

Draw a high-effort emoji from scratch:

How to Emoji, Part Two

by TKodami

|| a tutorial written for the **manmanbangbang discord server** for emojitober || word count: 6628 ||

Table of Contents

Introduction	[page 2]
Step Zero: Come up with a concept	[page 3]
Step One: Reference, Reference, Reference	[page 6]
Find Your Reference	[page 6]
Analyze Your Reference	[page 9]
Step Two: Start Drawing With a Square	[page 12]
Step Three: Detailing	[page 15]
Step Four: Analyze Your Sketch	[page 19]
If you are not satisfied: redraw.....	[page 20]
If you are satisfied: continue forward!.....	[page 21]
Step Five: Clean Up Your Sketch	[page 23]
Step Six: Time to COLOR	[page 26]
Step Seven: Prepare for web display	[page 36]
Further Learning	[page 45]

Introduction

Hey, I'm TKodami, and this is my second tutorial on emoji-making. In this tutorial, I will be covering how to make a high-effort emoji from scratch.

+ + +

My first tutorial, [How To Emoji](#) covered two of the three different ways you can make emoji in depth. I call these three emoji-making methods *low-effort*, *medium-effort* and *high-effort* emojis.

Low effort emojis are emoji where you find a base image and make a few changes to it to make it into the emoji you want.

Medium effort emojis are multi-purpose emoji where you find, design, or draw an emoji base. A base is neutral shape or pose that can be used to make a range of emoji with different expressions. Making the base can be a lengthy process—but the end result allows you to make full set of emoji “faces” for a chat client, a program, or a sticker set.

High effort emojis are emoji that are hand-drawn, and they are specific to the concept, scene, or mood that you are trying to convey. These emoji can be very complex or very simple; they can be flat colors or highly painted. The design process is geared towards creating a single emoji that generally can only be used for one purpose.

These aren't strict categories; sometimes a high effort emoji that was a one-off becomes fun and popular enough of a shape to become a base for a set of medium effort emojis. But in general, these are the three emoji-making processes as I see them.

If you'd like to know more about low effort or medium effort emoji making, please check out Part One of this tutorial.

[You can read How To Emoji: Part One here.](#)

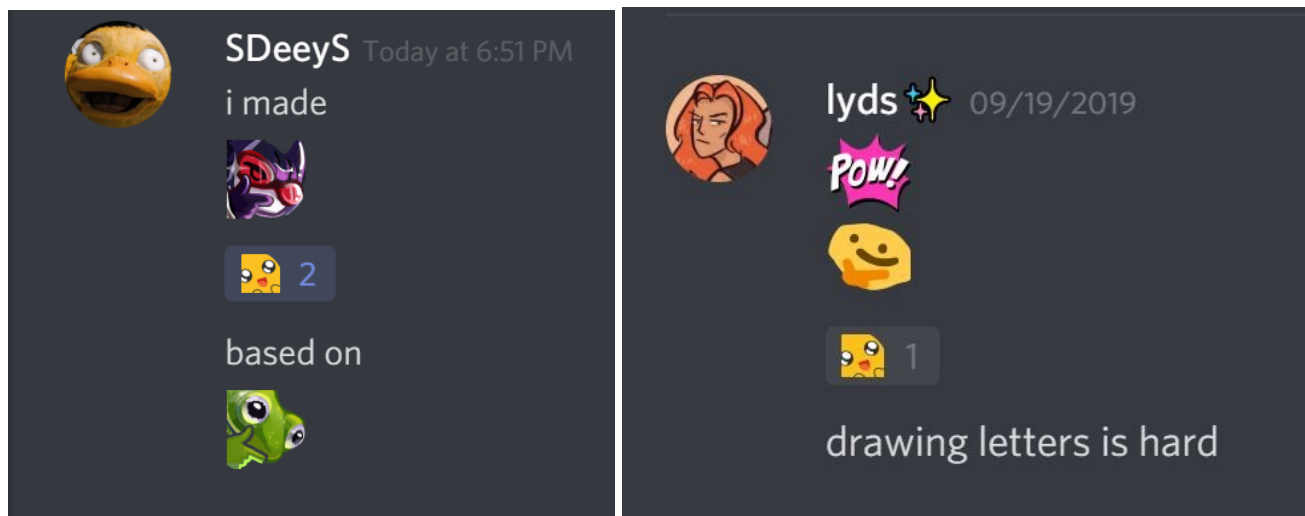
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While I'm linking things, you can find my fannish work here: <https://archiveofourown.org/users/TKodami/>.

>> STEP ZERO: Come up with a concept <<

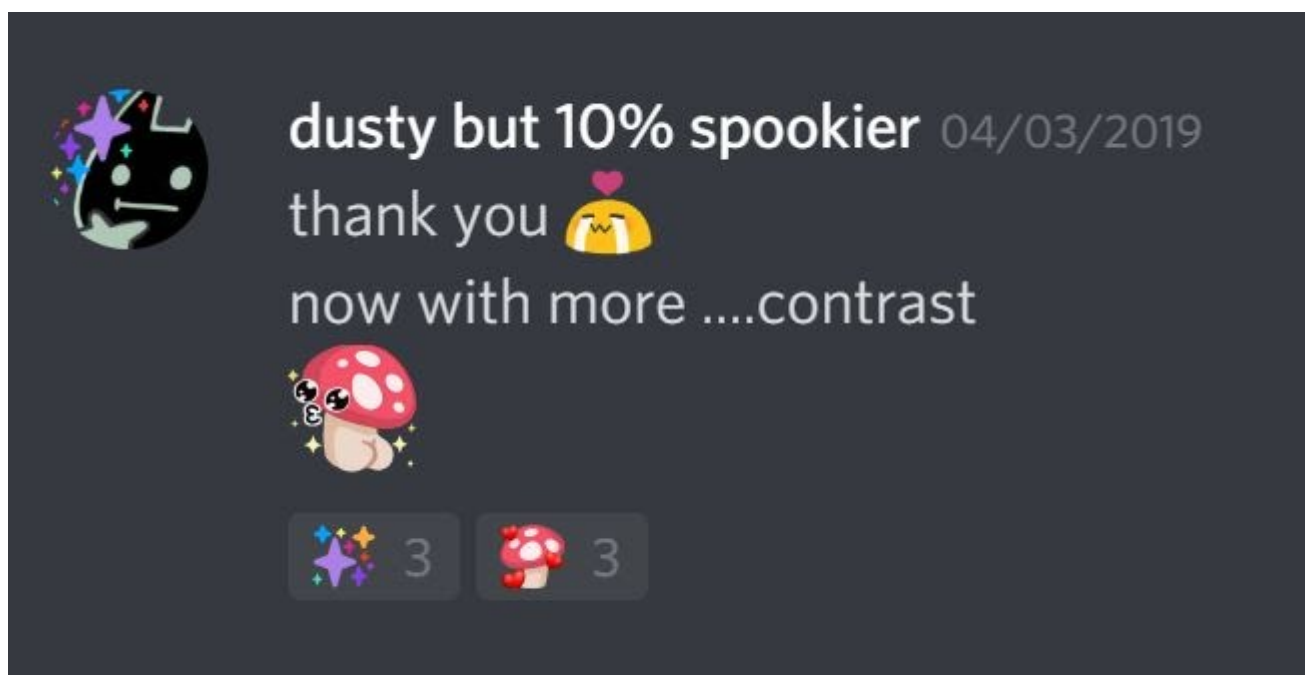
You know you want an emoji. You know it doesn't currently exist. (But you might want to double check. Ask around. Check out [Discord Emoji](#).) But you aren't sure *what exactly* you want.

Maybe you remember seeing a friend post a new emoji, and you were dazzled by their adorable creations.



Maybe you're just hungry for emoji powers that Discord Nitro affords you.

Or maybe you think you'll have the perfect new emoji for your server. You know nonsense is right around the corner. It can never hurt to have a trusty buttshroom in your arsenal.





EMOJITOBER

a weekly prompt challenge OCT 2019

- | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. space | 11. love | 21. tentacles |
| 2. money | 12. nsfw | 22. sweats |
| 3. thonk | 13. bee | 23. play |
| 4. do not want | 14. crown | 24. hug |
| 5. :C | 15. :V | 25. :D |
| 6. squid | 16. mushroom | 26. hyper |
| 7. knife(fight) | 17. blob | 27. squint |
| 8. emoji facing up | 18. fiend | 28. food |
| 9. emoji facing down | 19. at a table | 29. flower |
| 10. S T R E S S | 20. googly eyes | 30. clothing |
| | | 31. animated |

* MAKE ONE NEW EMOJI PER WEEK, BASED ON ANY OF THESE PROMPTS--OR TRY TO DO ALL 31!

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
	WEEK ONE		WEEK THREE		WEEK FIVE
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
	WEEK TWO		WEEK FOUR		EXTRA

The first thing you'll need to do is come up with a concept. I cover several different ways to find new emoji concepts in [Part One](#), including how to brainstorm ideas from a prompt. This month it was even easier to come with emoji concepts, as I am participating in *Emojitober*.

Emojitober is an inktober-esque challenge with a prompt list to help generate ideas. It's also a pretty relaxed challenge that only asks us to develop one new emoji per week. So far, I've made three emoji for the month.

I'd already checked "bee", "love", and "animated" off the list. So I wanted my idea to come from a different direction. Then I had a conversation with a friend about the pilot of HBO's *Watchmen*.



aformeroutlaw Last Sunday at 6:27 PM

imagine a perfect world where thousands of tiny squishy boys fall from the sky.....



dusty Last Sunday at 6:27 PM



but squidblorb
flowersquid :D?



aformeroutlaw Last Sunday at 6:28 PM

flowersquid!

Hot dang.

I immediately opened a fresh sketchbook page and jotted the new idea down.

CONCEPT

- flowerblorb
- squid
- = flowersquid.

It's not a complicated concept, but I'm excited by the idea. That's one of the most important parts of an emoji concept. **You want to be excited by the emoji you make**; and, most importantly, **you want other people to be excited too**.

Flowerblob has been pretty popular on one of my servers, so I think there's room to offer people even more flower options for their favs. I have my **prompt**. So now it's time to look at the four decisions that go into emoji-making during the concept stage.

Four Decisions Before You Start To Make The Process Extra-Smooth

1. Is my emoji going to be static or animated?
2. Will I need an image, a base, or a custom design?
3. What kind of mood am I looking for?
4. How detailed will the emoji be?

Right off the bat, I know I want to make a *custom design*. This is going to be a high-effort emoji. The mood is going to be a *delighted expression* (as demonstrated by the original flowerblorb). Historically, my squid designs have been inadvisably detailed. I'm going to try to keep the detail lower—I'm shooting for a *cel-shaded emoji*. This project already sounds complicated enough, so we're skipping animation this time. *Static emoji*.

Bringing it all together: *I'm going to make a custom, static emoji with simple shading*. It's going to be a squid with a delighted expression while it is wearing a little flower on its forehead. A flowersquid.

I now have my concept and can continue to the next design stage.

Tips about emoji sizes for Static Emoji

Emoji will be displayed at **48x48 pixels on Discord**. This is a *really* tiny format.

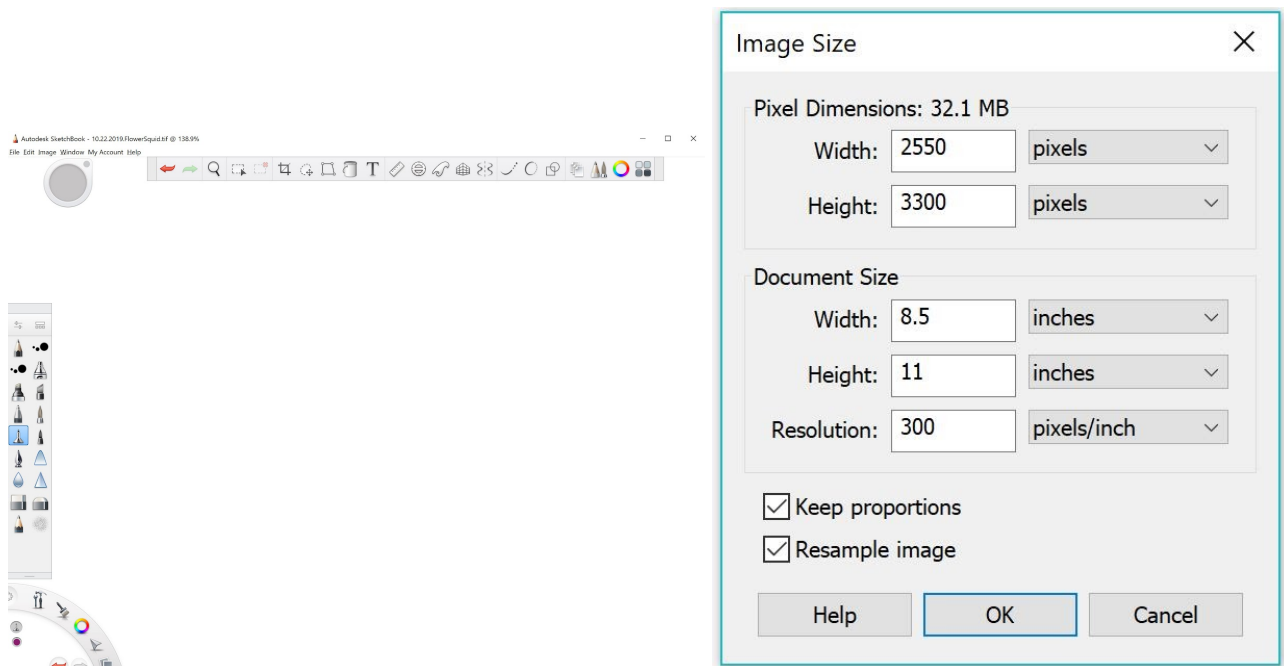
Discord will also size all image files down to **128x128** in their emoji uploader. This means that AT ABSOLUTE MINIMUM you should be designing emoji that are no smaller than 128x128 pixels. For crisper details—especially if you're digitally painting—you should shoot for minimum emoji dimensions of 200x200 or 300x300.

I usually work in much larger sizes, from 700x700 pixels to 2000x2000 pixels depending on how much detailing I expect to do, and what future uses I might have for my emojis.

>> STEP ONE: Reference, Reference, Reference <<

You have your prompt. Time to jump into the emoji making process!

Open a canvas in your favorite image editor or sketch program. I choose to start in Autodesk Sketchbook – but there's no reason you couldn't start in any program that is most comfortable to you. Your canvas should be large enough to be comfortable for you to sketch several squid next to each other, and to have room for the reference you will paste in.



Pictured: I check my canvas size under Image > Image Size in Sketchbook Pro. This will be suitable for my purposes!

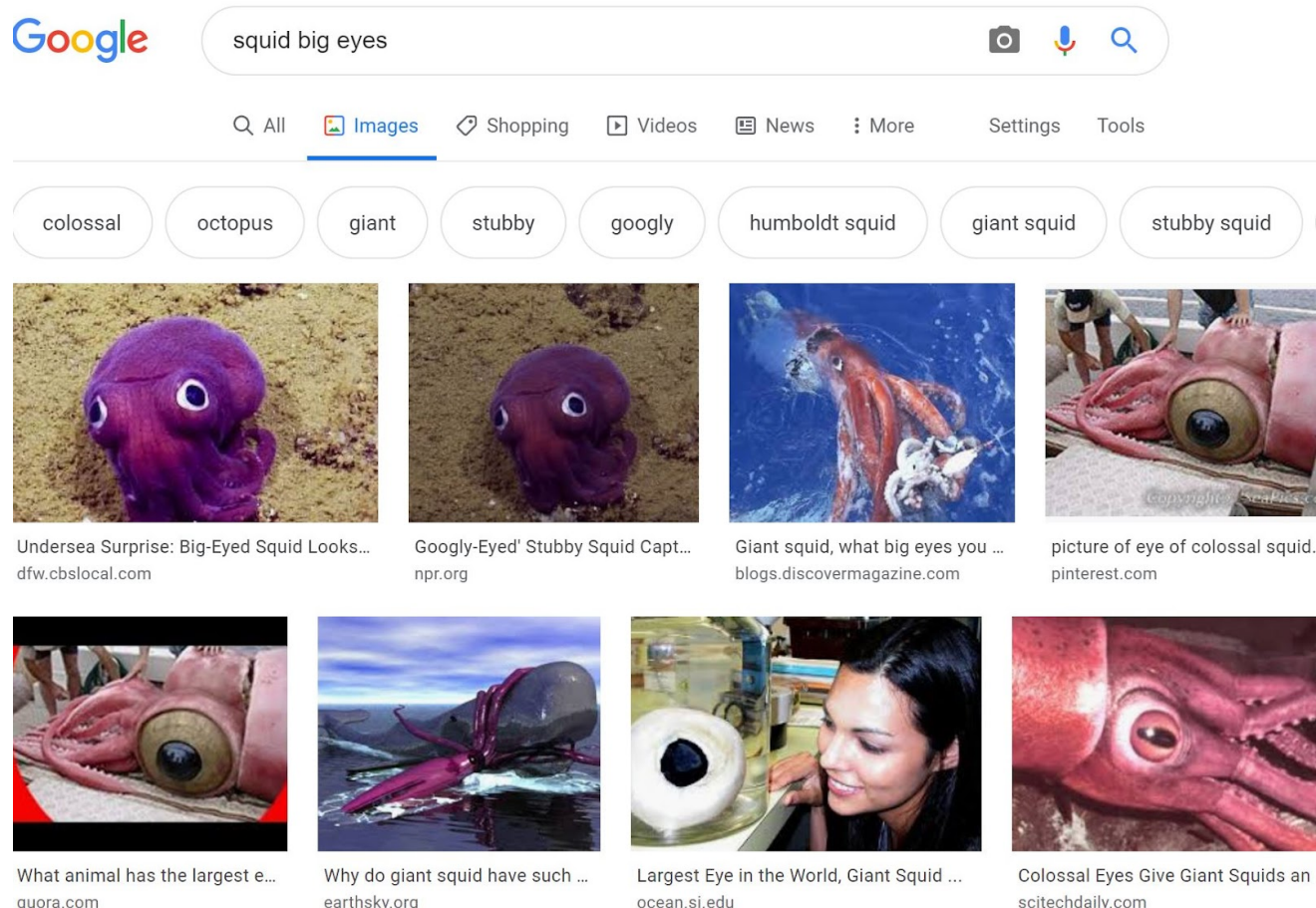
Find Your Reference

I'm all about having the right tools for the job. If you need a lot of reference to feel comfortable about starting a drawing...then you should spend a significant amount of time to find the right reference to make you comfortable before you draw. Big HOWEVER. Since you are going to be drawing an emoji, almost all detail that you draw in will be lost. The most perfectly rendered camouflage on a squid will be a little smudge on your monitor at the end of the process.

Accuracy to your subject matter is not important for emoji. Big emotions and expressions are. So when you are looking for reference, it's important that you look for two things:

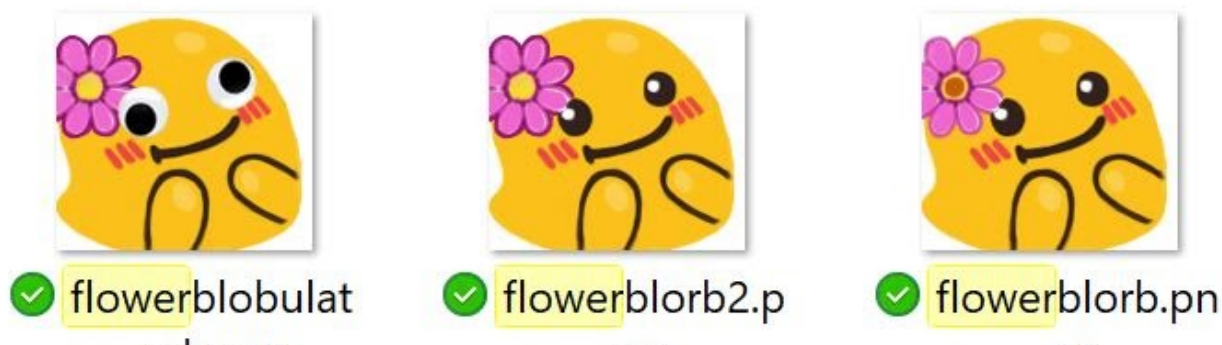
- + An image of your subject matter that shows off its proportions.
- + At least one emoji with a similar expression to the one you want to make.

Researching subject matter. Google Image Search, Pinterest, Flickr, pbase.com, tumblr, reddit, your own image folders will be good places to start to find an image of your subject matter. We're looking for a small squid with big, expressive eyes.

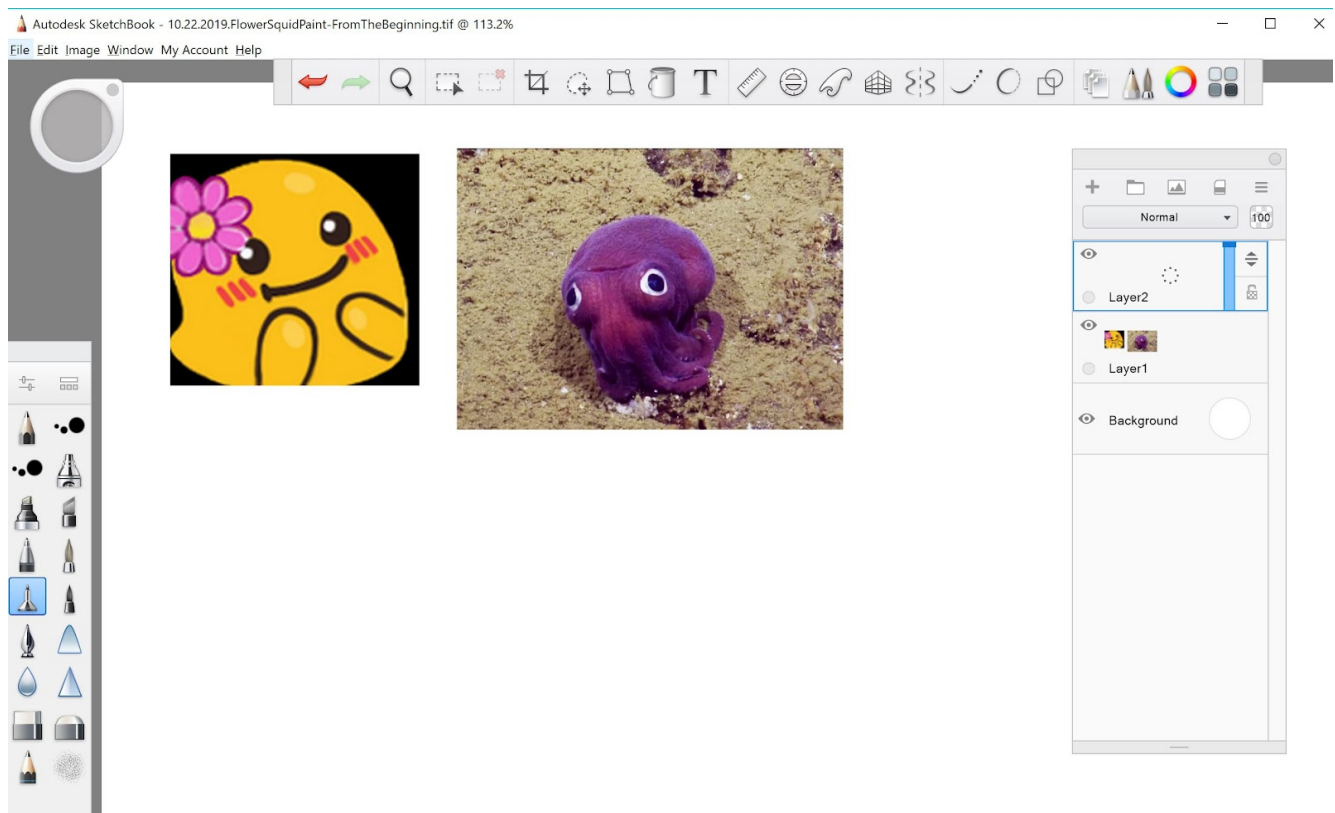


Aww yeah. The first image result is what I'm looking for.

Researching emoji. Discord's emoji panel, [Emojipedia.org](https://emojipedia.org), [Discordemoji.com](https://discordemoji.com), [the Line Store](https://linestore.com), Google Image Search with specific search terms are all excellent places to start. I lucked out with this design, since it's based on an emoji I previously made: flowerblorb. I head to the correct folder to find it.



At this stage, you should have no more than 4 research images. Any more than that will be...extremely distracting. Paste your research into their own layer on your sketch canvas.



Pictured: Research images have been pasted into their own layer. Any modifications will happen on a layer above them.

If you're an old hand at making an emoji, you could easily jump from here into the first drawing step. If you're confused about what, exactly, the reference is going to do for you in the emoji-making process, let's move on to the next step: analyzing your reference.

Tips about Research

If you're new to making emoji, don't over-research your subject. Focus on researching other emoji. **Looking at other emoji will allow you to get a quicker handle on what will and won't display at 32x32 pixels.**

If you're liable to get trapped in a reference-searching vortex, it's much better to only start researching once you've finished developing your prompt. How many of us have gone to Image Search with the best of intentions, only to come away with the burning certainty that you need to animate another butt?

Analyze Your Reference

Emoji drawing (usually) requires a lot more stylization than other forms of artwork. Once you've gathered your reference, you'll need to understand what you need to take from it to make a good emoji.

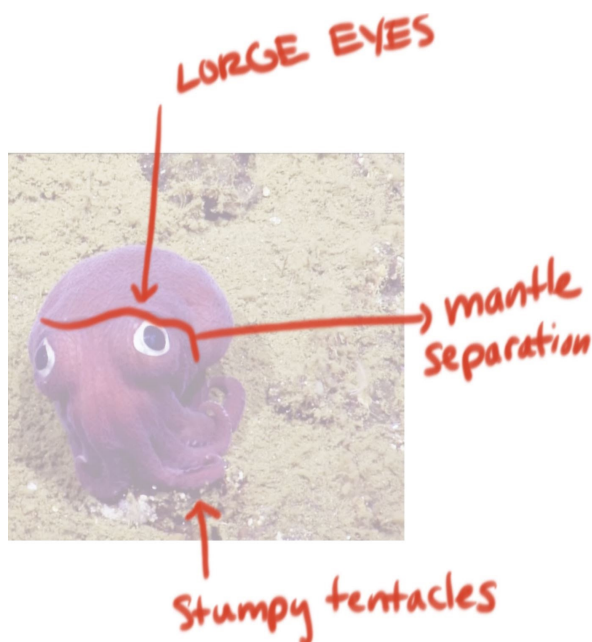
Analyze the major features. Lower the opacity, and lock the reference layer so you don't accidentally muck up your reference image. Now break out a bold color and write down your observations on a **Notes** layer. You may need these later, if your design goes wrong and you want to know why.



I start with good old flowerblorb. I identify the most important features of the emoji that make up the core of the "flowerblorb" expression. Four main components make up the "flowerblorb":

- + The flower on its forehead
- + Slashed bars pink blush
- + Big, moist eyes
- + Tiny hands held up to the face

Other things that I note is that there is a line of action in the emoji that feels like an arc from the top left corner down to the bottom right one. I will want to orient my emoji along a similar line.



I move on to the squid next. The most successful emoji are VERY stylized from their original shape, so what I'm looking for here are the parts that make this squid a specific kind of squid. I make note of:

- + its extra-large round eyes
- + the stumpy tentacles
- + The visible separation between the body and the mantle (or the "hat" part of the squid)

Analyze the shapes. Turn off your **Notes** layer. Create a new **Shapes** layer. Now we're going to do some basic shape analysis of the flowerblorb and the squid. You can take notes on this layer too, if it'll help you remember what you learn about these shapes.

SHAPE ANALYSIS



Pictured: I've drawn shape analysis lines on the flowerblorb and squid. More about this in a moment.

In my shape analysis, I'm looking at multiple things that are important to how I'm going to build my emoji. I'm looking at its silhouette (how the emoji looks in negative space), the line of motion, and where an emoji's important shape masses are.

The first thing I notice is that the flowerblorb is essentially a sack-like shape with a gently rounded head, and a little bit of a crunch on the left side. The flowerblorb has one shape mass, the body, and one line of action that curves from the top left towards the bottom right corner.

The squid appears bean-shaped. It has at least four shape masses: two eyes, the mantle, and the face+tentacles mass. The line of action is much more dramatically curved.

Now I have some choices to make from my analysis.

- + What in the shape language of my reference will help achieve my goals?
- + What specific details should I take from these reference images for my new emoji?

My goal is to make a squid that, a) looks like a squid; b) reminds people heavily of flowerblorb; and c) is clearly a new emoji, with its own expression and energy (it will not just be a copy of flowerblorb).

What will make my emoji look like a cute squid? I will take its very large eyes that are on almost opposite sides of the face, I will include a strong mantle separation as either a line or a heavy ridge, and I will have little stumpy tentacles on my emoji.

What will make my squid look like a flowerblorb? I think that a shape that has a similar line of action to flowerblorb's will make the emoji's provenance clear. The emoji will "flow" from the top-left corner down to the bottom right. Its eyes will face "upwards". I also decide to take the flower and the slashed blush on the cheeks.

I can write all of this down on the **Notes** layer of my sketch file if I'm not going to immediately move into the next stage of design... but I'm pretty hyped from the analysis, and will immediately dive into the drawing stage next.

Tips about being Confronted with Choice

Right now, you might be thinking there are too many possible directions to go. How will you know which direction is the right one? If you ever feel overwhelmed by choices, my suggestion is to stop and **thumbnail**.

Break out a fat pen or marker and draw scribbly silhouettes for the shapes you are considering. Take no more than a minute to draw these thumbnails. 30 seconds is ideal. Draw a lot of shapes, and quickly. As you thumbnail, you may see that many of your ideas are too complex for an emoji; or some are or that one shape seems better than the others.

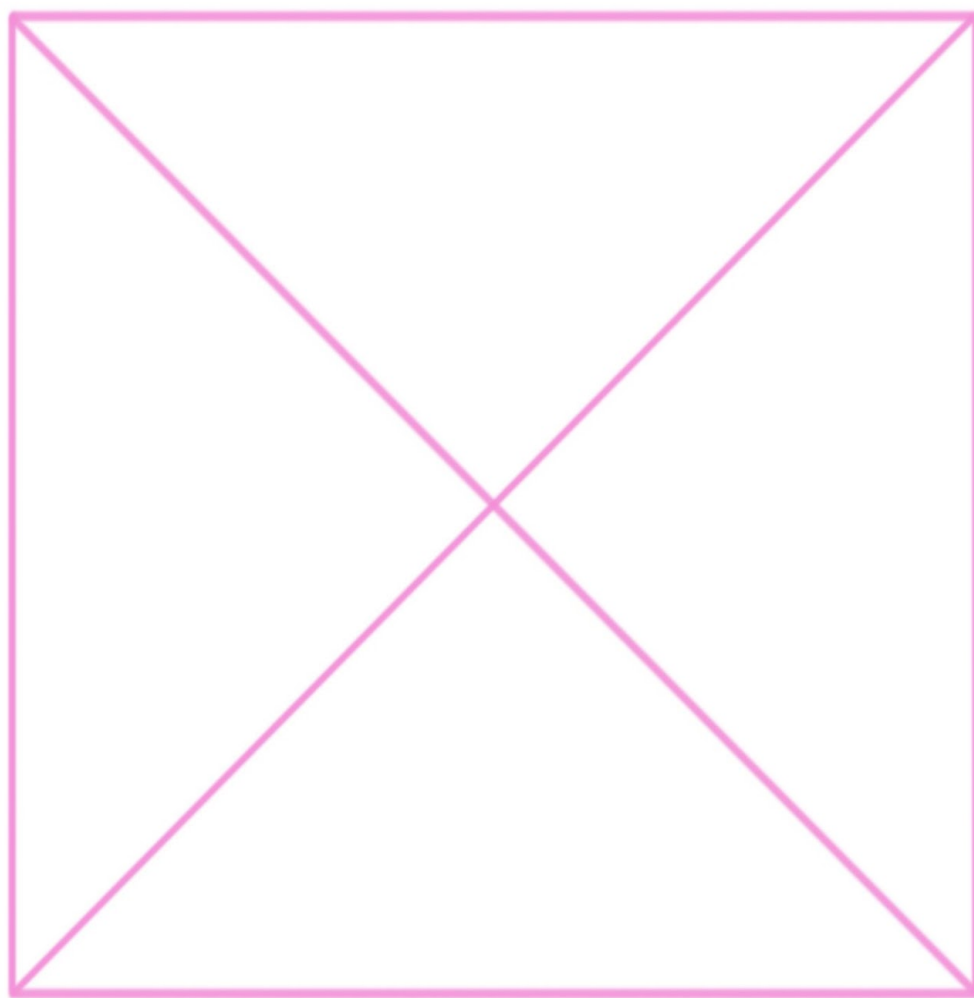
If all else fails, steal the silhouette of an already-made emoji. That shape's already been tried and tested for you.

>> STEP TWO: Start Drawing With a Square <<

The fun part, at last! Let's put pencil to paper, or stylus to screen. Let's start with a square.

Since my last emoji-drawing tutorial, I realized that most people want to maximize the size of their design at the very end of the process. Discord sizes images down to square dimensions of **128x128 pixels**. So if you want an emoji that fills up as much space as it can—or that cleverly uses the space that is available to it—we'll need to start with a square.

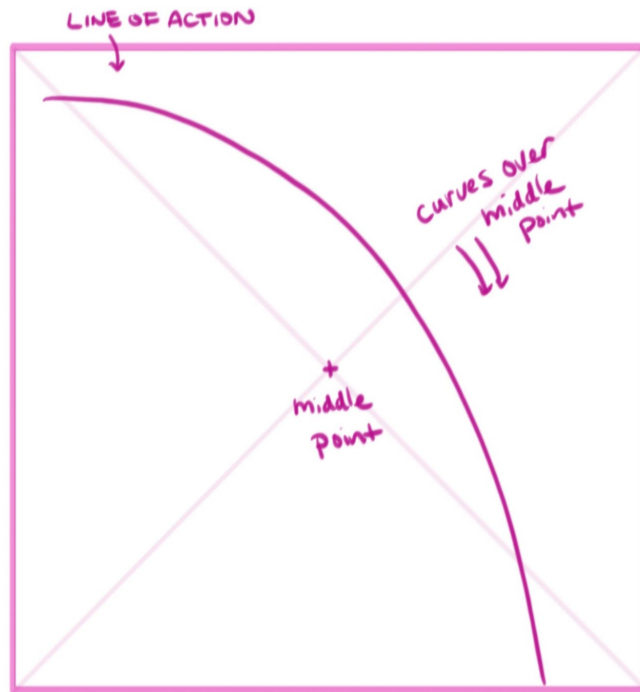
Draw as perfect a square as you can. Feel free to use shape tools that your drawing program has.



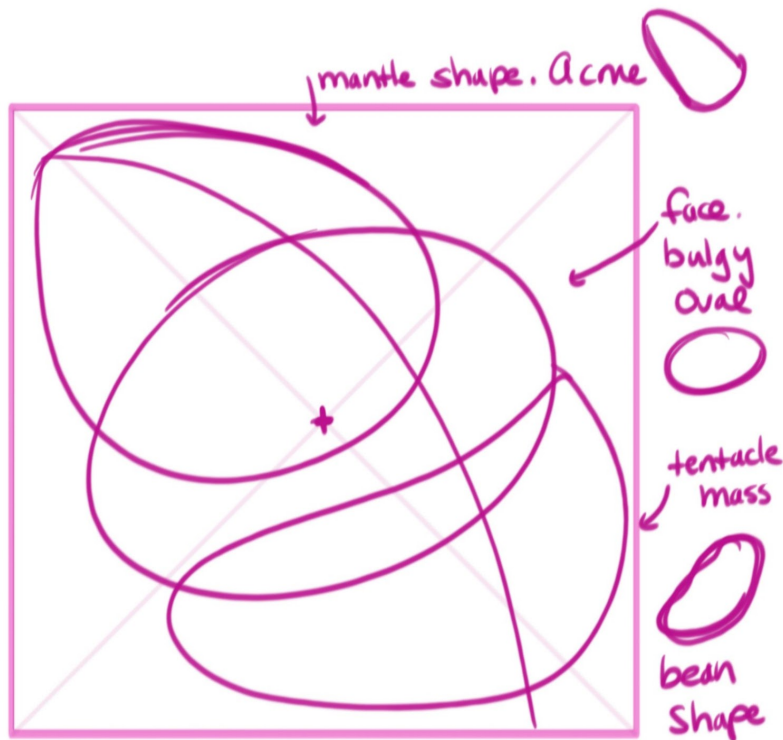
Pictured: I've drawn my square using Autodesk's feature that allows you to draw straight lines when you hold down SHIFT.

The inner X is drawn on a separate layer to help me eyeball that this IS a square. I turn the X layer opacity down before I begin with the scaffold that I will build my emoji on.

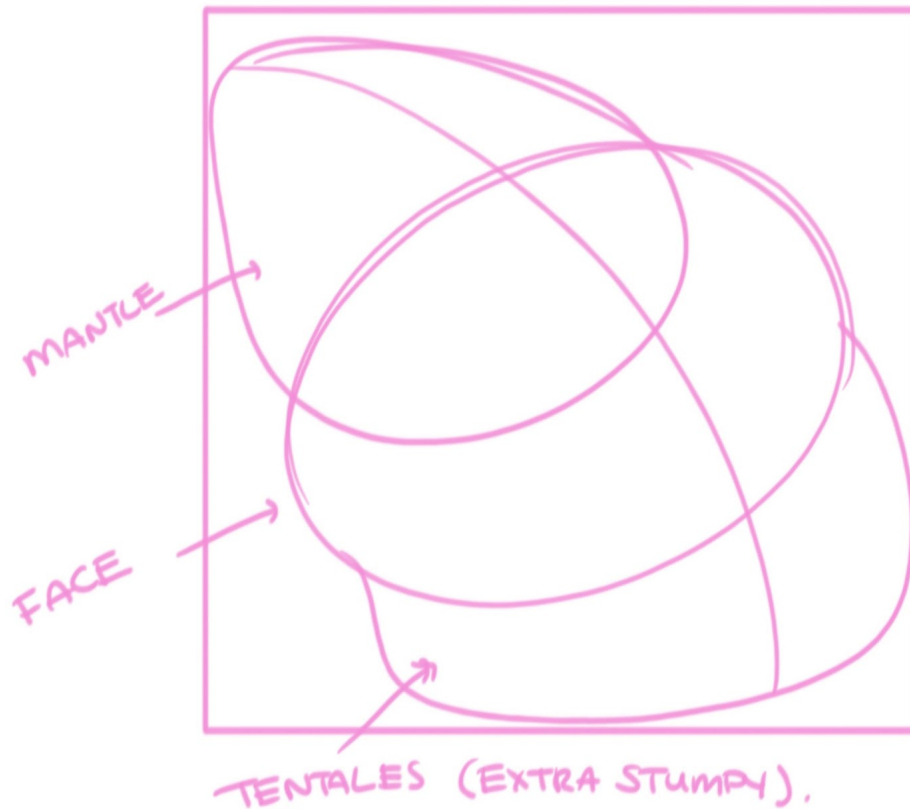
I start with a line of action. I want it to be similar to flowerblorb's line of action. It'll start at the top left corner, arc over the middle point of the square, and then it will end close to the bottom right corner.



Now that I've established my line of action. Time to draw some masses! I know I want three "mass" shapes that I saw on my squid reference. A squished cone for the mantle/squid hat, a bulgy oval for the face (the eyes will go on either side of the bulge), and a vaguely bean shape for the tentacles.



The important parts of this step are to make sure the shapes look well-balanced over the line of action and to make sure nothing strays outside of the box. I'm not quite happy with my shapes, so I redraw them to emphasize that the middle bulgy oval will be in front of the tentacle-bean mass.



There, that's better. The tentacles mass seems extra-stumpy now...and I'm more pleased by the size of the face's mass. I'm ready to move to the next stage.

Tips about drawing shapes and masses

If you are struggling with this part of emoji creation—or if you don't feel comfortable adding details to this type of sketch—you might be struggling with seeing your lines as 3D shapes. If you would like to practice seeing drawings as objects with weight, solidity, and dimension, I recommend [DrawABox](#). It is a free drawing resource that teaches you analytical drawing techniques and can also help you improve your drawing fundamentals.

>> STEP THREE: Detailing <<

You'll likely start to notice a pattern: reduce the opacity on your previous layer, the mass drawing, and create a new layer. This will be your **First Sketch** layer.

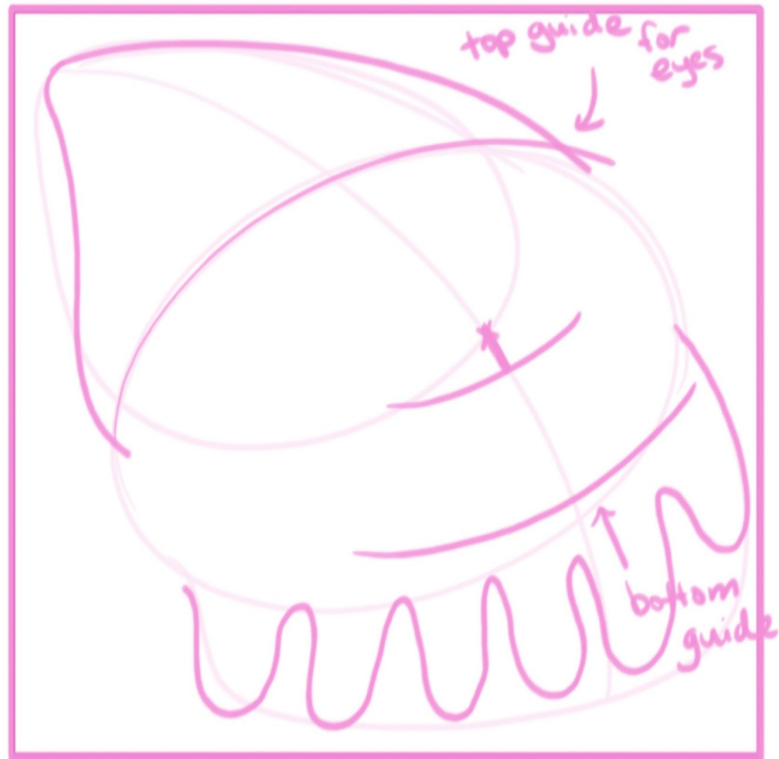
We'll start by finding the right lines. Mantles are supposed to be pointy, like little hats. But squid are still biological creatures *and* we want this emoji to be cute. Non-threatening. We want big curves, friendly little tentacle stumps. Using your pencil, draw quickly but cleanly. Choose a place where you think your line should be and commit to the shape. If you make a mistake now, you can always redraw your shapes later.



Pictured: mantle and tentacles sketched in.

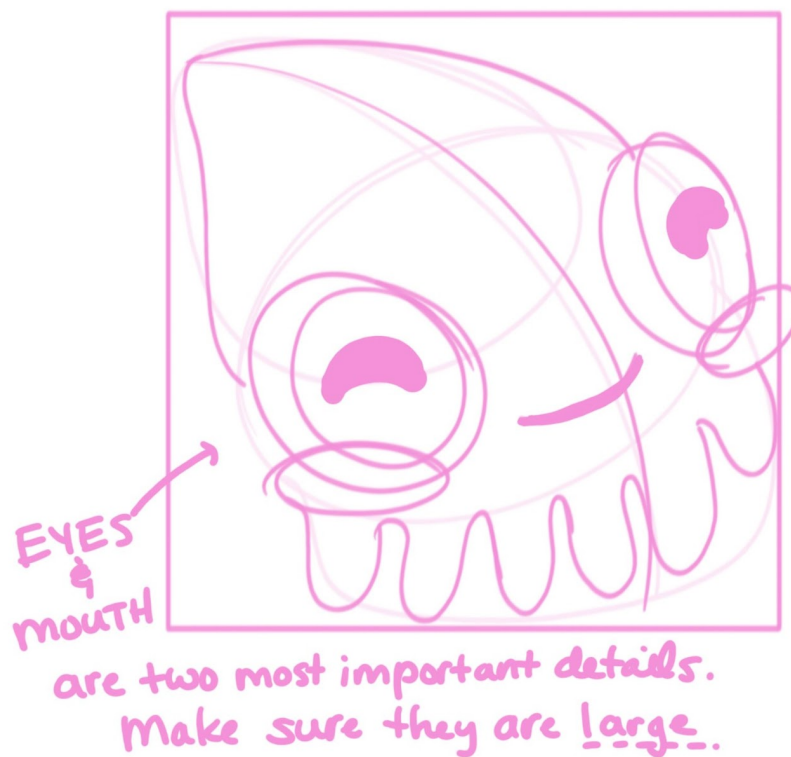
Now it's time to find where the expression will be located on our squid. I decide to use guides to make sure I'm going to like the result of my expression placement, rather than having to redraw the expression several times.

I decide that the mass line for the mantle makes a natural guide for the top of the eyes. I locate a mid-point where the mantle crosses the action line, and then draw a line a little below it. This will help me locate the middle of the eyes, or where I might want to place a mouth later. Then I draw my last guide in roughly following the tentacles (but well enough above it that our squid won't look like its eyes are falling into its feet.)



After I draw in the eyes, I draw in circles for the blush, and add a mouth.

Clean up the guide layers, and darken the expression when you find lines you like. Make sure your expression is large--maybe even comically large. Details get lost so quickly at emoji sizes.



The cheeks & the slight smile add in a wonderful touch that remind us of the flowerblorb emoji. Add in more details as you go, darkening your lines & exploring new directions that occur to you as you draw. It can get boring if you always know the result of your drawing.



Oh no, I think I took the whimsy too far. xD

Tips about details

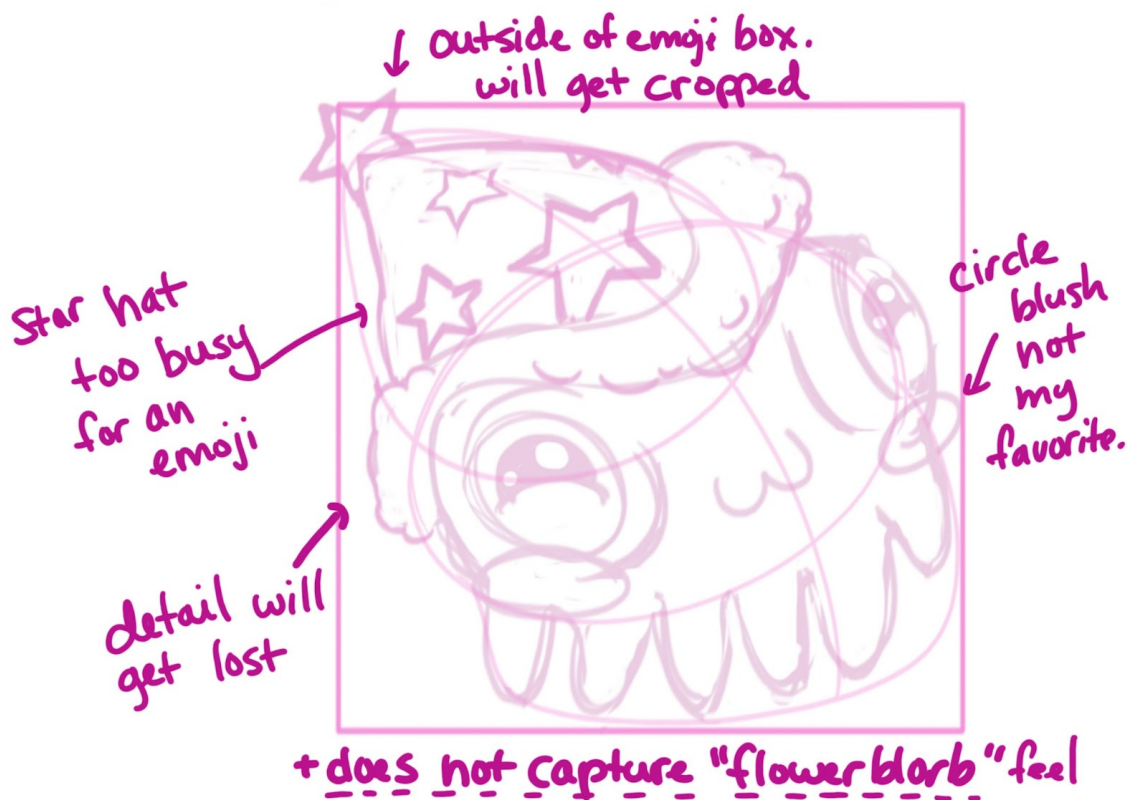
Detailing may be the stage that makes or breaks your emoji. Too many details, and the emoji will be too cluttered when it's reduced in size. Too few details, and you won't capture what's unique about this emoji. You may find that you need to stop to look at more reference at this stage. That's okay!

Also don't be afraid to try new things, even if you're not sure it'll work out. Sometimes it will, and wonderfully so. And if it doesn't? You can always simplify details later.

>> STEP FOUR: Analyze Your Sketch <<

It's time to workshop your emoji with whoever's handy! If you have a trusted emoji-making buddy, show them your sketch. If you'd prefer to work through the process by yourself, make sure that you turn the opacity down on the sketch, or mirror the layer your sketch is on. Use any trick in your hat to get your brain to tune back in to your drawing like it's seeing it for the very first time. This will allow you to more objectively evaluate your own work.

And now, let's see how well our sketch is achieving our goals of creating a flowersquid.



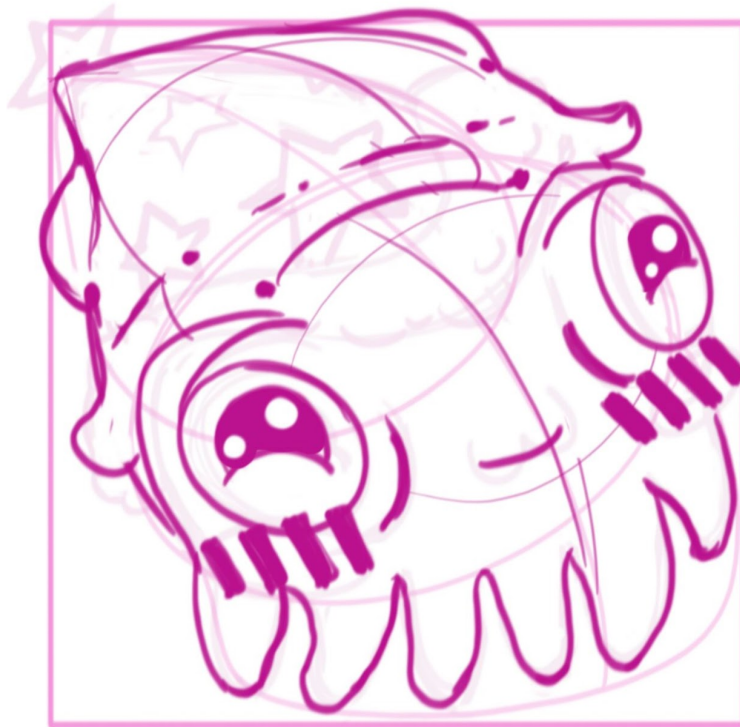
The verdict: I'm not doing so well. This squid is adorable, but it looks like a little wizard. It doesn't feel like a flowersquid at all. *Mainly because it doesn't even have a flower.*

Whenever we confront the results of our analysis, we have two options:

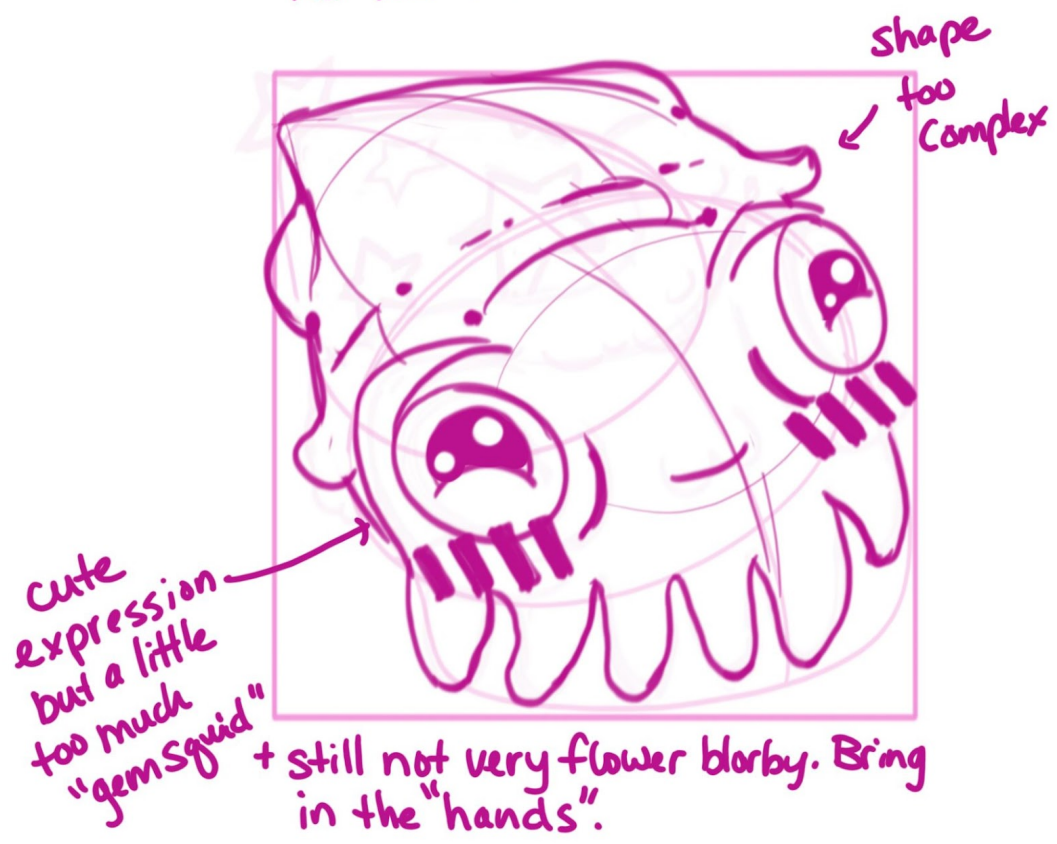
- + we're satisfied and we can move on to the next step;
- + or we're not satisfied and need to redraw our emoji.

Right now, I'm not satisfied with the direction of this emoji. **I'm opting to redraw my flowerblorb.**

If you are not satisfied: redraw!



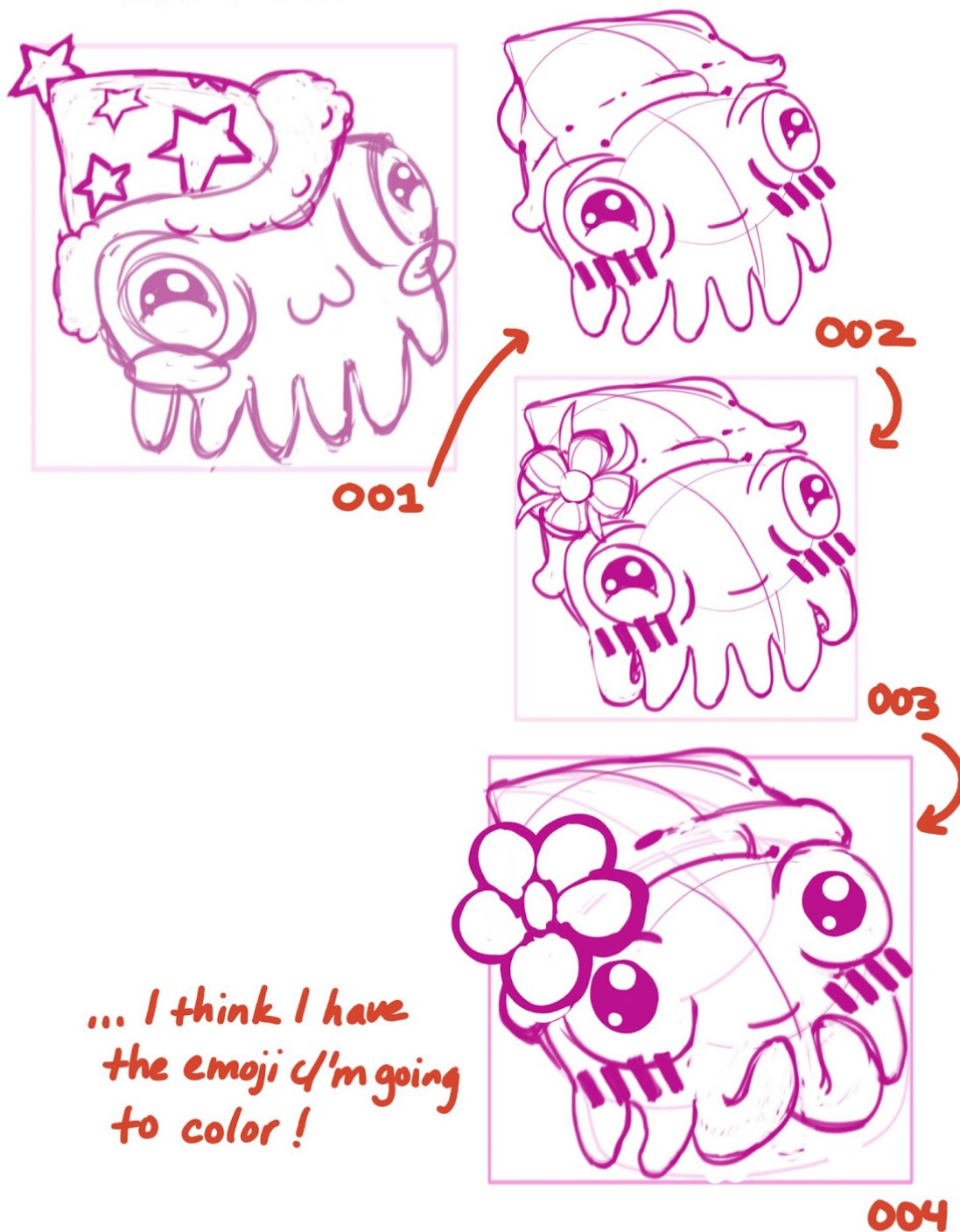
ANALYZE & REFINE AS MANY TIMES
AS YOU WANT TO!



The redraw-analysis-redraw cycle can go on for a *while*, especially if you find that your designs aren't conveying the thing you want to convey. My sketches are okay--and I probably could use any one of them as a undersketch for an emoji--but they're too "gemsquid" and not enough "flowerblorb" for my taste, so I continue drawing.

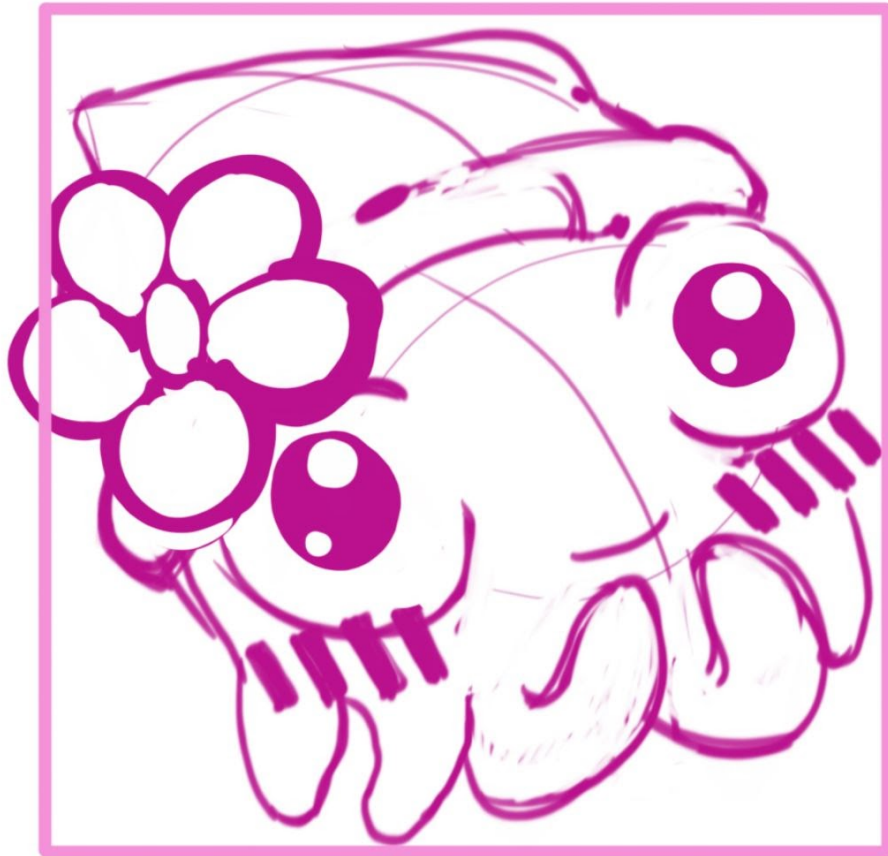
When I do a redraw, I set the previous layer to 20% opacity, and draw the next sketch on top of it. I don't want to lose any of my old sketches, in case I end up preferring to use one of them later on.

MANY REFINEMENTS LATER...



If you are satisfied: continue forward!

After four iterations of the flowersquid, I finally have the sketch that I feel lives up to my goal. It very much looks like a “flowerblorb but also a squid”.



Tips about choosing a design

Choosing a direction to move forward with your emoji may feel hard when you have several sketches of the same emoji. Sometimes you won't have a clue what sketch you should choose to develop.

Ask a friend! It's more than okay to ask others' opinions if you don't know how to move forward. Fresh eyes can sometimes spot things that we don't.

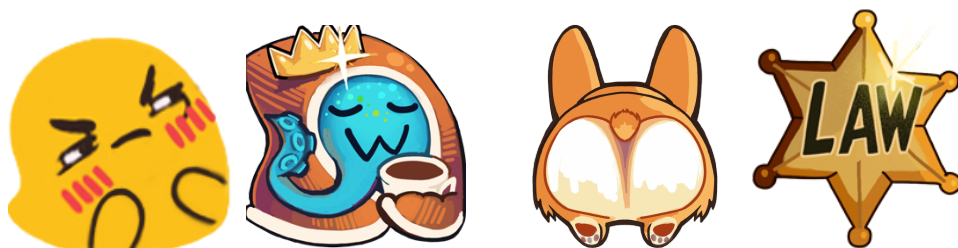
If someone picks a favorite sketch that you REALLY don't want to work on (because you feel another concept is stronger)...then there's your answer! Any feedback that helps you discover your opinions about your sketches is an invaluable resource.

>> STEP FIVE: Clean Up Your Sketch <<

Now that you have a sketch that you're going to turn into an emoji, your next step will depend on your preferred final coloring outcome.

- + If you want a **flat color emoji with no linework**, or you want to **paint your emoji** you can skip ahead to STEP SIX. Your lines won't be visible in the final emoji, so you can start coloring now!
- + If you want **visible and neat linework**, you should set your sketch opacity to 20%, lock it, and ink your sketch on a new layer.
- + If you want to **use your sketch in the final emoji**, you'll need to clean up your lines.

Each style has its benefits and drawbacks.



Pictured: on the left, Suspiciousjoy and Cozysquid, did not require inking. On the right, Corgisparkle and Law required inking.

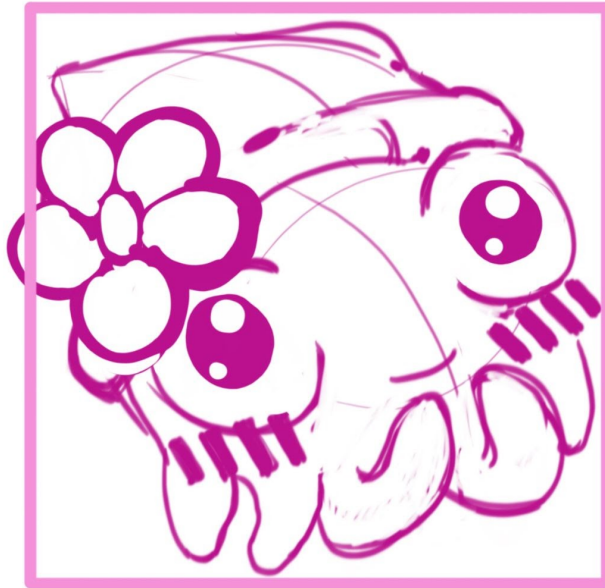
A **flat color style** is often really effective with simple shapes. Emojis based on recognizable shape language like the Google blob, the thonk, and other common shapes often benefit from this lineless style. If you want to create an emoji like this, the Twitter / Discord emoji can provide you with a style inspiration.

Painterly styles like cozysquid and most of the squid emoji line often completely paint over the original linework and therefore don't require particularly clean sketches. You can see more about how completely the undersketch gets painted over in the Gemsquid process in [Part One of the emoji guide](#).

Inked linework looks good on emojis that have rigid shapes (law), or wants to recall animation styles (Corgisparkle).

Cleaned up Sketch lines often have an energy that inked lines don't have. I don't make many emoji with cleaned up sketches, but I'm curious about how the final result will look.

>> My sketch isn't in too bad of shape and I want to use my sketch in the final emoji, so I decide **to clean up my lines rather than ink**.



I can see that I need to clean up the two little tentacles. I also want to clean up the “bump” that separates the face from the mantle. With a full opacity brush on a new layer, I paint over the messy areas in white.

As I paint out stray marks, I also take time to thicken the lines on the bottom of the “arms” and to straighten up the blush lines under the eyes.



Not pictured: the two hours it took me to paint out all of the stray marks to get to this stage.

I redraw my contour lines,
because they help me during
the coloring
phase.

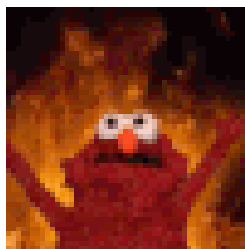


Tips about sketch clean-up

Inking is almost always less time consuming than cleaning up your lines. There are usually more things that need fixing in your sketchy lines than what your instincts tell you when evaluating whether to ink or not. However, **inking can often take away the energetic lines of your sketches.**

Depending on what you value, and what your goals are with the emoji, weigh your options wisely. It can be frustrating to decide to clean up a sketch, only to have to abandon that job halfway through because the lines are too junky to continue.

>> STEP SIX: Time to COLOR <<



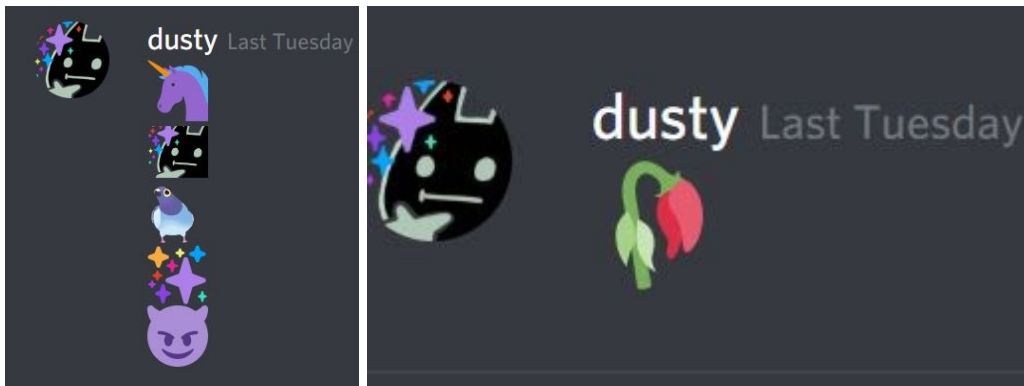
It is TIME TO COLOR.

You'll want to **pick a palette** before you begin. Picking good colors that will read well at a small size on Discord's background will save you a headache later.

I've made a lot of squid emojis over the years.

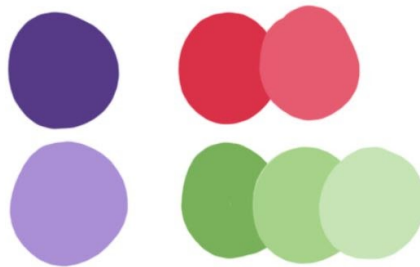


SO MANY green squids, quite a few blue squids, a few pink and red and plaid and pastel squids. I haven't made a nice dark purple squid yet. I'm also going to need accent flowers for the flower. I don't want the colors to match flowerblorb's flower, so I'll need to take a look at what the Discord emoji set has to offer me for flower colors.

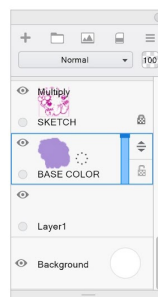


Pictured: Emojis from Discord featuring that one purple shade I enjoy; wilted rose emoji.

I screenshot the emoji and use the color picker function on Sketchbook. I take the purples from the imp emoji, and the greens and reds from the wilted rose for the flower. I paint small swatches on my canvas to give me samples of the colors to sample quickly when I need them.



It's time to flat your emoji!

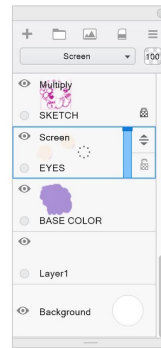


> Set your sketch layer to **multiply**.

> Create a new layer under your lines and name it **BASE COLOR**.

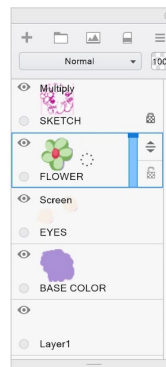
> Lay down your base color (light purple) under the entire sketch.

> Try to stay inside the lines, but if you stray outside of them, that's no big deal. We'll clean that up later.



> Add a layer that is set to screen. Using white or a very light tint, paint in the eyes.

> If the white spills outside of the eyes, you can leave it. We'll be painting in thick lines later in the coloring process.

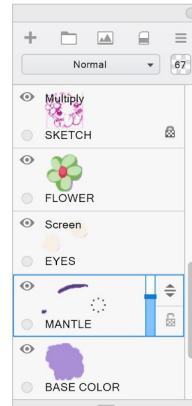


> Add another new layer. Call this one FLOWER.

> Paint some quick colors onto the flower.

> I choose to make the petals green and the center red, as this looks festive and seasonal.

> The FLOWER is the topmost color layer. It will cover up painting mistakes from the eyes. You'll want to be a little more careful about keeping your colors inside the lines.

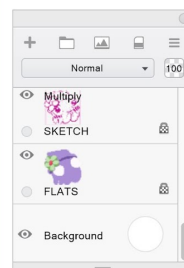


> One last flat layer goes under the sketch layer.

> Create a layer called **MANTLE**. Set it to 67% opacity.

> Use the dark purple from your color palette and draw the shadow.

> The mantle and the body should be strongly visually separated now.



> If you're using a program where you can select by color, you might want to **merge your flat color layers** into one layer.

> You can skip this step if you prefer to have the colors separated onto different layers.

> If you merge your layers, rename it to **FLATS** and lock it.

I'm now going to **paint over my sketch lines with thick, colored lines**. These lines will help hide my sloppy painting & will give my emoji better readability at small sizes. You can paint over with black, but I suggest using a dark, saturated color from a nearby hue. For a light purple base, I like to use **dark purple** lines that are darker than the shadow under the mantle. For the green flower, **dark forest green** lines.

From emoji experience, I know that the mouth & eye pupils need to be the darkest colors on the emoji. If the expression isn't visible, the whole emoji is a failure. For the pupils & mouth, I use an **extremely dark saturated blue** that is almost black. The contrast should be high enough to make these visible when the emoji is shrunk down in Discord chat.

The line painting process takes a long time, since it's important to be neat & I don't know exactly how thick my lines are going to need to be to read at final emoji sizes.

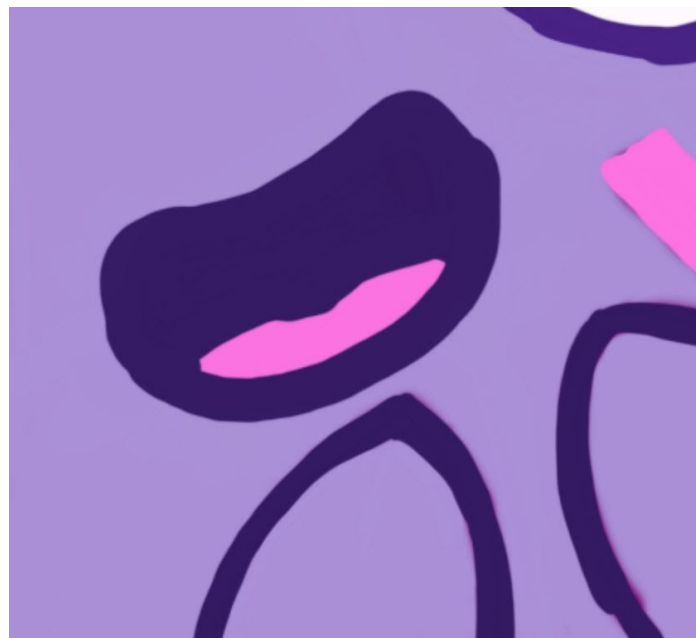


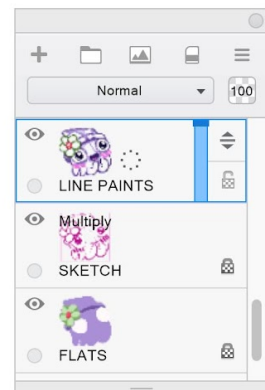
Zoom in VERY close while working on this stage to make sure that your painted lines are covering up the sketch lines below them.



More line repainting & neatenning. This part of the coloring process takes A WHILE.

During the line painting process, I discover that I'm not really thrilled by the expression I chose for the flowersquid's mouth. I want it to be more joyous. I draw a big blob for the new mouth and add a tiny sliver of pink color from the cheeks to make it look like an open mouth.





The results of my line painting! If I wanted, I could stop here, go on to finishing the emoji in STEP SEVEN and call it a day. This design works really well with (mostly) flat colors. The expression is big and readable, and I think would look good next to flowerblorb (which is also in flat colors).

At this stage, I can optionally play around with **cel-shading styles** or **digital painting**.

I remember my goal is to not spend forever on this emoji, so I opt to try some cel-shading techniques.

I add a new overlay layer and set the opacity to 80%. I select a light highlight color that has some yellow mixed in. I place a little light circle in all of the places that might catch a highlight if it were being lit from the top right corner.

I add a lot of highlight doots because the more highlights something has, the wetter it looks.

...the result is way too busy for an emoji.



Whoops, the poor squid looks like it has squid!measels. I'm not going to be doing this.

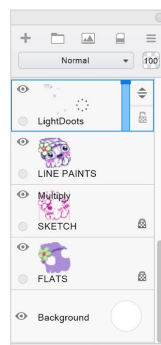


Not really loving this lighting scheme either. I'm going to have to be even more restrained with my highlight placement.

Also, I will need to increase the opacity; these colors are too subtle to show up at emoji sizes.



I increase the opacity on the light layer so the highlights contrast against the sketch base.

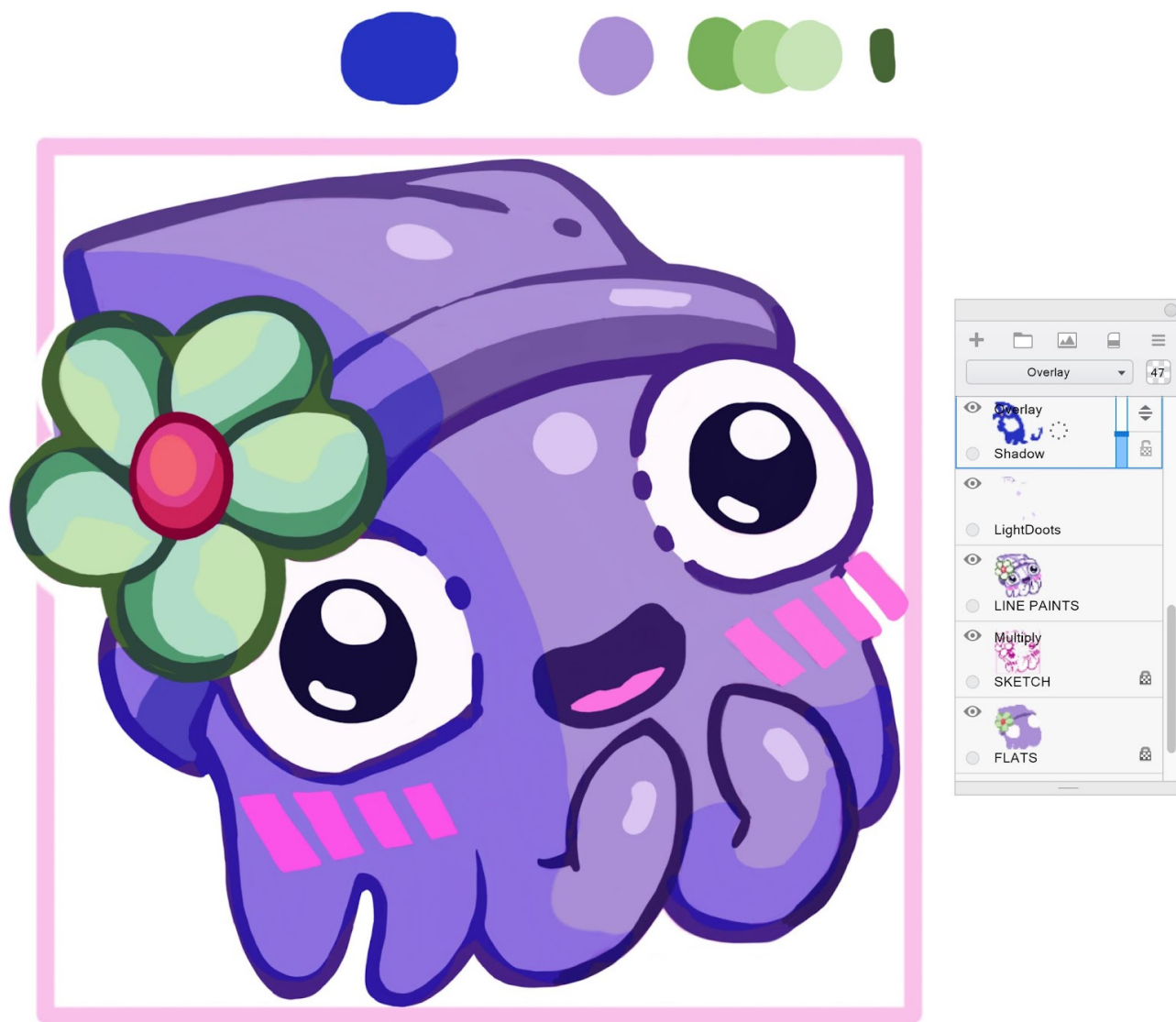


I also severely reduce the number of highlights to the most salient points on the squid: two on the mantle, one on the face, one for each little feeder tentacle / "hand".

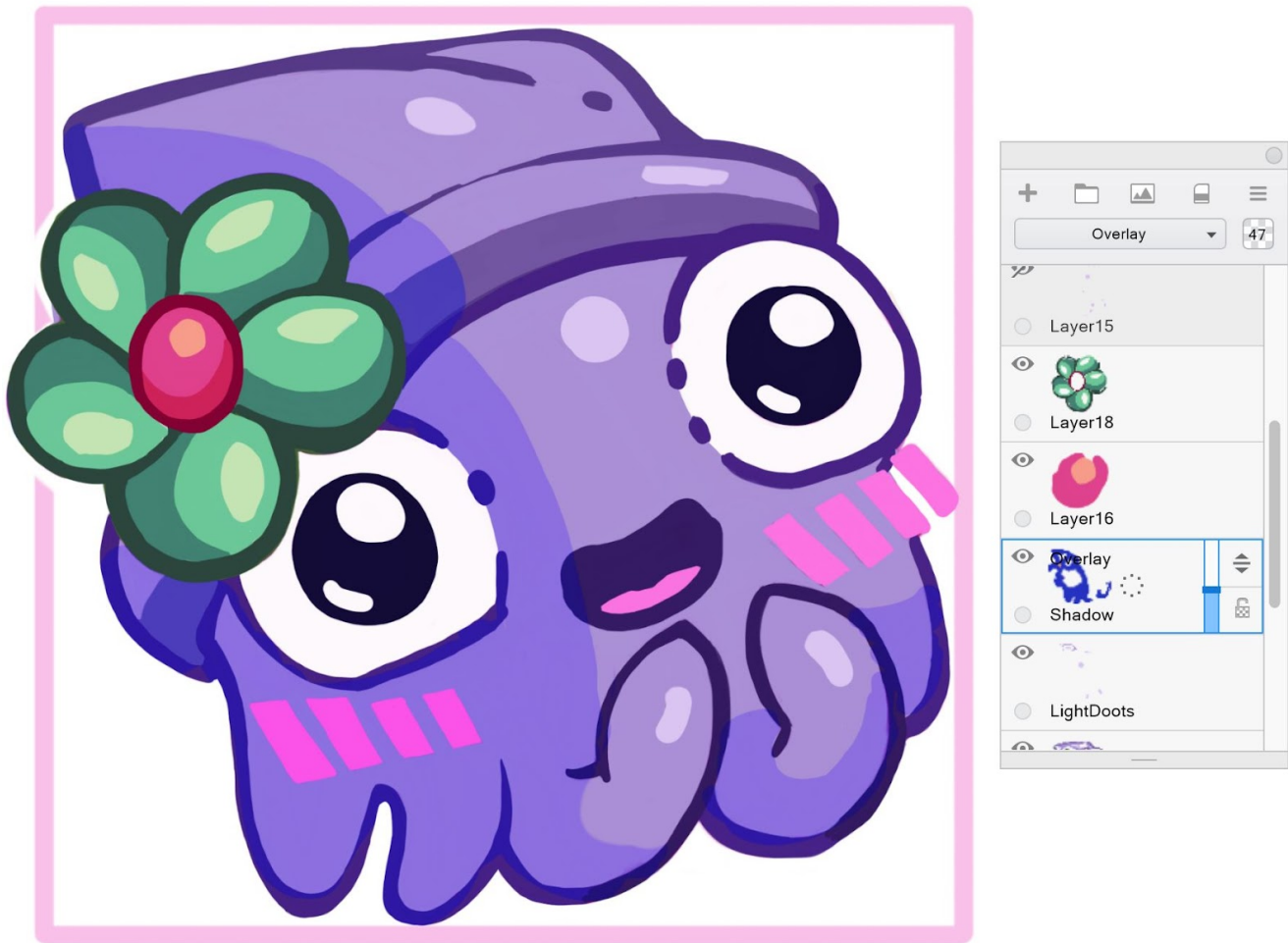
Now, to add shadows! Let's select a nice, deep blue from the color picker. On a new **Overlay** layer set to 47% opacity, we'll paint in the shadows.

The light is coming from the top right corner...but this is also an emoji, so our shadow doesn't have to be photorealistic. It just has to be *convincing*. So let's use the shadow to give the squid volume.

Remember where those contour lines were way back when in our sketch? Use their rough placement to help guide you where to put your shadows now.



This emoji feels close to “done” with the main coloring. The flower doesn't look as attractive as it could, so I'm going to fix that up with some quick painting before I call the main painting phase done.



And, that's it! Onto the next step, where we will prepare the emoji for web display.

Tips about coloring

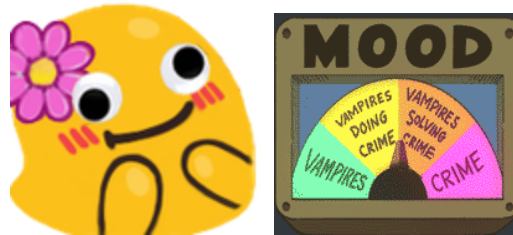
If you are coloring in Photoshop, you can save yourself some time by doing things like using the flats layer as a mask for the whole emoji. This will keep you from coloring outside of the lines. Sketchbook has limited tools, so I haven't shown off a particularly *quick* way of making emoji in this tutorial. As always, trust your own creative process and the tools you prefer to use if you know any shortcuts that can help you cut down on coloring time.

The one time-saver that I *don't* recommend is using Photoshop to lock the sketch layer and then coloring directly on those lines. Sketch lines are almost always too thin for Discord-sized emoji. You need comically fat lines to show up at 32x32 pixels. So you almost always need to paint fatter, thicker lines over your original sketch.

>> STEP SEVEN: Prepare for Web Display <<

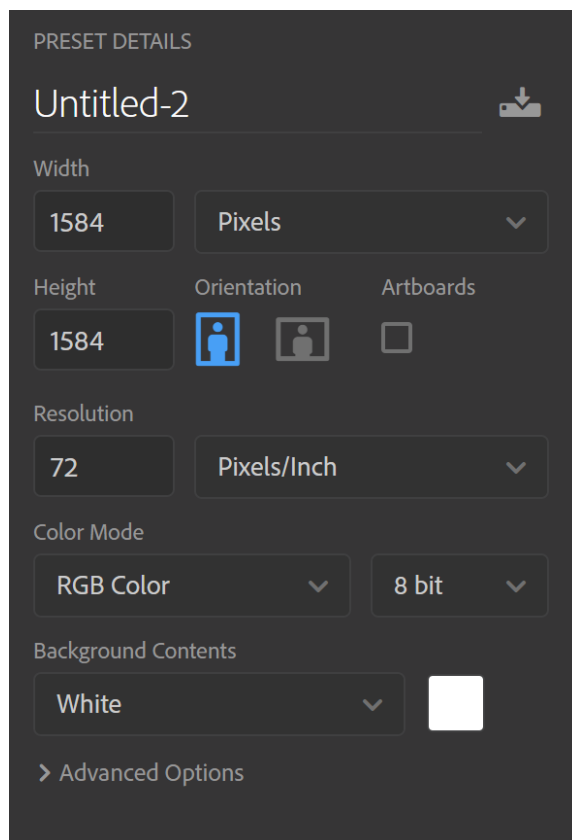
We're just minutes away from seeing our adorable emoji on Discord. Before we upload it to a server for the first time, we need to make sure that it's ready to be an emoji.

If your emoji doesn't have a custom background (which is most emoji that we tend to make on the mmbb), you will need to make sure it has a transparent background.



Pictured: Flowerblobulated is transparent. Moodzoom uses a gray background color (to fake transparency) because that makes the glows used on the panel easier to handle on an animated gif.

If you started your emoji making process in Photoshop, you don't need to sweat about transparency now. In Photoshop, you can simply delete the background layer and create an image with transparency. Autodesk Sketchbook doesn't have that function. So anyone who made their emoji in a sketch program that doesn't support transparency will need to **isolate their image** in an image editor.

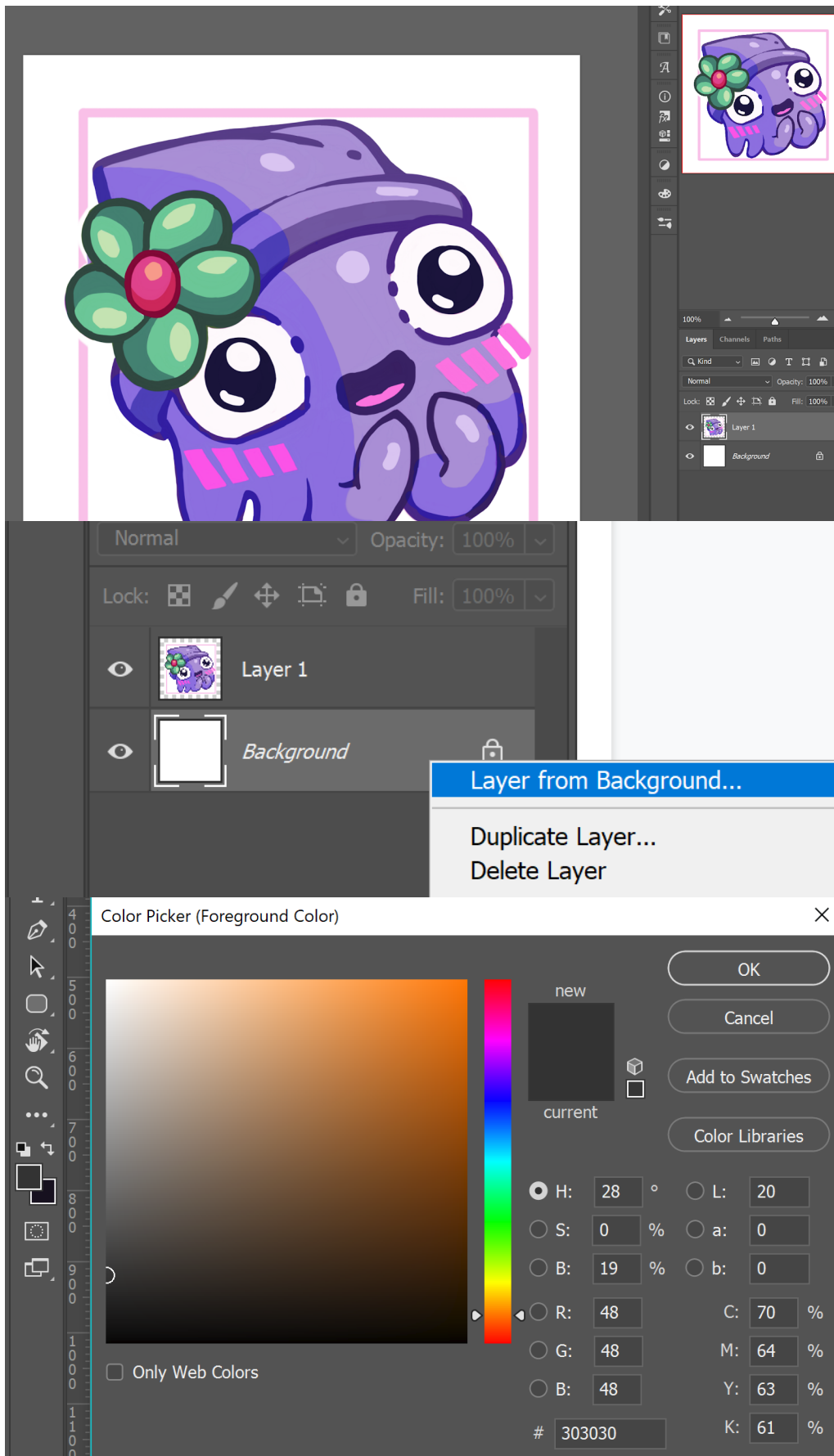


I fire up Photoshop and create a new image. I choose a large enough pixel dimensions so that my uneven coloring will be evened out when the image is sized down at the end of the process.

I choose 1584x1584 pixels. You can choose whatever size suits you.

In the new document, you can add your flowersquid using any number of techniques.

I have flattened my squid in Sketchbook, so I simply choose to use the rectangular select in Sketchbook, and copy+paste my squid in my new Photoshop document.



> I've pasted my Squid into Photoshop on its own layer.

> Next, I'm going to make the background removable.

> Right-click on the Background layer.

> Select "Layer from Background"

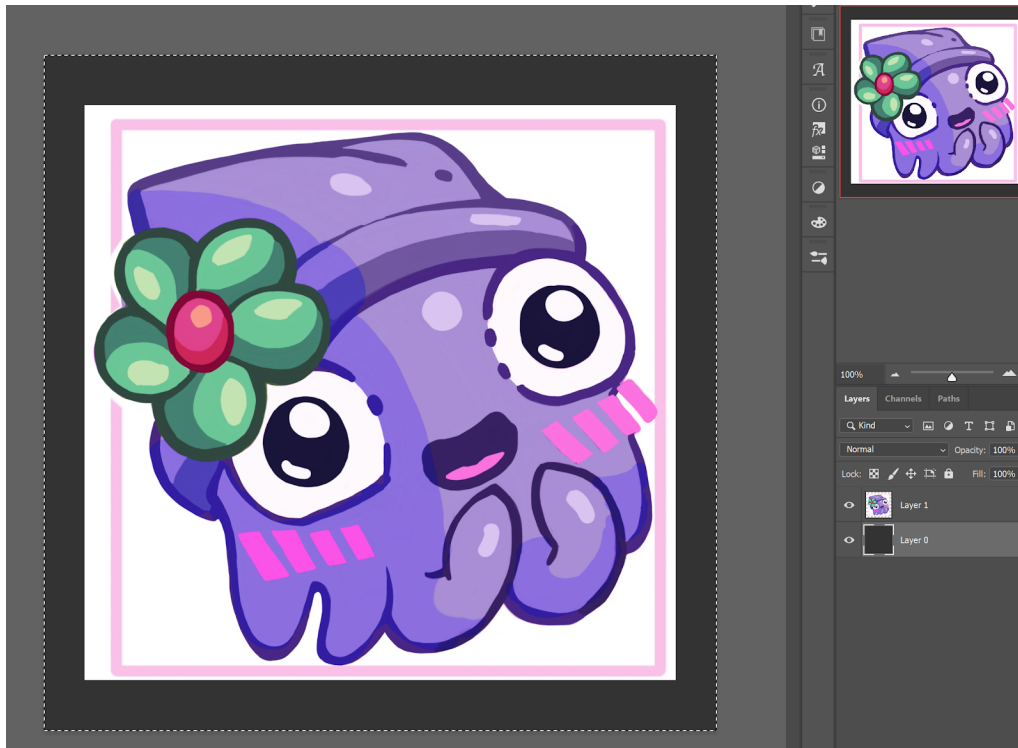
> Now the background is unlocked.

> CTRL+Left click **Layer 0**. This should select the entire layer.

> Click the foreground color to bring up the color picker. Select a dark gray that is similar to the Discord gray background.

> I choose **#303030**.

> Use this color to **fill Layer 0**. ALT + Backspace will fill the entire layer.



> You can now see the area that you will need to cut out of the flowersquid's layer.

> You have several options for cutting the squid out. I like to use the lasso tool, and carefully draw around the outside of the squid.



> Once you have a lasso selection, use the "Add Mask" button on the layers panel to mask the flowersquid.

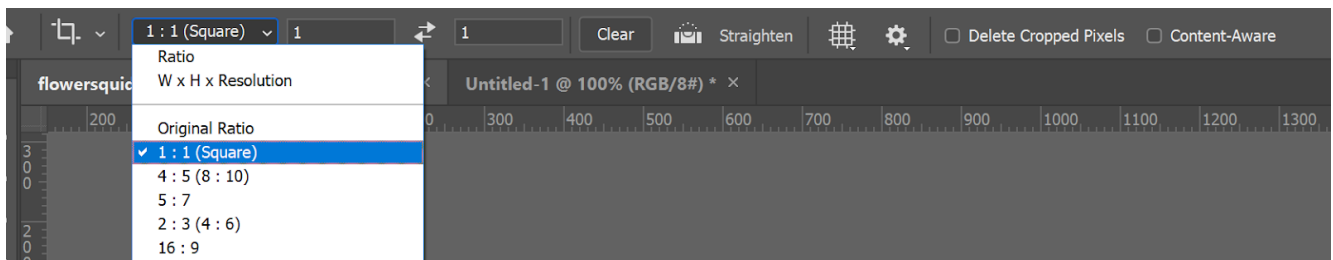
It should now be completely isolated from its background!

Now that you've isolated the squid, you can choose to go in several directions. You will need to do some combination of the following:

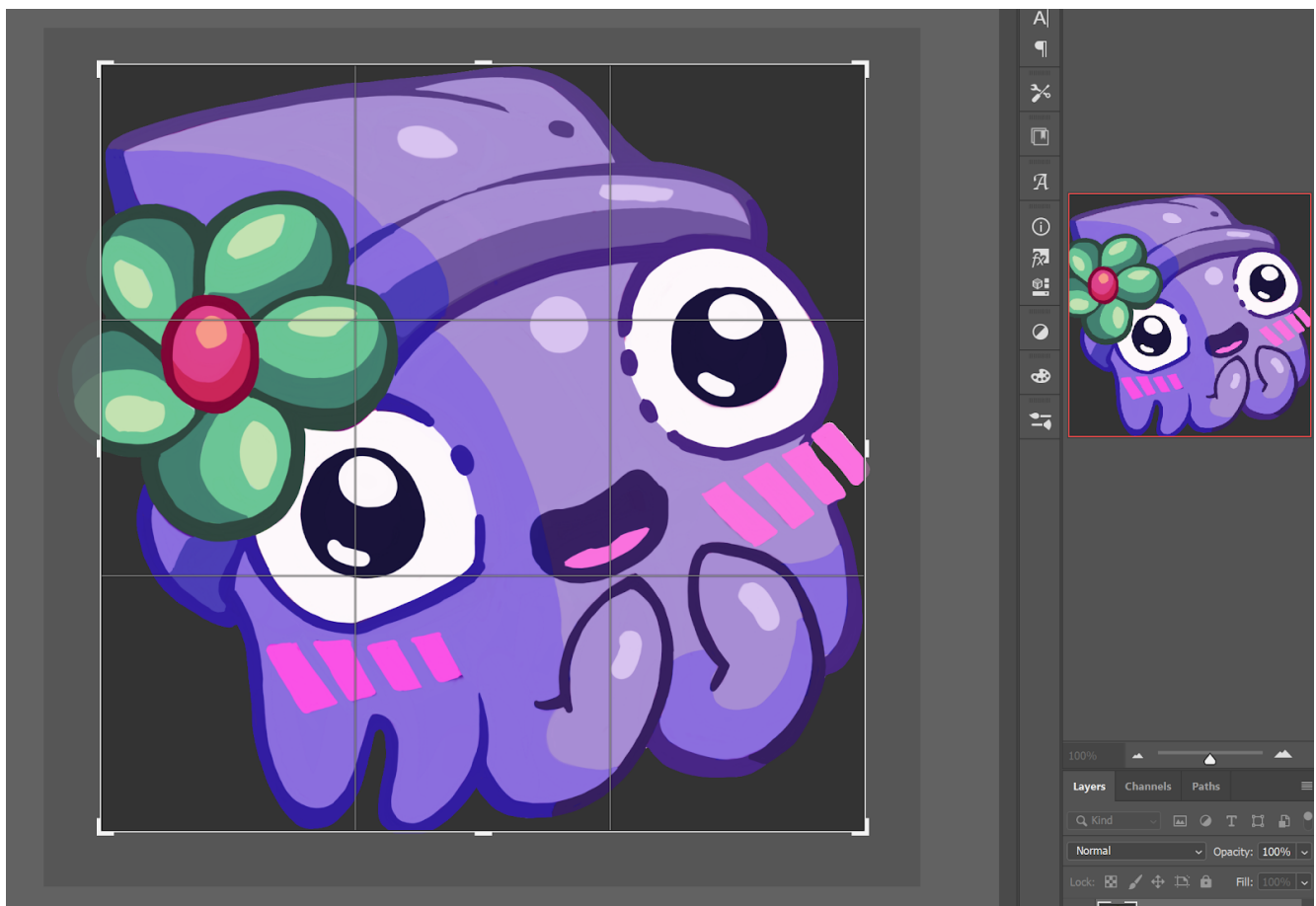
- + **Evaluate the colors** against the Discord gray background.
- + **Crop the image** for web display
- + **Save your image with transparency** for web display.
- + **Upload** it to a server to test it out
- + **Fix any errors** that arise when you test your emoji.

Evaluating colors. This step is pretty easy. All of the colors pop out well against the dark gray. I don't think flowersquid requires any color adjustment. If it did, I would adjust the colors using **Adjustment Layers** or by painting in a **Clipping Mask** over the emoji base. The clipping mask would prevent colors from spilling over the edge of the emoji.

Crop the image for web display. To maximize the size of the emoji, we'll need to crop it down to a square. Select the crop tool, and set it to a 1:1 (Square) ratio. It will now crop exclusively to squares.



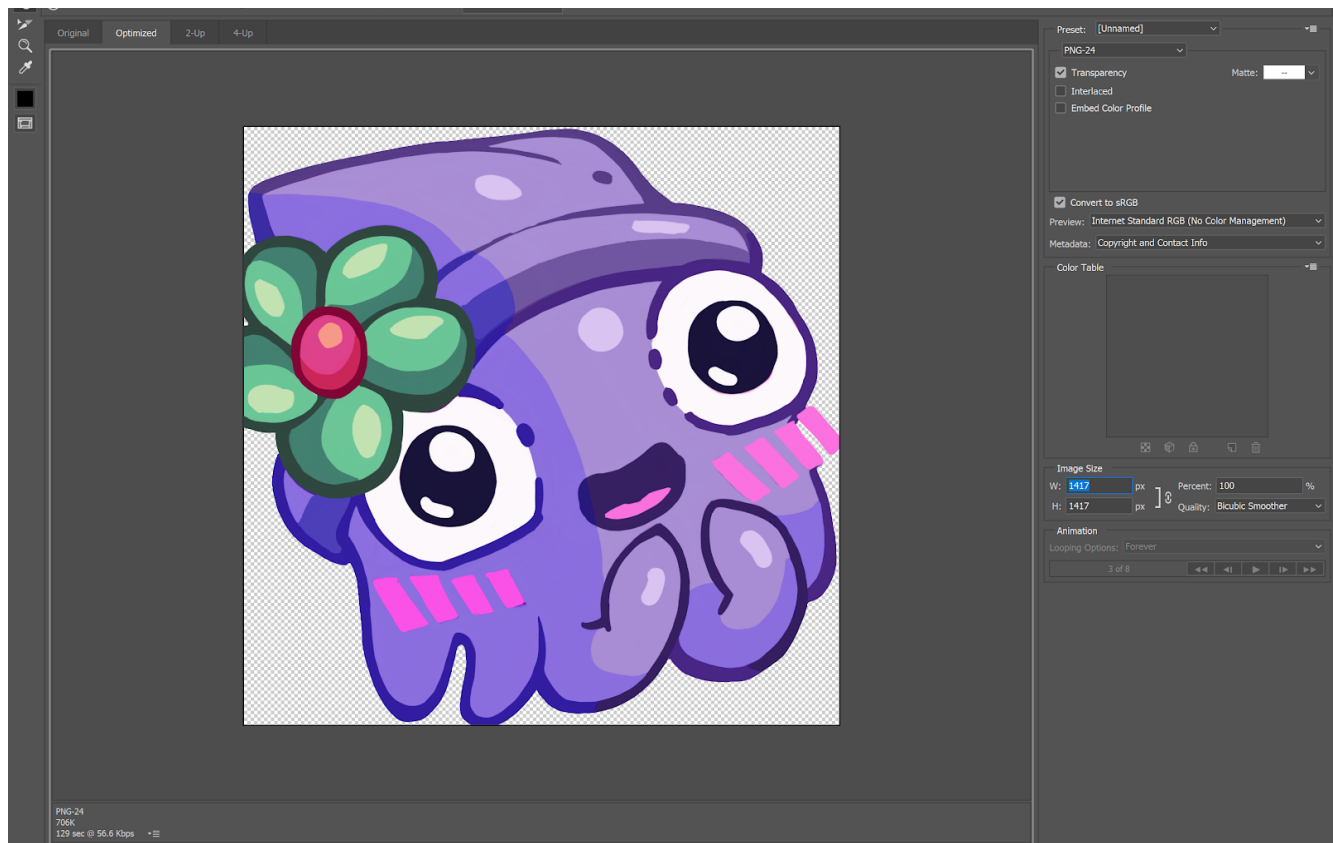
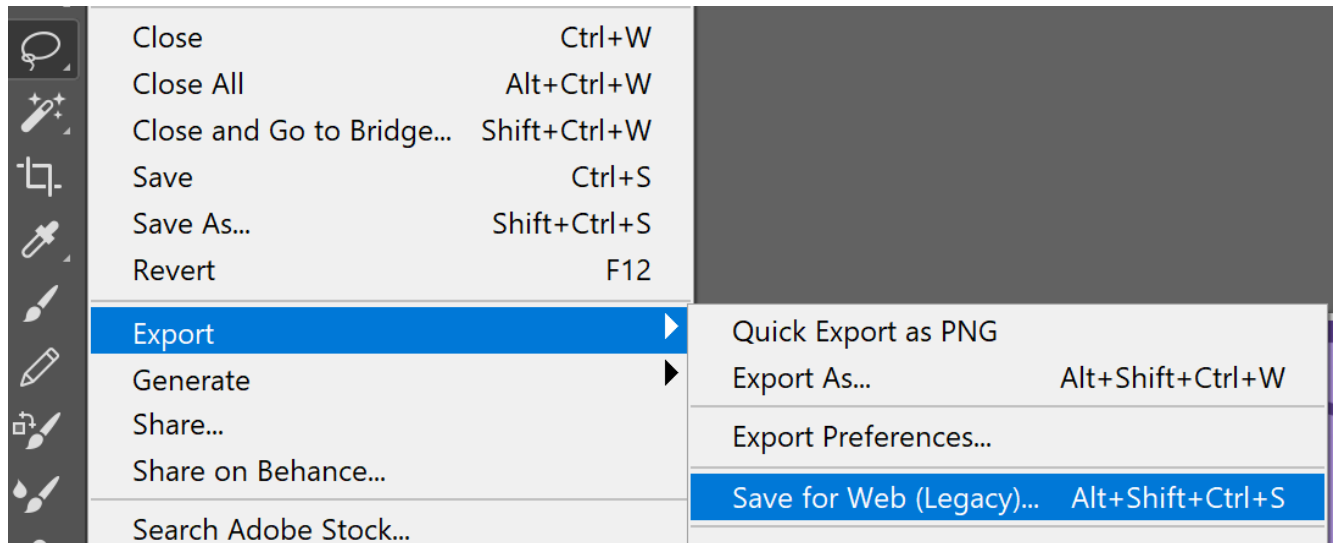
Position the crop tool, and move it around until you find a crop that you like. Ideally, your crop should prioritize the expression & position of the flowersquid. If small details get chopped off, it's not a big deal. The original flowerblorb has its flower cut off, and it still looks really good.



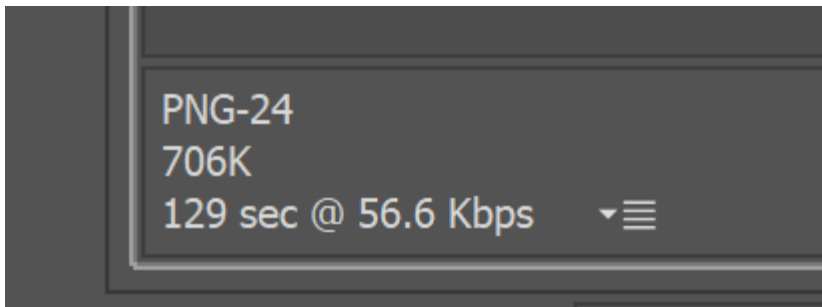
The flower is going to get cut off a little, but I'm satisfied with how much of the flowersquid fits inside the box. Now that I have a crop I like, I'm going to save it and upload it to my emoji test server.

Saving an image with transparency for the web. Deactivate **Layer 0** by clicking on the eye icon next to the layer in the Layers panel. Photoshop gives you a plethora ways to save the file. I prefer to use:

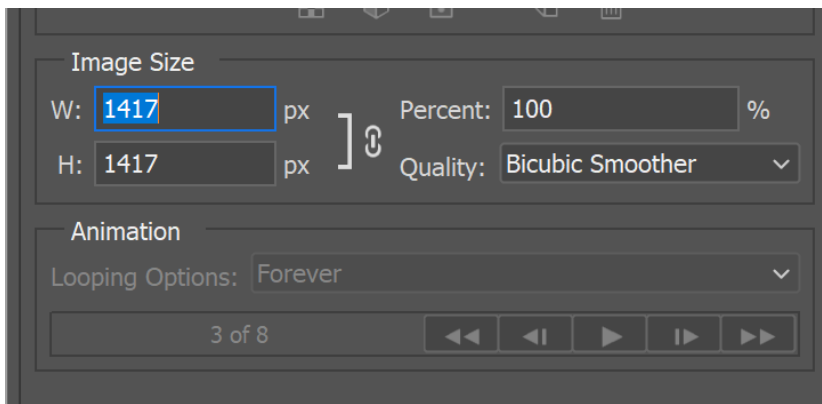
File > Export > Save For Web (Legacy)



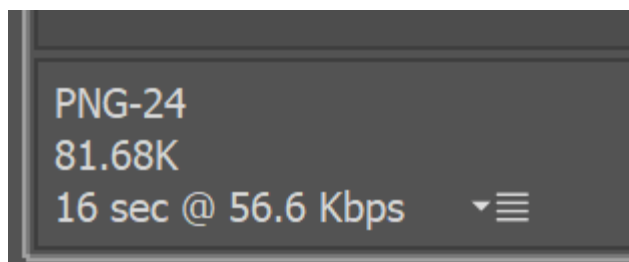
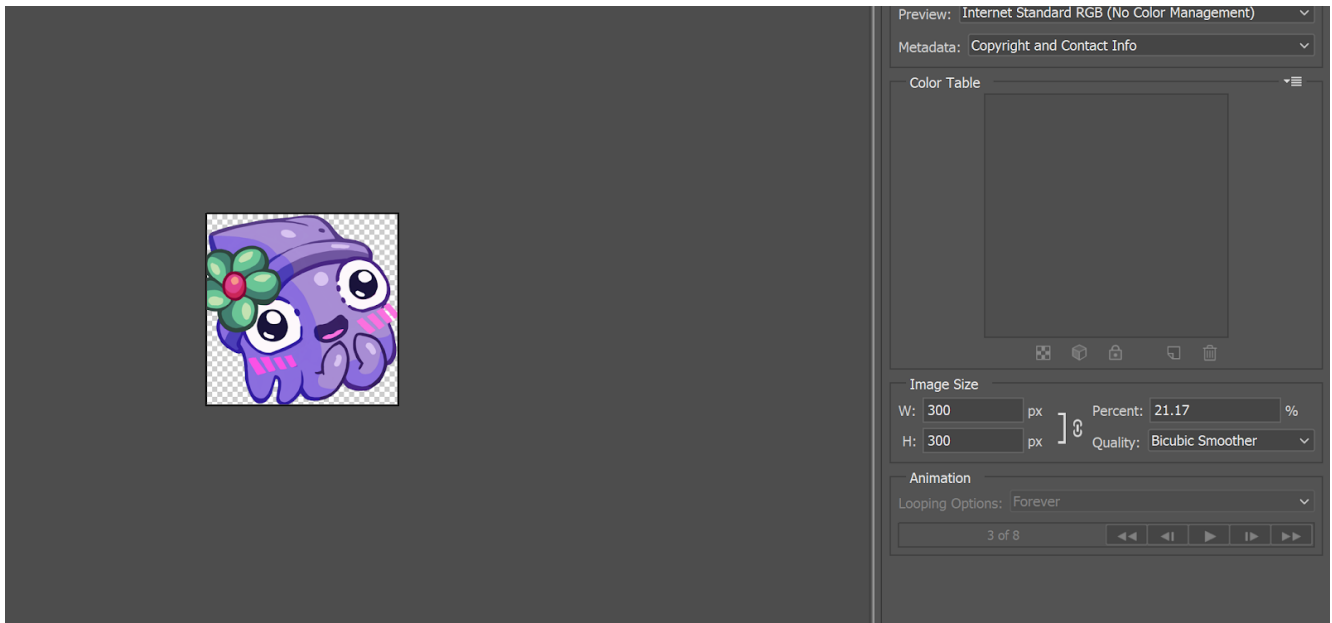
The save for web panel allows you to change several settings to make sure that you can save your emoji at the proper size. You will want to save it as either a .GIF or .PNG, as those are the two raster web formats that have transparency. Discord has a maximum file upload size of 256kb. Right now, this image is way too large to upload.



> The easiest way to decrease the file size is to decrease the pixel dimensions of the file.



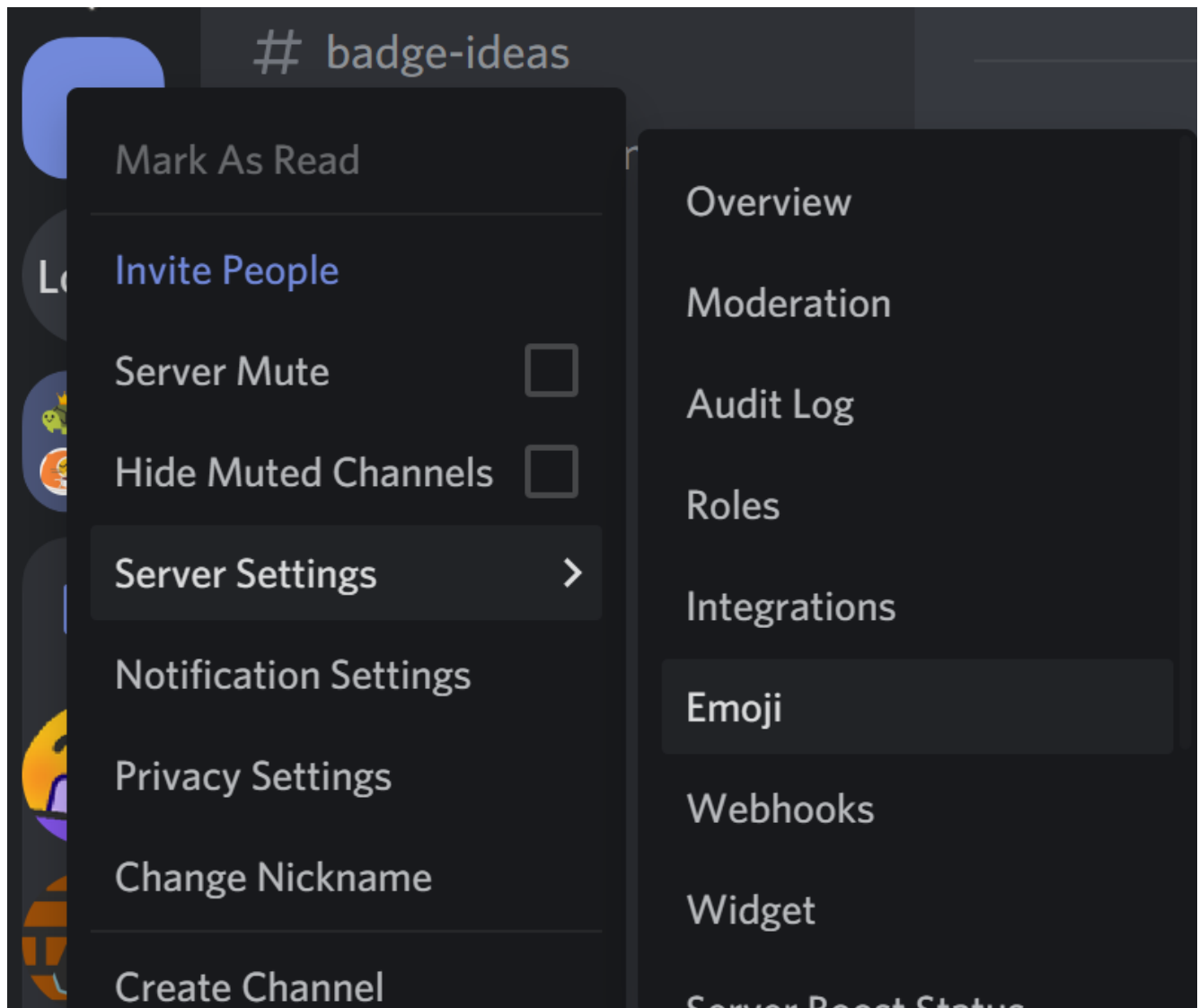
> In the Image Size panel, size the image down to 300 pixels.



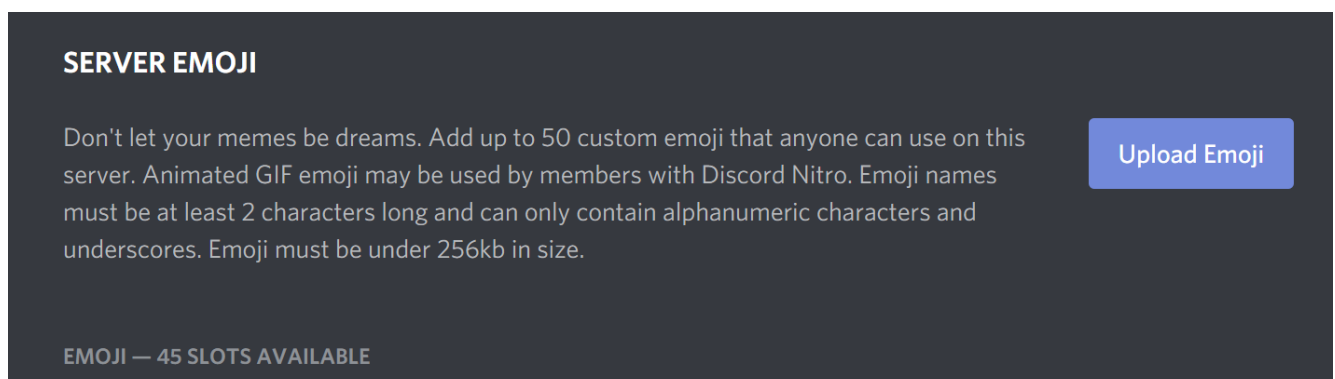
> The image size is now 81k. Perfect! Save your file and you now have an emoji to upload to your sever!

Upload it to a server to test it out. Once you have your emoji file, it's time to upload it to your test server. In the Discord browser or app, right click the icon for your server.

Click the **Emoji** menu. You will find it under Server Settings > Emoji



You'll see a big button next. Click "Upload Emoji" to upload your new squid!





If your upload is successful, you will immediately see it in your emoji list.

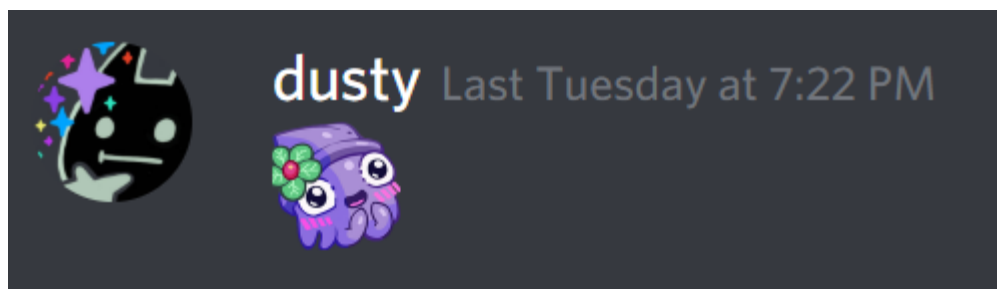
SERVER EMOJI

Don't let your memes be dreams. Add up to 50 custom emoji that anyone can use on this server. Animated GIF emoji may be used by members with Discord Nitro. Emoji names must be at least 2 characters long and can only contain alphanumeric characters and underscores. Emoji must be under 256kb in size.

EMOJI — 44 SLOTS AVAILABLE

Emoji	Alias	Uploaded By
	:firstflowersquid:	 dusty

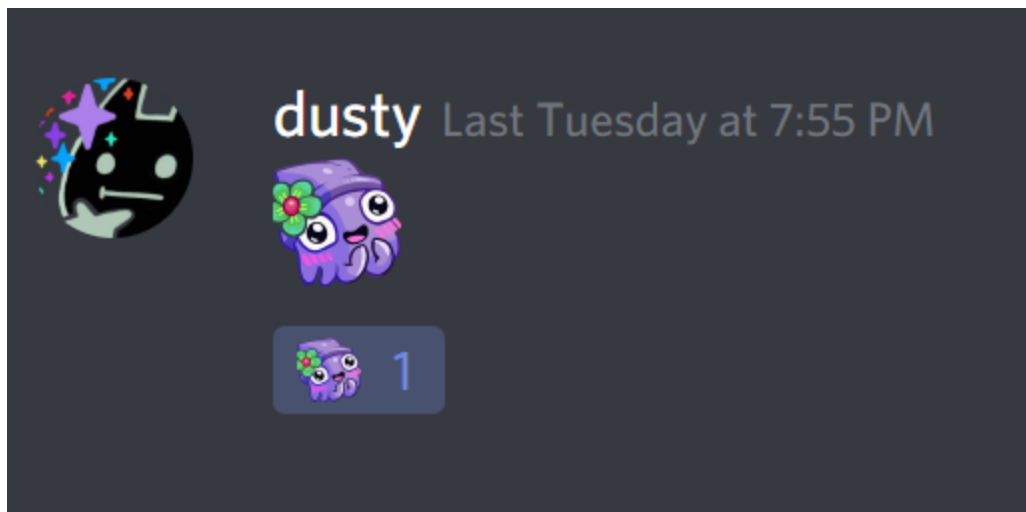
Success! You can now test it out on your server to see if does what you want it to.



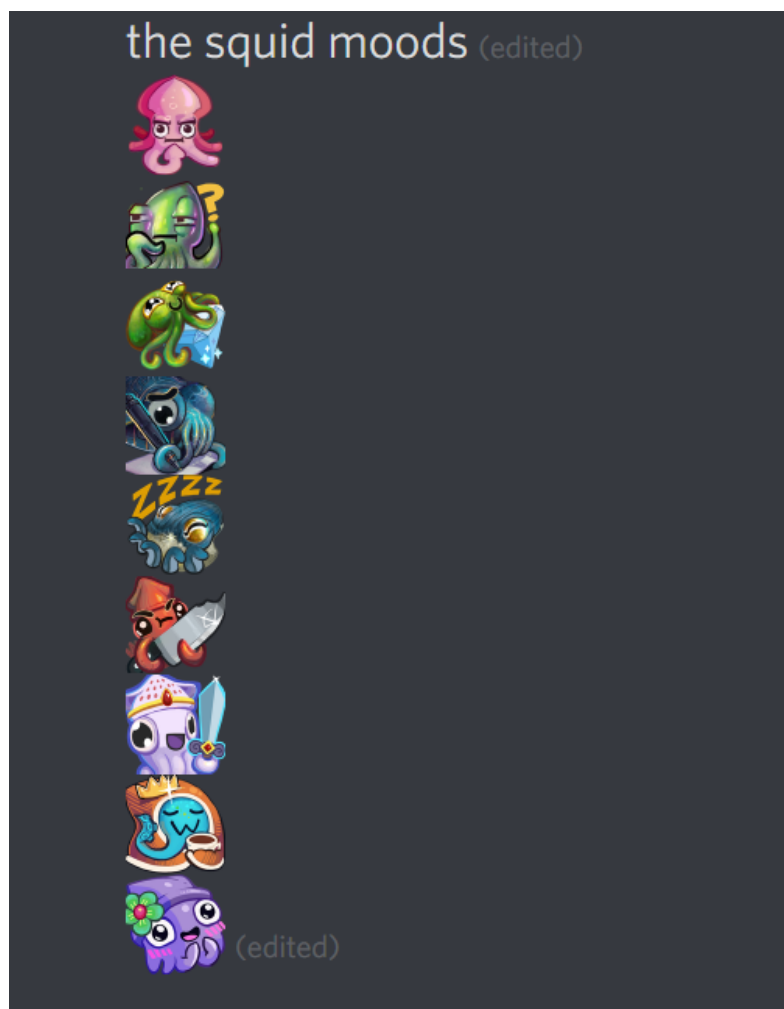
Hmm. I think the expression looks pretty good, but I think the broken lines are too distracting. I think I should revise my emoji a little, and then test it again.

This process, like the sketching stage, can go on *for a while*. I'm going to skip to the end of all of the adjustments.





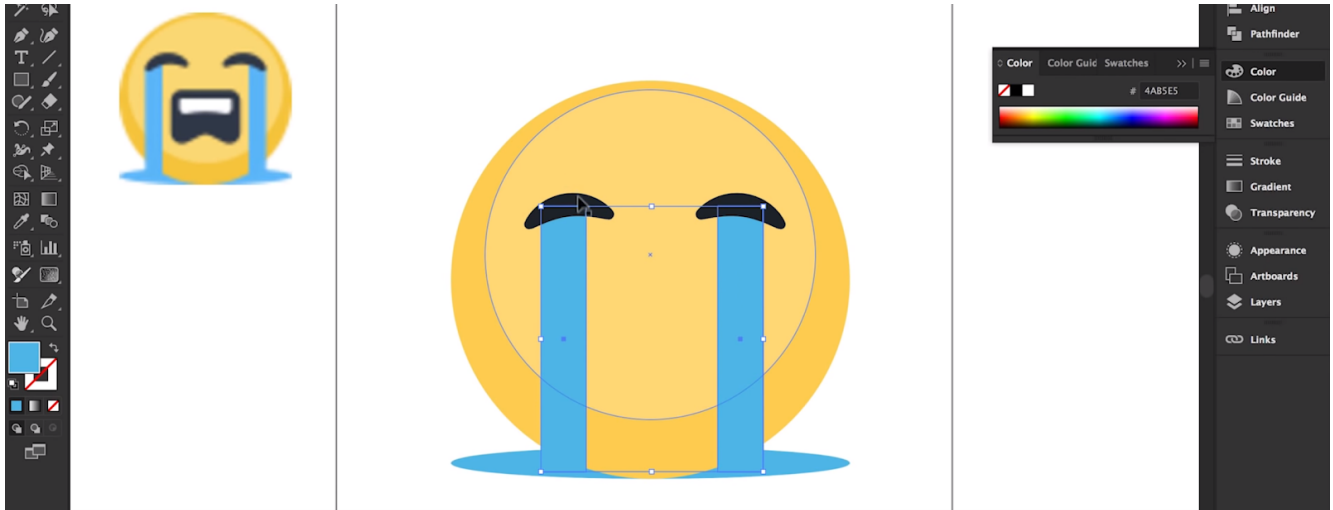
The 8th version of flowersquid displays wonderfully at emoji sizes, and it has the emphasis on its little hands that I wanted from the beginning. This is the one. Flowersquid is done! Time for me to upload it on my squid emoji server for everyone to use!



And that is how you make a high-effort emoji. I hope you've enjoyed this tutorial. Good luck and happy emoji-making everyone!

>> Further Learning <<

If you prefer to make emoji in Illustrator/vector programs, here's a pretty good tutorial that details how to make a crying emoji.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17JanK048w8>

If you'd like to draw an emoji on paper, this tutorial is a pretty great introduction to how to color emoji with pens and markers.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C42R5pOnlao>



That's all, folks! Flowersquid thanks you for reading along!