



# HOW TO DRAW CHARACTERS

BY MITCH LEEUWE

YOU'LL LEARN:  
ALL THE SKILLS  
YOU NEED TO DRAW  
HUMAN CHARACTERS



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# HOW TO DRAW CHARACTERS

BY MITCH LEEUWE



HI THERE!

Let me introduce myself. I'm Mitch Leeuwe and am an illustrator from the Netherlands. I always drew a lot as a kid. I even had the childhood dream to become an animator at Disney. During my teenage years, I lost that dream. Luckily, I slowly started drawing more and more. When I was 19, I began to do some freelance work as a graphic designer, which made me consider picking up drawing again. I attended several drawing programs at schools but I learned most from online resources. Now, I'm a freelance artist working on visual development. This means I design characters, props and backgrounds for games, animation and toys. However, you probably know me from my Instagram where I release tutorials and more. My goal is to create a place where people can learn the things I wanted to learn when I started out.

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

In this book I show and explain what I know about character design. It's great to be able to design your own characters. This is something that is very powerful. Because you can create your own intellectual property. You can create your own characters for an animated movie, tv show, video game, children's book, commercial and so on. You can also start creating your own stories and create characters for it. I do think people often forget how powerful it is to be able to draw your own ideas on paper, don't underestimate that! I work as a freelance artist and character design is a big part of my job. I designed characters for toys and commercials and currently, I'm working on designs for a children's tv-show. This made me realize it's really useful for companies to have someone who can translate their ideas to characters on paper.

Everyone can learn how to draw characters. It's a misconception that drawing is mostly talent. Drawing

is for just a small part talent, but it's mostly hard work. When I was a kid I had to learn to draw and the only reason why I now can make a living as an artist is because I put in the hours. Learning to draw was hard because you need to find your own way. Although there is a lot of technique involved, you need to make a lot of choices yourself. Like what kind of style would you like to work in? What kind of artist would you like to become?

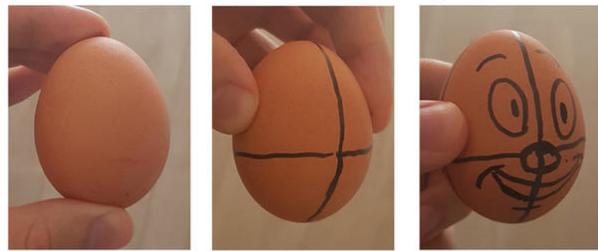
If you want to learn how to make character designs I would advise you to do the exercises in this book. You could start designing characters by copying the drawing steps I show you in this book. Once you are satisfied with those drawings, try drawing my characters from different angles and after you managed to do that you can start drawing your own characters.

Best, Mitch Leeuwe

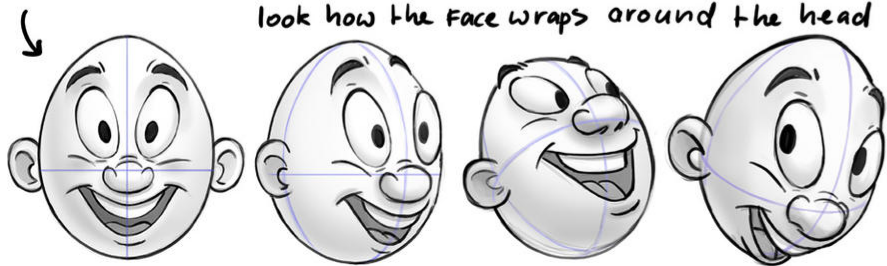
# FUNDAMENTALS

Construction of the head!  
using an egg!

1. Use AN EGG to DRAW ON
2. Draw Guidelines
3. Draw the Face on it



look how the Face wraps around the head

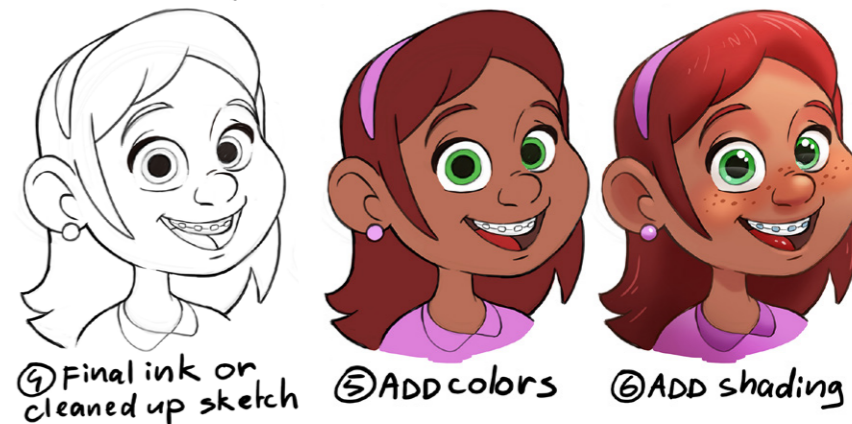
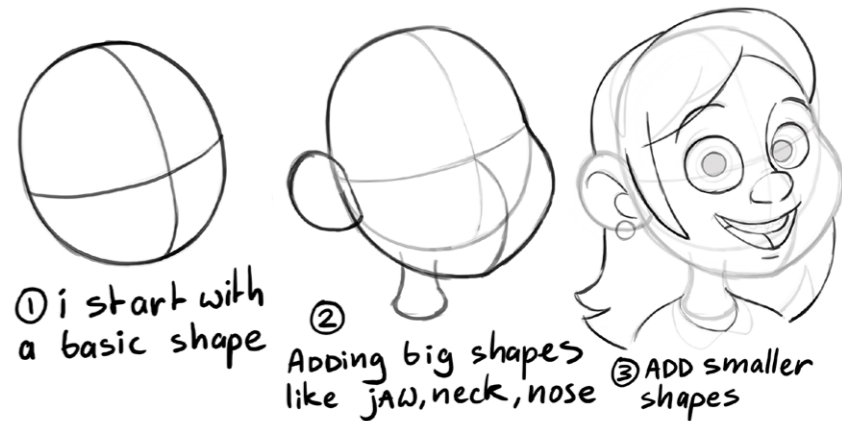


## CONSTRUCTION

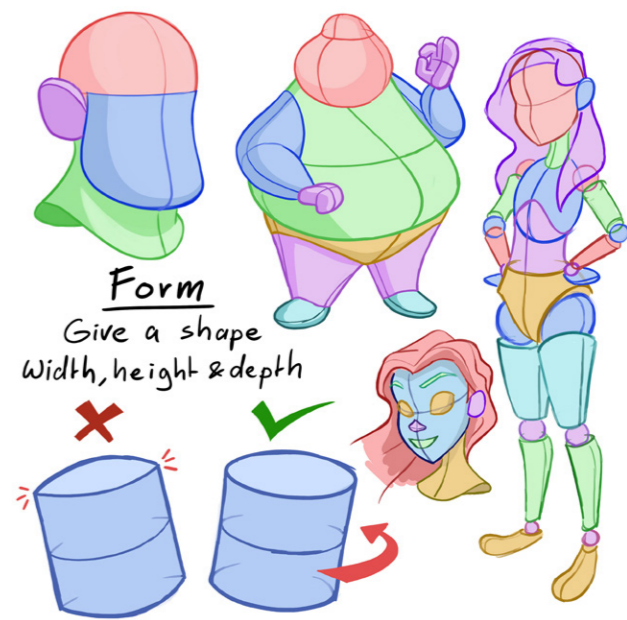
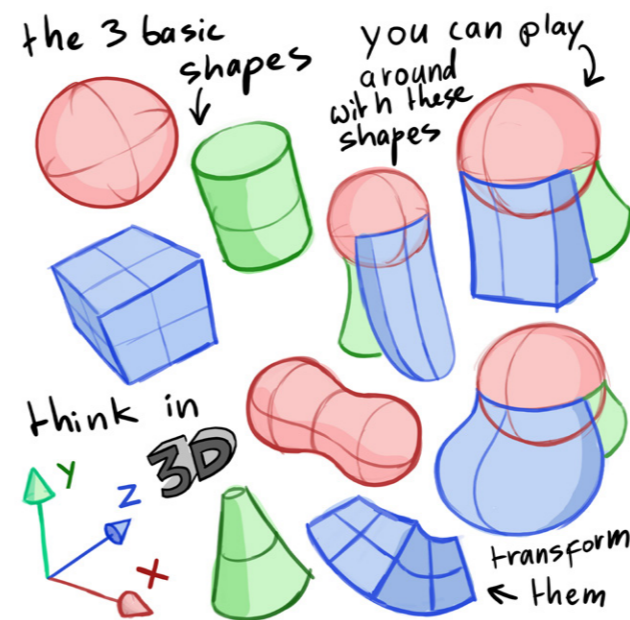
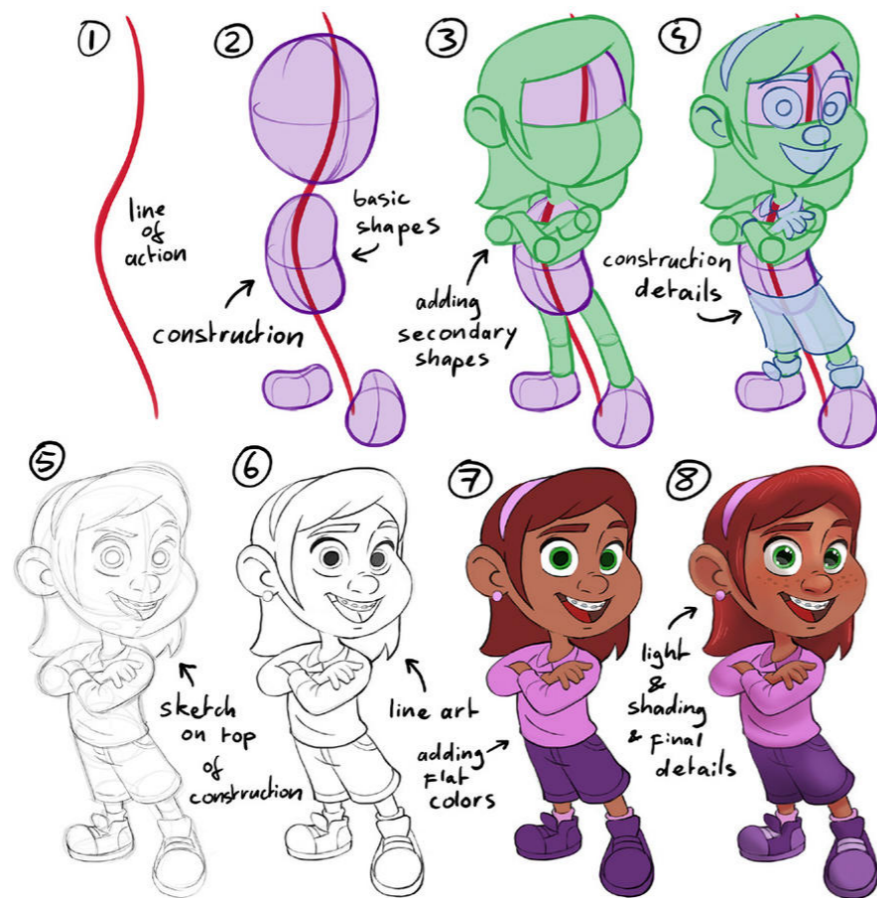
Construction is very important if you want to draw characters. By construction I mean how the character is built up from basic shapes. Basic shapes are a cube, a sphere and a cylinder. A great way to learn and practise this is to take a round object like an egg. Draw a face on it as I show in the image and look at it from different angles. See how the shapes distort from these different angles. In front view the eye looks different than in  $\frac{3}{4}$  perspective. Try it yourself by doing this exercise and draw this egg from different viewpoints. Once you get the hang

of it, you could repeat this exercise with a couple of toys and draw these from different angles. But try to keep in mind what these shapes look like in 3D.

When I draw characters, I always think in 3D and in terms of construction. In this image you can see the steps I take to draw a head. Try to draw this head and follow the steps I'm showing here. Try to notice you can draw basically everything you want, using basic shapes. When you are drawing the details on top of these shapes you let them follow the lines of these shapes. Think of it as a texture that follows the 3D shape, like with the egg.

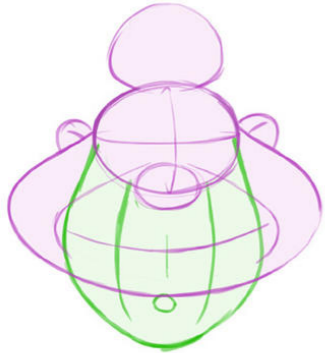


Here I'm showing the construction of a full-body girl. I'm also introducing the line of action here. The line of action is very important when drawing characters, I'll come back to this in a later chapter. But basically, it's a line that shows the action of the character. To this line you attach the shapes by following the flow of this line. This helps to make the character readable, clean and not stiff. In this example you can also see all the basic shapes I use to build this character. Once I have built this character I draw the details on top of it, and I think of it as a 3D object just like the egg.

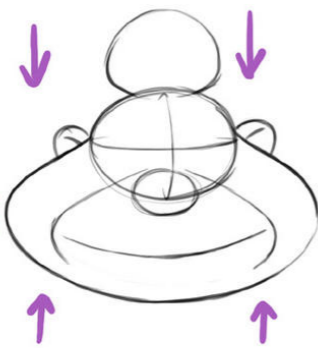


On this page I show the 3 basic shapes. The sphere, cube and cylinder. If you have trouble drawing the girl, you could practise drawing these shapes instead, it's a great exercise. Try to fill a whole page with these shapes. For practising purposes you can draw a long flowing line and draw these shapes as if they are following this line. This way you'll learn how to draw these objects from different angles. It's easy to understand but it takes practise to master. You can also combine and transform these basic shapes. But in the end, you can build anything you want with these shapes. Take a look at the characters examples that I've drawn using these shapes.

Squash & stretch



SQUASH



stretch



Relaxed



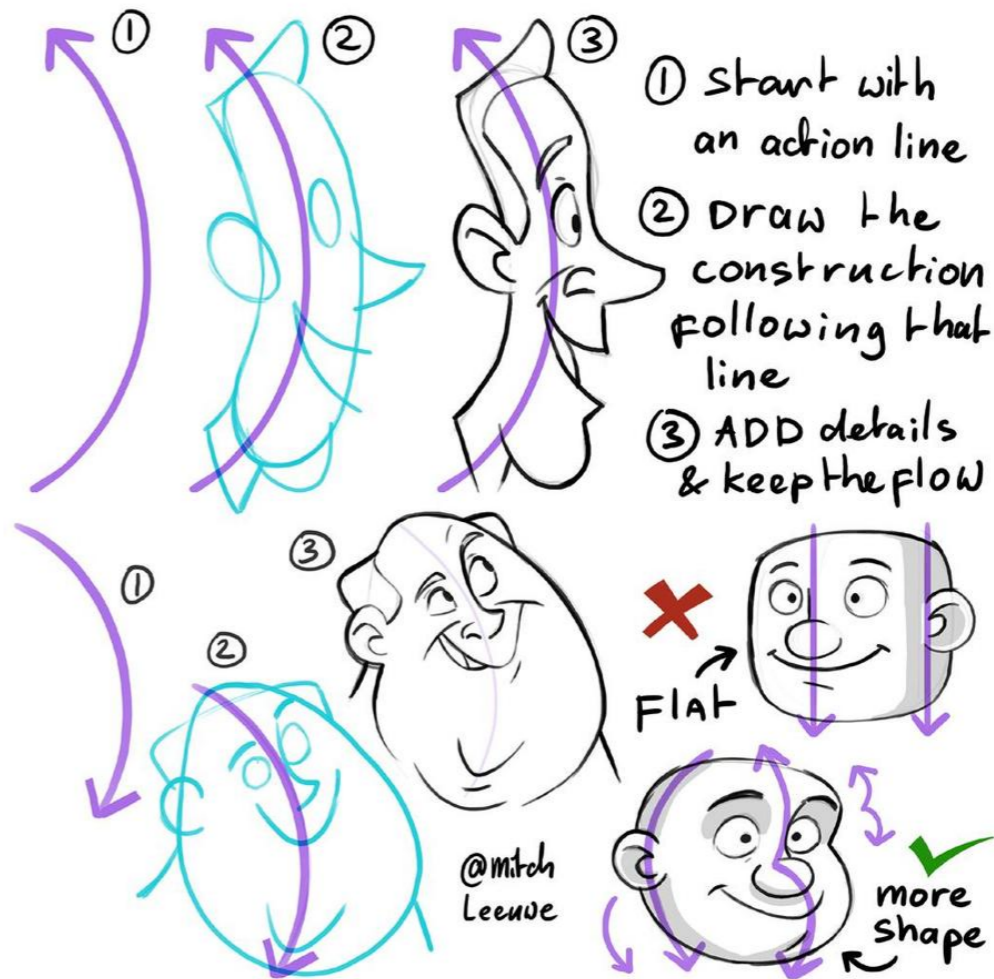
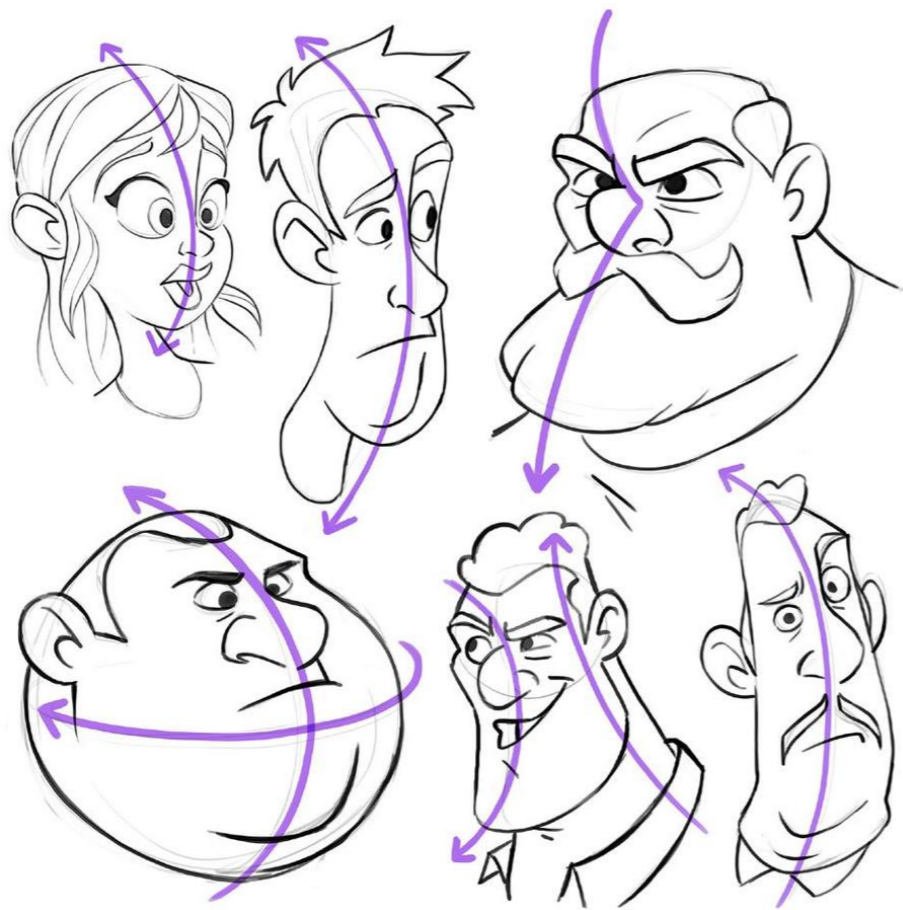
A body has hard and soft tissue. Bone is solid and hard, the flesh is flexible and soft. When drawing facial expressions, you can clearly see this. And soft tissue can be pulled or pushed. In animation this is called squash and stretch. When you are drawing a character it's important to keep this in mind



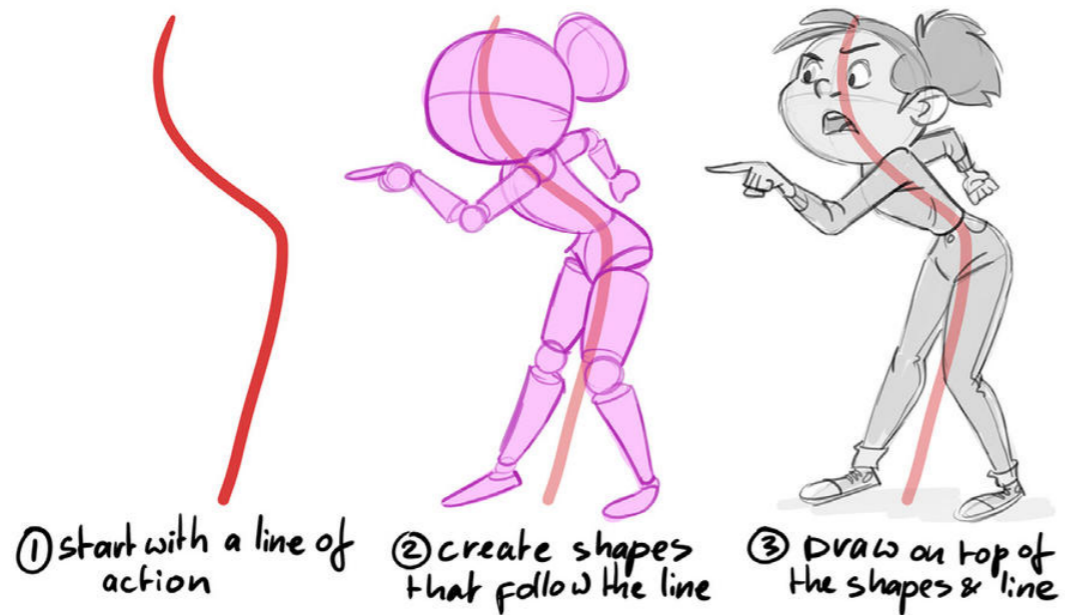
Another good exercise is to draw the construction of this icecream man's head. Notice how the soft tissue moves, squashing and stretching. Try drawing his head like I did in the example of the grandma on the

previous page. While practicing, try to see if you can exaggerate the squash and stretch effect even more. Try to experiment with how far you can go with this effect.

The head is usually not completely straight, it can have a direction and curve. Try to think of the forces that will determine what the head will look like. I do this by drawing arrows on top of the basic shapes that follow the general direction of the head. This helps to avoid drawing heads that are stiff and too straight. Also notice how soft and hard tissue follows these forces as well. You could practice by first drawing a few random arrows and draw heads following the direction of the arrow.

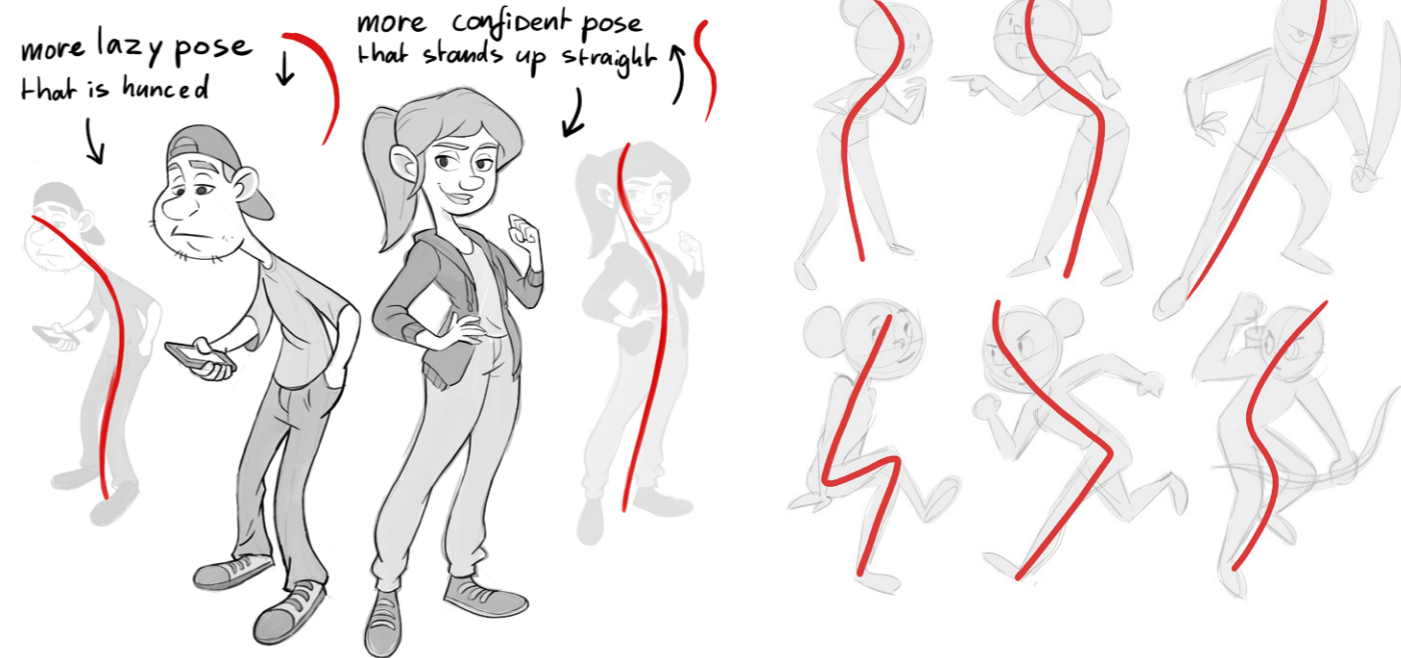


## LINE OF ACTION

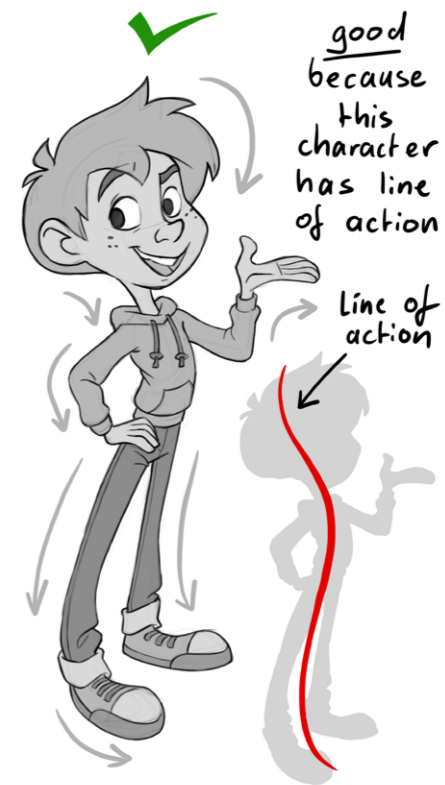
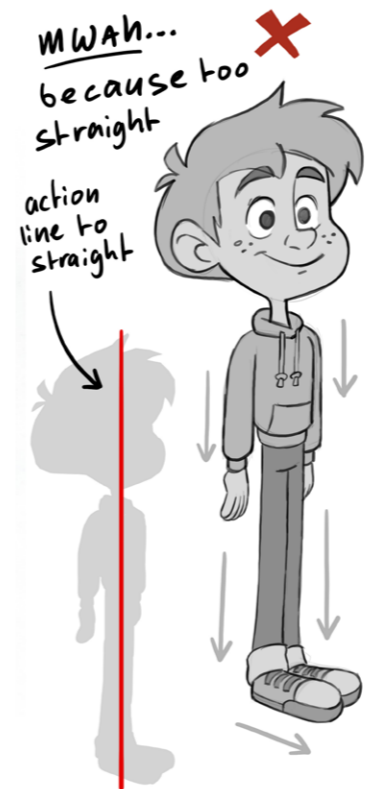
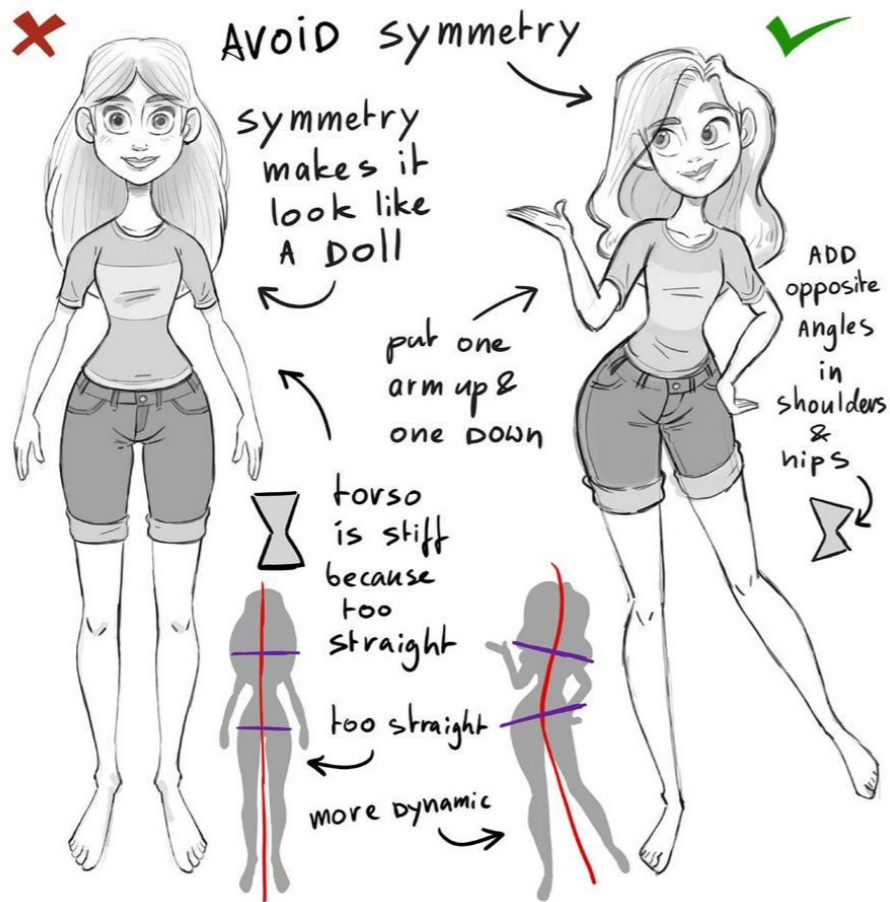


The line of action shows the main action of the character. When I start drawing a character I ask myself what is the story behind this pose. The story can be very basic like “this character is angry and points at the person she is angry at”, then I draw an action line that communicates that story. An action line doesn’t necessarily have to result an extreme pose, the pose can also be very subtle. Try drawing a few action lines and draw your characters on top of those. It’s important that you let the shapes follow this action line.

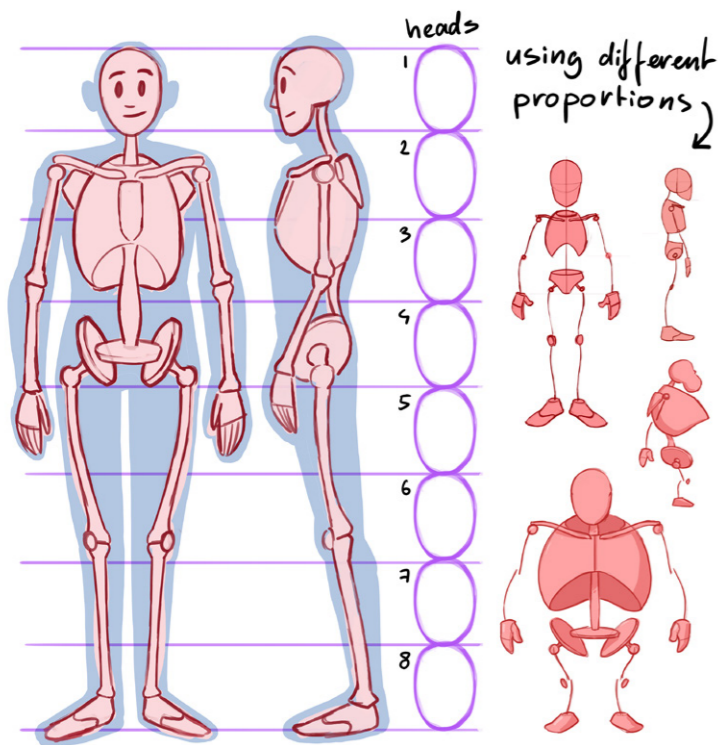
## using different postures for characters



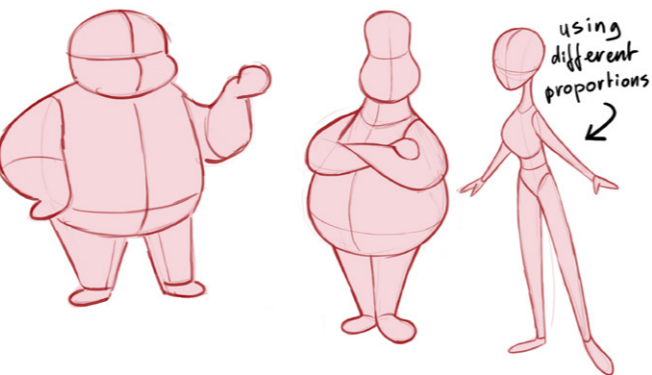
Avoid symmetry, even when you are drawing a frontal view. Using symmetry makes your characters look like dolls and very stiff. Using a simple action line can make all the difference. In some cases, clients will ask you to create a really straight pose, because it could help the 3D modeler that is going to model the character. But be careful that it doesn't get too stiff. Try drawing a really straight character and then draw the same character with a basic line of action. Do you see the difference?



This example shows that using a basic line of action adds character and personality. It gives your character attitude. When you draw a character, redraw it by pushing and exaggerating the pose.

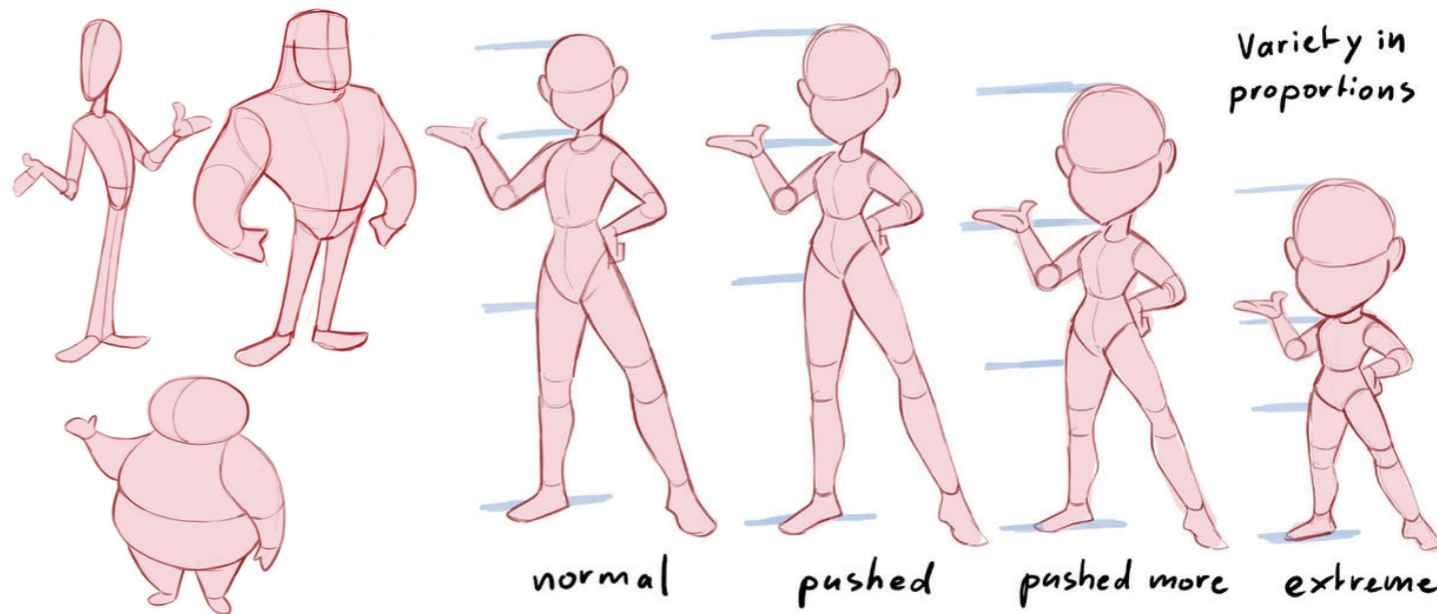


I start by drawing a straight vertical line. I divide it in 8 equal parts. Each part is one head high. Halfway, at the bottom of the fourth head, there's the groin area. By dividing, you can easily see where all body parts should be if you would use natural proportions.



## ANATOMY

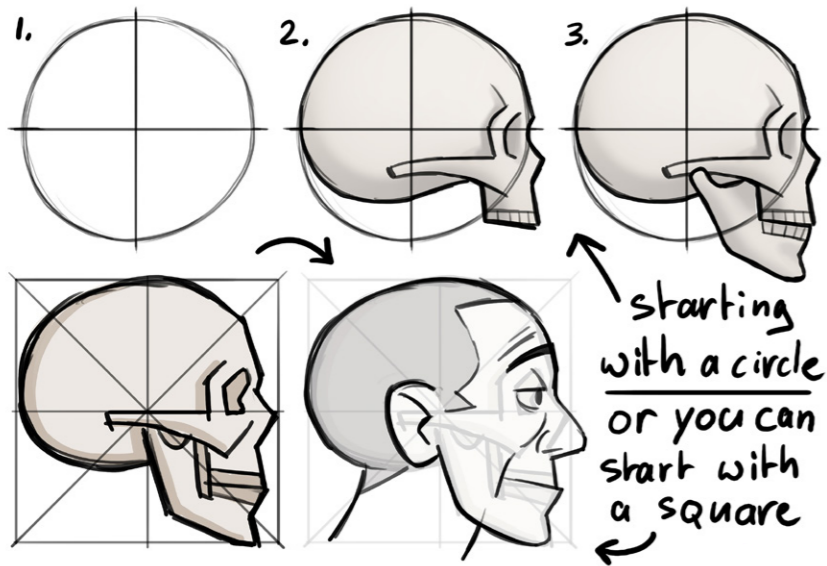
When I draw characters, I use a basic anatomy of a human skeleton. On top of this skeleton I often only add some basic shapes. It isn't always necessary to draw detailed muscles. Especially when the style is simple, when you see a character from a distance or when it's wearing clothes.



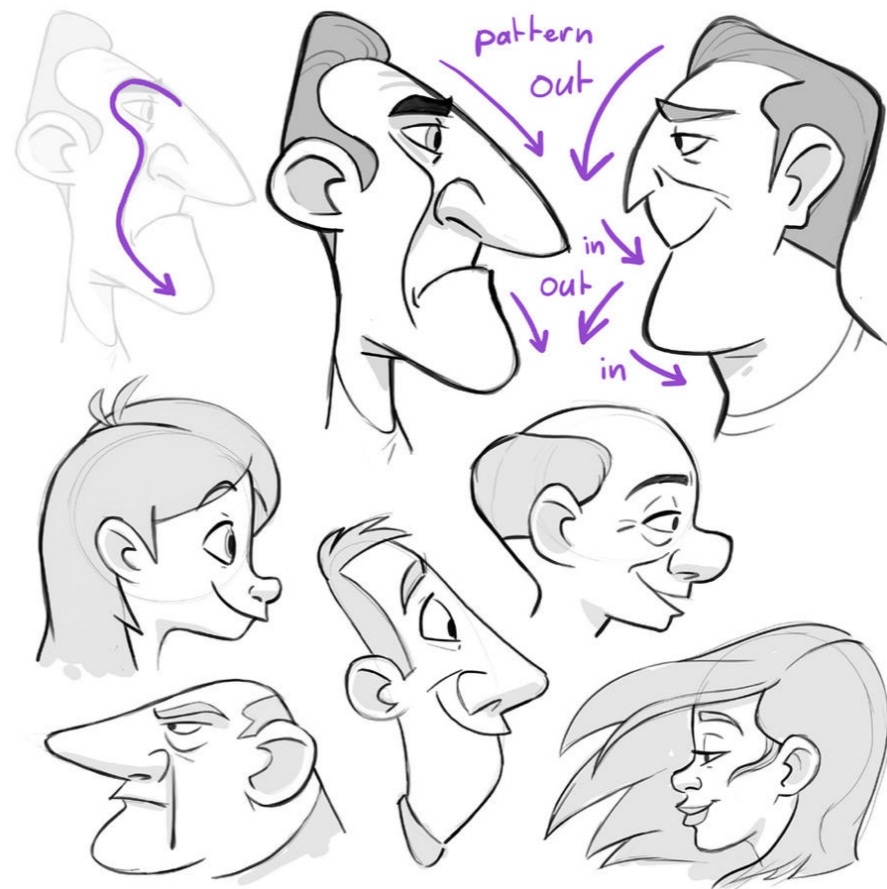
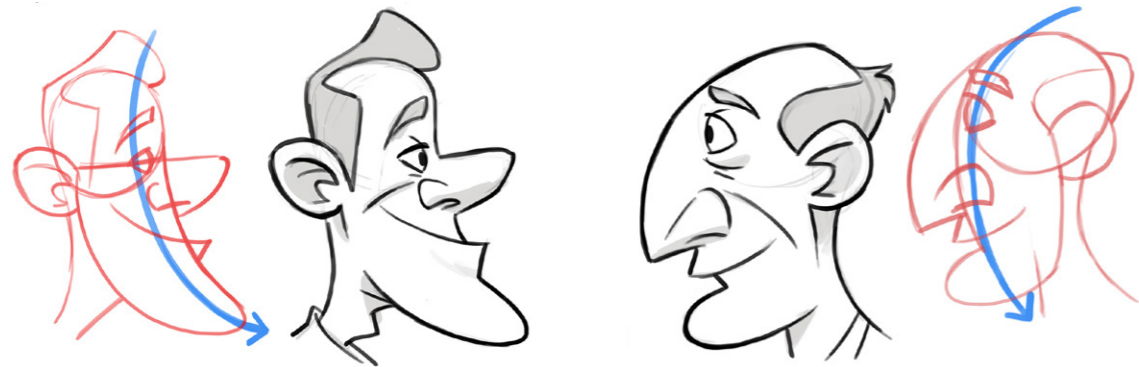
When drawing cartoon characters, I play around with these proportions. Most of the time I don't even use the '8 heads concept'. But still, it's good to be aware of this so you can refer to it when you need it.

Cartoon characters are usually still based on real life so it's good to know where they originate from. Try drawing a character with natural proportions and draw a few more versions in which you push

proportions. What I mean by that is if you start with a character that has even proportions (all the body parts are almost the same size), start increasing contrasts.



Having a basic understanding of the skeleton helps creating strong characters. Like I'm showing here with a side profile, you can see part of the skull shape. If you touch your head you can easily feel where the bone parts are and which parts are flesh. Try drawing a skull and draw a head on top of it

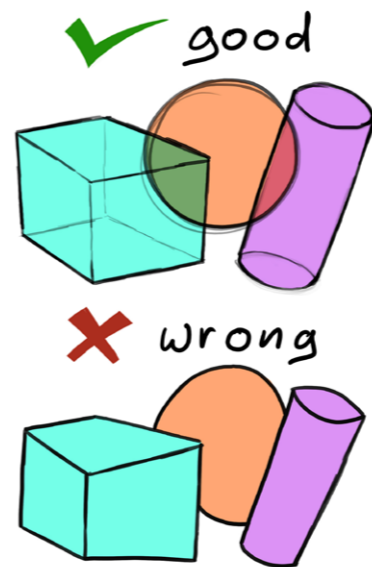
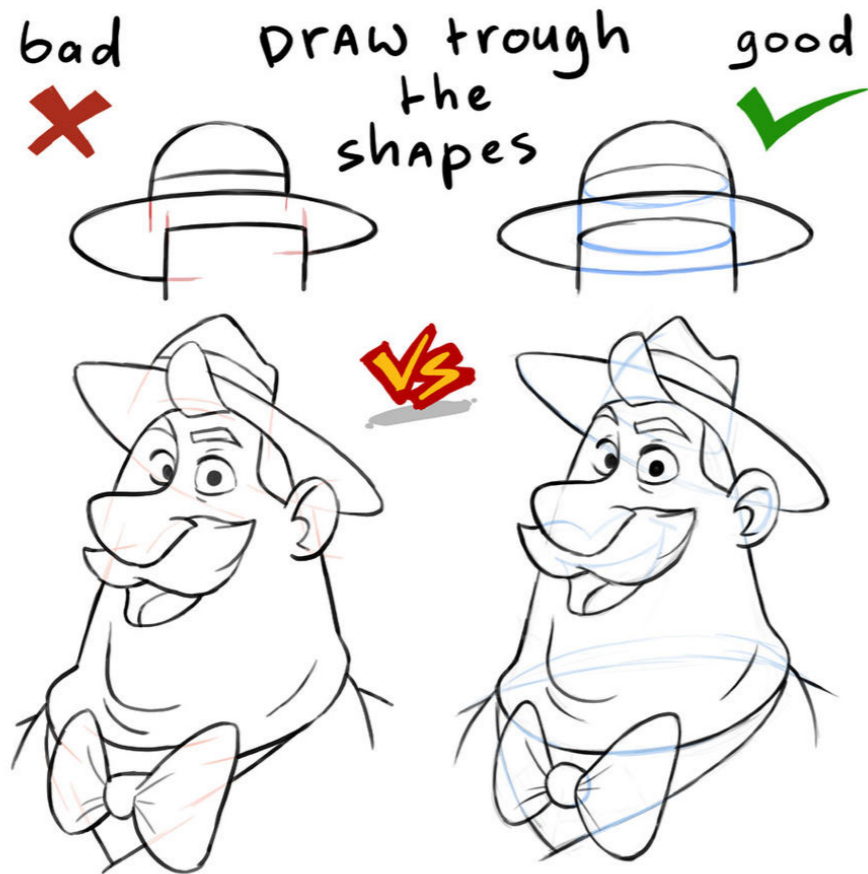


One trick when drawing the side profile of the head is to make use of a strong in and out movement. If you start at the top, the forehead moves out, the part with the eyebrow goes in and your nose moves outwards etc. Having a good and interesting balance here makes the head more interesting to read. Of course, you can play around with this.

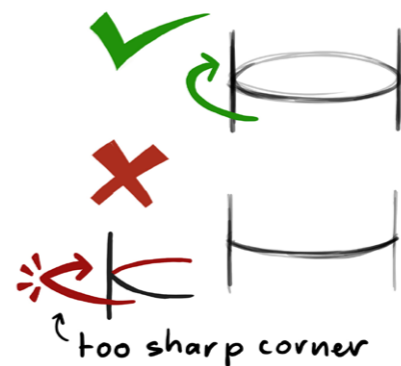
# SHAPES

When drawing your characters, it's important to draw full shapes. What I mean by that is that if you are drawing a character, you're drawing a lot of circles and other shapes, when drawing a shape don't just draw the visible part but also the part that you won't see in the final image.

This is important because if you don't do that, strange things might happen in your line work, like lines that don't match up or circles that don't look like circles.

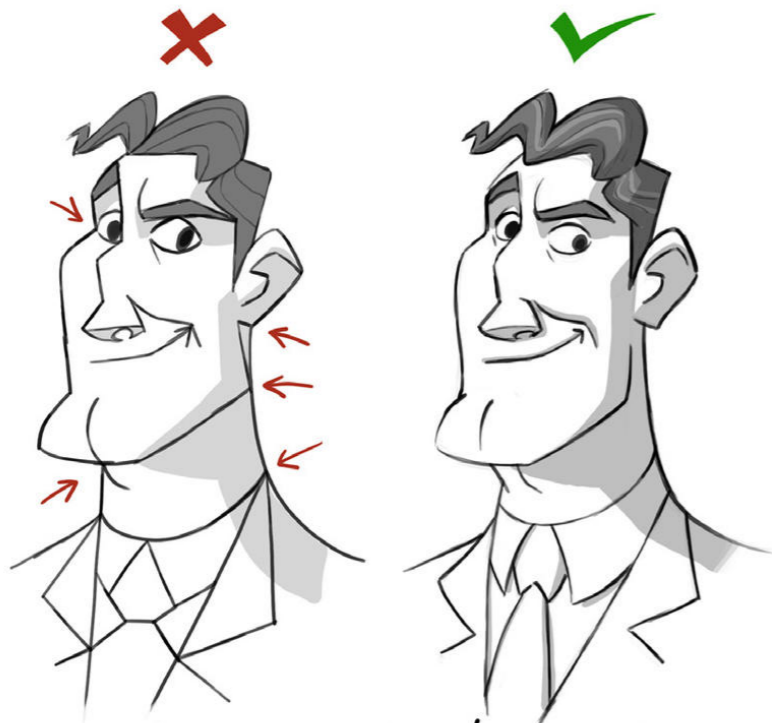


DRAW through the shapes



Here are some more examples of drawing full shapes. There are a couple of ways of how you can practice this. You could draw a couple of basic shapes or draw a few characters. Make sure that you draw the full shapes just as I did with the girl's head.

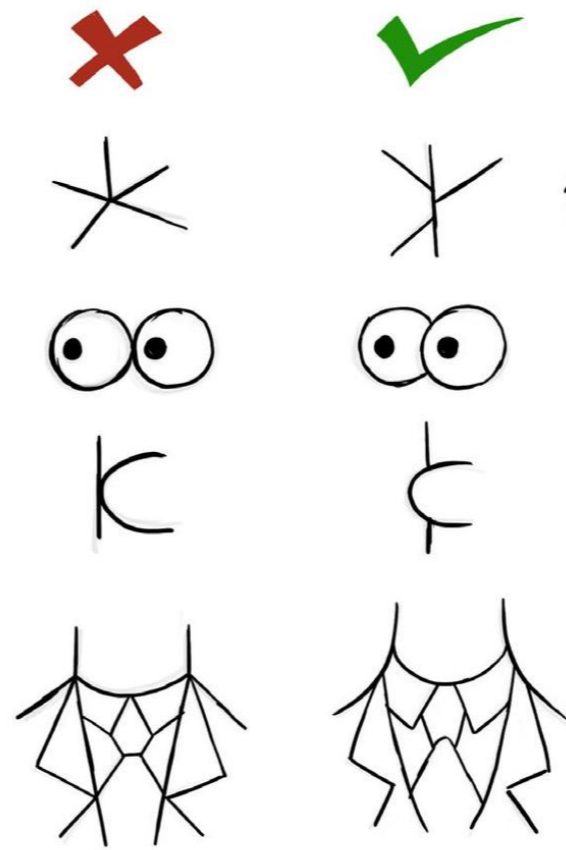
# AVOID TANGENTS



A tangent is a line touching but not intersecting another line

## TANGENTS

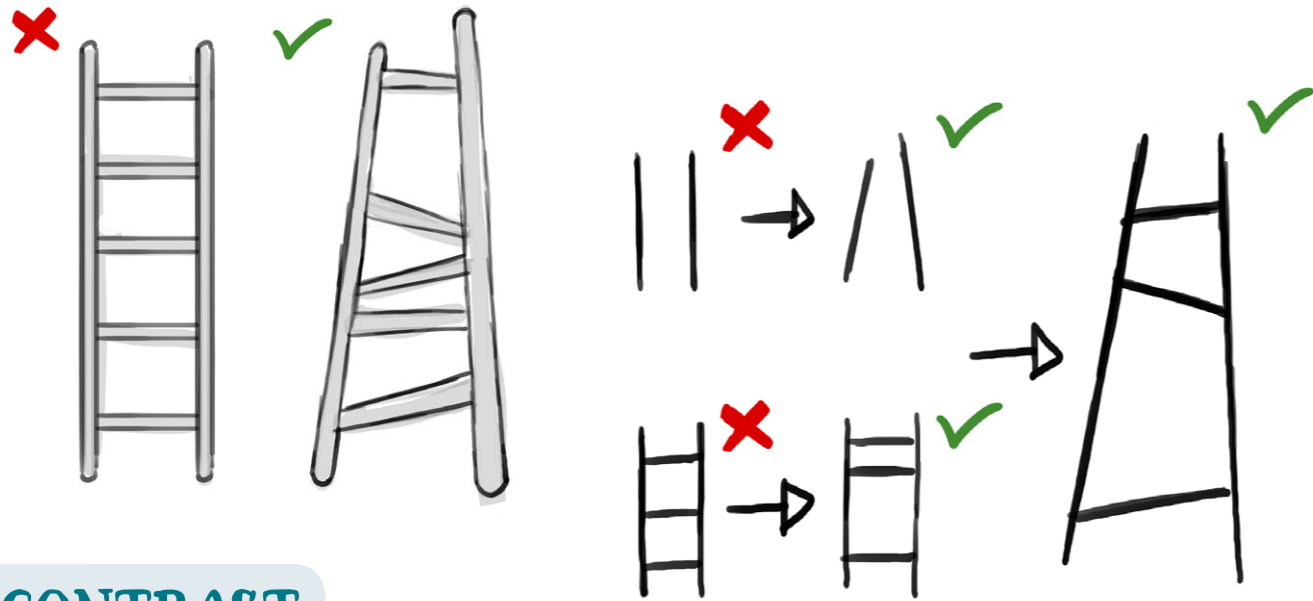
Watch out for tangents. One of the most commonly mistakes you see and something that is very easy to fix. A tangents is a line touching another line or multiple lines, without intersection. You can fix a tangent by simply moving it up or down a bit so there is some more space between the lines.



you can fix tangents by shifting the line or pushing the line back

Tangents are bad news because they distract the viewer's eye.

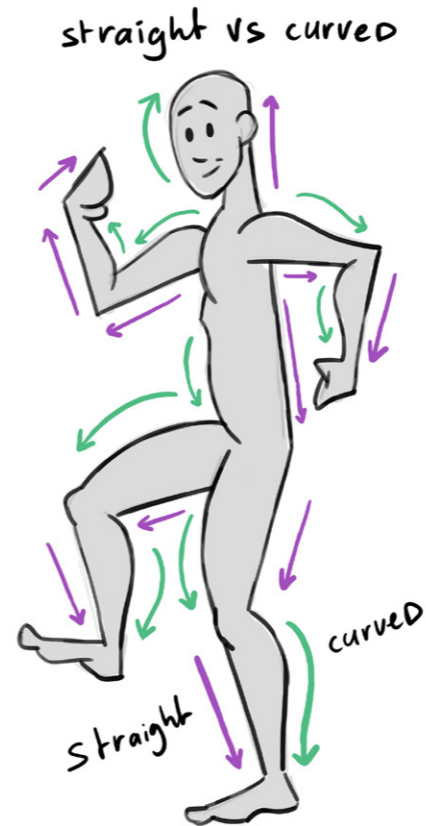
For some reason, people like to look at the point where all lines come together. That is also the reason why we automatically draw tangents without really thinking about it, so it's always good to check your drawings for tangents every once in a while. They are very easily overlooked but once you see them it's hard to unsee it.



## CONTRAST

Another thing to look out for is avoiding the ladder effect and using straight vs. curved.

**Avoiding the ladder** is important because it helps to make your character more interesting. If you are drawing a character and all angles and proportions are the same, it's kind of boring and predictable.

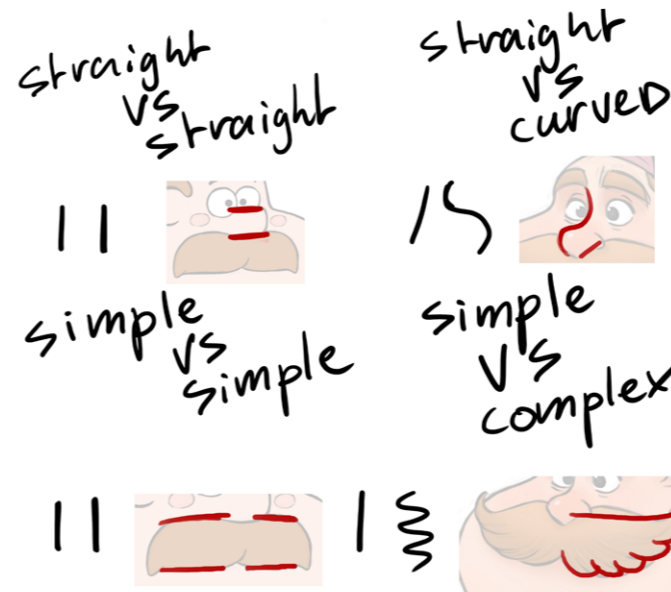
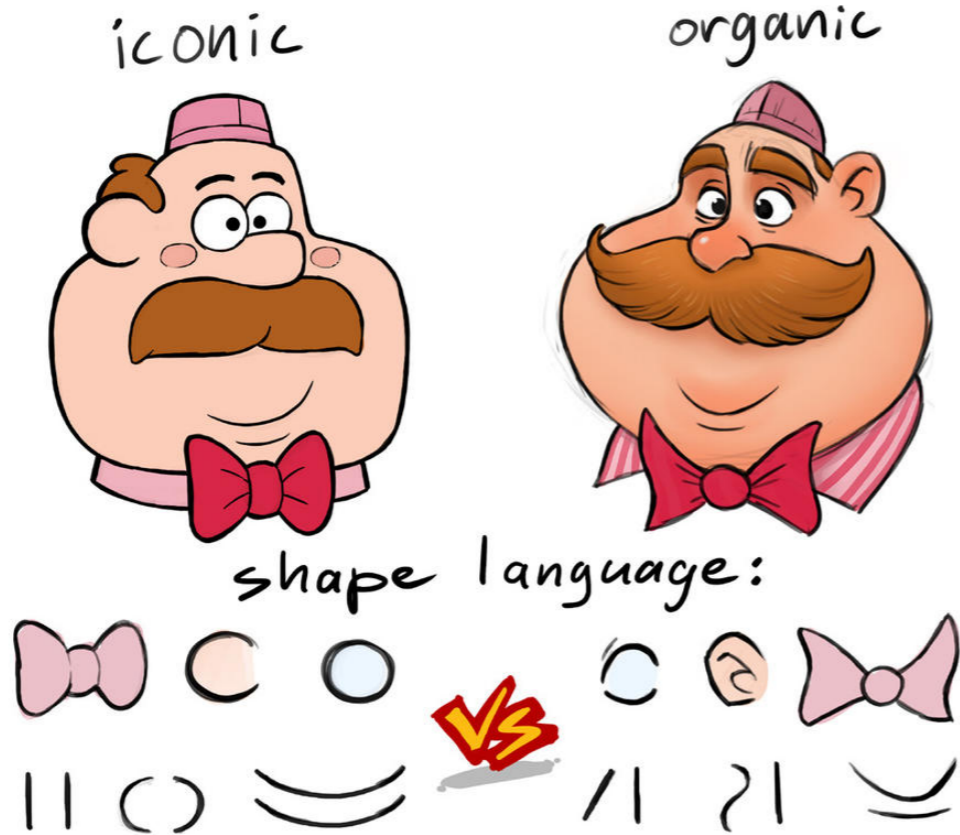


### Straight vs. curved

Avoiding symmetry by using straight vs. curved lines really helps with that. See the examples in the image. This is actually something you see in in real life as well. For example, your arm has a hard and straight side and a side which is soft and more curved. These strong contrasts will make your characters feel more dynamic and organic.

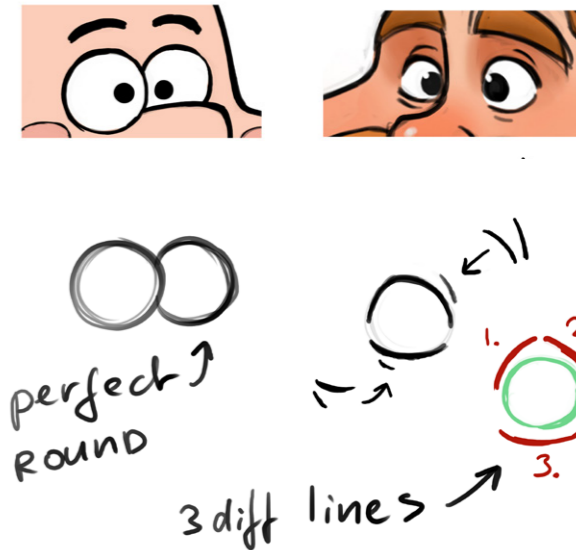
# ICONIC VS ORGANIC

Of course, these are just rules that can be bent or broken. And that is what I wanted to show here by putting two different styles next to each other. Also try to be consistent in your style when drawing a character.



Here are some examples of using straight vs. curved and simple vs. complex. I often work in a Disney-like style. But in some cases, it is appropriate to work in a more iconic style. This style is mostly seen in TV shows or in more comic oriented types of shows.

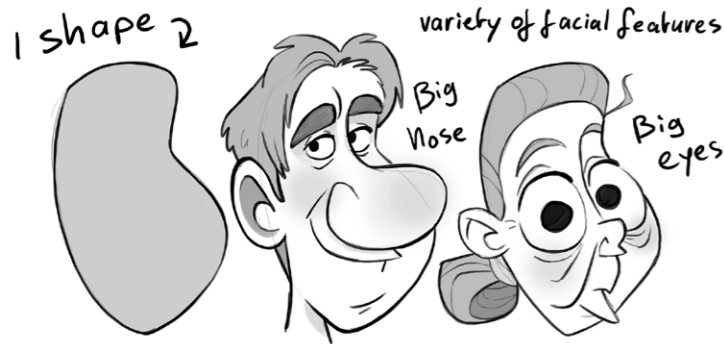
You can also create contrast in circles the eyes. Again, there is no right or wrong, but try to understand why and how you draw.



LET'S GET CREATIVE

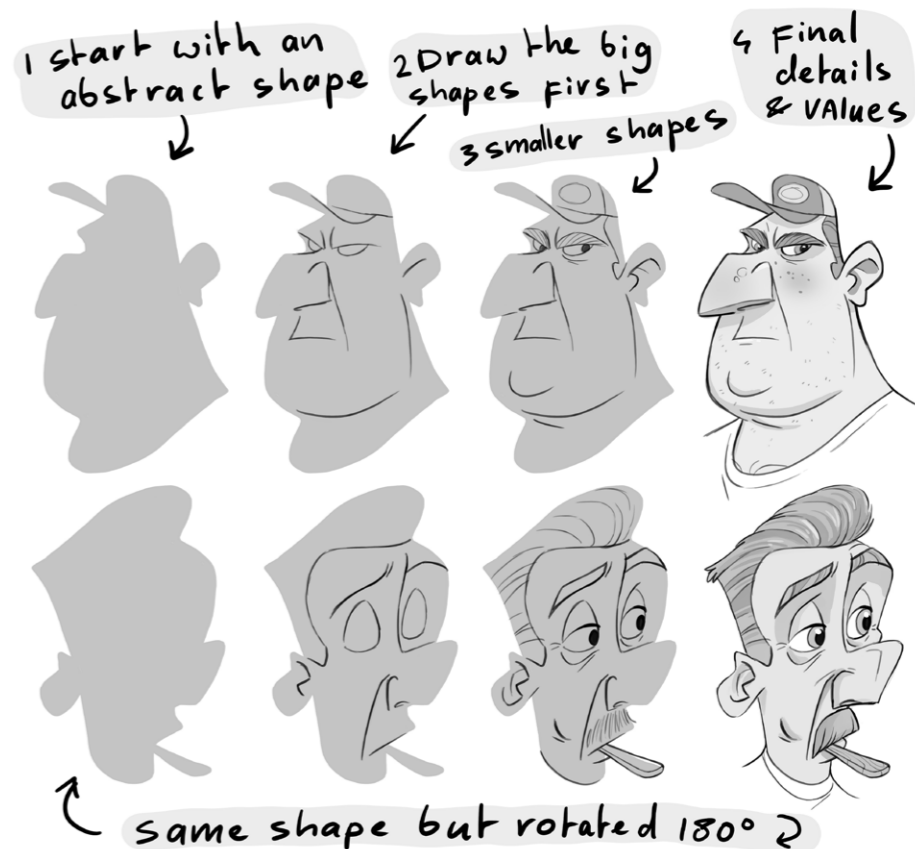
# CREATIVE TRICKS

Sometimes it can be very hard to create an original character. Or sometimes you may have an art block and you can't come up with any new ideas. A great way to get out of this is to just draw a few random shapes and start drawing faces in them. This is something I often do in my sketchbook when I feel uninspired. But sometimes, I also do this in the process of character design.

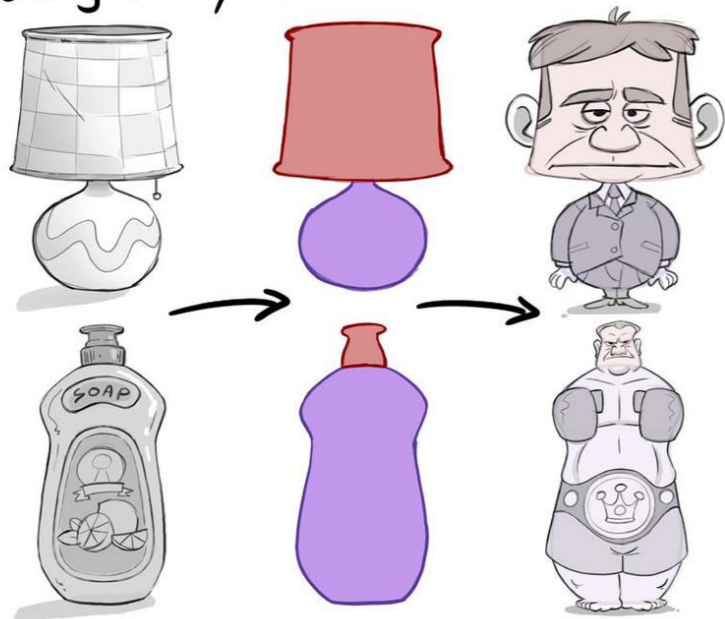


Try drawing random shapes in your sketchbook and fill those shapes with faces. Start with basic shapes like circles, squares or triangles. After that, you can go as crazy as you like. One of the fastest ways of growing is by experimenting a lot, don't be afraid to fail and enjoy the process.

Another way of designing a character is by starting with a semi-defined shape or silhouette. Once you have this shape you can fill it in. This is a method some character designers use. The silhouette/shape is very important and that's also the reason why some artists like to start with that. Later, I'll go deeper into the importance of silhouettes but feel free to already start playing around with this!



# using everyday objects to design your own characters



1. Pick a random object

2. Break it down in basic shapes

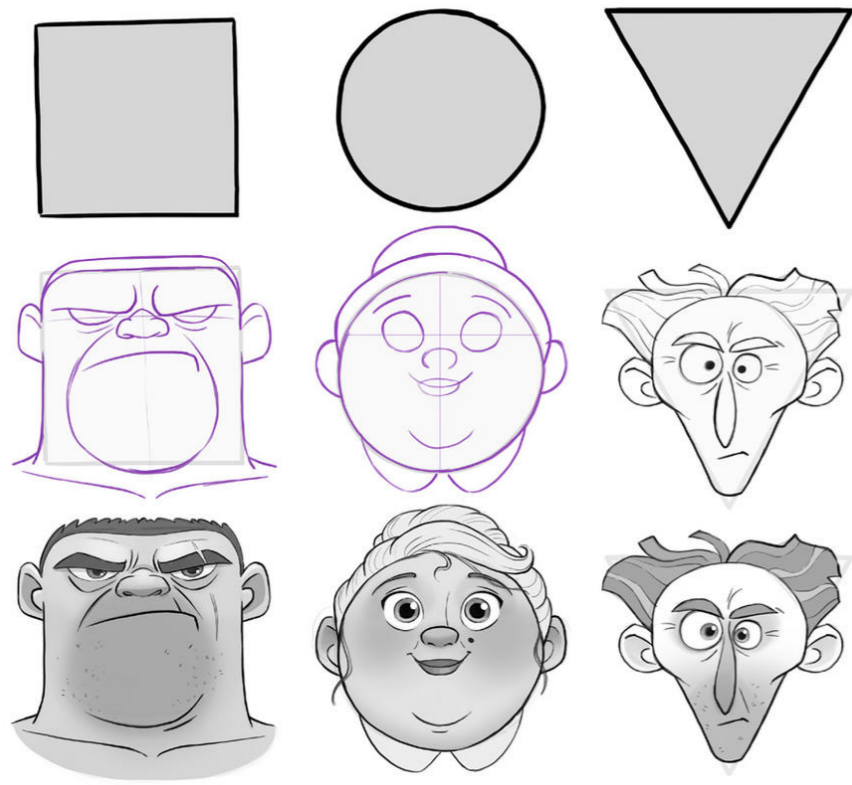
3. Draw on top of it

People often ask me how to learn drawing without reference. I think that is a wrong approach, you never should stop using reference when you draw. Let the world around you inspire you, it can help you come with solutions you otherwise wouldn't think of.



also try to find some object yourself and create your own characters!

Look around you and try to find a few interesting looking objects. Try to see the shape of it and imagine it being a character. You can also start by using these examples.

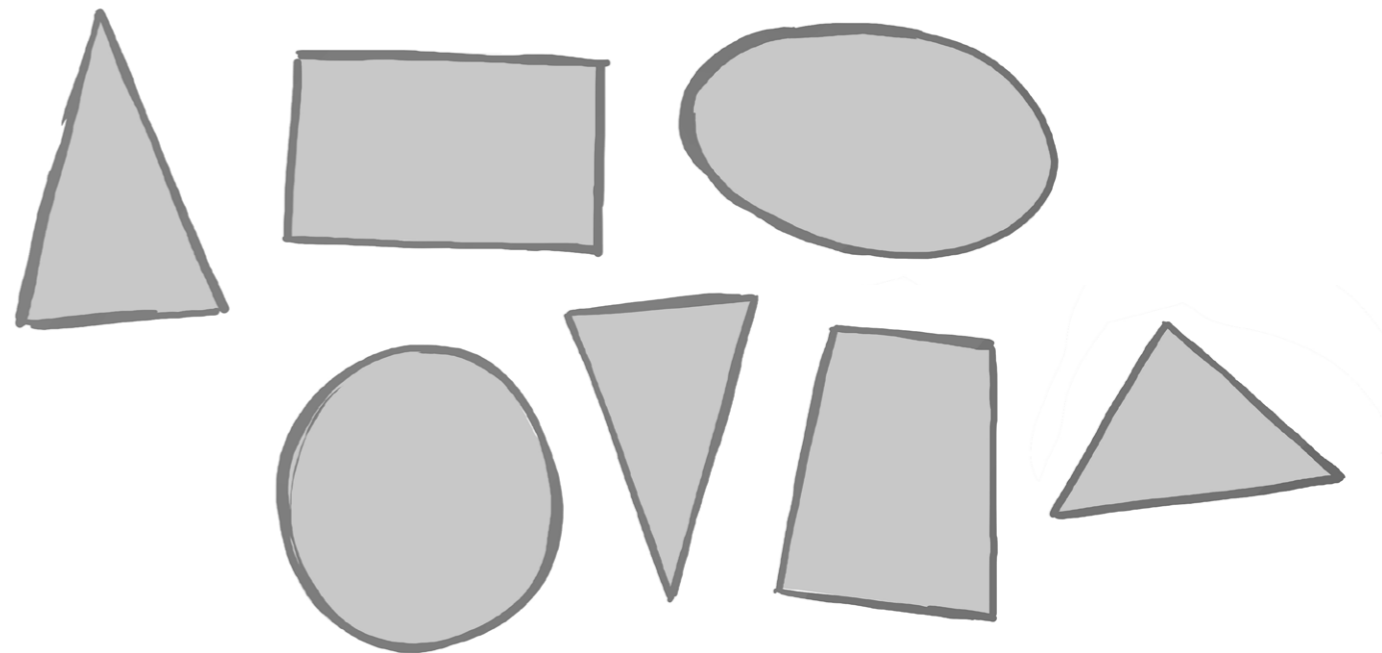


# SHAPES

Earlier I mentioned using shapes to draw characters. Using primary shapes can help you create really strong characters. Primary shapes can also add extra meaning to your character.

A square is really strong and stable. A circle tends to be very friendly. And a triangle can be very stable, think of a pyramid. But it can also be very unstable, dangerous and dynamic. A triangle shape is often used for heroes and villains alike.

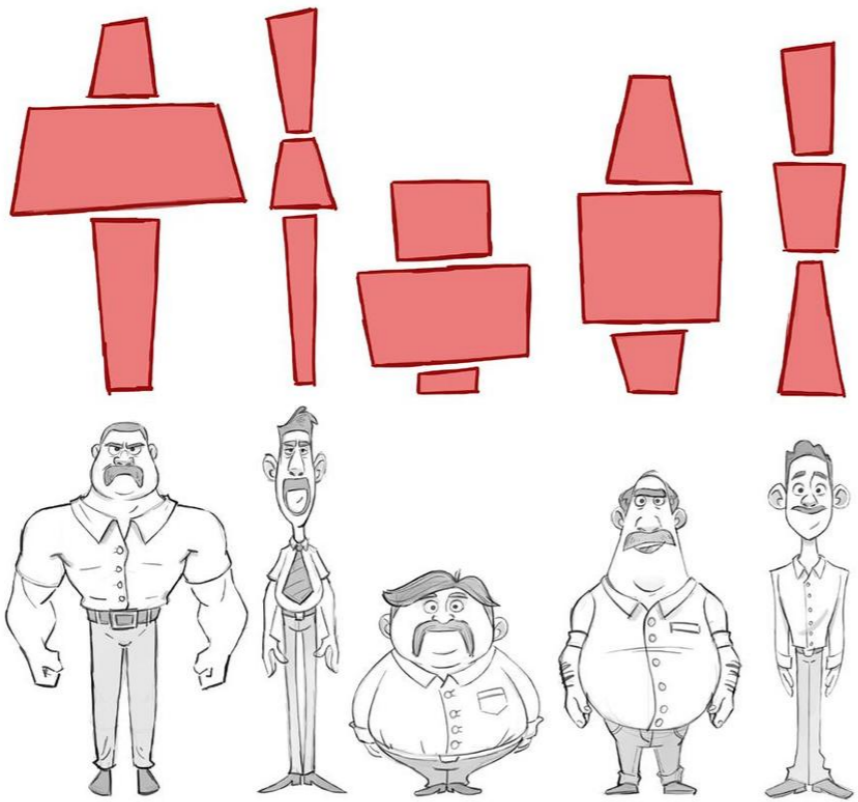
Try watch at your favorite characters and see if you can recognize a pattern and think of the meaning behind the shapes.



This is a really great exercise if you're just starting out with drawing. And a great first step before diving into 3D drawing. But it's also a great exercise for more experienced artists because it can really enhance

the power of your character designs. Many animation studios use the basic shapes method for creating strong characters, less is more.

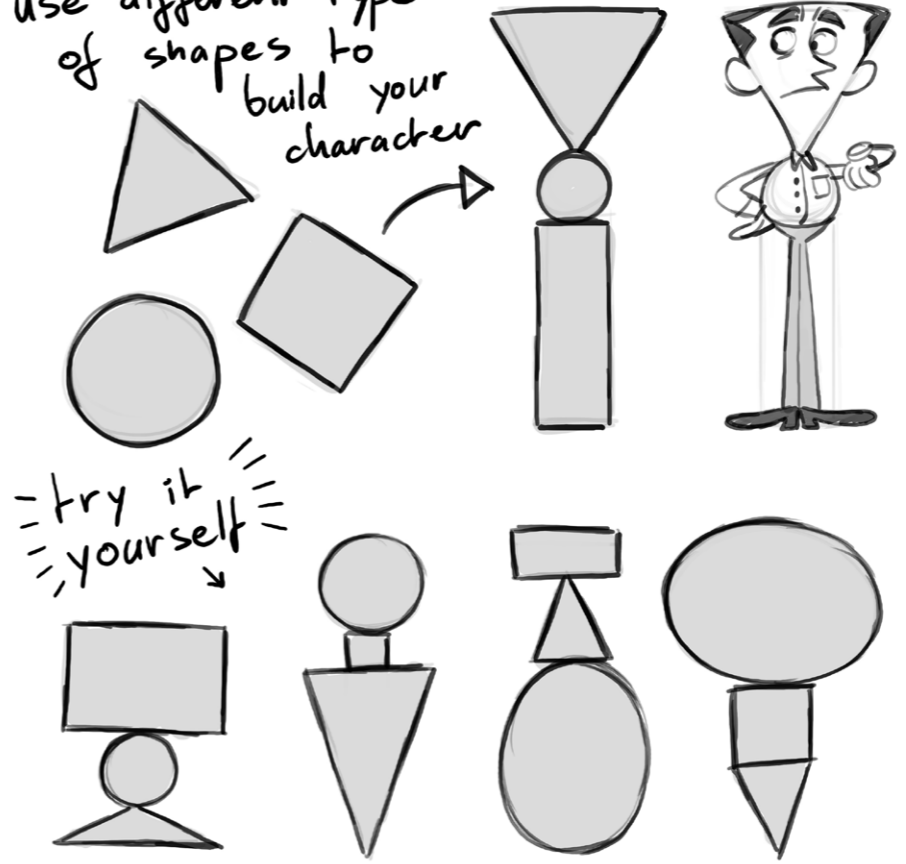
try using contrast in shapes  
to create different characters



Earlier, I mentioned avoiding the ladder. Sometimes this can be quite challenging because we humans often like to create even shapes. Starting with very basic shapes can be a great tool for avoiding this "problem".

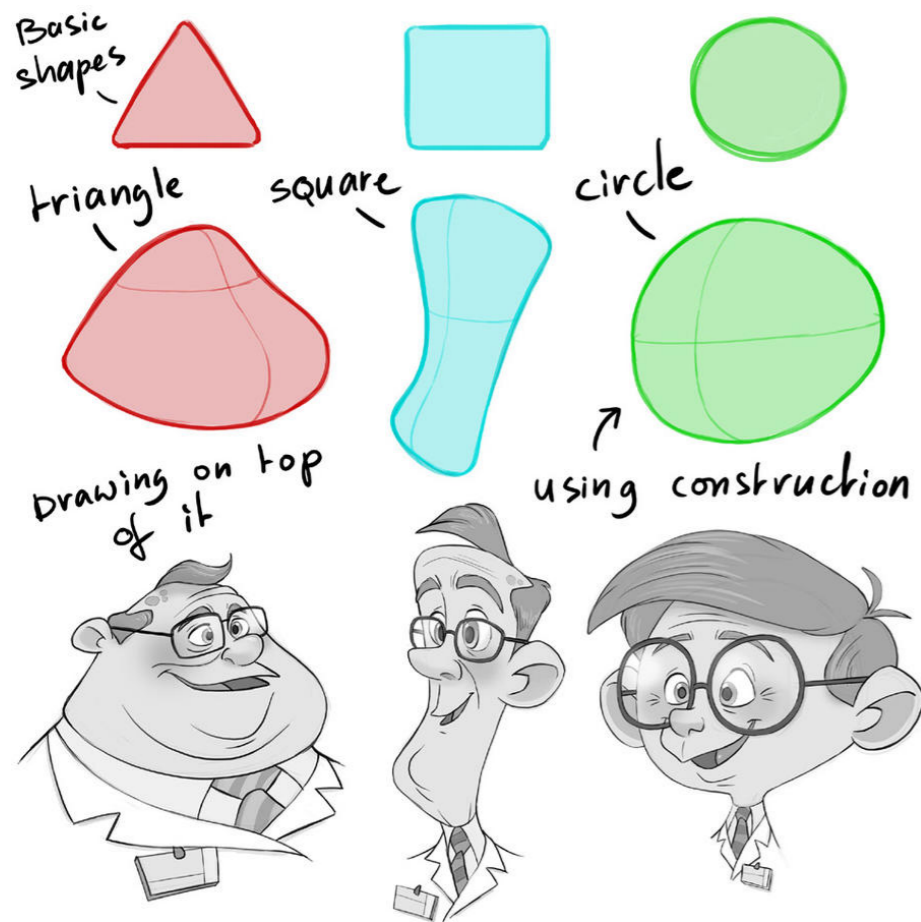
A great exercise is to create a lineup of characters like in this example and play around with the proportions to make a lineup with as much variation as possible.

use different type  
of shapes to  
build your  
character



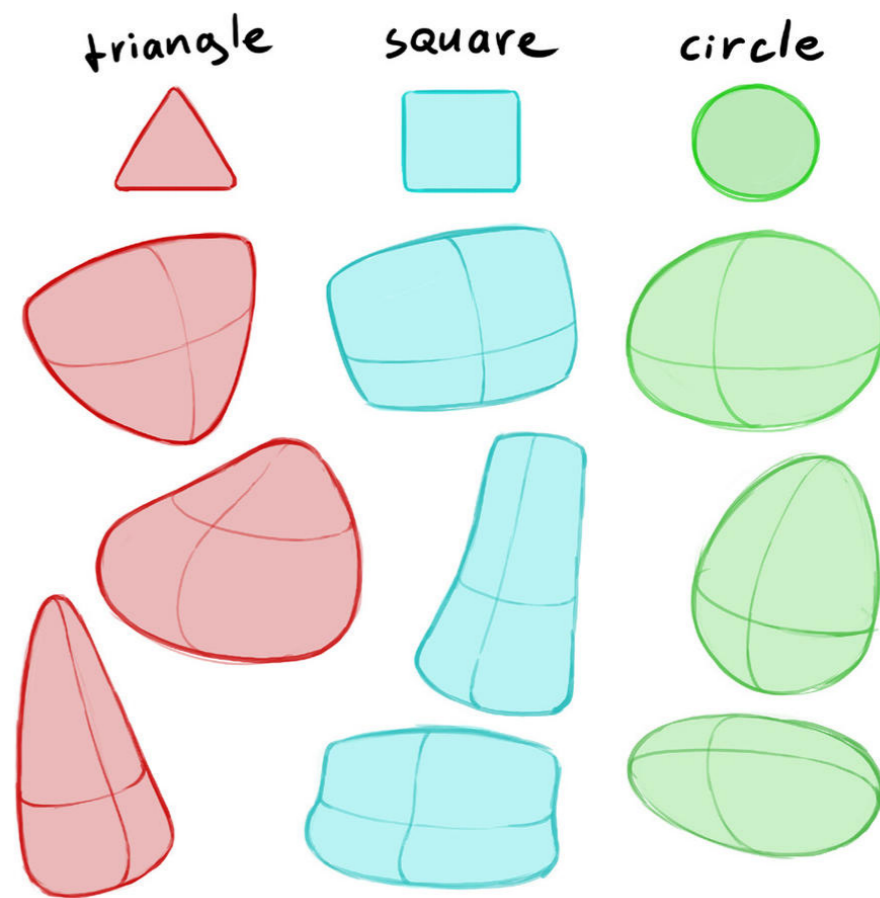
try it  
yourself

You don't have to use just squares. It's even better to use a lot a great variety of shapes. Try drawing your own characters using squares, triangles and circles and see what you can come up with.



Once you have mastered drawing 2D shapes, you can start drawing more complex shapes in 3D. For 3D characters, you still use basic shapes. The only difference is you give them volume and draw the details on top of that following the shape. But the principle stays the same and that's why it's good to first focus on drawing these shapes flat.

If you have difficulty drawing these characters in 3D, it can really be useful to design the character flat first and after that, you can redraw it but with volume. When something is difficult you can make it easier by breaking the process down into smaller steps.



Drawing these random 3D shapes is a great way of getting a better understanding of form and space.

Understanding it is simple (as with most things with drawing) but it can be very tricky to actually draw well. Try to fill a whole page with these shapes and if you want, you can start drawing faces on these shapes. The next step is to create full bodies and characters with these shapes.

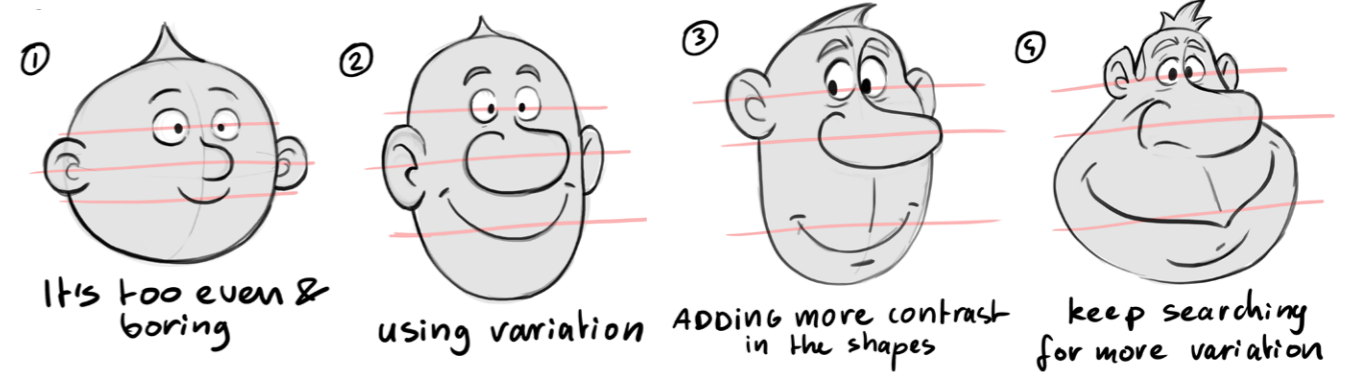
## CONTRAST IN PROPORTIONS



Here I'm showing how to avoid 'the ladder' with the example of a snowman. The first version has three balls that are of the same size, it looks boring and doesn't have any personality. The second one is a bit more of an interesting because of the difference in sizes.

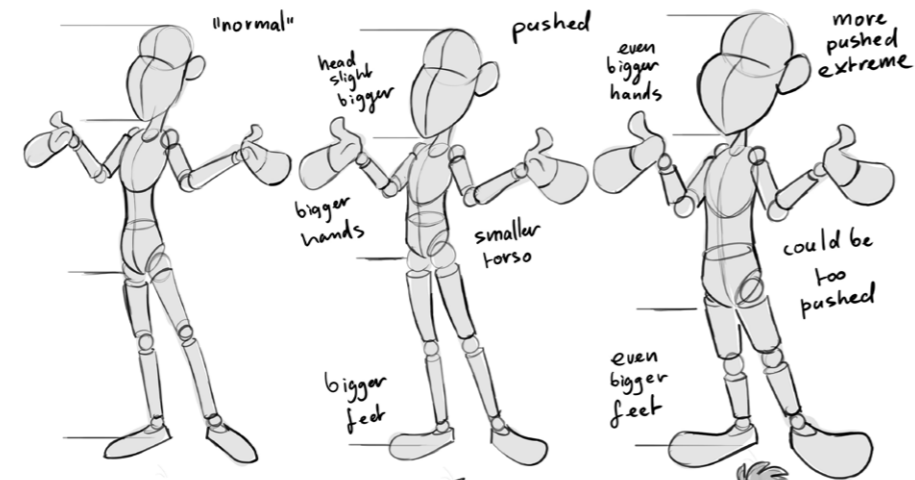
Working in threes gives you a great opportunity to create variety. Mixing small, medium and big works very well. When your using more than three different shapes you could lose some of the simplicity of the design. The third snowman consists of different sizes of shapes mixed up, which results in the most interesting designs. A great exercise is to fill a whole page with different snowmen.

① is weak → ④ stronger



The next step is to add this principle to your character design, as I did when drawing this character's head. Having everything in the same proportions is dull. Of course, if this is what you're going for it's fine.

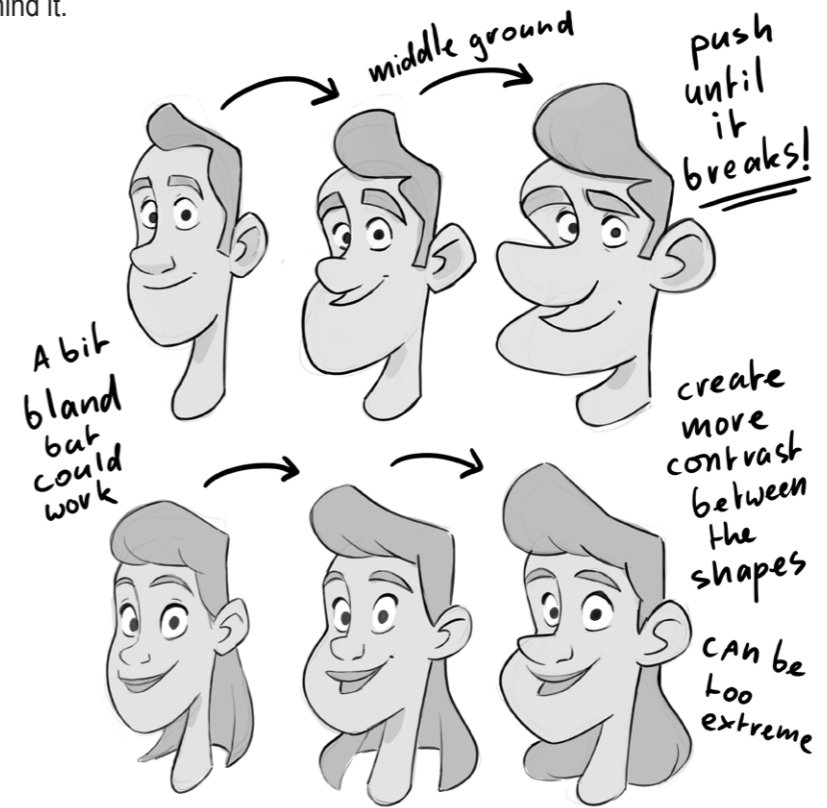
There are a lot of animated comic TV shows that use it, my guess is because it looks kind of silly, which helps the comic effect.



In this example, I played around with different proportions. Always try to push your designs. Don't be afraid of going too far, because you can always tone it down a bit.

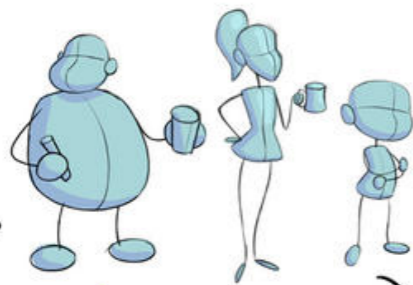
However, it's a missed opportunity if you don't try to push the design as far as you can.

Ask yourself what kind of style you want to go for. How far can you go in terms of silliness? In this example I'm pushing the designs. There is no wrong or right, but it's important to choose a direction with some sort of an idea behind it.



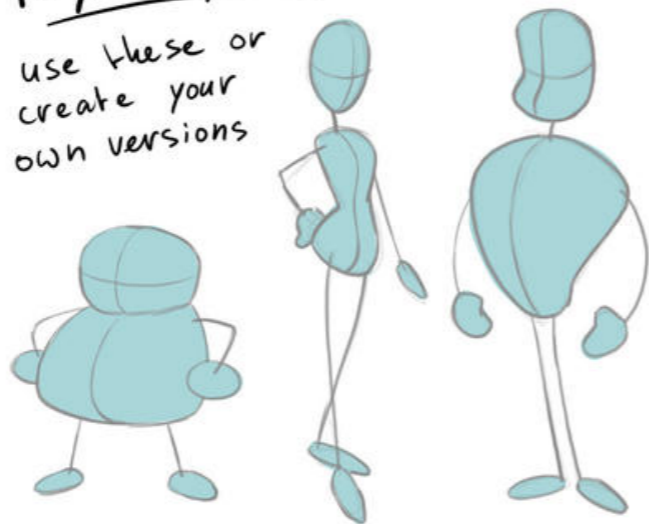
Kids often draw stick figures. And actually, drawing stick figures isn't that bad! They're easy and quick to draw. Once you've drawn a stick figure, you can add all the details on top of it. When you have an action line, it also helps to draw the stick figure on top of that action line. Let the stick figure follow that line and add shapes on top of it. This way you're working on your character step by step and that makes it way easier.

using basic shapes to create different body types



Try it yourself!

use these or create your own versions

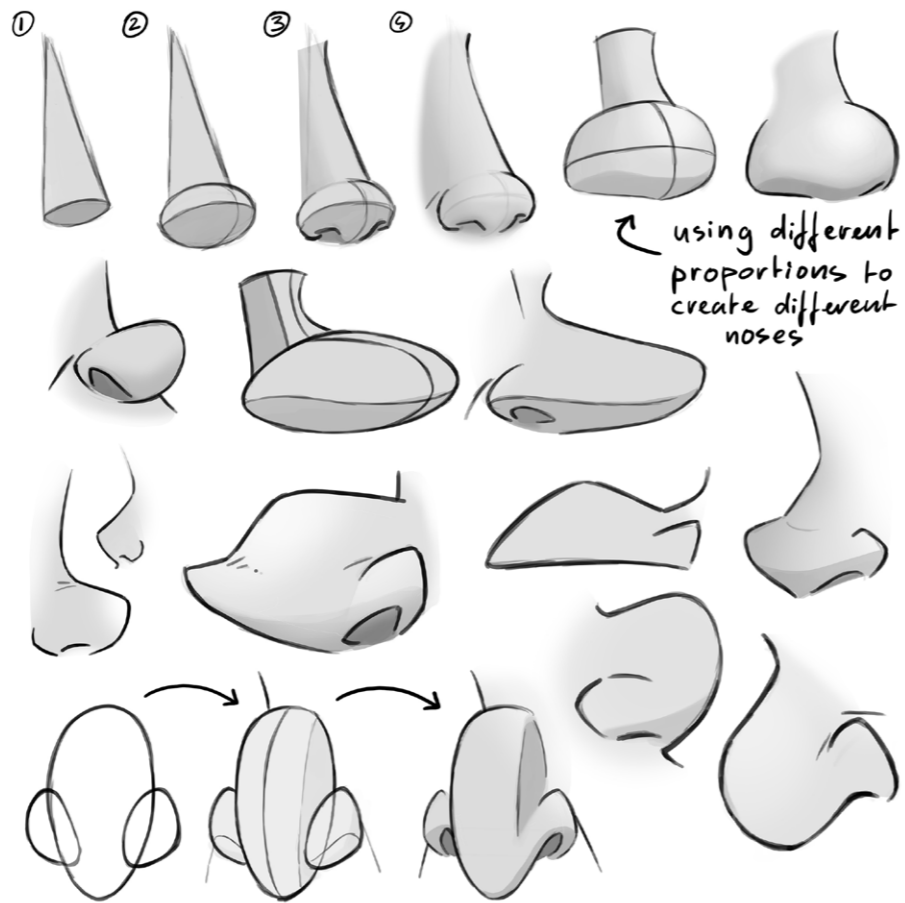


- ① Start with an action line & add basic shapes first keep it simple
- ② ADD MORE CONSTRUCTION  
cylinder sphere cube
- ③ start sketching on top of the shapes  
think 3D!
- ④ clean up the sketch & ink it if you want
- ⑤ ADD color using a hard brush and the lasso tool
- ⑥ start shading using a soft brush for the shadows

You can use my stick figure examples to create your own designs. You could do this as an exercise before making your own stick figures.

## NOSES

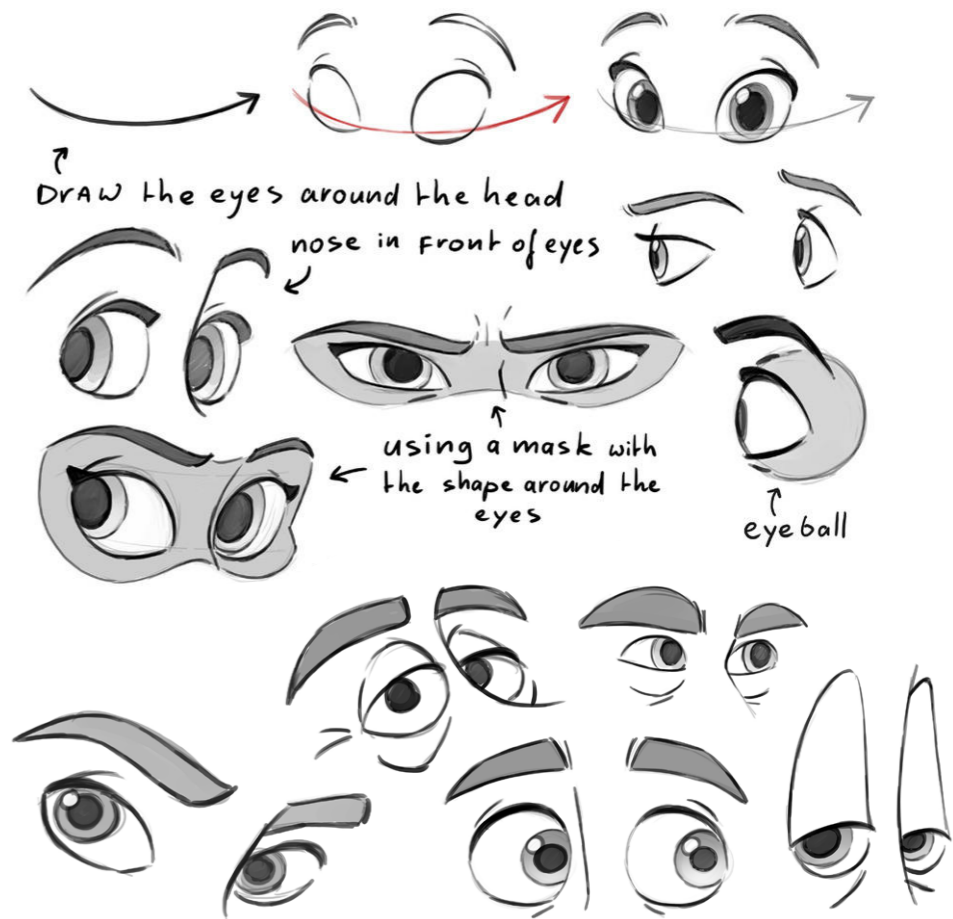
When I'm drawing a nose, I'm breaking it down into three or two shapes and merge it into one shape later. In these examples, I'm showing a couple of different designs. However, the way I construct a nose is always the same. This way of working applies to every part of drawing a character. Breaking it down into smaller and easier to understand shapes and later merge them together.



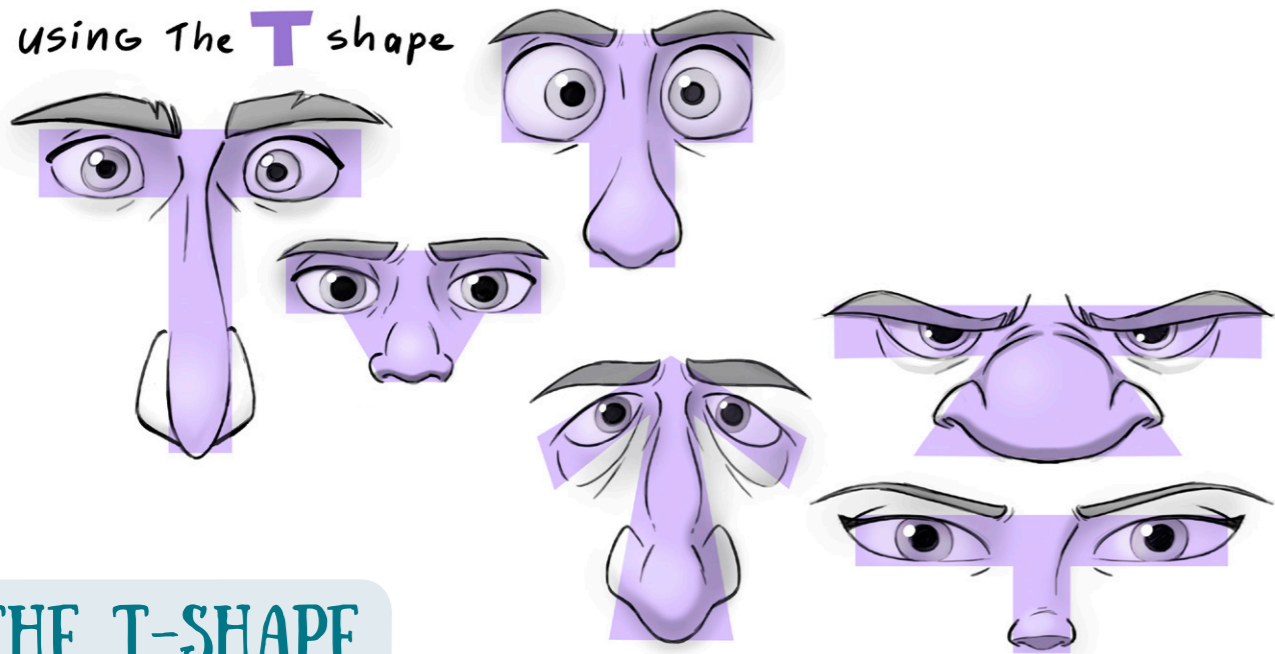
## EYES

When drawing eyes on a face it's important to realize that the face isn't flat. It's curved, which means the eyes follow the shape of the head.

I'm also showing how to use a mask to place the eyes and eyebrows in the right spot of the head. Beside all this, it's worth mentioning to be aware that you only see a small part of the eyeball, the biggest part is inside the skull behind the face.



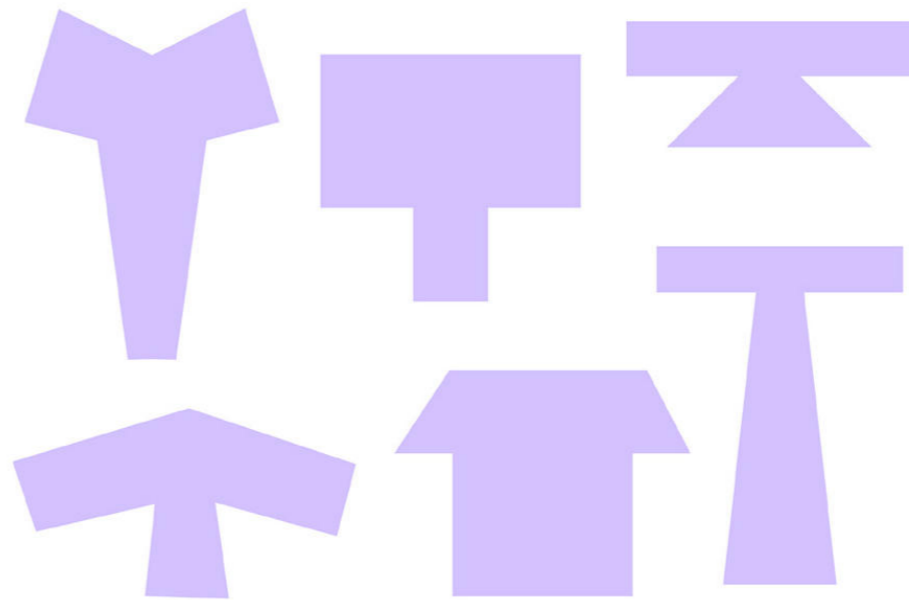
using The T shape



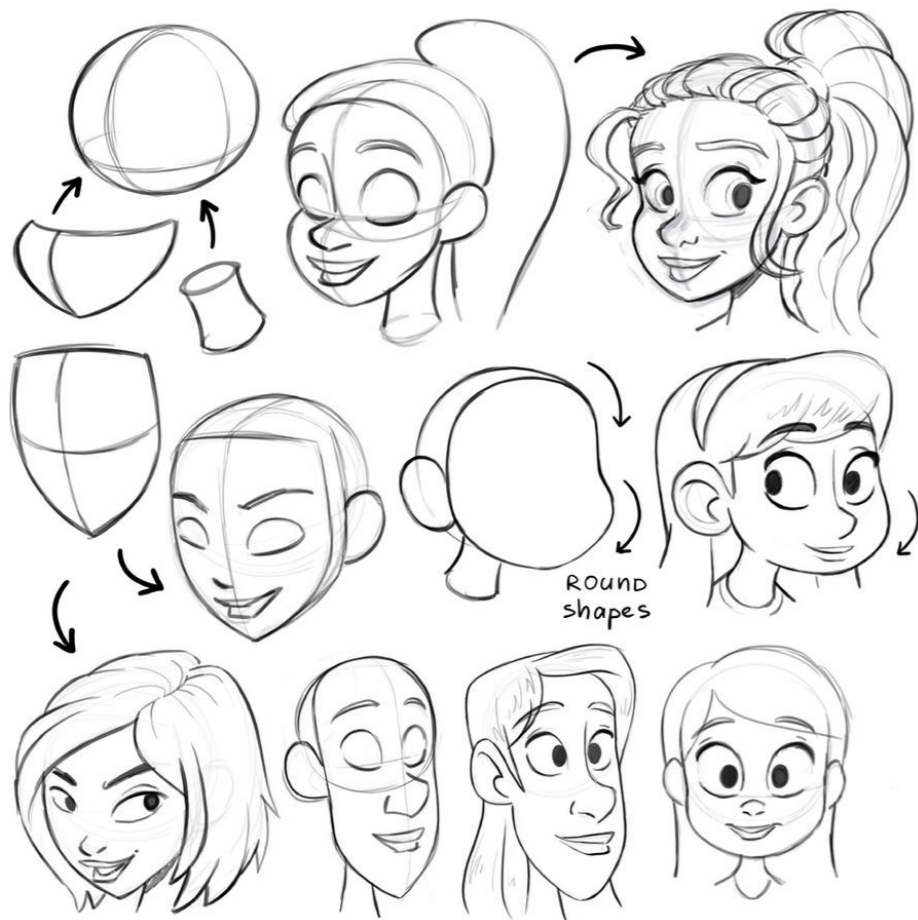
## THE T-SHAPE

The eyes have a relationship with the nose. The T-shapes in the example reveal this relationship. It works really well if you first draw a T-shape and draw eyes and a nose on top of that. The more interesting the T-shape is, the more interesting the eyes and the nose will be. Again, breaking down things your drawing as simple as possible shapes. This way it's easier to create interesting designs.

try it yourself!

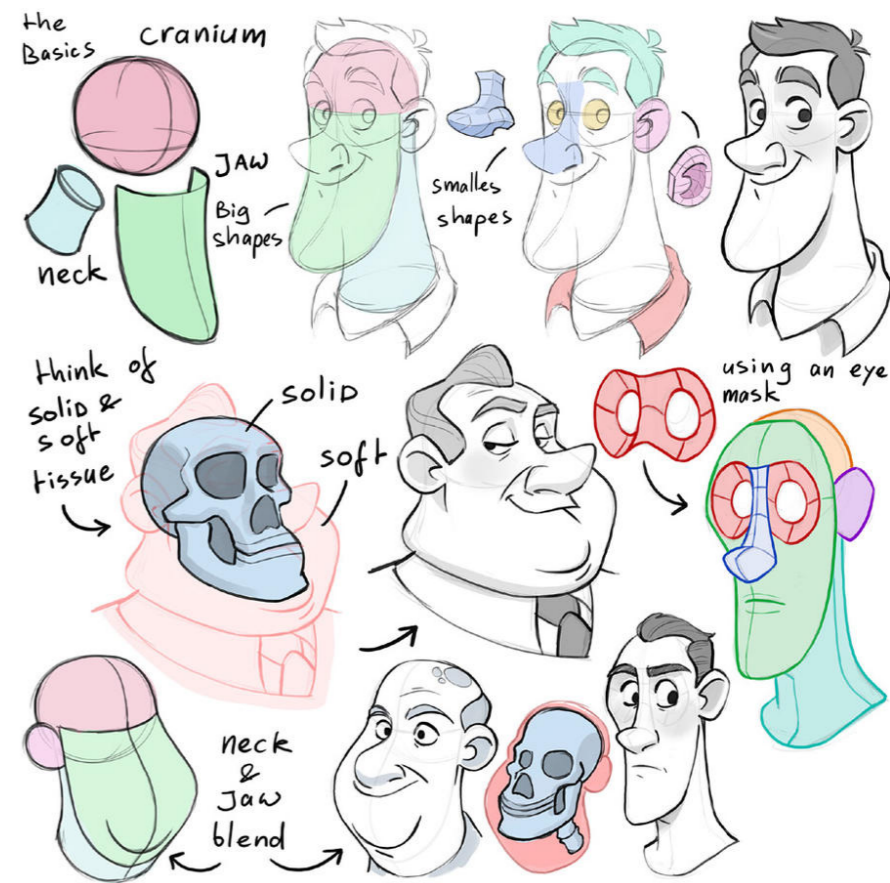


Use these shapes to create a few compositions of eyes and noses or design your own T-shapes. Try to apply enough contrast to your shapes to make your compositions as interesting as possible.

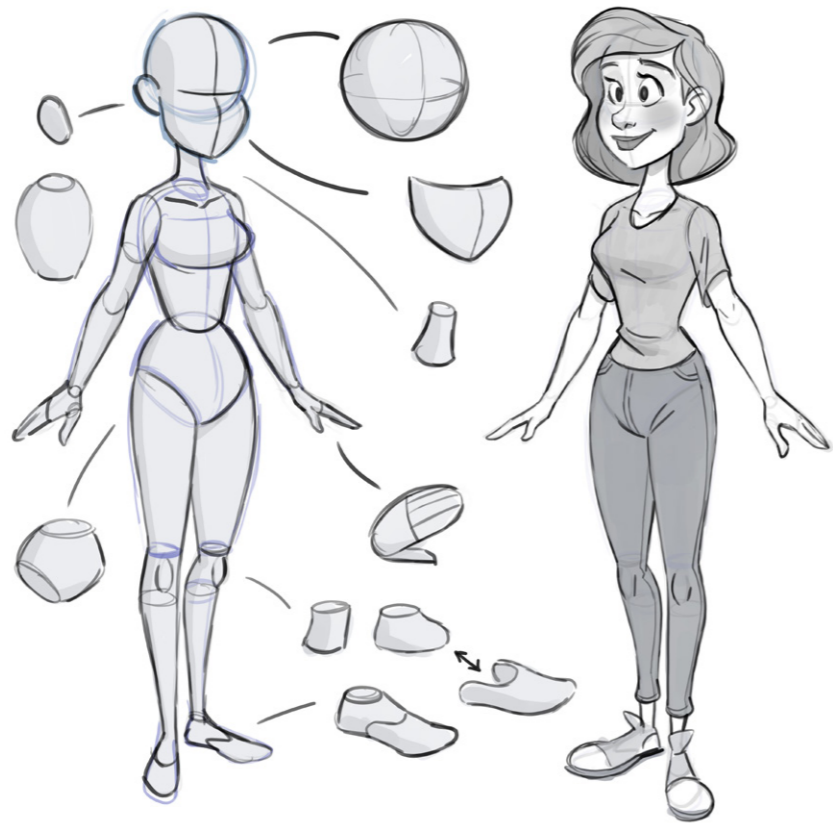


## FEMALE VS. MALE

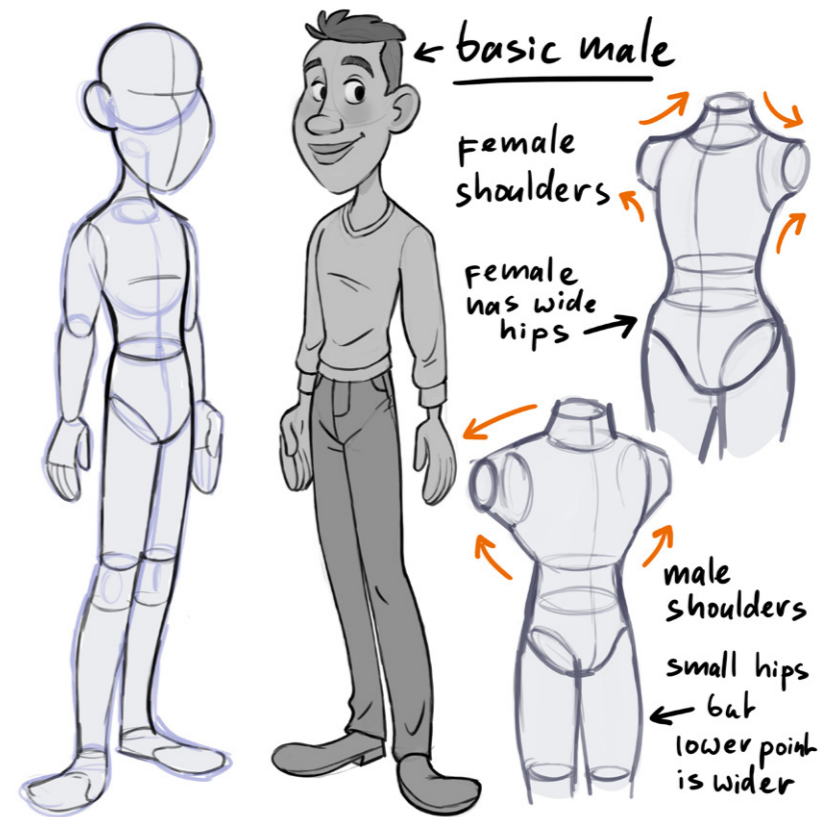
Generally, when I draw a female head I try to keep the angles and shapes rounded. Here, I show the basic construction from which I start.



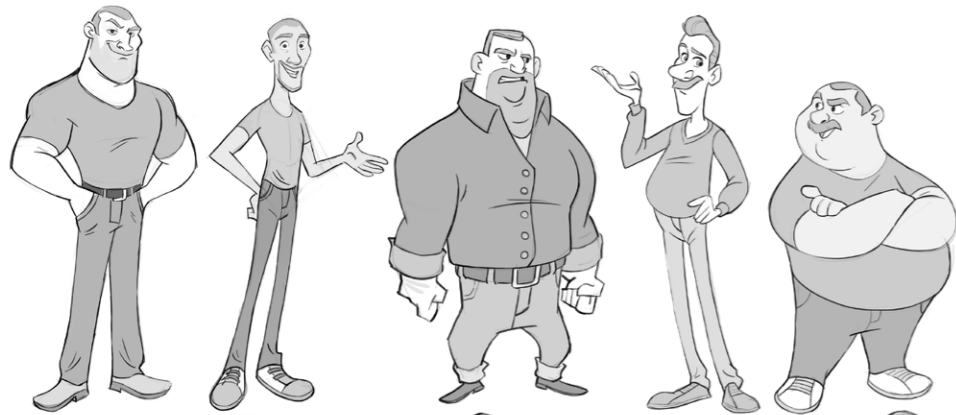
In this example, I show how to draw a male head. And generally, I draw the male head more angular than a woman's head. Of course, these are just guides. When you draw a heavier male character, it could be appropriate to use softer and more rounded shapes.



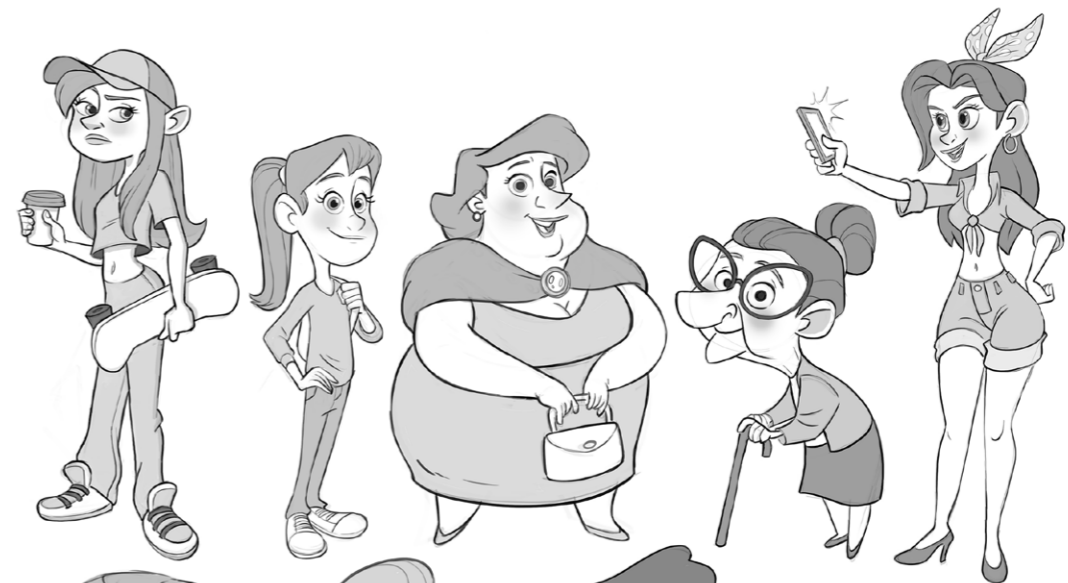
The female body generally has smaller shoulders, neck, waist and torso than a male body. However, females usually have wider hips.

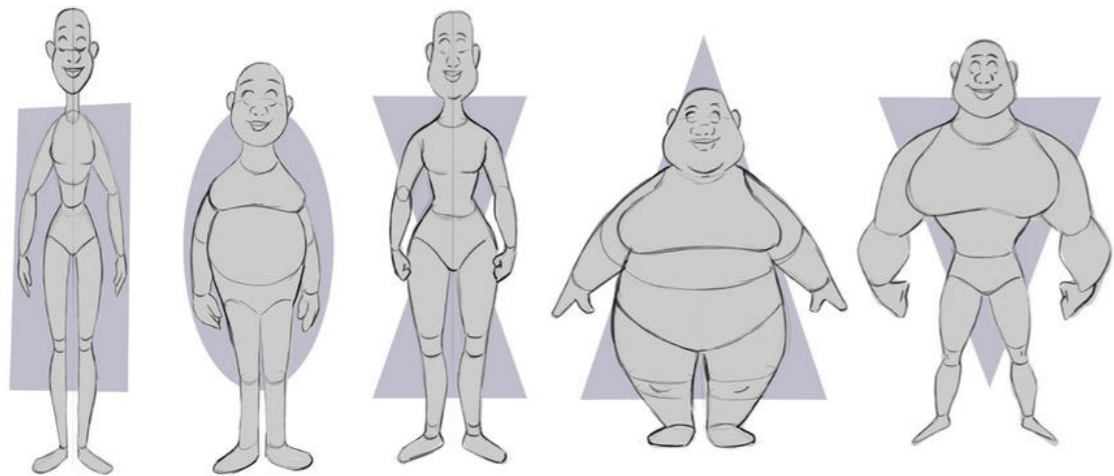
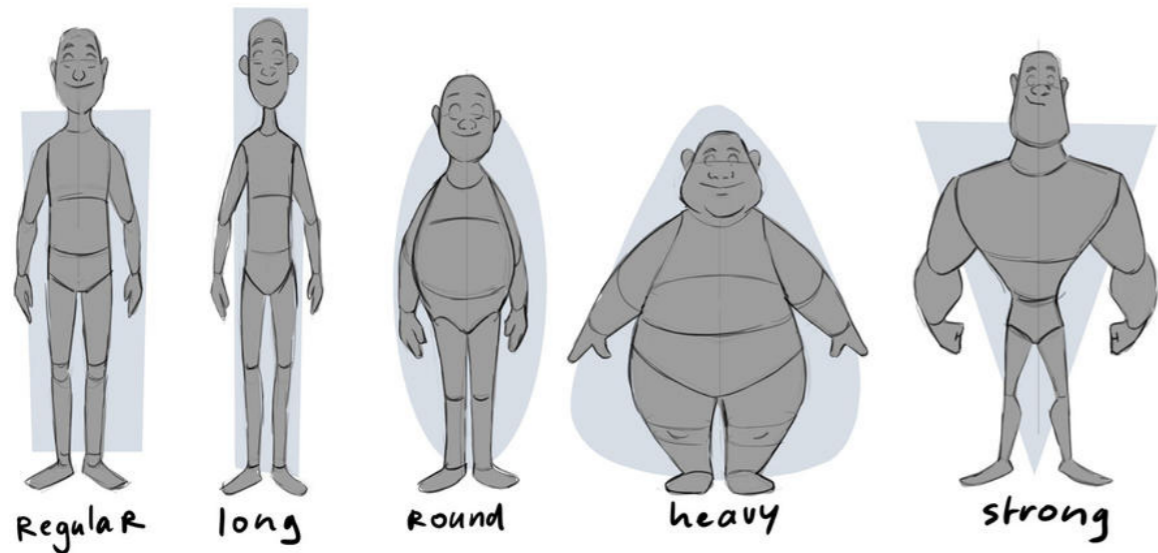


The male body is almost the opposite. The most obvious differences are a wider torso and smaller hips.



A good exercise is to draw a bunch of different types of male and female characters in different sizes and shapes.

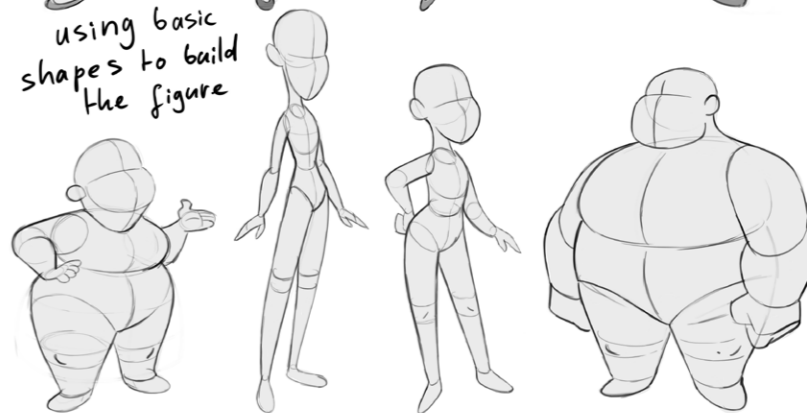




Work also  
in 3/4 view



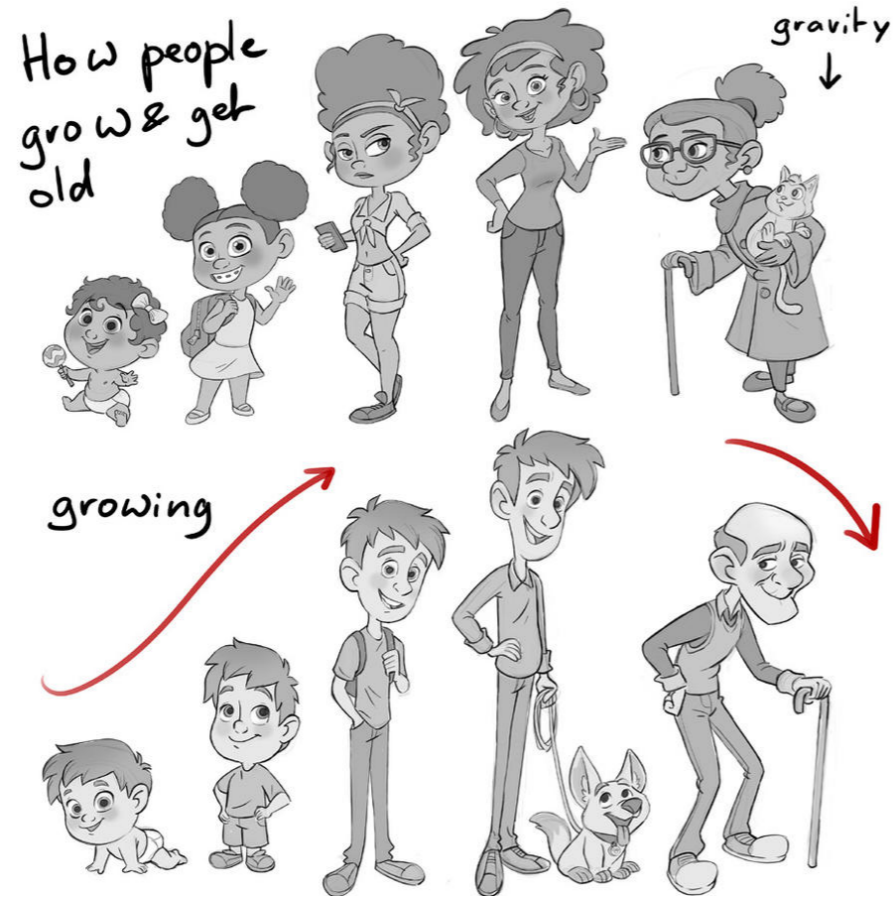
using basic  
shapes to build  
the figure



On the previous page, I mention drawing people in different sizes and shapes. Here, I'm showing a line-up of 5 different types of human bodies. These different body types are all based on a basic shape. When you're drawing a character, ask yourself what kind of body type (and shape) would fit your character best.

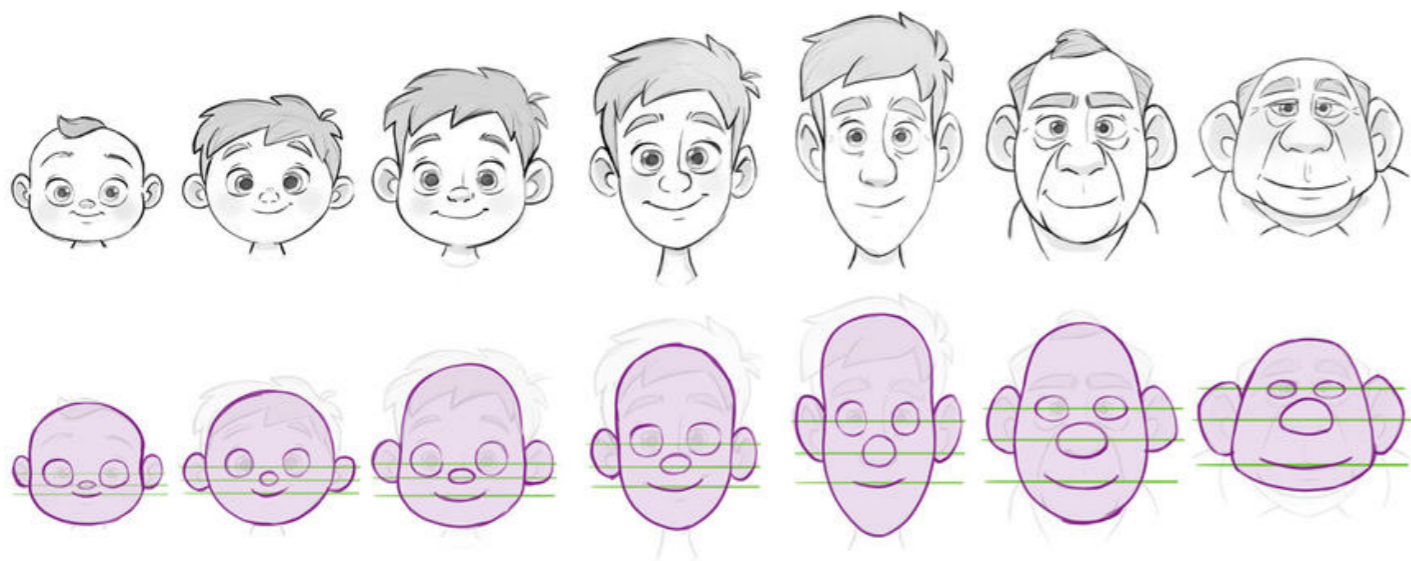
## AGING

People get older and every age has its own characteristics. When we are young, we grow. We become taller and taller. When we reach the age of 20, we stop growing. After that, people tend to grow in other places, some people gain weight in this time of their lives. Of course, this is a generalization and doesn't apply to everyone. So, we first grow taller, and finally we get pulled down by gravity.



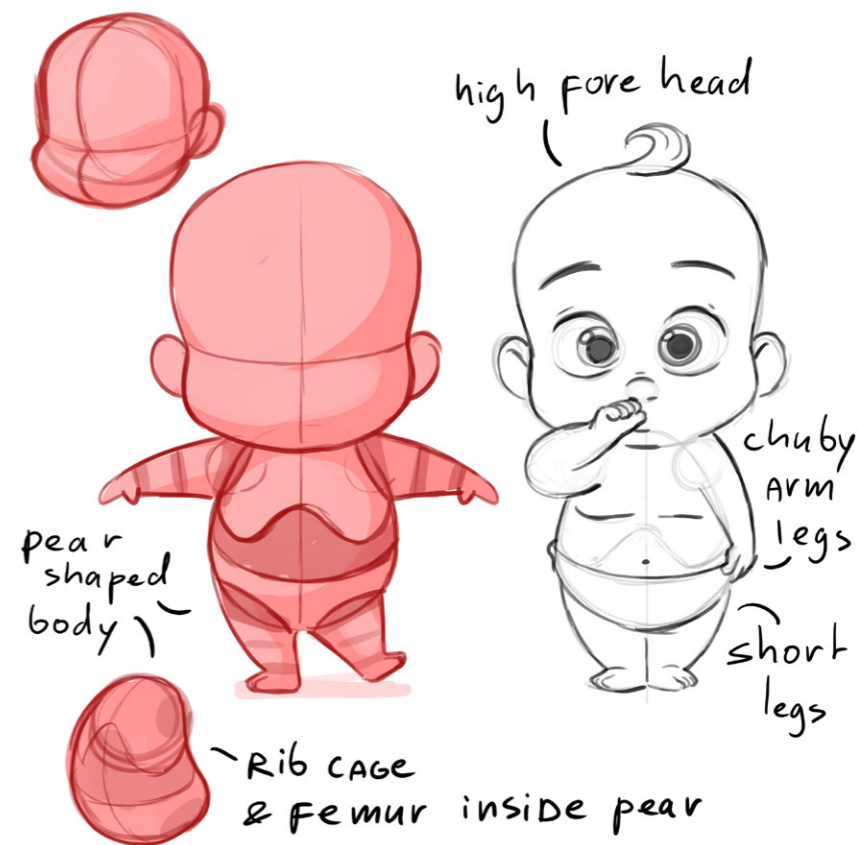
It's a great exercise to try and draw your own family or draw a character in each stage of his or her life. Consider which parts of the body grow. See the next pages for some extra tips.

As we age, our head grows as well. When we are very young, our eyes, nose and mouth are really close together and as we age they grow further from one another. The funny thing is that when we get older, everything starts to shrink again, except for the nose and the ears which keep on growing.

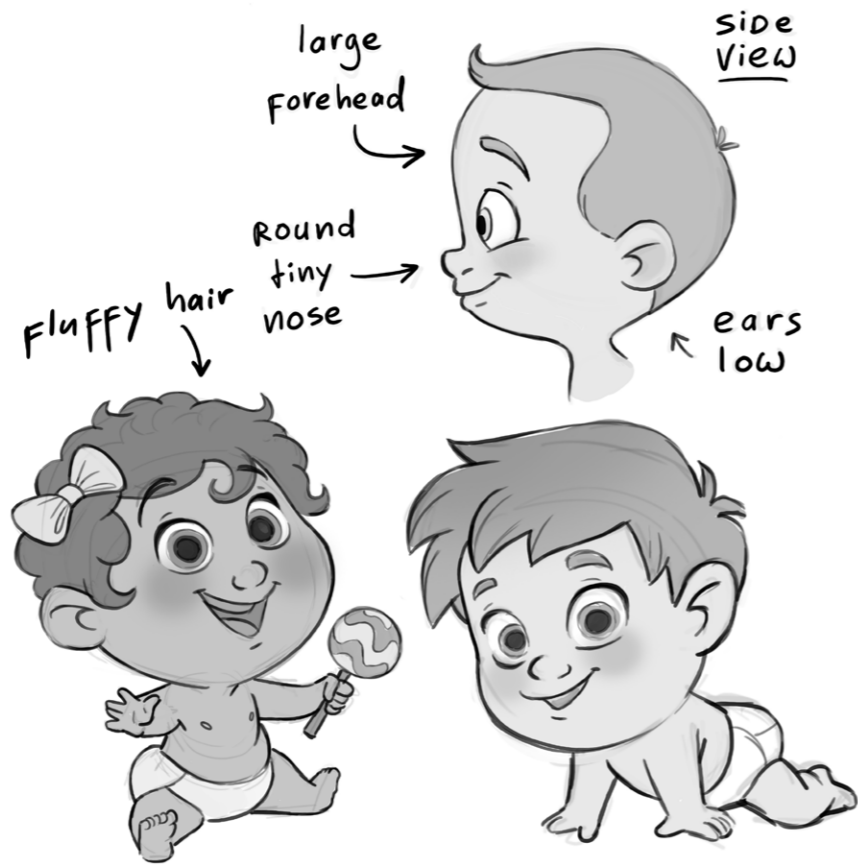


### Babies

Babies are cute. But why is that? And how do we draw a super cute baby? The trick lies in using proportions in a right way. You could play around with these guides to get a more original look, but make sure your baby doesn't look like a little creepy old guy. Babies often have a big forehead, big eyes etc. But not everything is just big. The nose and ears, for example, are very small. It looks as if a baby doesn't have anatomy but there is still some structure beneath all this baby fat.



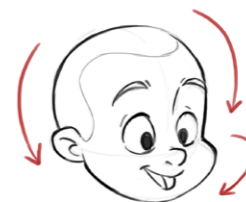
More examples of baby proportions. The image with the curved arrows shows that almost every part of a baby's body has curves and is round. This gives the baby that fun, cute and chubby look.



eyes  
nose  
ears  
mouth  
close  
to  
each  
other



When you are drawing babies use curved lines & no straights

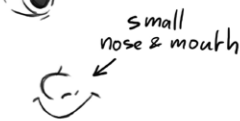


using ROUND shapes

Small ROUND ears



Round big eyes



small nose & mouth

### Young kids

Children are still very round and cute. But their limbs get longer and slimmer. They lose that baby fat. They also start to develop their own personalities.

But most often they are full of joy and listen to their parents, they are still innocent. Most of them ;-)



Messy hair



cute nose

small neck

back pack or schoolbook

full of energy

joyfull

big head



• Growth spurts

• clumsy

• want to be part of a group

• emotionally unstable



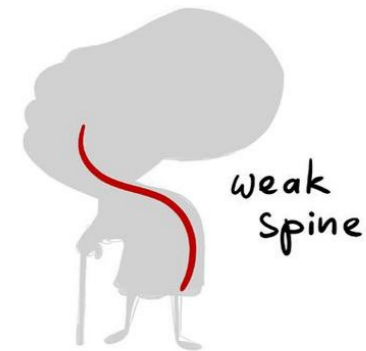
### Teenagers

Teenagers are rebels! They don't want to listen to their parents and want to be independent. Make use of this in your designs. At this stage in life, the body also grows very fast. This results in really weird proportions. Like long clumsy legs.

### Adults

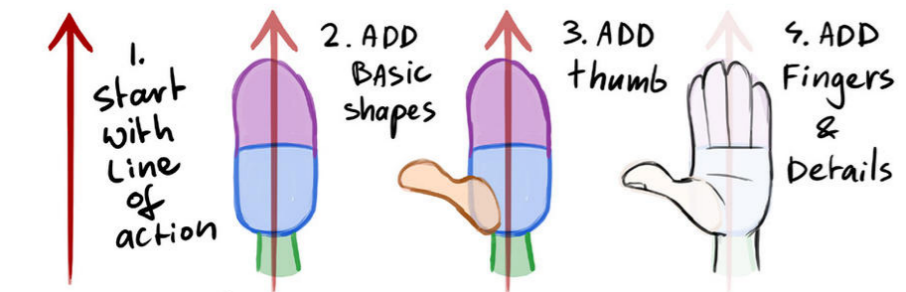
After our 24th birthday, we stop growing. At least, we won't grow any taller. But a lot of adults start gaining weight. Many parents don't have time to exercise and can start gaining weight. Maybe they aren't getting enough rest because of a crying baby at night. You could add all these different characteristics to your character. For example, you could give the father bags under his eyes. You can push this very far, if it fits the character.

- Large nose & ears
- body parts get pulled down by gravity
- more wrinkles
- weaker posture

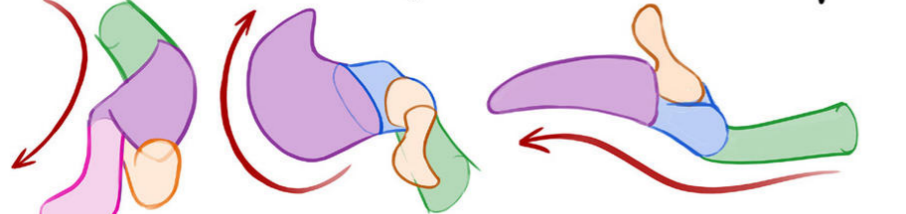


### Elderly

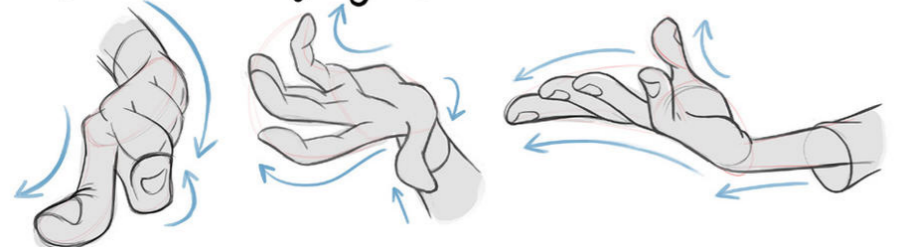
When it comes to elderly, the only parts that still grow are their noses and ears. Besides that, the body posture gets weaker with age. It looks like the body is pulled down by gravity. Also think of props that can help make your character stronger, like a walking stick or a pair of glasses.



1. start with a line of action & basic shapes



2. Draw all the fingers & details



# HANDS

Hands can be very difficult to draw. What I do when I struggle with drawing hands, is to break them down to shapes. In this image you can see how to divide the hand into three or four parts. As you can see, the fingers are also drawn as one shape.

Once you have that shape you can divide it into four fingers. The plus side of doing this, is that the overall shape is still in the fingers. If you don't see the fingers as one big shape they will lose their flow.

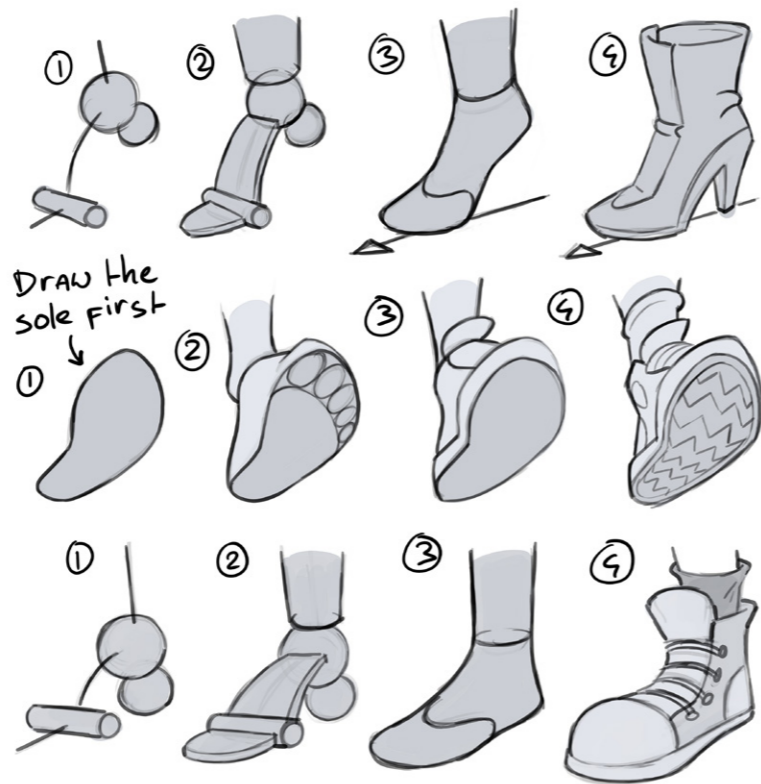


Try to break down these hands into big shapes, try to find out how they are constructed. You can also pick an animated movie, make screenshots and study the hands in it.

By breaking it down, you'll learn the fundamentals behind drawing hands.

# FEET

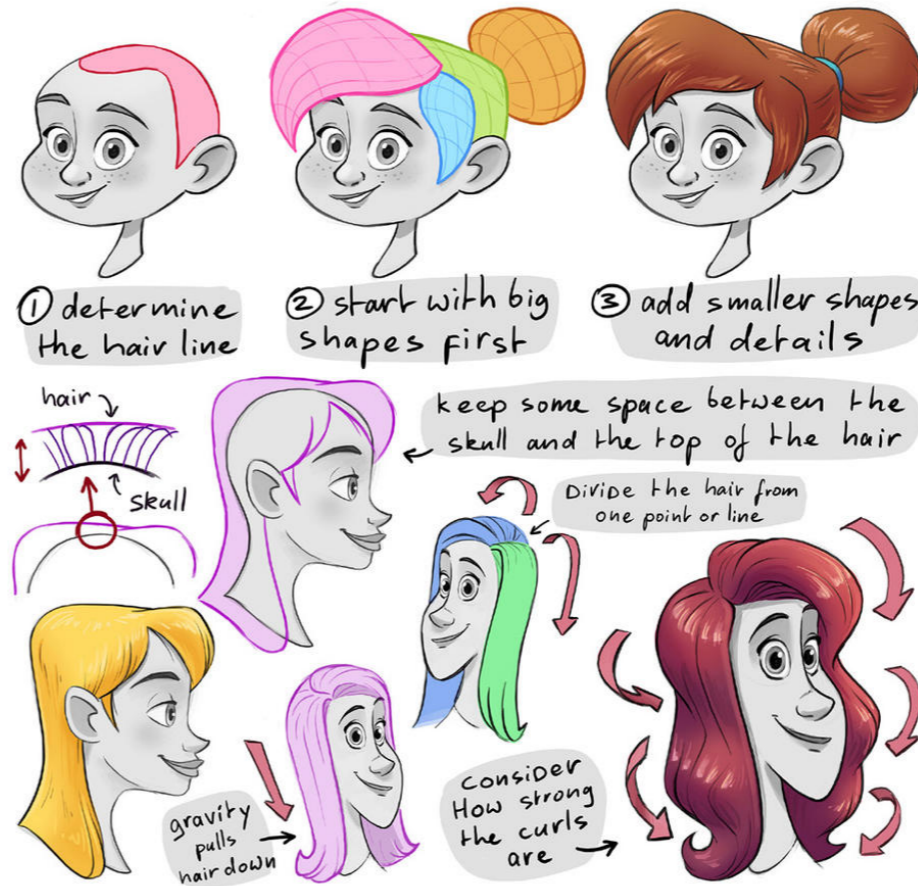
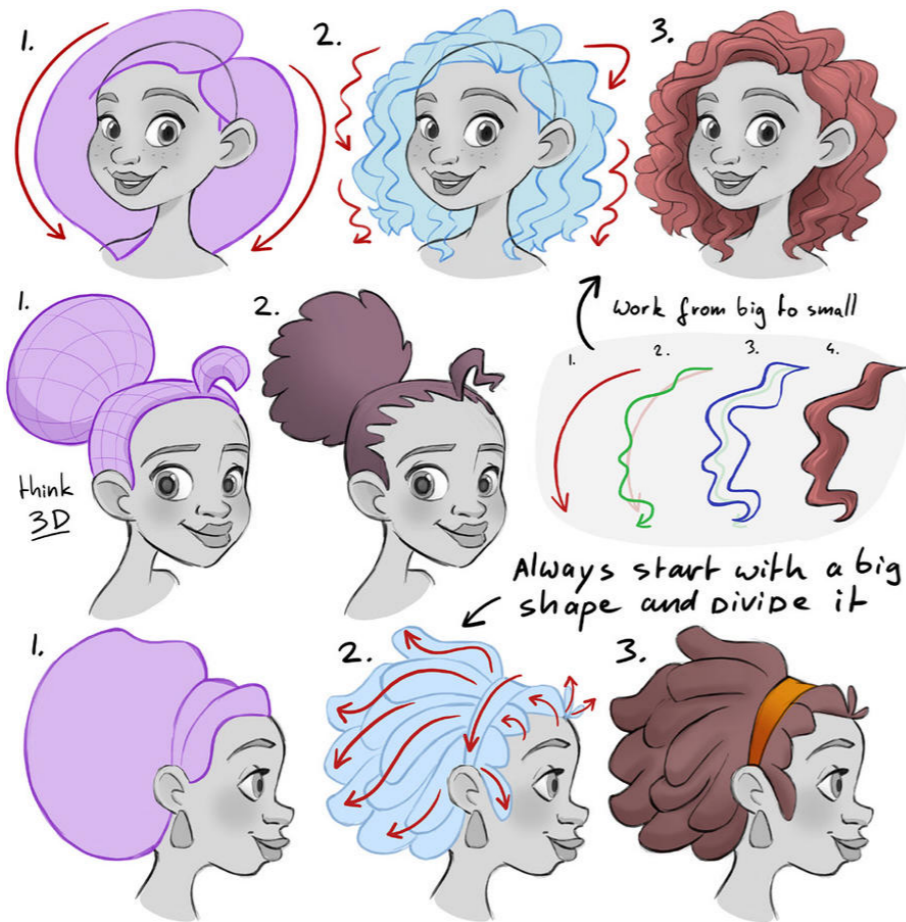
Similar to drawing hands, drawing feet can be way easier and more manageable when you break it down into just a couple of basic shapes. Those basic shapes are easier to rotate in 3D. Once you put these shapes down, you can start drawing all details on top.



Break down these shoes and feet into simple shapes as shown in the previous image.

# HAIR

Drawing hair can be very hard. Mainly because it consists of millions of individual hairs! But drawing hair can be simplified by breaking it down into shapes. Starting with big shapes and adding details later will make the process much easier and it also helps you to get a way nicer overall shape.



Some more tips about drawing hair. A great way to practice is to take a fashion magazine and try to make cartoony versions of all the different hairstyles you see. Try to break down these hairstyles into as few shapes as possible.



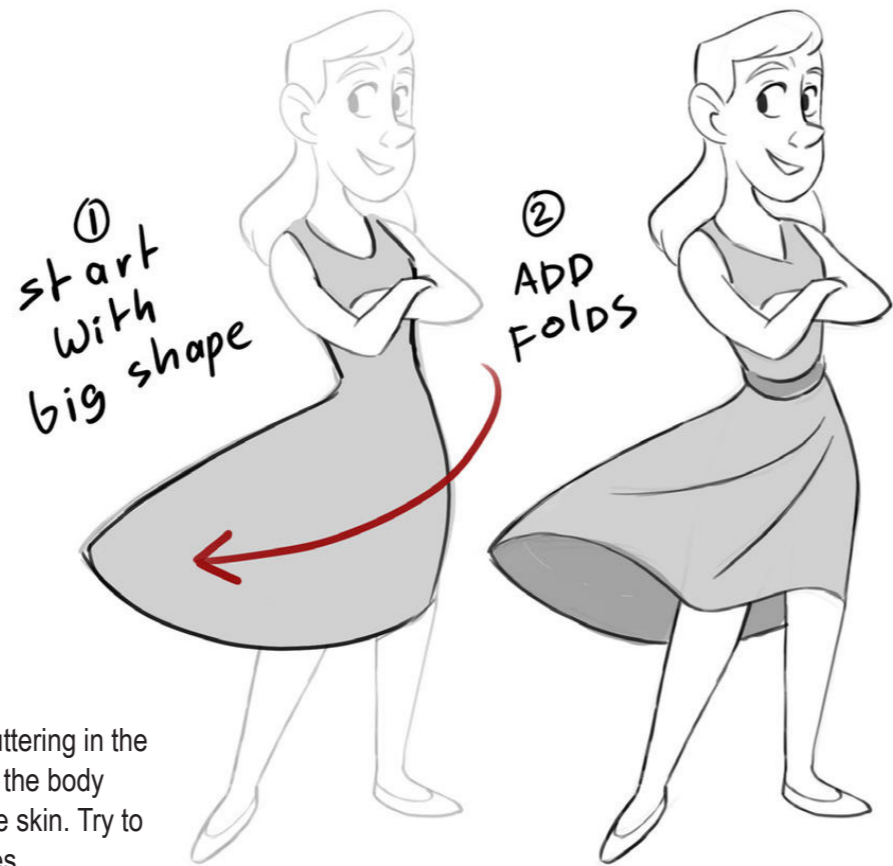
## CLOTHING

People often ask me how to draw clothing. And I think you can actually approach it quite similar as drawing hair: It's something loose that hangs around our body and gets pulled down by gravity.

In these examples you can see that I'm trying to keep it as simple as possible, don't add folds everywhere. I also use these folds to guide the eye to parts where I want the viewer to look. Like in this example with the guy in the orange sweater. You can see the fold from the sweater pointing to the hand.

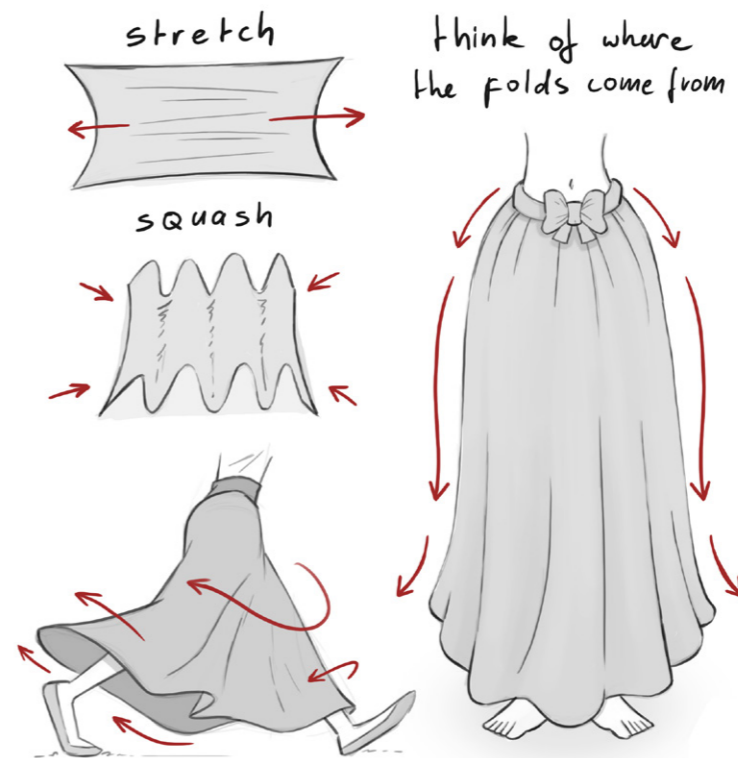


The clothing follows the shape of the body. It wraps around our limbs and follows our movement. Try to keep it dynamic and watch out for parallel and stiff lines.



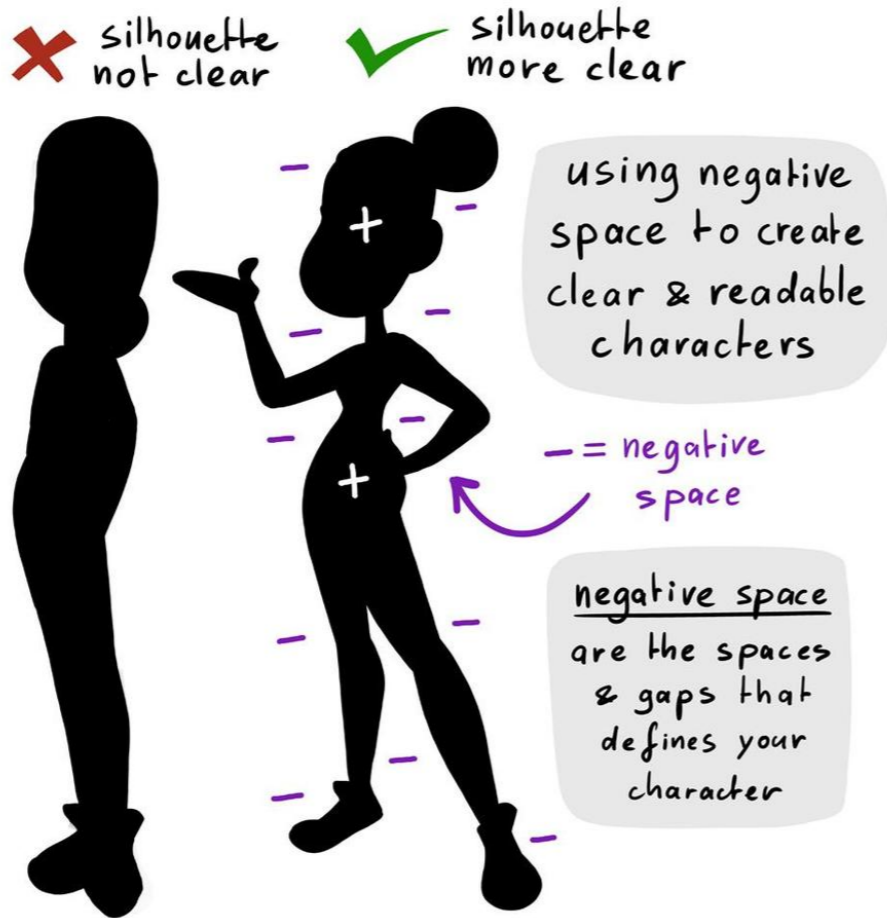
Here you can clearly see that the dress is fluttering in the air. On one side the dress is separated from the body and on the other side it's pressed against the skin. Try to always have that contrast between both sides.

Try to use a balance between squash and stretch when drawing clothing. It's the same as I explained earlier with drawing faces. Depending on the movement, there are parts that get stretched or pulled and other parts that get pushed and squashed. Look on the internet for images of dancers and draw simplified versions of their clothes. Try to see if you can recognize where it is stretched and where it is squashed.



# SILHOUETTE

Silhouettes are really important. Without a clear silhouette, your character would be very hard to read. The most well-known cartoon characters have very recognizable silhouettes.



try to keep your silhouette as clear as possible



Take a thick brush and draw a couple of silhouettes. Don't think in lines but try to think in shapes and make the characters as clear as possible. Try to find a good balance between negative and positive space.

① starting with basic shapes



② create the silhouette over it

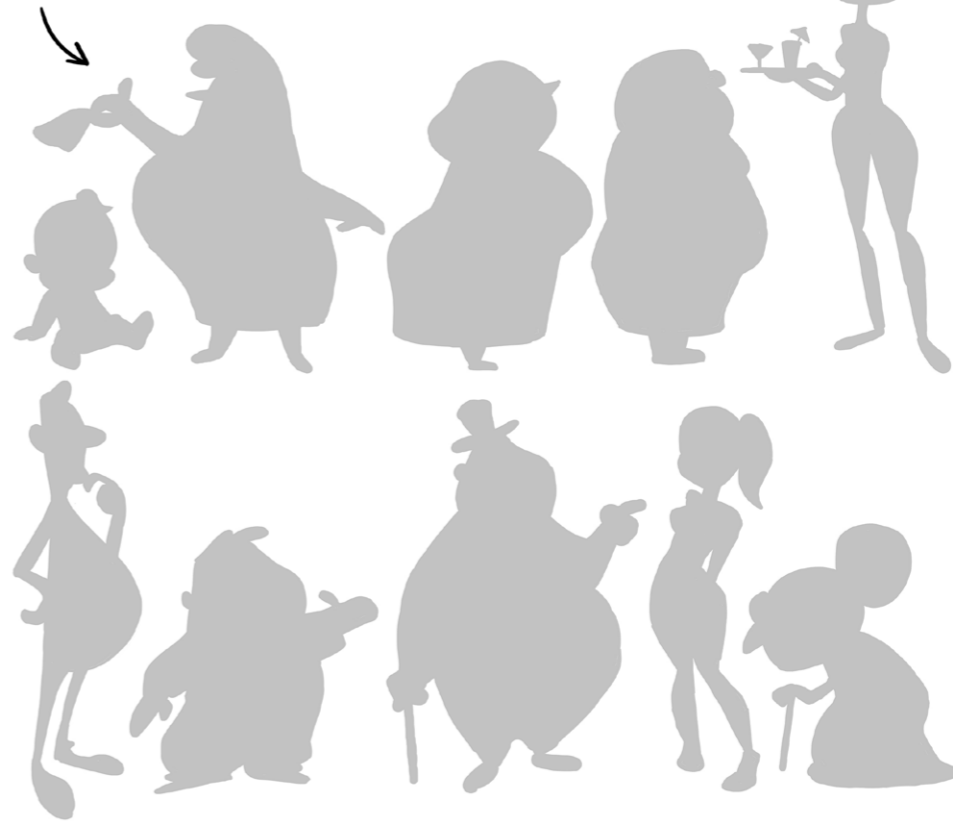


③ Draw on top of the silhouette



Some artists like to start with silhouettes. And even if you don't like it, it's a great exercise to try out. Because it forces you to think in shapes. In this example I started by drawing big shapes. But it would be way better to paint in these shapes.

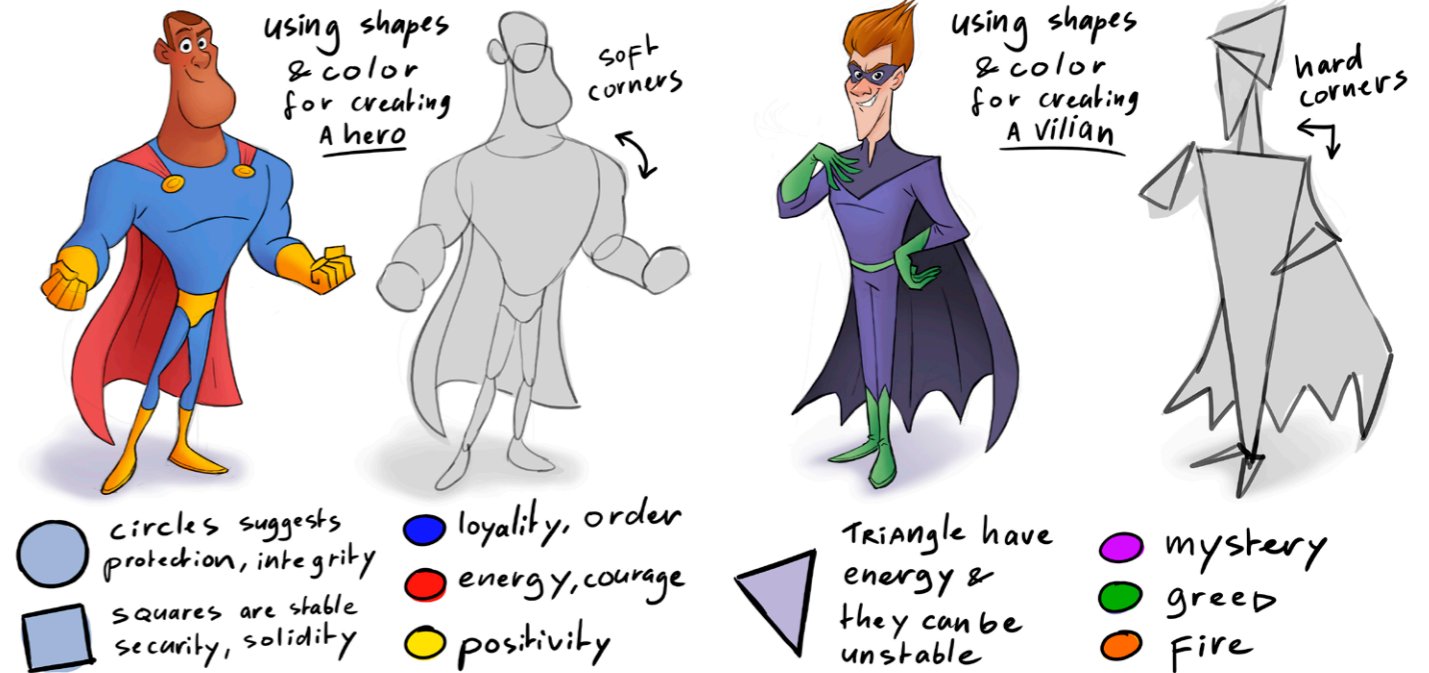
Try it yourself! Draw your own silhouettes or draw on top of these silhouettes



# COLOR AND SHAPE LANGUAGE

Using color and shapes to add character. Shapes have different meanings, which are often culturally determined, so they may vary from person to person. But a square is very stable and strong, so it can easily be linked to a strong hero. A triangle is way more dangerous and can be very unstable if you balance it on one point. In a lot of animated movies, the triangle is used to create villains.

This is also goes for colors. Blue stands for loyalty, order and so on. Red stands for energy and courage. Yellow is a color that often



is associated with positivity, at least in Western culture. Companies also use colors to communicate emotions and feelings to their customers. Carefully

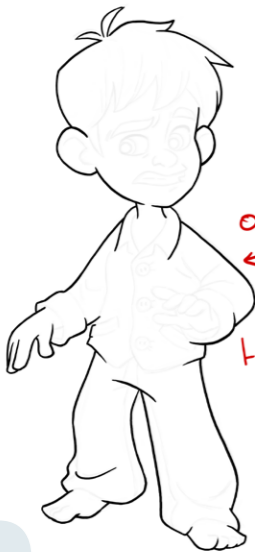
consider color, shapes and their meanings when you are creating your characters. Of course nothing is set in stone

and rules can be bent. But this could definitely give you a good basic understanding and the fundamentals to experiment with.

Ink on top of the sketch



I start with inking the outlines

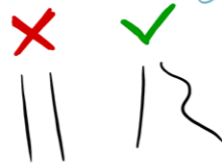


the thickest lines

# INKING

Even for inking, there are some guides you can use to create a strong design and appealing character. A weak sketch can be saved by a good inker. But a perfect drawing can be ruined by a bad inker. Inking is sometimes underappreciated, but it's so important because it's the final product

try to AVOID using parallel lines



using a thin brush to ink the rest



Overlapping  
• two pieces of something & one is covering a part of another



creating depth

Making lines thicker where there is overlap



this is the part that overlaps

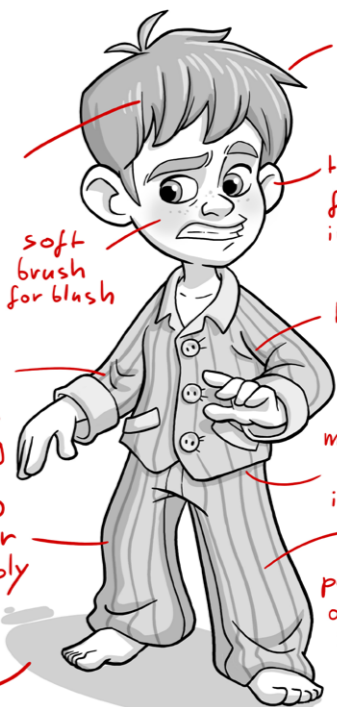


highlights grey color on screen

thin brush for details like folds in clothing

shadow grey color on multiply

cast shadow



thickest line for the outline

thin lines for less important lines

thick lines for overlap

medium weight line for important shapes

patterns & textures on lower opacity in this case 25%

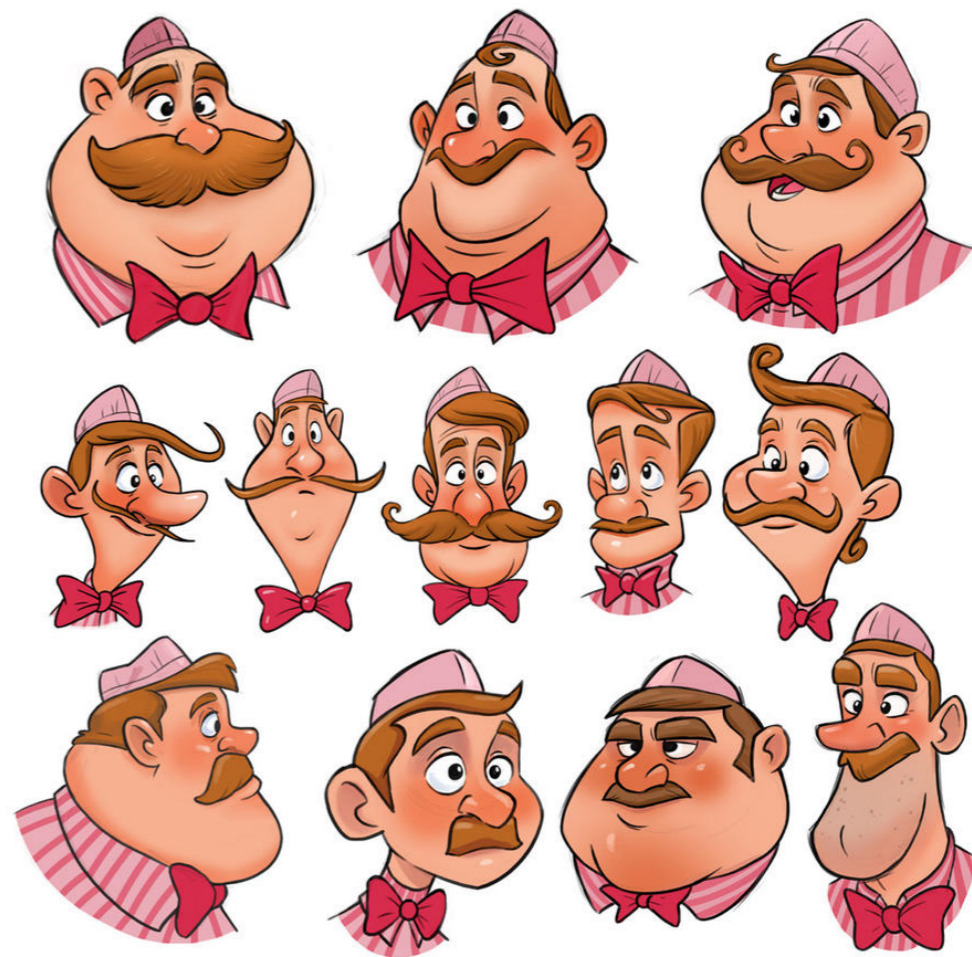
## SKETCHING

Never settle with your first sketches! In general, your first sketch is not your best one. Oftentimes when you keep sketching and look back at your first sketches later, you can't believe you were already proud of that first try. So even when you think you nailed your first sketch, keep making more variations.

Character design is a process of elimination. Once you have a lot of sketches, you can make a better decision on



which one fits the personality you are going for best. Often, I start by drawing heads, because the head conveys most of the character's attitude. It's also faster to draw the head instead of the whole figure.



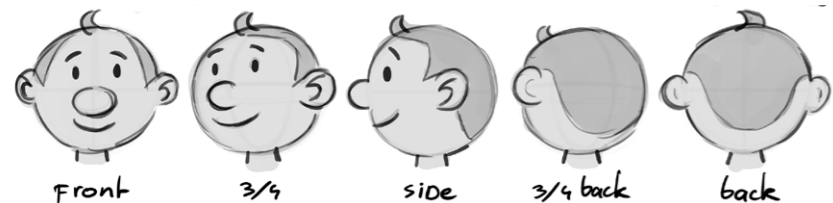
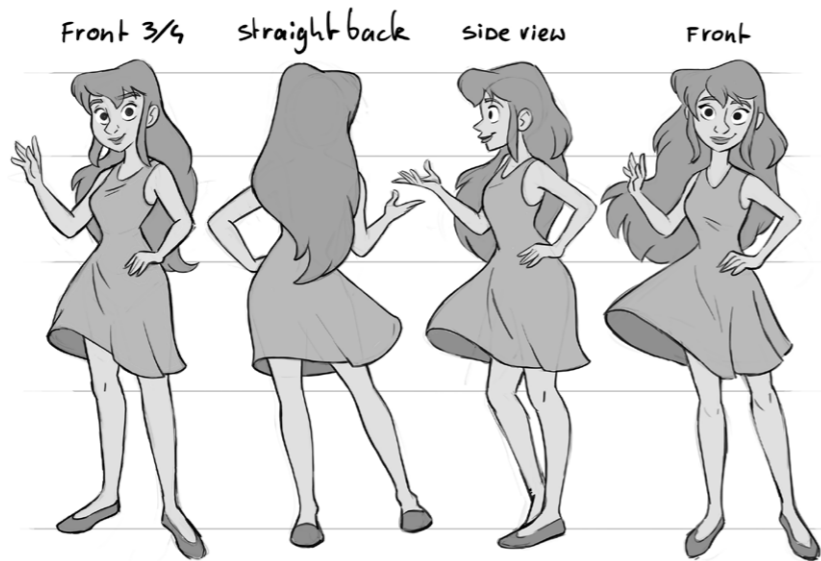
Once I have a couple of heads, I like to start adding the bodies. With this character I tried to explore different personalities. This project was a personal project and I was looking to create a character that could be a funny candy store owner. I used these drawings to find out what kind of personality I wanted to go for. Usually, this is already clarified when you receive a briefing from a client.



# PORTFOLIO MATERIAL

# PRESENTATION

Turnaround drawings are often used for production. They can be very useful for other artists in the production process, for example an artist that needs to redraw your character or a 3D modeler. I like to draw my model sheets with a slight pose, but they might ask you to draw a T-figure.



A T-figure is a character that is standing really stiff with its arms in a 90 degree angle. I like to depict my characters with a slight pose to reflect their personalities more, a T-pose is very unnatural and you don't want that to end up in the final product.



Take one of your own characters and draw it in a turnaround. Having a turnaround in your portfolio can be very useful, because it's something that you probably have to do when you're a character designer. It shows that you have some experience, which could be beneficial.



I started by sketching a lot of different ideas in my sketchbook. Once I picked the ones I liked the most, I started thinking how I could bring all these characters together. I started sketching them next to each other and work a bit on their style and design so they would fit together.



## A LINEUP

This was a project I did for the ImagineFX magazine. They gave me the briefing to create a sci-fi character lineup. That was it, so that meant a lot of freedom! Freedom is great, the only downside is that you have to make your own decisions. Sometimes it's easier to let someone else choose.



The final drawing with all the characters. I left some space in the middle because there needed to be some space for the fold of the magazine.

Making these types of character lineups are great for your portfolio. It

shows that you can create a group of characters and that you are able to think in story and relationships between those characters.

A good portfolio tip is to create something that you would like to work on. So, if you want to work as

a character designer for the next big animated feature movie, start drawing/designing a character lineup for your own movie. It's not important that that movie gets made, but it's more important that you learn how to develop such a character lineup.

This is another character lineup I wanted to make for this book. Sometimes it can be very hard to pick what you want to use for your portfolio. If you don't have an original idea, you can just pick something you like to draw. But do try giving it your own twist.



First, I start sketching the whole lineup. Having all these characters next to each other helps with making decisions. It's great if you can let them interact a bit with each other, that creates some extra character.

## QUICK TIPS



**Quick tips to focus on:**

- To create strong characters, you need to research the world of your character. Get to know your character, get into its head. It's best to do this before you start drawing the character.
- Don't settle with your first sketch, keep drawing. Once you have a lot of sketches, throw the weakest away (or put them in a drawer).
- Think about different the traits of your character. What is their physical shape, gender, age, motivation, back story... Try to get as much information as you can, this can help you to come up with a strong character design.
- Personality and character are more important than a cool design. Try drawing your character in a pose that fits his him or her. Observe people in real life and see how their body language says something about them.
- Ask people for feedback. Show them your character and see if they can describe the character the way you had it in mind. If they come with a totally different

description, you know you have to work on it some more. If they describe it correctly, you win!

- Don't focus too much on your own style. Generally, in the industry, you'll have to work for someone with a vision. Be versatile. I think style is overrated. Of course, the strongest and most famous artist have their own style. But don't force that, focus first on technique and giving your characters meaning and life.
- Do research and get informed. Use the internet. Don't be intimidated but be inspired. Easier said than done, but try to do this.
- Always keep growing and develop yourself. Of course, enjoy yourself and be happy with what you do. But keep challenging yourself and ask how and where you can grow. You can also ask other artists what things you could draw. A fresh perspective is always useful!

CONCLUSION  
& THANK YOU

# THAT'S IT!

Drawing your own characters is a great and powerful skill. The characters are the face of the game, animation show or feature. Characters need to be designed for all these types of productions.

Being a character designer might be the most popular job in the artist entertainment industry. At the same time, a lot of characters need to be made. They are not only used in animation shows and feature films, games (big and small), toys, board games and commercials need character designs as well. Maybe you won't be working on the biggest movie projects, but working on those different products can be just as fun!

My goal was and is to become a character designer for Disney or Pixar. I don't have a clue if I'll ever reach that level. But having that goal is might be even more important. Because of that goal, I got to where I am

now. For example, this year I worked on character art for television shows, a comic with well-known princesses, toys and board games. The goal is still to work on animated features. That is a very hard goal to reach as you'll have to compete with the very best to get there. But the other sectors I just mentioned offer a lot of fun opportunities as well. And who knows how things will develop!

Apart from always wanting to become a character designer, I also learned how to draw backgrounds, how to paint and how storyboards work. A varied skill set will help you get more work. You don't have to be a pro at each of these skills, but it will definitely help you to at least have a good understanding of it.



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