Template for research proposal: Critical Report

This guide allows you to provide an outline of research motivations and objectives identifying key research to support a discussion on a specific research topic.
Note: you should apply the Harvard referencing conventions in all sections.

1. Research Objective and Question

A title's primary function is to define precisely and concisely the topic. A legitimate secondary function is to stimulate the reader's interest. Two-part titles are common: a main title to stimulate interest and somehow imaginatively 'encapsulate' the topic, and a subsidiary title to specify or focus the topic.

Title

Beyond Visual Fidelity: How Real-Time Rendering Enhances Cinematic Character Performance in Contemporary Video Games

Research Question

How do real-time rendering technologies support cinematic storytelling and subtle character performance in contemporary video games?

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the relationship between real-time rendering and cinematic storytelling in contemporary video games.
2. To examine how subtle character performance contributes to player empathy and emotional engagement.
3. To analyze how lighting, atmosphere, environmental design and rendering technologies support narrative experiences.
4. To identify how these techniques can inform character animation practice within real-time production workflows.

2. Project Rationale

Consider and explain why you wish to research the subject? A short introduction to the topic, why it is of interest, and why the research is worthwhile. Clarify the central question you are addressing, what will your argument, (your hypothesis) be? (Max 200 words)

Contemporary video games increasingly utilize cinematic techniques to create emotionally engaging experiences. Advances in real-time rendering technologies have enabled developers to produce highly immersive worlds in which lighting, atmosphere, environmental storytelling and character animation work together to support narrative experiences. While much discussion surrounding real-time rendering focuses on visual fidelity, this research aims to investigate its contribution to character performance and storytelling.

As a 3D animation student with a particular interest in game production and real-time workflows, I am interested in understanding how technical developments can enhance audience engagement beyond graphical realism. Games such as Red

Dead Redemption 2, Bloodborne and Elden Ring demonstrate different approaches to environmental storytelling, character performance and world-building. Through analyzing these examples, this research will explore how real-time rendering technologies support subtle character performances and strengthen cinematic storytelling.

The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of how technical and artistic decisions work together in contemporary game production and may inform my own animation practice.

3. Keywords and keyword phrases used for research

Experiment with connecting key words and phrases relevant to your topic and research objectives on academic sites. You can optimise key words/phrase searching by reading around your topic.

Real-Time Rendering, Cinematic Storytelling, Character Performance, Environmental Storytelling, Video Game Narrative, Performance Animation, Interactive Storytelling, Digital Cinematography, Real-Time Production Pipeline

4. Situate your proposal in relation to key texts, issues and debates.

Produce a draft review establishing and explaining the views of relevant authors and how they can support the presentation of your argument to answer the research question. Use Harvard referencing (Max 300 words)

The relationship between narrative, player engagement and visual presentation has become an important area of discussion within game studies. Jenkins (2004) argues that games are capable of communicating stories through environmental design, proposing the concept of "narrative architecture." This perspective is particularly relevant when examining games such as Bloodborne and Elden Ring, where storytelling often emerges through exploration rather than direct exposition.

McCloud (1993) and Thomas and Johnston (1981) emphasize the importance of visual communication and performance in creating emotional responses from audiences. Their observations regarding gesture, movement and visual interpretation remain highly relevant to contemporary character animation within games. Similarly, Hooks (2017) argues that believable character performance depends on the communication of thought and emotion through subtle physical actions rather than exaggerated movement alone.

Recent developments in real-time rendering have introduced new possibilities for visual storytelling. Technologies such as physically based rendering, dynamic lighting and real-time global illumination contribute not only to realism but also to atmosphere and emotional tone. Discussions surrounding modern game production

increasingly focus on how technical systems can support artistic and narrative goals rather than simply increase graphical fidelity.

This research will bring together ideas from game studies, animation theory and digital cinematography to examine how character performance and real-time rendering work together. It will argue that rendering technologies should be understood as narrative tools that influence the audience's interpretation of character emotion, performance and story, rather than as purely technical improvements.

5. Identify any materials or data that will be examined

Include names of material examples to be examined such as films, artworks, games, events, directors and artists, or any other relevant media. sources that might provide pertinent data or statistics to support research objectives. All material should be referenced using the Harvard Style

Red Dead Redemption 2 (Rockstar Games, 2018)
Red Dead Redemption (Rockstar Games, 2010)
Bloodborne (FromSoftware, 2015)
Elden Ring (FromSoftware, 2022)

6. Bibliography

List recognised academic books, journals and articles, that you may use to support the research you wish to undertake. This list should be referenced. Harvard Style – For guidance on how to reference correctly (using your UAL login) See appropriate examples on https://www.citethemrightonline.com/

Hooks, E. (2017) Acting for Animators. 5th edn. London: Routledge.

Jenkins, H. (2004) ‘Game Design as Narrative Architecture’, in Wardrip-Fruin, N. and Harrigan, P. (eds.) First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 118 – 130.

Manovich, L. (2001) The Language of New Media. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

McCloud, S. (1993) Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art. New York: HarperCollins.

Murray, J.H. (1997) Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Nitsche, M. (2008) Video Game Spaces: Image, Play and Structure in 3D Worlds. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Thomas, F. and Johnston, O. (1981) The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation. New York: Abbeville Press.

Wolf, M.J.P. (2012) Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation. New York: Routledge.