Female Portrait Negative Space Drawing: See the Gaps, Draw the Face

Original tasks 1, 2, 3 / complete keys

Task 1

Sketch a simple female portrait silhouette with head height 8 units, neck width 3 units, and shoulder span 12 units. Shade the background with a contour gap of one pencil-line width. Leave all portrait mass unshaded. Describe where you shaded and where you left gaps.

Answer: Shade only the background; leave the head, hair mass, neck, and shoulders unshaded. Keep a continuous contour gap around the silhouette. Ratios: neck:head = 3:8; shoulder:head = 12:8 = 1.5:1.

Reason: The task tests negative-space logic and proportion measurement. Shading the background and leaving the portrait light creates the silhouette; the contour gap separates them without positive outlines.

Check: Measure head height and neck width again; confirm the ratio is 3:8. Hold at arm’s length: the portrait should read as a light shape with continuous gaps.

Task 2

A portrait has a background gap between the hair and the shoulder that is 2 units wide, and a hair-mass gap that is 1 unit wide. Which gap do you shade, and why? Use the convention from the lesson.

Answer: Shade the 2-unit background gap; leave the 1-unit hair-mass gap unshaded. Background is shaded; hair mass stays light.

Reason: The convention distinguishes true background from portrait mass. The 2-unit gap is background, so it receives shading; the 1-unit gap is part of the hair mass, so it remains unshaded.

Check: Check that the shaded gap is outside the portrait silhouette and the unshaded gap is inside the hair mass. Confirm no shading crosses the contour gap.

Task 3

You measure a head height of 5 cm and a shoulder span of 9 cm. Write the shoulder:head ratio in simplest form. Then state one check you would perform after shading to confirm the contour gap is consistent.

Answer: Shoulder:head = 9:5 (already simplest). Check: measure the contour gap at three points around the silhouette; they should be equal within one pencil-line width.

Reason: Ratios are checkable arithmetic in consistent units. The contour-gap check verifies the convention was applied evenly.

Check: Re-measure head height and shoulder span in centimeters; confirm 9:5. Measure the gap at three locations and compare.

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Original tasks 4 / complete keys

Task 4

Design a label for your drawing using a consistent letter style. State the x-height convention (baseline to midline) and describe how you would check uniformity across the label without referring to any image.

Answer: Choose one letter style and keep it consistent. X-height is baseline to midline. Check uniformity by measuring baseline-to-midline distance for three letters; the distances should match within your chosen unit.

Reason: Letter styles vary, so the task rewards consistency and a measurable check rather than a single universal alphabet.

Check: Measure baseline-to-midline for three letters in the label; confirm the distances are equal in your chosen unit.

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Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] Silhouette accuracy: head, hair mass, neck, and shoulders match the observed proportions within a checkable ratio.
- [ ] Contour-gap continuity: a consistent gap (e.g., one pencil-line width) surrounds the portrait without breaks.
- [ ] Negative-space logic: background is shaded, portrait mass is unshaded, and no positive-space features are drawn as lines.
- [ ] Proportion consistency: measurements use one unit and recorded ratios are re-checked.
- [ ] Shading quality: even pressure and direction; no shading crosses the contour gaps.
- [ ] Valid alternatives: different hair textures or letter styles are acceptable if internally consistent and measurable.

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