



ANIMATION MENTOR®
The Online Animation School®

TIPS & TRICKS FOR BEGINNERS



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PART I

Animation Career Advice

How Important is an Art Background? Starting Animation



By Shawn Kelly

Animation Supervisor, Industrial Light & Magic
Co-Founder, Animation Mentor



ANY background is going to be helpful in SOME way. I've met animators who were fighter pilots, detectives, maintenance workers, engineers, architects, soldiers, bartenders, and athletes.

There was a time when I thought that there was nothing more important for an animation student than a solid background in traditional art. Painting, drawing, color theory, art history, the works. At least that's what I was told, back in the day, and on the surface, it makes sense, doesn't it?

Of course an artistic background will help you as an animator. It's a no-brainer. Color design may inform staging decisions, drawing classes will certainly help with composition issues, figure drawing and an understanding of anatomy are helpful for any animator.

But if the question is whether or not an art background is absolutely NECESSARY to becoming a great animator, experience has taught me that the answer is no.

It isn't.

Now, to be clear, it certainly doesn't hurt! I'm thankful, in particular, for all those years of figure drawing. I may be a decade out of practice, and unable to accurately draw anything to save my life right now, but the anatomical and biomechanical knowledge I soaked up in those classes helps inform my animation decisions to this day.

If nothing else, as strange as it sounds, it was very helpful for me to just sit in a room with a naked person and study how their body worked without any of the important hip/spine interactions being hidden by clothing. I actually even learned more in between the model's poses than when he or she was actually holding a pose for us to draw! As an animation student, it was fascinating to

watch them move from pose to pose, or climb up onto the stage, etc. In fact, I think I'd say that considering the sad state of the animation program I was attending at the time, I probably learned more about body mechanics during the spaces between figure drawings than I did in any of my "animation" classes!

That said, it isn't absolutely necessary. In fact, you know what kind of background would be helpful for an animator who is just starting out?

In order to bring a character to life, there is almost nothing more important than having a collection of interesting actions and acting choices we've observed and either committed to memory or written down or sketched. These actions we've set aside to remember are our secret weapons in the creation of memorable character performances.

In light of that, just about any life experience you have may come in handy during your animation career!

What's necessary is that you have a passion to learn animation and a hunger to seek that knowledge out anywhere and everywhere.

Yours! That's right! ANY background is going to be helpful in SOME way. I've met animators who were fighter pilots, detectives, maintenance workers, engineers, architects, soldiers, bartenders, and athletes. All of these people bring their unique backgrounds and knowledge base to their work, and these life experiences inform the acting decisions of their characters, the stories they will tell, and the style of their work.

As animators, observation is one of the most important aspects of what we do.

I would say that any artistic experience you can have, whether it's studying photography, visiting museums, or even reading comic books -- these are all more immediately helpful to you as an animator than your memory of the drunk who spilled everyone's drinks one night when you were tending bar. The drunk may come in handy at some point down the line as you craft a performance that takes place in a bar, but the artistic growth you've experienced in the first three examples is something that you'll be able to use from Day 1 as you jump

into animation.

So sure, any art background is helpful to the animator, and obviously I think that figure drawing classes, in particular, can be very beneficial, but I've met too many incredible animators now who have next to no art background at all to be able to say that it's completely necessary.

While an art background, used properly, will be an advantage for any animator, the computer has removed the absolute need for draftsmanship. Keeping a character "on-model" is no longer an issue, at least as far as maintaining the mass goes. (Taking the facial animation and acting choices off-model is still as big a problem and challenge as it ever was, though!). Being able to draw an accurate turntable of a character is a fantastic and enviable skill, but as our computer tools get more and more robust, there is increasingly room in the ranks of the world's animators for animation artists who have never picked up a pencil for serious drawing.

Of course, if you want to pursue 2D animation, obviously that means you WILL need strong draftsmanship and a well-rounded background in traditional art, but the question I get is usually referring to a career in 3D animation, which is a different story all together.

Animation students who don't have any artistic background at all may need to work a little harder to make up for it, but it's simply no longer necessary to have the drawing skills that many of our animation heroes possess.

What's necessary is that you have a passion to learn animation and a hunger to seek that knowledge out anywhere and everywhere.

What's necessary is a keen sense of observation throughout your daily life, and the ability to learn from what you are observing. What's necessary is the ability to apply those observations to your work, and to accurately recreate and exaggerate the life you see around you. What's necessary is the patience to plan your work out, and the tenacity to be detail-oriented enough to completely finish it. What's necessary is the desire to find criticism of your work and to grow from what you hear.

THAT's the stuff that's absolutely necessary. If you're missing any of the above, you might as well give up right now -- you aren't going to make it as an animator. I'm sorry. That's the stuff you can't live without. Everything else is gravy. Sometimes the gravy really makes the dish, though - something we

shouldn't ignore. In other words, your ice-cream sundae might be delicious, but it might not be able to compete with your neighbor who actually put the cherry on top, you know?

I do think that you can make a pretty darn good sundae without any art background, but if our goal as animators it to never stop learning (which it SHOULD be), I'd encourage all of you to study any and all aspects of art in any way you can.

And if you become an animator having no art background at all, then guess what?

You're an artist. ...

Which I guess means you have an art background now! Cool, huh?

Shawn :)



Who Is Cut Out for Animation?

Answer: YOU!



By Shawn Kelly

Animation Supervisor, Industrial Light & Magic
Co-Founder, Animation Mentor



I learned that something my grandfather once told me was very true: simply “following your dreams” isn’t enough -- you have to aggressively and proactively HUNT your dream down.

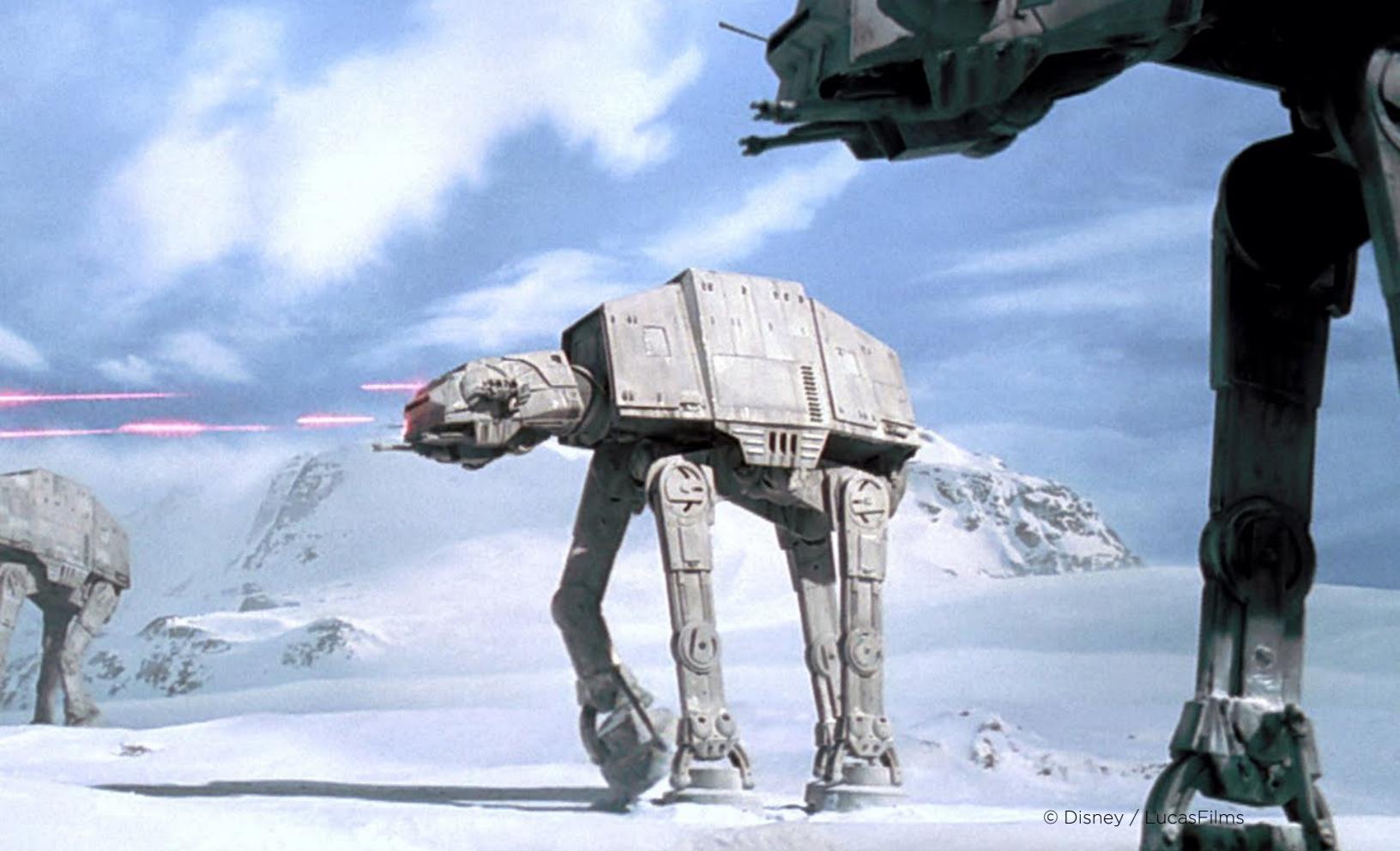
I've been getting a lot of questions emailed to me asking what it takes to be an animator. I've talked a bit about that stuff before and elsewhere, but I thought I'd address those questions again here.

I believe with all my heart that ANYONE with the passion and drive and desire to learn animation, can learn animation. Yes, there will always be those VERY few lucky people who just naturally have crazy amounts of animation talent, but they are few and far between. I've been either learning or teaching (well, always learning!!) animation one way or another for 13 years now, and can only think of three students in all that time who really fit that description. Maybe four.

Those people are very rare. For most of us, we just have to study our brains out and practice like crazy and sacrifice a lot of sleep in order to try to get the hang of this animation stuff.

You're probably worrying about competition in the industry, and you know what? There WILL be competition, and a lot of it. In fact, hundreds of people will probably be competing with you for that job at your dream studio. But gosh, if that's your dream? If that's your absolute dream job, how can you not give it a shot?

I really think that unless you have serious time-consuming family obligations or other extenuating circumstances and responsibilities -- unless you're in some kind of situation like that, you owe it to yourself to chase after that dream. If you want it more than those other hundreds of people, and work harder for it than those other hundreds of people, then it's those hundreds of people who should be worried about YOU, and not the other way around!



© Disney / LucasFilms

When I was in high school, I wanted to work on *Star Wars* more than anything in the world, and they hadn't even officially announced that there would be more *Star Wars* movies. It was just rumors, but I made it my goal to get to ILM. ILM was where I wanted to work, period. In light of that, every single decision I made was based on "does this decision take me one step closer to ILM or take me a step away from it?" If it was the former, then that's what I did, no matter what kind of burden it created on my time, my social life, schooling, etc. I worked my butt off to somehow

unbelievably make it into ILM after years and years of training, networking, and working at smaller studios. I learned that something my grandfather once told me was very true: simply "following your dreams" isn't enough -- you have to aggressively and proactively HUNT your dream down.

People spend their entire lives "following their dreams" and the vast majority of them never arrive. If you want to get into your dream studio, you have to be better than that. You have to be a hunter.

If you can combine a true passion for learning animation with the tenacity necessary to hunt down your dream job, then I have zero doubt that someday I'll see your name in the credits of my favorite TV show, a video game that I've been lost in for weeks, or at the end of a film in a packed theater. It might not happen right away, and you'll probably have to slowly build experience and your reel as you work your way up through smaller studios, but if you just never let go of that dream, and base your decisions on it, you CAN make it come true.

I know, because I've been there. And the hard truth is that I saw plenty of people who could have tried harder. Back when I was in school, I saw plenty of students leave the animation lab at 10 p.m. to go play video games or hit a club or go to sleep. The people who stayed in that lab until it closed at 2 a.m. EVERY NIGHT are largely the people who have their dream jobs right now.

We made animation our LIFE, and put everything else on hold. Could it be a coincidence that those are the people who ended up with the jobs everyone else wanted? I don't think so. I think it ended up coming down to who wanted those jobs the most, and who was

willing (or able) to make the sacrifices necessary to completely immerse themselves in their art.

For me, it was a great life lesson, and one I feel happy and lucky to have learned, so I figured I should pass it along...

I also want to add that I'm not merely talking about joining Animation Mentor. I realize that many of you aren't in a situation where you can join the school right now -- that's fine! Seek out other ways to hunt your dream down. There are a lot of free online resources that can at least help get you started, such as forums, online animation and art communities, and blogs. There are great books out there such as *The Illusion of Life* and *The Animator's Survival Kit*. There are fantastic making-of documentaries on any number of your favorite DVDs.

Seek that stuff out and soak it up! Do the best hunting you can with whatever is at your disposal right now, and take that first step that brings you even the tiniest bit closer to your goal, whatever it may be.

Best of luck!

Shawn :)



What's the Role of an Animator?



By Shawn Kelly

Animation Supervisor, Industrial Light & Magic
Co-Founder, Animation Mentor

At any medium-large studio (including games, TV, or feature films), an animator is hired to animate. Not to create textures or model characters or light scenes. Most bigger studios recognize that these are all skills that take decades to truly master, and that the true path to beautiful imagery onscreen is to fill the studio with expert specialists. In other words, most studios aren't too hung up on finding people who "know a little about a lot of different disciplines." Most features and games studios are looking for an artist who "knows a LOT about ONE discipline."

It's the pairing up of these experts that results in the truly memorable work you'd see in any blockbuster film or A-list game. Of course, there is nothing wrong with dabbling in all the different disciplines available to you as a CG artist, but we generally recommend that once you've found which discipline you are the most interested in -- be it animation or modeling or lighting or rigging or textures or whatever -- once you've found your "true calling," your best bet is to put the rest of that stuff aside and focus as much time as humanly possible on becoming a true expert in whatever that chosen field is.

Many people will say that this will limit your job opportunities, and guess what?

They're right. It will.

But I guess it boils down to you deciding what kind of job you are looking for, and what kind of career you are going to attempt. There is nothing wrong at all in deciding to be a generalist, and continue to learn about all aspects of this stuff called Computer Graphics. There are many jobs, especially junior-level jobs at smaller-to-medium-sized studios, where generalists are specifically sought out and encouraged.

However, I can't tell you how rare it is for a generalist to get a job as an animator at a major feature studio or large game studio. Almost every professional animator at that level has decided to focus at least MOST of their time on animation, even if they also enjoy other disciplines deep down...

Before I end that thought, though, it's really important to point out that if you are new to the industry, getting a junior job as a generalist can be one of THE best ways to break into this business.

Getting your foot in the door of a studio and getting *any* kind of professional experience is invaluable, and will help you make connections, learn the ropes, meet people to learn from, and will look

great on your resume.

If you aren't getting to spend most of your time at work actually animating and growing as an animator, then my advice is to work hard, do a great job, and then go home and animate your brains out and practice as much as you possibly can in your spare time. Read animation books, get involved in online animation communities, meet up with some animation student friends and watch some animated films frame-by-frame and talk about what you see...

Getting a job where you aren't doing *exactly* what you hope to be doing doesn't mean that you have to stop striving towards your dreams of working as an animator! It's more than common for animators to have to work their way up, and slowly climb that ladder until they finally get their dream job.

It's very rare for that to happen overnight, so don't automatically turn your nose up at jobs that aren't exactly what you hoped for. Just don't let that job stop you from continuing to move forward.

Shawn :)



Questions About the Animation Job Market

JOBS SAVED ALERTS

Category Title Location Date posted Type Company type Employer

All Computer & IT Art, Fashion & Design Education Media, Communications & Writing Sports, Fitness & Recreation Management Human Resources Manufacturing & Warehouse Restaurant & Hospitality

Animation Lead (Project Hire)
Lucasfilm
San Francisco, CA
via Disney Careers
28 days ago 9 min Full-time

3D Technical Artist - Rigging & Animation
Cruise
San Francisco, CA
via ZipRecruiter
23 days ago 9 min Full-time

Software Engineer, Animation
Lucasfilm
San Francisco, CA
via Disney Careers
Over 1 month ago 9 min Full-time

Animation Lead, Daydream
Google
San Francisco, CA
via Google Careers
21 days ago 9 min Full-time

Pixar Animation Studios - Job Opportunities
The Walt Disney Studios
Emeryville, CA
via LinkedIn
Over 1 month ago

Animation Lead (Project Hire)
Lucasfilm
San Francisco, CA

Apply on Disney Careers Apply on Glassdoor Apply on JobMonkey Jobs

28 days ago 9 min Full-time

Primary Responsibilities:

- To support and collaborate with the Animation Supervisor and Supervising Director on the visual direction of animated sequences while also assisting Animation Supervisor in leading the overseas Animation, Cloth, and Crowds teams.
- Work with the Animation Supervisor and Supervising Director to help set and maintain the style and look of the animation.
- Work alongside the Animation Supervisor to review daily animation deliveries and provide clear, concise critique.
- Attend after hours kick-off meetings and live dailies with overseas teams.
- Review and aid in the development of animation cycles.
- Partner with the Animation Coordinator to create and maintain documentation to assess and track the shots requiring Cloth and Crowds.
- Communicate daily with overseas vendors to aid in development and delivery of any Animation, Cloth, or Crowd related tasks.
- Present in progress and approved shots to Supervising Director for notes and final approval.
- ...

[READ MORE](#)

Lucasfilm

Glassdoor 3.5 - 109 reviews

Indeed



By Shawn Kelly

Animation Supervisor, Industrial Light & Magic
Co-Founder, Animation Mentor

Hello from the other side of the planet!

As I write this, I'm in Singapore for six weeks to help train some animation apprentices and am having the time of my life. What's more fun than visiting an exotic location, meeting new friends, reuniting with old friends, and getting to talk about animation all day?! It isn't all Happy-Go-Lucky-Land - I *am* really missing my family, my US friends, my ILM work, and especially my incredibly understanding wife, but home is just two weeks away at this point, so I'm on the home stretch!

Singapore is amazing, by the way. Really friendly people, it's super safe, the streets are shockingly spotless, and I've met some really talented people here...

I know what you're wondering, and I was wondering the same thing: "I know Singapore is famous for its great food, but how is the fried chicken?" Well, I'm still working on getting a full overview of Singapore's fried chicken situation, but so far it's pretty decent! They have the requisite American fast food stuff (a KFC at the zoo!), and a US-style diner that I went to, which actually had some pretty terrific fried chicken, and then there is obviously lots of Chinese fried chicken, but that's been a little hit-or-

miss so far -- but I'm still open to trying some more places! You can never taste-test too much fried chicken!

This is actually my second trip to Singapore, and during the two trips I've eaten some truly bizarre things -- or at least bizarre to my American eyes: chicken-foot soup (which is exactly what it sounds like), century eggs (pickled robin's eggs, or something?), durian (AAAAAAA! Just run away! Sorry, Singapore -- I know you love it, but holy moly, my white-trash taste buds just cannot handle the horror of the Durian "fruit"), and a grape-sized fish eyeball that my friend Snowy convinced me to eat. Meanwhile, she's completely disgusted by the concept of eating a banana!

Gotta love Singapore...

Anyway, I got a great question about the animation job market in the comments on Animation Mentor's new Tips & Tricks blog (www.animationtipsandtricks.com) that I thought I'd go ahead and answer here.

I'm not the expert in the job market, by any means, but I'll share at least what I've personally observed... I'd definitely still recommend that you guys

ask around to other sources, because my experiences certainly aren't all-encompassing, and are largely limited to the feature animation and vfx animation niches...

**QUESTION:What types of jobs are available to animators? (I'm assuming character animation in film/TV isn't the only possibility)
Which jobs are in the most demand and which are in the least demand? What are the best job market cities in the U.S./Canada (abroad as well)? Do you have to move to a big city to get a job?**

What jobs are available to animators – it's right to assume that the industry is much larger than simply “film/TV” jobs. Character animators have found work in many companies and studios, doing – among other things: character animation for feature animated films, character animation for visual effects films, a huge variety of TV shows, TV commercials, in-game video game work, cinematic video game work, bringing to life architectural CAD fly-throughs, Internet flash animation, online greeting

cards, web-based video games, crime-scene recreation, automobile safety simulations, 3D motion “rides” at amusement parks, teaching, and have also put their artistic talents to use in a variety of graphic design, illustration, and marketing jobs.

So yes, there's definitely a variety of jobs out there, and everyone has their own preferences of what they enjoy the most.

As for demand, that's very difficult to answer, as all of the above industries fluctuate considerably, often in a very cyclical pattern. For example, sometimes (such as for the last few months), the visual effects industry hits a slow patch, and it can be very difficult to get (or keep) a job. And then, often just a few months later, the demand for animators is suddenly huge as a bunch of films get green-lit and studios scramble to fill animation positions. Demand is very difficult to predict, but especially when you don't have a lot of experience, it can be difficult to find a job at times. That's for sure.

I would generally advise greener animators to not expect their first few jobs to be the most glamorous, but those jobs will often be terrific learning experiences as you climb the ladder to

your dream job!

The best job-market cities would be difficult to nail down as well, because the animation industry is growing a lot in Europe, India, and Southeast Asia right now, as well as in Mexico and a number of other countries. Traditionally, the big animation cities have been LA, Northern California (San Jose and San Francisco Bay Area), London, Paris, New York, Vancouver, etc. However, Oregon, Florida, and Texas all have strong animation markets these days, as do cities in India, New Zealand, Australia, and of course all over Asia. Singapore's industry is growing quickly as well, and many governments (such as Singapore's) are making a concerted effort to support and fund a home-grown animation industry.

So basically, animation is growing pretty much all over the place right now!

As for having to live in a big city, I would say that for most of the larger animation studios, you would have to live at least near a large city, yes. However, I see the day rapidly approaching where animators can work from home much if not most of the time. Once security and some amount of a "work from home" system. Once that's here, which

realistically is still years away and would only work for certain mediums, I suppose we'll be able to work from wherever we want!

That's the dream, anyway, because I BADLY want to animate a transformer while sitting on some sand with my feet in a warm ocean! :)

Ahhhhh... someday.... OK, maybe that'll never happen, but I can dream, can't I?!

Hope that answers all your questions!

Shawn :) ♡

6 Animation Demo Reel **DOs** and **DON'Ts**



By Don Kim

Director, Storyboard Artist, Animation Supervisor
Nelvana Limited
Mentor, Animation Mentor

Getting your first job in the animation industry can be quite intimidating and challenging. Networking and checking out job boards will get you started, but it's your demo reel and portfolio which will be the deciding factor if you move to the next stage of the hiring process. In most cases, the person(s) reviewing your reel has an immense amount of material to review and make judgments on. There is no time to think too long or hard about the degree of someone's talent and skill set before moving on to

the next demo reel. That's why it is so important to make as strong an impact/first impression of your work as you can to potential employers.

Being a Director and having worked as an Animation Supervisor, I have reviewed many many demo reels (actually too many). What I can tell you is, after a while, mediocre work begins to blend together and you find yourself skipping through reels or only watching a few seconds of the start of



WATCH PHILIP TO DEMO REEL

ON VIMEO

*Alumnus, Philip To's 2010 Animation Mentor Demo Reel. Don Kim was his mentor for Advanced Acting back in 2007. Philip won an Annie Award in 2010 for his work in **Monsters vs Aliens: Mutant Pumpkins from Outer Space**. He currently works at Disney Feature Animation.*

the reel because of the quality of the work. You want to always put your best work forward to give that ‘WOW FACTOR’. This will grab the attention of the person reviewing your reel and make them want to watch more.

Below are a few do’s and don’ts regarding putting together an effective demo reel.

DO : Only include your best work! You might have some sentimental attachment to particular shots in your past work, but you need to be brutally honest when reviewing for your demo reel. It’s also a good idea to have a colleague review your work to give you more of an objective point of view. But, bottom line, your demo reel should ONLY include your BEST work.

DON’T : Please do not have a 5 to 10 min demo reel, this is way too long. Again, those individuals reviewing your work have a limited amount of time to review a vast number of reels. Keep your reel between 1-2 mins tops. Less is more, and only putting in your best work should cut down the length of your reel.

DO : Begin and end your reel with your killer shots. You want to ‘wow’ them right off the start to keep them engaged and wanting to see more. Then end with another amazing shot, this

is what you are going to leave them with so they remember you. Obviously, the animation in between is also very important, but typically it’s a good idea to start and end with your strongest work.

DON’T : Don’t muddy your reel with over the top titles, transitions and underscore. Clarity is very important, you want to highlight your animation and make those moments read as best as possible. Where there are acting shots with dialogue, I would personally not include any underscore that is not present in the original scene, where you have a bunch of action shots edited together, a bit of subtle music might be nice to string the shots together.

DO : Be mindful of what shots you edit together and how each shot relates to the shot before and after, in terms of performance (acting vs action) and also timing (fast vs slow). Obviously, you are not telling a story through the sequence of shots in your demo reel, but it can still have a sense of rhythm and highs and lows. For example you could have a few action heavy shots in a row then go into a slower acting driven scene to create contrast and break up your reel, creating rhythm and variety in the beats. This can potentially make your reel feel more



WATCH WIRA WINATA DEMO REEL

ON VIMEO

Alumnus, Wira Winata's 2014 Demo Reel. Don Kim was his mentor for Animation Basics and now he's rocking it at Blue Sky Studios!

engaging / interesting to the viewer because of the changes in rhythm.

DO : A lot of studios, welcome a portfolio in addition to your demo reel. Including creative work outside of actual animation, for example, life drawing, colour studies (keys), a short film, storyboards, animatics, etc. This will help to show you as a more well-rounded artist that possesses versatility and could potentially be used in other areas of production.

Think that's it and again always submit work you are most proud of, if you

don't have work up to those standards then wait until you do. Making a strong first impression is very important and you want them to remember you amongst the flood of reels that frequent recruiters.

Best of luck! ♦

Shawn Kelly Answers 5 Burning Questions About **DEMO REELS**



By Shawn Kelly

Animation Supervisor, Industrial Light & Magic
Co-Founder, Animation Mentor



WATCH SHAWN KELLY'S DEMO REEL WEBINAR

ON VIMEO

Animation Mentor co-founder and Industrial Light & Magic Lead Animator Shawn Kelly answers five great student questions about demo reels and gives advice on applying for studio animation jobs. And he should know—he's been at ILM for more than 20 years!

In this webinar, Shawn critiqued some student demo reels and talked about do's and don'ts, creature animation, and what studios are looking for when they review reels.

During the webinar, Shawn answered so many amazing questions—but there were so many we couldn't get to

them all. Here are five more excellent questions on demo reels and the animation job market.

How much do you guys weigh a demo reel along with a resume and cover letter from an applicant? Like for example, let's say a person has a great reel but not much experience on their resume?

Shawn: Honestly, I never even glance at a resume until I've seen the demo reel. The reel is always going to be at

least 90% of getting the job. Knowing someone at a studio may help with getting an interview, but it isn't going to get you a job unless your demo reel wows people.

However, once I've seen and liked a reel, then I'm extremely interested in reading the cover letter and the resume. It's a great way to get to know the applicant a little bit and get an idea of their interests and background. Take care with your cover letter and resume as well—if it's rife with spelling or formatting errors it shows a lack of attention to detail, the exact opposite of what studios would want in an artist.

Always be 100% truthful about your experience on the resume as well or those lies will very likely come back to haunt you. Remember, this is a small industry, and the recruiters all know each other and all experienced animators have friends at tons of other studios, so

using someone else's work on your demo reel or lies on the resume will travel around the entire industry in flash.

That said, if the demo reel is amazing, most studios aren't going to care much at all about any lack of experience on your resume.

I never even glance at a resume until I've seen the demo reel. The reel is always going to be at least 90% of getting the job.

Is it smart to frequently show a studio your work even without a job posted on their website?

Shawn: It's never a bad idea to send an updated reel to a studio, regardless of whether or not they have openings posted. There's a fine line, though, between keeping them updated and becoming a pest to the recruiters, so I'd say to only send an updated reel when you really feel that you've improved it and added new content (a new shot). Hiring needs can change really fast at studios, so it's always good to be on their radar. If you apply and they aren't hiring right then, at least you're getting yourself into the queue of artists they

may turn to when the show suddenly needs animators or a new project starts ramping up.

Is story more important than the physical mechanics of a shot? Is having a funny idea important too? How important would that be?

Shawn: No, the physical mechanics of a shot are much more important than the storytelling on a demo reel. That isn't to say that the storytelling isn't an important part of the equation as well, though. Your shots need to make sense, and the more entertaining and emotionally sincere the performances are, the better your demo reel will be. That said, you might have the best acting performance ever, but if the character looks floaty and wrong when she walks around, the shot is ruined.

Studios are looking for animators who can bring something special to a shot. Artists who can "plus" the direction they are given and take even a "small shot" to a higher level and make it sing. However, at a studio, you will be given direction and it's often very specific direction. It's rare that a junior animator at any studio would be expected to come up with a shot idea out of whole cloth. 99.9% of the time, you'll be animating a shot that has already been somewhat thought out and you're executing the vision of the Director while bringing what you can of yourself to it.

Physical mechanics are what are most important, and frankly, strong physical mechanics are much harder to find on a demo reel than strong storytelling skills.

In light of that, the physical mechanics are what are most important, and frankly, strong physical mechanics are much harder to find on a demo reel than strong storytelling skills.

As far as "funny," goes, it doesn't hurt to have some humor on your reel, but it isn't a

prerequisite to getting a job. It doesn't have to be funny, specifically, but the reel should be as entertaining to watch as possible.

The "holy trinity" of demo reels would be strong body mechanics, entertaining storytelling, and sincere emotional changes in the characters. Everything else, such as lip sync, music, etc., is still important, but is the icing on the cake if you've already nailed those first three.

rather showing most of the same content in a different order.

The order you describe isn't a bad idea for your "generic demo reel" to have on-hand that most studios could watch and get excited about. Alternating between character and creature work does give you a chance to get any studio, no matter their chosen style, interested in your work.

It's getting harder to get a job at many (I might even say "most") studios without some animal and/or creature work done in a more realistic style.

Do you recommend having one shot character then the next shot creature, then character, etc. Or what is a good way of ordering shots on your reel?

Shawn: Generally speaking, you should be tailoring your demo reel to the studio you are applying to. Often, that doesn't mean entirely different content, but

However, there are some few studios who very specifically only want to see a certain type of content or style. A few studios may really want to see some motion graphics work because they do a lot of that with their game, or some few studios may only really want to see stylized "cartoony" work. Some few visual effects studios may only want to see creature animation and realistic work.

I say "few," though, because those

Tailor your reel to the job you are applying for and the studio you are applying to!

studios are not in the majority. Not by a long shot. The vast majority of studios are happy to see whatever your best work is, and know that “style” just comes down to exaggerating the same principles in different ways. Exaggeration is really the only difference between “realistic” and “cartoony.” Both styles are using exaggeration, but in different ways and very different amounts, but it’s all built on the same foundation.

That said, more and more games and vfx and commercials studios really badly want to see some creature animation on your demo reel. They are still eager to see your more stylized work as well, but it’s getting harder to get a job at many (I might even say “most”) studios without some animal and/or creature work done in a more realistic style.

As for the order of shots, you definitely want to grab their attention right off the bat and leave them excited at the end. That means bookending your reel with your best work, and ideally starting the reel off with the type of work that

the chosen studio typically works in. I usually recommend putting your second-best shot first, your best shot last, and everything else in between, but I would switch that up if that would mean placing realistic shots at the beginning of a reel sent to Pixar or Blue Sky, for example, both of which might still be interested in seeing that work, but are much more interested in your stylized work.

Remember, tailor your reel to the job you are applying for and the studio you are applying to!

How important is rendering your demo reel vs. just playblasting? My school tells us to render everything, but I see professional reels all the time with just playblasts.

Shawn: Playblasting is totally fine. I’ve never met an animation supervisor who cares at all if something is nicely lit on a reel. The only time it can matter

is if lighting or particle work helps tell the story of the shot. Other than that, I'd say playblasts are totally fine. When we are looking at reels, we are looking at the body mechanics and the acting performances, and I couldn't care less if something has textures or is lit.

That said, if you do have some nicely lit shots, it doesn't hurt the reel at all to include them, of course! ♦

6 Tips from Recruiters Who Look at **YOUR** Animation Demo Reel



By Animation Mentor



WATCH SIGGI ORRI ÞÓRHANNESSON DEMO REEL

ON VIMEO

Animation Mentor Alumnus Siggurdur Orri Thorhannesson's Demo Reel, he currently works at Framestore and recently worked on Guardians of the Galaxy

Attention current or future animation job seekers! Recently, we had the pleasure of hosting recruiters from one of the largest, most important animation studios in the world (trust us, it's big ...). They gave us some insight on their pet peeves, their likes, and what they look for when hiring a new animator for their studio. Take notes, get motivated, and go make that demo reel!

1. You have 30 seconds to make an impression.

You have 30 seconds to make an

impression on the recruiter. Remember, studio recruiters look at thousands of reels a month. If you spend 30 seconds on your fancy name intro and your eclectic taste in music, they will quickly lose interest.

Recruiter's Tip: Keep it simple.

Start with a simple title card including your name and contact information. Move immediately to your BEST shot and then follow up with your other acting or body mechanics shots. End with your contact info again. Your

animation demo reel should not be longer than one or two minutes.

2. Don't put everything you've ever done in your demo reel.

Representing every shot you've ever worked on can actually work against you. Recruiters don't want to see everything you've done – including your bouncing ball exercises. Recruiters regularly cite instances where the demo reel starts off strong and then loses steam because the work became

progressively worse. Including everything you've ever worked on can take you from a possible "yes" to a very clear "no."

Recruiter's Tip: Recruiters would rather see 2-3 really strong performance shots than everything you've done in school.

3. Unique acting is King.

Tailor your demo reel to the studio you are applying to and take note of those studios known for great acting.



Check out this playlist from The New York Times Magazine's series, "14 Actors Acting". Javier Bardem, Matt Damon, Jennifer Lawrence and many more famous actors silently act their scenes and the emotion reads beautifully. A nice study of facial and body movements for animators.

Recruiters at character-driven animation studios like DreamWorks Animation, Blue Sky Studios, or Pixar Animation Studios, really hone in on unique ideas and non-cliché acting choices.

Recruiter's Tip:

Take acting classes. Why? So you can learn acting methodologies and embody the character you are trying to bring to life. You are a unique person so if you can feel it, you can animate it. Don't be cliché.

Another option is to observe your family, your friends or great actors that are masters at understanding their bodies and facial muscles so they "become" the character they are playing. There are tons of video references of great actors who talk about their approach in developing a character and what type of mannerisms they create to make that character seem believable. The same methodology can be used for animators – build the

character backstory, and determine what quirks or mannerisms they have that are unusual and non-cliché. Observe, act, plan, and animate.

4. Know your audience. Tailor your demo reel to the studio you are applying for.

When we say interesting acting choices and unusual ideas are what recruiters look for, it doesn't mean you should animate a gory "serial killer" shot for a studio like Pixar or DreamWorks. Take a look at the body of work the studio does and tailor your animation shots for that studio. They don't want you to mimic their style but to use your best judgement on the type of audience they cater to. Stay away from anything that could be considered offensive.



**WATCH
OPINIONS ON
BEST ACTING
PERFORMANCES**

ON YOUTUBE

George Clooney, Sandra Bullock and many more actors comment on what they thought was the best acting performances in the past decade and highlight unique acting choices from The New York Times Magazine series "Screen Tests".

For example, the demographic for recruiters are mostly women, so you might not want an animation shot that will offend women in your demo reel.

Recruiter's Tip:

Everyone has a different type of sense of humor. Stay on the safe side when choosing your shots for your demo reel – being offensive reduces your chance of getting hired.

5. Make sure your demo reel link works.

Sometimes it's the simple things that cost you the job. Don't overlook the details when you submit your demo reel to a studio. When you give them a URL to look at, make sure all the links on the page work. If its password protected, make sure you give them the right password. As a rule, recruiters are very busy people, so make it easy for them to view your work.



Animation Mentor Alumnus Nicole Ridgewell's Demo Reel, she was a Pixar Intern and is now working at Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Recruiter's Tip:

- Online streaming videos are preferable
- Create a your own Vimeo channel
- Showcase your demo reel in HD
- If they like your reel they will look at other videos in your Vimeo channel even if its a work in progress.

6. Be aware of trends.

Be cognizant of animation trends and dialogue shots that have been used by thousands of people. Recruiters tell us that they see a lot of "death" or somber scenes. Five years ago, this type of shot might have been rarer in animation but it has become more mainstream. Vary your dialogue choices to showcase that you can animate range



WATCH TIM RUDDER'S DIALOGUE SHOT

ON VIMEO

Animation Mentor Student Tim Rudder and his unique take on this dialogue performance

and different types of emotional beats.

Recruiter's Tip:

Animate something unexpected. With current pop culture trends swaying towards dark themes as seen on *The Walking Dead*, *Breaking Bad*, or even *Game of Thrones* ... they are getting tired of the brooding anti-hero ... unless there is a unique twist to it of course. Be the unique storyteller that you were meant to be.

These tips are meant to be guidelines because in the end, “one size doesn’t fit all.” Every studio is different so experiment, don’t give up, and keep working on your demo reel so you can land that job! You can do it! ♦

PART II

The Working Life of an Animator

What is it like to be a **PIXAR** animator?

A Q&A with Mentor Nate Wall



By Nate Wall

Animator, Pixar Animation Studios
Mentor, Animation Mentor

Ever wonder what it's like to work at Pixar? Of course you do! That's why we chatted with Pixar Animator Nate Wall to hear all about it. Nate has worked on some of our very favorite movies like Finding Dory, Inside Out, and The Good Dinosaur. Not bad, eh? Read on to learn what it's like to live the dream!

Animation Mentor: What's a typical day like for you at Pixar?

Nate Wall: Typically the day will start about 8 o'clock, with coffee. It's nice to see friendly co-worker faces around and we'll usually chat a bit before jumping into work. Pixar's animation dailies happen most days in the morning in one of the larger screening rooms, and it's a good way to start work. Might have another meeting at some point during the day, but most of the rest of my time I spend in my office

animating, drawing, or studying. In the afternoon I may show the anim leads a polish pass of my shots that have been finaled by the director. Or I might take the opportunity to show shots to the director in walk-thrus, which is what we call a smaller, less intense version of dailies. Then wrap up for the day with a last push on my work. I might try a new idea quickly that came from review, or perhaps just make some last tweaks to what's been the main project of the day. Boom. Click. Head home.

AM: Can you explain what dailies are? Is it something unique to Pixar? And why would you say it's a good way to start work?

Nate: Dailies may be the most amazing and valuable part of the job, honestly. The generic version: dailies are the animation department's opportunity

Story doesn't serve animation, like some vehicle to try a new style, for example. No, the animation style must come naturally out of an understanding and respect for what type of story is told.



Running sequence animated by Nate Wall

to meet with the director and show our work. But it is much more. And no, it isn't unique to Pixar, generally speaking. However, I previously worked at other studios, and can say that the animators and department leadership have forged Pixar's dailies into something special.

It's a raucous, inspiring affair. Anyone in the room can (and everyone does) give notes, speak up with ideas and opinions, and all of it is in service of the shot and the story. Egos are naturally checked at the door, because we've all agreed to let creativity fly around that room until we find what will make the shot into its best version.

We are also lucky to have such generous

directors that engage with this process. Because the director of course has the final say, guiding the process along the way, and is responsible for every detail of the movie. But if I had to sum it up, I suppose I would say what defines Pixar's animation dailies is humility. It is, after all, incredibly humbling to show your work to a room full of brilliant artists, and with the same humility those same artists show their work with the same openness to ideas and improvements, and with the same humility the directors and producers open themselves to the group's ideas and passions—because we all just want to make a great film. And it works, with immense satisfaction, for everyone involved. But humility is the key. We all serve the story.

Regarding emotions, it can be a wild ride as you invest yourself in your work and yet stay open to any and all criticism. And you do that because you either trust—or you know first hand—that every shot can be better and the more you listen and see with other artists' eyes the better you will become.

AM: What does that mean, “Serve the story?”

Nate: Well, I suppose that's one of the themes at Pixar's core, at least from my perspective. To me it means that while every part of the filmmaking process adds value to the film, the most powerful way each person can contribute is to make every decision based around one central idea—that we serve the story.

Story doesn't serve animation, like some vehicle to try a new style, for example. No, the animation style must come naturally out of an understanding and respect for what type of story is told.

Even the Story department serves story,

in that way. It's all about carrying around a profound respect for the story, so you can let it influence you at every step of the way.

AM: Let's shift gears and talk about some finer details of your job. What are some of your favorite types of shots?

Nate: Anything that takes something you've seen before and makes it new. It might squeeze some new or extra meaning out of a moment, like an acting shot where the character is profoundly sad yet somehow maintains a brave smile the entire time. Or it might be an action shot. And one that immediately comes to mind is in Studio Ghibli's *Princess Mononoke*, where



WATCH NATE WALL'S GOOD DINOSAUR SEQUENCES

ON VIMEO

Nate Wall's Shots from The Good Dinosaur. (Audio Not Included)

the hero is riding his stag to escape a sudden ambush from samurai who were attacking a village, and one of the samurai lets loose an arrow in the hero's direction. Pretty simple, but the shot is unreal. How exciting the animator made that arrow fly at camera. You see it release from the bow, then lose it for a second as it arcs away left, then back right suddenly, and the hero just barely dodges it across his shoulder. Stuff like that.

AM: In your work, what is one shot you wish you could have back to do again?

Nate: Hahaha. Many of them. I don't really want to call out anything in particular, at risk of putting some film under a microscope. However, I'd say it's frequent that I watch my shots once they are "finaled" and wish I could have them back. Which is natural, right. As an artist your eye improves over time from experience and hard work. So it is natural that you would see your past work and have a new and better understanding of how you would improve it now. How does the song go? "I wish that I knew what I know now, when I was younger." Yeah, it's like that.

AM: So, what's the biggest challenge you've faced on a project at Pixar?

Nate: Whew. Well. The easy and boring answer is time. There's never enough time it seems. But I'd say for me personally the biggest challenge has been balancing my time and effort with my emotions, and sometimes my anxiety. Honestly, this job comes with the pressure to stay sharp and do good work. In other words, it's a job, not a side passion project you can spend years on at your leisure, which is where professionalism comes in.

Regarding emotions, it can be a wild ride as you invest yourself in your work and yet stay open to any and all criticism. And you do that because you either trust—or you know first hand—that every shot can be better and the more you listen and see with other artists' eyes the better you will become. And yet our department has never wavered in its support of the time my family needs, which is just to say that I work with good people who know my best work will always shine when life is balanced. That's a testament to this job, and in that case we're pretty lucky to get to do this. Animation I mean.

AM: Leads nicely into my last question: Why DO you do this?

Nate: I guess the most honest answer is that I love the process. Don't get me wrong, I love films and love seeing the final product, but it's the process that keeps me doing it every day. Which is a good thing, because I don't think working only for the final product would be enough. This work can be daunting—in its scope, density, and relentless attention to detail. Not to mention the volume and sharpness of skills required to do the job at all.

But then again, the final product is part of it. When I was younger someone asked me why I wanted to make animated films, and my answer then was that I wanted to make something meaningful for MY kids to watch. She replied that was a silly reason for making art a career, which I suppose from a purely pragmatic perspective is correct. And I took that to heart for a few years, until it became absolutely obvious that animation is a real voice in the world. Films, TV, games, advertising: these things are LOUD and can say a lot. Anyway, what I've learned in the everyday grind is that it was important to me, in whatever I did, to have

something meaningful to say. And in animation that can take shape by virtue of collaboration at the film level, or just on the shot level where we work to make every performance, every bit of motion and design meaningful to the audience. So for me that last bit defines what we do (and why) as animators, and it's a lucky thing to work at a place that fully supports those lofty goals. ♦

Yair Gutierrez

Q&A

From Animation Mentor to
Captain America: Civil War



By Yair Gutierrez

Animator, Industrial Light & Magic
Alumnus, Animation Mentor



Talk about a student success story! Animation Mentor alumnus Yair Gutierrez is killing it at Industrial Light & Magic, where he was a part of the team nominated for an Annie Award for Captain America: Civil War! We caught up with Yair to ask the important questions: How freaking awesome is ILM? What advice do you have for aspiring animators? And are you Team Cap or Team Iron Man?! Enjoy!

Animation Mentor: Let's do this! Tell us about your journey from Animation Mentor to Industrial Light & Magic and why you decided to become an animator.

Yair Gutierrez: My journey to Industrial Light & Magic started all the way back in my childhood. Growing up watching movies like *Jurassic Park* and *Terminator 2*, I was completely mesmerized by the incredible work done by ILM. Back then I didn't really care about the movie making process, but that totally changed after I saw the first Transformers movie. I remember very vividly, walking out of the theater and telling myself, somehow somehow I want to work making movies. I was completely blown away.

I then started researching and looking for a way to get into the industry, but I had no idea what field to pursue. I enrolled into art school, which is where I found my passion for animation,



WATCH YAIR GUITERREZ DEMO REEL

ON VIMEO

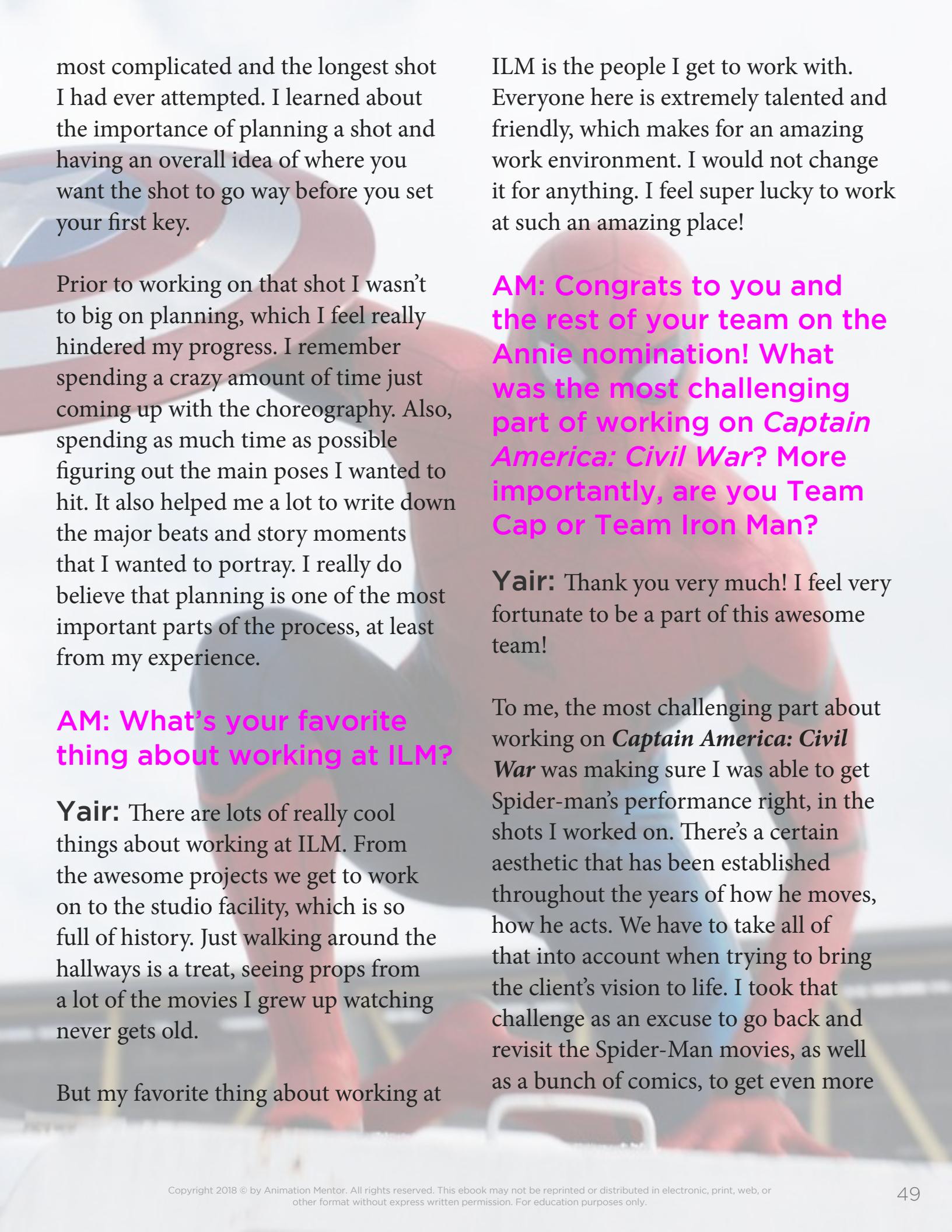
and also learned about the character animation program at Animation Mentor. I decided to enroll at AM mainly for the fact that I was going to be learning directly from animation professionals. I went through the Animals and Creatures classes as well as the Character Animation Program. I learned so much while taking the courses, but I also met so many talented and amazing people, some of whom I work with today.

Fast forward a few years, and I was lucky enough to work on *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, alongside the people who directly influenced my decision to

become an animator. I feel so blessed and thankful to work with all these wonderful people!

AM: From what animation shot have you learned the most? And tell us why!

Yair: There are a few shots from which I've learned tons of new things, either about body mechanics or even about my workflow and how to be more efficient. But if I had to pick one shot, I would have to go back to the very last shot I worked on while at Animation Mentor, which is also the first shot of my demo reel. Up to that point, it was the



most complicated and the longest shot I had ever attempted. I learned about the importance of planning a shot and having an overall idea of where you want the shot to go way before you set your first key.

Prior to working on that shot I wasn't too big on planning, which I feel really hindered my progress. I remember spending a crazy amount of time just coming up with the choreography. Also, spending as much time as possible figuring out the main poses I wanted to hit. It also helped me a lot to write down the major beats and story moments that I wanted to portray. I really do believe that planning is one of the most important parts of the process, at least from my experience.

AM: What's your favorite thing about working at ILM?

Yair: There are lots of really cool things about working at ILM. From the awesome projects we get to work on to the studio facility, which is so full of history. Just walking around the hallways is a treat, seeing props from a lot of the movies I grew up watching never gets old.

But my favorite thing about working at

ILM is the people I get to work with. Everyone here is extremely talented and friendly, which makes for an amazing work environment. I would not change it for anything. I feel super lucky to work at such an amazing place!

AM: Congrats to you and the rest of your team on the Annie nomination! What was the most challenging part of working on *Captain America: Civil War*? More importantly, are you Team Cap or Team Iron Man?

Yair: Thank you very much! I feel very fortunate to be a part of this awesome team!

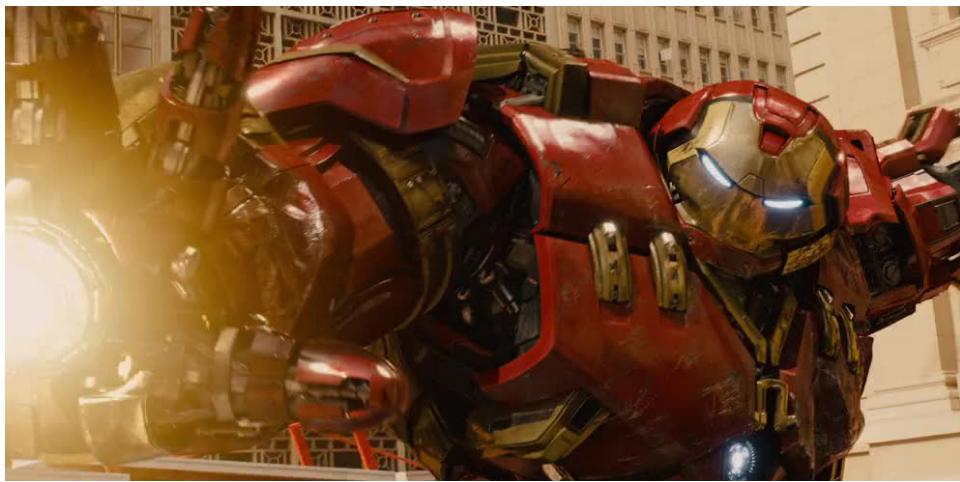
To me, the most challenging part about working on *Captain America: Civil War* was making sure I was able to get Spider-man's performance right, in the shots I worked on. There's a certain aesthetic that has been established throughout the years of how he moves, how he acts. We have to take all of that into account when trying to bring the client's vision to life. I took that challenge as an excuse to go back and revisit the Spider-Man movies, as well as a bunch of comics, to get even more

familiar with the character than I already was. All for the sake of research! It was a very intimidating project to take on but it was also a lot of fun!

Tough choice between Team Cap and Team Iron Man. I think Marvel has done such a great job with their movies and characters that it's really hard to choose between the two—but if I had to pick, I'm leaning more toward Team Cap.

AM: What about for *Avengers: Age of Ultron*? What characters/scenes did you work on and what was your favorite part?

Yair: I remember watching The Avengers in theaters and being completely blown away by all the incredible work, specially the Hulk's animation. So when I found out I was going to be working on the sequel, I was over the moon. I worked on a few shots during the opening sequence and also a few shots



during the final battle. But by far, my favorite part of *Avengers: Age of Ultron* was the chance to work on the Hulk vs. Hulkbuster sequence. It was truly a dream come true getting the chance to work on something so iconic!

AM: What advice would you give to current animation students as they're working their way through the program and/or looking for jobs?

Yair: I don't want to be preachy but, something that I have learned throughout my years as a student is that you only get out what you put into it. Take advantage of the program and don't be afraid to reach out and ask questions!

And as far as the job hunt goes, making sure you have a strong reel is super important. Also, being patient and not being discouraged if you send your reel and don't hear back. Sometimes things don't go our way but always keep a positive attitude and continue working toward your goal!



Zach Parrish

Q&A

From Animation Mentor to
Head of Animation for *Big Hero 6*



By Zach Parrish

Animator, Disney Animation Studios
Alumnus, Animation Mentor

*Zach Parrish starts off our **Where are they now?** blog series as we take a look back at our alumni and past students to see how everyone is doing. We were lucky enough to get a hold of Zach who attended Animation Mentor in 2008 and look at where he is today – he's the Head of Animation (HOA) for **Big Hero 6** at Disney! Wow and what an amazing accomplishment! Read about how he got there, his advice for students, and how Glen Keane taught him a big lesson in humility. Be inspired, enjoy, and go animate!*

ANIMATION MENTOR: Tell us about your journey. How did you get to where you are today?

ZACH: Well, it all started the day I was born. 7 lbs 8 oz... I kid. I wanted to do animation since I was a kid. I grew up on Disney movies and Warner Brother cartoons. I always said I was going to “draw cartoons” when I grew up. I fell a little off the wagon during high school, but after seeing Mr. Bobby Beck’s work (as well as his colleagues) in **Monsters Inc.** and realizing that there were actual people out there making me feel for a one eyed, green ball, I knew

that animation was what I wanted to do. I went to the Savannah College of Art and Design and graduated with a BFA in Animation. I started attending Animation Mentor at the end of my time at SCAD and I was in the middle of class 1 when I was hired as an Apprentice at Rhythm & Hues Studios on **Alvin and the Chipmunks**. I continued my studies with Animation Mentor during the production of **Alvin and The Incredible Hulk**. I stayed at R&H for a year and a half before switching to Sony to work on **Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs** (mostly due to my Animation Mentor work). I worked on **Cloudy** and **Alice in Wonderland** at Sony before hearing about **Tangled** (then Rapunzel) at Disney. I was fortunate enough to get hired at Disney as the last animator on **Tangled**.

After **Tangled**, I worked on the **Prep and Landing** short as well as **Prep and Landing 2** before applying to be an Animation Supervisor on **Wreck-It Ralph**. I was given an amazing opportunity to fill that role and worked on **Ralph** for a year and a half. At the end of **Ralph**, I applied to be the Head of Animation on **Big Hero 6**. I was paired with Patrick Osborne to share the role before he was selected to direct his story “Feast.” I continued on as the solo Head

of Animation on *Big Hero 6*, and the rest is history.

Bored yet? Did I even answer the question? Short answer: by doing a LOT of animation and a LOT of learning.

ANIMATION MENTOR: What personal roadblocks did you overcome to get there?

ZACH: There have been so many roadblocks along the way that it is difficult to pick a few out of the herd. I think the biggest roadblock that I still am not sure I have overcome completely is the fear of failure. Every transition in my career has been laden with the fear of failure. I struggled at the beginning with not being good at animation right away. I still struggle today with the feat that I might not know what I am doing. I think all of the early failures in my education and career have given me a confidence and a comfort with that fear and with failure.

I think Ed Catmull's mantra of "Fail fast. Fail often." is a valuable one. Every stumble and every "mistake" is a lesson in hiding.

Another valuable hurdle to overcome has been the power of communication.

Animation is all about communication in a variety of ways, but the biggest challenge for me has been communicating with my teammates either in giving or receiving feedback/notes in a clear, respectful manner while maintaining my personality and passion for the craft. I think it is an important lesson for all students to learn, because it doesn't matter how talented you are, if you are a jerk, no one will want to work with you.

ANIMATION MENTOR: What is a typical day like for a professional animator and how does that differ from being head of animation?

ZACH: A typical day for an animator at Disney is from 9am – 7pm with an hour for lunch. Obviously, this varies from animator to animator as it isn't a hard rule. A typical day could consist of issuing; a meeting with the Animation Supervisors, Head of Animation, and Director(s) where the animator is assigned their new shots and walked through the specifics that the Director and Anim Leads would like to see and the subtext/emotion of the scene. We also have meetings called Rounds and Dailies where the animators gather to



Disney's Big Hero 6 production crew wrap photo

show their shots to the Anim Supes/HOA (rounds) or to the Anim Supes/HOA and Director(s) (dailies). In these meetings the goal is to give notes to better clarify the point of the shot, the emotion and subtext of the performance, or to simply give notes on how to push poses/timing/spacing/entertainment. Typically, an animator will show their shots in Rounds to get the notes of the supervisors before addressing those notes and showing in Dailies. The rest of our days are filled with animating (I swear we sit and do some of this), video reference, research (YouTube cat videos), ping-pong, pool, and socializing.

The day of a Head of Animation is fairly similar, except the amount of time available for animating and socializing is considerably less. The Head of

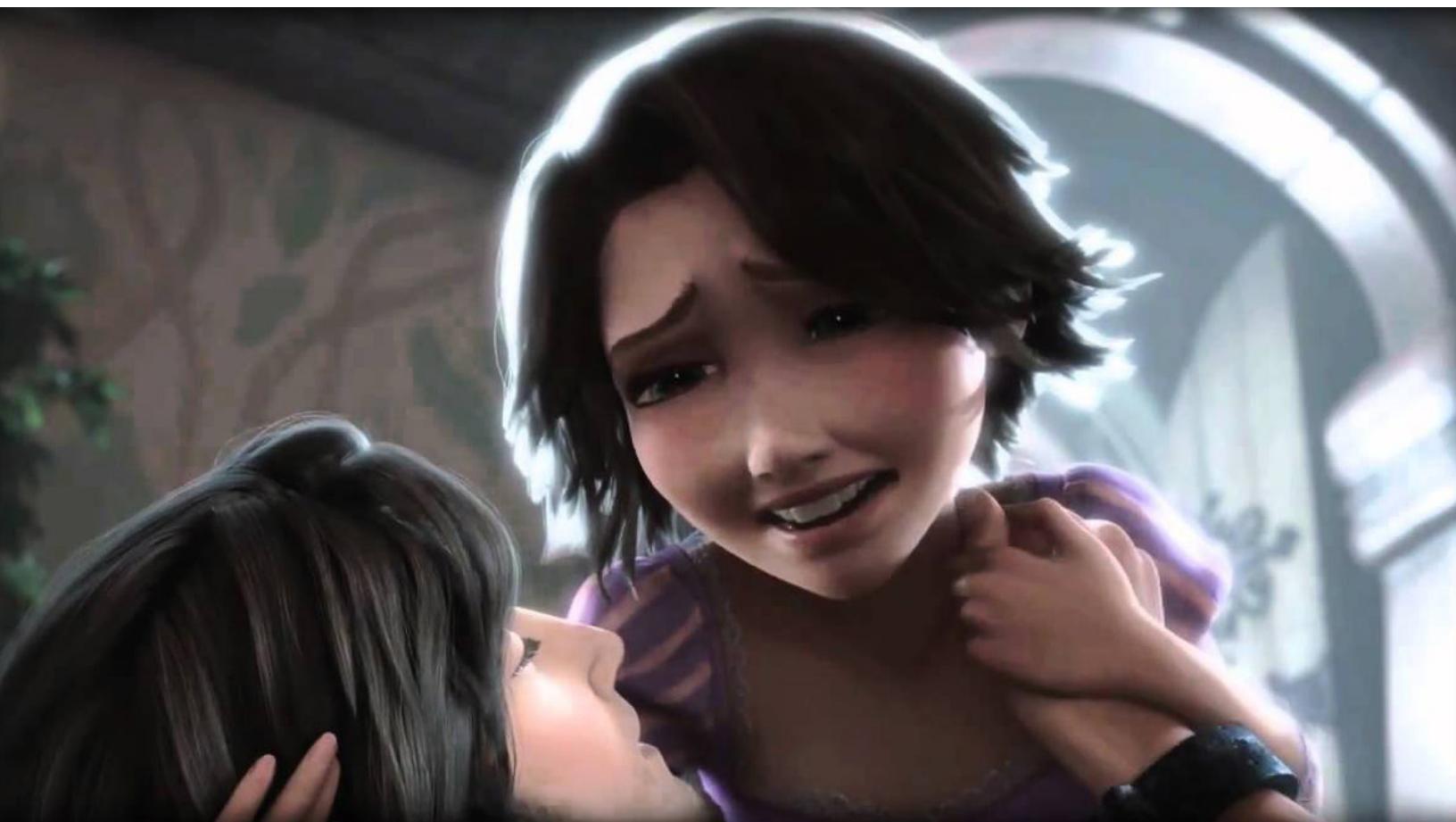
Animation is also responsible for representing the animation department to all other departments on the show. Therefore the HOA and the Animation Supes are in meetings from Workbook Turnover (hand off from Story to Layout) through Layout and Editorial, as well as tracking the shots after they leave Animation through Lighting. This gives the animation leads the context of the scenes so that they might offer performance ideas during layout as well as be able to give advice to the animators while they are on the floor at animator's desks or in Rounds. Rounds and Dailies take up a large portion of the day as it is the best way for the HOA to support the crew of animators. Other responsibilities throughout the day for the HOA also include planning, bidding (how long will a shot take to animate), casting (who will animate the shot), and interfacing

with top level show leadership. That answer was really straight forward and boring! I am sorry. I swear it is all a lot of fun! We mostly just laugh and make fun of each other and do animation all day. It is great!

ANIMATION MENTOR: What was the most rewarding shot you've ever animated? Why, and what did you learn from it?

ZACH: The one shot that jumps to mind is a single shot I got to animate

on Tangled. I had been cast a wide variety of shots on the show, but John and Clay wanted to test me to see where I would break. They gave me two shots of Rapunzel crying over Flynn as he dies. Flynn says "You were my new dream" which was animated by Frozen HOA Lino DiSalvo, and I had the counterpart shot of Rapunzel saying "And you were mine." That shot was a huge challenge for me. I had never done a crying character (not well anyways), and definitely never a crying female character. I put a lot of myself into the shot and spent a lot of time crying in



Zach's subtle facial animation on Rapunzel's "And you were mine." shot

the reference room (for reference I swear!). My first pass was completely over animated. I pushed everything to a point where I could easily see what I was doing, but the directors and the anim supes all felt like it was too much. I worked and reworked the shot and learned so much about the subtlety of facial animation.

The most rewarding part was when Glen Keane stopped my shot during dailies and started framing through it. He kept saying, “wow” and then went on to explain how he was jealous. He

ANIMATION MENTOR: What was the most rewarding experience you've had in animation? Why, and what did you learn from it?

ZACH: I think the most rewarding part of working in the animation industry is the relationships that are forged in the fires of production. The people I have been fortunate enough to work alongside have constantly challenged me in my animation

Animation Mentor was the foundation of my career.

told me that I was doing things with the forms in the face that he always tried to do in hand drawn animation but was difficult to accomplish because of the medium. To be told I had accomplished something that THE Glen Keane was impressed by was a huge moment in my career. I also learned a big lesson in humility. Glen is arguably the best animator of all time and he was humble enough to show appreciation for others' work.

skill set as well as my perspective on story-telling, film-making, and communication. I am constantly inspired and entertained. The best feeling is going to the wrap party and watching the work of your friends and afterwards being able to celebrate the experience with them. I frame through animation everyday and learn little tricks about overshoots or overlap or exaggeration. I chat with other animators and learn about workflow,

tools, or teamwork. Every day the people around me are a lesson in some aspect of the animation industry and that is the most rewarding part of the job.

ANIMATION MENTOR: What is the most common pitfall you see students have and what advice can you give them?

ZACH: I feel like I commonly see students getting lost on the subtext of the scene they are animating. I think too often students try to animate with a capital “A”. I was prone to this mistake as well. I would push my animation way further than it needed to go because it was easier to see the arcs and the spacing, and when I did a really cool arc or squash and stretch it felt like I was really showcasing my prowess of the principles. However, I think the more impressive thing to see in a student reel is the ability to restrain the overacting and the over animating and to make the performance feel real/believable. I am not saying, only do subtle shots on your reel. I am saying to really dive deep into the “WHY” of the shot and then think about the most clear way to communicate that part of the shot. For

me personally, clarity is king. When we see a reel where the phrasing of the shot is overlapped and cluttered, it definitely gives us pause. Clarity spans into posing/staging, timing, spacing, phrasing, etc. Every principle can be examined under. “is this the clearest way to show the SUBTEXT of my acting?”

ANIMATION MENTOR: When you attended Animation Mentor, what was that experience like for you? How did it help further prepare you?

ZACH: I can honestly say that I would never be where I am today if it were not for my time with Animation Mentor. I had been animating for a few years and had a really good education at SCAD, when I started Animation Mentor.

However, I was doing a lot of things in my animation without knowing WHY I was doing them. I knew things looked wrong, but I didn’t have the verbiage or the eye to understand why.

Class 1 of Animation Mentor provided me with so many of those eureka

moments. I finally understood definitively the difference between timing and spacing. I could verbalize why my shots looked wonky, and I used that knowledge in my interview with Rhythm & Hues. I dissected my demo reel and told them what I would improve on all of my shots with my new found understanding of the principles.

I found the building block structure of the Animation Mentor curriculum to be super intuitive and it made it easier to learn. The community that is built within the Animation Mentor website allowed me to learn from others mistakes and success, to try my hand at giving notes, and to make friends that I still have to this day. I am still meeting people at other studios that I have “known” for years because we overlapped at AM. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of communication within the animation industry. I learned to communicate better with other students as well as my mentors who were working professionals in the business.

Animation Mentor was the foundation of my career. ♦♦

ILM London's **Chris Hurtt** Q&A

Animating for Live Action vs.
Animated Films



By **Chris Hurtt**

Animator, Industrial Light & Magic London
Mentor, Animation Mentor



*Chris had fun figuring out how to animate Cogsworth face in 2017's *Beauty and the Beast**

ILM Londons Chris Hurttt On Animating for Live Action vs. Animated Films

*Ahoy! We wanted to get a better sense of the difference between working on fully animated films and live action film VFX, so naturally we chatted with Chris Hurttt, mentor and Lead Animator at Industrial Light & Magic London who has worked on *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), *The Jungle Book*, *Spider-man 2*, and more! Chris helped us understand what it takes to work in VFX vs. fully-animated films and how important it is do always do your research before working on a shot! Be sure to take notes.*

-The Animation Mentor Crew

Animation Mentor: We're so excited for *Beauty and the Beast*! What character or creature did you work on and what was the most fun?

Chris Hurttt: I was the Lead Animator for Cogsworth, voiced by Sir Ian McKellen! So cool, as I had seen him perform *King Lear* in Los Angeles years ago, and now will never watch *King Lear* again. There can be only one!

The most fun was figuring out how to animate Cogsworth's face. Since he is a clock, we tried to make it mechanical

but at the same time have life and embody Sir Ian's delivery. A great challenge you don't get everyday.

AM: How about for *The Jungle Book*? What did you work on, and what was your favorite character or shot?

Chris: I worked mainly on Bagherra and a bit on the baby elephant that Mowgli bonds with. Two Disney remakes in a row! Next, *Pocahontas*. Hahaha.

For *The Jungle Book* it was non-stop video reference research 24/7. Before we even starting setting keyframes, you would present an edit of all your takes of video footage taken from the Internet. Usually you would string together several clips to make an edit of the entire performance you were going for. It was a hugely successful approach, as the animation director and director could see your ideas before you had spent any time animating.

Then when you starting keying you knew you were close to the right path and could work with confidence and also be quite fast. Most first passes looked really good because of the

attention paid to doing the research up front on a shot-by-shot basis.

AM: What are the major differences for animators working on live action film VFX vs fully-animated films?

Chris: It's a good question, but I want to start off by saying that the similarities far outweigh the differences. It's really just a question of style, with obviously VFX being pretty much set in a photo-realistic style. The differences can be more acting and creative freedom with Feature Animation vs. being a bit more tied to either Pre-Vis, Motion Capture, Live-Action Reference, or the live-action plate in VFX—and the technical needs to make it look real.

That being said, I love variety, and probably my favourite type of project is something like *Paddington* that is full character animation but with the believability of VFX realism.

AM: What's the most challenging shot you've ever animated, and what did you learn from it?



WATCH CHRIS HURTT ANIMATION SHOTS

ON VIMEO

Working as an animator means a constant variety of new challenges. You can be a flying whale one day, a talking brain, a super-hero or a cute bear. Here I've taken 1 shot from almost every project I've worked on and them in sequential order. They may not be the best, or longest shots I did, but they in some way encapsulated the spirit of each project for me.

Chris: Hahaha, I always feel like my current shot is the most challenging one! I can't really say, I have a killer sequence right now.... but I do have a doozy in *Beauty and the Beast*, super long with tons of characters. But that's more a time-management and technical challenge, which is the thing you learn the most from the heavy-lifting shots. Staying organised and focused.

For me in the end, the most challenging shots are the ones where you need to sell a story point that might not quite

be working yet in the storyboards or dialogue reading. You've got to sell it and save it. Which happens quite often, but when you pull it off it's like your birthday and Christmas all at once. What you learn from that is that in the end the audience is coming to be entertained and you've got to make good on that.

AM: What skills does an aspiring animator need to learn to animate for live action VFX films?

Chris: There are a few unique challenges to VFX. One is, your shot may go until the end of the show. Feature animation shots tend to last a few weeks at most, whereas VFX shots can all stay unfilled until the last month. So having the stamina to keep working on something almost endlessly is a big one.

An eye for realistic timing, weight, and motion is another. It's probably the biggest thing VFX anim supervisors look for, even above nice acting in a character animation shot, because that final polish on realism can be quite tricky and go on longer than feature work.

Technical skills are a huge bonus, as typically you have many more balls to juggle with your scene to make it happy with other departments. It needs to 'be real in the computer' a lot more than feature



WATCH CHRIS HURTT VIDEO REFERENCE

ON VIMEO

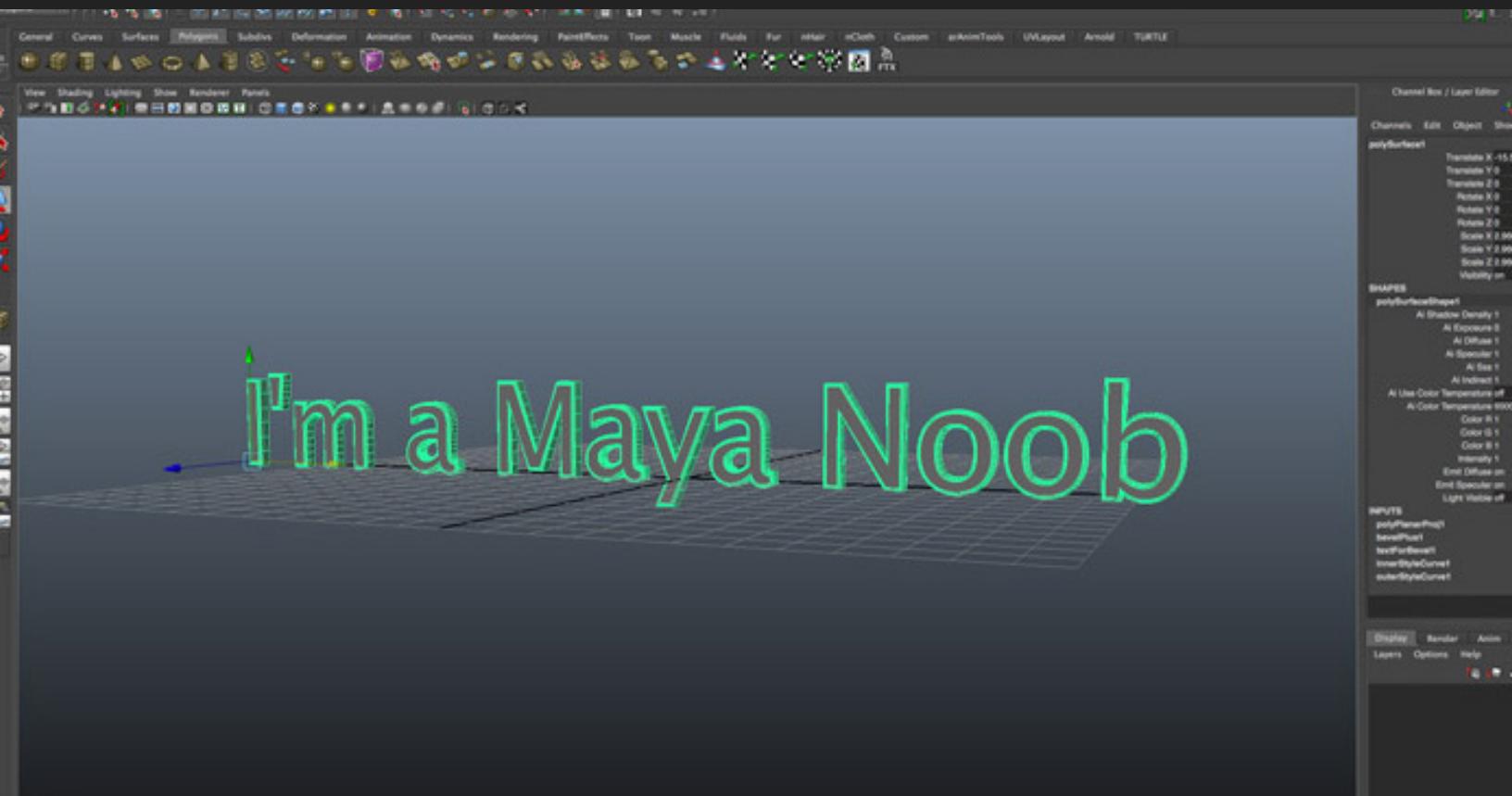
*Here is a favourite shot from **G-Force** and a string of takes I did for the video reference. See if you can guess which take is used in the end. (Its kinda a trick question as I used two sections of two clips!) One of the things I like about shooting reference is you can get in so many ideas in so little time. Here I was able to see 8 possibilities in 1 min of my time.*

work, which has more leeway to cheat things. Also making the animation playblast look very pretty is something that's becoming more and more expected, so some basic modelling, lighting, camera work, and pre-vis type skills can help. ♦♦

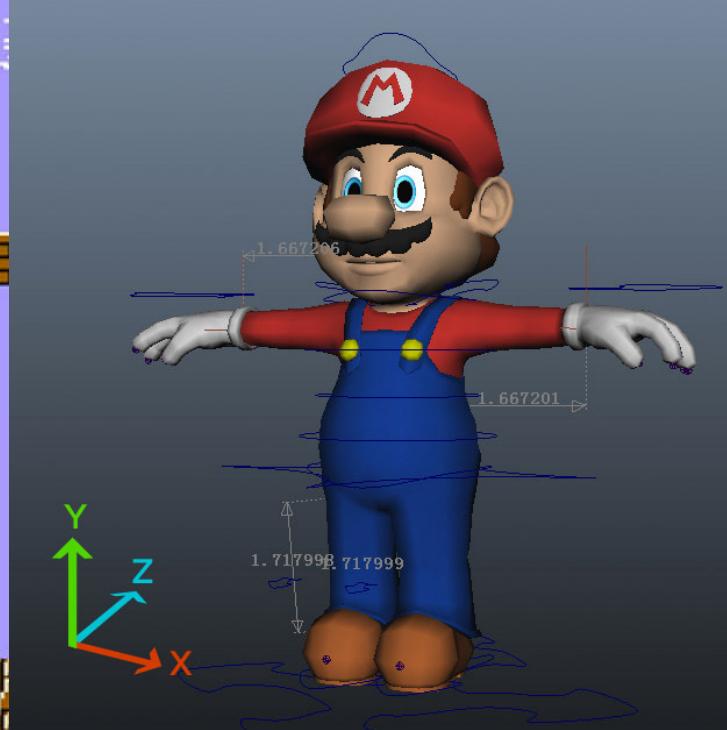
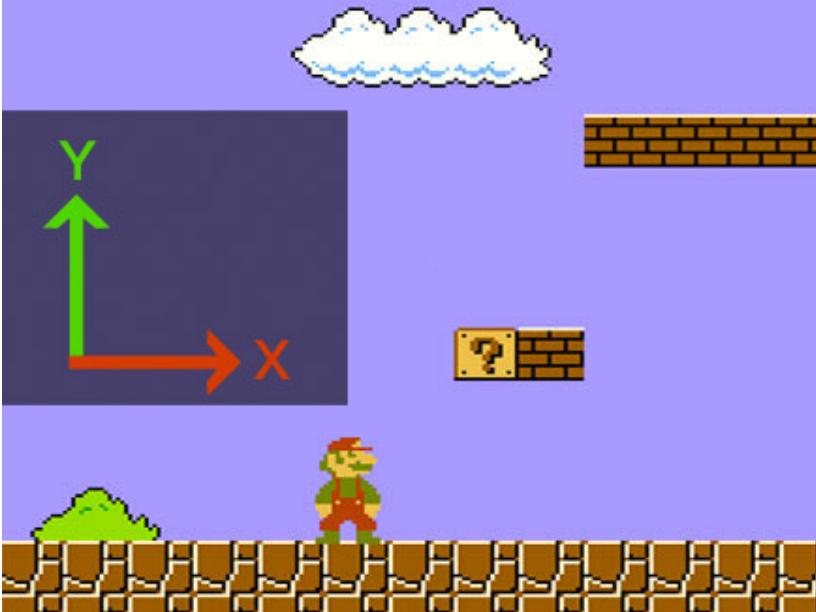
PART III

More Tips for Beginners

8 Things Maya Noobs Should Know



By Animation Mentor



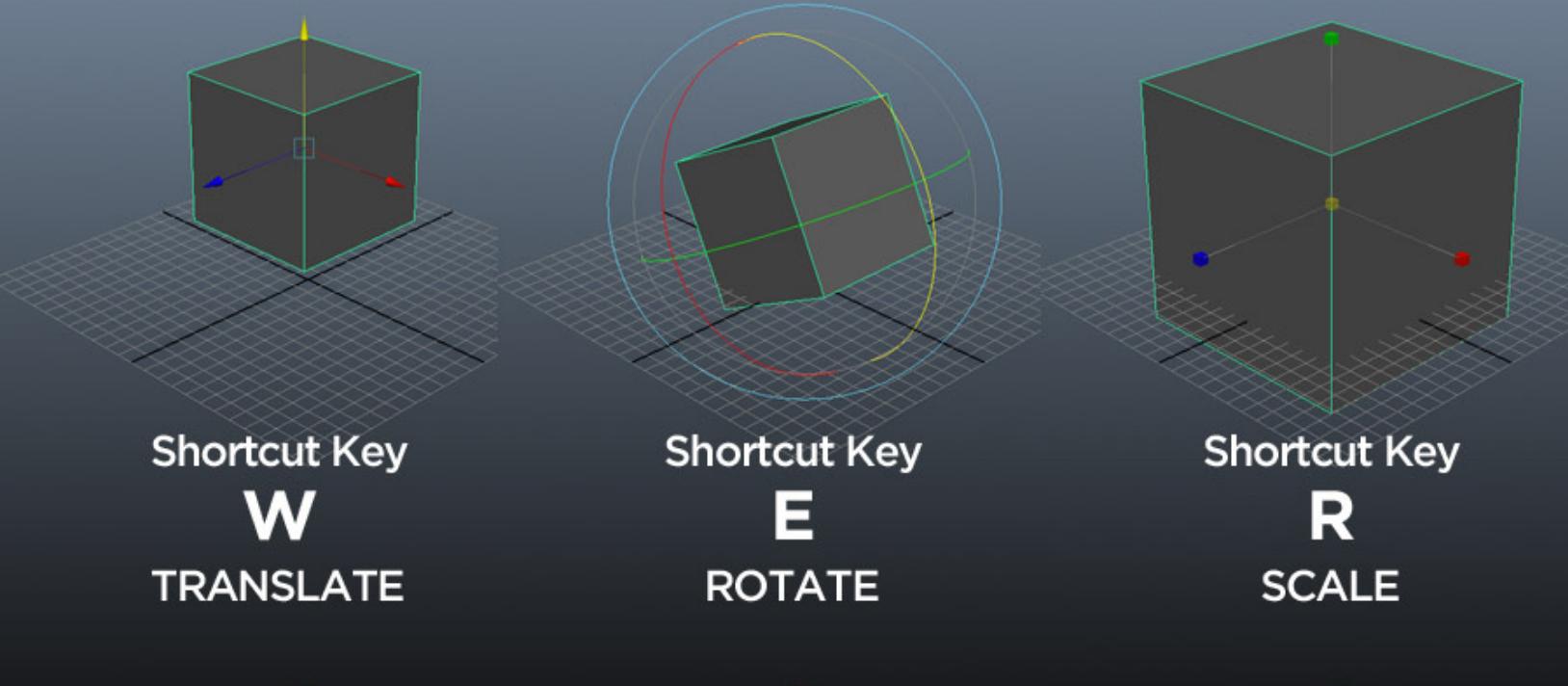
So, you've always wanted to learn animation. You've heard of this software package called "Maya" and that it is the industry standard for 3D animation. Friends and advisors have told you to download the free trial of Maya to get an idea of how it works. But there's one big problem: you've never worked in 3D before, you have no idea what in the world to do with this software package, and you can't manage to open a file, let alone start to animate something. You're hit by a wave of panic and self-doubt; you start to wonder if you should even be thinking about being an animator anymore. Sound familiar? We've all been there. Good news: we're here to help! Read on to learn the 8 things you need to know when you open Maya for the first time.

- The Animation Mentor Crew

1. How 3D space works and how it is represented by the computer.

Real life exists in 3D, but our computers screens are 2D. Maya, like many 3D software packages, represents 3D by using 3 axes: the X, Y, and Z axes. The intersection of these axes is called the origin and is represented by the coordinates (0,0,0). Think back to the classic Super Mario Bros. video game. Mario's world is represented entirely in 2D space, aka. the X-Y plane, X for the horizontal line (ex. the bricks Mario walks along), and Y for the vertical axis (ex. short Mario vs tall Mario).

Now, imagine how you would bring Mario into the 3D universe. You would



need to add a 3rd dimension, which is where the Z-axis comes in to play. The Z-axis is how you build out Mario's hat, the tip of his nose, or the bristles of his mustache.

2. Hotkeys are your friends.

Hotkeys are a way for you to work quickly in Maya and streamline your workflow. This is a life-saver, when you consider that our students spend upwards of 20 hours per week in Maya! Common actions such as move, rotate, and scale have associated “hotkeys”, meaning that you use a key on the keyboard to perform that action instead of using your mouse. Check out the full

list of Maya hotkeys and then go ahead and give ‘em a try.

3. Google is an even better friend than hotkeys.

When in doubt, look it up on Google. Can't figure out how to select the vertex on your polygon? Try a Google search. Maya just crashed and gave you an error message? Look up the error message on Google to see what happened and how to prevent it from happening again. The internet is full of resources, including Autodesk’s Maya User Guide, several tutorials on YouTube, and discussion forums about Maya. Maya has been around since 1998 and is the industry

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1 ..... 1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5 ..... 7
createNode transform -s -n "persp";
    setAttr ".v" no;
    setAttr ".t" -type "double3" 1.4158250538529249
32.466295892344789 -51.697506588605819 ;
    setAttr ".r" -type "double3" 151.37947075604239
3.5766204013418337 -179.99999999999804 ;
    setAttr ".rp" -type "double3" 4.4408920985006262e-016 -
7.5495165674510645e-015 7.1054273576010019e-015 ;
    setAttr ".rpt" -type "double3" -3.0673106714757083e-015
2.5928626155122188e-015
    -1.875564320882408e-014 ;
createNode camera -s -n "perspShape" -p "persp";
    setAttr -k off ".v" no;
    setAttr ".fl" 34.999999999999979;
    setAttr ".coi" 59.906040981019679;
```

Screenshot of a .ma file opened in WordPad; you can see how a savvy coder can read the script, find an error, fix it with some keystrokes, and save your animation!

standard software for animation – after 15+ years, thousands of animators have worked on countless films, shows, video games, and various other projects. If you need help in Maya, chances are very high that someone else has experienced the same thing and posted about it on the internet.

4. .ma vs .mb files – What are they and why do they matter?

In Maya, you have the option to save your scene file as either “scene.ma” or “scene.mb”. “.ma” stands for “Maya Ascii” and “.mb” stands for “Maya Binary”. There’s no difference to the visual look of your scene based on how you save it. The difference lies under the hood. Saving your scene as a “.ma” file

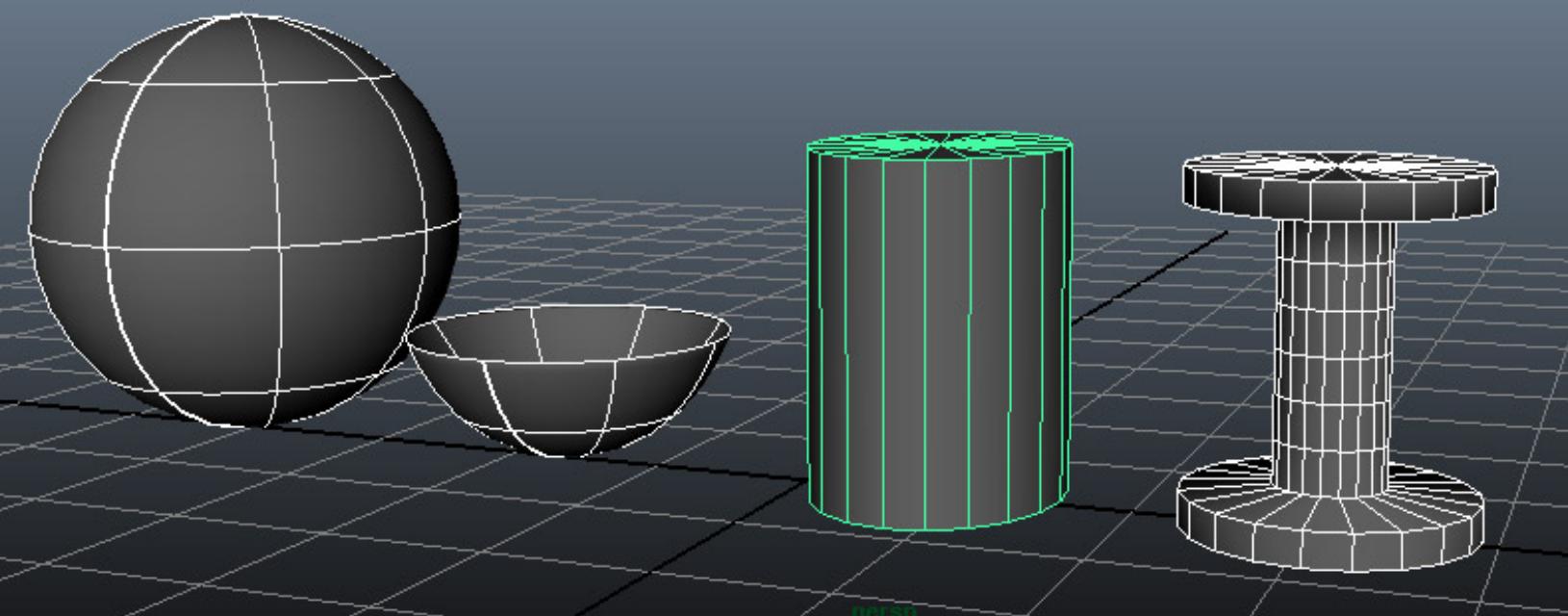
essentially saves your scene as a text file of commands. This allows you to open the file in a text editor, such as WordPad or Notepad, and edit the scene directly within the script of the file. This is handy if your file ends up corrupted and you want to try to restore it using scripts. By contrast, saving as a “.mb” file strips out the text information and compresses it into numeric values, reducing your file size, but making it impossible to edit the script from a text editor. “.mb” is the default saving method established by Maya, so if you do not anticipate editing your scene from the text file, “.mb” should work just fine for you.

5. Save! Save! Save!

The saying goes, “It’s better to have it and not need it, than need it and not have it.” The same idea applies to saving your work Maya. We’ve heard from students time and time again...it’s 1 o’clock in the morning, they’ve been refining a scene for hours, and then, wham, Maya crashed and they lost all of their work! If only they had been saving versions the whole time, they would have lost only minutes of work instead of hours. Trust us. **SAVE YOUR WORK.**

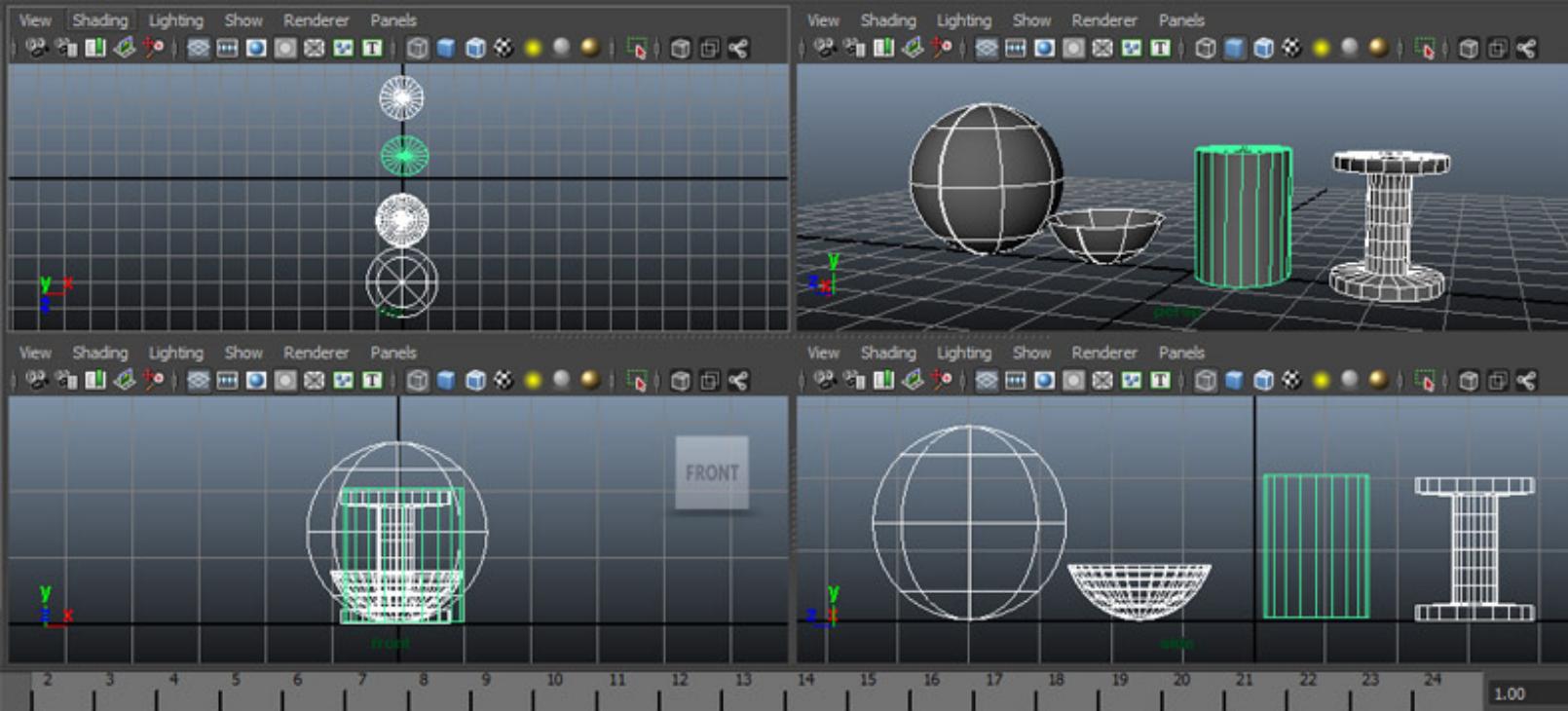
6. What the heck is a NURB, exactly? And how is a NURB different from a polygon?

NURBS and polygons are both ways you can create objects in Maya. NURBS stands for Non-Uniform Rational B-splines and are great for creating objects with smooth curves and surfaces. Polygons can be thought of more as a mosaic of pieces assembled together to create your object. Take the simple objects below:



On the left, a simple NURBS sphere has been modified into a bowl, with smooth curves forming the shape of the bowl; on the right, a simple polygon has been modified into a dumbbell, which has harder lines. NURBS are great to model a complex shape and then convert it to polygons. Textures are easier to map on polygons rather than NURBS. It really depends on what you are trying to do. Industry standard tends to lean toward polygons rather than NURBS.

Figure out what works best for your project.



7. Use the different views to refine your choices.

Maya offers you different ways to view your object in 3D space. You can look at it from above, below, in front of, behind, or from the side of your object. By default, Maya provides you with perspective and orthographic cameras (front, side, top, and a free-moving perspective camera). Use the perspective view to view your object from all angles, and use the side, front, and top orthographic views to examine a flattened version of your work (basically, you just see two of the axes). You can also view your objects in wireframe, shaded, textures, or lighting views and high, medium, or low resolutions, which can be toggled on or off via hotkeys. The different views allow you to get a good look at what you are doing, and to refine the placement of your object in 3D

space.

8. There's more than 1 way to do just about everything.

In many software programs, there's at least three ways to save your work: the File > Save menu; Ctrl + S; or clicking a Save icon. Likewise in Maya, there's multiple ways to do several commands. For example, you can add a NURBS object by either using the Create>NURBS Primitives>Sphere menu OR by selecting the Surfaces tab and clicking the Sphere icon. This may be confusing at first, after all, with so many options, how can you ever decide which is the "right" way. Here's a secret: it's up to you! As you grow as an animator, you'll start to learn which workflow works best for you. Experiment and play; learn and grow. ♦

Getting **Everything Done:**

Time Management for
Animators

**IF NOT NOW,
WHEN?**



By Boola Robello

Senior Animator, MPC
Mentor, Animation Mentor

You have a full time job, you have kids to pick up, and your homework is due tomorrow! What do you do?!

24 year veteran animator and mentor, Clarence “Bool” Robello, offers his industry advice on managing time so you can do everything you need to do without the stress. We guarantee you that there’s something here you can put into action right away. Let’s get organized!

- *The Animation Mentor Crew*

Time Management. It is something everyone struggles with. Whether you are a college student, a busy professional, a parent, or in this case an aspiring animator, everyone struggles to find the time to get to the things they want to work on. Finding the time is the wrong way to look at it. You have to make a point to make the time. If you want to be in shape, you make time to go to the gym. If you want to have a relationship you make time for your partner. If you want a family you make time to spend with them. If you want to become a professional animator, you have to make the time outside of your animation classes to advance yourself further. To say it all another way, you have to make a schedule that

will create the time you need for that specific goal.

First let’s start with some facts. A standard professional animator’s workday is 8-10 hours a day depending on which studio you work for. The 12-14 hour day is during our crunch-time/overtime where we are working towards the final end date to finish the project. That is a lot of hours of animating every day and therefore quite a bit of practice on the job. As an animation student part of your commitment is to get in as many hours of practice as you can to achieve your goal of becoming a professional animator.

Over the years instructing here at AM, I’ve seen many students struggle with managing their time to complete their assignments successfully. What I am about to offer in this post is what I have told every single student who has taken my class. Those that followed this “workflow” and stayed focused and committed to their schedule improved extremely well within a 12 week course at AM. They really made leaps and bounds in their work because of their commitment to themselves. I am not exaggerating as I have seen student’s animation go from mediocre at best, to “wow can this be the same student?”

I know this schedule works not only because of my students' success with it, but because it is the exact schedule I made for myself when I was working on my goal of becoming an animator. It takes a lot of dedication and discipline to attain your goals in life and if you're willing to do that, then here is what I did, what other successful students have done, and what I suggest you do too! Especially if you are a student at AM as this will work for every single class.

Monday – Friday

If you work full time or go to school full time, when you get home eat dinner and decompress a bit. If you have homework get that done. If you're not in college and are a working professional looking to become an animator, then get onto your animation homework immediately. You lock yourself in your studio and you animate until it is time for you to turn in for the night. Nothing else exists during this time. No television, no phone conversations, no texting, no distractions of any kind! Only animation. This is your time. Pure concentration. You are working on your skills and it needs to be honed. If this is your dream then to make it a reality you have to do something about it. Action needs to happen otherwise it just

remains a dream. This is the doing part of making it happen for yourself. Before you close down the computer, submit your work into the Public Review areas of AM or animation forums of your choice for critiques.

You follow this same pattern the next day, except now you should have feedback from peers and those forums. Remember some of these peers are working professional animators too, so you address the repeating notes because those are the notes everyone is agreeing on as they are clearly seeing it in your work. Address those notes and then move onto the ones you personally agree will make your work stronger.

If you do this right you will effectively be putting in at least 4-6 hours a day of animating time on your assignment. What you are trying to do here is replicate the hours put in at a studio. If a professional animator animates 8-10 hours a day, by you putting in 4-6 hours a day on your assignment you are at least reaching a half-day of their full day of work!

Saturday

If you do not have any personal/family plans, treat Saturday as a full 8-10 hour

work day animating your assignment. Submit your work at the end of the evening for your Mentor's critique. At the very latest submit first thing Sunday morning.

If you do have plans treat it like Monday-Friday. If the plans are in the evening reverse it all where you are animating in the day and then you can go out at night.

Sunday

This is your day off with the exception to watch the AM video lecture and take detailed notes.

If you do not work or have school, and you are home Monday – Friday, then I would treat that as a full workday, animating all day for 8 hours a day. If this is your case you could potentially take both Saturday and Sunday off, simulating the actual working week of a professional animator (not on crunch time).

At first glance this workflow may seem like common sense, but you would be very surprised how many people never see it this way! This workflow will help you keep your time managed properly, and will get you animating the most

amount of hours for at least 6 days straight. Remember, it is the closest way to simulate the working hours of a professional animator. Now of course things in life will come up and adjust this schedule. Just bend and flow with it as best you can, but get back on track as soon as it passes.

In order to make it in this business you have to really pay your dues to get there. We all did. This exact workflow schedule is how I became an animator very quickly. It made my work take significant steps forward and therefore get noticed when the time came. This kind of dedication and discipline that I learned from martial arts training will bring you the results you are searching for. Look at it all this way, if your goal is to become a professional animator, then you need to seriously practice like we do. This is the kind of passion and dedication we bring to our work in the films and projects that have inspired you to become an animator. It is not impossible to do this, but it does take a lot of hard work and a lot of dedication on your part. You have to put in your time and pay your dues. It will not happen just because you attend a certain school, learn a few quick tips and tricks, and animate an hour here or there. If you are willing to truly practice hard

and improve and grow from your mistakes, while never giving up on your dream, then there is only one outcome that is certain. But it all starts with how you manage your time. If it is important to you, then make the schedule, follow it, and go make your dream become your reality.

I sincerely hope this has been helpful for you. I wish you all the best in your goals and life. ♦

How to Maximixe Your Productivity

As an Animator

NOTHING
ELSE
MATTERS

INTENSE
CONCENTRATION,
NO ATTENTION
FOR PROBLEMS
OR ANYTHING ELSE

LOSE
YOURSELF,
TIME GETS
DISTORTED

FLOW



By David Tartt

Owner, RMAL
Mentor, Animation Mentor

*Animation is a time-consuming art form—there's just no way around it. Something that many people don't understand when they first get into animation is that the quality of a shot is directly related to available time. So what do you do when time is limited? How do you squeeze the most productive time out of your week? Learn top time management tips from David Tart, animator for **Toy Story**, **Monster's Inc.**, and **Finding Nemo**!*

The level of detail, the amount of planning, and the implementation in a complex program like Maya all take time, especially if you want to create great-looking work.

Something that many people don't understand when they first get into animation is that the quality of an animated shot is directly related to available time. For instance, an animator who's responsible for finishing 4 seconds of animation per 50 hour week is going to create much better looking animation than an animator who's responsible for finishing 40 seconds per week, even if they have essentially the same level of skill.

So time, and how you use that time, will be directly related to the quality of your finished shots. So how can you squeeze more time out of a week to create better

quality animation?

Below I'll list some ideas and tips that I've personally found incredibly helpful.

Creating Focus, or Flow

The psychological state of "focus", or "flow", is a time where you are incredibly focused on your tasks and able to get a maximum amount of great work done. When you achieve this level of focus, time is no longer relevant. You may have experienced this state yourself – it's when you're working on a specific task. You look up at the clock and an hour or two has passed, but it felt like only 10 or 15 minutes. Psychologists have researched this state of mind thoroughly and identified it as one where we are at our peak level of productivity. Our ability to create, to problem-solve, and crank out good work is at its maximum potential.

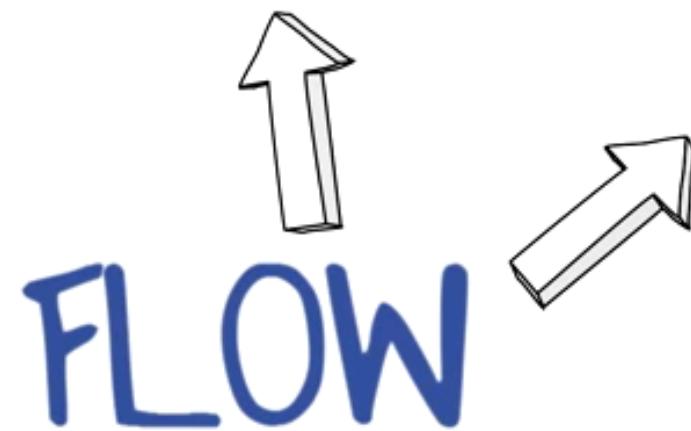
Research shows that it can take between 10 and 15 minutes to achieve the flow-state, while it can take only a minute to end it. This means that you want to plan your work time so that you have minimal interruptions, because these interruptions terminate flow.

For instance, if you set aside 3 hours to work on your animation but stop

NOTHING
ELSE
MATTERS

INTENSE
CONCENTRATION,
NO ATTENTION
FOR PROBLEMS
OR ANYTHING ELSE

LOSE
YOURSELF,
TIME GETS
DISTORTED



working to check your email, make a facebook post, shop online, talk to a friend, get some coffee, etc. eight times during that 180-minute period, you will have spent 80 to 120 minutes of potential flow-state in less-than-productive conditions. Sure, you'll still get stuff done but nowhere near as much you would have without those breaks.

Creating the Space to Do the Work

At the beginning of each week you should sit down and take a realistic look at your calendar. Doing good work at Animation

Mentor requires anywhere from 10 to 40 hours per week. Take a good hard look at that calendar, then block out sustained chunks of no less than two-hours each. Let friends and family know that you won't be available during those periods.





When those two-hour periods arrive, put your phone on silent mode. Close your facebook browser. In fact, close all other applications on your computer. There is no need to do anything other than animate. Make sure you have something to drink. Feed the dog. Put your pet bird to bed. Basically make sure to weed out any and all possible distractions. You can listen to music, but make sure it's something that you won't want to pay attention to.

Planning

We all hear it from our mentors, week after week. Planning, planning, planning! So you already know it's important. But as it relates to your productivity, it may be even more important than you think! In fact, there is no bigger waste of time than starting to block or animate a shot that you have

not fully planned.

I'll say that again: there is no bigger waste of time than starting into blocking or animating a shot you have not fully planned.

There are many reasons for this, but the biggest reason is that maya is really just a drawing tool, when it comes down to it. It's not at all good for "trying things out" because of the complexity and time-consuming interface. When you begin your blocking, you should understand every detail of the animated performance you are about to create. This means you understand the physicality, silhouette value, balance, and **appeal** of every single key pose from the fingers down to the toes (this should be present in your thumbnail drawings).

Playblast n' Tweak

This means you understand when and where you'll implement anticipations. You understanding the timing for each action—how long it takes to move from one pose to another because you already timed it out with a stopwatch. You have a good understanding of what type of in-betweens you'll create. You know when and where you'll implement **squash and stretch** frames, where overlaps will occur, when to use overshoot and settle . . . and so forth and so on.

You might think this sounds like overkill, but believe me, if your approach is anything less than this, you're not animating . . . you're just playing around in maya and wasting time. When you are in the first pass phase of animation, you should never find yourself thinking "I wonder what the **timing** for this movement should be". Rather, you should be thinking "Oh, I remember this action—I wrote the timing down in my planning. It was 7 frames". I can't tell you how much time I've wasted myself by not thoroughly planning. And remember, it's not just about saving time: any time you thoroughly plan your shot, the animation is guaranteed to come out better.

Many people ascribe to the "playblast n' tweak" method of animation, which basically means trying to fix something without really having figured out what the problem is, then playblasting to see whether or not it worked. While you may feel like you're working, actually the computer is working, and more importantly, you are breaking your hard-earned state of flow. Don't playblast until you've completed your to-do or fix list. I try to make sure I have at least 45 minutes worth of work to do in between playblasts. See "Making To-Do Lists" for the specifics.

Making To-Do lists

This is probably one of the most important ways to maximize your productivity. Making to-do lists requires your full focus and your critique abilities. The idea is that you want to avoid spotting problems in a random manner, then implementing questionable fixes— i.e., "Well, I'll try this, then playblast it and see whether or not it works". This is not animating, this is goofing around or desperately hoping for the best. Real animators can identify problems, when they occur, and how to fix them before doing anything about them. This will save you hours and hours of time and create an opportunity



for you to get into a “flow state”—that focused period of time where you are operating at top efficiency. Here’s how to do it:

1. Make a playblast.
2. Set your movie player to “loop”
3. Start identifying random issues— timing issues, weight issues, “pops”, spacing, ease-ins/outs, 2D arcs, overlaps . . . in general, use the 12 principles of animation as a measuring stick to see where your animation is not meeting these rules. Write them down on a piece of paper in no particular order.
4. After coming up with a list of 10 or 15 things that need your attention, watch the playblast again. For each item on your list, write down the frame number or frame range in

which the issue occurs.

5. Next, write down each problem you identified as a *solution* – i.e., “The arm has an issue with the elbow from frame 17–23” becomes “The screen right arm needs to have the RX adjusted in the upper arm joint”. Or “The pelvis looks floaty from frame 134–147” becomes “The COG needs a 2D arc, and the ease out adjusted on the translates from frame 134–147”.
6. Finally, prioritize the issues by hierarchy. Because of the hierachal nature of posing and animation in maya, there would be no sense in adjusting the 2D arc of an arm before adjusting the rotation of a joint in the spine, since you’d just have to redo the arm if you adjusted it before adjusting the spine.

Your final list might look something like this:

1. Body looks weightless from frame 10–19. Add 2D arc, adjust tilt of pelvis, and give some overshoot and settle. PRIORITY 1.
2. Blink looks weird, frames 38–43. Timing of the blink is early. Move blink to start at frame 41. PRIORITY 3
3. When character looks toward screen right frames 49–56, something is off. Need to lead head turn with the eyes by 2 frames. PRIORITY 3.
4. Pose from frame 3–12 looks off-balance. Rotate main controller in Rz to make character more vertically posed over the legs. PRIORITY 1.
5. The legs are popping at frames 18, 126, and 134. Adjust Ty of main controller. PRIORITY 1.
6. The arms feel like they are rotating in a way that doesn't feel connected to the body, frames 81–88. Add rotation in the torso and clavicles to make arms feel more physical. PRIORITY 2. etc.

Armed with this list you can now not only achieve the flow-state, but you can animate with purpose. Go through your

list, fixing each issue by priority level. Playblast, then DO IT AGAIN.

Taking Breaks

We've all been there (or you will be soon): it's 11:00 pm, you've been working on your shot for the past 4 hours, and it doesn't look much different than when you started 4 hours ago. You keep looking to see what's wrong, you keep trying to fix it only to break something else in the process and go back to a saved version of the shot. You've looked at the shot so long you can't even tell what's wrong anymore! You're feeling stressed, pressured. You simply HAVE to get some work done!

And this is exactly when you should save your file, gently reach for the power switch on your computer, and shut it off. It's time for a break. Not a 5-minute break, but an hour or more—or maybe it's even time to quit for the night. Get up. Get away from the computer. Take a walk. Go hang out with some friends. Go to the gym. Physical exercise is best, since you've been sitting so long, but the most important thing you need is distance between you and your work. Forget about it. Remind yourself that you'll get back to it, and that everything is going to work out fine.

As with “focus” or “flow”, stress can greatly affect our creativity and problem-solving abilities. Studies show that the right amount of stress can benefit our efficiency and work ethic. We should have some amount of concern about our work. But too much concern can basically shut down our thinking processes. Instead of seeing the work, we live in our fear and judgments...we spend time thinking about what will happen if we don’t finish or what it means that we can’t figure out a solution to the problems that need fixing.

So the next time you find yourself worrying more about the deadline than what’s happening on the screen, take a break. You deserve it!

Switching Tasks

If you find yourself trying to fix a problem over and over again with no success and you’re not ready to take a break, switch tasks. For instance, if you’ve been trying to figure out why that pesky elbow keeps popping for the past 30 minutes and it’s still popping, then drop it. There’s always something else to work on, so switch over to working on refining your hand poses or do some facial animation. My personal favorite go-to is lip sync, which for some reason I can do fairly easily. Or if you’re lucky

enough to be working on multiple shots at the same time, just close the one you’re having problems with and start out fresh on the other. You won’t regret it, and you might find that the next time you open that problematic shot, the solution was right in front of you the entire time—it happens more often than not.

Reducing Mouse Clicks

One of the things I do when I come into a new studio to supervise animation is ask animators to describe how they work—What steps do they take in their workflow? How do they plan, block, first-pass animate and polish? And as it relates to efficiency, what keyboard shortcuts, tools, and mel scripts do they use? My goal is to reduce mouse clicks, and this turns out to be relatively easy to do.

Imagine that in a typical 40-hour work week, you click and release your mouse 10,000 times. If you can identify repetitive tasks—and there are so many when animating in maya—it’s quite possible to reduce your mouse clicks down to 7,000 or 8,000. This may not seem like a big deal, but it is! Essentially, you save a whopping 20% of time, or 8 hours per week. You literally create more time where there was none before.

There are so many great tools that Animation Mentor has that you can use already. Many people never bother to use them, mainly out of the fear that it will “take time” to learn them, and who has time when your shot is due! But make a commitment to yourself to reduce your mouse clicks. Learning these new tools or keyboard shortcuts may take a small amount of time, and you’ll need to force yourself to keep using them, but you won’t regret it!

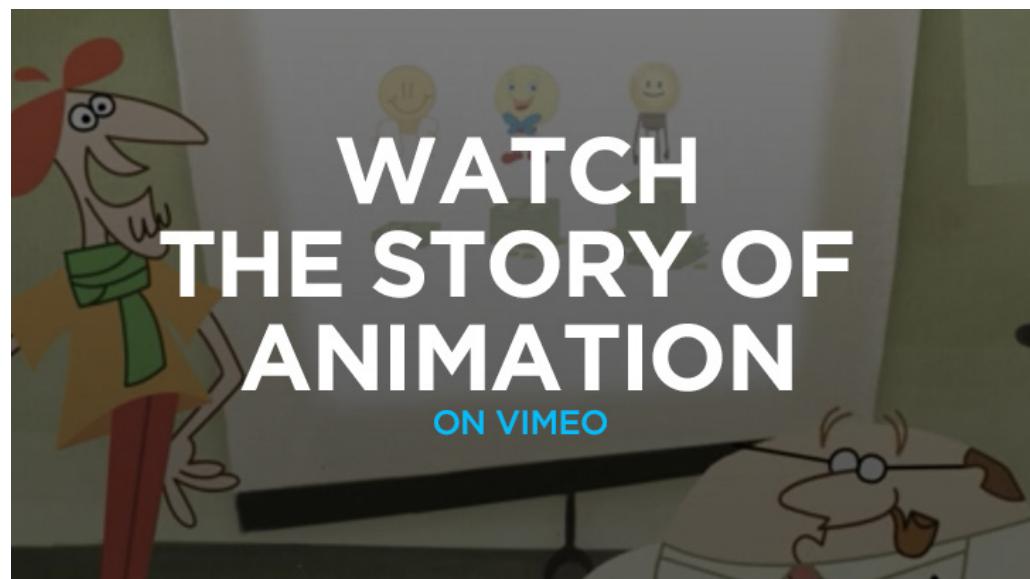
Creating Work Spaces on Maya

Organizing your desktop display is super important. I can't tell you how many times I've seen new animators clicking away on their screen—resizing windows, opening and closing windows, bringing windows to the front, minimizing, maximizing, or just endlessly rotating a perspective camera. Make no mistake, this is NOT

animating: it's just fussing around with a computer interface.

To avoid this waste of time, you'll want to make sure you have a few layouts saved that you use for specific tasks. One might be your main_cam or shot_cam window, another a perspective view for selecting nurbs curves, and another with the graph editor. Another might be a face_cam, perspective, and graph editor, if you're doing facial animation. Set the preferences for your heads-up display so your windows are filled with visual clutter.

*Now go forth, animators, and work smarter not harder. Also, be sure to check out David's short film, **The Story of Animation!** ♦♦*



Insecurity: Your Best Friend



By Michelle Meeker

Mentor, Animation Mentor

"At any time I still expect that the no-talent police will come and arrest me." -Mike Myers

Insecurity incessantly pushes people around. We all wish we could make our insecurities go away at will but what if there was a way to adjust your perspective on your insecurities?

Veteran animator and mentor, Michelle Meeker, offers her industry knowledge on how to grow through your insecurities and how embracing these insecurities ultimately will make you a stronger animator. So be patient, try to find a way to handle insecurity with grace and you'll see your animations come to life!

- The Animation Mentor Crew

What I most loved (and there are so many things I loved) about the film ***Inside Out*** is how it showed the purpose of sadness in our emotional lives. It causes you to slow down and be quiet with yourself. The film also says it's okay to have this feeling...in fact, you can't have joy without it.

This got me thinking about insecurity. What if allowing it to exist in your life is similar to sadness in ***Inside Out***. What I'm saying is...instead of trying to act like insecurity doesn't exist or allowing it to stop you in your creative path, you use its power to help you along. Using it to help you get to its alter emotion confidence.

Let's get something out of the way. Everyone deals with insecurity at various times in their creative journey. This includes the beginner all the way to the seasoned professional. In fact many seasoned artists never stop feeling it... they create in spite of it. There are many different reasons why we feel insecure. I'm not going to attempt to solve your insecurity in this short post. I'm still working out my own stuff so I'll get back to you when I find the answer.

As you figure out your personal insecurity issues, here are three ways to ride its wave towards confidence island.



Do the work

There is a scene from the final season on Mad Men where the main character is having a pity party about how he isn't where he wants to be in his career. A friend gives him this advice, "Do the work, Don." This line really hit me at my insecurity core. Your work is the only thing you have control over...not over your mentor's critique, the hiring decisions of a company, or if an artist you respect says they like your work. You only have



control over you... how hard you work and how you fight to keep progressing. If you stop working because you don't think you're good enough, then you've ended your own growth possibilities.

Get comfortable with being uncomfortable

If you're taking risks, you're going to be uncomfortable. Insecurity is all about being uncomfortable. This is not a bad thing. I know when I'm uncomfortable, I can use this feeling to push me to work harder and be more aware that I'm in the fight. Security and confidence can breed comfort. If you're comfortable in what you're creating...you're not pushing yourself. Don't fool yourself into thinking comfort and confidence equals security.

Stop comparing your journey to others

Notice I didn't say stop comparing your work. You do need to look at where your work ranks compared to others. This is a reality of becoming a professional artist. But don't use this comparison to freeze you in your tracks. Use their work to inspire you and to aim higher in your own work. As you are inspired, remember to stay on your own path. You are not here to make copycat work. Also, remember that social media has skewed real life. You have no idea how much sweat went into a final product or how much they thought their work was sub par up until the final pass. Don't take the

easy way out and make someone's great work about your inadequacies. Use the inspiration to aim higher and make your work stronger.

Lastly, reach out to other artists. This can be as simple as telling a classmate, "I really enjoyed how you handled your assignment." Think about what someone's kind words have meant to you in the past...especially from people that you aren't related to. Even better is finding a group of people creating stuff and go hang with them. Your fellow creators understand the feelings of insecurity and can support you to keep creating. When you support others it can also help you by pulling you out of your "I Suck Hamster Wheel"...even if only for a few moments.

Until...you are once again greeted by a now good friend.

"Why hello, Insecurity. Let's do the work." ♦

Be Brave

7 Ways to Overcome Your Insecurity

LET YOUR PAST INSPIRE YOU,
LET IT MOTIVATE YOU,
BUT NEVER LET IT HOLD YOU BACK.



By Dana Masson

Mentor, Animation Mentor

Today, studio owner and beloved mentor Dana Boardway-Masson touches on the topic that every animator struggles with. Throughout her career, Dana has had the great fortune to work alongside some of the most talented creative professionals in the world. But as we all know, creative work is always a struggle, and the ability to innovate comes with a plethora of fears and insecurities needed to overcome. In her post, Dana shares the lessons that have helped her deal with insecurity directly and maintain that sense of innovation in the ever-changing world of animation.

- *The Animation Mentor Crew*

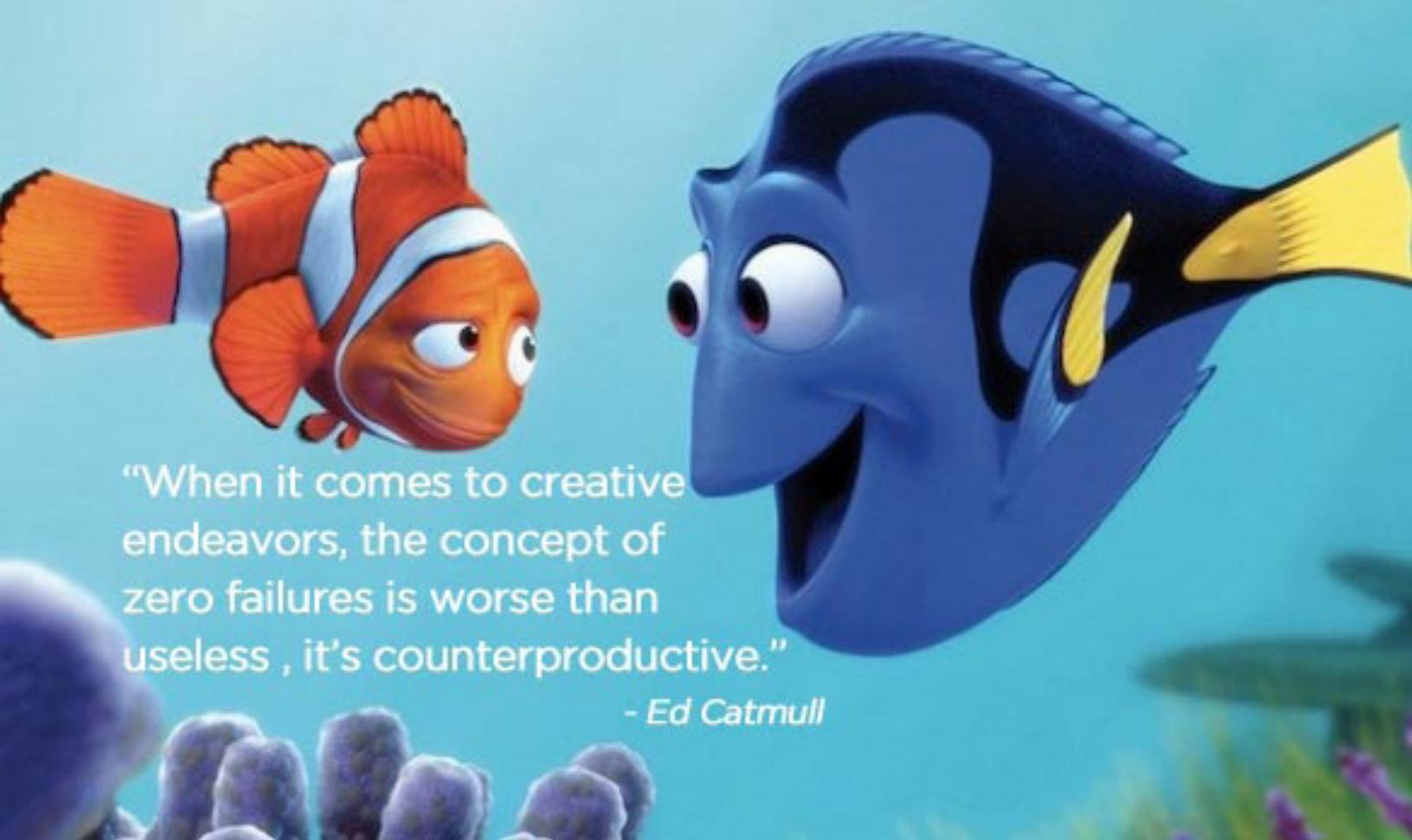
Hey all! I'm here to talk to you guys about confidence, insecurities, and some of the situations where these things come into play most when working in the animation industry.

THICK SKIN / HANDLE REJECTION

This is one of the first situations you're likely to encounter when you're trying to get your first job(s) and get some experience, but it's something that will happen throughout your career, even once you're established. I first learned

about this when I was acting, and I attended dozens of auditions, and got rejected from most of them.

The reality is that there are hundreds of animators out there, and many people vying for the same positions. If you gave up after your first couple of rejections, you'd never make it as an animator. You'll probably send out many applications before you finally get a response. The thing to remember is that there are lots of factors that come into play when it comes to getting that response – the quality of your work is only one of those. You should always be looking to improve the quality of your work and your reel, but you can't and shouldn't take rejections or non-responses personally. They could be looking for a particular style of animation for their project that you don't have on your reel, if you're not from their area they could be looking for a local resident because of tax laws or a short project duration, they could have others who have personal connections within the studio that have similar reel quality to yours – and the studio will generally go with people who come personally recommended by people they trust. Something I realized once when I went to a group audition, where we all had to do our monologues in front of



"When it comes to creative endeavors, the concept of zero failures is worse than useless , it's counterproductive."

- Ed Catmull

each other, is that most people are really mediocre at what they do. If you work hard, apply yourself, and keep at it, you can and will become better than most. This is why being passionate about what you do is so important. It keeps you moving in spite of rejection.

PERSISTENCE

Keep putting yourself out there! The more exposure you get, the better the chances that you'll get that first job that will set you on your path. And once you're in, you'll start getting to know people, and networking, and one day

YOU will be that person that comes personally recommended, and in turn you'll be able to recommend others once you've built relationships and you've got the trust of YOUR studio.

As a mentor of mine from my school days told me, "Take any job you can get in a studio, even if it's running for coffee. It's a LOT easier to get where you want to go from INSIDE a studio than from the outside."

If it takes time to get that first job, use that time to get feedback from peers and keep working on and improving

your reel! Yes, you can send updated reels to studios. As they see your work improving and evolving, they will keep you in mind for upcoming projects. Many studios will keep your reels on file over time.

ABILITY TO TAKE CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

When you're getting feedback on your reel, no matter who it's from, you have to remember that this feedback comes from places of various levels of knowledge and experience. You don't have to feel offended by any of it, and you don't have to use all of it if you don't want to, either. Sometimes a person's individual sense of style will also affect what kind of comments they give you – they can often be very subjective. Also, when you ask someone for comments, they may only give you ideas of things they think should be changed, and they may NOT include positive comments, even if they had positive reactions to your work.

If you're lucky enough to get feedback from a studio you've applied to, and you really want to work at that studio, you should take those suggestions and run with them, and re-submit your work.

Your eye for your own work, and the work of others will change and improve with increased experience. I remember having a GIANT leap in my ability to 'see' very subtle quality differences in animation once I worked on my first feature film and spent an hour or so each day in Dailies, watching the director give animators feedback on their shots. I learned a whole new visual language all of a sudden, and it was like a revelation. Sometimes only after you've had a revelation like this, can you truly understand what was missing in your work before. You'll have lots of "ah-HA!" moments throughout your career, over years and years of honing your skills.

PRESENTING YOURSELF IN THE RIGHT WAY

You don't have to pretend to be something that you're not, but a studio will generally be looking for people who can work well with their team. Presenting yourself in a friendly and personable way in an interview is important. Your animation skills are really the main key to your success, but over time, if you are a jerk to others in your studio, and disrespectful, your skills won't get you much farther.

Part of the studio experience and

working on a project with others is your ability to communicate well, get along with your colleagues, and play off of each other to get interesting performances from the characters you're working with. You'll be spending a LOT of time with these people, so personalities are important when forming a team. I've met some of my best friends working in studios! And conversely, I've met the occasional person who I really clashed with. The trick is to be able to put forth your best effort to work together and make compromises and act respectful even when you don't like someone. It will happen on occasion, but for the most part, I've really enjoyed my co-workers. There have been some times when I've started off not liking or being put off by someone, but after getting to know them better, came to at least respect their position, or even become very good friends with them. So staying open, receptive and friendly in the studio can not only help the production move forward well, but it can open doors to better work relationships, and sometimes even lifelong friendships.

Being able to deal with various kinds of personalities in a studio will also be key down the road when you end up with an opportunity to be a lead or a supervisor. You'll not only have to get along well with and motivate everyone on your team, but you might have to manage disputes between THEM as well.

FLEXIBILITY

This is a transient industry. Chances are pretty good that you won't be at the same studio for longer than a couple of years, and as little as a couple of weeks or months. There are some situations where you can make a pretty long career stretch at one place, but it's more the exception than the rule. You'll be working in different studios, in different cities, in different countries, with different software, for different leads and different directors, on projects with different styles. You'll need to learn how to adapt in many ways to new situations.

You'll need to adapt your workflow to meet the needs of different types of productions, too. Television series, for instance, have a much higher animation quota, with less time for attention to detail – compared to feature film, which has a much lower quota, but the level of detail and refinement (and the number of controls on a character!) is very high. One of the GREAT parts of being an animator is how many different kinds of work your skills can be applied to. It keeps things

“You’ll have a bunch of “ah-HA!” moments throughout your career over years of honing your skills.” - Dana Boardway-Masson



interesting! Right now I'm working on some character animation for a fine art installation – something I've never done before! And that's after 15 years of experience on just about every type of production you can imagine. There will always be something new to try. It's awesome!

INNOVATION & PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

The nature of working with computers and software, even in an artistic field, means you'll have to solve technical

problems, and figure out solutions that will help the production run smoothly. The more you can learn how to deal with your computer on your own, the easier things are. Yes, studios have IT people to help with issues, but it's great to be able to work your way through a problem quickly on your own, rather than having to wait for someone else to come and help you.

There will also be times when you'll have a shot you're working on that's got a particular challenge – like multiple characters and constraint animation

that you have to work out a solution for that will work within the studio pipeline, or coordinating with a rigger to create certain things in a character rig that will make the shot work better. Learning how to deal with these things on your own makes you a valuable asset to a team with a deadline. It also will be a skill that will serve you well if you have aspirations of becoming a lead or a supervisor one day. There will be lots of problem solving that you'll need to do when you're casting shots and planning out a sequence for your team.

BALANCE BETWEEN 'OWNING' YOUR WORK, AND DOING WHAT IS ASKED OF YOU BY A DIRECTOR OR LEAD

You are an artist. You are invested in your work. You want to have GREAT



**"The future is not a destination,
it's a direction."**

- Ed Catmull

looking shots in the production you're working on, and you want to get amazing stuff for your reel over time. You were hired because of your ability to be creative and entertaining. YET... you will get calls on your work that you completely disagree with, and you just KNOW would be better if you did it your own way. Well, when it comes down to it, the director's vision is the one that everyone on the team needs to work towards, whether you agree with it or not. It can be frustrating at times, but if each animator went off and did their own thing, the project would lack cohesion and consistency. There may be a subjective viewpoint that you don't share with a director. Sometimes you'll click with a director and "get" them with no problem at all, and sometimes you'll need to learn what it is that

they're looking for and how to apply that to your work for that particular project. Yes, there generally is room for you to put your own creative spin on a shot. Most directors do want their animators to contribute their ideas, and explore possibilities for entertainment. But where you are looking at your one shot or sequence of shots in detail, the director has their eye always on the big picture, and your idea for a shot may not always fit the bigger story arc or energy. You have to find that fine line between creativity and following direction, and walk it like a tightrope.

When you have an idea for adding something unexpected to a shot, the thing you need to be good at is presenting that idea. Your communication in your planning and blocking better be 100% clear and concise! If the director doesn't "get it" at first glance, it won't be approved for you to move forward with it. If it gets rejected, you have to be okay with moving forward with the direction you're given. If you continue to work on something that wasn't approved, it will be considered disrespectful of the director's valuable time. You need to be able to let it roll off your shoulders, and try again another time, whether you agree with the assessment or not.

In the end, when you're working at a studio, you're working on someone else's project, so you have to do a certain amount of adapting to their needs, and checking your ego at the door.

Every aspect that I've discussed in this article involves having the guts to put yourself out there, with the knowledge that there could be criticism and/or rejection. The victories can be very sweet, but at times your confidence can take quite a bruising. But if you're passionate, and persistent, and have a good work ethic, you can overcome the down times and work your way back to a positive place. The more you can take those 'negative' events, learn from it and then let it go and move forward, the better off you'll be. I still go through this all the time, even after a decade and a half!

Failures are, after all, an opportunity to learn. It doesn't mean you're finished, it means you're growing. And the folks who are the very best at what they do have a large string of failures in their past. The difference between those people and the ones who didn't make it, is they just didn't let it hold them back. :)

- Dana ♦

6 Most Common Mistakes

of Beginning Animators



By Jane Cassidy

Animator, Pixar Animation Studios
Mentor, Animation Mentor
Alumnus, Animation Mentor

We asked Animation Mentor Grad, Pixar Animator, and current mentor Jane Cassidy to share the common mistakes she sees time and time again from beginning animators. Here's your comprehensive list of what NOT to do as a beginning animator.

So you are thinking about entering the field of animation — it can be a daunting task. If you're already enrolled in Animation Mentor, you have taken the first step. I took that same step seven years ago, and as a student, I made plenty of mistakes. Now that I am teaching at Animation Mentor, hopefully my perspective from both sides allows me to guide you away from these common pitfalls.

1. Not Following the Syllabus

Assignments may seem straightforward, but I have had quite a few students turn in the wrong assignment, be it the incorrect exercise or the incorrect format. Typically reading the syllabus can easily prevent this.

The reason this is important—not only in class, but in your animation career going forward—is because in a real movie production you will be required

to thoroughly understand shot briefing notes before beginning your shot. Instill the habit early of following notes and understanding shot direction. As a result, you will enjoy a long and healthy career in animation.

2. Not using AMP

In a class of nine students, I find at least half the students will not utilize AMP. It is crucial that you check in your work using AMP, as this allows your mentor to pull up your work and “look under the hood” so to speak. Some mentors like to pull up your work and tweak your animation during class. The overwhelming feedback is that these demonstrations are extremely helpful. It allows you the students to see how a professional animator would solve the problem in a live step-by-step demo.

Make sure to set up AMP before the first week of class. Not only does it speed up your learning curve, but it benefits everyone else as well. We are all in this class to learn together!

3. Underestimating how hard animation is, not putting in enough time

Too often I see beginning students underestimate how much effort each assignment requires. Even a bouncing ball can take a few days if you are just starting. It may look easy, but once you start to move keys around and start to animate, panic and stress can set in.

I went through a similar experience when I was a student. What helped me the most was going in anticipating how hard it was going to be, how much work I was going to have to put in. The more space you create for yourself to do great work, the more room you'll have to make mistakes, make iterations, and break through natural plateaus that come with mastering any craft. And especially as the assignments get more complicated toward the end of class, a walk cycle for example will require even more time.

So have a good idea of how many hours each assignment will take and plan accordingly. The more effort you put in, the more your mentors can help you get to wherever it is you want to go.

4. Not giving or asking for feedback

Too many beginning animators make this mistake. Too often we feel like we are not good enough or experienced enough to give other animators feedback. The truth is, you are good enough. It is through looking at other people's work that we develop our eye. It is through viewing and discussing other people's work that we develop a community, a sense of togetherness. It bolsters the idea that we all have something to learn from each other. Plus, it's a fantastic way to get inspired.

Don't be afraid to look up fellow students' workspaces. Comment on their work or just say hello, even if they are in a different class than you. This is how we build our community and establish connections.

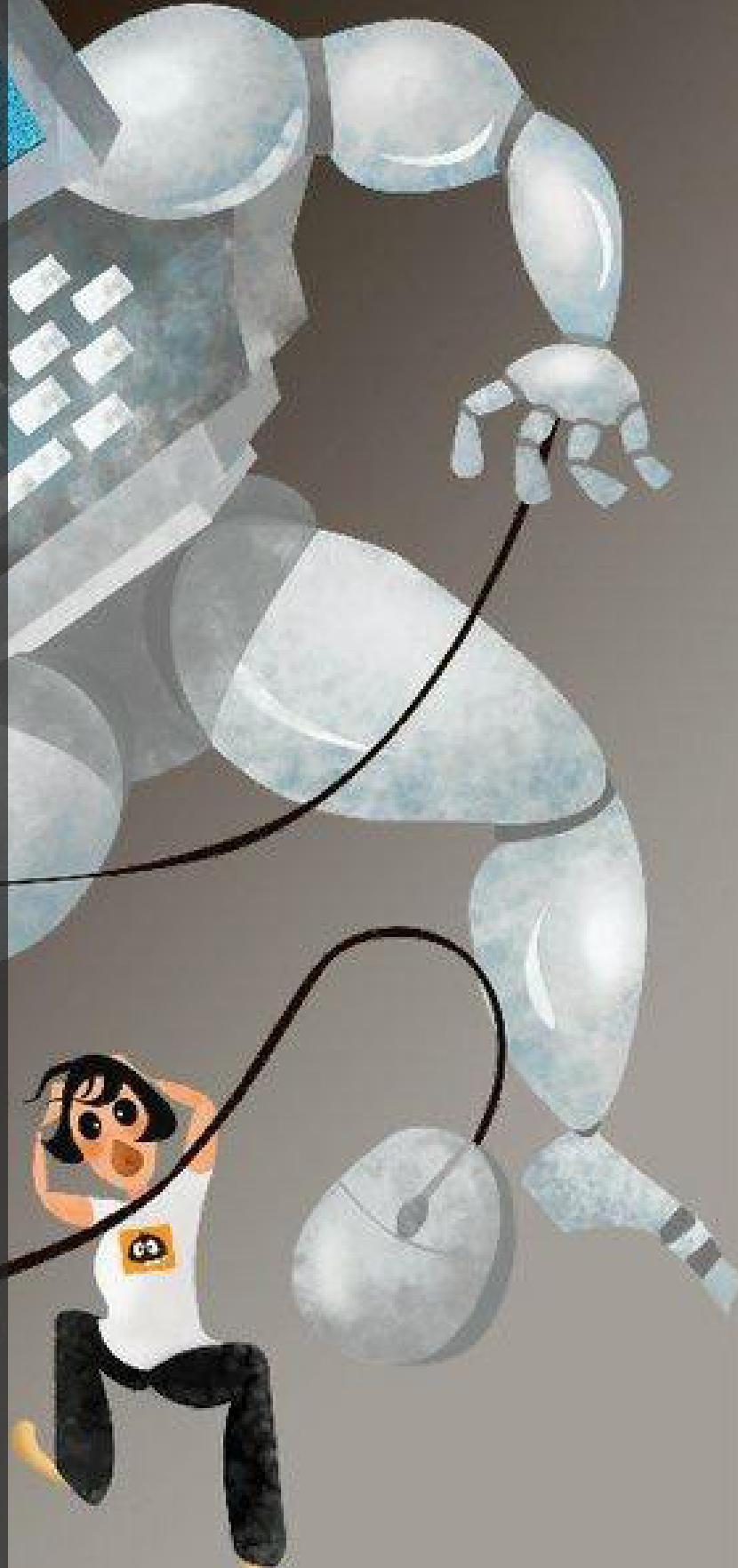
Specifically, challenge yourself to leave five people feedback each week. Add them to your buddy list. As you get more comfortable, add more people to that list—the more the merrier. Also, don't forget to put in a Peer Buddy request during your first week. You will be paired with an upperclassman, which will be another source of support for you. Take advantage of all the

community Animation Mentor has to offer. It will push you further than you could ever imagine.

5. Taking feedback personally, worrying too much about grades

We put a tremendous amount of hard work and love into our animation. It can be hard sit there and take the feedback when someone is giving you notes on your shot. You must NOT take it personally. The natural choice is to try and defend yourself, which is understandable. But rather than internalizing what someone says to you, your attention should be on the work itself. It's easy to hang your head down after a tough critique, but you must realize that you wouldn't be receiving criticism unless someone believes in you—believes in your ability to improve, believes in your ability to do great work. Criticism is a sign of your potential.

In a real production environment, animators work as a team to bring the director's visions to life. We try our best to put our creative voices into our shots, but at the end of the day, the director has the final say. Your mentors are in a sense, just like a director. Mentors have their own style of critiquing, just



WATCH JANE CASSIDY'S OVER DONE WALK

ON YOUTUBE

WATCH JANE CASSIDY'S SIMPLIFIED WALK

ON YOUTUBE

like directors have different ways of conducting. Some may not praise your work as much as others, but this is not because they don't appreciate your work, or have something against you as a person. It comes down to giving you a fair and truthful critique directed at the work, not you the animator. To be a professional animator means you have to have thick skin, but it also means you're lucky enough to be part of a team, a group of people focused on putting out the best work possible.

6. Not keeping it simple

I see a lot of students over-complicating their assignments. I should know, as I was one of them. Here is an example of over-complicating a walk cycle assignment by yours truly. I started with the "excited" walk. After that I decided to add some bird droppings, and then a

"sneaky" walk.

My mentor told me this was way too complicated, so I kept the excited walk and used all my time to perfect it. Here is the simplified version.

My advice is to stick with the simplest option. Focus all your time and energy into making that simple animation spectacular. Don't waste your time putting in fancy lighting. It is always better to have solid, simple animation with extra time left at the end of the week, as opposed to having an over-complicated storyline and rushing to finish your assignment at the end of the week. Just remember, "KISS"—Keep It Simple Stupid! ♦



Our Courses and Workshops

Animation Mentor offers 12-week courses and 6-week workshops on a wide variety of animation disciplines. Whether you're looking to focus your skill set, build out your generalist skills, or just try something new—we've got you covered. If you're a beginner, our core Character Animation Courses will get you started on your journey to becoming a professional animator.

Character Animation Courses

12-Week Courses

AN01 Animation Basics

In Animation Basics, you'll go beyond software to learn how to realistically convey weight, motion, and follow-through – critical skills on your journey to becoming a character animator. You'll start the course by learning how to animate a bouncing ball and then evolve that bouncing ball through the creation of both "vanilla" and "personality" walk cycles.

AN02 Body Mechanics

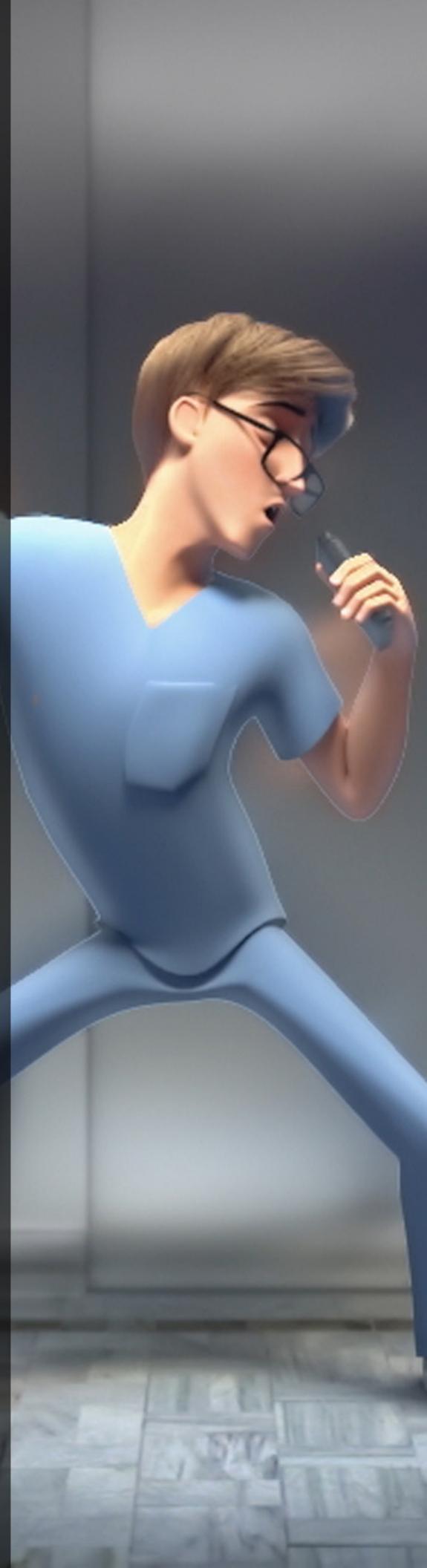
In Body Mechanics, dive deep into the physicality of animating full body walks on both human and animal characters with our Stella and Sloan rigs. Begin by honing your observational skills and understanding of human and animal anatomy. Once you understand the source of realistic motion, you're ready to learn how timing and spacing choices can take your animation from realistic to stylized. Finally, finish class with workflow tips on how to add polish and shine to your animation.

Prerequisites: AN01 or Advanced Placement

AN03 Advanced Body Mechanics

In Advanced Body Mechanics, you'll animate more advanced physicality with your characters. Pick a character and create your own sequence, using cuts to help tell your story. Whether you want to send your character barreling through a wall or jumping out of a plane, Advanced Body Mechanics will teach you the necessary skills to animate physicality and body mechanics believably.

Prerequisites: AN02 or Advanced Placement



Character Animation Courses

12-Week Courses

AN04 Introduction to Acting

In Introduction to Acting, you tackle two of the most challenging aspects of character animation: pantomime acting and animating dialogue. Through pantomime acting, you'll learn to show the audience the character's emotion without narration or dialogue. Advance to the most exciting concept in character animation: dialogue acting. In this class, you'll learn how to use subtlety and subtext to add complexity and depth to your characters.

Prerequisites: Either AN03 or Advanced Placement

AN05 Advanced Acting

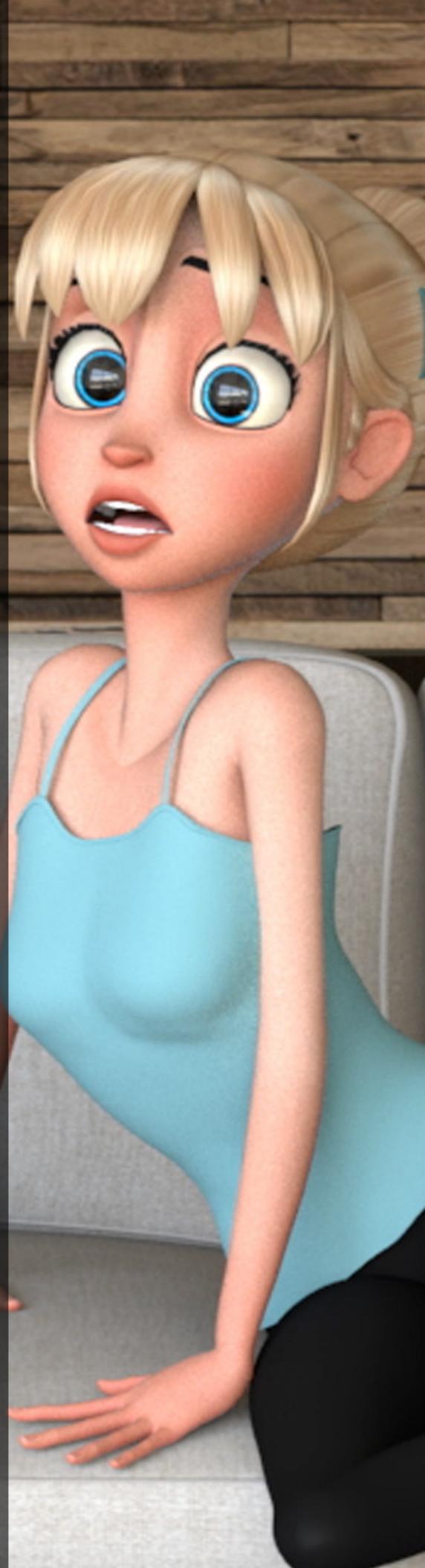
In Advanced Acting, you get your first taste of how to plan and execute your animation in a studio production environment! You'll learn to create shots that cut together correctly, staging your acting in the best way to support the overall story or character arc. Your assignments will focus on two-person dialogue shots and you'll learn how to find the balance of giving each character life without losing the focus on the core beats of your shot.

Prerequisites: AN04 or Advanced Placement

AN06 Polishing and Portfolio

In this course, you'll produce at least 15 seconds of polished animation for your demo reel. Learn the best practices for what to include and what not to include on your demo reel, and get valuable insights into the hiring process at top animation studios.

Prerequisites: AN05





Creature Animation Courses

12 Week Courses

WCL01

Creature Animation: Locomotion

Learn the essence of animal and creature locomotion—how a creature runs, walks, senses, stops, and turns. Challenge yourself to animate believable creatures with the help of top creature animators who've worked on *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Game of Thrones*, *Star Wars*, and more!



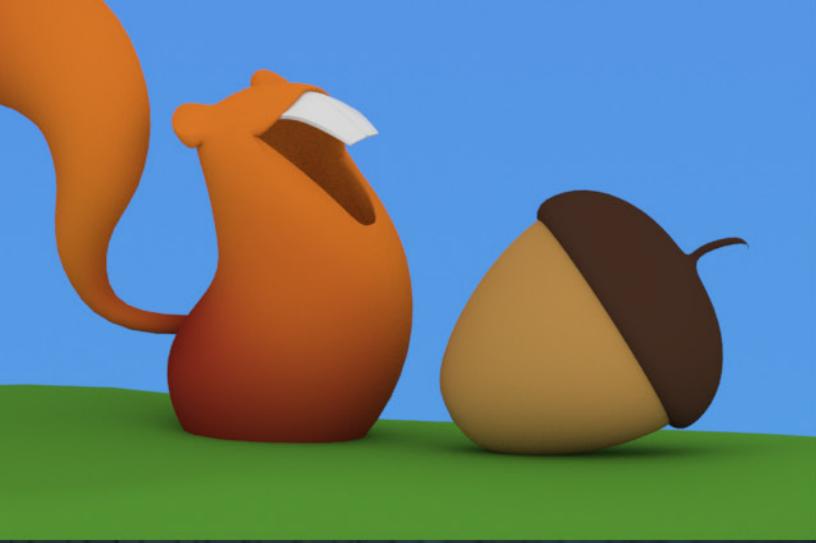
WCF01

Creature Animation: Fight or Flight

Learn how to train your own dragon and animate fight scenes like the pros! This advanced workshop takes your skills to the next level by teaching you how to integrate believable creature animation with live-action background plates. Learn what makes a good action sequence, with tips on planning and pacing physical animation—and learn how to work effectively with live-action footage.

Workshops

6 Week Courses



WTOON01

Cartoony Animation for 3D Animators

Push your 3D skills by drawing simple 2D animation sketches and learning to exaggerate your animation! You'll start with hand-drawn master studies of great animation to start learning effective cartoony techniques. You'll end up creating a simple cartoony animation following the traditional workflow and then re-creating that animation and workflow on a 3D character.



WMAYAO1

Maya Workshop: Animation Basics

This is where it all starts! This workshop is designed especially for beginners. Get comfortable with the Autodesk® Maya® user interface and the basic software tools for animators and set yourself up for success in our Character Animation Courses!

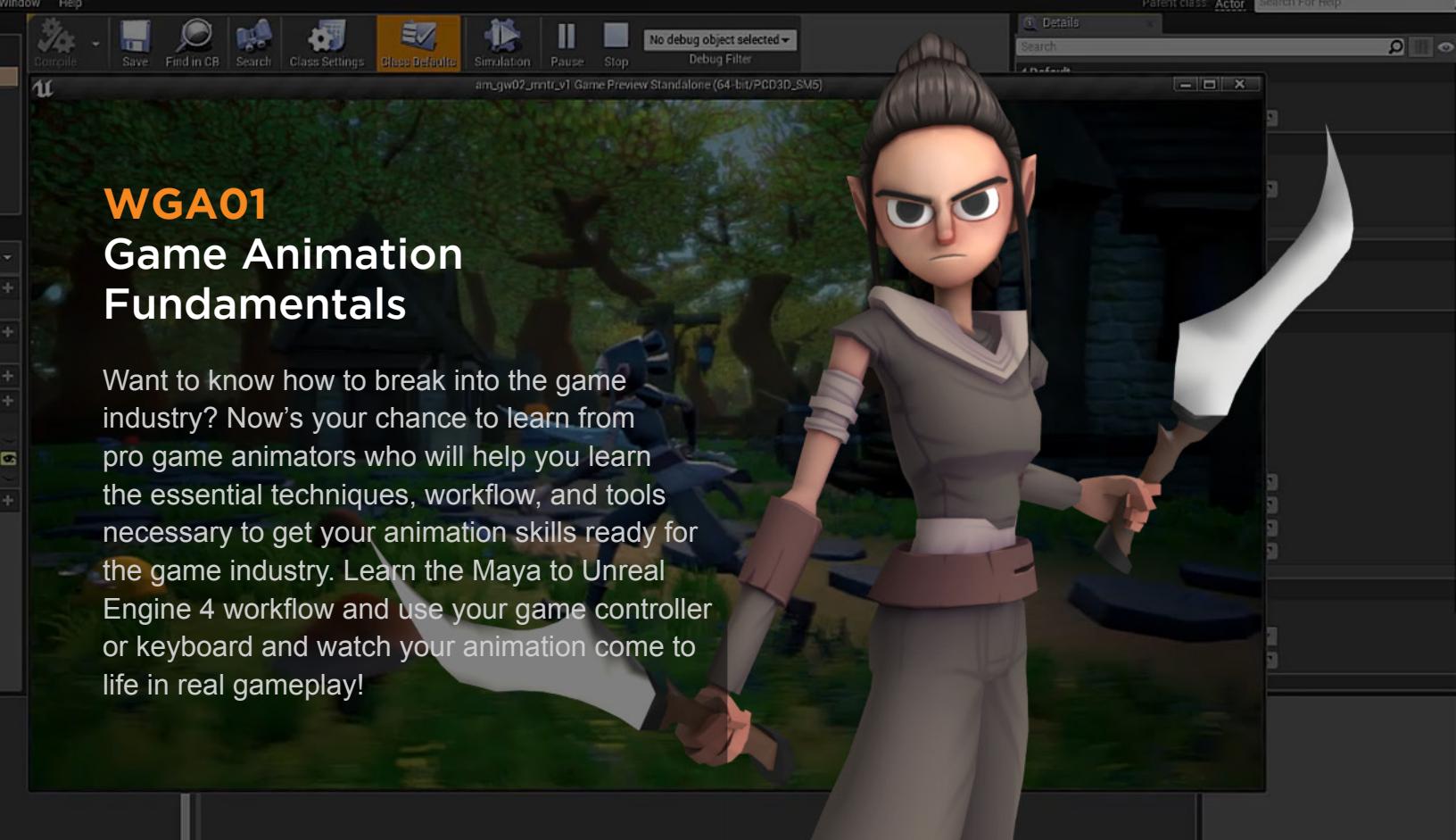


WSBOARD01

Storyboarding Fundamentals

Round out your animation skills by learning the foundation for staging, clarity, and emotion for visual storytelling! Learn why "Story is King" in Storyboarding Fundamentals with Mike Kunkel, who has pitched stories for Walt Disney Studios and Nickelodeon. Create your own simple short story and board it to completion.





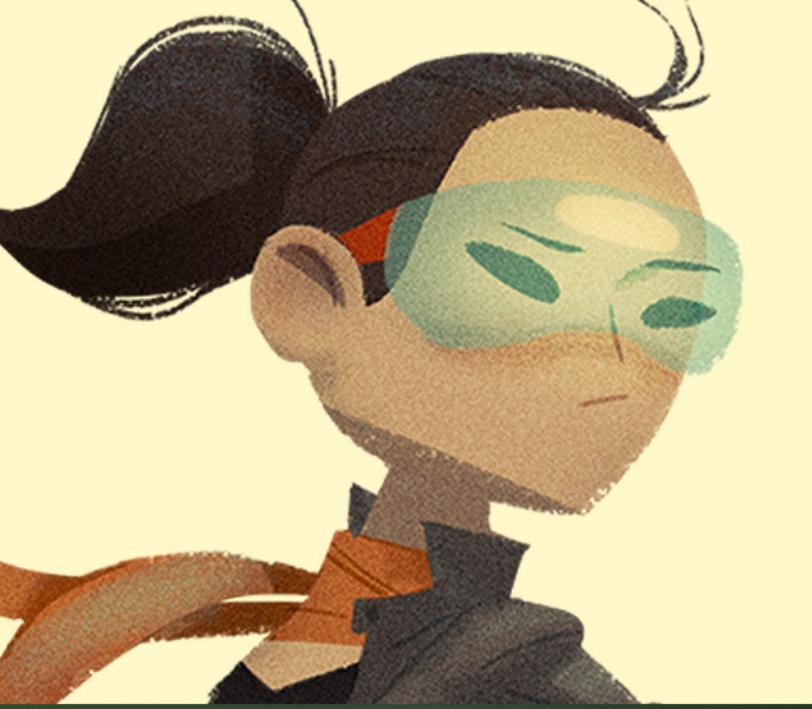
WGA01 Game Animation Fundamentals

Want to know how to break into the game industry? Now's your chance to learn from pro game animators who will help you learn the essential techniques, workflow, and tools necessary to get your animation skills ready for the game industry. Learn the Maya to Unreal Engine 4 workflow and use your game controller or keyboard and watch your animation come to life in real gameplay!



WGA02 Game Animation Combat Attacks

Animate and watch your gameplay come to life! Tailored for animators with an understanding of body mechanics, Game Animation: Combat Attacks gives you the opportunity to work with pro game animators. You'll learn the unique techniques and processes required in the gaming industry and use the Maya to Unreal Engine 4 workflow to animate two characters within a pre-made game level. Get ready for battle!



WVISDEVO1 **Visual Development:** **Principles of Design**

Vis Dev Artists—also called Concept Artists—determine the tone and mood for all the characters and environments in a film, TV show, or game. Visual Development Artists have a huge impact across the entire entertainment industry, from animation, to live-action films, to video games, and beyond! In this workshop you'll get started with the basics.

WDPAINT01 **Introduction to** **Digital Painting**

The character, creature, environment, and background designs that determine the look and feel of your favorite movies, TV shows, and games all started with a painting! Learn the basics of what makes a successful painting and how to apply these skills to your own career path. Storytelling is essential in any visual medium, and you'll learn to use your digital paint brush to share your own characters and stories.



WPREVIS01 **Previsualizaton Basics** **for Animators**

Previs Artist starts with rough building blocks—just the storyboards or script—which they interpret into a 3D space. In this workshop, you'll learn how animation and camera work are used to help take a project all the way from script to screen! You'll also end up with 15–30 seconds of animation for your demo reel.



Your Destiny.

Character Animation Courses

Start your epic animation journey with Character Animation Courses and learn from the pros at Pixar, DreamWorks Animation, and Industrial Light & Magic.

[Apply Now!](#)

Workshops and Creatures

Focus or round out your animation knowledge and learn new skills in less time with our 6-week workshops.

[Learn More](#)