

SUBMISSION

To have an animated feature even be considered for nomination, it has to fulfil certain criteria:

It has to be more than 40 minutes long.

And it has to have animation in no less than 75% of the film's running time.

[https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/95aa_anim_feature.pdf opening paragraph]

For example Marcel The Shell With Shoes On has mostly animated characters in a kind of real world documentary setting, and the film-makers had to submit documentation to prove it met the 75% requirements.

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/marcel-the-shell-with-shoes-on-animated-feature-oscar-1235258749/>

<https://twitter.com/DFLEISCHERCAMP/status/1549484967679299585>

Whereas films like The Smurfs and Yogi Bear failed to meet those requirements and were disqualified.

<https://www.thewrap.com/academys-animation-branch-disqualifies-smurfs-33735/>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/oscars-animated-feature-race-will-be-down-to-3/>

A rule was added in 2010 to make motion capture films not eligible for best animated feature such as a Christmas Carol and Tintin. This may have been done to prevent films like Avatar to count as an animated movie. So something like Happy Feet which won best animated feature in 2006 might not now qualify for its use of motion capture.

As animation techniques advance, the lines between live action and animation are getting blurry so maybe this was also to try and keep the two forms separated. But what about rotoscoping? When the award was launched in 2002, Richard Linklater submitted Waking Life but was rejected by the Academy because it could be mistaken for live action.

<https://nofilmschool.com/academy-disqualifies-animated-feature#:~:text=The%20Academy%20launched%20the%20Best.was%20clear%2C%E2%80%9D%20Linklater%20said.>

Then 20 years later, Linklater's "Apollo 10 ½" was once again rejected as the Academy still felt the use of live action, even if it was just for the outlines, did not meet the criteria for animation. This decision was reversed but it still didn't make it as a nominee.

<https://www.indiewire.com/2022/10/apollo-10-1-2-rejected-oscar-animation-richard-linklater-1234769949/>

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/marcel-the-shell-with-shoes-on-animated-feature-oscar-1235258749/>

But then many animated films use live action footage as reference like the 2011 winner, Rango. So where do you *draw* the line? HA!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDyYGBL0HKw>

Ok, so now say you're eligible and make it through the submission process. What then?

NOMINATION

In the Academy there are 17 branches. Each branch is dedicated to a certain field made up of their peers to select the nominees, so actors nominate the actors, directors nominate directors and so on. You can only sign on to be in one branch. But everyone in these branches can also nominate one movie for Best Picture.

There's 2 extra branches, the Members At Large and the representatives. They're not in any one branch, but they can also nominate a movie for Best Picture.

To qualify as a member of the Animation branch, you need a minimum number of screen credits in leading positions, have been nominated for an Oscar for Animation in the past, or in the judgement of the committee get a free pass for unique distinction, special merit or outstanding contribution. That feels a bit vague but ok. You can also get in for having four screen credits for Live Action Short films. That seems odd as well, but perhaps they qualify to be a judge for Animated Short films. Makers of short films judging on short films. Except no, they can judge feature films too.

But ok, let's just say that's all fine. You're a film-maker, passionate about animation, and you're qualified to judge who becomes the nominees.

There was a minimum of three nominees for Best Animated Feature. There was a rule that said if there were fewer than eight eligible films in a year, the award would be skipped that year, but that rule was dropped in 2019. If there are sixteen or more qualifying submissions, then the number of nominees goes to five.

So the members of the Animation branch decide on who those nominees should be, with the final decision made by the Animated Feature Nominating Committee. Which sounds good, animation nominees chosen by animation lovers. Except remember those Members At Large? Yeah, they can pick the nominees too.

In 2022 Variety said:

The five nominees are determined by the 867 short films and feature animation branch members and any Academy members outside the branch who opt to participate. The number of members who opt in is unknown.

<https://variety.com/2022/awards/awards/oscars-eligibility-international-documentary-animated-feature-1235451706/>

Now I don't want to suggest that these members outside of the animation community could be perhaps influenced with aggressive For Your Consideration campaigns, gift bags, parties, etc. To be schmoozed into voting favourably towards certain movies, including animated features. I don't want to suggest that, so I won't.

Animation historian Charles Solomon said:

"I wanted to see the animation branch take over choosing these nominees. As long as the body at large is choosing the nominees, they're going to go with what's familiar, and what they think would appeal to their kids, rather than the works that are perhaps a little more unusual."

<https://www.theringer.com/movies/2022/3/10/22969931/oscars-best-animated-feature-category-broken>

This is why the nominees tend to be the same old names again and again. Disney. Pixar. Dreamworks. That's why it's rare for there to be a non-American studio nominated and even rarer that they win anything.

Graph of following:

Pixar = 17 Noms (11 Wins)

Disney = 13 (4)

Dreamworks = 14 (2)

Studio Ghibli = 6 (1)

Aardman = 4 (1)

Cartoon Saloon = 4 (0)

Les Armateurs = 3 (0)

Charles Solomon again:

"The award itself seems to be reserved for the major American studios. And at a time when everyone is calling for a greater diversity of visions, they're not giving us that kind of diversity and they're not opening it to different talents and different voices."

And that's not to discredit some of the incredible animated works Pixar and Disney do or the incredibly talented people behind them. But is this really representing the full landscape of animated features?

Especially when films like *Wendell and Wild*, *Mad God*, *Lupin*, *The Peanuts Movie*, *Ponyo*, *Paprika* and even *The Lego Movie* don't get nominated?

"If you can call anything a "snub," this year, it was The Lego Movie, which was one of the best movies of the year."

<https://www.cartoonbrew.com/award-season-focus/proof-that-oscar-voters-are-clueless-about-animation-109456.html>

Everything is not awesome, but we have our list of nominees. And the winner is-

VOTING

One thing I was confused on was how the winners are even decided. Is it a display of the very best animation skills and techniques? Consider something like *Loving Vincent* which was animated frame-by-frame with oil paintings done by hand on canvas. A miracle of animation. It lost to Pixar. (*Coco*)

In 2015, one voter said:

"If I was just voting for animation, I'd have gone with Boxtrolls. But since you have to consider everything, I went with Big Hero 6."

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/brutally-honest-oscar-ballot-no-773906/>

So no, it is not a technical award, it is simply the Best Picture that just so happens to be animated. So why aren't they also nominated for Best Picture more often?

Before Best Animated Feature was introduced, the only animated movie to be nominated for Best Picture was *Beauty And The Beast* in 1991. It didn't win.

But once the award was introduced, it had been heavily criticised for basically preventing any other animated movies like *Shrek* from being nominated for Best Picture.

Technically any animated film can be nominated for Best Picture and the Academy states this in the official rules.

https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/95aa_anim_feature.pdf (Section III. Subsection E)

Wall-E was widely expected to be nominated for Best Picture and as one of the highest rated films of 2008, it could have won. But it was snubbed leading to outrage and claims that the

Academy purposely snubbed it so that an animated movie could never earn the prestige that is Best Picture. But it did win Best Animated Feature.

The Academy has never officially acknowledged it but it's believed this criticism partly led to the expansion of Best Picture nominees from five to ten the following year, which has led to Best Picture nominations for *Up* and *Toy Story 3*, the only other animated movies to do so since *Beauty And The Beast*. They didn't win, but they did with Best Animated Feature.

<https://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1820824,00.html>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20110717180938/http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/risky-business/2009/01/22/academy-awards-controversy-wall-e-gets-snubbed-for-best-picture-oscar>

So, remember those 17 branches? Well every single member of them, including the Members-At-Large, can now vote on their choice of winner for every award for any category. Naturally it's close to impossible to watch every movie nominated in every single category so members are discouraged from voting in ones where they lack the expertise.

<https://www.britannica.com/story/who-votes-for-the-academy-awards>

But that doesn't stop them making uninformed decisions and they don't even hide it.

BEST SOUND MIXING

Again, I don't know enough to make an informed decision. Obviously, the sound in Whiplash, with the drums and music, was so important.

MY VOTE: *Whiplash*

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/brutally-honest-oscar-ballot-no-773906/>

In 2019, one member openly admits to having not seen three of the five animated feature nominees, but placed their vote anyway. [1] And this uninformed vote carries just as much weight as someone who has seen all the nominees. Again, they don't have to vote and many don't. [2] But why do some do it anyway? Getting into the Academy is such a huge prestigious honour so maybe it's to prove their value as an Academy member and not come across as being passive? There's no way to know, I'm literally just guessing here.

1

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lists/2019-brutally-honest-oscar-ballot-2-cooper-perfect-green-book-offensive-1188021/best-original-screenplay-91/>

2 BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

I did not see all of the nominees.

MY PICK: I abstain.

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/brutally-honest-oscar-voter-ballot-684839/>

In the film award categories, such as short films, documentaries and foreign language, the Academy requires voters to have watched every nominee before they can vote.

Highlight "Final voting... shall be restricted to active and life members of the Academy who have viewed all of the nominated films" on each of these

https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/95aa_anim_short.pdf (Section V. Subsection D)

https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/95aa_short_subject.pdf (C. 2)

https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/95aa_doc_features.pdf (C. 2)

https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/95aa_international_feature.pdf (D. 2)

There are only two exceptions to this, and that's Best Picture and Best Animated Feature.

https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/95th_oscars_complete_rules.pdf (16. 5)

https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscars/files/95aa_anim_feature.pdf (V. C)

For these two awards, Academy members are not required to have seen every nominee to cast their vote. Best Animated Feature. And Best Picture, the most sought after award.

So with this in mind, is it any surprise that the winner of Best Animated Feature tends to be predictably Pixar and/or ones that appeal to the Academy member's kids.

I like to sit down with [the kids] and watch them. We all loved Big Hero 6 and there was no discussion, no argument, no nothing. The kids watched that one three times — what does that tell you?

MY VOTE: *Big Hero 6*

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/brutally-honest-oscar-ballot-no-775782/>

I only watch the ones that my kid wants to see, so I didn't see [The] Boxtrolls but I saw Big Hero 6.

MY VOTE: *Big Hero 6*

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/brutally-honest-oscar-ballot-no-773905/>

I have seen none of them. I have no interest whatsoever. That ended when I was 6. My son dragged me to a few when he was 6; I would seat him and go outside and make phone calls.

MY PICK: *I abstain.*

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/oscar-voter-reveals-brutally-honest-682957/>

That last one made me really sad, I won't lie. Fuck this.

This basically treats the Best Animated Feature, not as "the best picture that just so happens to be animated" but rebrands the award as "Best Children's Movie".

Which means films for more mature audiences rarely get nominated and those that do, such as Persepolis, Anomalisa and I Lost My Body, don't win.

During last year's presentation of Best Animated Feature, the actresses of Disney's live action remakes said this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Rmiq2PPQDg>

0:20 - "all these characters" to 0:38 - "some parents out there know what we're talking about"

Now this is probably not their opinion, they're obviously reading from a pre-scripted teleprompter but this echoes a lot of the sentiment at the Academy and even former Disney CEO Bob Chapek said much the same thing, which I covered in my last video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3SJBwbMQeQ>

This was met by outrage by those in the animation community.

Director Phil Lord said:

"Super cool to position animation as something that kids watch and adults have to endure"

<https://twitter.com/philiplord/status/1508249064382484485>

And one of the nominees was Flee, a widely acclaimed animated film that's definitely not for kids.

Regardless, given this was said after the animation industry helped keep cinema alive during lockdown, this was just a slap in the face.

<https://www.thewrap.com/oscar-new-deal-for-animation/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8LtP1GsoeA>

To summarise, a film has to be eligible as long as it fits a very strict definition of animation, nominated by animation peers plus anyone who wants to and voted on by people who may have not even seen your movie, unless it's made for kids and even then - you'll probably lose to Disney or Pixar.

It's no wonder many are so disillusioned when it comes to the Oscars.

With such bias and a broken system in place, how can anyone win an award for animation at the Oscars?

The answer is, you make a Short Film.

SHORT FILM

While the Best Animated Feature award began in the 2000s, Best Animated Short Film began in the 1930s and while it served the purpose of basically giving the award to Walt Disney every year, it slowly became an avenue for independent animations to be recognised. Oh sure the old favourites Disney and Pixar would pop up and win, but the nominees became so much more diverse, with unique art styles and different nationalities.

The category was slowly being swallowed up by major film studios looking to score award recognition, but then last year's shortlist was expanded from 10 to 15 films, [1] to accommodate for both studio and independent alike. One of the Academy's rules is to disregard the cost of production in order to keep the playing field even. [2]

[1 <https://www.cartoonbrew.com/awards/oscar-shortlist-animated-short-vfx-pinocchio-224369.html>]

[2 https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscar/files/95aa_anim_short.pdf (V. A)]

Once the 5 nominees are selected, there's another rule that states you can only vote for this category if you have viewed ALL of the nominated films.

https://www.oscars.org/sites/oscar/files/95aa_anim_short.pdf (V. D)

This won't prevent bias or favouritism, but this rule has seemingly forced the Academy members to make more informed decisions as evident by the variety of winners. Pixar hasn't won since 2018 and Disney hasn't won since 2014. [1] Neither have a nominee this year.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VK2QbXssjJ0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbAYLAbhyxc>

After winning last year's Best Animated Short for "The Windshield Wiper", [1] director Alberto Mielgo said:

0:35 "Animation is an art that includes every single art" to "lets call it cinema"

Then 0:55 "this year the 5 nominees" to "adult cinema basically"

(showing clips from the other nominees Affairs of the Art, Bestia, Boxballet, Robin Robin - the last of which is the not adult cinema)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yzz0QoplrFA>

[1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlvoPK-1t5w>]

This speech was the same year as:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Rmiq2PPQDg>

0:38 - "some parents out there know what we're talking about"

And it makes for a great statement, showing they're willing to speak against being called a genre for children, were it not for the fact that the Academy have attempted to cut the award, along 7 others such as with Live Action and Documentary shorts, editing, score and sound.,

in order to keep the runtime of the ceremony under three hours. After backlash, the Academy reinstated it but had the awards pre-recorded an hour ahead of the live show, so it could be edited in.

<https://mashable.com/article/animation-oscar-2022-joke-phil-lord>
<https://mashable.com/video/oscar-categories-eliminated>

So the call to accept animation as “cinema” came before

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Rmiq2PPQDg>

0:38 - “some parents out there know what we’re talking about”

And-

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouF_nOQ-62s

1:13 - “I didn’t see many- any of them” to “Encanto 190 times”

So their speech really did fall on deaf ears.

But maybe that change could happen.

When winning the Golden Globe for Pinocchio, Guillermo del Toro said:

0:31 *“Animated IS cinema - It’s not a genre for kids, it’s a medium”*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TASL0ZwXw80>

And given Pinocchio is the favourite to win the Oscar this year, perhaps those deaf ears will start to listen.

The wild part is, all the Academy needs to do to fix this are just two simple changes to the rules. One, have just the Animation Branch decide who the nominees are and no-one else. And two, members can only vote if they have seen all the nominees, just like the other film awards.

There’s no way to enforce they watch every film, they could just lie. And influences and bias will still worm their way in. But perhaps over time, this would stop treating animated features as something adults apparently have to endure and accept them for what they are. Cinema. Something the Oscars should be celebrating.