# Drawing the Portrait

Pencil sketches. These faces were drawn from the imagination (no photo or model reference).

This section delves into each feature of the face in depth and in (sometimes excruciating!) detail. Also, information is given about the structure of the head, things to avoid, and more.

While the information in this section is helpful for any portrait artist at any experience level, some amount of drawing experience is recommended.

Knowledge and understanding of the face and head are vital to the portrait artist. With practice and an understanding of proportion and structure, it is much easier to draw evocative and accurate portraits. Also, (as seen in the drawings above) with this knowledge, it is possible to draw portraits made completely from the imagination. (And, it's a lot of *fun* too!)

Face Structure

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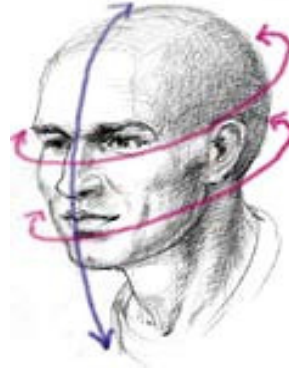
Three-Quarter View
The blue line in the illustration above shows the dimension of the head vertically, and the red lines show the dimension of the head horizontally. The head is basically an "egg shape". You can see the egg shape a little more clearly on a bald person!
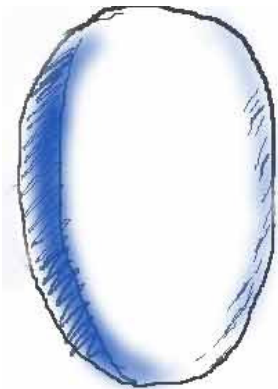
Frontal View
While all faces have a basic "egg shape", some are more "squarish", others are "heart-shaped", others are longer, shorter, whatever. The human head does has some variations. So, while always keeping the "egg shape" thing in mind, make sure to make note of the *individual* quality of the head you are drawing.

This illustration shows you how to measure the proportions of the face, to make sure you're getting everything right.
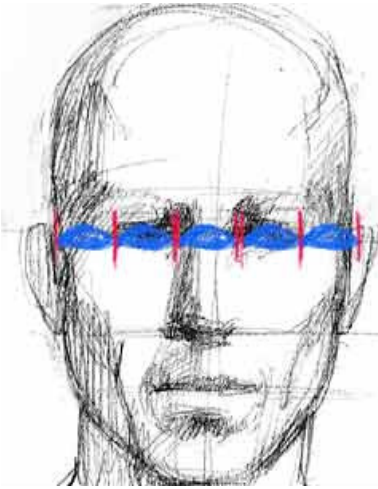
- The line of blue almond shapes going across the face represents "eye widths". Each blue almond shape represents the width of one of the eyes on the face. The red lines are there to make the division between each eye-width more obvious.

- You will notice that there is an eye-width between the two eyes. And then there is almost another eye width between the edge of the eyes to the outside edge of the head. So, this means that the face is approx. 5 eye-widths across (Note: This varies from one profile to another).

- It's a good idea to use this "eye-widths" trick often when drawing the face. It helps you keep the proportions right. For instance, the nose (from the bridge of the nose to the tip) is about an *eye-and-a-half* in length. And so forth. "Measure" most of the face this way, just to double-check to make sure you got everything right. Your eye can fool you sometimes. The proportions may look right, while in reality being completely off.

- When you are drawing someone (either from a photograph, or from life) check and see how many "eye widths" each feature is, and how many "eye-widths" are between each of the features. It will save you much time (and erasing!). If the eye-widths of the model and the eye-widths on your drawing don't match up, you know you need to do some adjustments! Do this eye-width thing while your drawing is still in its *preliminary* stages. Much easier to make erasures and adjustments then.

- This is a really fantastic measuring technique, and it will help you understand how to keep the proportions of the face accurate, and correct. It will also help you see where you are prone to "distort" the face. (As in, you tend to make the nose too short, or too long, etc. Don't feel bad, we *all* do this.) Once you know where your weak areas are (in drawing proportions), it will be easier for you to improve your drawings in the future.
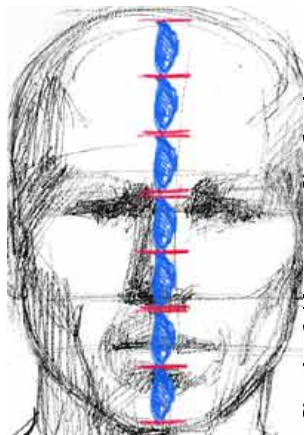
- Another use of the "eye widths" thing. In this illustration, I show that the head is about 7 eye-widths long. Most heads will be about 6-7 eye widths long. (More like 7 eye widths.) And - notice how many eye-widths are in the forehead. About 3 eye widths. Maybe even a bit more.

- Remember: Do not ignore the height of the forehead. Just like the when you are drawing the back of the head, you *must* allow enough room for the skull and brain, or your drawing won't look right. A lot of newbie artists don't add enough forehead to their portraits. Since there are no features up on the forehead, I guess they don't pay much attention to it. But it is very important to get all proportions of the head correct!
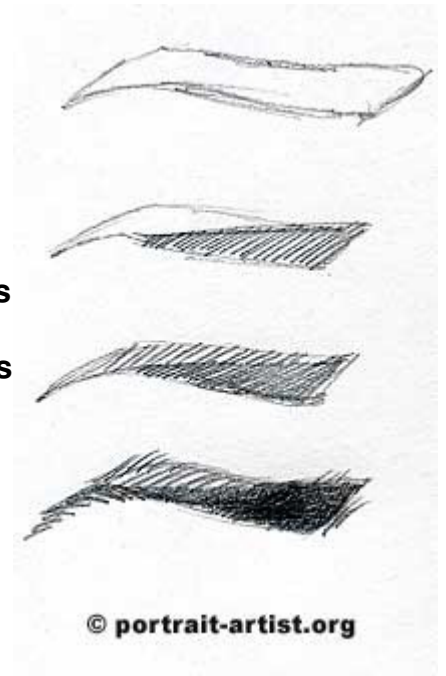
Drawing Eyes
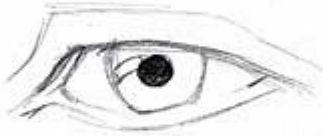
A step-by-step diagram on how to draw the eye:

-Draw the outline in first. Notice that the shape of the iris is round on the sides (it is a round circle) but its top is obscured by the upper eyelid, and a little bit of the bottom of the iris is obscured by the bottom of the eyelid.

-After you get the shape correct, start to draw in the light outline of the lower eyelid thickness. Draw in the pupil (which is round) and indicate where the highlight on the eye will be.

-Then start to add shading and detail. Keep the indication of the lower lid light and subtle. Make a few subtle lines to indicate the eyelashes. The upper lid will cast a gentle shadow on the eyeball, so add shading to indicate the roundness of the eyeball.

A step-by-step diagram on how to draw the eyebrow:

-The hair of the eyebrow grows in different directions. Look at your own eyebrows in the mirror!

-First step is to draw in the outline of the eyebrow.

-Then draw a line that indicates the "brow-line". This line is often a shadow in the eyebrow. It shows where the brow "dips" in towards the eye socket. Add some shading to this brow-line shadow.

-Then start shading the rest of the eyebrow. This part of the eyebrow is on the upper part of the brow-line, which is jutting out a little more. It will be a little lighter.

Drawing Eyes

Eyes are a very important and evocative feature of the face. People will notice any problems or flaws in your drawing of the eye, so special care needs to be taken.

First off, I want to show the depth of the eye, I've indicated some red "*contour lines*" on the eye sketch in the illustration above.

-As you can see, the eye is set in, starting with the eyebrow. Then, the upper lid comes out a bit. The contour then dips in to allow for the thickness of the upper eyelid.

The eyeball itself is rounded. Then, the contour juts out because of the thickness of the edge of the lower lid.
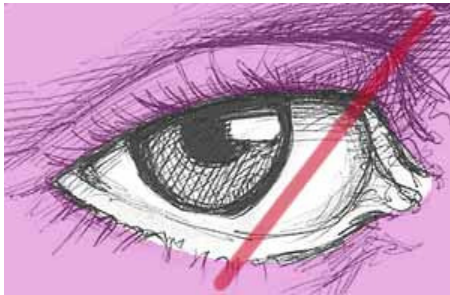
-The image to the left (pink) shows the basic shape of the eye - an "*almond*" shape. The red line indicates the angle to the shape of the eye. The top of the eye has its widest point to the right, the bottom of the eye has its widest point more towards the center, or left. The red line is going through the widest areas of the upper and lower parts of the eye, to show this angle.
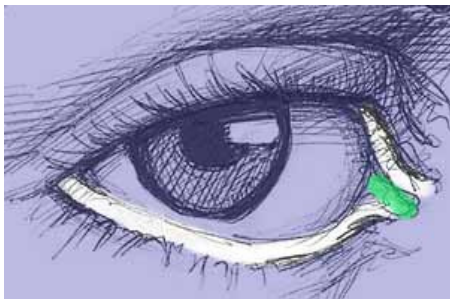
-It is important to discuss the thickness of the eyelid some more, because this is a detail many artists overlook. There is a definite thickness there. You can't ignore it, the eye won't look realistic if you do. You'll see in this illustration that a little bit of the upper eyelid thickness is showing in the corner of the eye as well.

However, be sure not to overdo the rendering of the thickness of the eyelid. It isn't necessary to make a harsh line across the whole border of the lower eyelid. Break up the lines, keep them soft, and often just "suggest" the thickness of the eyelid. If you draw the thickness of the eyelid with dark or thick lines, the person will look like they have been crying, or have really red, dry eyes. It just won't look very good.

-Also notice the green mark in the illustration above. That is where the tear duct is. People will notice if you don't draw that too. You just need to *suggest* it - you don't need to draw it in great detail.

-To the right are some of the more subtle angles to the top lid. Sure, the eye is a basic almond shape, but if you look at the eye closely, you'll see that there is a slightly "angular" quality to it, especially in the top lid.
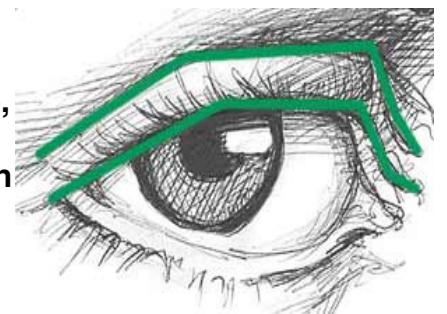
Drawing Eyes
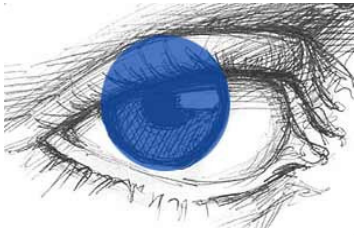
-The blue circle shows how the *iris* is round. A common mistake is not making the iris round enough. Just because some of the iris is obscured by the eyelids doesn't mean that it shouldn't still keep that basic round shape.

Also, notice how much of the iris is hidden by the eyelid. About one-third (sometimes more) of the upper iris is hidden under the upper lid. Sometimes a bit of the lower edge of the iris is hidden too. If you try to show almost all of the iris when you draw the eye, the person will look like they are opening their eyes really wide.

-As you can see on the right, the smaller circle lines up right over the pupil. It is completely concentric - completely *centered* inside the iris. That's the way it is supposed to be.
A common mistake is to just draw the pupil in there, but not worry if it is centered. But it *HAS* to be centered completely - not lopsided, or off to one side a little. Also, notice that the pupil is also very round. You must make it round, and you must make it centered inside the iris.
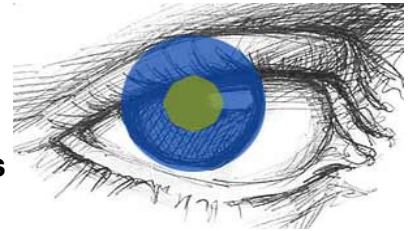
-Here is how to shade and make the eye more realistic. I have a simple "formula" to do this. (There are always exceptions to this "formula", of course.)
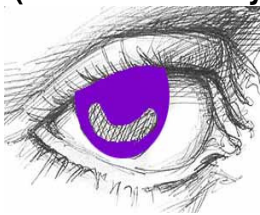
1. Draw a darkened area (seen in purple above) over the iris. The pupil is even darker, and - as always, is ROUND!
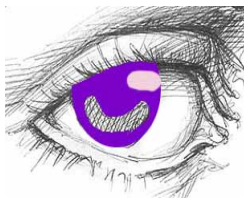
2. Add a highlight, like the pale pink highlight I added above. (Or, if I am drawing in pencil or ink, I leave this area open, to allow for the highlight.) The highlight will be placed on either side of the eye, depending on where the main light source is coming from.
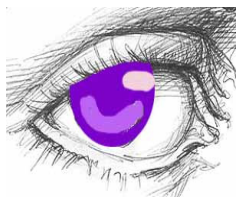
3. Finish colouring in the iris with a paler colour
-Blend these tones together, and if you like, add a suggestion of the little iris "lines" (but don't overdo that, or else the iris will look like a wagon wheel, with little spokes coming out of the pupil).

-Another thing you must not forget to do is to shade the eyeball itself. The eyelid has some thickness. This will cast a shadow on the white of the eye, and the iris. Also, the eyeball itself is round, like a sphere. So a shadow is needed to suggest the eyeball's roundness.
-The corners of the eye will also be more in shadow. Make the shadow subtle, and soft (as seen by the blue shadowing in the illustration above).

-As you can see from these illustrations, you don't need to overdo eyelashes. You can make them feather out, and just "suggest" them on the lower lid.

Drawing the Nose

The nose is a feature that is often overlooked by portrait artists. But it shouldn't be! If you don't get the nose quite right, the whole portrait suffers.

-Above are three nose illustrations. The drawing on the left shows the simple outline of the nose. Two lines for the length of the nose, the round "ball" at the tip of the nose, and the nostrils. The nose is made of these simple shapes.

-The middle illustration shows the basic outline of the nose, with some shadow and rendering starting to show.

-The illustration on the right shows a completely rendered nose. Notice how the strong "outline" on the light side of the nose is almost gone. Notice how the outlines for the nose are now indicated more with shadow, rather than harsh lines.

The NOSE, step-by-step:
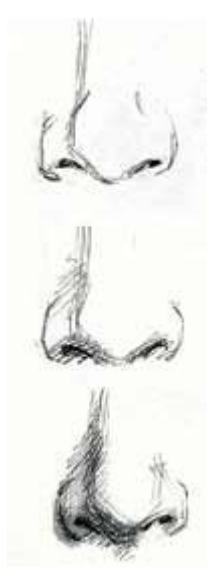
-First, sketch out the outline of the nose. Do not draw a dark line down both sides of the nose – doing so will create a "greek helmet" or mask-like look. Usually one side is more shadowed than the other.

-Start to add a little shading to the side of the nose that is in shadow, and the bottom of the nose. Define the nostrils. Shade the nostril that is in shadow a little bit, but not as much as the rest of that side of the nose. The nostril sticks out a little bit, and gets more light on it.

-Finish shading the nose. Suggest, through gentle shading, the "roundness" of the center (bulb) of the nose, and the roundness of the nostrils.

Drawing Lips

The MOUTH step-by-step:

-Sketch the outline of the lips.

-"Block in" the shading of the lips, putting more shading on the top lip, and leaving a highlighted area in the middle of the bottom lip, and some highlighted areas on the upper rim of the top lip.

-Add more shading and rendering. Don't forget the "ridge" around the lips, and the shading around the mouth that suggests its structure. Add the darkest accents of tone to the corners of the mouth.
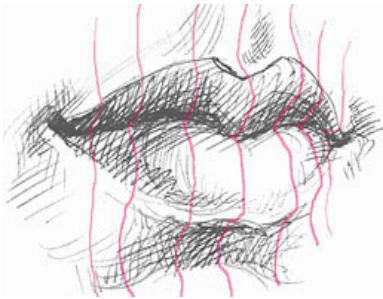
-Notice the "contour lines" drawn over the mouth in the above illustration. The contours of the red lines gives you an idea of how the mouth is constructed in a more dimensional way.

-The upper lip "dips in" (and therefore usually is darker, since it has more of a shadow). The lower lip comes out, which makes it lighter (more light on it). Notice how the corners of the mouth have more shadow. You will often want to make the corners of the mouth very dark.

-There are 5 basic "sections" to the lips. Depending on how much of a "cupid's bow" the person has, you will emphasize these "sections" a little, or a lot. When you draw the mouth, be looking for these subtle (or not so subtle) "sections" to the lips.

-The bottom lip: The highlighted area in orange shows an area of the lower lip that sometimes is a little darker, or has a little more shadow. This is where the lower lip curves in. The closer to the edges of the mouth, the darker (or, in shadow) the bottom lip gets. But, remember - the bottom lip is usually lighter than the top lip because it is facing upwards, and gets more light cast upon it.

How to Draw Hair

There are three things to pay attention to when you are drawing hair: the hair strands, the tones of hair, and the structure of the head that the hair is on.

-Hair is shiny - it has highlights, and dark areas. The first thing you should do when you draw hair is to lay in the shadows and highlights with a broad loose pencil stroke. Don't put in any "dark dark" tones yet, just indicate the shadows and highlights. Draw the areas of light and dark as "strips" of tone.

-Then, go in and draw in individual "hair strands" (but you don't have to draw in every hair!). Draw dark, sharp pencil strokes, to give the hair some crispness. But, still leave the highlights and mid-tone areas intact. Don't let them get too dark, or blend in too much with each other. These distinct variations of tone are what keeps the hair looking shiny.

-For darker hair, you'll have more areas of "dark dark" (but still have the mid-tones and highlights). For light colored hair, you'll have very few "dark dark" tones. The darkest tone may be a medium gray (when using graphite).

-The top-left illustration shows a head of hair "half done". The section of hair closer to the face is completed, the area near the back of the head isn't finished yet. You can still see the "strips" of tone in the unfinished area of the hair.
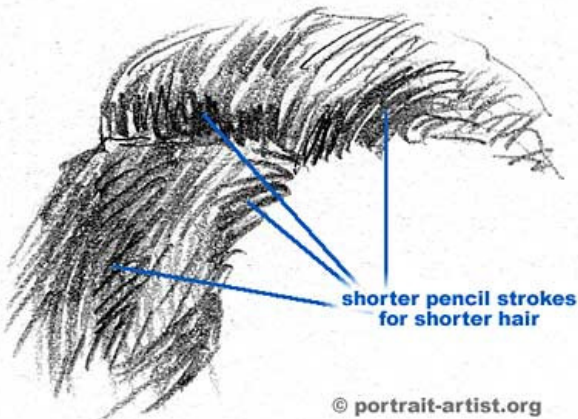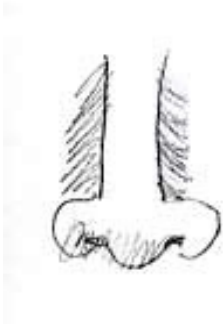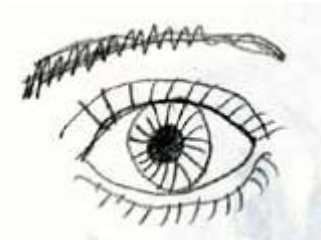
-For shorter hair, shorter pencil strokes are drawn. You can still lay in the basic areas of light and shadow with broad strokes, but the darker, "detail" strokes that indicate hair strands should be short. Also, it's good to keep a *sharp* pencil when drawing in the details of hair.

shorter pencil strokes
for shorter hair

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-Remember: Use any drawing tools available to you to help produce the texture of the hair. The _Sgraffito_ technique works well to accomplish this!

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DON'T DO's:

DO 's: