Shark Pencil Drawing: Shading and Fin Detail

Original tasks 1, 2 / complete keys

Task 1

On scrap paper, draw three small rectangles about 3 cm by 2 cm. Shade the first with one even layer, the second with two crossed layers, and the third with three crossed layers. Label them light, mid, and dark. Then describe where each tone would go on the shark.

Answer: The one-layer rectangle is light, the two-layer rectangle is mid, and the three-layer rectangle is dark. On the shark, the belly is light, the flank is mid, and the back is dark. Fin tips may use the dark tone as accents.

Reason: Layering controls value without heavy pressure. A consistent order from light to dark makes the shark’s form readable and prevents the belly from becoming as dark as the back.

Check: Hold the rectangles at arm’s length and confirm the three tones are distinct. Squint at the shark plan and check that the back is darkest, the flank mid, and the belly lightest.

Task 2

Draw a dorsal fin about 4 cm tall and 3 cm wide at the base. Add five fine detail lines that follow the leading edge and taper toward the trailing edge. Use one x-height as a spacing guide at the base. Describe how you checked the spacing.

Answer: The fin has five short lines that begin near the leading edge and become shorter toward the trailing edge. At the base, the gaps are about one x-height wide. I checked by comparing each gap to the baseline-to-midline distance of a lowercase letter on my paper.

Reason: Fin lines should describe the fin’s shape, not clutter it. Spacing lines with a personal x-height unit creates readable rhythm and allows valid variation because letter styles differ.

Check: Look at the fin from arm’s length: the lines should be visible but not crowded. Measure two or three base gaps against your chosen x-height and confirm they are similar, not identical.

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Original tasks 3, 4 / complete keys

Task 3

A shark drawing has the dorsal fin at the exact midpoint of the back and the belly shaded as dark as the back. List two changes that would improve it and explain how you would check each change.

Answer: First, move the dorsal fin slightly behind the midpoint. Second, erase tone on the belly until it is mostly paper with a faint lower edge. Check the fin by comparing its position to the body’s midpoint; check the belly by squinting to confirm the back is darkest and the belly lightest.

Reason: Fin placement affects realism, and value order affects form. Both changes are simple and checkable without special tools.

Check: Mark the body midpoint lightly and confirm the dorsal fin is behind it. Squint at the drawing and verify the value order from back to belly.

Task 4

Plan a pencil shark drawing on paper about 15 cm by 10 cm. State a hypothetical light direction, the three shading zones, and a spacing guide for fin lines. Then give one arithmetic check using hypothetical times: one layer takes 20 seconds per small zone, two layers 40 seconds, and three layers 60 seconds. How long would three small zones with two layers each take?

Answer: Light direction: upper left. Zones: back dark, flank mid, belly light. Fin-line spacing: about one x-height at the fin base. Three small zones with two layers each take 3 times 40 seconds, which equals 120 seconds, or 2 minutes.

Reason: A plan makes the drawing consistent. The arithmetic check is simple multiplication and keeps units consistent in seconds.

Check: Confirm the light direction is noted outside the drawing, the three zones are labeled, and the fin spacing guide is stated. Recalculate 3 times 40 to verify 120 seconds.

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Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] Silhouette: body tapers smoothly and the dorsal fin sits slightly behind the midpoint.
- [ ] Fin placement: pectoral fins are low on the sides and the tail fin is asymmetrical.
- [ ] Shading: back darkest, flank mid, belly lightest, with smooth transitions and no muddy patches.
- [ ] Fin detail: short controlled lines follow fin edges and taper toward tips; spacing uses a personal x-height guide.
- [ ] Edges: key edges are strengthened while some soft edges remain; no heavy outline around the whole shark.
- [ ] Alternative conventions allowed: any consistent light direction and any personal x-height spacing are acceptable if the value order and fin readability hold.

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