Character Design: Tips and Tricks

When it comes to designing a character, there's a lot you should take into consideration. I'm by no means an expert on the subject, but I still want to share with you a few tricks that I've found work nicely. I'm only going to focus on the concepts and techniques I find most useful, so please note that a whole lot of useful information about character design will be left out of this post. I'm just going to end up rambling if I cover everything there is to know, as there's so much to talk about when it comes to character design. So, this post is only intended as a brief introduction to the topic.

Alucard (Hellsing Ultimate)

First off, determine the part of the character that you want to draw the viewer's eye to. I've found that often, this area of focus should be the character's face. Once you've found the area that you want to emphasize, attract the viewer's attention to it. This can be done in a variety of ways, but my favorite way is to pick a bright and saturated (but not *too* saturated) color that appears nowhere else in the character design and place it near the intended focal point. This combination of brightness, saturation, and contrast makes it very hard for the viewer to NOT look at the focus area first. It helps if you use less bright and saturated colors elsewhere in the design, because it further draws attention to the focal point and also keeps your character from becoming oversaturated (and hurting the viewer's eyes).

Color combinations are another important thing to take into account. What I generally do is use a triadic color scheme (three colors that are spaced apart evenly on the color wheel). My favorite color triad is red, blue, and yellow, as it has a very "heroic" and "noble" undertone to it. It's best used for characters who you want the viewer to see as morally "good." It can also be used for sketchy villains

who do their best to put on a "hero" act (I've tried using it this way before, and the result looked really good and fit the character very nicely).

Jin Kisaragi (BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger)

Alternatively, you can use complementary colors for your palette (two colors opposite each other on the color wheel – like red and green). That color scheme works really nicely, too. One thing you should *not* do is use a million different colors with no rhyme or reason – the character will become a very ugly rainbow that makes the viewer wince and shield their eyes. Honestly, there's just so much that goes into making a good color palette for a character – I've really barely even scratched the surface here.

Gaara (Naruto Shippuden)

You should really also try to incorporate some meaning into the design – as in, what is the character all about? Try hinting at their personality / inner self through the clothes they wear and the accessories they carry. For example, if your character has a close connection with a specific person, you could have the character wear red ribbons (which symbolizes a "fated connection" between two people). The way I see it, the best character designs do more than just "look cool" – they show the character for who they really are, and even someone who knows literally nothing about the character's backstory or personality can get a sense of how they act and what they "stand for."

Homura Akemi (Puella Magi Madoka Magica)

Also, play around with the character's build and physique. Not every character has average height and average weight – and the more extreme you make these characteristics, the more the character will stick out in the viewer's mind. This alone is a great way to differentiate members of a fictional cast of characters – no one is ever going to confuse an extremely tall and slim character with an extraordinarily short and muscular one. And the more varied a cast of characters is, the better – both in terms of personality and in terms of appearance.

Jotaro Kujo (Jojo's Bizarre Adventure: Stardust Crusaders)

Whatever you do, don't go crazy with your character's design. You should have an idea of what you're trying to communicate through the design before you even start and make an effort to keep all the elements consistent with the character's personality as well as with each other. If you overload the design with tons of thematically clashing accessories, it's going to look like even *you* don't know who your character is. Keep it coherent, and keep it simple.

All right, I'm going to stop here. I could go on all day, but I think this is a decent starting point for anyone who wants to get into designing characters. If you want to learn more, there are a lot of really great resources all over the web for this sort of thing, all of which I've found to be immensely useful. If you like coming up with and drawing your own characters, I definitely encourage you to learn all you can and practice a bunch – there are so many amazing character designs that haven't even been made yet.