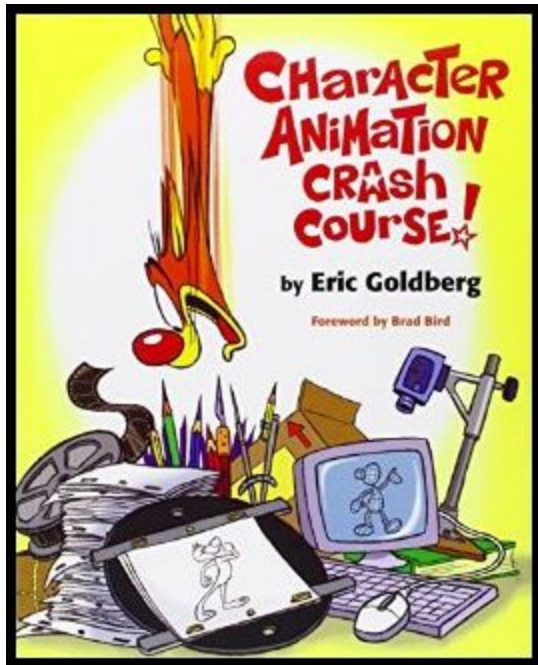# The Pose: Line of Action & the Silhouette

Key animators and directors recognize the power of the pose. Great animated storytelling is accomplished by moving from one solid pose to another.

In Eric Goldberg's book, the author places a heavy emphasis on character posing. For those looking to build an animation library, this book is a must read.
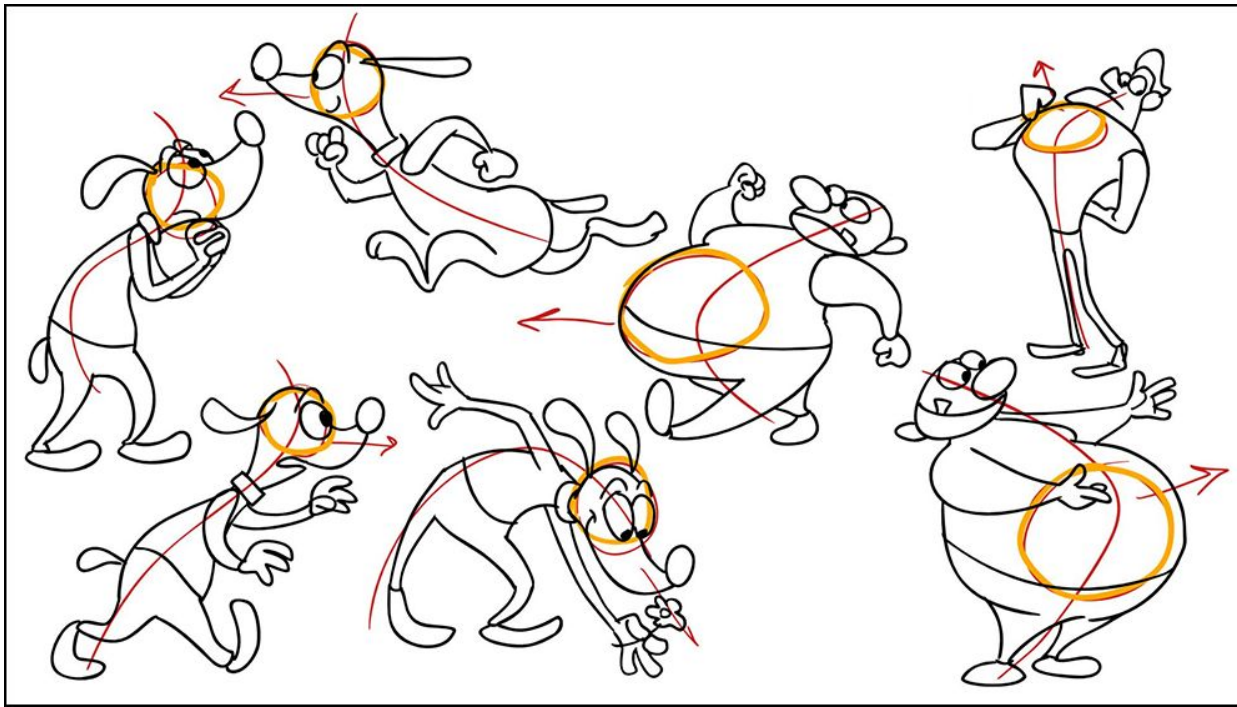
Keeping in mind that the purpose of a character's pose is to communicate an action, personality, mood, or emotion there are two things to keep in mind: Line of Action and the Silhouette. Let's consider these briefly:

Line of Action

Preston Blair wrote about and demonstrated a good Line of Action in his early volume on Animated Cartoons:
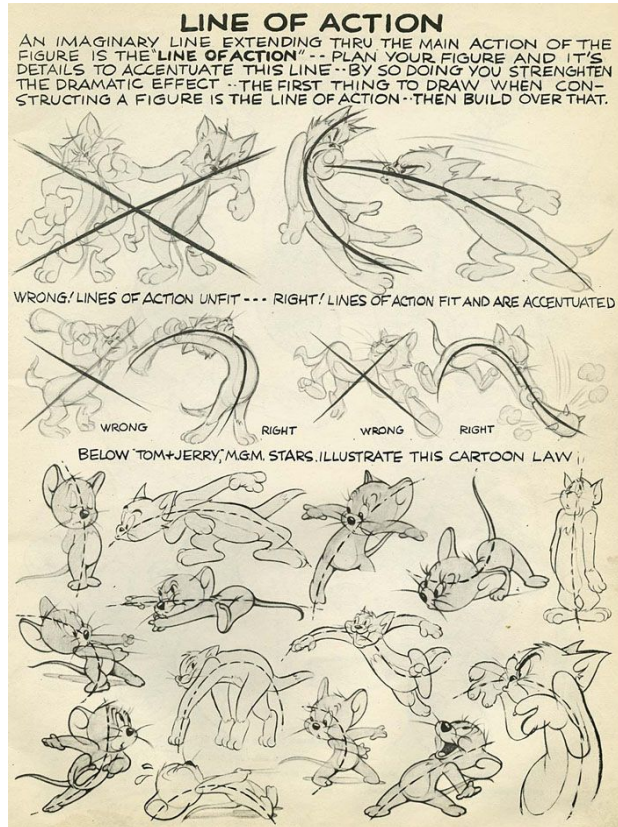
We will revisit the concept of a Line of Action in both *Storyboarding*, and in *Layout*. You should begin to use this idea in your sketchbook. Think of a character (even a dough boy with no apparent features) and try to exaggerate their body language with the use of a line that communicates motion. Draw the line first, then basic shapes over the top of that.

Posing

You can get a wide range of emotions with no faces using only a character's body. When all else fails, get up and see how your body bends and shapes when trying to act out emotions. It is always a good idea to work rough first and establish the actions and emotions of a character first, then come back later to refine your work.
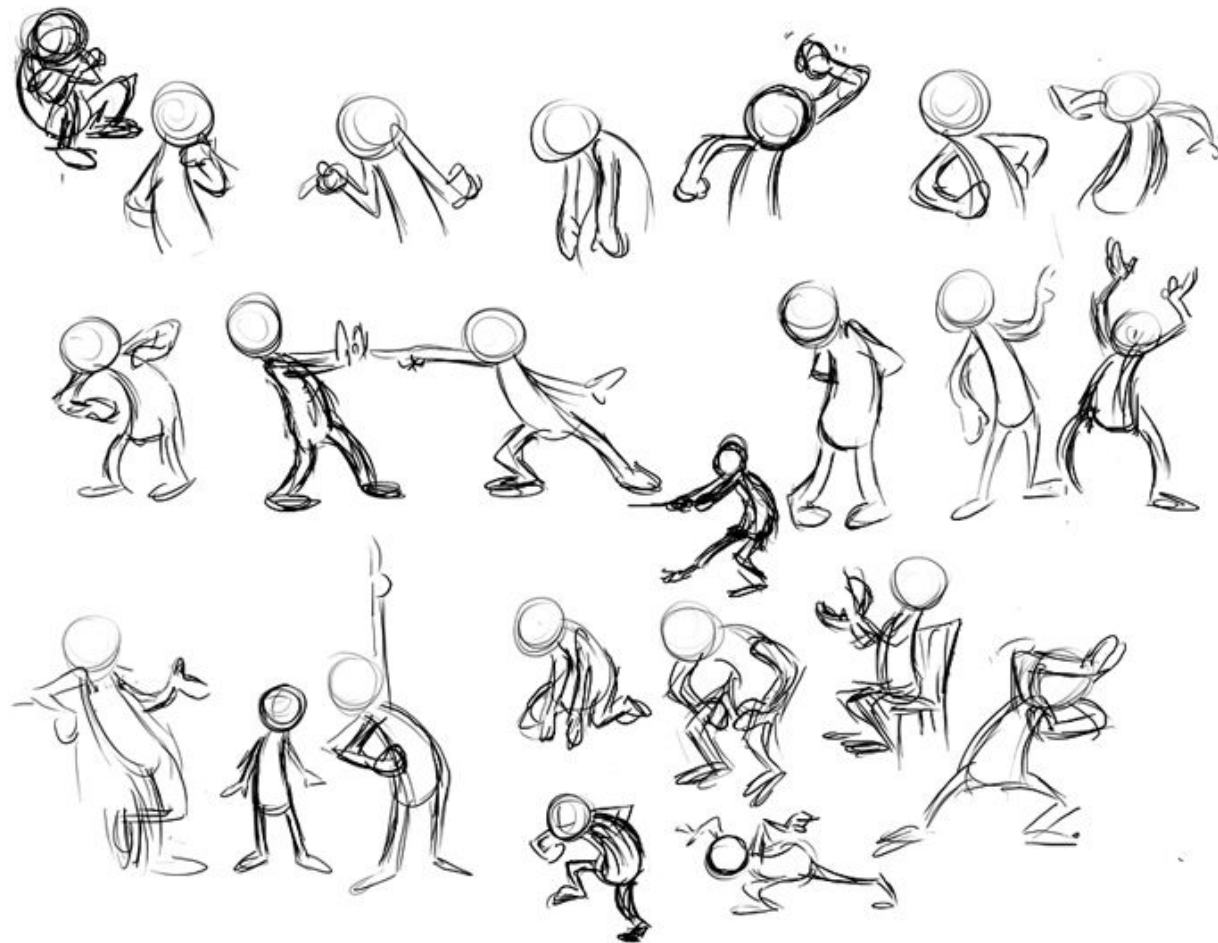
Most people jump into the details too quickly. They want to get the facial expression and details of the face before establishing the body. Fill up some pages of thumbnail sketches portraying as many expressions as possible (like those above). The body language should always come first, the face just backs it up.

Body language and posture can add enormously to the mood, expression, and context of your character. Once the mood of a scene has been worked out with rough drawings, facial expressions can be added. Check out the poses of the characters below and notice how well the action line, postures, and gestures harmonize with the facial expressions.

These images are were all done by Tracy Butler, who publishes a comic available on line and in print. You can find her website by searching *Lackadaisycats.com* in a web browser. Once there you will find a wealth of material. Whether or not you like her comics, it is hard to find fault with her ability to communicate emotion both in body language and in facial expression.
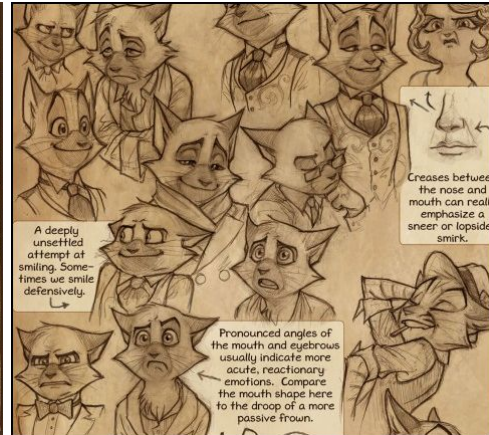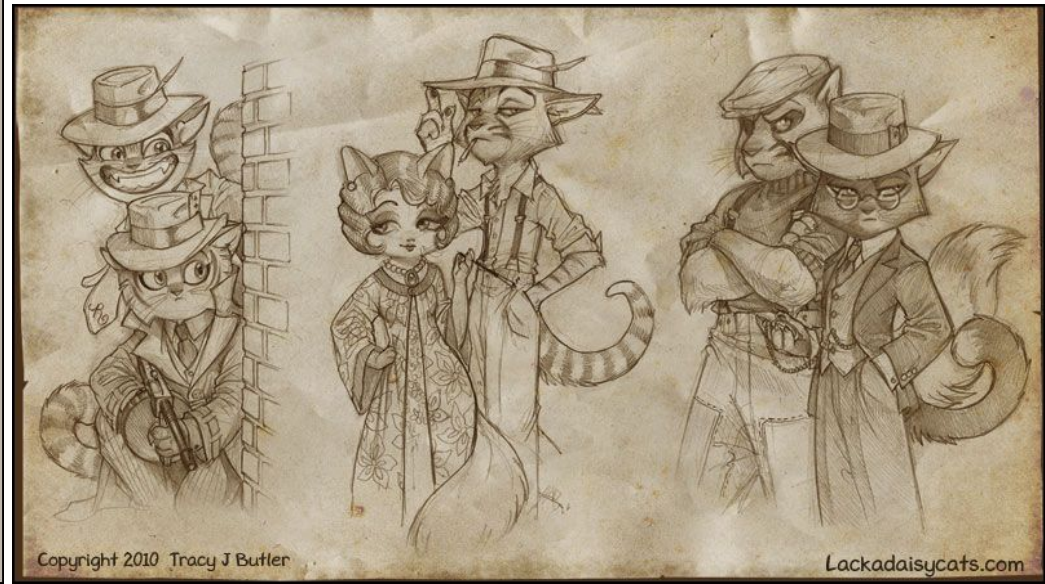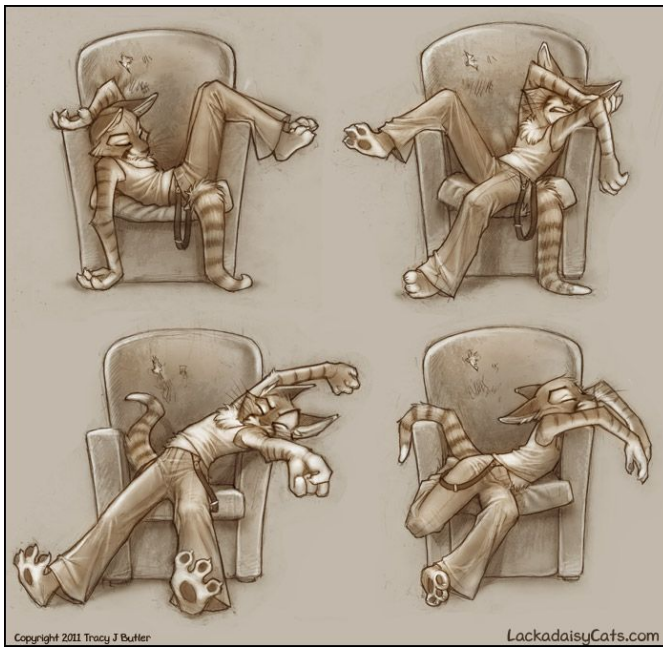
Silhouette

When you have the basic plan of your scene worked out, take some time to figure out how well the shot would work if the character was blacked out. The personality of a character should be well communicated even in its silhouette:

THE SILHOUETTE TEST

A long standing rule in animation is that a good extreme pose should read in silhouette. This means that you should be able to "black in" your pose and still see clearly what the character is doing.

The reason for this rule is that on the motion picture screen, you do not have an opportunity to study the pose as you do in many other types of art work. The impression of each key pose must, therefore, be as clear and unmistakable as you can possibly make it.

For example, in illustration A, it is fairly clear that Jiminy Cricket is eating an ice cream cone, even though the pose is blacked in; whereas in illustration B, this is not the case.

Try blacking in your own extreme pose and see if other people can tell what the character is doing.

A.

B.

(B. is a nice drawing , but it's more like a Breakdown or an Inbetween , not a KEY drawing. A is the KEY.)

Avoid a character pose that is mirrored. This is an idea clearly discussed in *The Illusion of Life,* and many other leading books on animation. Notice in the example below how a well planned Line of Action helps you to avoid mirrored or twinned images:

THIS IS WHAT'S CALLED A "WOODEN" CHARACTER.

EACH EYE, EAR, ARM, HAND, FINGER, LEG, COLLAR, SHOE, etc. LOOKS THE SAME AS IT'S COUNTER-PART. THE RESULT IS A VERY STIFF LOOKING POSE.

...THIS CHARACTER LOOKS MORE NATURAL SIMPLY BECAUSE EACH PART OF THE BODY VARIES IN SOME WAY FROM THE CORRESPONDING OP-POSITE PART.

EYES IN PERSPECTIVE

FINGERS THAT VARY GIVE THE HANDS A MORE DYNAMIC LOOK.

PAF!

When characters appear together in a group, the group looks more interesting when each character's body parts DIFFER from the corresponding parts of the other characters.

Compare this concept to...


...this concept, where all the body parts are the same.

Avoid using a straight "line of action".

The Strength of the Pose in Visual Storytelling

Obviously, an animated story comes together when all animation principles are employed. A strong pose is by necessity exaggerated, and is a big part of a character's appeal.

Look at the expressive posing in the figures below - these come for Goldberg's book:
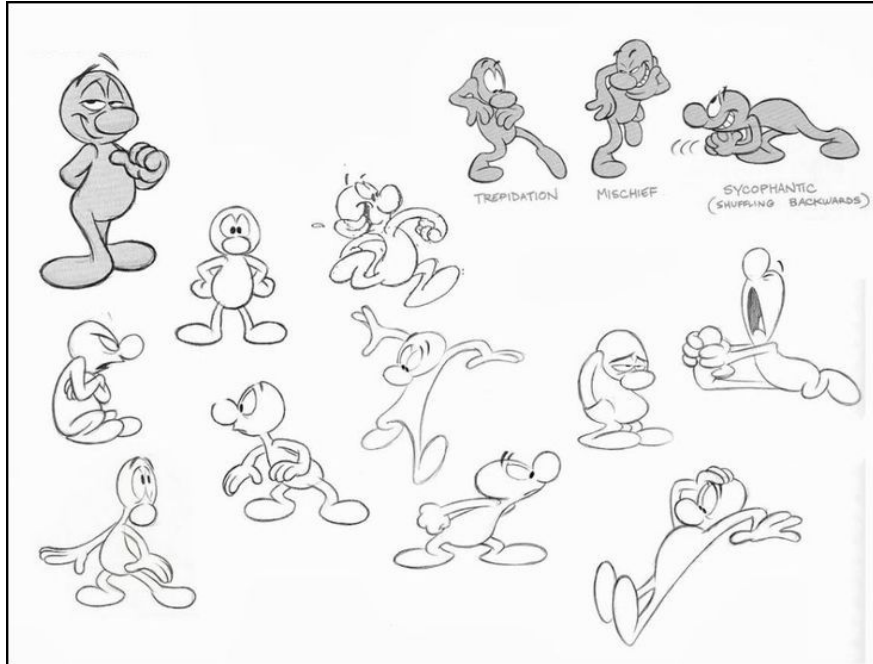
The principle of slow in and slow out also plays an important role in a pose. Use this principle to showcase the pose itself (even the slow in and slow out can be exaggerated a bit to strengthen the emotional impact of an image. What that allows is a brief pause of the when a character's pose is the strongest. Visualize this simple example: A character is getting ready bolt off the screen - they rear back (anticipating the forward motion, they move backwards and hoist one leg in a cocked position) and then, bang! - they take off. It's the reared back position that is held for an extra beat - as an animator, you slow into that pose with an extra frame or two (yes 1/24th of a second can make a huge difference in the way a character performs). This treatment makes a huge difference in the way a character is seen and understood by the audience.

Here are some impromptu comments made by Goldberg at a convention. Someone shot the "Q&A" on their cell phone and posted it on YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9Wy9x-msck
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVzHwZN4p60
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQ4yZWB-OFc
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGsy0EFx80E
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8ns0aqp6N8

This particular component of module two is short, but the concepts are dense. These are things you need to begin to work through and practice in your sketchbooks <u>every day</u>. Like many other things, it will take a lot of practice to begin to move toward mastery.