

Learn to Draw



Alfred Daniels

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by
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Chapter 1

Before We Begin

Drawing is fun. Sure, it may be a little difficult. But so what? We draw for the enjoyment it brings. If you're only concerned with doing it "well" you may feel so inadequate that you won't do it at all. And look at all the pleasure you'll miss.



Most things we do regularly feel easy, even if they're actually complex. If we knew how complicated it is to take one simple breath, we might give up and suffocate. Yet breathing comes so easily to us we do it without thinking. Drawing is the same way—easier than we think. All we need to know is what tools to use and how our tools behave when we use them. Drawing is a skill—anyone can master it. All it takes is practice.

This book talks about the kinds of equipment you'll need and how to use them, as well as suggested exercises and thoughts on different ways of seeing. But there are no firm rules about anything. These are just guidelines to help you get started learning to draw. Let your own inclination be the best judge of what is most useful to you. If you're going to express yourself, you'll break all the rules anyway—and you should.



Riverside, brush drawing, by Alfred Daniels.

Learning to See

Mastering the materials is the easy part of drawing. Forgetting everything you know (or *think* you know) is the hard part.

When you draw, you have to let go of everything you know about any object or figure. Whatever you know about a tree, a house, a table, a person—it doesn't matter. What you *see* is the only thing that matters.

Perhaps you find the outlines of things or people to be what strikes you most. Artists like you usually prefer line drawing, whether in pencil or pen. Other artists see volume, solidity. If you're one of them, you might want to start with charcoal or another soft medium to shade the world of your picture.

In this book, we'll address drawing from life, for the most part. But these principals apply to abstract art as well, or to anything drawn from your imagination.

Remember, your drawings belong to you—from start to finish. Use this book to help you get started but always feel free to go your own way.

Chapter 2

What You'll Need

Drawing only requires some very simple tools. Here is a sampling of what's available. Try out your options and discover which medium works best for you. ("Medium" just means whatever you are making a mark with: pencil, charcoal, etc.) One quick tip: remember that drawing is not writing. Many artists prefer to hold their drawing medium in an overhand grasp rather than the underhand grasp used for writing. This gives you a lot of control over the instrument, especially for shading.

Drawing Media

GRAPHITE

Graphite comes in sticks or in the traditional pencil. Drawing pencils range from very hard (6H) to very soft (8B). HB (generally equivalent to a number 2 writing pencil) is in the middle of this range. For drawing, you should use a pencil in the B range: 2, 3 and 4B are good for beginners.



Pencils are handy to carry with you and can be bought anywhere. They are the most convenient and most readily available drawing tool there is.

Graphite has some drawbacks: the range of tone for graphite is narrow, with no deep blacks, it's shiny when overworked and smudges easily. But for the workaday roughing out of ideas for composition, for beginning a watercolor or painting, tracing, or in combination with pen and ink, or just for whipping out when you see something you want to sketch, they are invaluable.

Most brands of pencils available in art supply stores or catalogs give good results. They vary a little in quality, but experience will help you choose the one you like best. Always keep your pencils well sharpened. You can use anything from a small, handheld sharpener to an electric desktop model.

Graphite sticks are good for sketching and shading, giving more drawing options than pencils. They come in an assortment of grades (soft, medium and hard) and sizes (3" or 1/4").



CHARCOAL AND RELATED MEDIA

Charcoal, conté crayon and carbon pencils all make dense black lines, have a wide tonal range and, on grey or tinted papers with the additional use of white chalk, reach a degree of richness no other drawing medium can give. They work well for inside or outside drawing, and combine well with watercolor or pen and ink, achieving quick, lively results.



CHARCOAL

Charcoal is delightful to use, easy to erase, but very messy, especially when overworked. Charcoal, like pencil, is graded into hard and soft sticks, and also into thin and thick sticks. You can purchase charcoal in boxes that contain a variety of grades and thicknesses, or buy individual sticks to give you exactly what you're looking for. You can also buy charcoal pencils that are similar to the loose sticks, except that you can't use the sides for shading.

CONTÉ CRAYON

Conté crayons are hard, slightly waxy pastels that are smooth and rich in pigment. They are graded into hard, medium and soft, and give a richer tone and line than either charcoal or pencil. Conté is a durable medium, difficult to erase but less liable to injury and smudging, as well as easier to fix.



“The Duchess of Suffolk.” conté and brush. Hans Holbein.

Conté is available in short, square sticks or in pencil form. Traditional conté is black, white and various shades of brown (often called sanguine). Some conté pencils are manufactured in a wider variety of colors. Pencils are cleaner to use but, being brittle, conté is not easy to sharpen. Use a razor blade or knife to sharpen conté pencils; be sure to sharpen away from your body and be careful not to cut your fingers.

CARBON PENCILS

Carbon pencils combine the fine grain and precision of pencils with the velvety blacks of charcoal. They sharpen well, are not too messy to use and only require the lightest of fixing. They give good rich tones and can be used in combination with all the other black media, including watercolor and pen and ink. They are highly recommended for both studio and outdoor work. Carbon pencils come in four textures, ranging from B (the hardest) to 6B (softest).

CHALKS PASTELS

Black, grey, and white chalks (or “soft”) pastels are alternatives to charcoal. They can be used in combination with charcoal and excel on grey or other tinted, toothed papers (see “Papers” below). Chalk pastels can be found in sets of shades of grey only or in a wide variety of colors. Chalks in shades of grey are terrific for learning about shading and tone. Then move on to colored chalk pastels for fun and vibrant drawing.



Use a light hand when fixing pastels. Colors can change a little in tone if too much fixative is used.

FIXING

Conté crayons, carbon pencils, and especially charcoal and chalk pastels must all be fixed on the paper or they will smudge—both on the picture itself and on anything it touches. You can purchase a commercial fixative in any art supply store, or simply use unscented hair spray.

In a very well ventilated space, spray the fixative lightly and evenly over the entire drawing, starting and ending each pass beyond the edge of the paper. Let it dry and test an unobtrusive spot to see if any medium still comes off. If so, lightly spray again. Two sprayings are usually enough, but sometimes a denser drawing may need more. Charcoal will always need at least two fixings, being more powdery than either conté or carbon.

PEN AND INK

You can draw with any kind of pen: ball point, roller ball, felt tip. Fine point Sharpies make wonderful, very black lines. Try out your favorite pens in your sketchbook, then move on to paper. Shading is accomplished with lines, cross hatching or washes (see Brush and Ink below).



Classic nib pens, with their expressive and varied lines, dipped in India ink, or technical pens (such as a Rapidograph®) are both favored by pen-and-ink artists. These types of pens are harder to learn. They can be difficult and unforgiving, so wait until you are more experienced with other types of pens, as well as pencil, before beginning to experiment with these.