Animal Negative Space Drawing: Shade the Surround, Reveal the Form

Original tasks 1, 2, 3 / complete keys

Task 1

A silhouette of a seated animal has a closed contour and one enclosed gap between its front paws. The body is unshaded. Describe the shading plan and the check.

Answer: Shade the outer surround in two light passes, then shade the gap between the front paws with matching pressure. Leave the body unshaded. Check by covering a short contour section; the animal should read as a light shape against the darker surround.

Reason: The gap is enclosed by the contour, so it is surround. Keeping the body unshaded preserves the convention and makes the silhouette readable.

Check: Cover a short section of contour and confirm the body still reads as unshaded against the shaded surround.

Task 2

A running animal silhouette has two enclosed gaps: one between the back legs and one inside a curled tail. The surround is shaded, but the tail gap is left unshaded. What is wrong and how do you fix it?

Answer: The tail gap is an enclosed negative shape and must be shaded as surround. Shade it with the same pressure and direction as the outer surround, then recheck the silhouette.

Reason: An unshaded enclosed gap reads as part of the animal, breaking the body-surround convention. Matching the surround tone restores the negative-space read.

Check: Step back and confirm the tail gap no longer reads as body; cover a contour section to test the silhouette.

Task 3

A silhouette has a very narrow gap between two limbs. The artist shades the body instead of the surround to create contrast. State the convention error and a valid correction.

Answer: The convention is body unshaded and surround shaded. Erase or avoid body shading, widen the narrow gap slightly in the planning sketch if needed, and shade the surround and gap in light passes.

Reason: Shading the body reverses the negative-space convention. Widening a narrow gap in planning is allowed if it does not invent anatomy, and surround shading creates the edge.

Check: Confirm the body is unshaded and the gap is shaded; cover a contour section to verify the animal reads.

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Original tasks 4 / complete keys

Task 4

An animal silhouette is drawn with a dark outline and a lightly shaded surround. The artist wants the negative-space read. Describe two changes and one verification step.

Answer: Lighten or remove the dark outline, and increase the surround tone in even passes while keeping the body unshaded. Verify by covering a short contour section; the animal should read through tone difference alone.

Reason: A dark outline competes with the negative-space read. Stronger surround contrast and an unshaded body make the silhouette emerge from the shaded field.

Check: Cover or erase a short contour section and confirm the animal still reads as a light shape against the darker surround.

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Source rubric / reflection

- [ ] The animal body remains unshaded under the defined convention.
- [ ] The outer surround is shaded in even passes and stops at the contour.
- [ ] All enclosed gaps are identified and shaded as surround.
- [ ] The contour line is light or absent; the edge reads through tone difference.
- [ ] The animal silhouette is readable when a short section of contour is covered.
- [ ] Valid alternative stroke directions and pressures are accepted if the body-surround contrast is clear.

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