

Isn't it time you had an animation override?

What does your avatar's body language say about you?

By Pollywog Gardenvale

Have you ever wondered why some avatars have more expressive body language than others? What about those saucy AVs who saunter confidently along the avenue, while you go clomp, clomp, clomping along? Does it ever feel like the whole world is a tuxedo and you're just a pair of brown shoes? Maybe they know something that you don't—the secret of animation override!

Research has shown that over fifty percent of our communication takes place on the nonverbal level. Although the meaning of each pose or gesture can vary from culture to culture, in the international community of Second Life, most residents still rely on the default set of animations.

For example, standing with your hands on your hips is included in the animated loop of default standing poses. However, in many cultures, standing with "arms akimbo" is considered to be an aggressive stance.

Wouldn't it be nice if your avatar would keep its head up while having its picture taken, or how about smiling once in a while?

So how hard is it to override your avatar's animation, anyway? You might be surprised to discover how common an occurrence it is. Your animation is overridden every time you click a pose ball, or sit down on a chair that makes you do things that seem out of character for your same old, default self. (Just watch out for those Gorean pose balls!)

Your Inventory contains a selection of gestures that can be triggered by typing a chat command or by pressing a shortcut key. To display your list of active gestures, select Gestures from the Edit menu. If you want to examine the internal workings of any gesture, click the Edit button.

The Gestures dialog box displays the properties and triggers that are associated with the gesture. A single gesture may be a combination of several elements, including sound and pauses. You can experiment by making changes to a gesture, and then take it for a test drive by clicking Preview.

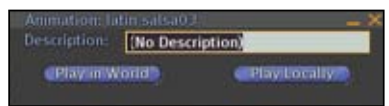


Another easy way to animate your avatar is to go to your Inventory, open up the Animation folder, and double-click an animation.



Typing Override

When the dialog box appears, click the "Play in World" button. (If you want to try an animation in the privacy of your own computer, click "Play Locally.")



You may be surprised to discover how many free gestures, dances, and other animations are in your inventory.

If you want something more specialized, you will find many animations for sale in the classifieds. Most of the third-party animations that are available in Second Life were created with *Poser 3D Figure Design and Animation* software from eFrontier. The completed animation is saved as a .BVH file and then uploaded to Second Life.

Miss Gardenvale is wearing a Mexican Tehuana dress from El Refugio Pottery (Diegoland) and Cesar Chavez red roses from The Mad Haberdasher.



Shy Assertive Reserved Aggressive Defensive Open

►Override

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So here's how it works: Your avatar has a set of preprogrammed animation channels that determines the way you walk, run, sit, stand, and fly. However, the default animations that are assigned to each channel can be replaced by wearing an animation HUD loaded with replacement animations. That is what animation override is all about.

In the military, a "Head-Up Display" (HUD) is an electronically generated navigational panel that is superimposed over the pilot's field of view. In Second Life, a HUD is a control panel that can either be worn or displayed in a fixed position on the screen.

Most animation overrides have a notecard that lists each possible position (or channel), followed by the exact name of the replacement animation. When the notecard is loaded and the HUD is activated—voilà!

Well, maybe it's not quite that easy, or at least it hasn't been so for me. I have lost track of the times I have gone flying into outer space (which seems to happen if your default animations are not correctly overwritten). So before you start experimenting with animation overrides, make to do the following:

1. Go to an enclosed space with a roof over your head. (That way, if you start to fly off into outer space, at least you won't go farther than the ceiling.)
2. Have a chair with a pose ball nearby. (You will need to click on it to get down from the ceiling.)
3. Make sure you don't have to be anywhere soon, because this might take awhile.
4. If your animations get messed up, don't panic. Calmly detach the HUD. You may have to log out and come back in again. At least two of the times that I had problems were caused by the server for the region. If you're having problems, teleport to another region and try reattaching the HUD.

Animations

Outrider Animations

Outrider Animations are on the expensive side, but they have lots of high-quality, natural animations for singles and couples.

The Motion Merchant

The Motion Merchant specializes in two-person animations, but also has a few singles that are interesting. The animations are open source, so they can be modified.

Their Typing Override product replaces your default typing with an animated conversation and gesture—but here's the catch: Whenever you type, you are transformed into a virtual, hand-flapping, tongue wagger. I was amazed to find myself typing things like, "Here I am stuck in a house full of screaming kids while you go out running around with your hoodlum friends!" I think I'll keep my nose buried in the keyboard for now, but the code looks like it might be fun to play around with.

Overrides

Huddles EZ Animator Basic v1.0.1.

This product is a synchronized dance machine that is by far, the easiest to use of all the products I tested. The product documentation is excellent, and consists of both online help and a convenient quick reference. In addition, the company maintains a Customer Service SL Forum.



Up to ten people can be invited to "boogie on down" to your favorite dances. The HUD has a clean design and can be set to varying degrees of transparency so it won't interfere with your field of vision. I like this product so much, that I'm going to buy the more expensive model.

WetIcon Animation Override

The WetIcon Animation Override is based on the Franimation Override engine, and is designed to be worn on your body, rather than attached to the screen. However, it is so small that you need to be careful not to lose track of it—especially when it's loaded with all your expensive animations. While I was working on it, I put it on a pillow next to the cat, just to be safe.



The notecard has channels for up to 39 different animations in the following categories:

- Walking 1 - 5
- Standing 1-5
- Sitting 1-5
- Sitting on Ground 1-5
- Turning Left
- Turning Right
- Running
- PreJumping
- Jumping
- Crouching
- Crouch Walking
- Flying
- Flying Slow,
- Fly Down
- Falling



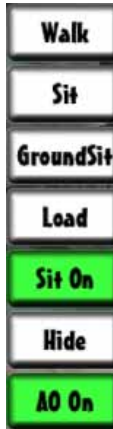
Free Latin Salsa by Jenna Fairplay

► Override

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- Soft Landing
- Landing
- Standing Up (brush yourself off)
- Hovering
- Hovering Up
- Floating
- Swimming Forward
- Swimming Up
- Swimming Down

Although I loaded the notecard with most of the animation categories, there were a few lines that I left blank. As a result, whenever it tried to use one of the missing animations, it attached an error message to my body. This happened only when the overrider was attached to my body. However, I found that even with missing animations, it works fine when attached as a HUD on the screen.

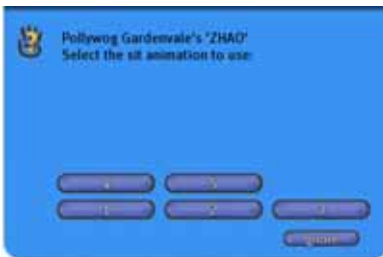


ZHAO HUD Animation Ovrider

This product also uses the Franimation Ovrider engine and has the same notecard setup as the WetCon overrider. The ZHAO HUD is designed to be displayed on the screen and has buttons for Walk, Sit, and Ground Sit. It also has chat commands, which I don't have room in my brain to remember.

Each button in the HUD displays a pop-up menu with five buttons that correspond to the five animations in each category. It would sure be nice if it had a Standing button so I could use my (rather expensive) Outrider Female Standing Poses 1-5.

When I click Sit, a menu appears with buttons 1 through 5. When each button is clicked, the wrong animations appear. Here's what each button on the Sit menu displayed:



- Button 1: Outrider Female Stand7
- Button 2: Outrider Female Ground Sit 1
- Button 3: [Floating]
- Button 4: [Swimming Forward]
- Button 5: [Swimming Up]



Swimming in "The POND" in Echo Park (Australian Telstra)
Miss Gardenvale is wearing "Siren Crafter" by Flea Bussy. (Available from Grendel's Children.)

I've spent a lot of time on this, but I still can't get it right. So I finally called my friend Charm and she told me that she uses ZHAO all the time without any problem. So maybe it's me.

Stopping an Animation

One of the biggest problems I've experienced is not being able to stop an animation after it has taken possession of me. As I write this, I am still wriggling around like a mermaid, although I am long out of the water and back in my clothes. It seems that this has become a routine experience for me. Here are the steps I normally take to deal with the situation:

1. On the **Edit** menu, click **Stop All Animations**. Then, check to see if the problem is resolved.
2. In your **Inventory**, right-click the offending animation and select **Detach From Yourself**.
3. Run Ezhar's **Stop All Animations!** or a similar program. Then, check to see if the problem is resolved. (I picked this one up somewhere for free.)
4. Attach a **different animation overrider**, with the hope that it will overwrite the animation that is currently in possession.
5. Right-click to select the HUD. Then on the **Tools** menu, click **Rest Scripts in Selection**.
6. **Log out** and come back in again.
7. Search in the **Classifieds** under **Stop Animation**.
8. If all else fails, go to a **party** and have some **fun**.

As I was testing these instructions, I found myself back at Huddles Games & Gadgets, looking at the EZ Animator Deluxe. It's L\$1499, but here goes: KA-CHING!

By the way, this store is great! I can't decide... should I get the Huddles Poof-er Pal, the Wizardy Arena, or the Zombie AO? There's also a Huddles Chat Macro, that's free, and a Vendor Locator—which sounds like something we

could use to keep track of our newsstands. There's also a Sound Buddy and a Landmark Pal. But wait—there's an Animation Stopper! Is says: "Find yourself stuck in compromising positions? Get this button for your HUD to stop those annoying anis!" And it's only L\$1. This must be a public service they provide. I ended up also buying a Rainy Day Umbrella for "those days when the rain seems to follow you everywhere."

Well, now that I'm back home, I've had a chance to try it out and I'm still wriggling around like a mermaid out of water. (No wonder it was free!) And I still have the Huddles EZ Animator Deluxe to try. If that doesn't work, I'll put my Siren Crafter bits and pieces back in place and leave it at that. Things could be worse, and I'll figure it out one of these days. ☹



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