# Animating a GIF Walk Cycle in Photoshop

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A. Setting up Your Workspace

Open new HD Video Document in Photoshop: Open Photoshop and select File/New… from the toolbar at the top of the window.   A "New Document" window will appear. Select the Film & Video tab in the upper right of the window. Then select HDTV 1080P from the Blank Document Presets. Click on the Create button on the lower right.
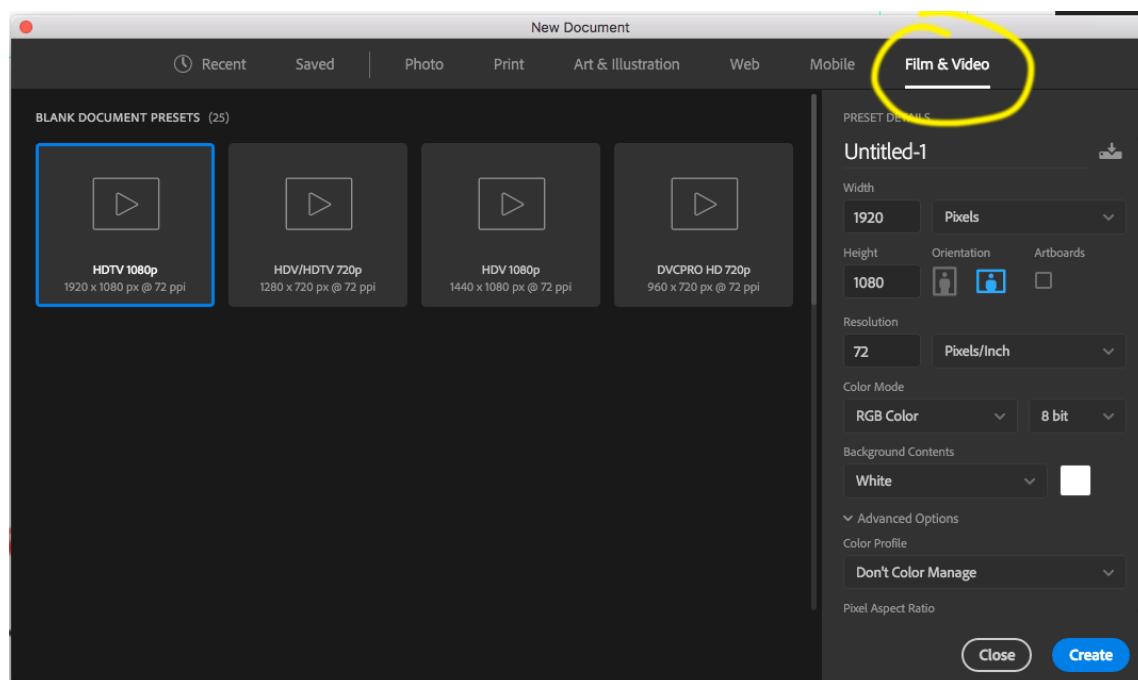

Set up Workspace: Click on the menu Icon at the upper right corner of the PS window and select the motion option. Notice the Timeline that appears at the bottom of your workspace.
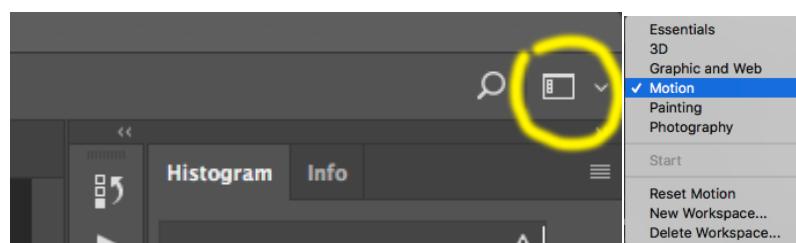
Set up options in the Timeline: This next step gets a little tricky so pay close attention and do the steps in order.

1. Click on the small menu icon at the top right of the Timeline panel and select "Enable Timeline Shortcut Keys".
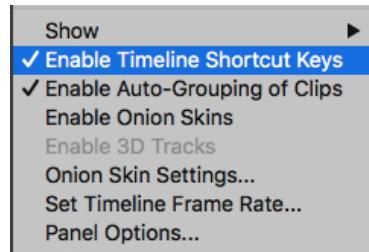
2. Go to the Layers dropdown menu and select "New Blank Video Layer".
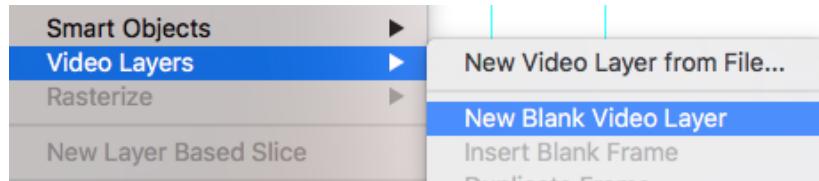
Notice the new video layer stacks in the Layer panel above the Background layer. The new video Layer (Layer 1) has a small movie Strip in the corner of the icon.
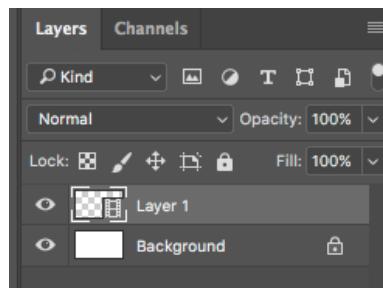
3. Click on the small menu icon at the top right of the Timeline panel and select "Set Timeline Frame Rate…" and enter 6 in the FPS window. Click OK.
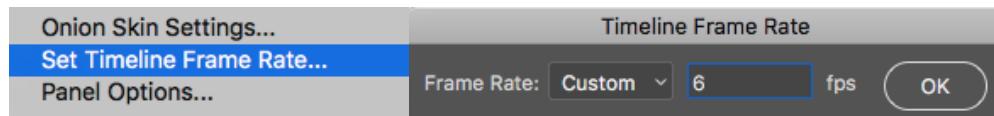
4. Go to the Layers/Video Layers (again) and create a second Blank Video Layer (Layer 2). Now select the first video layer in the Layers panel and delete it by dragging it into the trash at the lower right of the panel (trust me this is how it works)

B. Animate First Step in Walk Cycle

Set up your drawing space. Begin by selecting the *Background* layer in the Layer Panel. Now choose a brush to your liking (B) and draw a horizontal line across the bottom of the window for your ground plane. If you have trouble with the *Guidelines* interfering go to the *View* dropdown menu at the top of the screen and turn off *Snapping*. Use the *Move* tool (V) to move one of the *Guidelines* about 2/3 up the frame as a guide for the top your character's head.

Now select the blank video layer (Layer 1) and drag the Timeline cursor to the very left of the timeline. You can also use the left and right arrow keys (< >) to move the cursor.
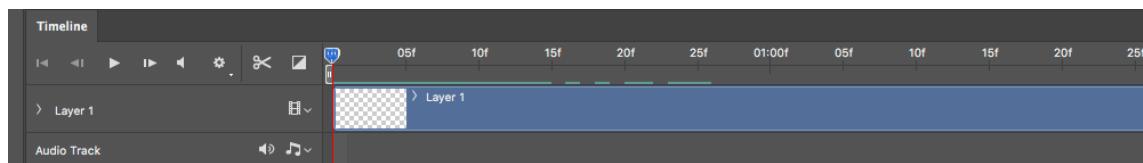
Click on the color icon and change your brush to red. Then set the opacity to 50%.
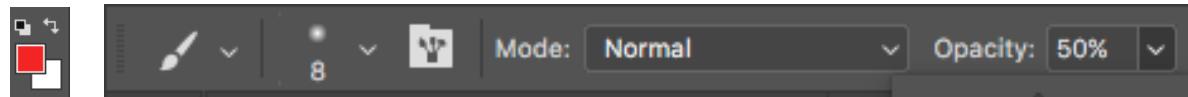
You are now ready to start animating!

Draw your first character in a Contact Pose in the first frame. Both feet should be in contact with the ground and the head should be just touching the Guideline. Draw a circle for the pelvic area and darken the far leg and arm. Label your drawing by writing C-1 in the frame.
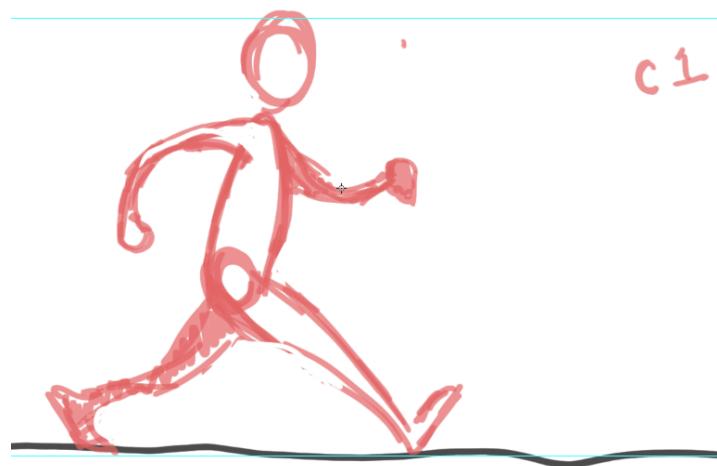
Use the Right Arrow (>) to advance to the next frame.

Turn on Onion Skinning. Click on the small menu icon at the top right of the Timeline panel and select "Enable Onion Skins". You may find it helpful to turn off Onion Skin at times to unclutter your drawings.

Draw your second Contact Pose. With the onion Skin on you should be able to see a ghost of the first Contact Pose. Trace over the first drawing trying to match the pose only switch which leg and arm are shaded for distance. Write C-5 in the frame.
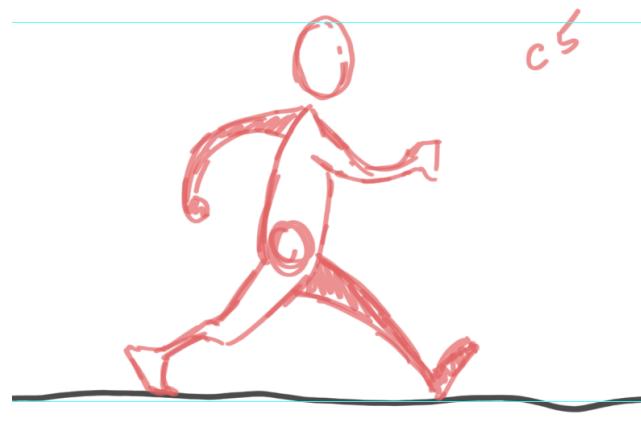
Insert Passing Pose Inbetween Contacts. Use the left Arrow (<) to return your cursor to the first frame. Then go to Layer/Video Layers and select Insert Blank Frame. Notice that both drawings *Contact-1* and *Contact-5* are ghosted. This means you have a blank frame bin between them. You will now draw a Passing pose on that blank frame.

Draw the head first just slightly above the Guideline. Then position the forward foot exactly between the front and contact feet only with the leg fully extended. This will raise the butt and the torso thus meeting the taller head placement. Now draw the arm swing directly between the two Contact arms (the far arm will be hidden by the body) and number the drawing P-3.
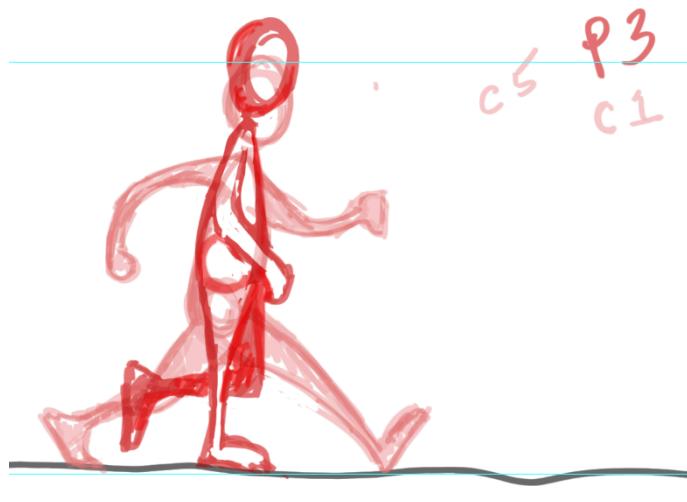
Insert Down Pose. Use the *Arrow Keys* to return to the first frame. Now you should see *Contact-1* and a ghost of *Passing-3*. Go to *Layer/Video Layers* and select "Insert Blank Frame". Now drawings *Contact-1* and *Passing-3* are ghosted with a blank frame bin between them. Now draw a Down pose on that blank frame.
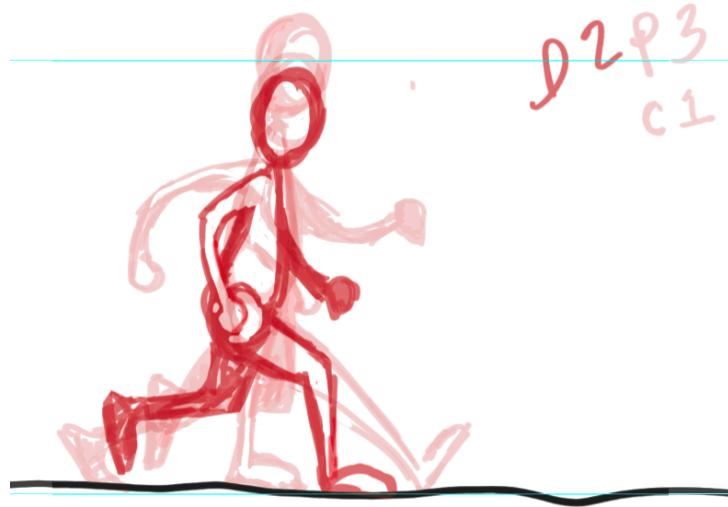

The head should be just below the Contact head. The butt and the shoulder will be slightly dropped. The front foot should be exactly inbetween the Contact and *Passing* feet. The rear foot should be just off the ground between the Contact and Passing rear feet and the arms should be placed inbetween as well. Write D-2 in the Frame.

Now the Up Pose: Use the *Arrow Keys* to go to *Passing-3* and insert a blank frame. Now drawings *Passing-3* and *Contact-5* are ghosted with a blank frame bin between them. Now draw an *Up* pose on that blank frame.

The head should be just above the Passing head. The butt and the shoulder will be slightly up too. The toes on the right foot will be lifted to allow the left foot to pass without stumbling. Arms will be inbetween. Write U-4 in the Frame.

Cycle Animation by Looping Playback: Use your *Arrow Keys* to move cursor to *Up-4* (this is technically the last pose of the first step with *Contact-5* as the first pose of your second). Now set the playback range by hovering your mouse over the handle at the end of your workspace bar (at the top of the Timeline). When the arrow appears move the handle to the left to align with the cursor.
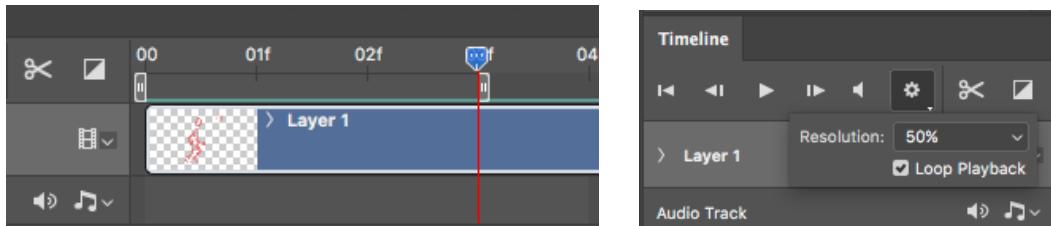

To turn on "Looping Preview" click on the Gear icon in the left top panel of the Timeline and check the "Loop Preview" box. Hit the spacebar and watch your animation!

Even though technically you have only animated one leg moving forward (a single step) you can still get a feel for the rhythm and motion of the first stride. If you like what you see move onto complete the second step for a full stride. If not, revise your poses now until it looks good.

C. Transfer Drawings for Second Step

This final step requires you to copy the *Down*, *Passing* and *Up* poses forward in the Timeline and alter them so the arms and legs are swapped to the opposite positions. If you recall we did something similar when we traced of the original *Contact* pose earlier.
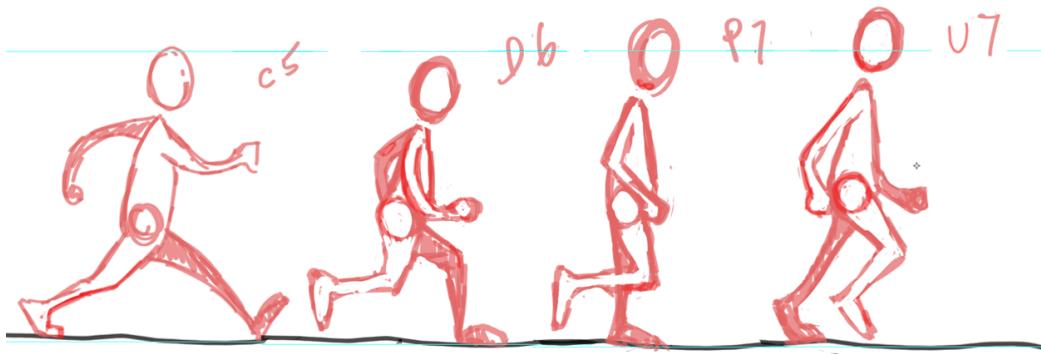

That trace-off from the original *Contact* (C-5) and the altered *Down, Passing* and *Up* poses will make up the second step thus completing a single stride completing the *Walk Cycle.* These drawings can then be looped indefinitely.

Copy and Paste Down Pose: Use the *Arrow Keys* to move cursor to drawing *Down-2*. Select character with the Lasso tool (L) and *Copy* (Cmd C). Use the Arrows to move to Frame 6 (one frame after Drawing C-5 and *Paste in Place* using (Shift/Cmd V).

Swap Limbs and relabel Frame: Using the Eraser and Brush tool to change the right leg and arm for the left by swapping the shading on each. Relabel drawing to D-6.

Repeat for Passing and Up Pose: Use the *Arrow Keys* to move cursor to *Passing-3* the *Up-4*. *Copy* (Cmd C), *Paste in Place* (Shift/Cmd V) edit drawings and label accordingly (P-6, U-7)

Cycle Animation by Looping Playback: Set the playback range to the end of your drawings by hovering your mouse over the handle at the end of your workspace bar and dragging it over the last drawing in your Timeline (Up-7).
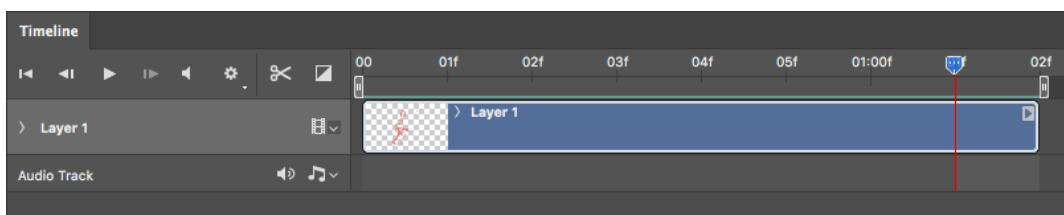

Hit the spacebar and watch your animation! Congratulations you have a Walk Cycle!

** A Brief Note on Animation Timing and Frames Per Second (FPS): Because our playback is set at 6 Frames Per Second (FPS) the animation is a tad chopping. This is because in animation time (24FPS) it is the equivalent of animating in 4's. For a super smooth Walk Cycle you could go back and insert an "inbetween" drawing between each pose, change your playback to 12 FPS and have a super smooth Walk Cycle playing at the equivalent of 24FPS in 2's, which if you recall, is a standard for cartoons.

D. Exporting a GIF File

Open *Save for Web* Window: Go to File/Export/Save for Web (Legacy) to open the *Save for Web Window*.

In the upper right-hand panel click off the Transparency box and select a low number for your colors to keep your GIF file small. I suggest 4.
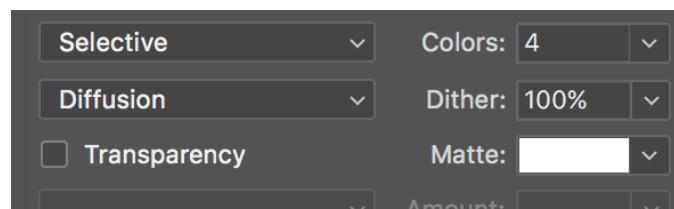
Then at the bottom of the panel change the Animation Looping options to Forever. Hit the play button and inspect your work.
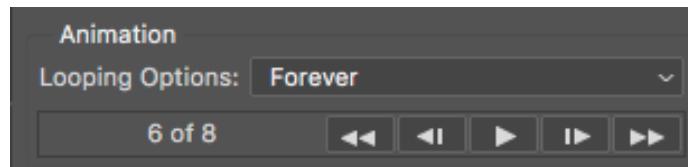
If you like hit the Save. . . button and browse to where you want to store your new walk cycle GIF file.