

# Careers in Animation and Comics

WL Kitts



———— Careers for Creative People ————



© 2020 ReferencePoint Press, Inc.  
Printed in the United States

**For more information, contact:**

ReferencePoint Press, Inc.  
PO Box 27779  
San Diego, CA 92198  
[www.ReferencePointPress.com](http://www.ReferencePointPress.com)

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, web distribution, or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Name: Kitts, W.L., author.

Title: Careers in Animation and Comics/by W.L. Kitts.

Description: San Diego, CA: ReferencePoint Press, Inc., 2020. | Series:

Careers for Creative People | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Audience: Grades 9 to 12. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2018058353 (print) | LCCN 2018060581 (ebook) | ISBN 9781682826768 (eBook) | ISBN 9781682826751 (hardback)

Subjects: LCSH: Animated films—Vocational guidance—Juvenile literature. | Animators—Juvenile literature. | Computer animation—Vocational guidance—Juvenile literature. | Comic books, strips, etc.—Vocational guidance—Juvenile literature.

Classification: LCC NC1765 (ebook) | LCC NC1765 .K58 2020 (print) | DDC 741.5023—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018058353>

# Contents

Introduction: Growth Faster than a Speeding Bullet	4
Video Game Animator	8
Web Animator	17
Producer of Animated Videos	26
Storyboard Artist	33
Visual Effects Animator	41
Comic Book Writer	49
Comic Book Artist	56
Graphic Novelist	64
Interview with a Comic Book Writer and Artist	71
Other Jobs in Animation and Comics	74
Index	75
Picture Credits	80
About the Author	80

# Video Game Animator

## What Does a Video Game Animator Do?

The life cycle of a video game, from creation to launch, can be anywhere from three months for a simple mobile game to three years for a full-featured one—and it all starts with an idea. Game designers and developers take that idea and plan the storyline, characters, and the interactive elements. Programmers and artists create the game's code, and concept artists design the game's look along with the characters and backgrounds. And then the animators take over.

ers and developers take that idea and plan the storyline, characters, and the interactive elements. Programmers and artists create the game's code, and concept artists design the game's look along with the characters and backgrounds. And then the animators take over.

Tony Ravo is a video game character animator who has been creating characters for games such as *Assassin's Creed* and *Marvel Super Hero Squad* since 1996. He spoke about his career on the Game Industry Career Guide website:

Being an animator is a cross between Dr. Frankenstein and an actor. We basically have to animate—which literally means “give life” to—static drawings or [three-dimensional] character models. That's the Dr. Frankenstein part. The actor part is not just moving them around,

### At a Glance

#### Video Game Animator

##### Minimum Educational Requirements

Bachelor's degree preferred

##### Personal Qualities

Advanced drawing, digital, and storytelling skills; attention to detail; communication, time-management, organizational, and problem-solving skills

##### Working Conditions

In an office or from home, dealing with tight deadlines and high pressure

##### Salary Range

About \$40,000 to more than \$123,000\*

##### Number of Jobs

Almost 74,000 as of 2016\*

##### Future Job Outlook

Growth of 8 percent through 2026\*

\*Includes multimedia artists and animators

but giving them personality and purpose so the player cares about the character no matter how large they are on the screen.

Animators collaborate with other artists, including modelers, texture artists, and motion-capture artists. First, the modelers build three-dimensional (3-D) digital frameworks, or skeletons, for the characters, objects, and scenes. This is called rigging. Then, along with texture artists, they do skinning—digitally wrapping the skeletons with two-dimensional textures like skin, fur, and other simulated textures. Finally, using specialized software, the animators bring the skeletons to life through movement, attitude, and behavior. By manipulating light, texture, and color, they also produce depth, which enhances the sense of realism. Sometimes animators are helped by motion-capture artists, who record the movements of real people or animals. Viewing these recordings can help an animator understand how muscles move, for example, and create more authentic-looking characters. This part of the animation process can be time-consuming, so animators often create a library of animations that can be reused for each character or object to save time.

According to Steve Bowler, the lead designer at Phosphor Games and an animator since the mid-1990s, one of the biggest misconceptions about creating video games is that “it’s all fun and games.” In an interview on the *Lifehacker* blog, he says, “I really enjoy the challenges of making games. It’s one of the most mentally stimulating and rewarding fields I’ve ever worked in. It’s also caused me the most anxiety and stress. We work very, very hard. . . . We iterate on something 100 times before it’s right. Even if we’ve done it before.”

Bowler says working in this field takes dedication:

Make games, write code, make art, every single day. You don’t get to be the best by taking a single class or earning a degree or even landing a single job. . . . If you’re not constantly striving to improve yourself and your craft, you’re falling behind everyone else who is.

But most importantly, don't go into making games because you love playing games. You have to enjoy the challenge of creating this problem of a game that didn't exist, and then fix that problem by creating that out of nothing.

## How Do You Become a Video Game Animator?

### Education

It is possible to be hired as a video game animator without any postsecondary education, but the applicant would need both solid art skills and technical know-how. The majority of people in this field have a bachelor's degree specializing in computer graphics, game design, digital art, animation, or illustration. Courses might include 3-D modeling, interactive animation techniques, and artificial intelligence.

Some employers will accept an associate's degree or certificate as long as it includes some combination of art and technology coursework. It is important to enroll in an animation program that focuses on video games; these programs include design and interactive aspects that general animation programs might not.

Learning how to use industry-standard software is essential—and that knowledge can be gained both inside and outside of school. Bowler says, "With the most popular (and most used) game engines now free or very low cost . . . , there's no excuse to not know how to use an engine before you apply [for a job]. Download it. Do the tutorials. Make something."

Education is always valuable, but making something—having something to show prospective employers, even if it is only a personal project—also has value. Bowler agrees, commenting that he "would take a new entry level designer with no degree or 'equivalent experience' who showed their work in creating their own game over someone with a degree who couldn't show their work in a heart-beat."



Video game animators give personality and purpose to characters, objects, and action in every video game. They manipulate light, texture, and color to create a sense of realism or whatever effect the game developer had in mind.

## Internships

Many gaming companies offer on-the-job training. And both companies and video game educational programs offer internships. An internship can help an applicant “stand out from the masses,” according to the GameDesigning.org article “Animation Internships 10.” The article states that “*Internships* are the **best way to get experience** in the video game and film industries if you are starting with none. Real life experience working on real projects with real release dates, with a team of real professionals . . . that looks a lot better than just a degree.”

## Breaking Into the Business

Mid- to high-level positions in the gaming industry generally require two to four years’ experience. But aspiring video game

animators right out of school can apply for entry-level jobs. Sometimes it is easier to break into the industry through a smaller game studio. Animators might also freelance to perfect their craft and gain experience while building their portfolio.

A strong portfolio featuring life drawings and movement studies is important for game animators. According to an article that appears on the OnlineDesignTeacher website, the portfolio must also include a show reel of animation projects: “Reels should last about 2-3 minutes and detail the specific contribution the Animator made to the work. Recruiters will look for a variety of genres and styles; walk and run cycles, as well as more fully developed sequences; and, perhaps most important, an ability to portray a character’s personality through movement and behaviour.”

Self-promotion is an important step in connecting with people in the industry. Animation conferences and video game competitions offer a chance to get one’s name and work out into the video game sphere. Many animators also promote their work on their own websites and on industry websites, social media, and online forums. Many game developers watch these spaces for new talent.

## Skills and Personality

Video game development requires collaboration. Game animators need to work with a variety of people, including artists, designers, and programmers. Ideas must be communicated clearly, so great communication skills are needed. On the Game Industry Career Guide website, video game character animator Tony Ravo says that coming up with ideas and collaborating with his team are his favorite parts of the job. “It really is awesome when you are brainstorming with creative people and what at first seemed like a small, almost insignificant idea takes life because someone took it and added to it.”

Game animators are highly creative, but technical skills are just as important in this job. Animators work with multiple software platforms and digital tools. In addition to having expertise in digital animation techniques, they must be able to draw by hand. In smaller studios, the animators may also be responsible for the rigging and skinning of characters.



People who are looking to be successful in this career need to be detail oriented, well organized, and have effective time-management skills. They also must work well under pressure to solve problems and meet the constant deadlines of launching a game. “Even when you’re making a sequel to something you’ve already made once, there are always new challenges that have to be solved,” Bowler says. “In our business it feels like often there are no shortcuts, so personal experience and problem solving are often the best tools of the trade.”

## On the Job

### Employers

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) groups multimedia artists and animators as one occupational group. In 2016 this group held close to seventy-four thousand jobs. Almost 60 percent were held by self-employed individuals, up by 14 percent from 2014. Eleven percent worked in the motion picture and video sectors, and another 11 percent worked in computer systems and software development.

Jobs in this industry are competitive. Video game animators may find employment with video game companies, software development firms, online game companies, mobile app developers, animation studios, and the entertainment industry. In November 2018, for example, online job boards like Glassdoor and Indeed displayed approximately two hundred job openings for video game animators. Available positions ranged from a senior narrative animator for Sony PlayStation’s *God of War* game in Los Angeles, California, to a technical animator job at Nintendo’s Retro Studios in Austin, Texas.

### Working Conditions

According to the BLS, the majority of people in this field work from home as freelance or contract workers. A smaller group work from corporate offices or studios; often, though, once a game is completed, so are the jobs.

Video game animators generally work a standard workweek. As the launch date approaches, many may work evenings and weekends as well. Game developers are often under intense pressure to create a successful game despite financial and time constraints.

## Earnings

According to the BLS, the median annual wage for multimedia artists and animators in May 2017 was more than \$70,000. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$40,000, and the highest 10 percent earned over \$123,000. Several factors can affect how much a video game animator earns. Those factors include level of experience, area of expertise, and the size of the company.

## Opportunities for Advancement

Technology changes constantly in this industry. Animators with knowledge of industry-specific graphics and video production programs and software will have better opportunities to advance. And even though programming and coding skills are not necessary in this job, they may provide an advantage. Plus, many animation skills are transferrable. Video game animators could find opportunities in other industries, such as advertising, television, and film.

### What Is the Future Outlook for Video Game Animators?

The BLS reports that jobs for multimedia artists and animators (which include video game animators) are projected to grow 8 percent through 2026. That is another sixty-two hundred jobs and is about as fast as the average for all occupations.

This growth is despite a trend of companies hiring animators overseas to cut costs. However, there has been an increased demand for games both online and on mobile devices. According to the *2018 Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry* report compiled by the Entertainment Software Association, only 36 percent of video games are played on traditional game consoles.

Also, as processors and graphics continue to evolve, there will be continued demand for games with more realistic-looking images and enhanced experiences such as virtual or augmented reality (AR) like Niantic's *Pokémon Go*. Plus, as AR becomes more affordable, the market will expand further. In July 2017, Orbis Research reported that the AR market will reach almost \$285 billion by 2023. All of this indicates a bright future for video game animators.

Find Out More

### Gamasutra

303 Second St.  
South Tower, Suite 900  
San Francisco, CA 94107  
website: [www.gamasutra.com](http://www.gamasutra.com)

Gamasutra is about the art and business of game development. Its website features a blog, articles, job bank, and a place to list contract services.

### Game Career Guide

website: [www.gamecareerguide.com](http://www.gamecareerguide.com)

This online resource features a job board, online counseling, a place for students to post games, and information about schools and programs for aspiring game designers.

### Graphic Artists Guild

31 W. Thirty-Fourth St., Eighth Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
website: [www.graphicartistsguild.org](http://www.graphicartistsguild.org)

The Graphic Artists Guild provides advocacy, community, and resources for graphic artists, interactive designers, illustrators, cartoonists, digital artists, animators, web programmers, and developers. Its website offers webinars as well as information on ethics, pricing work, and contracts.

# Interview with a Comic Book Writer and Artist

Eric Shanower is a freelance writer and cartoonist based in Portland, Oregon. Over the last thirty-four years, Shanower has written and illustrated multiple award-winning and *New York Times* best-selling comic books, graphic novels, and children's books. He wrote the graphic novel adaptations of L. Frank Baum's first six Wizard of Oz novels for Marvel Comics and created the *Age of Bronze* comic book series about the Trojan War for Image Comics. Shanower answered questions about his career by email.

**Q: Why did you become a comic book writer and artist?**

**A:** I have made up stories and drawn pictures ever since I was a child. I knew when I was young that I wanted to publish my stories and artwork when I grew up. I also loved comic books when I was a child. It took until I was a teenager to realize that becoming a cartoonist was the perfect way to synthesize my love for both writing and drawing. So that's what I decided to do.

**Q: How did you break into the comic book business?**

**A:** After high school I attended the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art in Dover, New Jersey. It concentrates on comics art and graphic design. All of the instructors are working professionals. In school I had to draw a lot, and I got better at it the more I drew. In my final semester of school, I sent out my portfolio to comics publishers and had interviews with editors in comics publishing in New York City. I got my first professional job the day after graduation and my second job the second day after graduation. The jobs didn't continue one per day, but I've had relatively steady work throughout my career.

# Other Jobs in Animation and Comics

Animation development manager	Interaction designer
Animation director	Layout artist
Animation production coordinator	Manga artist
Animation technical artist	Motion graphics artist/video editor
Animator and narrative manager	Motion graphics designer
Animator instructor	Shot creator/animator
Art director	Software engineer — gameplay
Art editor	Storyboard revisionist
Artificial intelligence software developer	Two-dimensional animation game artist
Background painter	Three-dimensional animation game artist
Character designer	Video artist
Comic book colorist	Video editor and motion graphics animator
Comic book cover artist	Visual development artist
Comic book inker	Visual effects software engineer
Comic book penciller	Webcomic artist
Comic concept artist	
Facial animator	

Editor's note: The US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics provides information about hundreds of occupations. The agency's *Occupational Outlook Handbook* describes what these jobs entail, the work environment, education and skill requirements, pay, future outlook, and more. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* may be accessed online at [www.bls.gov/ooh](http://www.bls.gov/ooh).

# Index

*Note: Boldface page numbers indicate illustrations.*

- Age of Bronze* (comic book series, Shanower), 71
- Alex Clark Studios, 21
- All Art Schools (website), 47
- Amanat, Sana, 62
- Angry Birds* (game app), 17
- animatics, 19, 27, 33
- Animation Magazine*, information about, 24, 32, 39–40, 47–48
- Animation World Network (AWN)
  - information about, 24, 32, 40, 48
  - skills needed by animation producers, 28
  - tips for becoming animation producer, 26–27
- animators
  - earnings, **6**, 14, 23, 46–47
  - educational requirements, **6**
  - employers, 6, 13, 22, 46
  - See *also* video game animators; visual effects (VFX) animators; web animators
- Art Career Project, 56, 60
- art directors, **6**
- augmented reality (AR), 15
- Aukerman, Scott, 49
- authors. See comic book writers; graphic novelists; writers and authors
- Authors Guild, 55, 69–70
- banners, 18
- Bassett, Sasha, 58
- Bowler, Steve, 9–10, 13
- Bravo, Eric, 35
- Brown, Reilly, 61
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)
  - careers in animation and comics, 74
  - earnings, **6**
  - animators, 14, 23, 46–47
  - comic book artists, 61
  - comic book writers, 53
  - fine and craft artists, 61
  - graphic novelists, 68
  - multimedia artists, 23, 46–47
  - producers of animated videos, 31
  - storyboard artists, 38–39
  - video game animators, 14
  - visual effects animators, 46–47
  - web animators, 23
  - writers and authors, 53, 68
- employers
  - animators, 13, 22, 46
  - comic book artists, 60–61
  - comic book writers, 53
  - fine and craft artists, 60–61
  - graphic novelists, 67
  - multimedia artists, 13, 22, 46
  - percent self-, 6
  - producers of animated videos, 30
  - storyboard artists, 37–38
  - video game animators, 13
  - visual effects animators, 46
  - web animators, 22
  - writers and authors, 53, 67
- job descriptions
  - storyboard artists, 38
  - video game animators, 13–14
  - visual effects animators, 46
  - web animators, 22–23
- job outlook
  - comic book artists, 62
  - comic book writers, 54
  - fine and craft artists, 62
  - graphic novelists, 69
  - producers, 31–32
  - storyboard artists, 39
  - video game animators, 14
  - visual effects animators, 47
  - web animators, 23
  - writers and authors, 54, 69