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VIDEO COMPANION

8 TIPS TO DRAWING A BETTER PORTRAIT

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Welcome to Your
"8 TIPS - Draw a BETTER PORTRAIT"
Video Companion

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Today I'm going to give you eight tips to drawing a better portrait.

It doesn't matter if you draw from photos or from life, these tips will help.

I'm going to begin my portrait today, of Corrie, working from life. And then, for my very last tip, I'll switch to looking at a photo. So, I can show you something that only works with a photo.

Tip 1: Life Size or Smaller

The average adult head is 8 to 9 inches high. But, since Corrie is here with me, why not measure *her* head so I can truly draw her life size?

I can really use anything to measure with. My pencil, a paintbrush handle. But I like to use this metal skewer.

Now, if you try this at home, be careful. Don't poke your subject in the eye!

And be polite. Ask for permission first.

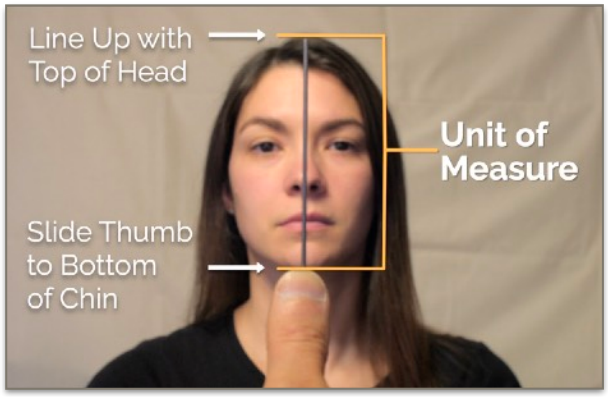
I should mention that I'm talking about a **traditional portrait** here, not modern art. In modern art anything goes. But with a traditional portrait, anything larger than life is going to look odd when it's hanging on a wall.

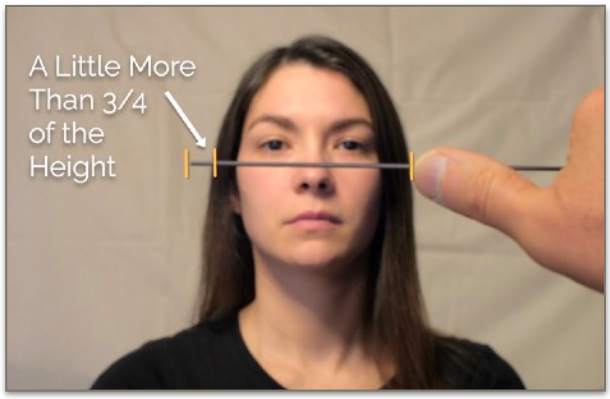
Tip 2: Match the Height to Width Ratio

This is the primary relationship to get right in anything you draw, not just a portrait.

I find out what the height-to-width ratio is with a technique called **sighting**:

1. I straighten my elbow and lock it into that position. I **hold my skewer vertically**. Line up the top of the skewer with the top of Corrie's head. And slide my thumb until it's lined up with her chin. So, this unit of measure is the height of Corrie's head.
2. Then, keeping the measurement and keeping my elbow locked, I **turn my skewer horizontally** and see how this unit of measure compares to the *width* of Corrie's head. It looks like the width of Corrie's head is a little more than 3/4 of the height.





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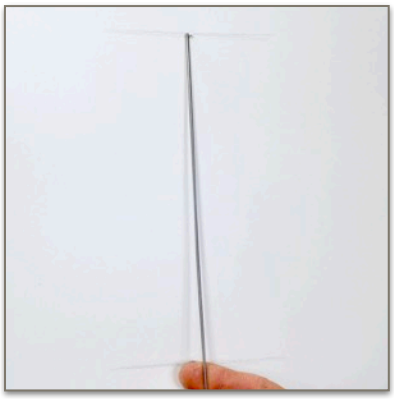
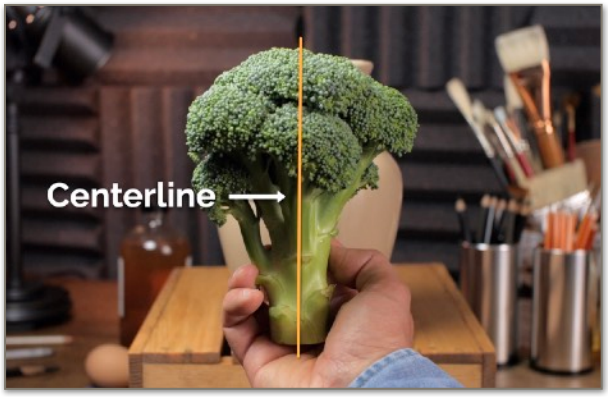
3. So now I **apply that ratio to my drawing**. I measure what will be the height of Corrie's head in my drawing. Find a little more than 3/4 of that measurement on my skewer. And use that measurement to determine the width of her head in my drawing.





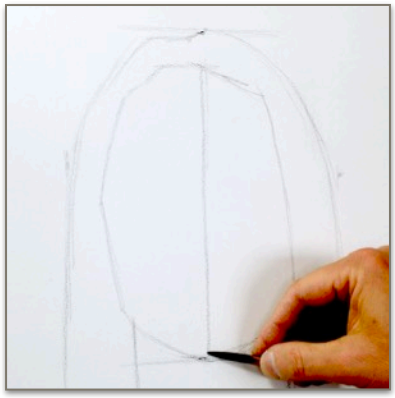
Tip 3: Draw a Centerline

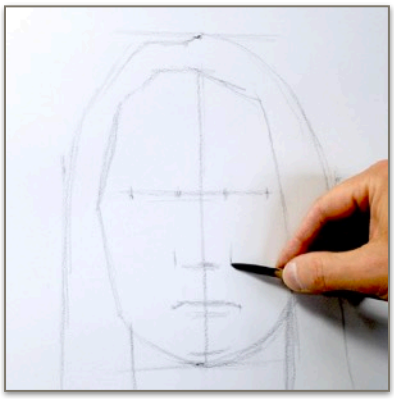
When I draw anything that's symmetrical I always, always, always draw a centerline. Very lightly so I can erase it later.

So, if I'm drawing a vase, broccoli… wait. **Broccoli isn't symmetrical**. It isn't balanced and evenly shaped. So, forget the broccoli.

But an egg? **An egg is symmetrical. And so is a person's face** — which is, of course, what we're drawing today.

Having a centerline helps me see how the left and right sides of Corrie's face match up. So, for example with this **front view**, I can measure from the centerline and make sure that one side is like a mirror image of the other.





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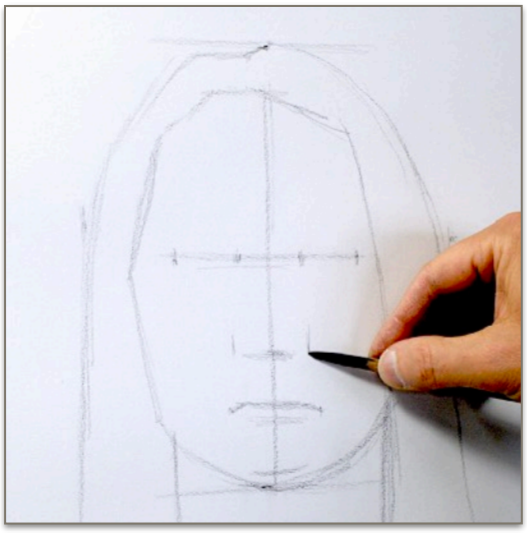
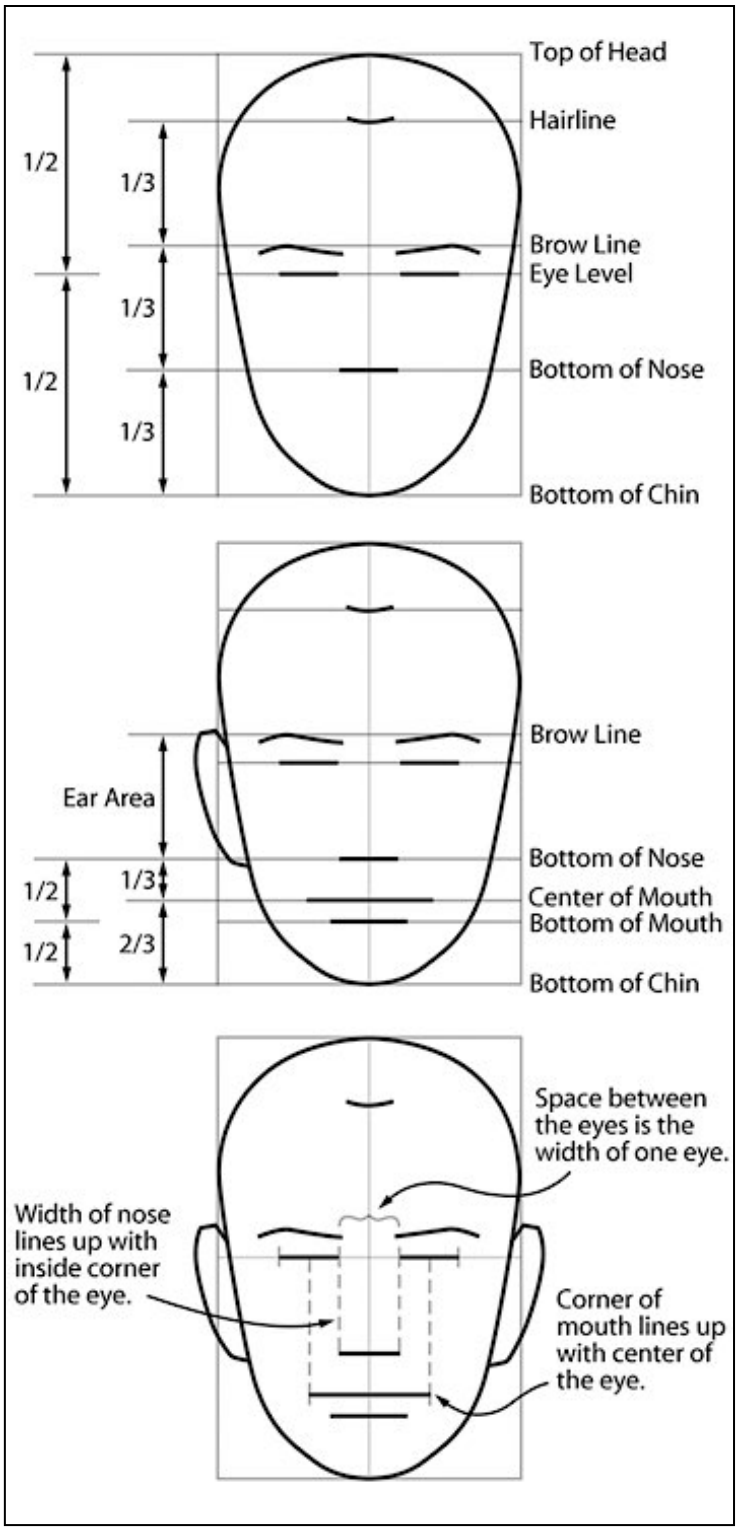


Tip 4: Draw Simple Shapes and Placement of Features First

As you can see, way before I draw any detail, I look for big simple shapes and draw those first.

And before I add any detail to the features, I indicate where those features are on the face. To help you do that, here's a…

…Bonus: General Head Proportions



I put together the diagram on the right to show you the features I'm referring to and where they usually go in relation to the head and to each other.

Even though everyone's head and features are proportioned differently, I still use the information in this diagram as a starting point. I then note where my subject differs and draw accordingly.

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Tip 5: Keep the Initial Lay In Light

You'll notice that every mark I've made on the paper, so far, has been pretty light. That's because this is my initial lay in, my first attempt at getting a likeness of Corrie.

As the drawing progresses and a likeness begins to emerge. I want to be able erase any mistakes I make during this first attempt.

Tip 6: Copy Shadow Shapes

Shadow shapes are more of those simple shapes I mentioned in Tip 4.

So, once again, before I even *think* about drawing *any* details. I draw those simple shapes that are formed by shadows on Corrie's face.

Tip 7: Fill the Shadows In with One Flat Tone at First

I see a lot of subtle differences in the shadows of Corrie's face. But, remember that in the initial stages, I want to keep my drawing simple and ignore details like that. I can always come back and add them later if I want to.

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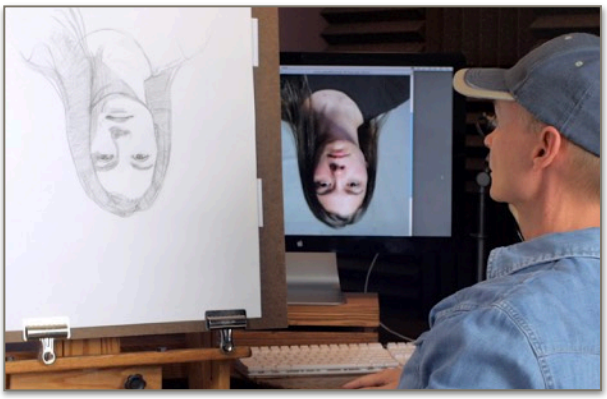
Tip 8: Evaluate with a Fresh Eye

It's true, isn't it? When you've been up close and personal with your drawing for a while, it's really hard to see where you've made a mistake and to self-correct.

Well, there are three things I do to help self-correct, that you can do, too:

1. One of the easiest things you can do is to **take a break**. Step back and evaluate your drawing from a distance.

2. Another thing you can do is **use a mirror**. You can either hold it in your hands or set it on an easel. If you've never done this before, try it. You'll be amazed. Seeing your drawing and your subject side by side but in *reverse* really helps mistakes pop out.



3. Now, I told you that I would show you something that only works with a photo. So, during my life drawing session with Corrie, I took a photo. And, while using that photo for reference, I can still take a break, I can still use the mirror. But one thing I can't do when working from life is — **turn everything upside down**.

   Doing this not only helps me see my drawing with a fresh eye. It really helps me see everything as a shape, instead of as a feature that I can name and have all kinds of preconceptions about.

   I've already talked about simple *shapes* and shadow *shapes*. And, this whole concept of seeing shapes is worth expanding on…

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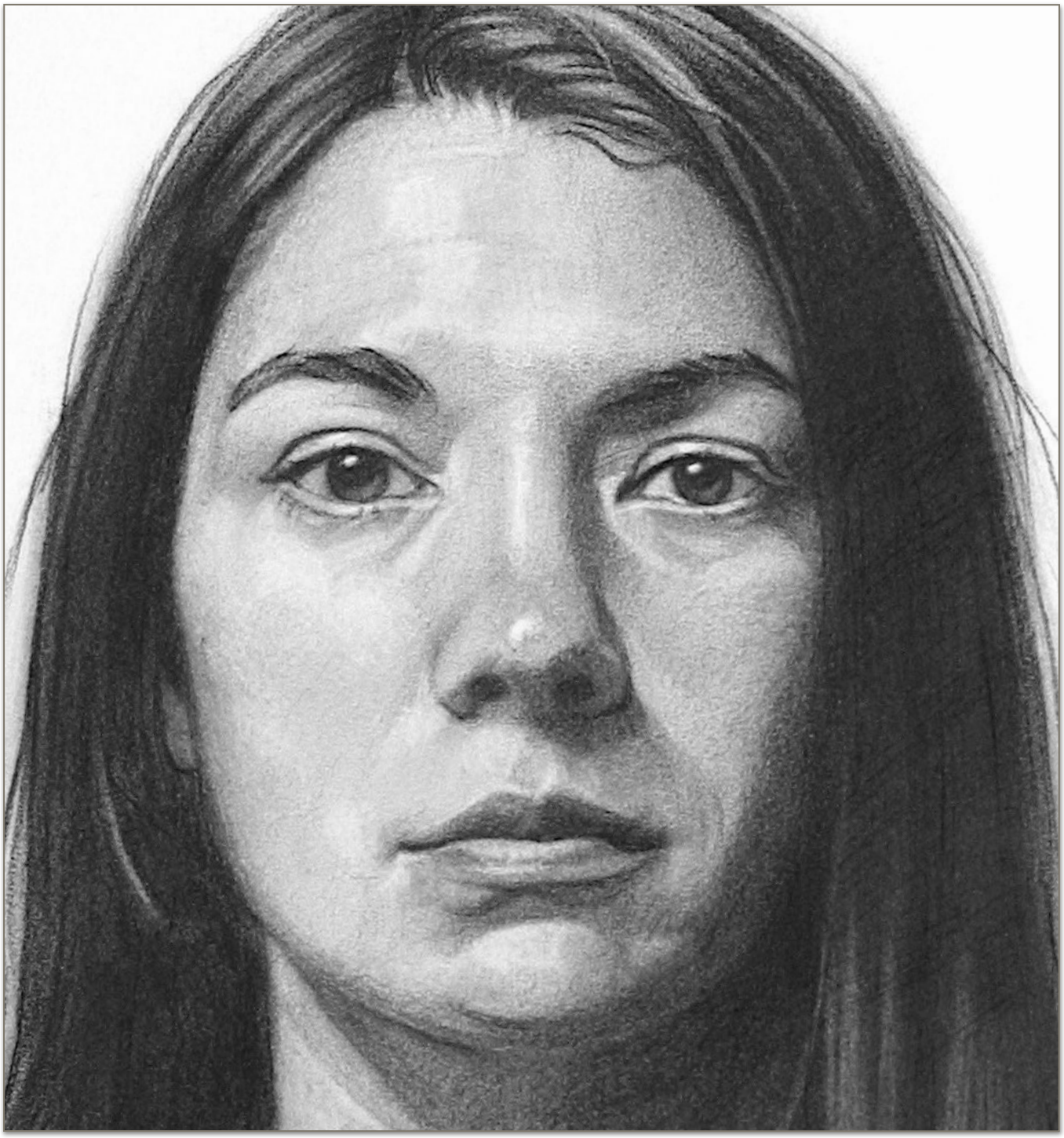
...Bonus Tip: Don't Name What You See

Don't name what you see, "This is an eye, there's a nose." Instead, see everything as a shape. A shape that you copy — the way you see it. Not the way you think it should be, because it *is* an eye, a nose, or whatever. This tip is crucial to drawing *everything* from observation, not just a portrait.



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