise effectively when working simultaneously on six different assignments. For the next semester, I plan to use a wall-chart, categorizing tasks into three sections; "*do now, do next, do after*" [6]. For short and focused periods of study, with regular quick breaks, I have found the *PomoDoneApp* [7] helpful, so I shall continue to use this next semester.

4 Concentration

In lectures, I have found maintaining concentration difficult. Learning ways to manage my anxiety, may help to improve my focus. However, I am yet to find a healthy and effective method. In all industries, particularly the team-focused environment of game development, poor anxiety-management is likely to have a negative impact on performance [1]. It may be useful to print off the session slides prior to a lecture, both for taking notes and to help draw me back once I have lost focus. At the very least, if I have not managed to concentrate during class, I need to ensure I have read and understood the session slides in my own time.

5 Interpersonal Skills Within a Team

As within the games industry, our course has a heavy focus on teamwork. Successfully contributing and communicating within a team can be difficult for me, as I often misinterpret social cues and dislike sharing incomplete work. In our team for the game development project, there was a large divide in programming competency between individual members, and this made it difficult to evenly distribute the work. I found it difficult to communicate suggestions effectively and felt this reduced my ability to contribute, as much as I would have liked, to the code. Developing a firm grounding in C++ will help me communicate and contribute with confidence. It may be beneficial to develop a better understanding of my role within a team and how I can best contribute. Familiarising myself with research into successful teamwork, such as Belbins team roles model [8], could help me determine how I should support my team next semester.

6 Public Speaking

The ability to pitch effectively to publishers and investors is crucial for a game concept to succeed. Public speaking is a challenge for me; I find it stressful being in new locations or

with new people, even if I am not required to speak. However, there are a few methods I can try next semester to improve my public speaking and reduce anxiety. Firstly, this semester I have pitched without a clear idea of what I am trying to communicate and a lack of confidence in the information I am giving. Placing greater importance on the preparation for a pitch and ensuring our information is relevant and correct, will increase my confidence in presenting future games. Currently I use negative strategies to manage public speaking anxiety, tending to rush through the pitch and avoiding eye contact with the audience. For our next presentation, I need to practice speaking at a slower pace and engaging with the audience. Finally, I need to change my underlying mentality towards public speaking, such that I make a conscious decision to be a speaker rather than feeling it is being forced upon me.

7 Conclusion

Over the Christmas break, my priority is to practice programming in C++ and to familiarise myself with Unreal Engine, this being fundamental to working on our game development project. I will also plan an independent study timetable, which I can review during the semester and adapt if necessary. To improve my independent study, I will be using a wall-chart for prioritising tasks and shall continue to use the Pomodoro technique. Developing discipline in studying will be of great help in managing project workloads and meeting sprint deadlines in the future. In January, I will be working on finding effective anxiety-management methods in my Study Skill sessions, which may benefit my ability to concentrate, communicate within a team and pitch to an audience. Learning to control my anxiety will greatly benefit my ability to maintain future employment.

References

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