The Elements of Animation

CONCEPT ART
In making Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Disney artists created hundreds of concept drawings to establish the film’s visual style, including its locations, the look of the characters, and the film’s colors and visual moods.

STORY
When Walt explained his ideas for Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs to his key artists, he acted out the entire story for them. The artists began by creating sketches of key scenes called “story sketches,” which were pinned in sequence to large boards. The red line suggests the camera’s view. This technique, called “storyboarding,” is still used today. This process allowed Walt to visually preview the story and make adjustments long before the first frame of film was shot.

MODEL SHEET
Once the look of the characters was determined, an official “model sheet” was created for use by the animators. Its purpose was to ensure that the look of the characters, props, and locations remained consistent throughout the film.

ANIMATION
Animators drew every movement of the characters by hand onto sheets of animation paper, changing each one slightly. Each second of animation required approximately twenty-four drawings.

CEL
Animation drawings were copied onto celluloid sheets, where they were inked and painted by hand. The animation cels were then photographed under the camera against the finished backgrounds, completing the scene.

LAYOUT and BACKGROUND
“Layouts” and “backgrounds” are the equivalent of theatrical staging, establishing the relationship of the characters to the background environment. In this film, background artists often used a muted color palette so that attention would be focused on the characters. When the cel was placed on the background, the cel setup was the final result of what would be seen on-screen.