



PORTPREP

## PortPrep's Tips to Make a Great Animation Portfolio:

### 1. Creativity:

- a. Creative ideas, strong story-telling, and unique characters are the most important aspect of your portfolio.
- b. Create all original characters that are unique and not from an established style, definitely avoid Anime style.
- c. Avoid fan art or established styles
- d. Show some of your idea development process in your portfolio somehow. Include one or two concept sketches not only finished artworks.
- e. Ensure that you include story and interest in every drawing you do to show your various skills.

### 2. Drawing Skills:

- a. Superb drawing skills are the second priority in your portfolio in the following areas; object drawing, perspective of both exterior and interior spaces, people, animals, hands and feet, vehicles, scenes and characters.
- b. Keep figure drawings simple with just line and no shading
- c. When drawing scenes or objects in your scenes ensure that you use both original visual references and photo references.
- d. Show the structure of an object or of a perspective drawing lightly in a light colour under your drawing. Ensure you *truly understand how to correctly draw geometric objects and perspective*. Get specific and accurate instruction on proper construction.
- e. Use a variety of line weights to convey depth in your drawings
- f. Most programs will ask for some specific required pieces and for some artist free choice pieces. This is your chance to show a range of creativity and drawing skill and really let your personality show. Make sure you show off your strengths and what is special about you. We recommend that you create a colour rendering of a scene from your story with your characters in it. Use whatever media you feel most confident in ranging from hand coloured media to digital painting.
- g. When drawing characters it is best to draw expressions and actions that you feel confident you can draw well. If you can draw extreme expressions or actions without breaking character and draw them well then that can be impressive to include in your portfolio. But most inexperienced animation students have not reached that drawing skill.

### 3. Story Telling:

- a. Come up with unique stories that evoke some sort of emotion: funny, sad, exciting, surprising etc. Come up with something clever that the portfolio reviewers will remember.
- b. Consider using a theme or story in a section of or for all of your portfolio. Design some original characters and put them in a story and make a fully developed scene from your story.
- c. Story telling can be shown in a variety of ways; consider showing story not only in story boards but in how characters interact, via action and expression and via scene design and strong hierarchy design in scenes. To learn how to do all of these effectively consider asking PortPrep about our tutorial videos, workshops and private portfolio coaching.

### 4. Character Drawings:

- a. **Requirements:** Read over the requirements carefully and check every year for updates. Most of the highest ranked schools change the requirements slightly every year. Some schools like Sheridan in particular only release the character design requirements to students once they have officially applied. This doesn't leave much time to produce your drawings in! This practice ensures that only the students who are able to produce high level drawings quickly will get accepted. The speed at which the work is produced is part of how they determine if you are ready for the fast and demanding pace of the program.
- b. **Character Sketches:** Keeping the rapid pace required to produce your character sketches in mind it is important that you develop your skills *in advance* of actually making your sketches. Below is a list of skills you need to master in your character sketches *before* you start on the portfolio pieces:
  - i. **Character facial expressions and head rotations** that maintain the character's identity (try subtle as well as typical emotional expressions)
    1. To prepare study facial expressions via observational drawings of people, actors and animals.
    2. Study what other character designers and cartoonists have done. Notice how effective changing the eyebrows and eyelids can be and the set of the mouth.
    3. Use books, websites and tutorial videos to learn and consider finding a mentor to review your designs. When you sign up for mentoring with PortPrep's animation instructors you will receive a learning resources list and get the input you need to learn how to improve your character designs.
    4. You want to wow the portfolio reviewers with unique original character designs that are all your own. In the expressions and poses push yourself to make as extreme as possible poses that you feel absolutely confident you can pull off while staying in

character. While this interest can be impressive. You run the risk of not being skilled enough as yet to do it convincingly. Avoid making errors or award characters. It is preferable to keep your character expressions and actions to simpler ones that you know for sure you can draw well.

- ii. **Character rotation** is a fundamental skill that takes practice and often requires some input from a qualified instructor. Some tips on how to improve your success are listed below:
  1. It is all too common to see character designs that look stiff and awkward in their body posture. Most students focus all their attention on the face and head without considering the stance and body shape. Don't let this be you!
  2. To avoid the awkward body posture observe both real people's postures and look at some of the best characters.
  3. Another tip is to first design your character as simple solid silhouettes. Look at their front and side view posture and body proportions. Try various geometries and postures that express that character's personality.
  4. Practice drawing the character in each rotated view in several ways.
    - a. Find a toy or action figure that is similar to your character and draw it from observation at eye level. Remember to adjust from pure vision to the standard approach character designers take when drawing character rotations. If you are unsure how to do this ask for a lesson with us at PortPrep to correct your rotation drawings.
    - b. Find some similar character rotations online and use them as reference to see how to draw the side view of shoulders and chest and arms
    - c. Ask a friend to pose for you to help you see what the body looks like in rotation. Take pictures of your family pet in rotation if your character has its basis in animal anatomy.
    - d. Learn about various tools to help you ensure that each view agrees with the other views. PortPrep has tutorial videos to help you learn tricks to keep your character accurate as you rotate it.
    - e. Take figure drawing classes and lots of them to help you prepare. Consider taking a workshop on character rotation.
    - f. Definitely get some advice if you are at all unsure!

- iii. **Character in Action and Story Boarding:** Now that you have a character design or if you are given a character to use in a story from the college you are applying to you will need to show that character in action and involved in a story. Be sure to play around with lots of ideas and try sketching out the possible story scenarios and poses. Try them out on friends and family and see what they think. The following advice may be helpful:
1. Creativity and story-telling are the most important focus here! Show your ingenuity or your humour. Make the viewer feel something or make them curious. Try drawing out the frames of the story on index cards. Sometimes leaving out one frame can help involve the viewer more and engages their own creative process. Be clever and try lots of various possible story arcs.
  2. Study camera angles that create excitement and help exude feelings and actions.
  3. For the character in action frame consider using a deep angled view of the character's body to create more drama. Avoid boring flat or horizontal views unless it is for an expressive idea in one of the story-board frames.
  4. Use reference photos and people or maquettes to create a believable pose.
  5. Always focus on the action and line of action and the drama first...ensure that you evoke emotion and story as your first priority
  6. Next check that your figure is believable in its structure. Create an underlying drawing of the action and geometric structure under the main outline in a lightly sketched in drawing in another colour as your first pass. Ensure that the perspective of the character is correct.
  7. Get a mentor to check your drawing for accuracy as well as for flow and drama!

## 5. Figure Drawing:

- a. This is a very important section of your drawing skills portion of your portfolio. It is so important that we have included some tips dedicated to figure drawing:
- b. Include mostly quick short poses that convey the essential aspects of the figure considering anatomy, pose, motion, and character.
- c. Show basic geometric structure lightly under the drawing
- d. Include the line of action and/or median line of the body

### **Figure Drawing Continued:**

- e. Use an economy of line with confident simple drawings
- f. Figures should be drawn from life and not from photos.
- g. Show a few different approaches to drawing figures
- h. Show a simplified understanding of anatomy or anatomical studies
- i. Show an variety of body types and poses and angles. Avoid only using one point of view.
- j. Avoid intricate fully shaded long pose drawings in favour of quickly drawn confident line drawings. Maybe only include 1 shaded longer pose if it is a strength of yours. Remember that you are showing that you understand expression and capturing movement as an animator not capturing high detail as if an artist or illustrator.

### **6. Sketchbook:**

- a. Draw in your sketchbook every day! Sketch ideas for characters, stories, scenes, and make observational drawings. Many schools ask to see your sketchbook. Or you can take excerpts from your sketchbook to include in your portfolio. Read the portfolio requirements for the school of your choice carefully to be clear on how to include your sketchbook.
- b. Your sketchbook gives the reviewers a glimpse inside your creative mind. A lot can be seen about an artist via their sketchbook. Most artists who are natural animators have very robust sketchbooks that are chock full of character ideas and story lines as well as observational drawings or scenes. As soon as a reviewer looks inside your portfolio they can tell if you are truly an animator versus an illustrator or conceptual artist.
- c. Don't worry if there are a few weak drawings or weird items in your sketchbook. Your book should show growth and exploration. If you prefer buy the type of sketchbook that enables you to rip out pages without leaving any torn evidence behind.
- d. Reviewers are looking in your sketchbook to see how you develop your ideas so use it to explore ideas and not just to draw finished ideas.