

# How to Draw EXACTLY What You See

By Dan Duhrkoop  
For EmptyEasel.com



*55+ pages of instruction  
Over 100 images*

**LEARN STEP-BY-STEP HOW TO DRAW ANYTHING!**

**How to Draw Exactly What You See**  
by Dan Duhrkoop

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## Dear artist,

Congrats on taking this BIG, IMPORTANT step today!

Whether you're a brand-new artist with zero training, or a more experienced artist looking to improve your drawing skills, this guide will teach you everything you need to know to look at a still life scene and draw it EXACTLY as it appears.

Because let's be perfectly clear: the ability to draw realistically isn't some kind of "innate" talent that some folks are born with. I certainly wasn't born with it—I learned to draw, just as you will, using the exact same techniques and drawing methods I cover in the pages to come.

Although. . . I daresay it won't take you as long as it took me. :)

The lessons ahead of you include drawing tips and techniques I've gleaned from every decade of my life—from the stacks of drawing books I checked out from the library as a child, to expensive college art classes in my twenties, to the many years I've spent teaching artists through EmptyEasel.com.

In short, I've seen what works and what doesn't—so I know for a fact that if you follow the instructions in this guide, you'll be amazed at how much your drawings improve.

Before you start, here are a few bits of advice I always share with my students:

**Understand your WHY.** Take a few minutes right now and fill out [your drawing goals here](#). Just the act of writing down your goals is extremely powerful—but we'll also email them to you so you can revisit your WHY anytime your motivation is flagging.

**Be kind to yourself.** Try not to compare yourself with other artists especially at these early stages. Remember, every journey starts with a single step. You'll get there too!

**Take as much time as you need.** Don't rush any of the steps, even if you think you already know what's being shared. You owe it to yourself to go slowly and do it right—if you do, I guarantee that you'll love your results.

All the best,  
Dan Duhrkoop  
Artist & Founder, [EmptyEasel.com](#)

# 1. Supply list

Each of the items below will be of use to you while going through the lessons in this guide. You can find most of them at local art supply stores, or online at Blick Art Materials.

*Please note: if you use any of the links below to make a purchase, EmptyEasel will receive a small percentage of the sale. This allows us keep the costs of our art courses affordable for all artists.*

\*\*\*\*

## [Pencils – 6b through 6h](#)

You don't really need every pencil from darkest to lightest, but they're often cheap enough to buy that it's not a big deal. At least have a 6h to draw your initial outline, a 4H and 2H for light values, and an HB, 2B, 4B, and 6B for shading.

## [Good pencil sharpener](#)

Hand-held pencil sharpeners work best—they won't break the tips of your pencils as often, which means less waste of good pencil lead.

## [Value chart](#)

You'll use your value chart during the shading process to make sure that you're getting a full range of values in your drawing. The best drawings go from white (blank paper) to full black (6B or charcoal dust) and have ranges of gray in between. You can buy a pre-made value chart, or it can also be a good practice to make your own.

## [Drawing pad or drawing paper](#)

You can use any paper you have on hand (regular printer paper will work if needed) but drawing paper is stronger, stands up to erasers better, and holds more graphite than cheap printer paper

Strathmore is a good yet fairly inexpensive option, but if you'd rather start out with a really cheap pad of newsprint or sketching paper for your first attempts, that's fine too.

## [Tortillon/blending stick](#)

For blending small areas, this will make it easier. You can either buy these or make them yourself. The one I use in this tutorial is from Caran d'Ache, it's thick enough to hold comfortably, and it works great.

## **Paper towel or napkin**

You can use clean swatches of paper towels for larger areas that need blending, like a background.

## [White vinyl eraser](#)

White artist erasers are a must-have (anytime you make a mistake, you'll want to be able to erase without damaging the paper or leaving an eraser mark).

Some artists also like [stretchy/kneadable erasers](#). These can be shaped for delicate graphite removal, and kneaded to keep clean.

## **Scrap paper**

Having scrap paper on hand is always a good idea. You can use it to protect your drawing from smudges (place it between your palm and the paper) or just have it handy to test things out.

### **Flat surface or drawing board**

You can draw on a kitchen table, any other flat surface, or a drawing board. The drawing board that I use in this tutorial is inexpensive and has a clip and a rubber band to hold your paper.

*NOTE: It may be helpful to tape down your drawing paper with masking tape on the corners to keep it in place.*

### **Straight edge or ruler**

Some still life drawings won't need this, but in most cases, a straight edge or ruler is very helpful for drawing any straight lines in your composition. I did not have a ruler when I sat down to do this tutorial, and a few minutes in I wished I did!

### **Viewfinder/Composition tool**

This is a must-have if you're just starting out. You can make one yourself with a few scrap pieces of sturdy card stock, cardboard, or plastic, or buy one at any art store.

For this tutorial I used a store-bought viewfinder from Blick called a "ViewCatcher" to plan my composition, and then created my own viewfinder out of scrap paper so I wouldn't have to keep holding it up as I drew.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with doing this, and it'll make it much, much easier if you're just starting out!

### **A single bright lamp/spotlight**

Also a must-have if you're setting up your own still life. The ideal setup is in a dark or dim room, with a single light source pointing directly at your still life. Some lamps won't work because they

scatter light in a strange way, but generally speaking, a bare bulb will work just fine.

The thing to avoid is overhead light, or a room with several windows, since that will create multiple shadows in your still life.

I've used cheap \$5 work lights bought at a local hardware store (some have a tension clip attached, which makes moving it around to different locations nice and easy) as well as photography lighting purchased on Amazon. Those are what I used for this tutorial, and they're actually more affordable than you'd think (around \$50 for a nice set).

You may also be able to re-purpose an existing light in your own home—ideally one that casts clean, strong shadows, and is maneuverable so that you can place it wherever you want in relation to your still life scene.

### **Camera**

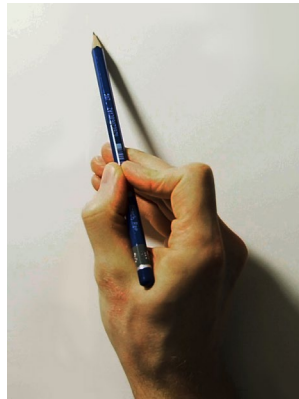
This is optional (and a smart phone camera would work just fine in most cases). It just depends on if you can leave your still life up where it won't be disturbed for a few days while you do your drawing. If that isn't an option for you, then it's probably best to set up your still life, take a photo, and work from that photo. You can also work from one of our photos in this guide if you'd like.

## 2. Pencil-handling & basic strokes

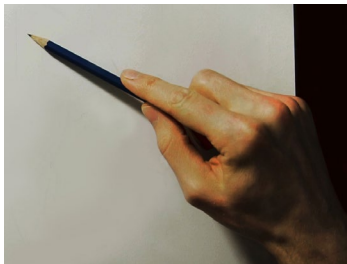
If you're just starting out, here are a few things you might want to know about drawing with pencils. You do NOT need to memorize these, or worry about them too much—there's no test! :)

\*\*\*\*

You can hold your pencil a few different ways. The first is what I call the “pen hold” which is essentially how you're taught to hold a #2 pencil in grade school.



For drawing purposes, you can move your grip forward to give you more fine control (and pressure) or backward to give you a wider range of movements (and speed).



The other way to hold your pencil might be new to you—it's typically called an “overhand” grip, and it's often used while standing at an easel. Instead of resting your hand on the paper, only the pencil-tip touches.

You may find occasion to use the overhand grip even when you're seated, however. By angling your elbow up and away from your paper, you can press the side of the pencil tip onto the paper, and draw with a much wider area of the pencil lead. This makes it easy to shade in larger areas of your paper quickly.

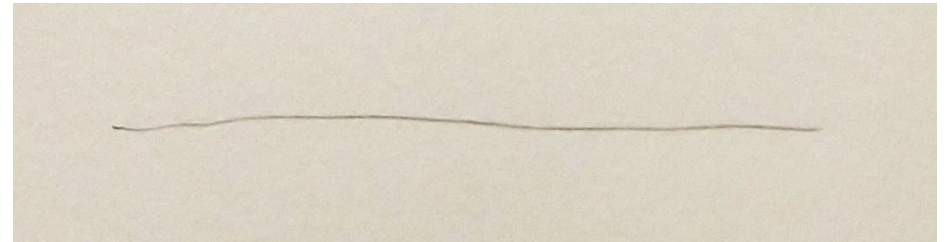
Typically you'll be using the “pen hold” or your own variation of it. (Everyone's grip is slightly different, and that's OK—there's not any right or wrong way to go about it!) And if anything ever feels awkward as you're drawing, just try a different grip.

### Pencil strokes & marks

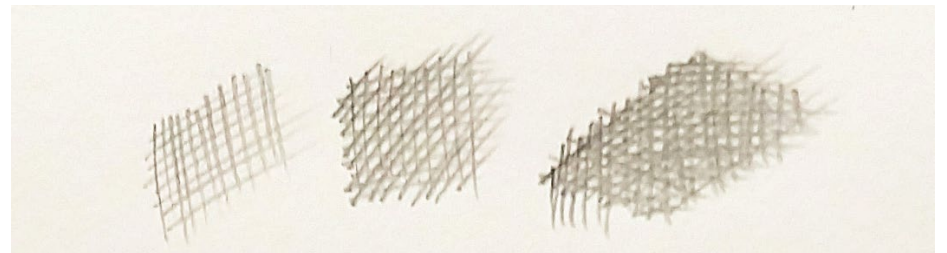
When we draw, we are making hundreds, even thousands, of tiny lines on paper. The trick is to make those many strokes blend together to give the illusion of reality.

In the lessons ahead, we'll use 4 main types of strokes:

*Single lines* are used to draw your initial line drawing, to outline highlighted areas that you want to leave alone, and to draw contour lines (these are curved, repeating lines that give the illusion of shape or depth to your drawing).

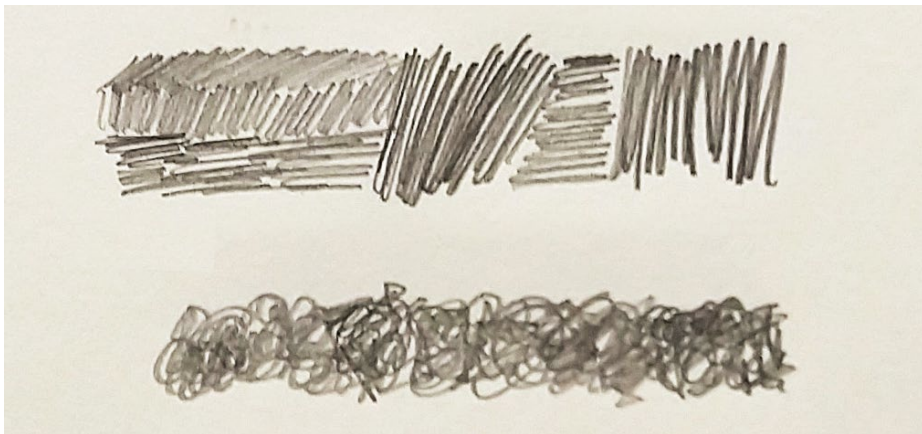


*Cross-hatching* is done almost exclusively for shading purposes.

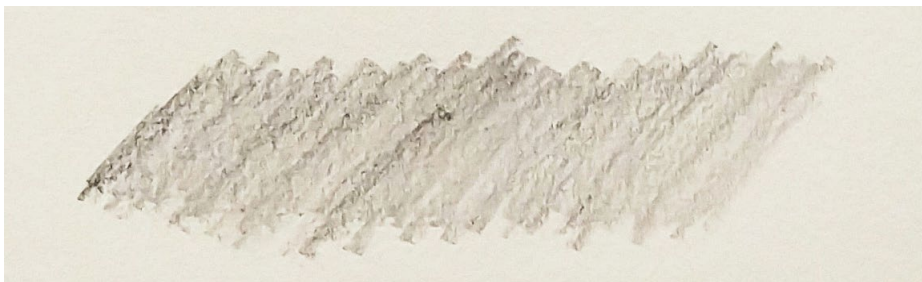


You start by drawing one set of lines at a particular angle, and then go over them with another set of lines going a different angle (and repeat again as-necessary to make it increasingly darker).

*Scribbling* is another way to fill in a section of a drawing. By moving your pencil tip somewhat randomly, and varying up your line direction, you can fill in sections quickly, in a way that's a bit more “natural-looking” than with cross-hatching. You can also use circular scribbles.



Lastly, *side-shading* is simply angling your pencil so that more of the pencil tip touches the paper at once. You can use a version of the overhand grip to draw like this. It tends to speed up shading in areas, as well as give a slightly different visual texture.



## Pressure

As long as you have a range of pencils to draw with (6H - 6B) you shouldn't need to use much pressure while drawing. If your marks aren't dark enough, just switch to another pencil.

While you draw, you may see lots of extra graphite dust on your paper. If that's the case, you may be pressing too hard while you draw. There will always be some dust, but you don't want to be bearing down on your pencil tip to the point where it's grinding away into dust in front of you. :)

Generally speaking, use a medium amount of pressure so that the pencil leaves a visible stroke on the paper. The one exception is when you're just starting your drawing—early on, it's better to use light pressure (and a light pencil, like a 4H or 6H) so that you can erase easier.

## Blending

Blending is where the fun happens! :)

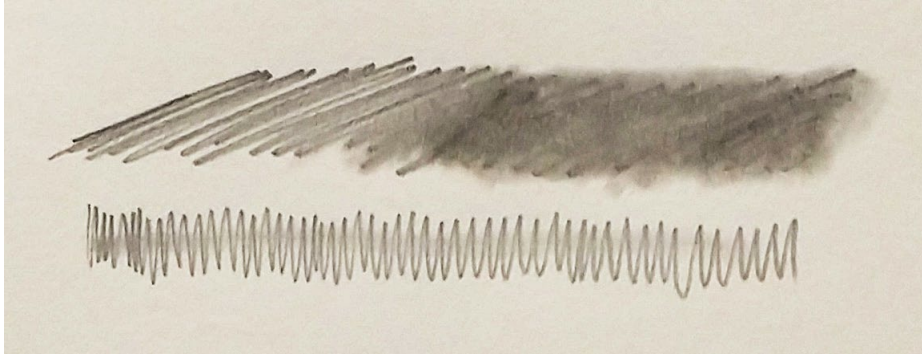
It's very easy to blend pencil marks, so much so that you might find yourself blending (or smudging) your drawing by accident—usually with the heel of your drawing hand.

Still, one of the reasons graphite is so versatile is that you can choose whether to leave the pencil strokes visible, or blend them into smooth, photo-realistic gradients.

I recommend using a tortillon or blending stick to blend small, tight areas of your drawing, and scraps of paper towel to blend large areas (like a background). In both cases, your blending



“tool” will pick up graphite dust from one section and smear it over another section—so be careful as you blend that you don’t go over a line which you’d prefer to keep sharp and crisp.



You can blend with the strokes of the pencil to enhance the directionality of the strokes, or circular (or perpendicular) to disguise the direction of your pencil strokes. If you plan to blend an area later on, it’s smart to use scribble or side-shading strokes to vary the direction ahead of time.

As you blend, it’s smart to move from light to dark areas, so that you don’t “contaminate” lighter areas with the darker graphite dust. You can also lean your blending tool (sandpaper works for that) or use a new scrap of paper towel to avoid those kinds of mistakes.

### 3. Setting up your still life

With still life drawings, preparation is half the battle. This is especially true if you're just starting out, and are still learning to train your eyes to see the subtle differences in value, tone, and angles.

**In short, the way you set up your still life will either make life easier or harder for you.**

So with that in mind, ignore your pencils and drawing paper for a bit, and let's talk about setting up your first still life.

*NOTE: If you don't have space to set up a still life to draw from, or you'd rather draw from the same photograph that we're using, that's totally fine. This is just a great way to learn about setting up a good composition, and gives you ultimate flexibility (you can create a new still life at any time).*

Choose a room where you can close the blinds or draw the curtains and make a dim environment. Bonus if no one else will use the room while you're not in it—kids especially!

You can probably create a good first still life from objects you find around the house. The ideal still life for a beginning artist is 3 items, without much color variation or complex shapes. Look for a square shaped object, a round- or tube-shaped object and something like a vase, or some other slightly more variation for the third object.

If at all possible, the objects should be fairly neutral colors—like

white or beige, or black/gray. Here are some suggestions:

**Eggs**

**Bowls**

**Vases**

**Cups (not transparent)**

**Paper towel roll**

**Candles (unlit)**

**Hardback books (take dust jacket off)**

**Blocks of wood**

If you feel like starting with something a bit more adventurous, you can add more complex items:

**Figurines or decorations**

**Toys (alphabet blocks, plastic duckies, etc)**

**Tools or utensils**

**Fruit or veggies**

**Flowers in a vase**

**Staplers, tape dispensers, etc**

However, if this is your first time setting up and drawing from a still life, I'd highly encourage you to keep it simple and use items from the first list only. You'll find that even simple items offer plenty of chance for complexity!

I recommend laying down a white tablecloth or sheet first, so that your still life has a simple, clean base to it. Depending on what's behind your still life, you may also want to create a solid-colored background for your drawing by hanging a dark sheet or blanket behind your objects.

For example, in my own drawing I didn't bother with a background. There was plenty of white sheet behind my objects. But if it had been a busy background, I would have.



And that's really the point of all of these steps. . . it may seem like a lot of arbitrary requirements, but in reality what you're doing is simplifying and removing visual distractions. You're controlling every aspect of this scene, so that when the time comes to draw, you can simply draw exactly what you see in front of you.

With a little practice, you won't need to do so much setup—your eyes and brain will be more used to seeing the shadows and lines of objects, and you'll be able to ignore a slightly complex background (for example). But for now, this is just one way you're setting yourself up for success in your first drawing.

Have you got your objects, and set the stage? Excellent!

It's now time to set up your light source. Whatever light you're using, place it to one side of the still life—most likely you'll want to keep it within a few feet, so the shadows are clearly delineated.

Place the light so that it shines down towards the stage you've created at an angle. (You can move it later, if you like.) With the lighting in place, go ahead and start to arrange your objects.



I suggest using no more than three objects to begin with, and staggering them so that at least one of them is in front of the others. If you're really brand new to drawing, you could start with one object—that's completely fine!

If you have several objects, then try to make them interact in some way. Allow two of them to touch, or make sure they overlap, or are grouped so that the tallest is centered between two other dissimilar-height objects.

Also, notice the shadows being cast by your objects as you set up your still life. Shadows are as much a part of a still life drawing as the objects themselves—not only do they help create visual depth, and contrast in a work of art, but they’ll give you interesting lines and angles to draw, no matter how bland and boring it might feel like your three items are.

For those of you drawing multiple items, do try to mix and match your objects so that you have something with square edges, something with a rounded edge, and something with a mix of both. It’s not imperative, but it will give you a chance to experiment with drawing different three-dimensional shapes.

Once you feel confident about your still life scene, step back and take a seat wherever you’ll be drawing from. Does each object cast a single, crisp shadow?

If not, move the light closer, or change the angle of the light so that you can see the cast shadows from where you’re sitting.

Is there a nice sense of dark and light, or contrast, within the still life? If not, see if you can dim the room a bit more, turn off any other lights in the space, or add a higher-wattage bulb to your light source. (You may also need a reading lamp or light close to you, to illuminate your own drawing if it gets too dark!)

You can also swap in a dark-colored object if you feel like everything’s a bit TOO white, or use a dark tablecloth for the base instead of a light tablecloth. It’s up to you!

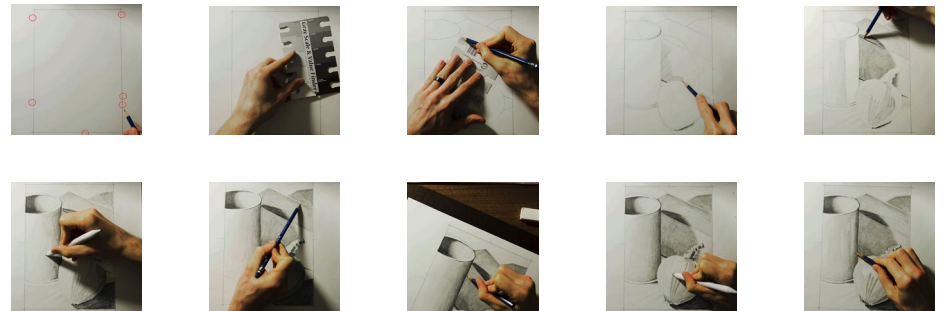
When you’re satisfied, then settle in with your drawing paper, a 6H pencil, your viewfinder, and a straight edge.

In the next few lessons I’ll show you how to choose a GOOD composition from your still life, and walk you through my step-by-step process for creating a truly accurate line drawing!

Let’s get started!

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[Click here to purchase the full drawing course for just \\$19.95](#)  
*You’ll receive 45 more pages of detailed instruction, and learn step-by-step how to complete your own still life drawing!*



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