Best online tools for learning 2D animation

Learn how to create your own 2D animation with industry leading software including Adobe After Effects (see our tutorials for After Effects here), Autodesk Maya (you can download a free trial) and Adobe Animation, with these online tutorials, videos and websites for beginners through to advanced learners. You can also learn basic forms of animation using CrazyTalk Animator and Reallusion ToonBoom in the following tutorials.

Animation is becoming increasingly important skill for both illustrators and graphic designers with the high demand for video, GIFs and motion graphics for anything from a social media campaign to a website homepage. Of course, animating in 3D is powerful skill to have under the belt too, but here we mainly focus on courses for 2D animation, largely aimed at those learning animation for the first time. Most online tools listed here will offer tutorials in 3D animation as well, such as Udemey and Lynda.com.

In this feature we've listed each education platform followed by which software it teaches animation in, and how much the tutorial will cost. Software websites such as Adobe and Autodesk are also a great place to look first for free basic advice and support (usually written) to get you started and to make sure you chose to learn software that's best for you. Bear in mind when looking at which tutorials to take part in, if you haven't already purchased an Adobe Creative Cloud subscription, this will be an additional cost. Please get in touch and let us know what 2D animation tutorials you are using so we can add to the list.

Training program + peer review
Autodesk Maya

Premium Membership for £15 per month

AnimDojo is a new training program (aka an ‘online animation gym’) for animators who wish to learn Autodesk Maya, developed by co-founder Tom Bax and animation director Bader Badruddin at Blue Zoo Animation – a production studio in London. The program is designed to make sure participants can meet the needs of today’s working studios, and for animators to find employment – but it’s mainly set-up to address a current skills shortage in the sector.

With AnimDojo, you’re given regular mini-assignments, materials, peer reviews and the opportunity to have worked critiqued by industry professionals.

When you sign up, you can take part in animation challenges, work with character rigs and learn from live sessions which are hosted on the AnimDojo site weekly. There are also discussion forums so you can build a professional network and meet others similar to you.

The great thing about AnimDojo is you can sign up for free, and Premium Membership is priced at an affordable £15 per month (giving you extra training videos and peer critiques) with no minimum contract, and it’s not limited to students and graduates. Additional features can be purchased, such as showreel feedback and accreditation, with the aim to position you as a desirable candidate for the industry.

Video tutorials
CrazyTalk Animator, Marionette Studio, Photoshop
Anywhere between US$9/£6 and $97/£69

With Animation 101 learn how to create your first animated short with free video training with Mark Diaz, a self-taught animator. More than 47,000 people are already using the online training centre which creates animation in basic software such as Marionette Studio (which also has its own 2D animation course) and CrazyTalk Animator, rather than the likes of Maya and Unity.

Videos cover the eight steps to creating an animated short, how to draw when you don’t know how, how to animate a scene better and time management skills.

Alongside offering free videos, there are a bunch of online tutorials that help you to pick which software to use, such as CrazyTalk Animator, Photoshop or Moho – and how to get started.

Video tutorials
ToonBoom Studio, Adobe After Effects
Prices vary

Udemy is a wealth of online videos for learning creative skills – and mastering 2D animation is thankfully one of them. Mastering 2D Animation is split into three different videos for the combined price of US$39.99/£28. The tutorials explore hand-drawn and digital techniques by Tony White. The apprentice-style course has a promising 4.7 rating and over 1,000 students enrolled.

You'll learn how to use equipment, the principles of movement, how to execute a pencil-drawn and digital vector shaped animation and how to animate a rigged character. The course includes four hours of digital instruction and 10 articles. Check out Mastering 2D Animation from Udemy here.

There's also a bunch of other 2D animation Udemy courses, so make sure you browse around for what suits you most, such as a course which requires no drawing skills in After Effects (AE), or if you are interested in forming basic 2D animation in AE, this character animation course will be for you.

Video tutorials
Adobe Animation, ToonBoom Harmony
Prices vary

Become a 2D digital animator with this online video course by Lynda.com. Learn the basics of animation and character development, and practice within Adobe Animation and ToonBoom Harmony. This course is not for the faint-hearted though, with 29 hours of video tutorials to crunch through.

You'll first have to sign up to Lynda.com however, which costs US$27/£19 for Premium, or you can sign up to a free trial.

Online tutorials
After Effects, Animate
Free

Adobe offers its own support for learning how to use its software, including After Effects and Animate. Although the mixture of text and video tutorials may not be as in depth as others in this list, if you're a quick learner and strapped for cash, this free option may be your best bet.

See here for Adobe After Effects tutorials, and here for Adobe Animate tutorials.

Video tutorial courses
Adobe After Effects, Houdini, Autodesk Maya
Prices vary

Whether you’re a beginner or expert, Pluralsight offers a range of tutorial courses made up of a number of videos, extensively covering how to use Adobe After Effects and Autodesk Maya to create 2D animation, including creating your first animation and becoming familiar with certain tools such as the Puppet Tool.

Have a look at the Pluralsight animation courses to see individual prices and a description of each.

Written tutorials
CrazyTalk Animator, Unity, Photoshop
Free

Learn how to create 2D animation using Unity and CrazyTalk Animator 3 with these step-by-step written tutorials with screenshots to help. Although it might take a little longer to follow than a video tutorial, it’s another free option.

https://www.digitalartsonline.co.uk/features/motion-graphics/best-online-tools-for-learning-2d-animation/