

Cartooning — Workbook

This workbook turns the Cartooning course into drawing reps. 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 and one original character in mind, and finish by carrying that character all the way from simple shapes to a fully inked three-panel strip.

Shapes, Construction, and the Line of Action

Drill seeing the world as primitive shapes, constructing solid forms with centerlines, and finding the line of action that gives a pose flow.

Exercise: Twenty Objects, Three Shapes Each

Fill one page with twenty everyday objects from around you, drawing each as nothing but its two or three underlying shapes in under thirty seconds. No detail, no outlines of the real object. Train your eye to find the circle, square, or triangle inside everything.

- Draw ten hard, man-made objects (mug, book, phone, lamp) as pure boxes, cylinders, and spheres.
- Draw ten soft or organic objects (a pillow, a piece of fruit, a pet) as the bean, pear, or oval that fits best.
- Circle the three objects whose dominant shape was hardest to find and redraw each more boldly.

Exercise: Same Animal, Three Personalities

Design the same animal three times changing only the dominant shape, proving that shape alone is characterization. Use circles for the first, squares for the second, triangles for the third.

- Build the round version (circles and ovals) so it reads as sweet, young, and harmless.
- Build the square version (rectangles and blocks) so it reads as strong, solid, and stubborn.
- Build the triangular version (wedges and points) so it reads as sly, fast, or threatening.

Worksheet: Character Shape Brief

Fill this out before designing your main character for the course so the personality is decided in shapes before you draw a single feature.

Character name and one-line personality

Dominant shape (circle, square, triangle, bean, or pear) and why it fits

Defining trait to exaggerate (in one word)

Big shape, medium shape, and small shape that make up the body

Friendly, strong, or threatening: which read am I going for

Checklist: Construction Soundness Check

- Every form was built from simple shapes, not copied as a flat outline.
- Heads and bodies have curving centerlines that match the tilt and turn.
- I drew through the forms, including the hidden far side, so volumes feel solid.
- Each pose was started with a single line of action drawn before the body.
- Shoulders and hips oppose each other (contrapposto) rather than mirroring.

Exaggeration, Squash, and Stretch

Practice pushing proportions toward a defining trait, conserving volume in squash and stretch, and engineering appeal through silhouette and shape contrast.

Exercise: Push It Three Times

Pick a photo of a person or animal, name their most defining physical trait in one word, then draw three escalating cartoons that each push that trait twice as far as the last. The third should feel almost absurd and probably reads best.

- Write the one-word defining trait at the top of the page.

- Draw version one (mild), version two (bold), and version three (extreme) in a row.

- Mark which version finally reads as a confident cartoon rather than slightly odd realism.

Exercise: The Bouncing Ball Volume Test

Draw a five-position bouncing ball across the page: neutral, stretched while falling, squashed flat on impact, stretched while rising, neutral. Then check that conservation of volume holds.

- Stretch the falling and rising balls into eggs pointed along the direction of travel.

- Squash the impact ball into a wide pancake that spreads sideways as much as it loses height.

- Trace or eyeball the area of all five and confirm they enclose nearly the same amount.

Worksheet: Proportion and Appeal Planner

Plan your character's proportions and shape contrast on purpose before finalizing the design. Height in heads (e.g. 4 heads for a brute, 9 for a dancer)

Which masses are exaggerated bigger and which are shrunk

Big / medium / small shape contrast across the figure

Squash pose (what the face or body does in a big laugh)

Stretch pose (what the face or body does in a shocked gasp)

Checklist: Silhouette and Appeal Check

- Filled solid black, the character is still instantly recognizable.
- Key gestures, hands, and props read in silhouette and are kept off the body.
- The design has an obvious mix of big, medium, and small shapes.
- Squash and stretch poses conserve volume rather than gaining or losing mass.
- Beside my other characters in black, this one has a distinct outline.

Turnarounds and Expression Sheets

Build the model sheet: a four-view turnaround aligned to shared guide lines, an expression sheet driven by brows, eyes, and mouth, and the on-model habit.

Worksheet: Turnaround Guide-Line Sheet

Set up the horizontal landmarks that every view of your turnaround must hit, then confirm each view aligns. Fill in the relative height of each landmark and tick it off per view.

Top of head height

Eye line height

Bottom of nose height

Chin / jaw height

Shoulder line height

Waist, knee, and feet heights

Views completed (front / side / three-quarter / back)

Exercise: Eyebrows Do the Heavy Lifting

Draw one neutral copy of your character's face four times and change only the eyebrows, leaving eyes and mouth identical, to feel how much a single feature controls emotion.

- Brows down and together: confirm it reads as angry.
 - Brows raised in the middle: confirm it reads as sad or pleading.
 - One brow up, then both brows high: confirm skeptical, then alarmed.
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Exercise: Nine-Cell Expression Sheet

Build a nine-cell expression sheet for your character, deforming the whole head shape for each emotion rather than only swapping features. Push squash and stretch into the skull.

- Draw neutral, happy, sad, angry, surprised, afraid, disgusted, smug, and exhausted.
 - For each, move all three zones together: eyebrows, eyes, and mouth.
 - Stretch the head tall for the big laugh and compress it down into the shoulders for the sulk.
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Checklist: On-Model Consistency Check

- [] Every turnaround view hits the same horizontal guide lines.
- [] Head size, eye height, and limb length match across all views.
- [] Details that wrap around the form (logo, cowlick, patch) are placed correctly from behind.
- [] I flipped the canvas horizontally and corrected the drift it exposed.
- [] I overlaid a fresh drawing on the model sheet and fixed where the character crept off-model.

Comic Strip Layout and Digital Inking

Lay out a readable three-panel strip, set up Procreate or Clip Studio for inking, apply weighted line, and finish with spotted blacks, flats, lettering, and export.

Worksheet: Three-Beat Strip Planner

Plan one three-panel gag strip before drawing so each panel carries a single idea and the punchline lands in an uncluttered final frame.

One-line beat: setup, what shifts, punchline

Panel 1 idea, shot type (wide/medium/close), and balloon text

Panel 2 idea, shot type, and balloon text

Panel 3 (punchline) idea, shot type, and balloon text

Where each word balloon sits in reading order, top-left to bottom-right

Exercise: Uniform vs. Weighted Line

Ink a single drawing of your character twice to feel what line weight alone does. First with one uniform line throughout, then re-inked with full weight variation.

- Ink version one with a strictly uniform line, noting how flat and coloring-book it looks.
- Ink version two: heavy on the outer silhouette, light on interior details.
- Thicken under the chin, under the arms, and where forms overlap, and taper every line end to a point.

Exercise: Carry the Strip Through the Full Pipeline

Take your planned three-panel strip all the way to a finished, exportable piece using the course pipeline in Procreate or Clip Studio Paint.

- Tight pencils over construction, then clean weighted inks drawn from the shoulder with light stabilization.
- Spot the blacks (pupils, deep shadows, solid darks), then add flat color on a layer below the inks.
- Drop in the planned lettering, then export one web PNG and one 300 dpi print-ready file.

Checklist: Finished Strip Quality Check

- [] Each panel carries one clear idea and the eye flows left to right, top to bottom.
- [] Shots vary (wide, medium, close) and the punchline panel is the tightest and least cluttered.
- [] Line weight is heavy outside, light inside, thick on the shadow side, with tapered ends.
- [] Blacks are spotted deliberately and fills are expanded so there are no white halos.
- [] Line art, flats, and lettering are on separate layers, and both web and print files are exported.

Your Action Plan

1. Choose one original character to carry through the entire workbook.
2. Fill out the Character Shape Brief so the personality is decided in shapes before drawing features.
3. Construct the character from simple shapes with curving centerlines and a clear line of action.
4. Use the Proportion and Appeal Planner to push the defining trait and lock in big-medium-small

shape contrast.

5. Test the design in solid-black silhouette beside any other characters and fix it until it reads distinctly.

6. Draw the four-view turnaround on shared horizontal guide lines so every view stays on-model.

7. Build the nine-cell expression sheet, deforming the whole head shape and moving brows, eyes, and mouth together.

8. Add a four-pose action row and a standard-hands chart, then flip-and-overlay to catch off-model drift.

9. Plan a three-panel gag with the Strip Planner, one idea per panel and the punchline reserved for the last frame.

10. Ink the strip in Procreate or Clip Studio with weighted line, spot the blacks, add flats and lettering, and export web and print files.

