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Tips & Helpful Hints

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J01 INTERMEDIATE: SKILLS & SECRETS

During my lengthy career, I've made tons of mistakes and learned from them. With necessity being the mother of invention, I've also discovered numerous easier and more efficient methods of working. These tips and helpful hints are designed to make your drawing experiences more pleasurable and less frustrating!

To help you find what you need more quickly, this article is divided into the following sections:

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GENERALLY SPEAKING

- 1) To prevent cramping and repetitive movement injuries, move your fingers and wrist as little as possible when you draw. You should also be moving your lower and upper arm.
- 2) Stay away from poor-quality graphite! Inexpensive graphite may work well for writing, but can scratch your drawing paper instead of going on smoothly. Professional drawing pencils are made with a higher-quality mixture of graphite and clay and make marks that flow more smoothly.
- 3) Always lay your graphite pencils somewhere safe so they don't fall! When a pencil falls to the floor, the graphite inside the core breaks, and the pencil becomes very difficult to sharpen. Small pieces of broken graphite can jam up the inside of the sharpener.
- 4) Purchase only professional quality mechanical pencils. You can find inexpensive novelty mechanical pencils in many stores. However, professional mechanical pencils that are designed for drawing can only be found in art supply stores. Most are expensive, but they tend to last much longer than the department store variety.
- 5) Stay away from papers with a glossy surface! Glossy paper is toothless, and therefore too smooth for graphite or charcoal to properly stick to it.
- 6) Stay away from acid! Don't be fooled by cheap imitations of good-quality drawing paper. Before you buy a sketchbook, look for a label that says the paper is acid-free. Just because the cover of a sketchbook says it's suitable for drawing doesn't mean it's acid-free. Your drawings can be ruined when poor quality paper deteriorates and turns yellow.
- 7) Always take good care of a paper's tooth! The tooth of any paper can be easily destroyed by pressing too hard on its surface with your pencil. If your shading begins to look shiny, the tooth is flattened beyond repair. Additional shading will no longer hold fast to the paper's surface.
- 8) The wrong erasers can ruin your drawings! Stay away from erasers that are colored (especially the pink ones) or very hard (such as those on the ends of some pencils).
- 9) You can make a sanding tool similar to a sandpaper block. Cut sheets of sandpaper into long narrow pieces, and use a heavy duty stapler to hold them together at one end.
- 10) Don't draw on a flat surface! When you draw on a flat surface, the top of your paper is farther away from you than the bottom. As a result, you can end up with all sorts of problems trying to draw accurate proportions.
- 11) You can clean your kneaded eraser by stretching and reshaping it several times (also known as "kneading") until it comes clean. However, kneaded erasers eventually get too dirty to work properly, so pick up some extras.

- 12) When drawing an oval or a circle, rotate your paper and examine it from different perspectives. View its reflection in a mirror to help locate problem areas.
- 13) Draw slowly. Accuracy is more important than speed. Your speed will automatically improve the more you practice.
- 14) Don't press too hard with your pencils. Not only do these areas become impossible to touch up, but they also leave dents in your paper. When you try to draw over dents in the paper with a soft pencil (such as a 2B or 6B), they show up as light lines, spoiling the overall appearance of your drawing.
- 15) Have a basic set of drawing materials pre-packed so you can spontaneously take your art outside your studio whenever you want.
- 16) When planning to draw outdoors, take into consideration such factors as weather, lighting conditions, time of day, and the angle from which you wish to capture your subject. Then make your plans accordingly.
- 17) Practice drawing straight lines freehand in any way you find comfortable; however, you may want to use a ruler to draw straight lines for some subjects.
- 18) A thorough visual examination of your subject is the most important ingredient for making great sketches.
- 19) Drawing from actual objects enhances your memory. Each time you draw something new, valuable information is stored in your long-term memory.
- 20) Always feel comfortable to use your creative abilities to rearrange, modify, or even completely change, various components of subjects that inspire you!
- 21) Display your unfinished drawings in a safe place in your home, where you see them frequently throughout the day. Each time you look at the drawing and see something that needs to be touched up, write yourself a note about the problem area, and go back to fix it later.
- 22) Be careful not to put tape on your drawing paper as it may damage the surface when you remove it.
- 23) If you need anything to look symmetrical, from a vase to a face, draw a faint line down the center of your drawing space before you begin. Visually measure the spaces on both sides of this line as you draw. You can even use a ruler to measure different sections if you wish to be very precise!

WORKING FROM PHOTOS

- 24) Unless you are an expert photographer, use photos only as reference tools and draw from actual objects whenever possible.
- 25) Use a viewfinder frame to help you modify the composition of a photo before you begin drawing. You can make a viewfinder frame with heavy paper and two large paper clips.

- 26) If you want the face in a photo to be at a slightly different angle, you can tilt your photo a little as you tape it to a piece of paper, and then add a mat to hide the tilted corners of the photo.
- 27) Whenever you plan to do a drawing from photographs, take lots of pictures of the potential drawing subjects from several different angles. You need to be familiar with a subject from all sides, before you can accurately draw its forms.

VALUES AND SHADING

- 28) Before you begin shading, confirm that objects, spaces, and perspective elements are drawn correctly. Check the relationships of objects to one another, observe that angles, sizes, and proportions are accurate, and adjust as needed.
- 29) Many artists prefer to work from light to dark. By drawing the light values first, you can then layer your medium shading on top of your light shading. This layering creates a nice smooth transition between values. The darkest values are then built in layers on top of the medium.
- 30) Squinting, to see the different values of an object, provides you with a visual map for sketching the shape of each value.
- 31) Almost everything has more than one value. Depending on the light source, most things have areas that are very light and others that are quite dark. When you can see these different values you can draw the object in the third dimension.
- 32) When shading with graduations, you can make the transition from one value to the next barely noticeable by drawing the individual shading lines different lengths. Sometimes a short line, placed inside a space between two other lines, helps make the transition look smoother.
- 33) Step back from your drawing from time to time and have a look at the overall values. You may need to make some areas lighter and others darker.
- 34) Take your time when drawing the forms of an object (or living being). Draw the shapes first and then shade in the light and shadows.
- 35) Capturing the illusion of a three dimensional reality is more important than rendering patterns and/or textures.
- 36) Use a piece of scrap paper to experiment with drawing the different textures you plan to use, before incorporating them into your actual drawing.
- 37) Your drawings can appear flat, rather than three-dimensional when too little contrast in values is used. Unless you are trying to achieve a specific mood or want the subject to look flat, always use a full range of values.
- 38) The textures of some three-dimensional objects are difficult to translate into a two-dimensional drawing, for example a seashell, or a highly textured piece of driftwood. Photocopy (or scan and print) black and white images of a section of the object, so you can see the texture on a flat piece of paper before you begin adding shading.

- 39) When shading a drawing subject with crosshatching, turn your paper around in various directions as you work, so that you are always using your natural hand movement. You should also try holding your arm in different positions as you draw. Whatever you find to be the most comfortable is right for you.
- 40) When drawing an animal or person, visually break the subject down into shapes and measure proportions. Closely examine the areas where parts of the body bend, twist, or are extended or outstretched.
- 41) The shading in a cast shadow (on the surface on which an object is sitting) is darker closer to the object and becomes gradually lighter as it moves outward.

BLENDING SHADING

- 42) Blending is difficult for beginners. Develop strong skills with traditional shading techniques, such as hatching and crosshatching, before you attempt blending. For blending to work well, you need to be reasonably skilled at putting graduated values on your paper. After all, there has to be something to blend. On the other hand, expecting blending to fix poorly done shading, simply isn't realistic.
- 43) When blending NEVER use your fingers! As a matter of fact, don't touch your drawing paper in the sections where you plan to blend. Your skin can transfer oil to the paper, which becomes noticeable after blending (especially in light and middle values). Creating a smooth tone then becomes darn near impossible.
- 44) Realistic shading with blending needs a broad range of values. The most common blending mistake is to over blend dark values. Either use blending very sparingly in dark shadowed areas, or don't blend your dark values at all. If blending removes too much graphite, you can darken the values again by adding more graphite.
- 45) Be careful not to wear away tissues or paper towels so your fingers are doing the blending. Wrap several layers around your finger and check often that the tissue isn't wearing away.
- 46) The final look of blended shading can be affected by many factors, including your choice of blending tools, shading techniques, media, and types of drawing paper.
- 47) Don't give up if you don't like your first few attempts at blending. With patience and practice your blending skills improve.

COMPOSITION

- 48) An ideal composition requires components of different values, textures, shapes, and sizes. However, remember to keep it simple! Too many objects in a drawing creates overcrowding and disharmony.

- 49) Choose a drawing format that best fits your subject; for example, many portraits look better in a vertical rectangle (sometimes called portrait format) rather than horizontal (often referred to as landscape).
- 50) You can unify a still life drawing by choosing objects that relate to one another. Some themes to consider are: gardening tools and plants, kitchen utensils and food, table settings, themes based on texture or color (such as all black or all white objects), or an arrangement of children's toys.
- 51) A composition becomes more intriguing when you highlight your center of interest with more detail and a stronger contrast in values than other aspects of your drawing.
- 52) Include an odd number of objects into a grouping, rather than an even number, whenever possible.
- 53) Pay close attention to the shapes of negative and positive spaces.
- 54) Often you discover perfect drawing subjects with imperfect compositions. If nature or man has placed an object in a position you don't like, draw it in a different place on your paper or simply leave it out.
- 55) Study composition by examining the works of masters. When you understand the basic guidelines of composition, you become more confident in planning your drawings, and subsequently your drawings improve.
- 56) A shading plan, in the form of a thumbnail sketch, provides you with a blueprint for a composition.
- 57) Use some of the basic elements of composition such as balance, shading, proportion, and overlapping to draw the viewer's eye to your focal point.
- 58) Arrange your objects asymmetrically. Taller objects usually look better off to one side.
- 59) Place your focal point off center within the boundaries of your drawing space. In other words, don't position a focal point dead center (sometimes called a bull's eye)! While this serves to make your focal point stand out, all the other parts of your drawing may be ignored and your overall composition becomes weak.
- 60) Don't place all the dark or all the light values on one side of your drawing space. Rather, balance dark and light values in much the same way as objects. Sometimes, simply moving objects slightly to the right or left or drawing them lighter or darker than they appear in actuality, balances the composition.

DRAWING WITH A GRID

- 61) No matter how careful you are, when you draw with a grid, accidents do happen. If you draw some lines in the wrong grid squares, simply erase that section, redraw the grid lines, and keep on going! Lightly drawn lines are easy to erase!

- 62) Draw the grid on your photo with a fine tip permanent marker or an ordinary ballpoint pen. They can be seen more clearly than a pencil, which tends to scratch the surface of the photo.
- 63) Never draw a grid directly on a valuable photo! Make a photocopy, or scan and print it, and work from the copy.
- 64) Using a grid helps render precise facial and figurative proportions and correct perspective when working from a photo.
- 65) If you don't like drawing grids on photos, pick up a few sheets of clear (don't buy frosted) acetate at an art supply store. Draw grids with squares of different sizes on separate sheets with a very fine permanent marker (or draw the grid in Photoshop and print it on the acetate). To grid a photo, especially one you don't want to damage, you simply place the clear grid over the photo, and you are ready to draw. As an extra perk, you can reuse acetate grids over and over again.
- 66) Tape the corners of your drawing paper to a large sheet of graph paper to help draw the grid lines. Adjust the size of each square proportionate to the size you want the drawing to be. For example, if you want your drawing to be twice the size of the photo, use four (2 by 2) of the one-quarter-inch graph squares, to represent one, quarter-inch grid square on the photo.

DRAWING PORTRAITS AND PEOPLE

- 67) When drawing a frontal view of a face, draw a line of symmetry on your paper before you begin. This line serves as a guideline for visually measuring horizontal distances so the head and face don't end up lopsided.
- 68) Always add some shading to the whites of peoples' or animals' eyes.
- 69) In a graphite or charcoal portrait, you can imply the color of the iris of an eye, by using different values. Brown eyes are very dark in value, almost as dark as the pupil. Hazel, blue, or green eyes are mostly shaded with middle values. Pale blue, green, or gray eyes are very light in value and contrast sharply to the dark pupil.
- 70) The secret to drawing teeth well, is to hardly draw them at all! Simply allow the shading of the lips, the upper and lower gums, and the shadows created by the light source to define them. Teeth, which are farther back in the jaw, need to be shaded darker because they are in the shadows of the mouth. Never draw lines between the individual teeth, or else they end up looking like a checkerboard!
- 71) Never draw eyelashes from the tip down toward the eyelid. Always draw them in the direction in which they grow, from the eyelid (or root) outward.
- 72) Soft lighting works best for portraits of young children.
- 73) The eyes of babies and children are more rounded, the irises appear to be much larger, and their eyebrows are lighter than those of adults.

- 74) Babies' heads are proportionately large when compared to their tiny bodies, but their faces are disproportionately tiny. The most common mistake of beginners, attempting to draw a baby's portrait is to make the face too big, in proportion to the size of the skull. An adult face is half the size of the adult cranial mass. However, a baby's face is approximately one third the size of his or her cranial mass.
- 75) Resist the temptation to make a baby's hair too thick or full. When it comes to babies, the old expression "less is more" applies nicely. Too much hair in a drawing can make the baby look older than his or her actual age.
- 76) You age progress a person by illustrating the changing three-dimensional exterior forms of the skeletal structure, and by transforming the outward appearance of the skin, fat, and muscles pulled downward by gravity. You can't accurately depict the aging process by simply drawing lines on a person's face.
- 77) When drawing a cartoon or caricature of someone familiar, such as a friend, family member, or a celebrity, exaggerate prominent features. If the eyes are far apart, draw them even farther apart. If his or her eyebrows are heavy, thick and dark, draw them heavier, thicker, and darker! If he or she has a big chin or nose, draw it larger! If the hair is thin, make it thinner and if it's thick, draw it thicker!
- 78) The various parts of eyes look very different when you view them from different angles. People's eyes also change shape with different facial expressions.
- 79) When drawing eyes, you need to draw the forms of the face, and the various folds of skin around the eyes.
- 80) Whenever you draw eyes, keep the initial sketch lines very light so they can be erased later. No part of an eye should be drawn with dark bold lines. Instead of lines, use contrasting shading graduations to separate the various parts of the eye, and give depth to their forms.
- 81) A full range of facial expressions are created by the movements of muscles. As various muscles do their jobs, different sections of the face move and often create folds and wrinkles in the skin.
- 82) When someone is feeling down (sad), the corners of the mouth curve down. If a person is feeling up (happy), the corners of the mouth curl up.
- 83) When selecting a pose for a portrait, something as simple as the tilt of a head, can make your drawing more interesting, and even tell something about the personality of your model.

PERSPECTIVE

- 84) When viewing the world according to geometric perspective, the farther away objects, animals, and people are, the smaller they appear to be.

- 85) Perspective allows you to draw people visually correct and more realistic. Long parts of a body, such as arms or legs, look disproportionately short when viewed from an end.
- 86) Find opportunities to view people from extreme perspectives in real life. You can even lie on the floor and have a friend or family member (the taller the better) stand beside you. As you look up at the person take note that the person's head will look especially tiny, his or her legs and feet look disproportionately large, and the entire body looks much shorter than it actually is.
- 87) Be patient with yourself. Your abilities to render perspective accurately, improve with practice, and eventually become instinctive. Careful observation of people and objects around you expands your understanding of perspective.
- 88) The horizon line and your eye level are the same thing. Objects at your eye level seem to touch the horizon line, and their perspective lines converge both downward and upward. Objects above your eye level are above the horizon line and their perspective lines converge downward. Angular lines of objects below your eye level (below the horizon line) converge upwards.
- 89) Always draw the horizon line parallel to the upper and lower sides of a square or rectangular drawing space.
- 90) You can create the illusion that clouds near the horizon line are farther away, than those directly overhead, by drawing them smaller, closer together, and lighter in value.
- 91) By overlapping closer objects over distant objects, the illusion of depth is enhanced.

FIGURE DRAWING FROM LIFE

- 92) Identifying the exterior three-dimensional forms of adult bodies, as defined by bones, fat, and muscles, is more important to artists than memorizing the names of different parts of the body.
- 93) Choose poses that are expressive, artistically pleasing, and comfortable for your model.
- 94) Use tape or chalk to mark the placement of a model's body on the surface on which he or she is sitting, standing, or lying. For example, by marking the outline of the model's feet in a standing pose, he or she can easily find the correct pose again after a break.
- 95) Experiment with different drawing media such as conté, charcoal, or graphite sticks and use large sheets of paper when sketching figures.
- 96) When figure drawing from a live model, have snacks and beverages handy. Remember, modeling is very difficult.
- 97) Don't worry if your drawings of hands and feet look all wrong at first. Just do your best and in time, you will get better!

SIGNING YOUR NAME

- 98) Spend some time experimenting with the letters in your name and come up with a creative signature that will be easy to use.
- 99) Sign your name in the same medium used for rendering the drawing. For example, if the drawing is in charcoal, sign your name in charcoal.
- 100) The best place to sign your name is in either the lower right or lower left corner of your drawing. Sketch your name very lightly first, and then if you like its position, you can then draw it darker.
- 101) Be careful not to make your signature too large, because it will distract from the artwork. On the other hand, if you make your signature too small, it will be difficult to read.

PROTECTING YOUR DRAWINGS

- 102) When your drawing is completely finished, a spray fixative can protect it from being accidentally smudged. The instructions on the can often say you can erase after using this spray, but erasing hasn't worked well for me. They also say that you can work over the spray. However, I find the spray changes the texture of the paper, and graphite especially, won't adhere to the surface as well after it's been sprayed.
- 103) Use spray fixative only in a well-ventilated place or outside on a fine day. Three or four very light coatings of fixative work much better than one or two heavy coats.
- 104) Don't store your drawings, with either clear tape or corrugated cardboard, touching them. Either of these items can discolor your drawings, and do permanent damage after only a few weeks.
- 105) Always place a piece of clean paper under your hand as you draw. Each time you work on a new section, remember to move your paper, to prevent you from smudging your drawing.
- 106) The natural oils or dirt on someone's hands can damage your drawing paper. Handle drawing paper by its edges, and never touch the surface, unless absolutely necessary (even before you begin to draw). Before you show a drawing to another person, let him or her know that the drawing is very delicate, and can be ruined if they touch it. Then watch them VERY closely, in case they forget!
- 107) Put your drawings away in a safe place when you are finished working!
- 108) Never place or hang drawings in direct sunlight, no matter how well protected you think they are. Better safe than sorry!
- 109) Have a special surface for cutting drawing papers and boards. A completed drawing that has been accidentally cut in half becomes two pieces of scrap paper.

- 110) Never rest a cup of coffee (or any other beverage) on your drawing surface or you'll end up with a soggy brown mess instead of a drawing.
- 111) Drawings always need to be framed behind glass. Make sure that both the mat and the backing are acid-free. If you're framing a drawing you're really fond of, use conservation glass, available at most reputable framing shops. Better still, if you can afford it, have your drawings professionally framed.

WARM FUZZIES

- 112) Drawing is a journey, not a destination. The day that you are totally happy with your drawings is the day you pack up your supplies and quit. Learning to draw is an infinite quest.
- 113) You need three invaluable ingredients in order to improve your drawing skills - practice, practice, and more practice! Drawing is an action word – you learn by doing!
- 114) Experiment with lots of different shading techniques until you find what works best for you. You are a unique individual with distinctive artistic needs. Stay true to yourself and continue developing your own vision and style. Remember there is no right or wrong way to draw.
- 115) Maintain a sketchbook and save all your favorite drawings. Reflecting back on your personal journey as an artist is inspirational and self-affirming.
- 116) Draw in a way you really love. Styles are neither right nor wrong... they just are. With time, your style develops all by itself.
- 117) Talent is the self-discovery that you possess the ability, and motivation needed to become exceptional. This acquired physical or mental aptitude is accessible to you, and can be developed with hard work, patience, and dedication.

KEEPING THE ENJOYMENT

- 118) Make some time to draw every day. Find a peaceful space that is comfortable and free of distractions. If you begin to tire or feel frustrated, take a break. When you return have a fresh look at your drawing and touch up anything you're not happy with.
- 119) To prevent your eyes from becoming too tired, always make sure you have adequate lighting. Natural light through a window is best in the daytime. On overcast days and in the evenings, a flexible-neck study lamp can focus light directly on your drawing surface.
- 120) Make sure your proposed project isn't more than you can handle. If you're a beginner to drawing, choose a subject you feel is very, very simple. You set yourself up for a frustrating experience by taking on a project beyond your skill level.

- 121) Always choose a drawing subject that appeals to you. Otherwise you may get bored halfway through your project.

BEYOND THE SKETCHBOOK

- 122) Take time to examine, and appreciate a diverse range of art and artists. Art has become very accessible in recent years through galleries, art books, and the Internet. With careful observation of the drawings of other artists, you gain invaluable information, which you can apply to your own drawings.
- 123) Watch your local newspapers and media for art exhibitions and plan to attend as many as possible. You can usually meet and chat with artists in your community by attending the openings of these shows.
- 124) You can enhance your artistic development by practicing mental and visual exercises, such as optical illusions.
- 125) Check out your local community based educational facilities and recreational centers, for programs in your area. You can always benefit from drawing classes and workshops. You can meet others who also want to improve their drawing skills and you are exposed to different techniques and drawing styles.
- 126) Plan an outing, find some floral models, and draw them from various perspectives. Do close-up detailed drawings of the textures and forms of the individual petals and leaves, which define their unique qualities.
- 127) If you can access life-drawing classes, you have the highly rewarding opportunity to draw from live models. As you uncover local art resources, you meet other artists, and have opportunities to become involved in art groups. Many art groups organize incredible workshops, taught by prominent artists, and the camaraderie and enjoyment is well worth your time.
- 128) Explore garage sales, flea markets, and antique stores, and find some “old” objects to draw. Old, weathered and worn objects have a lot of “personality” which you can identify, and incorporate as an integral part of your drawing.
- 129) The Internet is a vast resource for drawing lessons; an extensive list of artists provides online tutorials, lessons, and courses. Take time to investigate and participate in some of the wonderful drawing e-groups on the Internet, where international artists share tips, critique one another’s works, and openly discuss various art techniques and art resources.
- 130) Check out the Internet or your public library to find out more about the history of art. Be sure not to miss Renaissance, Romanticism, Realism, or Impressionism.



BRENDA HODDINOTT

As a self-educated teacher, visual artist, portraitist, forensic artist (retired), and illustrator, Brenda Hoddinott utilizes diverse art media including her favorites: graphite and paint.

Brenda is the author of *Drawing for Dummies* (Wiley Publishing, Inc., New York, NY) and *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Drawing People* (Winner of the Alpha-Penguin Book of the Year Award 2004, Alpha - Pearson Education - Macmillan, Indianapolis, IN). She is currently writing two books on classical drawing.

My philosophy on teaching art is to focus primarily on the enjoyment aspects while gently introducing the technical and academic. Hence, in creating a passion for the subject matter, the quest for knowledge also becomes enjoyable.

>Brenda Hoddinott<

Born in St. John's, Newfoundland, Brenda grew up in the small town of Corner Brook. She developed strong drawing and painting skills through self-directed learning.

During her twenty-five year career as a self-educated civilian forensic artist, various criminal investigation departments have employed Brenda's skills, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. In 1992, Brenda was honored with a commendation from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and in 1994, she was awarded a Certificate of Membership from "Forensic Artists International".

In 2003, Brenda retired from her careers as a forensic artist and teacher to work full time writing books and developing her website (Drawspace.com). This site is respected as a resource for fine art educators, home schooling programs, and educational facilities throughout the world.