Drawing the Human Face

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DRAWING A REALISTIC HEAD
Bringing Faces Alive

By Paul Heaston

Heads and faces are some of the trickiest things to draw—so let’s focus specifically on those parts. Because we spend all day looking at them, we are very aware when something is a little off in a drawing or painting.

While lots of repetition and direct observation are the most important things you can do to sharpen your skills, here are some useful tips to keep in mind as you practice drawing a head.

1. KNOW YOUR PROPORTIONS.
Heads are not perfect circles, and they are not perfect ovals either. You can think of them as kind of egg-shaped, with the tapered end toward the bottom. Of course this varies depending on the actual person and the angle you are seeing them from. But let’s start with an egg...

2. REFINE THE JAWLINE.
If you are drawing a woman, this egg shape might do well to describe her jawline, but let’s say we’re drawing a man with a slightly more angular jaw, and flatter chin. Let’s bring the jawline out.
3. WHERE TO PLACE THE EYES?

Well, we have a tendency to think the eyes are closer to the top of the head than the bottom, because they are the highest facial feature. But that’s not really the case.

As you can see, the eyes are just about halfway between the bottom of the jaw and the top of the head. There is a lot of head above the eyes, as any of us with a receding hairline know. But I skipped a step here—how far apart should the eyes be? How big should they be?

4. A GOOD RULE OF THUMB IS THAT THE HEAD IS ABOUT 5 EYES WIDE.

That means the gap between the eyes where the bridge of the nose is located is about the same width as the face on either side of the eyes. Like any rule of thumb, it’s important to remember this isn’t always the case, and that this applies only to drawing the face head-on in a portrait.
6. NOW LET’S PLACE THE EARS.
Locate the tops just above the eyes, and bring them down to a point almost halfway from the eyes to the bottom of the jaw. Depending on the person, the ears can stick out a lot or a little, so there’s not a good rule for that other than careful observation.
Well, what do you know, now you have a great idea about where to locate the nose!

7. ADD THE NOSE.
Noses do vary quite a bit in width, so keep that in mind. The sides of this guy’s nose extend a little past the inside corners of his eyes.

8. THE MOUTH IS A BIT TRICKIER.
Rather the mouth itself being halfway from the earlobes to the jawline, use that halfway point for the bottom lip. The width of the corners of the mouth often extend to about the location of the iris in the eyes above.

9. EYEBROW PLACEMENT.
This is another feature that varies greatly from person to person. Do keep in mind each eyebrow is generally wider than the eye below it. They also tend to be thickest toward the bridge of the nose and taper toward the sides of the face, where they often also sweep downward.
10. DON’T MAKE THE MISTAKE OF PLACING THE HAIR ON THE VERY TOP OF THE HEAD!

The hairline is typically about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way from the top of the head to the eyebrows. Or in Sir Patrick Stewart’s case, behind the top of the head.

These proportions work just as easily for a woman. Adjust the jawline to be a little more rounded, make the ears a bit smaller and the neck a little narrower and you have a pretty convincing female face.

The other cool thing about knowing your proportions is you can use them to draw a head in profile too! Just extend your proportion lines across and you have a great way to keep your head proportions consistent.
Facial features are what makes a head unique and give it character. Facial features are the cues we use to recognize the people we know, and the way we remember new faces, so they are extremely important to any effective portrait. Here are some simple tips everyone should know about drawing those facial features just right.

Let’s look at the face in front view and profile again. The blue horizontal lines serve to show how different features line up in each point of view.

This a great reference for facial proportions except for one problem—in the real world, you’re not likely to only see the face in front and profile view. More often, the face will be somewhere in between, and could be tilted up or down. We call the view of a face that is angled more or less halfway between front view and profile a three-quarters view face.

This oil self portrait I did from a mirror is a classic example of a three-quarters view face. You might have noticed many of the proportion rules for a front view face are different, particularly the relationship between the eyes, nose and mouth. Let’s look at each
of these features separately in front, profile and three-quarters view.

**EYES**

Notice on the eye in profile just how far back the eye is from the bridge of the nose. This is because our brow and the bridge of our nose protrude from the face to protect the eye. Also notice that the disc of the iris in profile is only a sliver. In the middle three-quarters view the eye, including the iris, is foreshortened, or compressed a bit from side to side. Because the eyeball itself is a sphere, the bottom and top lids wrapping around the eyeball stop more abruptly on the far side, and taper more gently on the side facing us. In all three views, you can also see very clearly how the top of the iris meets and goes under the top eyelid a bit, while the bottom contour of the iris remains visible. Remember, unless your subject is surprised, you will almost never see the entire iris.

**NOSE**

The nose is a bit trickier. The contour of the bridge of the nose is most clearly visible in profile view, a little bit in three quarters, and only softly defined in full frontal view. Value can be used to better indicate
the shape of the bridge in the more frontal views. In the profile view, notice that the walls of the nostrils meet the face much further back than the septum (the middle part between the nostrils), which meets the upper lip directly under the bridge of the nose. In three-quarters view you can start to see both nostrils. Note also that the nostrils, which we think of as being at the bottom of the nose, start a little bit higher than the actual bottom.

**LIPS**

In this person’s mouth, notice there’s a little bump at the center of the top lip. Not everyone has one this pronounced, but there is often something there. A thicker line along the bottom of this bump is a good way to indicate its volume with just line. The bottom lip is usually (but not always) thicker than the top lip, and is generally a simpler curved shape, whereas the top lip is a bit more complicated. In addition to that bump, the top lip often has a depression in the center along the top from the philtrum (that funny little divot between the nose and lips). It’s best to indicate the top of the top lip more faintly than the bottom, where a thicker line can indicate that it overhangs the bottom lip just a bit.

**EARS**

I’m only showing you two views of the ear, as the differences between a profile, a front view and a three-quarters are pretty subtle. Ears can vary quite a bit from face to face. Some people have hanging lobes, some are connected, and some have shallow depressions and ridges within the ears while others don’t. It helps to think of an ear as something like a semicircle with a ridge around the back edge, the doubles toward the bottom to becomes two ridges. The
outer ridge flattens and becomes the earlobe, while the inner ridge starts from somewhere inside and underneath the outer one and stops with a little bump above the lobe. Ears can be tricky, but with a little practice they are conquerable.

A good exercise is to try drawing your facial features individually in a mirror from different angles. How do they change as you look at them from below or above?
THE EYES HAVE IT
Tips for Drawing Realistic Eyes

By Paul Heaston

While we’ve already talked about how to draw facial features, the eye is probably the most challenging facial feature to draw for a variety of reasons. They are the first feature we notice about someone when we meet them. Almost all of our non-verbal communication is through eye contact. Eyes reveal far more about a person than, say, the nose or ears. There is a reason they are called “the windows of the soul.” For all these reasons, it can be quite frustrating getting them just right, so here’s a few tips to make drawing realistic eyes a bit easier.

Many of us learned a simple visual formula for drawing eyes as children. For years the eyes I drew looked something like a football with two circles inside for the iris and pupil.

Of course, no one’s eye really looks like that. The most important thing to remember about drawing realistic eyes is to draw what you see, not what you know. Every person’s eye is different and no visual formula, even if it’s more sophisticated than the one above, can substitute for the real thing. That said, there are a few things you’ll notice most eyes have in common.

AN EYE IS ASYMMETRICAL.

Rather than tapering smoothly to a point on either end, an eye has subtle differences in the shapes of the top and bottom eyelids.
Notice above that the top eyelid is flatter along much of its length than the bottom, except where it curves downward to meet the tear duct on the left. The bottom lid is curved along most of its length, with the most pronounced curve being where it sweeps up to meet the top eyelid on the right. This brings me to our next observation:

**THE HUMAN EYE IS THREE-DIMENSIONAL.**

Your eyeball is a sphere, but most of it is concealed by your eyelids. Notice above how the eyelids look as though they are wrapping around that spherical shape. This is even more evident in profile view.

**THE IRIS IS ALMOST NEVER COMPLETELY VISIBLE.**

Unless the person you are drawing is surprised, most of the time the iris will be covered partially by the top eyelid, as seen in both examples above, and in some cases both the top and bottom eyelids will cover some of the iris, as in when your subject is squinting or sleepy.

**THE TOP EYELID CASTS A SHADOW ON THE EYEBALL.**

Because the top lid projects out a little further than the eyeball itself, and also in part because it has the thicker set of eyelashes, it casts a shadow along the top of the eyeball in most lighting situations. This can be easily depicted simply by making the line of the top eyelid thicker than the bottom.
**HOWEVER, THE TOP EYELID RECEIVES MORE LIGHT THAN THE BOTTOM.**

The best way to draw a realistic eye is to use value to suggest volume. I’ve used gray to show how value can do this for the line drawing below, but the same effect can be achieved with other kinds of mark-making as well.

Assuming an overhead light source, the underside of the brow overhangs the eye and is therefore in shadow. The upper eyelid faces upward, so it receives light, and it also casts a shadow on the uppermost portion of the eyeball. The eyeball itself is curved, so the bottom receives less light than the top. The bottom eyelid faces down, and receives little light, and also cast a shadow on the portion of the face directly beneath it.

It’s important to remember that every eye is different. Some people have heavy eyelids or heavy brows, some almost no eyelids or brow at all. Thinking about how value suggests three-dimensionality can help you go a long way toward drawing realistic eyes.
Mona Lisa’s smile has captured the imagination of millions of viewers, showcasing the importance of the mouth in a work of fine art. After the eyes, the mouth is perhaps the most expressive feature of the face, and is fundamental to convey the feelings of the individual.
Follow these step-by-step instructions for drawing lips accurately:

Before going into the details of drawing the lips, here are a few tips to help with their placement on the face:

- The bottom lip is usually at the same height as the angle of the jaw.
- The outer corners of the closed mouth are in vertical line with the inner corner of the iris.
- The central line of the mouth, also called aperture, will be roughly situated at $\frac{1}{3}$ of the distance between the bottom of the nose and the chin line.

**STEP 1: DRAWING THE APERTURE LINE**

The first step is to draw the line of the aperture. It is not a straight line, so it’s important to pay attention to its specific curve.

To start, draw three vertical lines: two for the width of the lips at each outside corner and one at the center line. As the head is tilted in this example, the center line is not in the middle but at about a $\frac{1}{3} - \frac{2}{3}$ location. Very often that aperture line will be the darkest part of the mouth.

*Note:* There are a few differences when drawing male lips and female lips — the central line is often more defined on women’s lips that on men lips. Men lips tends also to be thinner with a less defined outline. For this example, I am drawing female lips.

**STEP 2: PLACING THE MAIN MASSES**

The upper lips can be divided into three masses and the lower lips...
into two masses. Here, I did roughly draw the masses of the lower and upper lips. The depression above the mouth is called the cupid bow.

STEP 3 : PHILTRUM SHADE AND PLACEMENT OF NODES

The crease between the upper lips and the nose is called the philtrum. Here, I outlined the cast shadow on the philtrum.

I am also added more details, such as the small depressions at the outside corners of the mouth, which are the nodes. I find that the best way to think about nodes is to think about a doughnut’s shape. Because the mouth is from a 3/4 view point, the node on the left side is in perspective.

STEP 4: LIP CREASES

Start to work on some shading. I did also place some skin creases on the lower lip. Each lip has a bit more than 20 creases, but most of the time, only the most important ones will be visible. They might almost completely disappear when a person is smiling and become more visible with age.
STEP 5: SHADING THE LOWER LIP
Still working on the shading; the lower lip did catch some cast shadow from the upper lip.

STEP 6: SHADING THE UPPER LIP
The top lip is usually a bit darker if the light source comes from the top because of the cast shadow. Here, my light source was on the left.

The edge of the upper lip is a flat area that will often catch the light—you see it on this drawing on the right side.

STEP 7: SHADOW UNDER THE LOWER LIP
Most of the drawing was made with an HB pencil, but for the last stages of shading, I did use a 4B so I could make the dark areas darker and add more contrast. The shadow under the lower lip helps define the volume—that shadow is usually darkest at the center. Very often, the upper lip is overlapping the bottom lip and you can see it in the central part.
CONQUERING THE COIFFURE
Keys to Drawing Realistic Hair

By Paul Heaston

Drawing realistic hair can seem daunting because we artists sometimes get caught up in just how many strands of hair we can see, and lose sight of the big picture. The key to drawing great hair is to think about shape and value, and not always the finest details.

As with so many aspects of drawing, less is often more. Overworking any area can detract from the rest of the image, and hair is one of those areas that can easily be overworked. For the ultimate lesson in just how simply hair can be drawn, look at George Seurat’s The Artist’s Mother from 1883.
There are no individual strands and dramatic highlights. Only her subtly drawn part gives any indication of the shape of her hair, while the lightness at the top tells us it’s probably light brown or blonde, rather than very dark.

**How to Draw Realistic Hair**

**STEP 1:**
To begin drawing hair, start with drawing of the face and head. Even if your subject has big hair, it’s important to understand where the head is located underneath. The head determines how the hair falls, whether or not the hair is full-bodied and coarse or thin and limp. It is useful to indicate the shape of the hairline at this phase, and show the location of the ear, even if you know it will partially or completely covered by hair.
**STEP 2:**

Using a light pencil, draw your outline of the shape of the hair. You can draw lines to indicate the shape and direction of the hair, but be careful not to get carried away at this point. Note that hair does not always fall down away from the top of the head. In this woman, the hair at the front of the hairline is pulled back behind the ear, and it droops enough that the shape of hairline between the ear and top of the forehead is concealed. This will not always be the case, so observe carefully.

**STEP 3:**

Using a darker drawing tool such as conte crayon or charcoal, start to lay down the location of the darkest values in the hair. It often helps to
use the edge of your too here, and to lay down the values in blocks, rather than think too carefully about the direction of the hair.

STEP 4:
Finer and narrower areas of value can be laid down using a charcoal pencil. Some areas need to remain light, as they will serve as your highlights. Also, remember that it’s not necessary to indicate every hair.
STEP 5:
You can allow some lines to cross the highlights, but not all. For the most part, the highlights will follow the contours of the head. Some strands will cross over others, and may have different highlights if they project out or do not follow the shape of the head, as with the group of strands behind the woman’s ear.

This drawing could be simpler still. Even if you only focus on shape and value within the hair, you can still show hair effectively, as the Seurat drawing at the top illustrates.
This is just the beginning. For more in-depth, detailed instruction on how to create compelling portraits, from drawing animated eyes and an authentic smile to transforming your portrait from flat to fully dimensional with highlights and shadows, sign up for the online class Drawing Facial Features (www.craftsy.com/class/drawing-facial-features/294), taught by expert Gary Faigin, author of The Artist’s Complete Guide to Facial Expression.

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