

A young artist will say, "I want to learn to shade realistically." They recognize that their drawings are lacking something, and accurately identify the problem as shading. Shading is to drawing what light and shadow is to life. A poorly shaded drawing is like an extremely overexposed or underexposed photo, flat. Don't leave your teen languishing in a land of flat drawings.

This portrait is instantly recognizable as my oldest daughter. The accurate line drawing is not what makes it realistic, although that helps. The bright colors are not what makes it realistic, in fact they give it a fairy tale, story time sentiment. The shading and blending is what makes it realistic. Shading realistically is highly achievable for any interested teen!

There are two problems a teen has when shading a drawing. First she must identify where the shadows and highlights belong. Second she needs to learn the proper pencil techniques. Both of these problems can be quickly overcome!

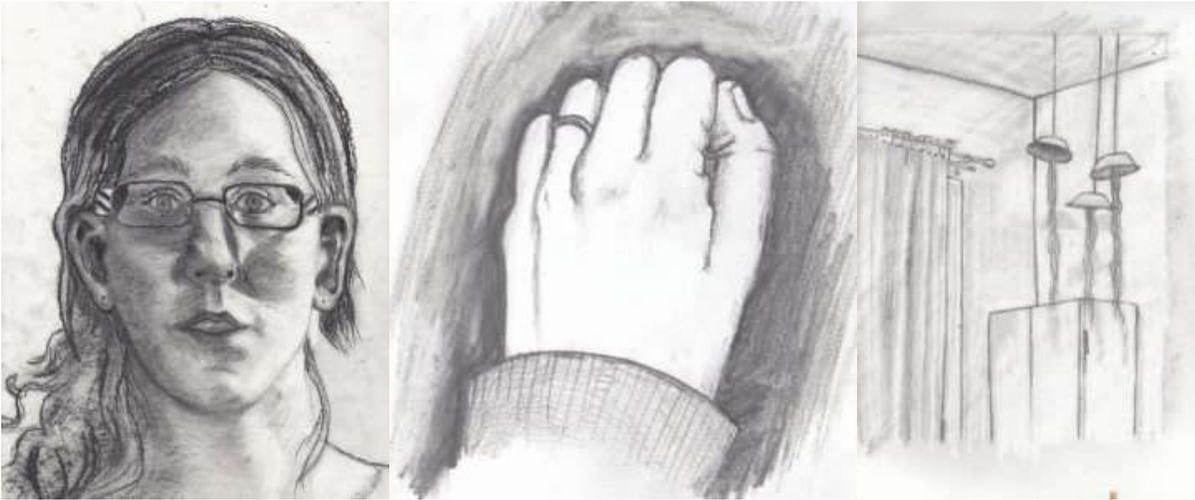
Identify shadows and highlights:

From a Photo



To have easy success with any realistic drawing work from a photo. With the help of the grid method an accurate line drawing and placement of shadows is incredibly simple. The smaller the grid squares the more accurate the drawing. These photos demonstrate how I quickly completed this portrait of my daughter.

From Life



When drawing from life we use informal perspective to make an accurate line drawings and place the shadows. Informal perspective is a fancy way of saying we measure everything against everything else. With portraits the base unit of measurement is the eye. When identifying shadows it helps to think of them as shapes. In the three drawings above I used informal perspective. For more on informal perspective check out my post on realistic portraits.

From Our Imagination

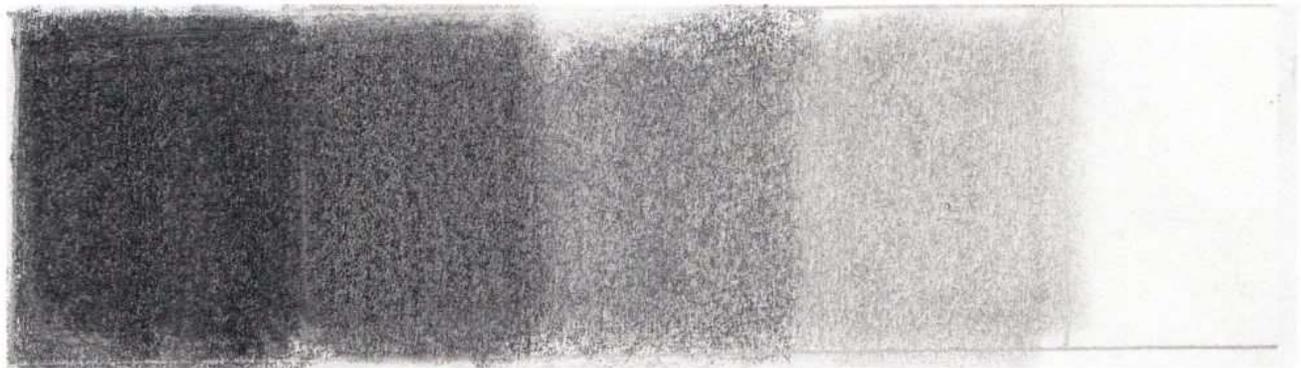


Every artist wants to make incredibly realistic drawings from their imagination. Unfortunately only artists who have practiced extensively will be able to do this. Why? Because, they have drawn enough from life or from formulas to accurately remember and recreate what they've seen or drawn. This is why artists study anatomy, carry sketch pads and do drawing exercises like gesture drawings.

So to draw something realistically from our imagination we should either practice drawing the same thing from sight repeatedly or learn a formula for drawing it. It helps to lower our expectations for realism when we draw from our imaginations and instead focus on creating something beautiful or emotionally evocative.

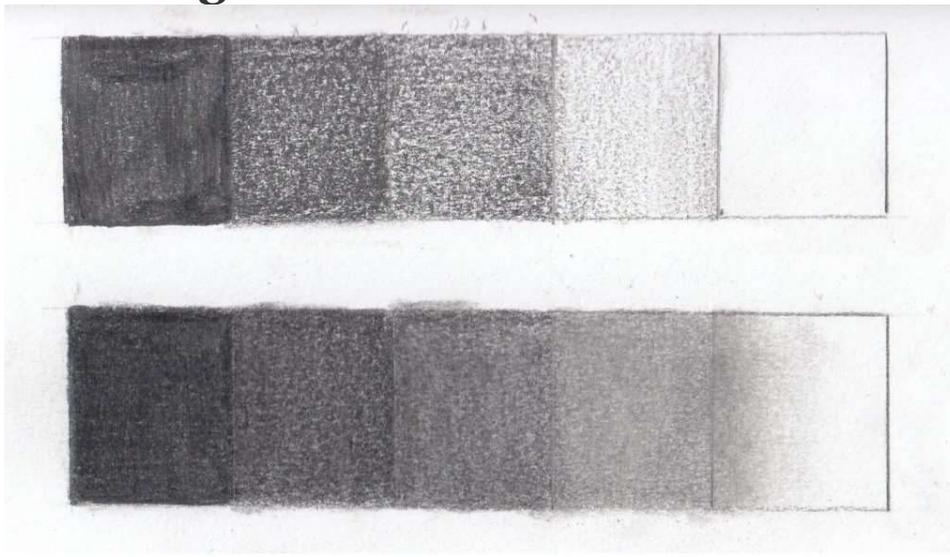
Learn the techniques:

Value Scales



Shadows are not uniform. They vary from deep to light shadows. Every object has various graduations of shades. We need to identify the various shades of shadows on and around objects in our drawings. A tool we use to do this is called a value scale. It is a record of tones we make on a scrap paper to compare with the tones on our subject and in our drawing.

Blending



Many inexperienced artists will very carefully shade a drawing with pencils getting all the shadows correct but it's still lacking. It's not smooth, this matters especially with portraits. The simple technique of blending solves this problem. You can see the two value scales, the top is not blended and the bottom one is blended. Blending fills in the valleys of the page removing white spots and smooths the transitions between tones. In order to have a truly smooth transition it is necessary to use faint lines on you drawing or the lines will show through the shading.

Some young artists will recognize the need for blending and attempt to use their fingers, but due to the oils in skin this is not the way to go. The oils will make smudges that cannot be effectively erased. Tortillions, blending stumps, chamois are all tools that can be used to blend with. Even a tissue is acceptable. The trick is to use light pressure while forming little circles to smooth the shadows and create smooth transitions between shadows and light areas.

Art Challenge

First complete the exercise of making a value scale and blending it smooth with a blending tool. Choose a subject (either a portrait or still life) to draw from a photo using the grid method or from life using informal perspective. After lightly drawing a line drawing, identify the shades using the value scale. With the side of the pencil tip shade in each tone beginning with the darkest shades, viewing them as shapes to be copied. Then using a blending tool make the shading smooth. If necessary sharpen the highlights with an eraser.

If this lesson helped you please send me a picture of your drawing at:
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