

a. The basics

We will now go over the very basics of sketching (and drawing in general). We will talk about materials, basic techniques, tricks and tips to help you start out.

Materials

For the sake of simplicity, I highly recommend you use a **pencil** for sketching. Any pencil will do. I personally used to love using **mechanical pencils**, but later found out I'm getting better results using a **graphite pencil** (the common orange pencil everyone knows and loves).

Regarding the hardness of the pencil, I recommend you use a medium HB pencil, or something close (anything between HB and 2B).¹ This is good for beginners. Later on, you should experiment and see what feels best to you.

The gist of it is that the higher you go up the scale of B, the darker and stronger the lines become. The higher you go up the scale of H, the brighter and weaker the lines become. HB is right in the middle.

As for **paper**, any regular, printer paper will be good. I recommend A4 size (again, the standard, most common size). I would sometimes work on projects on A3 paper (double the size of A4), which is good for getting a lot of details into a large work. For the sake of this book, A4 will be perfect.

I also recommend getting a small notebook that you can carry around with you, in case you want to sketch on the go. It should have blank pages.

Erasing is not such a big deal when it comes to practicing sketching, but there WILL be corrections necessary from time to time. I recommend you use a **kneaded eraser**. It's an eraser you can knead into any shape you want. This way you can turn it into a finer eraser, or use it to cover large spaces when erasing. It also leaves NO DEBRIS, which means there's no need to wipe away anything (and accidentally smear you

sketch).

In addition to all of these, I recommend you have a black rollerball pen (the common Pilot pens) as well. There is a very interesting reason I recommend using it. I find that when I know I can erase my lines, I make more mistakes and care more. But, when I know my lines are permanent, I care less, and counter-intuitively, I do better.

So basically sketching with a pen is a good exercise in NOT being a perfectionist, and in distinction between essential and non-essential.

And... that's it, we have everything we need!

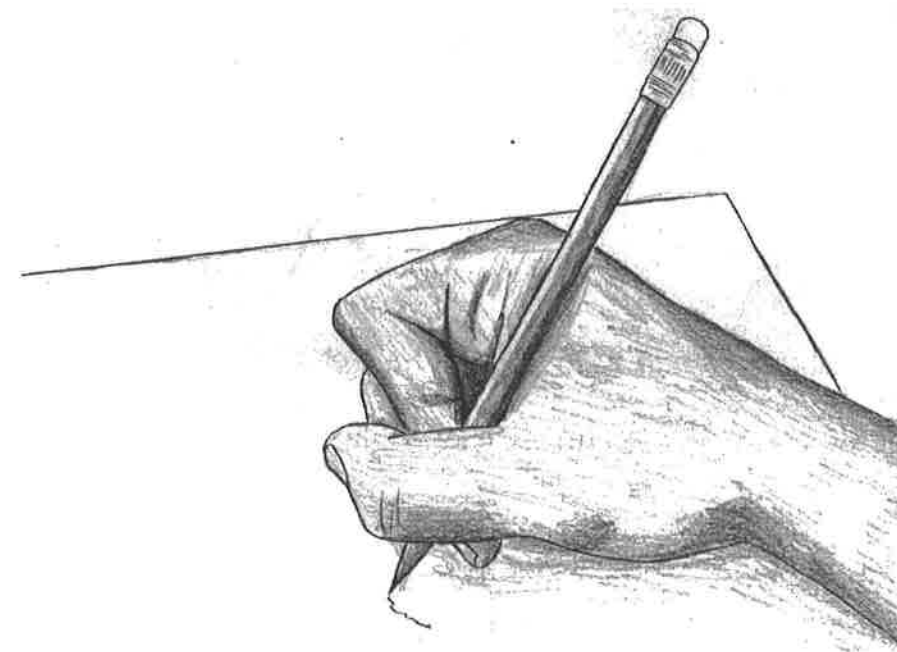
Holding the pencil

Let's talk about the correct way of holding a pencil. I will explain and show examples with sketches, to get you into the sketchy mood.

The first thing I'd say, is that the correct way of holding the pencil is the same way you use for writing. It's what you feel most comfortable with.

Next, it's important to understand we can improve our range of motion, by changing our grip of the pencil.

We normally hold the pencil in an angle of about 45 degrees from the paper. Here is what it looks like.

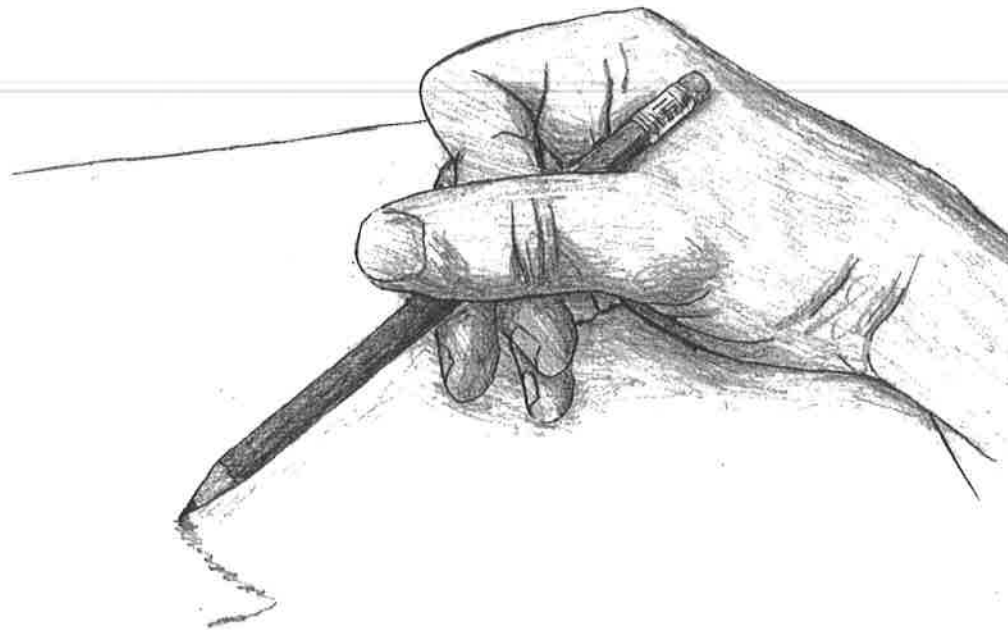


This is good for some of the time, or even most of the time. But let's try something here.

Grab a pencil and a paper. I want you to hold the pencil like I just showed, and draw a relatively straight, quick, 5 inches long line, **WITHOUT** lifting your hand off the paper. Don't worry if the line isn't perfectly straight. Aim for your best, but this is not an exercise in accuracy.

Was that easy? You probably discovered that your range of motion was limited to about 2-3 inches.

How can you get a better range? Here is the (simple) trick. Hold your pencil at a lower angle, about 20 degrees from the paper. Also hold it more towards its back.



Now try doing the same thing. A little easier, right?

We can make our range EVEN better, using another little trick. Ready?

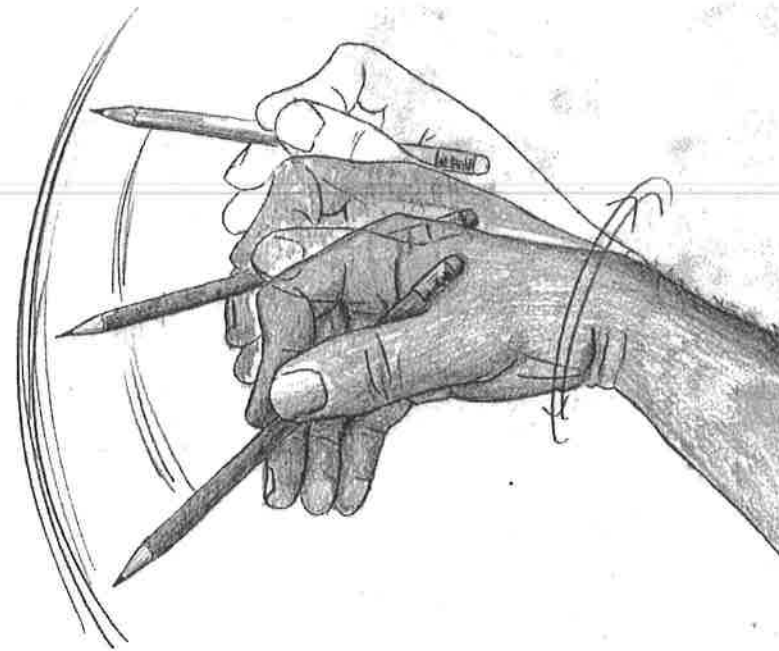
Remember how I asked you not to lift your hand off the paper? Now let's try lifting it off the paper, while maintaining an angle of 20-45 degrees (whatever feels natural to you).

Now try drawing a long, straight line. Much easier getting a better range this way, right?

And again, don't be too worried if your line isn't perfect, I just want you to understand the goal of changing our grip occasionally.

So, what happened here?

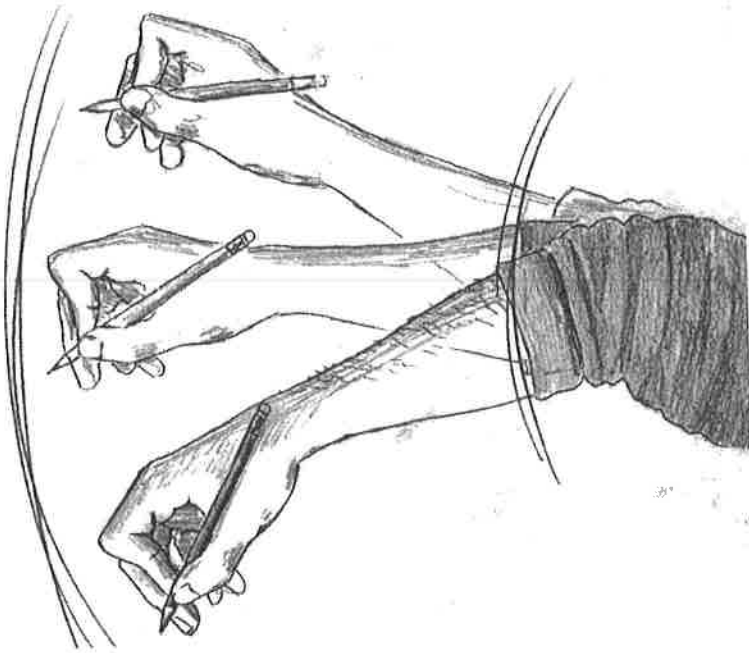
When we placed our hand on the paper, the pivot for our movement was actually our wrist. Try doing the exercise again, and feel where the motion is coming from. It's your wrist. Here is a sketch to clarify it even further.



By lowering the angle, and holding back on the pencil, we actually gave ourselves some more freedom of movement.

Later, when we lifted our hand off the paper, our motion's pivot was actually our ELBOW. If this sounds strange to you, repeat the exercise again, and try and draw an even longer line, perhaps about 10 inches long.

Where did your motion come from? Your elbow!



Our elbow has a much greater range of motion. This is a nice trick for you to remember. In the future, when you have to sketch using longer lines, you'll see how you naturally lift your hand slightly off the paper.

By the way, painters using canvases use the elbow as a pivot all the time. They have no other choice!

After discussing range of motion, **let's talk about the quality of lines.**

Quality of lines

Depending on what you are drawing, you will need to use different lines.

Some types of lines would be:

- Straight
- Curved
- Jagged
- Short
- Long
- Parallel
- Dark lines
- Light / bright lines
- Large areas (fill)

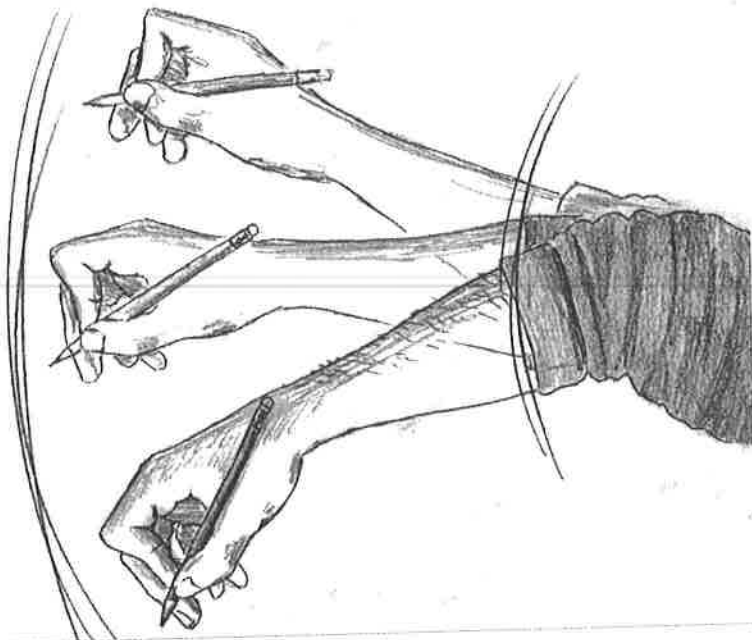
In order to sketch these lines in the best way possible, you are going to learn how to change your grip accordingly.

As a general rule, remember that it's easier drawing lines with motions that move AWAY from your body.

Straight lines in general, are most easily created using your elbow as a pivot. This is true especially when we are talking about long straight lines. Holding back on the pencil, at an angle of 20 degrees will make our lives easier, but lifting our hand entirely and using our elbow will produce even better results.

Curved lines are also best created using your elbow as the pivot, OR by using the 20 degrees angle grip. The reason for this is that our joints' range of motion is circular, as we've seen earlier.

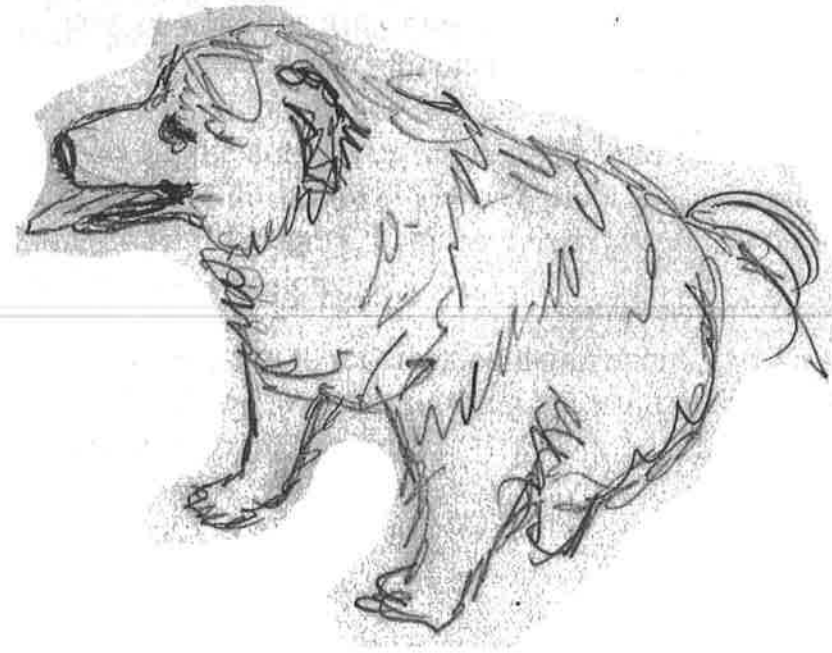
Here is a reminder.



Try it out now. Draw a few curved lines and feel how your wrist and elbow naturally create them. Try longer and shorter lines.

Jagged lines are simple. Let's say you want to draw a dog's fuzzy fur, or the leaves of a tree.

Here is an example.



To get that nicely, I recommend the simple, 45 degrees angle grip we talked about, just like when you write. Here is the reason. Just like it's easier drawing longer lines by changing to a lower, 20 degrees angle, it's also easier drawing short, fuzzy or jagged lines by holding the pencil at a higher angle.

In fact, holding the pencil close to its tip, as opposed to the 20 degrees grip, will further help us, as it provides more accuracy

Next, let's talk about the darkness and brightness of lines.

This one is also simple. The closer, high angle grip (45 degrees) is better for creating darker, stronger lines, while the low angle, holding back grip is better for lighter lines.

Also, I don't recommend lifting your hand too much in these cases, unless absolutely necessary. If you need to get an exact tone (brightness / darkness), using the paper or desk as support can help. If however you are experienced enough, or want to try something new, feel free to experiment with maintaining accuracy while lifting your hand off the paper.

Correct use of your eyes and gaze

You may have never thought about it, but your gaze and the way you use your eyes are VERY important for sketching and drawing.

Let's try a little exercise... Here are two dots.



I want you to draw the same two dots on a piece of paper, with a distance of about 5 inches between them.

Now, I want you to connect the two dots using the straightest line you can.

Pay attention to your gaze. Where were you looking? Did your gaze move from the first dot to the second, or was it doing something else entirely?

The optimal use of your gaze would be having it somewhere in between those two dots. You need to be aware of both of their locations. If you were moving your gaze from one dot to the other, or only focusing it on one of the, you may discover that your line didn't turn out the best.

Try the exercise again. This time, force yourself to focus on a spot somewhere between the two dots, and see if you get better lines.

The ideal behavior will become a second nature when you practice on a regular basis. I don't want you to worry about every small thing, such as your gaze, but to simply be AWARE of such things.

Let's talk about our hands as well. In this situation, the easiest way of connecting the dots for most people, would be to lift their hand off your desk, and use the entire elbow as a pivot. If you completed this experiment differently, I advise you to give this a try as well. You may find it A LOT easier.

It may seem petty to talk in such detail about a single line, but remember that a sketch is nothing but a multitude of lines. This is important.

Direction of sketching

I mentioned earlier how it's easier drawing in a direction away from you. But let's zoom-out for a minute, and look at the ENTIRE work.

Let's say I was to sketch this building.



Where should I begin? In what order should I start sketching?

The answer is really simple. If you are right-handed, the preferable GENERAL direction would be to sketch from LEFT to RIGHT. The reason for this is that you'll be less likely to smear what you already sketched, by accidentally going over it with your hand.

If you are left-handed, the general direction would be from RIGHT to LEFT, for the same reason.

Now, does this mean you have to follow this little rule 100% of the time? NO. That would actually be impossible. But do remember that generally speaking, this makes it less likely you will destroy your work. Sometimes you will have to move in a different direction, and that is fine. Whenever possible however, try following this rule.

And by the way, this practice is more strictly followed when using ink, which can be smeared more easily than pencil, and is harder to correct.

Later, we will go over complete step by step drawings, accompanied by a picture of the original object drawn, and you will get a FULL explanation of the process. For now simply remember that the GENERAL direction is from left to right if you are right-handed, and vice versa, and the reason is to avoid smearing.

Let's continue our journey, and start sketching for real.

b. Baby Steps

In this part we will finally begin doing some exercises that are designed to take you from being a complete beginner, to being a complete beginner with some experience!

Even if some of these exercises seem easy or stupid to you, try having the attitude of curiosity and experimentation. Even I learn new things every time I do them.

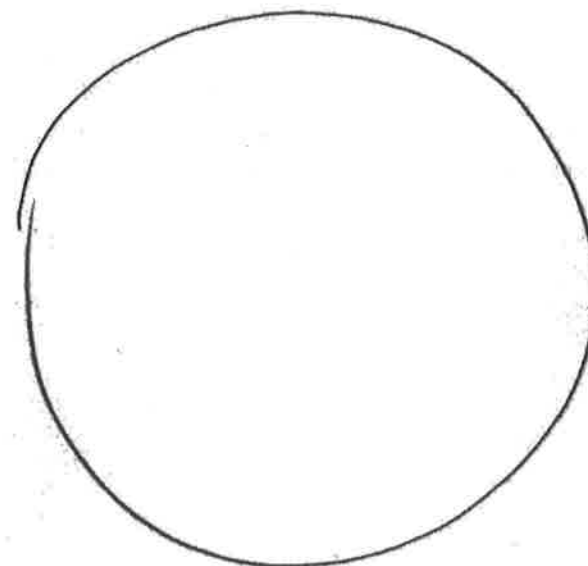
Let's start with a really simple exercise. I want you to try and **draw a perfect circle**. Try going for as-perfect-as-possible.

You can pick whichever size you want.

When you finish, go on.

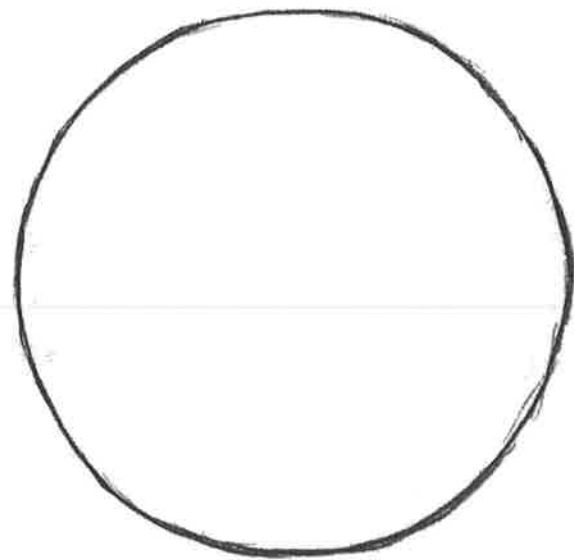
Ok, how did your circle turn up? And how long did it take you to finish?

Did you draw the circle using one line, like the example below?



If so, consider drawing it again, using short, accurate, LIGHT strokes.

Here is an example of this:

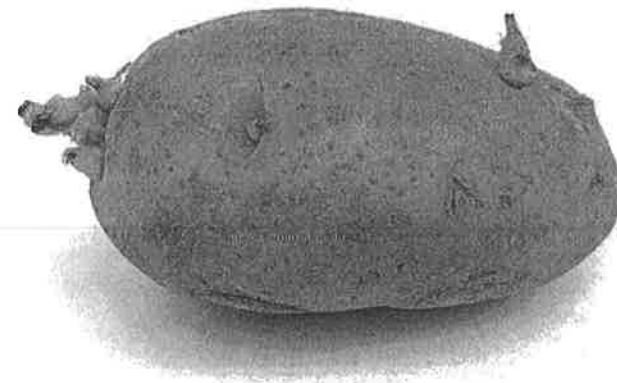


Sketching like this, using many short strokes until a complete shape is created, can be very beneficial. It allows you to improve accuracy. On the other hand, using as few lines as possible, or even one line (such as in the previous example) can also be beneficial, as it keeps the sketch cleaner.

Here is my golden tip: If you can get it done with one line, while maintaining accuracy – go for it! If you feel like you might not be able to, go for the more “sketchy” use of multiple lines and strokes.

In this specific exercise, I personally couldn't get a circle with one line, and that is fine.

Now let's try another fun exercise. **Here is a picture of a potato** (you didn't expect that, huh?).

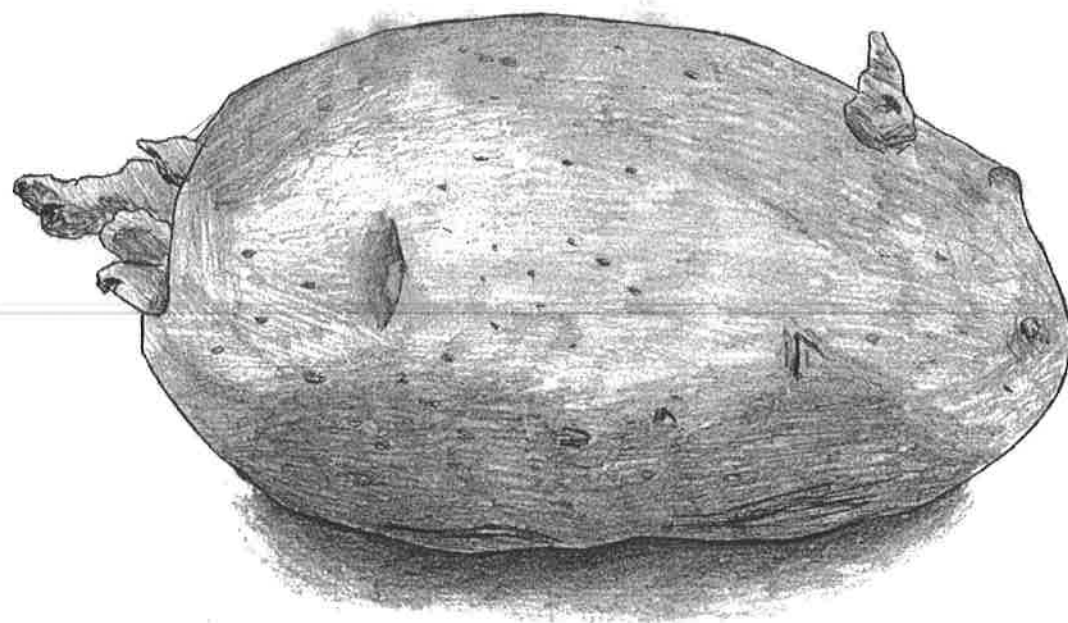


Now, if you have a real potato you can use, I highly recommend doing so. If you don't, use the picture above. I will use this picture as reference, so you can see what my sketch is based on, and better learn what I did.

What I want you to do is to place the potato in front of you, and try and sketch it. Go for accuracy, and take your time. This can take a couple of minutes, or even longer – depending on the level of details we are going for. I think 5-10 minutes is the maximum time you should allow yourself for this.

When you are done sketching move onto the next page.

Okay, how did your potato turn out? Here is mine.



I was going for accuracy, while keeping it to a minimum of only the necessary details.

Now I want you to judge your potato using 4 main criteria:

- The level of similarity to the original potato
- How realistic it looks, regardless of its similarity
- How pleased YOU are with it
- How long it took you

Note that by “how long it took you”, I don't mean you shouldn't take your time, or that every sketch should be “quick”. Quite the contrary, I want to make sure you gave the sketch ENOUGH time and care.

These criteria allow you to judge your results by their technicality, but also by how you feel about them. This is important. From now on, remember these criteria whenever you try to assess how good your sketch turned up.

On some occasions, it doesn't even matter how good your sketch turned out! All you wanted was the experience itself.

You may wonder why I chose a potato in the first place. I think potatoes are great, as they allow room for mistake. Their shape is somewhat oval, but not perfect. This makes them a very forgiving and mistake-tolerant object to draw.

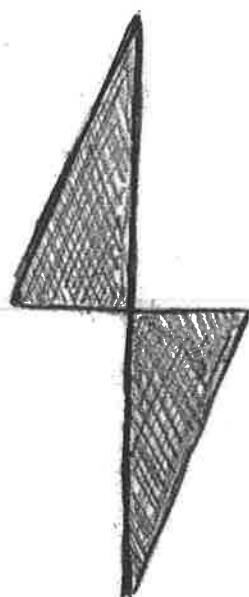
If your potato doesn't look good to you, and you can't seem to understand why, try comparing it to mine. See what things I may have done that you haven't.

Chances are there is one main difference between us that led to the different results. When I drew my potato, I did so knowing it's a three-dimensional object. You may have known that, but didn't sketch using that knowledge.

If this is the case (and it might not be the case, too), fear not. We will slowly introduce the third dimension later on, in the next chapter.

Okay, now that we've EXHAUSTIVELY covered the potato exercise, let's go for something else.

Here is a shape made of triangles.



I want you to try and lightly sketch this shape. Again, take your time and go for accuracy.

Finish up and read on.

In this little exercise, unlike the potato, I simply wanted you to practice seeing a shape and drawing it.

Remember how we talked about observation skills, and the ability to see and sketch? This is a really basic exercise on looking and sketching.

Did you get the angles accurately? Did you notice that the two outermost, diagonal lines are actually parallel? These are the kind of things you must pay attention to and notice when sketching.

If I had to sketch this shape, I would start with the central, vertical line. Then, I'd go for the upper diagonal line, trying to keep the accuracy of the angle between them.

In order to keep it accurate, I would have to look at the entire diagonal line, instead of just staring at the top corner, trying to assess the angle created. After the diagonal line, I will continue with the horizontal line,

and on and on...

When I decide how I am going to go about a sketch, it's important to form some kind of plan. BUT, with that said, sometimes we don't want to form a plan; we want to just dive in. Sometimes we don't have TIME to form a plan, because the bird we are trying to sketch is about to FLY AWAY. That is perfectly okay, and you will find yourself acting differently with different scenes and objects.

A building has a very accurate structure that is usually composed of straight lines. If I was to draw a building, it would probably not run away. I have the time to take it easy, calculate angles and observe lines. It would actually be a good idea to do so.

If on the other hand I was to draw a cat, I wouldn't have as much time, and I'd prefer to get the main lines in first, quickly, even for the price of accuracy.

Don't worry, as we will see examples of both situations. Many examples. You will be able to try them both and experience how to deal with them first hand.

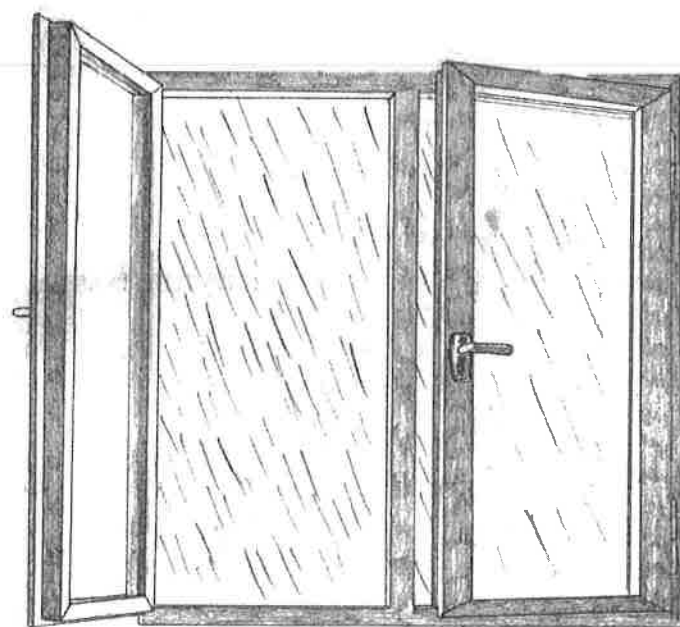
Here is another interesting exercise. **Try and recreate this gradation.**



I want you to FORGET ABOUT accuracy, and focus on tone and darkness. Instead, start by applying a strong pressure on your pencil, and slowly take the pressure off. This is a fun thing to do while on the phone.

Now assess your work. Is the change of tone gradual? Or is it too abrupt? There is no “perfect” here, only things to learn. Rest assured, we will devote an entire chapter to toning, darkening and textures. This is more of an exercise in general techniques.

Here is an exercise in drawing lightly. Here is a **window, and it is raining outside.**



I want you to only sketch the rain, and to do so using quick, very light and short lines. Try filling an entire area with rain.

This seems deceptively easy, but here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- Did you use light lines?
- Were you able to throw the lines quickly and accurately?
- **Did you make sure all the rain drops are parallel?**

Pay attention to the last question in particular. Rain drops tend to drop parallel to each other, as they are all influenced (generally) by the same forces. This is the perfect example of how important it is to REALLY

UNDERSTAND what you are drawing. If you have experience drawing rain, this is something you would know, and you would have drawn the lines parallel. But if you didn't know – you just wouldn't draw them that way.

Don't worry if you “failed” at one (or all) of these questions. This is perfectly okay. Use this to really hammer in the lesson – **observe and get to know the subject of your drawing.**

For the last exercise I want to give you some freedom to do what you want. **Pick an object inside your house**, and place it in front of you. Sit comfortably and try sketching it. You can choose whatever you want: fruits, your TV set, a book or your dog.

Important – make sure you have fun. Don't be rigid and stiff, let yourself enjoy the process. Also, for this exercise, you should absolutely feel free to take your time, even if it takes you an hour.

I want you to do your best, even if your best doesn't seem “good enough” to you.

When you finish, I want you to assess your work using the aforementioned criteria: Similarity and accuracy, realism, how pleased you are, how long it took you.

I hope you enjoyed that last exercise. The point is sketching something that would be fun FOR YOU.

Now let's continue and introduce the third dimension.