

Drawing is the root of everything, and time spent on that is actually all profit.

-Vincent van Gogh

AP Drawing Summer Assignments Due 9/5/25

1. **Reading and Writing:** Reading and Writing: Read the article “How to Create an Excellent Observational Drawing” on pages 4-9 of this packet.

Begin to make weekly sketchbook entries addressing these tips while writing annotations in your sketches. You can buy a sketchbook of your choice to use or pick one up from WHS before summer break begins.

Assessment: Sketchbook Check

2. **Artwork:** Complete an **original observational drawing** of **one or more** of the **Subject Options** below. This “Summer Piece” will be the first artwork in your AP Drawing portfolio.

You can use any traditional or unconventional drawing materials. These can include but are not limited to charcoal, ink, colored pencil, acrylic paint, oil paint, watercolor, gouache, graphite, pastel, and digital drawing. Artwork should exhibit thought and careful planning. Acceptable forms of observation or drawing directly from life or from a photographic image.

If you are working from a photograph that you did not take, you need to cite the source and significantly change it to make the image your own. This artwork should include elements of creativity and represent the kind of art you’re aesthetically and/or conceptually drawn to and compelled to create.

Assessment: Exhibit with Written Statement and Rubric

(See subject options on the next two pages)

Subject Options

- **Portrait with Chiaroscuro:** from observation draw a portrait of yourself or someone else with intense lighting, called Chiaroscuro or “Rembrandt Lighting”. Tips: Look at portraits created by Rembrandt for inspiration. Take several digital pictures of your model to work from. Experiment with lighting, hold a flashlight to create dramatic shading and great contrasts in light or dark. Check out this webpage for masterworks from art history
<https://drawpaintacademy.com/chiaroscuro/>
- **Portrait with Social Commentary:** from observation create a portrait drawing with the intent of making a comment on society. Tips: Brainstorm issues that you are passionate about to inspire your artwork. Include creative elements: background, additional figures, and details to express your concept. Check out the “Artworks To Discuss Social Justice Issues”
<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1e1i90TRFsrvubX4PScdDFkynNLhAz6ubrtLskWcN7Q/edit?usp=sharing>
- **Self-Portrait:** Create a drawing yourself from observation that expresses something about your nature, feelings or beliefs to the viewer. Tips: transforming into a new form. Tips: Take a series of digital images of yourself from various angles to develop the drawing. Think about the effects or lighting, clothing, background, etc. Think about what you can include in the composition to give the viewer insights into the artist. express creativity through artistic decisions including use of abstraction, metamorphosis, fantasy, style choices, etc. Check out this webpage for more insight into the history of selfportraits through art history
<https://www.arthistoryproject.com/subjects/self-portrait/>
- **Study of Hands:** From observation draw hands engaged in activities doing yard work, cooking, throwing a baseball, holding the bicycle handlebars, with and without gloves on. Tips: Think of action verbs. Compose the hands-on one surface, overlapping, diminishing, and exaggerating the foreshortening. Keep it detailed and shade consistently with a single light source to create unity. Consider the use of the page and how the hands create movement in the composition. Check out this webpage for some background on the use of hands in artworks through history
<https://www.thewestologist.com/arts/hands-in-art>

continued on the next page...

- **Still Life of Everyday Objects:** Set up a collection of items to draw from observation that have a variety of different surfaces, translucencies, and reflective qualities. Tips: Group several different sizes and heights of objects (bottles, containers, nicknacks, toys, cosmetics, etc.) on a shelf or countertop. Play around with the arrangement adjusting the items in relationship to each other. Place one or two items in front of the others to give a sense of space. Consider the way they are affected by lighting and reflections. Take a series of photographs to work from. Draw the items as if they are a congregation of people, giving each one of them equal amounts of attention. Create visual interest by including fabric folded, draped, and/or wrinkled, notice how the grain or print of the fabric moves between folds. Convey volume by using a complete range of tonal value changes. Check out the work of artists like Janet Fish, Audrey Flack, and Anthony Waichulis. Consider objects that create meaning, check out the webpage for some background on meaning created through still life objects <https://www.art-is-fun.com/still-life-paintings>
- **Stilllife of Natural Life:** Organize a grouping of flowers, vegetation, fruit, vegetables, shells and other natural life to draw from observation. Tips: Cut and slice them, personify, show the cross-section, etc. to bring visual interest and dynamic composition. Try arranging different sizes and heights of objects.. Play around with the arrangement adjusting the items in relationship to each other. Place one or two of them in front of the others to give a sense of space. Use various textures, and values to create a sense of dimension. Consider the way they are affected by lighting and reflections. Take a series of photographs to work from. Draw the items as if they are a congregation of people, giving each one of them equal amounts of attention. Create visual interest by including fabric folded, draped, and/or wrinkled, notice how the grain or print of the fabric moves between folds. Convey volume by using a complete range of tonal value changes. Check out this webpage of artists who work in this genre <https://drawpaintacademy.com/top-20-still-life-artists/>

3. **Written Statement:** Write a short statement that explains the 2-D Artwork you created for assignment #2.

- include information about your use of materials, processes, and ideas
- typed 600 characters maximum/500 characters minimum

Assessment: Exhibit with Artwork and Rubric

How To Create an Excellent Observational Drawing: 11 Tips For High School Art Students

Observational drawing is an integral component of many high school Art courses, including AP Level Art. Often, drawing is the core method of researching, investigating, developing, and communicating ideas. While it is accepted that there are many wondrous types of drawings –and that non-representational drawing methods have an important role in student Art projects –it is usually advantageous to demonstrate competent, realistic observational drawing skills to the examiner (particularly in the early stages of a project).

What follows is a list of tips that have been written specifically for high school art students who are looking to improve the realism of their observational drawings.

Tip 1: Look at what you are drawing

Failing to look at what you are drawing is one of the most fundamental errors an Art student can make. This sounds obvious, but it is the most common error made by art students. Many students attempt to draw things the way that they think they should look, rather than the way they actually do look.

The only way to record shape, proportion, and detail accurately is to look at the source of information. Human memory does not suffice. Forms, shadows, and details are hard enough to replicate when they are right there in front of you; if you have to make them up, they appear even less convincing. In order to produce an outstanding observational drawing, you must observe: your eyes must continually dance from the piece of paper to the object and back again. Not just once or twice, but constantly.

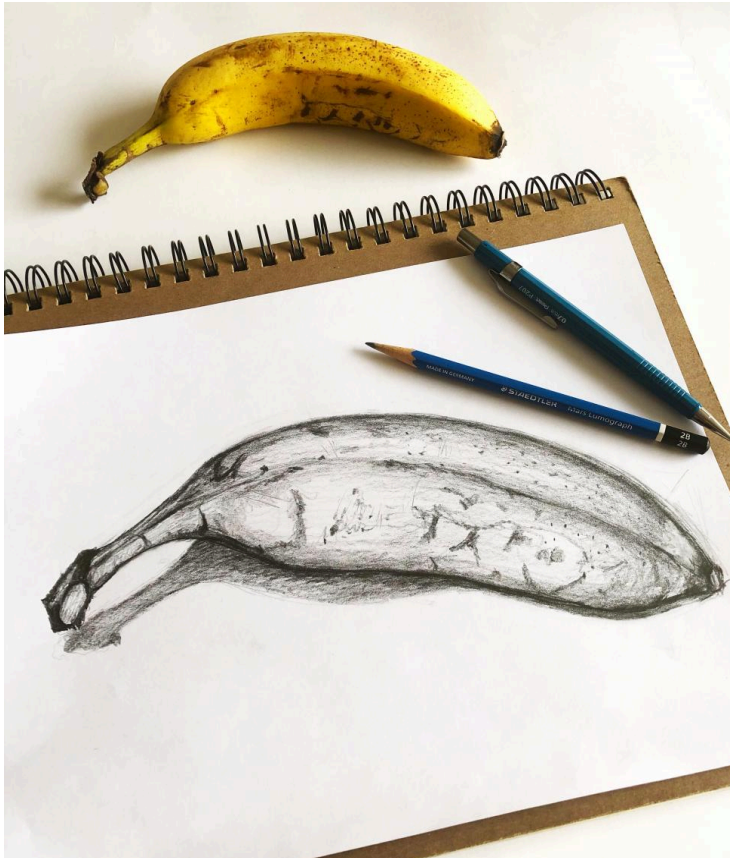
Note: even if you pursue a theme about mythical creatures, fairy tales, or some other imaginary form, you should work as much as possible from observation. Piece your creatures together from fragments of life. Dress people up and then draw them or merge different parts of insects or creatures together (using an artistic license as appropriate) rather than creating an entire form or scene from your head.

Tip 2: Draw from real objects whenever possible

The phrase "observational drawing" typically implies drawing from life. Ask any art teacher and they will list the benefits of drawing from objects that are sitting directly in front of you. You are provided with a wealth of visual information...changing light conditions; rich



textures; views of the subject from alternate angles; as well as information from other senses...smells and noise from the surroundings, etc. Transcribing from three dimensions to



two is ultimately much harder than drawing from a photograph, but it often results in drawings that are "richer" and more authentic.

This doesn't mean, however, that you should never draw from photographs. Students frequently traipse from home to school and back again: it can be impractical to carry and set up complex still life arrangements over and over again. Some subjects –such as landscapes and nude models –are also unavailable in most classroom settings. It can therefore be good practice to set up a still life arrangement in the flesh (or visit a location) and begin drawing directly from the subject, using photographs to complete the work at home).

Tip 3: Don't trace

Throughout history, great realist painters have traced from photographs or worked from projections blown up onto walls. But these painters are not high school art students; nor are they assessed on their ability to replicate form.

There is a place for tracing in AP Art (such as when tracing over something you have already drawn or creating a repeat pattern), but tracing from photographs and then simply applying color or tone is not acceptable. Such methods of "drawing" involve minimal skill, teach you little, and run the risk of producing clunky, soul-less outlines. Don't do it.

Tip 4: Understand perspective

As objects get further away they appear smaller. The replication of this change of scale on paper (through the use of vanishing points) is called "perspective". The fundamentals of perspective are usually taught in junior high school; by year 10 at the latest. If you are a senior art student and have somehow missed this lesson, remedy this situation urgently. There are not many theoretical aspects of art that are essential to learn, but this is one of them.

Tip 5. Use grids, guidelines, or rough forms to get the proportions right before you add details

Many students start with a tiny detail (the eye on a face, for example) and then gradually add in the rest of the image ending up with a drawing that is badly proportioned or doesn't fit on the page (or floats aimlessly in the middle of it). This can be avoided by approximating the basic forms before adding details or by using guidelines to ensure that proportions are correct.

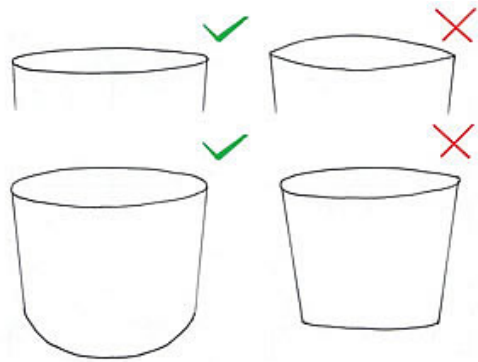


If working from a photograph, using a grid can result in highly accurate work. It allows students to focus on one small segment of the image at a time and gives arbitrary lines from which distances can be gauged. This can be a helpful strategy when precise, detailed images are required and can itself become a celebrated component in an artwork. As gridding is methodical and involves meticulous plotting of lines, however, it is important to acknowledge that this approach runs the risk of producing tight and regimented drawings that lack in "spirit" and should thus be approached with care.

If working from life, roughly sketching outlines of the major forms will allow you to get the proportions right, before you add the details. While you do this, you should constantly check which points line up (i.e. edge of nostrils lining up with the edge of the eye) and the size of every object should be estimated in relation to the things that are beside it. You must get used to seeing things not in terms of absolute scale, but in terms of how one thing compares to another.

Tip 6: Be wary of ellipses

Ellipses –the oval shapes that are visible at the top of cylindrical objects such as bottles or jars –frequently "trip up" a weak drawer. They can send an immediate signal that a student is not looking at what they are drawing. All ellipses, no matter what angle they are viewed from, should be rounded (not pointed) at the ends.



Tip 7: Keep the outlines light

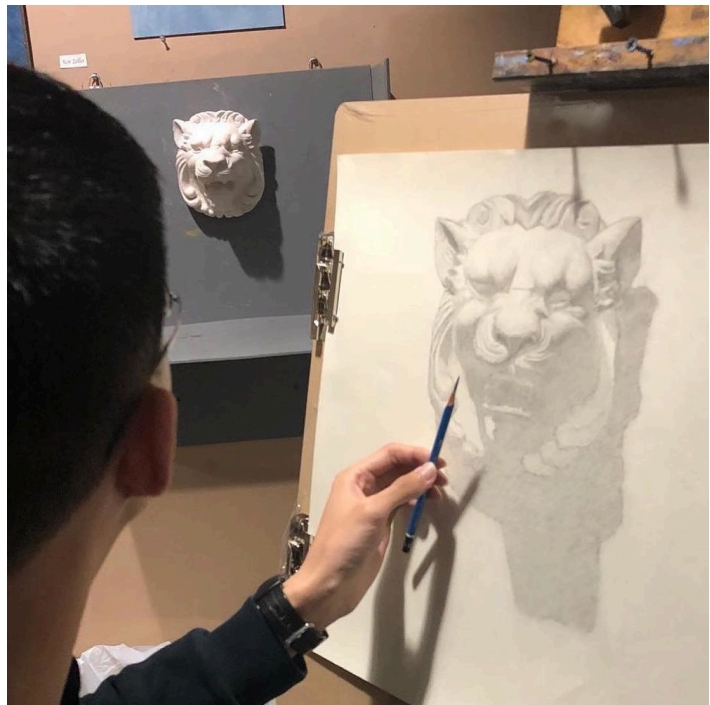
Note that there is not a single black outline within the work: edges are defined solely through variation in tone. As your drawing is fleshed out in more detail, with attention given to the subtle variations in shape and form, the natural inclination –especially of the novice drawer –is to want to darken in the outlines, to help ensure they are visible. Do not do this. Real objects do not have dark lines running around every edge. Edges should instead be defined by a change in tone and/or color.

If you are producing a line drawing, a cartoon or some other graphic image, outlines may be darkened, but in an observational drawing –especially one which you wish to be realistic –dark outlines are never advised.

Tip 8: Have a Good Range of Tone

When it comes to applying tone to your drawing, as with everything else, look at the object. Observe where the light and dark areas are and copy what you see. In almost all cases, your drawing should have a full range of tones, from black, through a multitude of grays (or colored mid-tones) through to white.

Some students –having learned how to blend tone smoothly from dark to light –develop the unfortunate habit of randomly shading all surfaces from dark to light. The tone should never be invented and it should never be applied by guesswork. Even when a light material is depicted (as in the cloth shown underneath the fruit) shadows are deep and rich in tone.



Tip 9: Use mark-making to convey surface quality and texture

When producing an observational drawing, the mark-making used should help to convey the texture(s) of the subject matter. There are a multitude of different ways a pencil can strike paper –hatching/dashes/smudges/dots...think carefully before you decide which technique to use.

Tip 10: Include / omit detail as necessary

One area where students often become disheartened is in the depiction of incredibly complex subjects. When drawing trees, plants, and bushes, it is not necessary to replicate every leaf or stick. When drawing a person, it is not necessary to depict every strand of hair. The artist is always in a position to pick and choose what goes in their artwork. As long as the decision is based on what is aesthetically best for the work (rather than wanting to leave out something that is hard to draw...which is often the driving force behind students wanting to eliminate certain aspects of their image) there is nothing wrong with omitting certain details from a drawing. In fact, often the composition is less cluttered and easy on the eye because of it. There are many approaches to this. Sometimes every single detail might be recorded with accuracy. Sometimes a certain area of a drawing is rendered in full, with other parts trailing away.



Tip 11: Insert your own soul

Most of the tips above are aimed at helping a student create more realistic observational drawings. This last tip is something different. It is a reminder that sometimes it is the difference between the real item and the drawing that matters.



Although observational drawings are usually expected to be realistic in nature, they do not need to be hyper-realistic (in other words, they don't have to look exactly like a photograph). Often, it is the unrealistic parts: the unexpected mark-making –the gap between the real object and what is drawn –where the soul sneaks in. It is the beauty in smudges and irregularities and artistic interpretation. An AP Art student is an artist. Embrace this!

Website: How To Create an Excellent Observational Drawing: 11 Tips For High School Art Students

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<https://www.studentartguide.com/articles/realistic-observational-drawings>