Making Machinima with *The Sims™ 2*: General Tips by TheSidDog™
(Version 1.0)

by
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Introduction

This is a basic tip sheet to aid in the production of machinima made with *The Sims™ 2*. It is the intention of the author to give the reader a better understanding of the small steps that she can take to ensure a smoother production.

Document Version

This guide was written in August 2006 – it covers features from the original *The Sims™ 2* base game, and the following expansion packs: *University*, *Nightlife*, and *Open for Business*. As more expansion packs are released, this guide will be updated.

Special Notice: You do not need any of the expansion packs for The Sims™ 2 in order to understand this guide, however certain tips will only work with specific expansion packs installed – those tips will contain a special notice.

Assumed Knowledge

It is assumed that the reader is familiar with using and navigating the *Windows®* operating system – this includes making, copying and deleting files and folders. It is also assumed that the reader has a good understanding of *The Sims™ 2* and how it is played – this includes the steps necessary to back up a family / lot.

Special Note: When this guide refers to a camera, it is referring to the first person camera, which is accessed by pressing the TAB key. The W-A-S-D keys control movement, while the mouse controls the camera's pitch.

What This Guide Will Teach You

This guide will teach you the technical aspects of creating machinima with *The Sims™ 2*. You will learn how to create custom camera resolutions and speeds; how to take advantage of special cheat codes; how to control more than eight actors per set; how to keep your production streamlined, and how to share your machinima.

What This Guide Will Not Teach You

This guide will not teach you the art of cinematography; the art of film editing; the art of story telling; the details of modding *The Sims™ 2*; or the details of operating video editing software. Additionally, because it is already assumed that you know how to play *The Sims™ 2*, this guide will not be going into the details of performing standard gameplay operations.

Table of Contents

Pre Production Setting up your software

- Setting up your software. **3**
- Preparing your folders. **3**
- Preparing your files. **3**

Production

- Launching *The Sims™ 2*. **4**
- Modifying configuration files. **4**
- Modifying the camera. **6**
- Know thy cheat codes. **9**
- The BoolProp Cheat. **13**
- Casting your actors. **16**
- Building your sets. **17**
- Controlling your extras. **17**
- Numerical hot keys. **18**
- Setting up your scenes. **18**
- Knowing when to save. **18**
- Recording your scenes. **19**
- The importance of reloading. **19**
- Voice acting. **19**
- Setting up special effects. **20**

Post Production

- Organizing your video files. **21**
- Organizing your audio files. **21**
- Organizing your image files. **21**
- Editing your machinima. **21**
- Rendering your machinima. **22**
- Preparing your release. **22**
- Backing up your work. **22**
- Sharing your machinima. **23**
- Handling criticism. **23**
- Final words. **23**

Bibliography and Notes **24**

Pre Production

- **Setting up your software:** If you wish to make machinima, you will need programs that specialize in audio and video editing, in addition to *The Sims*™ *2*.

  Audacity is a free audio editor that let's you record and edit voice acting, plus sound effects. Audacity can be found here: *http://audacity.sourceforge.net/*

  Windows® Movie Maker is a free video editor that is easy for beginners to understand – it comes installed with the *Windows® XP* operating system. In addition to *Windows® Movie Maker,* the author recommends trying out a free trial of *Sony® Vegas*, found here: *http://www.sonymediasoftware.com/products/vegasfamily.asp*

- **Preparing your folders:** Before you begin shooting, create an organized place to store your work. Do the following:

  1) Create a new folder called "Machinima" – this is where you will store your future projects.

  2) Inside your machinima folder, create a new folder and give it the same name as your machinima's title. This guide will refer to it as your "project folder."

  3) Create these new folders inside your project folder: Video, Audio, Stills and Saves.

  4) Store all your video clips in the video folder – this includes raw footage, rough cuts and final cuts. Give each cut its own folder.

  5) Store all your audio clips in the audio folder – this includes music, sound effects and voice acting. Give each sound type its own folder.

  6) Store all still images in the stills folder.

  7) Store all your editing software's save files in the saves folder.

  8) Additionally, you can create a special folder for text files, such as your script.

- **Preparing your files:** If it's possible, start creating or gathering files that aren't dependant on machinima footage now, i.e. your soundtrack or script. Preparing those files now will save you time when you are ready to begin editing your work.

  Special Note: When it comes to still images for your machinima, do not create or use .jpg files, as their compression can make them grainy and ugly. If possible, use .tiff or .bmp files, which can be created by most respectable image editing programs.

Production

- **Launching** *The Sims*™ *2*: Launch *The Sims*™ *2* and create a new neighborhood. Name this new neighborhood something like "Machinima Town" or any other self explanatory name. Then, choose a terrain type for your new neighborhood – this should suite the style of your machinima's genre. Creating neighborhoods for the purpose of machinima will help preserve the aesthetic style of your regular ones.

  Next, open your game options and go into the camera controls. Depending on your computer's strength, set everything to their highest settings. You always want to record your raw footage at the highest quality.

  Special Note: You will see a list of compression settings in your camera options. Ideally, you should always record without compression, but keep in mind that even a few seconds of uncompressed footage can equal hundreds of megabytes in file size -- Sim footage is recorded as an .avi file, which becomes corrupted when larger than two gigabytes in size. If you cannot record uncompressed footage, then use the next best option on the list.

  Special Note II: Unless you absolutely have to, do not record the sound effects. You will see a little check box that controls this option.

  When you are done modifying your camera settings, open your graphics options and set everything to their highest settings – the exception is screen resolution, which should be on the lower end.

- **Modifying configuration files:** Be default, you cannot record with "Smooth Edges" on, so you will need to modify to a configuration file. Additionally, you can create custom video resolutions with this file. Do the following:

  While the game is running, press "Alt + Tab" to minimize your game – then, go to the following location: My Documents / EA Games / The Sims 2 / Config.

  Inside the Config folder is a file titled "VideoCapture" – back it up. Next, open the original file – it will look like the following (see next page):

Production
(Modifying Configuration Files, Continued)

Below are the configuration file's settings. The details will be explained in bold text along side, or below, the settings they are covering. Please note that the bold text is not part of the actual file.

```
[Config]
PreferredCodec=VP61
# Folder is relative to Res/Userdata
Folder=Movies
FilenameBase=movie
NoFillFrames=0
AudioStereoOutput=0
AudioRateDivisor=4
```

GlobalSettings	= reset, vbr:1, fps:10, keyinterval:30, mode:1, datarate:0
SmallSettings	= size: 128x128 **<Small, medium and large setting resolutions.**
MediumSettings	= size: 320x240
LargeSettings	= size: 640x480
LowQualitySettings	= minq: 6, maxq: 16, mode:0
MediumQualitySettings	= minq: 4, maxq: 10, fps:15, mode:0
HighQualitySettings	= minq: 2, maxq: 8, fps: 30, keyinterval: 60
SmallLowSettings	= datarate: 75
SmallMediumSettings	= datarate: 150
SmallHighSettings	= datarate: 300
MediumLowSettings	= datarate: 150
MediumMediumSettings	= datarate: 300
MediumHighSettings	= datarate: 600
LargeLowSettings	= datarate: 300
LargeMediumSettings	= datarate: 600
LargeHighSettings	= datarate: 1200

AllowAntialiasing=0   # some drivers have issues with capture when AA is enabled
^The above controls whether you can record with "Smooth Edges" on.

```
[Codecs]
0=VP61        # On2 VP6.1
1=VP62        # On2 VP6.2
2=VP60        # On2 VP6.0
```

This tip is concluded on the next page.

Production
(Modifying Configuration Files, Continued)

You can create custom resolutions by replacing the default numbers with new values.
Your custom resolution must be of the same ratio as your game's supported monitor
resolutions, i.e. 4:3 (320x240, 640x480, 800x600, and 1024x768) or 16:9 (1280x720).
It is the opinion of the author that you should not exceed 800x600, which is what EA uses
when shooting their *Sims Played By* television commercials.

To record with "Smooth Edges" on, replace "AllowAntialiasing=0" with
"AllowAntialiasing=1"

When you are done modifying the configuration settings, save the file and maximize *The
Sims™ 2*. You will have to do the above every time you launch the game, as these
settings are reset when you close it. When you modify the configuration file, *The Sims™
2* must already be running.

- **Modifying the camera:** Just like above, you can modify the speed and viewing angles
  of the camera by modifying a configuration file.

  With *The Sims™ 2* running, press "Alt + Tab" and go to the following location: My
  Documents / EA Games / The Sims 2 / Cameras. Once you are in the Cameras folder,
  open a file titled "FirstPersonCameras" and create a backup copy. Next, open the
  original file – it will look like the following (next page):

Production
(Modifying the Camera, Continued)

Below are the configuration file's settings. The details will be explained in bold text along side, or below, the settings they are covering. Please note that the bold text is not part of the actual file.

Free moving first person camera.
camera   "CameraMan" CameraMan
fov   (20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 80 85 90)
clip   0.15 2000

 setparam defaultminchange   0.5
setparam mouseheadingsensitivity   0.0005
setparam upperpitchlimit   35
^Controls the upward pitch of the camera, in degrees.
setparam lowerpitchlimit   -80
^Controls the downward pitch of the camera, in degrees.
setparam orientationminchange   0.1
setparam orientationsteps   5
setparam fovminchange   0.001
setparam fovsteps   3
setparam mincameraheight   1
setparam maxcameraheight   50
setparam translationminchange   0.01
setparam translationsteps   7
setparam maxvelocity   10
^Sets the movement speed of the camera – the lower it is, the slower it moves at top speed.
setparam velocitysensitivitymin   0.1
setparam velocityminchange   0.1
setparam velocitysteps   5
setparam ticklimit   50
^Sets the general speed of the camera – the lower it is, the slower it moves.
setparam constraintwidth   -10

This tip is concluded on the next page.

Production
(Modifying the Camera, Continued)

By default, the camera cannot look straight up or down. You can modify that by changing the values above (35 and -80) to 90 and -90.

Special Note: When the camera is at either extreme, you will be unable to move the camera with the W-A-S-D controls – simply changing the pitch will correct the problem.

To change the camera speed, modify the two lines above. The first one, "setparam maxvelocity," controls the camera's top speed while it is moving. To change its speed, replace the 10 with a higher or lower value – 1 is really slow while 20 is really fast.

The next line to modify is "setparam ticklimit," which is more of a generalized speed setting. Like above, replace the 50 with a higher or lower number to change its speed.

At this point you should load a blank lot and test your camera speeds – ideally you should find a good setting before you shoot, so you don't waste time changing it in the future.

Special Note: These changes only work with the first person camera, while in a lot.

Special Note II: Numerical hot keys are keys you can assign to a camera's position – doing this allows you to return to it should you move the camera. See an example below:

1) *Press tab and use the W-A-S-D controls to set up a camera position you like.*

2) *Save that position by pressing CRTL + any number between four (4) and nine (9).*

3) *Use the W-A-S-D controls or mouse to move the camera's position / angle.*

4) *Without pressing CRTL, press the number you assigned to your previous position.*

5) *Notice how the camera moves towards the saved position in a very linear fashion.*

6) *Find a new position and save it with an unused hot key.*

7) *Press the hot key you assigned to your first save.*

8) *Notice how you can transition between hot key camera positions in a linear fashion.*

Production
(Know Thy Cheat Codes)

- **Know thy cheat codes:** Below is a list of cheat codes for *The Sims*™ *2* that are useful to machinima makers and set builders. The cheats are listed in different categories, depending on their use or the expansion pack they came with.

  Special Note: This guide does not include the entire list of possible cheats. For a complete list, please visit any popular Sim fansite – the author recommends www.snootysims.com

  To activate the cheat menu, press CRTL+SHIFT+C and type the cheat. Press ENTER to activate it.

  (on / off) , *(true / false)* or *(X / Y)* = When you see these next to a cheat, you only need to enter ONE option, and DO NOT include the parentheses or quotation marks.

  # = When you see this, you replace the # symbol with a numerical value of your choice.

General Cheats:

Motherlode: Adds $50,000 to household funds.

Moveobjects (on / off): "On" allows you to move all objects and Sims. Use with caution, and never move the trashcan or mailbox.

Aging (on / off): "Off" keeps Sims from aging.

StretchSkeleton #: Makes Sims taller or shorter, with 2.0 being twice their height, and 0.5 being half. This makes for some funny animations.

boolProp snapObjectsToGrid (true / false): "False" allows you to place objects outside of the grid.

boolprop constrainFloorElevation (true / false): "False" lets you raise or lower the terrain, even if walls or objects are occupying it.

intProp maxNumOfVisitingSims #: Use at the neighborhood screen. This allows you to override the game's default limit of eight guests per gathering with a new limit of your choice. Higher numbers may cause significant slowdown.

boolProp simShadows (true / false): "False" allows you to turn Sim shadows off.

boolProp useEffects (true / false): "False" removes effects like speech balloons, memories and the sky.

Production
(Know Thy Cheat Codes, Continued)

University **Expansion Pack Cheats:**

boolProp allow45DegreeAngleOfRotation (true / false): "True" lets you place objects at a 45° angle using the < and > keys.

setHighestAllowedLevel #: Lets you build higher than the five story limit, with a new limit of your choice.

boolProp dormSpecificToolsDisabled (true / false): "False" allows you to use build / buy mode while in a dorm.

changeLotZoning (residential / community / greek / dorm / secretsociety): Changes the lot's zoning type.

Nightlife **Expansion Pack Cheats**

familyfunds (Familyname) #: Adds or subtracts money from the chosen family, i.e. writing +50000 would add $50,000 to the family funds, while -50000 would take $50,000 away – scary thought, isn't it?

roofslopeangle (15 – 75): Changes the slope angle of all roofs on a lot.

showHeadlines (on / off): "Off" turns all thought bubbles invisible.

unlockCareerRewards: Unlocks all the career rewards for the selected sim.

MaxMotives: Maximizes the motives of all Sims on the lot.

MotiveDecay (on / off): "Off" stops motives from lowering.

aspirationPoints #: Adds a specified number of aspiration points to the selected Sim.

lockAspiration (on / off): Stops aspiration point decay for all Sims on the lot.

aspirationLevel (0 – 5): Adjusts Sims aspiration levels. 0 is the lowest, while 5 is the highest.

ageSimsCheat (on / off): Adds "set age" to the interaction menu, which lets you change a Sims age.

Production
(Know Thy Cheat Codes, Continued)

Open for Business Expansion Pack Cheats

AddneighbortoFamilycheat (on / off): "On" lets you click on a Sim and add it to the current family. This is useful if you need to film, and control, more than eight Sims.

Forcetwins: If you have a pregnant Sim selected when you enter this, she will give birth to twins.

Sethour (0 -23): Lets you set the current hour. This is useful if you need to shoot at night and don't have time to wait.

PlumbbobToggle (on / off): "Off" hides the plumb-bobs of all Sims on the lot (the little green diamond).

Lot cheats

boolprop lotWater (true / false): "False" removes all water from the lot.

boolprop lotTerrainPaints (true / false): "False" removes the terrain painting from the lot.

boolprop showFloorGrid (true / false): "False" hides the grid in build or buy mode. This can be useful if you choose to record in that mode.

boolprop objectShadows (true / false): "False" removes the shadows from objects outside the house.

boolProp guob (true / false): "False" removes the shadows from objects inside the house.

boolprop locktiles (true / false): "False" lets you place floortiles outside of the lot's boundaries.

boolprop reflectionWithExtraViewer (true / false): "False" turns mirror reflections off. This can be useful for filming vampire stories.

Production
(Know Thy Cheat Codes, Continued)

Neighborhood Cheats

boolprop displayNeighborhoodProps (true / false): "False" removes props, such as rocks and towers, from the neighborhood.

boolprop displayNeighborhoodRoads (true / false): "False" removes roads from the neighborhood.

boolprop displayNeighborhoodFlora (true / false): "False" removes trees / plants from the neighborhood.

boolprop displayNeighborhoodWater (true / false): "False" removes water from the neighborhood.

boolprop displayLotImposters (true / false): "False" removes the house graphics from the neighborhood, but not the actual houses.

boolprop displayNeighborhoodRoadsWithModel (true / false): "False" removes bridges from neighborhood.

boolprop lotTerrainLighting (true / false): "False" keeps lots from lighting up when you move your mouse over them.

boolprop carsCompact (true / false): "True" makes neighborhood cars have more detail.

boolProp carsOnRight (true / false): "False" changes whether neighborhood cars drive on the left or right side of the road.

Filmmaking Cheats

Slowmotion (0 – 8): 0 is the normal speed, while 8 is the slowest.

boolProp enablePostProcessing (true / false): Must be true for all film cheats to work.

Bloom (r g b x): Creates a look in which everything's so bright it blurs together. R, G, and B are color values (0-255) and "x" is the amount of blooming from 0 to 255.

vignette (centerx centery X): Creates a filmic look in which a focal point is clear but everything around it is blurry.

filmgrain (0 - 1): Creates a film graininess.

letterbox (0.0 - 0.4): Creates a letterbox view of size specified.

Production
(Know Thy Cheat Codes, Continued)

Here is a final note on cheat codes: You should create a quick test family and test the cheats out on them. It will benefit you to become familiar with the game's cheat codes before you start shooting your machinima.

- **The BoolProp Cheat:** Perhaps no cheat in *The Sims*™ *2* is more powerful than the "BoolProp" cheat. This powerful code contains many of the tools the developers used to test the game, and because of that you will find many interesting options while using it. To access it, open the cheat menu while in the neighborhood menu and type the following:

  boolprop testingcheatsenabled (true / false): "True" enables the "BoolProp" cheat – enter "false" when you are done with it.

  Caution: It must be emphasized that because this cheat is so powerful, it has the potential to ruin your gameplay. Please DO NOT save your game if you encounter strange errors and glitches. If an error message does appear, it will have three options – please only select *reset*, not *delete* or *cancel*. Although entering this cheat in the neighborhood screen presents a more streamlined process, you can also enter it while in a lot. SAVE your game first.

  Below is a list of "boolprop" features:

  Create a Sim:

  To access hidden skins and hair styles, enter the "Create a Sim" menu and begin the process of making a Sim. While you are designing your Sim, press SHIFT + N – you will now have access to hidden skins and hair styles.

  Hiding the Plumb-Bob:

  SHIFT click on any Sim's plumb-bob and select "Force Error." An error message will appear – select *delete* to remove the plumb-bob for all Sims on the lot. This is the only time you should ever select *delete* when an error message comes up.

  Modifying Personality, Skills, Motives and Relationships:

  To modify your Sims individual personality, skills, motives and relationships, click and drag the sliders that are associated with whatever it is you wish to change. Keep the game paused while you do this. Using this trick to maximize your Sim's skill levels is useful for situations where you don't want to record a skill progress bar.

Production
(The BoolProp Cheat, Continued)

<u>**Sim Options:**</u>

SHIFT click on a Sim to bring up the following options:

Set aspiration: Lets you set the aspiration level of the selected Sim. Additionally, you can change their life aspiration.

Kill: Self explanatory – it gives you a few options to kill your Sim.

Change Suit: Lets you change what your Sim is wearing – similar to the dresser but with a few extra options.

Change fit: Makes Sim either fat or skinny.

Plan Outfit: Brings up the clothing shop menu.

Spawn: Selecting spawn will allow you to generate special objects or interactions. When a box or tombstone is generated, you simply click on it to choose between its features. Below is a list of all the spawn options:

Give / Remove Cell phone: Guess what this one does. (*University* expansion only).

Give / Remove MP3 Player: See above. (*University* expansion only).

Give / Remove Handheld: See above. (*University* expansion only).

MakeMeSick Tester: Lets you select sicknesses for your Sim – these include cold, flu, morning sickness, food poisoning and pneumonia. Can also make Sims immune.

Rodney's Death Creator: Gives you all the death options and animations.

Toms Clothing Tester: Spawns a clothing rack that lets your Sim wear career exclusive skins.

Tombstone of L&D: Gives you a lot of powerful options – most are self explanatory.

Paul's Reaction Tester: Lets you chose between different animations – useful for machinima making. When you click on an animation and a dialog box appears, select "Anim."

Production
(The BoolProp Cheat, Continued)

Mailbox Options:

SHIFT click on the mail box to get the following options:

Invite all Neighbors: This will invite all the neighbors to your lot, but may slow your game down quite a bit.

Make friends for me: Sets the relationship bar to 50/50 with everybody in the neighborhood. Using this option may spawn a lot of phone calls.

Make me know everyone: Makes the selected Sim know everyone in the neighborhood.

Make All Happy: Maximizes the motives of all Sims on the lot.

Force a Newspaper delivery: News paper will arrive within the hour.

Force Burglar: Spawns a robber.

Trigger Birthday: Lets you age a household Sim.

Add to Secret Society: College Sims will become part of the secret society; however they will not be friends with fellow members or be taken away in a van / limo. (*University* expansion only).

Newspaper Options:

SHIFT click on the news paper to get the following options:

Adult or Teen / Elder Jobs: Lets you choose career and job level.

Career Rewards: Gives the selected Sim any career rewards you choose.

Misc. Objects:

SHIFT click on the following objects to access their options:

Toilets Showers, Sinks, Counters and Stoves: Lets you set their cleanliness levels.

Stereo or Pool Table: Lets you modify skill level for dancing or playing pool.

Staircase: Lets you select the emotion your Sim walks with.

Window: Allows Sims to look out, or clean, windows. Walls must be up for it to work.

Production
(Casting Your Actors)

- **Casting your actors:** When it comes time to cast your actors, you will need to do a bit more than simply make them. Follow the steps below:

  1) If your machinima has a few main characters and several extras, create two families. The first family should contain your main characters, with the second containing the extras.

  2) Now that you have your two families made, you need to move them into two empty lots – place a phone in each one.

  3) Using the "BoolProp" cheat, have one of your Sims get to know everyone (refer to the mail box options in the "BoolProp" section).

  4) Now your main character knows all the extras, so you can invite them over when it is time to shoot your machinima.

  5) Back up your family now. You can do that my going into the neighborhood menu and exporting them to your desktop.

  Additionally, you can now move your extras into the same family as your main characters. To do that, follow the steps below:

  1) Invite one of the extras to your main character's lot.

  2) If you have the *Open for Business* expansion pack, enter the following cheat:

     AddneighbortoFamilycheat (on / off): "On" lets you click on a Sim and add it to the current family.

     If you have the *Open for Business* expansion pack, there is no need to read further.

  3) If you don't have *Open for Business*, then use the "BoolProp" cheat to spawn the *"Tombstone of L&D."*

  4) With the extra visiting the lot as a guest, click on the *"Tombstone of L&D"* and select "Add neighbor to family."

  5) Select the extra's name, and she will now be part of your main character family. The *"Tombstone of L&D"* can also work with NPCs; however they tend to disappear after a while.

  Once you have your larger family set up, you should back them up again.

Production
(Building Your Set)

- **Building your set:** When you build your set, only build what will be seen on the camera. For instance, if you are only shooting one room, don't waste time building and furnishing an entire house. If your machinima takes place in only one location, then you should go all out and design the entire structure – this gives you more scene options.

  Because there are no ceilings in *The Sims™ 2*, you should visit www.ModTheSims2.com and download their ceiling mod. The ceiling mod lets you place a ceiling as if you were placing floor tiles, and is invaluable to machinima makers who don't want their cinematography limited close ups and wall shots.

  Build multiple sets throughout the neighborhood before you begin shooting, this way when you wrap up a shoot at one location, you can simply move your actors to the new one. Building multiple sets before you shoot will prevent you from breaking your flow once shooting begins.

  Sometimes it is best to build your grander sets without Sims occupying the lot, this way you can back it up and re-import it if you ever need to. Don't spend two days building a grand set only to ruin it after one hour of shooting – back it up first!

  By not fully enclosing a room, you can take advantage of the sun light to illuminate your set. Using the sun light is useful if you plan to employ a darkening effect when you edit.

- **Controlling your extras:** This is just a repeat of the section above on moving neighbors into your house – so if you've already read that section, move on. Otherwise, do the following steps in order to control more than eight Sim actors per set:

6) Invite one of the extras to your main character's lot.

7) If you have the *Open for Business* expansion pack, enter the following cheat:

    AddneighbortoFamilycheat (on / off): "On" lets you click on a Sim and add it to the current family.

    If you have the *Open for Business* expansion pack, there is no need to read further.

8) If you don't have *Open for Business*, then use the "BoolProp" cheat to spawn the *"Tombstone of L&D."*

9) With the extra visiting the lot as a guest, click on the *"Tombstone of L&D"* and select "Add neighbor to family."

10) Select the extra's name, and she will now be part of your main character family. The *"Tombstone of L&D"* can also work with NPCs; however they tend to disappear after a while.

17

Production
(Numerical Hot Keys)

- **Numerical hot keys:** Numerical Hot Keys are keys you can assign to a camera's position – doing this allows you to return to it should you move the camera. See an example below:

    9)   Press tab and use the W-A-S-D controls to set up a camera position you like.

    10) Save that position by pressing CRTL + any number between four (4) and nine (9).

    11) Use the W-A-S-D controls or mouse to move the camera's position / angle.

    12) Without pressing CRTL, press the number you assigned to your previous position.

    13) Notice how the camera moves towards the saved position in a very linear fashion.

    14) Find a new position and save it with an unused hot key.

    15) Press the hot key you assigned to your first save.

    16) Notice how you can transition between hot key camera positions in a linear fashion.

    Here is a tip regarding the numerical hot keys: If you would like the camera to move to another position in a very streamlined, linear fashion, do not use the mouse to change the viewing angle after you assign it a hot key. Now, using only the W-A-S-D keys, move it to a new location and assign it to a new hot key. As long as you didn't use the mouse to change its viewing angle, the camera will move very smoothly to its new location when you switch between different hot keys. This trick also applies to zooming in (press Z) or out (press X).

- **Setting up your scenes:** Find the camera angles you want to use, and assign them to a numerical hot key. With your camera positions assigned, move your actors into position and "rehearse" their scenes – there is no need to actually record at this point. Rehearsing your scenes will allow you to spot problems before you shoot, making the process more streamlined.

- **Knowing when to save:** Before you begin shooting, save your game. This gives you the luxury of simply reloading it if you need to re-shoot something. It seems petty, but you'll eventually make it into a habit once you make your first mistake.

Production
(Recording Your Scenes)

- **Recording your scenes:** Keep these tips in mind while you record your scenes.

  1) Pause your game before you begin recording. Once you start recording, leave the game paused for ten seconds – do the same when you are done. This gives you several extra frames at the beginning and end of your clip, which is useful for doing fade ins / outs. Always give yourself plenty to work with.

  2) Take advantage of the numerical hot keys, which allow for smooth, linear motions. While using the mouse and W-A-S-D controls will make movement less linear, it also makes it choppier.

  3) Take advantage of the ***Slowmotion (0 – 8)*** cheat for scenes that call for it. Recording at regular speeds and then using your editing software to slow it down will only make it choppy.

  4) Sometimes guests will enter your set while you're shooting – use the ***Moveobjects (on / off)*** cheat to delete them.

  5) Keeps your Sim's aspiration points up (refer to the *Cheats* and *BoolProp* section), otherwise they'll display distressed animations – this may be to your advantage.

- **The importance of reloading:** If you need to re-shoot your scene, then you have two options. If it was an easy scene, simply set it up again and shoot. For more complex scenes, it will save you time to simply reload the lot. Ideally, you should always have more than one take of a particular scene, just be mindful of your hard drive space.

- **Voice Acting:** To record voice acting, you need a mic and audio editing software. As suggest earlier, use *Audacity* to edit your voice and sound effects. It can be found here: http://audacity.sourceforge.net/

  Where you buy your mic is up to you, but ideally it should have a wind screen to block the recording of your breath. Use it to record several takes of your script, with varying levels of speed and volume – useful for when you are trying to sync your voice with your Sim's mouth.

  Once you're done recording, create a folder for each character's dialog, and save the files in there. Here is a good naming method: *title_character_scene_month_day*. "Title" refers to your movie's title; "character" refers to the character's name; and "scene" refers to the scene name. "Month_day" refers to the date.

Production
(Setting up Special Effects)

- **Setting up Special Effects:** Below are a couple of tips for adding special effects to your machinima. If you have no use for special effects, please feel free to move on to the next page.

  1) To add a chroma-key (blue screen) effect to your machinima, you will need two things: a video editor that supports chroma-key effects, and a pure blue / green wall in *The Sims™ 2*. Fortunately it is fairly easy to obtain a pure blue / green wall – simply visit www.TheSims2.com and download the HomeCrafter program:

     http://thesims2.ea.com/getcoolstuff/homecrafter.php

     The HomeCrafter tool lets you create custom floors and walls, so use it to make your pure blue / green wall.

     When it comes to a video editor that supports chroma-key effects, you will have to use a commercial editor. Download a free trial version of *Sony® Vegas* and explore its chroma-key options there. You can find it here:

     http://www.sonymediasoftware.com/products/vegasfamily.asp

     Keep in mind that if you are shooting against a blue or green background, your actor cannot be wearing any of those colors, anywhere on her body. If she is wearing blue or green, you may want to make your solid colored wall into something different, like purple.

     Chroma-key effects are useful in machinima for the same reasons they are in traditional film – they allow you to place your actors in environments that would be hard to create with your set. The author strongly recommends that you read more about chroma-key effects from respected sources, since explaining the finer details of it is beyond the scope of this guide.

  2) Here is a trick to create an unlimited number of clones for a particular Sim:

     1) Enter the *Moveobjects (on / off)* cheat.

     2) Select a Sim in BUILD while holding the CRTL key.

     3) Click and drag the Sim while still pressing CRTL and the left mouse button.

     4) If you did it right, you will be able to place an army of clones.

  The above trick may take a few tries to get right, so just be patient.

  It is best to leave the game paused when you have dozens of Sims on screen at once, since un-pausing the game will cause your clone army to dramatically slow your computer down – having a more modern system may keep things up to speed.

Post Production
(Organizing your video files)

- **Organizing Your Video Files:** When you are done shooting, rename your video files. Here is a good naming method: *title_ scene_month_day*. Naming your clips in this way will make things easier when you are editing, since you won't have to waste time searching through the generic "movieXX" names the game gives it. Imagine having your unorganized clips going as high as "movie1138" or "movie3250." After naming your files, move them into the video folder you created earlier.

- **Organizing your Audio Files:** For the most part, there is no need to create special file names for your music files; however you should employ a good naming system to your sound effects and voice files. Following the same model above, you should include your title, scene name and date on a sound effect or voice file.

- **Organizing your Image Files:** Image files are the easiest to organize, since you'll only be working with a few. Basically, name your image files appropriately based on their functions, such as "logo," "title" and "credits." You may also use special still images to place in various scenes – simply use the same naming model as you would with your video or audio files.

- **Editing your Machinima:** Learning how to operate your editing software of choice is beyond the scope of this guide, so please refer to the manual and any other specialized web tutorials. Below are some generic tips that apply to editing software and machinima.

  1) Save often while editing, and don't be afraid to edit / save different versions of the same machinima.

  2) Render low quality versions of your machinima after making any major additions to your edit – doing this lets you see how you like it before you move further, giving you time to change it if need be.

  3) Most movie editing software will allow you to add your name and other comments to the video – this option can most likely be found in the "Properties" menu of the software. It is a good idea to take advantage of this if you would like to add your copyright to trademark information, as well as your personal website URL.

  4) When adding sound effects, zoom in close to the frame where the sound starts to play, and add the sound there. Most editing software lets you zoom in really close to the individual frames, so take advantage of that when syncing sounds.

  If you would like to learn all the rules and techniques of film editing, please search out appropriate books and internet tutorials, and consider taking a class in film editing.

Post Production
(Rendering your Machinima)

- **Rendering your Machinima:** When you're done editing, render a "master version" that is of the highest possible quality. Your master version will be too large to upload to the web, but it'll serve as a high quality final cut of your machinima, which is useful for backup purposes.

  Special Note: Refer to your video software's manual for the different rendering settings, but ideally it should render at the same resolution you recorded at (320x240, 640x480, 800x600 or 1280x720), and with as little audio compression as possible.

  When it comes to video formats, there are two popular choices – WMV and MOV. WMV is a format that is exclusive to the *Windows*® operating system and requires *Windows Media*® *Player* to watch, which makes it harder for *Macintosh*® computer users to view (unless they have the appropriate media player installed). MOV is a *Macintosh*® format, and requires the *QuickTime*® player to watch – which is more universally used than the former. There is no best format, so your best option is to just render your machinima to both formats, and decide which master version looks best.

  With your master version rendered, begin rendering a couple of web friendly versions. Ideally, you should create a *dial up* version, and a *broadband* version. Your dial up version should be less than five megabytes – the size of your broadband version is relatively unimportant, so long as it isn't over one hundred megabytes.

- **Preparing for Release:** Before you release your machinima, write a text file containing an advertisement for it – this will be posted on web forums. Next, write a description of your machinima for sites you upload it to.   Writing these things before you share your machinima makes things more streamlined.

- **Backing up Your Machinima:** When your production is complete, back up every file associated with it to a CD-R or DVD-R. Store the CD(s) or DVD(s) in a cool, dry place.

- **Sharing Your Machinima:** Upload your machinima to www.TheSims2.com – each registered user has an allowance of twenty megabytes of machinima storage. If your machinima is over twenty megabytes, upload it to www.Sim-Movies.com, which has no size limit – their service is also free.

  Post notices for your machinima in the Movie section of the www.TheSims2.com forums, and other machinima web forums. Lastly, register a free account at www.Sims99.com and add your machinima to their listings, where it may be rated by other users.

22

Post Production
(Handling Criticism)

- **Handling Criticism:** When you share your machinima, there may be people who do not share your fondness of it. Learn from the constructive criticism and ignore the deconstructive insults. Do not let criticism upset or discourage you – as your machinima skills improve, so will your reviews.

- **Final Words:** Making machinima with *The Sims™ 2* is a fun experience, and doing it will teach you a lot about cinematography and film editing. Continue to nurture your machinima skills, and do all you can to share and promote your work. Lastly, visit www.SimsPlayedBy.com and learn how your machinima can get you featured on a TV commercial for *The Sims™ 2*.

Thank you for reading this guide, peace!

-Peter "TheSidDog" Medina

Bibliography and Notes

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- **Notes:** This guide was written to help newcomers to the world of machinima feel comfortable using *The Sims™ 2* as their engine of choice, however it should be noted that the author is not an employee of Maxis™, or its parent company, Electronic Arts™, Inc. This guide should not be used as a replacement for any official guide materials released by the creators of *The Sims™ 2*.

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