

ACTING FOR ANIMATION

by Pete Paquette

Pantomime:

- **Animate the subtext.**
 - If your better half says something like "I was thinking we could get out to the beach this weekend." You would actually animate to "Don't make any f#@ing plans, a-hole."
 - Consider a routine trip to a therapist. He gets paid to sit there and listen to you rant while occasionally jotting in his notebook. What is he writing?? Not at all what you're saying. He's writing the subtext because what you're saying about Mom or Dad on the surface is more than likely not what you truly mean.

- **If you feel like your first idea is the best idea, you're dead wrong.**
 - When analyzing dialogue, you should NEVER choose the first acting choice that comes to mind. This is usually the choice you've seen associated with your situation most often. Think of the subtext. Study live-action films with situations similar to the one you're facing and brainstorm ideas with your co-workers if you find yourself lost.

- **Avoid "canned" poses during dialogue.**
 - These are poses that literally interpret the dialogue being said in a scene. This leads to an overly "stagey" and unnatural feel to your animation.
 - STAY AWAY from these. Or run the risk of your animation looking like this SNL skit: <http://www.kewego.com/video/iLyROoaftuEi.html>



- About 12 years ago I was an intern doing exactly this. See the shot "wishesToComeTrue" to see what I'm talking about.
 - N:\2KGBOS\Users\ppaquette\wishesToComeTrue.mov



- **DO NOT over-animate.**

- Usually you will only change emotion once or twice during a shot or sequence (depending on length). Any more and you run the risk of the character feeling mentally unstable.

- **When in doubt, act it out.**

- If something seems off with your animation, turn on your speakers, get up and act it out yourself to the dialogue. Act it out EXACTLY as you have animated it. If it feels unnatural, then your animation is wrong.

- **"Presenting" is amateur.**

- In all the minutes of animation I have completed, I have maybe used the "presenting" gesture *maybe* once (probably because I was directed to).

- See another one of my internship shots "Do You Want To Fly" to help illustrate the point.

- N:\2KGBOS\Users\ppaquette\doYouWantToFly.mov



- If you find yourself using this gesture at all, I can almost guarantee there are better acting choices out there. These instances should be used for isolated incidents only.

- **Save facial animation for the end.**

- The audience should be able to read emotion without help from face.
- The face should be considered as icing on the cake. If the acting beats aren't working with no facial animation, it's like trying to build a house on a broken foundation.

Animating The Face:

- **Asymmetry**

- Use the concept of compression vs. pull (squash vs. stretch) when designing your facial poses. Think of the classic flour sack exercise. This should be applied judiciously when animating "realistic".



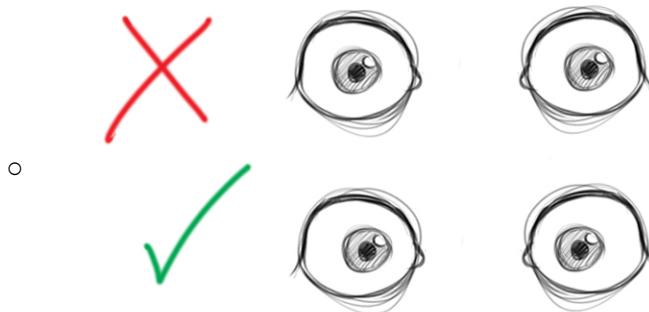
- Facial expressions are always stronger in $\frac{3}{4}$ view. So cheat it slightly if you have to.

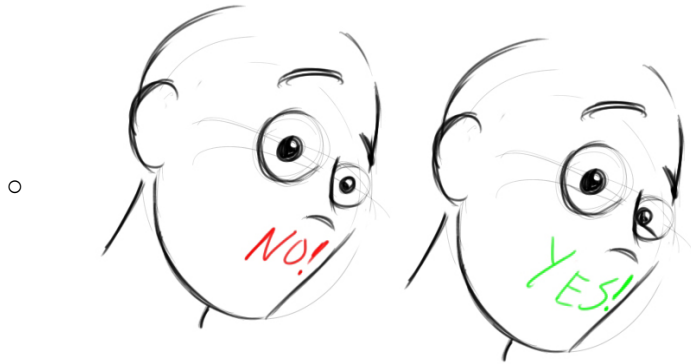
- **The Eyes**

- Blinks should never be a mechanical matter of close, open, shut.
 - A blink should ease out, close, compress, relax closed, and ease into an open (generally 3,2,5)

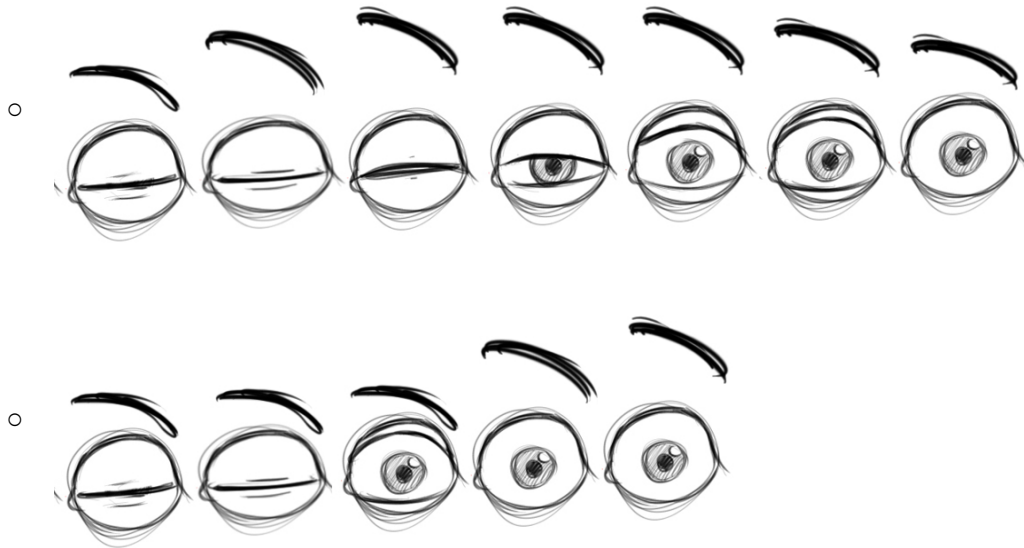


- Of course there are variations to this rule depending on the state of the character and even the sex.
 - To make a female character feel softer & sexier a blink is usually extended for an even longer period of time on the back end.
 - Use half-blinks if you find that your character needs to blink a lot over a short period of time.
- Pupils should be focused and grounded on the eyelids somewhere.





- Pupils tend to generally move in a tiny triangular pattern while scanning from the top of the triangle to the person's right, left and back again.
- Brows generally move in tandem with the eyelids (give or take a frame or two) but can sometimes lead the eyelids opening (sleepy) or they can be delayed (extreme surprise) depending on the situation.



- ****Do not over-animate the brows**** Like with pantomime, it can make your character look mentally unstable.

Lip-Synch:

- Someone once told me "Animating lip-synch properly has little to do with phonemes. The trick is getting the jaw to flap correctly, the rest is just fluff." It's 100% true.
- A general rule-of-thumb is to animate your mouth 2 frames early to create the illusion of crisp lip-synch.
- Please, for the love of God, OPEN YOUR MOUTH!!

- To many times I've seen characters appear to have their jaws wired shut while delivering dialogue.
- If you think your mouth is opened too far, open it further. You can always pull back.
- If the character is yelling, keep it open that far.
- **DO NOT** use every phoneme to articulate every syllable in your sound file. This will result in poppy lip-synch.
 - Along with paying close attention to your jaw flap, get a mirror and see how many phonemes are actually passed over from one word to the next. Nobody enunciates by exaggerating every single syllable that comes out of their mouth.
- When animating consonants (especially BMP and FV), be sure to use the same idea of close, compress, relax close with a blink to ensure it reads. These should never be only one frame.