

ASSIGNMENT 1 / WEEK 1: SO YOU WANT TO LEARN HOW TO SKETCH.....

Do you know what you can achieve in two hours, an hour, half an hour, 15 minutes or 5 minutes?

You'll have a much better idea after doing this assignment!

INTRODUCTION

I'm going to start with a very practical issue – time. That is finding time to sketch, how long it takes you to draw and having to observe a time limit for sketching – which is imposed either by yourself or your subject.

This first assignment is therefore about:

- Getting familiar with drawing quickly
- Learning how to sketch within time constraints
- Not fussing about the finish level
- Getting the essence of a subject down

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT – HOW TO SKETCH

But I don't know to sketch! What do I have to do?

There is no one right way to sketch – just have a go and see what works for you. When you start to sketch, you have the freedom to find a new way of making marks. Try and find out what is your own signature style (everybody's is different).

Some tips:

- **Always remember that a sketch is a preliminary drawing or study.** Which means:
 - You do not have to draw the same way you normally work
 - You do not have to be “perfect” – people who normally exercise a lot of control to draw highly refined drawings may have difficulty with this one (I did – it took me a very long time to learn how to scribble – but if you keep practising it comes in time and you can even enjoy letting go!)
 - You do not have to draw everything
 - You do not have to erase if you don't want to
 - You do not have to work the whole sketch to the same level.....or even finish
 - You do not have to compose a picture – that can come later with more practice
- **Draw what you see not what you think you see – keep looking all the time.** You can always tell people who are sketching – they're the ones whose heads are bobbing up and down all the time. As you become more expert and learn to draw more quickly you may well find your head stays up more for more of the time.

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- Find something to use as a reference for a unit of measurement – and keep measuring as you sketch
- Try and find an anchor point from which to measure distances. (I often work out what the centre of my sketch is before I start and that helps with positioning on the page)
- If it all seems too much just choose a place to start and work out from there – this can be the same as your anchor point. If you don't get it all on the page remember it's just a sketch and try and work out what went wrong.
- Identify the main contrasts between colours, tones, textures – this helps with identifying potential focal points for your sketch
- Go for big shapes rather than detail – it's surprising how few details are needed to identify a shape (e.g. a few tile shapes on a roof; a few leaves on a tree)
- Look for negative shapes – they're incredibly helpful to developing an ability to draw quickly and accurately
- Describe the differences in values in simple terms (try practising hatching). Five values is probably the minimum for any sketch with tone. If you're used to using a value scale then try using it for sketching.
- Try making marks in different ways – and think about differences in texture when you do.
- Using pen and ink is a really good discipline when trying to 'get your eye in' – it makes you look more carefully as there is no scope for erasure.
- Try recording colours in different ways – but initially focus on sketching without colour until you're happy you're getting the hand of it.
- Make sure you study what you're trying to draw and try not to look down too much. Observe, draw, check, correct and check again.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT – DRAWING QUICKLY

But I can't draw quickly! I don't know how to.

Your sketching generally will benefit from being able to draw quickly as this helps you to:

- Let go of the 'control' that you may normally employ when drawing.
- Exercise your visual muscles and stimulates hand-eye co-ordination.
- Do more sketches in the time available
- Be much less bothered by any sketches that don't quite work out!

Drawing quickly is a skill which can only be developed over time and with practice. People going to life drawing classes for the first time often say that the quick 2-5 minute poses at the beginning are the most difficult. However, they soon begin to understand the huge value that learning to draw quickly can bring. You learn ways of conveying a lot with a little - how few lines or marks are required to represent an image. Lots of practice at looking carefully and drawing quickly helps most people to achieve much more than they ever thought possible.

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This assignment is a set of exercises which are the equivalent of 'doing scales' if you were a pianist or a singer. You can do them anywhere and at any time but they should ideally be done as often as you can.

You may be sketching a person or an animal in a particular pose. You may try to sketch the effect of light at a particular time. Remember that you're not producing a finished drawing, it doesn't have to be perfect and you don't have to sketch everything – but you do need to work out the key things you do need to draw for the sketch to make sense.

If you feel you're getting quite good at drawing quickly and want to step up a gear, try the following. You'll draw faster if you can:

- Draw at least some of the time without looking at your paper (akin to [blind contour drawing](#) and typing without looking at the keyboard)
- Store information you have observed after something has moved – and then draw it. Pets are great for practising this!

ASSIGNMENT 1: WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

PRACTICE DRAWING QUICKLY FROM LIFE AT HOME.

Before your first sketching trip outside, try seeing what you can sketch at home within set time limits. This assignment is about doing the sketching equivalent of the "quickies" which people do at the beginning of most life drawing classes. These are essential and you will find these difficult to begin with BUT I guarantee that you will gain confidence and get better the more you do. The main benefit is that it trains your eye to observe more acutely and develops speed in hand-eye co-ordination.

You should choose people / objects / scenes in your own home. What you choose is less important than that you practice drawing quickly. However, you MUST NOT use a photograph to practice drawing quickly.

Set aside an hour in two half an hour slots and produce:

- **3 sketches of 5 minutes each**
- **1 x 10 minute sketch**
- **1 x 15 minute sketch**
- **1 x 20 minute sketch**

Try and practice the shapes and type of perspective which you might encounter when you go outside. Try drawing using line only. Try drawing using values only. Do you have time for both? Work out whether drawing in lines or values works better for you.

You'll find this quite tiring because of the intense observation involved. You may be very disappointed about the quality of the sketches produced. Don't be. If you're really, really upset I'll dig out my old sketchbooks from life drawing class and show you what I used to produce when I started doing 5 minute sketches at the beginning of a life drawing class!

If you have another hour produce 2 x 30 minute sketches. And if you have more time, see what you can do in an hour time slot or two hours.

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However, the emphasis needs to be on lots of practice in sketching in short time slots. This is about learning to draw differently and quickly in order to sketch in public eventually.

WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED:

- Show the class some or all your ‘quickie’ sketches – make sure you say how long they took
- Say what you did well/what you learned and then say what you’re still finding difficult / did less well and need to work on and improve.
- Note anything you noticed as you tried drawing more quickly
- Evaluate the impact drawing quickly has on your sketching style

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March 2008

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