

Things to Consider Before Making your Cut-Out Animation

By Kelly Gallagher

DIY LIGHTING

Lighting is important when animating!! You can use household lamps as light sources which work more than fine for paper cut-out animation or object animation. BUT, if you are shooting during the daytime in your house for example, you are going to want to tape black trashbags over your windows (or go into a very dark or windowless room), because funny enough, the daylight slipping in through your window will be picked up by your DSLR and the light across your cut-out animation will change noticeably. But you may want that to happen, perhaps you're experimenting with the changing daylight in which case that's fine! For a more stable lighting situation, you want to control the light as seriously as possible when animating so that there aren't wild or even subtle (because the subtle will actually become jarring) light differences from frame to frame. So wait until night, or block out the light completely (like a darkroom) and then bring in a bunch of house lamps or whatever is most easily available, then white balance your DSLR to those lights and you're good to go. You'll learn that playing with lighting can be both frustrating and rewarding. Sometimes it's fun to incorporate flashlights or bike lights or twinkle string lights and get creative! Think about shadow, mood, tone, and how light can play a role in these aspects of your animation!

VERTICAL OR HORIZONTAL ANIMATING

You can animate with your cut-outs laying flat on the ground or on a desk/table. But the most important thing to remember when animating horizontally like that is that your DSLR camera lens needs to be on the *same plane* as your animation "canvas." (Canvas just meaning the surface you are animating on.) Your camera lens must be parallel to your animation plane. If you lay your cut-outs flat on a desk, then you'll want your camera rigged directly above your head (a "down-shooter" set up), looking straight down. This can be hard to do without some camera rigging gear. If you're interested in making an actual animation stand, then there are numerous ways, some easier than others, that you can check out

here: <http://smfaanimation.blogspot.com/p/animation-workspaces.html>

Because it can be difficult to acquire or build something like that, an easy DIY option is to simply tilt your animation canvas up a bit when shooting "horizontally" so that you can simply attach your DSLR to a tripod and match the angle of your animation plane really easily. Meaning: put something like a 3 ring binder underneath your cut-outs, so that when you put your camera on a tripod, you can tilt and match your camera lens plane to the plane of the 3-ring binder so that you don't get any weird perspective/visual morphing of your cut-outs in post-production.

Alternatiely, you can animate vertically. For example, maybe you want to animate some refrigerator magnets. You can set up your DSLR on the tripod and shoot the action straight-on. Additionally, you can create a little vertical animation stand by going to a hardware store and having them stick a pane of plastic upright into a wood base. I have a few stands like this and have my plastic panes upright and use

sticky poster tack on the back of my cut-out pieces to move them around on the plastic board. You can also play with green screens and chroma-keying (which can be really pretty fun).

JPEG NOT RAW

There is simply no need to shoot raw images for a stop-motion animation. Most DSLR cameras' medium or large jpeg formats are HD and greater than 1920x1080 pixels. Shooting raw will create a lot more frustrating work for you when you get to post production, and the last thing an animator needs is MORE work to do!

FRAME RATE

"How many frames should each photo count for?" You can "animate on the 2's" or the 3's, or the 4's, or even 5's, 6's, etc. "Animating on the 2's" means that each still image you take will count as 2 frames in your editing sequence. You don't have to worry about this when you're shooting and you can play around with this once you are at the editing stages to see what kind of look you like. Do you prefer really smooth and fluid motion in your animation? Then maybe animating on the 2's would be best. Do you like the frenetic and choppy look of more experimental works and cut-outs? Then perhaps animating on the 3's or 4's would work, etc. So generally, animating on the 2's means that there are 12 photos in one second of video on a timeline. (Most) animators generally use a 24fps timeline (instead of a 30fps timeline) because we are trying to make our lives as easy as possibly, so the less frames in a second, the better. Animating on the 4's means there will be 6 photos in one second, etc. Again, when you're filming, you are just going to take one picture for each new motion or movement you make, and you can play with speed and frame rates once you get to premiere pro, as detailed in the animation workflow document.