Still Life Drawing Exercises: Tonal, Edge, and Composition Drills

Original tasks 1, 2, 3 / complete keys

Task 1

Draw a five-step value scale in five 2 cm squares. Label each square 1 to 5. Then draw a 4 cm circle and shade it so the lower half is value 4 and the upper half is value 2, with a sharp transition between them.

Answer: A completed scale with five distinct steps and a circle whose lower half is clearly darker (value 4) than the upper half (value 2), with the change occurring within 2 mm.

Reason: The scale establishes reference values. The circle tests whether you can apply two values with a controlled sharp edge. The 2 mm threshold is a hypothetical practice convention, not a universal standard.

Check: Squint at the scale to confirm even steps. Measure the transition on the circle with a ruler; it should be 2 mm or less. If the halves look too similar, increase the value difference.

Task 2

Draw two 5 cm squares side by side. In the left square, shade from value 5 at the bottom to value 1 at the top with a soft transition over at least 8 mm. In the right square, do the same but with a sharp transition within 2 mm. Label each square.

Answer: Left square shows a gradual gradient over 8 mm or more; right square shows an abrupt change within 2 mm. Both use values 1 and 5.

Reason: This drill isolates edge quality. The soft square requires gradual pressure changes; the sharp square requires a deliberate boundary. The thresholds are hypothetical examples for practice.

Check: Measure the vertical distance over which the value changes in each square. Confirm the left is at least 8 mm and the right is 2 mm or less. Squint to check that both reach value 1 and value 5.

Task 3

Draw a 10 cm by 12 cm rectangle. Add light third-lines. Place a cylinder and a box so neither sits on a grid line and both have at least 1 cm margin from the edges. Sketch the layout only, no shading.

Answer: A rectangle with third-lines and two forms placed off the lines, each at least 1 cm from the edges, with clear space around them.

Reason: The drill tests placement and margin control before shading. Offsetting from grid lines avoids static composition. The 1 cm margin is a hypothetical example for this exercise.

Check: Measure the distance from each form to the nearest edge; confirm at least 1 cm. Check that no form touches a third-line. Confirm the layout looks balanced when you squint.

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Original tasks 4 / complete keys

Task 4

In a 6 cm by 8 cm rectangle, place a sphere and a box. Shade the sphere with a soft edge on its upper left and the box with a sharp edge on its lower right. Use at least three values from your scale. Keep a 1 cm margin.

Answer: A small composition with two forms, a soft upper-left edge on the sphere (8 mm or more), a sharp lower-right edge on the box (2 mm or less), at least three distinct values, and a 1 cm margin.

Reason: This combines tonal, edge, and composition skills in one small study. The edge thresholds and margin are hypothetical practice conventions. Valid alternatives include different value choices as long as three distinct values appear.

Check: Measure the soft and sharp transitions. Count the distinct values used (at least three). Measure the margin. Squint to confirm the composition feels balanced and the edges read as intended.

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Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] Value scale shows five distinct, evenly stepped values.
- [ ] Sharp edge transition occurs within 2 mm; soft edge spreads over at least 8 mm.
- [ ] Composition keeps forms off grid lines and maintains at least 1 cm margin.
- [ ] Work is checked by squinting and measuring where needed.
- [ ] Valid alternatives (blending tools, pencil angle) are accepted if control is demonstrated.

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