Learn Contour Drawing

Reference I Reference plate I LETTER

About this lesson

A printable contour line study plate that teaches blind contour and slow contour drawing from one reference, with a worked example, four self-contained practice tasks, complete answer keys, and visual checks.

Introduction

Contour drawing means drawing the edge you actually see, not the edge you assume. Blind contour trains your eye to follow the subject while your pencil records the path without looking at the paper. Slow contour trains the same looking, but lets you check and refine the line as you go. This plate uses one reference subject, a simple hand holding a mug, so you can compare both drills on the same form.

What contour drawing is

A contour line is a single line that describes where one visible surface meets another or meets the background. It is not an outline of the whole object; it is a record of the edges your eye travels along. In contour drawing you draw the edge as you see it, including overlaps, folds, and changes of direction, rather than drawing a symbol for the object.

Blind contour drill

In a blind contour drill you place your pencil on the paper, fix your eyes on the reference, and draw the edge slowly without looking at the paper until the drawing is finished. The point is not a tidy result; the point is to keep your eye and hand moving together. Look at the reference the whole time, move the pencil at the same pace as your eye, and accept that the drawing will look strange.

Slow contour drill

In a slow contour drill you may glance at the paper, but you still move slowly and deliberately. Draw one short segment of edge, then check it against the reference before starting the next segment. Slow contour is about deliberate looking and honest correction, not speed. Keep the line continuous where the edge is continuous, and lift the pencil only where the edge truly stops.



One side-view reference for all four tasks

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Reference I Worked contour comparison I LETTER

Worked example

Reference: a hand holding a mug, seen from the side. The visible edges are the top rim of the mug, the side of the mug, the handle, the fingers wrapped around the mug, the thumb, and the wrist. A correct blind contour of this subject is one continuous line that follows those edges in order without looking at the paper; it may be wobbly and out of proportion, and that is acceptable. A correct slow contour of the same subject is a line that follows the same edges but is checked segment by segment, so the rim closes, the handle connects to the mug, and the fingers overlap the mug side in the right order. The visual check is whether the line follows the reference edges in the same order and whether overlaps are drawn as overlaps rather than as separate objects.

Worked prompt

Draw the hand-holding-mug reference twice: once as a blind contour and once as a slow contour.

Answer

Blind contour: one continuous line following rim, side, handle, fingers, thumb, and wrist in order, drawn without looking at the paper; wobbles and wrong proportions are expected. Slow contour: the same edges drawn segment by segment with checking, so the rim closes, the handle meets the mug, and fingers overlap the mug side in the correct order.

Reasoning

Both drills use the same reference and the same edge order; the difference is whether you look at the paper while drawing. The blind version tests eye-hand following; the slow version tests deliberate checking and correction.

Check method

Compare each drawing to the reference: does the line follow the same edges in the same order, and are overlaps drawn as overlaps? For the slow contour, also check that the rim closes and the handle connects.

Same reference



Blind contour · one line



Slow contour · checked

