

TEACHER'S NOTES

There are several technical skills being taught in this unit.

1. The hand holding the drawing instrument should be loose, not held tightly as a pen is when writing. The main action is not in the wrist, but in the arm. The entire arm must be loose. I used to have my students shake out their arms before beginning, to get the freedom of movement they needed.
2. Gesture drawings are not intended to be accurate depictions of a figure. The exercise is needed to make the student's attention take in the whole figure at once. The gesture drawing also helps loosen up the hand and arm. If the student has only a few seconds to register the entire figure, it will force his attention away from the specific, and to the general and force him to keep his hand loose.
3. The general proportions of the figure should be explained first. The top of the legs is generally a halfway point. Most students make arms and legs too short. Have students place the palm of their hands on their chins to note how far the fingers reach on the face. This should give them a general idea of how large the head is to the face. Then have them place their arms at their sides to note that the elbow is about waist-high and the ends of their fingers a few inches above their knees. These references become a good shorthand to use while drawing.
4. Most students draw the spine and neck straight up, regardless of the pose. Direct students to note the angle of the spine first. If the head sits on the neck like a lollipop on a stick (which beginning students inevitably draw) the architecture of the spine's interaction with the skull is not being taken into consideration. I had my students draw skeletons that I borrowed from the biology department. The angle the head hangs off the Atlas and Axis vertebra is essential to understand. This can also be said of the relationship between the clavicle and scapula that holds the ball of the arm bone, and the angle of the femur to the pelvis. This can easily be learned just by sketching a skeleton and it will inform the artist when he draws a live model.
5. If the angle of the spine and head is registered, the rest of the construction lines are much easier to judge. The student also notes the angle of the shoulders and hips by drawing a construction line that registers the angle.
6. The most essential ingredient to learning how to draw a figure is practice. It is not something learned in only a couple of lessons. I thought it wise to base my grades for a student's work on the progress they showed over a period of weeks.
7. The quality of contour lines is also important. They should register the quality of what they are describing. Outlines like those used in a coloring book are the opposite of what the students should make. Demonstrate sensitive lines by showing how even pressure is not used.