Draw an Upside-Down Line Drawing

Lesson notes: copy contours, not names

About this lesson

A self-contained drawing lesson on making an upside-down line drawing: study an inverted reference, copy its contour relationships rather than named objects, then check the copy by comparing it upright and inverted. Includes a worked example and four practice tasks with complete answer keys.

An upside-down line drawing is a copy made while the reference is turned upside down. The point is to stop naming parts (face, hand, chair) and instead follow the lines as shapes: where a line starts, how it curves, where it meets another line. Turn the reference upside down, draw what you actually see, then turn both the reference and your copy upright to check.

What the task is

You are given a line reference. Turn it upside down. Copy it line by line onto blank paper, working from one contour to the next, without turning your paper or the reference back upright until the copy is finished. This is a contour-copy exercise, not a test of naming or shading.

How to work

First look at the inverted reference and find one clear starting line, such as an outer edge. Draw that line, then find the next line that touches or nearly touches it, and draw that. Keep asking where each new line begins and ends relative to lines already drawn. Ignore what the shapes mean; treat every line as a path with a direction and a meeting point.

How to check

When the copy is complete, turn both the reference and your copy upright. Compare the overall outline, the spacing between lines, and where lines meet. Then turn both upside down again and compare the same relationships. A useful copy keeps the same line relationships in both orientations; small differences in line weight or smoothness are acceptable.

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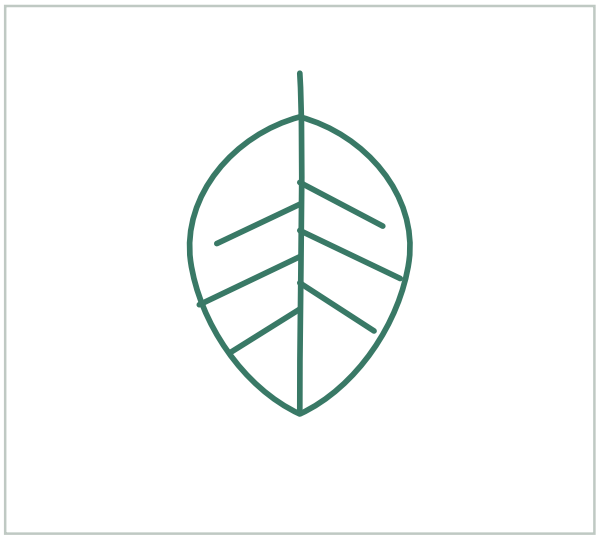
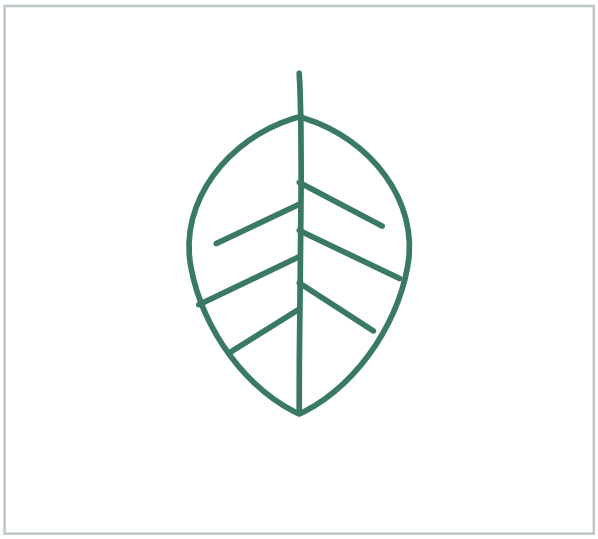
Worked example: leaf and stem

Worked example: copy the inverted reference line drawing of a simple leaf-and-stem shape, following contour relationships.

Inverted reference



Completed inverted copy



Answer

The correct copy reproduces the inverted leaf outline, the central vein, the side veins, and the stem, with each line starting and ending where it does in the reference. The copy is judged by matching line relationships, not by perfect smoothness.

Reasoning

The exercise trains the eye to follow contours as shapes rather than named objects, so the copy should preserve where lines meet and how they curve when viewed upside down.

Check method

Turn the reference and copy upright, then upside down again; the outline, vein positions, and stem attachment should correspond in both views.