Charcoal Eye Drawing: Tonal Blending and Highlight Lift

Original tasks 1, 2 / complete keys

Task 1

On a 60 mm wide eye opening, the iris is 30 mm across and the pupil is 12 mm. Using a five-step scale, state the step numbers for the pupil, outer rim, iris middle, upper lid lash line, and lower lid. Then describe where the highlight goes.

Answer: Pupil step 5, outer rim step 4, iris middle step 3, upper lid lash line step 4, lower lid step 1 to step 3. The highlight is a small oval inside the iris, lifted to paper white.

Reason: The scale runs from paper white step 1 to charcoal black step 5. The pupil is darkest, the rim next, the iris middle is mid, and the lids are lighter except at the lash line. The highlight is the lightest area and sits inside the iris.

Check: Compare each stated step to a labelled value strip and confirm the pupil is step 5 and the highlight is paper white.

Task 2

A drawing has iris step 2, outer rim step 3, pupil step 4, upper lid step 4, lower lid step 2, and highlight step 1. Identify two tonal problems and give a fix for each.

Answer: Problem one: the iris middle is too light relative to the rim and pupil; fix by darkening the iris middle to step 3. Problem two: the lower lid is too light and competes with the highlight; fix by darkening the lower lid to step 3 so the highlight remains clearly the lightest value.

Reason: The highlight must be the lightest value, and the iris should show a clear progression from pupil to rim to middle. The lower lid should not compete with the highlight.

Check: List the steps in order from darkest to lightest and confirm the highlight is step 1 and the pupil is the darkest.

Charcoal Eye Drawing: Tonal Blending and Highlight Lift

Original tasks 3, 4 / complete keys

Task 3

Describe how to lift a highlight on an iris that is already shaded to step 3, using a kneaded eraser. Include one check to confirm the lift is correct.

Answer: Press the kneaded eraser onto the highlight area in small dabs, cleaning the eraser between dabs, until the area reaches paper white. Check by comparing the lifted area to the value strip: it should match step 1 and be the lightest value on the eye.

Reason: Dabbing lifts charcoal without smearing, and cleaning the eraser prevents transferring dark charcoal back onto the highlight. The value strip confirms the lift reached the lightest step.

Check: Compare the lifted area to step 1 on the value strip under the same light and confirm no darker charcoal remains in the highlight shape.

Task 4

An eye drawing uses a four-step scale: step 1 paper white, step 2 light, step 3 mid, step 4 black. The pupil is step 4, the iris middle is step 3, the outer rim is step 3, the upper lid is step 2 to step 3, and the highlight is step 1. State whether the tonal order is consistent and give one improvement.

Answer: The order is broadly consistent because the pupil is darkest, the iris and rim are mid, the lid ranges from lighter to mid, and the highlight is lightest. One improvement is to darken the outer rim to step 4 so the iris shows a clearer progression from pupil to rim to middle.

Reason: A four-step scale still requires the pupil to be darkest and the highlight lightest. The rim and iris middle sharing step 3 is allowed, but darkening the rim improves separation.

Check: Confirm the pupil is step 4, the highlight is step 1, and every other tone lies between them on the labelled scale.

Charcoal Eye Drawing: Tonal Blending and Highlight Lift

Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] Value convention is defined and labelled before shading.
- [ ] Iris shows at least three distinct tonal steps with the pupil darkest.
- [ ] Upper and lower lids show separate gradients that match the convention.
- [ ] Highlight is lifted to the lightest value and reads as a simple shape.
- [ ] Edges are controlled: iris rim crisp, lid edges softened.
- [ ] Measurements and units are recorded consistently.
- [ ] Valid alternative conventions are accepted if internally consistent and documented.

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