



When it comes to drawing, we all have subjects we are more comfortable with and subjects outside of our comfort zone. An easy trap that artists fall into is thinking that they lack the ability to draw subject matters outside of their comfort zone. "I can draw this, but I can't draw that."

It's all fine and well to stay safely in your comfort zone when you are only drawing for your own enjoyment and don't have a need or desire to expand beyond that box.

But what happens when a job or project comes up that requires you to draw or paint something that you have never even attempted before?

Or maybe you get an idea for a new piece but it will require you to get outside of your comfort zone.

Whatever the case, you will need to tackle drawing something new... and maybe something you don't think you are capable of drawing.

But I'm here to tell you that you **ARE** capable. With the right tools and attitude, you can do so much more than you realize!

So let's get into it!

Reference!

Let's get the most obvious but most important tool out of the way first!

FIND AND USE GOOD REFERENCE! I think you already know this, but it is very important and deserves to be shouted from the rooftops.

If you are drawing something that you aren't comfortable with, you are going to need to look at reference A LOT throughout your whole process!



Where to find reference?

Luckily, we live in an age where finding reference is really easy!

If you use common sites like google and pinterest, I do recommend digging a little deeper so that you don't copy the same top 5 results that 100 other artists have already drawn.

Here are some of my go-to sites for reference!

- Google
- Pinterest
- [Deviantart Stock](#)
- [LineofAction.com](#)
- [Pixabay](#) (I have really been loving this one lately. Gorgeous copyright free photos!)

Take your own reference!

Taking your own reference can be really useful and isn't too difficult. If you use your camera or phone to take a photo yourself, you can get the exact angle and pose that you want.

Sometimes I will spend an hour trying to find a reference for something very specific only to end up snapping a quick photo myself in about 2 minutes. Turns out I should have started with taking the photo myself and saved myself that time!

Study the reference

If possible, try and find reference that shows your subject from multiple angles, even if you will be drawing the subject from only 1.

The more you look at the reference and try to understand how the subject works in 3d space, the easier you will find drawing that subject and the more you will learn.

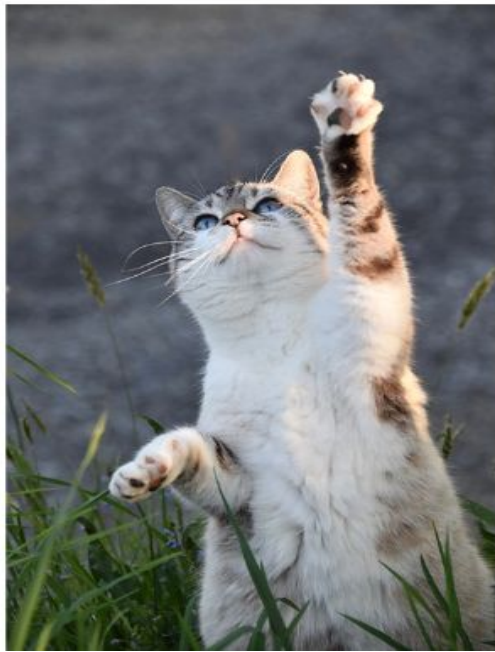
How to position reference?

This is something that came as a revelation to me a couple years ago so I HAVE to share it with you! Where you position your reference while you are working MATTERS.

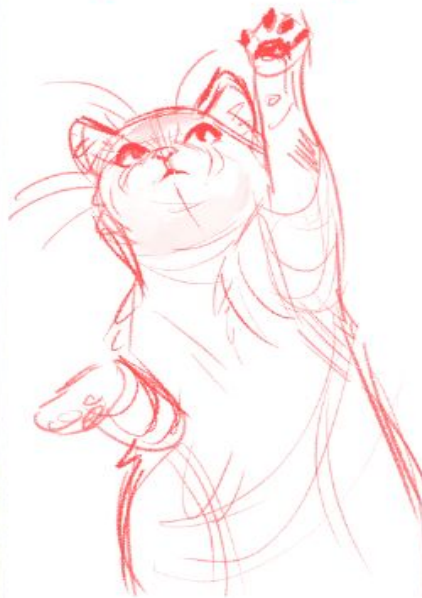
The **CLOSER** you position your reference to your drawing, the **EASIER** you will be able to draw exactly what you see.

This is because there is less time for your eyes and brain to forget what the reference looks like between looking at the photo and looking at your drawing.

When you are working on something new, I recommend putting your reference right next to your drawing.



ref right next to drawing!

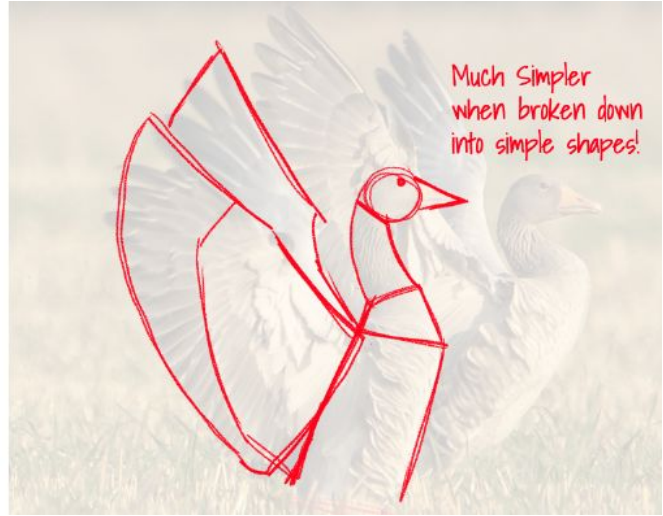


If you are trying to test your memory, try placing the reference further away, or even on another monitor.

If you don't want your reference taking up space on your canvas, a really handy free reference tool is [PUREREF](https://www.pureref.com/).

Break the subject down into simple shapes

A common technique to drawing a complicated subject is to stop thinking about the subject as itself and instead look at it only as shapes and break it down that way. This helps you see the silhouette for what it is and can help you not feel too overwhelmed! You are just drawing shapes!

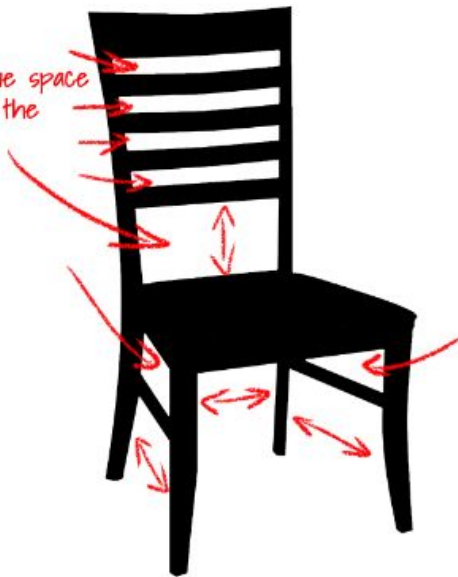


Negative Shapes

Going along with the previous point, it can be very helpful to not just look at the shapes the subject makes but also the “negative shapes” or spaces



Pay attention to negative space and the proportions of the negative space!



Tracing

Lets talk about tracing and how to do it correctly. YES, sometimes it is okay to trace. It is actually much more common to trace in the industry than you think.

Of course the ultimate goal will be to be able to draw the subject from your imagination without needing to trace or even rely completely on reference. But what if you have a big deadline coming up and you just can't get the angle of that blasted sword right?

Tracing can be a really handy tool not just to get something to look correct but also to learn! If you do it right.

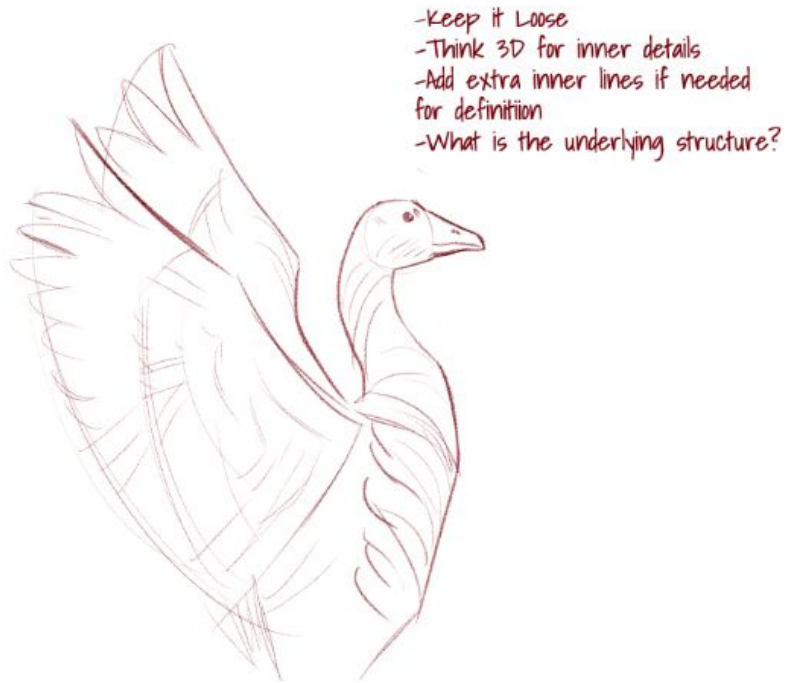
What can you learn from tracing?

- **Muscle Memory**
Tracing can help instill muscle memory and mechanically how your hand should move when drawing certain shapes.
- **True shapes**
Tracing can help you learn the true shapes of the subject that you might have been missing before when you were trying to copy.
- **Proportions and Anatomy**
Tracing can be a really good tool to study anatomy and proportions when done correctly!
- **Foreshortening**
Foreshortening can be really tricky, and sometimes the best way to figure out what is actually going on is to go ahead and trace it.
I have done this a few times and have been surprised at how different the traced shapes and foreshortening were vs when I was trying to copy the photo.
- **Perspective**
Scenes with a lot of perspective can be really challenging. If you sit down and take the time to map out all of the perspective, you can of course figure it out without tracing. BUT, what if you could just pull a scene from 3d and work out the perspective that way? What a time saver!

So how do we do it right?

- **Stay Mindful**
First and foremost, it is really important to stay mindful while you are tracing. To learn ANYTHING from tracing you must be very focused on UNDERSTANDING the subject you are tracing. Tracing mindlessly won't get you anywhere.

- **Keep it Loose!**
Think about your trace as a sketch, not final lineart. You absolutely NEED that energy behind your sketch when you trace or else it will be super obvious that you traced a photo and it won't look good. You can do clean lineart later when you are done tracing.
- **Think in 3d**
To avoid a weird flat 2d looking trace, think about your subject in 3d and
- **Add extra defining lines that show the 3d FORM of the subject**
- **Sketch in the underlying structure as you trace.**
I'm talking about the circle for the head, circles for the joints and maybe lines for the bones. The same as if you were doing an understitch to figure out the character's anatomy.



Photobashing

Photobashing is a technique where an artist blends photos, 3d and painting all into one and it is an extremely common practice in the concept art world! It is another one of those techniques that some people consider “cheating”. But to successfully do photobashing, you actually do need to have a good understanding of artistic principles and it takes some practice!

I will admit that I am quite new to photobashing. It's only something I have started experimenting with over the past year or so at my job. But I will share with you where I sometimes like to use photobashing/photo paintovers.

For me, the best places to use photobashing have been with Environments and Props.

Blurred Backgrounds

A very simple and easy way to use photobashing for a character illustration is in making some sort of blurred background.

The trick to this is making sure to still do enough paintover of the photo before you blur it so that it doesn't look like just a blurred photo! If it still looks like a photo, it won't match your character illustration.

Please note that while doing this can yield nice results for an illustration, it doesn't necessarily teach you how to draw backgrounds from scratch.

-----www Go to the next page for an example of how to do this! www-----

Photo-bash Blurred BG Example!



BG Photo



-Color Adjust
-Rough BG Paintover



-Blurred
-Added Xmas Lights



-Blurred even more!
-Adjusted Position
-Adjusted color

You can also photobash with non-blurred backgrounds, but I personally have not experimented with this enough to feel comfortable offering advice/examples on it.

What is important, is making sure that you are actually painting over the photos that you bash into your painting.

Your end product should be much more painting than photo, otherwise it's just "photoshopped".

Props

I don't do this very often, but when I am in a hurry to get a lot of stuff painted for work, I sometimes will "photobash" or paintover photos for things like props.

If I can find a good reference for what I need I can adjust the colors to what I need and then, on the same layer, paint directly on top of the photo!



Here is a rough example from my work. I needed a new quick helmet, so I found some decent reference, adjusted the color, and painted over the photo to better match the game style.

Other than the angle and helmet design, the painting ends up quite different, despite starting from a photo. Most people wouldn't be able to recognize that it came from a photo, unless they saw it side by side!

It's not something I recommend doing for LEARNING purposes, since you don't really learn how to draw the subject by using this technique.

But if you are on a time crunch or you are dealing with a particularly complicated prop, painting over like this might be something to try out..

You Can Do it!

Realize that if you are trying to draw something outside of your comfort zone, it will probably take you longer than usual.
You will probably even get frustrated!
That's totally normal! You are LEARNING and learning takes time and dedication.

Keep using reference and focus on understanding your subject.

The more you practice drawing new things, the less daunting it will become!

Eventually you will realize that you actually CAN draw anything, provided you have the right reference and dedication!

The last point I want to make is....

It's okay to return to your comfort zone from time to time.

It's probably your comfort zone because you enjoy it. Those drawings are what will help keep the joy alive!

