

Id Animation & Arts

International Animation Day, 28th Oct-07

The Process of Animation Short film making

Why make a short film

Short films are often used as the starting place for new filmmakers. Why is this?

Filmmaking is a skill that can only be learned by practice. Diving into your first feature before learning your craft on shorts would be like driving your Dad's expensive sports car on the motorway before you'd had any lessons on quiet back-roads.

Advantages of shorts over features

- Lower cost
- Less time commitment
- Can take bigger risks
- Good practice for filmmaking skills (almost all directors have made short films at one time or another)
- You can basically do anything you want - there are no censorship restrictions for short films (since there's no real market for them), and you don't need to tell a story in under ten minutes. You can just have an insane barrage of jokes and gags if you wish.

Experience

It is tough to start out big, and if you do, you can fall flat on your face (and the creditors can become your worst enemies). But, it helps to just try to get out there and shoot something. Taking a look at the outcome of a short piece can teach you a lot about yourself and what you need to improve (and maybe whether you are in the right industry).

The Structure

Any animation studio, whatever the difference in the techniques they use, work in basically the same way, and have to work through the same processes to produce animated films.

Pre-Production-

People often think of filmmaking as everything that happens from production onward, but getting ready for that first day is incredibly important and a lot of work. This phase of prepping for the shoot is *pre-production* which usually referred to by the shorthand *prep*.

Pre-production is the first, very practical step in the filmmaking process.

It all starts with the generation of an idea and its development. A member of the studio will sponsor an idea for a film or a product, and will take it through a selection procedure. If it is adopted, (and that's a big if) this idea will start to be fleshed out giving a storyline and some scenes. These are further developed by producing storyboards, similar to strip comics, which start to capture the "look" and feel of the movie and many of the characters and scenes. This process finishes by making "reels", video mocks of the cartoon, to see if it stands by itself. If it doesn't flow or work, it's back to the drawing board.

Major Areas of Pre-Production

- Story Idea**
- Animation Script**
- Concept Art**
- Character Designs**
- Backgrounds**
- Story Boards**
- Animatics**

Production

- The art department then starts to work on characters, making 3D computer models and adding animation. They produce backgrounds, sets which have to be dressed and then scenes can be cut - characters animated - the Pixar studio likens this to using puppets, ready made and then movement is added. Maya is a common and popular tool in the animation industry.
- Voices are recorded, often with several different cuts and then a selection of the best fits will be made. Music and other sound effects are worked on.
- The scenes are polished - shading, lighting and illumination added to give a deep and realistic feel to the animation, and finally they are "rendered" - all the layers of technical information are put together to form the frames. Any remaining technical issues are resolved at this stage, and the final film is ready for release.

Major Areas of Production

- Modeling (Sets, Characters, Props, Environments etc)**
- Animation (Camera, props, characters etc)**
- Shading & Texturing**
- Lighting & Environment Development**
- Compositing**

Post-Production

• **Audio**

- Music/Film Scoring
- Sound Design

• **Visual: What is editing**

- How To Edit a Dramatic Scene
- Visual Effects
- Animation (for Visual Effects)
- Color Grading
- Digital Intermediate
- Subtitles
- Which format to finish on?

Some Important Concepts of Animation Film Making

The Animation Storyboard

The animation storyboard is the first sight of what a cartoon or piece of animation is going to look like. The animation storyboard looks like a series of strip comics, with individual drawings of storylines, scenes, characters and their emotions and other major parts of the movie. The drawings will reflect the early ideas of what characters will look like, what the backgrounds and scenery will be some idea of dialogue, emotions, and a general feel of the animation process.



Storyboards are very important, as they form the basis of the work that is carried out on the movie, describing most of the major features as well as the plot and its development.

Animation storyboards are also the coordinating vehicle of the film, taking the place of the script, and allowing different teams of people to work on different aspects and scenes in the movie. A studio like Pixar will have thousands of storyboard frames like the one shown here.

The finished movie may not always conform to all aspects of the storyboard, but they will document many of the early developments in the movie. They are often the first step of the animation process, as they show the first views - albeit static - of the animation process.