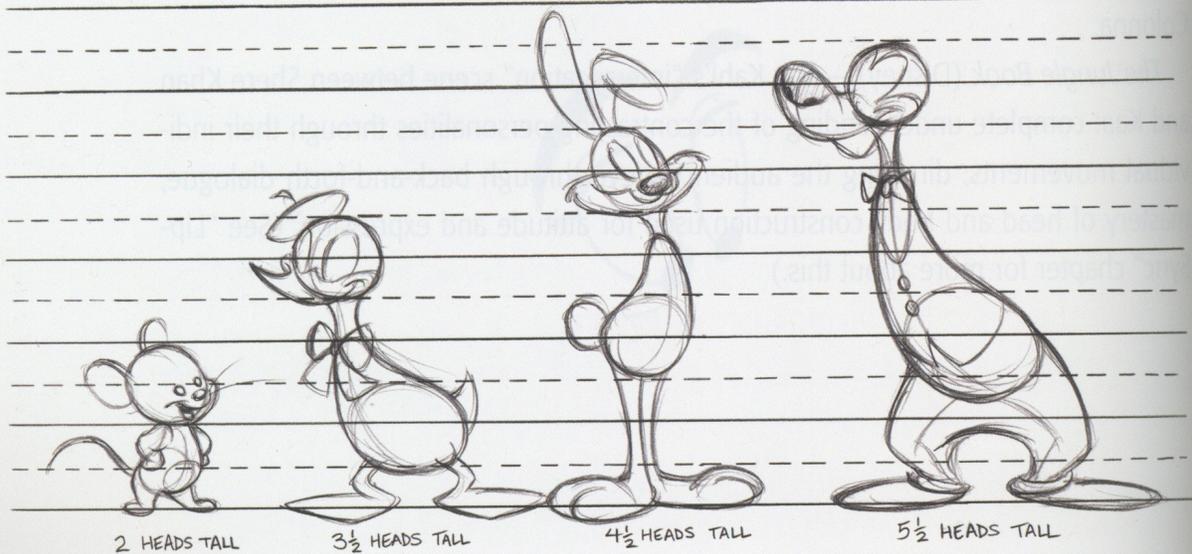


Character Construction and Design

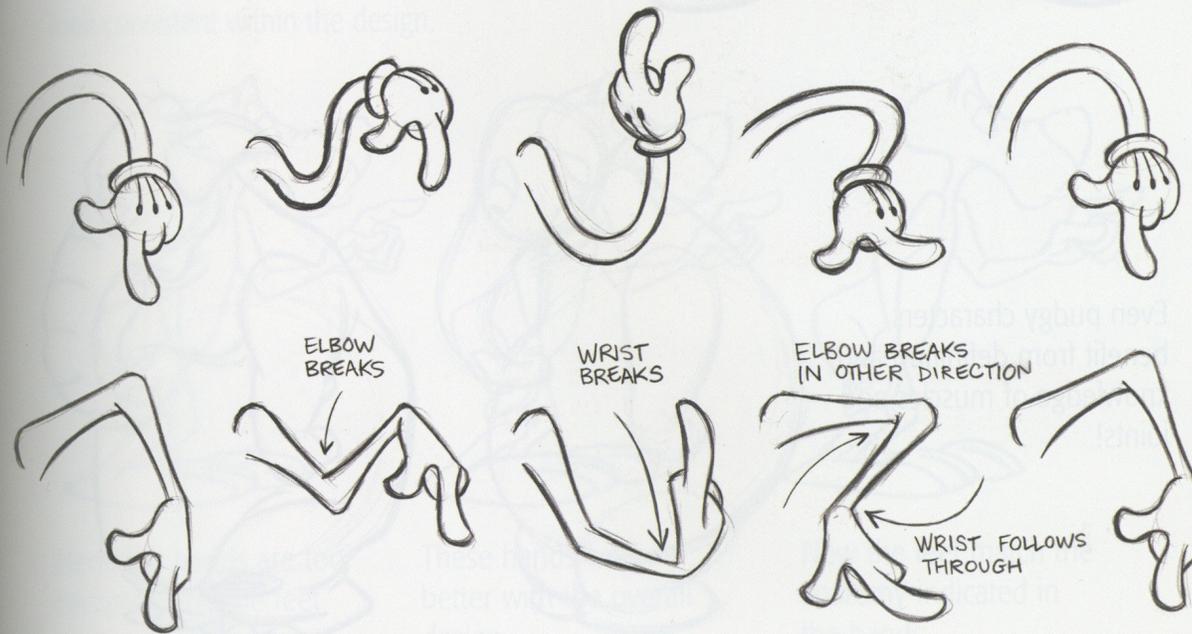
Most “traditional” cartoon-character construction is based on circles and pear-shapes, as these tend to be easier to turn around and more fluid to animate. It doesn’t necessarily mean that all shapes slosh around without any anatomy underneath, however, unless you’re working for Fleischer’s in the 1930’s. “Cute” characters tend to have larger heads in relation to the rest of their bodies.



Posture is a good place to start for good acting and poses. It's good to start with a simple line of action that establishes attitude, on which you can build the character (not unlike a wire armature for a clay sculpture).



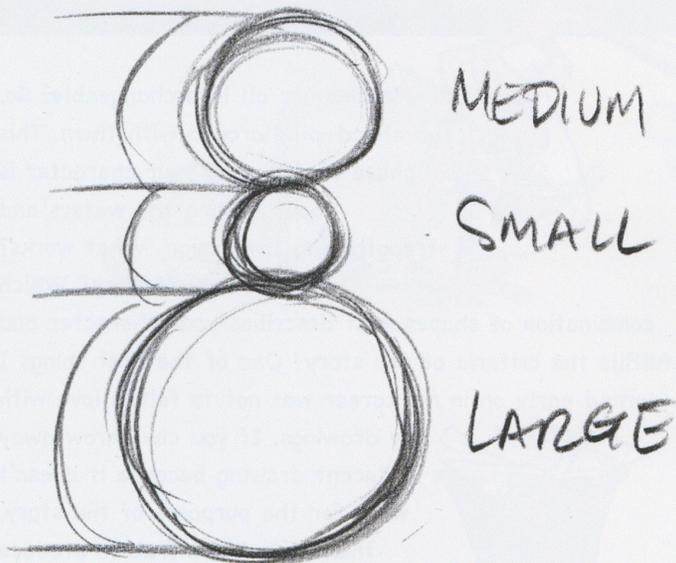
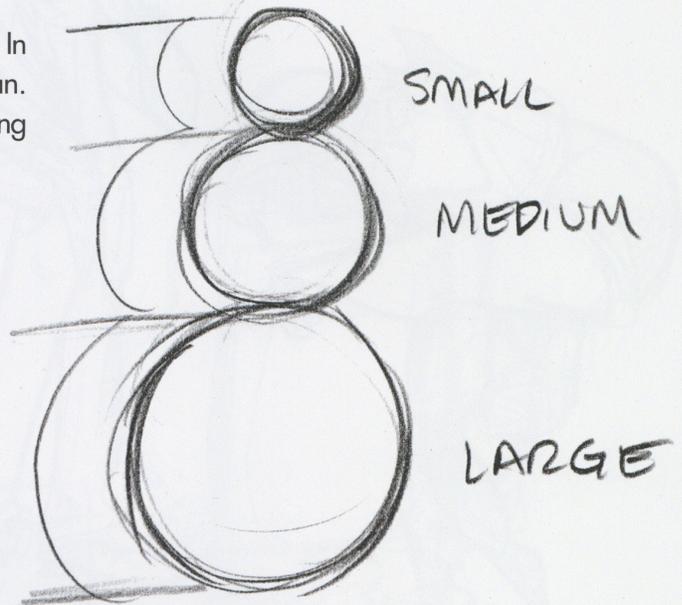
Although these simple shapes can be animated fluidly, be aware of at least a simple skeletal structure underneath on which the fleshy bits hang. Some animators (Art Babbitt, for example) would even have it that your character should work in this skeletal form without embellishment, if your animation is "correct," the theory being that the animation should work primarily due to "successive breaking of joints" for its fluidity, and not through Olive Oyl rubberizing.



SIZE

Interesting size relationships between shapes make for a stronger design with more visual interest.

Think of small, medium, and large shapes. In fact, think of an ordinary snowman. Traditionally, a snowman is created by stacking large, medium, and small circles like this:

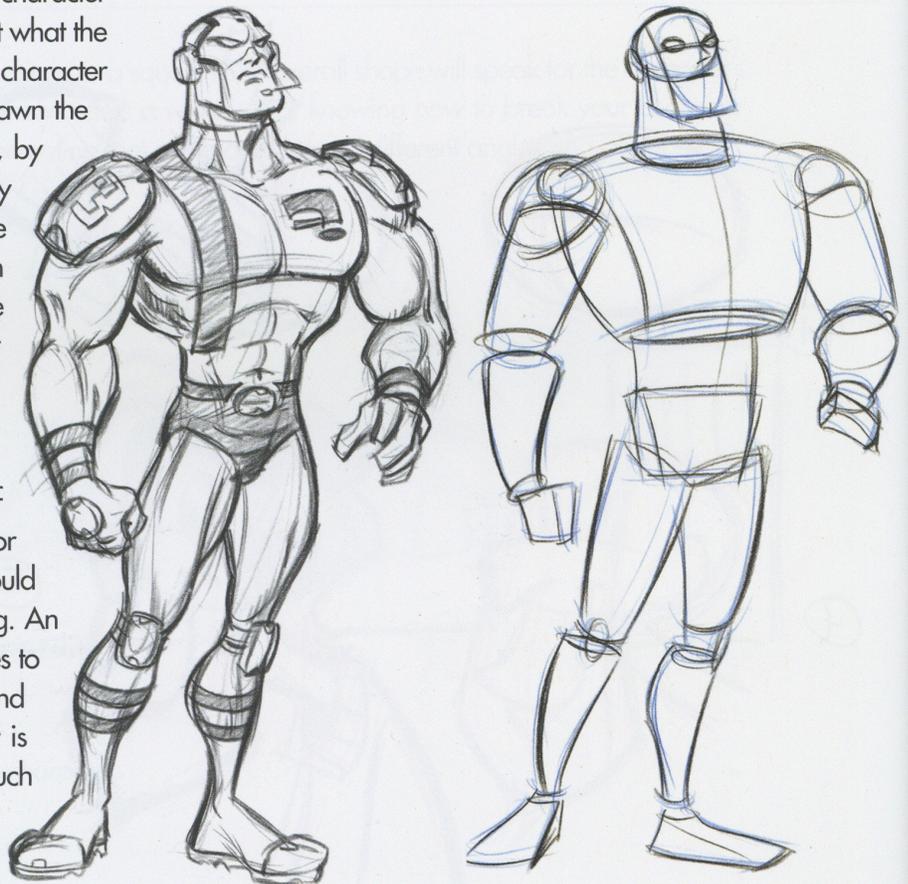


The arrangement above is dull and predictable. By varying the size of these same shapes, we can create a look that is more interesting. While this stacking wouldn't work too well for an actual snowman, it does make for a stronger design, because the size relationships are more dynamic.

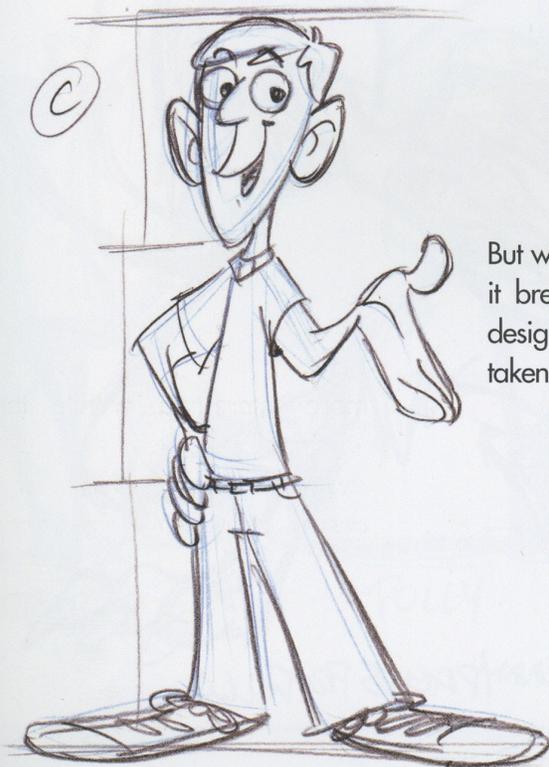
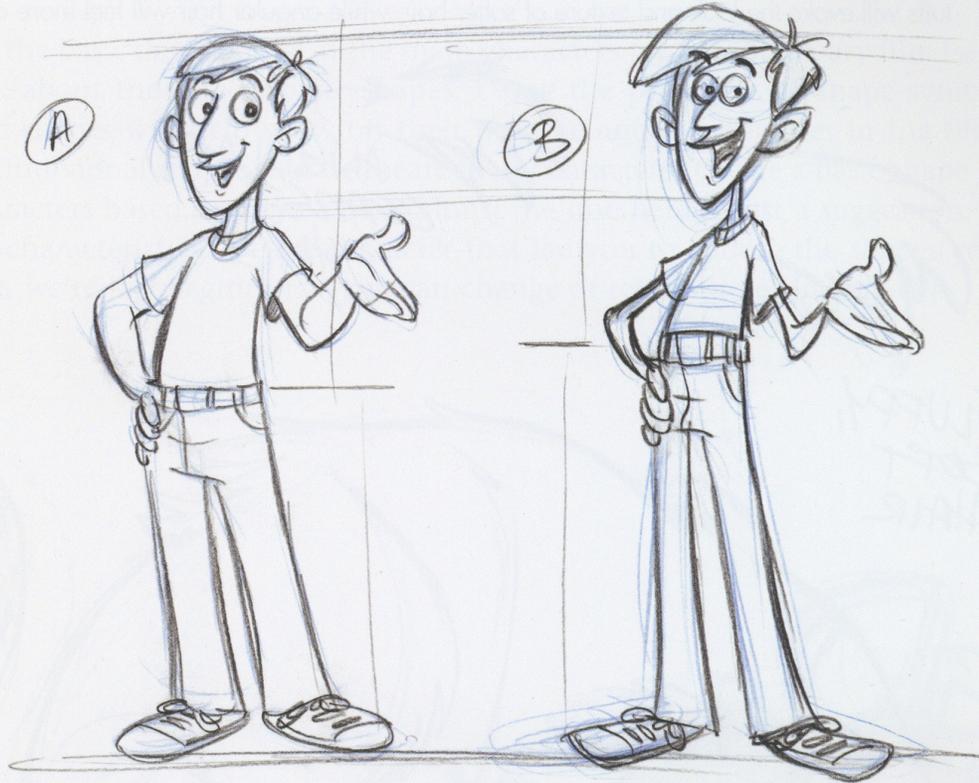
Here is a wide variety of different characters. All are comprised only of basic shapes or variations of them. Even with no facial details, expressions, clothing, or posing, you can start to see some personality coming through. This is why the “almighty shape” is the first thing you need to think of when starting your character design. Remember, too, that each of these designs can be rearranged into an endless number of different character designs.



You should be able to break down any character into simple shapes. If you can figure out what the shapes are, then you can draw any character from any angle, even if you haven't drawn the character from that angle before! This, by the way, is the basic idea behind any animation drawing. Because of the great number of drawings involved in animation, an animator needs to be able to sketch out even the most complex characters quickly. The animator then checks to see if a particular movement the animated character will be making works. If everything looks good, then the animator adds the details. This philosophy should apply to all forms of character drawing. An artist should be able to use basic shapes to sketch quickly, evaluate the outcome, and be willing to abandon a drawing that is not working before committing too much time to details and rendering.



The size-relationship principle illustrated by the snowman applies to many different parts of a character's design. Look at these two drawings. The design on the left uses fairly bland and even-sized relationships; the one on the right has been pushed to maximize the shape-size relationships. This makes for a more dynamic character design.



But watch out! A design can be pushed so far that it breaks! Here's a drawing that uses the same design, but the size relationships in it have been taken too far. It's just plain odd at this point.

CIRCLES evoke appealing, good characters and are typically used to connote cute, cuddly, friendly types. Consider Santa Claus, or endearing, fuzzy animals. Attractive women are often described with a lot of curves and circles, and drawings of babies usually rely heavily on circular shapes as their visual cues.

