Building a Better Area or Prefab

Here are a few guidelines for working with and improving your areas, whether prefab or not. It's useful to keep in mind as a sort of "final proof" of an area before finishing with it.

Terrain Tips:

Avoid Steep Edges

- Unless you have a specific need to do so, avoid having huge height differences over a short period. The textures will stretch vertically and will not look as good.
- This also applies to edges that are at a uniform incline over a large area. Breaking the slope up with a small flat section will improve its overall appearance dramatically.

Blend Textures

- Vary your opacity when laying down textures to get a blended edge unless there is a specific reason for not doing so.
- Paths don't immediately end in a sharp line, and dirt/grass should blend over the top of the edges in an uneven fashion.
- Don't blend **too** much, otherwise you'll lose definition in your texturing and the area will look too monotonous.
- Look at the minimap of your finished area – if there are large areas that repeat, blend.

Use The Colour Tool

- Use the colour tool to provide additional variance in your paths or grassy sections. Typically, use a colour that is similar to those of the nearby textures unless you are aiming for a specific look.
- Paint greens and browns over grassy/dirt sections, and use grey over mountain cliffs. Typically, gullies or depressions should be darker due to the implication that water would sit and make the ground damper and darker - though obviously this doesn't apply to deserts.
- Try using a little bit of brown and grey in "junction" areas that would see a lot of wear and tear.

Darken Terrain Underneath Placables

- A big way to improve the appearance of the terrain is to darken the area under and around placeables, typically with a grey brush. Keep the effect tight and focussed around the placeable.

Fix Your Walkmesh

- Do **not** leave your walkmesh at its default. Fix it so that rocky mountainous sections are not walkable, along with deep pools & lakes.
- **Do** use walkmesh cutters around your trees - this cannot be stressed strongly enough.
- Prefabs that have a good walkmesh are **greatly** appreciated by modders.

Placeable Tips:

Check Placeable Heights

- A beginner mistake that occurs **lots** is objects floating in the air. Just because a particular part of a placeable in sunk into the ground, it does not mean that part of it might still not be 'floating'. Make sure that this is not the case unless it makes sense for it to do so.

Use Height/Position Lock

- Double clicking on an object will cause it to raise up so its centre point is at the level of the terrain. Moving an object will also have the same result. Seeing as in many cases objects are "sunk" to provide a better effect, it is extremely annoying to have to reposition their height if this is done accidentally.
- Using the "Z" key to toggle height-locking on any selected objects, or the "*" key to lock their position entirely.
- Modders **really** appreciate this being done for prefabs, and it's a very good habit for builders to get into.

Convert Placeables to Environmental objects

- Any placeables in non-walkable areas of the map should be converted to environmental objects seeing as the player can never interact with them.
- Many placeables in walkable areas of the map should be converted to environmental objects as well. Any object the player is unlikely to interact with is a likely choice. Make sure you fix the walkmesh around them as described previously.

Sound Tips

Limit Non-Positional Sounds

- Carefully check the volume of any area wide-ambients - these should be used very sparingly, as a low volume is quite loud.

Adjust Intervals

- Non-looping sounds should have the "Random" & "Continuous" checkboxes ticked, but **not** looping.
- Increase the time between durations and also the interval variance.
- Make sure the sound will play only at appropriate times during the day/night.

Implement Variance

- Look at adjusting the volume and pitch variation on the sounds. Often a slightly softer sound with more variation can provide a more varied feel.
- Use positional variance. Remember that you can limit that positional variation to a single axis to focus a sound within a particular corridor, alleyway or gully.

Lighting Tips

Use Colour

- Don't use the default lt_white light. It's far too nondescript. Add some colour to your light, using warmer colours (yellow/orange) for a calming effect, or cooler colours (blue/green) to give a more ominous feel.

- Be careful not to use too much saturation unless you are aiming for a particular effect. For example, saturated green can give a sickly/diseased atmosphere, whereas bright red gives a hot and dangerous feel.

Tweak Your Day/Night Settings

- Pay attention to this for exterior areas. There are various lighting settings available on nwvault that might be useful. Take one of these and tweak.

Beware of Shadows

- Point lights will often have very heavy shadows. Set your shadow intensity to no more than about 0.4 in most cases.

- Lamp placeables will often need to have their shadow settings set to not cast shadows from point lights if you are using them with point lights.

Don't Overdo It

- Don't have too many lights close to each other. Look at their ranges and make sure you have no more than 3 or 4 lights overlapping at any given point.

- Shadow casting point lights are very resource intensive. Limit their use within an area.

Final Words

This is just a quick document to provide a few areas to focus on as the final touches for when producing an area – it's not intended to be a full area creation tutorial. I hope you find it useful to glance at before closing an area for the final time.

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