

CHAPTER 5

ANIMATING MEMORIES

This section is contributed by Ho Wei Siong, who is among the pioneer group of animators trained in Singapore. He co-founded Animate, a leading provider of animation-based training to both students and adults in Singapore. Animate has developed proprietary software and solutions to support learning through animation.

INTRODUCTION

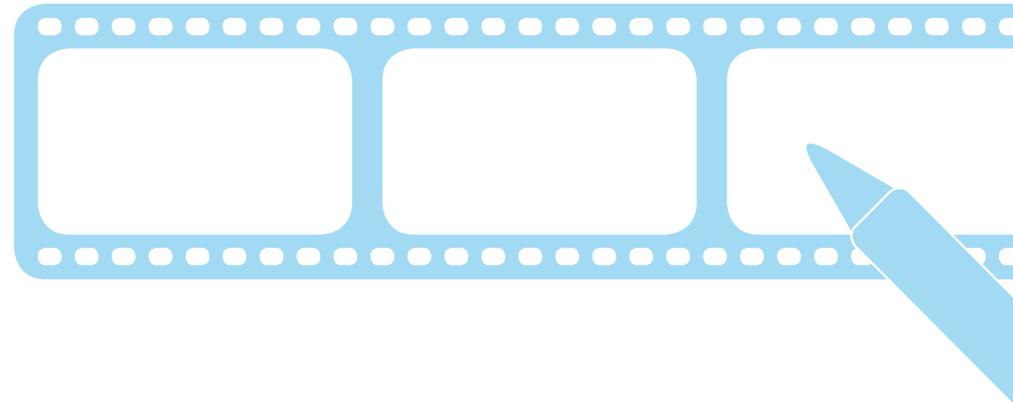
Animation is a technique involving filming or photographing drawings, models (such as clay and paper cut-outs) or objects in sequence. The drawings, models and objects are slightly moved or changed in each successive frame so that when the frames are played back in rapid succession (24 frames per second), an illusion of continuous motion is created. Animated sequences can be presented as videos or motion pictures.

Combining storytelling with visual entertainment, animation is an excellent medium for documenting and presenting memories. Stories and experiences are brought to life with action, sound and visual impact.

There are three types of basic animation, namely:

- Cel animation, where pictures are hand-drawn on transparent sheets called celluloids
- Computer animation, which uses computer graphics in 2D or 3D formats to create moving images
- Stop-motion animation, which uses models or objects manipulated and photographed frame by frame

Stop-motion is a suitable animation style for beginners, as the resources and tools needed for it are readily available. Stop-motion techniques are also easy to learn and practise. This chapter provides a guide to making stop-motion animation using cut-out models.



WHAT YOU NEED

Stop-motion animation with cut-out models uses flat characters, props and backgrounds cut from materials such as paper, cardboard, stiff fabric and photographs. To film or photograph the individual frames, you may use a webcam, digital camera, video camera or even a smartphone.



The process of making an animation can be divided into three stages, namely pre-production, production and post-production.

PRE-PRODUCTION

1 Choose a topic

All great stories begin with an idea. Before you decide on the memory you want to capture, ask yourself some questions: **Whose memories or what kind of memories are you interested in?** Are there people around you with interesting stories to share about places, people or events from the past?

2 Research

Once you have decided on your idea, research deeper into it. **Interview people for their recollections.** Flesh out the details with background research at the library or on the internet.

3 Write the outline

You may wish to **use the classic storyline with three main parts: beginning (set-up), middle (confrontation) and end (resolution).** The set-up introduces the main characters, and their situations and goals; in the middle part, the main characters confront their obstacles; the finale sees a climax in which the main characters overcome their final obstacle and reach a resolution.

4 Make a storyboard

Prepare a storyboard using your outline. A storyboard is a series of drawings or sketches (stick figures are fine) that **tell the story visually and help you organise your animation shot by shot.** Your storyboard should reveal information such as the characters and how they are moving in each frame, dialogue, and the types of shots and camera angles.



Storyboard frames for the animation *Little Gestures.*

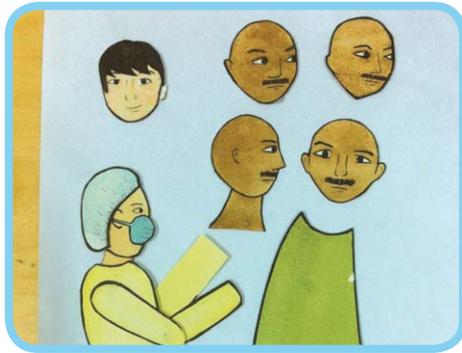


Illustrations courtesy of Animagine

PRODUCTION

5 Create the scenes and characters

Set up the first scene. Draw the characters on paper, cut out and piece together the different parts with Blue Tack to create figures with moveable joints. Remember also to include a background with cut-out objects for the scene.



Cut-out models and props used for *Little Gestures*.



Photos courtesy of Animagine

6 Begin filming or photography

Set up your digital camera on the tripod so that it faces the scene. If you are using an animation software such as Animaker, connect your web or video camera to the computer and launch the software. **Begin by taking 24 frames as the establishing shot.** [For a tutorial on Animaker, log on to www.animagine.com.sg/products/animaker]



Using Animaker, a software for stop-motion animation.

7 Capture the frames

Move the artwork bit by bit and capture the images frame by frame. For each adjustment, capture two frames. Continue making adjustments and capturing frames until you have captured all the frames needed for the first scene. Refer to your storyboard and move on to complete the subsequent scenes.



Photos courtesy of Animagine

POST-PRODUCTION

8 Editing

If you are using a Mac, import the images first into iPhoto and then iMovie to review the frames and animate them as a sequence. After creating the animation, **add any desired dialogue recording, music and sound effects** as well as titles, transitions and credits. If you are using Animaker, the frames would already have been captured by the program. Review the frames and render the frames as an animation sequence by clicking “Make Movie”.

9 Upload your animation

Ensure that your animation is in one of these formats: AVI, MOV, MP4, WMV (20MB per file). Follow the step-by-step instructions and **upload your video directly onto the singaporememory.sg portal.**

Alternatively, you can save your videos into a DVD and **mail it to:**
Singapore Memory Project
100 Victoria Street #14-01
National Library Building
Singapore 188064
Attention: Azlin Aziz

Still from *Little Gestures*.



Photo courtesy of Nexus



- It is crucial to plan ahead when producing an animation because it is time-consuming and sometimes difficult to fix mistakes during editing. That's why it is important to have a script or outline and to follow your storyboard.
- Keep your camera steady on a tripod. Don't stand too near the camera or you may accidentally knock or move it.
- Keep the lighting bright and consistent. Use electric lights such as table lamps, and don't film or photograph near a window.
- Be aware of shadows, especially those created by people walking past. Any shadows cast will create a flicker in the final sequence.
- Always check to make sure that the hands that are adjusting the cut-outs and objects are not caught in the shots. Don't rush to capture the frames.
- Vary the types of shots (such as wide shots, medium shots, close-ups) and camera angles (frontal, low, high) — this will make your animation more interesting visually.

SAMPLE ANIMATIONS

Stop-motion videos

Little Gestures

N.E.Mation!

MORE ON ANIMATION

Books

Beginner's Guide to Animation: Everything You Need to Know to Get Started by Mary Murphy

Frame-by-Frame Stop Motion: The Guide to Non-Traditional Animation Techniques by Tom Gasek

Online

[Animaker tutorials](#)

[iMovie tutorials](#)



SHARING OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

JANICE LOW EARN QING

Janice Low Earn Qing, Sumithri Rekha Venketasubramanian, Sheryl Teng Swee Sim and Felicia Koh Xiao Jie, from National Junior College, took part in the 2013 N.E.mation!, a digital animation competition organised by Nexus for youths to express their thoughts on Total Defence in Singapore. Their animation, *Little Gestures*, was a top 10 finalist and can be viewed on YouTube.

How did your team decide on the story for *Little Gestures*?

The theme of N.E.mation! competition was "Together We Overcome". 2013 marked the 10th year since Singapore overcame the SARS crisis, so we thought that the SARS topic would express the theme very well. We wanted to show how people could help others overcome problems with simple gestures. This seed idea guided us in building our story.

Was *Little Gestures* based on a real-life story?

Little Gestures is fictional, but our ideas came from our observations, experiences and research. For example, we learnt that nurses had contributed a lot during the SARS crisis, so we felt that it was important to include them in our story. Towards

the end of our animation, our main character thanks a nurse for taking care of her mother who has contracted SARS.

What was the production experience like?

We had only three weeks to produce our animation, and we had to work really fast to meet the deadlines. Our characters and props were first cut from paper and painted with watercolours, which gave a soft, pastel look that suited our emotional story. We then took many pictures and animated them using stop-motion techniques.

What did you enjoy most about the experience?

Producing an animation may be a tedious process, but animation is a powerful tool to convey ideas and illustrate a story. We animated many characters and took thousands of pictures. It was really satisfying to see all the images come to life as an animation.

What advice do you have for someone telling a story using animation?

Be determined and never give up. Continue to reanimate a scene as long as you think there is room for improvement. It may be too late to make any changes to it at the later stage.

Still from *Little Gestures*.



Photo courtesy of Nexus



From storyboard to animation.



Photos courtesy of Animate