

# Exploring Exaggeration in Animation: A Case Study of *One Piece* (2023)

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper delves into the realm of animation, specifically focusing on exaggeration as a pivotal artistic tool in conveying emotions, enhancing storytelling, and shaping character dynamics. Employing a case study approach, the investigation centres around the renowned anime series *One Piece* (2023), known for its unique art style and expressive character animations. Through a meticulous analysis of selected episodes and character interactions, the study aims to uncover how exaggeration is employed as a narrative device and artistic technique in the animation industry. The research methodology involves qualitative content analysis and visual interpretation, utilising a framework that considers exaggerated animation's cultural, psychological, and storytelling implications. By examining key scenes, character designs, and the overall visual language of *One Piece*, this paper seeks to illuminate the intricate balance between realism and exaggeration, showcasing how these elements contribute to creating a vibrant and emotionally resonant animated world.

**Keywords:** *2D Animation, Animation principle, Exaggeration, One Piece, Character design*

## INTRODUCTION

Exaggeration in the context of art and design involves deliberately amplifying or distorting certain features or characteristics to create emphasis, convey emotions, or enhance storytelling. Exaggeration refers to making some of a character's features more prominent than others (Coursera, 2023). In character design, exaggeration can highlight key traits, making characters more memorable and engaging. The concept is rooted in the principles of caricature, where artists exaggerate features to satirise or accentuate specific qualities. Disney's animation style, particularly in classics like *The Little Mermaid* (1989) or *Aladdin* (1992), often incorporates exaggerated features to enhance the expressiveness of characters and heighten the overall visual appeal. In essence, exaggeration is a powerful artistic tool that transcends various creative fields, adding flair and impact to visual storytelling.

*One Piece* is a famous Japanese manga and anime series created by Eiichiro Oda. Launched in 1997, it has become one of the most iconic and enduring franchises in the world of manga and anime. According to Alosson (2023), the anime adaptation of *One Piece* follows the adventures of Monkey D. Luffy and his diverse crew of pirates as they search for the ultimate treasure, known as *One Piece*, in the vast Grand Line. Produced by Toei Animation, the anime *One Piece* brings Oda's vibrant and vast world to life through vibrant animation, colourful visuals, and engaging storytelling. The series is famous for its engaging characters, complex plot, and the perfect blend of action, humour, and emotional moments. With more than a thousand episodes and many movies, *One Piece* has attracted an enormous fan base around the globe. Its success lies in its adventurous plot and the way the animation team transformed Oda's complex and imaginative manga panels into a captivating, animated experience that left a lasting impact on viewers.

Over the past two decades, the animation industry has experienced notable technological progress and artistic shifts, which have impacted the animation style of *One Piece* (2023). The use of exaggeration, one of the fundamental principles in animation, plays a significant role in defining the series's visual identity and emotional impact. Unfortunately, limited studies address exaggeration more deeply, making it difficult to understand how exaggeration works in animation. This study aims to fill the gap by exploring exaggeration in the animation of the case study *One Piece* (2023). According to Aminian (2024), one of the challenges of exaggeration is that overusing it can make an animation look unrealistic, distracting, or less appealing. It takes experience to learn when and how to apply exaggeration firmly.

As for the research objectives, the study aims to achieve these three: firstly, it aims to identify the use of exaggeration in *One Piece* (2023). Secondly, it is to analyse the exaggeration in *One Piece* (2023) by using Acting Principles. And finally, to conclude, the impact of exaggeration in *One Piece* (2023). This research is essential for understanding exaggeration in animation, using *One Piece* as a case study. It contributes to the academic discourse on animation by analysing how the series' exaggerated techniques have adapted over two decades, providing insight into the dynamic interaction between technology and art trends. Beyond its academic scope, this research has practical implications for animators and industry professionals, providing valuable insights into the changing landscape of aesthetic cartoons. The data for this study will be collected from various sources, where *One Piece* episodes from 2023 will be watched to identify changes of exaggeration in the animation. Online forums and social media platforms will also be searched for discussions and debates among viewers about the changes in *One Piece's* character design in addition to the data collection.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The 12 Principles of Animation

Initially introduced by Disney animators Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston in their book *The Illusion of Life*, the 12 Principles of Animation are the fundamental guidelines that have shaped the field of animation. These principles provide animators with a comprehensive framework for creating convincing and realistic character movements. His first three principles - squashing and stretching, anticipation and staging - demonstrate the importance of dynamic movement, preparation for action, and clear presentation. The following principles (straight ahead action and pose to pose, follow through and overlapping action, slow in and slow out) will guide animators in choosing the appropriate method for creating movement. These principles work together to deliver fluid, realistic movement to bring the characters to life.

Timing and exaggeration are two principles that refine animation and emphasise the importance of pacing and high expression. The principles of solid drawing and appeal encourage animators to create three-dimensional and visually appealing characters. The last two principles – arcs and secondary action – each emphasise the importance of supporting motion, natural trajectory, and a solid understanding of shape. These principles serve as a comprehensive toolkit for animators, ensuring their work captivates viewers with realistic, dynamic, and visually appealing movement. These basic principles have been widely adopted throughout the animation industry, influencing generations of animators to create memorable and engaging animation experiences (Thomas & Johnston, 1981).

## **Exaggeration in Animation**

Exaggeration in animation is a dynamic and creative technique that involves intentionally amplifying or distorting certain elements, whether a character's features, movements or expressions, beyond the limits of reality. Exaggeration in animation means making things bigger, smaller, or more extreme than in real life. This helps to make the animation more interesting and fun to watch (Gillbanks, 2023). Exaggeration is a fundamental principle of animation, known for its ability to enhance storytelling, engage audiences, and infuse a sense of dynamism into the animated world. At its core, exaggeration is about emphasising certain aspects to create visual impact or evoke specific emotions. It serves as a basic guideline for animators, and exaggeration is crucial in injecting life and energy into the characters or animated objects.

Exaggeration serves several purposes in animation. One of the main functions is to enhance animation's entertainment value by introducing humour or drama elements. Exaggeration in animation can make any action look more appealing and entertaining to the audience (Darvideo, 2021). In animation comedy, exaggeration can be used for comedic effect, with characters displaying exaggerated reactions or movements to induce laughter. On the other hand, in dramatic or action-oriented scenes, exaggeration can enhance the impact of movements, making them more visually striking and memorable. Additionally, exaggeration plays a central role in conveying the personalities and characteristics of animated characters. By exaggerating certain traits or behaviours, animators can effectively convey a character's essence, making them more distinct and memorable. This is especially important in character-based storytelling, where the audience's connection to the characters significantly affects the story's overall impact. In traditional 2D animation, exaggeration can involve stretching and compressing characters to create a more dynamic and livelier feel. Successful implementation requires a deep understanding of the narrative context, the intended emotional impact, and the overall aesthetic goals of the animation.

## **Types of Exaggeration in Animation**

Different types of exaggeration, such as facial or expression exaggeration, motion exaggeration, character exaggeration, and emotional exaggeration, can help create engaging and dynamic content in the context of animation.

**Table 1. Types of Exaggeration**

<b>Expression exaggeration</b>	It is a technique for emphasising and magnifying facial features and expressions to convey emotions and reactions (Deneen, 2022). This technique is often used in animated films, television shows, and video games to enhance the emotional impact of characters
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	and scenes. Animators stretch, distort, and exaggerate facial expressions to emphasise emotions such as sadness or anger.
<b>Motion exaggeration</b>	It is a technique in animation that pushes actions and gestures beyond their realistic limits, giving animations more appeal and expressiveness. When used carefully, exaggeration can take the animation to the next level, making movement and personality more dynamic and convincing (Aminian, 2024). Motion exaggeration can also be used to add humour to animations. Animators can create humorous and engaging content by stretching body movements beyond normal levels and extreme distortions in limb movements.
<b>Character exaggeration</b>	Character exaggeration in animation is a technique that makes characters more expressive and memorable by emphasising their personality traits, physical features, and movements. The idea is to give character animation an extra level of expressiveness and personality (Gillbanks, 2023). Character exaggeration allows animators to create more engaging and relatable characters that the audience will remember. By emphasising character traits, animators can make characters more dynamic and expressive.
<b>Emotion exaggeration</b>	It is a technique used to enhance animated characters' emotional expressions and reactions. Facial expressions are an essential element in exaggerating emotions. The exaggeration can make the emotion more intense or subtle, effectively conveying the intended emotion to the audience (Larrison, 2014). Additionally, the design of an animated character, including facial expressions and body language, significantly impacts the viewer's perception of the emotions being conveyed. Emphasising a shot's main action or secondary actions that support the emotion can increase the overall emotional impact of the animation (Boadway-Masson, 2017).

### **Acting Principles as Observation Method**

In acting, the principle of "Objectives" aligns with the animation principle of "Squash and Stretch." Understanding a character's objectives in acting is mirrored by the animator's use of squash and stretch to add purpose in acting, weight, and flexibility to movements in animation, creating a dynamic visual narrative (Coron, 2024). Exploring "Subtext" in acting, delving into the unspoken layers beneath dialogue, resonates with the animation principle of "Anticipation." Both emphasise the power of anticipation — acting adds depth to emotions and intentions, while animation creates engaging and nuanced movements by preparing the audience for what is to come. "Characterisation" in acting, involving a thorough understanding of a character's background and personality (O'Brien, 2021), aligns with the animation principle of "Staging". In animation, staging emphasises the clarity and visual appeal of a character's movements within a scene, akin to an actor's portrayal of a character's distinct personality

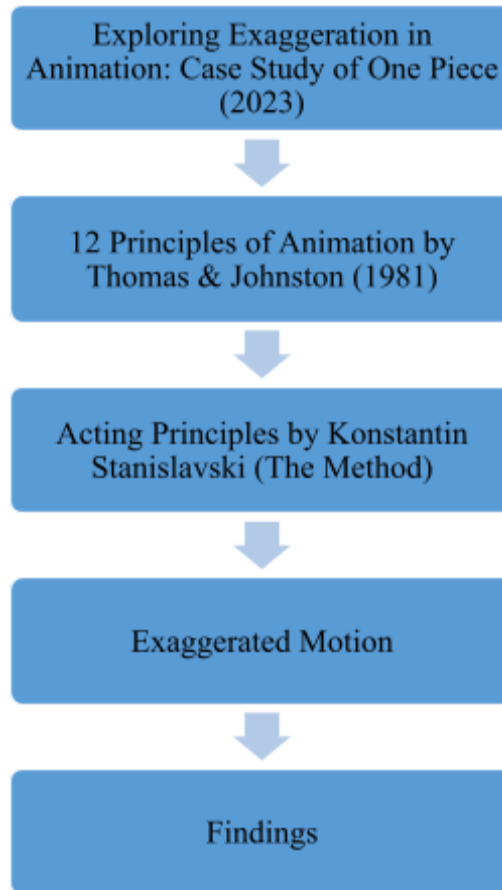
traits (Coron, 2024). "Given Circumstances" in acting corresponds to the animator's choice between "Straight Ahead Action and Pose to Pose" in animation. Both involve choices that contribute to the overall narrative flow — in acting, responding to contextual factors, and in animation, deciding on the best approach to frame creation, while in acting, circumstances act as a blueprint for the actors (O'Brien, 2021).

The principle of conveying "Emotional Truth" in acting echoes the animation principles of "Follow Through and Overlapping Action". Both aim to create natural and believable movements, whether in expressing genuine emotions on the stage or screen or in animating characters with authentic and fluid motions. "Action and Intention" in acting connects with the animation principle of "Slow-In and Slow-Out". In acting, deliberate and nuanced movements reflect the character's actions and intentions (Westbrook, n.d.). At the same time, in animation, these principles ensure that movements are precisely timed, contributing to a lifelike and engaging visual rhythm. "Listening and Reacting" in acting finds common ground with the animation principle of "Arcs." Both principles emphasise creating fluid and natural movements that respond to the character's emotional and physical states, enhancing the overall authenticity of the performance or animation.

Maintaining "Concentration and Focus" in acting aligns with the animator's emphasis on precise "Timing." Both principles ensure that movements, whether performed by an actor or animated character, are well-paced and contribute to the overall narrative rhythm (Pluralsight, 2023). The principle of "Physicality" in acting, focusing on authentic bodily expression, parallels the animation principle of "Exaggeration". In acting, physicality adds authenticity to character movements, while in animation, exaggeration is used for stylistic and expressive purposes, amplifying movements for visual impact. "Voice and Diction" in acting corresponds with the animation principle of "Solid Drawing". Both principles emphasise creating three-dimensional and well-defined characters (Admin, 2019), whether through vocal expression in acting or visual appeal in animated characters. The "Imagination and Creativity" principles in acting resonate with the animation principle of "Appeal". Imagination in acting involves bringing characters to life, while appeal in animation ensures that characters captivate and resonate with the audience through creative and visually compelling design.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The theoretical framework of this analysis is by Thomas and Johnston (1981) which is the 12 Principles of Animation published in their book called "The Illusion of Life". Exaggeration, as a principle, suggests that actions and expressions should be amplified to make them more dynamic and entertaining. By focusing only on one of the principles in animation by Thomas and Johnston, which is an exaggeration, to understand it even more deeply, one must use the acting principles by Konstantin Stanislavski (The Father of The Method) to create a base of understanding of exaggeration.



**Figure 1. Theoretical Framework**

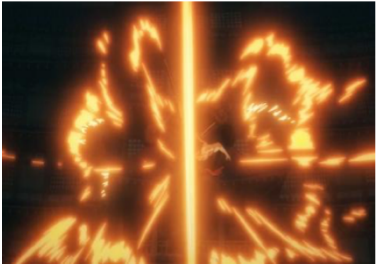


Stanislavski emphasised that actors must build a character's behaviour through specific, concrete, performable actions. This means that actors should focus on the physicality of their characters and express their intentions through physical actions (Lamda, 2021). Meanwhile, Kumar (2023) has a different way of interpreting these acting principles. He states that acting is the art of embodying characters and stories and has the mesmerising power to captivate audiences and transport them to another world. He also states that acting principles and technique are the bedrock of captivating performances.


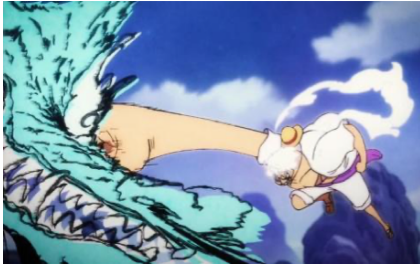
Acting principles have been mentioned by many previous experts to gather information about what acting principles are, and this shows that they can be related to the 12 Principles of Animation by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston. Acting principles refer to actors' basic concepts and techniques to produce convincing and authentic performances. These principles include understanding the character's goals, motivations, and obstacles, using physicality and vocal techniques to convey emotion and intent, and building solid connections with their scene partners. This principle was taken from various influential figures in acting, including Konstantin Stanislavski, Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner, and Stella Adler. These form the basis of acting techniques and are essential to an actor's training. By understanding and applying these principles, actors can create engaging, authentic performances that resonate with audiences.

## FINDINGS

**Table 2. Findings and data analysis of *One Piece* (2023) in use of exaggeration**

(Source: Toei Animation, 2023)

Scenes	Findings	Discussion
 <p><b>Figure 2. Clip sample of exaggeration</b>  <i>(One Piece (2023): Episode 1046 (7:53-7:57))</i></p>	<p><b>Motion Exaggeration</b></p> <p>This scene shows Zoro jumping in and cutting Queen's Blast with his katana.</p>	<p><b>Acting Principle Action and Intention</b></p> <p>The scene shows that Zoro jumps in and manages to cut a blast by simply slashing through them, intending to fight the Queen.</p> <p>This emphasises that the character is strong and fast in the blink of an eye.</p>
 <p><b>Figure 2.1. Clip sample of exaggeration</b>  <i>(One Piece (2023): Episode 1046 (8:18-8:29))</i></p>	<p><b>Motion Exaggeration</b></p> <p>The scene shows that both King and Zoro prepare to fight head-to-head.</p>	<p><b>Acting Principle Concentrating and Focus</b></p> <p>Both of the characters start to concentrate and make their preparations before they start to fight.</p> <p>This made both characters look entirely focused, emphasising the fight scene as thrilling and intense.</p>
 <p><b>Figure 2.2. Clip sample of exaggeration</b>  <i>(One Piece (2023): Episode 1050 (4:15-4:17))</i></p>	<p><b>Motion Exaggeration</b></p> <p>This scene shows Yamato and Luffy attempting to take down Kaido once and for all.</p>	<p><b>Acting Principle Subtext</b></p> <p>Both of the characters charged their attacks on Kaido.</p> <p>This scene emphasises that both want to deliver a decisive blow to Kaido.</p>

Scenes	Findings	Discussion
 <p data-bbox="217 573 667 663"><b>Figure 2.3. Clip sample of exaggeration</b>  <i>(One Piece (2023): Episode 1050 (4:24-4:27))</i></p>	<p data-bbox="708 289 951 317"><b>Motion Exaggeration</b></p> <p data-bbox="708 331 951 453">This scene shows the powerful attack from Yamato and Luffy on Kaido</p>	<p data-bbox="993 289 1308 317"><b>Acting Principle Physicality</b></p> <p data-bbox="993 331 1406 394">This shows the audience the impact of a mighty blow from Yamato and Luffy.</p> <p data-bbox="993 409 1390 472">This shows that the attacks are potent for the audience.</p>
 <p data-bbox="217 978 667 1068"><b>Figure 2.4. Clip sample of exaggeration</b>  <i>(One Piece (2023): Episode 1071 (16:04-16:08))</i></p>	<p data-bbox="708 695 951 722"><b>Motion Exaggeration</b></p> <p data-bbox="708 737 951 837">In this scene, we see that Luffy punches Kaido in the face.</p> <p data-bbox="708 852 951 974">This also shows the cartoonish sound effect when Luffy punches Kaido.</p>	<p data-bbox="993 695 1373 722"><b>Acting Principle Characterisation</b></p> <p data-bbox="993 737 1406 800">The scene emphasises how silly Luffy's personality is when he gets his Gear 5.</p> <p data-bbox="993 814 1406 877">This also shows the audience that Luffy has a funny persona and backstory.</p>

*One Piece* (2023) masterfully employs the concept of exaggeration to elevate the series to extraordinary levels while maintaining a sense of believability within its fantastical world. At its core, *One Piece* (2023) thrives on the art of exaggeration to breathe life into its vibrant characters, intricate world-building, and awe-inspiring battles. The characters embody exaggeration, each possessing unique traits, skills, and ambitions that surpass the ordinary. The protagonist, Monkey D. Luffy, epitomises this with his insatiable appetite for adventure and goal of becoming the Pirate King. His ability to stretch his body like rubber, a result of the *Gomu Gomu no Mi Devil Fruit*, adds an element of physical exaggeration that defines his combat style.

Exaggeration extends to the vast and diverse world of *One Piece* (2023). With its unpredictable weather and mysterious Red Line, the Grand Line exemplifies the series' penchant for exaggerating natural phenomena. Legendary locations like the Sky Island of Skypiea and the colossal fish known as Sea Kings further amplify the fantastical elements of the world. The battles, a hallmark of *One Piece* (2023), showcase exaggerated combat abilities called 'Haki' and intricate fighting styles unique to each character. Moments of intense exaggeration, such as Luffy's Gear Second and Gear Third transformations, are meticulously introduced, allowing the audience to accept these power-ups as logical progressions in the character's growth. Moreover, *One Piece* (2023) balances its exaggerated elements with deep emotional storytelling and well-developed characters. This emotional grounding connects the audience and the fantastical world, making even the most exaggerated moments resonate with authenticity.

In essence, *One Piece* (2023) achieves a delicate balance between exaggeration and believability by establishing consistent rules within its universe, ensuring that the fantastical elements serve the narrative



rather than detract from it. This harmonious blend contributes to the series' enduring appeal, captivating audiences with its grand adventures, larger-than-life characters, and a world that, despite its exaggerations, feels remarkably tangible.

## CONCLUSION

From this research, we can find out that exaggeration plays a crucial role in storytelling, and the principles of acting provide a valuable framework for understanding why exaggeration is essential in creating engaging narratives. The principles of acting, such as those taught in theatre and film, emphasise the significance of conveying emotions and stories in a compelling and relatable manner. It provides a foundation for storytellers to grasp the nuances of exaggeration, ensuring that it serves as a powerful and complementary tool rather than a disruptive force. By embracing these principles, creators can navigate the fine line between the fantastical and the relatable, crafting narratives that resonate deeply with their audience.

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