

VALIDATE BEFORE YOU ANIMATE.

A Field Guide for Testing Story Ideas Before You
Animate Them



Blake Ugo

Founder, Lauda Collective

TikTok: @designedbyblake · Instagram: @blake.animation.biz

laudacollective.com



What This Guide Is (and Isn't)

Most creators spend months building something before they know if anyone cares.

This guide gives you a framework to test that first. It uses the same signals the industry already looks for, before any commission needs to get involved.

THIS GUIDE HELPS YOU

- Identify whether a story idea can generate repeatable, shareable moments
 - Test animation concepts before spending months producing them
 - Understand what signals make an idea grow into long-term IP, and what keeps an idea at the scene level
-

THIS GUIDE WILL NOT

- Teach animation technique
 - Write your story for you
 - Tell you which idea to pursue
 - Guarantee success
-

Let's run the test.

Why the Industry Needs Proof

The industry doesn't reject bad ideas. It rejects *unproven* ones.

I speak with indie creators all the time: animators, filmmakers, and storytellers who have an idea they believe could become a series or a film. Most of them aren't struggling with creativity.

They're struggling with the space between making something they love and turning that idea into a real production. Because those two worlds operate very differently.

Making something you love is one thing. Getting it to survive contact with a real budget, a real commissioner, and a real audience is something else entirely.

And animation is one of the most expensive forms of storytelling to produce.

BEFORE COMMISSIONING, STUDIOS ASK:

- Is there already an audience for this idea?
- Is the character recognisable and memorable?
- Could this grow into long-term IP?

This is why so many great ideas never make it past development.

Not because the creators lacked talent.

“But because the industry needs proof before it can take the risk.”

The Economics of Animation

TYPICAL TV BUDGETS PER EPISODE



£6M – £15M
Average cost to produce a full animated series

THE TRADITIONAL INDUSTRY FUNNEL



But modern audiences discover stories differently.

Audience Attention Has Shifted

AVERAGE DAILY VIDEO VIEWING TIME BY PLATFORM (2025)



Sources: Data Reportal · Nielsen · eMarketer · Statista (2025). Approximate global averages.

THE AUDIENCE-FIRST PIPELINE

BEFORE



NOW



They rarely commit to full episodes first.
They connect with moments.

How Moments Work

Original stories aren't discovered through episodes.
They're discovered through moments.

Most people know the feeling, even if they've never named it. You're scrolling. Something catches your attention. Before you realise it, you're waiting to see how it plays out.

That pause. That anticipation. That payoff. That's what makes moments work.

Social content isn't built around plot. It's built around moments. The difference matters. A moment can travel on its own. An episode can't.

As an indie studio founder, I've seen how often creators invest months in production before knowing whether the moment actually lands with anyone beyond themselves. The framework below is the test we run before anything gets made.

THE MOMENT STRUCTURE

Curiosity

1

Something unexpected grabs attention.

Suspense

2

The viewer anticipates what happens next.

Surprise

3

An unexpected outcome happens.

Recognition

4

The viewer relates — and wants to share.

The Framework in Action

EXAMPLE 1 Zoomies — Cliff Moment Watch →

295K 27K 3.3K
LIKES SAVES SHARES

CURIOSITY 1
A child moves toward the edge of a cliff.

SUSPENSE 2
The parent rushes in to stop them.

SURPRISE 3
The child is saved — but the parent falls instead.

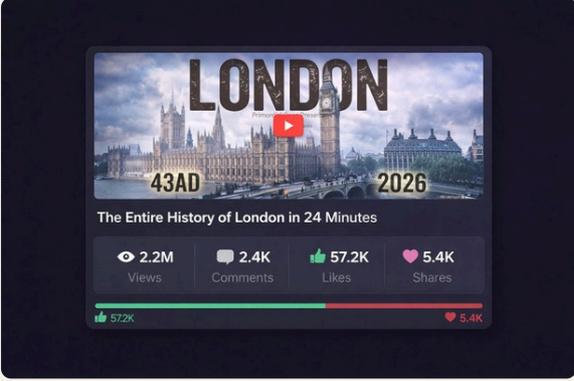
RECOGNITION 4
Immediately relatable: a reckless child and a protective parent.

The tools got easier. The bar for a moment worth sharing didn't.

The Difference Between Content and a Moment

Same technology. Same format. Dramatically different results. Every time I look at why, it comes down to the same thing: one had a moment; the other just had content.

EXAMPLE A — STRONG STRUCTURE
WATCH →



2.2M 57K 5.4K

VIEWS LIKES SHARES

Curiosity: "How can London's history fit in 24 minutes?"

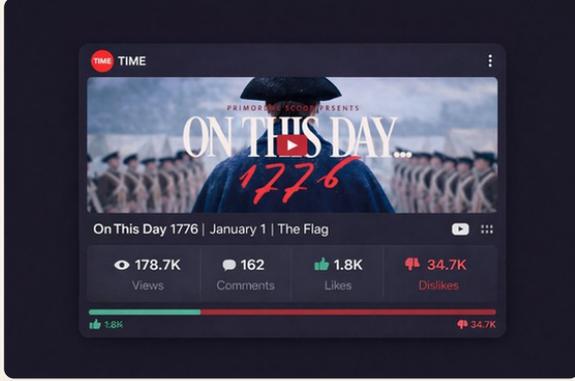
Suspense: Time moves relentlessly forward.

Surprise: Unexpected transitions across centuries.

Recognition: Viewers recognise landmarks and eras.

STRONG MOMENTS

EXAMPLE B — WEAK STRUCTURE
WATCH →



178K 1.8K 34K

VIEWS LIKES DISLIKES

Curiosity: Low — informational rather than intriguing.

Suspense: Limited tension in storytelling.

Surprise: Less unexpected progression.

Recognition: Niche historical interest.

FAILED — SAME TECH

MINIMUM VIABLE MOMENT

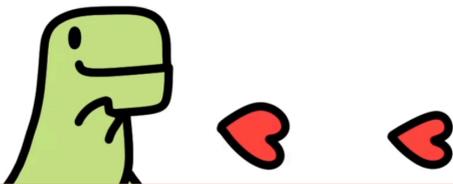
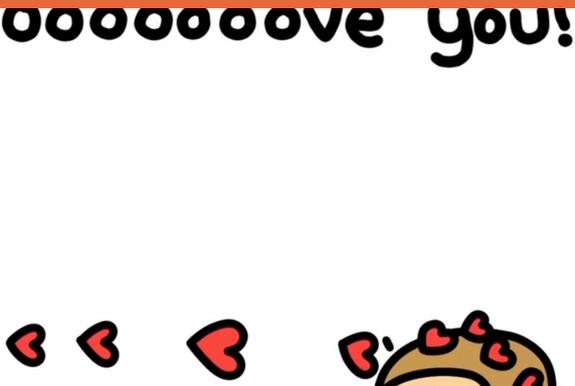
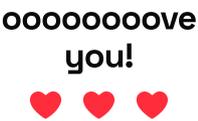
The simplest version of a story moment you can test with an audience.

You no longer need a fully finished animation to learn whether a moment works. You only need the simplest version that still creates curiosity, suspense, surprise, and recognition.

Minimum Viable Moment

The simplest version of a story moment you can test with an audience.

EXAMPLE 2 **Loof & Timmy — Carousel** Watch →

CURIOSITY 1 One character starts saying, "I loooooove you..."	SUSPENSE 2 The audience expects a sweet love confession.
	
SURPRISE 3 The affection escalates into something excessive and chaotic.	RECOGNITION 4 Viewers instantly recognise the playful, over-the-top relationship dynamic.
	

12.1K **809**
SHARES COMMENTS

Why it works: This is a static carousel, not an animation. Yet the moment reads immediately. The audience recognises the setup, anticipates the payoff, and enjoys the exaggerated twist. The format is as minimal as it gets. The structure does the work.

Ideas that produce one moment become scenes.

Ideas that produce many moments can become IP.

One thing I keep seeing in real projects: recognition is usually the difference between a moment people enjoy and one they actually want to share. This kind of format discipline is what makes indie production sustainable. It's also what Launchpad is designed around: test the dynamics, read the signals, then commit.

BREAKDOWN

Core dynamic:
 Two characters whose exaggerated affection creates repeatable chaotic moments.

Social hook:
 "What if someone said 'I love you'... but the affection became overwhelming?"

TEST YOUR IDEA.

Use this before committing anything to production. Recognition is the signal that matters most.

My idea is a story about:

Social Hook – What if _____ but _____:

What does the viewer expect to happen? (Suspense):

What unexpected outcome actually happens? (Surprise):

RECOGNITION TRIGGERS – Tick any that apply to your moment:

- Relatable behaviour**
A situation people recognise from their own life
- Familiar relationship dynamic**
Parent/child, friends, siblings, couples, rivals
- Social awkwardness**
An uncomfortable or overly honest moment
- Irony or truth**
Something too accurate to ignore
- Exaggerated everyday situation**
A normal experience pushed to an absurd level

THE RECOGNITION CHECK

Recognition is difficult to judge yourself. Ask 3–5 people to react to your moment sketch. Ask them: did they understand it immediately? What did they recognise? Would they share it or send it to someone? Their answers matter more than your own ticks.

Moment structure – tick each stage you’ve mapped:

- Curiosity
- Suspense
- Surprise
- Recognition

Sketch your moment – one thumbnail per stage:

CURIOSITY

SUSPENSE

SURPRISE

RECOGNITION

Reading your result:

MOMENT STAGE	WHAT IT SIGNALS
All 4 stages + audience says yes	Validated: post on social and let the audience pull you forward.
All 4 stages + recognition ticks only	Promising: confirm with a real audience before committing.
2–3 stages mapped	Clear hook, incomplete structure. Map the missing stages first.
Fewer than 2 stages	Not ready to test yet. Revisit the core hook.

If your result is promising or validated, that's the signal to act on. Post it. Test the reaction. Let the audience tell you whether the moment is worth building around.

FAQ

Creators who run this test tend to come back with the same few questions. Here are the ones that matter.

If this approach is available, why don't more creators use it?

The issue isn't secrecy. The information is out there. What's missing is curiosity. Many creators are taught a single path: make a short, submit to festivals, pitch producers, hope for a deal. Very few stop to ask how IP actually makes money, why audience familiarity matters more than prestige, or why creators give away ownership before testing demand.

Is this approach anti-studio or anti-film?

Not at all. Film, television, and studios still play a huge role in storytelling. The difference is *when* they enter the process. Building an audience before pitching doesn't close the door on traditional routes. It strengthens your position when you walk through them.

Does testing online mean giving up ownership?

Quite the opposite. Testing ideas directly with audiences helps creators understand what resonates, build leverage, and retain more control. When creators enter partnerships already knowing the value of their IP, the conversation changes entirely.

What does "direct-to-audience" actually mean in practice?

It means building familiarity with your story before relying on gatekeepers. That might look like short-form content, social storytelling, or online communities built around your characters. The goal is not to replace studios. It's to develop genuine leverage before you need them.

FAQ (continued)

What is Lauda Launchpad?

Launchpad is where this framework becomes practice. A waitlist-based platform for creators who are ready to test story ideas with real audiences, develop characters alongside other makers, and grow a following before committing to full production. The feedback loops and iteration support are built in. You bring the idea.

→ [Apply at laudacollective.com/launchpad](https://laudacollective.com/launchpad)

What happens after I finish this guide?

You now have the framework. The next step is to run the test on a real idea — not once, but across multiple scenarios. If recognition is there and an audience confirms it, you're ready to start building. That's when the guide ends and the real work begins.

→ laudacollective.com/launchpad

WHAT CREATORS EXPERIENCE AT LAUDA

The same audience-first thinking that shapes our studio work is built into every Launchpad project.

"Lauda didn't treat the Susie Sloth animation as a one-off deliverable. They helped me see how each creative choice could build familiarity with children and parents over time, and how the character could grow into something more enduring and valuable across formats."

Charlotte Marsh — Author & Creative Partner, Susie Sloth

"We came to Lauda expecting great animation, but what we got was a much deeper rethink of the project. They pushed us to consider audience, format, and longevity before a single frame was made, which fundamentally shaped how the work now lives beyond delivery."

Simran Witham — Producer, Format

You now understand the core idea.

You now have the framework most creators only discover after burning months on something that didn't land. You understand how moments work, what recognition actually signals, and how to test before committing. What comes next is applying it. Take a real idea. Test it with a real audience.

WHAT THIS GUIDE CANNOT DO

- ✗ Help you test your idea with real audience feedback
- ✗ Develop characters and worlds alongside other creators
- ✗ Turn early audience signals into a long-term IP strategy
- ✗ Build systems needed to grow an idea beyond a single moment
- ✗ Provide collaboration, infrastructure, and feedback during development

INSIDE LAUNCHPAD CREATORS CAN

- ✓ Test story ideas with audiences
- ✓ Develop characters and worlds collaboratively
- ✓ Share the production load with artists and animators
- ✓ Turn moments into repeatable story dynamics
- ✓ Grow audience familiarity before full production

Lauda Launchpad

Launchpad is where this framework becomes practice. A platform for testing story ideas with real audiences, developing characters with other makers, and growing a following before committing to production. The feedback, the collaborators, and the iteration support are already in place. You bring the idea.

[JOIN LAUNCHPAD →](#)

[WORK WITH THE STUDIO →](#)

Studio support is for creators who need bespoke strategy and production help for a specific project.



Blake Ugo

Founder, Lauda Collective

I work with independent animators and storytellers to develop ideas that can grow into real IP. This guide is based on what I've seen work — and what I've seen cost creators years of wasted production time.

TikTok: [@designedbyblake](#) · Instagram: [@blake.animation.biz](#)
[laudacollective.com](#)