Negative Space Ballerina: Draw the Gaps, Not the Girl

Original tasks 1, 2 / complete keys

Task 1

A seated ballerina leans forward with both hands on one knee. Two enclosed gaps appear: a long sliver between the upper arm and the torso, and a rounded wedge between the forearm and the thigh. Shade both gaps using parallel strokes, then draw the arm and thigh edges from the shaded shapes. State the order you used.

Answer: Shade the long sliver first, then the rounded wedge. Draw the torso side from the sliver's inner edge and the thigh top from the wedge's lower edge. Order: sliver, wedge, then figure edges.

Reason: Shading the larger, simpler sliver first establishes the arm-torso spacing; the wedge then fixes the forearm-thigh relationship. Building edges from shaded shapes prevents the arm from being drawn too close to the body.

Check: Cover the figure and confirm the two shaded shapes still suggest a leaning pose. Measure the sliver's width against the wedge's width; they should differ clearly, not be equal.

Task 2

A ballerina stands with one leg raised behind her and the other straight. One enclosed gap is a narrow triangle between the raised leg and the standing leg; another is a crescent between the raised arm and the head. Shade both gaps, then draw the leg and arm edges. Explain how you decided which gap to shade first.

Answer: Shade the narrow triangle between the legs first because it defines the standing leg's position, then the crescent between arm and head. Draw the raised leg from the triangle's edge and the arm from the crescent's edge.

Reason: The leg triangle controls the figure's balance and is the larger enclosed shape; shading it first anchors the pose. The head-arm crescent is smaller and depends on the arm position already suggested by the torso.

Check: Check that the triangle's tip does not touch the crescent and that both boundaries are closed. Compare the triangle's width to the crescent's width; the triangle should be wider at its base.

Negative Space Ballerina: Draw the Gaps, Not the Girl

Original tasks 3, 4 / complete keys

Task 3

A ballerina bends one elbow so the hand rests on the opposite shoulder, creating a loop-shaped gap between the forearm and the chest. A second gap is a thin sliver between the upper arm and the side of the torso. Shade the loop first, then the sliver. Draw the chest and upper arm edges. Describe one adjustment you would make if the loop looked too round.

Answer: Shade the loop between forearm and chest, then the sliver between upper arm and torso. Draw the chest from the loop's inner edge and the upper arm from the sliver's outer edge. If the loop looks too round, flatten its lower boundary slightly to match the chest angle.

Reason: The loop is the more distinctive enclosed shape and sets the elbow position; the sliver then confirms the upper arm's distance from the torso. Adjusting the loop's lower boundary corrects the chest angle without changing the arm.

Check: Trace the loop with a finger; it should be a closed shape, not a spiral. Confirm the sliver is narrower than the loop at every point.

Task 4

A ballerina stands with both arms curved overhead, forming a large oval gap between the arms and a small triangular gap between each wrist and the head. Shade the oval first, then the two triangles. Draw the arm edges from the oval and the head edges from the triangles. State how you kept the two triangles consistent.

Answer: Shade the large oval between the arms, then the left wrist-head triangle, then the right wrist-head triangle. Draw both arms from the oval's outer edge and the head from the triangles' inner edges. Keep the triangles consistent by comparing their widths to each other before shading.

Reason: The oval defines the overall arm curve; the two triangles are smaller and symmetrical in role, so comparing them first prevents one wrist from looking closer to the head than the other.

Check: Measure the two triangles' widths against each other; they should be similar but not identical if the pose is slightly asymmetric. Confirm the oval boundary is closed and does not merge with either triangle.

Negative Space Ballerina: Draw the Gaps, Not the Girl

Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] All enclosed gaps between limbs and torso are shaded; open background is not shaded.
- [ ] Each gap boundary is drawn as a single closed line before shading.
- [ ] Shading is consistent across all gaps, using one chosen stroke style.
- [ ] Relative gap sizes and tilts match the reference pose within a reasonable comparison.
- [ ] The figure is built from the shaded gap edges rather than from a pre-drawn body outline.
- [ ] Valid alternatives in line weight, hatching style, and minor detail are accepted if the gap shapes remain accurate.

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