

STORYHACK

Storyhack is a touring professional development and training programme. It is built and experienced like a game and designed as a reboot for storytellers and communicators from traditional linear forms.

Our aim is to help artists, film makers, theatre directors, musicians, marketers and others to embrace interactivity, gamification, speculative design and transmedia methodologies into their practice as a means for adapting their approach for the emerging age of playful media.

CONTENT – [THEORY & PRACTICE]

The programme incorporates both contemporary concepts around interactivity and practical learning about production tools including;

THE THEORY

Audience Trends

We begin the residency with a breakdown of current audience trends, demonstrating how interactivity and playfulness have become the areas of culture which are in growth whilst traditional linear mediums are in decline. We aim to communicate very clearly that contemporary audiences no longer want to simply sit back and watch, that there is a huge opportunity to generate new audiences by including them meaningfully in the culture which they enjoy.

Interactive Design / Games System Design

How do we utilise what we know from research into positive psychology to create incredibly engaging stories? Stories which enable audiences to experience prolonged creative engagement, a sense of being part of something larger than themselves, the rewards of social connection and feelings of heroic purpose? How do we create digital works which have positive results in people's real world lives? Games system and interactive design is concerned with these and other questions related to creating work which meaningfully engages audiences

Writing for Interactivity

Stories which offer audiences continuous opportunities for meaningful decision making bring with them a number of challenges not present in linear narratives. How does the writer manage complexity issues with regard to sophisticated branching narratives? What kinds of software can you use for writing interactive stories? How can you share and communicate your ideas with other people? We will cover these and other aspects of writing for interactive content.

Speculative Design

How can we harness the power of interactivity to do more than simply tell a compelling story? What happens if we present a fiction where the interactive elements seek to consult an audience, gather opinion data or find where consensus lies around critical issues?

Transmedia Storytelling

In a world where the vast majority of our audience carry a smartphone in their pocket, in which internet access is both ubiquitous and continuous and open world exploratory games are a dominant cultural form, there are great opportunities to be inventive with presenting stories across multiple platforms simultaneously. How can we use transmedia approaches to create experiences which fuse and meld with audiences' everyday lives rather than being something they have 'go to' or 'seek out'? We will look at the ideas behind transmedia storytelling with case studies of how it has been used successfully.

A Different Starting Point? How Games Engines Can Transform the Practice of Writing

In theatre, cinema and other traditional mediums the written script is invariably the starting point of a project and for very good practical reasons. Software such as Unity Games Engine however offers creators new possibilities to work differently, to create a world-based approach to telling stories, physically constructing environments and then inhabiting them in virtual reality to design stories from the inside out. What are the advantages of this? Have we reached a point where the storytelling can also be the creative technologist dealing with content production seamlessly as they write?

Storytelling and Immersive Technologies

The language and grammar of cinema emerged over a number of decades, moving away from its roots in theatre to become a distinct form with its own rules and approach to telling stories. Virtual, augmented and mixed reality technologies are still very new, we are yet to figure out exactly how best to use them and this situation is compounded by the fact that the technologies themselves are still rapidly evolving with new sensors and devices coming to market on a regular basis. So what technologies are currently available and what have we learnt so far about their use in storytelling? What is the future likely to hold and how are artists and storytellers adapting to these new approaches?

THE PRACTICE

Unity Games Engine

At the heart of all the practical skills participants will learn sits **Unity**. It is the most popular games engine available, it has the shallowest learning curve and is available in a free version. Games engines were originally designed for making video games but have evolved to become the go to choice for making smartphone apps, virtual reality, augmented reality and a huge range of other types of interactive media supported across a broad spectrum of devices. We aim for all participants to achieve a good understanding of Unity, to get them through the initial learning curve so that they can then go and continue exploring the possibilities in their own practice.

Visual Scripting

Visual Scripting tools enable creators to make interactive content using Unity without ever having to write a line of code. We will be helping participants understand the **Playmaker** visual scripting tool as a means for making stories respond automatically and intelligently to their audiences actions, to track their progress within a story and to streamline the making and prototyping interactive content.

3D Modelling

We will be helping participants understand some of the options for creating 3D models to use in their content; from traditional screen based 3D modelling software such as Cinema4D to new intuitive VR based modelling systems such as Oculus Medium.

Photogrammetry

Photogrammetry is a technique for creating incredible photorealistic 3D environments which can also be interactive and adaptive to audience actions. It is an approach which can be achieved using a DSLR camera and free software and utilised in virtual reality as well as interactive games.

Virtual Reality / Augmented Reality

We will spend time learning how to make content for virtual and augmented reality devices using Unity Games Engine to make immersive content which places the user at the centre of an interactive environment.

Adapting Content for Smartphone and Mobile Devices

Content which is designed to be exported for use on mobile devices (mobile VR / smartphone apps etc) need to be optimised in order to run smoothly. We will look at the options available to makers who wish to make the most of the computing power available in these devices whilst reducing or avoiding sacrifices on quality.

HOW STORYHACK WORKS

We have built Storyhack in the form of a game, partly because we feel this is the best approach but also in order to demonstrate that the ideas being conveyed throughout the week are effective tools for more than just storytelling. They apply and can be adapted to many areas of our lives including how we help people to learn.

Participants will be given a brief containing a goal, a set of rules and protocols for ongoing feedback throughout the residency. They will form into groups based on their own and other participants' areas of expertise and together build their skills by making something to share on the final day. Each group will be given a different brief, with different goals and rules to follow.

The residency will be split into morning and afternoon sessions. The morning sessions will be focussed on learning new skills and the afternoon sessions will be for group work. Tutors will be available for group mentoring in the afternoons, to give feedback on progress and offer advice.

Where applicable the work they produce within the residency can be exhibited afterwards, if the programme is happening in a venue or as part of a festival.

THE TUTORS

Storyhack is devised and delivered by Simon Wilkinson and Myra Appannah. They have both individually made the transition from linear storytelling in theatre and film to large scale interactive immersive works which have toured across 27 nations on 6 continents, featured at Tate Modern and been BAFTA longlisted. Together they have curated festivals of progressive gaming for British Council and are regular speakers at universities, conferences and festivals around the world.

PRACTICAL STUFF

Storyhack can accommodate up to 20 participants. The course usually runs for between 5 and 10 days but can also be adapted for shorter durations where applicable.

Residency locations will need internet access and all participants will be expected to bring their own laptop (mac or PC) with the latest version of Unity Games Engine installed and registered. The venue will also need a projector / screen and audio system set up.

Storyhack can provide some equipment for the group to use, including virtual reality headsets.

FOR ANY FURTHER INFO EMAIL storyhack@circa69.co.uk