ADCx
GATHER

LEARNINGS FROM A DECADE OF BEING A MENTOR IN GAME AUDIO

JORGE GARCIA

Learnings from a Decade of Being a Mentor in Game Audio

Jorge Garcia - Audio Software Engineer at Electronic Arts
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Hello everyone, thank you for coming to my talk "Learnings from a Decade of Being a Mentor in Game Audio". I hope what I'm sharing with you in this presentation is of help, independently of your mentoring experience or familiarity with the game audio field.

Who am I?

Jorge, Software Engineer in Audio

- Based in **Madrid, Spain**
- Started Game Audio career at **Electronic Arts** in **2008**, worked at Codemasters, Activision, MercurySteam and Zynga on AAA games like **FIFA/FC** and **Guitar Hero Live**
- Enjoy **hiking**, **reading**, **swimming**, **travelling…**

All that said, I shall introduce myself! I'm Jorge, currently a Software Engineer in Audio, based in Madrid - Spain.

I started working in games in 2008 at EA (a short stint in the localization studio the company has in my city). I've also worked for some mid-size and large game companies like Codemasters, Activision, Mercury Steam and Zynga on some high-budget games (AAA, as we call it in the industry) like FC (previously FIFA) and also the latest installment of the Guitar Hero franchise, Guitar Hero Live.

Something personal: from time to time I also enjoy hiking, reading about varied topics, swimming and travelling.

Why Become a Mentor?

76% Of People Think Mentors Are Important, **But Only 37% Have One**

61% of mentoring relationships develop organically and tend to be more effective than formal pairings

https://www.forbes.com/sites/christinecomaford/2019/07/03/new-study-76-of-people-think-mentors-are-important-but-only-37-have-one/

Why become a mentor?

There is a bit old study from 2019 referenced by Forbes in the link below. A couple of key takeaways are that not many people have mentors and most of the mentoring relationships develop organically vs. in more structured programmes.

Why am I Giving this Talk?

A decade (almost!) of being a mentor

- Selfish initial motivations: **career progression** and **develop leadership skills,** learn from **others** and learn **about management**
- Share my **learnings and experiences as a mentor**
- Give back to the community and to **pay it forward**
- Hopefully encourage **you to become a mentor** or do more mentoring!

Now, why am I giving this talk? I actually started mentoring formally in 2018 as part of a game audio mentoring programme, so perhaps I should have titled this talk "Learnings from 7 years of being a mentor in game audio" but since 'a decade' sounded better and practically I started sharing my knowledge and doing presentations in 2014, I hope you forgive me for the (in part) inaccurate title.

In any case, the motivations behind this talk have been the same. When I started asking around what was required to be given the "senior" title (and benefits), a common theme people said was becoming a mentor. So in some way, this was part of my selfish initial motivations for becoming one. Also, developing leadership skills while learning from others and having a sneak peek on management were driving motivators.

In my own career at companies such as EA, Activision (etc.) mentors paved the way for my success. I became a mentor at first because I saw it as necessary for my career...and that's a really valid reason to start on the path...but as I went down the path I came to value more being able to give back to others.

With this talk I will be also trying to convince you very hard to become and mentor, or to do more mentoring. Let's see if I can do it!

Successful Mentoring Modalities

Structured

- Within a **mentoring programme** (e.g., ADC)
- Sets **agenda** and **goals**
- Sets **expectations**
- **Continuous feedback**

Less structured

- **Ad-hoc** interactions
- **Exploratory**
- **Organic conversations**
- **Informal**

Here are some of my learnings about mentoring modalities after a few years, these guidelines also come from the Code of Conduct and some of previous mentoring programmes I've been part of. On one hand, we have structured: perhaps in part the ADC mentoring programme is one of them as it encourages to set agenda and goals and some initial expectations, which help to set the stage for the mentoring relationship. Also continuous feedback is mentioned, and I've seen it's also helpful for some mentees.

On the other hand, a less structured approach is also very helpful. More ad-hoc, casual/informal, organic conversations that can really happen anywhere… between coffee chats in the office or on Slack or Teams.

I've experienced both approaches in the past, and I personally think that while the less structured approach has worked better for most of my mentees (and also when having mentors myself), I feel that having at least some structure and expectations set at the beginning also helps to have a more fruitful mentoring relationship.

What a Good Mentoring Relationship Looks Like

Ideal end goal: WIN-WIN situation

- Mutual **trust and respect**
- Defined **boundaries and expectations**
- **Professional** AND **personal** interactions
- Mindful of **personal requirements** e.g., availability
- Both parties are **learning from each other**

So, what a good mentoring relationship looks like?

Well, ideally we want to reach a WIN-WIN situation where we have mutual trust and respect supported by defined boundaries and expectations. We also want to experience professional interactions that at the same time are personal since we are all humans in the end. We also need to be mindful of personal requirements, e.g., I've had some neurodivergent mentees in the past and I've tried to accommodate as much as I could to help with their schedules by offering flexibility on meeting times, for instance.

Most importantly, I believe that a healthy mentoring relationship should be one where both parties are learning from each other. So, in some way, it's less one-sided.

What a Great Mentor Looks Like

Leadership skills

- Listening, **empathy**, patience
- **Question**
- Guide and promote **independent thinking**
- **Facilitate**
- **Share** experiences

Behaviours

- Open and honest **communication**
- Give honest, constructive and actionable **feedback**
- **Celebrate** achievements
- Act as **advocate**

Now, what a great mentor looks like

In this slide I have a list of items that I've compiled from some manual and recommendations, and they have been a guiding set of values for me. I should say that some of them have been more aspirational than practical, but I also think they are also key for becoming a good mentor.

For leadership skills, of course listening, having empathy and patience are key while questioning mentees on their assumptions. We ideally want to guide and promote independent thinking and facilitate conversations or career decisions. One of the things that many mentees also like to hear are past experiences so that they can have a better understanding on your own path, and how it could relate to them. Additionally, behaviours that we want to promote are open and honest communication, while giving honest and actionable feedback. Not less important is to celebrate the achievements of mentees and to be an advocate for them when possible and necessary.

Mentoring in Game Audio

The last few slides have been a generic introduction to mentorship and so far I've talked about it as a general topic, but what about Game Audio in particular? Let's take a look!

Mentoring and Game Audio

Industry Challenges

- **Niche field** compared to other audio/tech fields

- Clarity in job opportunities, audio in games is just another pillar. **Industry volatility**

- **Sub-specializations**, required **knowledge and skills**

Job Opportunities

- Demand of skills and some **good opportunities**

- Inspiring work with **other game disciplines**

- Interesting work and **potential to innovate**

In my view, Game Audio has its challenges and opportunities, as with any other creative and tech-based industry. How does this relate to mentoring?

Game audio is niche compared to other tech fields like web development. We should also have in mind that usually job descriptions, as in other tech industries, could be vague and perhaps don't help to understand the roles we can find in the games industry (I'll touch on this later). Audio is just another pillar (an important one!) in games development. I'm just mentioning it because having this in mind can help differentiate opportunities with others in audio and music technology. The final product that a games company creates is a game, not a piece of audio technology. But thankfully, in the last decade audio has become increasingly important and identified as a key for the success of games in many studios. Which is great for us working in the field.

Here, I'd also say there are opportunities for doing interesting work while working closely with other game disciplines like animation or graphics. There is also a high potential to innovate in the field - one of my personal motivators that has kept me in this industry.

Game Audio - Common IC Roles

Sound Designer
Technical Sound Designer
Audio Programmer
Audio Software Engineer

OK, so what are the typical individual contributor roles that you can find advertised in game studios? If we want to be mentors in game audio, first we need to understand the different roles. I'd say these are the big four, with different flavours and definitions. Some companies use sound and audio interchangeably for designers working in content creation and the "audio art" part of the game. There are even some companies, like EA, that call their sound designers "audio artists".

On the other hand, we have the most technical roles, perhaps closer to the audience of this conference: programmers and software engineers.

Game Audio - Common IC Roles

Sound Designer
Technical Sound Designer
Audio Programmer
Audio Software Engineer

So about the design roles, we can usually find a spectrum of technical skills. This varies depending on the company, and expectations could be different. More details on what each of these roles do later.

Game Audio - Common IC Roles

Sound Designer
Technical Sound Designer
Audio Programmer
Audio Software Engineer

- Gameplay
- Tools
- Rendering

If we talk about programmers and software engineers, there is an agreement in the industry that there is at least three different disciplines. People working more on the gameplay side of the game, others working on tools and pipelines, and then we can also find people working on rendering and DSP technology, for instance. All are required to make a great game, but the need of specialists for each are would most of the times depend on the budget, scope, and even the company culture. You can also find people in the industry that can do a bit of everything, or that have broad knowledge across specializations.

Game Audio - Common IC Roles

Sound Designer
Technical Sound Designer
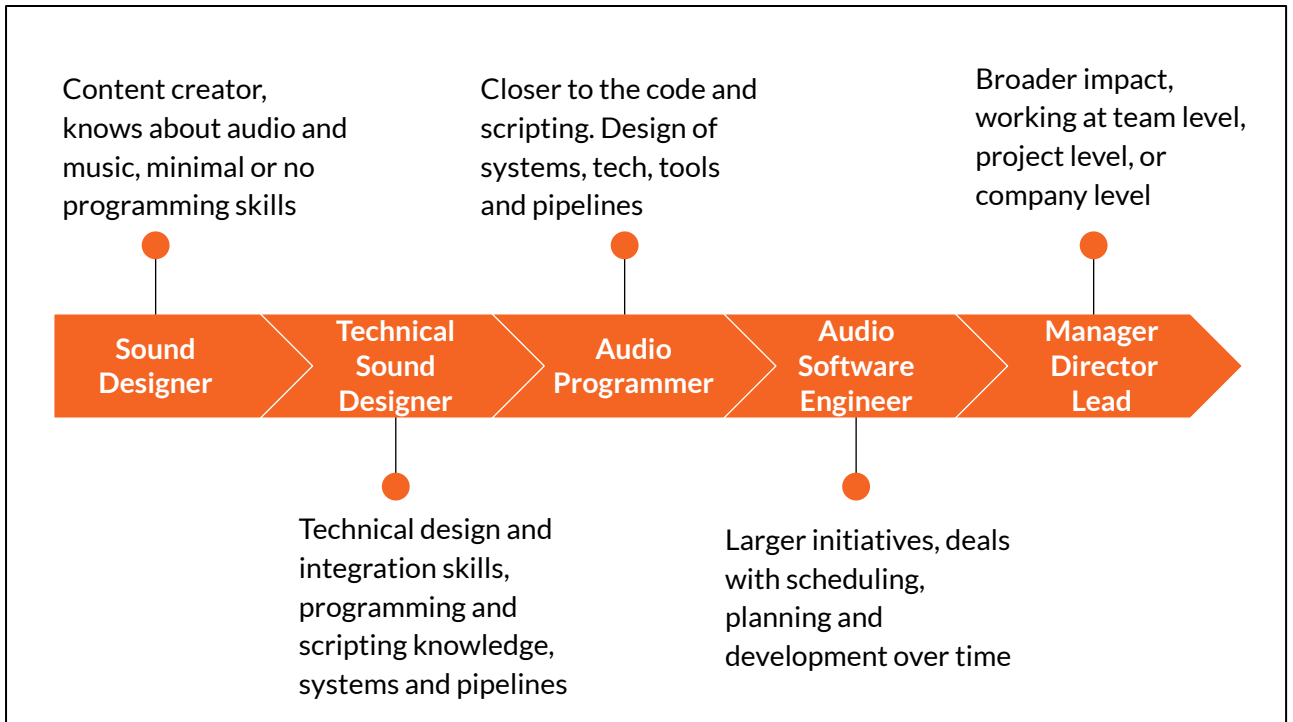**Audio Programmer**
Audio Software Engineer

Gameplay

Tools

I also wanted to focus here on the fine line that technical sound designers and audio programmers (and to some extent, audio software engineers) can find themselves. At least what I have experienced, the title sometimes doesn't matter. As both of these roles could be doing similar jobs in a game studio, sometimes.
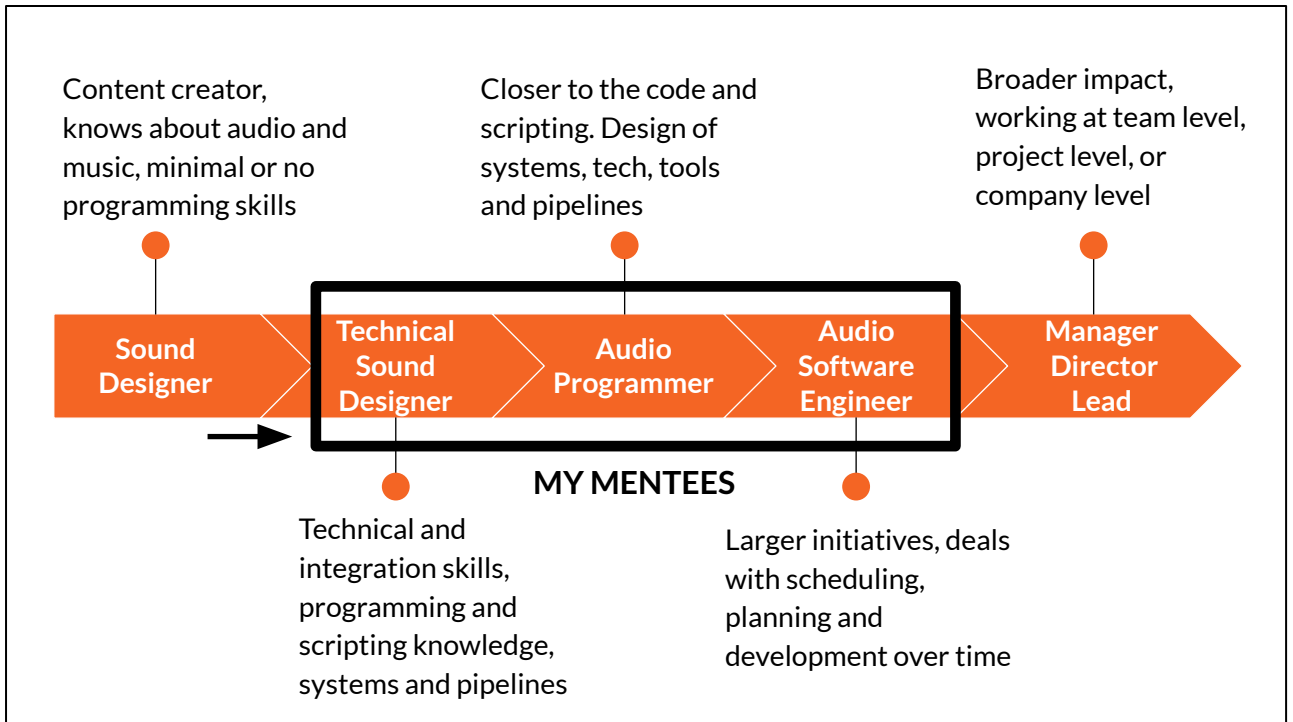
Game Audio Career Paths

Now that we know the different roles we can see different career paths and how people will need to develop in different ways. Here I wanted to share some of the career paths I've seen my mentees taking, and some ideas around the advice I try to give people that is interested in breaking into the industry.

Content creator, knows about audio and music, minimal or no programming skills

Closer to the code and scripting. Design of systems, tech, tools and pipelines

Broader impact, working at team level, project level, or company level

| Sound Designer | Technical Sound Designer | Audio Programmer | Audio Software Engineer | Manager Director Lead |

Technical design and integration skills, programming and scripting knowledge, systems and pipelines

Larger initiatives, deals with scheduling, planning and development over time

From left to right (I've laid it out intentionally), we can go from more design roles to the most programming and technical roles. This isn't meant to be the only valid career path, as it's just an example.
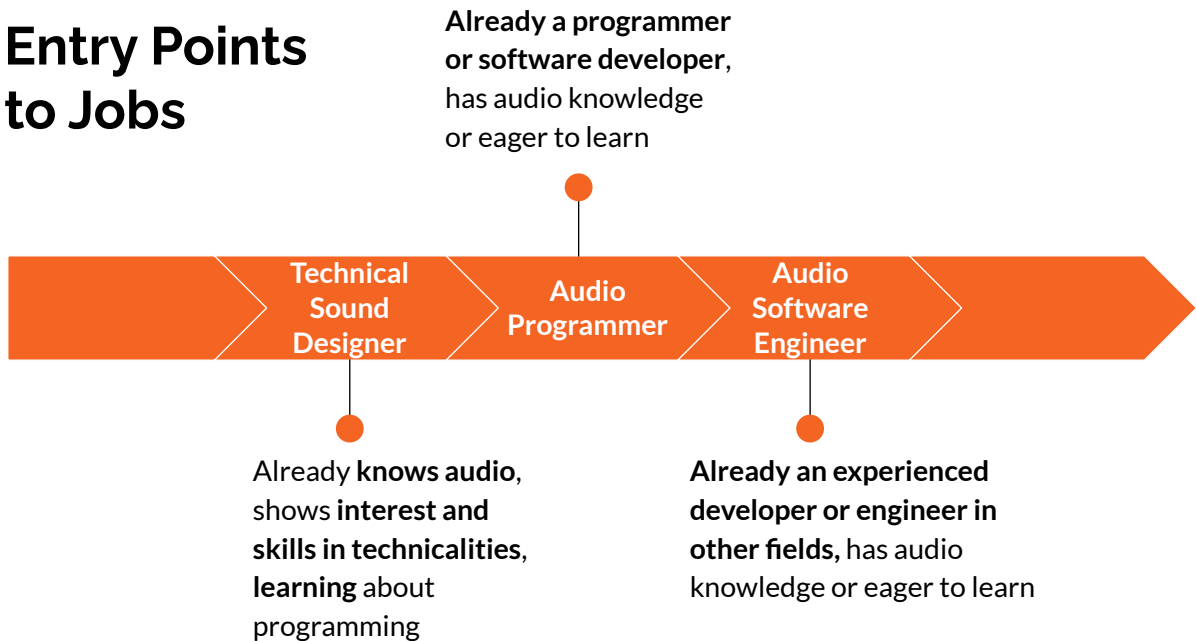
[Click through]

Please bear in mind that these descriptions are meant to be more about the roles stated in the centre orange timeline, and not much about the titles. E.g., a sound designer could be also doing technical sound design as part of their role.

Content creator, knows about audio and music, minimal or no programming skills

Closer to the code and scripting. Design of systems, tech, tools and pipelines

Broader impact, working at team level, project level, or company level

Sound Designer → **Technical Sound Designer** → **Audio Programmer** → **Audio Software Engineer** → **Manager Director Lead**

MY MENTEES

Technical and integration skills, programming and scripting knowledge, systems and pipelines

Larger initiatives, deals with scheduling, planning and development over time

The majority of mentees and people I've mentored in the last decade have fallen on technical sound design, audio programming and audio software engineering. So, what if some person wanted to work as any of those?

Entry Points to Jobs

Already a programmer or software developer, has audio knowledge or eager to learn

| Technical Sound Designer | Audio Programmer | Audio Software Engineer |

Already knows audio, shows **interest and skills in technicalities**, **learning** about programming

Already an experienced developer or engineer in other fields, has audio knowledge or eager to learn

Here is a personal opinion on what are the entry points to jobs, with an example that is illustrated in this diagram. My motivations in mentioning these are to help clarify what are the possibilities of getting a job in a competitive market and volatile industry.

In my view, someone wanting to get a job as a technical sound designer, should already know about audio/tech fundamentals and show an interest and skills in the technicalities of games and/or game design knowledge as well as familiarity with middleware and integration, etc. They should be interested in developing programming skills, as many technical sound designers find often themselves e.g., writing scripts or small tools, or even writing small extensions in C++ for game engines and middleware. In any case, technical sound design roles can vary a lot across companies, some focusing more on the actual design of the game using node-based editors and much less on programming.

On the other hand, and I will refer to audio programmer and audio software engineer interchangeably here since both titles in different companies could be very similar or even the same: a strong candidate should already have programming experience or an engineering background. Unfortunately, junior or intern positions in the industry are scarce, so I also try to be mindful of that when giving advice. Another entry point some colleagues have shared for audio programming is Audio technology QA.

All that said, just to give here an example, one of my past mentees did the transition from a sound design role, to technical sound design, and then to audio programming. Unfortunately, getting a programming position these days without any professional

programming experience is mostly unlikely. So the advice I try to give to my mentees is to carve a path progressively. Of course, as in everything there could be outliers and exceptions. But in my view, making the transition from sound designer to audio programmer takes time, and it isn't trivial if starting with programming from scratch.

Cultivating Unique Talents

Which leads to some of the practical approaches I've found for cultivating unique talents.

Acting as a Gardener
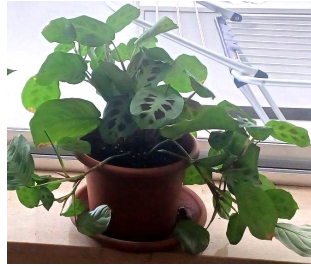
So here I wanted to use an analogy. My partner and I have some plants in our apartment that we have been taking care of for more than half a year now. So I've thought that my experience with them could be used for helping me to make a point.

First plant on the left mostly has had the need of getting water. It has beautiful, gorgeous flowers. Looking at it and giving it water works great and it's currently thriving.

The plant on the centre at some point in time started to deflate and go down. One day my partner said: maybe it needs more space? So I moved it to a bigger flowerpot. After a few days, we noticed that it started to grow more. It also still needs water, of course.

The right-most plant has been a challenge. It has been always small, giving some flowers only during spring. Unfortunately giving it just water didn't work out. We had regular check ins, and unfortunately it didn't survive. I hope this doesn't trigger you much. A learning here for me is that we should have investigated what it needed more earlier in time, and have perhaps more regular check-ins.

So, how does this relate to mentoring? Now let's talk about my mentoring experience for cultivating unique talents, and how we can also act as gardeners with mentees.

Finding a Successful Intersection

Good At

- **Soft** and hard **skills**
- Formal and non-formal **training**
- **Proven audio experience** in other fields

Interests

- Learns, reads up and **investigates** what people do
- **Curious** about it
- **Lifestyle**

Makes a Living

- **Salary** requirements
- **Personal** situation
- Local **context**
- Available **networks**

I think what I've found with time is that helping the mentee identify their skills, strengths and needs is more often than not a key to success in mentoring.

[Go through each of the sections briefly]

Asking the mentee AND observing them, asking some questions to gather what are they good at, what are their interests and what do they need to make a living. The intersection of the three is one formula I've found helpful and I think it's also an enabler…

Finding a Successful Intersection

Good At + **Interests** + **Makes a Living**

PURPOSE

There are some texts and guidance you can also find online that talks about purpose. In my view, this is key for a sustainable career. If you are an experienced programmer or engineer, you've seen this in yourself. There are always ups and downs and challenges to face. For me personally, having a purpose has been helping me. Talking to other colleagues and friends in other industries, like education, also mention purpose as a good tool to motivate people long term.

I also need to remind myself sometimes that different people can, of course, have different purposes in life - and that is completely fine.

Cultivating Unique Talents: Tools

Targeted supporting materials (see last slide)

Videos, books, articles, websites, memes

Opportunities research

Job descriptions, industry, companies, games, projects

Network development

Conferences and meetups, key industry people, former colleagues and classmates

What are some of the tools to help mentees find out their interests, learn, or find their purpose? I've split them into three different categories, and I know other people might have other tools (would love to learn what you do!).

I've found that supporting materials, encouraging opportunities research and network development are perhaps the most useful. YouTube videos and presentations from conferences like ADC or GDC, books like the fantastic Game Audio Programming series by Guy Somberg or attending conferences and meetups around the world are great resources for learning and for connecting with peers.

Does it Work?

Now that we are getting short of time I wanted to share some of the feedback (anonymized) I've got from previous mentees.

Here are some of the highlights to demonstrate if what I've presented works or not.

Areas of Improvement for Mentor
(Real feedback from mentees, 2024)

"I think it could be interesting to have **worked on a particular project together.** It'd also be interesting to see the **internals of a project together and how it works in detail.**"

"I think maybe **more structure** - in the mentoring sessions - **is better as it's easy to forget about the meetings in the month between** (but I can't say whether this is just a me issue or if that could be helpful for future mentees)."

These are some areas of improvement, which have also been opportunities for learning and growth for me.

A common theme is that working on a particular project together seems to be very valuable, though it's sometimes challenging with time constraints. On the other hand, there are people who prefer more structure, which also helps everybody with busy lives.

Positive Comments for Mentor
(Real feedback from mentees, 2024)

"I found the meetings **super helpful even if the topics where sporadic**."

"**Thank you so much again for all the help** and for being interested in continuing to meet occasionally."

"I'd like to **thank you again for taking the time** to have the mentoring calls and for driving them with **respect and good vibes**. They were **very productive**."

"It was enriching to **hear about your experiences in the industry**, how you built your path and how you see the current job market."

These positive comments are also a testament to the benefits mentees can get from a mentoring relationship. And they also motivate me to keep doing mentoring.

Get Involved!

1. Mentoring is **WIN-WIN**

2. **Give back** and **pay it forward** to the community

3. Help make a **more inclusive, strong and supportive** industry

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So, to wrap up. Please get involved!

I think a common theme I've regularly heard from the organisers of mentoring programmes is the lack of mentors to fulfill the demand. In audio, and of course in game audio in particular, there are more mentees than mentors.

[Click through the three points]

Please consider helping out!

Thank YOU!
Questions?
info@jorgegarciamartin.com

Thank you! I'd be happy to take any questions if you drop me a message or find me online on Discord or Gather.

Mentoring Materials

📺Videos

[Understanding Audio Programming and How I Got There - Michelle Auyoung - GDC 2025](#)
[Inside Game Audio Programming: Purpose, Process, and Impact - Harleen Singh - ADC 2024](#)
[Advice for Self-Teaching Audio Programming - Karl Davis - AirCon 2023](#)
[Inside Modern Game Audio Engines - Simon N Goodwin - ADC 2021](#)
[Crash Course in Digital Audio - Aaron McLeran - Unreal Fest Online 2020](#)
[Game Audio Programming - Guy Somberg - ADC 2018](#)
[Lessons Learned from a Decade of Audio Programming - Guy Somberg - GDC 2014](#)

📖Books

['Game Audio Programming: Principles and Practices' series edited by Guy Somberg](#)
['Beep to Boom' Simon N Goodwin](#)
['The Audio Programming Book' Victor Lazzarini and Richard Boulanger](#)
['Start with Why' Simon Sinek](#)
['Drive' Daniel Pink](#)
['Outliers' Malcolm Gladwell](#)
['The Element: How Finding your Passion Changes Everything' Sir Ken Robinson](#)
['Team Geek' Brian W. Fitzpatrick and Ben Collins-Sussman](#)
['Peopleware' Tom DeMarco & Timothy Lister](#)

💻Resources

[ADC Mentoring Program](#)
[GDC Vault](#)
[The Audio Programmer Discord Community](#)
[Game Audio Learning Resources](#)
[Learning Resources - Harleen Singh](#)
[The Interactive Audio Special Interest Group (IAsig)](#)
[Game Audio Programming Blog - Rob Bantin](#)
[Ross Bencina Blog](#)