

# Charcoal Drawing — Workbook

This workbook turns the Charcoal Drawing course into hands-on practice. Each section matches a course module and gives you exercises to do at the easel, worksheets to plan and self-assess your drawings, and checklists to keep your process clean. Work through it with charcoal in hand, not just by reading, and keep every practice sheet so you can see your tonal control improve.

## The Charcoal Toolkit and First Marks

Get familiar with your materials and build basic hand control before drawing anything realistic.

### Exercise: Material Test Strip

On one sheet, make a labeled swatch with each charcoal you own. Then drag a kneaded eraser across all of them and note what lifts. This shows you which material to use for layout versus committed darks.

- Which material gave the darkest black, and which erased back closest to white paper?

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- Which material felt most controllable for a clean line?

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- Based on this test, which charcoal will you use for your erasable block-in?

### Exercise: Pressure and Side-Stroke Drill

Snap a stick of vine charcoal to about 4 cm. Using the overhand grip and moving from the shoulder, lay a smooth side-stroke gradient from black to white across a 10 cm band. Then make a column of swatches at five distinct pressure levels.

- Can you produce at least five clearly different values by pressure alone?

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- Where in the gradient did it jump abruptly instead of transitioning smoothly?

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- Did you draw from the shoulder, or did your fingers take over?

### Worksheet: My Studio Setup Sheet

Fill in your actual studio choices so you have a repeatable, dust-safe setup before every session. Drawing surface and weight (e.g. Strathmore 400, 64 lb)

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Easel or board angle in degrees

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Backing board used

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Dust-management plan (brush, damp rag, ventilation, mask?)

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Hand-bridge or scrap-paper method to avoid smudging

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Lighting source and direction

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### Checklist: Pre-Drawing Setup Checklist

- [ ] Paper clipped to a rigid backing board
- [ ] Board tilted to 60 to 70 degrees so dust falls clear
- [ ] Soft brush and damp rag within reach
- [ ] Vine charcoal sharpened or snapped for side strokes
- [ ] Single light source set; competing lights off
- [ ] Five-value reference chart pinned up nearby

### Seeing and Building Value

Train your eye to simplify light into a few value masses and shade rounded forms with logic.

#### Exercise: Build Your Five-Value Scale

Draw five 4 cm boxes. Leave box 1 as bare paper and fill boxes 2 to 5 with even tone, each clearly darker, ending in your blackest black. Squint to check the steps feel evenly spaced. Keep this chart for every future drawing.

- Squinting, do any two steps look too similar? Which ones?

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• Is your value 5 a true black, or is it only dark gray?

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• Is each box filled evenly, with no streaks or tooth showing?

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#### Exercise: The Lit Sphere Study

Light a single ball (an egg, an orange, or a styrofoam sphere) from one side. Draw it showing all five light zones: highlight, halftone, core shadow, reflected light, and cast shadow. Keep reflected light darker than any halftone.

- Where exactly does the core shadow fall, and is it your darkest value on the form?

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• Is your reflected light staying inside the shadow family (darker than the light side)?

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• Is the cast shadow hardest and darkest right at the base of the sphere?

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#### Worksheet: Value Mapping Worksheet

Before shading any subject, squint and assign each major region a value number from 1 to 5. Use this sheet to plan it.

Subject and light direction

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Lightest area and its value number

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Darkest area and its value number

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Background value number

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Cast shadow value number

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Two regions most likely to be confused, and how you will keep them separate

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## Checklist: Mud-Prevention Checklist

- Blocked in with erasable vine charcoal first
- Worked light to dark, broad shapes before small accents
- Blended less than felt necessary; lifted to light instead of adding dark
- Refreshed any tooth-clogged area by lifting before relaying tone
- Saved the blackest black for the final accents
- Stepped back and squinted to check value relationships

## Blending and Erasing as Drawing

Use blending tools with restraint and treat the eraser as an instrument for drawing light.

### Exercise: Blender Comparison Grid

Lay four identical value-3 patches. Blend one with a finger, one with a stump, one with a tortillon, and one with a chamois. Compare the smoothness, control, and any marks left behind.

- Which blender gave the smoothest gradation for a large area?

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• Which gave you the most control in a tight space?

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• Did your finger leave any glossy oil marks?

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### Exercise: Reductive Toned-Ground Study

Cover a whole sheet with an even value-3 layer of powdered charcoal using a chamois. Then draw a simple subject entirely by lifting lights with a kneaded eraser and adding darks with compressed charcoal. Sharpen the brightest highlights with a vinyl eraser last.

- Which highlights did you pull with the eraser, and which did you leave?

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• Did dabbing (not scrubbing) keep the paper tooth intact?

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• How does drawing light by erasing change how you see the subject?

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## Worksheet: Edge Decision Worksheet

Plan which edges to sharpen and which to lose before finishing a drawing, so focus lands where you want it. Center of interest (sharpest edges go here)

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Three edges to keep hard

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Three edges to soften or lose

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Surfaces that should be blended (skin, glass)

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Surfaces that should stay textured (cloth, hair, bark)

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## Checklist: Eraser-as-Tool Checklist

- Kneaded eraser shaped to a point for fine lifts
- Lifting by dabbing straight up, not scrubbing
- Kneaded eraser folded to a clean face as it darkens
- Vinyl eraser reserved for the brightest white accents
- Eraser shield or pencil eraser ready for tiny catchlights
- Highlights lifted only after darks are established

## Still Life and Portrait Application

Combine every skill into finished still-life and portrait drawings from observation.

### Exercise: One-Light Still Life

Arrange two or three simple overlapping forms and light them from one side at about 45 degrees with a single lamp. Draw from block-in to finish: vine block-in, flat shadow masses, turned halftones, value-5 accents, then lifted highlights.

- Did you establish two or three proportion relationships by comparative measuring before shading?  
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- Is the whole shadow side held within values 4 and 5?  
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- After stepping back and squinting, which value did you have to correct?  
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### Exercise: Loomis Head Construction

Using vine charcoal, construct a front-view head with the Loomis ball-and-plane method: cranial circle, side planes, centerline, brow line, thirds, and attached jaw. Place the features on the guides. Flip the drawing in a mirror to check symmetry before shading.

- Do the eyes sit near the vertical midline of the whole head?  
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- Is the space between the eyes about one eye-width?  
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- What did flipping the image in a mirror reveal about symmetry?  
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### Worksheet: Portrait Proportion Checkpoint

Verify the standard front-view proportions on your constructed head before committing to tone. Eyes on or near the head's vertical midline? (yes/no)

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Gap between eyes equals one eye-width? (yes/no)

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Nose-base-to-chin roughly equals forehead height? (yes/no)

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Mouth corners align under the irises? (yes/no)

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Ears span brow line to nose base? (yes/no)

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Big shadow shape identified before shading (describe its path)

### Checklist: Finishing and Storage Checklist

- Big light-versus-shadow masses laid before any features detailed
- Features kept subordinate to the head's overall form
- Darkest accents (pupils, nostrils, lip line) placed last at value 5
- Highlights lifted with a sharpened eraser
- Workable fixative applied in thin coats, tested on a scrap first
- Drawing stored flat under glassine; mat planned so glass never touches the surface

## Your Action Plan

1. Assemble a beginner kit: vine charcoal, 2B and 4B compressed sticks, HB and 4B charcoal pencils, powdered charcoal, kneaded and vinyl erasers, a stump, a chamois, and toothy paper.
2. Set up a dust-safe easel station tilted to 60 to 70 degrees with one controllable light source.
3. Draw and pin up your own five-value scale to reference in every session.
4. Complete one lit-sphere study and verify all five light zones, keeping reflected light inside the shadow family.
5. Do a reductive toned-ground study to practice drawing light by erasing.
6. Run the edge-comparison drill: one sphere four times with hard, firm, soft, and lost core-shadow edges.
7. Finish a one-light still life from block-in to lifted highlights, measuring proportions before shading.
8. Construct a front-view head with the Loomis method and check it in a mirror before toning.
9. Shade the portrait by masses first, features second, then place darkest accents and lift highlights.
10. Fix the finished drawing in thin coats, then store it flat under glassine and log what to improve next time.









