

Animation As Film Notes

Animation is a film study; therefore, elements of film should be considered, as well as elements of design. Graphic arts are just fictional screenshots of animation and film, so this applies to comic books, graphic novels, wallpapers etc. as well.

BEFORE YOU DO ANY PROJECT, MAKE SURE THE FORMAT IS RIGHT!!

Projects will squish, stretch, shrink, or play poorly if the dimension, aspect ratio or frame rate is not correct. Start the project with the size that the client assigns. If the client does not give a specific size, consider the context of the video's platform. If it is known that it will be published for the Web, choose a decent Web size; if it is for a large screen monitor presentation, choose a size for the projection, so on and so forth. The aspect ratio is usually in conjunction with the size of the video. HD TV aspect ratio goes with an HD video, a SD TV aspect ratio goes with an SD video, and Film aspect ratio goes with film content. Set the project to the right frame rate so it will playback decently according to its platform. It can be more of a hassle to change the format after the project is complete. Make sure there is an understanding of what the client's format is.

Composition

KEEP CHARACTERS AND OBJECTS OUT OF THE DEAD CENTER!

Use the Rule of Thirds to effectively place characters and object. It would appeal to the audience visually. When using the Rule of Thirds, determine the type of composition that will read the best for the story. The right-triangle composition is the most appealing usually, followed by the circle and then the V-shape.

CONTROL THE NEGATIVE SPACE!

If the shot consists of the character's head being shown (medium-close up to long shot), make sure the top of the head is seen with a small amount of negative space. Avoid leaving a great amount of space above the character's head in a fixed shot; this can give the effect that the character is sinking.

When a character is speaking, give them "speech room". "Speech room" is the negative space away from the character that balances out the composition of the shot. If a character is speaking to the right, position the character at the left so their words can "fill" the space and show that there is an audience for the character (even if there really is none). Otherwise, the character appears to be suffocating in the space. If a character is in this position, it should be because it is walking off screen, it had moved to that spot

Commented [DS1]: These are reminders as well as tips for animation students who are struggling with keeping their animations appealing. This may also be useful for new animators; however, it assumes a lot of knowledge and understanding from at least two years of study. The information was obtained from courses at The Art Institute of Philadelphia. The courses include Fundamentals of Design, Language of Animation, Color Theory, Principles of Animation, 3D Animation Principles, Advance Drawing for Animation, Introduction to Digital Editing, Storyboarding for Animation, Character and Object Design, and Acting for Animation.

and the shot/scene is going to change shortly after, or it will turn the other way shortly after.

MIND THE COLORS!

Be careful with what colors are used in the composition. They can complement the composition if applied right, and can destroy the meaning of the shot (that you've worked so hard to achieve) if applied poorly.

When in doubt, start with the basic color schemes. Primary colors stand out the most, especially if they are highly saturated and shaded. Then comes the Secondary colors, and then the Tertiary colors.

Items in the background should be softened by means of using low saturated colors that are mildly tinted, while the foreground colors are the most saturated and the darkest. The middle ground colors would lie in between those ranges. Tinted colors push an element back in space, and shaded colors pull an element forward. If you tint the color of a background element with a high saturation (bringing it closer to white), the element would appear to come forward in space.

An example of tinting and shading would be being on top of a hill next to a cabin with a mountain range off at a distance; the cabin is darkest and the most saturated, the mountain range in the far distance is soft and fading away, and everything in between is between those values.

As a default, make sure all of the colors have the same temperature. Then, for very dramatic scenes/shots, alter the temperature. Be careful not to alter it too much or the audience will be too preoccupied with elements that are not effectively telling the story.

Overall, color should be used to direct the audience's eye to what you want them to focus on.

Editing

DON'T RUSH IT!

Allow at least 16 frames for the viewer's eye to process what they just saw. This applies to both cutting between scenes and cutting between shots. This is especially important in the case of successive actions being equally or increasingly important within the story. Allowing enough time will prevent the viewer from getting lost.

ESTABLISH THE SCENE SOMETIME SOON!

The default rule for shot selection is to open up with an establishing shot (long shot or wide shot). From there, the camera can then move to either another long shot, or transition to a closer shot. The establishing shot allows the viewer to become comfortable with the scene. It is another way to prevent them from getting lost.

There is also a technique in which close-up shots are the first couple of shots used before the camera pulls back. This is designed to put the audience in discomfort until the establishing shot is presented. In any case, the establishing shot needs to be set sometime soon so the audience can lock into the film.

NEVER DO A 360 AROUND AN OBJECT!

By the time an object is seen 180° around, the audience should get an idea of its form. Unless you are a professional who must intentionally add a 360° rotation to fit the story, avoidance will save you from criticism. Doing a 360 will draw the viewer's attention to the camera's presence, thus removing them from the imaginary world of the film.

If a 360° view must be shown, deliver it by performing cuts. This is one way of crossing the Axis of Action conventionally. Do not proceed with three camera shots that establish the Axis of Action, and then jump the Axis to set a new one; it will convey the sense of characters and/or objects being on the same side of a scene when they are not. Instead, do one of the following: have a shot rest right on the Axis, then cut to a shot with a new Axis of Action; rotate the camera beyond the Axis and establish a new Axis; cut to a medium shot, then cut to the shot with the new Axis; have a new action take place in which the camera has to move and cross the Axis; have the character or object turn to its least interesting side (Back, or a side with not much detail or shapes), then cut to a shot with a new Axis of Action and capture a reaction or a new action.

MAINTAIN FILM CONTINUITY!

Camera shots should convey the idea that the story is progressing forward. If a character exits to the right in the shot of a location, have the next shot be of them entering from the left within the same location. Otherwise, they would appear to be walking back to where they came from even if the background is altered. If, however, the character leaves the scene to the right, and the next shot is that of a new scene location, an entrance from the left may seem debatable from an editing standpoint. One way of resolving the "reverse direction" effect is to add another shot after the character enters the second scene.

Remember the minor actions that transpire in a scene, and keep them consistent. Remember how much fluid is in a glass before and after the character drinks it, and

maintain that amount. If a character's tie is loose, have them at least begin to adjust it before cutting to a shot of the tie being neatly tied.

Use camera shots, angles, and movements that add to the storytelling. Do not use a variation of a particular camera movement one right after another (for example, a pan left after a pan right). Do not hold a close-up shot of something moving for long, or overuse the zoom movement in one shot, for these tactics can disorientate the audience. When in doubt, apply the basic understanding of the use for each shot, angle, and movement as a default. Then experiment with alternatives to give a more profound effect.

Animation Tidbits

KEEP IT SIMPLE!

Worry about classiness and awesomeness after the basic principles of animation are applied. Most of the principles of animation revolve around having the character/object carry weight and volume to feel like it belongs in the environment. The rest are used to make the character/object have a bigger nature to appeal to the audience. As the principles are applied, the sequence will start to become more "awesome." Then, find opportunities to exaggerate the principles to give it more flair. What typically happens is that the animation done this way will look better than what was presented in the artist's mind. Just a hint of exaggeration in a quick fight sequence can be the difference between stick figures playing tag and meaty contact inducing flesh wounds.

CONTROL THE FOCUS!

If there is content in the background that would move in real life, have it move in the animation. Background characters should at least breathe, but they can also turn their heads, rotate or shift their weight slightly. Light hanging objects should sway. It is another way of making the environment more believable.

If there are two characters moving, make one character more important by moving it more charismatically. Alternatively, make the least important character less focused by having its movements be subtler. Give one character a stronger power center to assert focus onto it, while the timid introvert will become slightly less fascinating to watch. Controlling the characters in such a way will lead the audience to whom they should follow.