Drawing Realistic Mouths: Lip Planes, Highlights, and Shadow Placement

Original tasks 1, 2 / complete keys

Task 1

A mouth is 8 cm wide. The upper lip is 1.6 cm tall and the seam is 0.2 cm thick. Calculate the expected lower-lip visible height using the lesson convention, then describe where the upper-left highlight and the right-corner shadow go.

Answer: Expected lower-lip visible height is 0.8 cm (half of 1.6 cm), measured from the bottom of the seam to the bottom of the lower lip; upper-lip height is measured from the top of the upper lip to the bottom of the seam, and the 0.2 cm seam is counted separately. The upper-left highlight goes on the upper-left column near its top edge. The right-corner shadow goes at the right corner, blending inward.

Reason: The convention sets lower-lip visible height as half the upper-lip height: 1.6 / 2 = 0.8 cm, with upper-lip height measured from the top of the upper lip to the bottom of the seam and seam thickness counted separately. With upper-left light, the left column faces the light and the right corner turns away.

Check: Measure the drawn lower lip from the bottom of the seam to its bottom edge; it should be about 0.8 cm. Confirm the highlight is on the left column and the shadow is at the right corner, not the left.

Task 2

You draw a mouth with light from the upper right. List which lower-lip side plane should be lighter and which should be darker, and state one highlight and one shadow location. Then give a value-scale check using values 1 to 5.

Answer: The lower-right side plane is lighter and the lower-left side plane is darker (the side planes flip with light direction). The central bulge highlight shifts slightly right of center because the bulge faces the light source. One shadow goes under the lower lip and one at the left corner. On a 1-to-5 scale, the highlight is 1 or 2, the underside shadow is 4, and the left-corner shadow is 3.

Reason: Mirroring the light direction swaps which side planes are light and dark. The central bulge still catches light, but the highlight shifts toward the light side. Shadows fall opposite the light.

Check: Verify that the lighter side plane is on the same side as the light source. Check that the highlight value is lower (lighter) than the shadow values on your drawn scale.

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Original tasks 3, 4 / complete keys

Task 3

A learner draws a mouth with three planes and a uniform dark seam. Identify two mistakes and describe the corrected drawing in words, including where to add two missing planes.

Answer: Mistake one: too few planes. Mistake two: uniform seam. Corrected drawing: add the upper-right column and the lower-left side plane so five planes exist. Vary the seam thickness, making it thicker at the corners and central dip and thinner where lips meet lightly. Keep the existing light direction consistent.

Reason: The convention requires five planes for complete shading. A uniform seam flattens the mouth and ignores the varying contact between lips.

Check: Count the planes in the corrected description; there should be five. Check that the seam description includes at least two different thicknesses.

Task 4

Design a quick self-check for a mouth drawing with upper-left light. Include one arithmetic check, one plane-count check, and one light-consistency check. State what result would fail each check.

Answer: Arithmetic check: lower-lip visible height should be about half the upper-lip height, where upper-lip height runs from the top of the upper lip to the bottom of the seam and lower-lip visible height runs from the bottom of the seam to the bottom of the lower lip, with seam thickness counted separately; failing means the lower lip is taller than expected. Plane-count check: count five planes; failing means fewer than five are present. Light-consistency check: highlights should be on the upper-left column and the lower-lip left side, shadows on the right corner and under the lip; failing means a highlight appears on the right side or a shadow on the left.

Reason: Each check targets a different failure mode: proportion, completeness, and coherent lighting. Simple counts and comparisons make the checks repeatable.

Check: Apply each check to a sample drawing and record pass or fail. A drawing passes only if all three checks pass.

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Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] Five distinct lip planes are visible and labeled or clearly implied.
- [ ] Light direction is stated and consistent across highlights and shadows.
- [ ] Highlights sit only on light-facing planes; shadows sit on receding planes.
- [ ] Lower-lip visible height is about half the upper-lip height, where upper-lip height runs from the top of the upper lip to the bottom of the seam and lower-lip visible height runs from the bottom of the seam to the bottom of the lower lip, with seam thickness counted separately, within a reasonable margin.
- [ ] Lip seam varies in thickness and is not a uniform outline.
- [ ] Value scale is drawn and used to justify at least three shading choices.
- [ ] Valid stylistic alternatives are accepted if planes, light direction, and proportions remain coherent.

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