

Portrait Drawing Shading Workbook

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Before We Begin

Shading is one of the most important drawing skills. If you understand how light behaves on surfaces, your drawings will start to look much better.

The following shading exercise can be a great preparation for portrait drawing.

What you need is a simple graphite pencil. A soft one is preferred (a B, 2B or HB).

On this 3-D model you can see the representation of the human head using flat planes (the Loomis head). This will be our reference image.

Shading flat planes is always easier than shading curved surfaces. But at the end of this exercise, I will show you how to hide this angularity and get a pretty convincing shaded head.

1 Observation

As a first step, let's observe the different shades of gray on the image.

This composition has a typical lighting setup where the form of the face reads well. We have a single light source pointing to the head from the front - top right. The planes with different orientations reflect the light to varying degrees. That's why we see different tones.

Notice that the forehead on the right is the brightest, the hair line on the left is the darkest, and there are tones between them. We will try to copy what we see in a structured manner.

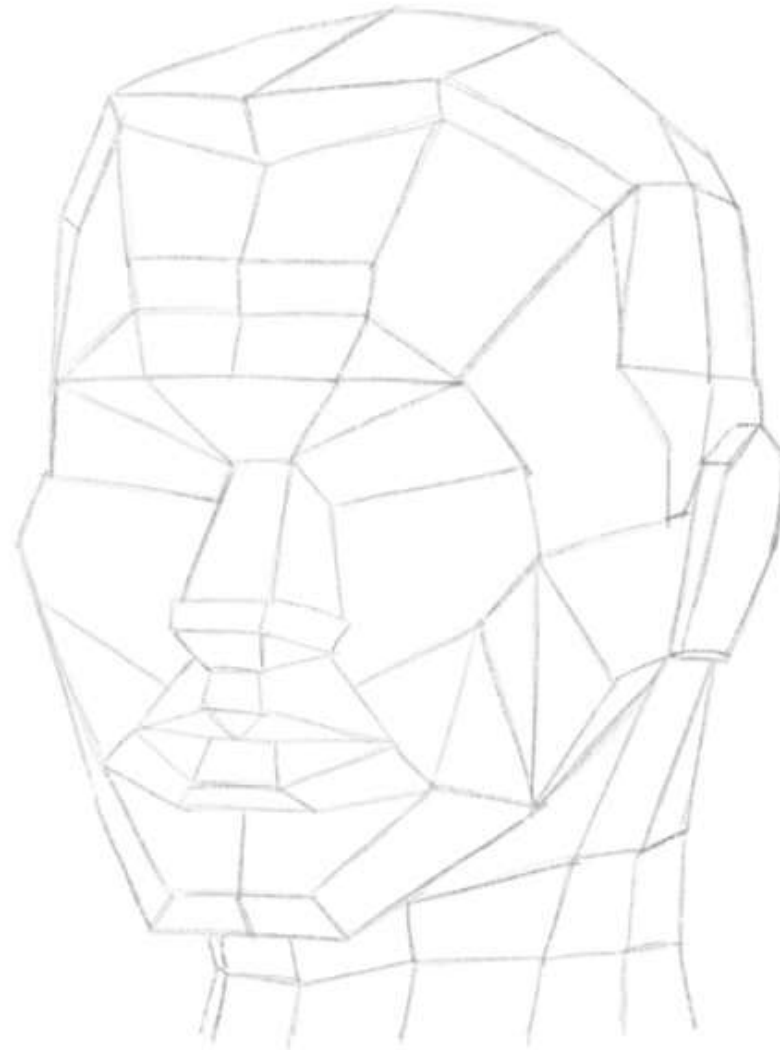


Reference Image

2 Draw the Structure of the Head

If you just want to practice shading, you can skip this step and take the attached line drawing as a starting point. Print it out or copy it into your drawing software.

But I encourage you to draw this head structure for yourself making an exact copy of it. Make sure you copy every single edge with relatively light strokes.



3 Create a 5-Step Palette

Take your pencil, and create a palette like this next to your line drawing. It should contain 5 different tones evenly distributed between dark and light. Use different pressure on the paper to make different tones.

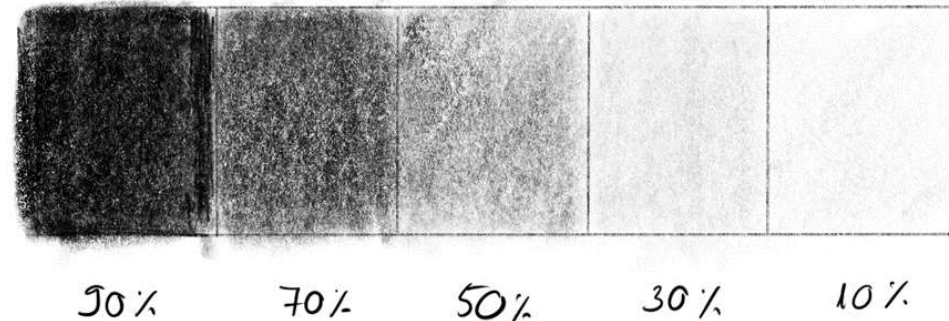
Start off with the step in the middle. Try to shade this area with a middle gray tone (50% black) applying a medium pressure on the paper.

Then shade the darkest one (90%) on the left, and the lightest one (10%) on the right.

Finally, find transitions for the remaining two empty steps. We will be using these tones to shade the planes on the head.

We will try to find a match from the palette for each plane. Our 3D model obviously has more than five tones, but don't worry about it. We will convert those tones into five.

We're going to pick a tone from our palette, scan the 3D reference image, find the planes that fall into that category or close to that, and shade those planes on our line drawing accordingly.



4 Start With the Middle Tone

Let's find those planes on the reference image that have a middle tone (50% black) or darker than that, and shade those planes on our drawing.

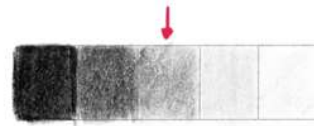
It's a good practice to start with the middle tone, then take steps one by one to the dark and light side.

Try to shade these mid-gray planes evenly. You don't have to be super accurate. If you miss the edge of a plane slightly, that's ok.

Notice that there are some cast shadows on the reference image. The eyebrow on the left casts a shadow on the eye, the nose casts a shadow on the cheek, and the chin casts a shadow on the neck. Don't worry about them for now. We're going to deal with them later.

Your drawing should look something like this.

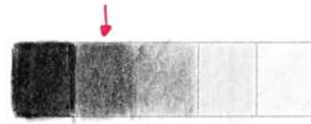
On the right you can see the shaded planes without the line drawing. It's interesting to see that even with a single tone, if it's placed properly, our drawing starts to read well to the viewer.



5 One Step to the Dark Side

Now, let's find those planes on the reference image that are darker than our middle tone. So, locate the planes that are 70% black or darker.

But make sure you shade them on the line drawing uniformly with just the second darkest tone on our palette (70% black).



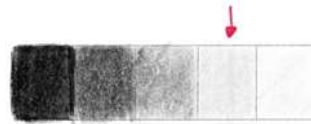
6 One Step to the Light Side

Now, we take our second lightest tone.

Let's find the planes that match it, and shade them on our line drawing.

We leave the lightest planes untouched for now.

Basically, there are two planes left white, the one on the front head on the right, and the one on the nose.



7 The Darkest Planes

Now, let's find the darkest planes.

Actually, only the hairline on the left falls into the darkest category.

Let's shade it.



8 The Lightest Planes

You can leave the two lightest planes untouched, or you can apply a very light tone on them.

It depends on how dark is your darkest tone on the palette. If your darkest tone is almost black, you can leave the lightest planes white.

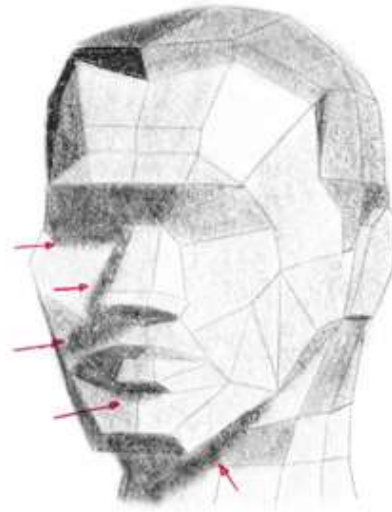
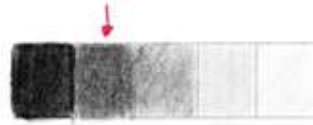
If your darkest tone is lighter, then shade with a very light gray in order to keep a balance between darkest and lightest areas.



9 Draw the Cast Shadows

As I mentioned earlier, there are some cast shadows on the face and the neck.

Let's shade them with the second darkest tone.



10 Final Touches

Now, let's forget our 5-tone palette.

Check the reference image and our shaded line drawing back and forth.

Where you feel like, add some more dark tones.

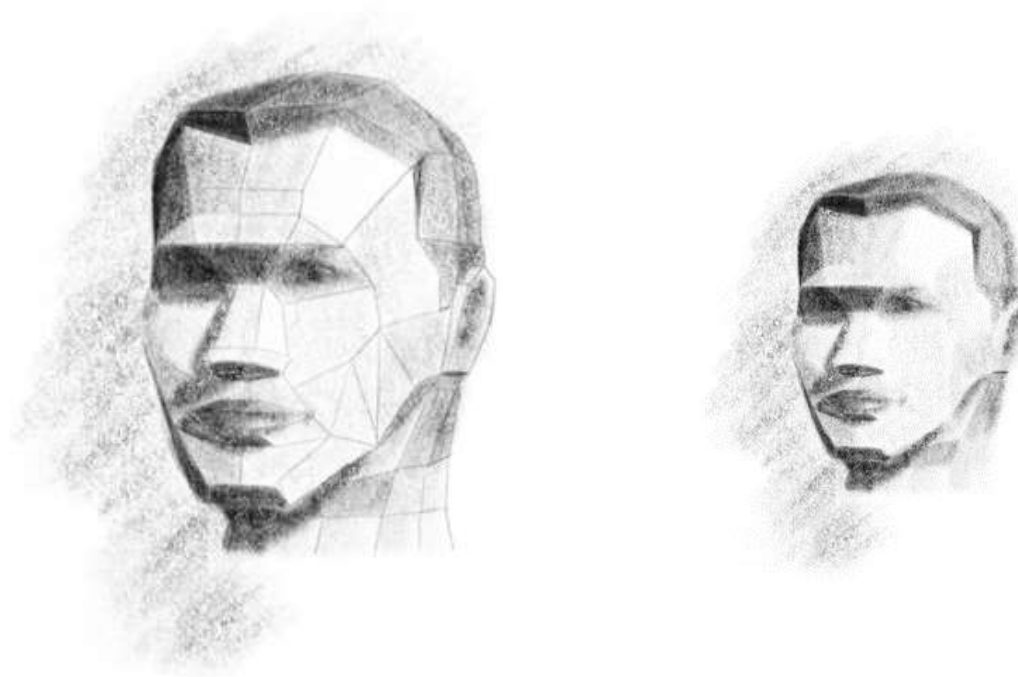
Use your eraser here and there and soften some of the hard edges between planes.

I added some details for the eyes, a little darkness to the ear, and drew the separation of lips.

I also added some middle gray tone to the background on the left to make the drawing a bit more interesting.

And we're basically done.

I hope you also managed to draw something you're satisfied with. If you'd like practice some more, scroll down to the next page.



Bonus More Head Positions

You can try to skip drawing a precise head structure with lines. Just focus on the shape of each plane when you shade with different tones.

You can also try to use a palette with 7 different shades of gray. It will be a little bit more challenging, but your drawing will look better.

Have fun with practicing!

