ACT IT OUT OR SEEK IT OUT

When trying to work out the key poses for an unfamiliar or complex movement you should try and act out the movement as much as possible. You'll learn the most by performing the action yourself. But some motions are beyond the abilities of the average animator and would require the skills of a dancer, gymnast, or martial artist. In those cases, finding video reference is the best way to go. If you can act it out yourself it's also a good idea to record yourself performing the action so you get both the benefit of feeling the movement in your body and having the video reference to draw from as you analyze the motion and work out the key poses.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, RELAX

You don't need any fancy equipment or lighting to record yourself, a phone camera will work fine. Just prop it up so you can see your entire figure, head to toe, and that you give yourself room to move within the frame.


When recording...

   • Try to match the angle of the character to the camera, i.e. front on, side view, 3/4, etc. If you're animating in 3D, you might want to try and get more than one angle.

   • Try to perform the movement as naturally and realistically as you can at first. Once you've done that do some more exaggerated stylized takes depending on how exaggerated you plan to make your animation. That will give you a good range of information to work with as you find and interpret the key poses.

   • Don't be afraid to act like a goof ball! Remember, animation is a performing art!

ANALYZING ACTION

Photoshop with the AnimDessin2 extension is a great tool for quickly finding and sketching out key poses from video reference. Open (don't import or place) your video file in Photoshop in order to scrub through the video to find the key poses. As you scrub through the video reference, look for:

   • The "extreme" positions at the beginnings and endings of each individual movement.

   • Weight shifts.

   • Emotional shifts, changes in attitude or expression.

   • Overlap and follow through or secondary action between the extremes, make notes or sketches as needed.
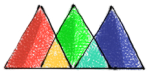
Your sketches do not have to be fancy or even good. They merely have to convey the position of relevant parts of the body as clearly as possible. Make sure to note the position of all joints with as much detail as needed to get a good reference for your poses.

Once you've completed your sketches you can render a movie to use as you pose your figures in After Effects.

INTERPRETATION & EXAGGERATION

As you move into After Effects and begin posing your puppet remember to...

• Start with the sketch as reference and then exaggerate and "push" the poses as much as possible for your character's rig. Keep in mind what is appropriate for the story, animation style, art style, character personality, etc.

• Work within the limitations of your puppet, just capture the essence and functionality of the pose in the movement.

• Always apply ALL the basic guidelines for good posing; strong silhouettes, asymmetry, good balance, etc.

• Look for the underlying structure behind most actions: starting pose, anticipation, action, reaction, settle.