STRETCHLEARN · WORKBOOK

Portrait Drawing & Likeness - Workbook

This workbook turns the Portrait Drawing & Likeness course into hands-on reps. Each section pairs with a course module and mixes guided exercises, fill-in worksheets, and checklists so you build a structure-first portrait practice. Work through it with pencils and a mirror nearby, not just a pen - the value is in the measured drawings you make and the proportion notes you write down. Keep a small sketchbook beside this workbook and date every page so you can watch your likeness improve over weeks.

Materials and the Head as a 3D Form

Assemble a focused kit and prove to yourself that a head is a constructed solid, not a flat outline of features.

Exercise: Ten Loomis Heads from Memory

Without any reference, draw ten Loomis heads: a cranial ball, sliced temple planes, a curving center line and eyeline, and an attached jaw. Turn each head a little differently - front, slight turn, three-quarter, looking up, looking down. The goal is to make the construction automatic so your attention is free later. Keep all lines light.

• Which head turned most convincingly in space, and what did the center line do on it?

• Where did your jaw attach - did it line up with the ears, or float too low?

• By head ten, what part of the construction had become automatic versus still slow?

Exercise: The Upside-Down Likeness Test

Choose a clear photo of a face and turn both the photo and your paper upside down. Draw the face purely as shapes and shadows without thinking 'eye' or 'nose'. Turn it right-side up only at the end. Notice how much more accurate the proportions are when your brain stops 'reading a face'.

• What looked more accurate drawing upside down than you expected?

• Which relationships (eye spacing, nose length, jaw width) came out closer to the reference?

• What does this tell you about why your right-side-up drawings drift?

Worksheet: My Portrait Kit and Budget

Fill in the materials you own or plan to buy, using the course's focused graphite, charcoal, paper, and eraser guidance. Total your spend before purchasing, and prioritize a sharpener that gives a long point and the core four graphite grades.

Graphite grades owned / needed (target: H or 2H, HB or 2B, 4B, 6B or 8B)

Charcoal owned / needed (vine, compressed, charcoal pencil)

Paper brand, weight (lb/gsm), surface (smooth or toothed)

Erasers owned (kneaded? vinyl?)

Blending tools (stump / tortillon)

Sharpener type and estimated total cost (USD)

Checklist: Foundations Setup Checklist

[ ] Acquired the core four graphite grades plus vine and compressed charcoal
[ ] Have both a kneaded eraser (for lifting lights) and a vinyl eraser (for clean erasing)
[ ] Can draw a Loomis ball with sliced temple planes and attached jaw from memory
[ ] Practiced pencil measuring at arm's length with a locked elbow and one eye closed
[ ] Set up a mirror to check drawings reversed, and a spot to step back five feet

Facial Proportions and the Construction Canon

Drill the average proportion map until placement is automatic in front, three-quarter, and profile views.

Exercise: The Proportion Canon Drill

Draw five blank average front-view heads using only the canon from memory: eyes halfway down the head, the Leonardo thirds (hairline-brow-nose-chin), and the fifths across (five eye-widths wide, one eye-width gap, nose within the inner-eye spacing, mouth corners under the irises). No specific person - just the map. Check each with a mirror.

• Did you instinctively place the eyes too high? Re-measure top-of-skull to chin.

• Do the corners of the mouth fall under the irises, and the ears between brow and nose base?

• Which landmark do you keep forgetting, and how will you remember it next time?

Exercise: Turn the Head Five Ways

Construct the same head in five rotations: full front, slight three-quarter, strong three-quarter, near profile, and full profile. Curve the center line and horizontal guides for each, compress the far side, and make the far eye narrower than the near eye. This builds the foreshortening instinct beginners lack.

• In the three-quarter views, did you make the far eye smaller, or keep both eyes equal by habit?

• Where did the nose break the far contour of the cheek?

• How did the visible ear's position help you read how far the head had turned?

Worksheet: Average vs This Face Comparison

Pick one photo reference. For each landmark, write the average-canon value, then what this specific face actually does, then the difference. This worksheet trains you to see individuality as deviation from the average, which is where likeness lives.

Eye line height (average: halfway down) vs this face

Eye spacing (average: one eye-width apart) vs this face - wider or closer?

Midface length, brow to nose base (average: one third) vs this face

Jaw width (average vs this face) - narrower or broader?

Nose width (average: within inner-eye spacing) vs this face

Biggest single deviation from average on this face

Checklist: Construction Mastery Checklist

[ ] Built a correct front-view head: ball, jaw, eyes halfway down, thirds, and fifths
[ ] Placed the corners of the mouth under the irises and the nose within the inner-eye spacing
[ ] Constructed a convincing three-quarter head with a compressed far side
[ ] Made the far eye narrower than the near eye in the turned views
[ ] Curved the center line and all horizontal guides to follow the head's tilt
[ ] Mirror-checked symmetry around the center line before committing

Rendering the Features and Building Value

Render each feature as a 3D form described by shadow, and model the head with a full controlled value range.

Exercise: Feature Studies: Eyes, Nose, Mouth, Ear

Fill a sketchbook page with isolated feature studies from reference: at least three eyes (built as a ball in a socket, lids wrapping over it), two noses (planes and shadow, no outline), two mouths (soft form over the dental cylinder, only the seam dark), and two ears. Describe each with value, not contour lines.

• In your eyes, did the upper lid cover the top of the iris, and did you keep one clean catchlight?

• On the nose, were you able to avoid outlining and let the shadow planes define it?

• On the mouth, is the lip seam the only truly dark line, with soft outer edges?

Exercise: Two-Value Shadow Map

Choose a strongly lit portrait photo. Squint until the face collapses into just light and shadow, then fill every shadow shape with one flat mid-dark tone, leaving the lights as clean paper. Stop there. Observe how the head already reads as solid and 3D with only two values and no detail.

• Where is the core shadow - the dark band where the form turns away from the light?

• Which cast shadows (nose onto lip, hair onto forehead) anchored the features to the face?

• Did the two-value map alone make the head look round? Where did it still feel flat?

Worksheet: Value Scale and Light Plan

Draw a value scale of five to nine steps from clean paper-white to your darkest 8B or compressed-charcoal black. Then plan the light for a portrait: one direction, and where each shadow element falls. Keep this beside you as you render so you push the full range instead of staying gray.

Number of value steps on my scale (and darkest grade used)

Single light direction for the portrait

Location of the darkest accents (pupils, nostrils, lip seam, under chin)

Where the core shadow falls on the face

Where reflected light appears (and a reminder to keep it darker than the lit side)

Highlights to reserve as clean paper or lift with a kneaded eraser

Checklist: Rendering and Value Checklist

[ ] Drew the eye as a ball in a socket with lids wrapping over it, not a flat almond
[ ] Described the nose with shadow planes and no hard outline
[ ] Kept the lip seam as the only dark line, with soft outer lip edges
[ ] Mapped the whole face into light and shadow before adding any detail
[ ] Used the full value range - true darks in the deepest shadows, clean lights untouched
[ ] Obeyed one consistent light direction across the entire head
[ ] Softened edges on round forms and kept them crisp at sharp plane changes

Capturing Likeness and Finishing in Three Media

Pin a specific person's likeness through proportion and angle, then complete finished graphite, charcoal, and ink portraits.

Exercise: Likeness from Proportions Only

Pick a well-known or familiar face. Using only simple lines and the unique proportions and angles - eye spacing, midface length, jaw width, the tilt of the eyes and mouth - try to make the person recognizable before adding any rendering or detail. Show it to someone and ask who it is.

• Which two or three signature features carried the likeness most?

• Did anyone recognize the person from the un-rendered drawing? If not, which proportion was off?

• Where could a slight exaggeration of a deviation have strengthened the likeness?

Exercise: Same Head, Three Media

Draw the same portrait reference three times: once in graphite (patient layered build to full range), once in charcoal (block big with vine, tone and lift lights, commit darks late), and once in pen-and-ink (translate every value into hatching, cross-hatching, and contour hatching). Compare how each medium changes the feel.

• How did your workflow differ between building graphite up and carving charcoal out of a gray field?

• In ink, how did you handle the lightest light (untouched paper) and the darkest darks?

• Which medium best suited this particular face, and why?

Worksheet: Likeness Diagnosis Worksheet

When a portrait does not look like the person, use this to find the cause before re-rendering. Likeness errors are almost always proportion or angle, not detail. Compare your drawing to the reference side by side and flipped in a mirror.

What feels off (in plain words, e.g. 'something about the eyes')

Suspected proportion error (eye spacing / midface length / jaw width / nose-to-mouth)

Suspected angle or tilt error (eyes / mouth / brow line)

Mirror-check result - what jumped out when reversed

Fix to make before touching any detail

Did a friend who knows the person confirm the fix? (Y/N)

Checklist: Finished Portrait Checklist

[ ] Captured likeness in the big proportions and angles before rendering detail
[ ] Identified and slightly leaned into the face's distinctive deviations from average
[ ] Graphite portrait built in patient layers to a full value range, not left gray
[ ] Charcoal portrait blocked with vine, lights lifted, darks committed late, fixative applied
[ ] Ink portrait built tone from hatching, with untouched paper as the lightest light
[ ] Erased all pencil construction from the finished ink piece
[ ] Mirror-checked the final likeness rather than judging features for prettiness
[ ] Photographed or scanned each finished portrait in flat, glare-free light for the portfolio

Your Action Plan

1. Assemble your kit: four graphite grades, vine and compressed charcoal, a charcoal pencil, toothed paper, a kneaded and a vinyl eraser, and a long-point sharpener.
2. Draw ten Loomis heads from memory until the ball, planes, and jaw are automatic.
3. Run the upside-down likeness test to feel how seeing shapes beats reading features.
4. Drill five average front-view heads using the proportion canon - eyes halfway down, thirds, and fifths.
5. Construct the same head in five rotations, compressing the far side and shrinking the far eye.
6. Fill a page with feature studies, describing eyes, nose, mouth, and ears with shadow, not outline.
7. Make a value scale, then reduce a portrait photo to a two-value shadow map.
8. Pin a familiar person's likeness using only proportions and angles, before any rendering.
9. Complete the same portrait in graphite, then charcoal, then pen-and-ink.
10. Use the likeness diagnosis worksheet to fix any miss, then photograph all three finished pieces for your portfolio.