

Life Drawing & Figure Study — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a repeatable studio practice. Each section pairs with a course module and gives you timed drills, fill-in worksheets, and checklists that build real skill on paper, not just notes. Work through it with charcoal actually in hand and a timer running: the goal is hundreds of gesture drawings, a stack of measured studies, and one fully rendered long pose.

Seeing, Setup, and the Gesture

Set up a working kit and session structure, then drill the line of action until 60-second gestures read clearly.

Exercise: The Line-of-Action Sprint

Using an online timed-pose source (Line of Action, QuickPoses, or SketchDaily) or a live model, run a warm-up of ten 30-second poses followed by five 60-second poses. For each pose, your first mark must be a single continuous line of action drawn head-to-foot before anything else. Draw large with vine charcoal in an overhand grip; do not outline.

- For three of your 30-second drawings, write the one-word main action you saw (e.g. reaching, slumping, twisting).

- Which shape did each pose's line of action reduce to: a C curve, an S curve, or a straight I?

- Pick your weakest drawing and note in one line whether the failure was action, tilt, or hesitation.

Worksheet: My Starter Kit and Session Plan

Fill this in once to lock down your materials and a repeatable session shape. Keep it where you draw. Paper pad type and size (target at least 18 x 24 inches)

Gesture tool (vine charcoal / graphite stick / other)

Dark-value tool (compressed charcoal / 6B)

Erasers owned (kneaded / plastic)

Board and clip setup (easel / propped / lap)

Pose source (studio session / Line of Action / QuickPoses / other)

My standard warm-up count and timing (e.g. 10 x 30s, 5 x 60s)

My standard long-pose length (target 25-40 min)

Distance I stand from the paper

Gaps still to buy

Checklist: Before-You-Draw Setup Check

- Pad is clipped to a rigid board and near vertical
- I am standing at arm's length, not hunched over a desk
- I can see model and paper by shifting only my eyes
- I am holding the charcoal overhand, not in a writing grip
- My drawing arm can swing freely from the shoulder
- A timer is set for the pose length
- I have decided the main action before making the first mark
- I am drawing the figure large enough to nearly fill the page

Proportion and Measuring

Lock in the eight-head canon and pencil-measuring so the head, torso, and limbs relate correctly.

Exercise: Eight-Head Layout Drill

From a standing reference or model, lightly tick eight equal horizontal divisions for the figure's height before drawing anything. Place the head in the top eighth and plot the canon landmarks against the divisions, then draw the figure into that scaffold. Repeat for three different figures.

- Did the crotch land at the line at 4 (the true vertical midpoint)? If not, by how much were you off?

- Where did the navel and the bottom of the rib cage fall relative to your divisions?

- With arms relaxed, did the elbow reach the navel and the wrist reach the crotch?

Exercise: Pencil-Measuring Calibration

With your arm locked straight and one eye closed, measure the model's head height as one unit, then count how many head-units fit the torso, the leg, and the full height. Draw the figure, then re-measure to find your single biggest proportion error.

- How many heads tall was your actual model (versus the eight-head ideal)?

- Which measurement did your eye get most wrong before you checked: leg length, shoulder width, or head size?

- What was the tilt of the shoulder line and the hip line against true horizontal?

Worksheet: Proportion Check Sheet

Fill in for one measured study to verify the key relationships against the canon.

Total height in head-units (measured)

Nipple line: which eighth?

Navel / bottom of rib cage: which eighth?

Crotch (midpoint): which eighth?

Knee: which eighth?

Shoulder width in head-units (target ~2)

Rib-cage tilt vs pelvis tilt (same way / opposite / level)

Checklist: Measuring Discipline

- Arm fully locked and the same length every measurement
- One eye closed while sighting
- Head height established as the unit first
- Angles of shoulders and hips checked against horizontal
- Landmarks plotted with light marks before committing
- Re-measured the finished lay-in to catch leg-length error

Artistic Anatomy and Construction

Anchor poses on bony landmarks, ride the major muscle masses, and build weight through contrapposto.

Exercise: Landmark Connect-the-Dots

On a 10-minute pose, plot only the bony landmarks first as dots: pit of neck, both shoulder caps, both front hip points, knees, and both ankle bones. Connect the shoulder and hip lines, draw the plumb line from the neck pit, then build the figure off this skeleton of points.

- Did the plumb line from the neck pit fall over the weight-bearing foot?
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- Did your ankle line tilt because the inner ankle bone sits higher than the outer?
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- Were the shoulder line and hip line tilting in opposite directions?
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Exercise: Masses and Overlaps Study

Pick one limb and the torso from a longer pose. Draw each as a simple tapering cylinder or box for gesture, then add only the two or three major masses that ride on it and mark where each mass overlaps the next with a short interrupting line. No surface detail.

- Which masses did you use for the upper arm and the lower leg?
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- Where did one mass shingle over another (e.g. deltoid over biceps, calf heads uneven)?
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- Did the limb read as a solid three-dimensional form rather than a flat tube?
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Worksheet: Contrapposto Read-Out

Complete for one standing weight-shifted pose to verify the weight logic.
Weight-bearing leg (left / right)

Plumb line from neck pit falls over (which foot/arch)

Pelvis: which hip is raised?

Shoulder line tilt direction (vs pelvis)

Spine curve between the masses (S-direction)

Free leg position (bent / knee dropped inward / extended)

Which side of the body is compressed vs lengthened?

Checklist: Construction Soundness

- Rib cage drawn as an egg/box, pelvis as a box, with their tilt
- Far side of each mass indicated (drawn through)
- Bony landmarks plotted before soft form
- Weight-bearing leg identified and plumb line checked
- Shoulder and hip lines tilt in opposition
- Limbs built from cylinders before adding masses

Rendering Form and a Finished Study

Apply the logic of light, control edges, and take one long pose through a strict order of operations to a finished study.

Exercise: Two-Value Separation Drill

On a 15-minute pose with a single clear light source, squint and divide the entire figure into only two values: a light family (leave the paper) and a shadow family (one flat mid-dark). Do not add halftones. The aim is one clean, unified shadow shape across the whole body.

- From which direction is the light coming, and did you stay loyal to it everywhere?

- Where does the core shadow (terminator) fall on the rounded forms?

- Did any reflected light or stray mark accidentally break the unity of the shadow shape?

Exercise: Long-Pose Order of Operations

Run one 30-to-40-minute study following the timed sequence from the course: gesture and masses, then proportion and landmarks, then construction, then light/shadow separation, then halftones and shadow depth, then edges and highlights. Note the clock at each stage transition.

- At which stage (if any) did you discover a proportion error, and could you still fix it?

- List two edges you deliberately kept hard and two you softened.

- Did you stop while the drawing still read clearly, or did it go gray and muddy?

Worksheet: Long-Study Record

Fill in for each finished long pose and keep with the dated study.

Date

Pose length (minutes)

Pose source (live model / which online library)

Light direction

Single biggest win this study

Single biggest error to fix next time

Did I over-render? (yes / no)

Checklist: Finishing the Study

- Single light direction established and held everywhere
- Figure separated into light family and shadow family first
- Core shadow kept as the darkest value on the form itself
- Cast shadow given a harder, darker edge near the body
- Edges varied: some hard, some soft, at least one lost
- Cleanest lights lifted with the eraser; highlight small and placed last
- Stepped back and squinted to confirm the big shapes still read
- Study dated and pose length noted on the page

Your Action Plan

1. Assemble the kit: an 18 x 24 pad, vine charcoal, one compressed charcoal stick or 6B, and kneaded plus plastic erasers; set up a board near vertical at arm's length.
2. Run a daily warm-up of ten 30-second and five 60-second gestures, leading every pose with a single line of action.
3. Do the eight-head layout drill on three standing figures, ticking eight divisions before drawing and checking the crotch lands at the midpoint.
4. Calibrate pencil-measuring with a locked arm, establishing head height as the unit and re-measuring each lay-in to catch leg-length error.
5. On 10-minute poses, plot bony landmarks as dots and build the figure off them, always checking the plumb line over the weight-bearing foot.
6. Study the major muscle masses by drawing limbs as cylinders first, then adding two or three masses and marking their overlaps.
7. Practise contrapposto: find the weight, tilt the pelvis up on the loaded side, oppose the shoulders, and curve the spine into an S.
8. Drill the two-value separation on 15-minute poses, dividing the whole figure into a light family and one unified shadow shape.
9. Run one full long pose per week through the timed order of operations, foundation first and rendering last, varying your edges.
10. Date and photograph every long study, log it in the record sheet, and commit to mileage: hundreds of gestures and dozens of long studies.

