

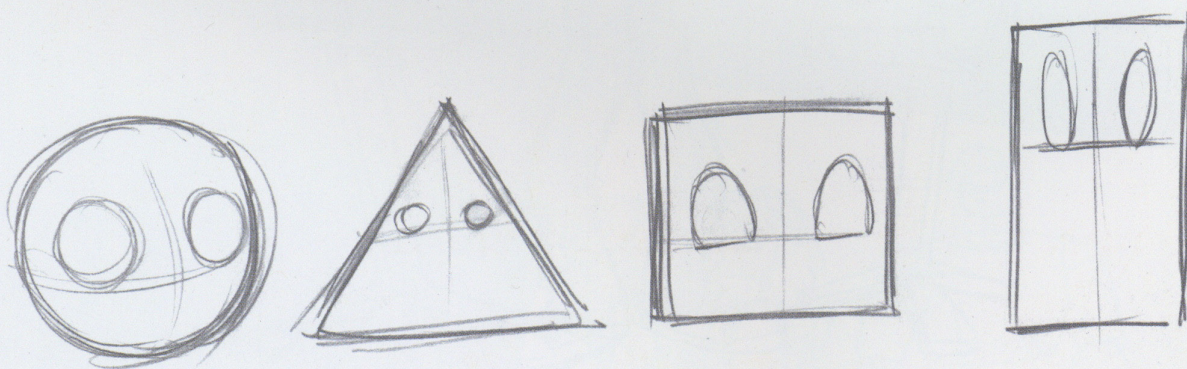
***START
WITH
SHAPES***

THE MEAT, POTATOES, AND VEGGIES OF CHARACTER DESIGN

Before we jump into designing our first character, let's go over some visual design basics that we will apply to our character designs. Shape, Size, and Variance are the basic elements of character design, what I like to call the "meat, potatoes, and veggies." They are the foundation of your design in its most basic form. Remember, though, that these are just a few of many design rules or concepts that will help you create a stronger character design. The more you learn, the stronger your drawings will be.

SHAPE

This is the meat. Is the head a circle or a square? The overall shape will speak for the character's personality even before he or she utters a word. Also, knowing how to break your character into basic shapes is key to recreating that same design from different angles and poses.

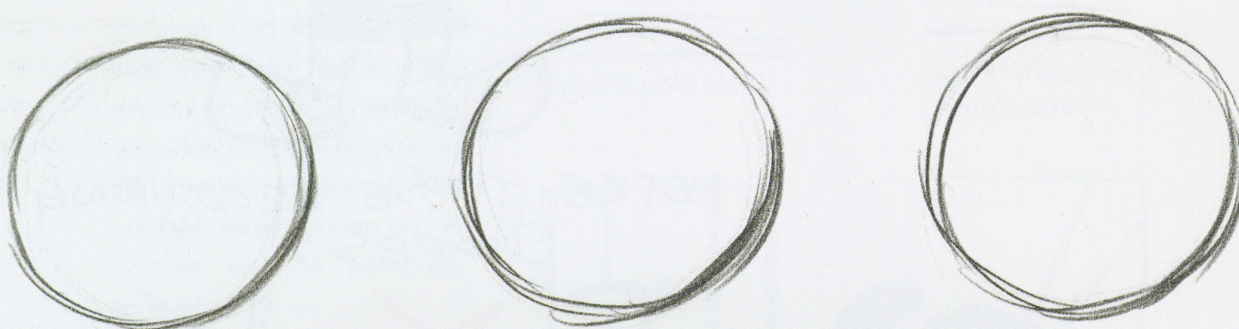


Simple shapes make simple characters . . .

BEGIN WITH THE BASIC SHAPES

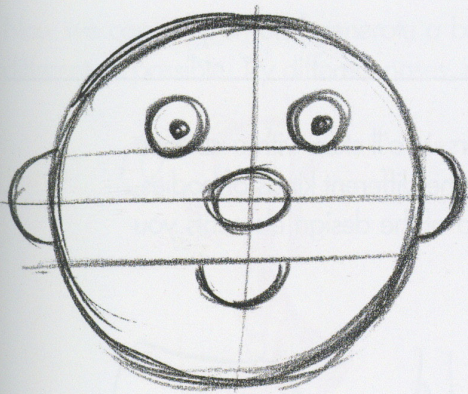
Now, let's road test shape, size, and variance, and look at how you can combine all three elements in the same design for maximum effect.

Let's start with three identical circles.



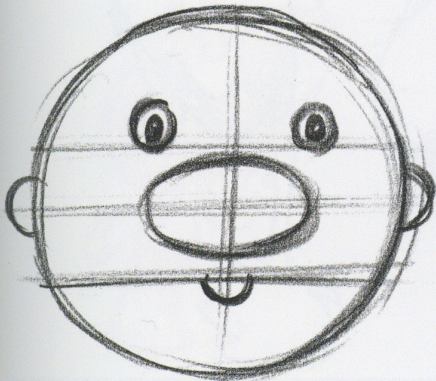
These are the basic shapes to work when constructing a character's face.





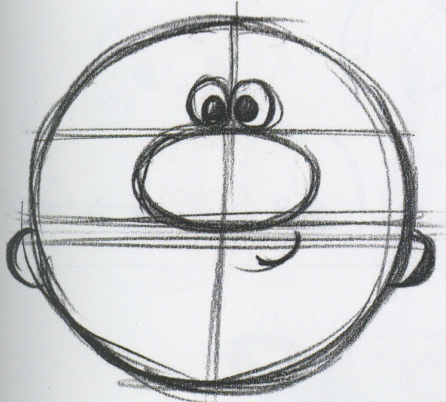
BLAH!

I place these basic shapes—an oval, two circles with dots inside of them, a curved line, and two half circles—into the circle, without paying any attention to the principles of size and variance. The result is as plain and basic as you can get. It's a character, but now a very interesting one!



BETTER!

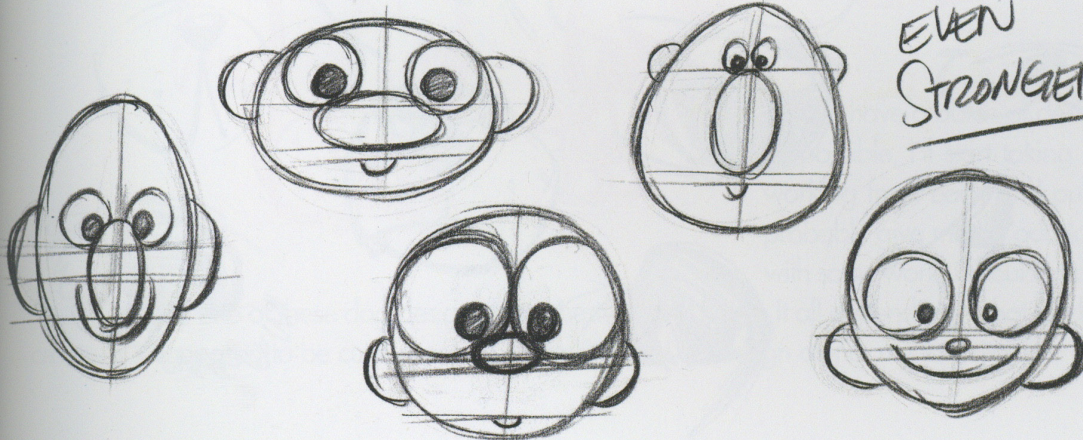
In the second circle, I take the same shapes and add the element of size, using small, medium, and large shapes to help make my character design stronger. This design is better and you can start to see a little personality shining through.



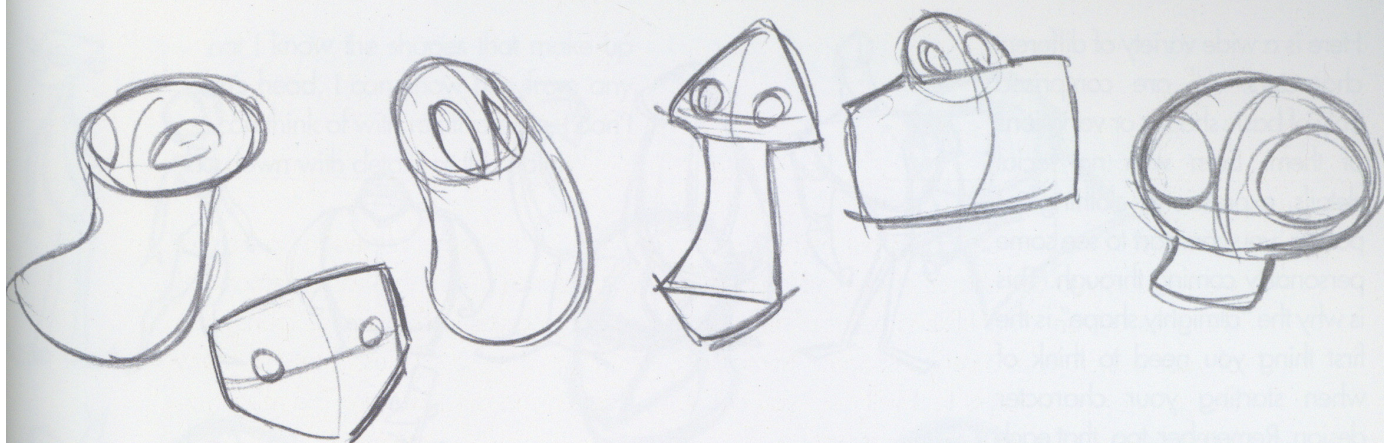
BEST!

In the last circle I add variance to the mix. Still using the same-sized shapes, I vary their spacing and placement—and make a huge difference in the design! This is the strongest design of the three because shape, size, and variance are working in harmony. The best designs, no matter how simple, work on all three levels.

EVEN STRONGER!



You never want to stop with your first success. Now I take all the same elements and apply even more variations.



... while combining shapes makes more complex characters. Some slightly more complex characters will be made up of altered shapes; that is, a shape composed from multiple shapes. Being able to recognize a shape's origin will help you re-create the character. The example below begins with (1) a basic oval shape as its base, but (2) slices off the front third at an angle to create a flat surface. Next, (3) a square shape with a flattened triangle on the bottom is added. Then, (4) the smaller, interior shapes are added and, finally, (5) the lines are rounded and varied as the details are added. Voila!

