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Learn everything you need to know about character design—including the fundamental principles, best practices, and a step-by-step process. Character design is a special niche within the broader graphic design discipline. It focuses on creating characters that connect with the target audience on an emotional level and help to tell a story—whether that's within a movie, a video game, or marketing materials. Perhaps you're curious about what defines an effective character, or you want a practical guide you can follow from start to finish. Either way, you've come to the right place. Here you'll find everything you need to know about character design, including: First things first: what exactly is character design? Let's set out a definition. What is character design? Character design is the art and process of creating distinctive, engaging characters that help tell a story and support the overarching narrative. It is also a popular discipline within graphic design. It involves conceptualizing and illustrating each character's visual appearance, personality, and behavior—making sure they resonate with the target audience and align with the surrounding context. There are many different scenarios where character design might be relevant, including: Branding, marketing, and advertising Animated films, TV shows, and videos Video game design Publishing (e.g. comic book and graphic novels) Live-action movies Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) UI UX design—e.g. designing characters that feature within apps and software (consider the famous Duolingo owl) We'll explore the different types of character design shortly. To begin with, though, let's consider the role of a character designer. What is a character designer and what does a character designer do? Character designers are responsible for conceptualizing characters and bringing them to life across a range of media—including animation, video games, comics, and branding. They work closely with directors, writers, and other creative stakeholders to develop characters that support the project's narrative, have the desired emotional impact on the target audience, and, where necessary, align with the overall brand. The exact role of a character designer varies depending on the context and the medium. But, generally speaking, they take on the following tasks and responsibilities: Research: Conducting research to understand the project context, genre, and any relevant historical, cultural, and artistic references that can help with the creation of authentic and compelling characters. Concept development: Brainstorming and coming up with initial character concepts based on the project's story, themes, goals, and target audience. Sketching and illustration: Producing detailed sketches and illustrations of characters, depicting multiple angles and poses. This includes creating facial expressions, gestures, and body language to accurately convey each character's personality and emotions. Costume and accessory design: Designing clothing, props, and accessories that help to enhance each character's identity and bring them to life. Gathering and implementing feedback from creative directors, producers, and other key stakeholders. Character documentation: Maintaining a character style guide to ensure consistency throughout the project. No matter where they work, character designers play a crucial role in creating memorable and relatable characters. They are skilled artists, designers, and storytellers—and great collaborators. Character designers rely on a variety of tools to bring their ideas to life, each catering to different aspects of the design process. Some of the most popular tools for character design include: Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator: These industry-standard programs are perfect for 2D character design and illustration. Photoshop excels in painting and detailing, while Illustrator is ideal for creating scalable, vector-based designs with clean lines and shapes. You can learn more about Adobe Illustrator in this guide, or check out this introduction to Photoshop. Procreate: This intuitive iPad app has become a favorite among digital artists for sketching and painting. Its customizable brushes, layering options, and touch-friendly interface make it an excellent tool for creating quick concepts or polished character designs on the go. Blender: A powerful, open-source tool for 3D modeling, rigging, and animation. Blender is typically used by character designers working on video games, CGI films, or VR projects, offering everything needed to create dynamic, fully realized 3D characters. ZBrush: This software specializes in high-resolution 3D sculpting, making it perfect for creating intricate character models with fine details like wrinkles, textures, or ornamental designs. ZBrush is widely used in industries such as gaming and film. Clip Studio Paint: Known for its precision and versatility, this program is a top choice for artists designing comic book and manga characters. It offers specialized tools for inking, panel creation, and vibrant coloring to bring graphic storytelling to life. For more design tools, check out our complete round-up of the best graphic design software, tools, and apps. The 8 different types of character design There are many different types of character design, each with its own unique approaches and techniques. We'll introduce the most common types now. 1. 2D character design 2D character design focuses on creating flat, two-dimensional characters often used in animations, comics, and illustrations. These designs emphasize strong silhouettes, bold color palettes, and exaggerated features to ensure the characters are visually striking and easy to recognize. When creating 2D characters, designers must prioritize clean lines and dynamic poses to convey personality and emotions effectively within a limited dimensional space. 2. 3D character design 3D character design involves creating fully realized, three-dimensional characters using modeling software such as Blender or Maya. This type of character design is crucial for video games, CGI films (films that use computer-generated imagery), and VR experiences, requiring detailed textures, realistic anatomy, and rigging (the process of creating a skeleton for the character to enable movement). In 3D character design, the focus is not only on aesthetic appeal but also on ensuring that characters translate well into motion and interaction within digital environments. 3. Character design for animation Animation character design is all about flexibility and expressiveness. Characters must be designed to move fluidly, with features that remain consistent across a range of poses and actions. When developing animated characters, it's important to create designs that are simple enough for repeated use—without compromising on personality and visual appeal. 4. Character design for films In film, character design must align with the cinematic narrative and visual style of the movie. Whether live-action, animated, or a combination, these designs often require a high level of detail to be worthy of the big screen. In this context, character designers collaborate closely with directors to ensure that characters embody the story's themes, incorporating elements such as costumes, textures, and emotional depth into their designs. 5. Character design for video games In the context of video games, character design is essential for creating an immersive and captivating gaming experience. Video game character design requires a careful balance between aesthetics and functionality. Designers must consider technical constraints like polygon counts (the number of polygons used to create a 3D model, which affects the model's level of detail and performance) and rendering efficiency, especially in real-time graphics. In gaming, characters often include customization options and are designed to interact seamlessly with gameplay mechanics. The focus is on making characters visually compelling while also ensuring that they're responsive and interactive in a virtual environment. 6. Character design for branding Brand character design involves creating mascots or icons that encapsulate a brand's identity. These characters need to be simple, memorable, and versatile for use across various mediums—from digital platforms to print to physical merchandise. When creating characters for branding purposes, designers often emphasize emotional appeal, using expressive traits and bold designs to create a connection with the audience. 7. Character design for comics and graphic novels Character design for comics and graphic novels focuses on creating characters that are visually engaging and fit within the story's style. In this context, designers must consider how characters look from different angles and in various poses, ensuring they are recognizable and dynamic across multiple panels. Each character's appearance, expressions, and clothing are carefully crafted to reflect their personality and role in the story, while also working seamlessly within the layout of the comic or graphic novel. Designers must also consider how the characters will appear in print, ensuring that designs are clear and legible even when reduced in size or printed in black and white. As such, they must pay close attention to line quality, contrast, and detail. 8. Character design for mobile apps and games In mobile apps, characters can help to guide the user, provide encouragement and feedback, and make the experience more engaging and interactive. Referring back to our earlier example, consider how the famous Duolingo owl guides users through their language-learning journey. When designing characters for mobile, it's essential to prioritize simplicity and clarity to accommodate smaller screens. Bold colors, clean lines, and instantly recognizable silhouettes are key. Now that we're familiar with the different types of character design, let's consider the fundamental principles and properties that character designers must adhere to. The fundamental principles of character design No matter the context, effective character design is rooted in these 6 key principles: 1. Silhouette A strong, recognizable silhouette ensures that characters are easily identifiable, even from a distance or when viewed in a minimalistic context. For example, Mickey Mouse's iconic round ears and simple shape make him instantly recognizable, even when seen in silhouette. The silhouette should clearly reflect the character's role, such as a bulky shape for strength or a slender form for agility. 2. Style and tone The character's design should align with the overall aesthetic and mood of the project, whether it's realistic, stylized, or abstract. For example, in the Pixar film Toy Story, the characters' exaggerated features and smooth, rounded design fit the playful and imaginative tone of the movie. In contrast, with something like The Lion King, a more realistic design style where the characters are designed to evoke a more serious and lifelike tone, would be needed. 3. Functionality Characters must serve their intended role effectively within the story or gameplay—whether as a hero, villain, or sidekick. In video games like Super Mario Bros., Mario's design is practical: his short stature and overalls convey a down-to-earth hero who's easy to relate to, while his bright colors and distinct features make him stand out in a fast-paced environment. 4. Personality In character design, personality is conveyed through details such as facial expressions, gestures, and posture, making sure that characters are relatable and engaging. For example, in How the Grinch Stole Christmas, the Grinch's mischievous personality is reflected in his sly grin, hunched posture, and exaggerated, sneaky movements. These details immediately communicate his devious nature, making him both humorous and memorable to the audience, without much dialogue. 5. Color palette A well-chosen color palette enhances visual appeal and reinforces the character's defining traits or associations. For example, Elsa from Frozen is designed with a cool, icy color palette featuring shades of blue, white, and silver. These colors not only reflect her ice powers but also convey a sense of elegance, isolation, and calmness. The choice of colors aligns with her character's journey and the film's overall theme of self-discovery and empowerment. Consistency The character's design must remain consistent across different poses, expressions, and actions. This ensures that the character feels stable and believable. A good example is SpongeBob SquarePants: no matter the situation, his basic shape, yellow color, and unique details (like his square body) remain consistent, whether he's in motion, interacting with other characters, or showing extreme emotions. You can think of these as the core building blocks of character design. As you move through the character design process, keep these fundamental principles in mind. A step-by-step guide to the character design process Are you ready to get started with character design? Here's a practical, step-by-step guide you can follow—from research and ideation, right through to finalizing and testing if your characters are ready for implementation. 1. Research and ideation The character design process begins with research and ideation. With the project brief to hand, start by exploring the context and the narrative surrounding your character(s). Consider the role and purpose they should serve within the story—be that the hero, villain, sidekick, or supporting character. Conduct research to explore various factors that will shape your character's design, such as art styles, cultural references, fashion, and any similar characters within the same genre. If you're designing a superhero, for example, you might take inspiration from existing characters like Spider-Man or Wonder Woman. As you gather inspiration for your characters, be sure to keep your target audience in mind. Think about what kinds of visual styles and personality traits will resonate with them and help them relate to the character. 2. Sketching concepts Next, you'll sketch out early-stage concepts for your characters. At this stage, the goal is to create rough sketches to explore different shapes, proportions, and overall styles without getting too caught up in the finer details. Start with basic shapes—such as circles, squares, or triangles—to establish the character's body and proportions. Experiment with different silhouettes to see what works best for the character's personality and role (if you need a refresher on the importance of silhouette, refer back to the fundamental principles of character design we covered earlier). You might also experiment with different artistic styles and aesthetics for your characters, bearing in mind their personality, the surrounding context and genre, and the target audience. If you're designing a robot character, for example, you could try out different body types—such as boxy and mechanical versus more fluid and sleek. This step is all about experimenting and exploring your options, so don't worry about getting your characters perfect just yet. There's plenty of time for perfection later on! 3. Defining key features Once you have your basic sketches, focus on defining key features for your characters. This is where you'll really start bringing the character to life by highlighting physical traits such as clothing, accessories, and distinguishing features that reflect their personality. As you go through this step, think about how the character's design communicates who they are. What do they wear? What accessories do they carry? What's their posture like? All of these factors should provide visual clues about the character's role in the story. Again, we can use Elsa from Frozen as a great example here. Her sparkling blue gown and long, flowing hair not only convey her elegance but also symbolize her connection to the cold, magical world she inhabits. 4. Refining and iterating character designs By now, your characters are really starting to take shape! Next, you're going to refine and iterate on your initial concepts to get them even closer to their final form. Revisit your character sketches and fine-tune the smaller details. You might adjust their facial expressions, posture, color choices, and textures, or tweak their props and accessories. If you're designing a villain, for example, you can experiment with a range of facial expressions until you find their most menacing look. Like any design process, feedback is crucial in character design. This is a great moment to share your characters with key stakeholders to see how they resonate—and to gather ideas for improvement. 5. Finalizing the design After gathering feedback and refining your character concepts, it's time to finalize the designs. This is where you'll create a polished version of your character, cleaning up the lines, finalizing the colors, and adding more intricate details. Focus on ensuring that the character looks cohesive and visually appealing. And, if your character will appear in different mediums—such as animation or marketing materials—make sure that the design works well in all contexts. 6. Testing and implementation Last but certainly not least: the all-important testing stage. After finalizing your characters, it's crucial to place them in the context in which they'll be used to ensure that they perform and appear as expected. Whether it's testing the character in animation, gameplay, or in printed materials, you need to make sure that the design not only looks good but accurately fulfills its role within the intended environment. Does the character look dynamic and believable in different poses and actions? For example, a video game character would need to be tested in various gameplay scenarios—running, jumping, and interacting with different objects—to check that the design works well in all possible contexts. Throughout the testing stage, weigh up whether or not the character is functional, visually consistent, and effective in all scenarios. Yes? Then your characters are ready for implementation! You'll finish by handing them over to the relevant team—such as animators, developers, or marketing specialists—depending on the project. This team will integrate the characters into the final product, whether that's a game, film, or marketing campaign. Tips and best practices for effective character design As you follow the character design process, remember these tips and best practices. They'll help you create engaging, effective, and impactful characters. 1. Keep the audience in mind This is the golden rule in any design context, including character design: always focus on your target audience's preferences and expectations. If you're designing characters for a children's cartoon, you'll want to keep them colorful, friendly, and approachable. If you're designing characters for an adult audience, on the other hand, you can give them a more complex or nuanced appearance. Beyond aesthetics, consider cultural references, emotional appeal, and relatability. You want to create characters that connect with your target audience and have the desired impact. 2. Iterate often Don't fall into the trap of perfectionism. You don't need to get your character designs perfect on the first attempt—or even the second or third. Character design is an iterative process, so don't be afraid to regularly revisit and refine your concepts and go through multiple feedback rounds. Iterating and building your characters incrementally helps to uncover new possibilities along the way—and will ultimately improve the quality and impact of the final product. 3. Focus on simplicity and clarity Even when creating more complex, nuanced characters, don't overdo it on the details. If your characters are too elaborate and intricate, you risk diluting their visual impact. Prioritize simplicity and clarity to create characters that are easy to recognize and remember. This is especially important for characters that appear in fast-moving contexts, like animations or video games. Start with bold shapes and clean lines and go from there. 4. Maintain consistency Make sure that your character's appearance and defining traits remain consistent throughout the project. Keep their proportions, colors, and key features identical across different poses, expressions, and contexts. Consistency in character design is key for building a sense of familiarity and trust with your audience—especially when it comes to storytelling and branding. 5. Emphasize storytelling A good character tells a story without words. Use visual elements like clothing, accessories, and posture to hint at their backstory, traits, and motivations. A scar or worn-out armor might suggest that a character has been in battle, for example, while bright, playful attire could reflect a cheerful or mischievous personality. Review your characters in relation to the overall script and story. Every detail should contribute to the narrative and deepen the character's impact. Key takeaways and further resources We hope you've enjoyed learning about character design. It's a highly rewarding process—allowing you to unleash your creativity and work across many different contexts to bring your imagination to life. Character design is just one of many specialist fields within the broader design discipline. If you'd like to continue exploring the wonderful world of design, we can recommend the following: Next Steps In case you need further assistance, here are some of our resources you can consider: Note: All information and/or data from external sources is believed to be accurate as of the date of publication. When we think of some of our favorite characters, from Superman to Pikachu, design is often that last thing that comes to mind. That's what good character design does: it hides the designer and leaves behind only a memorable character. But great characters don't come from nothing—they are the result of planning, visual storytelling, choices and artistic skill. For this reason, character design can be harder than it at first appears. The design has to evoke who the character is and that means the designer must be skilled at using nonverbal, visual elements such as expression, gesture, color and clothing to communicate personality traits. This is especially true for simplistic character styles, where the designer has to communicate more with less. You may also have to make technical considerations such as whether the design can be easily animated. On top of that, there's the question of originality and staking out your own character design style. Ready to let some colorful characters into your life? Design by OrangeCrush Fortunately, character design is a fairly old practice, and there are common tips and workflows that can guide aspiring designers from concept to finished artwork. With that said, every artist is going to have a different approach that works for them. With both of these factors in mind, we've put together this ultimate guide to character design to provide a step-by-step process and specific character design tips and advice from professional designers who are experts on our platform. The step-by-step character design process — Step 1: Develop a concept — Gather your pencils! Illustration by Maria GR Character design belongs to a class of illustration called concept art. It is about communicating the artist's vision of how a character might appear in a future context, such as a film, video game or company website. The entertainment industry uses concept art to visualize their ideas before committing exorbitant amounts of money on production. To that end, a good character design should sell the vision. Even if you are not designing a character for any purpose other than your own portfolio, that's all the more reason for a clear concept: your design won't have any future context in which to explain the story behind the character. Create a character profile The creative brief, if you are given one, is a good place to start. The client should have provided you with information about the context for the character, the target audience, and the preferred style. Top Level character designer Cross The Lime explains the importance of establishing a direction based on the brief, "How mainstream or quirky a character can be in branding projects really depends on the industry and client. Ask them for examples of characters they like and why." By Cross The Lime But while the client (or writer) may have already created a story for the character, that does not let the artist off the hook. Briefs are by their nature, well, brief, and it's not uncommon for a client to have trouble expressing themselves in artistic terms. How mainstream or quirky a character can be in branding projects really depends on the industry and client. It is often up to the illustrator to interpret the brief, ask the right questions, read between the lines, and distill the client's explanation into core character traits. Your ideas should not contradict the brief, of course, but keep in mind that you were hired for your expertise. In many cases, the client will be expecting you to expand on the concept in novel ways that will not have occurred to them. If you are not given a brief (perhaps even if you were), it is a good idea to essentially come up with one for yourself. You are aiming for a short prompt—no more than a paragraph or so—that gives a basic profile of the character: where they come from, what they want, what makes them special. The Five Ws can be helpful for establishing a basic premise. At this stage, you should not get bogged down in frivolous details like if "her favorite ice cream is rocky road!", but should aim instead for descriptions that serve as an introduction. Brainstorm the details There are a number of brainstorming techniques that can help you develop your character profile. One of the most helpful for character design is word association, starting with some keywords from the brief and coming up with related words that come into mind, either via mind-mapping or writing a straightforward list. The reason being that singular words keep ideas simple, distilling them to their essence, and this comes in handy when you need to communicate those traits visually. By noodlemie According to Top Level designer noodlemie, "I take some time to brainstorm ideas and picture how it would look like in my mind. Before physically starting anything, I create my 'good mood' atmosphere by listening to music and sometimes reading comics, news or a novel." "Before physically starting anything, I create my 'good mood' atmosphere by listening to music and sometimes reading comics, news or a novel." The character concept is a lot like the destination your ship is steering towards, and for that reason, you should pay particular attention to this step. Unfortunately, there's not always a straightforward way to know whether you've chosen the right destination. Creating art is a process of blind feeling, aesthetic judgement and trial-and-error. Get the concept as fleshed out as you can, and come back to this step later if necessary. When something in your design just doesn't feel right, the underlying concept is usually the first place you should look. Step 2: Do your research — Creating unique characters from your mind can feel like magic—so much so, that it can be easy to overlook pesky considerations like research. You might be asking, "is this a character or a term paper!?" But research and imagination go hand-in-hand. Your imagination, after all, comes from your mind, and your mind is informed by your real world knowledge and experiences. Research the target audience More importantly, your design will depend on the experiences of your intended audience. "Before anything else, research the target audience to which the character aims to reach out," Top Level character designer Maylyn describes their research process. "This will serve as the basis of the design. Knowing the audience makes it easier for you to decide how the character should look, including the colors to be used and setting the mood." "Before anything else, research the target audience to which the character aims to reach out." A client will typically provide audience information in the brief, but you'll want to do research beyond demographics such as age, gender, location, etc. Look up other artists who design for that target audience, and the types of styles that appeal to them. Gather reference images This brings us to our primary means of research: gathering reference images, or scouring the internet for photos and artwork relevant to your concept. It is important to understand that using reference images for inspiration is not cheating (provided, of course, you are not creating exact copies). Whether you like it or not, your art is subconsciously influenced by what you've seen, including other artists that have inspired you, and collating references is how you consciously control that influence. In addition, researching the work of other artists on similar concepts or designs for similar audiences can also help you see what is common and how your character can be different. By bananodromo Find how other successful artists make their characters awesome. Analyze and come to conclusions, but don't imitate. As Top Level designer bananodromo puts it, "Gathering inspiration is necessary sometimes, maybe to understand how other successful artists make their characters awesome. Analyze and come to conclusions, but don't imitate. Find your own path." Of course, other artists are simply interpreting what they see in real life in their art, and your reference material must similarly include real life photos or direct observation. As Top Level designer ananana14 so eloquently puts it, "the best tip I wish I could have given myself when starting out is that real life is the best inspiration." Logos by ananana14 Exaggerated, cartoony or oddball characters are not excluded here—if anything, you should make more of an effort to ground them in realistic traits that people will easily recognize. An important consideration is also anatomy. Even if you are not planning to animate the character, you will imply physicality in their pose and should understand how they move and distribute their weight. By Cross The Lime According to Cross The Lime, "A good character is recognizable, yet unique. If you need to draw a giraffe, look at photos of giraffes. What are the proportions, what shapes make up the body, how do the legs work, how does the character work when in motion? The more you sketch and draw variations of these recognizable features and shapes, the easier it is to abstract and come up with your own character." The more you sketch and draw variations of these recognizable features and shapes, the easier it is to abstract and come up with your own character. You can find reference material from virtually any source—Pinterest, Google images, ArtStation, Dribbble, even your own camera roll. You can also gather reference images for anything you're unsure about—from the character concept as a whole to specific details like clothing, hairstyle, facial expression, poses and more. The important thing is that each of these images help you visualize your concept. Top Level design team Miniverso Studio offer their perspective on this stage: "Research is the essential part in character design. Get inspired by other designs and styles that bring you closer to what you are looking for. Gather references in images, style, color, personality, expressions and more. Soak up everything that manages to give your character soul." How many reference images you'll need will depend on the project and how much you feel you need to learn. That said, it should definitely be more than a few in order to get diverse perspectives. Once you've gathered these materials, it can be helpful to create a collage or mood board. This does not have to be anything fancy: just all of your images collected in one document that you can keep open on your computer as you work. Step 3: Choose the best tools for your project — There's an argument to be made that the tools you use don't necessarily matter. In theory, you can design a character as effectively with pen and paper as on the computer, and likewise top tier software won't cover up poor concepts or lacking art fundamentals. Using pencil and paper helps to unfold our imagination and not to stagnate. The tools you use largely come down to your intended style, personal preference and the client's file type requirements. Some art styles, such as watercolor, can be mimicked on the computer but usually come out best in their original medium. Personal preference, of course, depends on your own experience creating artwork. By velcheva Finally, you should base your decision on the image file type the client wants. These days, most clients will be expecting some sort of digital file for easy storage and sharing, usually an original source file from a program like Photoshop and a simple image type such as JPEG. But while the client's preference determines the format of your final design deliverable, you can use any tool you like before you get to that point. For example, many of the character artists we interviewed prefer doing preliminary sketches on paper. As Top Level designer velcheva puts it, "I draw my illustrations using a laptop and a graphics tablet. Although I got used to the tablet for many years, it is still quite difficult for me to start drawing; I draw a line, delete, draw another one, delete again. But it's much easier for me to start drawing on paper." I still always start my drawings on paper, even after years of experience using a tablet. Meanwhile, Cross The Lime outlines her process as; "I often draw outlines by hand, then vectorize and add color in Adobe Illustrator—it is faster for me, and has a more fluent/ organic look and constructed lines and vectors." As mentioned before, the analogue tools, whether inkwells or paint brushes, will depend on the style you are going for. Digital drawing tools can be more flexible, but let's briefly go over some of the most common software for character design: Adobe Photoshop / Clip Studio Paint / Krita for digital painting (be sure to pick up some brand of graphics tablet and stylus pen) Adobe Illustrator / Affinity Designer for vector characters (typically used in logo characters or mascots for brands) Maya / ZBrush / Blender for 3D characters Procreate for drawing with a tablet (mimics the experience of drawing with a sketchpad, be sure to pick up a stylus pen) Step 4: Start with thumbnails (a lot of them) — You might be familiar with the term "thumbnail" from its internet usage: a tiny preview version of an image or video. In the illustration world, the idea is similar—thumbnails are small samples of images—but the purpose is different. Thumbnail sketches allow the artist to put their ideation into practice, trying out several, small, quick drawings before committing to a single idea as noodlemie explains, "I draw some doodles or raw sketches on paper for a few options before I do the actual illustration digitally, after I look for some related references for the style or coloring". Design by noodlemie Work small and fast There's no specific recommended size for thumbnail sketches, but ideally they should be small enough that you can fit dozens on the same page. They should be devoid of most detail: focusing on basic shapes and gestures. The key here is variety—in terms of poses, "camera" angles, and the specific reference image you're capturing. Sketch out as many ideas as you can think of, even if you think you found one you already like. You should also emphasize speed and volume: aim for a minute or less for each thumbnail drawing. Working this way keeps you from getting too precious about any one particular drawing since the more time you put into a sketch, the more reluctant you will be to change things. You will also capture a sense of energy in the character pose through speedy linework. Another of our Top Level character artists, BayuRIP, uses this phase to push the concept to new heights, "Combine some elements into the character, make it weird and unique. Try to explore shape and angle to make it different and add your personal style to the design". Pay attention to overall shapes and silhouettes When you have a good number of these (in the tens, at least) a useful technique is to block in silhouettes. This means painting over the shape so that you can see whether the image reads clearly based entirely on its outline. Ask yourself, can you tell what the image is supposed to be? What are the dominant shapes? Is the pose clear? Keep a clear silhouette in mind: have ears, head shape and position of arms all clearly defined. Cross The Lime summarizes, "It is even more important that you keep a clear silhouette in mind when designing. Have ears, head shape, position of arms clearly defined, so that you can recognize the character even when it is just the silhouette." If you have not done so, it's a good idea to brush up on shape language. This, (in addition to color later on) is a primary visual way to communicate traits and emotions such as stability, danger, or innocence. Step 5: Finalize your sketch — If you're tired of sketching after that last step, I have good news for you! Just kidding—it's time for more sketching. That said, it is a good idea to take a break at this point if you have the time to spare. Doing so will allow you to clear your mind and come back to your thumbnails with a fresh perspective. When you are ready to get back to work, find the thumbnail that evokes your concept most effectively. You are then going to create a larger, more detailed sketch that will serve as the basis for your final artwork. Miniverso Studio highlights the importance of this stage, "The digitization process of our character will be easier with a well-elaborated sketch." Finalize the pose and fine details Your main concern at this stage should be the pose, so take the time to sketch a few options that show off the character's personality. If you are designing a character for an animator, you will also need to create a handful of orthographic T-pose sketches. These display a front, back, and side view of the character standing with their legs together and arms outstretched, and they give the animator a neutral view of the design on which to animate. T-poses can also be useful for figuring out clothing detail that may get lost in a more expressive pose. Cross The Lime advises, "As you are sketching, remember that depending on use, your character must be able to move around. Will it need to hold a sign, jump over things, or bend down? Your character's anatomy must allow for these things. Ideally, your first character sheet has expressions along with the character turning around. What will a frontal view look like, side view, two-thirds, and maybe even from behind." Besides the pose, you should be paying particular attention to details like facial expression, hand gestures, and clothing folds in order to get the design as far along as you can. "The facial expression, especially the eyes, significantly defines the mood of the character," Maylyn explains. "The posture and colors make the character pop out. So, everything needs to complement each other to make your character alive and believable." By Maylyn The facial expression, especially the eyes, significantly defines the mood of the character. Their clothes add personality. These need to match to bring them to life. Gather feedback before proceeding If you are working on a team or with a client, this can be a good time to gather feedback before going any further—in which case, you may want to provide a few (no more than three) options. The purpose of this sketch is to guide your final artwork, so it is going to get harder to make any big changes to the design from here on. Step 6: Render your character design — In a lot of ways, you have already successfully designed a character by this point. Design is less about illustrative flair and more about choices, creating the concept, and the bulk of that hard work is behind you. Now is where you start the render process, which is a fine art way of saying going from sketch to finished artwork. That, of course, is not to say that you should pay less attention to the render. In order for your character concept to land, it has to be truly presentable. In addition, you may notice details that you need to change the more realistic your design becomes. Digitize the sketch If you've been working on paper up until now, you will first need to digitize your sketch. You can do so fairly easily these days using a smartphone, as velcheva tells us, "I take pictures with my phone and send a personal message to myself in any messenger that is also installed on my laptop (this is much faster than scanning). I take a photo of this sketch, make it a translucent layer and draw over it in a graphics editor." Be sure also to convert the image to black-and-white and adjust the contrast to really help the linework come through. It can also be helpful to trace a clean, digital sketch on top of this one using your brush tool or you may want to jump into inking if your character will include inked, cartoon lines. Finally, be sure to turn down the opacity on your sketch so that you can draw over it. If you are sticking with physical artwork, you can use tracing paper to transfer a clean version of your sketch onto your canvas. From there, you simple render from the colors and materials of your preference. Focus on value Most artists recommend starting your render with a focus on value. Value is an art term that refers to light and shadow, and as this can be a challenge in and of itself, it is best to separate value from color. By Nemanja Vulevic To block in value, you'll want to choose contrasting shades of grey for shadows, mid-tones, and highlights. Working in a separate layer beneath your sketch, color over your character with the mid-tone. Next, decide from what angle your light source is coming (don't forget secondary sources such as the light reflecting off of the floor back onto the character), and block in the general area for shadows and highlights on the character. If you are going for a more painterly style, you can blend these tones by using a brush with a lowered opacity and sampling new grey tones periodically using the eyedropper tool. Otherwise, most cartoonish styles tend to keep the hard edges for their colors and shading. To get an idea of how all this is done, search for and study process videos from other character artists on YouTube. Add color When you get to the coloring stage, Miniverso Studio offer sound advice, "the 'for fun' final stage has arrived! Play your favorite song and look for the most welcoming place; in this phase, the final artwork is the reward for your hard work". Character design by Miniverso Studio For colors, you should aim to choose those that contribute to the character's overall mood and story but that are also realistic. A firm grasp on color theory and color psychology as well as learning from the colors in your reference images all can help you identify the ideal color palette. Working non-destructively in a separate color layer will also allow you to experiment. When you're ready to paint in your colors, use a blend mode such as "Color" in Photoshop in order to tint your value tones with the appropriate color. Step 7: Add the finishing touches — No character lives in a vacuum. Well, technically Galactus lives in outer space, but for everybody else, it is important to create a sense of environment for an effective presentation. Decide on a background This character design by Studio yknot uses a neutral, textured background. Generally, building a detailed background with scenery and props is not only a lot of extra work, it can distract focus from the character. One option instead is to suggest a distant, out-of-focus background with roughly painted shapes behind the character. But most artists opt for a fairly simple background, often in a neutral greyish tone with a subtle color gradient or texture. The colors you choose can further enhance the intended mood of the character. Adding a floor shadow as well is a simple way to ground your character in space and reinforce the lighting. Put together a presentation Additionally, you are going to want to put together a client presentation. These presentations often include a variety of secondary poses (including neutral ones), outfits, facial expressions, and close ups and side profiles of the face. These variations can be much simpler than the main action pose since that design should be the focus. Some artists like to show a few of the sketches and thumbnails so that the client can appreciate the development of the concept. Doing so not only gives the client options, it creates the sense that this character is alive rather than a doll pinned down to a static pose. Of course, before you send your presentation off to your client, it's a good idea to take a step back and evaluate honestly how you yourself respond to the finished character. "Ask yourself: Does this character make you giggle? In my case, a huuuge component of my work is the comedy factor," artist bananodromo describes her process. "I love silly details, grotesque expressions, surrealism, surprise effect. Of course, this doesn't apply to all projects […] but mainly for the most creative ones." Too much information doesn't exist. By bananodromo 4 final tips on character design — Character design might look like artistic magic, but it actually involves thought, experimentation and hard work to get a successful result. While the steps we've laid out here can help give you a starting framework to develop your character designs, it takes time and practice to hone your skill as a character artist. To that end, we'll leave you with some final words of advice from experienced character artists to help you along your journey: 1. Explore what you like, advises InQueen: "If you want to be a character designer, here is my advice: first of all, I think you have to be realistic and know what you are good at and what you are not. Try everything and see what you like. What do you really like that makes your heart burn? I love my job, and I know it doesn't suit everyone. Being a character designer, or a professional designer of any kind, goes beyond passion. It requires a lot of discipline, and hard work. Really hard work every day. It is a difficult path but a fun one." 2. Think on the bright side, like c-artworker: "Wherever you go, always draw doodles on napkins, draw paper, tablets, whatever. Over time you get a supply of shapes, gestures and figures. Don't be frustrated with rejections! You have a wonderful job where you don't have to wear a tie and suit and you don't have to make coffee for your boss!" 3. Or like Maylyn, be persistent. "Find time to practice. As an anime lover, I actually started sketching anime characters in my early years as an artist. And honestly, it helped me in honing my skills through time." 4. And last but not least, ananana14 shows us how character design truly is all about finding your niche: "When I got into graphic design, characters seemed like something so far away and unachievable. Then I got a cat, then another one, and yes, you guessed it, I started drawing cats. I began noticing how they run, how they sit, their poses and used that in my drawings. It also helped that cats don't sit around and wait for me to finish my drawing. That way I had to learn to pick up the most important traits, exaggerate them and avoid getting too caught up in the details." When we think of some of our favorite characters, from Superman to Pikachu, design is often that last thing that comes to mind. That's what good character design does: it hides the designer and leaves behind only a memorable character. But great characters don't come from nothing—they are the result of planning, visual storytelling, choices and artistic skill. For this reason, character design can be harder than it at first appears. The design has to evoke who the character is and that means the designer must be skilled at using nonverbal, visual elements such as expression, gesture, color and clothing to communicate personality traits. This is especially true for simplistic character styles, where the designer has to communicate more with less. You may also have to make technical considerations such as whether the design can be easily animated. On top of that, there's the question of originality and staking out your own character design style. Ready to let some colorful characters into your life? Design by OrangeCrush Fortunately, character design is a fairly old practice, and there are common tips and workflows that can guide aspiring designers from concept to finished artwork. With that said, every artist is going to have a different approach that works for them. With both of these factors in mind, we've put together this ultimate guide to character design to provide a step-by-step process and specific character design tips and advice from professional designers who are experts on our platform. The step-by-step character design process — Step 1: Develop a concept — Gather your pencils! Illustration by Maria GR Character design belongs to a class of illustration called concept art. It is about communicating the artist's vision of how a character might appear in a future context, such as a film, video game or company website. The entertainment industry uses concept art to visualize their ideas before committing exorbitant amounts of money on production. To that end, a good character design should sell the vision. Even if you are not designing a character for any purpose other than your own portfolio, that's all the more reason for a clear concept: your design won't have any future context in which to explain the story behind the character. Create a character profile The creative brief, if you are given one, is a good place to start. The client should have provided you with information about the context for the character, the target audience, and the preferred style. Top Level character designer Cross The Lime explains the importance of establishing a direction based on the brief, "How mainstream or quirky a character can be in branding projects really depends on the industry and client. Ask them for examples of characters they like and why." By Cross The Lime But while the client (or writer) may have already created a story for the character, that does not let the artist off the hook. Briefs are by their nature, well, brief, and it's not uncommon for a client to have trouble expressing themselves in artistic terms. How mainstream or quirky a character can be in branding projects really depends on the industry and client. It is often up to the illustrator to interpret the brief, ask the right questions, read between the lines, and distill the client's explanation into core character traits. Your ideas should not contradict the brief, of course, but keep in mind that you were hired for your expertise. In many cases, the client will be expecting you to expand on the concept in novel ways that will not have occurred to them. If you are not given a brief (perhaps even if you were), it is a good idea to essentially come up with one for yourself. You are aiming for a short prompt—no more than a paragraph or so—that gives a basic profile of the character: where they come from, what they want, what makes them special. The Five Ws can be helpful for establishing a basic premise. At this stage, you should not get bogged down in frivolous details like if "her favorite ice cream is rocky road!", but should aim instead for descriptions that serve as an introduction. Brainstorm the details There are a number of brainstorming techniques that can help you develop your character profile. One of the most helpful for character design is word association, starting with some keywords from the brief and coming up with related words that come into mind, either via mind-mapping or writing a straightforward list. The reason being that singular words keep ideas simple, distilling them to their essence, and this comes in handy when you need to communicate those traits visually. By noodlemie According to Top Level designer noodlemie, "I take some time to brainstorm ideas and picture how it would look like in my mind. Before physically starting anything, I create my 'good mood' atmosphere by listening to music and sometimes reading comics, news or a novel." "Before physically starting anything, I create my 'good mood' atmosphere by listening to music and sometimes reading comics, news or a novel." The character concept is a lot like the destination your ship is steering towards, and for that reason, you should pay particular attention to this step. Unfortunately, there's not always a straightforward way to know whether you've chosen the right destination. Creating art is a process of blind feeling, aesthetic judgement and trial-and-error. Get the concept as fleshed out as you can, and come back to this step later if necessary. When something in your design just doesn't feel right, the underlying concept is usually the first place you should look. Step 2: Do your research — Creating unique characters from your mind can feel like magic—so much so, that it can be easy to overlook pesky considerations like research. You might be asking, "is this a character or a term paper!?" But research and imagination go hand-in-hand. Your imagination, after all, comes from your mind, and your mind is informed by your real world knowledge and experiences. Research the target audience More importantly, your design will depend on the experiences of your intended audience. "Before anything else, research the target audience to which the character aims to reach out," Top Level character designer Maylyn describes their research process. "This will serve as the basis of the design. Knowing the audience makes it easier for you to decide how the character should look, including the colors to be used and setting the mood." "Before anything else, research the target audience to which the character aims to reach out." A client will typically provide audience information in the brief, but you'll want to do research beyond demographics such as age, gender, location, etc. Look up other artists who design for that target audience, and the types of styles that appeal to them. Gather reference images This brings us to our primary means of research: gathering reference images, or scouring the internet for photos and artwork relevant to your concept. It is important to understand that using reference images for inspiration is not cheating (provided, of course, you are not creating exact copies). Whether you like it or not, your art is subconsciously influenced by what you've seen, including other artists that have inspired you, and collating references is how you consciously control that influence. In addition, researching the work of other artists on similar concepts or designs for similar audiences can also help you see what is common and how your character can be different. By bananodromo Find how other successful artists make their characters awesome. Analyze and come to conclusions, but don't imitate. As Top Level designer bananodromo puts it, "Gathering inspiration is necessary sometimes, maybe to understand how other successful artists make their characters awesome. Analyze and come to conclusions, but don't imitate. Find your own path." Of course, other artists are simply interpreting what they see in real life in their art, and your reference material must similarly include real life photos or direct observation. As Top Level designer ananana14 so eloquently puts it, "the best tip I wish I could have given myself when starting out is that real life is the best insp

sheet has expressions along with the character turning around. What will a frontal view look like, side view, two-thirds, and maybe even from behind.” Besides the pose, you should be paying particular attention to details like facial expression, hand gestures, and clothing folds in order to get the design as far along as you can. “The facial expression, especially the eyes, significantly defines the mood of the character,” Maylyn explains. “The posture and colors make the character pop out. So, everything needs to complement each other to make your character alive and believable.” By Maylyn The facial expression, especially the eyes, significantly defines the mood of the character. Their clothes add personality. These need to match to bring them to life. Gather feedback before proceeding If you are working on a team or with a client, this can be a good time to gather feedback before going any further—in which case, you may want to provide a few (no more than three) options. 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Focus on value Most artists recommend starting your render with a focus on value. Value is an art term that refers to light and shadow, and as this can be a challenge in and of itself, it is best to separate value from color. By Nemanja Vulevic To block in value, you’ll want to choose contrasting shades of grey for shadows, mid-tones, and highlights. Working in a separate layer beneath your sketch, color over your character with the mid-tone. Next, decide from what angle your light source is coming (don’t forget secondary sources such as the light reflecting off of the floor back onto the character), and block in the general area for shadows and highlights on the character. If you are going for a more painterly style, you can blend these tones by using a brush with a lowered opacity and sampling new grey tones periodically using the eyedropper tool. Otherwise, most cartoonish styles tend to keep the hard edges for their colors and shading. 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Then I got a cat, then another one, and yes, you guessed it, I started drawing cats. I began noticing how they run, how they sit, their poses and used that in my drawings. It also helped that cats don’t sit around and wait for me to finish my drawing. That way I had to learn to pick up the most important traits, exaggerate them and avoid getting too caught up in the details.” When we think of some of our favorite characters, from Superman to Pikachu, design is often that last thing that comes to mind. Character design is a captivating art form that lies at the heart of many creative endeavors, from animation and video games to literature and visual storytelling. A well-designed character can evoke emotions, tell a story, and leave a lasting impression on audiences. Designing your own characters is one of the most creative ways that you can explore your ideas as an artist, illustrator, or animator. In this article, we will offer a complete guide on how to design a character. Whether you're a seasoned artist or a beginner looking to explore the world of character design, this guide will provide you with valuable insights and practical tips to help you craft compelling and stunning characters. What is Character Design? Character design is the process of creating and visualizing fictional characters, each with their own unique traits, personalities, and appearances. It's a multidisciplinary art that combines elements of illustration, psychology, storytelling, and aesthetics. A successful character design not only captures the essence of the character's role within a narrative but also establishes a visual identity that resonates with the audience. But character design involves much more than just creating something pretty. It encompasses everything about design at large: the principles, the theory, and above all, the execution. That is why character design is so important to know as an artist. It touches on so many facets of the design creative process that you are bound to elevate all your technical skills to the next level. So, what makes a good character? Here are some key elements that contribute to the success of a character design. Distinctive Appearance: A memorable character possesses a visually distinctive appearance that sets them apart from others. This could be a unique hairstyle, clothing style, or a particular physical trait. Personality Traits: Characters should have well-defined personality traits that influence their actions, decisions, and interactions. Whether they're brave, funny, shy, or mischievous, these traits shape the character's behavior and help them resonate with the audience. Backstory and Motivations: A character's backstory and motivations give depth to their persona. Understanding their past experiences and what drives them helps in creating relatable and empathetic characters. Consistency: Consistency in a character's design is essential. All aspects of the character, from their appearance to their behavior, should align with their established traits and narrative role. Visual Cohesion: The character's visual elements, such as color palette, design motifs, and overall style, should be coherent and complement their personality. 6 Steps to Create A Good Character Creating characters is a multi-faceted process that involves careful consideration of their traits, personality, appearance, and role within a narrative. Here are 6 crucial steps to guide you through the process of how to draw a character. Step 1: Conceptualization The journey to a well-designed character begins with a strong concept. Consider the context in which your character will exist. Are they part of a fantasy world, a futuristic setting, or a historical period? Think about their role in the story: are they a hero, a villain, a mentor, or a sidekick? Brainstorm ideas that align with the narrative and explore various personality traits that suit the character's role. During this phase, create rough sketches and jot down notes about the character's appearance, background, and motivations. This stage is all about exploring possibilities and allowing your creativity to flow. Step 2: Research and Inspiration Creating unique characters from your mind can feel like magic—so much so, that it can be easy to overlook pesky considerations like research. Research is a fundamental aspect of character design. Gather inspiration from a wide range of sources such as art, literature, films, history, and cultural references. This research will help you infuse authenticity and depth into your character's design and story. More importantly, your design should also consider the experience of your target audience. Step 3: Silhouette and Proportions Crafting a recognizable silhouette is essential for making your character stand out. Experiment with different body shapes and proportions to create a visually appealing outline. The silhouette should communicate the character's identity even from a distance. Consider exaggerating certain features to emphasize the character's traits or role. For example, a hero might have a strong and upright posture, while a mischievous character could have a more dynamic and asymmetrical silhouette. Step 4: Facial Features and Expressions The face is the window to a character's emotions and personality. Design the character's facial features based on their traits and background. The eyes, nose, mouth, and expressions should align with their story and role in the narrative. Practice drawing various expressions to capture a range of emotions. A well-designed character should be able to convey their feelings effectively through their expressions, enhancing their relatability and depth. Step 5: Clothing and Accessories The character's attire and accessories offer opportunities to convey their identity, personality, and background. Consider their occupation, environment, and personal preferences when designing their clothing. For instance, a futuristic warrior might wear armor with sleek, high-tech elements, while a medieval bard might be adorned in flowing robes and musical instruments. Accessories such as jewelry, weapons, and tools can further enrich your character's visual narrative. Step 6: Refinement and Iteration Once you've established the core elements of your character design, it's time to refine and iterate. Add intricate details, experiment with colors, and make some adjustments based on feedback. Test different color palettes to find the one that resonates with the character's personality and surroundings. Don't be afraid to make changes during this stage. The refinement process often leads to surprising and innovative solutions that enhance your character's overall appeal. 8 Expert Character Design Tips To further enhance your character design skills, here are 8 expert tips to consider. Embrace Simplicity A character's design should be easily recognizable and reproducible. Avoid excessive complexity that might hinder the character's appeal. Balance Proportions Proportions play a significant role in how a character is perceived. Experiment with proportions to create unique and visually engaging characters. Use Color Purposefully Colors can convey emotions and traits. Choose a color palette that reflects your character's personality and the mood of their story. Pay Attention to Silhouettes Silhouettes should be distinct and instantly recognizable. A strong silhouette contributes to a character's overall visual impact. Think About Movement Consider how your character will move and interact in their world. Design elements that facilitate their movements while staying true to their design. Personality in Poses Experiment with different poses to bring out your character's personality. A confident character might have bold and dynamic poses, while a shy character might have more reserved ones. Cultural and Historical Influences Incorporate elements from various cultures and historical periods to add depth and authenticity to your character's design. Iterate and Seek Feedback Character design is an iterative process. Don't hesitate to make changes based on feedback, and be open to refining your character's design over time. How to Make Your Own Characters with Fotor In addition to creating characters from scratch step by step, you can also use AI tools to generate stunning characters with one click. Here, we recommend the character generator of Fotor. Fotor is an all-in-one photo editor with various editing tools. Apart from image editing, Fotor also offers a powerful AI tool to help you create characters, character generator. Backed up by an advanced character making model, our AI image generator creates a character you desired from entered descriptions. Just input character drawing ideas, our AI photo generator will analyze and process to make your character automatically and quickly. Imagine your favorite video game without the main character. No Mario, no Link. Sonic is actually a rabbit and not a hedgehog. Weird stuff, right? (And yes, Sonic was actually first thought up to be a rabbit, then under consideration to be an armadillo before eventually becoming the classic hedgehog—check out these other video game facts.)I mean, we might have held these different character concoctions in the same glowing regard—or maybe not? Perhaps Mario is Mario because his name is Mario and he is an Italian plumber, and anything else would have fallen flat. Thankfully, we will never know. Point is, character matters, and choosing the right (or wrong one) can significantly alter a game’s chance at success. Why character design mattersCharacter's are more than just simply a person or visual representation. They are the driving force behind connecting gaming audiences to game stories. A good character can help a player enjoy the game they’re playing, but a great character can make a player fall in love with that game. Character design processSo, it’s crucial for game designers to put resources into first learning the basics of character design and the thought process behind creating a classic, lovable character before moving on to creating concept art, and then finalizing character art for 3D creation. 1. Define the characterWhen it comes to designing a character, these questions help creators think about who their character is, and what personality their character will take on prior to drawing out a design. Where is the character from?A great place to start when designing a character is to think about what era or location the character is from. This is an important step because it sets the stage for the eventual environment and backdrop the character will traverse. For example, a full armored knight would fit a renaissance castle. And a suited-up space marine would fit a futuristic space war. Think about the time period too—the 1980's style of clothing and personality is vastly different than what took place in the 1920's.What’s the character’s name and what do they look like?Once a time period and location have been chosen, it's time to create some baseline stats! The list below provides a starting point, but designers shouldn’t feel limited to just these differentiators. For instance, anyone who has ever played a role-playing tabletop game can think of the different stats they might need to define.NameAgeHeightEye colorHair colorDefining physical characteristics (scars, blemishes, moles, etc.)Birth home/current residenceWhat’s the character’s redeeming characteristic?Every character has a redeeming characteristic about them; a trait that is good and positive. It could be that the character is kind, passionate, charming, loyal, patient, or anything else that could be thought of as a “plus!”What’s the character’s fundamental flaw?All that said, every well-written character also has a fundamental flaw—something about them that is not so good, or even detrimental; something that they will struggle with throughout their story. This is sometimes the main struggle that the character is trying to learn from or overcome on their quest, and can be anything from a personality that is rude or mean-spirited, to developed insecurities, impulsive stealing, etc.What’s the character’s motivation?The last thing to think about is the character's motivation. Why are they here? What journey are they wanting to go on, and why? Maybe it’s a star-crossed lover who is traveling the world to save their partner. Or a knight who must slay the demon dragon to save their hometown. Perhaps it’s a space explorer who is trying to discover the next planet suitable for human life. Basically, why is your character in this game?2. Bring the character to lifeAfter forming the character backstory, it’s time to move on to forming the actual character! From anatomy to common physical poses, there are a few different considerations at this point in the character design process. AnatomyIt may sound like a given, but fully understanding human anatomy is a must for anyone wanting to create an accurate 3D model. (This is, of course, assuming the main character is human! For those using animals or other objects as characters, the same care should be exercised.)Basic anatomy points to become familiar with include basic bone structure, as there are over 200 bones in the human body! Character designers should be familiar with the main pieces, including:Head: Forehead, eyes, nose, ears, lips, mouth, and jaw.Torso: Ribcage, hips, and soft “twistable” area of stomach, etc.Arms: Shoulders, upper arm, elbow, and lower armHands: Wrist bone, palm, fingers, and thumbLegs: Upper leg, knee, and lower legFeet: Heel, midfoot, and toes.PosesWhen practicing drawing a character, designers may want to explore different physical poses their character might find themselves in. Trying out different facial expressions, action shots, fighting stances, etc. is a great way to explore and define who the character is and how they carry themselves.(Check out Draw with Jazza: Creating Characters, a book for awesome reference poses for characters.)Read More: How to Draw From ReferenceDrawing poses is all about breaking the drawing down into basic shapes. Think of it as deconstructing those anatomical landmarks that were covered earlier.3. Draw the characterAs with anything, there is more than one way to succeed, but here are a few steps a designer can follow when beginning to draw their character. Step 1: Break down the drawing into simple shapes and lines. For example, using a sphere for the chest, cube for the hips, sphere for the head and a triangle for the chin, lines for each limb, triangles for feet and lines for each finger.Step 2: Add in the anatomy.Next, it's time to create body landmarks into your sketch. This step builds on the previous sketch layer, but still stays rough and explorative.Step 3: Fill in the details of your character.Now is the time to add in the details of who the character is and explore the features within creative design.4. Design the characterWhen it comes to designing a character's look, it's important to know who they are and how the audience should feel about them. TraitsWith traits, it’s useful for designers to write out 3 to 5 words that summarize up what attributes they want the audience to feel when they look at the character.Showcasing TraitsNow, it's time to think about and find ways of expressing who the character is through their visuals.Eyes: The saying goes that "eyes are the gateway to the soul," and even how a person's eyes are shaped can say a lot about them. A furrowed brow alludes to an angry soul, while strong laugh lines mirror a happy spirit. Eyebrow shapes can easily tell something special about the character.Jawline: Strong jawlines could tell the audience that a character is bold, tough, and confident. Meanwhile softer jawlines emote feelings of youth and kindness.Nose shape: There are many different styles of noses for characters. A hooked or crooked nose showcases mysterious past or perhaps a nefarious schemer. Small button noses are good for cute, young, and innocent characters. Strong angular noses are great for confident or tough characters.Read More: Graphic Design Projects for BeginnersGet Started: Graphic Design Courses for Kids & TeensEars: Ears can describe certain mystical characters like elves or orcs, but they can also be adorned with jewelry that will speak about the person. Someone with elegant traditional earrings may come from royalty. Stark metalwork earrings on the other hand could be used for harsher, more misunderstood characters. Shape TheoryThere are three basic shapes that can be used to draw characters: circles, squares and triangles. Each shape means something to the subconscious mind. This shape language ties through the entire character, from the basic body shapes, to details like the shapes of their eyes or ears.Circles: Circles can be used for characters that have any of these words: soft, sweet, kind, gentle, open, approachable, honest, caring, young, naive, gullible, unsure, worldly, nature-driven, etc.Squares: Squares can be used for characters that have any of these words: strong, confident, trustworthy, cocky, brash, action-oriented, driven, pushy, committed, arrogant, dependable, even-tempered, etc. Triangles: Triangle shapes can be used for evil characters, but also used for: speedy, calculating, cunning, hot-headed, rougue-like, stealthy, emotional, loving, quick-thinker, slick, elegant, etc.5. Begin the 3D designAt this point, character designers have a reference library, have learned the basics of design theory, and studied the basics of sculpting, which means it’s time to think about creating the character's concept art. That also means design isn’t far from finalization and making its way to Autodesk Maya, the industry standard for creating TV shows, games, movies, and more!Not only can Maya create cute and stylized characters, but it's been used for more photo-realistic character types as well. Maya's unique modeling pipeline allows artists to create whatever visuals they can think of!So, have a kid or teen who has a video game or drawing interest? Check out our drawing fundamentals course, online learning classes and game design summer camps for a number of cutting-edge learning opportunities. When we think of some of our favorite characters, from Superman to Pikachu, design is often that last thing that comes to mind. That’s what good character design does: it hides the designer and leaves behind only a memorable character. But great characters don’t come from nothing—they are the result of planning, visual storytelling, choices and artistic skill. For this reason, character design can be harder than it at first appears. The design has to evoke who the character is and that means the designer must be skilled at using nonverbal, visual elements such as expression, gesture, color and clothing to communicate personality traits. This is especially true for simplistic character styles, where the designer has to communicate more with less. You may also have to make technical considerations such as whether the design can be easily animated. On top of that, there’s the question of originality and staking out your own character design style. Ready to let some colorful characters into your life? Design by OrangeCrush Fortunately, character design is a fairly old practice, and there are common tips and workflows that can guide aspiring designers from concept to finished artwork. With that said, every artist is going to have a different approach that works for them. With both of these factors in mind, we’ve put together this ultimate guide to character design to provide a step-by-step process and specific character design tips and advice from professional designers who are experts on our platform. The step-by-step character design process — Step 1: Develop a concept — Gather your pencils! Illustration by Maria GR Character design belongs to a class of illustration called concept art. It is about communicating the artist’s vision of how a character might appear in a future context, such as a film, video game or company website. The entertainment industry uses concept art to visualize their ideas before committing exorbitant amounts of money on production. To that end, a good character design should sell the vision. Even if you are not designing a character for any purpose other than your own portfolio, that’s all the more reason for a clear concept: your design won’t have any future context in which to explain the story behind the character. Create a character profile The creative brief, if you are given one, is a good place to start. The client should have provided you with information about the context for the character, the target audience, and the preferred style. Top Level character designer Cross The Lime explains the importance of establishing a direction based on the brief, “How mainstream or quirky a character can be in branding projects really depends on the industry and client. Ask them for examples of characters they like and why.” By Cross The Lime But while the client (or writer) may have already created a story for the character, that does not let the artist off the hook. Briefs are by their nature, well, brief, and it’s not uncommon for a client to have trouble expressing themselves in artistic terms. How mainstream or quirky a character can be in branding projects really depends on the industry and client. It is often up to the illustrator to interpret the brief, ask the right questions, read between the lines, and distill the client’s explanation into core character traits. Your ideas should not contradict the brief, of course, but keep in mind that you were hired for your expertise. In many cases, the client will be expecting you to expand on the concept in novel ways that will not have occurred to them. If you are not given a brief (perhaps even if you were), it is a good idea to essentially come up with one for yourself. You are aiming for a short prompt—no more than a paragraph or so—that gives a basic profile of the character: where they come from, what they want, what makes them special. The Five Ws can be helpful for establishing a basic premise. At this stage, you should not get bogged down in frivolous details like if “her favorite ice cream is rocky road!”, but should aim instead for descriptions that serve as an introduction. Brainstorm the details There are a number of brainstorming techniques that can help you develop your character profile. One of the most helpful for character design is word association, starting with some keywords from the brief and coming up with related words that come into mind, either via mind-mapping or writing a straightforward list. The reason being that singular words keep ideas simple, distilling them to their essence, and this comes in handy when you need to communicate those traits visually. By noodlemie According to Top Level designer noodlemie, “I take some time to brainstorm ideas and picture how it would look like in my mind. Before physically starting anything, I create my ‘good mood’ atmosphere by listening to music and sometimes reading comics, news or a novel.” “Before physically starting anything, I create my ‘good mood’ atmosphere by listening to music and sometimes reading comics, news or a novel.” The character concept is a lot like the destination your ship is steering towards, and for that reason, you should pay particular attention to this step. Unfortunately, there’s not always a straightforward way to know whether you’ve chosen the right destination. Creating art is a process of blind feeling, aesthetic judgement and trial-and-error. Get the concept as fleshed out as you can, and come back to this step later if necessary. When something in your design just doesn’t feel right, the underlying concept is usually the first place you should look. Step 2: Do your research — Creating unique characters from your mind can feel like magic—so much so, that it can be easy to overlook pesky considerations like research. You might be asking, “is this a character or a term paper!?” But research and imagination go hand-in-hand. Your imagination, after all, comes from your mind, and your mind is informed by your real world knowledge and experiences. Research the target audience More importantly, your design will depend on the experiences of your intended audience. “Before anything else, research the target audience to which the character aims to reach out,” Top Level character designer Maylyn describes their research process. “This will serve as the basis of the design. Knowing the audience makes it easier for you to decide how the character should look, including the colors to be used and setting the mood.” “Before anything else, research the target audience to which the character aims to reach out.” A client will typically provide audience information in the brief, but you’ll want to do research beyond demographics such as age, gender, location, etc. Look up other artists who design for that target audience, and the types of styles that appeal to them. Gather reference images This brings us to our primary means of research: gathering reference images, or scouring the internet for photos and artwork relevant to your concept. It is important to understand that using reference images for inspiration is not cheating (provided, of course, you are not creating exact copies). Whether you like it or not, your art is subconsciously influenced by what you’ve seen, including other artists that have inspired you, and collating references is how you consciously control that influence. In addition, researching the work of other artists on similar concepts or designs for similar audiences can also help you see what is common and how your character can be different. By bananodromo Find how other successful artists make their characters awesome. Analyze and come to conclusions, but don’t imitate. As Top Level designer bananodromo puts it, “Gathering inspiration is necessary sometimes, maybe to understand how other successful artists make their characters awesome. Analyze and come to conclusions, but don’t imitate. Find your own path.” Of course, other artists are simply interpreting what they see in real life in their art, and your reference material must similarly include real life photos or direct observation. As Top Level designer ananana14 so eloquently puts it, “the best tip I wish I could have given myself when starting out is that real life is the best inspiration.” Logos by ananana14 Exaggerated, cartoony or oddball characters are not excluded here—if anything, you should make more of an effort to ground them in realistic traits that people will easily recognize. An important consideration is also anatomy. Even if you are not planning to animate the character, you will imply physicality in their pose and should understand how they move and distribute their weight. By Cross The Lime According to Cross The Lime, “A good character is recognizable, yet unique. If you need to draw a giraffe, look at photos of giraffes. What are the proportions, what shapes make up the body, how do the legs work, how does the character work when in motion? The more you sketch and draw variations of these recognizable features and shapes, the easier it is to abstract and come up with your own character.” The more you sketch and draw variations of these recognizable features and shapes, the easier it is to abstract and come up with your own character. You can find reference material from virtually any source—Pinterest, Google images, ArtStation, Dribbble, even your own camera roll. You can also gather reference images for anything you’re unsure about—from the character concept as a whole to specific details like clothing, hairstyle, facial expression, poses and more. The important thing is that each of these images help you visualize your concept. Top Level design team Miniverso Studio offer their perspective on this stage: “Research is the essential part in character design. Get inspired by other designs and styles that bring you closer to what you are looking for. Gather references in images, style, color, personality, expressions and more. Soak up everything that manages to give your character soul.” How many reference images you’ll need will depend on the project and how much you feel you need to learn. That said, it should definitely be more than a few in order to get diverse perspectives. Once you’ve gathered these materials, it can be helpful to create a collage or mood board. This does not have to be anything fancy: just all of your images collected in one document that you can keep open on your computer as you work. Step 3: Choose the best tools for your project — There’s an argument to be made that the tools you use don’t necessarily matter. In theory, you can design a character as effectively with pen and paper as on the computer, and likewise top tier software won’t cover up poor concepts or lacking art fundamentals. Using pencil and paper helps to unfold our imagination and not to stagnate. The tools you use largely come down to your intended style, personal preference and the client’s file type requirements. Some art styles, such as watercolor, can be mimicked on the computer but usually come out best in their original medium. Personal preference, of course, depends on your own experience creating artwork. By velcheva Finally, you should base your decision on the image file type the client wants. These days, most clients will be expecting some sort of digital file for easy storage and sharing, usually an original source file from a program like Photoshop and a simple image type such as JPEG. But while the client’s preference determines the format of your final design deliverable, you can use any tool you like before you get to that point. For example, many of the character artists we interviewed prefer doing preliminary sketches on paper. As Top Level designer velcheva puts it, “I draw my illustrations using a laptop and a graphics tablet. Although I got used to the tablet for many years, it is still quite difficult for me to start drawing; I draw a line, delete, draw another one, delete again. But it’s much easier for me to start drawing on paper.” I still always start my drawings on paper, even after years of experience using a tablet. Meanwhile, Cross The Lime outlines her process as; “I often draw outlines by hand, then vectorize and add color in Adobe Illustrator—it is faster for me, and has a more fluent/ organic look and constructed lines and vectors.” As mentioned before, the analogue tools, whether inkwells or paint brushes, will depend on the style you are going for. Digital drawing tools can be more flexible, but let’s briefly go over some of the most common software for character design: Adobe Photoshop / Clip Studio Paint / Krita for digital painting (be sure to pick up some brand of graphics tablet and stylus pen) Adobe Illustrator / Affinity Designer for vector characters (typically used in logo characters or mascots for brands) Maya / ZBrush / Blender for 3D characters Procreate for drawing with a tablet (mimics the experience of drawing with a sketchpad, be sure to pick up a stylus pen) Step 4: Start with thumbnails (a lot of them) — You might be familiar with the term “thumbnail” from its internet usage: a tiny preview version of an image or video. In the illustration world, the idea is similar—thumbnails are small samples of images—but the purpose is different. Thumbnail sketches allow the artist to put their ideation into practice, trying out several, small, quick drawings before committing to a single idea as noodlemie explains, “I draw some doodles or raw sketches on paper for a few options before I do the actual illustration digitally, after I look for some related references for the style or coloring”. Design by noodlemie Work small and fast There’s no specific recommended size for thumbnail sketches, but ideally they should be small enough that you can fit dozens on the same page. They should be devoid of most detail: focusing on basic shapes and gestures. The key here is variety—in terms of poses, “camera” angles, and the specific reference image you’re capturing. Sketch out as many ideas as you can think of, even if you think you found one you already like. You should also emphasize speed and volume: aim for a minute or less for each thumbnail drawing. Working this way keeps you from getting too precious about any one particular drawing since the more time you put into a sketch, the more reluctant you will be to change things. You will also capture a sense of energy in the character pose through speedy linework. Another of our Top Level character artists, BayuRIP, uses this phase to push the concept to new heights, “Combine some elements into the character, make it weird and unique. Try to explore shape and angle to make it different and add your personal style to the design”. Pay attention to overall shapes and silhouettes When you have a good number of these (in the tens, at least) a useful technique is to block in silhouettes. This means painting over the shape so that you can see whether the image reads clearly based entirely on its outline. Ask yourself, can you tell what the image is supposed to be? What are the dominant shapes? Is the pose clear? Keep a clear silhouette in mind: have ears, head shape and position of arms all clearly defined. Cross The Lime summarizes, “It is even more important that you keep a clear silhouette in mind when designing. Have ears, head shape, position of arms clearly defined, so that you can recognize the character even when it is just the silhouette.” If you have not done so, it’s a good idea to brush up on shape language. This, (in addition to color later on) is a primary visual way to communicate traits and emotions such as stability, danger, or innocence. Step 5: Finalize your sketch — If you’re tired of sketching after that last step, I have good news for you! Just kidding—it’s time for more sketching. That said, it is a good idea to take a break at this point if you have the time to spare. Doing so will allow you to clear your mind and come back to your thumbnails with a fresh perspective. When you are ready to get back to work, find the thumbnail that evokes your concept most effectively. You are then going to create a larger, more detailed sketch that will serve as the basis for your final artwork. Miniverso Studio highlights the importance of this stage, “The digitization process of our character will be easier with a well-elaborated sketch.” Finalize the pose and fine details Your main concern at this stage should be the pose, so take the time to sketch a few options that show off the character’s personality. If you are designing a character for an animator, you will also need to create a handful of orthographic T-pose sketches. These display a front, back, and side view of the character standing with their legs together and arms outstretched, and they give the animator a neutral view of the design on which to animate. T-poses can also be useful for figuring out clothing detail that may get lost in a more expressive pose. Cross The Lime advises, “As you are sketching, remember that depending on use, your character must be able to move around. Will it need to hold a sign, jump over things, or bend down? Your character’s anatomy must allow for these things. Ideally, your first character sheet has expressions along with the character turning around. What will a frontal view look like, side view, two-thirds, and maybe even from behind.” Besides the pose, you should be paying particular attention to details like facial expression, hand gestures, and clothing folds in order to get the design as far along as you can. “The facial expression, especially the eyes, significantly defines the mood of the character,” Maylyn explains. “The posture and colors make the character pop out. So, everything needs to complement each other to make your character alive and believable.” By Maylyn The facial expression, especially the eyes, significantly defines the mood of the character. Their clothes add personality. These need to match to bring them to life. Gather feedback before proceeding If you are working on a team or with a client, this can be a good time to gather feedback before going any further—in which case, you may want to provide a few (no more than three) options. The purpose of this sketch is to guide your final artwork, so it is going to get harder to make any big changes to the design from here on. Step 6: Render your character design — In a lot of ways, you have already successfully designed a character by this point. Design is less about illustrative flair and more about choices, creating the concept, and the bulk of that hard work is behind you. Now is where you start the render process, which is a fine art way of saying going from sketch to finished artwork. That, of course, is not to say that you should pay less attention to the render. In order for your character concept to land, it has to be truly presentable. In addition, you may notice details that you need to change the more realistic your design becomes. Digitize the sketch If you’ve been working on paper up until now, you will first need to digitize your sketch. You can do so fairly easily these days using a smartphone, as velcheva tells us, “I take pictures with my phone and send a personal message to myself in any messenger that is also installed on my laptop (this is much faster than scanning). I take a photo of this sketch, make it a translucent layer and draw over it in a graphics editor.” Be sure also to convert the image to black-and-white and adjust the contrast to really help the linework come through. It can also be helpful to trace a clean, digital sketch on top of this one using your brush tool or you may want to jump into inking if your character will include inked, cartoon lines. Finally, be sure to turn down the opacity on your sketch so that you can draw over it. If you are sticking with physical artwork, you can use tracing paper to transfer a clean version of your sketch onto your canvas. From there, you simple render from the colors and materials of your preference. Focus on value Most artists recommend starting your render with a focus on value. Value is an art term that refers to light and shadow, and as this can be a challenge in and of itself, it is best to separate value from color. By Nemanja Vulevic To block in value, you’ll want to choose contrasting shades of grey for shadows, mid-tones, and highlights. Working in a separate layer beneath your sketch, color over your character with the mid-tone. Next, decide from what angle your light source is coming (don’t forget secondary sources such as the light reflecting off of the floor back onto the character), and block in the general area for shadows and highlights on the character. If you are going for a more painterly style, you can blend these tones by using a brush with a lowered opacity and sampling new grey tones periodically using the eyedropper tool. Otherwise, most cartoonish styles tend to keep the hard edges for their colors and shading. To get an idea of how all this is done, search for and study process videos from other character artists on YouTube. Add color When you get to the coloring stage, Miniverso Studio offer sound advice, “the ‘for fun’ final stage has arrived! Play your favorite song and look for the most welcoming place; in this phase, the final artwork is the reward for your hard work”. Character design by Miniverso Studio For colors, you should aim to choose those that contribute to the character’s overall mood and story but that are also realistic. A firm grasp on color theory and color psychology as well as learning from the colors in your reference images all can help you identify the ideal color palette. Working non-destructively in a separate color layer will also allow you to experiment. When you’re ready to paint in your colors, use a blend mode such as “Color” in Photoshop in order to tint your value tones with the appropriate color. Step 7: Add the finishing touches — No character lives in a vacuum. Well, technically Galactus lives in outer space, but for everybody else, it is important to create a sense of environment for an effective presentation. Decide on a background This character design by Studio yknot uses a neutral, textured background. Generally, building a detailed background with scenery and props is not only a lot of extra work, it can distract focus from the character. One option instead is to suggest a distant, out-of-focus background with roughly painted shapes behind the character. But most artists opt for a fairly simple background, often in a neutral greyish tone with a subtle color gradient or texture. The colors you choose can further enhance the intended mood of the character. Adding a floor shadow as well is a simple way to ground your character in space and reinforce the lighting. Put together a presentation Additionally, you are going to want to put together a client presentation. These presentations often include a variety of secondary poses (including neutral ones), outfits, facial expressions, and close ups and side profiles of the face. These variations can be much simpler than the main action pose since that design should be the focus. Some artists like to show a few of the sketches and thumbnails so that the client can appreciate the development of the concept. Doing so not only gives the client options, it creates the sense that this character is alive rather than a doll pinned down to a static pose. Of course, before you send your presentation off to your client, it’s a good idea to take a step back and evaluate honestly how you yourself respond to the finished character. “Ask yourself: Does this character make you giggle? In my case, a huuuge component of my work is the comedy factor,” artist bananodromo describes her process. “I love silly details, grotesque expressions, surrealism, surprise effect. Of course, this doesn’t apply to all projects […] but mainly for the most creative ones.” Too much information doesn’t exist. By bananodromo 4 final tips on character design — Character design might look like artistic magic, but it actually involves thought, experimentation and hard work to get a successful result. While the steps we’ve laid out here can help give you a starting framework to develop your character designs, it takes time and practice to hone your skill as a character artist. To that end, we’ll leave you with some final words of advice from experienced character artists to help you along your journey: 1. Explore what you like, advises InQueen: “If you want to be a character designer, here is my advice: first of all, I think you have to be realistic and know what you are good at and what you are not. Try everything and see what you like. What do you really like that makes your heart burn? I love my job, and I know it doesn’t suit everyone. Being a character designer, or a professional designer of any kind, goes beyond passion. It requires a lot of discipline, and hard work. Really hard work every day. It is a difficult path but a fun one.” 2. Think on the bright side, like c-artworker: “Wherever you go, always draw doodles on napkins, draw paper, tablets, whatever. Over time you get a supply of shapes, gestures and figures. Don’t be frustrated with rejections! You have a wonderful job where you don’t have to wear a tie and suit and you don’t have to make coffee for your boss!” 3. Or like Maylyn, be persistent. “Find time to practice. As an anime lover, I actually started sketching anime characters in my early years as an artist. And honestly, it helped me in honing my skills through time.” 4. And last but not least, ananana14 shows us how character design truly is all about finding your niche: “When I got into graphic design, characters seemed like something so far away and unachievable. Then I got a cat, then another one, and yes, you guessed it, I started drawing cats. I began noticing how they run, how they sit, their poses and used that in my drawings. It also helped that cats don’t sit around and wait for me to finish my drawing. That way I had to learn to pick up the most important traits, exaggerate them and avoid getting too caught up in the details.” In film and games, a well-designed character compels their audience to feel invested in the unfolding story. These are often memorable characters who are instantly recognizable by their clothing, how they enter a room, and their subtle quirks and idiosyncrasies. Character design can include everything from how a character looks and dresses to how they move and the emotions they exhibit. Here’s what you need to know about the creative world of character design. The principles of character design Character design in film and games is a form of concept art and involves visually defining a character’s physical appearance, personality, behavior, and aesthetic. It's more than just a drawing. Characters play an essential role in telling a story or conveying a message, and as a character designer, you will bring characters to life with attributes that align with the story and creative direction of the film or game. Character design is used as a reference point throughout many stages of a project’s development. Witch character design by CG Spectrum graduate Polina Scherba who studied our Concept Artist Specialization. What is good character design? Good character design starts with a character's personality, which may come from a writer or creative director in the form of a brief or script. As a character designer, you’re responsible for visualizing the description or idea of a character, often for the first time. Good character design is about clarity and includes the following: Style/Tone: Does your character match the style of the production? For example, if it's a Disney character, you wouldn

used in logo characters or mascots for brands) Maya / ZBrush / Blender for 3D characters Procreate for drawing with a tablet (mimics the experience of drawing with a sketchpad, be sure to pick up a stylus pen) Step 4: Start with thumbnails (a lot of them) — You might be familiar with the term “thumbnail” from its internet usage: a tiny preview version of an image or video. In the illustration world, the idea is similar—thumbnails are small samples of images—but the purpose is different. Thumbnail sketches allow the artist to put their ideation into practice, trying out several, small, quick drawings before committing to a single idea as noodlemie explains, “I draw some doodles or raw sketches on paper for a few options before I do the actual illustration digitally, after I look for some related references for the style or coloring”. Design by noodlemie Work small and fast There’s no specific recommended size for thumbnail sketches, but ideally they should be small enough that you can fit dozens on the same page. They should be devoid of most detail: focusing on basic shapes and gestures. The key here is variety—in terms of poses, “camera” angles, and the specific reference image you’re capturing. Sketch out as many ideas as you can think of, even if you think you found one you already like. You should also emphasize speed and volume: aim for a minute or less for each thumbnail drawing. Working this way keeps you from getting too precious about any one particular drawing since the more time you put into a sketch, the more reluctant you will be to change things. You will also capture a sense of energy in the character pose through speedy linework. Another of our Top Level character artists, BayuRIP, uses this phase to push the concept to new heights, “Combine some elements into the character, make it weird and unique. Try to explore shape and angle to make it different and add your personal style to the design”. Pay attention to overall shapes and silhouettes When you have a good number of these (in the tens, at least) a useful technique is to block in silhouettes. This means painting over the shape so that you can see whether the image reads clearly based entirely on its outline. Ask yourself, can you tell what the image is supposed to be? What are the dominant shapes? Is the pose clear? Keep a clear silhouette in mind: have ears, head shape and position of arms all clearly defined. Cross The Lime summarizes, “It is even more important that you keep a clear silhouette in mind when designing. Have ears, head shape, position of arms clearly defined, so that you can recognize the character even when it is just the silhouette.” If you have not done so, it’s a good idea to brush up on shape language. This, (in addition to color later on) is a primary visual way to communicate traits and emotions such as stability, danger, or innocence. Step 5: Finalize your sketch — If you’re tired of sketching after that last step, I have good news for you! Just kidding—it’s time for more sketching. That said, it is a good idea to take a break at this point if you have the time to spare. Doing so will allow you to clear your mind and come back to your thumbnails with a fresh perspective. When you are ready to get back to work, find the thumbnail that evokes your concept most effectively. You are then going to create a larger, more detailed sketch that will serve as the basis for your final artwork. Miniverso Studio highlights the importance of this stage, “The digitization process of our character will be easier with a well-elaborated sketch.” Finalize the pose and fine details Your main concern at this stage should be the pose, so take the time to sketch a few options that show off the character’s personality. If you are designing a character for an animator, you will also need to create a handful of orthographic T-pose sketches. These display a front, back, and side view of the character standing with their legs together and arms outstretched, and they give the animator a neutral view of the design on which to animate. T-poses can also be useful for figuring out clothing detail that may get lost in a more expressive pose. Cross The Lime advises, “As you are sketching, remember that depending on use, your character must be able to move around. Will it need to hold a sign, jump over things, or bend down? Your character’s anatomy must allow for these things. Ideally, your first character sheet has expressions along with the character turning around. What will a frontal view look like, side view, two-thirds, and maybe even from behind.” Besides the pose, you should be paying particular attention to details like facial expression, hand gestures, and clothing folds in order to get the design as far along as you can. “The facial expression, especially the eyes, significantly defines the mood of the character,” Maylyn explains. “The posture and colors make the character pop out. So, everything needs to complement each other to make your character alive and believable.” By Maylyn The facial expression, especially the eyes, significantly defines the mood of the character. Their clothes add personality. These need to match to bring them to life. Gather feedback before proceeding If you are working on a team or with a client, this can be a good time to gather feedback before going any further—in which case, you may want to provide a few (no more than three) options. The purpose of this sketch is to guide your final artwork, so it is going to get harder to make any big changes to the design from here on. Step 6: Render your character design — In a lot of ways, you have already successfully designed a character by this point. Design is less about illustrative flair and more about choices, creating the concept, and the bulk of that hard work is behind you. Now is where you start the render process, which is a fine art way of saying going from sketch to finished artwork. That, of course, is not to say that you should pay less attention to the render. In order for your character concept to land, it has to be truly presentable. In addition, you may notice details that you need to change the more realistic your design becomes. Digitize the sketch If you’ve been working on paper up until now, you will first need to digitize your sketch. You can do so fairly easily these days using a smartphone, as velcheva tells us, “I take pictures with my phone and send a personal message to myself in any messenger that is also installed on my laptop (this is much faster than scanning). I take a photo of this sketch, make it a translucent layer and draw over it in a graphics editor.“ Be sure also to convert the image to black-and-white and adjust the contrast to really help the linework come through. It can also be helpful to trace a clean, digital sketch on top of this one using your brush tool or you may want to jump into inking if your character will include inked, cartoon lines. Finally, be sure to turn down the opacity on your sketch so that you can draw over it. If you are sticking with physical artwork, you can use tracing paper to transfer a clean version of your sketch onto your canvas. From there, you simple render from the colors and materials of your preference. Focus on value Most artists recommend starting your render with a focus on value. Value is an art term that refers to light and shadow, and as this can be a challenge in and of itself, it is best to separate value from color. By Nemanja Vulevic To block in value, you’ll want to choose contrasting shades of grey for shadows, mid-tones, and highlights. Working in a separate layer beneath your sketch, color over your character with the mid-tone. Next, decide from what angle your light source is coming (don’t forget secondary sources such as the light reflecting off of the floor back onto the character), and block in the general area for shadows and highlights on the character. If you are going for a more painterly style, you can blend these tones by using a brush with a lowered opacity and sampling new grey tones periodically using the eyedropper tool. Otherwise, most cartoonish styles tend to keep the hard edges for their colors and shading. To get an idea of how all this is done, search for and study process videos from other character artists on YouTube. Add color When you get to the coloring stage, Miniverso Studio offer sound advice, “the ‘for fun’ final stage has arrived! Play your favorite song and look for the most welcoming place; in this phase, the final artwork is the reward for your hard work”. Character design by Miniverso Studio For colors, you should aim to choose those that contribute to the character’s overall mood and story but that are also realistic. A firm grasp on color theory and color psychology as well as learning from the colors in your reference images all can help you identify the ideal color palette. Working non-destructively in a separate color layer will also allow you to experiment. When you’re ready to paint in your colors, use a blend mode such as “Color” in Photoshop in order to tint your value tones with the appropriate color. Step 7: Add the finishing touches — No character lives in a vacuum. Well, technically Galactus lives in outer space, but for everybody else, it is important to create a sense of environment for an effective presentation. Decide on a background This character design by Studio yknot uses a neutral, textured background. Generally, building a detailed background with scenery and props is not only a lot of extra work, it can distract focus from the character. One option instead is to suggest a distant, out-of-focus background with roughly painted shapes behind the character. But most artists opt for a fairly simple background, often in a neutral greyish tone with a subtle color gradient or texture. The colors you choose can further enhance the intended mood of the character. Adding a floor shadow as well is a simple way to ground your character in space and reinforce the lighting. Put together a presentation Additionally, you are going to want to put together a client presentation. These presentations often include a variety of secondary poses (including neutral ones), outfits, facial expressions, and close ups and side profiles of the face. These variations can be much simpler than the main action pose since that design should be the focus. Some artists like to show a few of the sketches and thumbnails so that the client can appreciate the development of the concept. Doing so not only gives the client options, it creates the sense that this character is alive rather than a doll pinned down to a static pose. Of course, before you send your presentation off to your client, it’s a good idea to take a step back and evaluate honestly how you yourself respond to the finished character. “Ask yourself: Does this character make you giggle? In my case, a huuuge component of my work is the comedy factor,” artist bananodromo describes her process. “I love silly details, grotesque expressions, surrealism, surprise effect. Of course, this doesn’t apply to all projects […] but mainly for the most creative ones.” Too much information doesn’t exist. By bananodromo 4 final tips on character design — Character design might look like artistic magic, but it actually involves thought, experimentation and hard work to get a successful result. While the steps we’ve laid out here can help give you a starting framework to develop your character designs, it takes time and practice to hone your skill as a character artist. To that end, we’ll leave you with some final words of advice from experienced character artists to help you along your journey: 1. Explore what you like, advises InQueen: “If you want to be a character designer, here is my advice: first of all, I think you have to be realistic and know what you are good at and what you are not. Try everything and see what you like. What do you really like that makes your heart burn? I love my job, and I know it doesn’t suit everyone. Being a character designer, or a professional designer of any kind, goes beyond passion. It requires a lot of discipline, and hard work. Really hard work every day. It is a difficult path but a fun one.” 2. Think on the bright side, like c-artworker: “Wherever you go, always draw doodles on napkins, draw paper, tablets, whatever. Over time you get a supply of shapes, gestures and figures. Don’t be frustrated with rejections! You have a wonderful job where you don’t have to wear a tie and suit and you don’t have to make coffee for your boss!” 3. Or like Maylyn, be persistent. “Find time to practice. As an anime lover, I actually started sketching anime characters in my early years as an artist. And honestly, it helped me in honing my skills through time.” 4. And last but not least, ananana14 shows us how character design truly is all about finding your niche: “When I got into graphic design, characters seemed like something so far away and unachievable. Then I got a cat, then another one, and yes, you guessed it, I started drawing cats. I began noticing how they run, how they sit, their poses and used that in my drawings. It also helped that cats don’t sit around and wait for me to finish my drawing. That way I had to learn to pick up the most important traits, exaggerate them and avoid getting too caught up in the details.” Character design is crucial in storytelling, shaping the visual identity of characters across various media. Whether in animation, video games, or graphic novels, character design captures attention and conveys narrative depth. A well-designed character enhances the audience’s connection with the story and its world. Character design involves creating a visual representation of a character’s personality, traits, and background. This process requires careful thought about: Appearance: The physical traits that define the character, such as size, shape, and color scheme. Personality: Facial expressions, gestures, and poses that reflect the character’s nature. Backstory: The design elements that hint at the character’s past, lifestyle, or role in the story. A well-executed design can make a character instantly recognizable and memorable. It helps bring stories to life by visually expressing key aspects of the character’s journey. In this guide, you will learn the fundamentals of character design to help you create captivating characters for any creative project. Character design is the process of creating characters for various forms of media such as animation, video games, and comic books. It involves designing the appearance, personality, and traits of a character to bring them to life within a narrative. The purpose of character design is to visually communicate a character’s identity and role in a story to the audience. Unique characters stand out in a crowded market and help create a lasting impression on the audience. Memorable characters are essential for building a strong connection with the audience and ensuring they are invested in the story. Creating unique and memorable characters can set a project apart and increase its chances of success. Character design plays a crucial role in storytelling by visually representing characters’ motivations, emotions, and actions. Well-designed characters can evoke emotions such as empathy, fear, joy, or sadness in the audience, enhancing their engagement with the narrative. The visual aspects of a character, including their appearance, expressions, and body language, contribute to the overall storytelling experience. Read: Importance of a Good Workspace for Digital Artists Research plays a crucial role in character design as it helps in creating well-thought-out and believable characters. It is important to gather information on various aspects such as the character’s background, personality, and motivations. This will help in making the character more relatable and engaging to the audience. Research is the foundation of character design. It helps in understanding the context in which the character exists, making the design process more informed and authentic. By conducting research, designers can ensure that their characters are not only visually appealing but also consistent with the story they are a part of. Inspiration can come from various sources, including real-life references, art, literature, and other media. By observing the world around us, designers can find unique elements to incorporate into their characters, making them more dynamic and interesting. Unlock a personalized career strategy that drives real results. Get tailored advice and a roadmap designed just for you. Start Now Drawing inspiration from different sources also helps in creating diverse and well-rounded characters. One effective way to gather inspiration is by creating mood boards. Mood boards are visual collages that include images, colors, textures, and other elements that evoke a particular mood or theme. Designers can use mood boards to explore different concepts and styles, helping them refine their ideas and develop a cohesive visual language for their characters. When creating a mood board, it’s important to consider the mood or personality of the character. Include references that reflect the character’s traits, background, and the world they inhabit. Experiment with different combinations of images and colors to convey the desired emotions and atmosphere. To gather inspiration effectively, designers can explore a wide range of sources. Look for inspiration in everyday life, such as observing people, animals, and nature. Visit museums, art galleries, and exhibitions to experience different art styles and techniques. Watch movies, read books, and play video games to immerse yourself in diverse narratives and visuals. When gathering inspiration, keep an open mind and be willing to experiment with different ideas. Don’t limit yourself to one source ‘ explore different genres, cultures, and time periods to expand your creativity. Take note of elements that resonate with you and incorporate them into your character design process. By conducting thorough research and gathering inspiration from various sources, designers can create compelling and memorable characters that resonate with audiences. Remember, character design is a creative process that requires exploration, experimentation, and imagination. Use research and inspiration as tools to bring your characters to life and make them truly unforgettable. Read: How to Build a Successful Ceramic Art Studio Creating a character profile is a crucial step in character design as it helps bring your character to life in a comprehensive way. Reach thousands of readers actively exploring professional services. Publish your business profile and grow your audience now. Publish Now Backstory: Start by crafting a backstory for your character, including details about their past, experiences, and significant events that shaped who they are. Personality Traits: Define the personality traits of your character, such as introverted, outgoing, brave, or compassionate, to give them depth and complexity. Motivations: Consider what drives your character and what goals or desires propel them forward in your story or project. A character profile serves as a roadmap for character design, helping you make informed decisions about their appearance, clothing, and overall aesthetic. By understanding your character’s backstory, you can choose design elements that reflect their experiences and journey. Personality traits can influence how your character carries themselves, their facial expressions, and even their posture. Knowing your character’s motivations can inspire you to incorporate symbolic elements into their design that represent their goals. Consistency is key when it comes to character design, and a well-developed character profile can help maintain that consistency throughout your project. References to your character profile can guide you in keeping their design elements cohesive and on-brand. Consistent portrayal of your character’s personality traits can help ensure their actions and reactions are authentic and believable. Understanding your character’s motivations can also help you stay true to their core values and decisions as the story progresses. When developing a character profile, it can be helpful to ask yourself some key questions to deepen your understanding of your character: What is your character’s greatest fear or weakness? What are their most significant strengths or skills? How do they interact with other characters in your story? What are their goals or aspirations, and what lengths are they willing to go to achieve them? How do they adapt to challenges or adversity? By exploring these questions and more, you can create a detailed and multifaceted character profile that will enrich your character design and storytelling. Read: How to Turn Your Digital Art into NFTs Discover More: Production Design: Building Immersive Sets Sketching and ideation play a crucial role in the character design process. It allows artists to visually explore different concepts, shapes, and forms before finalizing a character design. Here are some key points to consider: Helps in brainstorming and generating a variety of ideas. Allows for quick visualization of different character traits and personalities. Facilitates experimentation with proportions, poses, and expressions. Provides a visual reference for refining and evolving initial ideas. Encourages creative exploration and problem-solving. Start with rough thumbnail sketches to capture basic concepts. Experiment with various shapes, sizes, and silhouettes to create diverse characters. Combine different elements from nature, mythology, or everyday objects for inspiration. Try out different art styles to see what resonates best with the character’s theme. Consider the character’s backstory, motivations, and environment to inform the design. Sketching is an iterative process that allows artists to refine and develop their initial ideas into a final character design. Here’s how sketching can help in this refinement: Iterate on key features and details to enhance the character’s visual appeal. Experiment with different poses and expressions to convey the character’s personality. Seek feedback from peers or mentors to gain fresh perspectives on the design. Use sketching as a tool to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments. Continuously refine and polish the sketches until the character design aligns with the intended vision. In general, sketching and ideation are fundamental aspects of the character design process. They allow artists to explore, experiment, and refine their ideas to create compelling and engaging characters that resonate with audiences. Read: Skills Needed to Become a Ceramic Artist After receiving feedback and going through iterations on your character design, it’s time to refine and finalize the concept. This stage is crucial in bringing your character to life and ensuring it meets the desired criteria. When refining your character design, pay close attention to feedback from peers, mentors, or clients. Analyze the comments and suggestions provided to identify areas that need improvement or modification. Be open to making changes to enhance the overall quality of your character. Iterate on different aspects of the design, such as the silhouette, proportions, facial features, and overall composition. Experiment with variations to see what works best for the character. Don’t be afraid to push the boundaries and explore different possibilities to refine the design further. Details, textures, and colors play a significant role in enhancing the visual appeal of your character. Consider adding intricate details to make the design more dynamic and visually interesting. Use textures to add depth and realism to different elements of the character. When selecting colors, think about the personality, traits, and background of the character. Choose a color palette that reflects the character’s characteristics and creates a cohesive look. Experiment with different color combinations to find the perfect balance for your design. Before finalizing the design, make sure to review it thoroughly to ensure all elements are cohesive and well-executed. Check for any inconsistencies or errors that need to be corrected. Make necessary adjustments to refine the design further. Once you are satisfied with the overall look of the character, it’s time to prepare it for presentation or implementation. Create a polished version of the design that showcases all the details, textures, and colors effectively. Consider creating different views or poses to provide a comprehensive look at the character. Reach thousands of readers actively exploring professional services. Publish your business profile and grow your audience now. Publish Now When presenting your final character design, consider creating a presentation deck or portfolio that highlights the key aspects of the character. Include sketches, iterations, and final renders to showcase the evolution of the design. Provide background information on the character’s story, personality, and traits to give context to the design. Prepare a high-quality presentation that demonstrates your thought process, creativity, and attention to detail. Practice presenting your design effectively, and be prepared to discuss your design choices and artistic decisions. Engage with your audience and be open to answering any questions or feedback they may have. By following these steps and putting effort into refining and finalizing your character design, you can create a visually appealing and well-executed concept that captures the essence of your character effectively. Gain More Insights: Behind the Scenes: Production Design Process Character design is a fundamental aspect of storytelling in various fields. Beginners should focus on understanding the purpose of the characters they create. Practice and experimentation are vital for honing one’s skills in character design. Ultimately, creativity, research, and dedication are crucial in mastering the art of character design. By exploring different techniques and styles, beginners can develop their unique visual language. Remember, character design is a journey of self-expression and storytelling. So keep practicing and never stop learning and growing in this exciting field! Character design refers to the process of creating characters for animated films, comics, TV, toys, and publications. A character starts as a concept: a collection of personality traits, behaviors, and physical attributes. Then the designer sketches the character or uses design software to bring the character to life in print, onscreen, or as a physical object.Discover what makes effective character design, the daily activities and salary of a character designer, the software character designers use, and some steps to guide you through your first character design.What is character design?Character design involves bringing concepts to life by giving them features that include personality, behavior, physical appearance, and aesthetics. You do this through a combination of art, psychology, and storytelling in various media, including video games, comics, film, animation, and toy design.3 components of good character design Three main components of character design are silhouette, color palette, and exaggeration. Compelling character design makes a character interesting and memorable to an audience and sets one character apart from others. A silhouette shows the outline of a character’s shape and excludes interior details like facial features and colors. By using what’s called shape language, you create meaning through the lines, curves, and angles that make up a character’s silhouette. These choices make the difference between a character that looks soft and cuddly and one that looks menacing and dangerous, for example.A color palette refers to your use of different colors to make a character unique. By using color theory, you can choose colors that evoke emotions in the audience. For example, red can convey a character’s passion or intensity, while green can convey serenity or a connection to nature. Exaggeration refers to making some of a character’s features more prominent than others, such as by enlarging the eyes or having the character make dynamic gestures. Depending on what you exaggerate, you can make a character appear comical, beautiful, evil, heroic, and more. Tip: Look for instances of good character design in the media you consume and note the silhouettes, use of color, and exaggeration. For example, many will know the Disney character Mickey Mouse by the size and shape of his ears, broad smile, and optimism.What does a character designer do?Character designers, sometimes called character animators, choose each detail of a character to communicate a personality, a role in a storyline, a relationship with other characters, and other essential aspects. Some specific duties and tasks you may perform as a character designer include: Exploring character conceptsDesigning characters’ visual appearancesDeveloping characters’ personalities, behaviors, facial expressions, and body movementsDrawing upon psychology to explore a character’s psyche Exploring different impacts on a story’s plot and themes Collaborating with other creators on a team to create characters Making sure characters match a given script Using digital design or software to create visual representations of charactersStaying up to date with the latest animation and 3D design technologies Read more: What Is 3D Design? And How to Get StartedDepending on your interests, you may want to focus on a particular area of character design, such as: Anime character design: Features humanlike characters with exaggerated facial expressions and large, expressive eyes, while bodies are relatively proportional Fantasy character design: Often features elves, witches, fairies, mermaids, or other supernatural creaturesCartoon character design: Features characters that appear in a cartoon series or animated film and that are intended to look drawn rather than true-to-life Character designers: job outlook and salaryThe median base pay for character designers in the US is $76,554 per year as of August 2024, according to Glassdoor [2]. Including base salary plus additional pay such as profit sharing, tips, commissions, and cash bonuses, character designers make an average of $82,615 [2].Character designers are in demand. The expected job growth for special effects artists and animators from 2022 to 2032 is 8 percent, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics [3]. What degree do you need to be a character designer?In general, career sites recommend that you earn a bachelor’s degree in fine arts, graphic design, animation, computer science, or a related field to apply for jobs in character design. According to Zippia’s resume data, 72 percent of character animators (designers) have a bachelor’s degree, while 8 percent have a master’s, 10 percent have an associate degree, and 10 percent have a diploma or other degree [1]. The most popular major among character animators is animation, with 43 percent of degree holders having studied this field [1]. Character design industriesSome of the industries you can work in as a character designer include sports, gaming, entertainment, nonprofit volunteer organizations, language learning, software development, IT, consulting, web design, faith and spirituality, and education. Companies that are hiring include Netflix, Disney, Sony, Dreamworks, Squarespace, Deloitte, Snapchat, and more. Yes, with the right skills and customer base, freelance character design can be quite profitable. ZipRecruiter reports the average hourly rate freelance character designers charge as $23 per hour, but the range is between $9.38 and $68.99 per hour [4]. As a freelancer, you can set your own rates based on your experience, skills, location, and the design specialties you offer. Read more: How to Become a Video Game Designer: Skills, Steps, and PayCharacter design software Explore the cost and features of five different character design software programs. Use this table as a starting point for finding the best software program for you. Character design softwareCostFeaturesAutodesk Maya$235/monthPolygon modeling, fast playback, graph editor, simulator, prebuilt graphs, interactive hair grooming, motion graphicsZBrush$39/monthCustomizable brush, polygon modeling, remeshing options, flexible workflows, advanced painting and texturingBlenderFree and open sourceRendering, modeling, sculpting, video editing, simulation, animation and rigging, Python APIPoser$249.95 flat rateThird-party digital content, rendering, animation, illustration, graphics card support, post effects, Python 3 supportSelfCADFree version; pro is $14.99/monthModeling, sculpting, rendering, animating, magic fix, file export and import, STL slicerHow to design characters: getting startedDesigning your own characters and building your portfolio is one way to get freelance work or gain experience to prepare you for a career in character design. If you’re ready to design your first character and see your ideas take shape, follow these steps: 1. Prepare and plan.The first step is to decide on the kind of character you want to create. Take a look at some prompts to guide and narrow your preparation: What kind of story will the character be a part of?What is the story about? Describe what happens and how the story ends. Identify the genre, such as fantasy, comedy, or mystery.What is the character’s role in the story? 2. Use character design prompts.The next step is to explore the character’s psyche and essence more deeply using character design prompts that spark your imagination. What goals and motivations drive the character to act? What personality traits set the character apart from others? How will these traits correspond to the character’s most important physical features? If you need more character design ideas to fuel your creative energy, look online for pre-made resources by searching the following terms: Character design generator: This can be an app or internet tool for auto-generating ideas or even a basic visual appearance for new characters. Character design sheet: A character design sheet provides an overview of a character in multiple poses and details the character’s personality, psyche, and role in a story. Character design template: This may be a pre-drawn outline or sketch of a stock character. You can modify a template by changing or adding details as you fine-tune a new character.3. Gather character reference materials. Before you start sketching and designing your character’s physical appearance, you’ll need some visual examples and inspiration to serve as reference material. Consider creating a mood board on Pinterest or collecting posts on Instagram from other accounts. Examples of reference material you might need include: HairstylesFacial expressionsPosesClothing or costumesGesturesBody types and proportions4. Create a thumbnail sketch. A thumbnail sketch is a visual mockup of the character you want to create. The sketch is an important step, even if you’re not a trained artist. When sketching, use your design templates and sheets to capture the basic shape of your character, proportions, the most salient physical features, and the colors. Next, you’ll fill in details, such as adding buttons to a costume or more volume to the hair. 5. Use software to finalize your character.Once you choose a character design software program, your final step is to turn the thumbnail sketch into a polished digital illustration. Familiarize yourself with the software program’s features to get the most out of the final design work.Learn character design with Coursera Earning online credentials can be a great way to formalize your training in character design. Launch your games career with the Epic Games Game Design Professional Certificate, which introduces you to engine fundamentals, blueprint sculpting, and more.Or learn from professional character designers and observe them in action in the CalArts Character Design for Video Games, which is a part of the Game Design: Art and Concepts Specialization. Character design is a fascinating and intricate art form that plays a crucial role in storytelling, whether it’s in movies, animation, video games, or even literature. It’s the process of creating visually appealing and emotionally resonant characters that capture the essence of a story and connect with the audience on a deep level. To achieve this, character designers rely on a set of principles that guide their creative process. Therefore, in this blog, we will delve into the world of character designing principles and explore the four fundamental principles that underlie this captivating art form.What is Character Designing?Character design is about more than just drawing aesthetically pleasing figures; it’s about crafting characters that evoke emotions, reflect personalities, and contribute to the narrative. Successful character design can make a story more relatable, immersive, and memorable. It involves careful consideration of various factors, including the character’s appearance, traits, backstory, role in the story, and the overall visual style of the project. Now, let us jump into our next section i.e. the four designing principles.The Four Character Designing PrinciplesSilhouette and Silhouette RecognitionThe silhouette of a character is its outline or shape when viewed from a distance or in silhouette form. It is crucial because it allows the audience to quickly recognize and distinguish the character, even in complex scenes. A strong and distinctive silhouette helps the character stand out and become instantly recognizable.Think about the iconic characters like Mickey Mouse or Batman. Their silhouettes are so unique that they can be identified even without detailed features. Character designers use shapes, proportions, and distinctive features to create silhouettes that are easily identifiable and resonate with the character’s personality and role.Proportion and AnatomyProportions and anatomy are the building blocks of character design. Understanding human (or non-human) anatomy is essential to creating characters that feel believable and visually appealing. However, character designers often play with proportions to emphasize certain traits or emotions. For instance, exaggerated features like large eyes can convey innocence or vulnerability, while a muscular physique can suggest strength and power.Proportions and anatomy also play a role in expressing character traits. A character with a hunched posture might be timid or subservient, while one with a confident stride exudes self-assuredness. Striking the right balance between realism and stylization is key to crafting characters that fit seamlessly into their narrative worlds. Here are the 5 essential skills every animator should master to succeed in the industry.Personality and Visual TraitsEvery character should have a distinct personality that shines through their visual design. The character’s appearance, attire, facial expressions, and body language should all reflect their traits, motivations, and role in the story. For example, a character with messy hair and a disheveled outfit might be interpreted as a creative and carefree individual, while someone in a suit and tie exudes professionalism and seriousness.Color palette also plays a crucial role in conveying personality. Warm colors like red and yellow can suggest energy and positivity, while cooler tones like blue and green might indicate calmness or introspection. The choice of colors can also create contrasts between characters, helping to establish relationships and dynamics within the story.Context and Story IntegrationA well-designed character is seamlessly integrated into the story’s world and narrative. The character’s design should align with the time period, setting, and genre of the project. A medieval fantasy character will have different visual cues compared to a futuristic space explorer.Furthermore, a character’s design should reflect their role and function in the story. A villain might have sharp, angular features and a dark color palette, while a mentor figure could have a softer appearance and warm colors. This cohesion between design and narrative context enhances the audience’s immersion and emotional connection with the characters.To Wrap UpCharacter design is a delicate art that balances aesthetics, storytelling, and psychology. By following the principles of silhouette recognition, proportion and anatomy, personality and visual traits, and context and story integration, character designers breathe life into their creations. If you want to become an animator, you can easily learn about these principles with the assistance of animation courses in Kolkata. These principles provide a framework for creating characters that not only look visually captivating but also resonate deeply with audiences, contributing to the overall success of a project. So the next time you encounter a beloved character on screen or in a book, take a moment to appreciate the intricate thought and design that went into making them truly unforgettable. We will be discussing Character Design Process in this blog post. Character design plays a crucial role in shaping stories across animation, video games, and comics. It sets the visual tone and brings the narrative to life. A well-crafted character enhances storytelling, making it more engaging and relatable for the audience. Through visual traits, emotions, and personalities, characters can establish strong connections with viewers and players. In animation, a compelling character drives the plot and conveys emotions visually. In video games, character design adds to the player’s experience, influencing how they interact with the game world. Comics rely heavily on distinct character visuals to quickly communicate traits and storylines. Well-developed characters captivate audiences, making them invested in the story’s outcome. Thoughtful designs enrich the plot, transforming simple narratives into unforgettable experiences. A relatable character can resonate with audiences long after they finish the story, creating a lasting impact. This blog will break down the character design process step by step. We will cover initial concept development, where artists brainstorm the character’s purpose and role. Next, we’ll explore defining features and characteristics that shape the character’s appearance and personality. Then, we’ll delve into sketching and refining designs, followed by adding color and final details. Finally, we’ll examine how designers test character functionality within their specific media. Whether it’s through movement in animation, interactions in video games, or visual appeal in comics, every detail counts. By following this process, creators can develop iconic characters that leave a lasting impression on their audience. Stay tuned as we dive into each step of the process, providing insights and tips for creating captivating character designs. Begin by defining the character’s essential traits like name, age, and gender. Unlock a personalized career strategy that drives real results. Get tailored advice and a roadmap designed just for you. Start Now These elements serve as the foundation. A character’s physical appearance—such as hair color, height, and distinctive features—also shapes their identity. Defining these early helps ensure consistency throughout the story. These basic elements set the tone for further development and guide future design decisions. Next, think about the character’s background and personality traits. Is your character introverted or extroverted? Consider their past experiences, upbringing, and key moments that shaped their identity. What motivates them? Their desires and fears inform how they interact with others and approach challenges. A well-rounded character will have both strengths and flaws, making them relatable and engaging. Now, brainstorm concepts and ideas that align with your character’s story. What purpose do they serve in the narrative? Whether they’re a hero, mentor, or antagonist, their role informs their design. For example, a villain might have darker, sharper features, while a mentor could appear wise and experienced. Consider how their look and personality reflect their journey and growth in the story. In fact, defining a character requires thoughtful consideration of their basics, background, and purpose. A strong foundation will help the character feel authentic and fully developed, making them a compelling part of any narrative. By focusing on their unique traits, you can create a character that truly stands out. Read: Creating an Inclusive Art Classroom Environment Research and inspiration are vital to creating original and memorable characters. The process begins by conducting thorough research on similar characters in popular media. This step allows you to gather inspiration while avoiding overused tropes and cliches. Reach thousands of readers actively exploring professional services. Publish your business profile and grow your audience now. Publish Now By analyzing existing designs, you can identify common elements and learn what works effectively in different contexts. Creating mood boards or collages is an excellent way to visualize the character’s aesthetic and personality. These collections of images, colors, and styles help solidify your character’s look. The mood board becomes a visual reference that guides the rest of the design process, ensuring consistency and coherence. It also serves as a creative spark, inspiring new ideas and possibilities. Exploring different art styles and techniques is the next step in refining the character’s design. Experiment with styles that resonate with the character’s personality or role in the story. For instance, a whimsical, playful character may benefit from a cartoonish style, while a serious, mysterious figure could be enhanced by a darker, more realistic approach. Exploring various techniques can add depth and originality to your design, making your character stand out. In summary, research and inspiration are key to creating a unique and engaging character. By studying existing designs, visualizing the character through mood boards, and experimenting with different art styles, you can craft a character that feels fresh and compelling. Each step in this process enriches the design and helps bring your character to life in a way that resonates with your audience. Read: Benefits of Continuing Education for Art Teachers In the character design process, sketching and drafting play a crucial role. It begins with creating rough sketches to explore various ideas. These early sketches allow designers to experiment with different poses, expressions, and costume designs. At this stage, the goal is to capture the essence of the character without worrying about perfection. Once the rough ideas are on paper, the next step is to refine the sketches. Here, the focus shifts to establishing the character’s proportions and defining important facial features. Designers must ensure that the character’s anatomy is balanced and visually appealing. This stage also helps highlight unique details that make the character stand out. After refining the initial sketches, it’s essential to experiment with multiple variations. Exploring different versions of the character allows for creative flexibility. Designers may try adjusting poses, tweaking facial expressions, or changing costume elements to discover the most compelling design. This iterative process ensures that every aspect of the character is thoughtfully considered. In character design, each sketch brings the character closer to life. The drafting stage serves as the foundation on which the final design will be built. By starting with rough ideas, refining them, and experimenting with different variations, designers can create characters that are engaging and visually striking. Through sketching and drafting, the character’s identity takes shape, setting the stage for a well-developed and dynamic final design. With careful attention to detail and a willingness to explore new ideas, designers can create memorable and impactful characters that resonate with their audience. Read: Effective Classroom Management for Art Instructors When it comes to color and texture in character design, there are several important factors to consider: Choosing the right color palette is crucial as it sets the tone for the character’s overall look and feel. Consider the character’s personality, background, and story when selecting colors. For example, warm colors like reds and oranges can denote passion or energy, while cooler tones like blues and greens may represent calmness or tranquility. Be mindful of cultural associations with colors as well, as different colors can have varying meanings across different societies. Texture and shading are essential elements in character design as they add depth and dimension to the character’s appearance. Experiment with different textures like fur, scales, or metallic surfaces to make the character more visually interesting. Shading helps create a sense of volume and form, giving the character a three-dimensional quality. Pay attention to light sources and shadows to make the character look more realistic and dynamic. Reach thousands of readers actively exploring professional services. Publish your business profile and grow your audience now. Publish Now Think about how the character’s colors and textures will interact with their environment. Consider the setting in which the character will exist and how their design will complement or contrast with it. For example, a character with muted earth tones might blend well into a natural, outdoor environment, while a character with bright, neon colors might stand out in a futuristic cityscape. Ensure that the character’s design is cohesive with the world they inhabit to create a visually cohesive and immersive experience. By carefully selecting a color palette that reflects the character’s personality, adding texture and shading for depth, and considering how the character’s design interacts with their environment, you can create a compelling and visually striking character design that resonates with viewers. Read: Understanding Color Theory in Digital Art After going through the initial sketching phase, refining the design, and getting feedback from others, it’s time to finalize the character’s appearance. This stage is crucial in bringing all the elements together and ensuring that the character is ready for use in various projects. Here are the steps you can follow to finalize the character design: Take a closer look at the character design and consider any feedback you’ve received. Make adjustments to the proportions, facial features, or clothing if needed. It’s important to address any issues that might detract from the character’s overall appeal. To enhance the character’s visual storytelling, consider adding final details such as accessories or props. These elements can help communicate the character’s personality, background, or role in a story. Think about how these extra details can add depth to the character’s design. Before finalizing the design, make sure to review the character from all angles to ensure consistency and coherence. Check that the character’s features align with their personality and role. Pay attention to details like color schemes, silhouettes, and overall aesthetics to create a cohesive design. By following these steps, you can ensure that your character design is polished and ready for use in various projects, whether it’s for animation, illustration, or graphic design. Remember that the finalization stage is your last chance to make any necessary adjustments before presenting your character to the world. Digital rendering brings your finalized character design to life with added precision and detail. The first step involves transferring your character design to a digital platform for refinement. By doing so, you can make necessary adjustments and prepare the design for the next stages of the creative process. This step allows for greater flexibility and control over the character’s appearance. Once transferred, use digital tools to clean up lines, add effects, and experiment with different color schemes. Digital tools offer the opportunity to sharpen details, erase imperfections, and enhance clarity. You can easily explore new color palettes, shading, and lighting effects to bring more depth and vibrancy to your design. Experimentation at this stage is key to finalizing the character’s unique look. Popular software like Adobe Photoshop or Procreate helps enhance the character’s digital appearance. These tools offer a wide range of brushes, filters, and layers to create visually stunning artwork. Layers, for example, allow you to isolate certain features and make changes without affecting the rest of the design. This flexibility ensures you can revise and refine the character’s look without limitations. Digital rendering not only enhances the character’s visual appeal but also prepares it for animation, game development, or print. The versatility of digital platforms provides endless possibilities for transforming your design into a polished, professional piece. With the right techniques and tools, digital rendering can elevate your character from concept to completion. Keep refining and experimenting to unlock your character’s full potential in the digital world. Once you have a character design, sharing it with others becomes crucial. Peers, clients, or mentors can offer valuable perspectives you may have overlooked. Their feedback helps refine the character and ensures it resonates with the target audience. Present the design in a clear and engaging manner to get constructive input. Reach thousands of readers actively exploring professional services. Publish your business profile and grow your audience now. Publish Now After gathering feedback, it’s important to implement suggested revisions. Adjust the character’s features, colors, or expressions based on these insights. This process ensures that the character not only fits the original vision but also aligns with the audience’s expectations and needs. Revisions can enhance storytelling by making the character more relatable or visually appealing. The design process doesn’t stop after one round of revisions. Iteration is key to creating a well-polished character. Revisit your design multiple times, tweaking and refining elements to achieve the best possible outcome. Sometimes, a small adjustment in the design can significantly impact the character’s effectiveness in storytelling. Throughout this feedback and revision phase, it’s important to remain open to suggestions while also staying true to your creative vision. Balancing external input with your original ideas can lead to a character design that’s both authentic and impactful. The goal is to achieve a final design that tells the right story, engages the audience, and serves its intended purpose. Remember, great character design is rarely perfect on the first try. Embrace the feedback and revision process as an opportunity to improve and bring your character to life in a more compelling way. After gathering feedback, make any necessary adjustments to the character design. Ensure that the character’s appearance aligns with their personality and role in the story. Refine details such as clothing, accessories, and expressions to enhance the character’s visual appeal. Develop comprehensive character sheets that document all aspects of the character. Include information on their backstory, motivations, relationships, and key traits. Use these character sheets as reference guides throughout the storytelling process

objectives, challenges, solutions, and results in formats that effectively communicate value to potential clients or employers. These case studies should demonstrate strategic thinking alongside artistic execution, showing how character design supports broader business or communication objectives. Digital portfolio platforms provide various options for character design presentation, each with specific advantages and limitations. Professional character designers must understand platform capabilities and audience expectations to effectively present their work. Portfolio optimisation considerations include loading speed, mobile compatibility, and user experience design. Successful character design extends beyond creation to strategic deployment across various digital platforms and business applications. These implementation approaches ensure characters deliver maximum impact while supporting broader marketing, educational, and communication objectives. Character design and animation integration are critical considerations for characters intended for motion applications. Animation character design requires specific technical considerations that static character applications do not encounter, influencing design decisions from initial concept development through final implementation. Animation-ready character designs must consider movement requirements from the earliest design phases. Joint placement, proportion relationships, and costume design all impact animation feasibility and quality. Characters with complex costumes or accessories might require simplified versions for animation applications while maintaining visual consistency with static presentations. Rigging considerations influence character design decisions for digital animation applications. Character proportions, limb relationships, and facial feature placement all affect rigging complexity and animation quality. Professional character designers collaborate with animators to ensure character designs support intended animation approaches while maintaining visual appeal and personality effectiveness. Animation style compatibility ensures character designs work effectively within chosen animation approaches. Traditional animation, motion graphics, and 3D animation each have specific character design requirements and limitations. Understanding these requirements early in the design process prevents costly revisions and ensures optimal animation results. Digital marketing applications present unique challenges and opportunities for character design implementation. Marketing characters must support specific business objectives while maintaining audience appeal across diverse digital platforms and contexts. Brand integration considerations ensure marketing characters align with the existing brand identity while providing distinctive value. Characters must complement existing brand elements without creating confusion or diluting brand recognition. This balance requires careful consideration of colour palettes, design styles, and personality characteristics that support rather than compete with established brand elements. Platform optimisation addresses the reality that marketing characters appear across multiple digital platforms with different technical requirements and audience expectations. Social media characters might emphasise bold, simple designs that work effectively at small sizes, while website characters might support more detailed presentations that enhance user experience. Campaign scalability ensures character designs support various marketing applications and campaign extensions. Successful marketing campaigns often expand beyond initial applications to support additional campaigns, merchandise, or communication needs. Professional character development anticipates these possibilities while maintaining focus on immediate objectives. Educational character design requires specific considerations related to learning objectives, audience development, and pedagogical effectiveness. Educational characters serve as guides, demonstrators, and motivational elements that support learning outcomes rather than purely aesthetic objectives. Learning objective alignment ensures educational characters genuinely support rather than distract from educational goals. Characters must enhance comprehension, maintain attention, and facilitate knowledge retention without overwhelming educational content. This balance requires understanding both character design principles and educational psychology. Age-appropriate character development considers the developmental characteristics, interests, and communication preferences of specific age groups. Characters designed for young children require different approaches than those intended for adult learners, influencing everything from visual complexity to personality characteristics and communication styles. Cultural sensitivity in educational character design becomes particularly important given the diverse audiences many educational applications serve. Characters must avoid stereotypes while representing diversity appropriately and respectfully. Professional educational character development considers these factors to ensure inclusive, effective learning support. Professional character design services provide comprehensive support for businesses seeking to implement character-based communication strategies. These services combine artistic expertise with strategic understanding to deliver characters that achieve specific business objectives. Service scope definition helps clients understand what character design services include and how different service levels support various project requirements. Comprehensive character design services might include research, concept development, final artwork, style guides, and implementation support, while focused services might address specific project phases or requirements. Client collaboration processes ensure character development projects meet client expectations while maintaining professional standards and creative integrity. Effective collaboration balances client input with professional expertise, ensuring final characters serve intended purposes while satisfying client preferences and requirements. Project timeline considerations help establish realistic expectations for character development projects. Professional character design requires sufficient time for research, concept development, iteration, and refinement. Understanding these timeline requirements helps ensure successful project outcomes while managing client expectations and project constraints. Character design applications continue expanding as digital technology evolves, creating new opportunities for strategic character deployment. These advanced applications demonstrate how characters can enhance user experience, support digital transformation, and drive measurable business results across emerging platforms. Character integration in web design presents unique opportunities to enhance user experience while supporting business objectives. Web-based characters can guide users through complex processes, provide assistance, and create emotional connections that improve engagement and conversion rates. User interface character integration requires careful consideration of how characters support rather than interfere with primary user tasks. Characters should enhance usability by providing helpful information, feedback, or guidance without creating distractions or increasing cognitive load. This balance requires understanding both character design principles and user experience design best practices. Responsive character design ensures characters work effectively across various devices and screen sizes. Mobile-optimised characters might require simplified presentations or alternative implementations that maintain personality and functionality within smaller screen constraints. Professional web character design considers these technical requirements from initial concept development. Accessibility considerations ensure that character-based web elements remain usable for audiences with various abilities and assistive technologies. This might involve providing alternative text descriptions, ensuring sufficient colour contrast, or offering character-free interface alternatives. Professional web character design balances enhanced user experience with inclusive accessibility. Video production applications require character designs that work effectively in motion while supporting video communication objectives. Character design for video must consider timing, pacing, and viewer attention patterns that differ from static applications. YouTube strategy integration involves creating characters that enhance video content while supporting channel branding and audience development objectives. YouTube characters might serve as hosts, demonstrators, or recurring elements that build audience recognition and engagement over time. These characters must work effectively within YouTube's technical requirements and audience expectations. Video character animation considerations influence initial design decisions related to complexity, movement capabilities, and production efficiency. Characters intended for regular video use require designs that support efficient animation production while maintaining visual appeal and personality consistency across multiple videos. Content series character development addresses the unique requirements of characters that appear across multiple videos or content series. These characters must maintain consistency while providing sufficient flexibility to adapt to various topics, scenarios, and communication needs. Professional video character design balances consistency with creative flexibility. Character Design and SEO Content Strategy Character-based content can significantly enhance SEO performance by increasing engagement metrics, encouraging social sharing, and creating memorable brand associations that support search visibility and user behaviour. Visual content optimisation involving characters requires understanding how search engines evaluate visual content quality and relevance. Character-based images, videos, and interactive content can improve page engagement metrics that influence search rankings while providing unique value that differentiates content from competitors. Content differentiation through character design helps create unique, memorable content that stands out in competitive search environments. Well-designed characters can make otherwise similar content more distinctive and shareable, supporting both direct traffic and search engine recognition of content value. Brand recognition enhancement through consistent character use across content properties can improve branded search performance and user loyalty. Characters that appear consistently across blog posts, videos, social media, and other content create stronger brand associations that support various SEO objectives. Character design increasingly supports AI training and digital transformation initiatives by creating engaging interfaces for complex technological systems and making artificial intelligence applications more approachable and user-friendly. AI interface design benefits from character integration that makes technological interactions feel more natural and less intimidating. Characters can serve as AI assistants, chatbot personas, or interface guides that help users understand and interact with artificial intelligence systems more effectively. Training program enhancement through character design creates more engaging and memorable learning experiences for digital transformation initiatives. Characters can guide employees through new software systems, explain technological changes, or demonstrate best practices in ways that traditional training materials cannot achieve. Digital transformation communication often involves explaining complex technological concepts to diverse audiences. Characters can simplify these explanations while maintaining accuracy and supporting the adoption of new digital tools and processes. Professional character design for digital transformation balances technical accuracy with accessibility and engagement. Character design represents a sophisticated blend of artistic skill, strategic thinking, and technical expertise that delivers measurable results across diverse digital applications. From enhancing educational content and marketing campaigns to supporting user experience design and digital transformation initiatives, well-crafted characters create emotional connections that drive engagement, comprehension, and business success. Professional character development services combine comprehensive design processes with strategic implementation support, ensuring characters not only look exceptional but genuinely achieve their intended objectives in today's competitive digital landscape. When we think of some of our favorite characters, from Superman to Pikachu, design is often that last thing that comes to mind. That's what good character design does: it hides the designer and leaves behind only a memorable character. But great characters don't come from nothing—they are the result of planning, visual storytelling, choices and artistic skill. For this reason, character design can be harder than it at first appears. The design has to evoke who the character is and that means the designer must be skilled at using nonverbal, visual elements such as expression, gesture, color and clothing to communicate personality traits. This is especially true for simplistic character styles, where the designer has to communicate more with less. You may also have to make technical considerations such as whether the design can be easily animated. On top of that, there's the question of originality and staking out your own character design style. Ready to let some colorful characters into your life? Design by OrangeCrush Fortunately, character design is a fairly old practice, and there are common tips and workflows that can guide aspiring designers from concept to finished artwork. With that said, every artist is going to have a different approach that works for them. With both of these factors in mind, we've put together this ultimate guide to character design to provide a step-by-step process and specific character design tips and advice from professional designers who are experts on our platform. The step-by-step character design process — Step 1: Develop a concept — Gather your pencils! Illustration by Maria GR Character design belongs to a class of illustration called concept art. It is about communicating the artist's vision of how a character might appear in a future context, such as a film, video game or company website. The entertainment industry uses concept art to visualize their ideas before committing exorbitant amounts of money on production. To that end, a good character design should sell the vision. Even if you are not designing a character for any purpose other than your own portfolio, that's all the more reason for a clear concept: your design won't have any future context in which to explain the story behind the character. Create a character profile The creative brief, if you are given one, is a good place to start. The client should have provided you with information about the context for the character, the target audience, and the preferred style. Top Level character designer Cross The Lime explains the importance of establishing a direction based on the brief, "How mainstream or quirky a character can be in branding projects really depends on the industry and client. Ask them for examples of characters they like and why." By Cross The Lime But while the client (or writer) may have already created a story for the character, that does not let the artist off the hook. Briefs are by their nature, well, brief, and it's not uncommon for a client to have trouble expressing themselves in artistic terms. How mainstream or quirky a character can be in branding projects really depends on the industry and client. It is often up to the illustrator to interpret the brief, ask the right questions, read between the lines, and distill the client's explanation into core character traits. Your ideas should not contradict the brief, of course, but keep in mind that you were hired for your expertise. In many cases, the client will be expecting you to expand on the concept in novel ways that will not have occurred to them. If you are not given a brief (perhaps even if you were), it is a good idea to essentially come up with one for yourself. You are aiming for a short prompt—no more than a paragraph or so—that gives a basic profile of the character: where they come from, what they want, what makes them special. The Five Ws can be helpful for establishing a basic premise. At this stage, you should not get bogged down in frivolous details like if "her favorite ice cream is rocky road!", but should aim instead for descriptions that serve as an introduction. Brainstorm the details There are a number of brainstorming techniques that can help you develop your character profile. One of the most helpful for character design is word association, starting with some keywords from the brief and coming up with related words that come into mind, either via mind-mapping or writing a straightforward list. The reason being that singular words keep ideas simple, distilling them to their essence, and this comes in handy when you need to communicate those traits visually. By noodlemie According to Top Level designer noodlemie, "I take some time to brainstorm ideas and picture how it would look like in my mind. Before physically starting anything, I create my 'good mood' atmosphere by listening to music and sometimes reading comics, news or a novel." "Before physically starting anything, I create my 'good mood' atmosphere by listening to music and sometimes reading comics, news or a novel." The character concept is a lot like the destination your ship is steering towards, and for that reason, you should pay particular attention to this step. Unfortunately, there's not always a straightforward way to know whether you've chosen the right destination. Creating art is a process of blind feeling, aesthetic judgement and trial-and-error. Get the concept as fleshed out as you can, and come back to this step later if necessary. When something in your design just doesn't feel right, the underlying concept is usually the first place you should look. Step 2: Do your research — Creating unique characters from your mind can feel like magic—so much so, that it can be easy to overlook pesky considerations like research. You might be asking, "is this a character or a term paper!?" But research and imagination go hand-in-hand. Your imagination, after all, comes from your mind, and your mind is informed by your real world knowledge and experiences. Research the target audience More importantly, your design will depend on the experiences of your intended audience. "Before anything else, research the target audience to which the character aims to reach out," Top Level character designer Maylyn describes their research process. "This will serve as the basis of the design. Knowing the audience makes it easier for you to decide how the character should look, including the colors to be used and setting the mood." "Before anything else, research the target audience to which the character aims to reach out." A client will typically provide audience information in the brief, but you'll want to do research beyond demographics such as age, gender, location, etc. Look up other artists who design for that target audience, and the types of styles that appeal to them. Gather reference images This brings us to our primary means of research: gathering reference images, or scouring the internet for photos and artwork relevant to your concept. It is important to understand that using reference images for inspiration is not cheating (provided, of course, you are not creating exact copies). Whether you like it or not, your art is subconsciously influenced by what you've seen, including other artists that have inspired you, and collating references is how you consciously control that influence. In addition, researching the work of other artists on similar concepts or designs for similar audiences can also help you see what is common and how your character can be different. By bananodromo Find how other successful artists make their characters awesome. Analyze and come to conclusions, but don't imitate. As Top Level designer bananodromo puts it, "Gathering inspiration is necessary sometimes, maybe to understand how other successful artists make their characters awesome. Analyze and come to conclusions, but don't imitate. Find your own path." Of course, other artists are simply interpreting what they see in real life in their art, and your reference material must similarly include real life photos or direct observation. As Top Level designer ananana14 so eloquently puts it, "the best tip I wish I could have given myself when starting out is that real life is the best inspiration." Logos by ananana14 Exaggerated, cartoony or oddball characters are not excluded here—if anything, you should make more of an effort to ground them in realistic traits that people will easily recognize. An important consideration is also anatomy. Even if you are not planning to animate the character, you will imply physicality in their pose and should understand how they move and distribute their weight. By Cross The Lime According to Cross The Lime, "A good character is recognizable, yet unique. If you need to draw a giraffe, look at photos of giraffes. What are the proportions, what shapes make up the body, how do the legs work, how does the character work when in motion? The more you sketch and draw variations of these recognizable features and shapes, the easier it is to abstract and come up with your own character." The more you sketch and draw variations of these recognizable features and shapes, the easier it is to abstract and come up with your own character. You can find reference material from virtually any source—Pinterest, Google images, ArtStation, Dribbble, even your own camera roll. You can also gather reference images for anything you're unsure about—from the character concept as a whole to specific details like clothing, hairstyle, facial expression, poses and more. The important thing is that each of these images help you visualize your concept. Top Level design team Miniverso Studio offer their perspective on this stage: "Research is the essential part in character design. Get inspired by other designs and styles that bring you closer to what you are looking for. Gather references in images, style, color, personality, expressions and more. Soak up everything that manages to give your character soul." How many reference images you'll need will depend on the project and how much you feel you need to learn. That said, it should definitely be more than a few in order to get diverse perspectives. Once you've gathered these materials, it can be helpful to create a collage or mood board. This does not have to be anything fancy: just all of your images collected in one document that you can keep open on your computer as you work. Step 3: Choose the best tools for your project — There's an argument to be made that the tools you use don't necessarily matter. In theory, you can design a character as effectively with pen and paper as on the computer, and likewise top tier software won't cover up poor concepts or lacking art fundamentals. Using pencil and paper helps to unfold our imagination and not to stagnate. The tools you use largely come down to your intended style, personal preference and the client's file type requirements. Some art styles, such as watercolor, can be mimicked on the computer but usually come out best in their original medium. Personal preference, of course, depends on your own experience creating artwork. By velcheva Finally, you should base your decision on the image file type the client wants. These days, most clients will be expecting some sort of digital file for easy storage and sharing, usually an original source file from a program like Photoshop and a simple image type such as JPEG. But while the client's preference determines the format of your final design deliverable, you can use any tool you like before you get to that point. For example, many of the character artists we interviewed prefer doing preliminary sketches on paper. As Top Level designer velcheva puts it, "I draw my illustrations using a laptop and a graphics tablet. Although I got used to the tablet for many years, it is still quite difficult for me to start drawing; I draw a line, delete, draw another one, delete again. But it's much easier for me to start drawing on paper." I still always start my drawings on paper, even after years of experience using a tablet. Meanwhile, Cross The Lime outlines her process as; "I often draw outlines by hand, then vectorize and add color in Adobe Illustrator—it is faster for me, and has a more fluent/ organic look and constructed lines and vectors." As mentioned before, the analogue tools, whether inkwells or paint brushes, will depend on the style you are going for. Digital drawing tools can be more flexible, but let's briefly go over some of the most common software for character design: Adobe Photoshop / Clip Studio Paint / Krita for digital painting (be sure to pick up some brand of graphics tablet and stylus pen) Adobe Illustrator / Affinity Designer for vector characters (typically used in logo characters or mascots for brands) Maya / ZBrush / Blender for 3D characters Procreate for drawing with a tablet (mimics the experience of drawing with a sketchpad, be sure to pick up a stylus pen) Step 4: Start with thumbnails (a lot of them) — You might be familiar with the term "thumbnail" from its internet usage: a tiny preview version of an image or video. In the illustration world, the idea is similar—thumbnails are small samples of images—but the purpose is different. Thumbnail sketches allow the artist to put their ideation into practice, trying out several, small, quick drawings before committing to a single idea as noodlemie explains, "I draw some doodles or raw sketches on paper for a few options before I do the actual illustration digitally, after I look for some related references for the style or coloring". Design by noodlemie Work small and fast There's no specific recommended size for thumbnail sketches, but ideally they should be small enough that you can fit dozens on the same page. They should be devoid of most detail: focusing on basic shapes and gestures. The key here is variety—in terms of poses, "camera" angles, and the specific reference image you're capturing. Sketch out as many ideas as you can think of, even if you think you found one you already like. You should also emphasize speed and volume: aim for a minute or less for each thumbnail drawing. Working this way keeps you from getting too precious about any one particular drawing since the more time you put into a sketch, the more reluctant you will be to change things. You will also capture a sense of energy in the character pose through speedy linework. Another of our Top Level character artists, BayuRIP, uses this phase to push the concept to new heights, "Combine some elements into the character, make it weird and unique. Try to explore shape and angle to make it different and add your personal style to the design". Pay attention to overall shapes and silhouettes When you have a good number of these (in the tens, at least) a useful technique is to block in silhouettes. This means painting over the shape so that you can see whether the image reads clearly based entirely on its outline. Ask yourself, can you tell what the image is supposed to be? What are the dominant shapes? Is the pose clear? Keep a clear silhouette in mind: have ears, head shape and position of arms all clearly defined. Cross The Lime summarizes, "It is even more important that you keep a clear silhouette in mind when designing. Have ears, head shape, position of arms clearly defined, so that you can recognize the character even when it is just the silhouette." If you have not done so, it's a good idea to brush up on shape language. This, (in addition to color later on) is a primary visual way to communicate traits and emotions such as stability, danger, or innocence. Step 5: Finalize your sketch — If you're tired of sketching after that last step, I have good news for you! Just kidding—it's time for more sketching. That said, it is a good idea to take a break at this point if you have the time to spare. Doing so will allow you to clear your mind and come back to your thumbnails with a fresh perspective. When you are ready to get back to work, find the thumbnail that evokes your concept most effectively. You are then going to create a larger, more detailed sketch that will serve as the basis for your final artwork. Miniverso Studio highlights the importance of this stage, "The digitization process of our character will be easier with a well-elaborated sketch." Finalize the pose and fine details Your main concern at this stage should be the pose, so take the time to sketch a few options that show off the character's personality. If you are designing a character for an animator, you will also need to create a handful of orthographic T-pose sketches. These display a front, back, and side view of the character standing with their legs together and arms outstretched, and they give the animator a neutral view of the design on which to animate. T-poses can also be useful for figuring out clothing detail that may get lost in a more expressive pose. Cross The Lime advises, "As you are sketching, remember that depending on use, your character must be able to move around. Will it need to hold a sign, jump over things, or bend down? Your character's anatomy must allow for these things. Ideally, your first character sheet has expressions along with the character turning around. What will a frontal view look like, side view, two-thirds, and maybe even from behind." Besides the pose, you should be paying particular attention to details like facial expression, hand gestures, and clothing folds in order to get the design as far along as you can. "The facial expression, especially the eyes, significantly defines the mood of the character," Maylyn explains. "The posture and colors make the character pop out. So, everything needs to complement each other to make your character alive and believable." By Maylyn The facial expression, especially the eyes, significantly defines the mood of the character. Their clothes add personality. These need to match to bring them to life. Gather feedback before proceeding If you are working on a team or with a client, this can be a good time to gather feedback before going any further—in which case, you may want to provide a few (no more than three) options. The purpose of this sketch is to guide your final artwork, so it is going to get harder to make any big changes to the design from here on. Step 6: Render your character design — In a lot of ways, you have already successfully designed a character by this point. Design is less about illustrative flair and more about choices, creating the concept, and the bulk of that hard work is behind you. Now is where you start the render process, which is a fine art way of saying going from sketch to finished artwork. That, of course, is not to say that you should pay less attention to the render. In order for your character concept to land, it has to be truly presentable. In addition, you may notice details that you need to change the more realistic your design becomes. Digitize the sketch If you've been working on paper up until now, you will first need to digitize your sketch. You can do so fairly easily these days using a smartphone, as velcheva tells us, "I take pictures with my phone and send a personal message to myself in any messenger that is also installed on my laptop (this is much faster than scanning). I take a photo of this sketch, make it a translucent layer and draw over it in a graphics editor." Be sure also to convert the image to black-and-white and adjust the contrast to really help the linework come through. It can also be helpful to trace a clean, digital sketch on top of this one using your brush tool or you may want to jump into inking if your character will include inked, cartoon lines. Finally, be sure to turn down the opacity on your sketch so that you can draw over it. If you are sticking with physical artwork, you can use tracing paper to transfer a clean version of your sketch onto your canvas. From there, you simple render from the colors and materials of your preference. Focus on value Most artists recommend starting your render with a focus on value. Value is an art term that refers to light and shadow, and as this can be a challenge in and of itself, it is best to separate value from color. By Nemanja Vulevic To block in value, you'll want to choose contrasting shades of grey for shadows, mid-tones, and highlights. Working in a separate layer beneath your sketch, color over your character with the mid-tone. Next, decide from what angle your light source is coming (don't forget secondary sources such as the light reflecting off of the floor back onto the character), and block in the general area for shadows and highlights on the character. If you are going for a more painterly style, you can blend these tones by using a brush with a lowered opacity and sampling new grey tones periodically using the eyedropper tool. Otherwise, most cartoonish styles tend to keep the hard edges for their colors and shading. To get an idea of how all this is done, search for and study process videos from other character artists on YouTube. Add color When you get to the coloring stage, Miniverso Studio offer sound advice, "the 'for fun' final stage has arrived! Play your favorite song and look for the most welcoming place; in this phase, the final artwork is the reward for your hard work". Character design by Miniverso Studio For colors, you should aim to choose those that contribute to the character's overall mood and story but that are also realistic. A firm grasp on color theory and color psychology as well as learning from the colors in your reference images all can help you identify the ideal color palette. Working non-destructively in a separate color layer will also allow you to experiment. When you're ready to paint in your colors, use a blend mode such as "Color" in Photoshop in order to tint your value tones with the appropriate color. Step 7: Add the finishing touches — No character lives in a vacuum. Well, technically Galactus lives in outer space, but for everybody else, it is important to create a sense of environment for an effective presentation. Decide on a background This character design by Studio yknot uses a neutral, textured background. Generally, building a detailed background with scenery and props is not only a lot of extra work, it can distract focus from the character. One option instead is to suggest a distant, out-of-focus background with roughly painted shapes behind the character. But most artists opt for a fairly simple background, often in a neutral greyish tone with a subtle color gradient or texture. The colors you choose can further enhance the intended mood of the character. Adding a floor shadow as well is a simple way to ground your character in space and reinforce the lighting. Put together a presentation Additionally, you are going to want to put together a client presentation. These presentations often include a variety of secondary poses (including neutral ones), outfits, facial expressions, and close ups and side profiles of the face. These variations can be much simpler than the main action pose since that design should be the focus. Some artists like to show a few of the sketches and thumbnails so that the client can appreciate the development of the concept. Doing so not only gives the client options, it creates the sense that this character is alive rather than a doll pinned down to a static pose. Of course, before you send your presentation off to your client, it's a good idea to take a step back and evaluate honestly how you yourself respond to the finished character. "Ask yourself: Does this character make you giggle? In my case, a huuuge component of my work is the comedy factor," artist bananodromo describes her process. "I love silly details, grotesque expressions, surrealism, surprise effect. Of course, this doesn't apply to all projects […] but mainly for the most creative ones." Too much information doesn't exist. By bananodromo 4 final tips on character design — Character design might look like artistic magic, but it actually involves thought, experimentation and hard work to get a successful result. While the steps we've laid out here can help give you a starting framework to develop your character designs, it takes time and practice to hone your skill as a character artist. To that end, we'll leave you with some final words of advice from experienced character artists to help you along your journey: 1. Explore what you like, advises InQueen: "If you want to be a character designer, here is my advice: first of all, I think you have to be realistic and know what you are good at and what you are not. Try everything and see what you like. What do you really like that makes your heart burn? I love my job, and I know it doesn't suit everyone. Being a character designer, or a professional designer of any kind, goes beyond passion. It requires a lot of discipline, and hard work. Really hard work every day. It is a difficult path but a fun one." 2. Think on the bright side, like c-artworker: "Wherever you go, always draw doodles on napkins, draw paper, tablets, whatever. Over time you get a supply of shapes, gestures and figures. Don't be frustrated with rejections! You have a wonderful job where you don't have to wear a tie and suit and you don't have to make coffee for your boss!" 3. Or like Maylyn, be persistent. "Find time to practice. As an anime lover, I actually started sketching anime characters in my early years as an artist. And honestly, it helped me in honing my skills through time." 4. And last but not least, ananana14 shows us how character design truly is all about finding your niche: "When I got into graphic design, characters seemed like something so far away and unachievable. Then I got a cat, then another one, and yes, you guessed it, I started drawing cats. I began noticing how they run, how they sit, their poses and used that in my drawings. It also helped that cats don't sit around and wait for me to finish my drawing. That way I had to learn to pick up the most important traits, exaggerate them and avoid getting too caught up in the details." A character design rarely arrives from nowhere. Any number of things you may think about, or even not think about, can find their way into your character design process. Think of it this way: on a conscious level, that specific anime style you love may inspire the character you create. On the other hand, you may not be quite aware of the color choices you're making in the design process because they may come from a color combination you saw in the past that stuck with you.Color choice can be its own obstacle.It comes to this as a character design trick: your experiences and environment influence your character designs. Both what you think about and what happens subconsciously. So, how can we fill our mental catalog of inspiration down the line?Watch, Read, and Listen"Character design, like story design, requires a hook to grab the reader's attention." - Ted NaifehTed Naifeh, the artist behind Gloomcookie, makes a great point about a hook in character design. Think back on some of the most iconic character designs regarding hooks, and this seems pretty straightforward, right? Let's start with Spider-Man. Here is his latest incarnation from Insomniac Studios.Even with Insomniac's unique white highlights, some elements, such as the webbing, remain.Sure, Spider-Man has a stunning red and blue suit with iconic webbing, but the real hook is the dynamic posing of the character. It's why you rarely see Spider-Man just standing there. It just wouldn't seem right. Spider-Man's hook is the contortion present in his posing. Artists may take in live contortionist acts as inspiration. The hook is a sense of motion at any given moment. With Marvel OCs, it's all about capturing that larger-than-life energy—whether it's dynamic poses like Spider-Man's or a powerful stance that tells their story in an instant.Let's try another character, Radical Edward from Cowboy Bebop. This character evokes potential chaos.The character is a whole mix of exciting design choices, but the most apparent hook here seems to be, for many, the androgyny of her look. Ed's androgyny helps communicate a kind of spritely characterization in her personality and role on the crew. Ed is a kind of unknowable presence who does magic on the computer like a computer fairy. The fact her gender isn't inherently easy to read adds a lot of that feeling. Fairy tails could be an inspiration here.But if a hook is so important, how do you find it? The trick is to open yourself up to inspiration and become more media literate. To build your inspiration library, you should take inspiration from various sources. That means watching movies and TV, reading comics, manga, and books, and listening to podcasts and songs. You never know what sort of things these can spark down the line, and a diversity of media can help expose you to new things you may not have considered.If your media diet consists of nothing but shonen manga, you don't have a very deep well to draw from. Can you find inspiring hooks within? Potentially, but you also run the risk of creating generic character design concepts as well. One tip for anime character design is to read more than manga and watch more than anime.ResearchTaking in that diet of different media isn't merely a passive activity, though. A good character designer should be active and think about what they are experiencing. Let's take in a cartoon character design tip from one of the finest cartoonists ever."I keep very weird hours. I never know when I'm going to get an idea." - Sergio AragonésSergio Aragonés reveals an exciting thing here when he talks about his schedule. His weird hours reflect the trait of someone who is always thinking with an active mind. Sure, sleep is essential to the body. But Aragonés, as a creative mind with an eye for taking in experiences to turn into inspiration, is always thinking. It's not that ideas show up spontaneously - they need to be recognized and noted. Noting these ideas can take any form, from mental notes to sketching or writing them down. What all of this ends up being is research.Sergio Aragonés' 'Groo' is a masterful character design that evokes various pulp and adventure influences.You're not just passively watching a movie and hoping inspiration comes to you. You seek it out. You find those hooks and collect them. The research is part of the process. Of course, research also comes in the actual study of ideas, concepts, and forms. Take this example from Eriana Mirabal, who stated in a write-up for Art Rocket, "Your closest reference is yourself. If you look at yourself in front of a mirror and start moving, you will notice that your body works as a single element."When trying to construct the form of a character, you can research by studying how your body moves, how clothing folds, and how limbs bend. Beyond that, though, you can push research in character design further. Photos and reference books of historical clothing can be invaluable in creating the look of a character, just as much as reading and understanding what the day-to-day life of your ancestors may have been like.Always being open to and actively hunting inspiration is part of the research process that results in excellent character design.Designing King Kabuto: Inspiration and ResearchWhen designing the character of King Kabuto, the ruler of the Insect Kingdom in my Bandit's Quest setting, I already had a pretty strong idea. I wanted a giant, bullying beetle. So, for research, I found a wrestler who had the vibe I wanted: Antonio Inoki. Inoki is a historical "strong style" wrestler who also entered politics. Big, powerful, and controversial: perfect for a brash king.As for the insect I chose, I went with a Rhino Beetle, particularly for the large horn. It's a showy element that should play well with a larger-than-life character.Based on these two pictures, you can probably get a sense of what kind of character I am working on.Character Design Process: Feeling out the Character DesignOnce sufficiently inspired and having conducted any necessary research regarding your character concept, you enter the most challenging stage of the character design process: designing the character. This stage can be the most time-consuming and frustrating part of how to design a character, but it is also the most rewarding. It is where the central imagery of the concept begins to solidify.Sketching Let's open with a quote from an expert, but not necessarily the type of expert you may be thinking about. "You can't do sketches enough. Sketch everything and keep your curiosity fresh." - John Singer Sargent (1856 - 1925)While John Singer Sargent wasn't a character designer, more a portrait painter, his philosophy is essential in art, especially in character design as a process. And when you think about it, a portrait can also get the subject's character across. His portraits reveal a lot about his subjects and are worth studying.Take, for example, this portrait of Miss Beatrice Townsend.The dog is almost a stylish accessory here. How did they get him to hold still for so long?:A tremendous amount of character and attitude is present in the portrait of this person. So much is communicated by a simple pose, the presence of the dog, and the pointed way the subject glances at the viewer. But do you know where such intricacies start? Sketching. It took sketching to start the journey to such a striking portrait. It's likely a lot of sketching, based on our quote from earlier.Don't Burden Yourself in Detail"Avoid loading the character with too much detail." - Carlos NietoAnother sketching element to consider, especially early on, is avoiding getting bogged down in details. While a ton of detail can be fun occasionally, it ultimately distracts from essential parts of conveying character. It is mainly an issue in animation when you have to produce a large volume of images of a character. That isn't to say some details aren't important - details can make a character. But considering things like texture less is more, not only in the design process but significantly further down the line when you make lots of art to showcase the character.A great example of why details can be a distraction comes from Emily Melling, author of 10 Principles of Character Illustration: "If you remove detail from your character and test it out as a silhouette and still looks recognizable that is usually a sign of a strong design" This is also known as the silhouette test, where you try to convey as much character as possible by their silhouette alone. Not much detail is necessary here, and it conveys a lot. Sketching is the most fundamental phase of character design because it is the earliest draft of how a character looks, acts, and feels. It is your first chance to show a character's appearance and general "vibe" through poses, expressions, props, and more. None of these require an extraordinary amount of detail, just relevant details. It is your first indication of what a more fleshed-out concept would be. Until the point of sketching, the character is just a concept. The sketch makes them a reality, albeit a slightly underdeveloped one.Designing King Kabuto: Shapes and AttitudeWhen designing King Kabuto, I wanted to emphasize strength and showmanship. So, I focused on wrestling-style poses and flexes. I wanted the character to be a showoff with a tendency to pose in ridiculous ways that emphasize his unusual body shape.Speaking of that body shape, I focused on the "big guy" aesthetic, as we'll see later. The emphasis here is working fast and loose - I am not bogging myself down in details. I want to get as much out of the concept in as few lines as possible.Building on the SketchThe process can be complicated when creating the stylized forms of Monster High's characters. Considering they are a brand, many restrictions and notes exist. Original characters like the kind made on CharacterHub don't have nearly as many guidelines and notes in their design processes. But that doesn't mean that your OC can't benefit from some of the same thinking, either.A great example of this kind of thinking in the early stages of character design can be found in the following quote from Keyframe Magazine by Bertrand Todesco, the Lead Character Designer for Monster High: "This is the kind of information we were given […] It included patterns, color palettes, a mood board with inspirations." Creepy, cute, and tones of texture. This is Monster High's Draculaura.Mood boards, palettes, and patterns are all big-picture considerations for a character design that can influence a character design in the sketching stage. Regarding cartoon character design tips, characters should be sketched with color blocking and inspirations in mind. Even throwing a basic color palette on top of a sketch is a good step. Even better if you work digitally - you can easily duplicate your sketch and apply different palettes and patterns to find what feels right in the early design stage.Mood boards are mighty in the early design stages for any original character. Creating a simple collage of images, colors, patterns, and inspiration nearby as you draw can help shape your work toward the overall theme you aim for. For example, if you rock a dual-monitor set-up and work digitally, you can draw on one screen while leaving the mood board on your second screen. The mood board would be unintrusive but welcome inspiration as you work. Mood boards are a tool that deserves a deeper dive of their own.Aim for ImperfectionsPerfect symmetry is not usually a thing in people, and it probably shouldn't be in character design. People are imperfect, and characters can benefit from imperfections as well. Even models considered to have more symmetrical features aren't quite as symmetrical as you think. Aiming for perfect symmetry in a character can make them appear otherworldly, which can sometimes have its place but generally comes off as unnatural.But let's look at a quote from Matthew Forsythe, the creator of the adorable Mina. Forsythe states, "Perfect symmetry rarely exists in nature and if it does, it's conspicuous - it's the exception rather than the rule. Find interesting ways to throw your characters off-balance." A great example of this principle is the film Paranorman, where every character is presented, for lack of a better term, slightly "wonky." The characters are still appealing but incredibly visually distinct and full of personality. It's a masterwork, as are many other of Laika's films, such as Coraline, which shares similar character design tropes.Paranorman is a stunning example of imperfect character designs and their power.Another example of character design tips and tricks is to play with shapes. This is especially relevant to the point about symmetry. Shapes help a character's design stand out. They're so influential in good character design. But here is a valuable tip regarding shape-driven character design from The Etherington Brothers, a pair of British comic creators best known for the How to Think When You Draw series: "A great approach for designing a wide range of distinctive characters is to divide them up into three sections."This tip can apply to many great character designs, but let's run with one as a specific example. Check out Mr. Incredible from the Pixar classic, The Incredibles.This is the peak of "big guy" character design.If we divided him into three prominent "parts," we would have his head, torso, and legs, and we can see how different each of those parts is. Mr. Incredible is built very "middle-out," with the most prominent shape at the center, making him powerful-looking. Contrast that with a smaller head and legs, and you have a character that emphasizes strength. A character design tip for beginners should always be to study The Incredibles. The film is (pardon the pun) incredible regarding character design choices. Every central character stands out. Playing with shapes and proportions in the sketching phase of any project is well worth the time spent.Every character in The Incredibles has a dynamic look thanks to shapes.Designing King Kabuto: ProportionsBased on everything I had on King Kabuto so far, such as the earlier poses, it is pretty clear I need proportions that emphasize strength, and my model here was Mr. Incredible. It's still very rough, but the core of the character design is coming through.So, I went with the middle-out look here, with a big middle section, but I made his head a little larger in proportion. In contrast, I have given him four smaller legs, which are arranged and flared outward to give him a sense of stability. The larger, pill-shaped forearms are also meant to emphasize strength; think Popeye.VariationsThe idea of play in the early stages of character design, and yes, we are still there at this point, is best exemplified by variations. We'd hit that point earlier, talking about different alternative color palettes. But let's talk about that in a broader sense.Here is a fascinating point about variations in character design in the show Krapopolis from Character Designer Andy Ristaino. In Keyframe Magazine, he states, "We'll get closer and closer, and at some point they'll be like, this isn't quite working. We're not back to square one, but we'll take where we're at and redesign it and go in different directions. … For each of these characters, there is a long evolution. For me, that's what's most interesting. To see how a character has changed before we even get to see them onscreen." You can get a strong impression of each character from their different appearances alone, but it took a lot of work.Even deep into the design process, there is a chance a character design that seemed to be working initially has hit a dead end or isn't quite delivering on what is needed. Or perhaps the concept has changed or evolved. It's not like starting over, but it can feel like it - after all, you're taking a few steps back. However, it is also very much about your mindset. Character design is a recursive process where you will find yourself going back and forth between stages and elements as you try to find a practical whole concept of the character. Your initial impulses for shapes might be great at first, but perhaps you need to dial them back upon reaching a further stage of character design.Don't look at having to go back and change a character design as a setback. Look at it as an opportunity.Character designs are rarely ever final, even in productions such as animation. Characters may change between seasons, or designs may be refined further.A great example is how much the look of Batman: The Animated Series changed as Glen Murakami influenced the production as a character designer. The original Batman look was softer, more like the work of the Fleischer Superman serials. (Left) Batman: The Animated Series vs. (Right) The New Batman AdventuresStill, as Murakami was promoted, the look of DC animation took on more refined and angular shapes with a slighter anime theme. This peaked with Teen Titans, of course.Teen Titans!Designing King Kabuto: VariationBy far, the longest process in designing and refining a character design is working on variations. As you can see from the following collage, I did a lot of drawings on my journey to a finalized design for the character. This doesn't even