

EXERCISE 20

Sighting an Open Doorway

Materials:

#2 and #4B pencils, sharpener, and eraser

Picture Plane/Viewfinder

Felt-tip marker

Time needed:

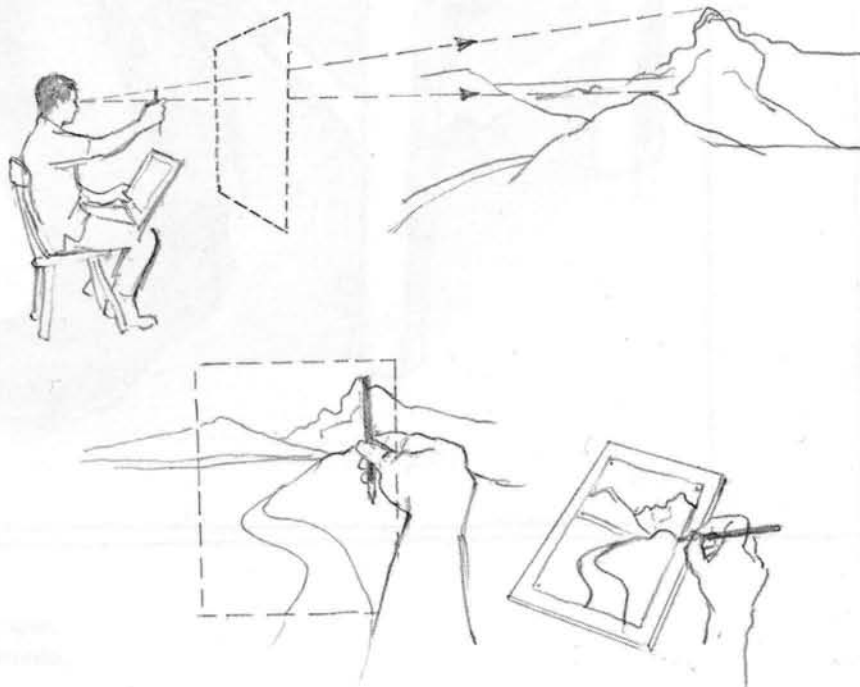
About 30 minutes

Purpose of the exercise:

In this exercise, you will practice the third component skill, the perception of relationships, also called "sighting." This is a two-part skill: sighting angles relative to vertical and horizontal, and sighting sizes relative to each other. Commonly known as "perspective and proportion," sighting has been the Waterloo of many an art student. It is a complicated skill, both to learn and to teach, but the Picture Plane/Viewfinder is extremely effective in clarifying how to see and draw relationships.

Sighting Proportions:

You will use your pencil as a sighting tool, just as artists have been doing for centuries. Look at the accompanying sketches to see how to do this. Practice by holding your pencil at arm's length with your elbow locked to establish



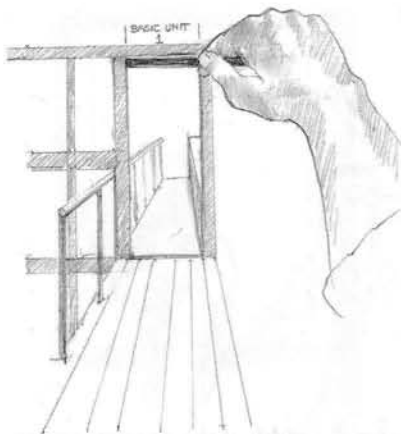


Figure 20-1. Close one eye, lock your elbow, and measure the width of the doorway. This is your Basic Unit.

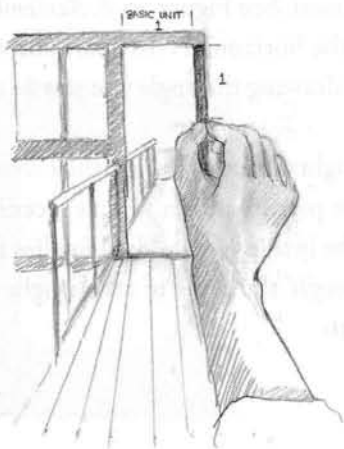


Figure 20-2. Holding that measure, turn the pencil to vertical and measure "One..."

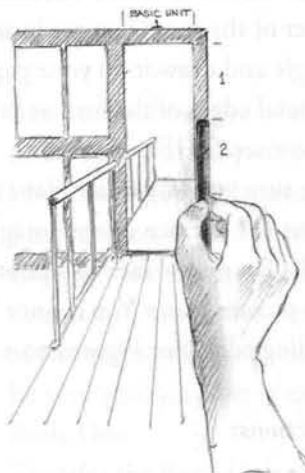


Figure 20-3. "Two..."

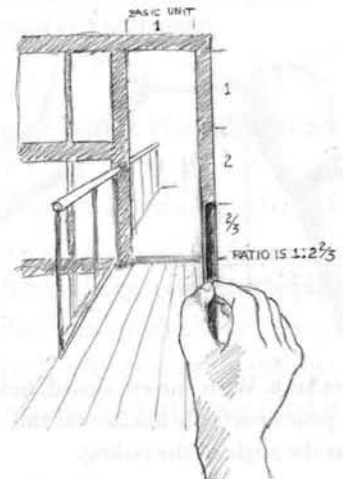


Figure 20-4. "And two-thirds..."

a constant scale, closing one eye, aligning the blunt end of your pencil with the horizontal top edge of a doorway, and placing your thumb to mark the width of the doorway (see Figure 20-1). This measured width is your Basic Unit, or "1." Now, keeping your thumb in the same position, turn the pencil to vertical and find the relationship (the ratio or proportion) of width to height of the doorway. See Figures 20-2, 20-3, and 20-4. In the sketches, the ratio is "One (Basic Unit) to two and two-thirds," expressed as $1:2\frac{2}{3}$. You will transfer this ratio into your drawing by using your pencil to measure your Basic Unit in your drawing, then repeating the measuring of the vertical edge of the doorway in the drawing, and drawing the vertical edge. See Figures 20-5, 20-6, and 20-7 on the next page.

Sighting angles relative to vertical and horizontal:

Your pencil is also your sighting tool for determining angles. Angles are sighted relative to vertical and horizontal. To practice, hold your pencil per-

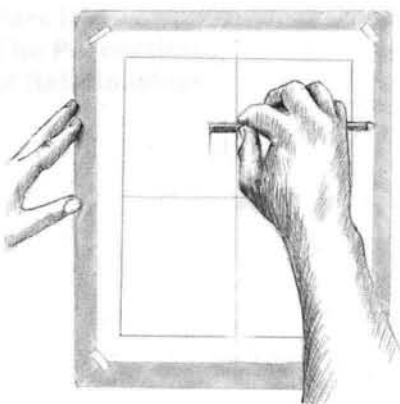
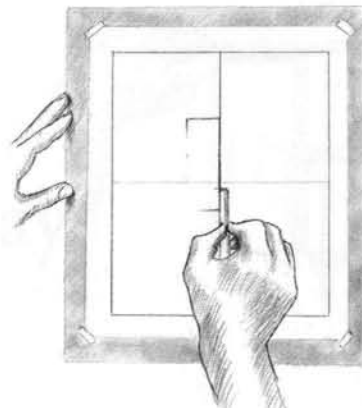
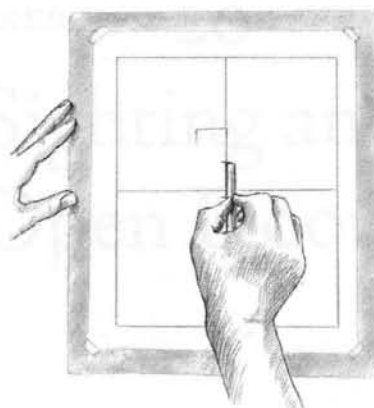


Figure 20-5. Transfer the Basic Unit to your drawing.



Figures 20-6 and 20-7. Holding the measure for the width of the doorway, count down for the height: "One, two, and two-thirds."

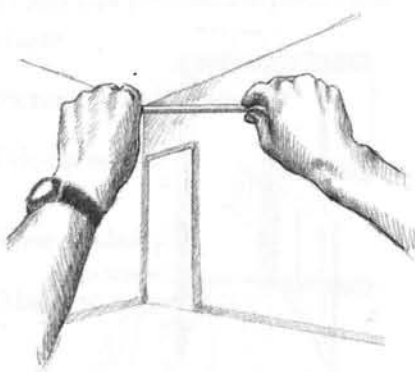


Figure 20-8. With one eye closed, hold your pencil perfectly horizontal and assess the angle of the ceiling.

fectly horizontally with both hands, close one eye, and compare an angle in a corner of the room you are in with horizontal. See Figure 20-8. Remember the angle and draw it on your paper using the horizontal crosshairs and the horizontal edges of the format as guides to drawing the angle you saw in the room corner. See Figure 20-9.

Be sure you stay *on the plane* in taking sights. Your sighting pencil always stays on the surface of the imaginary glass picture plane. Just as receding edges lie flat on the face of a photograph, the image you are drawing lies flat on the picture plane. You cannot "poke through" the plane to take a sight on a receding edge. See Figures 20-10 and 20-11.

Instructions:

1. Turn to page 75. The blank format may be toned or left untuned, as this can be a line drawing only or it can include lights and shadows.
2. Choose a site for your drawing—an open doorway leading into another room or into a closet, or a door open to the outside. See the example drawings for ideas.

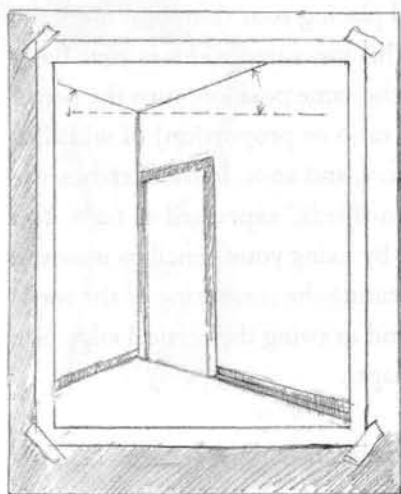


Figure 20-9. Match the angle of the ceiling in your drawing.

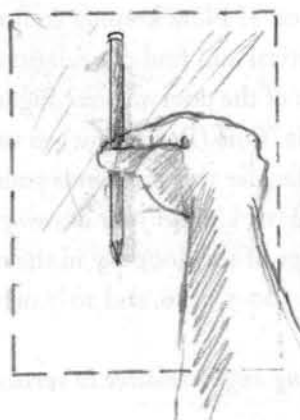


Figure 20-10. Always stay *on the plane* when assessing angles and proportions.

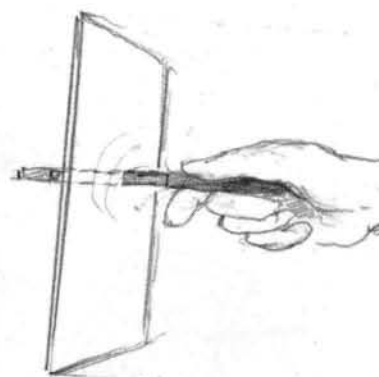


Figure 20-11. Remember! Do not "poke through" the plane when sighting receding edges.

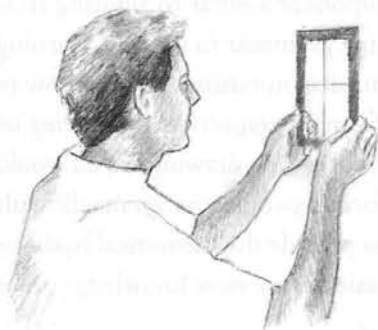


Figure 20-12. Use your plastic Picture Plane/Viewfinder to compose your drawing (as in composing a photograph).

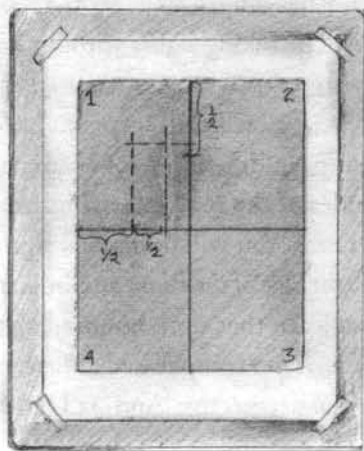


Figure 20-13. First, choose a Basic Unit and transfer it to your drawing paper.

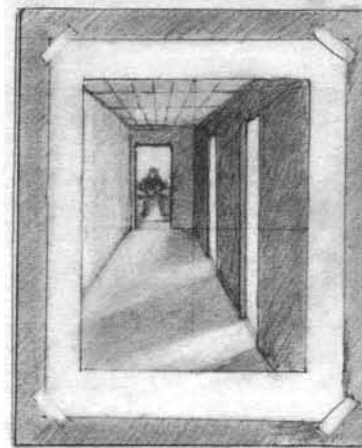
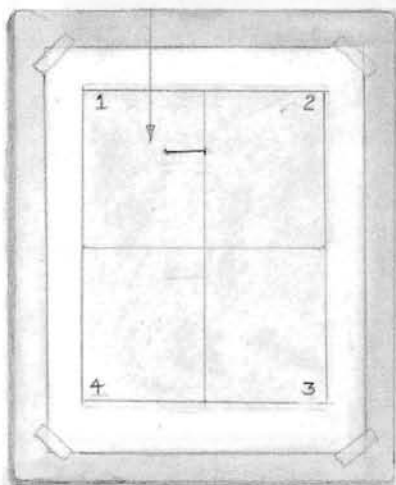
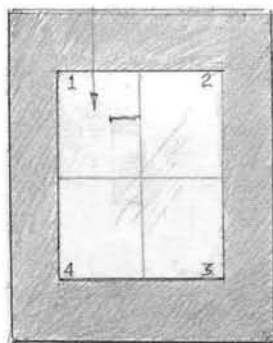


Figure 20-14. Then proceed with your drawing, relating all proportions to your Basic Unit and all angles to vertical and horizontal.



3. Seat yourself in front of the site. Use your Picture Plane/Viewfinder to find a composition you like. See Figure 20-12.
4. Hold the Picture Plane as steadily as possible and choose a Basic Unit. I suggest you use the shape of the doorway.
5. Use your felt-tip marker to draw the Basic Unit on the plastic plane. If you wish, you can also draw some of the main edges on the plane, such as the ceiling angles or the floor angles, but be aware that the line will be very shaky, and it is easy to make errors. All you really need is the Basic Unit.
6. Transfer the Basic Unit to your format. See Figure 20-13.
7. Using your pencil as a sighting tool, begin to sight the angles and proportions of the doorway and the surrounding walls, floor, and ceiling. Draw in all of the most important edges: the edges of the doorway, the open door, and the edges where the walls meet the ceiling and where the walls meet the floor. Do not forget to emphasize negative spaces wherever possible, especially for small forms like light fixtures and potted plants.
8. If any area of the drawing doesn't quite "look right," hold up your Picture Plane again, match up the Basic Unit drawn on the plastic with the doorway, and compare the angles or proportions you see on the plane with your drawing. Make any necessary corrections and complete the drawing.
9. Erase the crosshairs if you wish; sign and date your drawing.

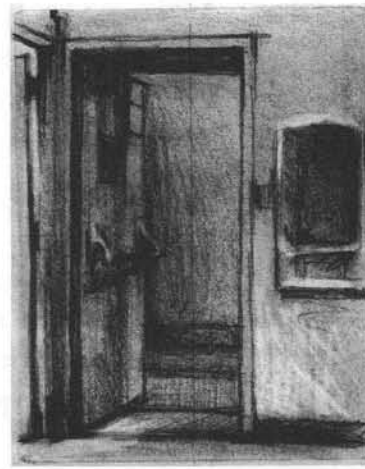
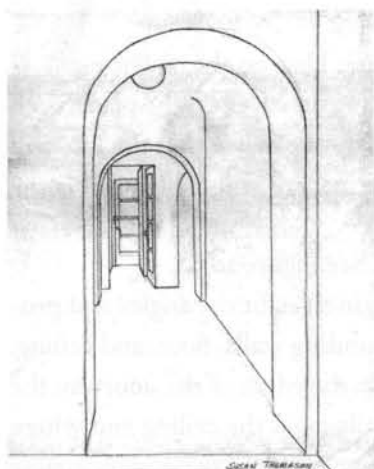
Post-exercise remarks:

You have just completed a drawing that many university art students would find daunting. Sighting angles and proportions is a complicated skill, requiring that you learn first how to "take sights" and then how to transfer them

to your drawing. Once learned, the skill quickly becomes automatic, and you will be taking sights without having to remind yourself how to do it at every step.

Every global skill seems to have a component similar to sighting relationships in drawing—for example, learning grammar in writing, learning the rules of the road in driving, learning musical notation, learning how to play chess. You will find a description of formal perspective in *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* and in many other books on drawing, if you would like to learn that time-honored system. Formal perspective seems difficult and much too complicated at first, but does provide the theoretical basis for informal perspective. And, as I have often said, in my view, knowledge never hurts.

Sighting relationships is required in every drawing and for every subject. Because of its complexity, students often leave sighting unlearned or half-learned, ensuring that they will make errors in their drawings that they will not know how to correct. Sighting relationships is well worth the effort to learn, and it becomes surprisingly enjoyable once mastered.



Some student examples.