Negative Space Face Drawing: Shade the Background, Not the Face

Original tasks 1, 2, 3 / complete keys

Task 1

A face outline has a gap between the eyes of 2.5 cm and an eye width of 2.5 cm. You shade the background around the contour. State one check you would perform and why.

Answer: Compare the gap between the eyes to the eye width. Both are 2.5 cm in this hypothetical example, so the gap shape is consistent with one eye width.

Reason: Negative space checks use gap shapes between features. Measuring both values in centimetres and comparing them gives a simple arithmetic check.

Check: Measure the gap and the eye width with a ruler. Confirm both are 2.5 cm and that no shading entered the face.

Task 2

You are shading the background beside the left cheek. Your strokes run diagonally from lower left to upper right. Beside the right cheek you switch to vertical strokes. Is this consistent with the convention? Explain.

Answer: No. The convention requires one consistent stroke direction across the background. Switching directions makes the background uneven.

Reason: Consistency helps the background read as a single field and keeps the face separate. Valid alternatives include cross-hatching, but it must be applied evenly.

Check: Inspect the background for stroke direction. If two directions appear, choose one and redo the inconsistent area.

Task 3

A learner shades the background but accidentally darkens the area inside the chin. What should they do, and how can they check the fix?

Answer: Erase the marks inside the chin so the face remains unshaded. Check by looking for any pencil inside the contour and confirming the face is the lightest area.

Reason: The face is positive space and must stay unshaded. Accidental marks break the negative space convention.

Check: Hold the paper at eye level and scan the face area for shading. Erase any marks and recheck.

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Original tasks 4 / complete keys

Task 4

A face outline has a gap between the nose and the cheek that measures 1 cm. The nose width measures 2 cm. You are unsure if the gap shape is correct. Describe a check and a possible adjustment.

Answer: Measure the gap (1 cm) and the nose width (2 cm). Compare the values as a hypothetical example. If the gap looks too narrow, adjust the outline before adding more background shading.

Reason: Gap shapes between features are checked by measurement. Simple arithmetic in centimetres helps identify inconsistencies.

Check: Use a ruler to measure both values. Confirm the units are centimetres and that the face area remains unshaded.

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Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] Face area remains unshaded positive space.
- [ ] Background shading is even and uses a consistent stroke direction.
- [ ] Contour edge is created by shading, not by a dark outline.
- [ ] Gap shapes between features are recognizable and checked by measurement.
- [ ] Valid alternatives such as cross-hatching are accepted if consistent.

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