Snowy Owl Drawing Step by Step: White Plumage Value Shading

Original tasks 1, 2, 3 / complete keys

Task 1

Draw a five-step value scale on scrap paper. Label 1 as bare paper and 5 as dark grey. Shade squares 2, 3, and 4 with increasing pressure. Then draw a small oval and shade it only at value 2. Check that the oval still looks white.

Answer: The scale should show five clearly different steps. The oval should be mostly bare paper with a very light grey layer, reading as white rather than grey.

Reason: White plumage depends on keeping most areas at values 1 and 2. Practising the scale first makes it easier to compare the owl's tones later.

Check: Compare the oval with square 1 and square 2. If the oval matches square 3 or darker, erase and lighten the layer.

Task 2

Sketch a perched snowy owl using two ovals: a body oval about three pencil-widths tall and a head oval about one and a half pencil-widths tall. Mark two level eyes in the lower half of the head. Do not shade yet.

Answer: The construction should show a small head on a broad body, with level eyes in the lower half of the head oval.

Reason: Proportions are easier to correct before shading. A small head and level eyes are the main structural checks for a perched owl.

Check: Measure the head and body with your pencil. If the head is as tall as the body or taller, redraw it smaller.

Task 3

On your construction drawing, add a value 2 layer under the chin and along the lower wing edge. Then add short, broken value 3 marks on the back. Leave the chest and facial disk at value 1.

Answer: The chin and lower wing edge should show a soft light grey, the back should have sparse broken marks, and the chest and facial disk should remain close to bare paper.

Reason: This exercise practises light-to-dark layering and keeps the white areas dominant. Broken marks suggest feather barring without making solid dark blocks.

Check: Squint at the drawing. If the chest looks grey, erase the layer there. If the back marks look like solid blocks, break them into shorter lines.

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Original tasks 4 / complete keys

Task 4

Finish the owl by adding a narrow value 4 shadow where the wing meets the body and a small value 5 accent at each eye ring. Then compare the whole drawing with your value scale and adjust any area that looks too grey.

Answer: The finished owl should be mostly values 1 to 3, with a narrow dark shadow at the wing-body join and tiny dark eye accents. Any broad grey area should be lightened.

Reason: Dark accents create contrast without turning the bird grey. The final comparison with the scale catches areas that were shaded too heavily.

Check: Cover the value scale and check that the lightest owl areas match bare paper. If more than a small area is at value 4 or 5, erase and lighten it.

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Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] Body proportions: head smaller than body, eyes level and in the lower half of the head.
- [ ] Value scale: five steps clearly different, with most owl areas at values 1 to 3.
- [ ] Shading build-up: light layers first, dark accents limited to small shadow areas.
- [ ] Feather marks: short and broken, following the body direction rather than solid blocks.
- [ ] White plumage effect: the owl reads as white overall, not grey or flat.
- [ ] Valid alternatives: different pencil pressures and paper textures are acceptable if the value relationships hold.

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