

# Pet Portraits — Workbook

This workbook turns the Pet Portraits course into drawing reps built on the same method: construct the animal head, lock the likeness from a photo, and render lifelike fur, eyes, and nose in coloured pencil or digitally. Each section maps to one course module and mixes hands-on drawing exercises, fill-in worksheets, and checklists. Work through it with a sketchbook or tablet, artist-grade coloured pencils or Procreate, and a stack of sharp, well-lit reference photos, and finish by carrying one real animal all the way from reference brief to a finished, recognizable, sellable portrait.

## Animal Anatomy for Portraits

Drill the structural eye: finding the skull inside the fluff, comparing dog, cat, horse, and bird skulls, and placing eyes, ears, nose, and muzzle accurately before any rendering.

### Exercise: Find the Skull Inside the Fluff

Take five reference photos, one dog, one cat, one horse, one rabbit, and one bird, and for each draw ONLY the underlying solid head in simple shapes: a sphere for the cranium plus a muzzle wedge or beak, with a vertical centerline, a horizontal eye line, and the ear set marked. Draw no fur or feather. This trains your eye to find the structure before you render a surface.

- Block the cranium as a sphere and attach the muzzle as a wedge or cylinder at the right length for the species.

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- Wrap a vertical centerline and a horizontal eye line around the sphere to match the head's tilt and turn.

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- Mark where the ears attach to the skull and where the eye sockets sit, without drawing a single hair.

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### Exercise: Three Skull Types in Your Hand

Collect references of one dolichocephalic (long, e.g. Collie or Siamese), one mesocephalic (medium, e.g. Labrador or shorthair cat), and one brachycephalic (flat-faced, e.g. Pug or Persian) dog or cat. Block each head in simple solids, labelling the stop, muzzle length, and eye placement, so you feel how differently each skull type is proportioned.

- Identify and label the skull type, then find the stop (deep, moderate, or near flat) on each.

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- Measure muzzle length relative to the cranium and note how many muzzle-lengths fit into the skull.

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- Note eye placement (forward-facing or side-set, large or moderate) and ear set for each type.

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### Worksheet: Head Construction Analysis Sheet

Print or load your chosen main subject and analyze its head structure before drawing. Fill in each field from the reference so the construction, not the fur, drives your proportions.

Species, and for dogs/cats the skull type (long / medium / flat-faced)

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Stop depth (deep / moderate / near flat) and muzzle length relative to the cranium

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Eye placement (forward-facing or side-set) and rough eye spacing in eye-widths

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Eye tilt or slant (level, up-tilted, almond/slanted)

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Nose/beak position on the centerline and where the mouth line falls

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Ear set (high/low, erect/folded/hanging) and ear size relative to the head

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The simple solid shapes I will build the head from (sphere + muzzle wedge, etc.)

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### Checklist: Structure-First Soundness Check

- I built the head as a solid (sphere plus muzzle/beak) with centerline and eye line BEFORE any fur.
- I identified the species and, for dogs/cats, the correct skull type and let it set the proportions.
- I got the stop, muzzle length, and forehead dome right for this specific breed or animal.
- I placed the eyes on the correct eye line, at the right spacing and tilt, not too high.
- I matched the ear set and size to the reference, since ears strongly signal breed and individual.

## Capturing Likeness From a Photo

Practice judging and choosing references, transferring proportions accurately with a grid, and locking the eyes and expression that carry the likeness, then testing whether the drawing truly resembles the animal.

### Exercise: Grade Six References

Gather six photos of pets, your own or from a stock site, and grade each against the six reference qualities, marking it usable or not and exactly why. Train yourself to reject weak references and recognize the qualities that make a photo worth drawing from.

- Check focus on the EYES first, then resolution: can you zoom in and see real fur and eye structure?
- Judge the lighting (soft directional vs flat flash) and the camera height (eye level vs shot from above).
- Confirm there are visible catchlights and a characterful expression, then mark the photo usable or not and why.

### Exercise: Grid Transfer vs Freehand

Transfer the same reference twice, once entirely freehand by eye and once with a grid (finer over the eyes), then overlay both on the original. Seeing exactly where the freehand version drifted teaches you which relationships your eye gets wrong.

- Draw a regular grid over a copy of the reference and a matching, scaled grid on your surface.
- Work square by square, copying only simple shapes and grid-line crossings, not the whole image.
- Overlay both transfers on the original and mark where the freehand version drifted in placement or proportion.

### Worksheet: Likeness and Eye Audit Sheet

Before final detailing of your main subject, audit the likeness, especially the eyes, against the reference at high zoom, and record the result of each test.

Eye shape and lid height vs reference (match / fix)

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Iris-to-surround proportion and iris color vs reference (match / fix)

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Catchlight size, shape, and position vs reference (match / fix)

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Expression: head tilt, ear set, eye openness, mouth line preserved (yes / neutralized)

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Squint test result (big shapes still read as this animal: pass / fix)

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Flip test result (mirrored: where likeness or asymmetry drifted)

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Owner / knows-the-animal test reaction and what they flagged

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### Checklist: Likeness Confirmation Check

- I chose a reference with sharp eyes, soft light, eye-level angle, high resolution, and a characterful expression.
- I locked accurate proportions with a grid or transfer BEFORE investing time in rendering.
- I spent a disproportionate share of attention on the eyes, getting the iris and catchlight exactly right.
- I preserved the animal's characteristic expression rather than averaging it into a blank one.
- The likeness survives the squint, flip, and thumbnail tests and an owner's instinct.

## Rendering Fur, Feather, and Features

Take a constructed, accurate drawing to a living surface: directional dark-to-light fur layering, the special cases of white coats, black coats, and feathers, and the wet eye and moist nose that bring a portrait to life.

### Exercise: Three Coat-Type Fur Swatches

Render three small fur swatches from references, a short smooth coat, a long flowing coat, and a wiry terrier coat, each built dark-to-light in directional layers. Comparing the three teaches you how stroke length, density, and direction must change to read as each coat type.

- Map the value pattern and lay a soft base layer before any individual hairs, for each swatch.
- Build hairs from dark to light, every stroke following the real growth direction and tapering at the tip.
- Match stroke length and character to the coat (short and fine / long and flowing / wiry and broken).

### Exercise: White Without White, Black With Light

Render a small study of a pure-white animal using NO white pencil until a final highlight pass (build the form in cool greys, blues, and warm reflected light), and a study of a solid-black animal on toned paper, built up with lights rather than down with darks. This breaks the instinct to equate white fur with blank paper and black fur with solid black.

- For the white animal, render the shadow form in cool greys and warm reflected light; reserve true white only for the top highlights.
  - For the black animal, build dark blues, browns, and purples, then add the sheen and rim light that reveal the form.
  - Find and draw the rim light along the dark animal's contour that makes it read as three-dimensional.
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## Exercise: Wet Eye and Moist Nose Studies

Render one animal eye and one nose as isolated studies at large scale, each treated as a wet, light-catching form with its catchlight and sheen, then compare to the reference at full zoom. Mastering these two small forms in isolation pays off in every portrait.

- Build the iris as a gradient (darker at the rim and around the pupil, luminous low and inner) and add the upper-lid shadow.

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- Reserve or lift a crisp catchlight matching the reference's size, shape, and position.

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- Give the nose form (lit top, shadowed underside), render the pebbled or smooth texture, and add the moist sheen and wet glint.

## Checklist: Living Surface Quality Check

[ ] I mapped the value pattern over the constructed head before drawing any hairs.

[ ] Every fur stroke follows the real growth direction and I layered from dark to light, brightest hairs on top.

[ ] White fur is built from greys and reflected light, and black fur from dark color plus sheen and rim light, not flat tone.

[ ] The eye has a graded iris, a lid shadow, reflected light, and a crisp, correctly placed catchlight.

[ ] The nose reads as a moist three-dimensional form with texture and highlights, not a flat shape.

## Coloured Pencil, Digital, and Commissions

Execute and sell finished portraits: artist-grade coloured-pencil materials and patient layering, a non-destructive digital pipeline in Procreate or Photoshop, and the practical business of running a pet commission end to end.

## Exercise: Same Fur, Two Surfaces

Render the same small fur study twice with the same artist-grade pencils and ten-plus directional layers, once on smooth Bristol and once on toned sanded paper such as Pastelmat. Feeling how differently each surface grips and builds teaches you to choose paper deliberately for a coat type.

- Build the same dark-to-light directional layers on each surface, protecting your highlights from the start.

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- Note how many layers each surface accepts before the tooth fills, and how rich the darks get.

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- Decide which surface suited the coat type better and why.

## Exercise: Brush vs Directed Digital Fur

Paint the same animal twice digitally, once relying on a fur brush without planning direction or value, and once building it deliberately on separate dark, mid, and light value layers along the real growth flow. The stark difference proves the brush is only as good as the thinking behind it.

- For the first version, drag a fur brush freely with no value or direction plan.

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- For the second, block the value pattern, then build fur on separate value layers, every stroke following growth direction.

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- Compare the mechanical and the directed versions and note exactly what the planning added.

## Worksheet: Commission Brief and Quote Sheet

Set up a real or practice commission before you draw, capturing the reference brief, the scope, and the price so both you and the client are protected.

Pet(s): species, breed, number of animals (a second pet roughly doubles the work)

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Reference photos received and which one(s) I will use, or how I will combine them

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Honest assessment of what is achievable from these photos

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Medium, size, and estimated hours

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Price, deposit (often ~50% upfront), and balance on completion

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Timeline and the stage at which I will send a progress image (after the eyes/likeness, before final detailing)

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### Checklist: Commission Delivery Check

- I briefed the client clearly on reference quality (sharp eyes, soft light, eye level, high resolution, characterful expression).
- I set honest expectations about what the supplied photos allow, especially for imperfect memorial references.
- I have a simple written agreement (size, medium, number of pets, price, timeline) and took a deposit upfront.
- I sent a progress image once the likeness was established but before final detailing, and addressed any concern.
- I protected and packaged the finished piece well and followed up to encourage referrals and reviews.

### Your Action Plan

1. Choose one real animal to carry through the entire workbook, and collect several sharp, well-lit reference photos at the pet's eye level.
2. Grade the references against the six quality criteria and select or plan how to combine the best frames.
3. Identify the species and skull type and construct the head as simple solids with centerline, eye line, and ear set before any fur.
4. Transfer the accurate outline with a grid (finer over the eyes) and confirm eye placement, spacing, and tilt against the reference.
5. Render the eyes first with a graded iris and a crisp, correctly placed catchlight, then test the expression honestly.
6. Map the coat's value pattern, then build fur in directional layers from dark to light, matching stroke to coat type.
7. Handle white fur with greys and reflected light, and black fur with dark color plus sheen and rim light, never flat tone.
8. Render the moist nose as a three-dimensional form with texture and highlights, and finish the soft edges around eyes and muzzle.
9. Complete the portrait in your chosen medium, artist-grade coloured pencil on suitable paper or digitally in Procreate or Photoshop.
10. Run the full commission flow once: brief, quote with deposit, progress image at the likeness stage, then protect, deliver, and follow up.









