runway

Curriculum Packet

For Film Production, VFX, and Digital Media Courses

runwayml.com

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Introduction

This curriculum packet provides ready-to-use assignment frameworks for integrating Runway's AI video generation tools into production and VFX courses. All assignments can be adapted for courses in cinematography, post-production, documentary filmmaking, and experimental media.

For technical tutorials, direct students to Runway Academy for comprehensive learning materials.

Runway Basics

Getting Started Resources

- Dashboard Overview - Interface navigation
- Asset Management - File organization
- Generation Credits - Credit system explained

Core Tools (Current as of December 2025)

Video Generation

- Gen-4.5 - NEW (Dec 2025) Runway's most advanced video model with unprecedented visual fidelity, native audio generation, and multi-shot editing. Supports audio editing on existing videos.
- Gen-4 Video - Image-to-video with character consistency
- Gen-4 Turbo - Faster, cost-efficient variant (April 2025 release)
- Gen-4 References - Consistent characters, locations, and objects across scenes
- Gen-3 Alpha - Text and image-to-video (legacy, still available)

Transformation & Performance

- Aleph - Video transformation and restyling
- Act-One - Performance capture and facial animation

- Act-Two - Voice-driven character performance

Emerging Tools

- GWM-1 (General World Model) - NEW (Dec 2025) Interactive world simulation for real-time explorable environments. Includes GWM-Worlds, GWM-Robotics, and GWM-Avatars. (Advanced/experimental)

Additional Resources

- Full Runway Academy Library
- Customer Stories - Educational integration case studies
- Product Changelog - Latest features and updates
- Help Center - Documentation and FAQs

Assignment Frameworks

Assignment 1: Documentary B-Roll Generation

Overview

Students create illustrative sequences or historical recreations when archival footage doesn't exist, is cost-prohibitive, or presents rights management challenges.

Learning Outcome

Students will be able to:

- Identify strategic moments where AI-generated content enhances documentary storytelling
- Integrate AI-generated sequences seamlessly with traditional documentary footage
- Apply critical thinking about authenticity and representation in documentary work

Assignment Brief

Documentary projects often require visual material that doesn't exist — historical events before filming technology, conceptual illustrations of abstract ideas, or impossible-to-capture moments. Create 3-5 b-roll sequences (5-10 seconds each) using Runway that fill critical gaps in your documentary narrative. You must clearly disclose AI-generated content in your final edit.

Technical Workflow

1. Pre-production: Identify which documentary scenes require illustrative footage
2. Image Generation: Use Gen-4 Image to create reference frames
3. Animation: Animate with Gen-4.5, Gen-4 Video, or Gen-4 Turbo
4. Post-production: Export, color grade to match documentary aesthetic, integrate into timeline. Note: Gen-4.5 can generate native audio if ambient sound is needed.

Deliverables

- 3-5 AI-generated b-roll sequences integrated into rough cut
- 500-word written reflection addressing:
    - Why AI generation was chosen over stock footage or traditional production
    - How generated content supports documentary truth claims
- In-class presentation (5 min) showing before/after edit comparisons

Discussion Questions for Critique

- Does the AI-generated footage feel authentic within the documentary's context?
- How would you disclose this content to audiences?

Real-World Example

- SVA's MFA Computer Arts program integrates Runway for documentary illustration and historical recreation.

Assignment 2: Proof-of-Concept Pitch Assignment

Overview

Transform static storyboards into proof-of-concept sequences for pitch presentations, combining technical skills with professional pitching experience.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Create compelling pre-visualization materials for film projects
- Articulate creative vision through visual proof-of-concept
- Present projects professionally to potential stakeholders
- Understand industry-standard pitching and development processes

Assignment Brief

Develop a 30-60 second proof-of-concept sequence for your film project by animating storyboards using Runway. Present this to the class in a mock pitch meeting where peers evaluate as potential investors/producers. Your pitch must include visual proof-of-concept, verbal pitch, and supporting materials (logline, budget estimate, timeline).

Technical Workflow

1. Pre-production: Create detailed storyboards for key sequences (minimum 8-12 frames)
2. Image Generation: Generate production design frames using Gen-4 Image
3. Character Consistency: Use Gen-4 References for consistent character appearance
4. Animation: Animate sequences with Gen-4.5, Gen-4, or Gen-4 Turbo
5. Post-production: Add temp music, sound design, titles. Alternatively, use Gen-4.5's native audio generation for integrated sound and dialogue.
6. Pitch Preparation: Create pitch deck with supporting materials

Deliverables

- 30-60 second proof-of-concept video
- Pitch deck (5-8 slides: logline, synopsis, visual style, target audience, budget, timeline)
- 5-minute pitch presentation to class
- Peer evaluation forms (evaluate 3 other pitches)

Pitch Presentation Format

- 1 minute: Logline and synopsis
- 2 minutes: Play proof-of-concept video
- 1.5 minutes: Visual style, influences, and market positioning
- 0.5 minutes: Budget and timeline overview

- Q&A with "investors" (class)

Real-World Example

- USC School of Cinematic Arts students create pitch materials using similar workflows for development and festival submissions.

Assignment 3: Generative VFX Integration

Overview

Students shoot practical footage and integrate AI-generated VFX elements, learning pre-production planning, on-set considerations, and post-production compositing for effects work.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Plan and execute shots designed for VFX integration
- Understand lighting continuity and camera tracking for compositing
- Integrate AI-generated elements with live-action footage
- Apply professional VFX pipeline thinking on student budgets

Assignment Brief

Shoot a 10-15 second practical scene and use Runway to add an "impossible" VFX element that couldn't be achieved with traditional student budgets (atmospheric effects, creatures, environment extensions, sci-fi elements, etc.). The integration must be seamless and demonstrate understanding of VFX fundamentals.

Technical Workflow

Pre-production Planning:

- Storyboard with VFX elements clearly marked
- Plan lighting setup for integration
- Consider camera movement and actor eyelines

- Create shot list with VFX notes

Production:

- Shoot clean plates (background without actors)
- Shoot practical footage with lighting/eyeline continuity
- Capture reference photography for lighting

VFX Generation:

- Use Generative VFX or Aleph for element generation
- Generate multiple variations for best result
- Consider using Gen-4.5 for highest fidelity elements

Compositing & Finishing:

- Composite in editing software
- Color grade for seamless integration
- Add finishing touches (grain, motion blur, etc.)

Deliverables

- Final composited video (10-15 seconds)
- Technical breakdown document including:
    - Shot planning sketches showing VFX intent
    - Behind-the-scenes production photos
    - Before/after comparison shots
    - Explanation of technical choices
- 3-minute presentation demonstrating VFX breakdown

Common Challenges & Solutions

- Lighting mismatch: Shoot reference spheres/gray balls on set
- Motion blur inconsistency: Match camera shutter speed to generated motion
- Edge quality: Generate slightly oversized elements for masking flexibility
- Color grading: Apply LUT to both practical and generated footage

Real-World Context

- Professional VFX workflows increasingly incorporate AI-generated elements for efficiency. This assignment mirrors industry practice at a student scale.

Assignment 4: Experimental Narrative Through AI Transformation

Overview

Students create experimental short films that utilize AI transformation as a core aesthetic and narrative device, exploring the boundaries between control and unpredictability in generative media.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Conceptualize experimental narratives that leverage AI aesthetics
- Work iteratively with generative tools as creative collaborators
- Develop personal artistic voice through AI-assisted workflows
- Critically engage with AI as a medium, not just a tool

Assignment Brief

Create a 60-90 second experimental film where Runway's transformation capabilities are central to the work's concept — not merely a production convenience. The work should explore themes of transformation, identity, memory, surrealism, or other concepts enhanced by AI's unique aesthetic qualities. Your artist statement must articulate how AI generation is integral to your creative vision.

Conceptual Approaches

- Metamorphosis narratives: Character/object transformations that explore identity
- Memory & dream logic: Unstable, shifting imagery reflecting psychological states
- Parallel realities: Same scene reimagined across different styles/contexts
- Abstraction studies: Movement between representation and abstraction
- Time manipulation: Visual exploration of temporal distortion

Technical Workflow

Concept Development: Create treatment outlining thematic intent

Source Material:

- Shoot original footage, OR
- Generate base imagery with Gen-4 Image, OR

- Combine both approaches

Transformation & Generation:

- Use Aleph for video-to-video transformation
- Use Gen-4 References for style consistency
- Experiment with Gen-4.5 for highest quality output with native audio
- Iterate extensively — embrace generative unpredictability

Post-production:

- Sound design integral to concept (or leverage Gen-4.5 native audio)
- Consider non-linear editing approaches
- Experiment with temporal manipulation

Deliverables

- Completed experimental film (60-90 seconds)
- Artist statement (300-400 words) addressing:
    - Conceptual framework and thematic intent
    - Why AI generation is essential to the work's meaning
    - How you balanced control vs. generative unpredictability
    - Influences and aesthetic references
- Presentation with work-in-progress examples (5 min)

Discussion Framework for Critique

- How does the work use AI generation conceptually, not just technically?
- Where do you see the artist's hand vs. the algorithm's influence?
- What does this work say about transformation, identity, or perception?
- How does the sound design interact with the visual instability?

Inspiration & Context

Encourage students to research experimental filmmakers working with AI (artists using Runway, Stable Diffusion video, etc.) and historical experimental film techniques (optical printing, hand-processed film, video synthesis).

Student Support & Resources

Getting Help

- Technical Issues: Runway Academy tutorials and Help Center documentation
- Credit/Account Issues: Student Ambassador program support — ambassadors@runwayml.com
- Other Issues: support@runwayml.com
- Education Program Info: Runway for Educators — discounts and classroom licensing

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Last Updated: December 2025

For latest tool updates, see: runwayml.com/changelog