Charcoal Portrait Drawing: Facial Planes and Tonal Modeling

Original tasks 1, 2, 3 / complete keys

Task 1

Draw a face oval and mark four facial planes: forehead, cheek, jaw, nose. Use a hypothetical light from the left. Assign values 1 to 5 and shade each plane with charcoal or pencil.

Answer: Forehead value 2, cheek value 3, jaw value 4, nose value 2 with a dark side value 4. Shade with the side of the charcoal, keeping plane edges visible.

Reason: Planes facing the light receive lighter values; planes turning away receive darker values. The nose is split because it has two angled sides.

Check: Squint at the drawing. The left side should appear lighter overall. Verify that four distinct values are visible and that plane edges are not fully blended away.

Task 2

Sketch a face with a light source from above. Divide the forehead into two planes and the jaw into two planes. Assign values and describe where you would use a sharp edge and where a soft edge.

Answer: Forehead top plane value 1, forehead lower plane value 3. Jaw upper plane value 3, jaw lower plane value 5. Sharp edge between forehead planes; soft edge from jaw to neck.

Reason: A steep angle between planes creates a sharp edge; a gradual curve creates a soft edge. The top forehead faces the light directly.

Check: Check that the top forehead is the lightest area and the lower jaw is the darkest. Confirm the sharp edge is visible at the forehead break and the jaw transition is blended.

Task 3

Using a five-step value scale, model a nose plane with a light side and a dark side. State the values and the charcoal technique for each side.

Answer: Light side value 2 applied with the flat side of the charcoal; dark side value 4 applied with the tip and blended slightly toward the bridge.

Reason: The nose has two angled planes; the side facing the light is lighter. The tip allows precise dark accents.

Check: Squint to confirm the dark side reads clearly darker. Check that the transition at the bridge is not a hard outline but a value change.

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Original tasks 4 / complete keys

Task 4

Draw a jaw plane in shadow with value 5 and an adjacent cheek plane with value 3. Describe how you would lift charcoal if the jaw becomes too dark and how you would check the result.

Answer: Lift charcoal with a kneaded eraser in small dabs, then reapply value 5 lightly. Check by comparing the jaw to the cheek; the jaw should remain darker but not uniformly black.

Reason: Kneaded erasers lift charcoal without damaging paper. Reapplying lightly restores the intended value.

Check: Use a scrap paper value scale to compare. Squint at the drawing; the jaw should read as the darkest plane while still showing some variation.

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Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] Planes are clearly indicated for forehead, cheek, jaw, and nose.
- [ ] At least four distinct tonal values are used consistently.
- [ ] Light direction is consistent across all planes.
- [ ] Edges are sharp where planes meet steeply and soft where they curve.
- [ ] Charcoal is applied with control; excessive smudging is avoided.
- [ ] The portrait reads as a three-dimensional form when squinted at.
- [ ] Valid alternative plane divisions and personal stylistic choices are accepted if the tonal logic holds.

Reflection: What did you check, what did you change, and what will you try next?