Illustration for animation

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Foreword

This document is to aid to smooth running of an animation project.

For our agency partners, it will make the process smoother and reduce costs by ensuring we are spending less time on amending artwork in order to progress the animation production.

For our fellow artists and illustrators, we hope this gives some helpful insight into the animation process and how to work in an animation production.

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Tools

Adobe suite is the primary suite of tools for illustration animation and motion graphics.

For illustration

- **Adobe After Effects** (.ae)
  For building animations, using imported illustrations/assets from other programs
- **Adobe Illustrator** (.ai)
  For creating **vector-based** illustrations
- **Adobe Photoshop** (.psd)
  For building illustrations, but is less **vector-based** than Illustrator
- **Adobe Indesign** (.indd)
  For storyboarding

For animation

- **Adobe After Effects** (.ae)
  For building animations, using imported illustrations/assets from other programs
- **Adobe Premiere Pro** (.prproj)
  For supporting After Effects with video and audio editing

Overview

What does ‘vector’ mean?

Ideally we need illustrations as vector artwork. Unlike JPEG or PNG images which are made of pixels, and therefore lose quality as you scale up, vector images use points, curves and ‘maths’ to create the outlines, so they can scale up infinitely without any loss of quality.

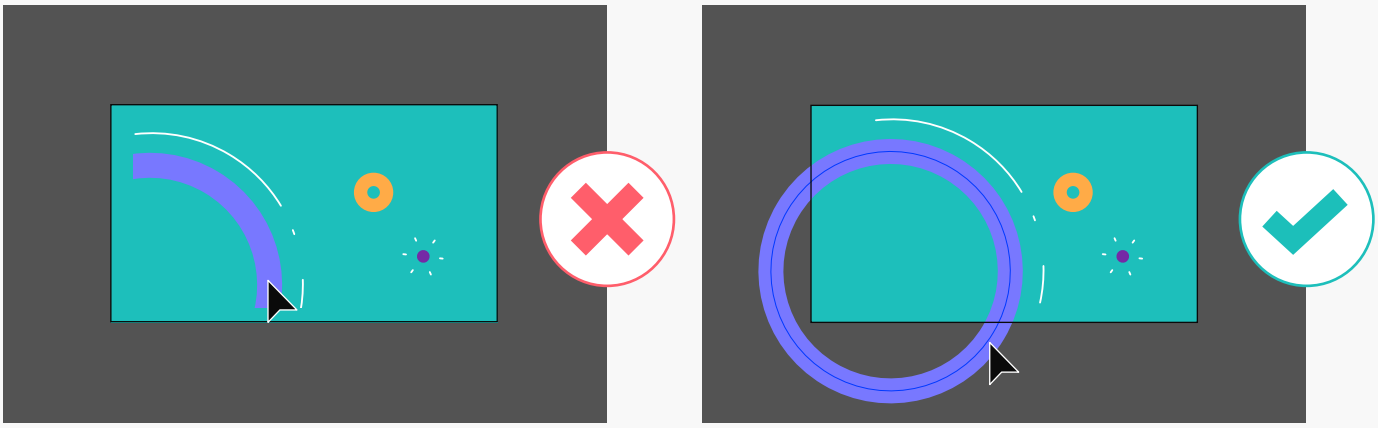
It’s not always essential, but it allows us more flexibility with how we animate the illustration. We can also modify vector artwork more efficiently, whereas jpegs and pngs are compressed, so we have little control over editing.

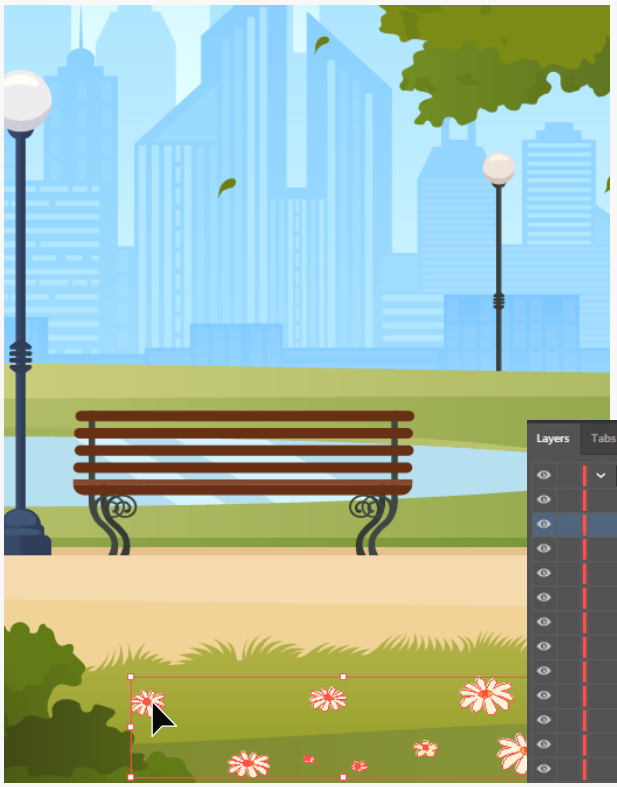
Above: example of a pixel-based image. The quality of the image will deteriorate as it is scaled up.

Above: example of a vector-based image. The quality of the image will remain the same at any scale.

Avoid cropping

Consider we will need to animate assets in and out of frame so we need every asset in full.

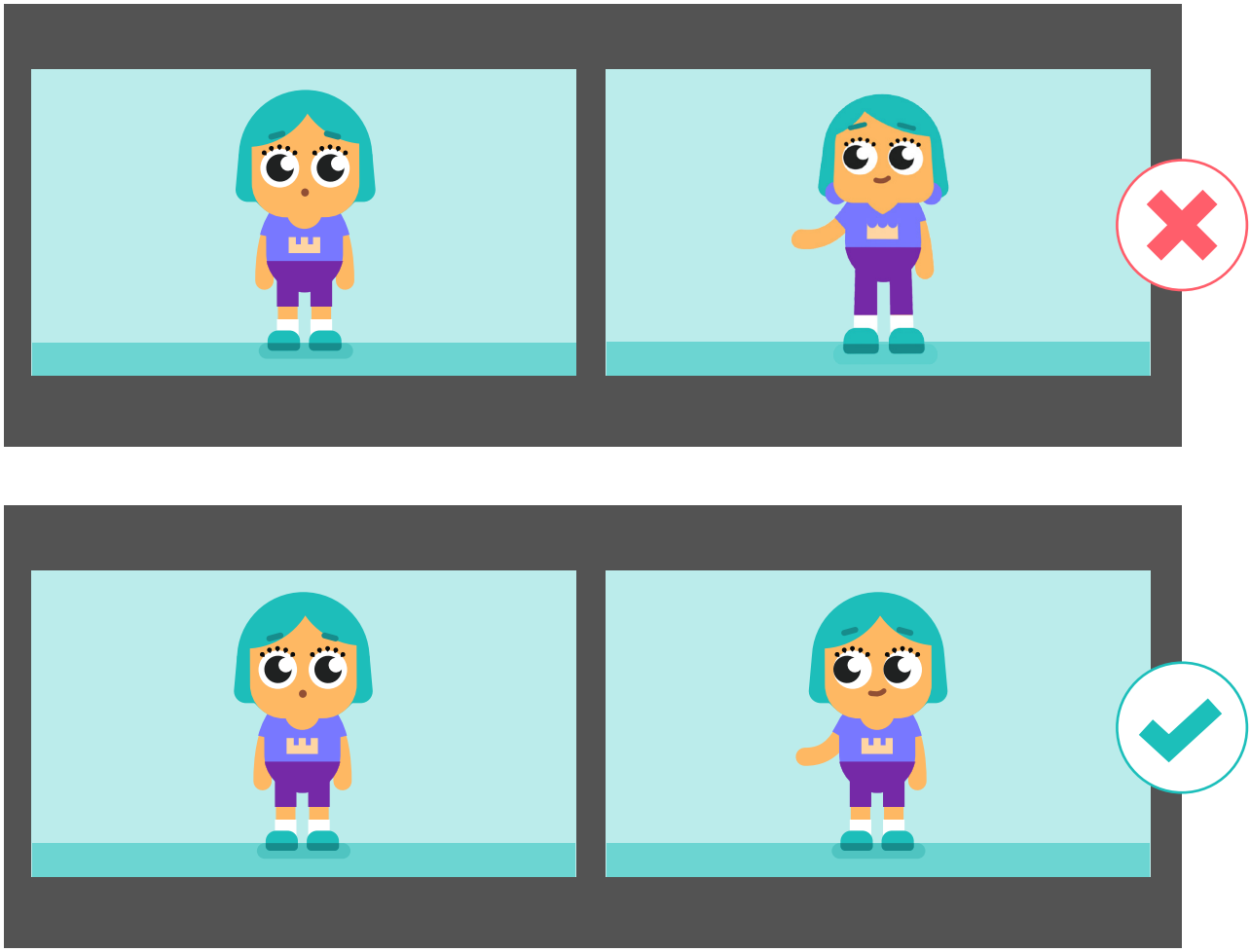




Grouping

Organisation of artwork can have a huge impact on animation time. If there are hundreds or thousands of layers, then sifting through them to group into assets can eat up a lot of time. Ideally each frame would be grouped, then within groups if needed, then each individual asset/item as a group.

Characters



Understanding rigging

Sometimes artworkers will draw the same character but slightly differently throughout. This can create problems in the animation stage, and ultimately add time/cost to a project.

Once a character or set of characters have been approved in terms of design, then next part of the process is usually to then 'rig' these characters. This means setting up the artwork files of the character so that it's ready for animation.

There are different ways to approach this and each approach has its pros and cons, but generally they tend to limit perspective and having lots of variations in design can be problematic.

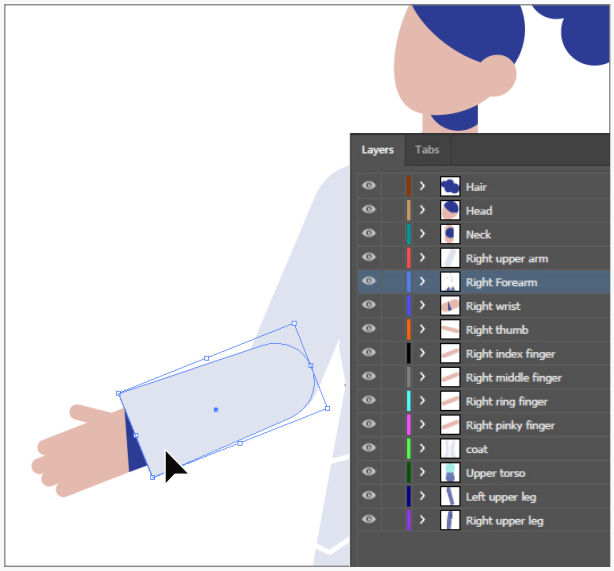
Ideally you'd have the same perspective and clothing for each character so only 1 rig needs to be created for each character.

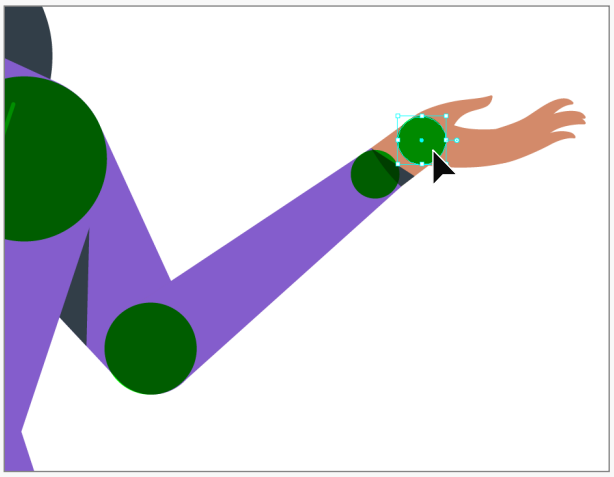
Considering limbs

The artwork will need to be broken up into separate parts so that its different components can be animated.

For example, if the entire arm is one layer then there is no joint for an elbow. Artwork can be animated in this way, but it restricts the ability for the animator to depict convincing character movement.

Therefore when creating artwork, its encouraged to create a separate layer for as many points of movement as possible, in order to free up this flexibility when animating.





Joints and anchor points

We often have to amend artwork so that the joints can rotate. Add a pivot point in the illustration software and check to see if any joints can rotate without an unwanted element popping out or showing any sharp edges.

The best practice is to put circles in place and then the anchor points can be added central to these so all joints rotating around circles.

Layout

Try and keep your artwork files neatly organised into artboards and groups, with named layers, so that its clear for the animator to look through.

Make sure any linked images or videos are included in the packaged artwork files as well as any unique fonts.

Contact

Do you have a project that you'd like to discuss? Get in touch today to discuss how we can best assist you.

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