

Gesture Drawing — Workbook

This workbook turns the Gesture Drawing course into reps you can actually draw. Each section maps to one course module and mixes timed drawing exercises, fill-in worksheets, and pre-flight checklists. Keep a stack of cheap paper and a soft pencil or brush pen ready, set a timer, and remember that almost every drawing here is a rep you will throw away. The value is in the volume of attempts, not in any single sketch.

The Line of Action

Train your hand to find and draw one expressive line of action first, then push it beyond the literal pose.

Exercise: Line of Action Only

From a timed reference tool such as Line of Action or Quickposes, draw nothing but the single line of action for each pose. No masses, no limbs, no detail. One committed stroke per pose, run slightly past the head and the leading foot.

- Squint at the pose for two seconds first and decide if the dominant shape is a C, an S, or a near-straight bend.

- Draw the line as one fast whole-arm stroke; if it does not feel like the pose, redraw it rather than fixing it.

- Complete fifteen poses and circle the three lines that most clearly read as their action with no figure attached.

Exercise: Literal vs. Pushed Pairs

Do a set of paired 1-minute poses to train exaggeration. Draw each pose twice: once exactly as you see it, then immediately again pushing every curve, tilt, stretch, and weight shift as far as you dare.

- On the literal version, copy the pose faithfully with no exaggeration.

- On the pushed version, deepen the line of action, widen the lean, lengthen the stretched side, and compress the bunched side.

- Set the pair side by side and mark which reads more clearly as the action; note that the pushed one usually wins.

Worksheet: Pose Read Worksheet

Before drawing a chosen pose, fill this out in a few words to force yourself to decide what the gesture actually is.

What is the figure doing, in one verb (reaching, slumping, kicking, twisting)

Dominant line-of-action shape (C, S, or near-straight)

Where the line starts and ends (e.g. raised hand down to planted foot)

One thing to exaggerate (curve, lean, stretch, or weight shift)

Emotional read of the pose in one word (tense, relaxed, eager, exhausted)

Checklist: Line of Action Pre-Flight

- [] The line of action was the first mark on the page.
- [] The line is curved (C or S), not stiffly straight.
- [] The line runs slightly past the head and past the leading limb.
- [] The pose was exaggerated beyond the literal reference, not just copied.
- [] The line alone reads as the action before any masses were added.

Timed Poses and the Gesture Workflow

Build speed and a repeatable layered process across 30-second, 1-minute, and 2-minute holds.

Exercise: Twenty 30-Second Poses

Run twenty 30-second poses back to back from a timed reference tool. Draw only the line of action plus a quick mark for the tilt of the rib cage and pelvis. Stop dead when the timer ends, even mid-stroke.

- Spend the first two or three seconds looking, not drawing, to find the line of action.
- Lay the line of action down, then add only the opposing tilt of the two main masses.
- Do not judge any single drawing; at the end, compare your last five to your first five and note the jump in confidence.

Exercise: The 2-Minute Structural Gesture

Do several 2-minute poses, using the extra time to add layers of structure, not detail. Begin every one with the line of action.

- Draw the line of action, then a tilted egg for the rib cage and a smaller tilted box for the pelvis, opposed to each other.
- Connect the two masses with a curving spine and run tapering tubes or lines out for the limbs.
- Add no faces, fingers, or shading; stop at a complete structural gesture with correct weight.

Worksheet: Session Ladder Plan

Plan one practice session as a ladder that climbs from short to longer holds. Fill this in before you start and follow it.

Warm-up block: number of 30-second poses (e.g. 15)

Speed block: number of 1-minute poses

Structure block: number of 2-minute poses

Optional long pose length (5 or 10 min) and whether you will begin it with a full gesture

Reference source (Line of Action, Quickposes, Croquis Cafe, or a live session)

Total session time

Checklist: Workflow Discipline Check

- [] Every pose, regardless of length, began with the line of action.
- [] Longer poses added more layers (masses, rhythm), not surface detail.
- [] Rib cage and pelvis were tilted in opposition on the structural poses.
- [] Lines were drawn from the shoulder and elbow, not cramped at the fingers.
- [] The session started with a short warm-up block before any long pose.

Rhythm, Flow, and Loomis Landmarks

Connect forms with opposing curves and anchor your gestures in head-count proportion, landmark heights, and balance.

Exercise: Straight Against Curve

From 2-minute poses, draw every limb and the torso as a curve on one side opposed by a straighter line on the other, letting lines carry through from one form into the next.

- On each limb, make the active side a C-curve and the opposite side relatively straight.
- Let the line of a shoulder flow into the arm, and the side of the torso continue into the hip and leg.
- Circle the figure where the carry-through and opposing curves made the body read as most connected and fluid.

Exercise: Landmark and Plumb-Line Check

Draw standing gestures and immediately test their proportion and balance against the Loomis landmarks and a plumb line. Redraw any that fail.

- Mark the top of the head and the soles, find the midpoint, and place the crotch there, not higher.
- Place the nipple line about 2 heads down and the knees a little above the three-quarter mark.
- Drop a plumb line from the pit of the neck and confirm it lands over the weight-bearing foot.

Worksheet: Proportion & Balance Reference

Fill in the landmark heights for an idealized 8-head figure and keep this beside you while drawing until the numbers are memorized.

Total height in heads (idealized) ____ ; real-life average ____

Crotch / vertical midpoint at ____ heads down

Nipple line at ____ heads down; navel at ____ heads down

Knees at ____ to ____ heads down

Quick arm cross-checks: elbow near the ____, wrist near the ____

Weight-bearing leg, hip that rises, and shoulder that drops (for a contrapposto stand)

Checklist: Rhythm & Structure Check

- [] Limbs were drawn as opposing curves (straight against curve), not matched parallel edges.
- [] Lines carry through from one form into the next rather than outlining isolated parts.
- [] The crotch sits at the vertical midpoint of the figure (legs not too short).
- [] The rib cage and pelvis tilt in opposition for natural weight.
- [] A plumb line from the neck pit lands over the supporting foot.

From Gesture to Finished Figure

Carry a fast gesture through structure and contour into a finished figure that still feels alive.

Exercise: Three Layers Over One Gesture

Take one 2-minute gesture you like and build it up in ordered layers without losing its life. Keep the original gesture faintly visible the whole time.

- Layer 1, gesture: confirm the line of action and rhythm are already on the page.

- Layer 2, structure: spend ten minutes wrapping solid 3D masses (boxes, eggs, cylinders) around the gesture.

- Layer 3, contour: spend ten minutes refining the edges and detail, checking the forms still flow along the original line of action.

Exercise: Foreshortening Drill

Practice the structure layer on poses where a limb points toward you. Begin with a gesture, then build the foreshortened form.

- Draw the limb short, telescoping the segments, with the near end enlarged and the far end small.

- Overlap the forms (knee in front of thigh, foot in front of shin) to sell the depth.

- Add cross-contour lines wrapping around the limb to confirm its roundness and the direction it turns.

Worksheet: Capstone Figure Plan

Plan the finished capstone figure before drawing it, so the gesture survives every later layer.

Chosen dynamic pose in one sentence (mid-stride, reaching, twisting)

Line-of-action shape and the one thing to exaggerate

Rib-cage and pelvis tilt direction (opposed)

Which limb is foreshortened and how it overlaps

Proportion check: crotch at the midpoint (yes/no)

Balance check: plumb line lands over which foot

Checklist: Finished Figure Pre-Flight

- [] The drawing started with an exaggerated line of action, not an outline.
- [] Structure was built as solid 3D volumes wrapped around the gesture.
- [] Foreshortened limbs are compressed and overlapped, not drawn full length.

- [] Proportions match the Loomis landmarks and the figure is balanced over its base.
- [] Final contours were drawn with confident whole-arm strokes, and the figure was not over-rendered.
- [] Held beside the 30-second version, the finished figure still feels as alive.

Your Action Plan

1. Set up a free timed-figure tool (Line of Action, Quickposes, or SketchDaily) and grab a soft pencil or brush pen and cheap paper.
2. Warm up every session with a block of fifteen to twenty 30-second poses, drawing only the line of action and mass tilt.
3. Drill exaggeration with literal-vs-pushed 1-minute pairs until pushing the pose becomes automatic.
4. Run a daily ladder, 30-second then 1-minute then 2-minute holds, and repeat the same ladder for a week to see the jump.
5. On 2-minute poses, layer in opposing curves and carry-through so the figure flows as one connected whole.
6. Pin every standing gesture with the Loomis landmarks (crotch at the midpoint) and test balance with a plumb line.
7. Practice foreshortening on limbs pointing toward you, using overlap and cross-contours to build depth.
8. Take one strong gesture and build it through structure and contour, keeping the line of action faintly visible.
9. Draw the finished capstone figure: exaggerated gesture, opposing masses, foreshortened structure, balanced proportion, confident contour.
10. Hold the finished figure beside the 30-second sketch of the same pose; if the life survived, log what worked and repeat the workflow.

