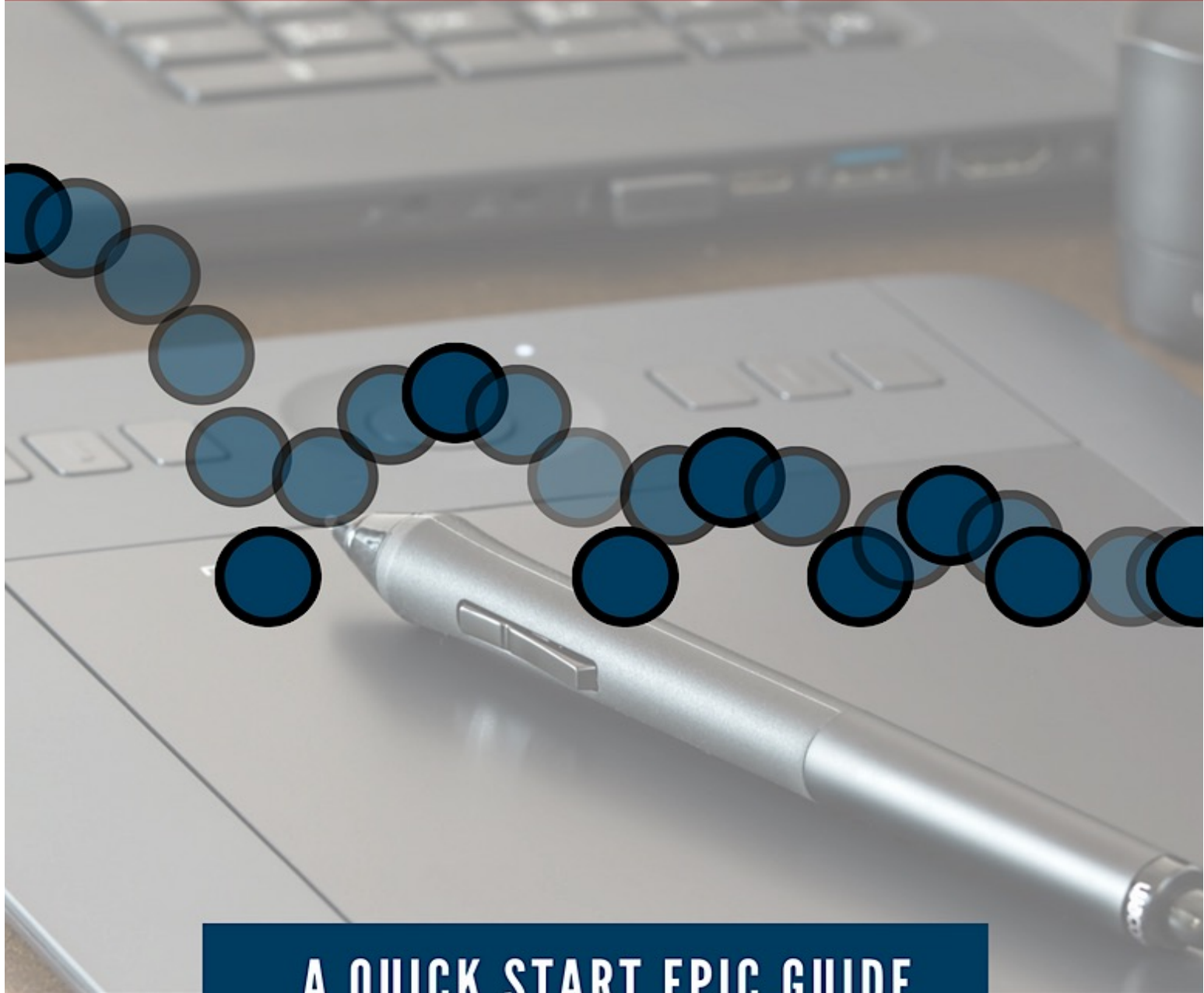


ANIMATION FOR BEGINNERS



A QUICK START EPIC GUIDE

Want to learn animation but don't
know where to even begin?

Check out this epic guide from a pro on software,
hardware, courses, workflow and more

BY RUSTY ANIMATOR.COM

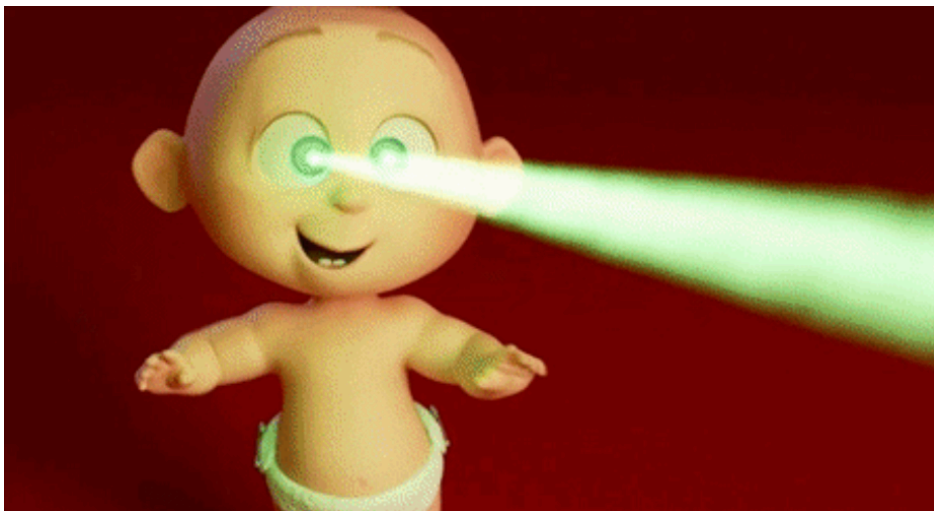
Animation for Beginners

A Quick Start Epic Guide

If you're a newbie animator - this animation for beginners guide will quickly get you started and after your dream career.

After all, you've probably drooled at the thought of getting paychecks for animating...

...in a vfx movie like Avengers, a game like God of War, or a feature like Incredibles 2.



But where do you even begin?

You have so many questions it's overwhelming.

- What is animation after all?
- How do you actually animate?
- What tools, software, books, exercises, character rigs, and courses do you turn to?

This epic guide on *Animation For Beginners* is about to answer all of them and more.

You're about to hear life changing insights and truth bombs from a veteran professional animator who learned it all the hard way.

So buckle up. The animation party is coming to you.



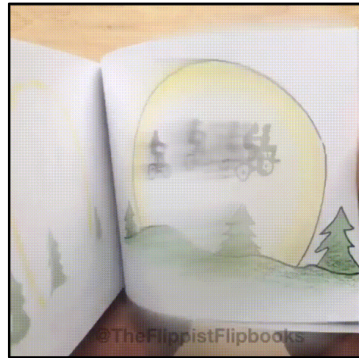
Lets dive in.

Epic Guide Chapters

- Ch.1 What is Animation?
- Ch.2 How to Animate
- Ch.3 The 5 Different Kinds of Animation And Their Advantages
- Ch.4 Animation Software for Beginners
- Ch.5 Animation Hardware for Beginners
- Ch.6 Animation Tools for Beginners
- Ch.7 Animation Books
- Ch.8 Animation Exercises
- Ch.9 Free Maya Rigs for Beginners
- Ch.10 Best Animation Courses
- Ch.11 Animation Career Paths
- Ch.12 Your Next Steps as a Beginner

What is Animation?

Animation is a series of still images that change over time to give the illusion of life. If you've ever seen a flipbook, you've seen animation.



Yes - this is animation in one of its most basic forms.

So first and foremost, animation is an art.

It's a very young art and its crazy easy to start learning today.

But it's also extremely challenging to animate well.

Especially, if you want to get paychecks for it.

In fact it's probably more complicated than any other art.

Why?

You're not just creating traditional art with still images, but you are also manipulating time, mimicking real movement in slow motion, acting through body language and you're telling a compelling story.

Whew. That's a lot!

How do you actually go about making all that without being overwhelmed?

How do you animate?

How to Animate

Thankfully, today, how to animate is less of a mystery, due to the awesome artists that came before us.

Artists like the Legendary Disney animators called [the Nine Old Men](#) who gave us road maps to quality animation.

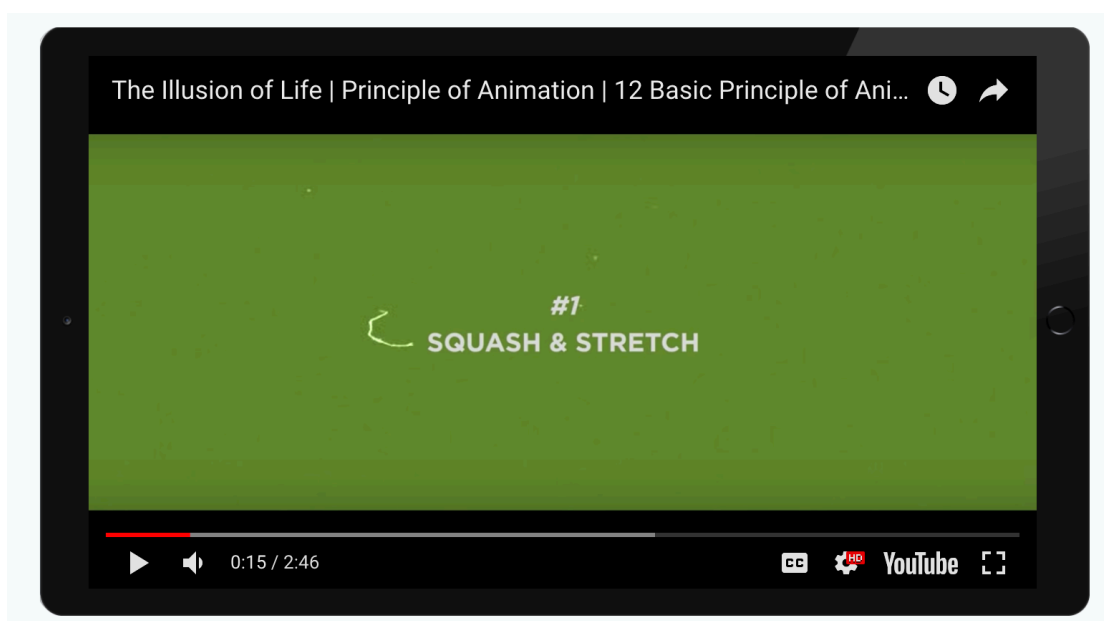
And perhaps the best road map of is...

The 12 Principles of Animation

If you've ever wanted a formula for making great animation - the 12 principles are as close as it gets.

Every professional, at every level, follows them to take their art to the next level.

But rather than reading all about them, watch this awesome video:



These 12 principles were first described in the legendary book "*The Illusion of Life*" by [Frank Thomas](#) and [Ollie Johnston](#).

Frank and Ollie were 2 of the Nine Old Men, who many consider some of the best animators who ever lived.

They were key animators for classic films you might know like...The Jungle Book, Peter Pan, 101 Dalmatians, Sleeping Beauty, and many more.



So it's a good idea to follow their advice, especially with the 12 principles, if you plan on becoming a fantastic animator.

Of course there is more to animating than just jumping in and following the 12 principles.

It helps to have clear steps from beginning to end - an order for when you animate what part - when. That way you don't get frustrated and lost along the way.

Animation Workflow

Every art has a process for creation – a workflow.

The better your process (*your workflow*) the better your art.

If you don't believe this, go try sculpting clay for the first time.

\$50 bucks you'll get confused at how to start or you'll wonder what tool to use when. And your first sculpt will end up looking horrible.



What animation workflow should you have then?

There are literally 100's of different workflows to choose from...

As every animators adapts and develops their own based on their preferences.

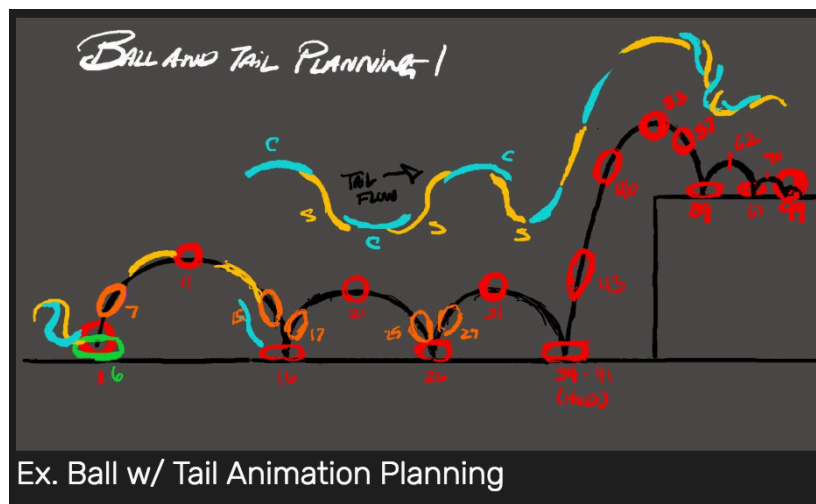
But here's basically what they all do

They go through 6 stages, starting really rough and then add more and more detail until it's finished. Check out those stages below for a rough idea.

The 6 Stages of Animation

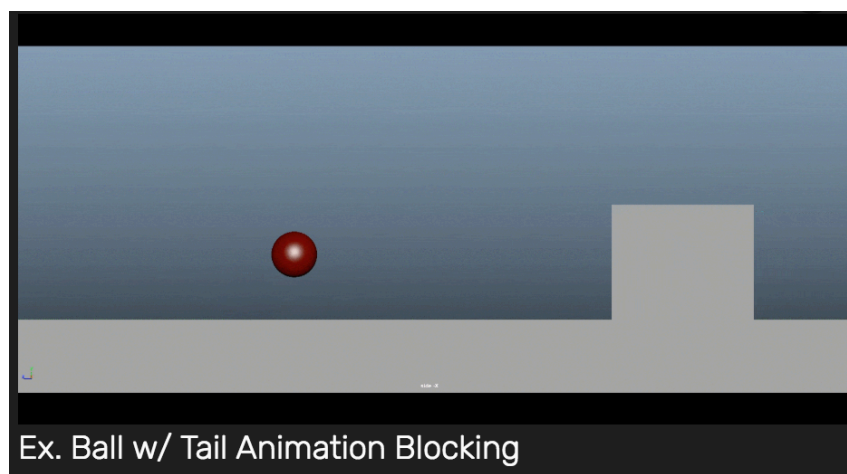
#1 - Planning (Conception)

- What kind of wood sculpture do you make?
- Find your ideas, your story, your character, your movements
- Do this with sketching, video reference, and story boarding



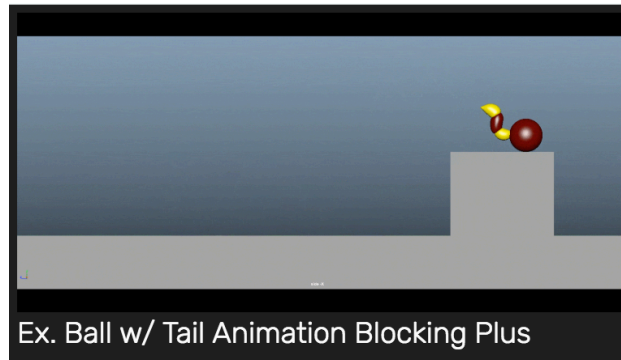
#2 - Blocking (Very Rough)

- What are your most important parts of the animation?
- Add in your storytelling drawings/poses/keys
- Just the bare minimum to sell the idea.



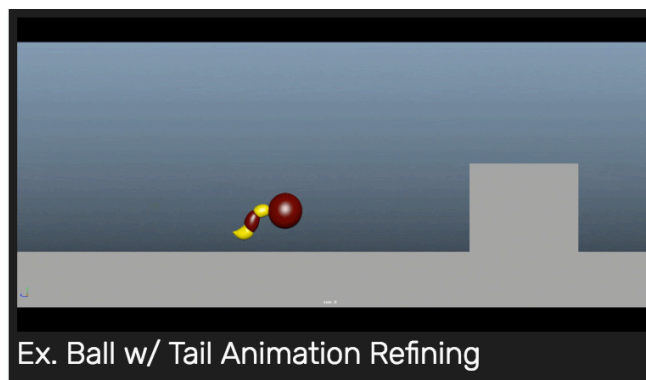
#3 - Blocking Plus (Rough)

- Breakdown how to move from 1 storytelling pose to the next
- Here your animation really starts taking shape.



#4 - Refining (Detailed)

- Add a lot more drawings/keys to further define each move
- By the end of this stage your animation, has believable weight, acting, and story.
- All the major movements feel good enough.



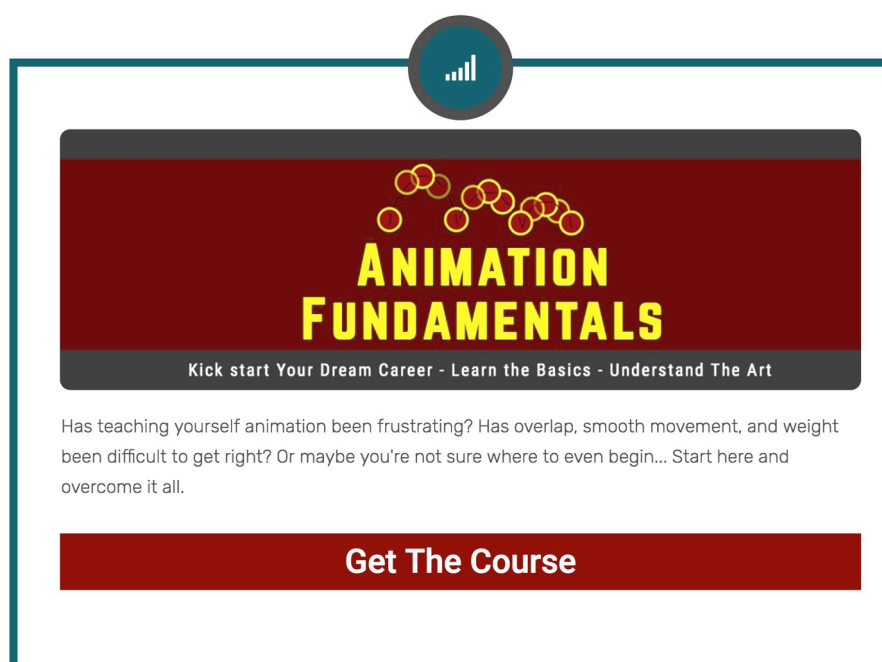
#5 - Polish (Extremely Detailed)

- At the last stage, the animation is already working overall.
- You're just getting all the little bits just right.
- Fingers, toes, drapery, ears, knee pops, arcs on the jaw, little lip-sync tweaks, etc.

Are you still feeling a bit confused about how to animate?

Don't feel alarmed. Like most art, you learn best by doing it - by using your hands.

If you really want to get a handle on how to animate, you should join an animation for beginners course with step-by-step walk-throughs taught by a pro.



Though, if you want to learn more about the advantages of the different kinds of animation, the best animation software, and more – keep digging in.

The 5 Different Kinds of Animation and Their Advantages

You probably already know what 2D and 3D looks like. Maybe you even have a preference for your dream career. But you probably DON'T know the advantages and disadvantages of each. Or how many different kinds there are.

This chapter will give you insights on how each medium differs, what skills you need to learn, and the job options.

2D Animation

#1 - Traditional Animation

Usually, when you hear traditional animation – Disney is what first comes to mind. Or maybe Looney Tunes.

It used to be the dominant medium for animation, though today it's taken a backseat for most animation productions.

In traditional animation everything is hand drawn page by page on real paper.

Here's some traditional animation in *Treasure Planet* by the legendary Glen Keane (*Tarzan*, *Beast*, *Ariel*, *Aladdin*):



How many drawings do you have to make?

If you were animating on a film, there could be as many as 24 drawings a second.

Why?

Films are typically captured on camera at 24fps - that's frames per second. A frame is what's caught in the camera frame - a picture or a drawing.

So 24fps = 24 drawings a second

Crazy huh!?

Now obviously, you could save a lot of time, cost, and stress if you could draw less right?

That's exactly what the master animators of old times did. They discovered a solution.

Just show only 1 drawing every 2 frames. (Animating on 2's).

And BHAM. Now you only need half the drawings. 12 drawings per second instead of 24.

To this day, this is still used. Sometimes there are even less drawings, like in anime or kid cartoons. And it works especially well for when your character is staying still.

It has to be used where appropriate though. For very fast actions, it's often still necessary to animate on 1's (1 drawing every frame).

This is an advantage traditional animation has over computer animation. In computer animation characters look dead if they stop completely, but more on that later.

- **Main Advantage:** Complete creative freedom to draw whatever you can imagine
- **Main Disadvantage:** High level drawing skill is required and there are far less job options
- **Skill required for job:** 5 stars
- **Job Availability:** 2 stars

#2 - Vector/Bitmap Animation

Vector animation is pretty much the same as traditional animation. You're hand drawing all of the animation, but you're drawing digitally with software. The style is instantly different but often more simplified than pencil and paper.

In recent years, with the growth of YouTube and social media, this kind of animation has become pretty popular.

Here's a famous flash example that got shared everywhere years ago:



- **Main advantage:** Less Expensive and more tidy than 2D
- **Main disadvantage:** Using software to mimic pencil drawings
- **Skill required for job:** 3 stars
- **Job Availability:** 3 stars

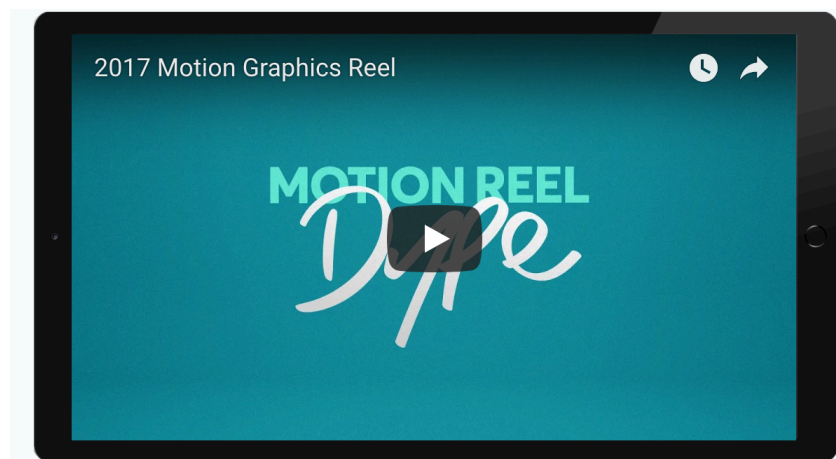
#3 - Motion Graphics

Motion graphics is very different from other kinds of animation. Often its focus is on interesting shapes and text, instead of story or character.

You're moving graphic elements, like titles or logos around in appealing ways. Typically most of the work is in commercials, marketing, and movie intros/credits.

The fun part is that this takes the pressure off. The required animation skill is much lower than other mediums. It's much easier to get high quality cool results when you don't have to create highly realistic character movements.

Here's a cool demo reel of a motion graphics artist:



- **Main advantage:** Simple straightforward medium
- **Main disadvantage:** Very little acting or storytelling
- **Skill level required for Job:** 2 stars
- **Job Availability:** 3 stars

3D Animation

#4 - Computer Animation

This is the most common form of animation today.

And this is where the most jobs are.

Studios of all kinds from HUGE ones like Disney to small TV cartoon companies do computer animation.

The unique difference in this medium is that you manipulate 3D virtual puppets called character rigs to create animation.

This means you don't need to know how to draw at all. But often you're also limited by what your 3D puppet (*character rig*) is capable of. Like having arms long enough to put a hat on.

Here's a short behind the scenes look at Pixar animators moving character rigs for Incredibles 2:



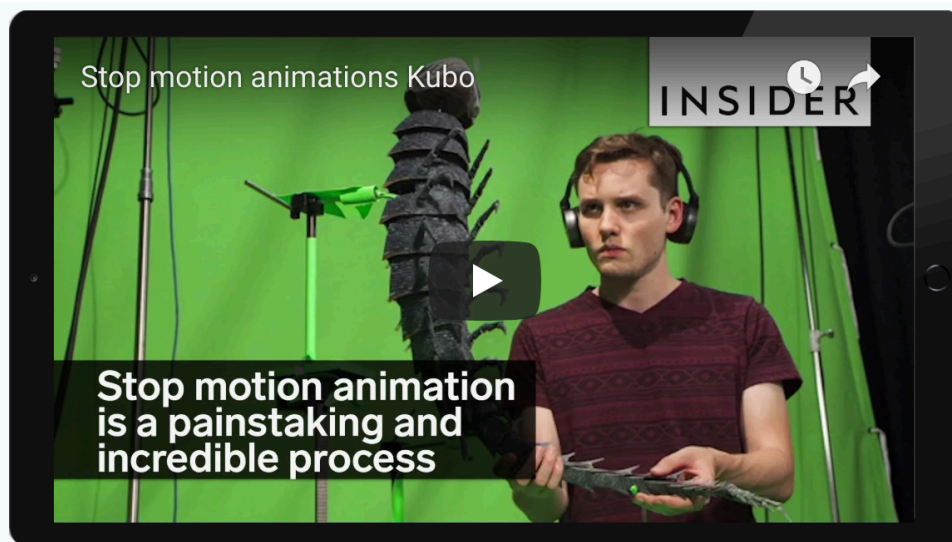
- **Main Advantage:** You don't need to know how to draw - you use 3d virtual puppets called (character rigs)
- **Main Disadvantage:** Limitations of character rigs and software
- **Skill Required for Job:** 5 stars
- **Job Availability:** 5 stars

#5 - Stop Motion

Stop Motion combines live action filmmaking with animation techniques using physical objects. You take a physical object, puppet, or even your own body and take a series of still images with a camera to create animation.

And man does it look cool!

Here's some behind the scenes footage of stop motion animators for Kubo and the Two Strings:



- **Main advantage:** very organic and naturally appealing
- **Main Disadvantage:** The most labor intensive medium
- **Skill required for job:** 5 stars
- **Job Availability:** 1 star

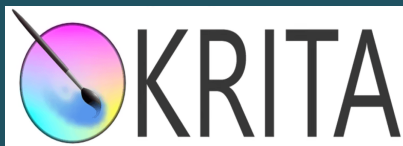
Animation Software for Beginners

Today, it's so easy to start learning animation, as there are all kinds of great software packages available and several of them are FREE.

Recommendations for all the best software options are listed below in order from inexpensive to professional.

2D Animation Software

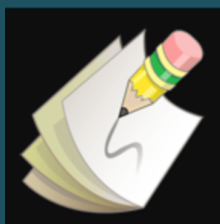
Krita



Cost \$ FREE

Can you get cheaper than FREE? [Krita](#) is a great example of why it's so easy to start learning animation today. It's open source, just click the link and download.

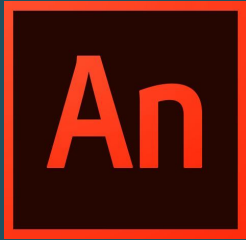
Flipbook



Cost \$ FRE

Again - FREE software. [Flipbook](#) is basic and very traditionally focused. The design is probably as close as you can get to traditional 2D animation with software.

Adobe Animate CC



Formerly known as Flash, this software is a favorite among many You-tubers, Independent Filmmakers, and Beginners.

With a \$20 /monthly payment plan and a free trial, [Animate CC](#) has made getting started with premium software - much easier.

Est. Cost \$20/Month

Toon Boom Harmony



A very flexible program that can go anywhere you want to go in any kind of style - from stick figures to high quality Ghibli / Disney.

It's a tad more expensive than Animate CC but still has a [free trial](#) with a fairly low month cost after.

Est. Cost \$41-78 / month

TV Paint



This is the digital hand drawn animators professional software of choice. If your seeking to create the highest level 2D animation like golden age Disney - [TV Paint](#) is your choice.

There is also a [Trial](#) version available to help you decide.

Dragonframe



Dragonframe is the #1 software for Stop Motion Animators. Feature Films like *The Little Prince*, *Loving Vincent*, and *Isle of Dogs* were created using it, so that pretty much says it all.

There are special student prices and helpful add on's like Bluetooth controllers. So check out the options.

Est. Cost \$295

3D Animation Software

Blender



Blender is a FREE open source 3D program. Due to this, it's gained a lot of popularity. However, very few, if any, animation studios actually use Blender on the job.

So it's great for testing out what 3D programs are capable of. But if you want to become a 3D professional animator, you should probably plan to learn Maya eventually.

Est. Cost \$Free

Autodesk Maya



Maya is the industry standard for most jobs in movies and game studios. If you want to get comfortable with what you'll probably be using as a professional, start here.

And don't let the cost scare you, there are FREE student versions and a Free Trial (*Other 3d programs exist that are similar to Maya, though they aren't worth mentioning for animation*).

Est. Cost \$190th

Animation Hardware for Beginners

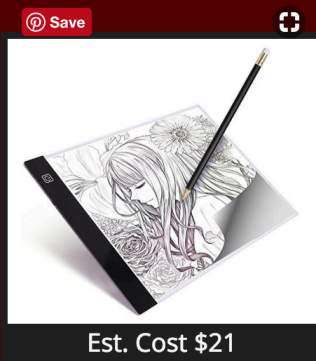
Creating your own animations doesn't require expensive equipment. You can go pretty bare bones, especially if you're animating in 2D.

But if you're an ambitious beginner and you want as sweet a setup as you can handle right now, there is some hardware that will make your life easy.

Recommendations for both the basics and the ideal hardware are below:

Basic Animation Hardware

Light box



If you're a traditional animator, a light box helps you see through all your animation paper so you can see how the movements in your animation flow.

This is not a fancy animation desk but it's an inexpensive way to start learning the art

[VIEW ON AMAZON](#)

Basic Desktop / Laptop and Mouse



Obviously, 3D and digital 2D animation requires a computer. Thankfully, most of us already have one that can do the job. As you often don't need a beastly machine for most beginner animation.

There are no specific recommendations here, as there are so many options to choose from. Generally, a decent starter machine will probably run around \$800-\$1200.

You could also save a little by building your own, and leaving it open for future upgrades.

Wacom Intuos Tablet



Est. Cost \$99

If you're animating with 2D software a tablet is essential. Compared to the Intuos Pro, this entry level version will save you roughly \$100 to \$200.

A tablet can also be fantastic for 3D software.

[VIEW ON AMAZON](#)

Ideal Animation Hardware

Dual Monitors or an Ultrawide



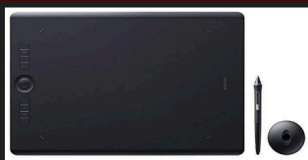
Est. Cost \$349

Having extra screen spacing when you're animating is a breath of fresh air. As you typically have so many windows open to keep track of cameras, graph editors, timelines, reference, and so on, it's annoying with only 1 monitor.

This way you don't have to constantly minimize and reopen what you create.

[VIEW ON AMAZON](#)

Large Wacom Intuos Pro Tablet



Est. Cost \$399

A larger Intuos Pro tablet will make animating a joy. There is amazing pressure sensitivity. And the larger available space to use the pen means far less work for you hand.

[VIEW ON AMAZON](#)

Tablet Pen Glove



Est. Cost \$8

A tablet glove will lets you hand glide across your tablet. It eliminates friction, and keeps your tablet clean from hand sweat.

It's an inexpensive add-on but it does make animating more enjoyable.

[VIEW ON AMAZON](#)

Strong Graphics Card and/or Memory



Est. Cost \$293

Sometimes 2D and 3D software gets demanding on memory or graphics power. Maybe it's due to a character rig, the many objects that are in your file, or just the program sucking the life out of your computer. Having a powerful graphics card and plenty of memory can alleviate laggy headaches.

The video card recommended here is not the only option. But it should be a massive upgrade to any basic computer setup.

[VIEW ON AMAZON](#)

Animation Tools for Beginners

If you're planning on animating in Maya the industry leading 3D software, the 3 FREE tools here will make animating much easier and fun for you.



Arc Trackers

Arc Trackers let you visually see how your animation is moving in 3D space from frame to frame. And they let you make adjustments on the fly.

This one is called Arc Tracker 110 and it's been around for a long time.



Ghosting

Ghosting lets you outline your character rig from frame to frame to better see your spacing and to help you breakdown your poses.

This one is called BH Ghost by Graphite 9 and it's fantastic.



AnimBot

Animbot is the BEST toolset for every Maya animator - whether they are a student or professional.

With a drag and drop install, you get an amazing arc tracker, tween machine, a flurry of curve management tools, mirroring and more. Just get it.

Animation Books for Beginners

The right books will vastly expand your understanding of the art, when you're practicing on your own. And they are amazing reference for you when you've joined an animation course.

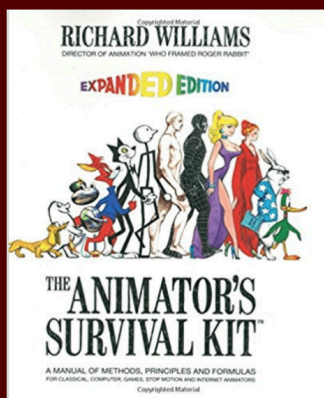
The books listed below belong on every animator's bookshelf.

They are not the kind you read once and throw away.

If all you got was 1 at first, it will shower you in priceless wisdom.

To help you decide, these animation books are ranked from most to least impactful for beginners.

The Animators Survival Kit *by Richard Williams*



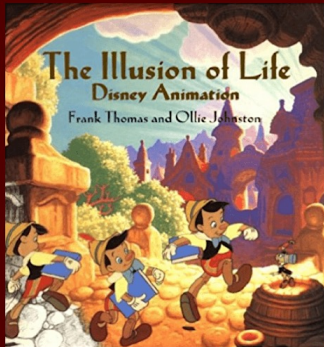
Est. Cost \$25

If there was 1 animation for beginners book to own - this is it.

Richard Williams (*animation director of who framed roger rabbit*) lays out practical animations from the most basic to the most advanced with clear drawings.

[VIEW ON AMAZON](#)

The Illusion of Life *by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston*



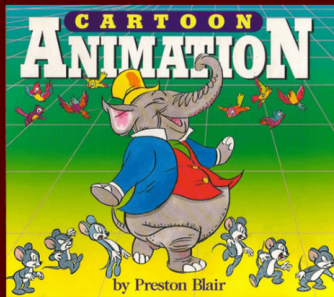
Est. Cost \$32

Often referred to as the "animators bible" this trove of wisdom unearths more golden nuggets with each and every read.

Not only do you come to understand the 12 principles deeply but you'll also learn deeply about acting, the history of the art, and what it takes to be a great animator.

[VIEW ON AMAZON](#)

Cartoon Animation *by Preston Blair*

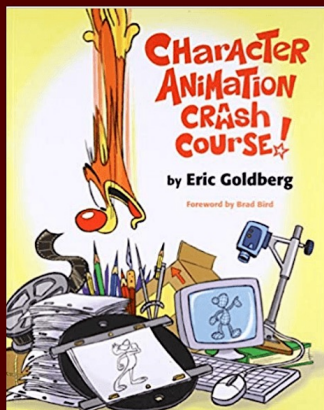


Est. Cost \$13

This is a compilation of the best parts of several how to animate books by Preston Blair. With his first book released in 1948, he was one of the first to teach animation via text. It's a fantastic resource for a further understanding of animation with plenty of illustrated examples.

[VIEW ON AMAZON](#)

Character Animation Crash Course *by Eric Goldberg*



Est. Cost \$24

Interested in learning craft secrets from the supervising animator of the Genie in Aladdin or Phil in Hercules?

If you're serious about becoming an animator you'd be foolish to skip it.

[VIEW ON AMAZON](#)

The Nine Old Men *by Andreas Deja*



Est. Cost \$18

Curious to know more about what animations, specific skills, styles, and experiences the legendary Nine Old Men had?!

Dive into this book. It was written by Andreas Deja (supervising animator of Scar, Jafar, Hercules, and Mama Odie)

He got to work alongside them, practiced their teachings after them, and shares all his wisdom from them in this book.

[VIEW ON AMAZON](#)

Animation Exercises for Beginners

If you want to try out animation for the first time, or if you want to develop your skills a little before you join an animation course, these exercises will be fantastic for you!

1. Vertical Ball Bounce

- (Straight up and down to a stop - 100f max)

2. Ball Bounce

- (Across the camera frame and settle to a stop - 150f max)

3. Pendulum

- (Moves across screen to a stand still - 150f max)

4. Flour Sack / Juice Box

- (Walks and hops once 72f max)

5. A Ball w/ a Tail

- (Hops along and leaves frame - 120f max)

6. Normal Walk Forward

- (An average walk with at least 4 steps - from the hip down only - 120f max)

7. Personality Walk Forward

- (A walk with 1 distinct emotion - from the hip down only - 120f max)

These animation exercises might seem extremely easy. They aren't. That is, if you try to make these animations closely mimic real life (*think Pixar Quality*) these exercises will challenge you immensely.

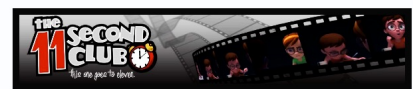
But they will be worth your time. And if you do them right they will give you a solid foundation of the fundamentals.

Site links with even more exercise lists:

[Animator's Island](#)

[Thinking Animation](#)

[11 Second Club](#)







ANIMATION FUNDAMENTALS

Kick start Your Dream Career - Learn the Basics - Understand The Art

Rather than going through these exercises on your own and struggle to figure out if your learning enough...why not learn the fundamentals from a pro? Inside you'll get step by step lessons, critiques, and a private student community to team up with. Check it out now.

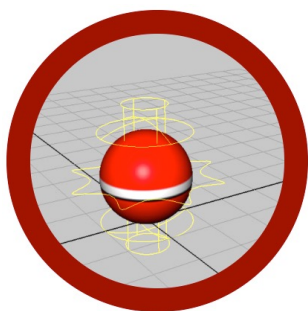
Get The Course

Free Maya Rigs For Beginners

If you're planning to use Maya (the industry leading 3D software) you'll need good free character rigs to start animating.

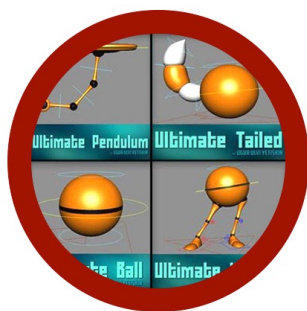
Simple rigs will also help you stay focused on learning the art - instead of getting overwhelmed with technical hurdles.

So to save you time searching for good rigs that aren't too advanced - here's a recommend list:



The Bouncin' Ball

As simple as this rig is, it's my favorite free ball rig for one reason - you can rotate the ball, as well as the squash and stretch independently.



Ultimate Rigs

Ultimate Ball, Tailed, Pendulum, and Ultimate Walker. An all in one fundamentals rig package.



Walking Battle Egg

A robot rig that keeps it simple but lets you practice all the basics in an exciting new way.

If you're looking for more **free Maya rigs** check out this page:



Best Animation Courses for Beginners

When you're looking to become a professional fast, taking animation courses is the best way to level up from amateur status.

Sure you could try to learn on your own. But learning on your own will leave you blind to all the mistakes you're making. You won't have experienced eyes to point out what to fix.

If you go that route, YEARS will go by as you search for answers to even basic questions that a veteran mentor could give you in minutes.

Of course, not all animation courses are created equal either.



Life Saving Truth Bomb

If you want to give your dreams the best shot, don't attend a traditional university.

It's a classic dream killing mistake.

Hundreds of thousands of aspiring animators still attend traditional universities spending \$100,000+ in tuition. Only to graduate jobless with little skill.

Here's some quick dream enabling facts:

- You don't need an animation degree (*they don't get you hired*)
- You can skip \$100,000+ in college tuition
- Online courses will make you a much more skilled animator for 1/8th the cost (\$5,000 to \$18,000)
- And online courses will best prepare you for getting hired.

The best animation courses are online

Below is a short list of course recommendations to start going after your dream job the right way.

And if you're looking for far more details or proof on why online courses give you the best shot at your dream job - check our ultimate guide on [the best animation schools](#) below.

Online Courses, Workshops, and Mentorships:

AB

AARON BLAISE

Animation Tutorials and video lessons from a former Disney Animator of 20 years.



[Click for details](#)

SP

SPUNGELLA

Feedback workshops that allow 16 submissions on a flexible schedule from an ILM pro.



[Click for details](#)

RA

RUSTY ANIMATOR

Video courses and Live Mentoring tailored to your struggles on the basics, powerful mechanics, and creating jaw dropping demo reels

RUSTY ANIMATOR

[Click for details](#)

Online Schools:

AM

ANIMATION MENTOR

Created in 2005 by Pixar and ILM Animators Bobby Beck, Shawn Kelly, and Carlos Baena - AM was the 1st to revolutionize animation education by bringing it online.



[Click for details](#)

iA

IANIMATE

In 2010, Jason Ryan a 15-year veteran animator of Disney and Dreamworks founded iAnimate. There are over 60 exclusive character rigs and many diverse course options.



[Click for details](#)

If you want far more insights for picking the right animation course check this out:



Animation Careers

What types of jobs in animation exist once you've become good enough?

You could have a job animating in movies, video games, TV, advertising, various freelance projects or even create your own job as an independent filmmaker.

You have so many possible animation career paths available. Especially since each industry also has very different roles and styles for the animation you create.

Check out more details and examples of possible animation career paths below:

Move / Film Animators



Feature Film

This is all about films like Snow White, Lion King, Toy Story, Kung Fu Panda, Wallace and Gromit, and Despicable Me

It's focus is acting, character performance and entertaining storytelling. .

The big players here are Pixar, Disney, Dreamworks, BlueSky, Sony, Laika. And Illumination Macguff.



VFX

This is the industry that gave us Star Wars, Jurassic Park, Lord of the Rings, and Avengers.

Its focus is on realistic and powerful body mechanics. This is for you if you prefer animating giant robots, monsters, spaceships, and superhero action sequences. Less focus on acting and story.

Video Game Animators



Cinematics

Most of the time, cinematic's are very similar to movie animation. You'll create an intro, cut scene, trailer, or short film for a game that will allow and require higher quality animation.

Sometimes it will involve acting. Sometimes it will be an epic action sequence. But you usually won't be limited by an in-game engine.



In-Game Cycles

This career path is just like it sounds. You focus on creating animations in-game that loop.

Combo moves for God of War anyone?! Resident Evil zombie attacks? Or parkour for Uncharted?!

The kind of cycles you could create are endless. What game style interests you most for animation?



Mocap (Motion Capture)

Games commonly use motion capture to save animation time.

But this Mocap is not perfect – it needs a lot of tweaking to make great animation. That's where the Mocap clean-up artist comes in.

Depending on the game studio this can be your entire job, or just part of your job as you also create cycles and cinematics.

Motion Graphics and Freelance Animators



Advertising

A lot of companies are using animation in their advertising now.

Its used in a variety of mediums from tv commercials, to social videos, and websites.

This opens all kinds of doors for work outside the typical animation studios.

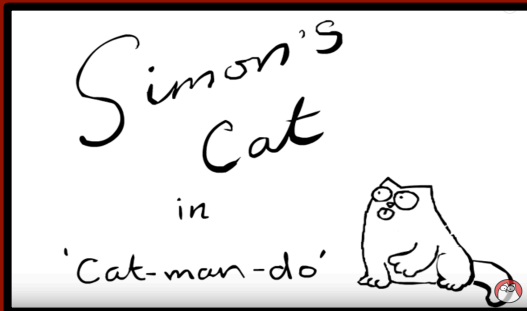


Ocassional Film/TV/Games

If you're a freelance and/or motion graphics animator ocassional you could land contract work in all kinds of projects.

Perhaps its a title sequence for a movie, a short clip from a kids cartoon show, or even short contract gig for a AAA video game.

Independent Filmmakers



Youtubers

If your passionate about making your own animated tv show, short, or series you could be an independent Youtube creator.

Simon's Cat is one successful example of just creating an animated series, but theres also Art and animation channels like [Draw with Jazza](#) if you wanted to create and share your process.

You'd can earn income from Ads, Affiliate Marketing, Brand deals and more. Not the easiest path to earning a living as an animator but its one of the most freeing.



Crowdfunding Films

There's no greater time to be alive for independent film making. Today, several films are being created thanks to crowdfunding like [Moons Milk](#).

Loving Vincent for instance was [kickstarted](#) and earned a 2018 Oscar nomination.

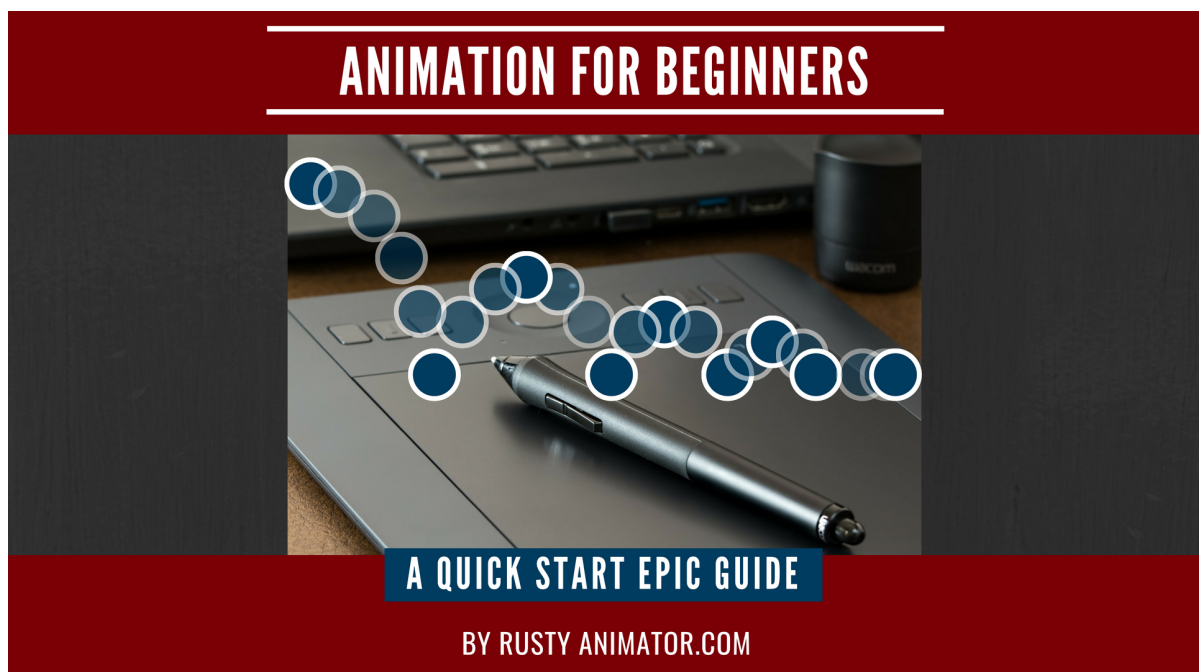
So you could use Kickstarter, Indiegogo, or a new platform to make the animation film you've always wanted.

Your Next Steps as a Beginner To Animation

By now, this epic guide should have given you a lot of insights on how to start going after your dream career.

And it's probably saved you several years and thousands of dollars of searching for the right answers.

If you feel the same way, would you pay it forward by sharing this guide?



Share it with a friend or anyone that you think might benefit from it too.

But you're probably also wondering - what's the next step for me? What skills do I need to become hire-able? What does the road ahead look like?

Checkout the journey from Beginner to Professional Animator:

