Edge-Only Contour Portrait Drawing: A Line-Only Guide

Original tasks 1, 2 / complete keys

Task 1

Using a reference of a face with a clear silhouette, a visible eyelid rim, and a nostril curve that is isolated (no visible edge connects it to the lip border or cheek edge), draw an edge-only contour portrait. Allow one lift for the isolated nostril curve. Do not shade.

Answer: A completed contour portrait with one continuous silhouette line, connected feature edges, and exactly one lift for the isolated nostril curve. No shading or cross-contour lines.

Reason: The task tests continuous edge tracing and selective lifting. The silhouette and connected features must form one line; the isolated nostril requires a lift because no visible edge reaches it.

Check: Point to each line on the reference. Confirm every line is an edge, confirm the nostril curve is isolated on the reference, count lifts (exactly one, at the nostril), and check that no area is shaded.

Task 2

Draw a contour portrait from a reference where the hairline meets the temple edge and the brow edge continues into the temple edge. Trace from the crown through the hairline and brow into the temple edge, then down the cheek edge. Keep the line continuous and do not lift.

Answer: A continuous line from crown through hairline, brow, temple edge, and down the cheek edge, with no lifts and no shading.

Reason: This exercise practices entering internal features from connected edges without lifting, reinforcing continuity.

Check: Trace the line with your finger: it should start at the crown and end at the cheek edge without a break. Confirm no shadow lines.

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Original tasks 3, 4 / complete keys

Task 3

Create a contour portrait using only the outer silhouette and three internal feature edges of your choice. Use one continuous line for the silhouette and separate continuous lines for each internal edge. No shading.

Answer: A silhouette drawn in one continuous edge-only line plus three separate continuous internal edge lines, each chosen by the student and each matching a distinct visible edge. No shading or cross-contour lines.

Reason: This allows isolated features to be drawn separately while maintaining edge-only discipline and line continuity within each edge.

Check: Count the lines: one silhouette plus three internal edges. Verify each internal line is continuous and matches an edge. Check for shading.

Task 4

Draw a contour portrait with a single unbroken line for the entire portrait, including at least one internal feature. If an isolated feature cannot be reached, skip it rather than lifting. No shading.

Answer: A portrait drawn in one unbroken line covering the silhouette and at least one connected internal feature, with isolated features omitted.

Reason: This tests the strict single-line convention and forces prioritization of connected edges over isolated ones.

Check: Confirm the line is unbroken from start to finish, includes at least one internal feature, and contains no shading or cross-contour lines.

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Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] Edge correspondence: every line matches a visible edge on the reference; no shadow boundaries or cross-contour lines.
- [ ] Continuity: the main contour pass is continuous or has only necessary lifts at isolated features.
- [ ] Line quality: lines are deliberate and readable, with consistent pressure; slight wobble is acceptable if edges are followed.
- [ ] No shading: no filled areas, gradients, or tonal rendering.
- [ ] Recognizability: the portrait is readable from edges alone.
- [ ] Valid alternatives: a single unbroken line or a few necessary lifts are both accepted; style variation in line weight is allowed if it does not imply shadow.

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