

Guide to Storyboarding

Dr. Alessandro Imperato

The Pre-Production Stage: Thumbnail Storyboards

“A storyboard serves the same functions in many visual presentations as an outline does in word-based projects. Visualization through storyboarding is a skill that is very important for directors to develop in order to communicate shots and actions. It is also a critical skill for the creation of animation sequences.”

Quoted from the Sleeve notes of ‘The Art of the Storyboard’ by John Hart.

The introductory words of John Hart’s book, stresses the significance and importance of storyboarding in communication in time-based media. This form of communication is compromised if the images are weak or non-representative of the desired communication. To this end it is imperative that the following areas be addressed as early as thumbnail storyboards.

A storyboard serves the same functions in many visual presentations as an outline does in word-based projects. Storyboarding is a skill that is very important for directors to develop in order to pre-visualize shots and actions. It is also a critical skill for the creation of animation sequences. It plots out the editorial sequencing of your film or animation. This is how the shots will be edited, not the order of the shooting.

Effective thumbnail storyboards combine four areas of understanding:

- 1) The cinematic frame incorporating use of perspective to focus the viewer’s attention.
- 2) The cinematic frame to reveal camera angle.
- 3) The framing of moving elements (Character/graphics/type etc.) in relation to shot-bottom line.
- 4) The framing of moving elements (Character/graphics/type etc.) within the discipline of the continuity of a style.

Effective thumbnail storyboards should demonstrate an understanding of animation and film language.

Students are expected to produce a storyboard that shows:

- 1) Composed camera shots to imply subtext and the function of the sequence to communicate.

- 2) Composed camera shots that indicate screen space and depth through perspective.
- 3) Frames should reveal intended shot depth.
- 4) Use between 16 and 24 frames.
- 5) Frames should employ variations of geometric form to sustain the viewer's visual interest.
- 6) Frames should express drama and depth through strong tonal contrast and be rendered in ink or a sharpie.

Tips:

- Sketch out the shot first on larger paper (master paper), then reframe the shot using academy ration templates, then scale them up or down to index cards and render.
- Take reference from movies, television and DVD using the pause/still button.
- Take reference from locations.
- Take reference from models created in 3D programs.

Method for Thumbnail

- Decide on the action that should take place. If necessary, sketch out the plan (top view) for this sequence. Block in the characters or moving elements/graphics/type.
- Get a good sense of the function of the shot. What does this shot need to do?
- Sketch small rough aspect ration rectangles in your workbook/sketchbook or use a template (see Storyboard Template – download).
- Ring the center of attention and/or draw the eye line. If not first shot then the center of attention is dictated by the previous shot.
- Decide on the shooting angle. Sketch in the horizon line above or below the center of attention.
- Sketch in key perspective lines. Can perspective be used to focus the viewer's attention?
- Indicate the lines of motion
- Use arrows to indicate the movement of the elements/graphics/character/type. Use a different color to indicate the movement of the camera.
- Indicate or sketch in the elements/graphics/character/type as appropriate.
- BE PREPARED TO DO THIS AGAIN UNTIL YOU FEEL IT IS RIGHT, varying any of the above including re-framing, altering the horizon line, , the shooting angle, the perspective. Amend the script if the change of framing goes beyond the shot description.

- Move on to the next shot. Keep in mind that the sequence is more than the individual shot and that every shot can mean something else depending on where in the sequence it stands.
- When you have finished the shot thumbnail storyboard, add sound and edit in either final cut pro or After Effects as an animatic.

Rendered Storyboard

A rendered storyboard is an animatic that is appropriately timed to imply an understanding of the shots and angles of the camera and also to time out the final work.

Method For Rendered Storyboard

- When you are happy with the animatic sequence in thumbnail form, transfer the perspective and the moving elements such as character/type/graphics positioning to the Storyboarding Template Sheet.
- Add relevant details, either printout the template and draw directly onto it or create a drawing, scan and add to the template in Photoshop.
- Render details and shading in charcoal or fiber pen to highlight the lighting and contrast. This will create depth.
- Re-shoot the rendered storyboard, add sound and edit in either final Cut Pro or After Effects as an animatic.

Recommended Reading:

Chapter 18 'Storyboard and Pre-Production' in *The Animation Book* by Kit Layboure. The Animation Book, Ch. 18 Production Planning, p. 278-295.

Useful Materials:

Sketchbook/workbook
Pencils softer than HB
Charcoal
Range of cool to gray marker pens.

