



→ FLASH

ILLUSTRATE IN FLASH

It may not be your first choice of illustration program, but *Flash* has some unique vector drawing tools that will change the way you work. Trevor Van Meter reveals the skills you need to use this new approach to best effect

→ If you want to create great illustrations, you must have a solid foundation to work from, and this foundation should be built on many things. For example, you must have discipline, ability, technique and, most importantly, your own ideas and perception.

The good news is that everyone has their own perception – a style, a voice, and a unique view on the world. This tutorial is not about your perception or your style. Instead, this tutorial outlines the techniques I use when I build an illustration in *Flash*.

These are suggestions that may spark an idea, or a new way of thinking when you approach your next illustration. By no means is this tutorial suggesting this is the only way to create a vector illustration. This is just the way I choose to do it.

One of the advantages of using the vector format is that it is fairly easy to make revisions to a work in progress. Changing colours or rearranging a composition, or even scaling an illustration, is easy. The advantages of working specifically in *Flash* are the tools it offers, which have a unique approach to handling raw vector shapes.

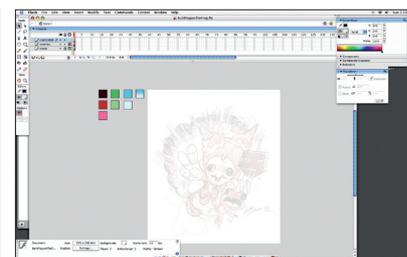
In this tutorial you will learn how to arrange and stack simple shapes to create more complex shapes, creating some custom shapes with the Line and Selection tools. You will not be using the Bezier tools to form these. This is one of the most unique features in *Flash* – the ability to manipulate, crop, and cut raw vector shapes without the use of Bezier curves.



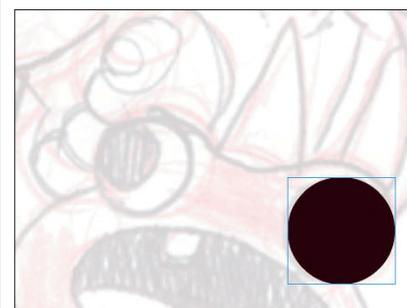
1 Before you start, you'll need a general idea, concept or theme for your illustration. My first thought was 'Cake and Ice Cream', so I created a couple of characters based on this – The Cake and Ice Cream Kid and Yogurt the Frog. Do a couple of sketches and pick the one you like best.



2 You can now use this sketch as a loose guide. It is helpful to keep in mind that you can't think of everything when you start. Most of the time, I have ideas while I work. These are valid ideas that should not be thrown out because they were not in your initial sketch, so leave some elbow room for changes and improvements while you work.



3 On this month's cover CD you will find a *Flash* file named BuildYogurtTheFrog fla. The sketch has already been imported to the stage, and converted into a symbol. The alpha has been taken down to about 20 per cent, so you can use the sketch as a ghost reference if you wish. The selected colours are just suggestions, so feel free to mix and match your own.



4 Now think of the basic shapes that will make up Yogurt the Frog. Start with the eyes. Select the Oval tool in your Tool palette, select the No Fill swatch for the stroke colour and then choose the darkest colour for your fill. Hold down Shift and pull a circle that is about the same size as the right eye in the sketch. Group the circle you have just pulled.

DOWNLOAD



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Click here to download the files you need to complete this tutorial

TIME NEEDED

3-4 hours

INFO



Van Beater (aka Trevor Van Meter) creates

web-based games and interactive experiences under two different monikers. His 'real world' clients include CitiBank, HBO, Red Bull, Hasbro, Lego, Mazda and Verizon, among many others. Find out more about his range of styles at www.VanBeater.com or www.TrevorVanMeter.com.

Tutorial by Trevor Van Meter
www.vanbeater.com

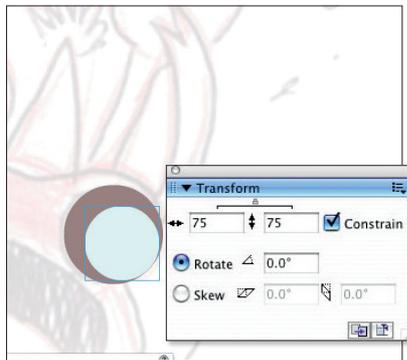




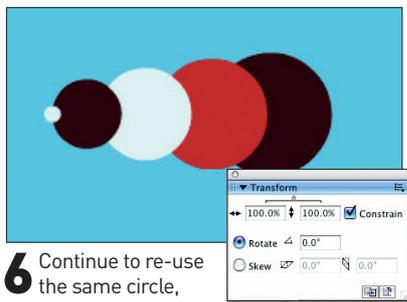
FLASH

LIMIT YOUR COLOURS

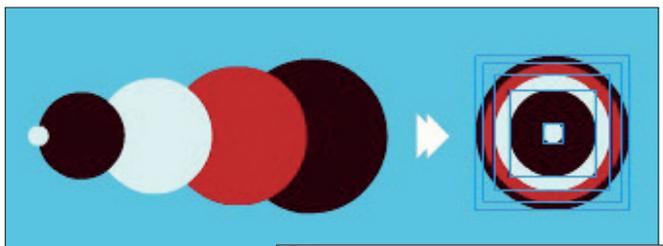
Try to limit the use of colours in your *Flash* illustrations. This will force you to make decisions about contrast that often become clouded when you have too many options to work with. By doing this you will instantly give your illustrations a more stylised look. Also, try to use alternatives to stark black and white – your image will feel more rich and colourful as a result.



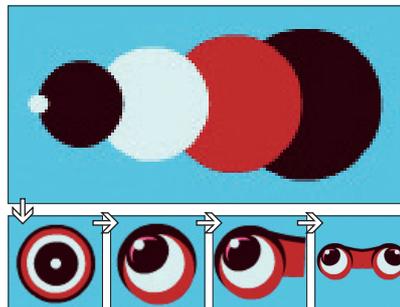
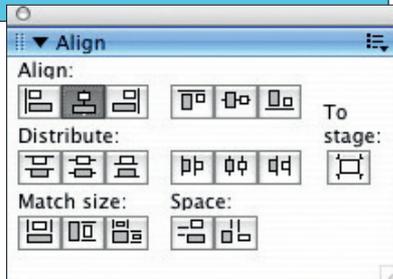
5 Select the circle you created in step 4 and then duplicate it by selecting Command+D. Now double-click on the new circle and change the colour to a light blue. Open your Transform window and scale (constrained) the new circle to 75 per cent.



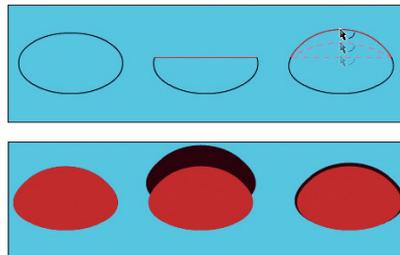
6 Continue to re-use the same circle, stacking and changing colour until you have created something that looks like the image shown above. Try to think of this process as designing with cut paper and do your best to use a consistent scaling system throughout your illustration.



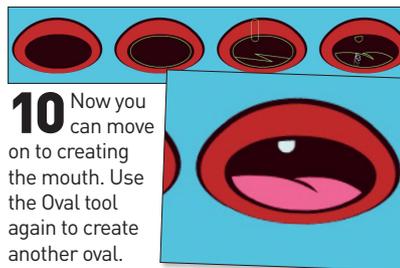
7 Now select all the circles you have created so far and open the Align window. Centre the circles vertically and horizontally. This should make the circles line up in a perfect bull's-eye. A frog's eye is unlikely to be perfect, so make it seem a bit more cock-eyed to add character!



8 Concentrating on the eye, make a few modifications by moving the pupil up and to the left, squashing the circle slightly into an oval. You could also add some reflected light from the explosion coming from behind. Grab all the parts you have created for the left eye, group them, and then Flip Horizontal to re-use the art for the right eye.



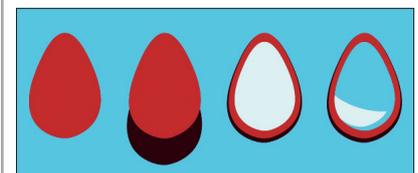
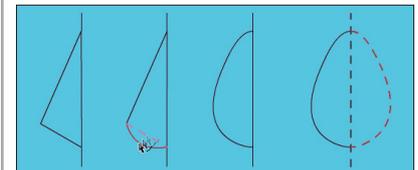
9 To create the base of Yogurt's head, make an oval shape using the Oval tool. Because the oval shape is too simple, you should modify it slightly to make it more of an egg shape. Take the Line tool and drag a line across the top of the oval. Select and delete the top portion. Now use the Selection tool to grab the edge and bend the straight line into the top curve.



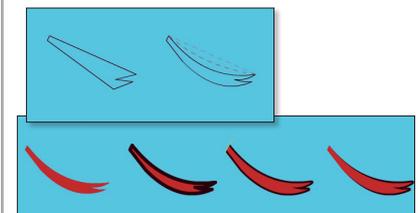
10 Now you can move on to creating the mouth. Use the Oval tool again to create another oval. Duplicate the oval shape and use the Transform window to scale the shape to 90 per cent. Stroke the oval and delete the fill. Use the Line tool and the Selection tool to shape the tongue. Fill the tooth and tongue and then delete any unnecessary strokes.



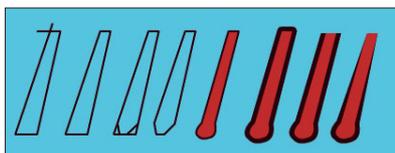
11 Now take all the existing parts you have created in steps 1 to 10 for Yogurt's head and place them together on the stage. Rotate the art to match the angle of Yogurt's head on the stage.



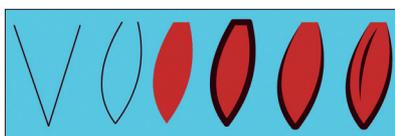
12 Create a new layer underneath Yogurt's head and name it Yogurt's Body. Use the Line tool to rough out the shape of the character's torso. Now, in the same way as before, use the Selection tool to push the edges into the curves you want. Re-use the shape as much as possible to create the stroke and stomach details.



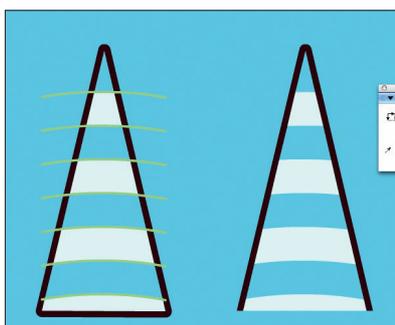
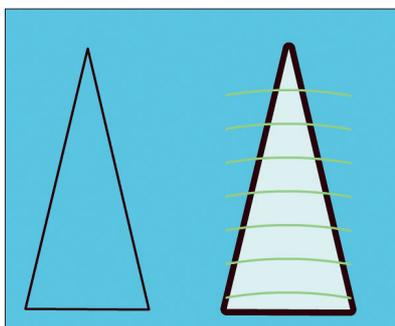
13 Now for the arms. Again, rough out the arm shape with the Line tool. Next, using the Selection tool, shape the straight lines into curves. Fill the arm with red, and stroke it with a 5pt stroke. Group the fill so it overlaps the stroke. Select the stroke and then go to Modify→Shape→Convert LinesToFill. Break the fill, and then use the Line tool and Selection tool to modify the corners so that they come to a point.



14 Using the same method as before, you can now make Yogurt's toe. Draw the basic shape of the toe with the Line tool, crop the corners and bend the three flat edges into a thermometer shape. Fill the toe shape, stroke it with a 5pt stroke, group the fill, select Convert Line To Fill, break the toe fill and modify the corners.

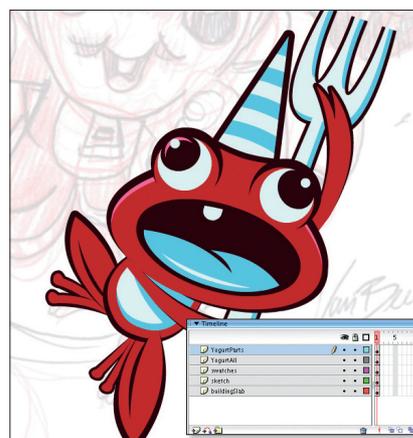


15 Now you can move on to creating the legs. Notice in this example, that I have started with one simple shape, and then implied a break down the centre with a curved line. Again, you can duplicate the leg shape for both legs, and the same can be done again for the toes.



16 Next, rough out the shape with the Line tool, shaping the object and stacking and scaling grouped shapes to make the party hat. Once you have the stroke and fill as raw vector art, create a slightly curved horizontal line and duplicate that line to make stripes.

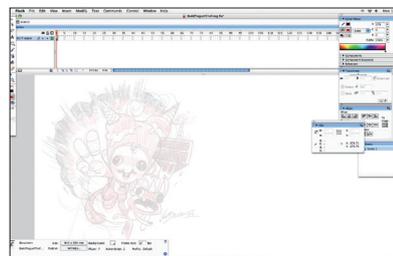
17 Now you can have a go at the other shapes on your own. Try to create the fork that Yogurt is holding, using the Line tool to rough it out, or break it down into simple shapes. Once you're done, group and stack shapes to make up larger shapes.



18 Take all the finished parts and assemble the character you have created on the stage. You can create a layer for each part or, alternatively, layer the parts inside a larger grouping. If you plan on printing your illustration, steer clear of movie clips and masks because they can cause unforeseen problems later on.

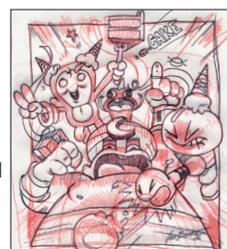


19 You should now be ready to take on the rest of the composition. Remember what you have learned in each step so far and repeat these techniques for the other character. Break your larger shapes down into simple ones and use the Line tool and Selection tools to create basic shapes.

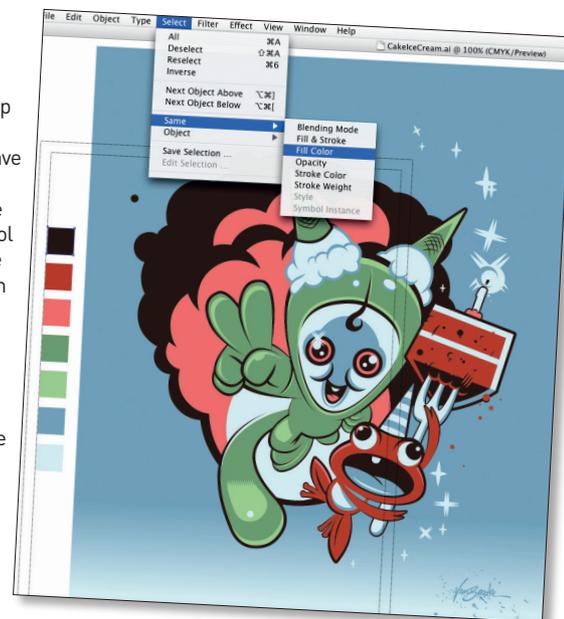


20 Delete everything you have done and do it again. This may sound harsh, but you have to practise if you want to get good. Try taking your own sketches and ideas and turning them into nice, clean, 'candy' style vector illustrations. Remember, the best investment you will ever make is investment in yourself.

21 Once you are happy with your completed illustration make sure all the art parts are grouped and not raw vector art. Select all the art and Copy and Paste it into either a new scene or a new .fla file so that all the art is on one layer. Be sure to include the colour swatches somewhere on the side of the stage. Go to File→ExportImage and save as an *Illustrator (.ai)* file.



22 Now open the file in *Illustrator*. You will notice at this point that in the short trip from *Flash* to *Illustrator* there have been some colour casualties. Use the Direct Selection tool to select one of the colour swatches on the left and then go to Select→Same→FillColour. Select the appropriate colour replacement. Make sure you have access to some Pantone swatch books to choose the true colours for your artwork. Do not trust your screen!



RECYCLE, RECYCLE, RECYCLE!

Do your best to re-use shapes as often as you can. This will save you time and create a consistent visual language that should help the flow of any illustration you create. However, you shouldn't recycle out of laziness!

BREAK IT UP

Break down complex shapes and make them simple whenever you can. Assemble them by grouping and stacking simple shapes or use your own custom shapes. As your shapes pile up, use layers to keep track of logical groupings. For example: Layer 1 = Body, Layer 2 = Head and Layer 3 = Right Arm.