Scenery Drawing Practice: Foreground, Horizon, and Background Layers

Original tasks 1, 2 / complete keys

Task 1

On a 20 cm tall page, draw a horizon line 8 cm from the top. Draw one foreground rock 5 cm tall at the bottom and one background tree 1.5 cm tall near the horizon. Check the size ratio.

Answer: The foreground rock is 5 cm and the background tree is 1.5 cm, so the foreground is more than three times larger. The horizon leaves 12 cm below for foreground and 8 cm above for sky. The depth reading is clear.

Reason: A large foreground shape and a small background shape near the horizon create a strong size contrast. The horizon position leaves enough room for both layers.

Check: Measure both shapes with a ruler. Divide the foreground height by the background height. If the result is 3 or more, the size contrast is strong.

Task 2

Draw a horizon line across the middle of a page. Draw two foreground bushes that overlap by 2 cm. Draw three background hills that are each half the height of the bushes. Describe how the overlap and size difference affect depth.

Answer: The overlapping bushes read as closer because one covers part of the other. The hills are half the height of the bushes, so they read as farther away. Together, overlap and size contrast make the scene read with depth.

Reason: Overlap is a strong depth cue because a closer shape interrupts a farther shape. Size contrast reinforces the effect when background shapes are clearly smaller.

Check: Confirm the overlap is at least 1 cm and that each hill is no taller than half the bush height. Ask a viewer to point to the closest shape without explanation.

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Original tasks 3, 4 / complete keys

Task 3

Sketch a scene with a horizon line, one large foreground tree trunk, and two small background clouds. The trunk is 7 cm tall and each cloud is 2 cm tall. The trunk touches the bottom edge. Is the layer separation clear?

Answer: Yes. The trunk is 7 cm and each cloud is 2 cm, so the foreground is more than three times larger. The trunk touches the bottom edge, which anchors it as nearest. The clouds sit near the horizon and are simple shapes. The layers are clear.

Reason: Touching the bottom edge strengthens the foreground position. Small, simple clouds near the horizon read as background. The size ratio supports the separation.

Check: Measure the trunk and one cloud. Confirm the trunk reaches the bottom edge and the clouds are no taller than one-third of the trunk. Check that clouds have no internal detail.

Task 4

A sketch has a horizon line 5 cm from the top of a 15 cm page. The foreground shapes are 3 cm tall and the background shapes are 2.5 cm tall. Identify the problem and describe one fix using size or position.

Answer: The foreground and background shapes are too similar in size, so the depth reading is weak. One fix is to make the background shapes smaller, for example 1 cm tall, or move them closer to the horizon. Either change increases the size contrast.

Reason: Depth depends on clear differences between layers. When foreground and background shapes are nearly the same size, the viewer cannot tell which is closer. Increasing the size difference restores the cue.

Check: Measure both shapes. If the foreground is less than twice the background height, adjust the background size or position and re-measure.

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Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] Horizon line is visible and separates ground from sky or distant land.
- [ ] At least two foreground shapes are clearly larger than background shapes.
- [ ] At least one foreground shape overlaps another shape to show depth.
- [ ] Background shapes are small and simple, with little internal detail.
- [ ] Foreground shapes reach or approach the bottom edge of the page.
- [ ] The three layers can be identified by a viewer without explanation.

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