

### Foreword



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Marc's book contains the kind of nitty-gritty information I was looking for back in my high school days. In those days I spent most of my time pouring over issues of Starlog, Cinemagic, or the occasional gem like Dick Smith's *Monster Make-up Handbook*, making crude latex and wire animation puppets and filming them on Regular 8 and Super 8mm film.

The effort paid off when, in 1987, at the age of 18, I was hired by Will Vinton Productions to work on the CBS special "A Claymation Christmas Celebration." I was making armatures and sculpting characters and props and I was eager to get some time in front of the camera to do some animation. I realized how valuable my home movie experience had been when I was given the opportunity to animate on the show, which went on to win an Emmy. I worked for the Vinton Studio for several years after that, and then went on to produce my own short films, a string of commercials for Converse shoes, and station I.D.'s for Nickelodeon, CBS, and others. Even now, as a professional animator on "James and the Giant Peach," "Antz," and "Monkeybone," I still find myself using some of the tricks I learned from those early movie making exercises.

You never know when that little tidbit of knowledge is going to pay off in a real production situation. Marc's book is a lot of fun and is full of those tricks of the trade that are usually only learned under the apprenticeship of a seasoned veteran, or through a lot of painful trial and error.

One thing I would like to emphasize is that the techniques Marc compiled into a book are just a means to an end. Don't get too bogged down in thinking about how you are going to get an image onto the screen. Ultimately, you need to tackle the practical issues of filmmaking, but it's extremely important that you spend just as much time-hopefully before you get started in production-thinking about what the image is that you want to create and what that image means to you.

## Secrets of Clay Animation Revealed E-Book Sample 2

Written by Marc Spess

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Perhaps you want to make a scene for a character-driven animated short film like Wallace and Gromit. Perhaps you want to create a fantasy effects sequence in homage of Ray Harryhausen; or perhaps you want to disregard all the rules of characterization, continuity, and staging and create a surreal stream - of - consciousness piece like the work of Bruce Bickford.

Most beginning animators want to try their hands at character animation, so it would be a good idea to go over the basic principles of animation. This list is, of course, based on the fundamentals of Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, with a few modifications added that apply to the technique of clay as opposed to cel. Whole books have been written just on the study of motion, so please note that this is very abbreviated and that there are many more principles which could be listed and studied in depth (some animators have identified twenty-eight.) As an overview, here are eleven principles:

1. Squash and Stretch-characters should feel like an elastic mass, squashing on impact and stretching on recoil or anticipation. When done in clay animation it's usually a sequence of sculptures (replacement animation).
2. Anticipation - a motion is preceded by a motion in the opposite direction, as in the recoil before hitting a golf ball.
3. Staging-the overall framing of your subject in the scene, and placement of the characters in space to communicate the action from shot to shot.
4. Follow-Through-appendages will have loose and trailing movements; they keep moving after the main body of an object stops. Like a flag flowing in the wind, the parts of the object on the tail end follow the path determined by movement of the leading part. A rag doll has lots of follow - through.
5. Overlapping Action-make sure that all the parts of your character do not arrive at the same pose at the same time. A centipede is an extreme example; each part of the body seems to be moving independently. You don't want your character to feel like an octopus, but you want to feel a looseness in the joints. Also, make sure that most of a character's parts move at varying speeds.
6. Ease In and Ease Out (also called slow-in and slow-out)-as speed increases, the increments of movement become larger. Usually you anticipate an action, "attack" a movement out of a pose, and then slow out the movement as you work towards a new pose. Objects that impact a surface will not slow down before impact.
7. Arcs (similar to "path of action") - the curve that an object makes as it moves (if you were to draw a line between the increments of the motion).
8. Secondary Actions - little bits of motion that play under the primary animation: the twitch of an ear, a foot tapping, hands rubbing together nervously. Be careful! It's easy to get caught up in noodling these little actions and lose sight of the intent of the scene. You normally want your character to do one action at a time, and each action to have a purpose. Ask yourself: "Does a

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secondary action contribute to the main idea or confuse it?"

9. Timing Holds-work out how the gestures will play out over time. Learn to use holds and pauses to communicate your ideas. Remember, it is the thought and circumstances behind an action that will make the action interesting.

10. Exaggeration-amplify the expression in your characters. The entire pose should express a thought and the facial expression should support, not contradict, the body.

11. Solid Posing/Silhouette-your characters should have interesting poses and attitudes. If you were to draw a silhouette of a pose, it should, by itself, communicate the purpose and emotion of the character. Avoid symmetry.

There's also a whole list of "gimmicks" like blurring, speed lines or multiple limbs, vibration, and so on. For more on the mechanics and aesthetics of movement, I recommend Timing for Animation by Harold Whitaker and John Halas (published by Focal Press) and How to Draw Cartoon Animation by Preston Blair (from Walter Foster Publishing). No matter what medium you're working in-computer, stop-motion, or cel - it always helps to do rough "thumbnail" sketches of key poses for a shot before you start animating. It helps to study acting as well, as a clay animator is just an actor conveying emotion through a lump of clay. Sounds challenging, doesn't it?

~ [Webster Colcord](#)

You can find the full version of Secrets of Clay Animation Revealed [here](#)

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