

## □□□ T206 INTRODUCTION TO DESIGN AND PRODUCTION □□□

### +++++++T206 PITCH PROJECT (45 pts)+++++++

#### **Overview+**

The Pitch Project will be an ORIGINAL dramatic piece (you may do a piece for film, TV, video game, the web, etc.) comprised of the following...

#### **Five components+**

**Premise and Synopsis (10pts), Proposal (15pts), Storyboard or Flowchart (15pts), Verbal Pitch (5pts)**

You are both the creator and the producer. Remember, your goal is to both articulate your creative aspirations AND to propose an exciting piece that you want to get funded.

At the end you will pitch your project in discussion (5pts).

Be sure to label, name and organize all components of the project. Please see me if you have questions about the project.

#### **Premise+**

Exciting, one sentence description.

#### **Synopsis+**

One paragraph overview/description of the project.

#### **Proposal+**

1-2 pages, double-spaced. Including the following:

Header- Title, Producer, Client, Length, Format, Date

Short paragraph introduction- who, what, when, where, why and how?

More detailed paragraph summarizing- objective, target audience, production schedule, research findings (inspirations, similar projects), and other vital info., like key talent, biographical info. of key talent, basic budgetary needs, summary of style, special effects or other special needs.

Remember you are trying to sell this to FUNDERS, make it interesting and exciting. Use K&M 33-34 for help or ask me feedback.

#### **Storyboard (or flowchart)+**

Storyboard a short sequence from your piece, at least 15 frames. Focus on the visual storytelling and style- camera subject distance (shots), camera angle, camera or subject movement and visual composition. Remember you want to create continuity from shot to shot. We should be able to follow the visual story. See the Simpson's handout and the article attached below for help. Don't worry about using stick figures, you don't have to be an illustrator to clearly express your piece.

All of these items should help you organize and think through your production, in order to make the most creative and exciting piece and get it funded! Please see me if you have any questions.

## STORYBOARDS...

This article was printed from Animation World Magazine. Visit this article online at ([http://mag.awn.com/?article\\_no=2161](http://mag.awn.com/?article_no=2161))

### Storyboards: What it Takes — Part 1

What one needs to know to be a top-notch storyboard artist, based upon a course Larry Latham taught at Walt Disney TV Animation.

Just about everybody thinks they can do storyboards. I once had a secretary tell me that she, with no drawing or film experience, could do that!

As a producer and director with more than two decades of experience [hundreds of boards to his credit], I can tell you that storyboarding requires a unique set of skills and talent.

Board people gained more respect over the last five or 10 years, mostly from the increased awareness given to the use of storyboards in live action. But there are some big differences between the two mediums, the most obvious being that live action (unless it is heavily special effects laden) can be made without boards, whereas boards are absolutely essential to animation. Everyone knows this, yet training for storyboards is still hard to come by. I recently gave thought to the specialized knowledge board artists need to do their jobs. Here is what I think every good board artist needs to know.

### Drawing

I put this first because it's the most obvious, but it is a long way from the most important, a fact many terrific draftsmen fail to grasp. I have held many beautifully rendered boards in my hand that were, from a production standpoint, totally unusable, both dramatically and mechanically. And I have seen, in moments of deadline panic, fantastic, expressive, workable boards done with stick figures. As in animation, gesture and expression are far more important than beautiful technique. Board artists in television deal with short deadlines. Drawing quickly and efficiently are pluses, *but* none of it matters if the artist can't stage or edit or tell a story. A well-staged board with so-so drawing can still work. Terrific animation on a well-drawn but badly staged board is a waste of time and money.

The best way to improve your drawing is to draw... a lot! That's something you will be doing already if you are currently doing boards. Make that time spent at the drawing table do double duty, and use it to constantly improve your draftsmanship.

### Staging

If I had to pick the most important element of boarding, this would be it. Gags fail and dramas crumble because of inept staging. This is where the board person becomes the equivalent of a live-action or theatrical director. It involves the meaningful arrangement of people and objects in space, and their movement through that space in a clear manner that is always in the service of the story, as well as the

judicious use of resources. There's the old joke about the writer talking to the board artist, saying, "and when I say a thousand screaming Bedouins come riding up over the sand dunes, I mean three!"

Of course, computers have made scenes like this not only possible but commonplace in features, but in television, the writer still generally means three. *But* you may use clever staging and editing to give the impression of a thousand. (I am reminded of the Confederate general that kept marching his limited troops around in a circle so that they would pass the clearing that was visible to his Union counterpart in an uninterrupted line. This actually worked and the Union general withdrew. That Confederate general might have had a career in theater if he had pursued it.)

The staging of the scene will dictate or at least heavily influence your acting, composition, camera movement and editing. It will, in turn, be influenced by the needs of the story at that moment, as well as the storypoint's purpose in the overall structure.

The quick way to understanding staging, besides just studying tons of movies and cartoons, is to read deeply in the literature, most of which is theatrically oriented. Nonetheless, the principles are there. I recommend *Directing for the Stage* by Terry John Converse for a starter.

## **Film Continuity**

Basically, this could be called keeping things clear. You've no doubt seen the shows, live and animated, where the hat is on in the closeup and off in the longshot; or the lady is standing on her left leg in one shot and her right in another; or the characters are facing each other in the two-shot but seem to be looking in the same direction in the singles instead of one looking left and one looking right. Mistakes like this knock the viewer out of the story momentarily, which is at best annoying, and at worst confusing as hell.

New filmmaking techniques have allowed for much freer use of the rules, and shots that once would have been considered jumpcuts are now used as dramatic effects. Film continuity is definitely more critical in realistic cartoons. Most features and traditional TV shows, from *Finding Nemo* and *Spirit* to *Justice League* and *Kim Possible*, would look pretty awful if they weren't sticklers for continuity, whereas really out there shows like *Ren & Stimpy* often dispense with it entirely. *But* in these cases it is important to realize that the rules are being broken by people who know the rules in the first place.

Aside from just paying close attention to what you are drawing from panel to panel, making sure that poses and props hook-up (you'd be surprised how many continuity mistakes are committed at the board level), you also need to keep screen relationships clear. This can get tricky when characters move around a lot. It is even trickier when more than two characters are involved.

When a mistake is made, it is usually because the camera has crossed the line, meaning it has jumped over an imaginary line that runs between two characters, or even a character and an object. Even pros will often get confused as to whether they have crossed the line. The best and most detailed explanation of how *not* to cross the line that I have ever seen is a chapter in an out of print little paperback called *Directing Motion Pictures*, by Terrence St. John-Marner. Do yourself a favor and hunt down a copy.

## **Animation Mechanics**

In that antediluvian era where we all used cels, we were limited to only six levels, which included OLs and ULs along with character parts. Then it was essential for the board artist to understand layout and animation mechanics, at least if he didn't want angry layout artists and animators stalking him through the halls. Many great effects were the result of creative combinations of mechanical elements.

Now that level limitations are a thing of the past and, except for monetary and time constraints, almost any shot you can dream up is possible, it doesn't seem like this would be so critical an issue. I contend that it is. On some shows, with certain budgets, some things are still not possible and without a usable knowledge of mechanics you run the risk of having the shot misunderstood and executed poorly in some cheaply simulated way, or worse, having your shot discarded completely by someone further down the production line and broken up into simple, more manageable and possibly less interesting shots. You also limit your ability to tell the story in the most effective way.

Most of the animation books on the market deal with this subject, but even doing simple animations in Flash is great training.

## **Storyboards: What it Takes — Part 2**

### **Cinematography**

Camera movement, lighting and composition are essentially the paintbrushes used to create a shot, be it live or animated. They can be combined in near infinite ways and, along with editing techniques, they dictate the pace and mood of the story.

Camera movement must, in animation, be combined with knowledge of Animation Mechanics, of which there will be more in a moment. Even in television animation, simple pans and zooms can enliven an otherwise dreary cartoon though it is essential to know when and where to use them. Panning around for no real purpose other than to add movement is a waste of resources. And complicated camera moves can have two unwanted results: on the one hand, it can be so clever a move that it takes the viewer out of the story so that he is admiring the virtuosity of the shot. Great for a demo reel, not great for a story. (For a particularly fun examination [and execution] of this phenomenon, see the opening shot of Robert Altman's live-action film *The Player*.)

Complex shots are often costly in time and money, and they may add little or nothing to the final effect of the story. In *Pinocchio* there is a stunning truck-in down through the village to Geppeto's shop, made all the more incredible when you realize the limited technology they had to achieve this move. It cost beaucoup dollars, and when the film was finished, no one even noticed it. A simpler truck-in would've have gotten across the same effect. Walt swore that he would never do such a shot again. But the fact remains that a simple one-field pan can completely alter the emphasis of a composition, as well as the mood of the shot. Camera movement is one of the board person's most important tools. Lighting in traditional TV animation has always been somewhat limited, though there are many effective tricks one can use to evoke mood. But in features, and with the advent of 3D animation, lighting has become as important to animation as it is to live action. Though other artists do the actual lighting work, crucial decisions about lighting, especially mood lighting, are made at the storyboard stage. Initial lighting setups and movements of characters in and out of lights can add immensely to the overall effectiveness of a scene. Although it is slightly outdated and overly technical for animation, a good primer on lighting is *Painting With Light* by John Alton.

Composition, where you decide to put the camera, is one of the prime creative questions in filmmaking of any sort. It is, in live action, decided by the director and cinematographer. In animation, it falls into the domain of the board artist.

The basic answer, of course, lies in how the event is staged and what you want the audience to see at any given moment, but the aesthetic answer also considers how you want them to see it. Clarity is

usually a consideration, yet straight on shots can be so dull as to disengage the viewer from the story. But complex, poorly thought out compositions can have the same effect by obscuring essential detail. Composition is *always* used in the service of the story being told.

Composition must also be considered in relation to the length of the shot; in other words, it is closely tied to editing. If a shot is intended to be on the screen for only a brief time, say 12 frames, then the composition of the shot must be that which most quickly focuses the eye on the information to be conveyed. More subtle composition can be explored in a lengthier shot.

And finally, composition must be considered in relation to editing in another way, that is, the relation of the shot to the one preceding and the one following it. Cutting from one composition to an identical one can either be confusing OR it can tie the two scenes together dramatically. And a progression of compositions over several cuts can help propel the dramatic impact of the editing.

## **Editing**

Editing is an art form unto itself. There is something magical about taking two unrelated pieces of film and splicing them together to create a new idea. It can make or break a movie, and many a film has been saved by a creative editor. Without meaning to disparage animation editors, most of the functions performed by live-action editors are done in animation by the board artist. And though *Sinbad* had the luxury of shooting coverage (multiple takes of different angles of the same scene) that can be played with later in the editing room, it is a lot more likely that the rest of us will have to edit entirely in our heads.

It is an old saw that that each shot must be considered in the context of the shot that precedes and follows it. That's true, but simplistic. The progression of images over time has a cumulative effect on rhythm, clarity, mood, pace and impact. Too much reliance on, say, closeups, or pans, both diminish the dynamics of the story as well as the impact of the particular shot. In a live-action movie like John Ford's *The Searchers*, there are only two closeups in the entire film, and their impact, because of their rarity, is overwhelming. The 1951 *The Thing From Another World* has *no* closeups at all, and the lack of them creates an incredible and subtle tension. (Watch the scene where they examine the severed arm of the Thing for an outstanding example of how composition and camera movement, rather than a closeup can add impact to a scene.)

Anime relies on such dynamic editing for much of its force and interest, and amazingly, solid editing combined with strong composition and staging can mitigate the lack of actual animation in such cartoons. (Even our old pals *Ren & Stimpy* often get their laughs from powerfully composed still drawings put on the screen at just the right moment, as opposed to the more commonplace mélange of meaningless head bobbing, finger-wagging animation. But then is that discussion better opened under composition? Or drawing? Hmmmmm.) A hybrid type show like *Samurai Jack* has broken much new ground in editing, often going far beyond rote editing techniques learned from other animation or live action.

A dry but solid book on the subject is *Film Editing* by Karl Reisz.

## **Storyboards: What it Takes — Part 3**

### **Animation**

Did I really have to put this in here? Yep. I am always surprised at how some board artists haven't the least idea of how to use animation effectively. Every time I see a scene where someone says, "Let's go,

gang” and a group of characters turns and walks off stage I cringe. What a waste of pencil mileage, even in a feature.

This is not to say one should stay away from scenes that require lots of animation, but resources, even on a \$150 million dollar feature are always limited, and it is best to use those resources wisely. Anime circumvents problems like these with strong composition and editing, then wows us with the real deal when the climax comes. It will be to your benefit to take at least a beginning animation course, if for no other reason than to be better able to communicate your ideas to the timing director and animators who will ultimately get your section.

## **Acting**

Many artists are fairly adept at drawing emotions on faces, but few seem to know what to do with the body of the character. In dramatic cartoons, except in moments of rage or laughter, characters tend to stand around with hands on hips or arms folded, or just arms hanging at the side. And in both realistic and funny cartoons, there is a tendency to reuse the same old poses over and over again, ad nauseum. (There is one pose, the one with the character holding both arms and hands up in a kind of shrug or explanatory manner that I would like to make illegal because of its overuse.) Posing is really about acting with the body, and you can't do it if you don't have some experience moving your own in a dramatic way. One well posed drawing is a thousand times more effective than a bad pose with lots of animated head bobs and extraneous arm moves. Look at the best anime, or *Dexter's Laboratory* or, to show that it's not a new idea, the original *Jonny Quest*. Acting knowledge will also improve your staging and, believe it or not, your drawing ability.

Want to be a better board artist right away? Take an acting class. Not a voice over class, but a class where you actually have to physically move. And there's a lot to be learned about acting and silhouette from the silent comedians as well.

## **Gag Structure**

Do you know a person who can't tell a joke to save their life? That's someone who doesn't understand gag structure. Acceptable socially, it is death to the board artist. And “gag” doesn't have to mean a funny incident. If Batman has to save Superman by the use of some clever trick, that is also a “gag.” Like a musical piece, all gags can be broken down into set-up, development and payoff. Whether humorous or dramatic, gags most often seem to fail because they are not set up clearly or because they are rushed in execution. (O.K., it's true that some gags are just not funny or dramatically satisfying, but their structure remains the same.)

I think gag structure can only be learned by watching and analyzing lots of gags, and not just those from Warner Bros. cartoons. In fact a lot of *their* inspiration came from silent comedies, and the study of Chaplin, Keaton and Laurel and Hardy pays rich reward, as does the study of anime, and great action and suspense sequences from classic live action movies.

Remember though that the goal is *not* to repeat the past. What is funny or dramatic, like everything else, evolves over time but basic structure remains the same. There is much room for innovation... once you are thoroughly grounded in the basics.

## **Storytelling**

The purpose of the board is to tell, in the most expressive, entertaining way possible, the story that has

been decided upon. Although storytelling is a technique in itself, it is, let's face it, also the whole point of what you are doing in a board, whether you are doing *SpongeBob SquarePants* or the new Miyazaki movie or Scooby-Doo's latest adventure.

And how do you learn this skill? There are, of course, books on the subject. There are countless films to watch, books and screenplays to read. Ultimately, however, this, even more so than the other skills discussed, must be learned by doing. You can tell yourself stories, then analyze them. Write them out on paper, tell them to friends. Study cartoons and movies and books that you like and challenge yourself constantly. The broader your base of knowledge and experience with story, the more skilled you will be in using all the tools we have discussed in the service of telling the tale.

Though we have discussed all these aspects of boarding separately, they are obviously interdependent. The script is the foundation and the board is the blueprint from which an animated film is built. It is of course a mistake to think that the script and storyboard *are* the finished movie. There are many creative decisions that must be made by dozens if not hundreds of other artists on down the line. But, as the old saying goes, garbage in, garbage out.

There are lots of writing classes and seminars and books to help the writer master his (or her) craft, but there are few comprehensive storyboard classes. You're pretty much on your own. But the material *is* out there. Go get it!

*Larry Latham is designing and building theatrical sets and working on a young adult novel, as well as doing storyboards for Sherm, a new show due out next year. Latham has worked on a number of animated productions and taught a storyboard training course at Walt Disney TV Animation.*

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