

Improve Your Ink Drawing with Hatching Techniques

by Jen Dixon

Project One: Pen Personality Reference Sheet

Materials for this exercise:

- All of your art pens from different companies, but limited to black and sepia.
- Bristol board, or the whitest, smoothest paper you have.

The purpose of this project is to record the unique mark styles, or “personality” of each of your pens as reference.

Line up your pens by manufacturer, in nib order from fine to broad. It's ok if you don't have every nib size. Just go with what you have.

Position your paper in portrait and consider it a two column layout. With each pen, draw - freehand - a horizontal line for a few inches or about 6cm using a neutral/typical pressure. At the end of the line, write the nib size of the pen you're using.

Under the line, make a small patch of crosshatching about the size of your thumbnail, a squiggle, and some dots. At a glance, this will give you a better idea what marks that pen is capable of creating.

Finally, don't forget to write the name of the pen above the line. If you have several nib sizes by the same manufacturer, you can skip writing the name for every one and label the next, new brand when you switch.

I tend to also put sepia pens in the reference, as they're often used in sketch kits and can vary wildly as to the intensity of the brown.



Pen Personality reference sheets are satisfying to create, and give you a real sense - pen to pen - what each has to offer your work.

Project Two: Hatching Patchwork

Materials for this exercise:

- A4 or US Letter size Bristol board or high quality, smooth, white paper.
- Any pens you are comfortable using. I encourage you to try a variety.

The reason for this patchwork is to begin training your hand to make consistent, controlled marks.

Using a sharp pencil, create a grid in faint lines, with gutters (space between columns and rows) on a sheet of Bristol. I like a one centimetre border around the edge, then draw in 3cm squares with 1 centimetre gutters between. In centimetres on A4, you'll end up with one border slightly larger after marking in the 3cm squares. That's just fine.

For US measurements, don't exceed 1.25 inch squares; ideally, closer to 1.1875 (1-3/16") each. It's important to stay small in this exercise.

**The number of rows or columns isn't that important; just fill your page.
On A4, using centimetres, I manage a 7x5 square grid with gutters between.
Something close to that is fine.**

Position your paper in landscape orientation.

For the first row of squares, focus on 45 degree hatch lines.

Resist the urge to start from the middle, but instead, begin to train yourself to stay consistent throughout the entire square, top to bottom.

**Important note before continuing: pulling a line towards you will always be easier to control and smoother than pushing a line away.
Whenever possible, draw towards yourself.**

Continue this practice across the whole row of squares.

Note: If your lines drift and the spaces between vary, this is normal. Try slowing slightly, don't forget to breathe. Also try to avoid corrections, as they will look obvious and less appealing than minor inconsistencies.

Row two should be vertical lines, top to bottom edge. Continue across the row.

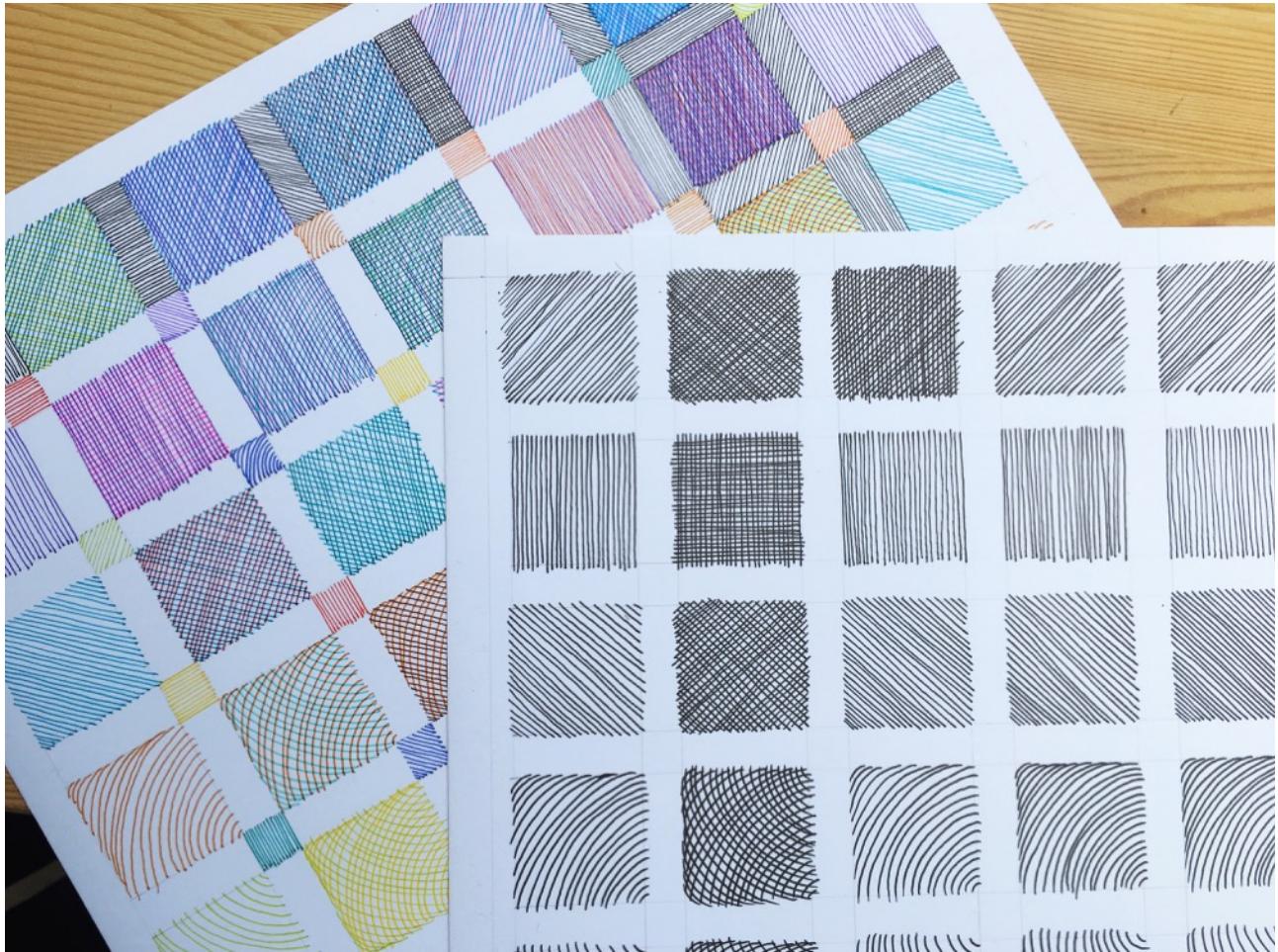
Row three should be 45 degrees the direction opposite the first row. Resist turning your paper to make this easier; you're training your hand and some movements will feel new.



Row four is to practice Contoured Hatching. These are often the most difficult and will likely be drawn slightly further apart. Practice the whole row.

Row five should practice Contoured Hatching in a different direction. As with the 45 degree marks, avoid turning the paper to make this easier. Train your hand to accept new ways to make marks as much as possible.

After completing the patchwork, return to the first row, second column.
Crosshatch the square using the opposing 45 degree mark. Work your way down the column applying an opposite mark to achieve crosshatching.



For the next column, try altering the angles slightly to achieve a different pattern, i.e. using 30 degree marks, or horizontal lines. Whatever is there, attempt to create a new pattern with a different mark. Explore this for the rest of the columns, leaving the first column alone as reference.

This exercise will likely make your hand incredibly tired.

If you're fatigued, take a break. Shake it out. Come back to the paper later, or the next day. A slight ache is normal when learning new marks and dedicating yourself to practice. This exercise is similar to calligraphers doing pen stroke drills to train their hands into graceful movements.

I have created this same hatching patchwork in colour to see what blended colour effects I can create. Try it if you have the pens for it. Layering up to three colours can create amazing results. This leads us into the final Project...

Project Three: Taking it Further

Materials for this exercise:

- Any pens.
- Other drawing materials: pencils, coloured pencils, charcoal, etc.
- Paper of your choice.

Now that you're comfortable and confident with your hatching, let's take those marks into new territory.

Begin experimenting with mixed media. Using watercolours, paint a few practice images and try layering hatching over, or take a sketchbook out and combine these techniques to rapidly capture a scene.

Try combining hatching with dot work; it can be very satisfying and create new textures.

Explore colour.

As with any drawing skill, practice will keep you sharp and you'll be prepared to add just the right mark to your work whenever you need it.

For this project, experiment. Show how you are bringing your skilled hatching into your art.

