PORTRAIT DRAWING Cheat Sheet 2.0

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How to draw the head...

THE SAME...BUT DIFFERENT.

There is an infinite variety of unique faces in the world; each of us is different in a thousand ways from every one else! But even with all that wonderful variety, we are also very similar.

That’s because, underneath it all, we’re all made of the same stuff. We all have a skull that’s more or less the same shape; we all have features like eyes, noses, and mouths... And we all share the same basic blueprint for approximately where those things are supposed to go.

Lucky for us, that gives us a perfect place to start when drawing a head. If we can learn to find the average locations of the features reliably, we have an easy, reliable way to start any portrait.

In this cheat sheet, I’m going to introduce you to the Loomis method for drawing heads, originally taught by Andrew Loomis in his book, “Drawing the Head and Hands.” This method will teach you to visualize the head as a 3D object, and begin drawing more proportional and realistic heads in no time!

THINKING IN 3D

The key to mastering this method is to learn to think about the head and your drawing in 3D.

It also helps to get a good look at the skull and get familiar with its structure.

BACK TO BASICS

Next, we want to simplify. We need to break the head into its simplest forms. We can start by picturing the cranium (top portion of your head) as a sphere, and the jaw/cheekbones as a tapering box.
Step 1

SHAPE OF THE HEAD

Imagining these simple forms, we can start our head by drawing a simple circle (and imagining it as a sphere).

Draw a line through the vertical center and horizontal center of your sphere. When looking straight ahead, these lines will be straight and uncurved.

Next, we slice the sides off the sphere at a slight angle: narrower in front and a little wider in back.

Draw lines to connect the tops and bottoms of the “sliced” sides, creating 4 boxes of equal(ish) size.

Now measure the height of your boxes. Use that measurement to make a mark that same distance down from the bottom line to mark the bottom of the chin.

Sketch in the jaw shape like an angular, upside down egg: first down from the side of the cranium, then in toward the center, and flat again at the bottom of the chin.

NOTE: The location of the slices, jaw length and nose height are variable, you can adjust them slightly depending on the type of face you are drawing.
Step 2

ADD THE FEATURES

Next we mark the location of the features, using the marks we've made as anchor points.

1. The top line marks the hairline.

2. The middle line marks the eyebrows (or tops of the eye sockets).

3. The bottom line marks where the nose meets the face (note: the tip of the nose may be higher or lower)

4. The mouth is about 1/3 down from the nose, and 2/3 up from the chin.

5. The ear sits behind the vertical center line between eyebrows and bottom of the nose.

Once we have these vertical placements, we can measure the width of the features:

1. The head is 5 eyes wide, with one eye space between the eyes and one on either side.

2. The nose is usually about the width of one eye.

3. The mouth extends to the halfway point of each eye.
Step 3

CLEAN UP YOUR SKETCH

Lastly, we need to polish up the drawing, adding in the features and making it unique!

Tips for Success

COMPLEX ANGLES

This formula can be used to more easily work out tricky angles: visualize your sphere with its vertical and horizontal center lines as a tennis ball with rubber bands wrapped it. (Better yet, get a tennis ball and draw lines or wrap rubber bands around it.)

When you tilt and turn the ball, notice how the lines become curves. Use this to set up your portraits for tricky angles. The rest of your lines will follow the same angles and curves.
Examples

SUBTLE CHANGES, BIG IMPACT

Using small tweaks to the proportions, we can create a wide variety of faces!

Subtle changes to the length of the jaw, height of the nose, or even width of the head result in big differences to your finished portrait.

Experiment and see how many unique faces you can create!