Contour Line Drawing of a Bonsai Tree: A Focused Outline Study

Original tasks 1, 2 / complete keys

Task 1

Draw a blind contour of a bonsai trunk from base to the first branch junction. Do not look at your paper. The reference shows a trunk that leans slightly to the right and narrows from about five centimeters at the base to about three centimeters at the junction over a vertical distance of eight centimeters. After drawing, describe where your line drifted.

Answer: The line should start at the base, move upward with a slight rightward lean, and narrow gradually. Because you did not look at the paper, the line may drift left or right. A valid answer describes at least one drift, such as the line moving too far right near the junction, and notes that the taper was recorded as a gradual inward turn.

Reason: Blind contour forces the hand to follow the eye. The drift shows where attention jumped ahead of the pencil. The taper is a slow change in direction, not a sudden step.

Check: Trace the line with a finger. Confirm it is continuous and that it shows at least one direction change consistent with the taper. Compare the described drift to the drawn line.

Task 2

Using slow contour, draw the outer foliage outline of a bonsai that has three visible bumps on the left side and two recesses on the right side. Keep the line continuous. The foliage mass is about twelve centimeters wide and eight centimeters tall. After drawing, count the direction changes in your line and compare to the reference description.

Answer: The line should be continuous and show at least five direction changes: three bumps on the left and two recesses on the right. A valid answer counts five or more changes and notes that the line wraps around the foliage mass without lifting. The exact shape may vary, but the count should match the described features.

Reason: Slow contour records each bump and recess as a direction change. Counting changes is a simple check that the line followed the edge rather than smoothing it.

Check: Count each noticeable turn in the drawn line. Confirm the count is at least five. Trace the line to confirm continuity.

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Original tasks 3, 4 / complete keys

Task 3

Draw a slow contour line along the upper edge of a branch that rises at a shallow angle for six centimeters, then turns downward for four centimeters. The branch thickness is about one centimeter. Do not draw the lower edge. After drawing, check whether the line shows the turn and whether the pencil lifted at the turn.

Answer: The line should rise gently for six centimeters, then turn downward for four centimeters without lifting. A valid answer notes one clear direction change at the turn and confirms the line is continuous. The branch thickness is not drawn because only the upper edge is requested.

Reason: The exercise isolates one edge and one direction change. The check is whether the turn is recorded and whether the line stayed continuous.

Check: Trace the line and locate the turn. Confirm the line does not lift at the turn. Measure the two segments with a ruler if needed; they should be about six and four centimeters.

Task 4

Combine a trunk edge and a foliage outline in one continuous slow contour line. Start at the trunk base, follow the left trunk edge upward for ten centimeters, then continue into the outer foliage outline with at least two bumps. Do not lift the pencil. After drawing, write one sentence about where the line was hardest to keep continuous.

Answer: The line should start at the base, move upward along the trunk edge, and transition into the foliage outline without lifting. A valid answer identifies a difficult transition, such as the junction between trunk and foliage, and confirms at least two bumps in the foliage section. The sentence should be specific to the drawn line.

Reason: Combining two edges tests whether the line can move from a slow taper to a bumpy outline while staying continuous. The written sentence encourages reflection on attention.

Check: Trace the entire line from base to foliage end. Confirm no lifts. Count at least two bumps in the foliage section. Read the sentence and check it refers to a specific point in the drawing.

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Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] Line is continuous from start to end with no unintended lifts.
- [ ] Trunk edge shows a visible taper from base to branch junction.
- [ ] Branch edge connects to the trunk line at the junction without a gap.
- [ ] Foliage outline includes at least three distinct bumps or recesses.
- [ ] Blind contour pass was completed without looking at the paper.
- [ ] Slow contour pass shows pencil speed matched to eye speed, with small direction changes recorded.
- [ ] Labels, if any, use the defined x-height convention: baseline to midline of lowercase letters; letter style may vary.

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