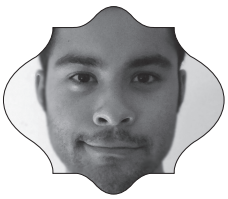
Sketch
WORKSHOP
ANATOMY

Learn to draw a male portrait

Discover how to sketch a typical head and its basic features using simple shapes

The Tutor



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Three-quarter view is a popular angle with artists for portraiture. Unlike the front and profile views of a face, the three-quarter angle view offers a greater sense of dynamism, and can allow an artist to convey a stronger sense of depth in their work.

Notice how there are hardly any hard lines or edges in this drawing of a male head. By building up areas of light and shade through delicate hatching and cross-hatching, you can define facial features without having to lay down harsh lines. This gives a much softer look. Plus, people don't have lines on their faces so why draw them in a portrait?

It's important to understand where the light is coming from when capturing a portrait. Here the light is shining from the front-right, giving him strong highlights on the left side of his head. You can achieve nice highlights by kneading out your pencil lines with a clean eraser.

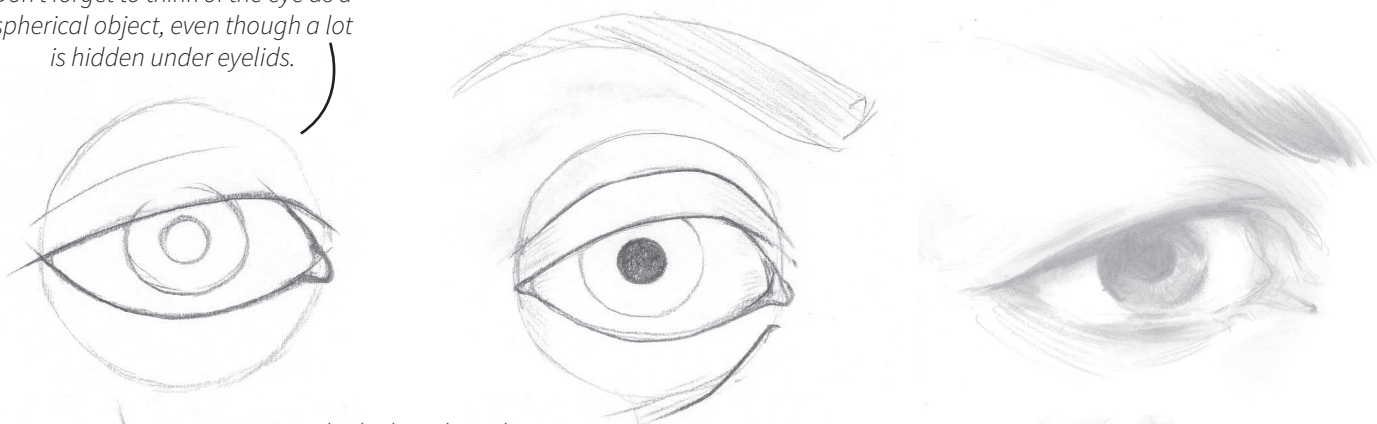
Another general piece of advice when working with faces is to liken drawing them to sculpting with clay; think about 3D forms and you'll find your drawings will begin to express a much greater sense of realism.

Pay careful attention to the location of the facial features in relation to one another. Later in this chapter, we'll break down methods that will assist in anchoring them, so you'll know what to do when drawing heads from your imagination.

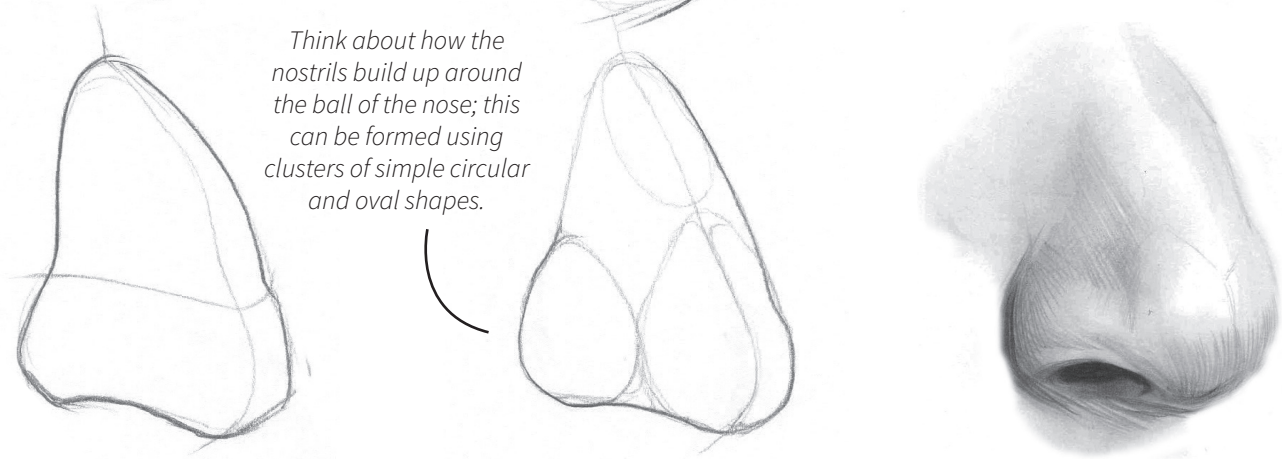
Drawing the human head can be a particularly challenging endeavor from first appearances – enough to rattle the confidence of even an experienced artist. However, with a little practice and determination – plus some clever tricks up your sleeve – you'll find that you will soon be able to get a leg-up on the competition. The exercises in this workshop will provide you with useful tips to quickly gain a stronger understanding of the subject matter. By the end of it, you should have great confidence sketching human facial features in a three-quarter view.

Here we'll be taking a look at the primary facial features. One of the most important factors to understand right away is that less is always more when it comes to drawing a face. Notice how with each of these reference images very few lines are used. Drawing the facial features isolated from one another is a great way to build confidence with your line work.

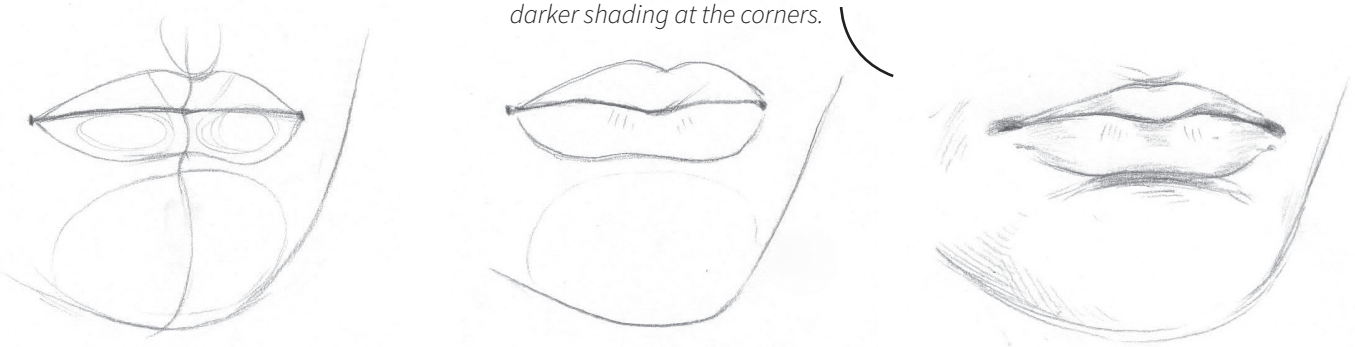
Don't forget to think of the eye as a spherical object, even though a lot is hidden under eyelids.



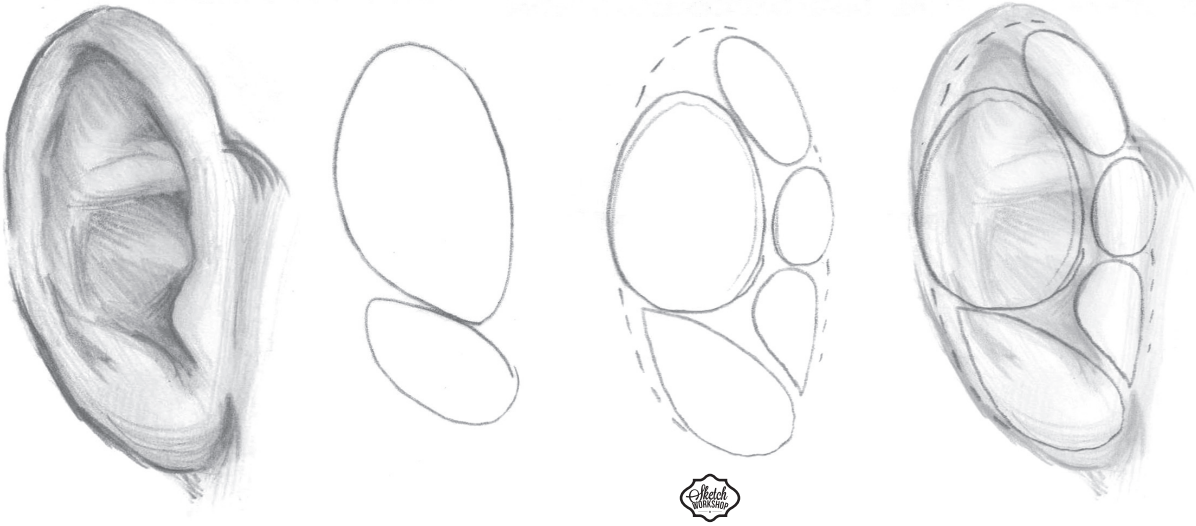
Think about how the nostrils build up around the ball of the nose; this can be formed using clusters of simple circular and oval shapes.

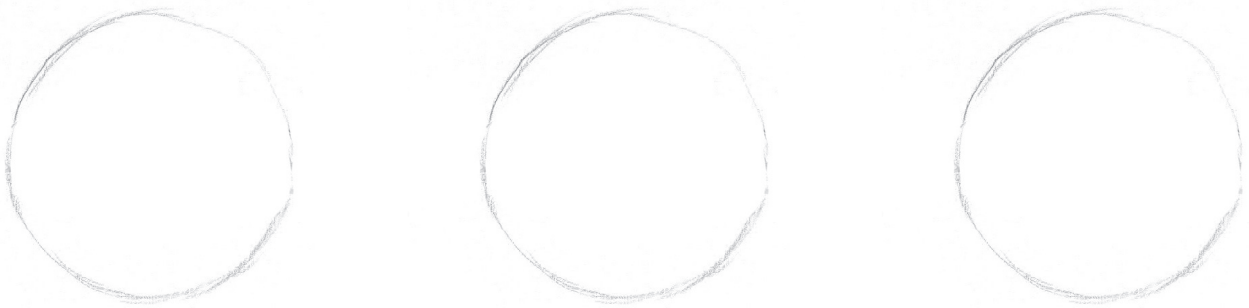


Remember that lips protrude slightly from the face. You can create this effect by adding darker shading at the corners.



Again, think about how the ear is split up into sections; the lobe, the inner ear and outer ear. Start with simple shapes to build these up.



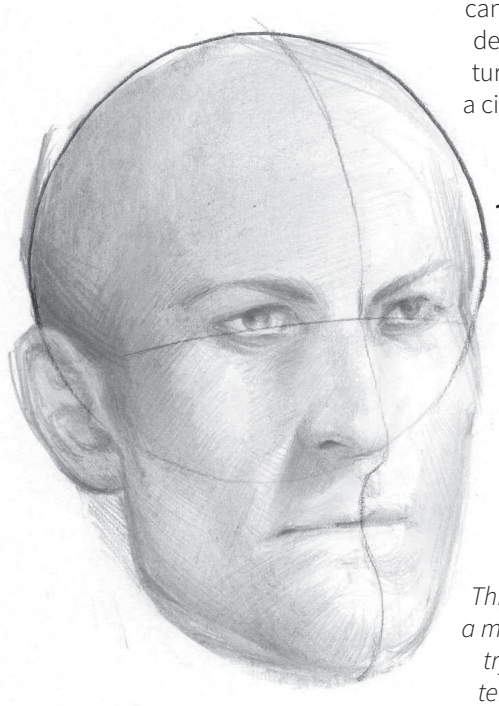


Use these template to practice drawing eyes, noses, lips and ears, using the references above as a guide.

Remember to tackle one thing at a time. First, start with simple shapes, and then build slowly from there. Be careful not to rush or be impatient. And most importantly: experiment. Use the templates for as long as you need to in order to gain a sense of familiarity with these shapes. Don't be afraid to go beyond the templates to try out new designs.

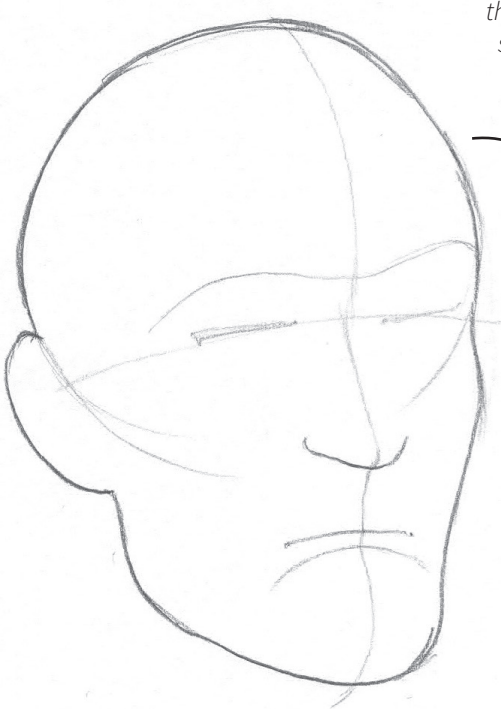
Now that you've mastered these key facial features, it's time to practice building up the structure of the head…

The quickest way to create a human portrait is to start with a circle. Sometimes it can be useful to think of a globe with its latitudinal and longitudinal lines used to determine the locations of various parts of the world. Well, a face has many features and distinguishing marks – and each with their own address. Starting with a circle gives you the foundation you need to pinpoint the locations of everything that makes up a successful portrait.



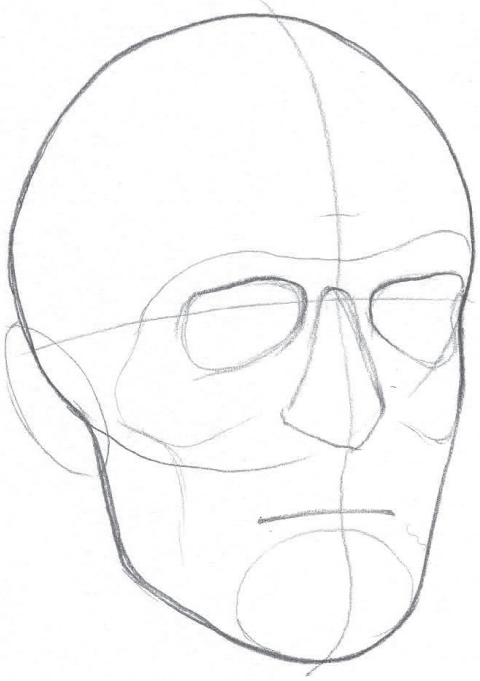
Start with a basic circle to solve most of the structural issues early on…

This exercise focuses on a male head, but you can try creating your own templates for females, too. Pay attention to references of female heads to understand how their proportions differ to those of a male. Generally speaking, females have more delicate features than those of a male.



The face will be divided into three sections: chin to below the nose, nose to brow, and brow to the top of the forehead…

While drawing portraits, try to picture the structure of the skeleton underneath that is building the features that you can see. A good understanding of anatomy will greatly improve the success of your drawings.



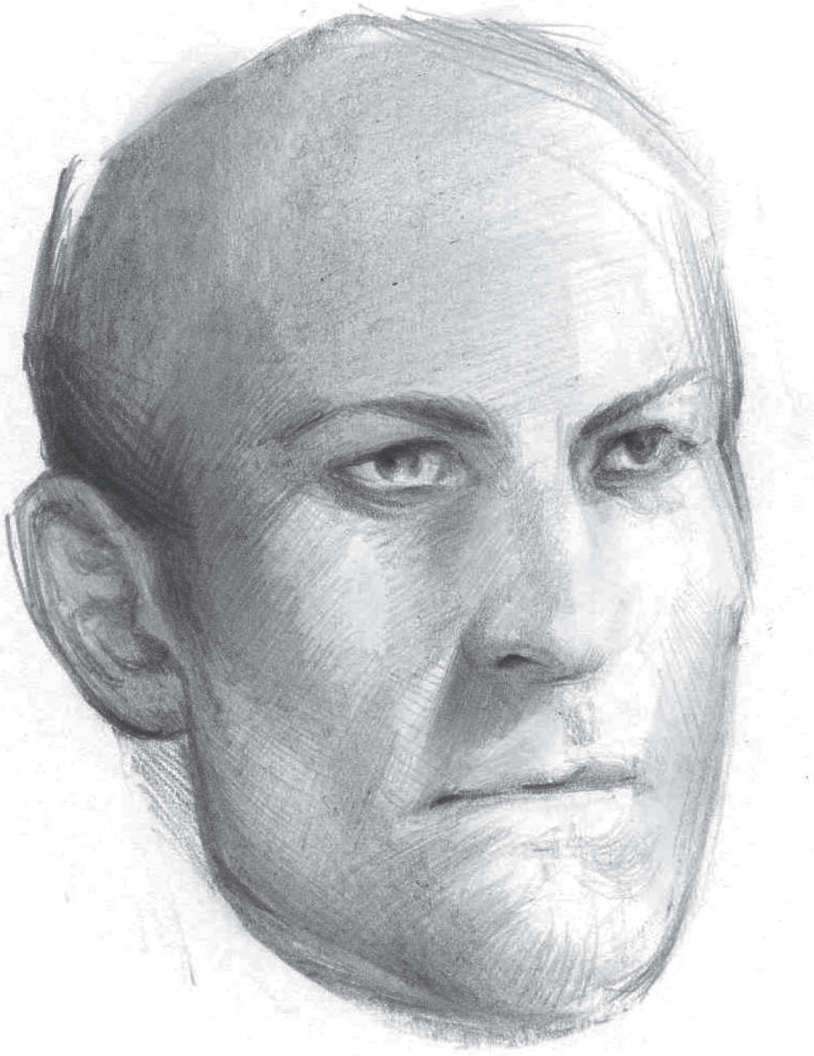
Notice how in these reference examples, there are points where the eyes, nose and mouth will line up with the circumference of the sphere. Use these to your advantage when working with the templates on the page below.

Use these templates to build up your own realistic male heads. Apply the techniques learned from the previous exercises to define the eyes, nose, ears and mouth. Don't be discouraged from straying from the lines to create new designs.

Pay attention to where the features lie in relation to one another.

Now you've gained confidence capturing the features of the face and building the structure of the head, it's time to put it altogether…

Taking what you have learned from the exercises, use the template below to build up your own male portrait. Feel free to use new references to create varied and interesting looks for your character.



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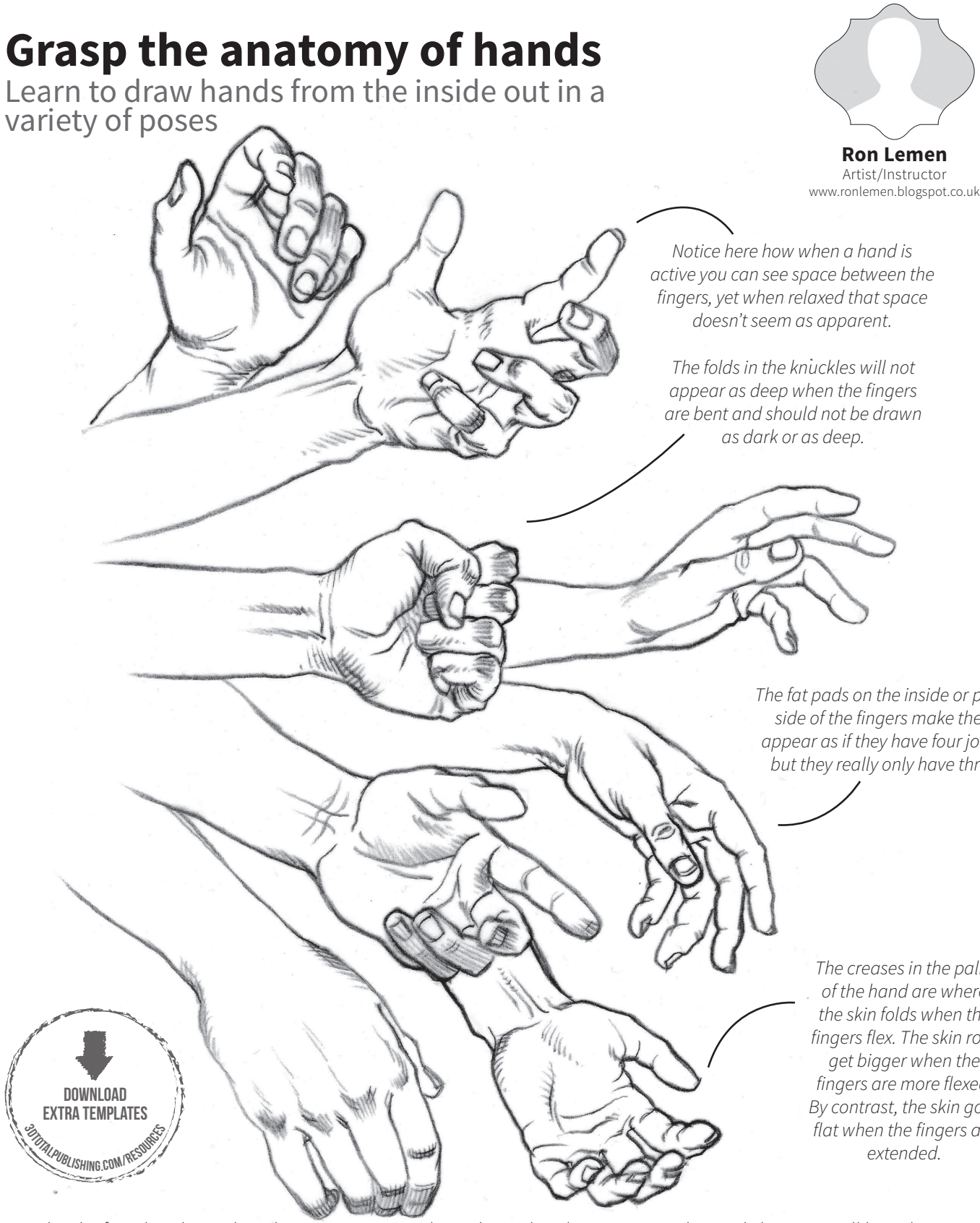
Once you've mastered the guides and templates featured in this workshop, use what you have learned and try to build your own heads from very simple shapes. It's far more important to train for an intuitive understanding of the basic shapes before you begin the details and rendering. Remember not to run before you can walk.

Grasp the anatomy of hands

Learn to draw hands from the inside out in a variety of poses



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Notice here how when a hand is active you can see space between the fingers, yet when relaxed that space doesn't seem as apparent.

The folds in the knuckles will not appear as deep when the fingers are bent and should not be drawn as dark or as deep.

The fat pads on the inside or palm-side of the fingers make them appear as if they have four joints, but they really only have three.

The creases in the palm of the hand are where the skin folds when the fingers flex. The skin rolls get bigger when the fingers are more flexed. By contrast, the skin goes flat when the fingers are extended.

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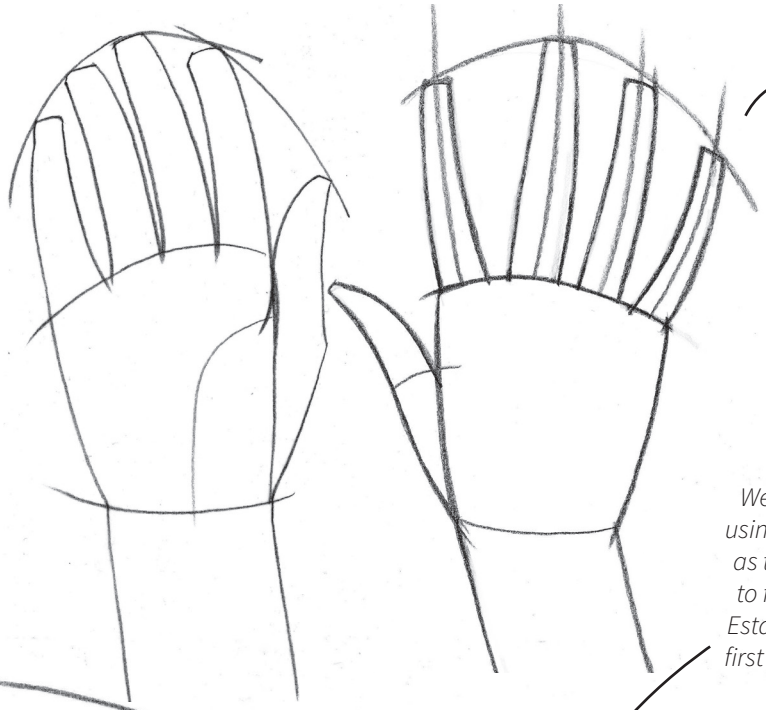
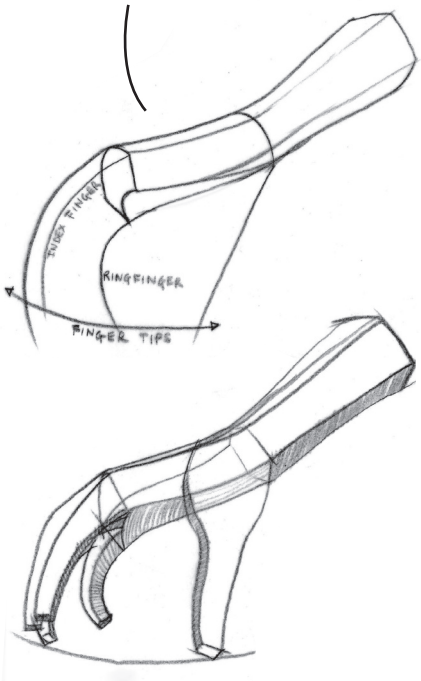
Besides the face, hands are the other feature of the human body that can portray a variety of emotions. Hands can seem very complex because of all the actions they are capable of, which can be daunting at first for new artists. But the reality is that they are actually not as difficult as we perceive them to be. While all the pieces and parts appear to be quite small and intricate, like with the rest of the body: they are still just shapes.

In this workshop, you will learn how to break the hands down from big shapes to small ones, developing a step-by-step process for drawing them with ease in your future works. You'll never fear drawing hands again.

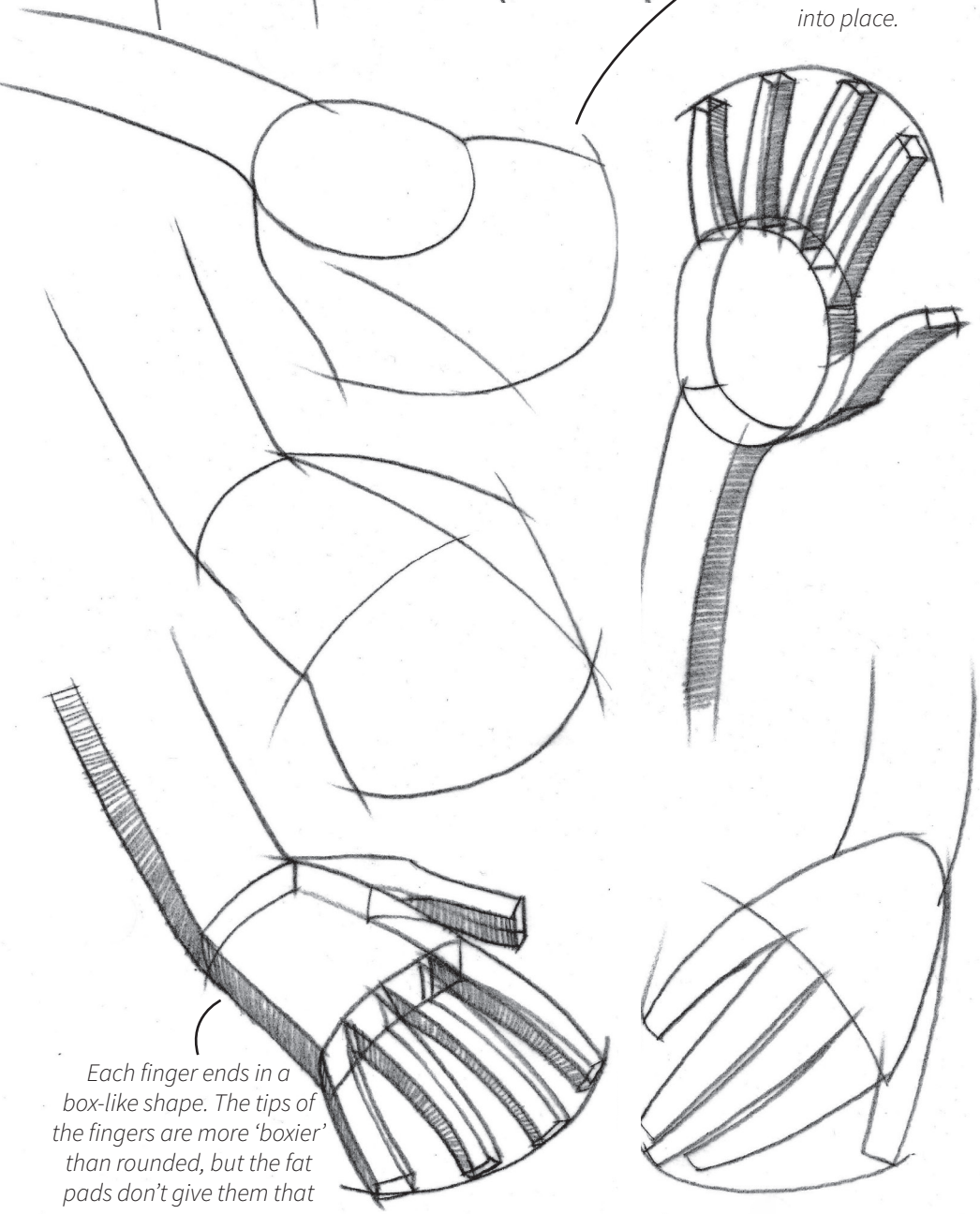


When we start drawing hands, we want to begin with a 'container' – by that I mean a series of basic shapes to depict the hand and its action within. Notice how there is an arc line that crosses the fingertips? This arc groups up the fingers into a shape, to 'contain' the action, and therefore making it easier for us to start drawing the hand.

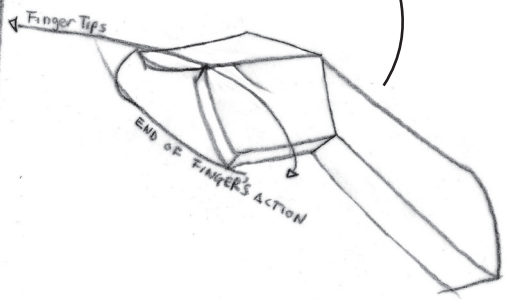
When starting a finger that is bent, try not to think about each segment, but instead let the fingers flow more with curved lines to find their action.

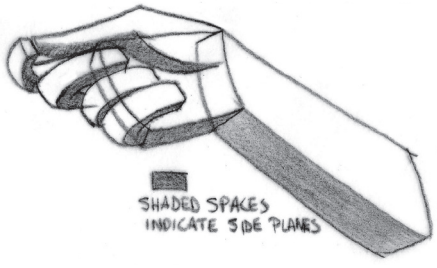


We start drawing hands using cartoon-like designs, as this can make it easier to flesh out actions later. Establish the basic shapes first and the rest will all fall into place.



The fingers are the primary holding mechanism, but the hand also curls in from the side for better grip and more flexibility.

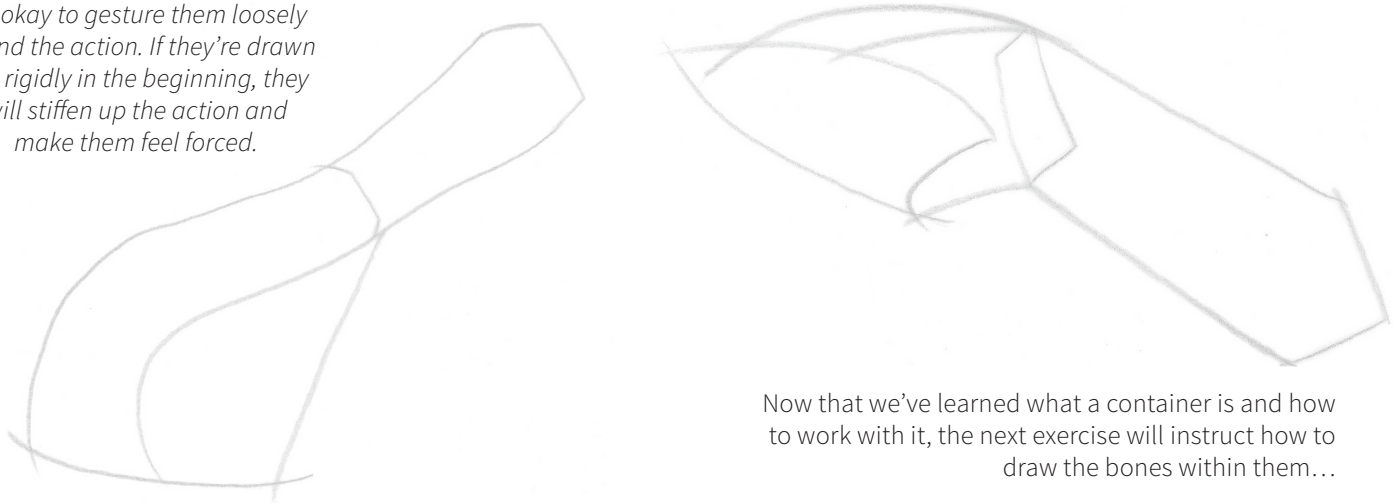




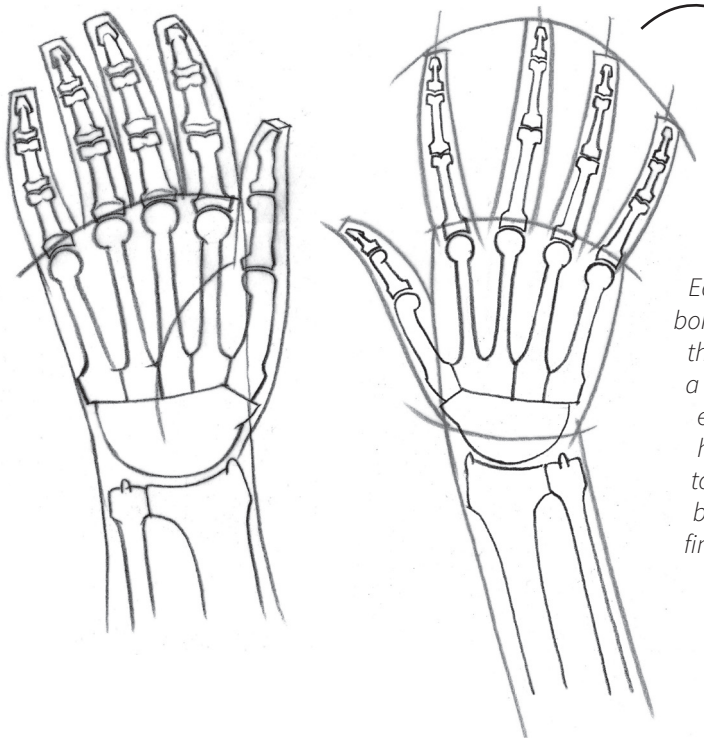
Each finger ends in a box-like shape. The tips of the fingers are more 'boxier' than rounded, but the fat pads don't give them that appearance.

Use the templates on this page to begin mapping a hand.

When drawing these containers, it's okay to gesture them loosely to find the action. If they're drawn too rigidly in the beginning, they will stiffen up the action and make them feel forced.

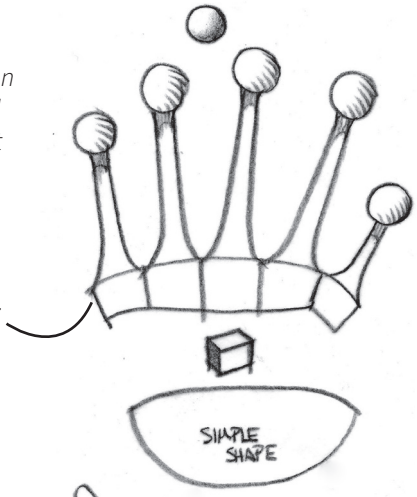


Now that we've learned what a container is and how to work with it, the next exercise will instruct how to draw the bones within them…

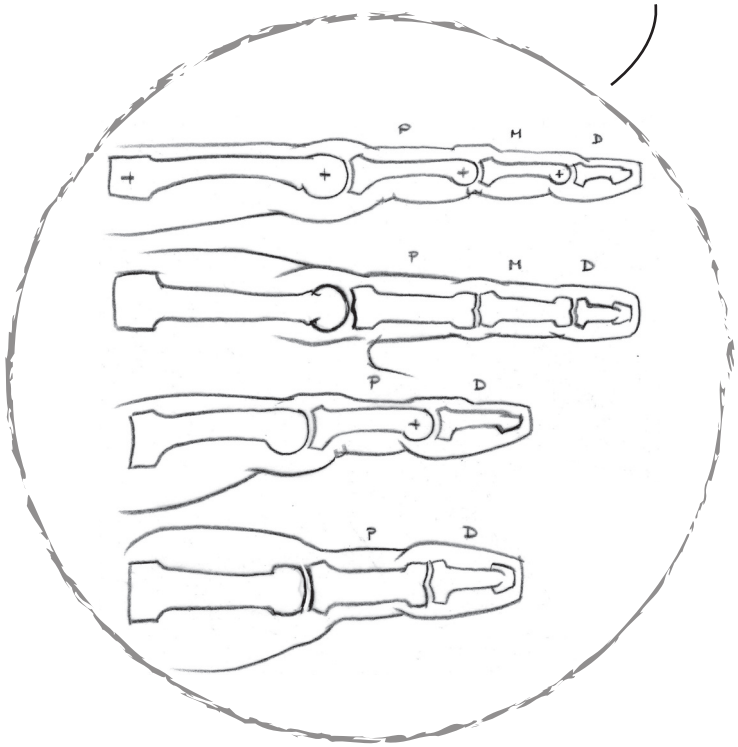


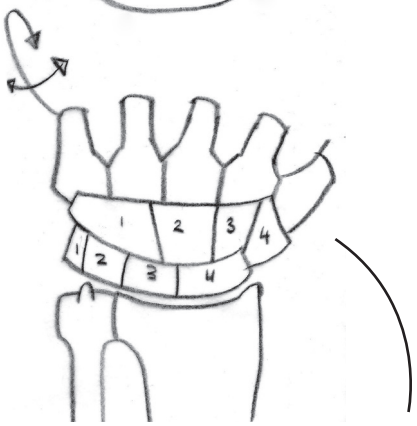
Here the hands are displayed with the bones within them. Notice how the bones aren't drawn all the way out to the edges. There is also skin, muscle, tendons and fat that actually sits around the bones. When we draw the bones within the containers we want to be thinking about this very concept.

Each metacarpal bone has a block on the back end and a ball on the front end. The blocks hold the fingers together and the ball is where the finger is attached.

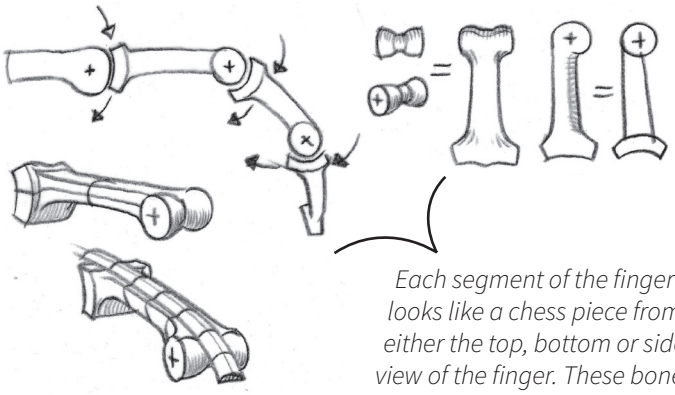


Notice how the fingers are broken up into three segments; these are called the proximal (which is closest to the hand), the middle, and the distal. The thumb only has two segments: the proximal and distal.

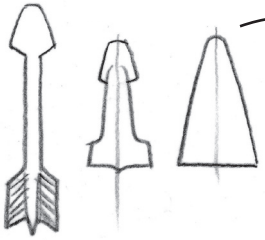




The wrist – or carpal bones – have eight bones with two rows of four each. Because these bones don't change the design of the hand, we are going to draw them all as a half circle.



Each segment of the finger looks like a chess piece from either the top, bottom or side view of the finger. These bones are designed on one end, like a spool, and the other as a sleeve for movement.

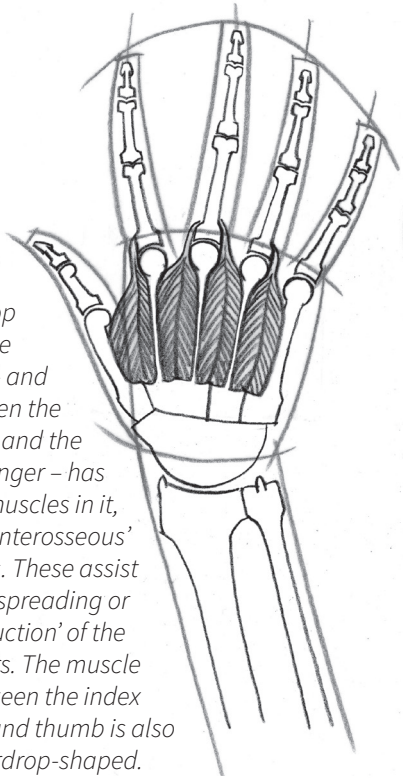


The fingertip is designed in the shape of a blunt arrowhead. These act like little hammers.

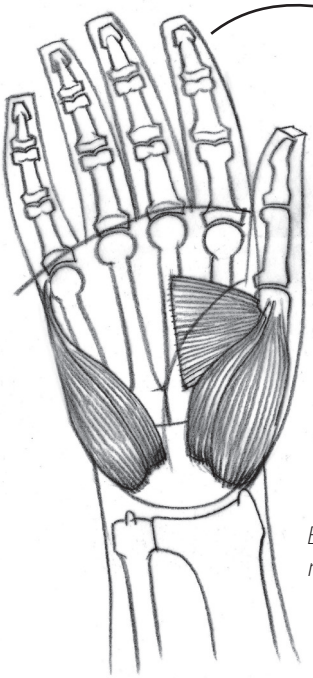
Use these containers to practice drawing the bone structure of hands, as you can see in the examples above. Be careful not to draw the bones right to the edges.

Think about the bones as very simple shapes – especially the carpal and wrist bones. Don't get caught up in all the details or they will be more difficult for you to draw – such as the wrist, which has been simplified into a half circle for ease.

Now that the bones have been mastered, next we will draw the muscles and tendons that flex and extend the fingers…

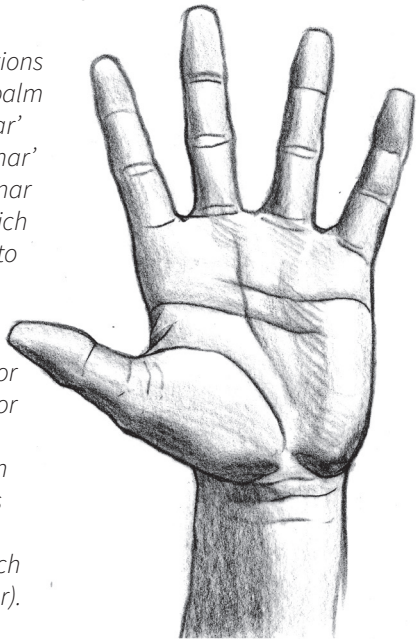


The top of the hand – and between the thumb and the index finger – has small muscles in it, called 'interosseous' muscles. These assist in the spreading or 'abduction' of the fingers. The muscle between the index finger and thumb is also teardrop-shaped.

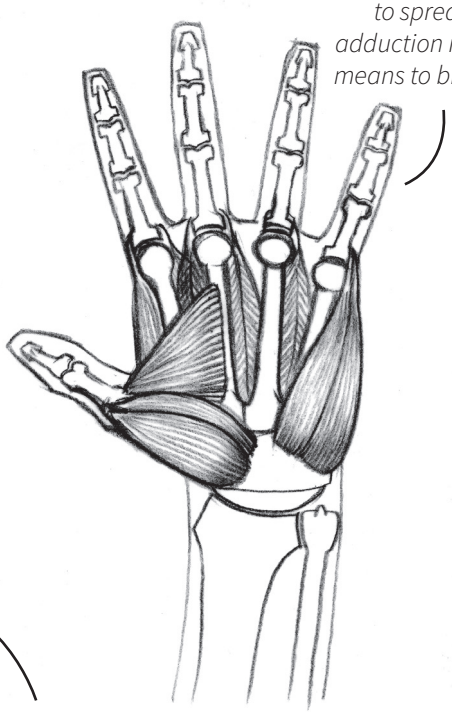


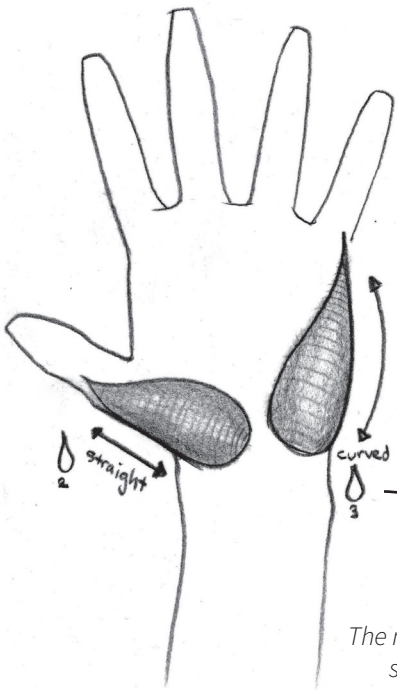
Much of what you see in a hand is the skeleton, since there are not very many muscles within the hand shape. The muscles that do appear are mostly in the palm of the hand. On the top, the lines you see are caused by the tendons from the extensor muscles sitting on top of these bones.

There are two sections of muscles in the palm called the 'thenar' and the 'hypothenar' sections. The thenar is the thumb, which makes it easier to remember.

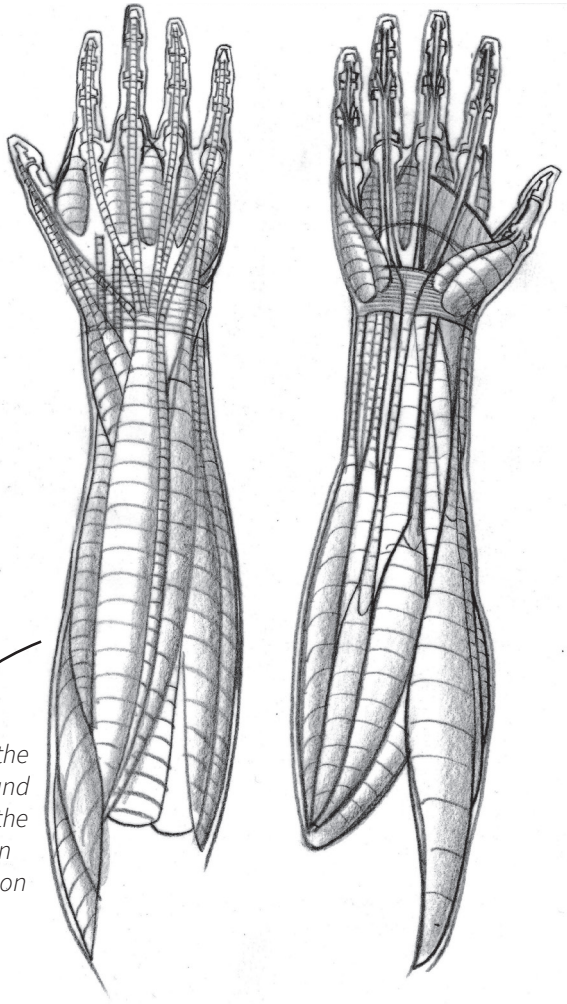


Each section has a flexor muscle and an abductor muscle. The thumb has both an abduction muscle (which means to spread) and an adduction muscle (which means to bring together).

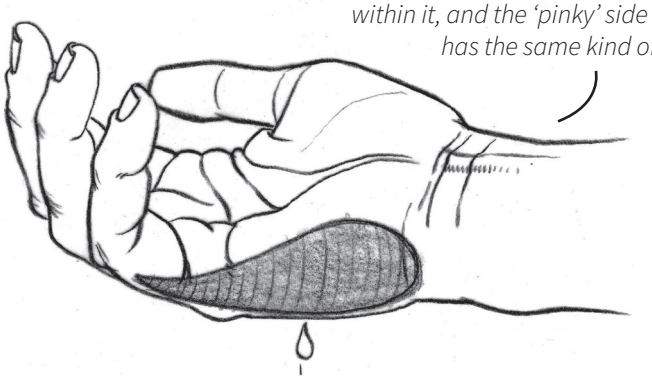




The muscles of both the thenar and hypothenar sections are grouped together to form a teardrop shape. The palm has two teardrops within it, and the 'pinky' side of the hand also has the same kind of shape.

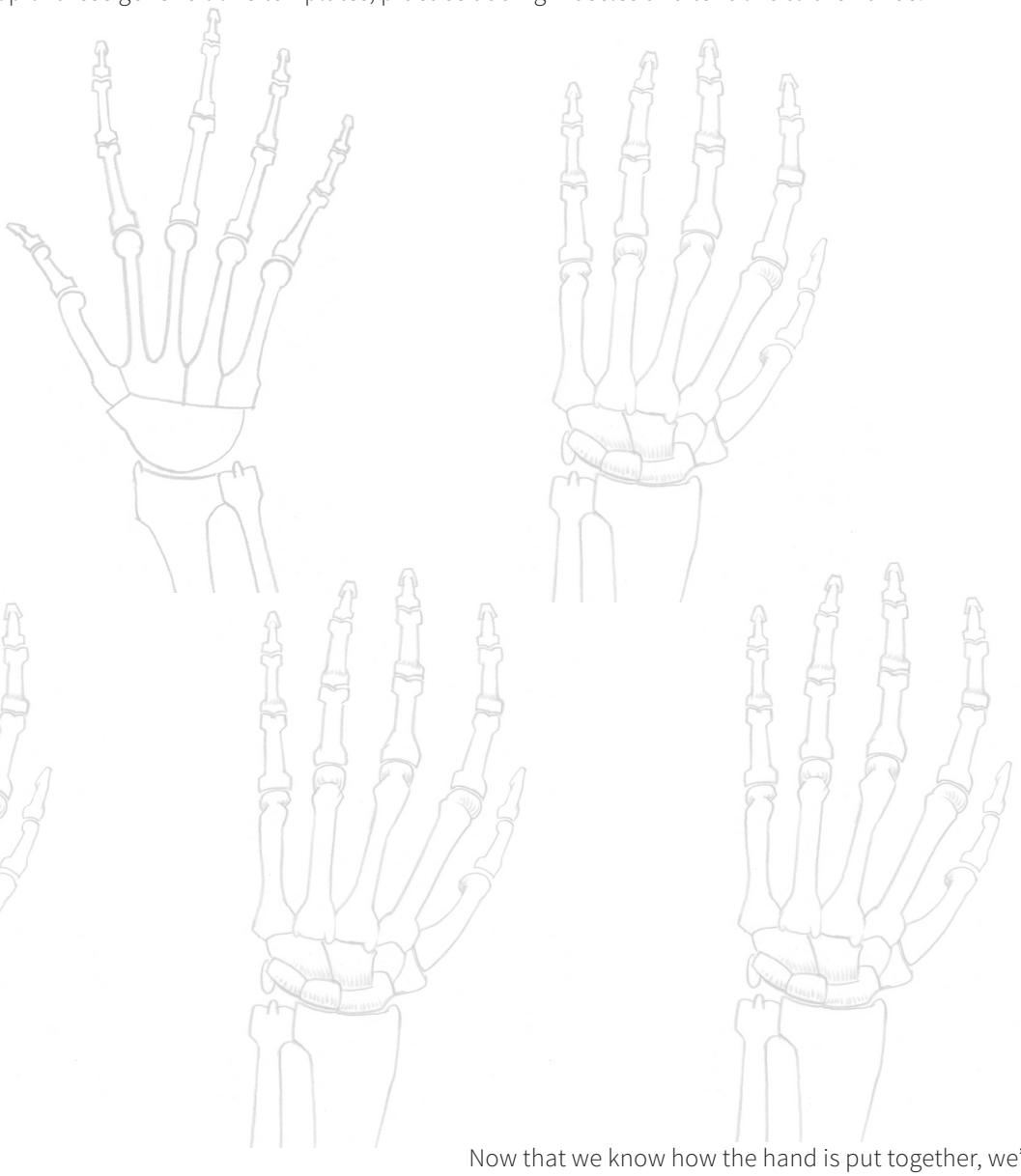


The tendons extend from the forearm to the fingertips and cross over the muscles in the palm, as well as between the interosseous muscles on the top of the hand.

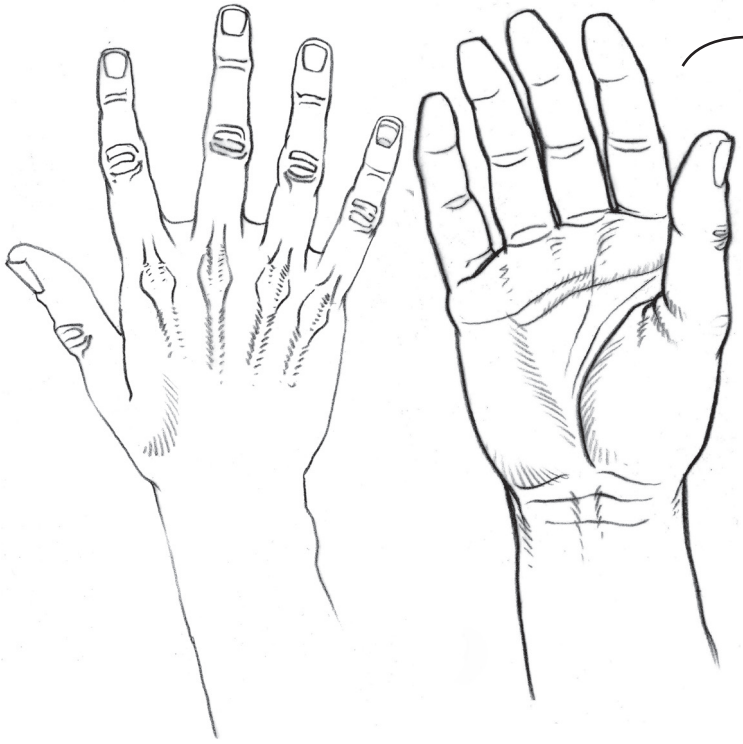


Over the top of these generic bone templates, practice adding muscles and tendons to the hands.

Draw the muscles as teardrop shapes at first, and then divide the teardrop shapes into two muscles each.

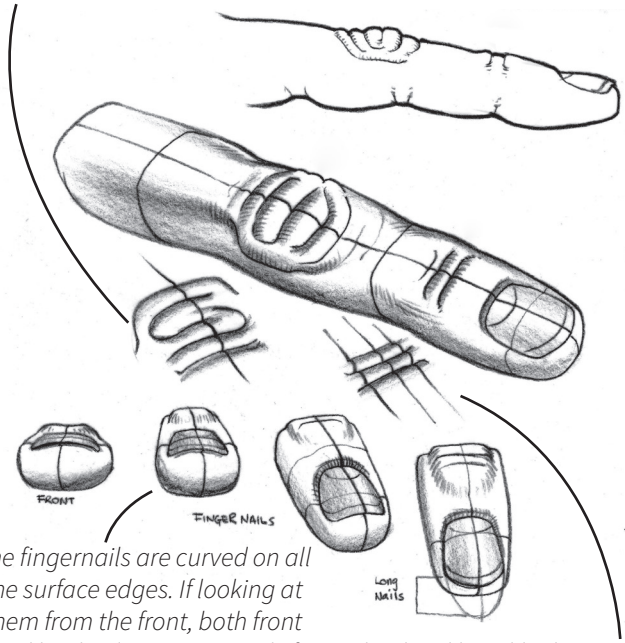


Now that we know how the hand is put together, we're going to draw the skin and fingernails, and then learn how to design the creases in the hand…



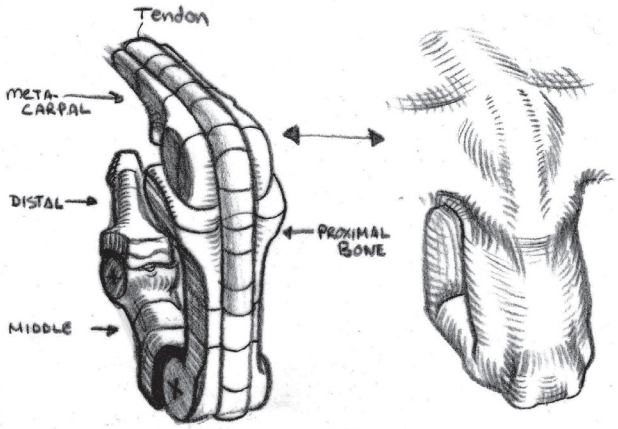
When drawing the hand fleshed over, there are several folds in the skin at the knuckles and in the palm. The fingernails are also interesting shapes, and they are great design tools to help us draw the perspective of the fingers on the hands.

On the top of the fingers, the proximal knuckle is a series of curved interlocking lines. This knuckle bends a lot more than the other and therefore needs more skin to stretch over the bones.

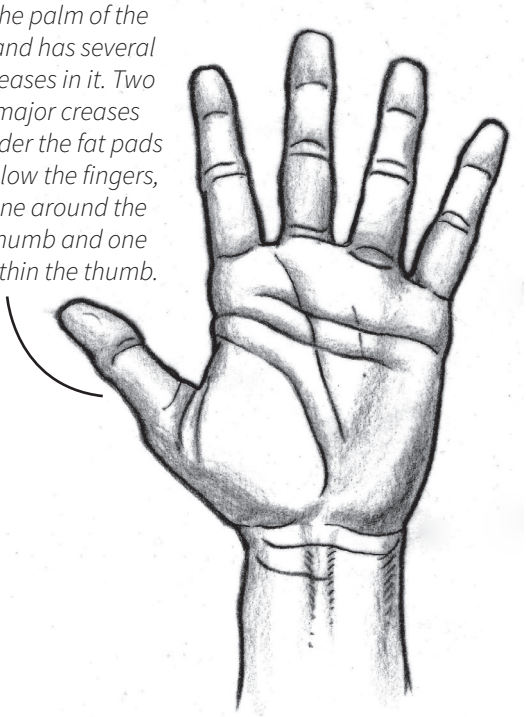


The fingernails are curved on all the surface edges. If looking at them from the front, both front and back edges are curved. If looking at them from the top-down, all four of the edges are curved, but the back is narrower and the front of the nail is wider.

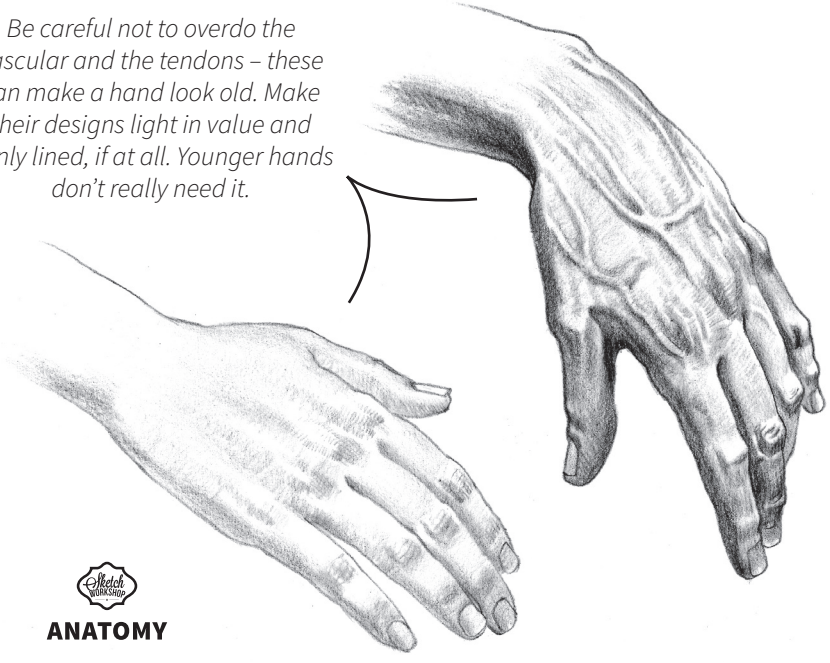
The distal knuckle doesn't bend as much. It's designed with two parallel lines for the stretching of the skin over the bones.

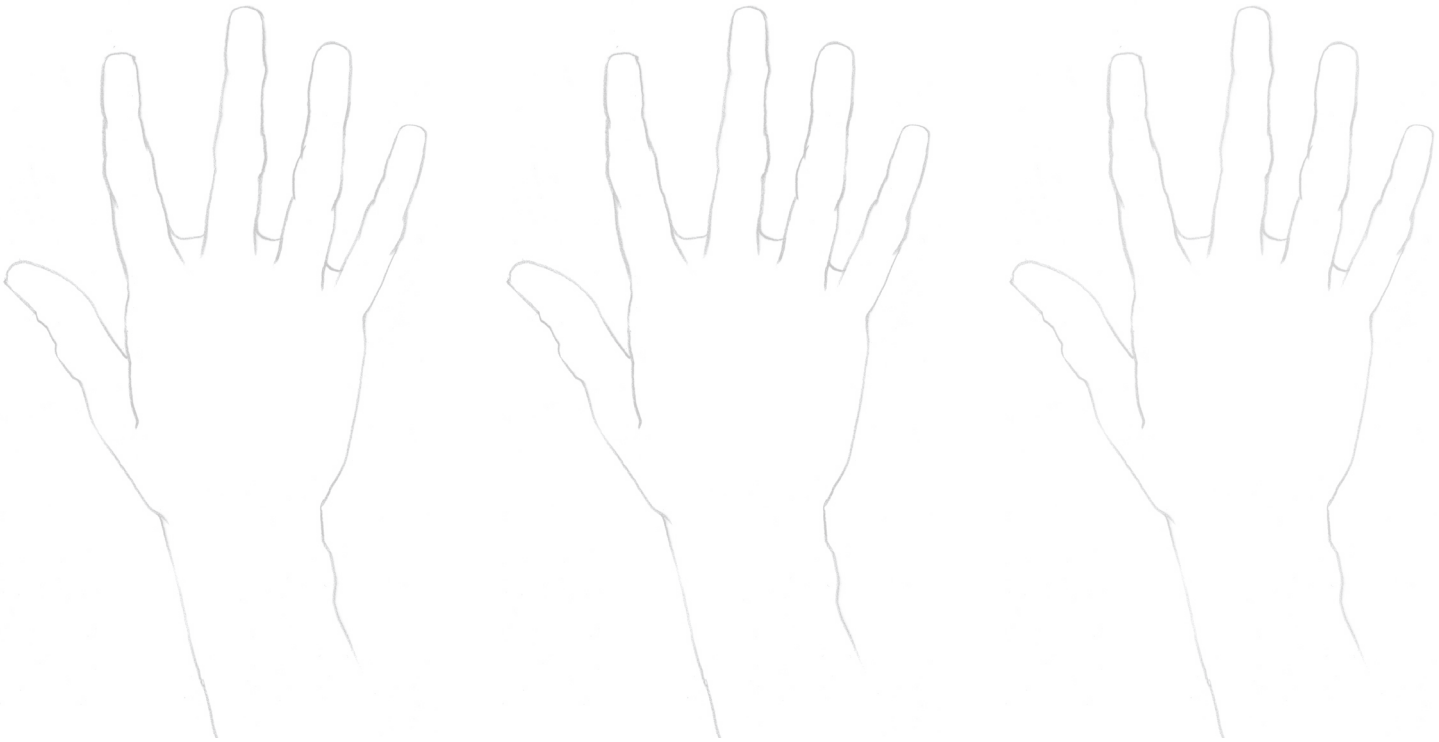


The palm of the hand has several creases in it. Two major creases under the fat pads below the fingers, one around the thumb and one within the thumb.



Be careful not to overdo the vascular and the tendons – these can make a hand look old. Make their designs light in value and thinly lined, if at all. Younger hands don't really need it.



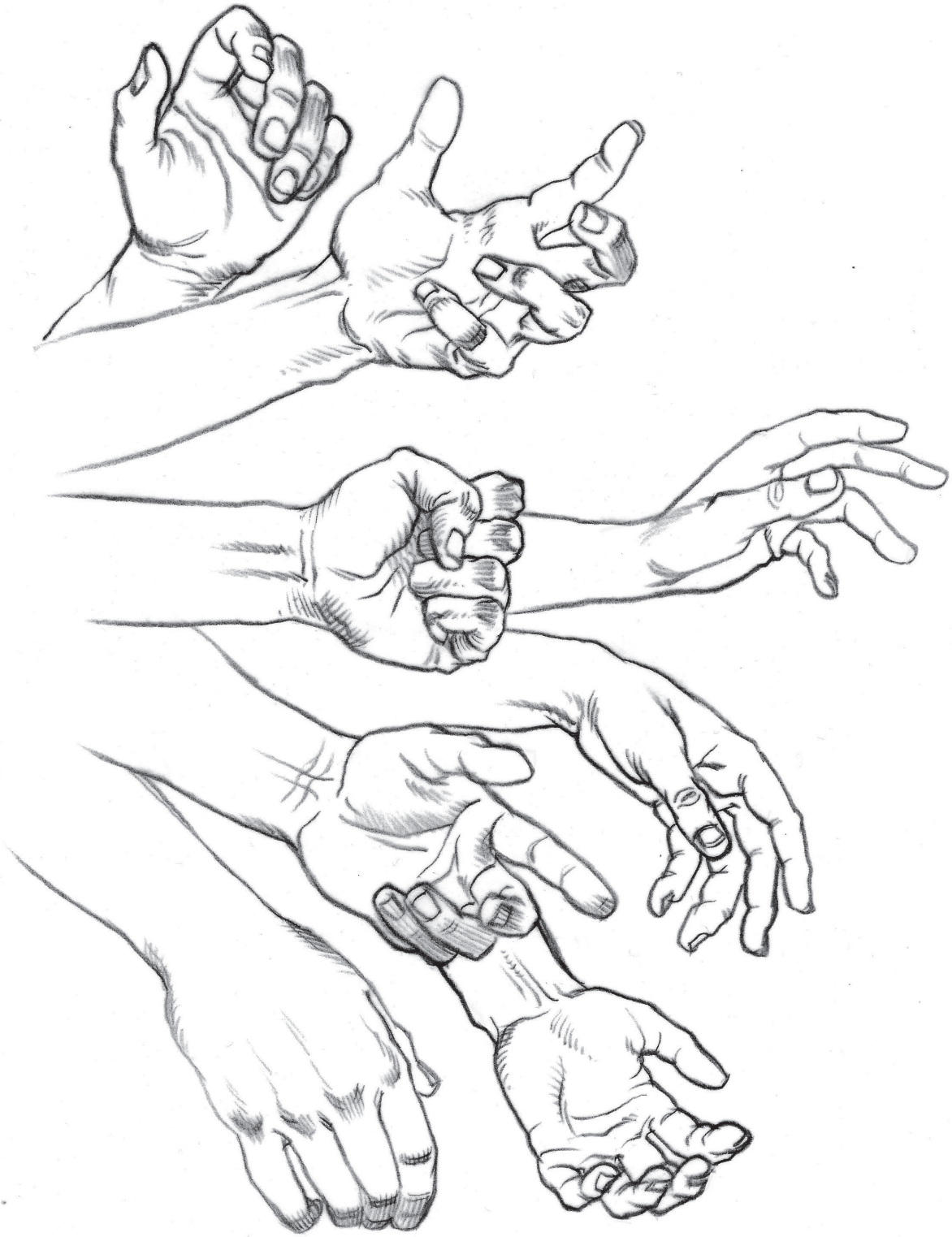


Here you can draw the bones and muscles within the hand – but do so very lightly, to help find the details in the skin.

Make sure to keep the under layers light and easy to remove, so when drawing the surface details they don't compete with the other information. You can also shade the surfaces a little, being sure to draw the tones using hatch lines that go around the form.

You can now compile everything you've learned into a final drawing exercise of a set of hands in a variety of poses to really test out your new-found knowledge…

Follow the same steps you have used for the previous exercises to articulate these more complex poses. Remember to work one step at a time and to solve the step entirely before moving on to the next one.



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Now that you've practiced every step in the process of drawing hands, and solved some complex poses, you can begin from scratch using a raw template for you to test your skills. You can use the original to go back to and look at how each of the gestures were solved, if you need to. Also try inventing your own lighting patterns. To do this, photograph your hand under interesting lighting scenarios to come up with some dramatically different designs. Try all types of lighting: from above, from below, the side or front. Don't forget: practice makes perfect.

Learn to capture expressions

Play with expressions using shading techniques to build up form and volume

The Tutor

Matt Smith
Teacher/Illustrator
www.mattksmith.blogspot.com

When building up the lights and half-tones, I like to sculpt around the form. Having a structured template helps to decide which direction your marks should follow.

With the puzzled face, notice how the eyebrows pull up to create the wrinkles in the forehead. For the shadowed areas, have the marks go along *the form. The half-tones should go* across *the form.*

As you build up your values, you want to be aware of your edges. There are four main edges: soft, firm, hard and lost (where the edge is so soft it loses definition).

Build up your dark values first and then work in the half-tone and light areas. Generally, you will never find a dark value in a light value area.

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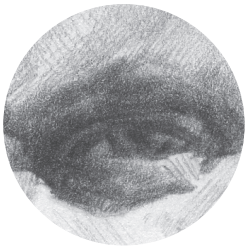
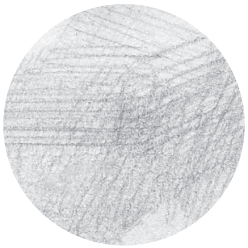
When you are ready to begin your drawing, start by sketching out a basic template. You can begin by sketching out a circle and adding the jaw or by sketching the basic shape that the head makes up. Next, add the center line and divide the head into three sections: chin to nose, nose to brow, and brow to hairline. These guides will prevent your drawing from becoming lopsided. Once the template is satisfactory, begin to sketch in the shadow patterns (shapes). When the shadow shapes look fine, fill it in cleanly.

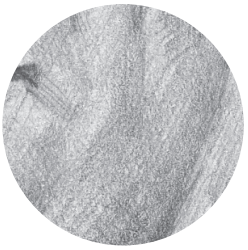
Here is a symmetrical angry face – although not all angry faces are symmetrical, of course. On an angry face, the features are generally pulled into the center, making the face look more menacing. A sad face on the other hand, for example, would be rounder and also droopier with the inside eyebrows pulled upward in the opposite direction of an angry face.



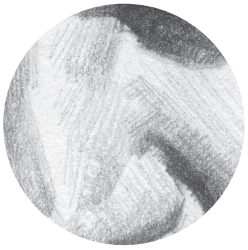
Follow the forms with your pencil lines to describe muscle movement and definition.



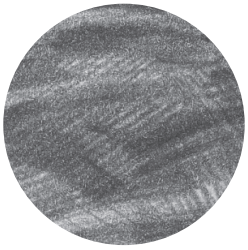
Cross-hatching is a fantastic way to build up areas of shade without using a heavier hand.



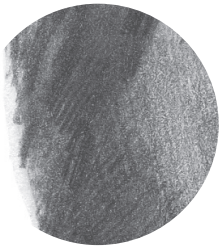
Mid-tones will rarely have any highlights on them so use light pencil work to build up shade.



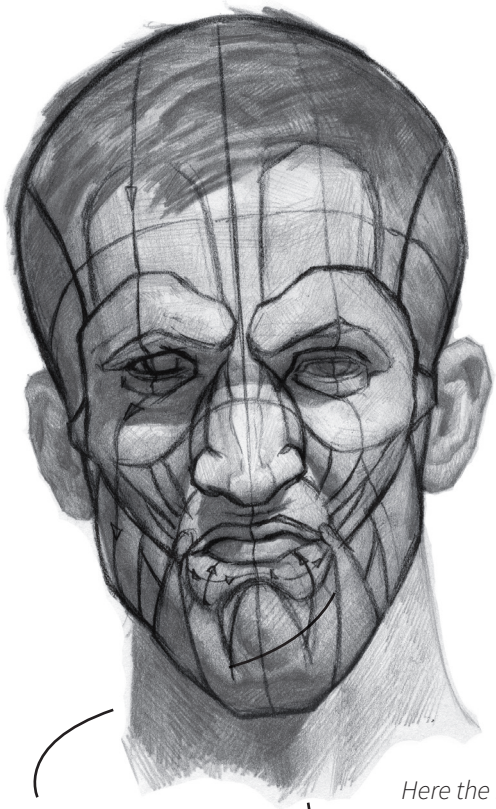
A great way to pull out highlights in a drawing is to use an eraser to dab the paper.



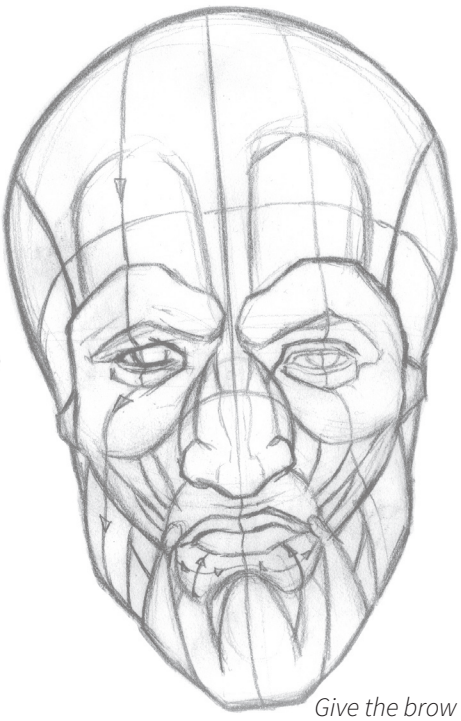
Build up line work to create shadows. Use soft 6B and 8B pencils with a light touch.



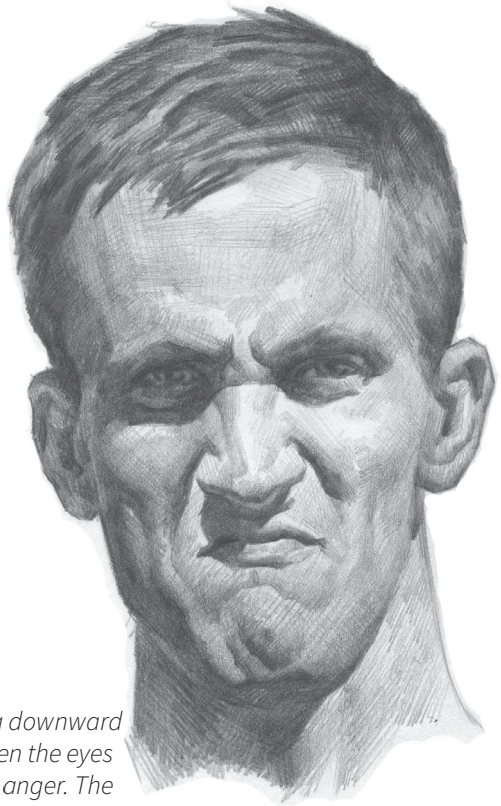
Don't press too hard. You don't want your paper to look shiny, so keep strokes light.



Since the muscles are active in this facial expression, there are firmer edges.



Here the features are sharp – your cross-hatching should capture the feel of the features being pulled in. Shadows will be less soft, as the muscles are really being pulled.



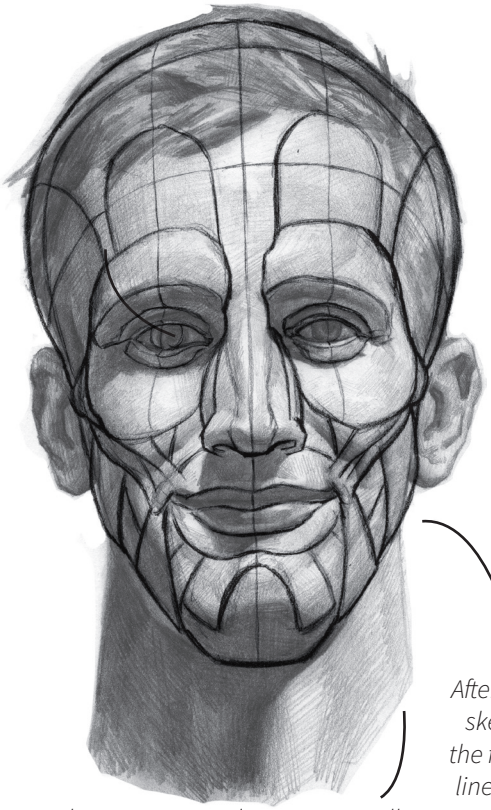
Give the brow a downward rhythm between the eyes to capture the anger. The mouth is pushed up as well.

Fill in the details and shadows of these templates to try and get the hang of your shading techniques.

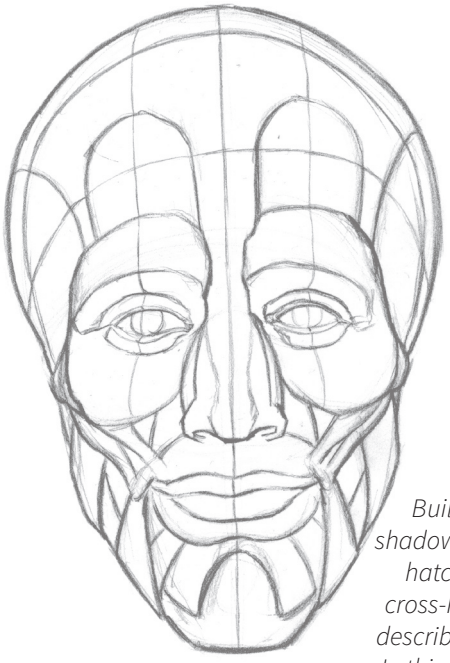
Prioritise which areas need the most shading and detail: key features like the eyes and mouth convey most of the expression, so make sure you give them enough attention.

We'll tackle a happy face and a surprised face in our next exercise…

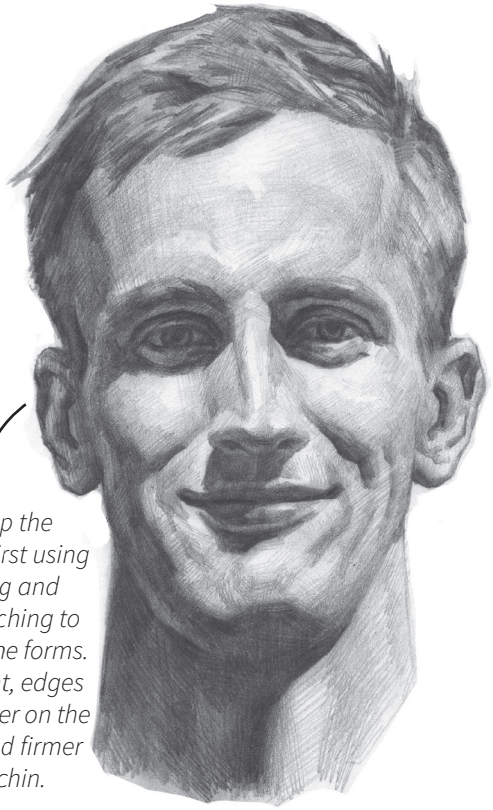
These structural drawings are accompanied by their anatomical equivalent. Knowing the anatomy is helpful when figuring out what is going on beneath the skin, but isn't necessary when sketching a template.



A happy, surprised expression will have more of a roundish feel to the features. Rounder features tend to be more pleasing than angular ones.

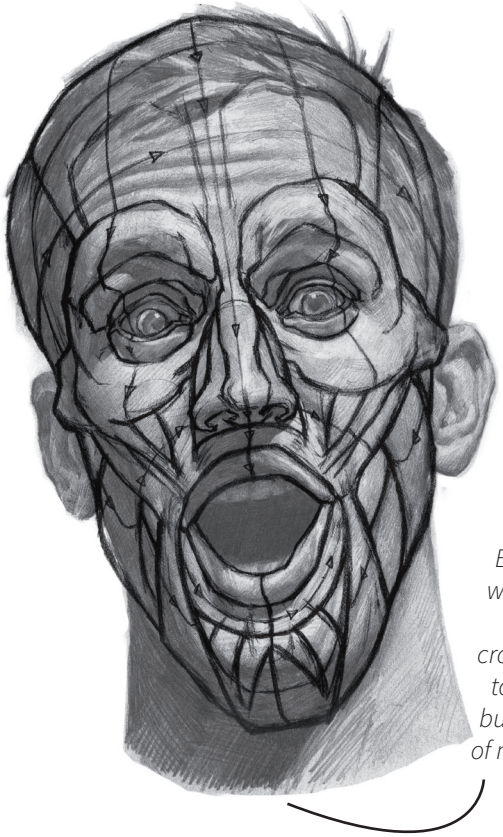


After I have a basic template sketched in, I draw across the form to keep the features lined up. If you sketch in the anatomy, keep it light.

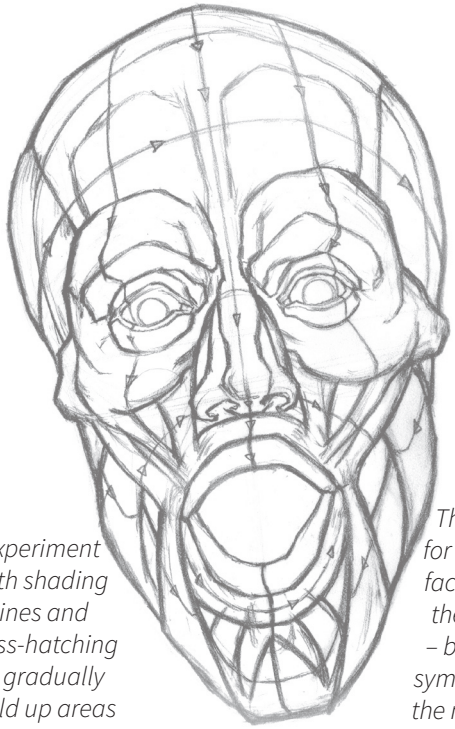


Build up the shadows first using hatching and cross-hatching to describe the forms. In this light, edges will be softer on the cheeks and firmer in the chin.

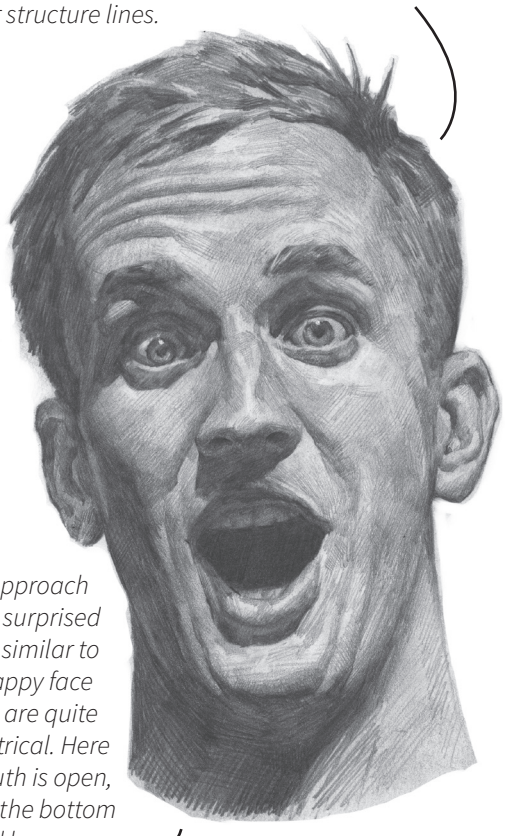
Follow the same process as before. Here there are wrinkles on the forehead created by the eyes opened wide. Hatching should follow your structure lines.



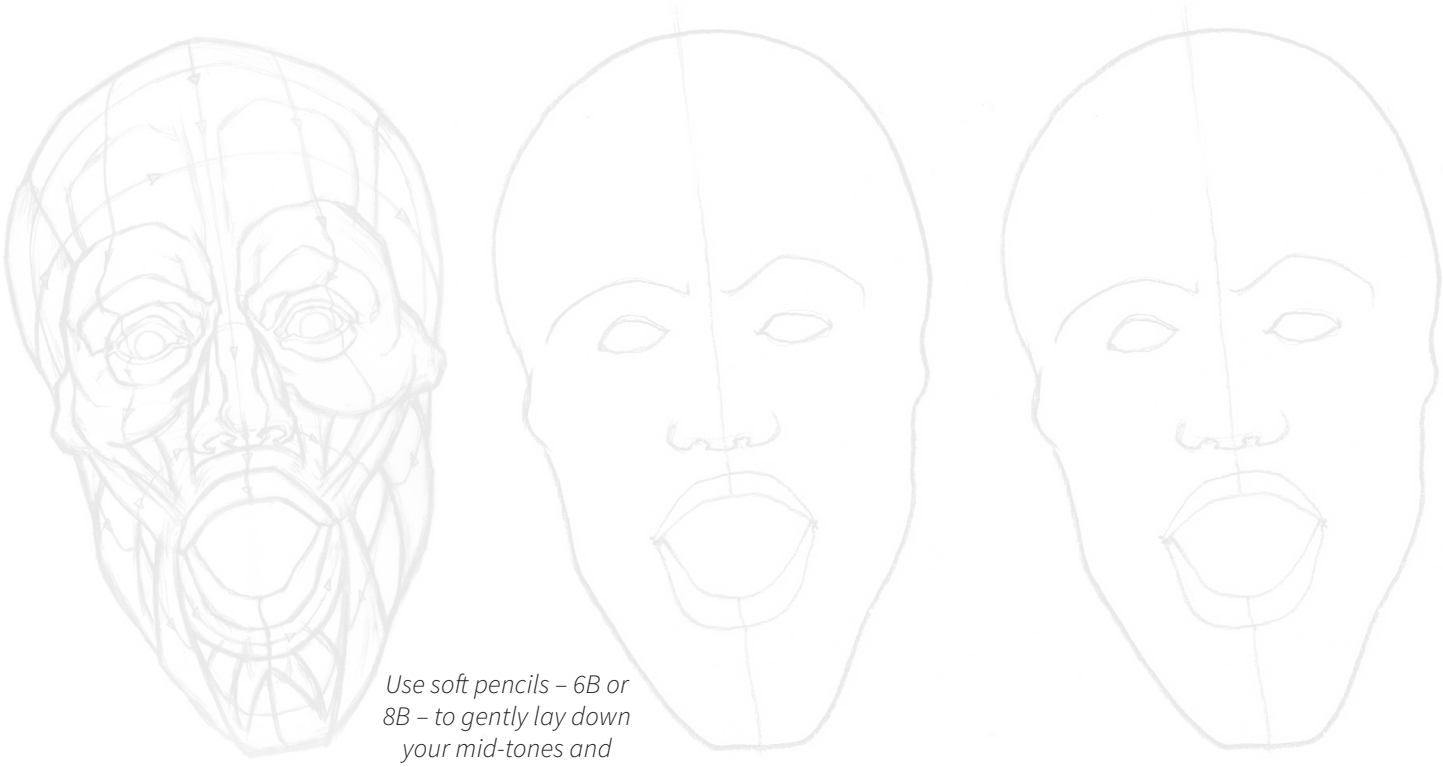
Experiment with shading lines and cross-hatching to gradually build up areas of mid-tone and shadow.



The approach for the surprised face is similar to the happy face – both are quite symmetrical. Here the mouth is open, making the bottom third larger.



Use these templates to practice building up and shading the expression and facial muscles, using the references above. Don't forget to use shading lines and cross-hatching techniques to build up mid-tones and shadow.



Use soft pencils – 6B or 8B – to gently lay down your mid-tones and shadows, and erase away highlights using a sharp-tipped eraser. You can also knead a putty rubber into a point.

It's important to understand underlying bones and muscles, but don't let them overwhelm your shading. Study your face in a mirror to see which areas are prominent.

You've now learned how to portray anger, happiness and surprise, looking at how different emotions affect the facial muscles. We'll tackle a more complex expression for our final drawing…

Shade and complete this final image on the template below. The major features are already in place to help you. Don't forget to put all of your previous shading experience into practice, using soft graded pencils to gently build up shadows, and carefully erasing away highlights for pleasing effects.

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Creating your own template is straightforward if you begin with the shape of the skull. Once the outline of the head is in place, you can situate major features like the eyes and mouth more easily. It's a common error to place the eyes much higher than they should be – they fall about halfway down the skull. Remember that the face is very mobile, and can squash and stretch much more than you'd think.

Don't be afraid to exaggerate an expression to convey what you want, as subtle details sometimes get lost once you begin shading.

Draw a complete figure in a pose

Put your skills to the test with a full-body study of a male nude

The Tutor

Matt Smith
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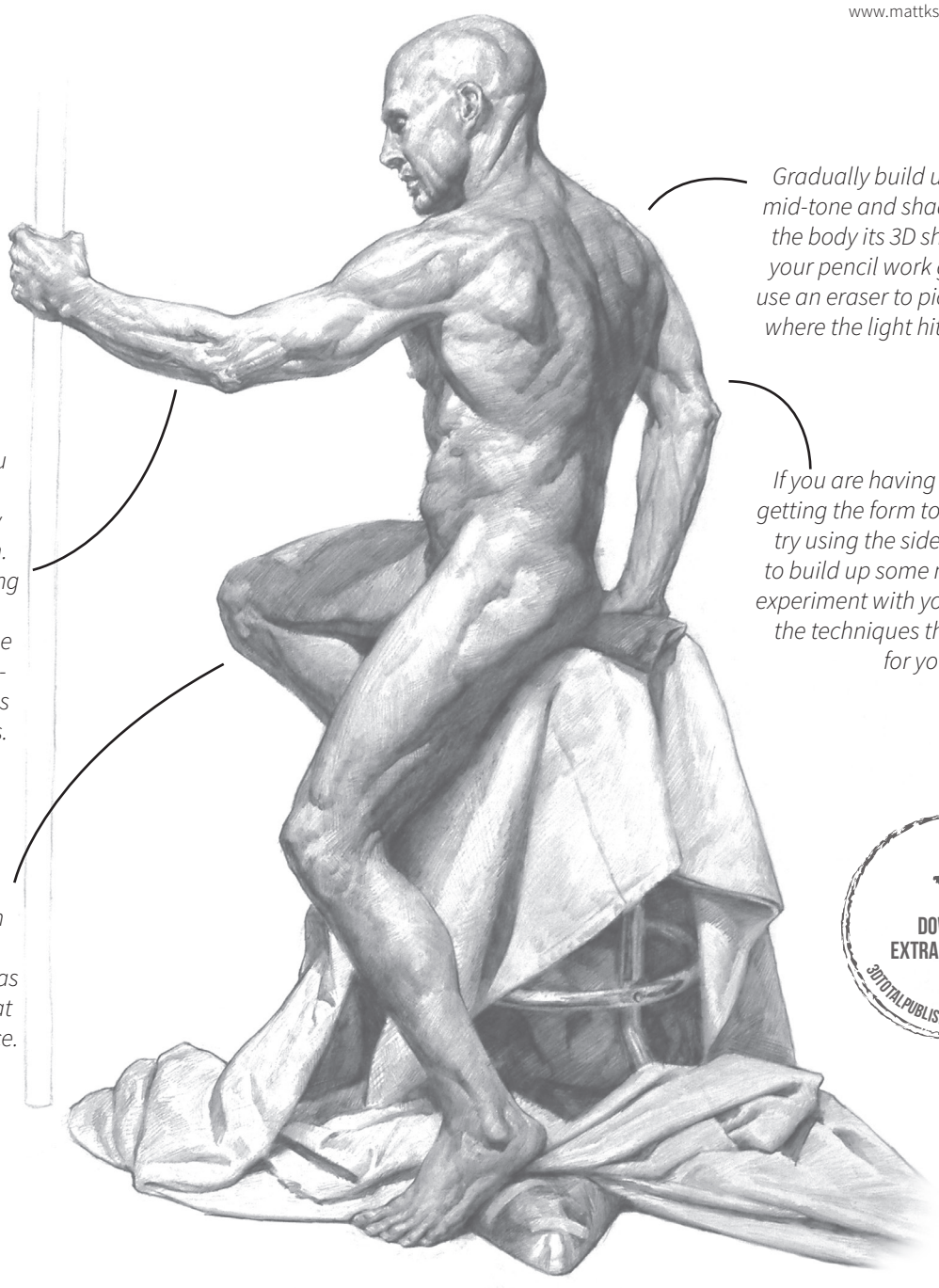

Gradually build up areas of mid-tone and shadow to give the body its 3D shape. Keep your pencil work gentle and use an eraser to pick out areas where the light hits the body.

If you are having a tough time getting the form to roll, you could try using the side of the pencil to build up some nice shading – experiment with your tools to find the techniques that work best for you.

Using shadows, you can describe the anatomy of a body to give it dimension. Think about designing interesting shapes as you work, and use hatching and cross-hatching techniques to 'sculpt' the forms.

See how the back leg here has more tone on it? To add depth to a drawing, add tonal areas to parts of the body that are further back in space.

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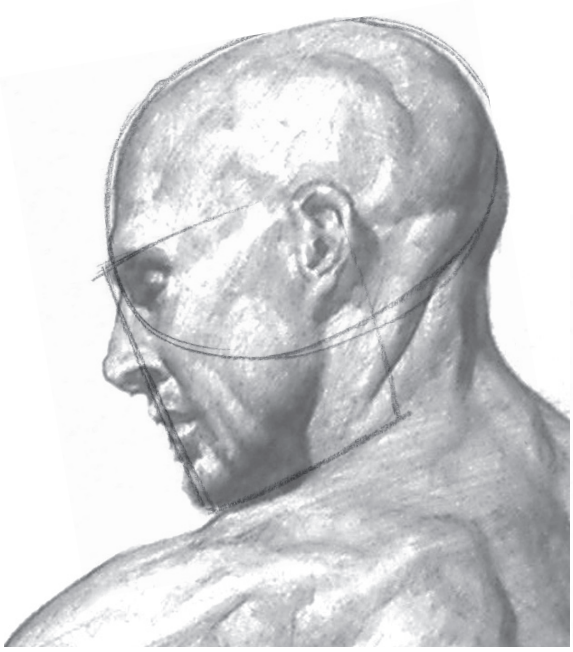
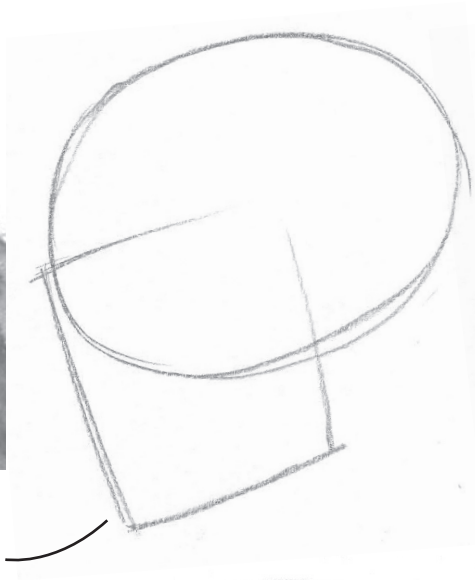
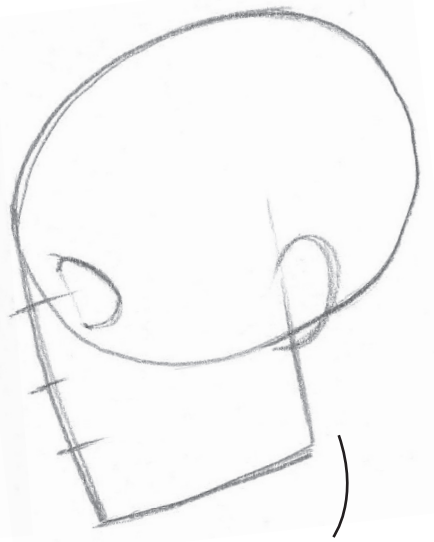
Before starting a full figure drawing, you need to analyze what's going on. Mark out the top, bottom and center of the pose, and then begin to work on the gesture of the figure to find the right angle of the shoulders, and the hips. Be sure to define the center line, running from the neck to the hips, and then the limbs. Once the gesture of a pose is established, you can build up structure, define the largest masses, and add perspective.

For the first exercise we'll look at drawing the head in profile view. A great way to do this – without getting overwhelmed by all the subtle details – is to establish the basics before anything else. All the major features of a head can be broken down into simple shapes. So we'll begin by learning this technique.



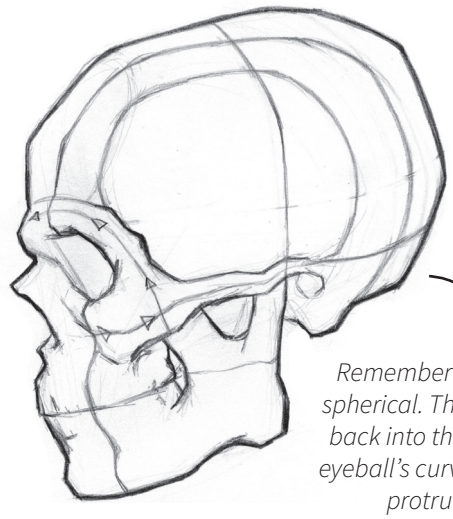


If you're drawing the face from the front, the cranium is a circle, but in profile it's a much longer oval – the brain's a large organ and has to fit somewhere.



Mark out where major features will be in advance. The eyes come halfway down the skull, and the bottom of the nose falls halfway between the brows and end of the chin.

Don't worry about extraneous details like eyebrows and hair yet. Plan all the big landmarks first. It's much easier to revise mistakes now than after you've added shading and details.



Remember that the eyeballs are spherical. The eye sockets are sunk back into the skull, but part of the eyeball's curved surface will always protrude from the face

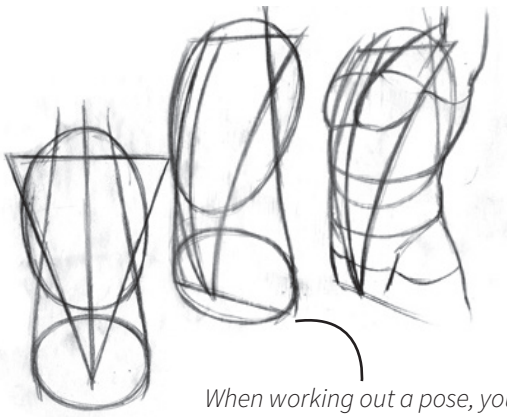
The lips are another feature that protrude slightly from the surface of the face. Even if someone only has thin lips, they won't lie totally flat against the teeth of the skull.

Build upon these templates to add basic features. For now, focus on proportions and anatomy rather than shading.

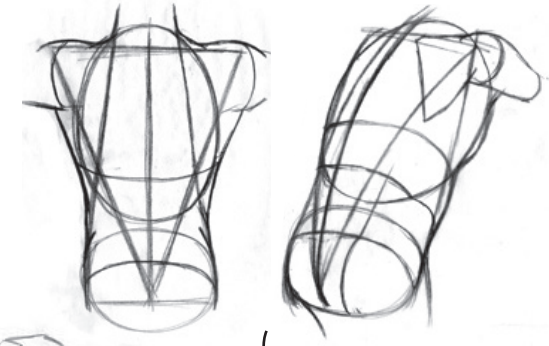
A profile view of the head can be broken down into an oval for the cranium and a rectangle to mark out the line of the face and box shape of the jaw. When you're confident with the shapes, start practicing shading.

A head has only limited use without a body, so the next exercise will show you how to build a full body from simple shapes…

Building a template for the body looks complicated, but it really isn't that difficult. It is one of the most important stages to get right in figure drawing, though, as a bad composition will lead to an ugly drawing. This page shows how you can carefully build up parts of the body using simple shapes. Once you understand the basic shapes that all bodies are built up from, you'll be able to depict figures in any pose. For this exercise, though, we'll focus on getting one pose right, and also getting the muscles filled in.

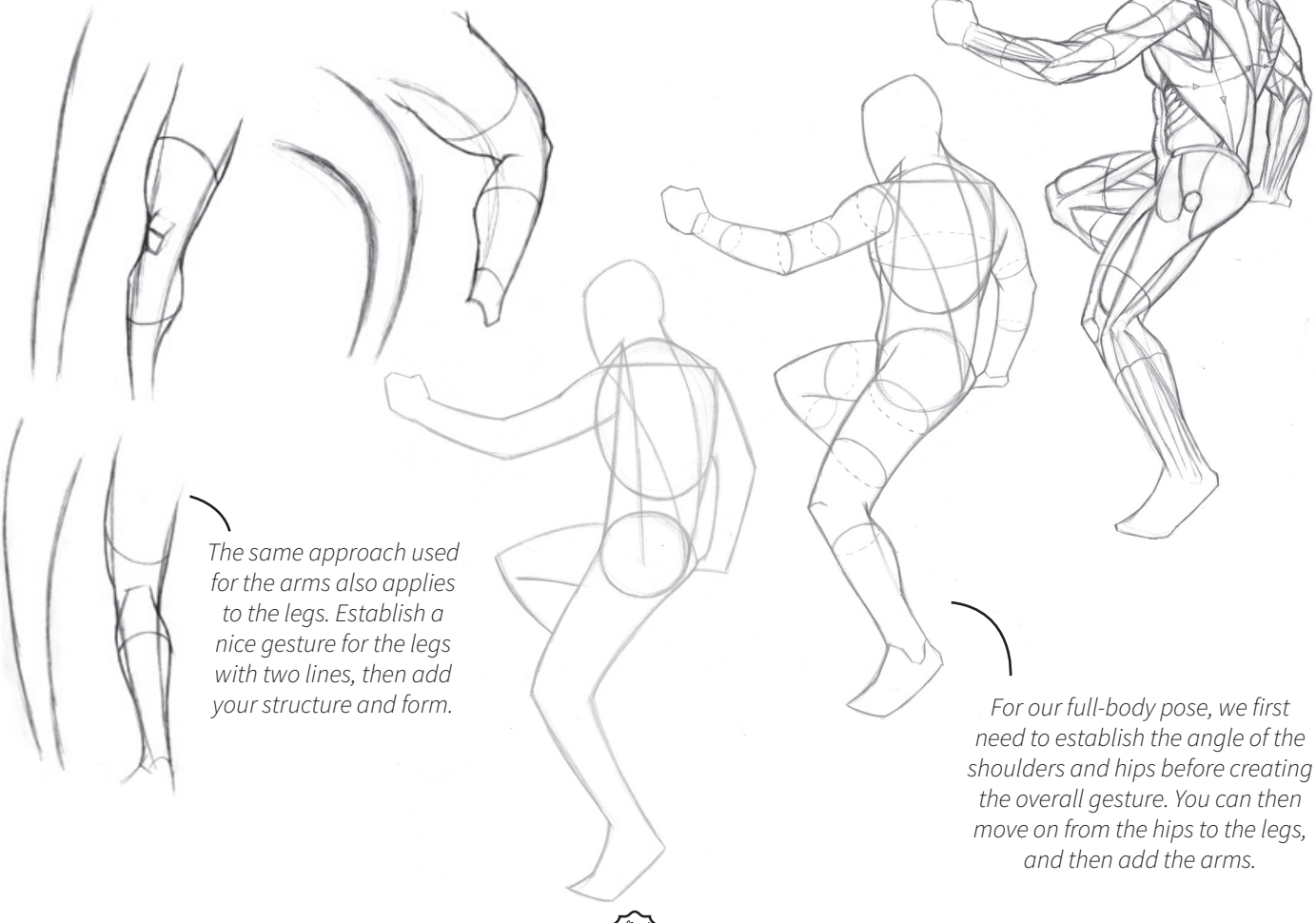


When working out a pose, you first need to establish the angle of the hips and shoulders. Next are the gesture lines from the shoulders to crotch, and neck to hips. Then we add the rib cage and pelvis.



The back of a figure is the same as the front when it comes to the key shapes. However, instead of lines meeting at the crotch, they converge at the top of the buttocks.

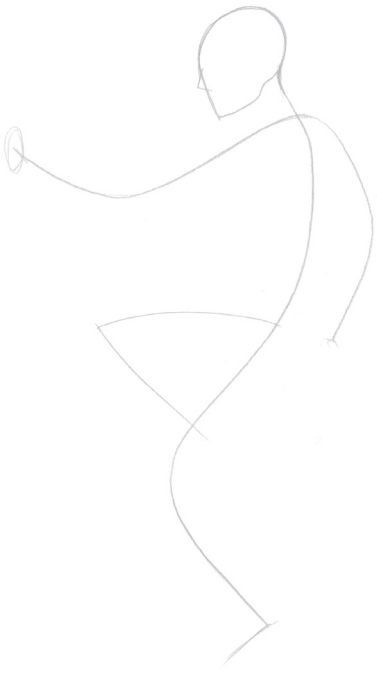
An arm can be depicted very easily with two simple gesture lines to establish a nice flow. You can then add structure and form.

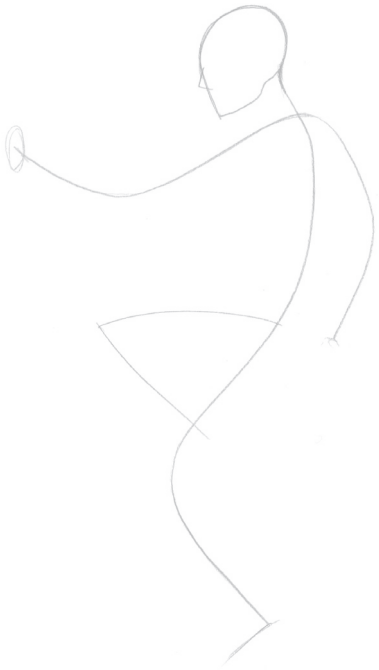


The same approach used for the arms also applies to the legs. Establish a nice gesture for the legs with two lines, then add your structure and form.

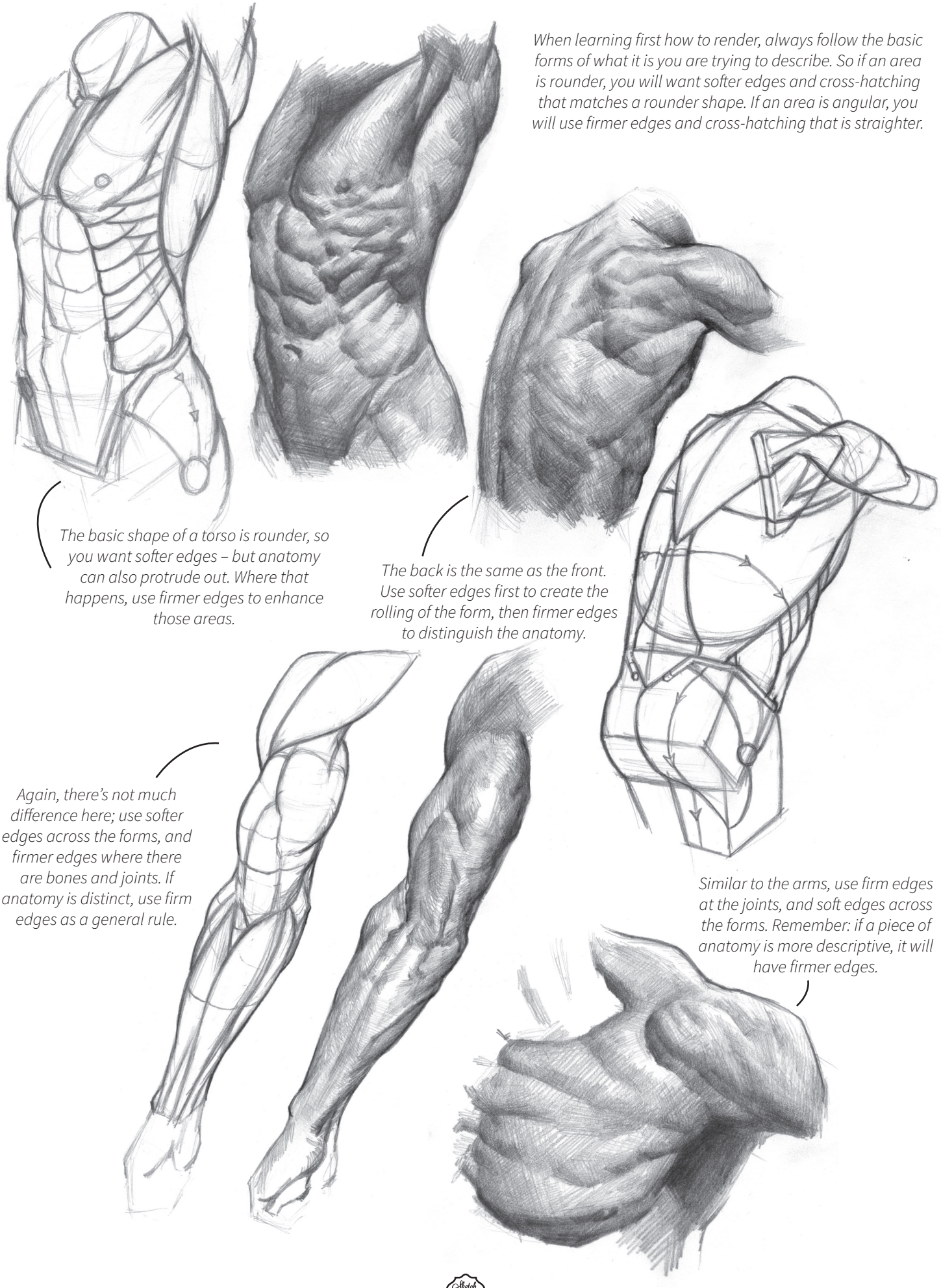
For our full-body pose, we first need to establish the angle of the shoulders and hips before creating the overall gesture. You can then move on from the hips to the legs, and then add the arms.

Use these templates as a base to build up the shapes and musculature of the full-body pose, using the references above as a guide.





Once you understand where the muscles and major landmarks of the body are, you can begin shading to get a more complete image. We'll do that next…



When learning first how to render, always follow the basic forms of what it is you are trying to describe. So if an area is rounder, you will want softer edges and cross-hatching that matches a rounder shape. If an area is angular, you will use firmer edges and cross-hatching that is straighter.

The basic shape of a torso is rounder, so you want softer edges – but anatomy can also protrude out. Where that happens, use firmer edges to enhance those areas.

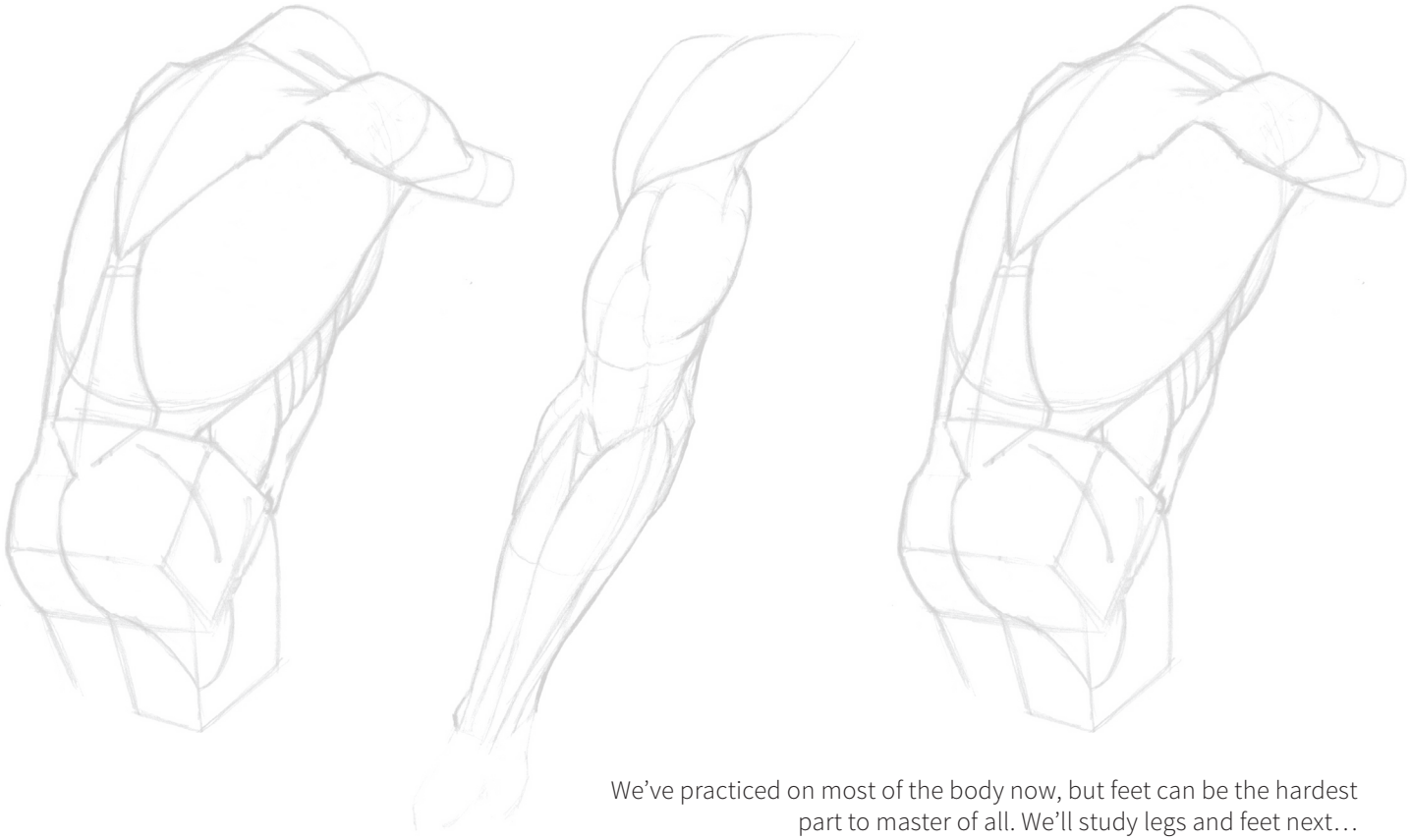
The back is the same as the front. Use softer edges first to create the rolling of the form, then firmer edges to distinguish the anatomy.

Again, there's not much difference here; use softer edges across the forms, and firmer edges where there are bones and joints. If anatomy is distinct, use firm edges as a general rule.

Similar to the arms, use firm edges at the joints, and soft edges across the forms. Remember: if a piece of anatomy is more descriptive, it will have firmer edges.

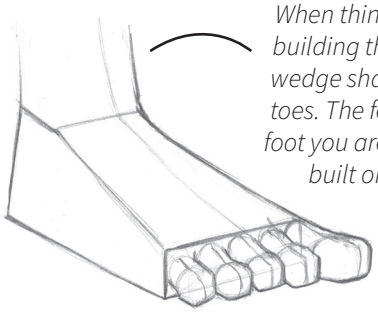
Build up the muscles on these templates and fill in the shading for the body parts, bearing in mind their underlying skeletal and muscular structure and using the references above as a guide.

Start shading lightly and build up to the darkest areas – it's much easier than working in reverse, although an eraser can be valuable for adding bright highlights, too.



We've practiced on most of the body now, but feet can be the hardest part to master of all. We'll study legs and feet next…

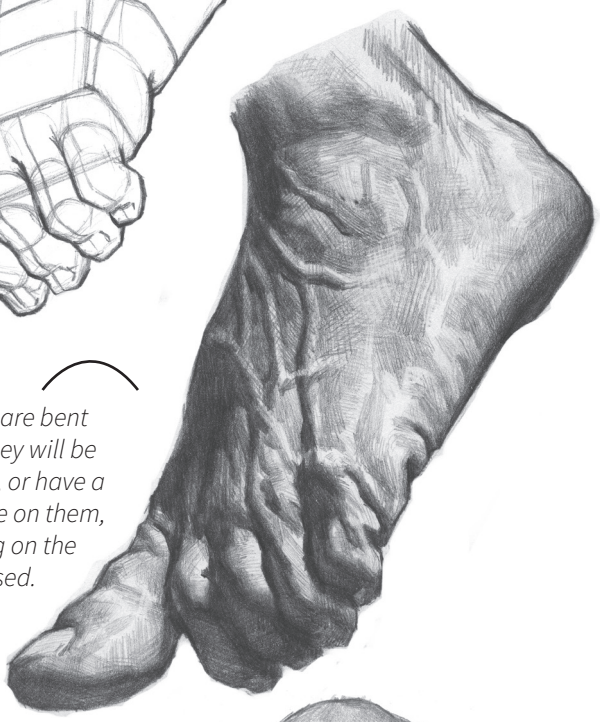
When rendering feet, something you want to be aware of is that the basic shape of a foot is a flat wedge. You will want your marks to replicate that, but there is always underlying anatomy that will break the shapes up, making for something that is more unique than a wedge shape.



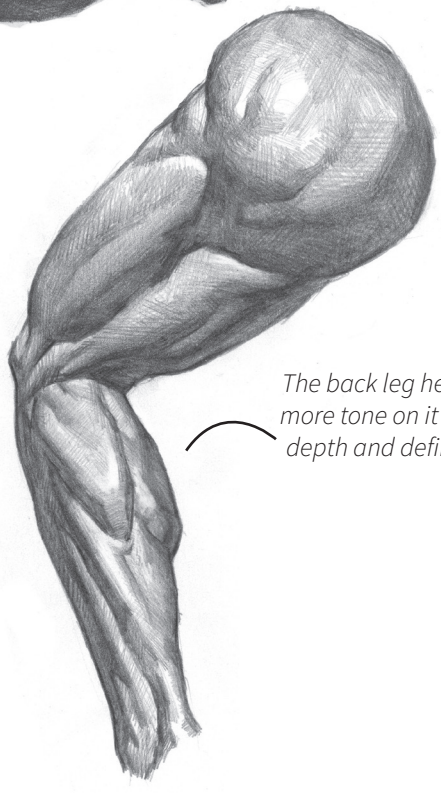
When thinking about feet, start building them up from a simple wedge shape, and then add the toes. The features of the specific foot you are drawing can then be built on the foundations.

A foot with bent toes is the same. Just be aware that toes are now bent down and the foot angled up, in a pose like this one.

On the side of the foot, your marks will go up along the side. On the top plane of the foot, your marks will go across the plane.



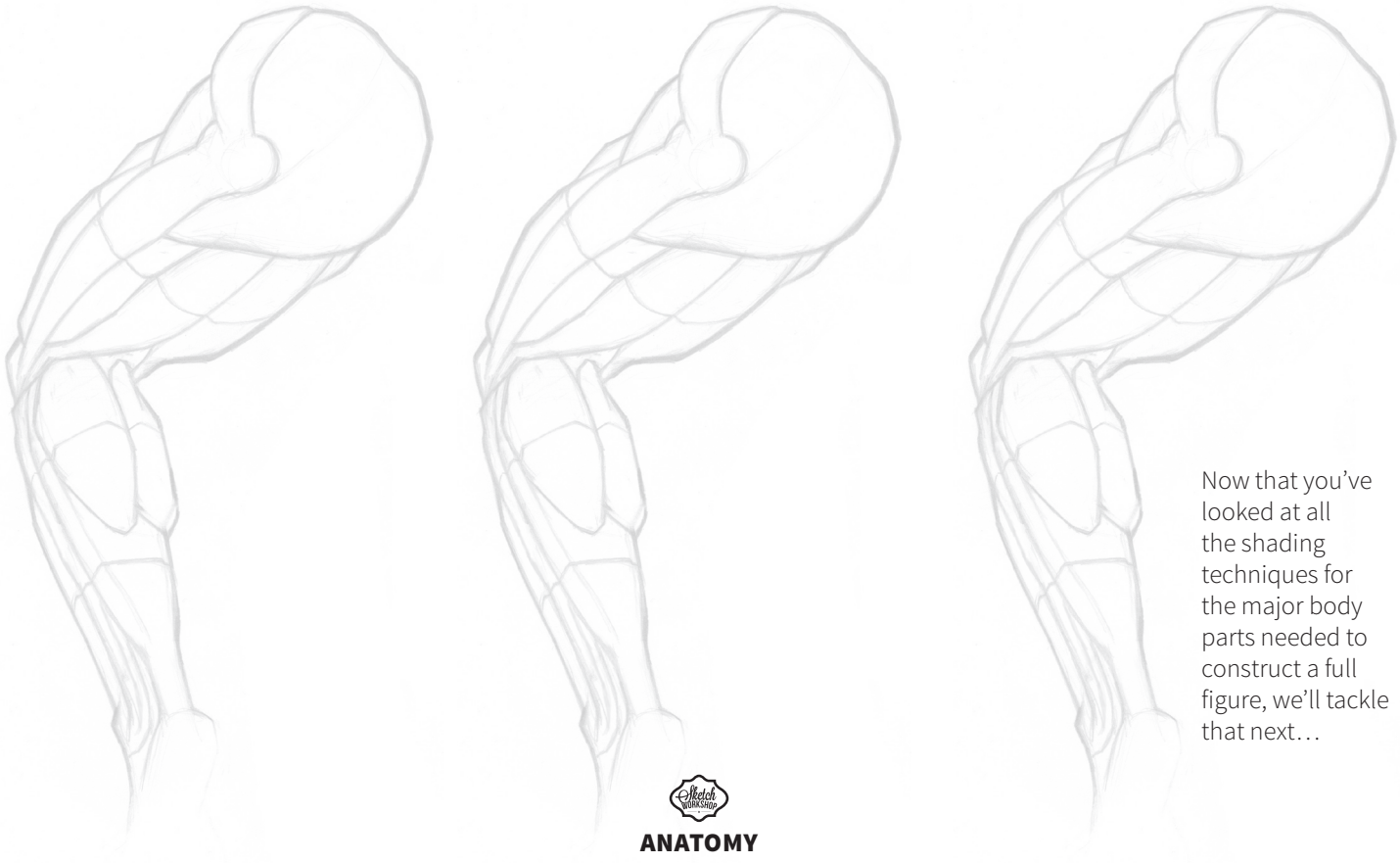
The toes are bent here so they will be in shadow, or have a darker tone on them, depending on the lighting used.



The back leg here has more tone on it to add depth and definition.

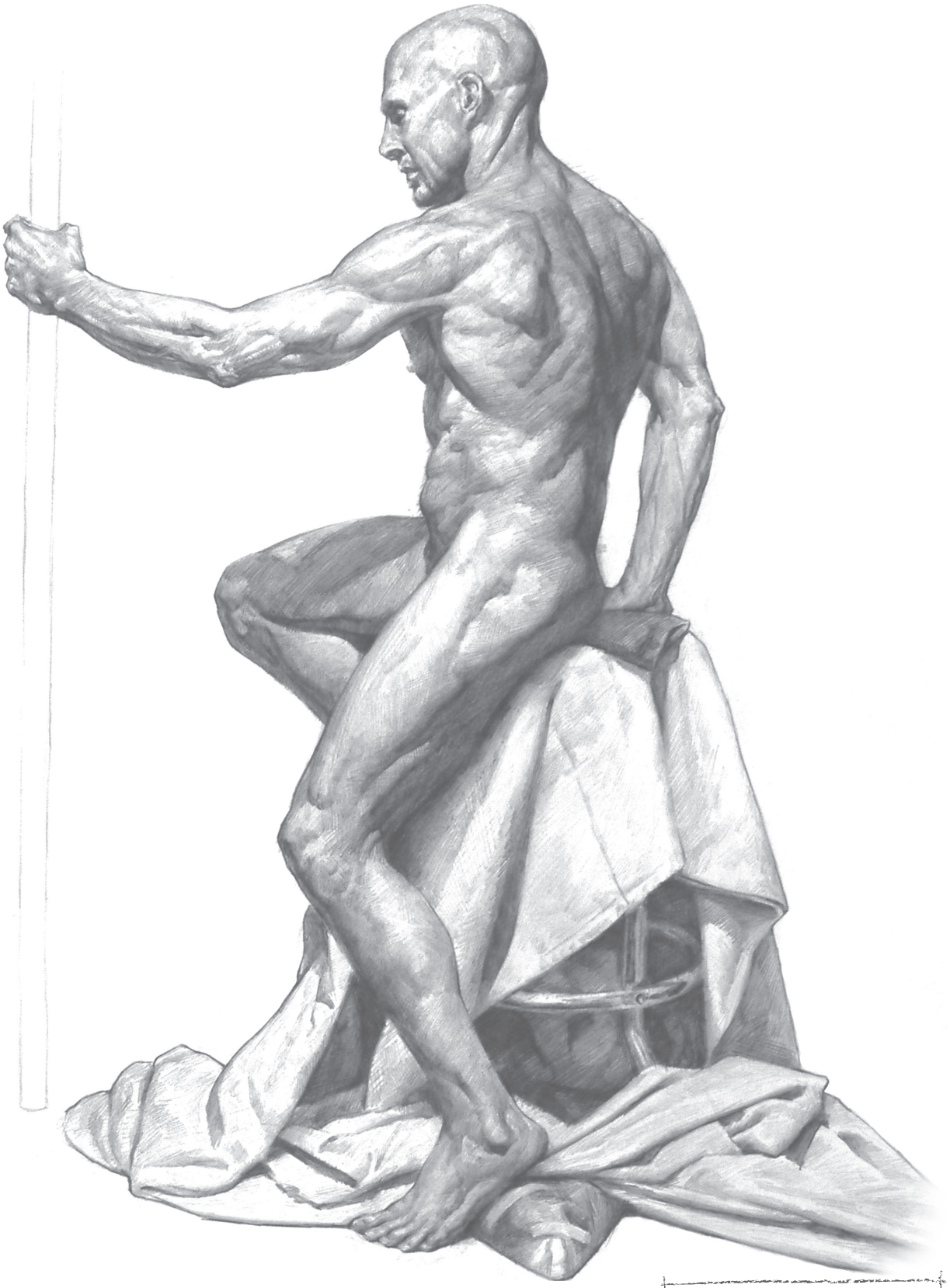
Practice shading these feet and legs, using the techniques you've learned so far and the references above as a guide.

Feet are surprisingly subtle, so it's easy to get them wrong. Remember that you're shading a wedge shape for the foot, and that the toes have joints that create bumps and shadows.



Now that you've looked at all the shading techniques for the major body parts needed to construct a full figure, we'll tackle that next…

Fill in the anatomical details using the skills you've learned so far and add shading to the template below. Outlines have been provided to get you started. You'll need to build up form and definition first, and then you can put your new-found shading techniques to the test.



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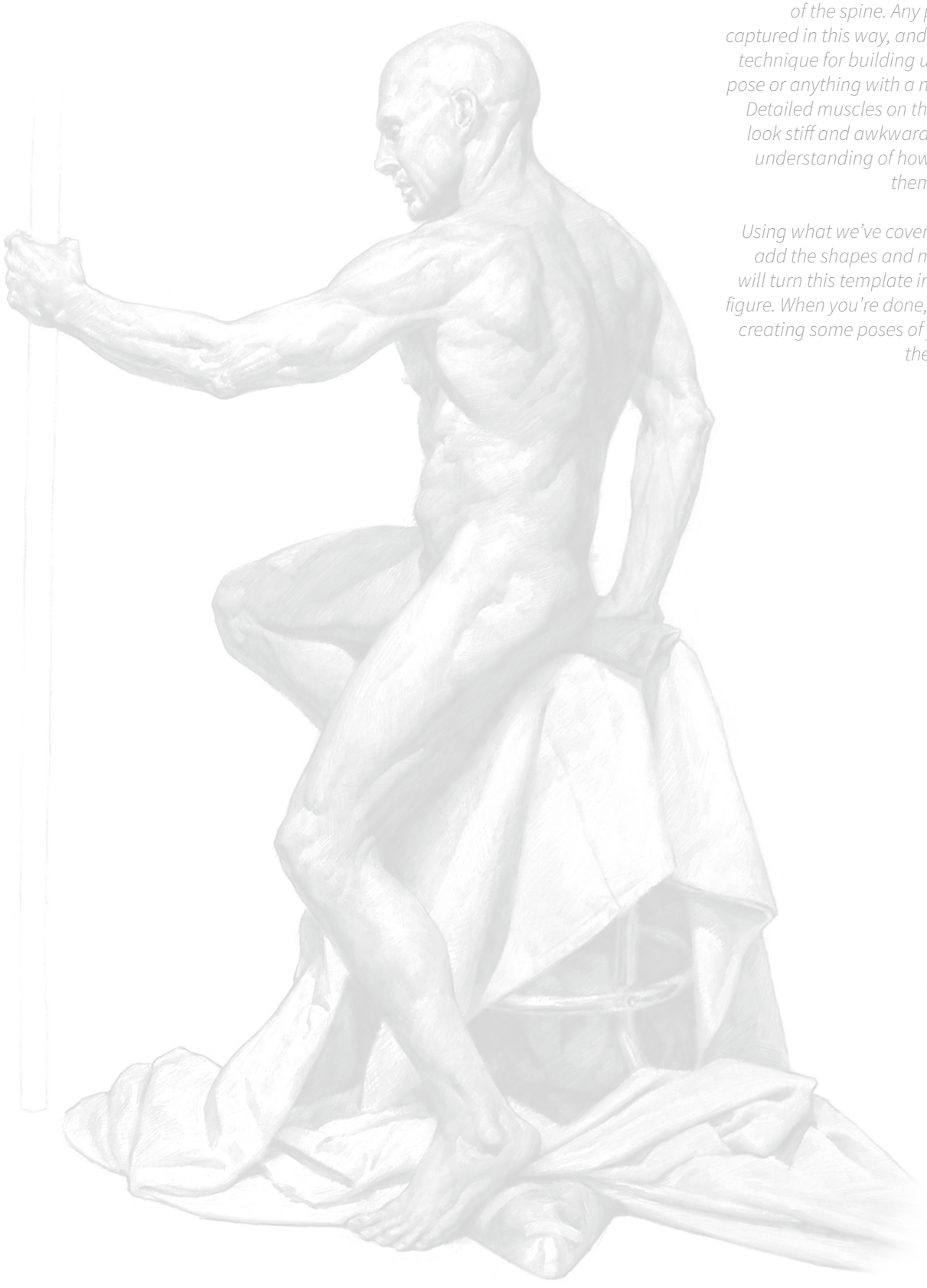
The simple gesture sketch below conveys the essence of the pose, based around the curved position of the spine. Any pose can be captured in this way, and it's a useful technique for building up an action pose or anything with a natural flow. Detailed muscles on their own can look stiff and awkward without an understanding of how to position them gracefully.

Using what we've covered, you can add the shapes and muscles that will turn this template into a proper figure. When you're done, you can try creating some poses of your own in the same way.



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