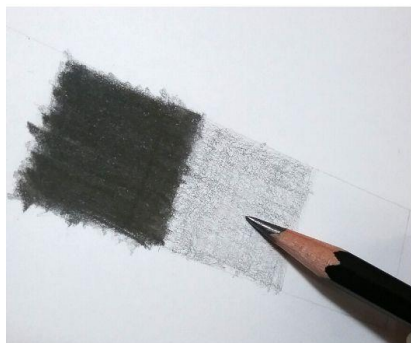
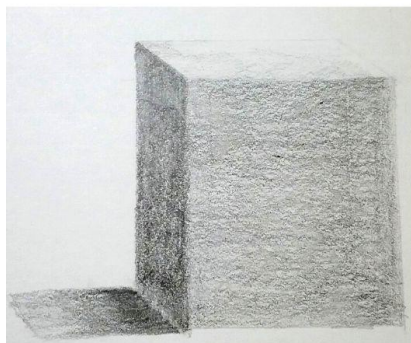
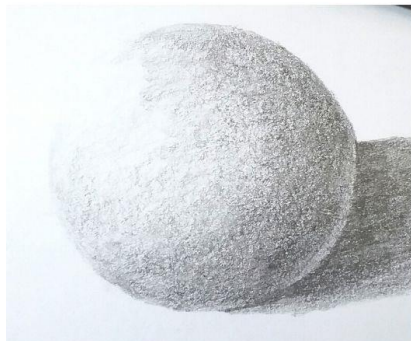




DRAWING BASICS

USING SHAPE & VALUE TO CREATE
REALISTIC DRAWINGS

BY-LISA DUNCAN

Drawing Basics: Using Shape and Value to Create Realistic Drawings

Lisa Duncan of Wandering Leaves Studio

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‘Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.’

Vincent van Gogh

Dedicated to all of my readers, followers, and students who *used* to think they couldn’t draw.

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Introduction

It is my sincere belief that anyone can learn to draw. Drawing is like any other skill we acquire in life; it takes time and practice to get better at it. The difference between you and artists whose drawings and paintings you admire? Desire. They felt compelled to pick up a pencil, a paintbrush, a stick, or a piece of charcoal over, and over, and over.

Art is when you hear a knocking from your soul — and you answer. ~ Terri Guillemets

The Importance of Repetition

With that in mind, I am going to give you several exercises to complete as we go along. Many of these exercises will seem repetitive, time consuming, and a bit boring at times. I promise you that working these practice exercises has a greater purpose than it may seem in the moment.

Remember the movie, *'The Karate Kid'*? Miagi agrees to teach Daniel karate. Daniel spends hour after hour and day after day at Miagi's home doing everything asked of him, even though he's just doing chores like waxing his car and painting his fence. He finally loses his patience and demands that Miagi stop using him as a slave and teach him Karate. That's when he discovers that Miagi had been training him all along—teaching him necessary muscle memory to use in his practice of karate.

This drawing guide works much the same way. This is the way that I was taught and I am so grateful, as some of the basics are so much a part of me that I don't have to problem solve quite so much as I work on a new drawing.

But I Want to Paint or Draw in Color

Even if drawing with graphite pencil is not what you really aspire to as your final destination, I promise that a basic drawing course like this one will make you a better painter! We're going to be learning the basics of shading and highlighting—principals that apply no matter what your chosen media or your chosen subject matter.

Unit I: Tools of the Trade

What tools are necessary to the beginner? A pencil, an eraser, and paper. You can learn to draw on the back of a junk-mail envelope as well as on expensive specialty paper. You can use a regular school pencil to start out. The most important tool in your toolbox is practice!

That said, there are tools specific to drawing that will make the journey more enjoyable.

Pencils

First in the toolkit is a set of drawing pencils. Graphite pencils come in degrees of light and dark. They have a number and either an 'H' or a 'B'.

'H' stands for hard. The higher the number, the harder the graphite. Harder graphite will make much lighter marks on your paper.

'B' stands for black. The higher the number, the blacker (softer) the graphite. Softer graphite will make much darker marks on your paper.

An 'HB' pencil sits right in the middle of hard and black, and is the same as the familiar #2 school pencil.

For most graphite drawing projects, I prefer 'B' series pencils (you can see that 4B and 5B have been favorites lately!). That is simply a personal preference. As you go through the exercises and play with different pencils, you'll find one or two that become your favorites also.



H & B graphite pencils

Erasers

While it's fine to use a regular school pencil to draw, using the eraser on top is not such a great idea. Most of those type of erasers will leave a mark behind on your paper—not what you want to see after putting hours in on a drawing!

Instead, you'll want to choose a white plastic eraser to use exclusively with your drawing work. This type won't leave a smudge or mark on your paper. White erasers come in different shapes and sizes, the large rectangular ones being the most popular. These work best for erasing large areas.

There is a stick version that works much like a mechanical pencil and is refillable, and also an electric eraser (also refillable) that is great for power erasing many layers and even colored pencil marks.

You'll probably also want to purchase a kneaded rubber eraser. This is my go-to eraser. With this eraser, you actually knead it like clay until it's soft and pliable. You can shape this one into a tiny, sharp point to lift out very specific areas. This one has a slight 'tackiness' to it. This characteristic means that you can just dab and lift a bit of graphite if you've gotten a line or an area darker than you'd like.



Top to bottom: battery eraser, stick eraser, kneaded rubber erasers

Blending Tools

Blending tools, while not a necessity for a beginner, can take a sketch or drawing to the next level by allowing you to create the illusion of a soft, smooth, or shiny texture. Oftentimes we kind of instinctively smudge a piece with a finger to create those looks.

*NOTE** Never use a bare finger on a drawing! No matter how clean and dry your hands are, there are *always* natural oils present. These oils will be transferred to your drawing. These little oily marks attract graphite dust and you will not be able to erase them away. As a matter of fact, you should place a clean piece of paper under your drawing hand for the same reason.*

That said, let's get on with the blending tools! The first one pictured is a blending stump. It comes in lots of sizes so that you can choose the right one for the area you'd like to blend. This is a solid paper product, sharpened on each end. Since it's solid, it can handle a bit of pressure. Also, since this is solid, you can re-sharpen it.



Blending Stumps

You can see from the graphite smudges on my set of stumps, you can use just the point to get into tiny, tight spaces, or use it more flattened out on larger, broader areas.

The next blending tool is called a tortillon. This is also a paper product, but this one is a hollow paper tube rolled into a point at one end. A tortillon is a bit more delicate than a stump and cannot be sharpened. It also comes in lots of sizes.



Tortillons

You aren't limited to 'professional' tools when it comes to blending. You can use anything that will blend the graphite without damaging your paper or leaving a mark behind. Below you can see that I have a makeup applicator that has been well-used as well as a small piece of a car polishing chamois. You can use a cotton ball or a cotton-tipped applicator.



Car polishing chamois, make-up applicator used for blending

Papers (Supports)

Papers, also known as supports, come in such a wide variety. As a beginner, I suggest that you stick with something affordable so that you aren't worried about wasting money as you use up paper. Most of the exercises in this beginner course can be completed adequately using plain old copy paper. You can pick up copy/computer paper at almost any store with an office supply section. Here where I live in Ohio, I can get 500 sheets for under \$5.00. You can use lined notebook paper, junk mail envelopes, or even your napkin from lunch. The idea is to draw, draw, and draw some more! Did I mention that your most important tool is practice?!

Ok, beyond copy paper, you may want to invest a bit more money in a sketch-book of some type. There are a dizzying number of options! You can find sketch-books in light, medium, and heavy-weight paper. They come in spiral bound, flat bound, or stitched. You can buy tiny little pocket sizes all the way up to table sized books. At this point in your practice, choose what feels right to you. I personally carry a purse-sized, spiral bound book for capturing thoughts and things I run across while I'm out and about as well as a large sized book for working on full-sized layouts at the studio. You will eventually discover that one type fits the way you live and draw.

Miscellaneous Tools

There are a few other random tools you may want to acquire at some point. You'll need some way of removing eraser crumbs from your working piece. For this I use a clean, soft make-up brush. You can also find special brushes in the drafting section of your local art store designed just for this purpose if you prefer. The main thing is that it should be soft and you use it with a very light touch so that you don't smear or blend in spots you don't intend.

One of my favorite random tools is my pencil extender. This is a handy-dandy piece of equipment that allows you to use a pencil all the way down to a nubbin before you need to replace it! I love no waste!

At the bottom of the picture is a sanding block. Although I haven't really used this very often, it is handy to have around. You use this to get a very specific edge on your pencil—rather than the generic point you get from a pencil sharpener.



Crumb brush, pencil extender, sanding block

Last Words About Tools

I know I've said it several times, but it really bears repeating. Your most important tool—more important than the right pencils, the right erasers, the right blender, or the right paper—is practice, practice, and more practice!

You will get out of this course what you put into it! Now let's get into the lessons!

'Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.' Pablo Picasso

Let's get on with learning the rules!

Happy Drawing!

Unit II: Value

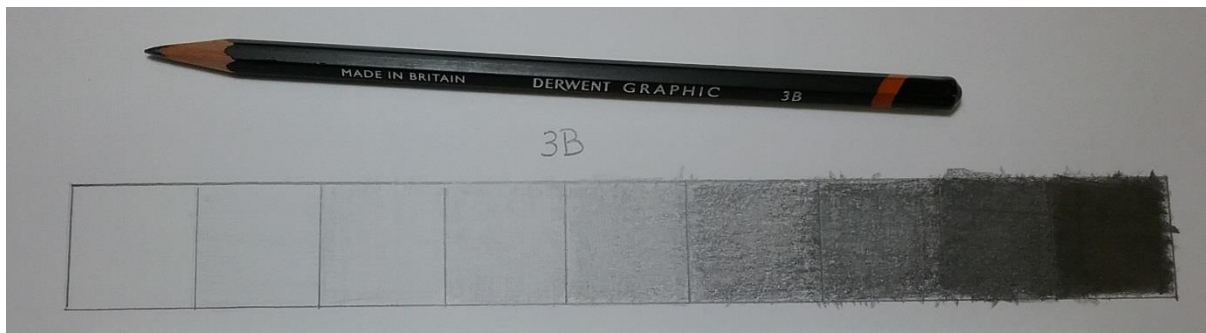
What is value? Value simply means how light or how dark something is. In a drawing, lighter areas show where light is hitting an object. Darker areas show what is in shadow. As artists, we use this play of lights, mediums, and darks to make a drawing on a 2-dimensional piece of paper look as though it has 3 dimensions.

How do we create these lights and darks?

Value Studies

We're going to start with value studies. Remember In the introduction we talked about '*The Karate Kid*'? This is where we begin our 'wax on, wax off' part of our journey.

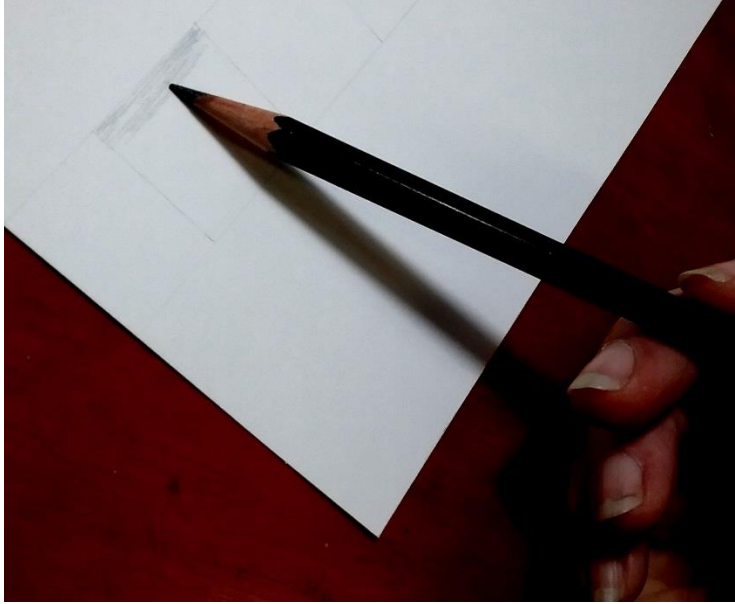
Choose one of your pencils to begin. If you're using a #2 school pencil, that's fine. If you have drawing pencils, choose one in the 'B' range to start. Using a ruler or straight edge of some type, draw 2 parallel lines across your paper—between $\frac{1}{2}$ " and 1" apart. No need to be crazy accurate—just guess! Now divide this up into 8-10 squares. When we're completely finished with this exercise, it will look something like the picture below.



Completed value study with 3B pencil

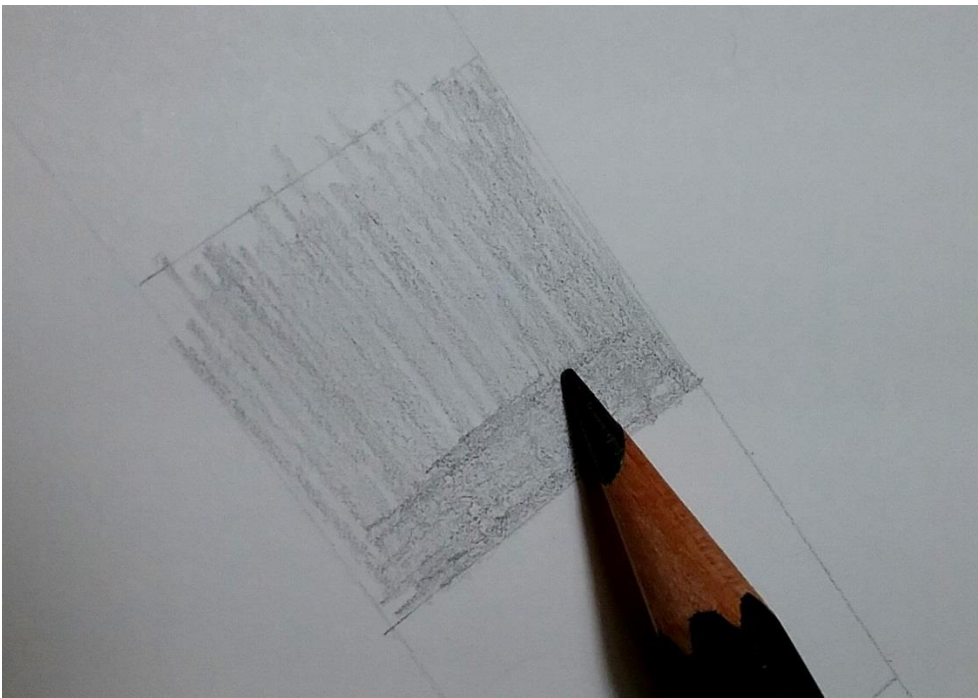
Beginning with the square on the right-hand side, we're going to create the darkest value possible with our chosen pencil. We are going to use lots of layers to get to the darkest value we can with our pencil. While we think we can accomplish the task more quickly by just pressing harder, that's going to ruin the paper quickly. All paper, even if it seems really smooth to the touch has 'tooth'. Tooth means tiny little nooks and crannies that will hold graphite for us. If we press too hard, we flatten out that tooth—once the tooth is flattened, we cannot add any more layers.

Notice in the picture below, I'm holding the pencil pretty far away from the point. In this way, I let the weight of the pencil do the work as I begin. This allows me to keep from damaging the tooth of the paper right from the start.



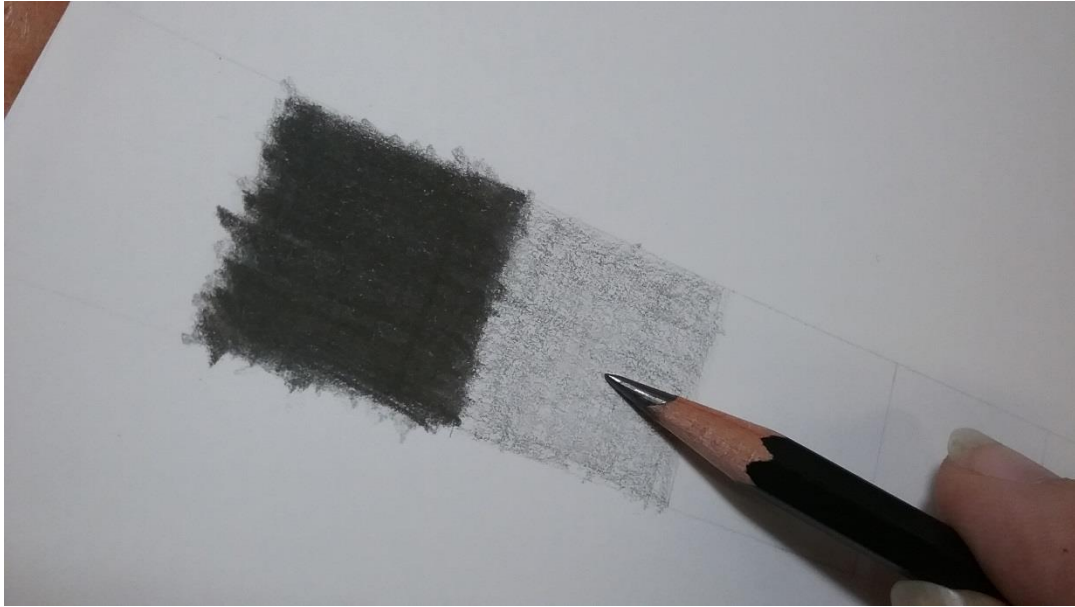
Hold the pencil farther from the tip for a lighter pressure.

Start out moving your pencil from side to side of your first box. For the next layer, go up and down. Alternate those movements until the square is as dark as your chosen pencil can get. You will know when you've gotten to the darkest value when the square becomes shiny and won't take any more graphite.



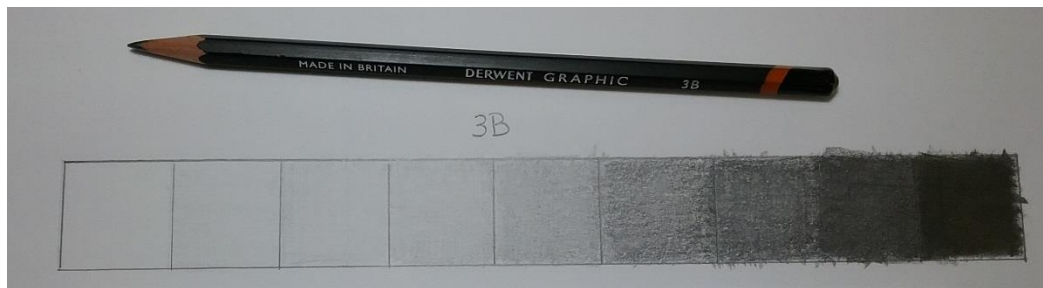
Many light layers will allow us to get to a dark value without marring the 'tooth' of our paper.

Once you have that first box as dark as your pencil will allow, move on to the next box. We'll work the same way, adding layer after layer. This time, however, we're going to stop short of the darkest value.



Move to the next box and continue—stop short of the darkest value

Continue on to the next box and then the next one. Try to lighten the value in each box as you go. Get as many different values as you can—aim for 8 to 10 different values. It should look something like this when you've completed the exercise.



A completed value study—9 values with a 3B pencil. The left-hand box is blank/white—the lightest value.

Exercise: Before Moving On

Now is where your 'practice tool' comes in. Spend plenty of time working on value studies. (I still enjoy doing these! I put on music and make it a meditation of sorts.) Complete at least one value study with each of your pencils. In general, the darker pencils will allow more distinct values (8 – 10) while with the lighter pencils you may get fewer (6 – 8).

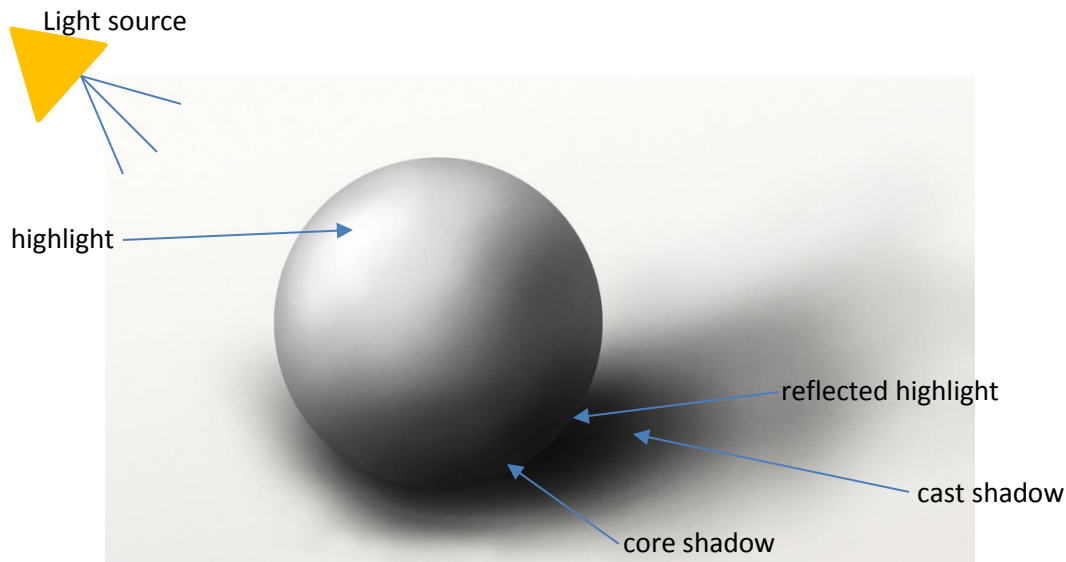
You may feel a bit like Daniel (Karate Kid) at this point, but I promise—the more time you spend understanding your pencils in this exercise, the easier the next ones will be!

Unit III: 2D to 3D

The next step in the learning process is to take a 2-dimensional object and make it appear 3-dimensional. We're going to use what we've learned about value to make this happen.

Circle to Sphere

For our first 3D exercise, we'll take a simple circle and turn it into a sphere or 3-dimensional ball. We need to take a look at a sphere in a specific lighting situation to figure out how to proceed.

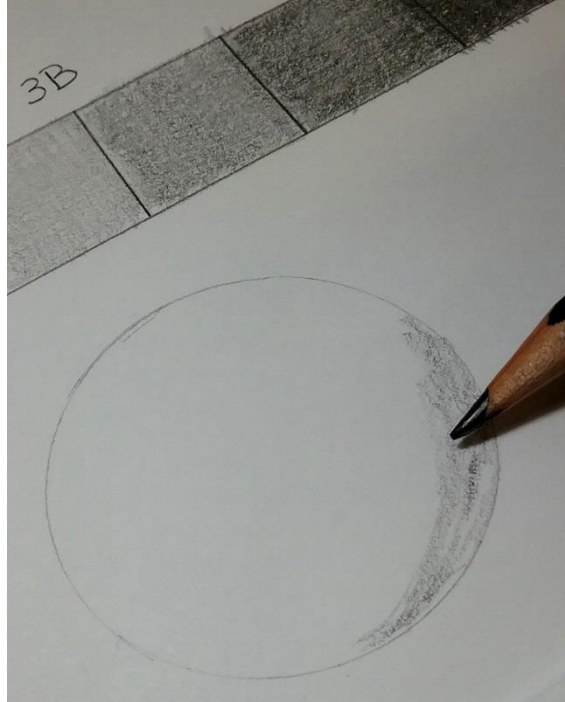


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We've placed the light-source in the upper left-hand corner. The *highlight* or the lightest part of our image is the spot closest to the light-source. The *core shadow* is the spot on our circle where our light-source can't reach—the bottom, underside of our ball in this case. The *cast shadow* is the shadow made by our ball onto the table or surface it's resting on. If you look really closely you can also see that our table surface reflects just a tiny bit of light onto the underside of the ball.

Exercise: trace something circular onto your piece of paper. (You can draw a circle but the lesson is about learning to shade, so tracing your coffee cup is fine!) Now we're going to use what we learned in our value studies to turn our 2D circle into a 3D sphere.

I tend to start with the darkest area first. I find it easier to get the values correct that way.



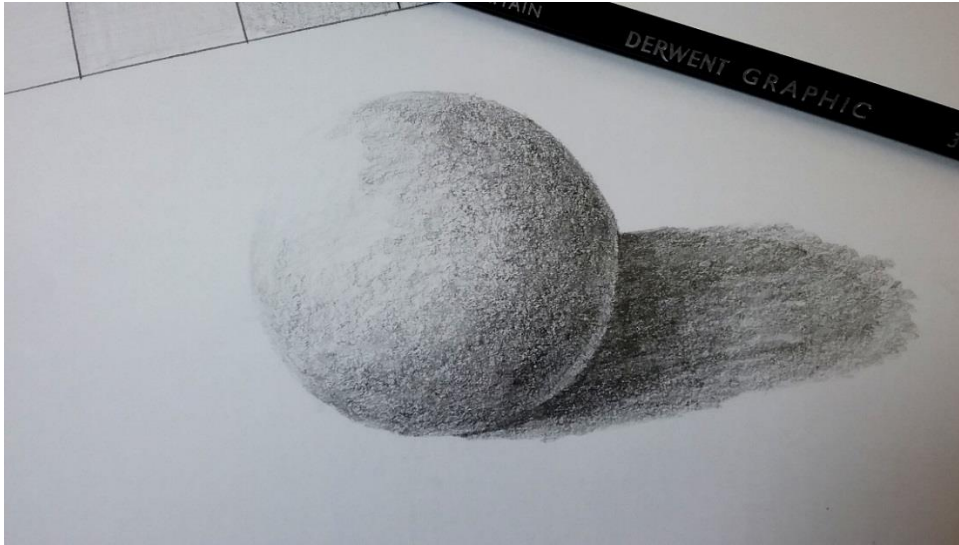
Begin in the core shadow area.

We're going to be working in light layers just like we did in our value studies. You can see also, that as I'm working on the layers, I'm going with the shape of the ball. This will help you create the illusion of roundness.



Lighter layers as I move towards the highlight near the light source

Continue working your way up toward the light source; layering, layering, layering until you have your darkest value at the core shadow, medium values near the center and outsides of the ball, with one small highlight near the light source. Your darkest dark should be in the core shadow nearest the ball. You may need to use your eraser to slightly lighten your outline near the light-source area of your ball.



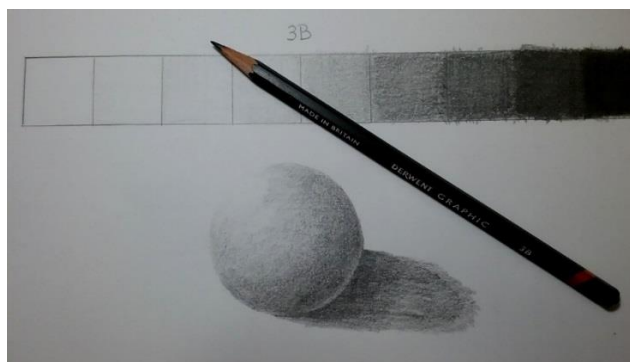
Completed circle to sphere exercise

Notice in this example, I have almost completely erased the outline of my circle near the top.

* In real life, there are no outlines! We perceive edges of things because of their value differences!

Bring out your handy dandy 'practice tool' now and do at least one of these circle-to-sphere exercises for each of your pencils. Spend some time on these! The better you get at seeing and being able to create clear darks, mid-tones, and highlights, the more convincing your drawings will be!

I like to choose a pencil and create a value study and the circle-to-sphere exercise together on the same page as a future reference.



Both exercises together for future reference

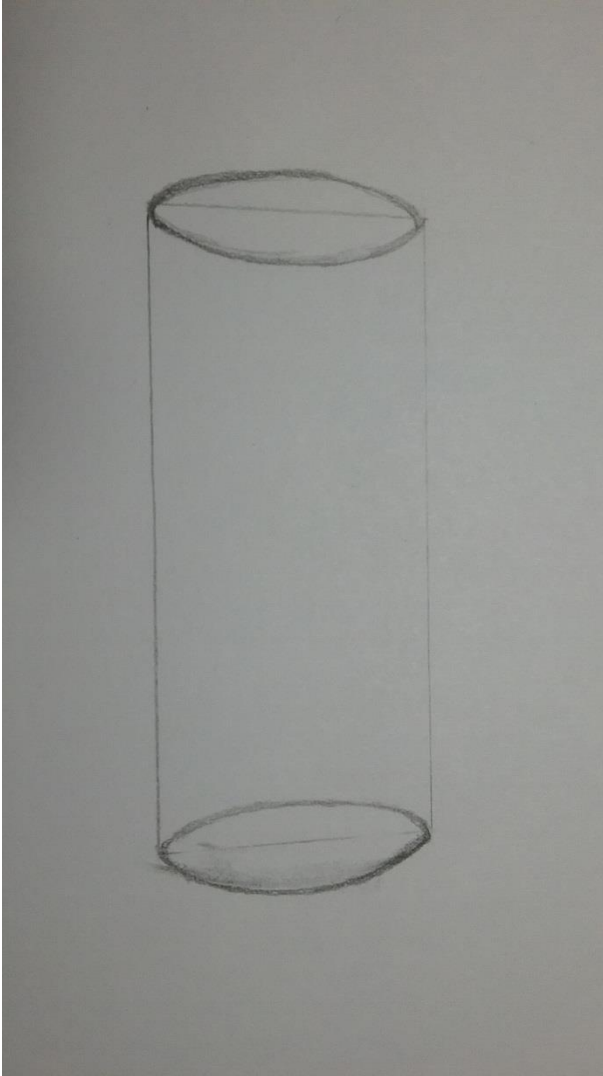
More Shapes

Is your confidence growing? It should be! You've come a long way to understanding what it takes to create 3-dimensional drawings.

Let's take what we learned in the circle-to-sphere lesson and apply it to a few more shapes.

Rectangle to Cylinder

The same basic rules apply when you're creating the illusion of a cylinder. Start with a rectangle.



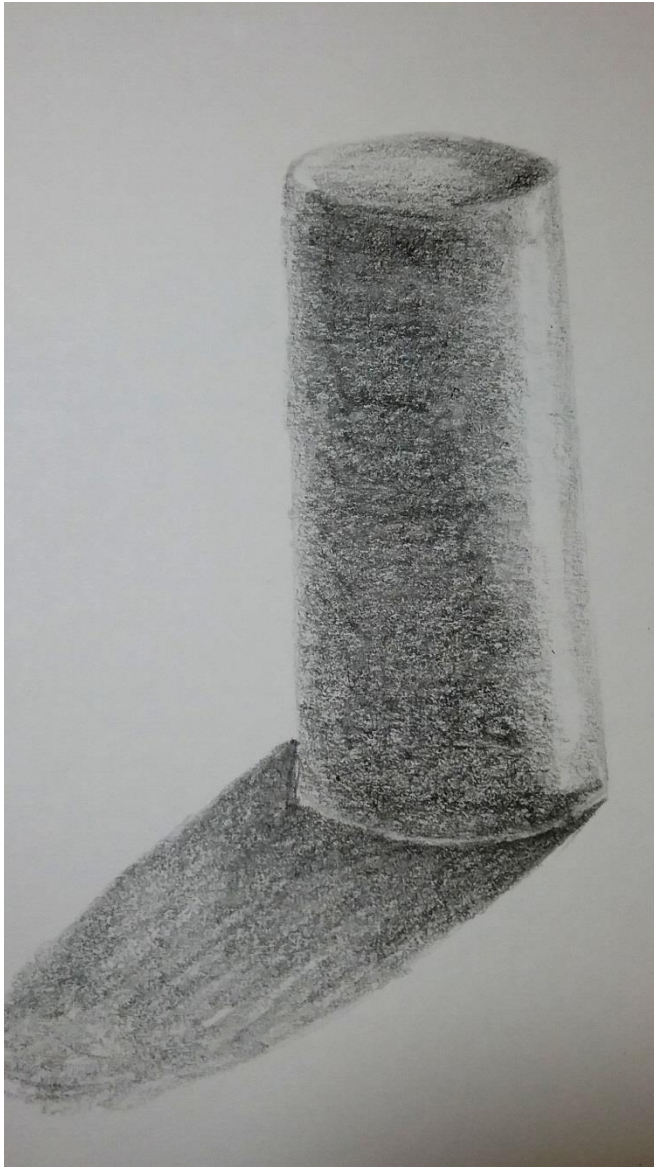
You start with a rectangle. You can see mine lightly in the drawing. (It's a bit off-kilter!)

If we were to look straight down on our cylinder, the top (or bottom) would be a circle. If you view a cylinder from the side, the top and bottom become squashed circles, better known as ellipses.

Ellipses are squashed circles. They are not pointy on the edges like a football—they are rounded.



Now that we understand the ellipse, we can move on to making a cylinder.



Just to keep you on your toes, I've changed up the direction of our light source. This time it's coming from the upper right corner.

Now, you get to choose whether your cylinder is open (hollow like a vase) or closed on top. I've chosen to treat mine as if it were hollow so that you get an interesting shadow pattern at the top.

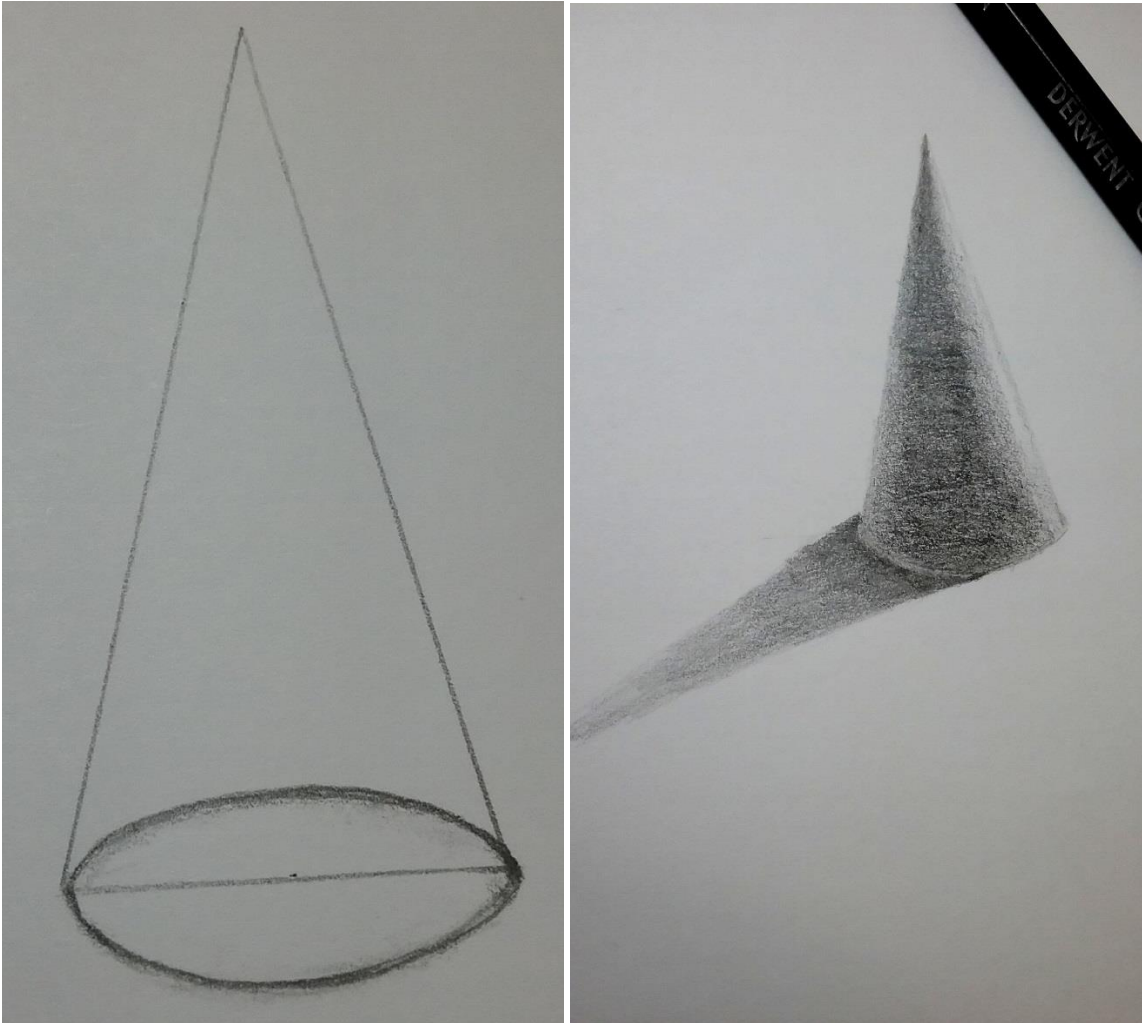
*Think through where your shadows would fall. If you have trouble visualizing it, get a vase or opaque cup from the cupboard. Set it up with one light source and see where the light and dark actually strike its surface.

*Take the time to step away from your drawing from time to time to see how it's progressing. No one looks at art from 6" away! Stepping back a few feet gives you a more realistic view of your work. You're doing better than you thought, right?!

Triangle to Cone

Let's work on turning a triangle into a cone shape.

Start with a triangle, then add your ellipse at the bottom. Remember to make it a squashed circle—not a pointy ended football.



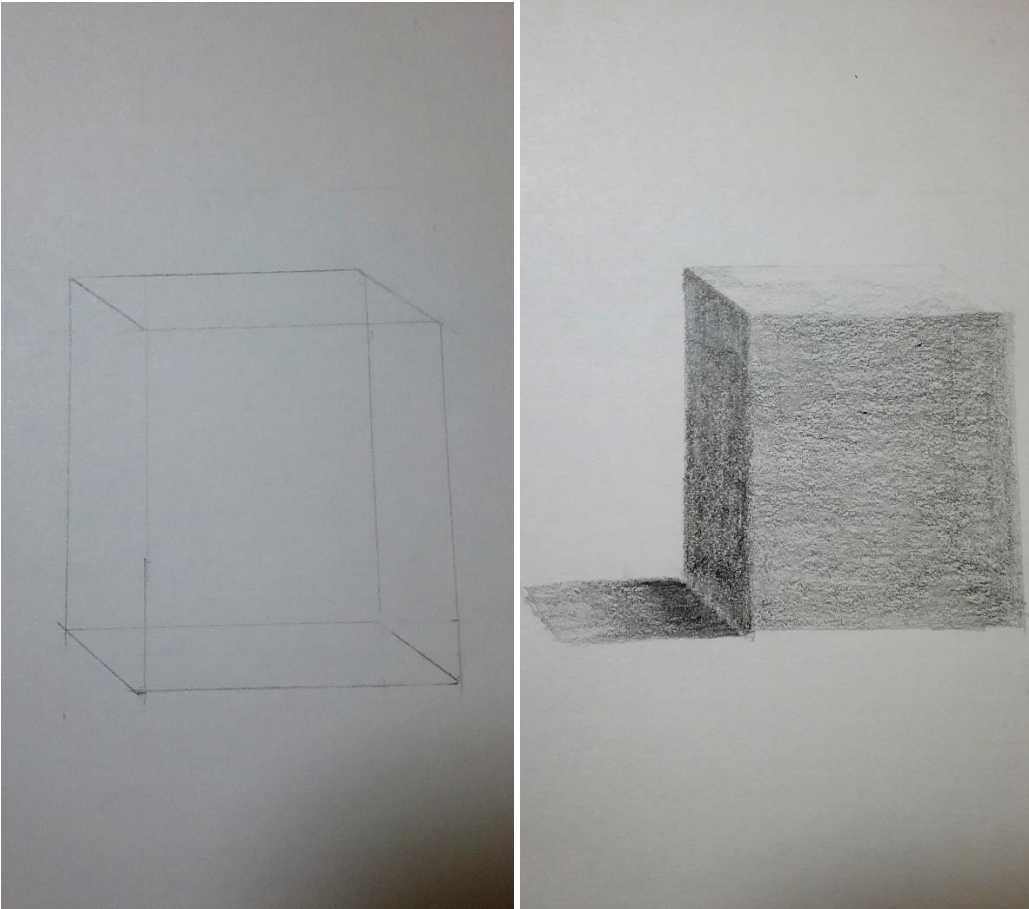
Most rounded shapes fall into one of these 3 shapes with a bit of tweaking as we'll see in an upcoming lesson. You'll be amazed at all the objects you can draw using only what you've learned about shading these 3 objects!

Keep working on the lessons! You're doing great!

Square to Cube

Last, we'll work on turning a square into a cube.

Erase the 'inside' lines. Using what you've learned from your value studies, follow your light-source (upper right-hand corner) and turn your square into a cube.



More practice: Do these exercises with each of your pencils! I know, . . . you want to get to the main event and draw what excites you. I promise you—time spent working on these first exercises will get you where you want to go. You cannot skimp on practice time!

Even though this part of the lesson was focused on a cube, the same basic rules apply to other linear shapes with flat sides—like a pyramid.

***'The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is practice.'* Vladimir Horowitz**

Unit IV: Creating the Illusion of Texture

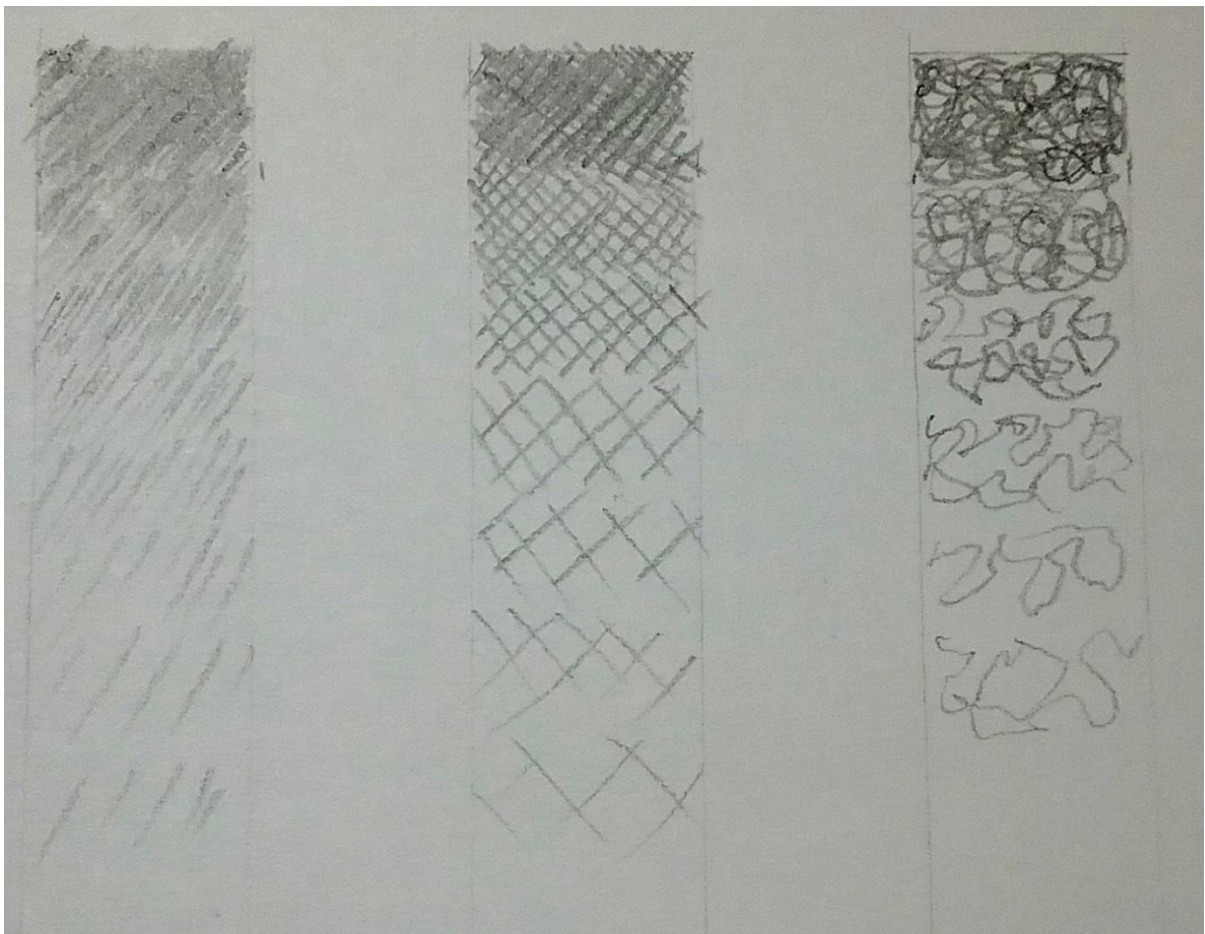
Sometimes when you're working on a drawing, you'll need to create the illusion of texture in an object. Not all objects have smooth surfaces. You might need hair or fur. Perhaps you're working on a landscape and need texture for pine trees and rocks. Let's take a quick look at how to create texture.

Mark Making to Create Texture

So far, we've worked on simply coloring in shapes to create the illusion of shadows and highlights. We're going to go back and revisit the value study exercises, but this time we're going to do these exercises using different types of marks.

In the picture below, I've used 'hatching'—lines going in all the same direction, 'cross-hatching'—crossing over hatching lines, and 'squiggles'—random scribbly lines. These are just a few ways that you can add texture and value at the same time in your drawings.

Exercise: do value studies with each of the 3 marks. Create marks of your own and do value studies with them! Try dots (pointillism), or check marks, or wavy lines—use your imagination! The more different marks you learn to make, the more texture options you have at your disposal.



To Blend or Not to Blend

Blending is another easy way to create texture. Blending can help you create very smooth textures such as glass, silky fabric, or a baby's skin.



left sphere blended with cotton swab, right sphere unblended

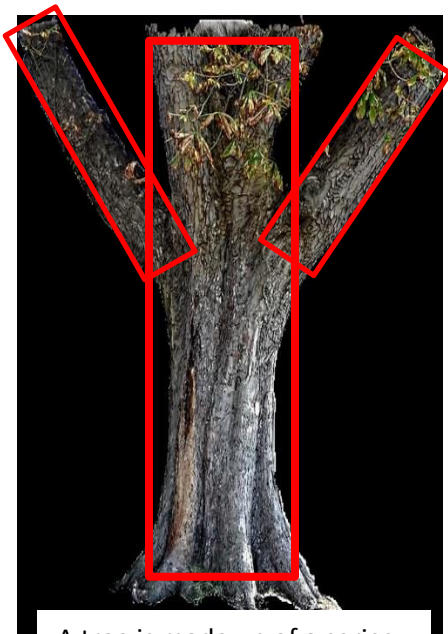
In the example, notice that the blended sphere on the left looks like it would feel almost fuzzy, like a tennis ball. If you want to create the smooth surface of transparent glass, use just a tiny bit of pencil and blend with a light touch.

*Blending tip: If you need just a bit of blended shading on a piece, perhaps on a clear glass object scribble a bit of pencil on scrap paper. Use your blender of choice to pick up a bit of that graphite and apply it to your shadow areas. This method will give you a more subtle look.

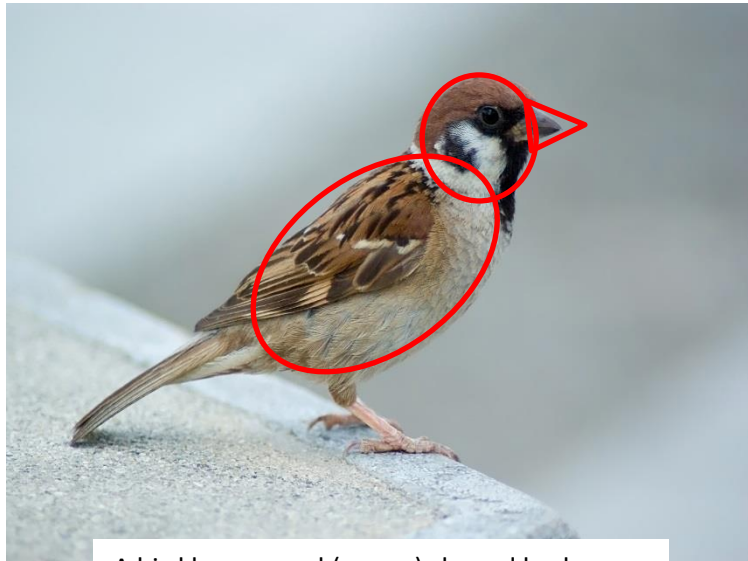
Unit V: Everything is Made of Shapes

Back now to our Karate Kid reference. Just like Daniel with the ‘wax on—wax off’ exercises, if you have diligently done all of the exercises and spent plenty of time perfecting them, you have built the necessary muscle memory to draw nearly anything you want!

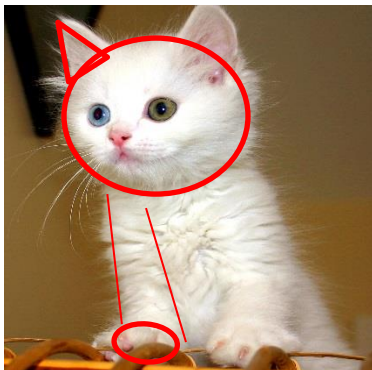
Everything you see is made up of the basic shapes that we’ve been working on! Now the secret is learning to ‘see’ these shapes like an artist, so that you can capture them on paper.



A tree is made up of a series of cylinders.



A bird has an oval (or egg) shaped body, a spherical head, and a cone-shaped beak.



More complex subjects, like humans and animals are made up of lots of interlocking shapes

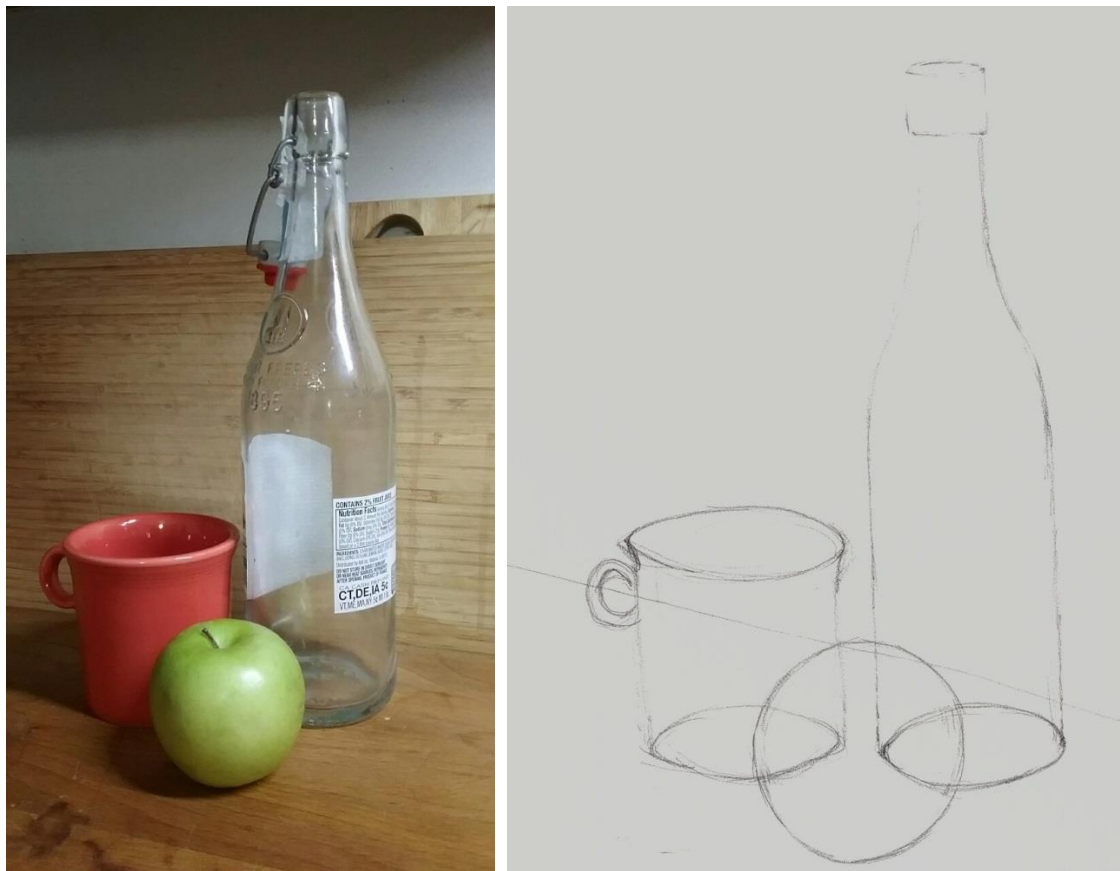
Exercise: take your sketchbook out into the world! Don't worry about trying to draw anything in a realistic way right now. The goal is to train your eye to see like an artist. Sketch out the underlying shapes in the things that you see. In the next unit, we're going to explore how to put it all together to make a realistic drawing.

Unit VI: Putting it All Together

We've learned how to use shading and highlighting to turn 2-dimensional shapes into 3-dimensional images. We've also learned that everything around us is made up of interlocking combinations of these simple shapes. We've learned to 'find' these interlocking shapes by looking at the world with our artist's eyes. In this unit, we're going to put all of this together to make a still-life drawing from start to finish.

Drawing 'Through' the Shapes

It's rare in real life that you find a simple, isolated shape that you want to draw. Whether you're trying to draw a still-life, a landscape, a car, or a person; you have to first find the shapes. Let's take a quick look at an example.



Here we have a very simple still-life. A coffee mug (cylinder), a glass bottle (modified cylinder), and an apple (sphere). We can see the shapes. We understand how to draw them, but drawing them together feels a bit trickier.

The key, when drawing multiple objects is to sketch *'through'* them. In our example above, I've drawn all 3 shapes in their relative positions. Notice that I have drawn the *whole* shape of the items even when I cannot see the whole item. Even though parts of the bottle and mug are hidden behind the apple, I know their shapes. You'll find that you have an easier time drawing objects in combination when you start your sketch this way.

Exercise: practice drawing multiple simple shapes together. Practice the example I've given you. Set up items with simple shapes on your own—fruits and vegetables are simple items to start with. Also try children's wooden blocks—their stackability and simple shape are perfect for this exercise.

Bonus exercise: try doing the 'sketch through' exercise outdoors with natural elements in the landscape.

Shading and Highlighting Objects in Combination

Notice in our example, all 3 of our objects follow the basic rules of where the shadows and highlights fall. Our light-source is slightly above and to the right of our objects in the photo. This time, however, with objects in combination there are shadows and reflections cast by one object onto another. We need to use our artist's eyes to see how these values play off of each other in order to maintain our illusion of 3-dimensional objects.



I have heightened the contrast in this photo so that we can more clearly see the shadows and highlights.

Look at the right-hand side of the mug—the bottle is throwing a shadow where there would be a highlight if the cup were alone.

The same thing is occurring with the apple. Because the apple is opaque, it's throwing a pretty large shadow area onto the mug.

Also look at the left-hand side of the bottle. The mug is reflecting light onto the portion of the bottle that would normally be in shadow if the bottle were there alone.



In this photo, I've started to work on the darkest shadow areas first. This gives me a map to follow.

Notice that even though these are the dark shadow areas, at this point in the process, they are light layers.

For the bottle, I'm using a cotton-tipped applicator to blend the graphite.



Since this is basically just a detailed 'sketch', I'm calling this finished at this point. You can see that I've added many more layers to the darkest areas. There are definite medium-toned areas, as well as highlights. The sketch pad I'm using is composed of slightly off-white paper, so the highlights are simply left as blank paper.

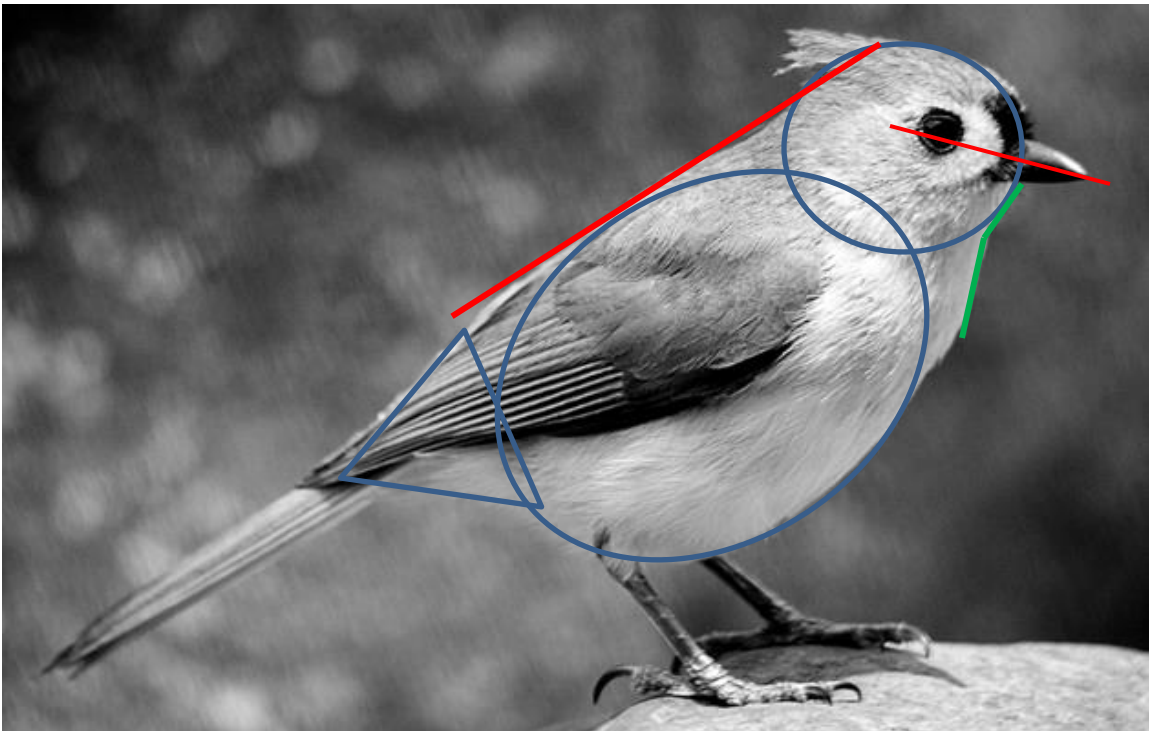
It's completely acceptable to use 'artistic license' in your drawings! In this case, I've chosen to leave the stopper and the labels off of the bottle—I like the simplicity of the drawing 'as is'. I also wasn't too concerned about capturing the exact shape of the apple.

Drawing a Bird: Start to Finish

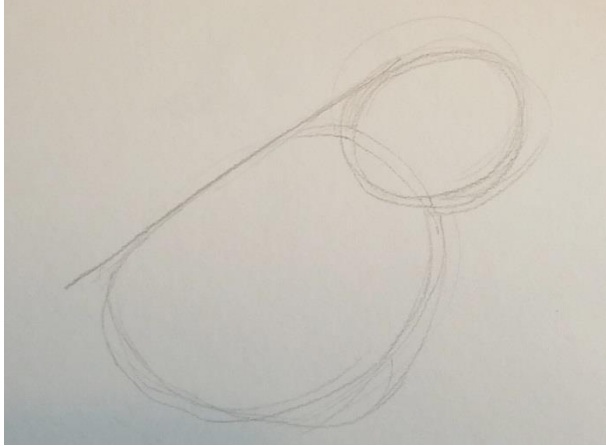
Now we're going to put all that we've learned into creating a finished drawing of a bird. Here's your reference photo:



Begin with finding the shapes in the bird.



First look at the red line down the bird's back. It's more or less straight. Lay your pencil down on the line to get a sense of the angle. Draw that straight, angled line on your paper. Next notice that its body is an oval or egg shape that 'hangs' from the line. Draw that shape. The bird's head is roughly a circle that hangs from the line and intersects with the body shape. Draw that shape.



Your drawing should look something like this. Notice that I'm kind of 'scribbling, but very lightly to get the shapes that I'm after.



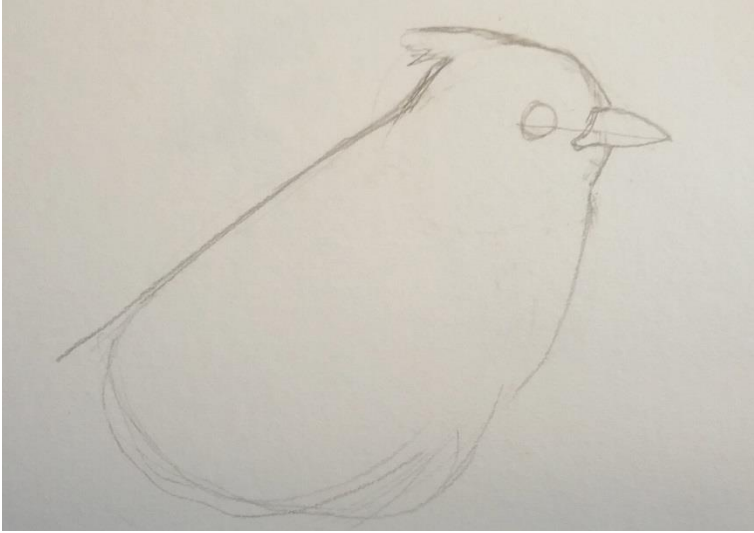
Now erase the intersecting lines between the head and body. Draw in the beak/eye line. This line runs from the center of the beak to the eye.

In most birds, the eye sits just on or slightly above this line.

Again, check the angle with your pencil before you draw.

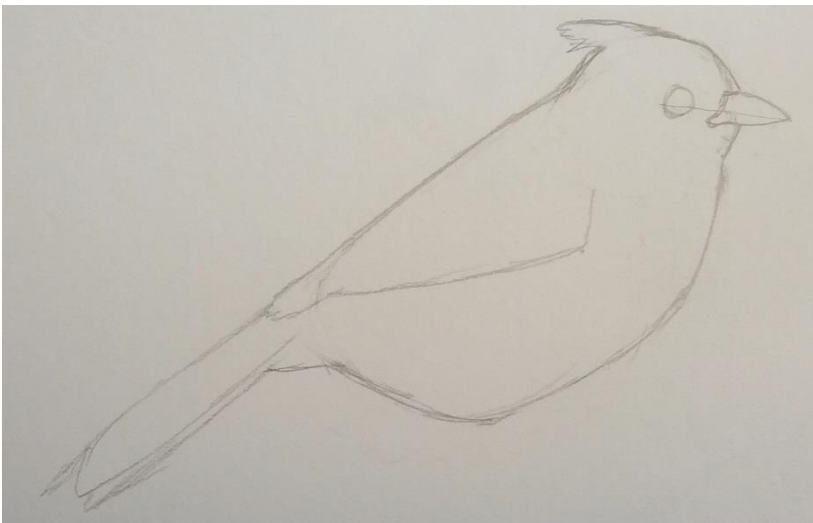
As this is just the sketching phase, make sure to draw lightly so that you can erase any marks that you don't

want as we go.



Draw in the eye and the beak. Notice that the beak doesn't sit on the edge of the face.

Now is the time to begin to refine the bird's outline. Go back to the shapes photo. Look specifically at the green lines under the beak. Follow the angles to create the neck and belly line of your bird.



Now look to see where the wing attaches, both on the body of the bird and where it meets the back.

Add in the tail, making sure to check the angle.

Pay special attention to the angle between the tail and the body. The tail isn't just 'tacked' on to the body. There is a little packet of muscle there that allows the bird to

use its tail to maneuver.

Now you're finished with the main shape of the bird. Take a second look, tweak any angles you need to. Erase any stray lines that you don't want.



Draw the legs & feet. Sketch in light lines to use as roadmaps for where your darks, mid-tones, and lights are.



Draw the rock for your bird to stand on. Add a few feathery details to the wings and tail.



Begin to fill in the darkest areas, . . . this will be an ongoing process, as you'll go back and forth as you add mid-tones!



Time to add in the mid-tones and slight shadowing to indicate that the bird isn't flat! Add shadows under the wing and on the legs under the belly. Lightly shadow the underbelly just above the legs to help indicate the roundness of its belly.

Make sure to add an indication of a shadow on the rock under the bird. Blend if you want. Add marks to indicate feather texture if you'd like.



You've drawn a bird from start to finish! Put a mat and frame around it – you'll be surprised how professional that makes it look!

It's my hope that you've spent the time not only working through the exercises, but also re-working them; perfecting your understanding of them. Spending plenty of time with paper and pencil will help you continue to build muscle memory and a true understanding of the lessons in this booklet.

You now have the knowledge needed to draw what you want and continue to grow with your drawing skills.

Final Tips:

- Draw something every day! Staring at a blank page and don't know what to draw? Type 'daily drawing challenge' into your favorite search engine for ideas.
- Don't throw away your first drawings! No need to keep them all, but over time you'll be amazed at your progress when you look back and realize how far you've come.
- Compare yourself only with yourself! We are all different. We learn and grow at different rates. Humans have this horribly damaging tendency to compare their first attempts to someone else's best work. ***'Rule of art: 'can't' kills creativity.'* Camille Paglia**
- Enjoy the process of being a beginner! Drawing, much like life, is a journey—there is no destination. A finished drawing will always signal the beginning of the next one. ***'Every artist was first an amateur.'* Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Happy Drawing!



When she isn't busy in the studio drawing, you'll find her wandering through the woods somewhere, sketchbook in hand. Lisa has a passion for nature and finds that the best way to connect is through keeping a Nature Journal.

'There is something special about sitting down and sketching a flower or a bird. In order to capture its essence, you must look very closely. In that close look, you're bound to discover not only elements, textures, and colors that you never noticed before, but also a connection to and love for your subject.'

Follow along with me on social media to see new artwork, as well as new online drawing & painting courses designed specifically for those interested in nature and nature journaling.

Find Lisa on Instagram as Lisa_Duncan_art.

Visit my website (www.wanderingleavesstudio.com) where my daughter, Elizabeth and I share articles and information on nature and art; and also sell our artwork.

We're on Facebook, YouTube, and Pinterest as Wandering Leaves Studio.