Learn to Draw & Learn to Paint - Step by Step

By [Barry Waldman](#)

Are you an artist?
Do you want to become an artist?
Do you want to be a better artist?

Are you a botanical artist, do you aspire to be a still life painter, a painter of bar scenes, a science fiction or manga artist or a seascape painter? Some people know from birth and others find themselves in their later years (i.e. Grandma Moses in her 70's). Some students learn on their own , or go to a four-year art school , some prefer to take an art class or art course from time to time. Others teach themselves using art textbooks, art videos or work with other artists and learn from each other.

Struggling to develop their art, some complain that they need better brushes. Some art teachers say "put a little blue here." It's not the brushes. Sure the light could be better where you paint or draw and it's not the little blue that goes here. What's missing in the art education of some is an understanding of the visual basics that underlie all good painting.

Here is a list of the basics that underlie quality drawing and painting.

1. DRAWING: Study and practice drawing. Keep an artist's blank sketch book with you and draw everything you see. Study books on how to draw and practice, practice, practice.

2. FORM: Understand that form underlies everything. A sphere underlies an apple or an orange. A cylinder underlies a tree trunk. An egg form underlies the human head ... and so on.

3. LIGHT AND SHADE: How an object changes its appearance across its surface depends on how the light(s) strike it, the underlying form and "local color" of the object. For example: Let's "paint" a word picture of an orange on a table. If the main light is a warm light (like the sun or a light bulb) striking the orange from in front and above to the right of the orange, the colors and values across the orange from left to right from the viewer's viewpoint are as follows:

- Rich medium orange
- Lighter, a little less orange, a little more towards yellow/white/orange highlight
- Back to a rich orange in stages getting darker and less color intense toward the shadow side of the orange
- Progressively darker and cooler into the shadow side of the orange
- The tones further from the light are less warm orange & more toward maroon or alizarin crimson orange
- The shadow side lightens some toward the extreme right as it picks up some reflected

light from the table top
- Next is the shadow cast from the orange on the table top ... and so on

4: COMPOSITION: Understand that paintings are composed, so study the principles of composition. Your art course(s) or art textbook(s) should include composition theory and training.

5. COLOR THEORY: Color is a major component of picture making so study and understand color theory.

6. PERSPECTIVE: Perspective underlies a building, a street or a city. In a smaller world, there is perspective (both linear and atmospheric) in three fruits and a wine bottle on a table.

7. STILL LIFE: Having learned the above basics numbers1-6, you can apply them to a still life.

8. LANDSCAPE: Landscapes may include cityscapes, roofscapes, seascapes and so on depending where you live and what you can access. Drawing, form, composition, light and shade, perspective and color theory underlie landscape drawing and painting.

9. FIGURES, PORTRAITS, PEOPLE and ANIMALS: Some students want to "only paint people" or "only do portraits." Tell that to Leonardo DaVinci ... his Mona Lisa is in front of a landscape. A rounded art education should include anatomy studies of people and animals in addition to the basics.

Let's review the underlying basics of how one can learn to draw and learn to paint. A rounded student needs to study and advance their understanding and skills in:

- drawing
- form
- light and shade
- composition
- color theory
- perspective
- still life
- landscape, botanicals, seascapes and so on
- figures, portraits, people and animals
- ... and over time ... an understanding of these basics will make any picture better.

As I asked at the beginning of this article, who are you or what do you want to become as an artist? You may know what you want to be as an artist or want to find out as you develop your artistic skills. Shakespeare had a rule to keep in mind as you educate yourself in painting "...This above all: to thine own self be true..." (Act 1, Scene III, Hamlet, Polonius to Laertes). You can find your artistic self while studying the basics

step by step.

I had a college art school buddy who started copying comic books as a child. He now travels the world drawing and painting elephants, other animals in the wild, tribes of nomads and other exotic subjects.
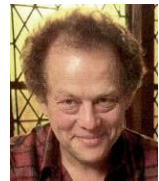
I also worked with a fellow instructor at Famous Artist's School who saw the work and career of a great seascape painter and decided that he wanted to do the same. He did become a successful seascape painter with his own art gallery on the sea. My seascape painter friend could paint a person walking on the beach, with driftwood and foliage here and there and the sea rolling in toward the beach.

Both my friends had to study and absorb drawing, form, light and shade, composition, perspective, color theory, still life, botanicals, landscape, seascapes figure, animals and portraits so they could end up painting their dreams.

Learn to draw and learn to paint by learning the basics step by step.

The author has painted and taught for 50 years and has had over 30 art exhibits of his paintings. My USA based online art school has students in 19 countries. I have taught art classes at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and Manhattan, USA, Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut, Famous Artists Schools in Westport, Connecticut, USA. I have also lectured on various art subjects all over the USA and in Holland, Belgium, France, South Africa and Australia.

My online interactive art school is at: http://www.interactiveartschool.com

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