

The Fundamentals of Figure Drawings for Your Art Portfolio

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Find out why using your whole arm and drawing what you eyes see can greatly improve your figure drawings for your art portfolio.

<http://bit.ly/figuredrawings>



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This article is a guest post from Kenzo Fry of [lovelifedrawing](#).

If you are an art student applying for fine art, fashion design, illustration or animation then having figure drawing in your entrance art portfolio are a must. In some fields showing a near mastery is essential to gaining acceptance particularly in animation and entertainment design. You'll find these tips from Kenzo a great place to start:

Figure drawings are an important part of your portfolio. We are endlessly fascinated with the human form. It is also one of the most technically in-depth things we can do as artists. If you feel your figure drawings needs strengthening , there are two fundamentals that will put your portfolio ahead of many other art students.

Draw on a larger scale and use your whole arm

Many young students we see at [life drawing](#) tend to be hunched over an A4 [sketchbook](#) with a pencil. A graphite pencil and a small sketchbook seem like logical starting points for an art student – you might think of them as the opposite of the 10-foot [tall oil](#) paintings that the old

masters would do. However, a graphite pencil and a little sketchbook are actually very difficult to draw well with. The technique needed is very advanced. It requires highly developed drawing technique and confidence, without which the drawing can look overworked and messy. So if this sounds like how you usually draw, we would recommend trying A2 with willow charcoal.

[caption id="attachment_1039" align="aligncenter" width="600"]



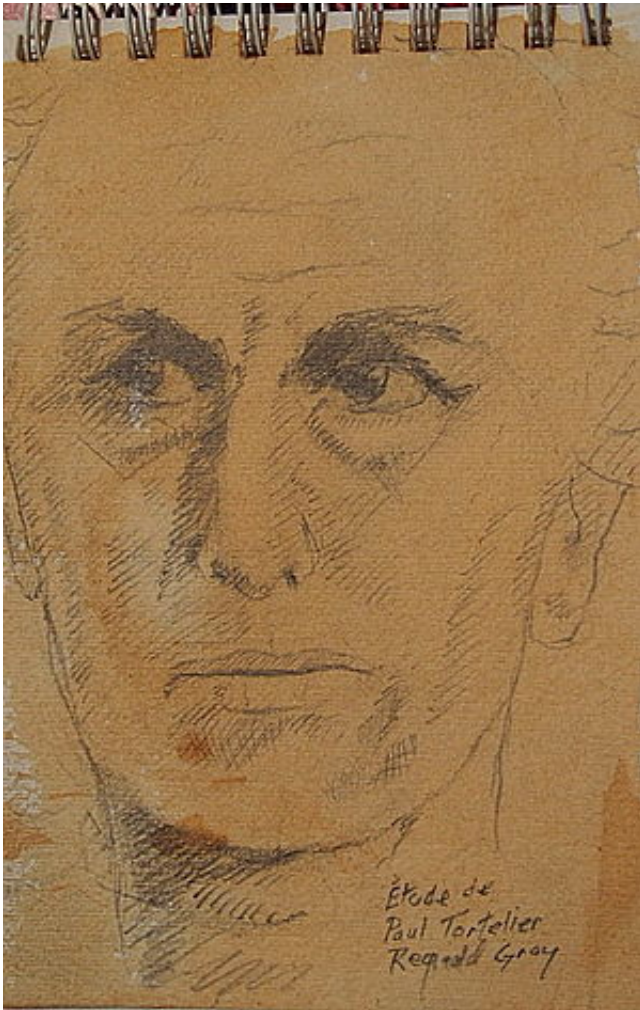
By Mayko Fry. Click [here](#) for image source.[/caption]

Drawing on a larger scale and using a less precise drawing instrument will help you to draw with your whole arm, instead of limiting your range of movement to just the rotation of your wrist and the movement of your fingers. Those are good tools for precision areas like the eyes, but to get the sweeping movement of the spine and curvature of the hips, you'll want smooth, large movements of your arm from your shoulder and elbow, and an open posture. It is scary changing the muscles you use to make lines, and at first it may not work as well as your old style, but things will get better rapidly.

Use A2 paper attached to an easel and things will start to improve automatically.

Draw what your eyes see

[caption id="" align="alignright" width="300"]



English: Drawing in sketchbook (Photo credit: Wikipedia)[/caption]

We are so intimately familiar with the human form that our eyes are unforgiving of any slight imperfections. Furthermore, our brains come pre-loaded with a lot of software that runs every time we see a person. Within the blink of an eye, we can recognize a person, read their body language, assess how attracted we are to them along with many other levels of interpretation and analysis. Further complicating things is that we all have very strong pre-conceptions of what the human form looks like and the lines that represent it. The eyes are ovals, the legs are long, the head sits on top of the neck etc. Unfortunately, all the above gets in the way when we want to [draw a person](#).

We recently conducted an experiment by asking someone to draw a plant and then draw a person. She is good at drawing, and the plant came out well. She was able to get the shapes of the leaves, and line everything up as it really looked. Light was bouncing off the plant, into her eyes and being transferred to lines on the page.

When it came to drawing the person, the true shapes of the face were lost. Things weren't lining up as they should. The face angled downwards a little, and contradicted the preconceptions about positions that features take on a face. So light bounced off the face, into her eyes, and then went through a lot of brain software, then 80% of the face's detail was

discarded and replaced by the preconceptions about the way a face should look. This distorted information was transferred to the page. Making things worse, our eyes when viewing the drawing were very unforgiving of its unnatural feel.

So, if you are struggling with your figure drawings, it is with good reason. One of the most fundamental things to do then is to *overcome the pre-conceptions and draw what your eyes see*.

There's two basic approaches you can use here. One involves **breaking down the figure into basic geometric shapes**. You don't need to become a master of anatomy if you don't want to; we aren't medical students after all. But you can learn to see the basic shapes that make up a figure. This helps to stop seeing the person as a person and start seeing them as shapes that are easier to draw. If you have a look at the books of [Andrew Loomis](#), he goes through this approach quite comprehensively.

The second approach is to flip a switch in your brain from 'I'm drawing a person' to '**I'm drawing a landscape**'. Think about the model as a landscape complete with hills and valleys.

Bonus tip: Squint your eyes

The tone on a figure can seem a bit overwhelming – there's a lot of it and it takes infinite shades. A picture can start to look messy when attempting to get all that complexity onto the page. A simple and common technique is to squint your eyes at the model. This *acts like a filter that simplifies the tones you see*. You'll realize where the light and dark are strongest, and the basic shapes that the tone is taking. Those are the things you need to get down onto your page.

Another bonus tip: try colored paper

[caption id="attachment_1040" align="aligncenter" width="600"]



By Mayko Fry. Click [here](#) for image source.[/caption]

If you have worked exclusively on white paper, consider mixing things up and trying colored paper. White is really on the extreme end when it comes to tone. If you use a colored piece of paper, the background color becomes a sort of middle ground tone. From here, you can go darker with your charcoal and highlight light areas with white. If you don't like the look of colored paper – some people think it looks tacky – then you could try covering your paper with a layer of colored acrylic gesso. This will also give the paper a nice, scratchy texture. Marks with charcoal or pastel look really good on that surface, and it gives the drawing a feeling of sophistication.

And one more for good measure: get in a period of consistent practice

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English: Sketch book A4 (Photo credit: Wikipedia)[/caption]

We all know that long-term, practice will be the reason that improves our drawings. However, there's also shorter-term benefits that you can think of a bit like training for a marathon.

Drawing is a bit like a muscle, and you can train up your drawing fitness in preparation for making your portfolio. It's amazing how regular and consistent practice can lead to a period where your drawings are coming out really strong, and a period without practice can damage your drawings. It's like taking a month off from training in a sport. If you think about the time that you have to get your portfolio ready, you can also think about staying disciplined and regularly practicing life drawing. Perhaps having a routine works for you, *or constantly carrying a **sketchbook*** – whatever works for you. Also, more time spent drawing means more work to choose from.

About the author

[Lovelifedrawing](#) is full of articles, podcasts, pictures and videos about life drawing - catering for everyone from beginners to intermediates to pros. It is run by mother and son duo Mayko and Kenzo Fry. Mayko is an award winning artist based in London - her figure drawings speak for themselves. Kenzo is a budding student of life drawing, who transfers Mayko and other professional artists' expertise into useful articles, videos and podcasts for all to enjoy.

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