

# **Introduction to Storyboarding**

## **A Guide for the Professional Story Artist**

# 1. DRAWING SHORTCUTS

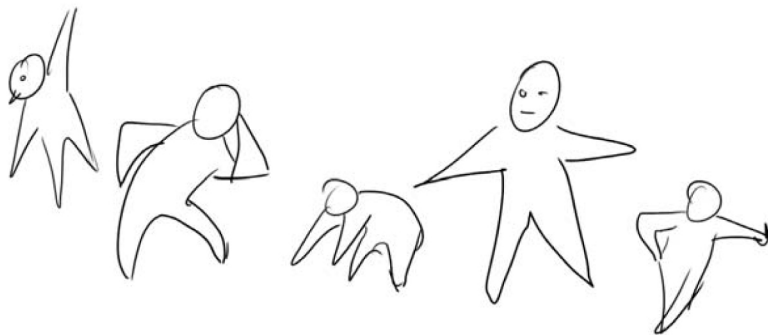
Drawing storyboards, requires speed. One way to draw fast and to simplify detail is to use "Drawing Shortcuts."

When you draw a human character simplify the bodies, hands and faces, for maximum clarity. What is important is to communicate the pose or expression, not the detail.



## Star People

Can't draw? No problem. Make a "star man." It's the most basic expression of a character without drawing a stick figure. With a little bit of practice you can get all types of body positions and even expressions.



## BODIES

To distinguish male and female bodies, use simple shapes.

### Male

Use a simple block for the male form. You can taper the sides a bit, but the shape is still basically rectangular. Add arms and a head to complete the figure.



### Female

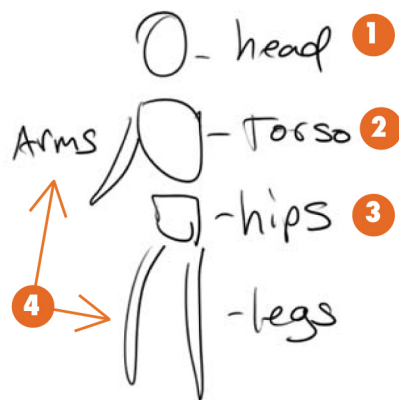
Use a diamond shape for the upper body. The lower shape should be more rounded. Add arms and a head with some longer hair. Just a few lines are enough.





# POSES

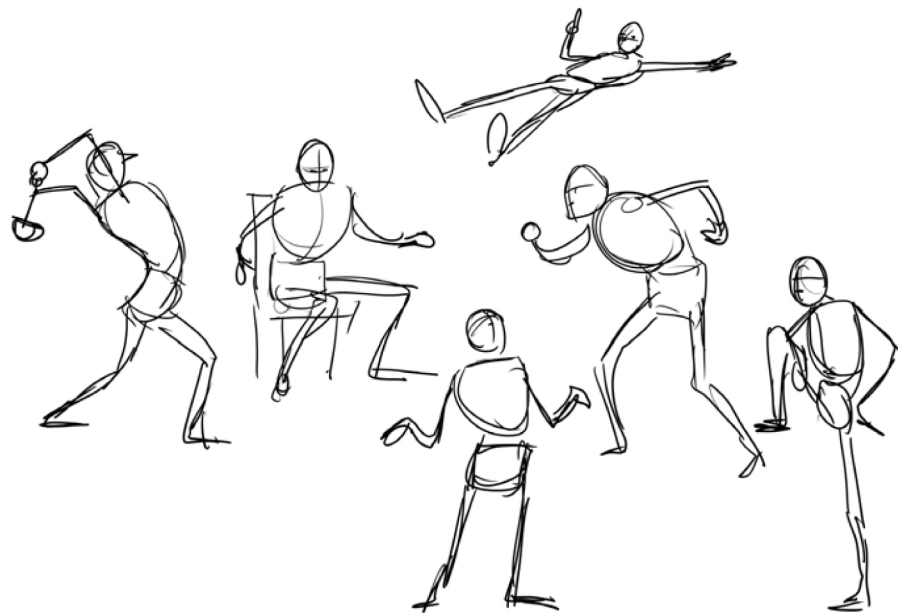
Visual storytelling relies on conveying action by posing your characters. To pose a figure, break the human shape into four components: head, torso, hips, and limbs. Start with the head and work your way down.



Position the figure in the frame with the head first. Drawing the torso and the hips separately allows you to offset the shapes for flexibility and to create the illusion of weight.

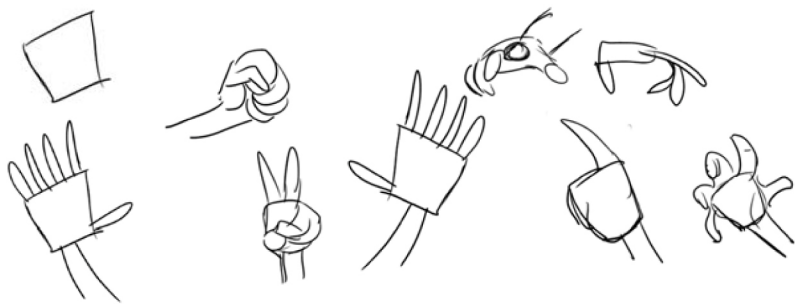


Practice drawing figures by using the body divisions in this order. The faster you become at drawing recognizable poses, the better you can communicate your ideas with your storyboards.



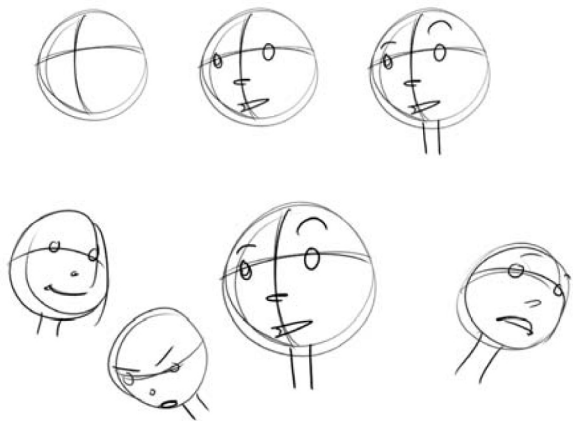
# HANDS

Draw a box and add five sausages to it. With these basic shapes you can make hand gestures quickly and easily.



# HEADS

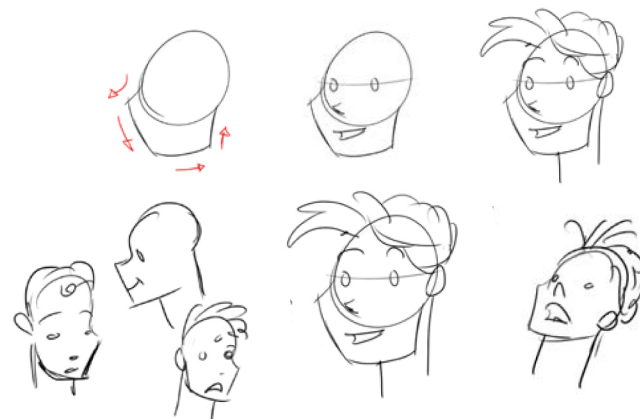
A head can be as simple as a circle. Imagine a head as a sphere in space. Add vertical and horizontal axis lines to describe the angle of the head. Move the axis lines off-center to point the face in any direction you choose.



You can also distinguish male and female face by using the sphere as a base and then modifying the shape.

## Male Face

The rounded, upper part of the face is an oval. The lower part of the face is wide and angular to give the face a more masculine appearance.



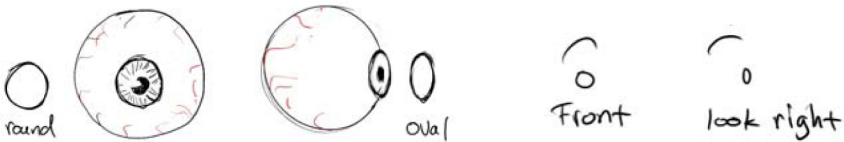
## Female Face

The female face should be curved with no hard angles.



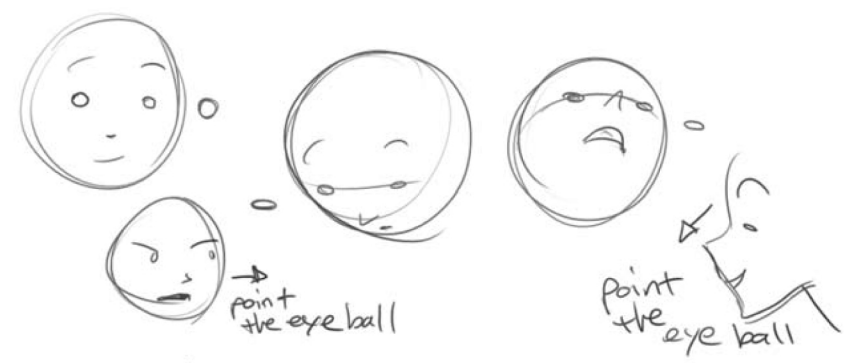
# EYES

The shape of the eye and the placement of the eyebrow can indicate expression and the direction in which a character looks.



Pupils seen from the front are round. Pupils seen from the side are oval. Use this oval to point the pupil in the direction you want your character to look.

Even without drawing the rest of the eye, you can show the line of sight with just the pupil.



# EYEBROWS FOR EXPRESSION

Eyebrows are essential for showing expression. All you need are the pupils and eyebrows for a fast and effective way to create expressions.



# CREATE YOUR OWN SHORTCUTS

Building a library of shortcuts will help you draw effective and quick storyboards. Forget about the unnecessary detail, and draw what is important to communicating the action. You should be able to draw a car, boat, house, person, or tree, with simple recognizable shapes that you draw within seconds. Simplifying a drawing also helps with clarity. If the drawing isn't clear, all the pretty drawing in the world won't fix it. A story drawing must be clear, first and foremost, to communicate the idea.



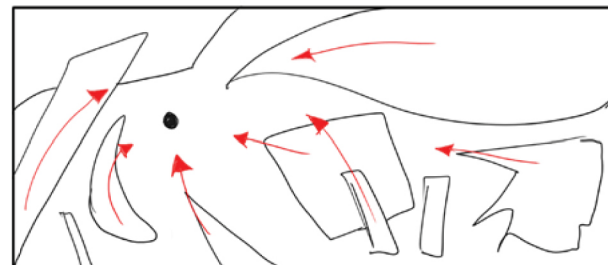
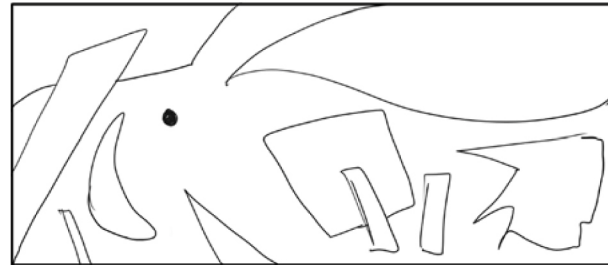
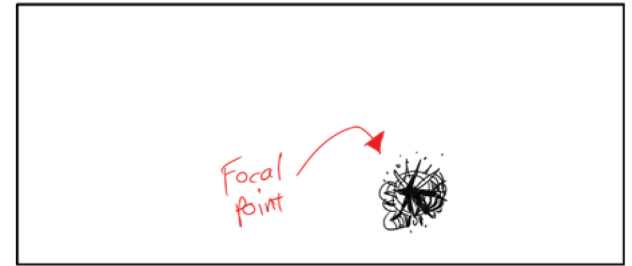
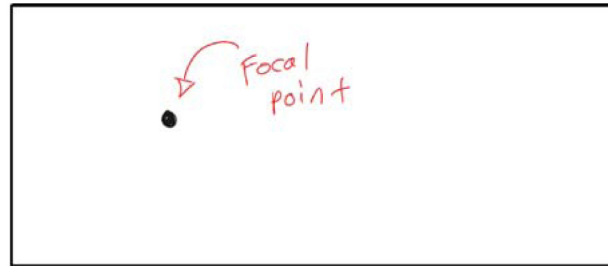
## 2. COMPOSITION

When composing storyboards, always start with a rectangular frame to define the boundaries of your picture plane. How you arrange the objects within your composition affects the emotional content of your subject. By manipulating the elements in the composition, you can direct the audience's eye to where you want it to go. This will direct attention to the focus, or story point and help communicate the emotional beat.

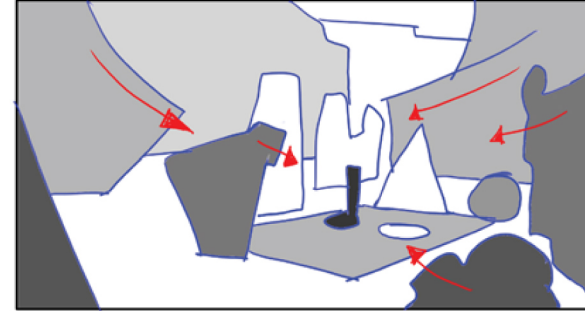
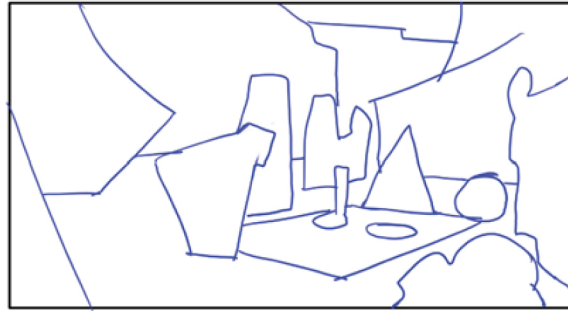
### ABSTRACT SHAPES

By breaking down the elements of your composition into abstract shapes, you can see how the design of your elements will affect the focal point. Use the objects in your composition to draw the eye of the viewer to the focal point. These shapes can be anything, a tree, a car, or a building, for example. What is important is to design these elements and make sure the composition is working in "the abstract" before you start adding detail.

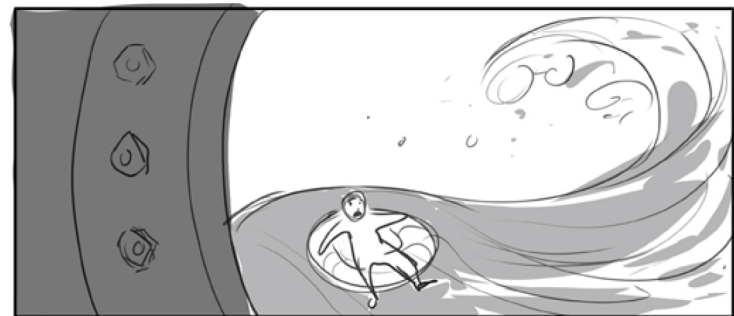
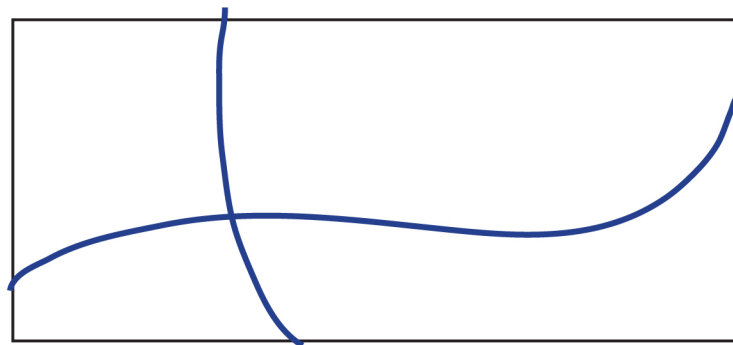
Look at these examples of how the shapes in the composition support the focal point.



Learn to see shapes abstractly and to be objective about your compositions. This will help you to see if the objects in your composition direct the audience's attention to the focal point.



Understanding abstract shapes and how lines breakup space lets you create a more interesting and appealing drawing that communicates the story point to your audience.

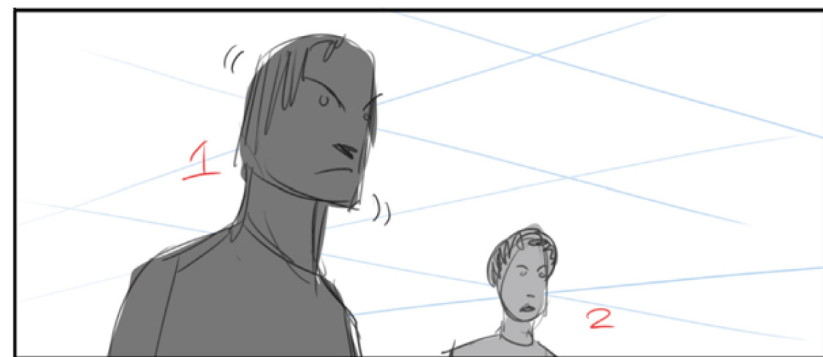


# Focal Point

Good composition directs the audience's eye to where you want them to look. Every storyboard needs a focal point.



A storyboard might have a primary focal point and a secondary focal point.



A storyboard might have three focal points: primary, secondary, and tertiary. There is an order of importance.

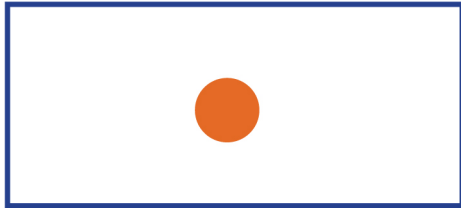


You must decide where the primary focal point is. The secondary and tertiary focal points support the primary focal point.



# THE RULE OF THIRDS

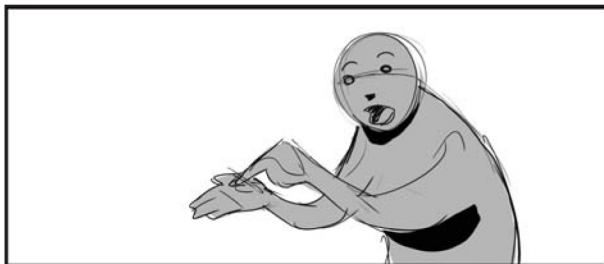
An object in the middle of the frame is boring. The symmetry does not give enough visual interest.



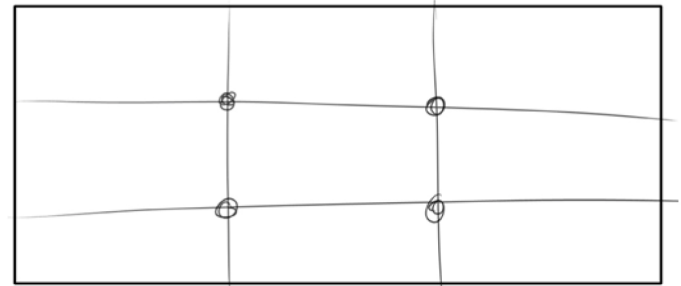
An object that is too near the edge creates too much empty space and an uncomfortable breathing room for the subject.



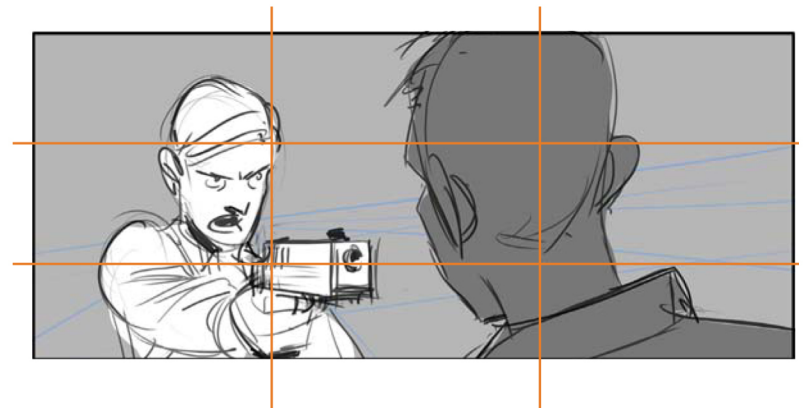
Offset your subject, but not too close to any of the edges, to create a more aesthetic feeling.



The rule of thirds is a guide to help you avoid symmetry in your composition. Draw lines that divide the frame into thirds both vertically and horizontally.



The intersections of the lines make good places to put your focal point. You can align objects with the lines themselves. The top line of the pistol runs along the lower horizontal line, and the head in the foreground hangs on the right vertical line.



### 3. CONTRAST

Contrast can help define the focal point of a shot. The eye is attracted to what is different. A light object will stand out if everything else is dark. Play with the amount of contrast between objects to affect the emotional response of the viewer.

dark vs. light  
big vs. small

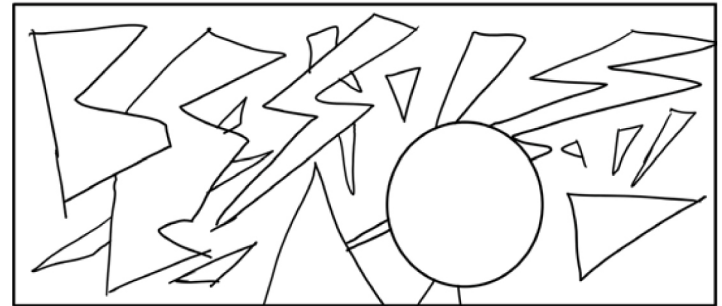
fast vs. slow  
focus vs. out of focus



These gray boxes below have different levels of contrast and therefore have different emotional weight to the viewer. The first set of boxes gives a feeling of calm and unity. The second contrasting shapes are more dramatic and tense.



#### *Contrasting Shapes*



#### *Contrasting Focus*



When you watch movies, or see a still image, look for examples of contrast that support the focal point and think about how they make you feel.



## 4. DEPTH

A piece of paper and the screen are both flat. We as storyboard artists should create the maximum illusion of depth to better engage the viewer in the worlds we create.

### PERSPECTIVE

Perspective is one of the most useful tools to create the illusion of depth. You should use a perspective grid in almost every frame you draw. It's a quick, easy shorthand to establish the camera height and to give a sense of depth within the frame. A drawing without a perspective grid leaves room for interpretation and might indicate a camera height that you don't intend.

#### *The Basics*

Parallel lines appear to converge as they recede into the distance toward a point (vanishing point) on the horizon.

The horizon line represents the eye level of the viewer and the camera height.

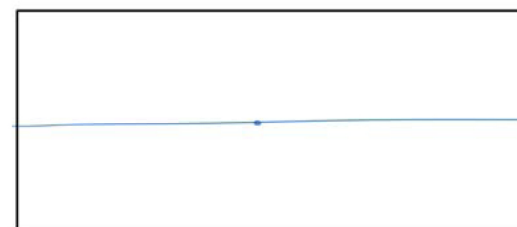
***You can have an infinite number of vanishing points on the horizon line, but in any composition you can only have one horizon line.***

Radiate lines from the vanishing point to create a grid representing the ground plane or the sky plane. You can align objects with the lines of the grid to create the illusion of depth.

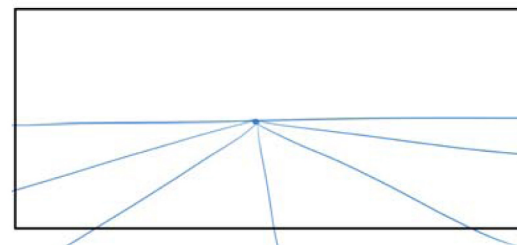
There are three types of perspective, ***one-point perspective, two-point perspective, and three-point perspective.***

#### ***One-point perspective***

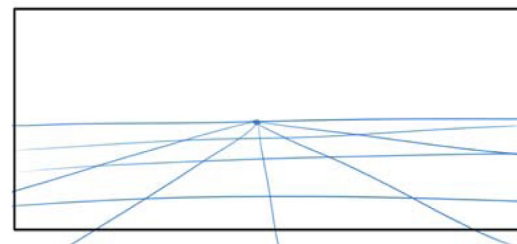
Draw the horizon line and put a single vanishing point on it. Draw lines that radiate down from the vanishing point. Draw lines below the horizon line and parallel to it. This creates a one-point perspective grid you can use to position objects in space.



Step 1



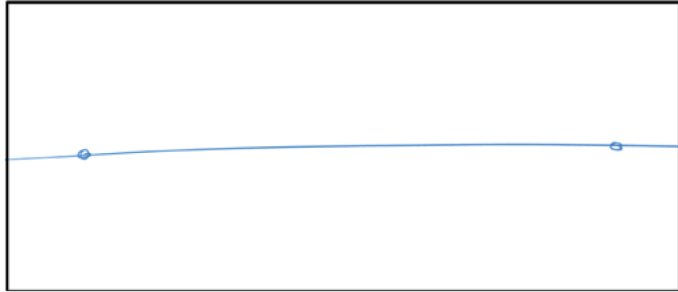
Step 2



Step 3

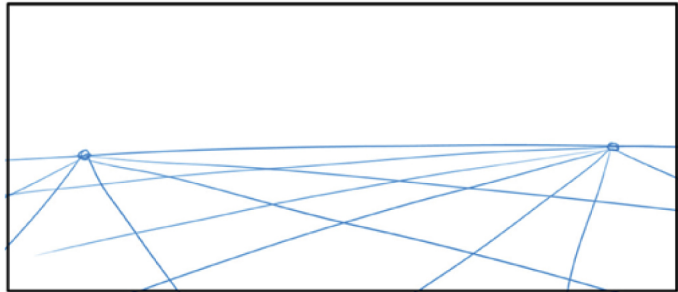
## Two-Point Perspective

Put two vanishing points on the horizon line, and draw lines radiating down from both of the points.



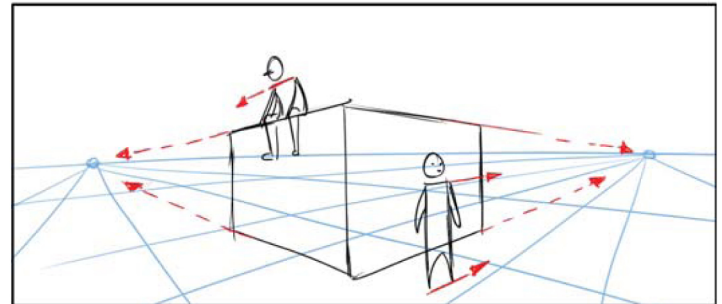
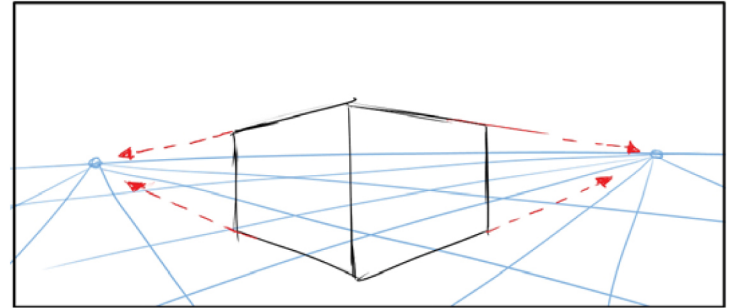
Step 1

These two sets of lines create the grid.



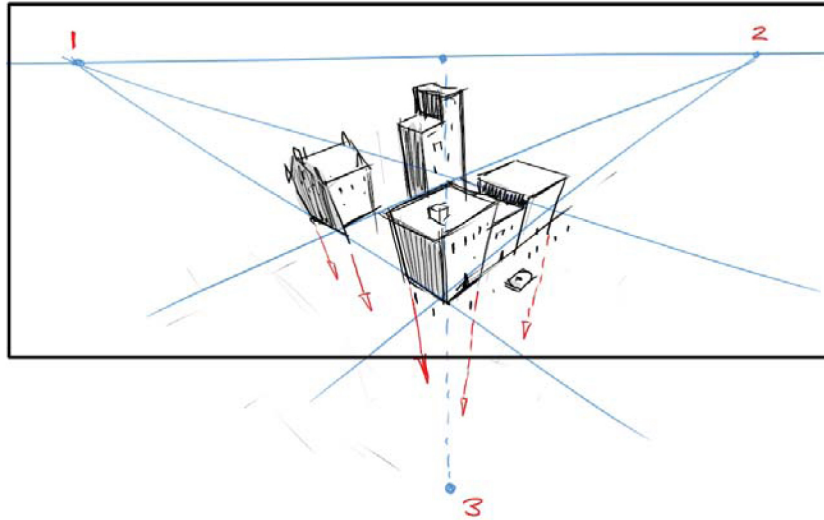
Step 2

Plant your objects on the grid with the lines of your objects converging to the vanishing points.

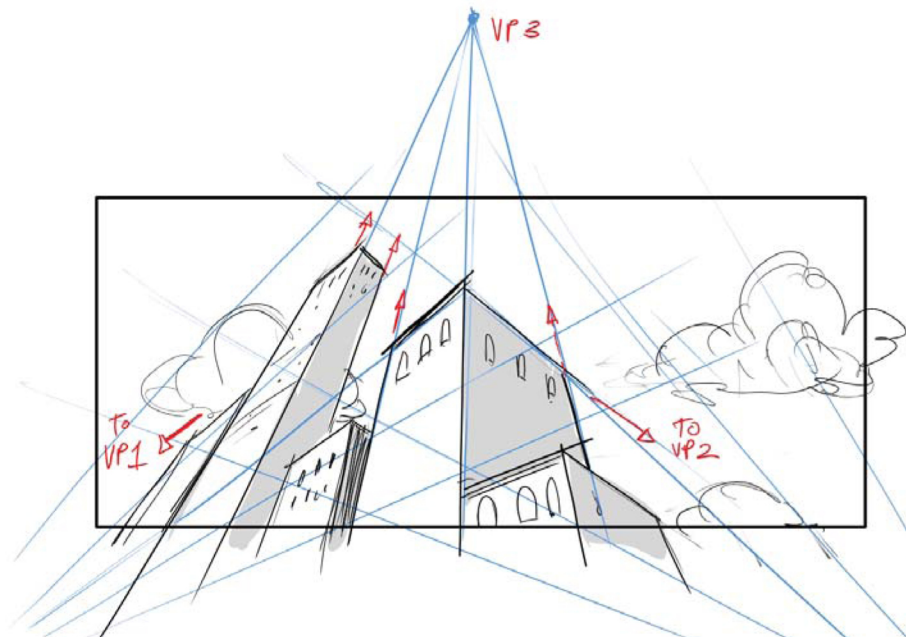


## Three-Point Perspective

Start with two-point perspective, and add a third vanishing point projected vertically from the horizon line.

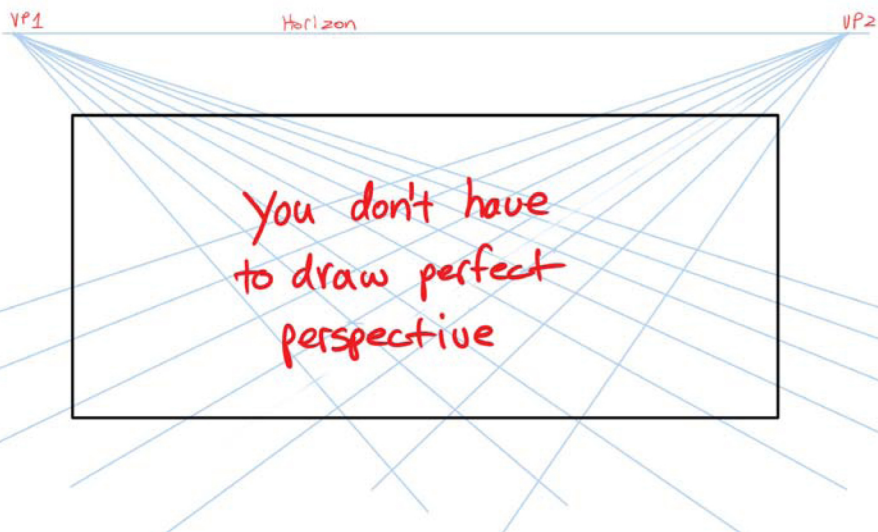


Vertical lines converge on the third vanishing point. This helps the sense of depth by exaggerating the distortion of the objects relative to the camera height.



## Cheating Perspective

You don't have to draw the horizon line and the grid lines with a ruler.



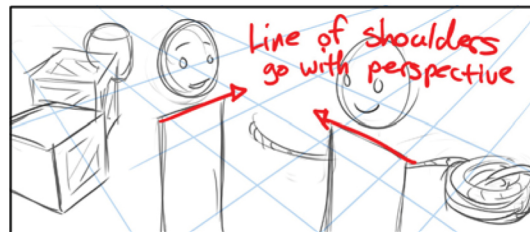
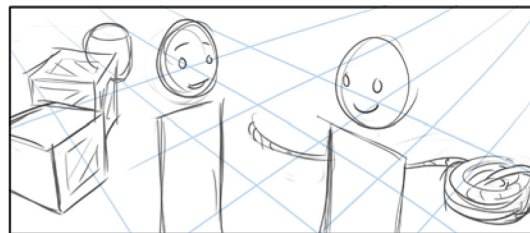
In a quick sketch your vanishing points might not exactly line up. What's important is the overall sense of objects converging to the vanishing points. A roughly sketched grid of converging lines is enough, even without the horizon line and vanishing points inside the frame.



**TIP:** Draw the perspective grid in every frame to help you create the composition and to establish the camera height.

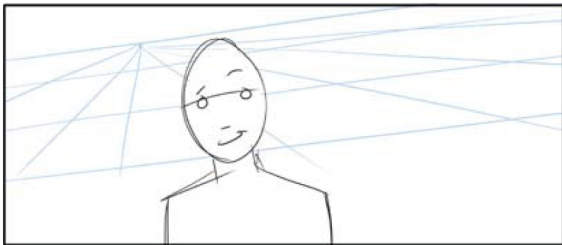
## USING THE PERSPECTIVE GRID

Align objects with the grid. This orients the figures in space relative to each other, and supports the sense of depth.



## Storyboard Magic: The Grid Trick

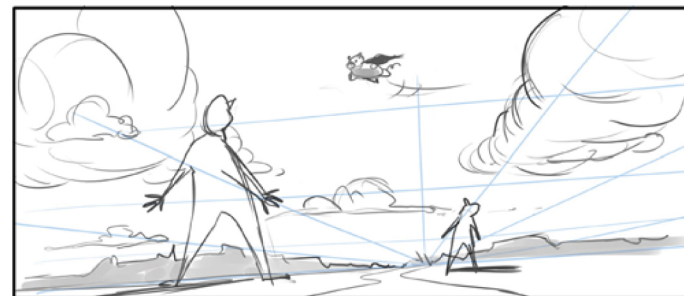
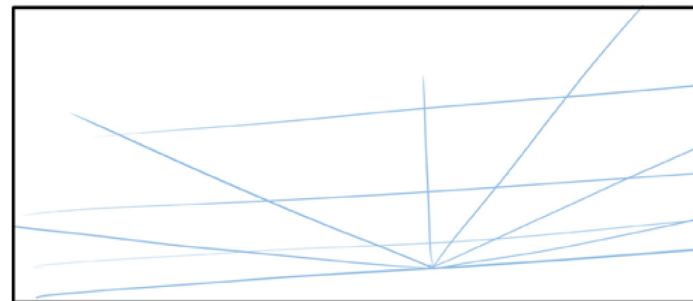
Simply change the direction of your perspective grid to indicate a different camera angle without redrawing your subject. Take a look at the drawings below. By changing nothing else but the grid, we suggest a down shot in the first frame, and an upshot in the second.



Add some background objects to complete the effect.



Draw the grid radiating above the horizon line to create an upshot.

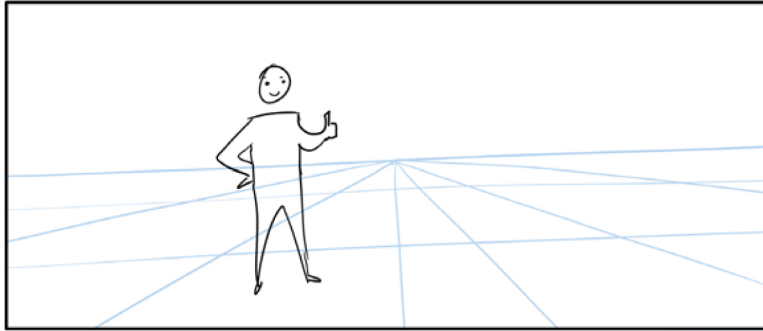




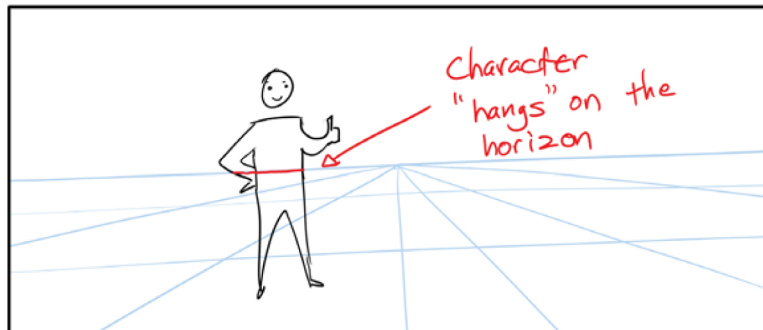
## Hanging Perspective

Figures of the same height will be cut off at the same point on the horizon line. Objects will seem to "hang" on the horizon from this point.

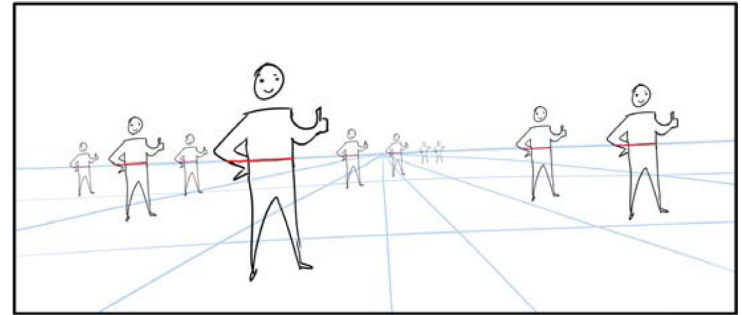
Start with the figure that you want to be your subject. Other figures are based off of this first figure.



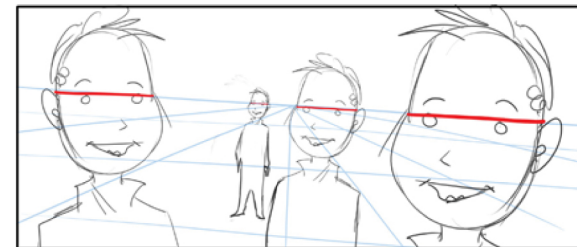
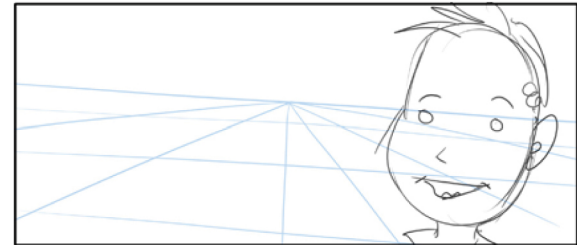
This figure "hangs" from the horizon line at the waist.



The other figures of the same height also "hang" off of the horizon at the waist. This is a quick way to draw in objects that recede into the background, but are still in correct perspective.



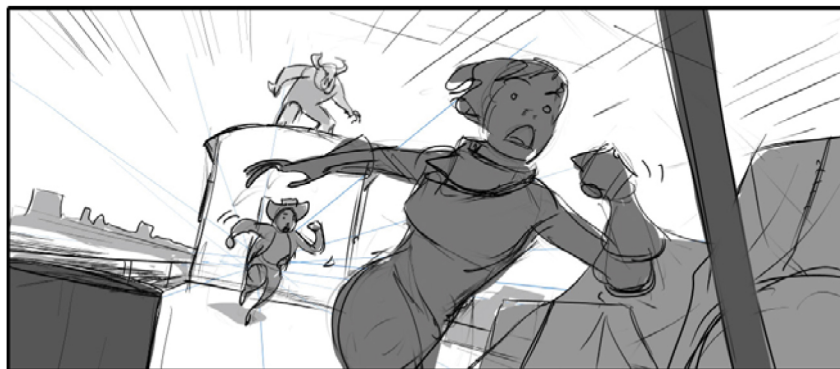
Here's another example where the figure hangs from the eyes.



# OTHER WAYS OF CREATING DEPTH

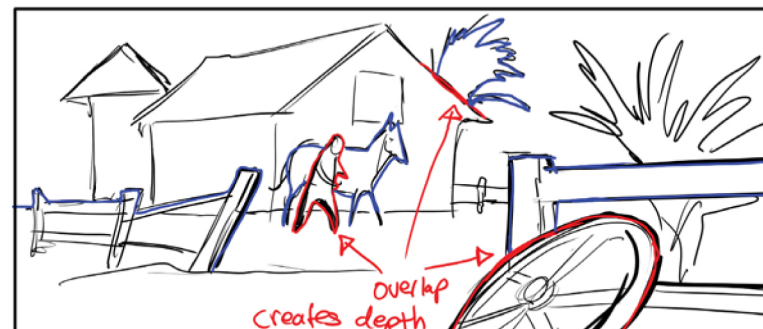
## *Foreground, Middle Ground, and Background*

When composing your shots, always try to incorporate a foreground, a middle ground, and a background. The more you can show these elements, the more depth your composition will have. Our natural tendency is to flatten things out and draw images that are on one plane. Force yourself to break that tendency. Even in a close-up shot, you might be able to add a foreground or background object.



## *Overlapping Forms*

By not intersecting lines of an object, we perceive one object to be in front of another. This overlap creates the illusion of depth.



## Depth with Tone

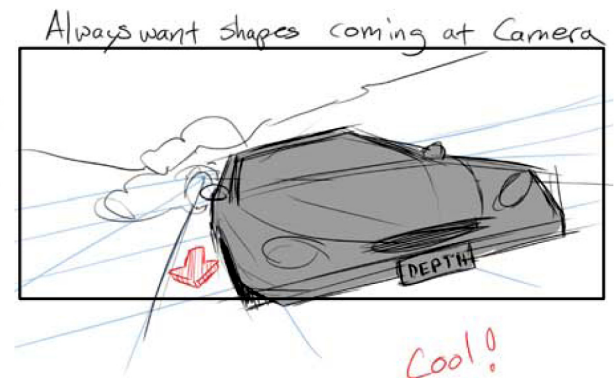
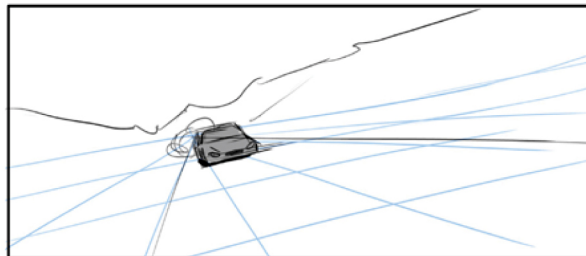
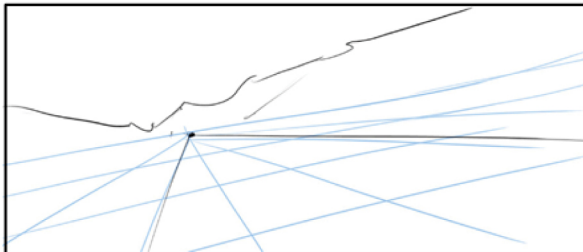
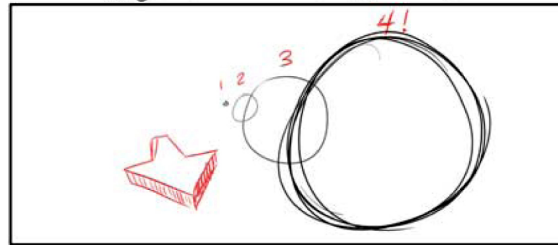
Create a sense of atmosphere by using different tones. Dark objects come forward. Objects in the distance fade, so making objects lighter is one way to add to the perception of distance.



## Change in Size

Even with a single object, a change in size from one frame to the next creates a sense of depth. Objects that grow appear to come closer.

objects should grow!





## 5. SHOT CHOICE

Shot choice refers to the camera angle and the camera's location relative to the subject of the picture. You have three basic choices:

### WIDE SHOT, MEDIUM SHOT, & CLOSE UP SHOT

The shot choice affects the emotional content of the scene. If you want your audience to feel the emotional reaction of the character, choose a series of close-up shots. Likewise, if you need to reveal information about a broad action, choose a series of wide shots.

**Story Tip:** Place your camera where you place your audience. If you want your viewers to understand the importance of a dialogue scene, place the camera close to the characters and in the middle of the conversation. The further away your camera is from the action the further your audience will feel from the story point.

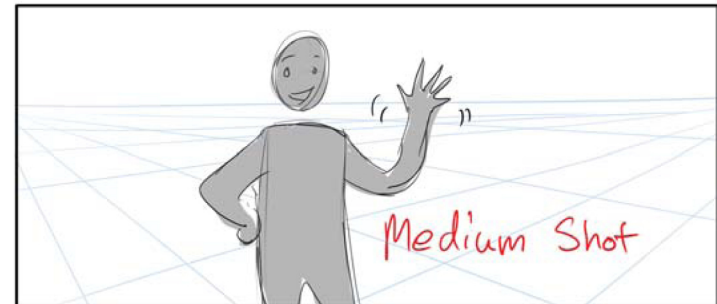
### ***Wide Shot***

Used a wide shot to establish a location, or to show a broad action. The viewer is emotionally distant from the action.



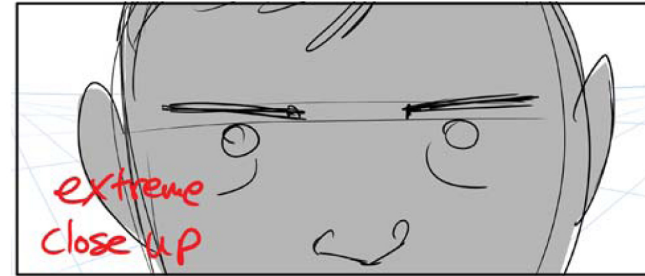
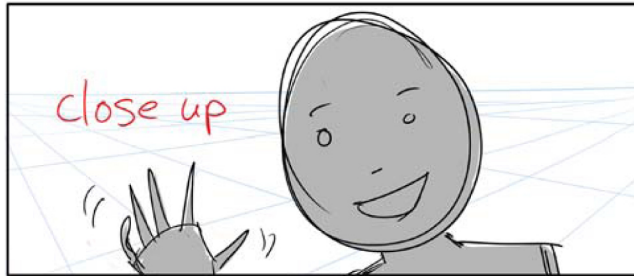
### ***Medium Shot***

Use a medium shot to show multiple people in a conversation, or to focus on a middle ground subject while revealing part of the background.



## Close-Up Shot

A close up is used for reactions or to reveal important information.

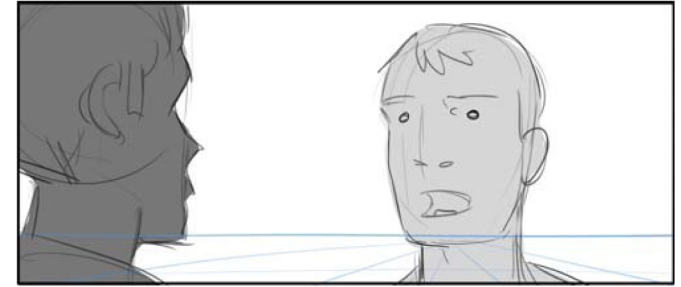
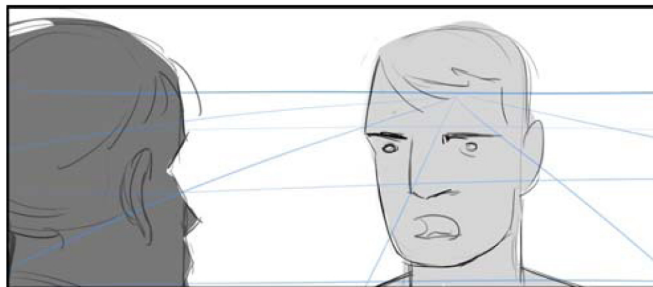


You can use any combination of these shot choices to create a complex camera setup. For example, you can start with characters in the background in a wide shot, but have other characters enter the frame closer to the camera to create a close-up

## CAMERA HEIGHT

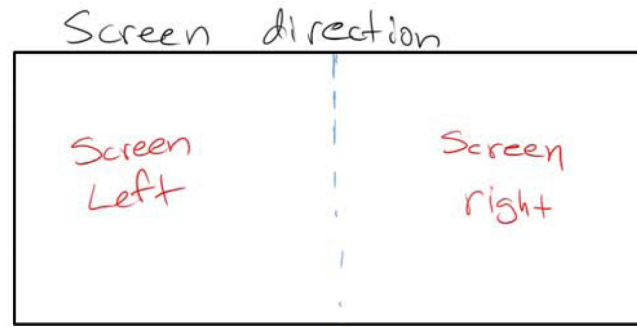
The height of the camera affects the emotional importance of the subject. In a drawn storyboard, the height of the camera is represented by the horizon line. If you place the horizon line, slightly above the character the audience will be looking slightly down onto the character. This gives a feeling of inferiority to the character. By slightly lowering the horizon line, we put the character in a slightly superior position. Use this to your advantage, by emphasizing the emotional importance of the character within the scene.

The difference in camera height can be very subtle. By moving the camera height (horizon), slightly above or below the character, you give a different feeling of importance to the audience.



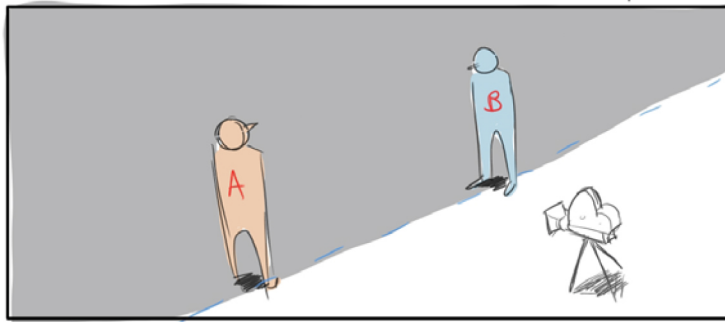
## 6. SCREEN DIRECTION

For every shot, you decide the direction from which the camera is viewing the scene. Character positions are defined as being on the left of the frame or on the right of the frame. We talk about this in terms of the final projected image being "screen right" or "screen left." If you establish a character on "screen right," you should maintain that character on the right side of the screen throughout the scene (unless you have a reason to switch positions, which we'll talk about later). This helps your audience identify the character according to their screen position.

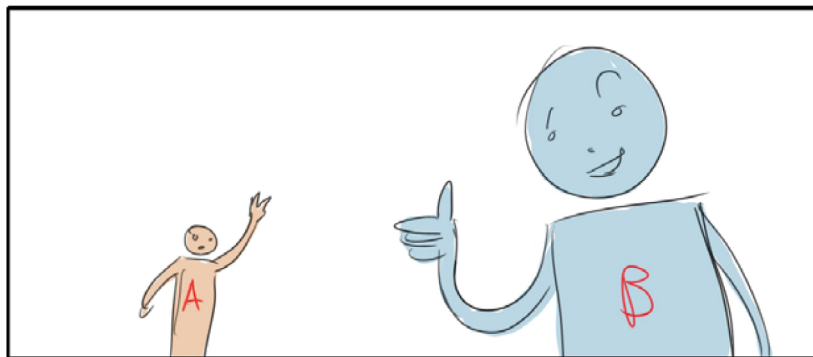


## THE 180 RULE

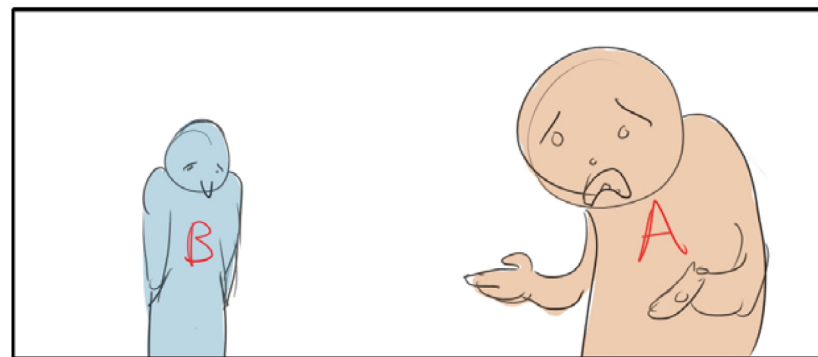
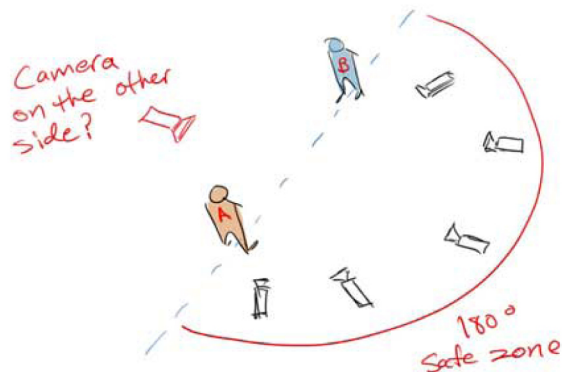
To avoid confusion, the camera should stay on one side of the subject. When there are two subjects, think of an imaginary line that runs through them. This axis divides the scene into two parts. Although you can place the camera anywhere within a 360 degree circle around the subjects, the camera should stay on one side of the axis to avoid the characters flopping screen positions. This creates a 180 degree arc that you can safely place your camera.



With the camera on the right side of the two figures, figure A is on "screen left" and figure B is on "screen right."

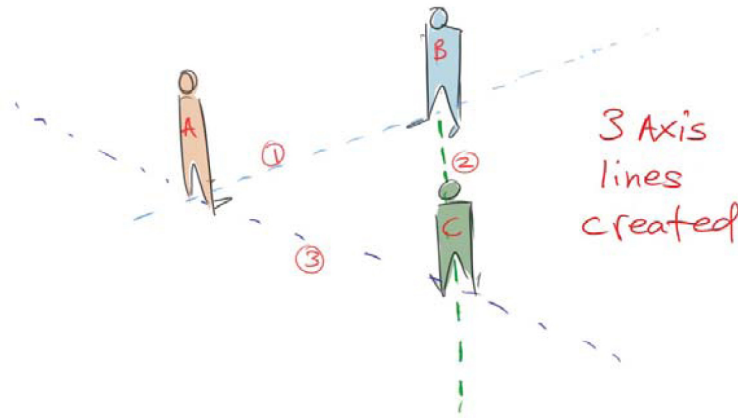


If you move the camera to the left side of the figures, A and B figures will appear to switch positions on screen. Figure A is now "screen right " and figure B is on "screen left." When these are placed together in sequence, this gives the effect of the characters flopping positions in the frame. It is a jarring cut, and is confusing to the audience because the characters switch positions without actually moving.

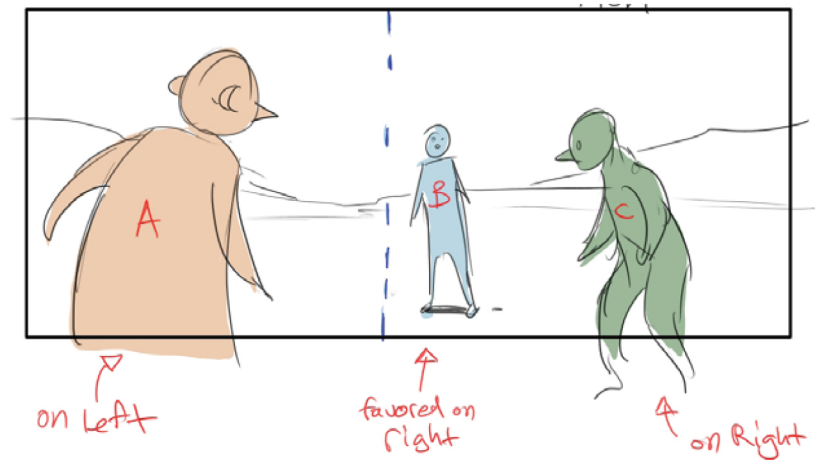
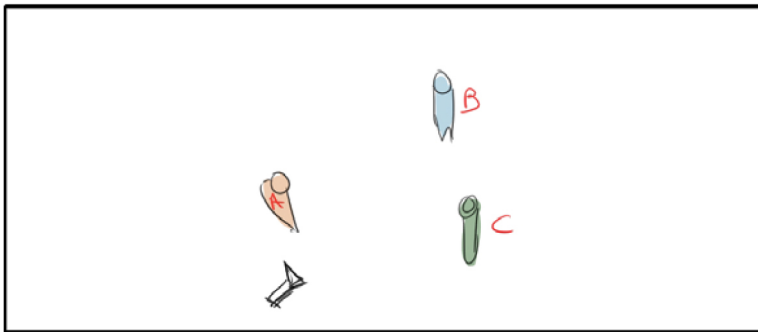


# 180 RULE -3 FIGURES

Three figures create three axis lines. The 180 rule applies to all three axis lines. To avoid confusion you do not want to cross any of the three lines from one frame to the next. What helps in this situation is to group one set of characters favored to one side of the screen.



For example, place the camera below axis line 3 putting figure A on "screen left," and figures B and C on "screen right."



If you move the camera to the right, away from figure A and toward figure C, the relative positions of the figures remain the same, as long as you do not cross the axis line.

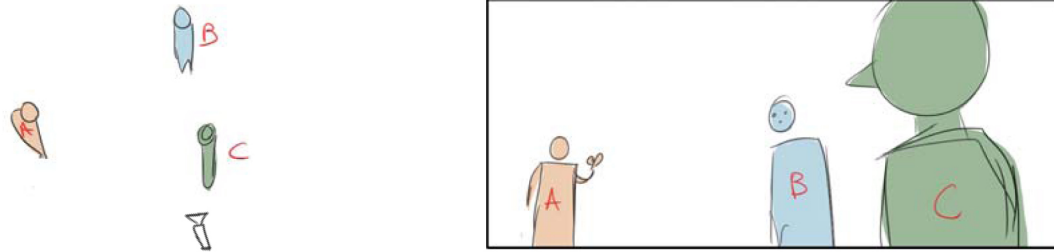
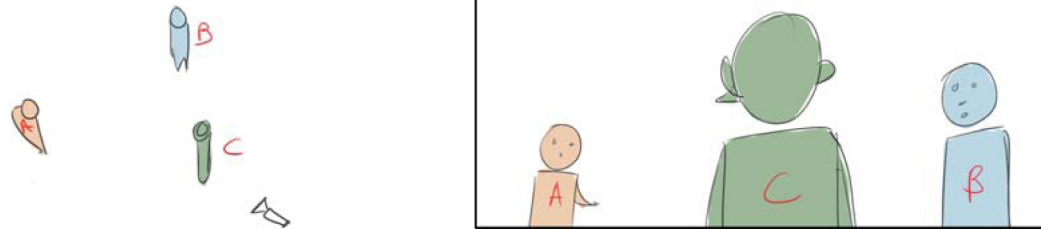


Figure A is still on "screen left," and figures B and C are still on "screen right."

If the camera moves farther to the right, it will cross axis line 3, the line that runs between figure A and figure C. This affects the relative screen position of figure B. Although this may not necessarily be confusing to the audience, you have to reestablish the character positions on screen. What is key in situations with multiple characters, is to maintain clarity for the audience.



### ***Breaking the 180 Rule***

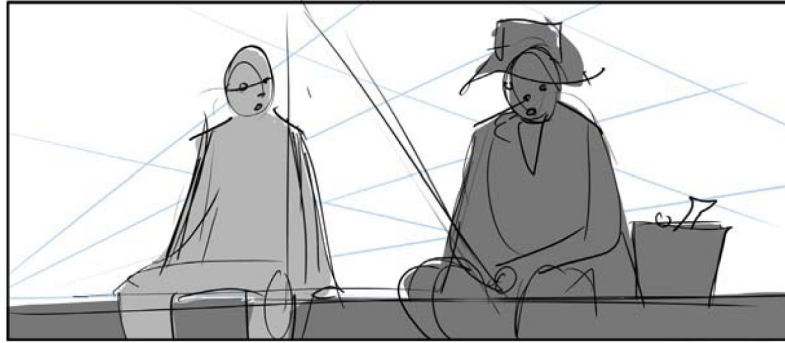
Above all, clarity is key. Don't break the 180 rule, unless you have a good reason. The reason for flopping screen direction, should support the emotional beat in your story. Even so, there may be times when it is necessary to place the camera on the other side of the 180 axis. You can break the 180 rule by following these guidelines:

- ***Cutaway to a neutral shot*** (a shot that does not include any of your subjects, or a shot that has a centered object in a neutral position relative to the screen direction)
- ***Move the characters*** from one side of the screen to the other
- ***Move the camera*** thereby changing the character positions
- ***Move both*** the characters and the camera



## 7. STAGING

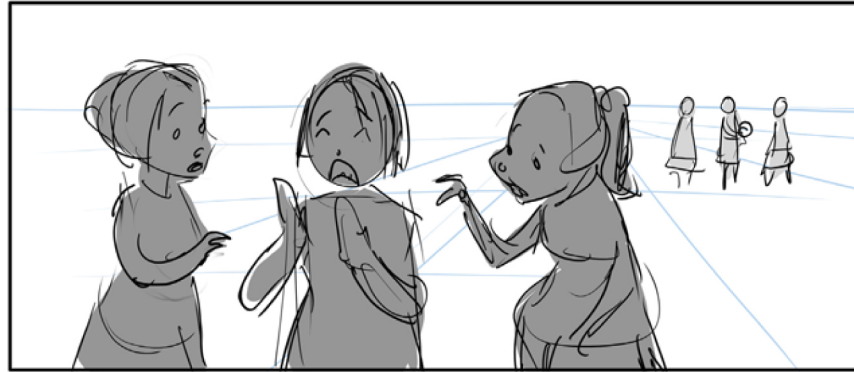
“Staging” refers to the arrangement of characters or objects within your scene. Depending on how close an object is to your camera, or how they are framed by the other objects, will it affect the emotional response of your audience. Staging is a fun and complex topic, but in this case let’s deal with staging as it refers to visual interest. In later discussions we can dive further into using staging to create rich and complex scenes. One basic rule of composition is to never have two objects with equal importance in the frame. Two things with equal importance divide the interest of the viewer and make the picture look flat.



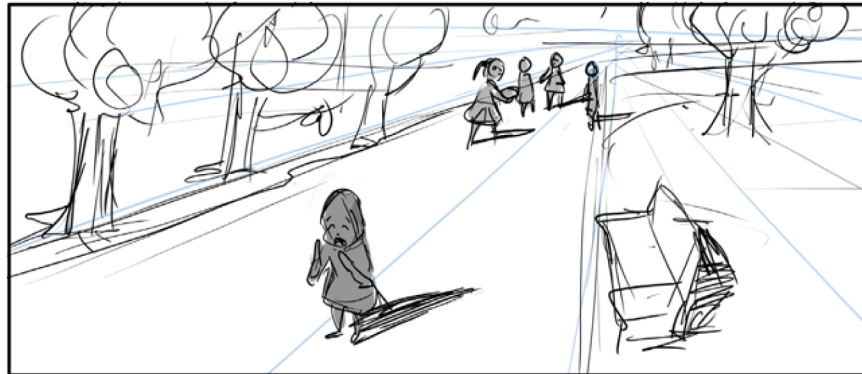
Give one object more visual importance by making it bigger. We emphasize the character on the right in emotional importance because of his increased size in the frame.



Use staging to support the emotional beat of the scene. If the idea is to show the audience how character feels after being rejected, pick the right camera angle and arrangement of objects to emphasize that point.



To better show the character's isolation and sadness, use a high angle and distance her from her friends.





## 8. CREATING A THUMBNAIL VERSION

A thumbnail version of a storyboard is a fast rough draft to see how your shot choices and your composition are working before you begin adding detail. There is no need to polish your drawing in a thumbnail. In fact, fancy drawing distracts from what is important; the story and the shot flow. In thumbnails all you need are quick and simple drawings that convey the basic information about camera angles, composition, and staging. No amount of shading will sell a shot or make up for your story flaws. Any good client or director will see right through it. ***Forget about the drawing and start communicating!***

### ***Why Thumbnail?***

If you don't thumbnail then you are just settling for the first idea off the top of your head. This works occasionally, but most of the time you want to dig deeper than your first idea. Up front planning will save you a lot of pain in the end. Be organized and THINK!

Thumbnailing is about discovering the emotional beats, through shots and staging. You are making choices that affect emotions, and trying to find the most efficient way to get there. Explore every possibility until you discover the best way to sell that particular idea or emotion. Forget about the details of drawing and lose yourself in ***thinking*** about how to be original and fresh.

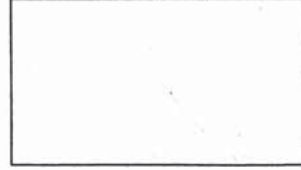
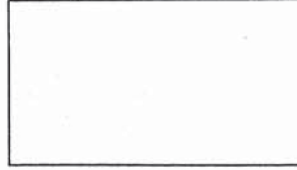
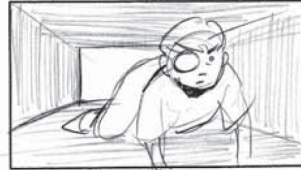
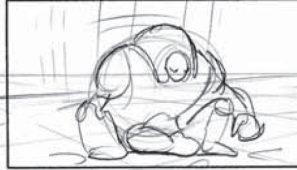
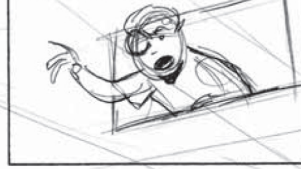
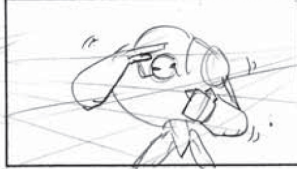
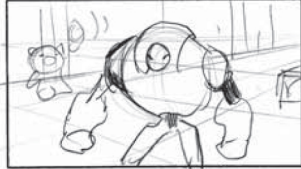
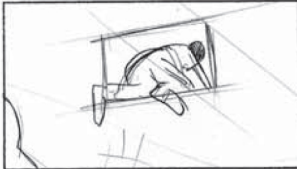
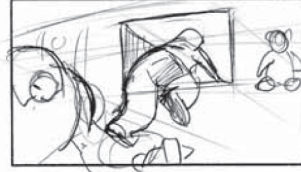
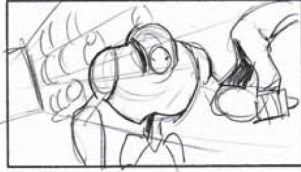
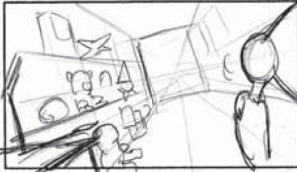
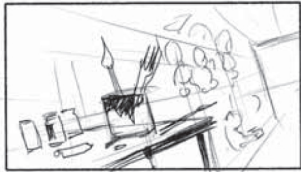
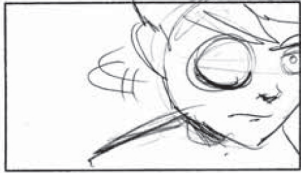
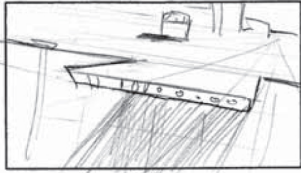
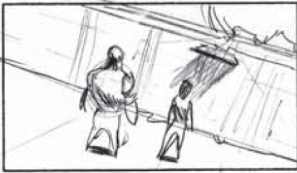
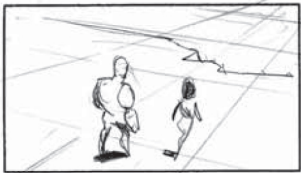
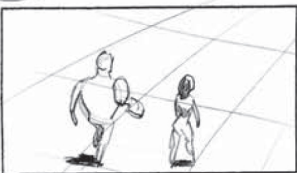
### ***Tips for Success***

Keep the drawings simple. Use pencil and paper only. Use arrows to show the direction of movements. Avoid color or shading. The drawings should only take a few seconds to produce. Most of the time should be spent thinking about what is important in your story.

Here are a few elements important in getting across in your thumbnails:

- ***Composition***
- ***Camera angles***
- ***Staging***
- ***Screen direction***
- ***Communicating the Story point***

## ACTUAL SIZE THUMBNAILS

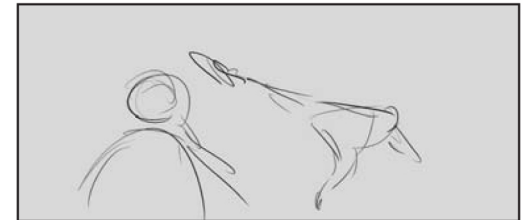
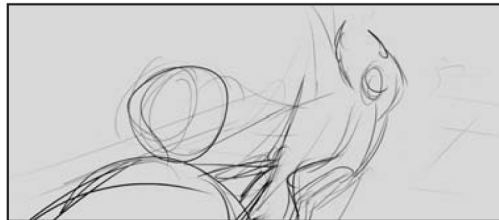
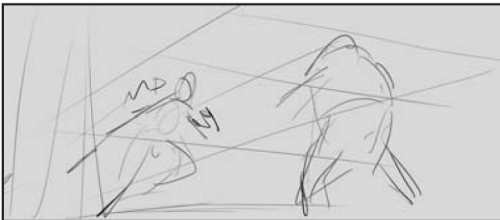
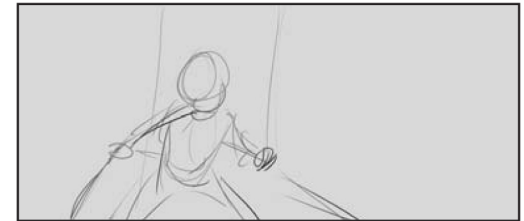
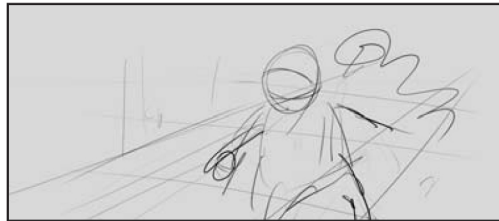


## 9. FINISHED STORYBOARDS

Once you have gone through with thumbnails in your sequence, you are now ready to finish your storyboards. Even though this is the opportunity to make the drawing as beautiful as possible, don't lose sight of clarity and simplicity. A finished storyboard panel, should be clear and understandable. Its main purpose is to describe the story point and emotional beat of the story, not to be a finished work of art. Here are some guidelines when finishing your storyboards:

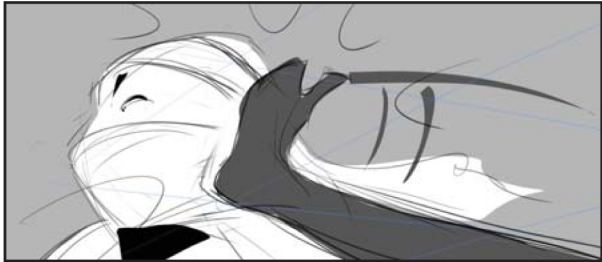
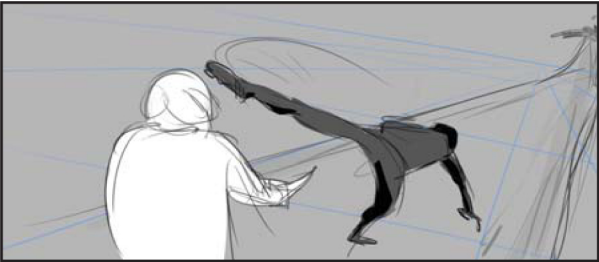
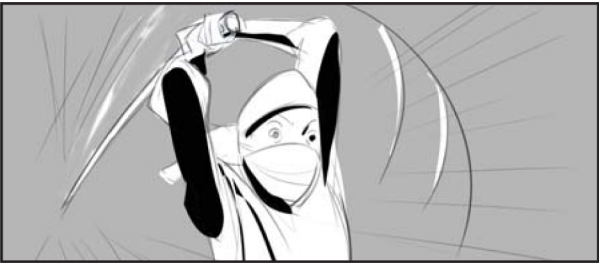
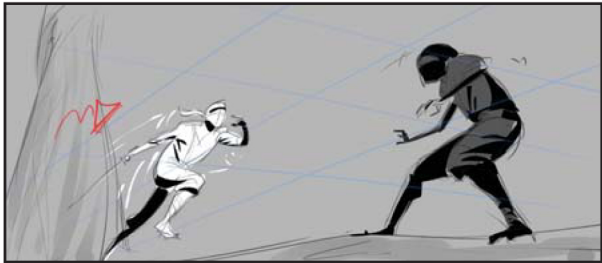
- Give the figures good solid poses with a clear silhouette
- Add simple tones— 2 to 3 grey tones is plenty
- Limit use of color— Save yourself time by only using color when necessary
- Limit use of arrows— Adding more panels with more character poses will help the action flow
- Use clean “on-model” drawings for traditional TV Boards.
- Add a perspective grid for maximum clarity

### THUMBNAILS





FINISHED BOARDS



# KEY QUESTIONS

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you stage and draw your storyboards:

1. ***Does the shot fulfill the story point?***
2. ***Is this the BEST camera angle for my story point?***
3. ***Does the shot have depth?*** Is there a foreground, middle ground, and background?
4. ***Am I using a profile shot?*** Is my composition too flat?
5. ***Is there good silhouette?***
6. ***Are there too many horizontal and vertical lines in my shot?*** Avoid symmetry
7. ***Are subjects coming at the camera/ going away from camera?*** Maximize the illusion of depth.
8. ***Do I cut from a low angle to high angle?*** Use variety in your shot choice.
9. ***Are the shapes in my composition interesting?***
10. ***Am I reusing this composition?*** Avoid reusing shots. Keep the audience interested by creative shot choice.