

What to do at Life Drawing

A QUICK GUIDE



This is not comprehensive! This zine is a small resource to get started.

Also, everyone draws at different speeds; my 10min drawing might takes 20 min or 5 min for you.



These are figures drawn throughout.

THESE WERE TRACED TO BE MORE ACCURATE, BUT NOTICE HOW STIFF THEY LOOK!

Why life drawing?

There is no true definition of art, but there are popular traditional methods for learning it. One common practice for drawing people is by attending figure drawing events. Figure drawing, or life drawing, is a session where a group hires a model - clothed or nude - to pose, usually for a variety of durations progressing from short to long. These events are great for practicing drawing people since so many poses can be sketched within a session. Here, you can focus on exaggerated forms to convey dynamic motions, use it as a chance to study anatomy, or something in between. Figure drawing events also provide unique access to drawing people from life as they stay still and there is often a community associated with regular events. So use this zine as a reference to start drawing and making friends!

Basics and Definitions

MINIMAL LINES!

Gesture: A gesture drawing is basically a quick drawing that captures the essential gesture of a subject in its most distilled form. Gesture is everywhere, embodied in every object, person, and place. It is action, emotion, movement, and expression all rolled together into one cohesive motion. Through gesture, your drawing can transform into anything from ferocious to quiet.

- Clara Lieu, RISD professor

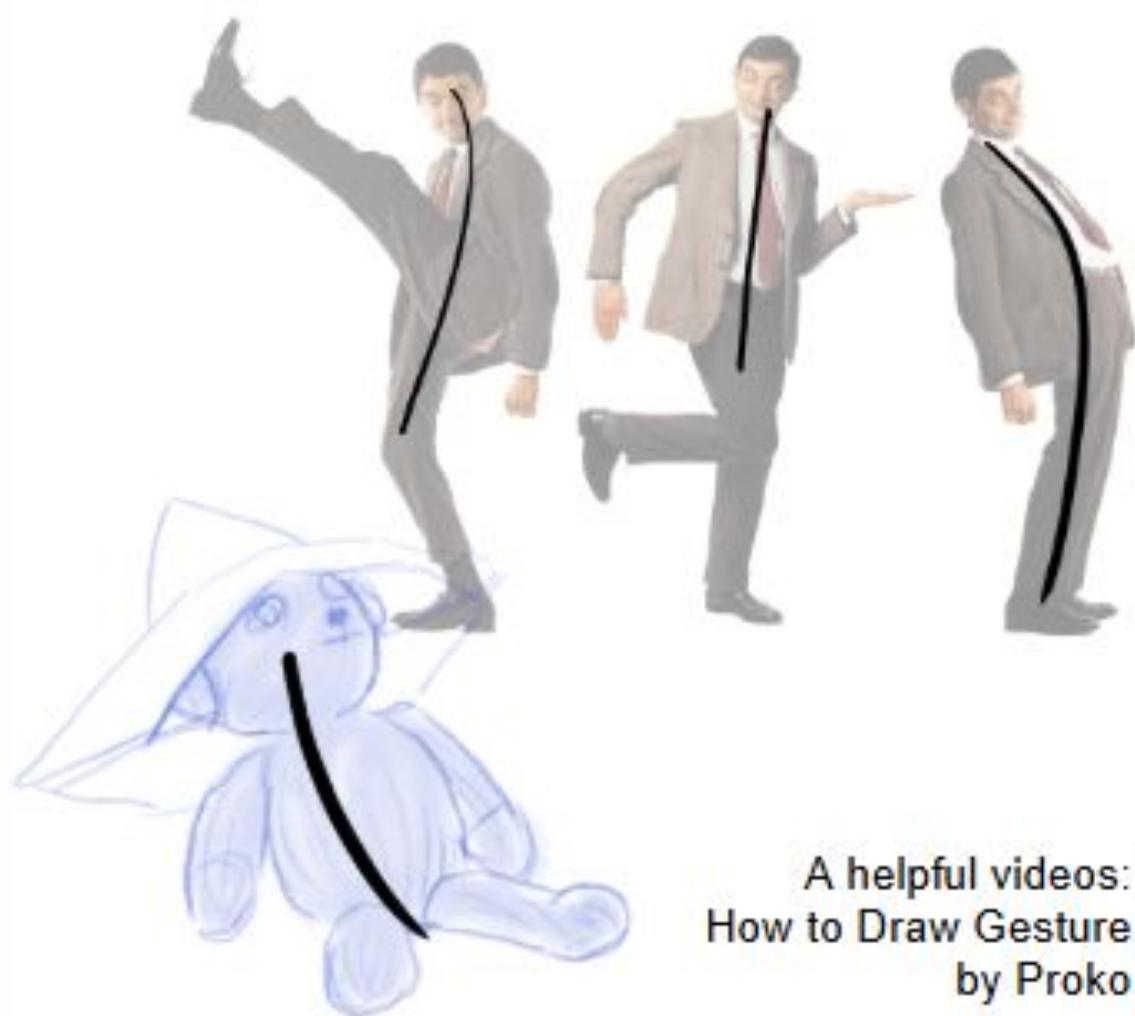
SEE 30s AND 2MIN EXAMPLES

3 lines: A straight line, a C-curve, and an S-curve indicate "rhythm" by conveying levels of energy and movement. S has the most movement, while I has the least. C falls in between. Most gesture drawings can be made through just these lines.



Line of action: You can think of the line of action as an imaginary line that runs down the spine. The more curve you put into that line, the more attitude, force and/or movement the image will communicate to your viewers. Note that they are curves, but they are not S shaped.

- LineOfAction.com, a popular figure drawing website



A helpful videos:
How to Draw Gesture
by Proko



Gestures for energy

Another method to heavily emphasize the “draw what you feel and not what you see.” This might be the easiest approach to start with since there are no suggested shapes or lines, except for a line of action since the goal here is to usually capture the “energy.”

I TEND TO DRAW INDICATORS FOR JOINTS WITH CIRCLES.



30s



2min



10min



While these can be done with a continuous line, it's not necessary!

As you gain more time, transition from gestures to adding details with contour lines

Style and gesture is very intertwined.

Gestures for energy

ONLY PURPOSE IS THAT
THE SKETCH MAKES SENSE 30s
TO YOU - OTHERS DON'T
NEED TO UNDERSTAND THEM



No straight lines

A lot of circles

Start anywhere
with this gesture

Gestures for energy

THESE ARE NOT
EXPECTED TO BE ACCURATE!

2min



There are no
structures or
suggested shapes
to draw

Long continuous
lines

Gestures for energy

10min

Half way - finding the contours



Finalizing the lines after



A helpful video:
What Gesture Drawing Is - and What It Isn't
By Life Drawing



Gestures that emphasize movement

The least realistic and most exaggerated method for drawing figures here, emphasis on rhythms of the lines and is very much, "draw what you feel, not what you see." Purpose is to capture movement.



30s



2min



10min



Your approach may change slightly with different pose durations

Popular to start at head, feet, or spine. Find what works for you

Very few straight lines

Gestures that emphasize movement

30s



Avoid repeated lines and symmetry

Better to overdo the exaggeration and tone it down later than to have a still figure

Gestures that emphasize movement

2min



Focus on line placement. Ignore contours

Try to make larger lines rather than small 'pets

Prioritize good lines, not speed



Gestures that emphasize movement

10min



NOTE THAT I CORRECTED EXAGGERATIONS IN SEVERAL PLACES



A helpful video:
How to Draw Gesture - Step by Step by Proko



Gestures for anatomy

THERE IS NO HIERARCHY FOR APPROACHES - TECHNICAL DOESN'T MEAN BETTER

This approach is a scaffold to eventually reconstructing anatomy, focusing primarily on major superficial muscles. This isn't necessarily realistic, but it helps understand how a human body is shaped and functions.



30s



2min



10min

NOTICE THE MUSCLE OUTLINE



You don't need to know anatomy to start with this!

These build up with extended times!

Can be used to id muscles



Gestures for anatomy

THE SPINE OFTEN GETS SEVERAL LINES THAT CORRESPOND WITH 3 SEGMENTS - CERVICAL, THORACIC, AND LUMBAR

30s



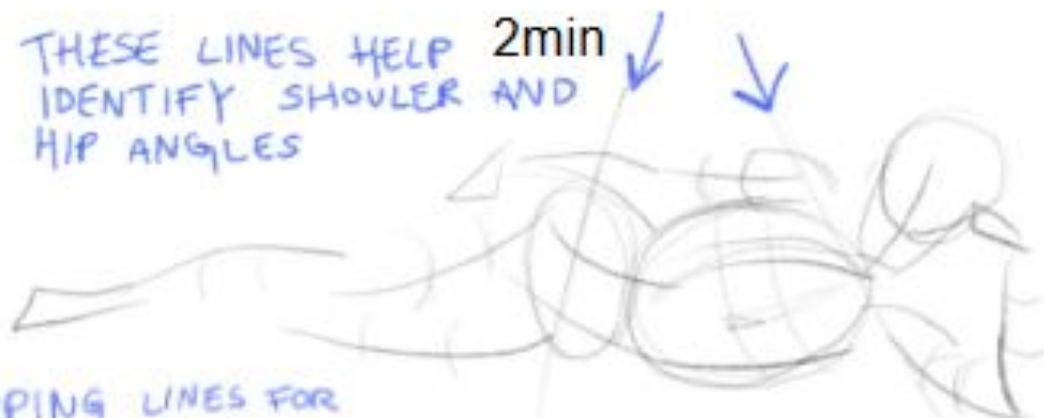
Focus on strokes for the:

- head
- spine
- limbs
- hands/feets

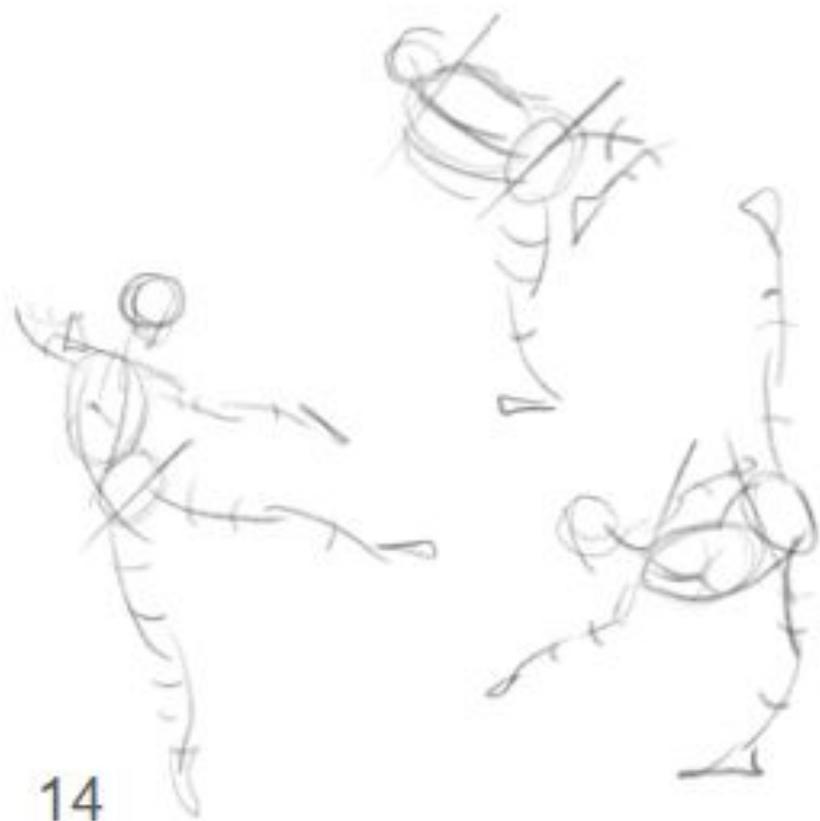
Above is also in a popular order of drawing

Gestures for anatomy

THESE LINES HELP 2min
IDENTIFY SHOULDER AND
HIP ANGLES



WRAPPING LINES FOR
LIMB DIRECTIONS



Focus on
depicting volumes
for ribs and pelvis

Add strokes to
indicate angles

Gestures for anatomy

10min

NOTE RIBCAGE
TO KNOW
ANGLES AND
MUSCLE PLACEMENTS

5min in - noting muscles and
general structure



I ALSO DREW SOME
BASIC BONE STRUCTURES,
BUT MANY ARE IRRELEVANT
FOR THIS

Move onto details after



A helpful video:
Gesture Drawing Lecture
by S. Michael Hampton



Different approaches

CONTOUR = OUTLINE

Blind Contour: For the short poses (30s or less), try drawing the model without looking at your paper. You can even try not lifting your pencil. This helps get a better sense of

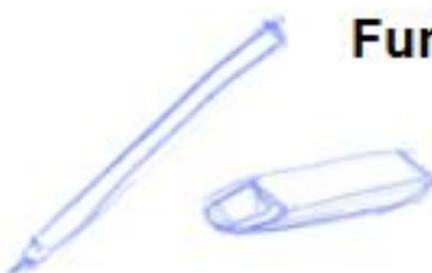


Focus on single body part: Maybe you just want to practice hands or you're just very passionate about portraits. Not everyone has access to a person willing to pose still for any duration of time, so draw whatever you want!





Fun materials to bring



pencil & eraser

ink, like pen and markers,

charcoal (vine, chalk)

color pencils

CHALK CAUTION:
POWDERY

chalk pastel

oil pastel

water color

oil paint

OIL CAUTION:
TOXIC FUMES



Don't forget your paper/canvas!

DMV Figure Drawing

Compiled by Babs @newdmodel

Fantom Comics (DC)

1st Mondays 8 -10pm (nude) \$15

3rd Mondays 8 -10pm (costumed) \$15

Washington Studio School (DC)

Mondays 7 - 9pm (online) \$14

Saturdays 10am-1pm (nude) \$20

Sundays 2-5 pm (nude) \$20

Capitol Hill Arts Workshop (DC)

1st, 3rd, and 4th Fridays

6:30 - 9:30pm (nude) \$15

Foundry Gallery (DC)

Tuesdays 6 - 9 (nude) \$20

Locals who organize:

Babs @newdmodel

Dom @kinkndraw

DMV Figure Drawing

Hyattsville Figure Drawing at Pyramid Atlantic (Hyattsville, MD)

Tuesday 6 - 9pm (nude) \$20

Saturdays 2- 5pm (costumed) \$20

beachKraft Art Gallery (Olney, MD)

Fridays 6 - 8pm (nude/costumed) \$25

Montgomery College (Rockville, MD)

Sundays 1- 3 pm (nude) \$15-20

Montgomery Art Associations at The Compass Atelier (Kensington, MD)

Sundays 9am - 12pm and 1- 4 pm (clothed)
\$10-20

The Art League at Torpedo Factory (Alexandria, VA)

Fridays 1 - 5pm (nude) \$70 for 4 sessions

Del Ray Artisans (Alexandria, VA)

Tuesdays twice a month 7- 9pm (nude) \$8-10

Note

- **Bring your own materials** unless otherwise specified.
- **Expect a focused group** - figure drawing sessions won't have chit-chatting during timed poses unlike craft gatherings. This doesn't mean that people are cold or unfriendly! You can socialized during breaks.
- **Most events are uninstructed**, but you can look for instructed events which aren't uncommon.
- **Tip the model** at workshops or single sessions (usually not at classes). Online payment information or a tip jar is probably advertised. Tipping about \$5 for 2 hours is good.



Suggested books:

Basics:

Figure Drawing For All It's Worth
by Andrew Loomis
(A classic!)

Anatomy:

Figure Drawing Design and Invention
By Michael Hampton
(Pair this with his youtube lecture recordings.)

Shortcuts:

390 tips for drawing the human body
By Taco
(Officially only in Korean or Japanese, but it's mostly diagrams. And come with some understanding of muscle anatomy to fully utilize this book. Online translation available on pinterest by Christine Is Not Here)

THERE IS A LOT IN
HERE. WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT
IS THAT YOU HAVE FUN!
DISREGARD ANYTHING/EVERYTHING!

April 2025
By Julia @paint.brains