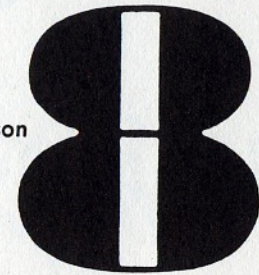


Famous Artists Cartoon Course
Westport, Connecticut

Action and the figure

Lesson



Rube Goldberg

Milton Caniff

Al Capp

Harry Haenigsen

Willard Mullin

Gurney Williams

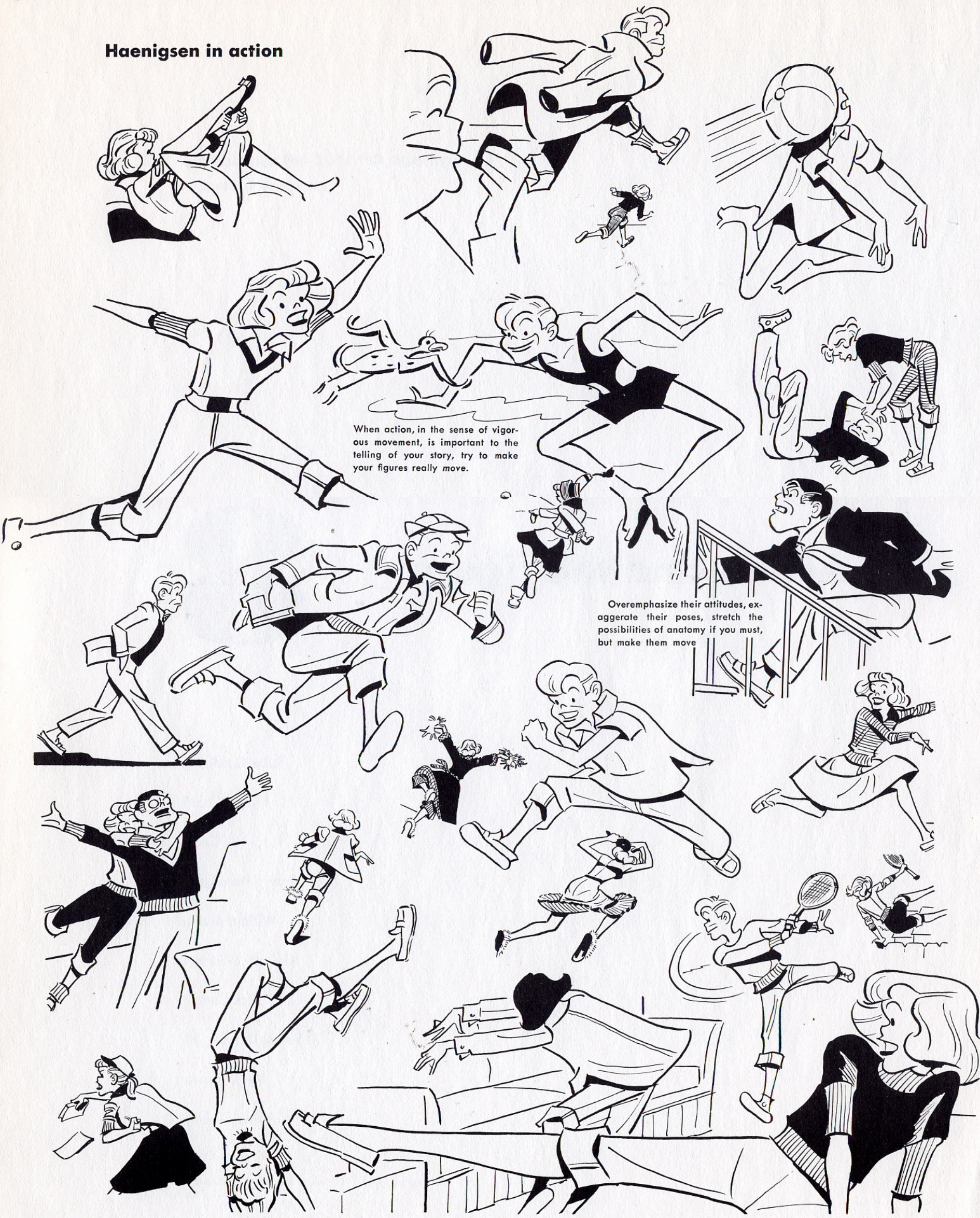
Dick Cavalli

Whitney Darrow, Jr.

Virgil Partch

Barney Tobey

Haenigsen in action



When action, in the sense of vigorous movement, is important to the telling of your story, try to make your figures really move.

Overemphasize their attitudes, exaggerate their poses, stretch the possibilities of anatomy if you must, but make them move.



The figure in action

Action is the key to good cartooning. Many a good idea has been ruined by badly drawn action, and many a weak idea has been strengthened and saved by humorous and appropriate action.

Action does not necessarily mean violence or exaggeration. The way a character sits in a chair is action, even if he isn't moving. Observe and note how each of your friends has his own way of slouching in a chair. A cartoonist with a realistic style must keep his action close to what the real human figure is capable of doing. Then again, an all-out comic or "big-foot" style cartoonist can do anything with the action of his figures that he can think of, or — more important — that he can draw.

Balance is the key to all good action. Only when it is in free fall is a figure not in balance. We don't mean you can't exaggerate. Exaggerate all you want — but your action will be stronger if your figure has the appearance of being in balance. A figure leaning backwards can only lean over so far before it falls on the back of its head. But, if that figure were pulling an elephant's tail, it could lean back as far as you want. The pull of gravity would be offset by the tail attached to the elephant, and the figure would still be in balance. Always consider counter-pull, or opposing forces, when drawing action.

Avoid stiff and inactive figures. Try to have your characters *doing* something at all times. In a comic strip that is carried by the balloons, don't have your figures stand or sit in the same position throughout the whole series of panels. Even if they just

scratch their heads, or use their hands while they talk — keep them *moving*. Draw them stiffly, without action, and your characters will look like window dummies. Dummies aren't alive — cartoon characters *must* be.

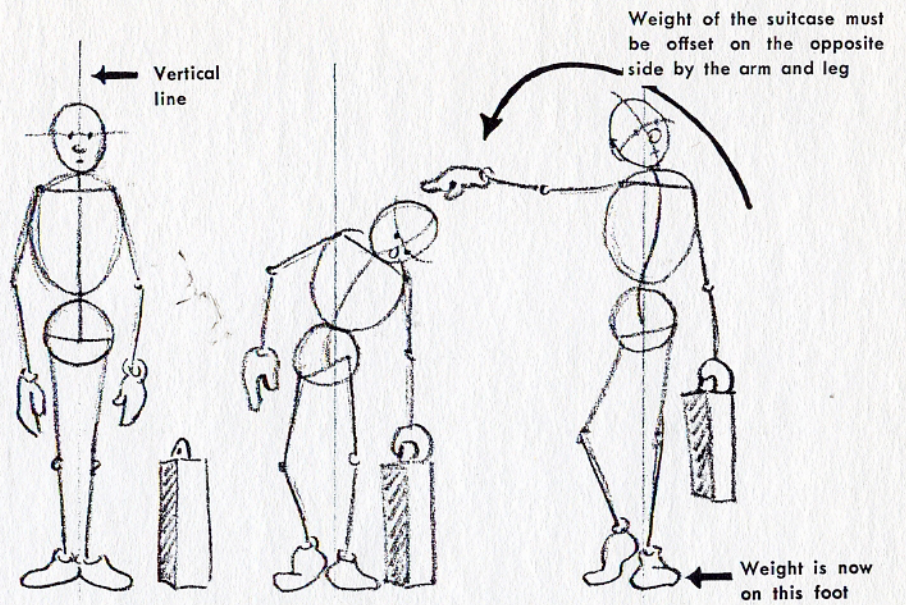
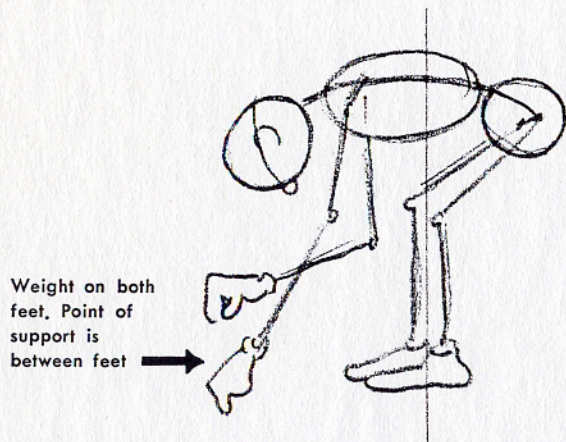
Speed, or expression, lines can help the figure perform its action. A running man is speeded up by a few straight lines flowing out behind, as though he were cutting a path through the air. A whap on the head with a rolling pin or brick is funnier and stronger with action lines radiating from the point of contact and surrounded by stars. The blurred effect of a vibrating punching bag can be drawn with action lines. Here again we caution you that simplicity, the basic law of cartooning, should govern everything you do. Too many speed lines and stars can start looking like spaghetti and distract your reader from the action you're trying to draw.

Single panel or gag cartoons used in national magazines usually contain a minimum of action lines. The modern panel drawings have action — plenty of it — but the action is usually toned down as the composition becomes more important in illustrating the gag line. Also, if a cartoon is done in wash or halftone, speed lines can complicate application of the tones.

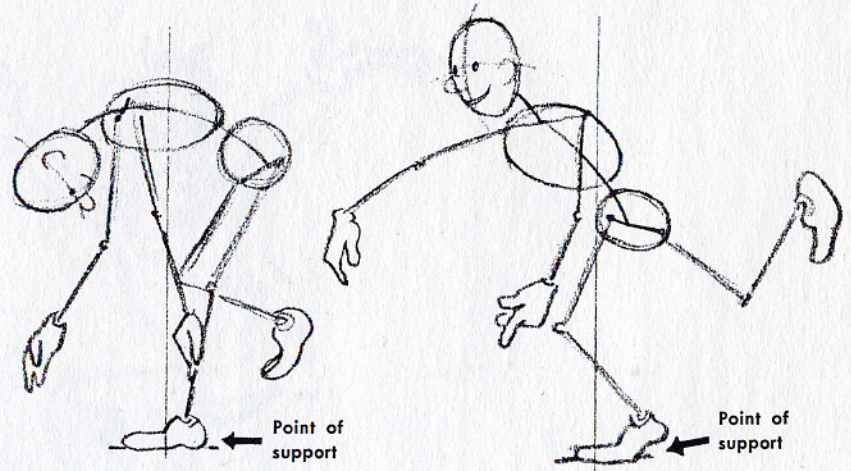
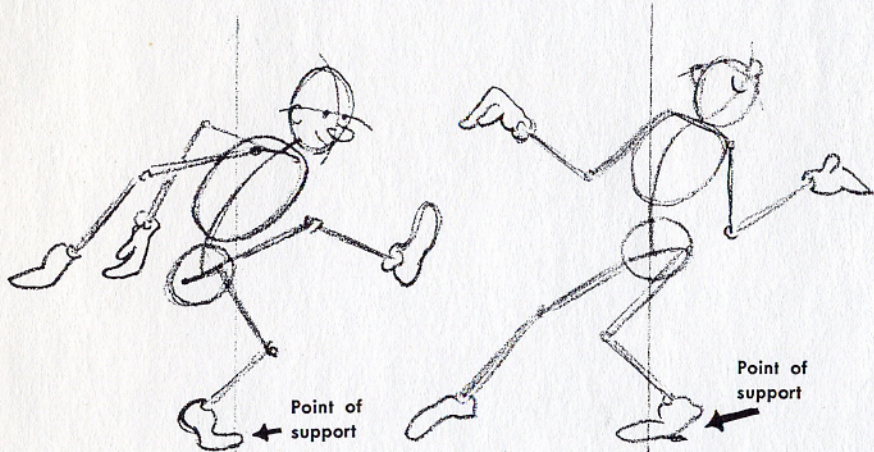
Your reader's first glance at a page must sell him on the idea of reading it. Interesting action gets attention — lack of it loses customers. Keep this in mind, have fun, and spend plenty of time on this all-important part of your cartooning.

Balance

Regardless of whether the figure is in motion, it must always appear to be in balance — except when it is in free-fall. A vertical line through your figure will help you to check this.



When standing erect the weight is equal on either side of the line. In bending to the side, the arm is extended on the opposite side to preserve balance



Generally, the weight of the body should be balanced over the foot or feet — or between the feet that rest on the ground and support this weight

Milton Caniff on Action



A smallish gent like Happy Easter provides humor with lively action. He's planted solidly on that left foot — his right impels the other gentleman off balance

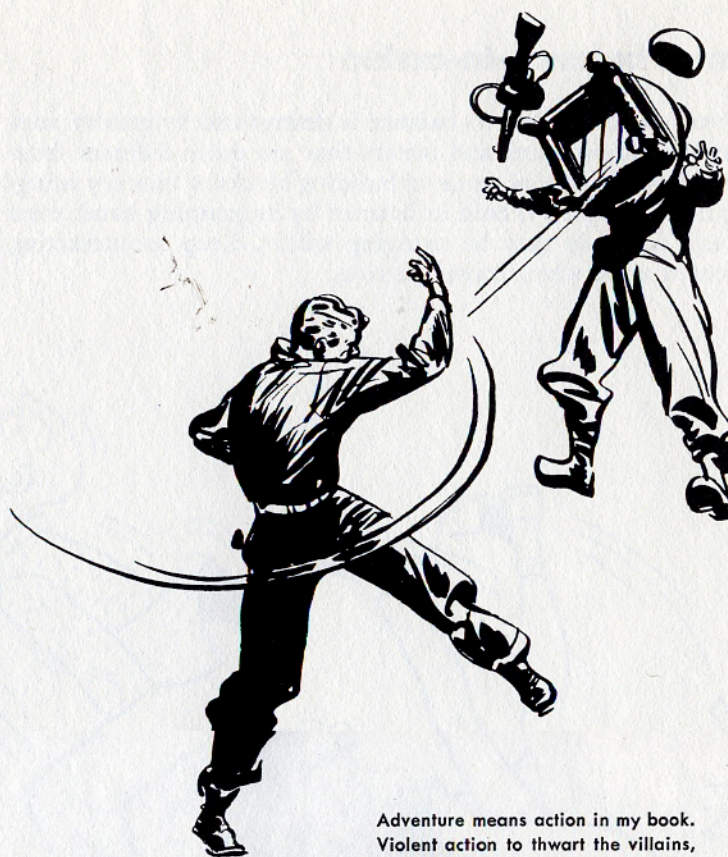


A two-figure action like this is fun to do, but takes some thinking out. Here I'd like to emphasize the importance of practicing rear view action, as well as front and side views

The young lady swinging the lead pipe is in balance — her feet are solidly planted under her and she has control of her body — and the situation

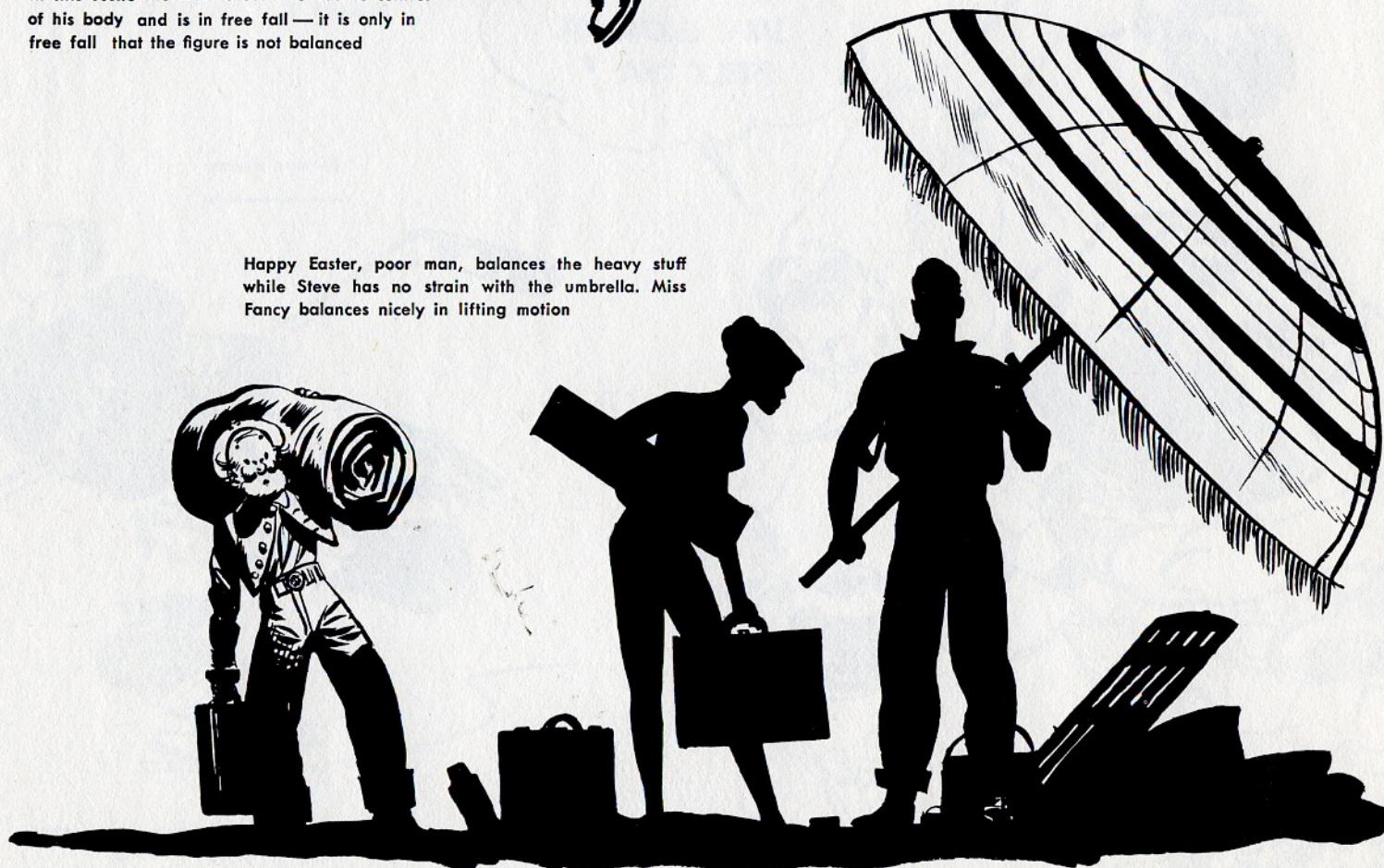


In this scene the man is out—he has no control of his body and is in free fall—it is only in free fall that the figure is not balanced



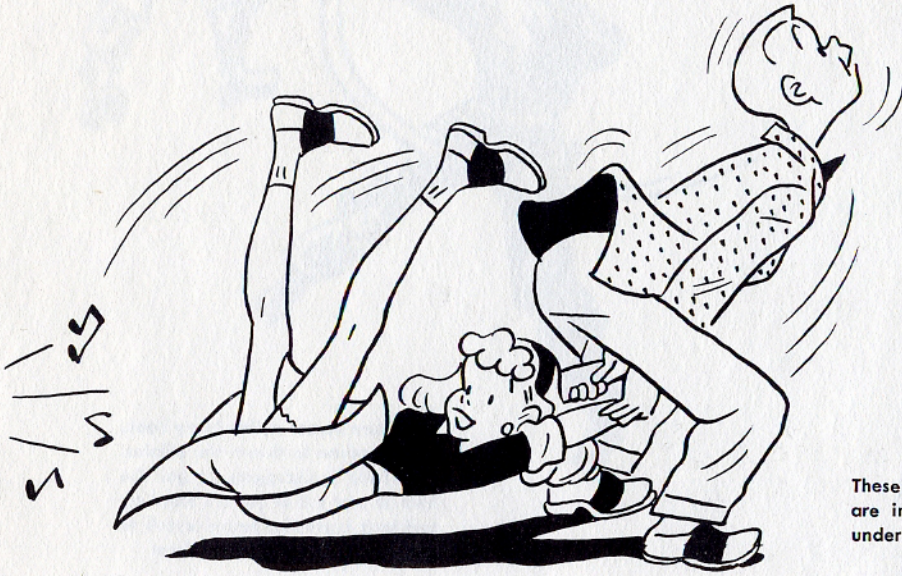
Adventure means action in my book. Violent action to thwart the villains, and lively skullduggery to get the hero in and out of jams. I stood up and took a practice heave myself to get the feel and balance here

Happy Easter, poor man, balances the heavy stuff while Steve has no strain with the umbrella. Miss Fancy balances nicely in lifting motion



Comic balance-in-action

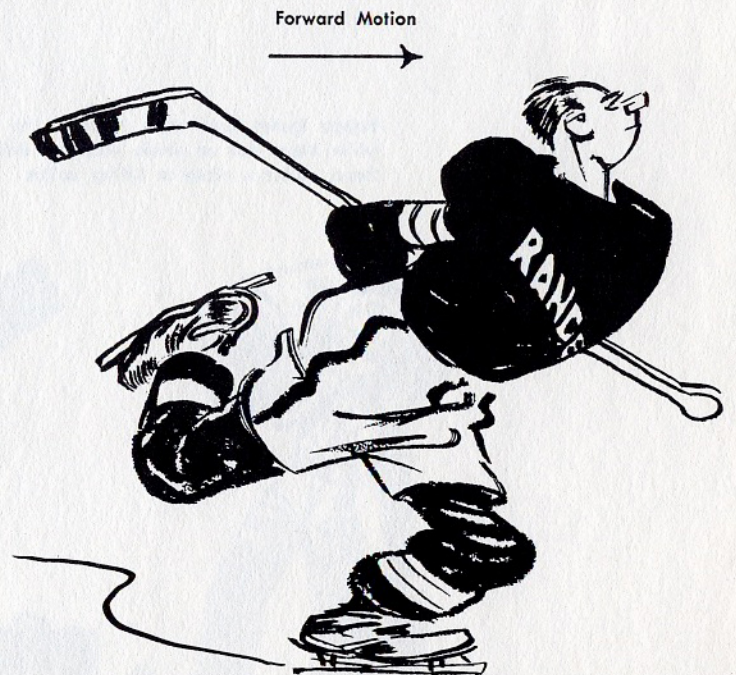
When a figure moves, its balance is determined by gravity, support points, pressures and factors that are quite different from the formal balance of a pile of building blocks. A monkey swinging from a trapeze is held in balance by its grasping hand, even though its body may be swinging wildly. Keep counteracting forces in mind when drawing action.



These dancing kids by Harry Haenigsen are in balance because their bodies are under control



In these action drawings by the faculty you can see that even though the action is exaggerated the figures are balanced

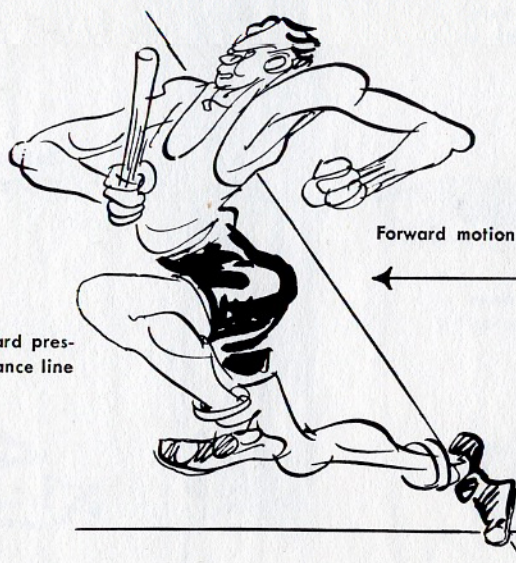
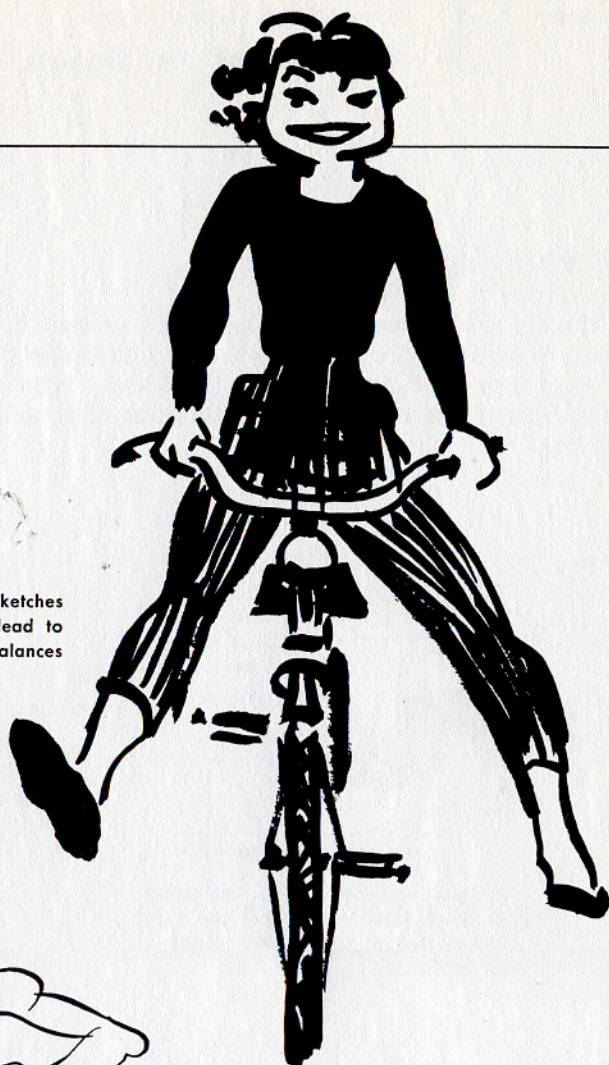


Willard Mullin is an acknowledged master of action drawing

↑ Formal balance



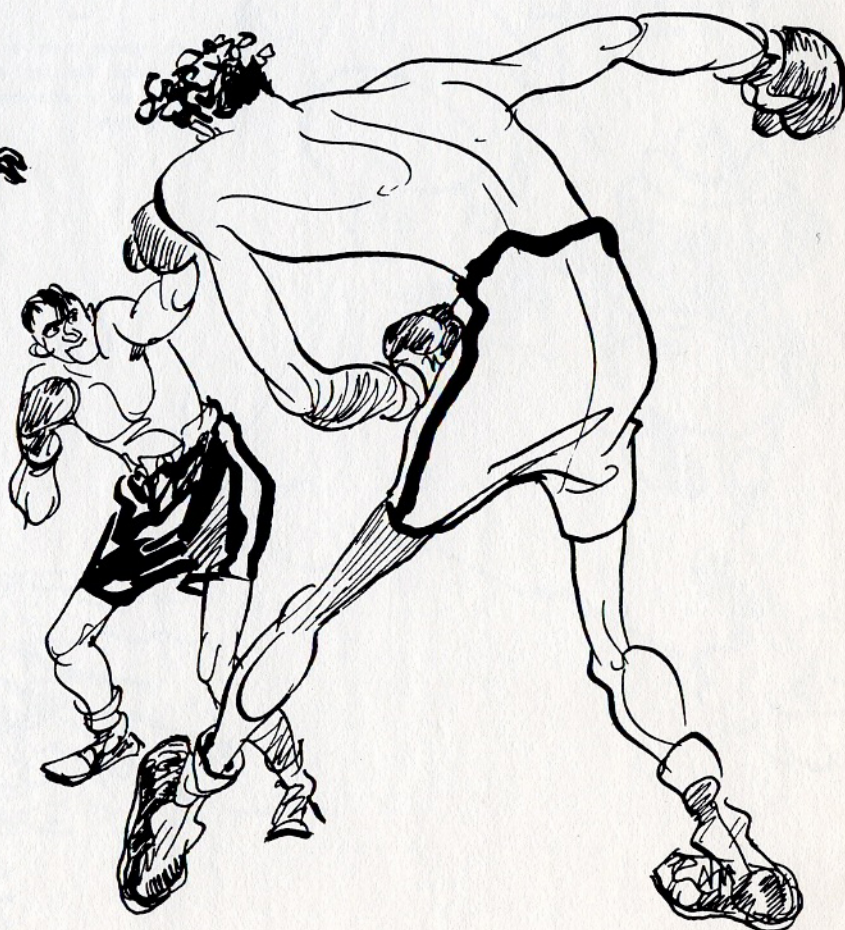
Quick, free brush sketches like this sometimes lead to new ideas. This girl balances nicely on her bicycle



In this figure by Willard Mullin there is a forward pressure against the foot on the ground, thus the balance line is slanting forward

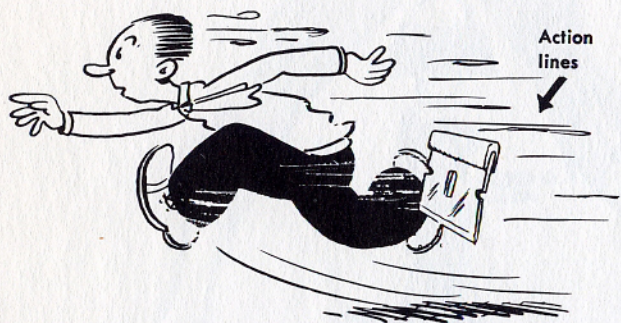


This ballet dancer by Al Capp is balanced in the air because she has control over her body — she has that toe out, ready for a landing

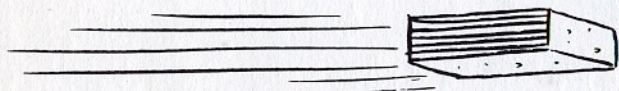


Action or speed lines

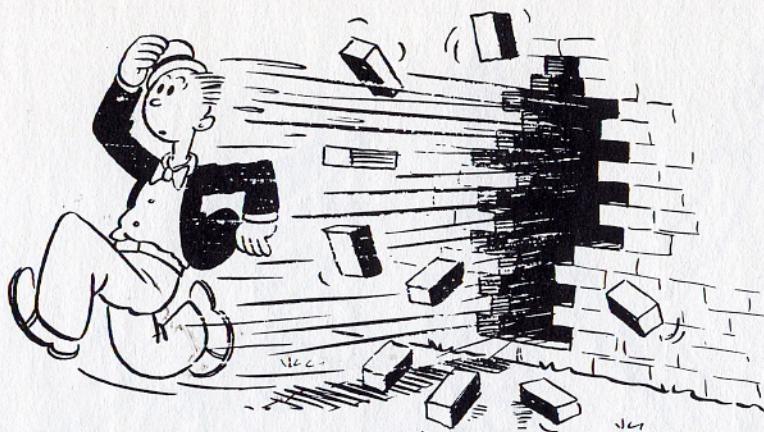
All through your course we keep harping on action. Figures and objects in cartoons don't move — they're immovably printed on the page. But, you can give them the *illusion* of motion with action lines. Here are some basic examples of action lines for your use.



This figure was fully drawn, with action lines inked. Then white action lines were scratched through and behind it with a razor blade



On bricks, etc. in transit, it helps to have the shading lines go in the same direction as action lines.



Speed lines made with pen and long razor blade scratches — or Chinese white — into black of the hole



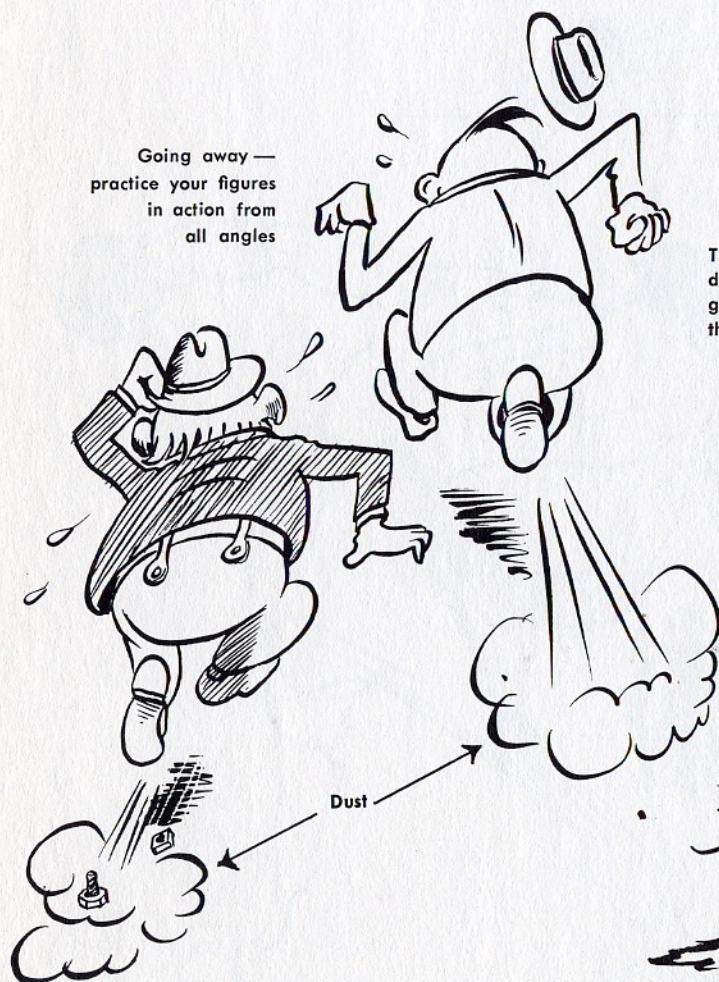
This young man is going down fast. He could also be going up or sideways—turn the picture

A grand old standby



Radiating lines from point of action, with stars and sweat

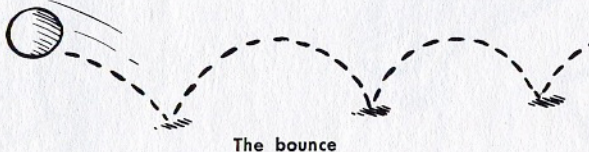
Going away — practice your figures in action from all angles



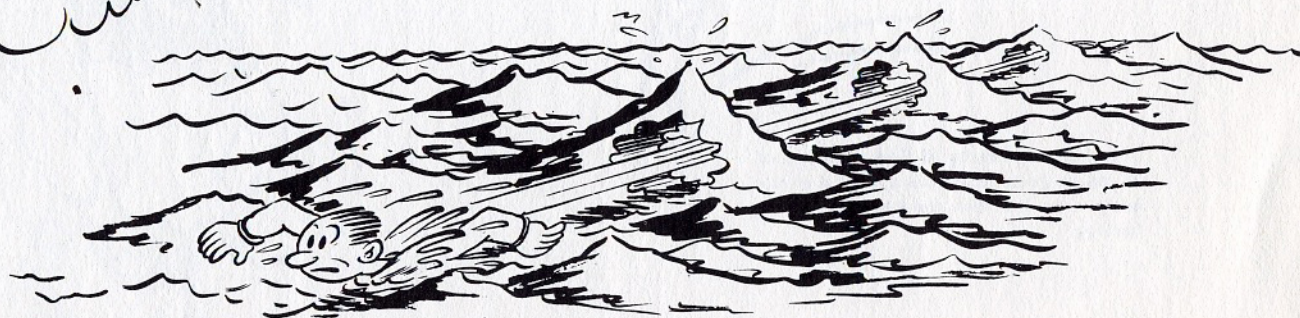
His head is still vibrating and the lump is risen and shining



Shine marks call attention to small things



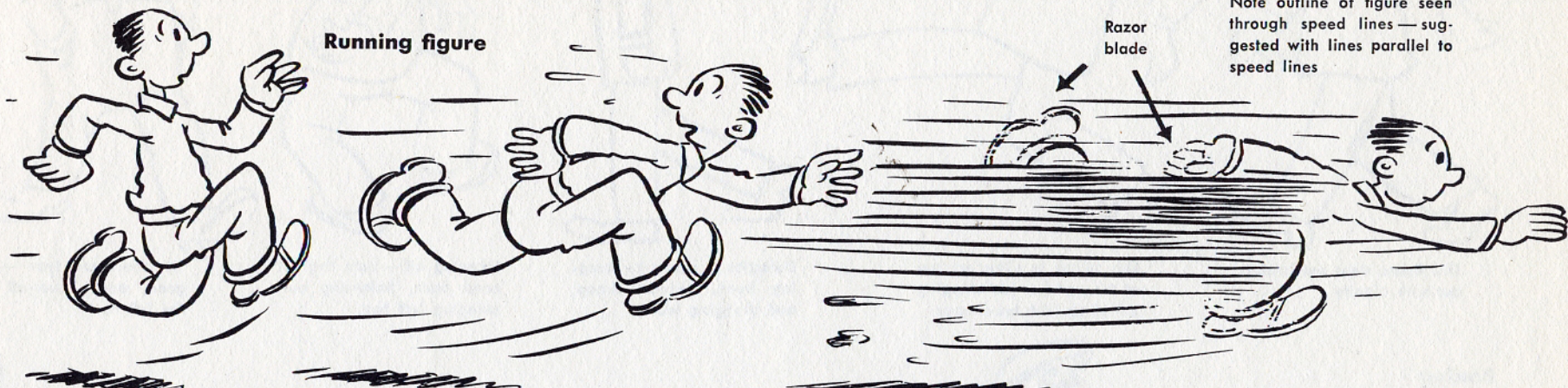
The bounce



No one could swim this fast, but those holes in the water sure give the impression of speed

The chase

In the old two-reel comedies and today's animated cartoon movies you always see a chase. Chases are exciting and funny. The customers love them and you should, therefore, be able to give them what they want. Practice your running figures until you, too, can have 'em rolling in the aisles.

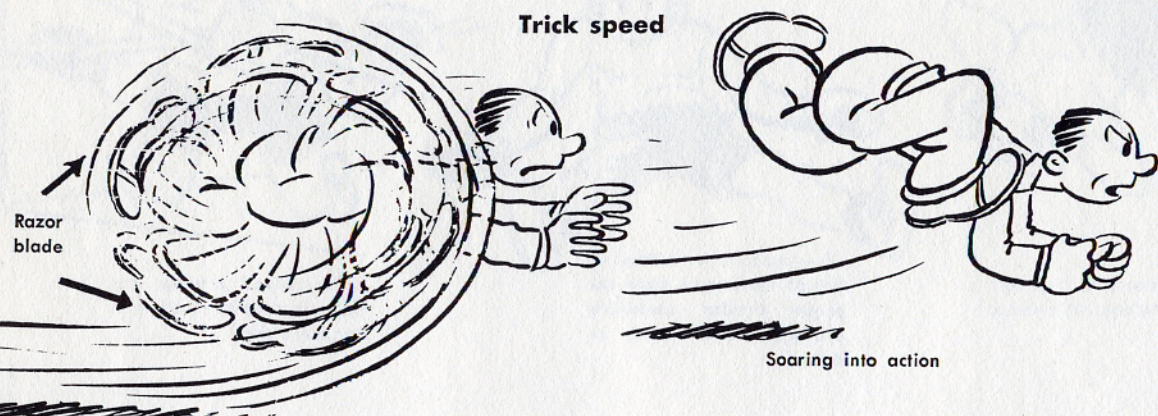


This figure is hustling away from something — just a few action lines

He spots his pursuer. More speed lines - - and sweat — he's worried

Now he's supersonic — Front of figure drawn in — rear blurred by atmospheric disturbance of his passage

Note outline of figure seen through speed lines — suggested with lines parallel to speed lines



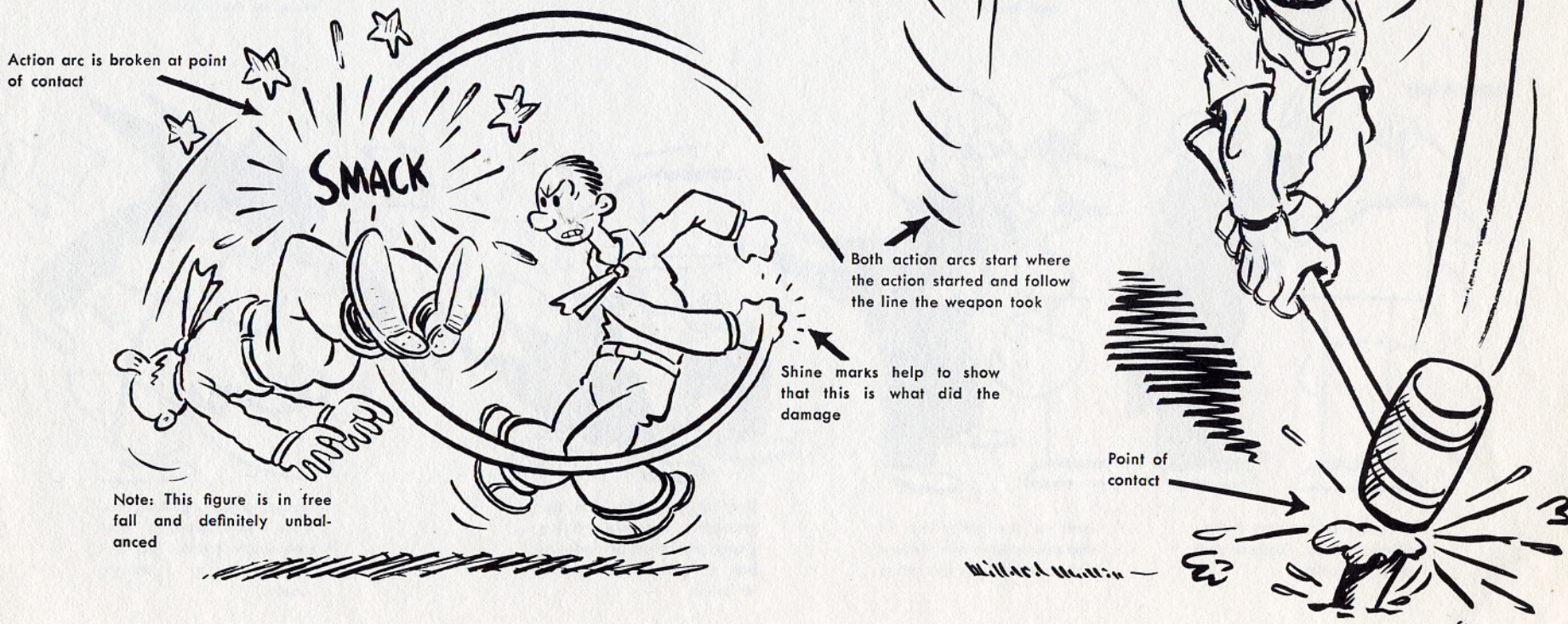
Razor blade

Soaring into action

The pursuer starts pursuing — his drivers are slipping

Sock and smack

The action of both figures on this page is basically the same — they are both hitting something. The only difference is that the point of contact with the stake driver is at the end of the action arc. The fighter's action arc is interrupted half-way by the other gentleman's chin — then it keeps going, because the hitter is full of vitamins.



Action arc is broken at point of contact

Both action arcs start where the action started and follow the line the weapon took

Shine marks help to show that this is what did the damage

Note: This figure is in free fall and definitely unbalanced

Point of contact

Miller & Miller

Walking



This figure steps out briskly, but with dignity



This fellow is either on top of the world or just stepping out of an Irish tea-shoppe



Dejection is shown by hanging head, general droop, and dragging foot

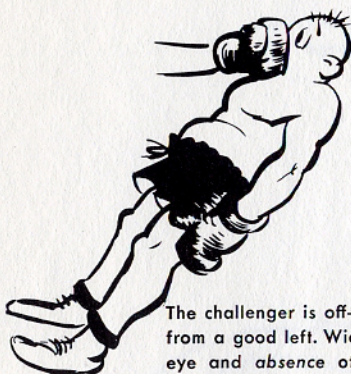


Stepping off — note the left hand back, balancing out-swinging left foot

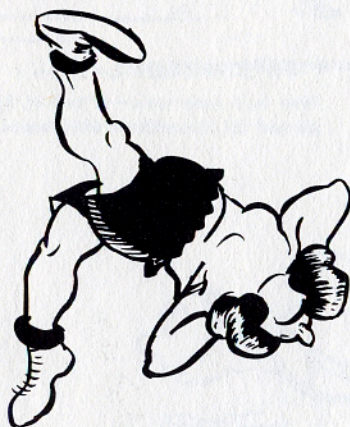


The nonchalant type — a good, sturdy push-off with the left foot

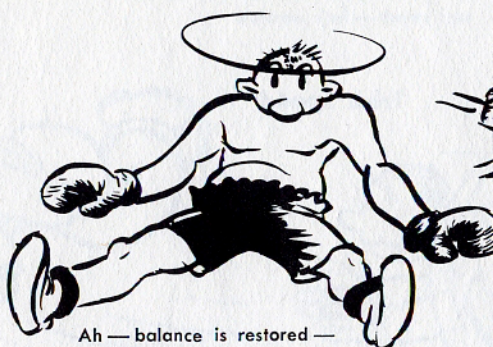
Boxing



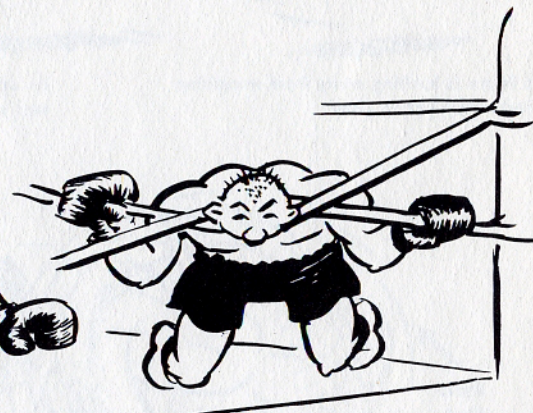
The challenger is off-balance from a good left. Wide open eye and absence of action lines add to the solemnity of the moment. Under-drawing, like understatement, can be funny



Our character is in free fall now — definitely off-balance

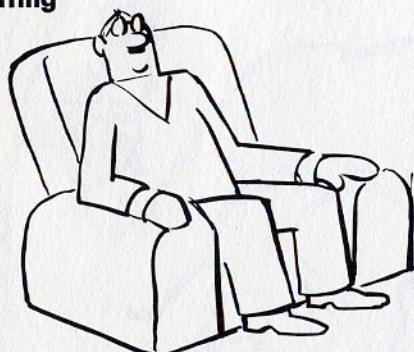


Ah — balance is restored — flat on the canvas. Note the single circular speed-line showing bewilderment or daze



He's stopped moving, but there is definitely action in our boy's pose

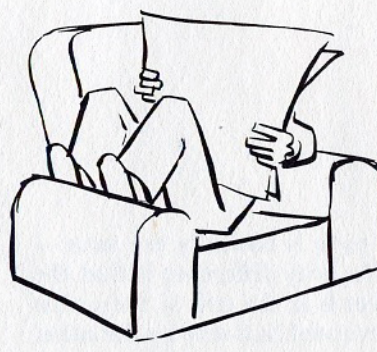
Sitting



Bolt upright. He's sitting down, but there's no action to him



Ah — he's more comfortable now — notice the action in his smoke and natural body-position

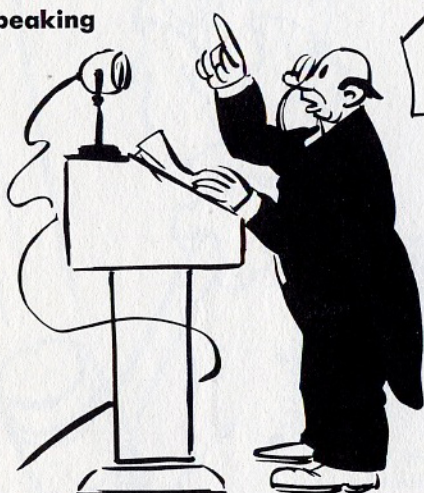


Right at home with the sports news. His wife will howl at those feet on the furniture



He has just heard a few thousand well-chosen words on a dull subject — but he's living in that chair!

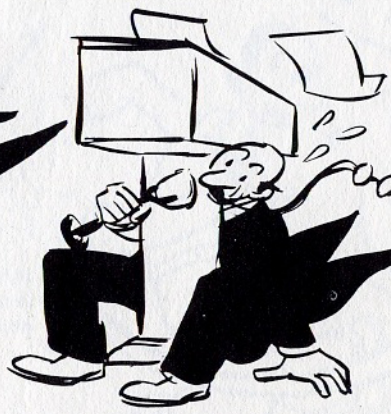
Speaking



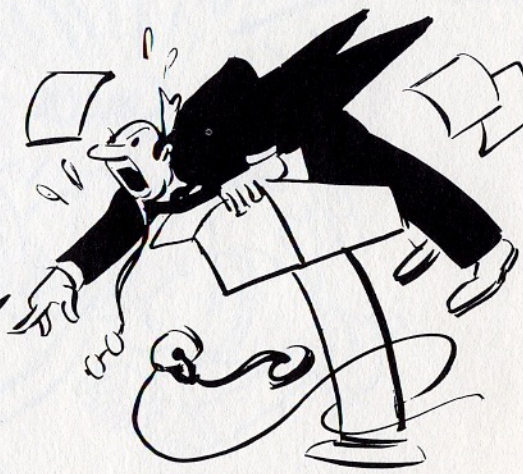
The address starts on a dignified keynote. Rostrum and speaker upright



Look at the action-line of that microphone wire! Papers and coattails help the action

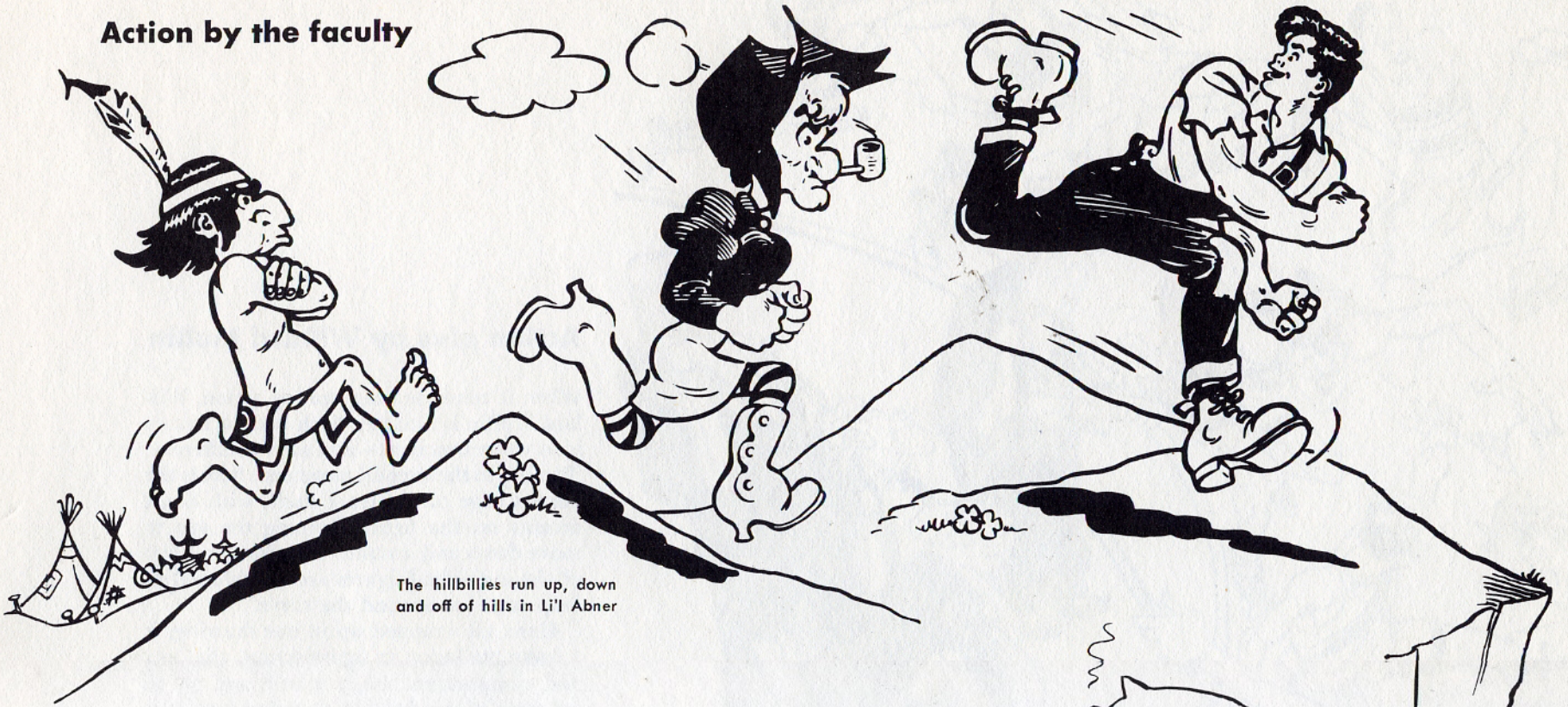


Ducking the eggs from appreciative audience. Flying paper, sweat drops and ribbon on glasses are accents to action



Figure, papers, glasses, rostrum, microphone, and clothes are flying. This is a real climax to a rousing speech

Action by the faculty



The hillbillies run up, down and off of hills in Li'l Abner



HAENIGSEN



In Milt Caniff's adventure strip, adventures mean action





Action plus by Willard Mullin

When it comes to exaggerating action, Willard Mullin is a master. Each of these figures is in violent motion — and each is different. The key to the over-all movement here is the curved edge of the track itself, with black accents on the figures helping the eye to move down and around. The arms and legs of the individual figures are also plotted to help your eye around the curve.

Here, all wrapped up in one drawing, is a complete lesson in figure-action, anatomy and composition. Study it well and try to get some of this freedom of action into your own work.

Page 2

FAMOUS ARTISTS CARTOON COURSE
Student Work
Lesson 8

To study and practice

In this lesson you learn the principles of action. Realistic or comic, in whatever style you draw, action is important. Interesting action will attract the reader's eye and, by itself, give him a chuckle. Without animation, any character will look like a store-window dummy -- and there are no successful cartoons being drawn about lifeless dummies.

There is no other way to develop the knack of drawing figures in lively, interesting action than to draw them ... over and over again ... in as many different positions and actions as you can dream up. Use pencil on any kind of sketching paper. Don't become too concerned with "noodling" unimportant details in these figures. Instead, try to express the over-all action as simply and graphically as possible.

Harry Haenigsen's sketches on page two illustrate only a few of the countless actions the figure can perform. Make drawings from them and other figures in your textbooks to understand the tricks of giving the illusion of movement to the cartoon figure. As you draw, study and analyze the actions -- don't merely copy. Note the forward lean of the figure and opposing twist of shoulders and hips in running actions; how twisting and bending the torso eliminates the otherwise static quality of seated or standing figures; the foreshortening of many parts of the figure which occurs in the Milton Caniff and Willard Mullin drawings of violent action; and the use of speed lines to point up and accentuate paths of movement.

In addition to making pencil sketches of many different figures in action, you should concentrate on refining the action in a particular figure. A good way to do this is to use tracing paper. Place one of your action drawings under the top sheet of your tracing pad and redraw it. As you do, eliminate any unessential lines and accentuate those which help tell the story of the action. You may find it desirable to repeat the process and carry the refinements further on a second or even third tracing. It is also good to hold your drawing up to a mirror and look at it in reverse. You then see it with a fresh eye and can more easily see what is right and what is wrong with the action.

Besides practicing with pencil sketches, try drawing some of your figures directly with either pen and ink or brush and ink because the quality of the line you use can do much to strengthen the action. Make the ink lines flow and move in any way that will help bring out the movement of the figure.

Don't overdo the use of speed lines. They alone will not make your figures move -- they are merely accents to help emphasize action. Make the lines of the figure -- its clothing, the hair, etc. -- follow the line of action.

After you've made many of these sketches (and not before!) draw the following assignments for this lesson. Our criticisms of your work will be based on (1) how well you express the figure actions, (2) how well you draw the figures themselves and (3) your use of instruction given in previous lessons.

The assignments you are to mail to the School for criticism

ASSIGNMENT 1

On a sheet of 11 x 14-inch Bristol board, measure off and ink a panel 7 inches high and 9 inches wide. In it, with pencil and then with ink and pen or brush, do a three-quarter front view of a man in the act of falling. He has just tripped over a brick on the sidewalk while running at full speed. Use everything you've learned to make this drawing as full of action and humor as you possibly can. Keep your picture simple. To tell your story, all you need draw is the falling action figure, the brick and the sidewalk on which he is about to land.

IMPORTANT - Mark this sheet ASSIGNMENT 1.

FAMOUS ARTISTS CARTOON COURSE
Student Work
Lesson 8

ASSIGNMENT 2

On a sheet of 11 x 14-inch Bristol board, measure off another panel 7 inches high and 9 inches wide. In it draw two running figures, side or three-quarter view -- a frightened young man and a pretty girl. He is carrying a bouquet of flowers and running away from the girl, who is just about to catch him. Use either pen or brush for inking. For this assignment we want you to use your own imagination to create a solid-looking panel cartoon with lively, active figures.

IMPORTANT - Mark this sheet ASSIGNMENT 2.

Present your assignments in the same clean, professional manner you would use if you were submitting them to the cartoon buyer of a publication. Letter your name, address and student number in the lower left-hand corner of each drawing. In the lower right corner, place the Lesson Number and Assignment Number. Mail to:

FAMOUS ARTISTS CARTOON COURSE
Westport, Connecticut

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