



Measure with your Pencil

(Once again, I have used a couple of resources to create this. I do not own this content.)

You can estimate proportions and then check them with a fair degree of accuracy by employing what is called the thumb-and-pencil method of finding proportions.

- Hold your arm straight out, without bending the elbow. Bending the elbow will bring the measurement closer to your eye and increase the size. The measurement will be consistent if the elbow is locked.
- Tilt your head to bring the eyes as close as possible to the pivot point at your shoulder. This is important to keep the measurements consistent throughout the whole subject. If you don't do this. When measuring around the top of the pose, the pencil will be closer to your eyes and when measuring around the feet it will be farther from your eyes. This difference in the distance makes the measurements inconsistent. Keep your eye near the shoulder to minimize this.
- Close one eye. Use the tip of the pencil as the top point of whatever you're measuring and put your thumb at the bottom point.
- Now that you have the unit, you can compare it to another part of the figure. For example, it's very common to count how many head lengths fit in the height of the pose. Move your measurement down below the chin and note where your thumb is.

Establish a unit

Once you start using your pencil to figure out the proportions, you will use the basic unit you have decided upon to measure the scene.

The Lay-In: Measuring Relationships

This approach involves measuring relationships to make the composition fit on the size surface you're working on. Be sure to use your unit to help you flesh out the size of the drawing FIRST. Look at the big picture, place the drawing on the paper from the start. Find the top, bottom, left, right, and center of the composition. Once you establish a unit of measure, you can place the object in the plane of the paper. The size of our paper allows the item to be only so big, so mark the top and bottom. Then break it up into equal units.

Relating the whole thing first is a way to step back and look at the big picture. Make sure the foundation works before we add the parts.

Using a unit tells us a lot and makes measuring the rest of the figure much easier. Think about the placement of the drawing vertically AND horizontally.

Shapes and Angles

With the units in place, we can start drawing in the shapes. Start with the largest shapes and use simple lines. The largest shape we can use is what's called the Envelope. Use large angles connecting the outside points of the whole pose. Imagine if the pose was gift wrapped. Doing this allows you to look at the big picture and establish its perimeter. Everything else should fit inside this shape. Now start observing the next largest shapes. Focus on getting the angles right with simple gesture lines.

Keep it simple and worry only about the major relationships at first. It's also a good idea to keep your lines thin and light. Most of these initial construction lines will need to be erased later, so if you draw dark thick lines, you'll end up with a very messy drawing.

Plumb Lines

A plumb line is an exact vertical line that you can drop to see alignments within the pose. If drawing from a model we can actually use a string with a weight at the end to determine a perfect vertical.

We can also use horizontal alignments. Horizontal and vertical measurements are more accurate than angles. They are much easier to get right because you can align them with the edge of the paper and we tend to have a pretty clear vision in our mind of a horizontal and vertical. Subtle angle variations can make a big difference. Such as measuring an angle from the head to the shoulders to find the width of the shoulders. If your angle is slightly off on both sides, the shoulders end up being wider or narrower than you intended. It's OK to use angle relationships, just keep in mind that there's more room for error. Double check them when possible with verticals and horizontals.

Triangulation

Something that might help to measure angles is triangulation – measuring angles of 3 points instead of 2. If we've determined these 2 points to be correct and we're trying to find the placement of a third, we can estimate the angle from one point and then the other. If these two estimates don't match, well then we have to re-measure them.

Negative Shapes

A negative shape is the space around or between the subject. It's the background but with no detail at all. Negative space is employed as a brain-fooling method of seeing shapes with clarity. The shape here between the thighs is a triangular shape. This shape is easier for us judge than the shapes of the thighs themselves because we have less preconceived opinions about what that shape should look like. So, we are more likely to make an unbiased evaluation of the negative shapes.

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