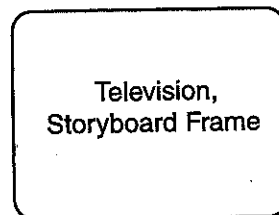
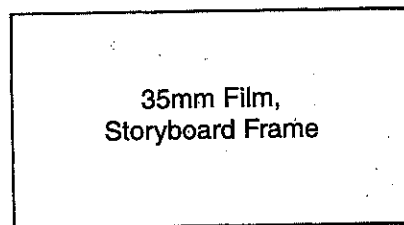


## Chapter Six

## THINKING VISUALLY

Since storyboards are, more or less, a series of drawings on a stationary sheet of paper, your goal as an artist must be to bring that paper to life. The series of storyboard pages you will create need to flow and keep up with the continuity and action of the scene. This means there must be movement in your storyboards, which is really the movement of the camera. In other words, every panel of your storyboard represents a particular frame as seen through the camera's point of view. Let's discuss this further.

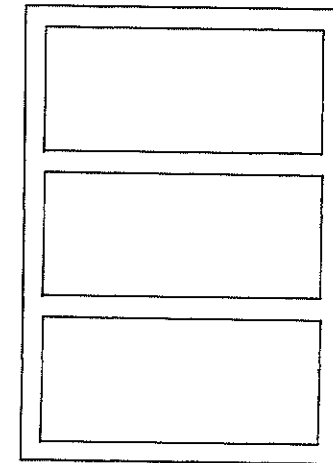
Beginning with the border of your first frame, think of the box you have drawn as the eye of the camera. Everything inside the box is what the camera sees. Everything outside is not. That's why it's necessary to draw your borders with a specific format in mind. For example, in television, the framed border is usually square. In film, a rectangular cinematic border is commonly used.



There are two basic approaches to drawing these borders. Some artists will sketch first, then frame the drawing later with the appropriate border. The second approach, which I find much easier and much more efficient, is to use a pre-drawn template. What I like to do is draw three correctly proportioned borders centered on a standard 8 1/2" x 11" sheet of white bond paper, creating the "template." Then I produce an ample supply of nice, clean copies from my original to draw on later.

I use this timesaving technique because when I am in meetings with the director or am requested to hammer out a quick storyboard sequence, I can grab a stack of my pre-drawn borders and immediately begin sketching. This eliminates the worry of drawing something too large or small or taking the time to frame everything at the end.

Remember, one of the keys to becoming a successful storyboard artist is to sketch and deliver quickly. Why not start out by being one step ahead?



Sample 3-panel storyboard template

After your borders have been properly positioned on the page, it's time to start thinking about the camera's point of view. Remembering that storyboards reflect movement and action, you first must decide what camera angles you will want to use and how the particular scene will develop and feel using the camera lens. Let me help you understand this theory by illustrating the concept through a detailed example.

The director has handed you a couple pages from a screenplay. Your job now is to storyboard the particular scene so the director and his team can discuss the filming prior to the scheduled shoot date. The scene reads as follows:

**EXT. MOVIE THEATRE, MAIN STREET – AFTERNOON**

A statuesque brick building on this sleepy little street in this sleepy little mid-Western town. It's cold out. As people stroll by we can see their breath.

A fat-tired bicycle rests against glass cases advertising coming attractions. Now playing: "OLD MAN AND THE SEA."

Suddenly, the front door of the theatre BURSTS OPEN and MILTON WHITEHURST, 12, sprints outside and hops on his bike.

**ANGLE**

At the edge of town, Milton takes a sharp turn and what he sees makes him suddenly slam on his brakes—

EMILE, a kid from school. Big. Tough. Wears an oversized TOOTH on a chain around his neck. Blocking Milton's path with a bike of his own. A face-off—

EMILE  
(ominous)  
C'mere yah little hoser.

Emile peels tape from his handlebars, and as he slowly moves toward Milton, he wraps his knuckles with it like a boxer.

MILTON  
(standing brave)  
I'm a lover, not a fighter.

Emile nods. Then hits Milton square in the nose. One shot.

EMILE  
Yer a hoser.

**ANGLE**

Clutching his bleeding nose, Milton watches Emile ride away.

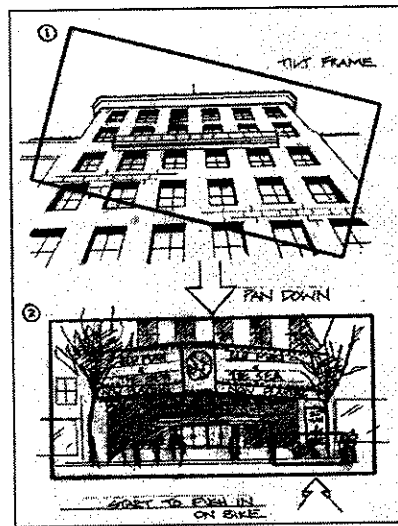
MILTON  
(to himself)  
a hoser and a lover.

After reading the scene, you quickly get an overall sense of what is visually transpiring in the story. A kid leaves the movie theatre, jumps on his bike, sees a bully from school, challenges him, gets punched in the nose and the scene ends with the bully riding off on his bicycle. Sounds simple enough. Now, you need to add the visual presence to the scripted words. For this, you'll need to put on your thinking cap to decide how best to draw the sequence of panels, so not only you, but also the director will get a feel for how the scene should look when filmed.

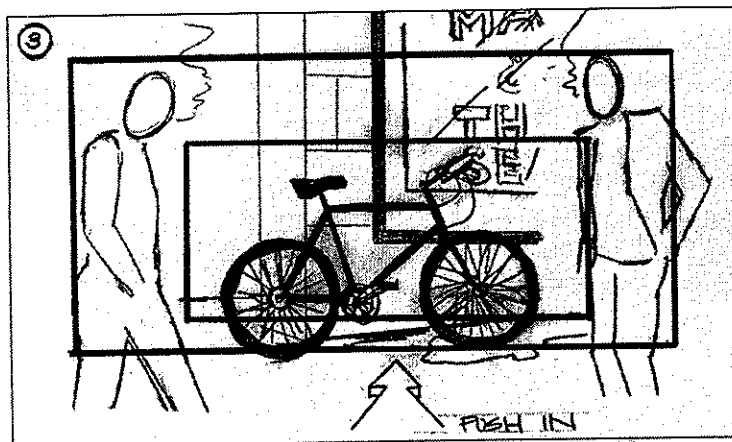
Starting from the beginning of the scene, it looks like we have an establishing shot so the audience can get a feel of the setting. There's a brick building and some people milling about in the cold weather, which is evident by their breath.

Here, you may start with an aerial shot looking down on the town, followed by a zoom in on the people walking through. On the other hand, you may want to start on the roof of the brick building, then crane down to the street, picking up the people walking by. Finally, you may want to start on the ground, look up at the building and then slowly pull back, widening the shot so the people walk right into frame.

Speaking earlier with the director about this sequence, you're informed that, due to budget constraints, there is no arrangement for aerial or helicopter photography or a crane for the opening sequence. So it looks like your first panel will begin with the camera down low looking up at the building, with the intention to widen and tilt down catching the people in action. To help get the idea across, you'll add some arrows to indicate the camera and atmosphere movement. Presto! There's the first shot on paper.



Moving forward to the next shot, you have a couple of options. You can keep the focus first on the people and then, after a beat, zoom past them and in on the bicycle and movie sign, giving a nice transition into the theatre. Or, you can move from a close-up of the people to an extreme close-up of their cold breath, having the camera dissolve into it, and then fade up to the movie sign while widening to catch the bicycle. Both options are nice, but given the simplicity of the scene, you choose the first option. You also throw in some arrows to help with camera movement.



Continuing, we now have Milton running out the front door of the theatre, sprinting and jumping on his bicycle. Since this is fast-moving action, perhaps we start low with the camera as well as a close-up of the doors getting thrown open for dramatic effect, then pull back and pan, track or dolly with Milton, also using arrows, as he runs over to his bike and hops on.



And so on...

You can see the importance of the visual thought process and the need to be familiar with various camera angles, movements, and equipment as well as having insight into what the director may be visualizing.

In the first few panels, the following camera angle options were mentioned: Low angle, pan, wide-shot, zoom, close-up, track and dolly. You should really be

familiar with the various angles and camera movements used. It might also be a good idea for you to get out those comic books. Flipping through the pages, you'll discover that the many angles and movements used in comics are very similar to how I use them to help me storyboard.

In addition, if you later find yourself storyboarding a sequence and know from your prior meetings with the director that there's no plan to hire a helicopter or crane, for example, for a particular sequence, then don't put it in your sketches. Instead, find out from the director and cinematographer what equipment might be used, and then sketch creatively and visually using those parameters.

When you begin storyboarding, whether for a production designer or director, you discover that no matter what the scene calls for or what action is taking place, people are always involved. Whether the main actor is in a fight scene or a crowd of people are in the background, people are involved. So if you're unable to draw people, your boards will turn out like that plain, boring sandwich that no one wants.

The good news is that there are several ways to quickly teach yourself how to draw people and draw them effectively.

Before I began drawing storyboards, I couldn't sketch people at all. My drawings were better than basic stick figure drawings, but far from a uniform body-type of sketch. I would find that either the people's heads I drew were three times the size of the body or one leg was two feet longer than the other; and no, I wasn't working on a monster movie where this would be deemed acceptable. So I began to teach myself how to draw the human figure properly, proportionally and how to do it fast. As you now know, speed is equally as important as conveying the visual story.

The first plan of action I embarked upon was to gather as many visual aids as I could on body composition. I started with a visit to local library, one that had an ample supply of art books.

I browsed the aisles that had books on the human body, particularly picture books. These can be found in sections which specifically pertain to the human body, or they can be found in the art section. I thumbed through those books and looked for people in various positions or forms of motion.

There was even a series of books which included virtually every angle of the human head and body for adults and children, male and female. Every possible angle that you could imagine was displayed in these books with a photograph of an actual human model — standing, turning, walking, running, sitting, bending, dressing, kicking, falling and

hitting. I highly recommend you get your hands on illustrative books like these and use them as a visual reference to help you draw people.

Another great reference source is the local comic book store, where hundreds of comics line the shelves. They contain page after page of people in action. Similar to storyboards, comic books are nothing more than visual stories displayed in various pictures.

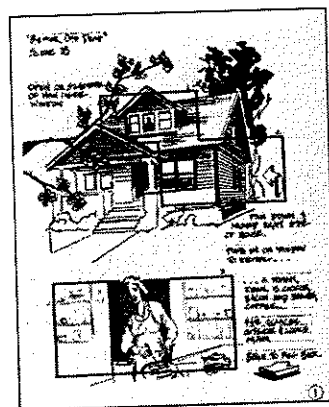
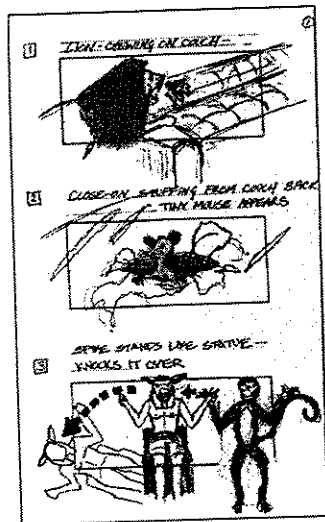
Pick up several comic books and go home and study them. Notice the different angles the artist uses. Notice the various shading, which reflects a certain mood or atmosphere the artist is trying to convey. Notice the particular expressions on the faces. Notice how the pictures tell the story, not the words. Remember your job as a storyboard artist is not to create a written story, but rather, a visual picture for everyone to understand.

## LAYING OUT THE PAGE

Since we're on the topic of storyboard design, let's take a minute to understand correct storyboard layout.

When I started in the film business, the very first production designer I worked with preferred storyboards on 11"x 17" paper with three rectangle panels per page. Each rectangle was roughly 4 1/2" x 9". It wasn't until after storyboarding numerous sequences that I later discovered my own style and dimensions that I found easier to use. Since time is always of the essence in storyboarding, I found that sketching three large panels per page was just too time consuming. When I worked as a storyboard artist for the Paramount film, *The Temp*, in 1992, I met a fellow storyboard artist who had a great approach. He was hired to storyboard complex action sequences, which required 15 to 30 pages of drawings. He would draw five to six panels per page and get them on a standard 8 1/2" x 11" sheet of paper. Sometimes he would even draw a panel as small as 1" x 2".

I quickly modeled my style after his, because I liked how he laid out his panels with "time of the essence" in mind. Besides, why draw more than you have to?



Various styles of storyboards

If you are going to be successful, I believe that you must study and compare your work to that of others in your field. Like watching tapes of Michael Jordan play basketball or a great chef preparing a tantalizing dinner, you will quickly pick up pointers if you continually watch and absorb what the professionals do.

Don't panic if you don't have the luxury of knowing any storyboard artists. Contact your local storyboard/artist union or agencies which represent storyboard artists or production illustrators. Have them send you samples of various storyboards so you can get a feel for how the finished product looks. If the agency questions you, just say that you're interested in hiring one or two of their artists and you would like to see their work.

Another great resource to help you understand storyboard layout and design is books. Yes, that's right, back to the library or bookstores. The books I have found most useful and informative are those based on popular movies. For example: Bram Stoker's Dracula, Star Wars or Raiders of the Lost Ark. All these movies have great picture books with excellent sections on storyboards.

You can even get several educational books that are full of sample storyboards for you to browse and study. One great one that comes to mind is Film Directing - Shot by Shot, published by Michael Wiese Productions. This book, which I used as a guide when learning how to draw storyboards, has plenty of sample storyboards, not to mention tips on camera angles and visualization techniques.

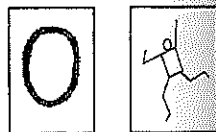
Stock up on plenty of these reference books and storyboard samples that you can thumb through to get a feel for how other storyboard artists create their boards. Not only will you gain valuable information, but you will also start to get an idea of how storyboards are drawn and how they all serve the purpose of telling a visual story through pictures.

## FIGURE DRAWING

After thoroughly educating yourself, it's finally time to put the wheels in motion. Time to get yourself lots of blank white paper or a stack of your pre-drawn storyboard frames and preferably No. 2 pencils. Of course, don't forget the erasers. Lock yourself in a room and start practicing sketching people.

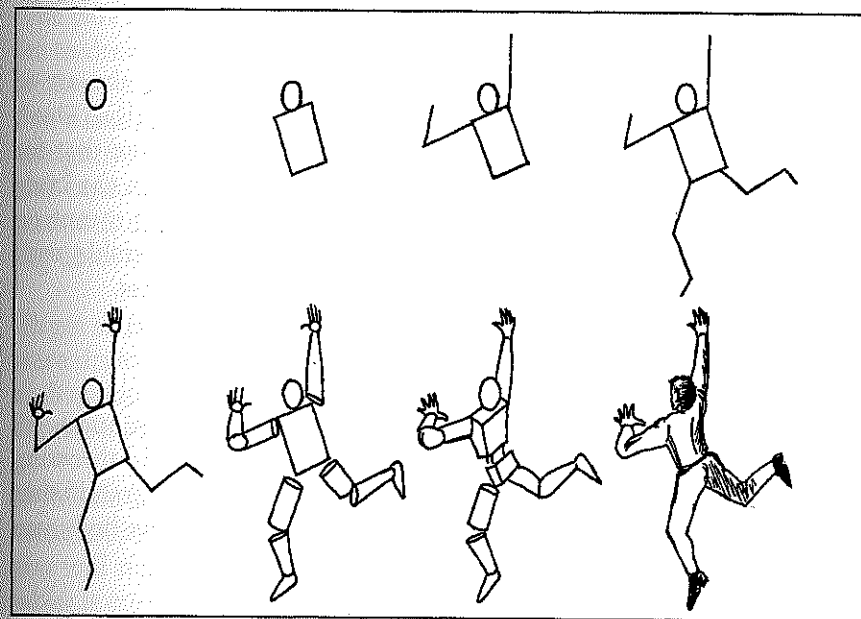
To help you get started, let's pick a body in motion from either a page in a comic book or another picture book, demonstrating a body doing something. Set that drawing next to you and study it for a minute. Next, grab your pencil and start by thinking of that human body you are looking at as if it were in four sections. You have the head, the body or torso and the arms and legs.

Now, let's start with the head by representing it on your paper as an oval. So far, so good? Next, look at the picture from the book again and add the body by representing it on your paper as a rectangle. Finally, look at your subject again and add the two arms and legs just as if you were drawing a stick figure.



Okay, now put your pencil down and look at your drawing. How does the basic shape of the body look? Is the head too big? Too small? Is the body or torso too long? Too short? How about the arms and legs? Are they bending in the right direction? Are the arms the same length? How about the legs? Once you get the basic shapes down, then you can go back and start filling in the rest. For example, to add the hands, start by drawing a little circle at the end of your stick arm representing the palm. Then add five little lines indicating the fingers and thumb. Fill in the arm and leg lines with long, narrow cylindrical shapes. Angle the rectangle of the torso by giving it a wider area in the upper body and narrower space at the waist, with a smaller rectangle indicating the hips. See, you're drawing a basic body shape in action already.

Now, keep practicing. Remember, determination and discipline are the ultimate keys to storyboard success. Keep finding new angles from your books to draw, and draw them. Start by using the simple line approach like we just did, and then go back and fill in the rest.



Becoming a great storyboard artist means being able to sketch anything and sketch it fast. Storyboarding isn't like a fine arts class where eyebrows and fingernails are a necessity.

A director wants to see how the scene will appear visually and what angles are best suited for the camera. He or she is not interested in whether the person you draw has any hair or forgot to put on their pants, unless those two items are of great importance to the scene. What the director wants to see is the angle of the person you drew and how the person is represented in the scene.

For instance, if the director wants to storyboard a “hit-and-run” sequence, the areas of interest in your storyboard panels are going to be the relationship of the person that gets hit to the car on the street. The director’s focus will be on the action and how the person and the car interact. No one cares if your person is missing an ear or a car is missing a door handle.

The point is to spend your time learning and practicing the art of accurately drawing people — in various positions — in motion. Don’t spend time on detail. That was a big mistake of mine. Save that for when you do want to become a fine artist. Until then, get the body language down and make the body uniform in shape. That means no more balloon heads or pirate legs. Once you get comfortable with drawing, you can practice speeding up the sketching process.

## ADDING THE OBJECTS

Once you have sketched hundreds of various bodies in motion, it’s time to put those bodies together with other objects. A child throwing food, a woman riding a bicycle, a man mowing the lawn, a grandfather pushing his wheelchair. Whatever the situation may be, the body you draw will always be in some form of motion.

A director or production designer won’t hire you to draw ten pages of two people sitting on a couch talking to one another. They’re hiring you to help them visualize complex scenes so they can better convey their thought process to the rest of the production crew.

The purpose of storyboards is to understand the action of a scene. Remember that.

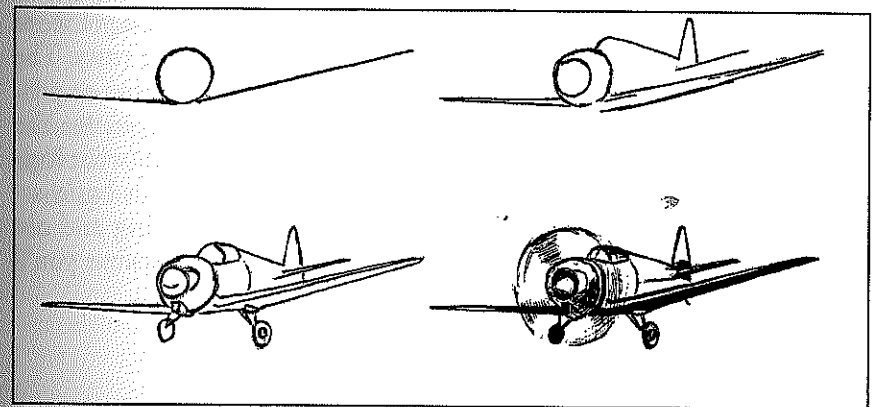
As you know, objects are everywhere around us. The quickest way to learn how to draw objects is to choose an object to draw and then find a picture of it, just like we do with the human body. If you want to draw bicycles, get a magazine on bicycles. If you want to draw cars, get a magazine on cars.

There’s virtually a magazine for everything you want to draw and magazine’s are cheap and chock-full of pictures. Have access to the Internet? Surfing the “net” on a computer allows you to search for literally any object you want and within seconds find a picture of it.

The part I enjoy most about drawing objects is that they are much easier to draw than people. Why? Because objects are, for the most part, stationary. They don’t twist, they don’t sit, they don’t run and they don’t kick. If you have to draw a lawnmower or bicycle, it’s a pretty straightforward task. There are usually two matching sides with a top and bottom. They don’t have the multitude of angles, movements, positions and expressions that a person has. To me, that makes drawing objects easier.

To get started drawing objects, follow the same steps we used when we were drawing people. Begin with basic lines until you have the general shape on paper. Then go back and fill in those lines to add body and depth to your sketch.

If you find later that you still can’t get your sketches to resemble the actual object, I have a little secret in overcoming this obstacle. What you will need is some tracing paper and a window. Forget the light table; it costs too much.



Find the picture you want to sketch and tape that picture to the windowpane so the light penetrates through. You can also use a lampshade to accomplish the same technique, especially when drawing at night. Next, grab your tracing paper and pencil and outline the object from the magazine.

When you are finished, remove the photograph, tape your tracing of the object to the window and then place a blank sheet of paper or your pre-drawn storyboard page over your tracing. Now, all that's left for you to do is trace your penciled object to your new page.

It's that easy. By the way, to answer the question, "Is this cheating?" I say, "No, it isn't." After all, didn't you just do all the pencil work yourself?

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

After spending plenty of quality time sketching page after page of various objects, from frisbees to telephones, it's time to put both person and object together, with the end result being a series of storyboard panels, which will convey the action of a scene. Of course, this will come from lots of practice, determination and discipline.

Furthermore, I recommend that you make yourself a schedule, which allows you to draw at least one hour a day. This will help you get more comfortable with drawing and it will keep you from getting rusty. The last thing you want to happen is to get a call from a director or production designer when you haven't drawn anything in six months. For some reason, if you find that you can't keep to this schedule (what happened to determination and discipline?), then enroll in a basic art class, but a class in which the primary focus is on sketching and not lecturing. Then, you'll be highly motivated to sketch, because you'll be paying for the class.

Okay, time for another helpful hint in putting an action sequence together using both human figures and objects. When I was working on the movie, "Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls," the director asked me to storyboard a scene in which Ace Ventura (played by Jim Carrey) was chasing the villain in a giant monster truck through the jungle. The scene played out to where Ace ended up throwing a cigarette lighter out of his window, which landed on the villain's lap causing the villain to crash into a tree.

The problem was, I didn't know the first thing about monster trucks other than that they had really big tires. In fact, I had never seen one of those trucks up close. I had never drawn one. I'd never had the desire to draw one.

But now I was on location in South Carolina and the director was standing right in front of me asking that I storyboard the scene with the monster truck. Yikes! It obviously was my wake-up call to quickly teach myself how to draw the scene, without any time to spare.

Rather than panic, I first visualized in my head how I wanted the monster truck scene to look, just like we discussed in the chapter "Thinking Visually." I thought about the various angles I wanted to use. I thought about the close-up shots and the wide-angle shots. I thought about the mood. And, of course, I thought about the action of the scene, obviously the most important consideration.

This is another reason why I urge you to pick up several books on camera angles or enroll in a cinema class which teaches basic directing skills. It will help you open your mind and explore different ways of looking at something.



By making yourself more creative and expressive, you will add much more "punch" to your storyboards, giving your work more unique angles and movement the director may have never considered.

After a good half-hour of brainstorming the monster truck scene, I started by grabbing a stack of my pre-drawn panels. Then I wrote down inside each panel a brief description of the picture I wanted to draw. For example, Panel 1: Wide shot of monster truck chasing villain's car through bushes. Panel 2: Close-up of villain's eyes expressing fear. Panel 3: Low angle of Ace closing in.

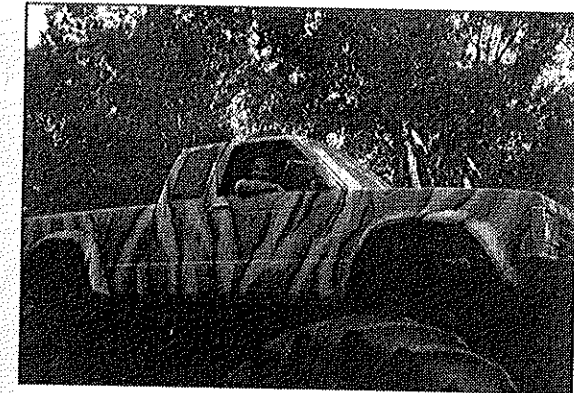
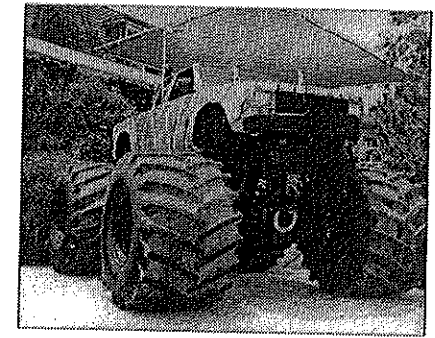
I did this until I got to the last panel, which was the villain's car smashing into a tree. Now, all I needed was the visual reference material to draw from, just as we did when we were learning to draw human bodies and objects.

Using a friend of mine from the film set, I quickly had him get into the monster truck which sat idle in the parking lot. I had him pretend he was driving. I had his hand shifting the gear stick. I had his finger push in the cigarette lighter. I had him pretend he was throwing the lighter out the window. And the entire time he was performing all these different actions, I was taking pictures of him at various angles using my Polaroid camera.

There is always a Polaroid available on a movie set, but I highly recommend that you go out and get yourself one.

If I wanted to capture a low angle of Ace Ventura driving, I crouched down low and took a picture of my friend in the truck. If I wanted a close-up of Ace's finger pressing the cigarette lighter, I got inside the truck and snapped a shot of my friend performing that activity. The great thing about using Polaroid cameras is that you don't have to wait for the film to develop. If the picture or angle, for some reason, doesn't turn out the way I envision, I just take another. I repeat this procedure until I feel I have all the shots I need for the sequence. Then I

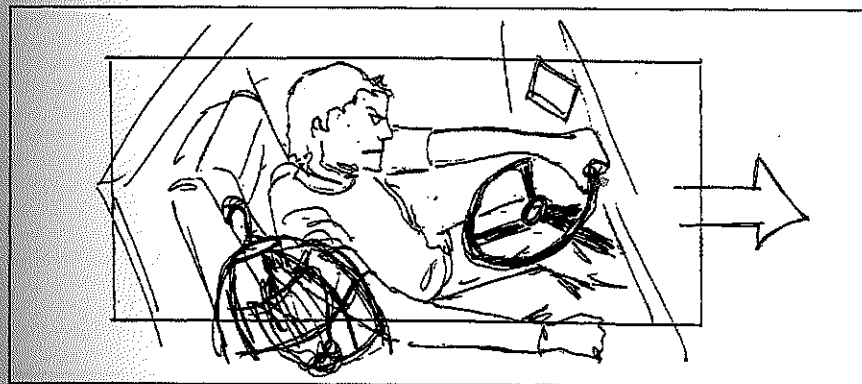
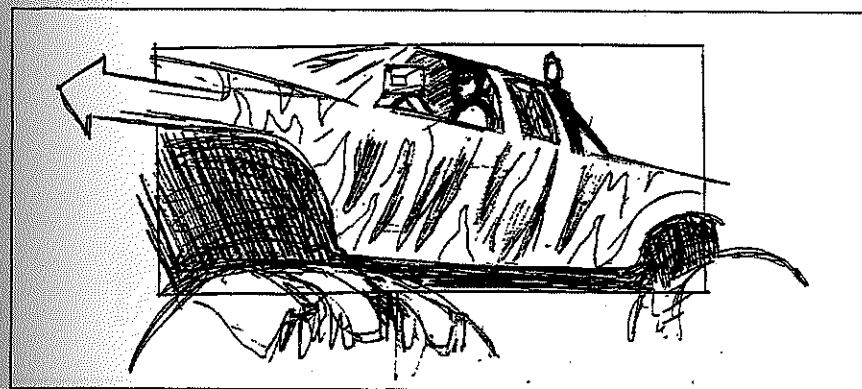
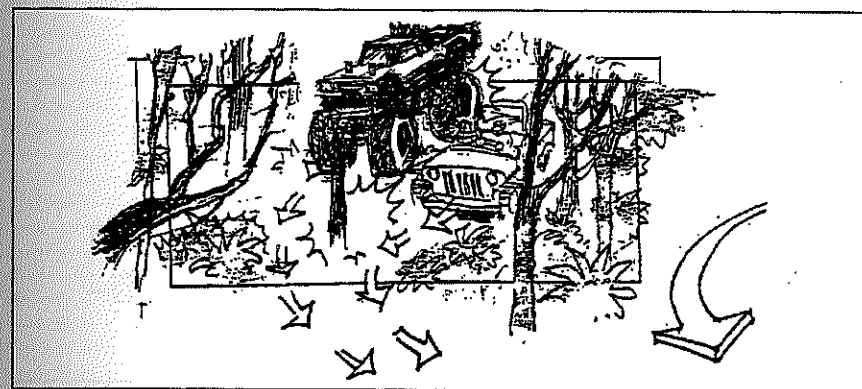
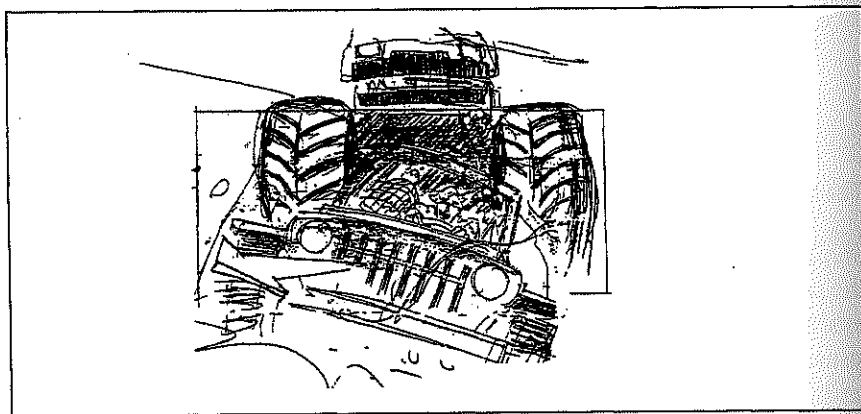
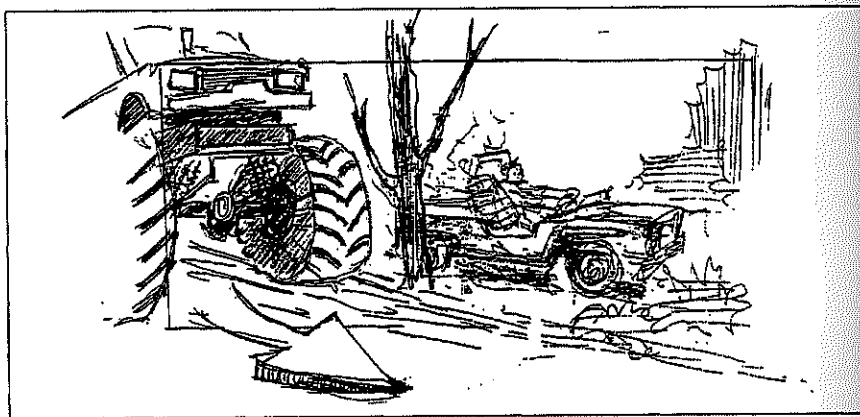
end the quick photo shoot and go back to my drawing table to lay out the pictures.

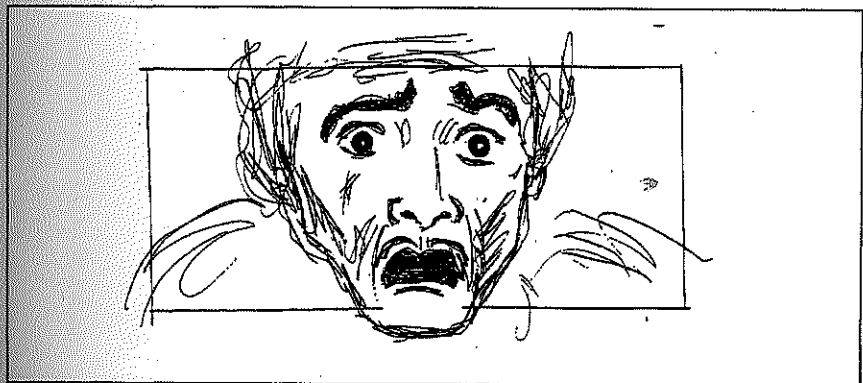
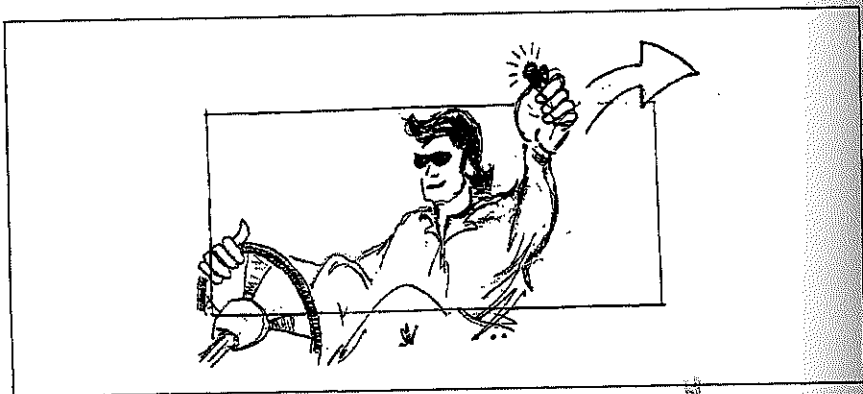
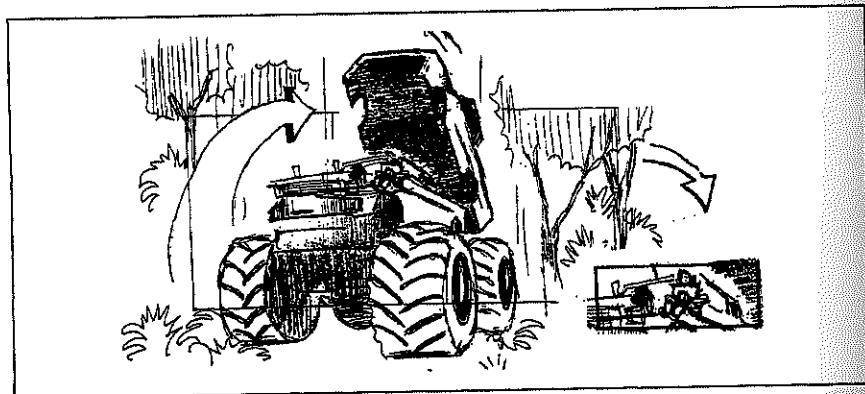
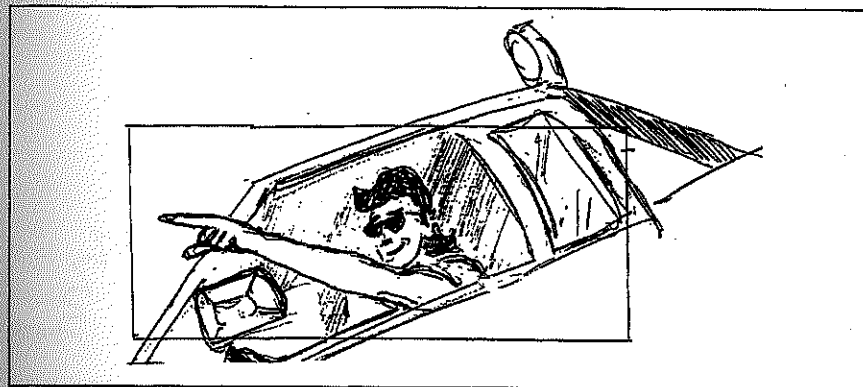
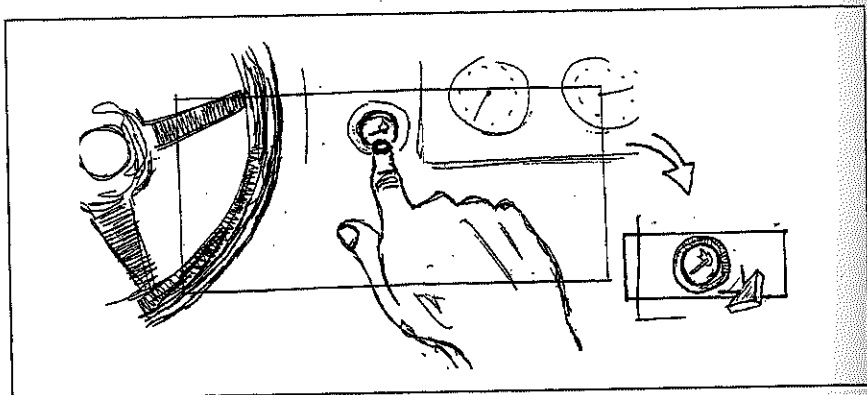


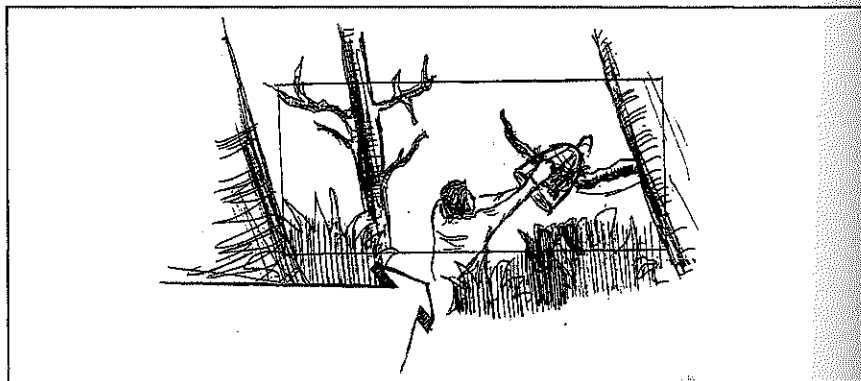
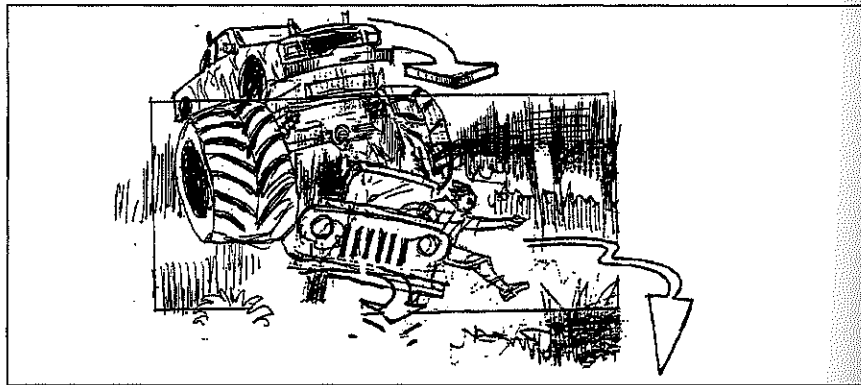
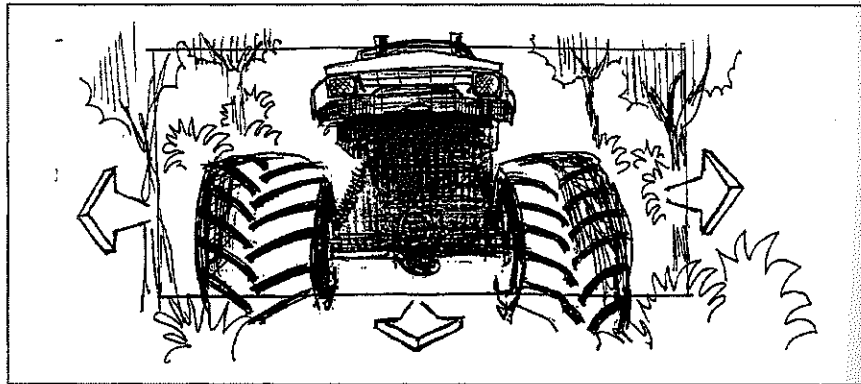
The monster truck from *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls*

Stepping back from the table, I smiled knowing I had already finished the sequence the director wanted. I had the various angles, from wide establishing to close-ups, and I had a series of photographs that told a visual story of the action that was taking place. Now, it was just a matter of merely transferring those still pictures onto paper.

And how did I do that? That's right. Because I had been duly diligent and spent my earlier days learning how to sketch people and objects using visual references as a guide, all that was left was sketching and adding some really big tires to the truck and my final storyboards were finished! Not bad for having never drawn a monster truck or car chase scene before!







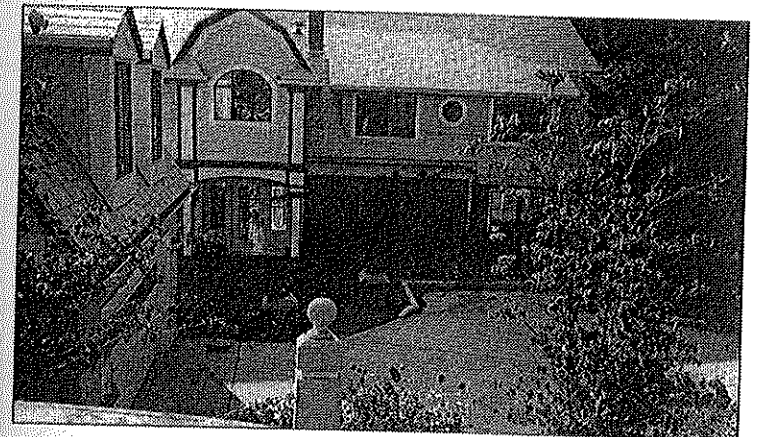
## TRICKS OF THE TRADE

ks and tips that you will discover will come by way of on-the-job training. As you work in the industry, you will become familiar with what works and what doesn't. You will also become more efficient, cost-effective and timesaving, and in general, make your life as a storyboard artist easier.

eral,

I have already shared with you a few of the "tricks" I discovered over the years. To help you remember, they are:

- **Get and use a Polaroid camera.** When you are asked to draw a particular angle, person in motion or particular object, let the camera help you. Rather than draw from memory or recall what something looked like, go out and take a picture (or pictures) of what you need and how it appears at a variety of angles. Then all you have to do is draw from the pictures. It's easier, quicker and much more accurate. You may even want to photograph an entire sequence if you're having trouble envisioning the layout.



Snapping a photo on set