Draw Cupped Hands Without Contour Lines: Volume-First Construction

Original tasks 1, 2 / complete keys

Task 1

Construct a cupped hand with a palm bowl 4 x-heights wide and 2 x-heights deep. Use four finger tubes each 1 x-height thick. Describe the rim span check and one adjustment if the span is too wide.

Answer: The four tubes span about 4 x-heights at the rim, matching the 4 x-height bowl width, so the given configuration is already consistent. If a drawing's span is too wide for its bowl, narrow each tube (for example, to 0.75 x-height so four tubes span 3 x-heights) or widen the bowl to match the span. Shade the bowl interior darkest and keep finger tops light.

Reason: Rim span equals four tubes times 1 x-height each, which equals 4 x-heights. Matching bowl width keeps the cup proportional. Adjusting tube thickness or bowl width restores the match.

Check: Measure the rim span against the bowl width using your x-height unit. Confirm the bowl interior is visible between fingers and darker than finger tops.

Task 2

A student draws a cupped hand where the bowl interior and finger tops are the same tone. Identify the problem and describe two shading changes that fix it without adding an outline.

Answer: The hollow does not read because there is no tonal separation. Darken the bowl interior with dense strokes and keep finger tops light, adding only edge tone. Add a soft shadow under the fingers where they meet the bowl.

Reason: The bowl interior faces away from the light and should be darkest. Finger tops catch light. A shadow under the fingers shows hovering and anchors the cup.

Check: Blur your eyes; the bowl should read as a darker hollow inside lighter finger tops. Confirm no contour line was added.

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Original tasks 3, 4 / complete keys

Task 3

Construct a cupped hand where the middle fingers curve least and the outer fingers curve most. Use a bowl 3 x-heights wide and finger tubes 1 x-height thick, then adjust the tubes so the rim span matches the bowl. Describe the curve placement, the thumb position, and the rim-span adjustment.

Answer: Attach four tubes at the far rim. The two middle tubes curve slightly inward; the outer tubes curve more strongly toward the bowl center. Place the thumb on the near side, angled across the bowl edge. Four tubes at 1 x-height each would span 4 x-heights, exceeding the 3 x-height bowl, so narrow each tube to 0.75 x-height ($4 \times 0.75 = 3$) to match the bowl. Shade the bowl interior darkest and add a shadow under the thumb.

Reason: Longer middle fingers reach farther forward, so they curve least. Shorter outer fingers curve more to wrap the bowl. The thumb on the near side braces the cup. Rim span equals four tubes times tube thickness, so matching it to bowl width keeps the cup proportional.

Check: Multiply tube thickness by four and compare to bowl width; with 0.75 x-height tubes the span is 3 x-heights, matching the bowl. Trace each finger curve mentally to the bowl center. Confirm the thumb is on the near side and casts a shadow into the bowl.

Task 4

Your cupped-hand drawing has a rim span of 5 x-heights but the bowl is only 3 x-heights wide. Describe the mismatch, one adjustment, and how to check the fix using simple arithmetic.

Answer: The rim span exceeds the bowl width by 2 x-heights, so the fingers look too thick or the bowl too narrow. To match the 3 x-height bowl, narrow each tube to 0.75 x-height so four tubes span 3 x-heights. To match the stated 5 x-height span instead, widen the bowl to 5 x-heights. Check by multiplying tube thickness by four and comparing to bowl width.

Reason: A rim span of 5 x-heights exceeds the 3 x-height bowl width by 2 x-heights, so the fingers are too thick or the bowl too narrow. To match the 3 x-height bowl, narrow each tube to 0.75 x-height so four tubes span 3 x-heights. To match the 5 x-height span, widen the bowl to 5 x-heights. Arithmetic makes the check simple.

Check: Multiply tube thickness by four and compare to bowl width. Confirm the bowl interior is visible between fingers and that no contour line closes the silhouette.

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Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] Palm bowl is placed as a tilted oval with open rim arcs, not a closed outline.
- [ ] Four finger tubes are attached at the far rim and curve toward the bowl center.
- [ ] Thumb tube sits on the near side and braces the bowl edge.
- [ ] Bowl interior is the darkest plane; finger tops remain light.
- [ ] Shadow under fingers and thumb anchors the cup and shows hovering.
- [ ] Proportions use a consistent x-height unit, with any numerical values labeled as examples.
- [ ] No continuous contour line closes the hand silhouette.
- [ ] Valid alternatives are accepted if the hollow reads clearly and volumes are consistent.

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