

## MAKING CHARACTER SHEETS

A character sheet is a specific industry-standard format that communicates the design of a character. It is used to introduce potential investors to a cast of characters, tell us a little bit about their personalities and relationships, and give us a general sense of what the character looks like and how they might move or behave.

These Character Sheets are used in virtually every entertainment field from game design to animation. Though they can be used in a variety of fields, all character sheets contain roughly the same information:

1. A full-body, full-color illustration of the character in a relatively relaxed pose. This should be the largest drawing of the character and give us a good idea of proportion and how the character will look when they are in a neutral emotional state.
2. One or two additional full body drawings that might show the character in different poses, sitting, or wearing unique costumes or interacting with props. These are typically called Secondary Poses and are used to show the character in a different context.
3. 3-6 expressions. These are drawings of the character's head and shoulders, demonstrating a range of emotional states. These drawings do not have to be in color and are often used to show animators what specific emotions the character is capable of achieving and how the design will change when the character is in these emotional states.
4. The name of your character and a short, written description of the character's personality. This should be no longer than a short paragraph, but should give us a quick explanation of the character's role in your story.

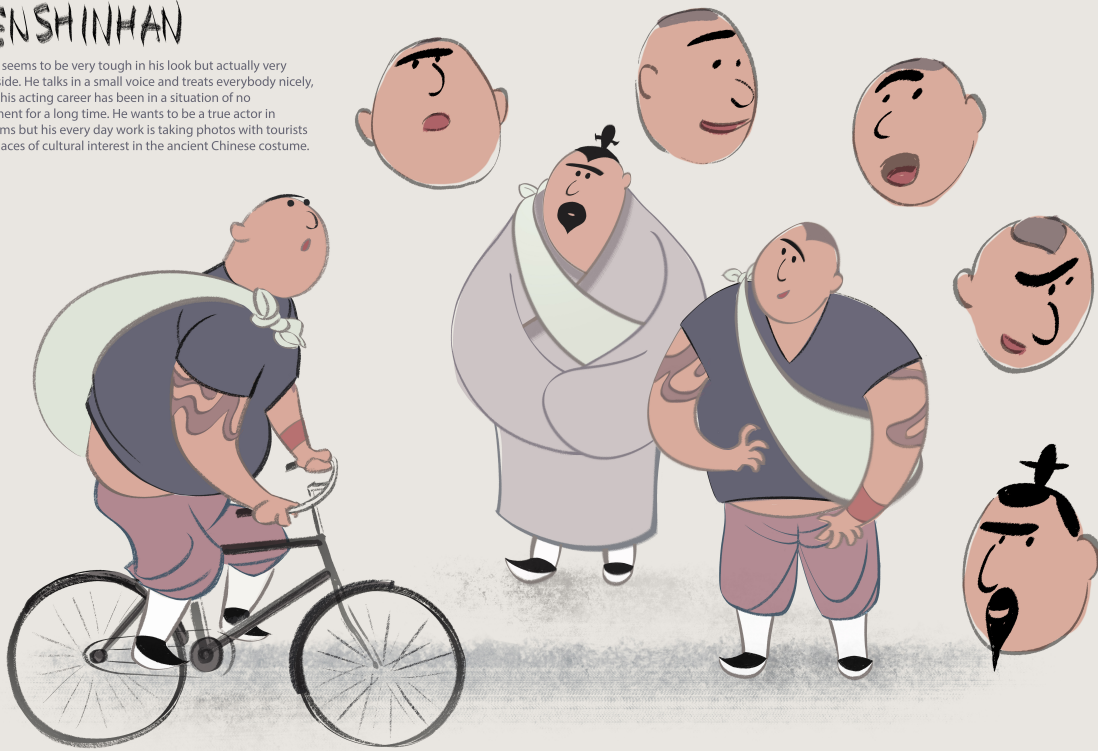
In addition to these elements, some character sheets will also contain the following :

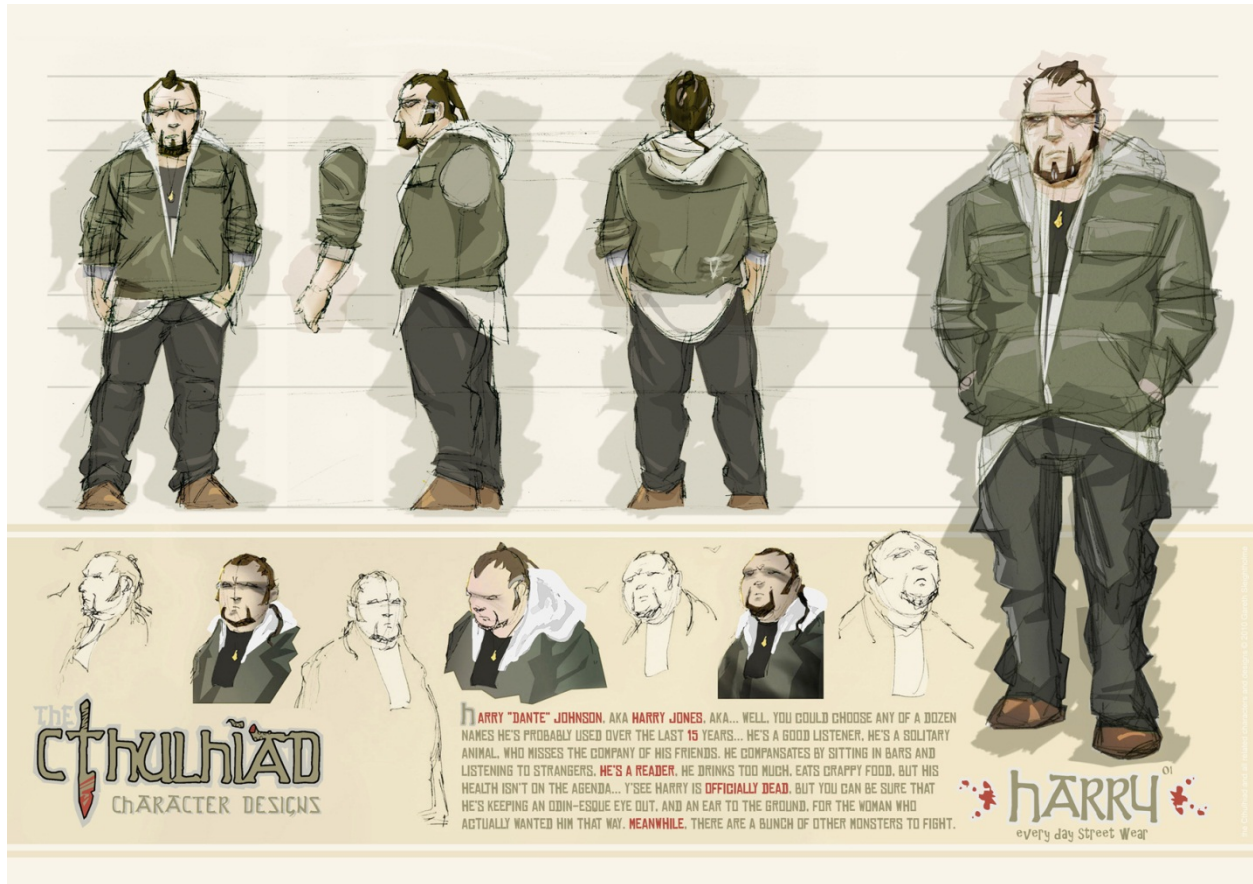
5. Character turnarounds – showing the character from front, side, and back view so that we can clearly see proportion and detail. This is not mandatory and is often omitted from traditional character sheets because they character may not appear to have much personality when standing in this turnaround pose.
6. Color swatches. Samples of the colors used to make the character. This, too, is optional as we will be able to plainly see the colors in the full-body color illustration.

Below are some examples of how these character sheets might look.

# TENSHINHAN

the actor, seems to be very tough in his look but actually very gentle inside. He talks in a small voice and treats everybody nicely, however, his acting career has been in a situation of no improvement for a long time. He wants to be a true actor in feature films but his every day work is taking photos with tourists visiting places of cultural interest in the ancient Chinese costume.





Again, the sheets must contain:

- At least one full body illustration of your character in a pose. Full color.
- At least 3 expressions showing the character's bust and head in various poses.
- A single paragraph describing the character, titled with the character's name.
- At least 2 secondary drawings that show the character in different full body poses.

## HOW TO BEGIN DESIGNING A CHARACTER

In addition to formatting, another thing that all of our industries share is the strategy for creating compelling, well-designed characters. The best way to begin working on a character design is to begin with silhouettes.



Notice that you can tell a great deal about each of the above characters simply by looking at the silhouette. The characters' attitudes are readable, even without the detail pass. Notice the use of repeating shapes in many of the characters. Working in silhouette before adding detail helps ensure that the design will be consistent from head to toe and that the character will appear unified. Notice that Mickey mouse is a series of circles. Look at how Marge and Bart Simpson are basically the same head-shape, flipped upside-down and then horizontally. Notice that the Pink

Panther looks like a musical note.



This works with more realistically proportioned characters as well. Once the silhouette is readable and presents a strong style, the detail will only help accentuate that style. However, detail will not save a bad silhouette.



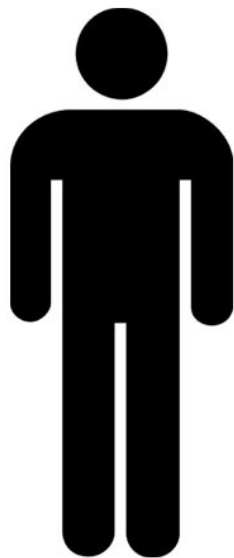
We also want to stay loose because a silhouette can be interpreted in different ways. A shape like this might be filled in with detail in different areas.



We don't want to 'lock on' to an idea for detail too quickly or we might miss an opportunity to do something unexpected. Once you get a few silhouettes that you like, try allocating detail in different ways and then decide which is the most effective.



We really want to avoid designs that have boring silhouettes, or designs which create characters with interesting heads, but with boring bodies.



This is what we want to avoid! A standard 'men's room' style silhouette. This is not expressive. If I add an interesting head to this character, the body is still dull and boring.



In this case, the design doesn't carry through the silhouette. Below, you will see additional examples of poorly incorporated detail. All of the silhouettes below are the same! We cannot "save" these by adding detail because they are fundamentally flawed.



Instead, think about ways the silhouette can communicate the character's personality and predilections **from head to toe**.



This is a much more successful silhouette so, once detail is added, the results are more unified and impressive. This works with simple, cartoony characters as well.

