Facial Proportions - How to Draw a Face

From the Virtual Instructor
VIDEO REFERENCE: https://thevirtualinstructor.com/facialproportions.html

Many people make mistakes when drawing faces because they don't fully understand facial proportions. Proportion refers to the relationship in size and placement between one object and another. There are many formulas that one can adapt to draw the facial features in the correct location. There's a simple approach - one that I first learned and is great for beginners. Then there is the more complex approach using illustrator, Andrew Loomis' guidelines.
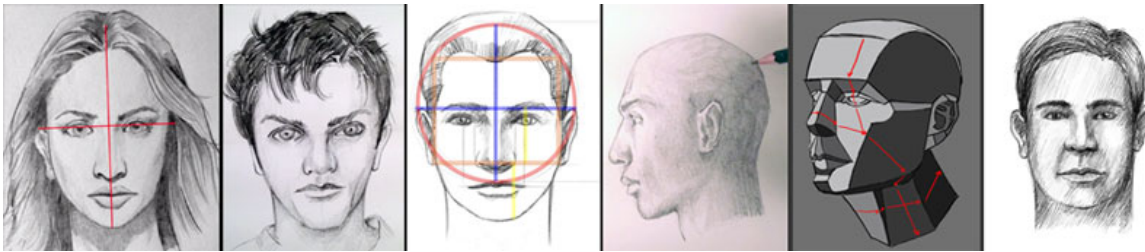

HOW TO DRAW A FACE FROM THE FRONT - STEP BY STEP

We'll first discuss Loomis' approach, which is more complex, but more accurate. If you find that this approach is a bit difficult for you, you can skip to the simpler approach further down the page. Remember, either way, the goal is to create a convincing drawing of a face so either approach you take is fine.

Step 1 - Draw a Circle and a Cross

We'll first draw a circle with two intersecting lines that connect directly in the center. The circle represents the top portion of the head. We'll use the intersecting lines to determine the locations of the facial features.
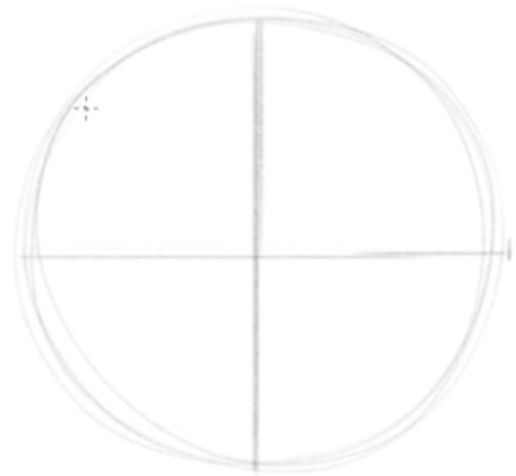
Step 2 - Draw a Square within the Circle

Next, we'll draw a square in which each corner touches the circle. This square will eventually represent the edges of the face. The top line will eventually become the bottom hairline. The bottom line will become the nose line, while the center line will become the brow line.
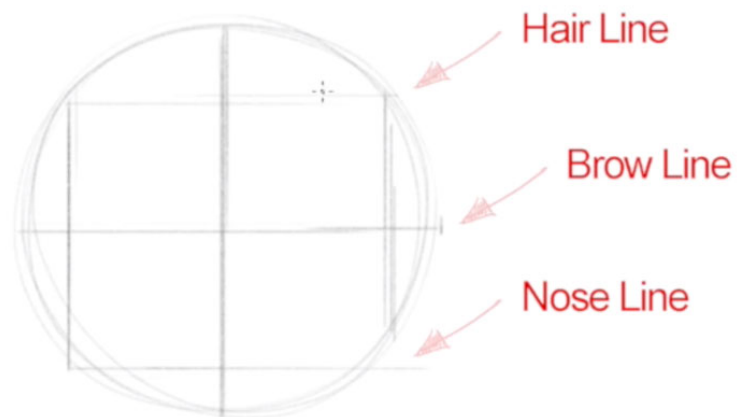
Step 3 - Draw the Chin

Now we'll measure the distance from the center line to the bottom line. You can use your pencil to do this. From the bottom line of the square, use this measurement to mark the location of the bottom of the chin. Then, draw the edges of the chin from each side of the square so that they connect at your marked location.
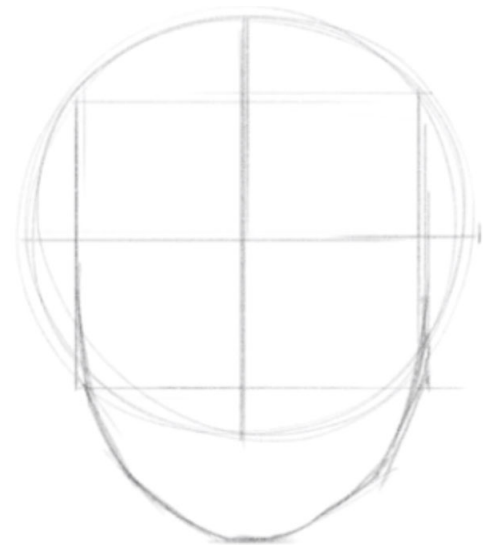
Step 4 - Locate the Eyes

Now we have the basic structure of the shape of the face in place. We'll next locate the eyes. We can use the height of the head to help us determine the location of the eyes on the face. The eyes are generally found on a line in the center of the head.

The brow line is represented by the center line that we drew in step one. So we know that the eyes should be found just below this line, in the center of the head. We can draw a line here for the "eye line".
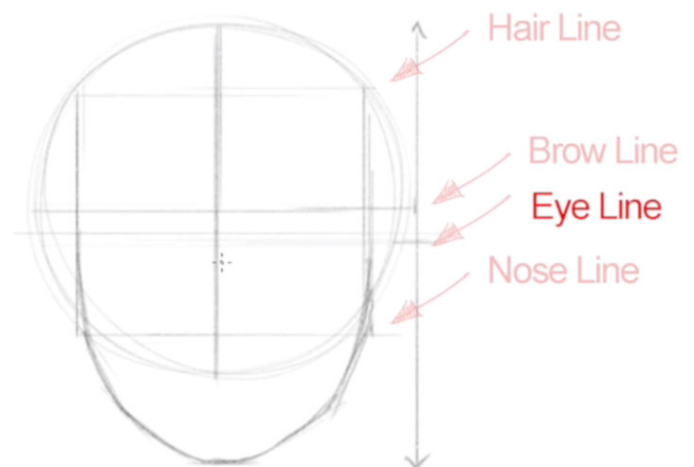
Step 5 - Draw the Eyes

Now that we know where our eyes are located on the face, we can draw them. There's another measurement to keep in mind. We also should consider the width of the eyes. The width of the head, from ear to ear, generally measures the same length of five "eyes". This means that if we want to draw the eyes with accurate proportions, then we need to draw them so that they match this approximate measurement.

How to draw the eyes with graphite:

https://thevirtualinstructor.com/Graphiteeye1.html
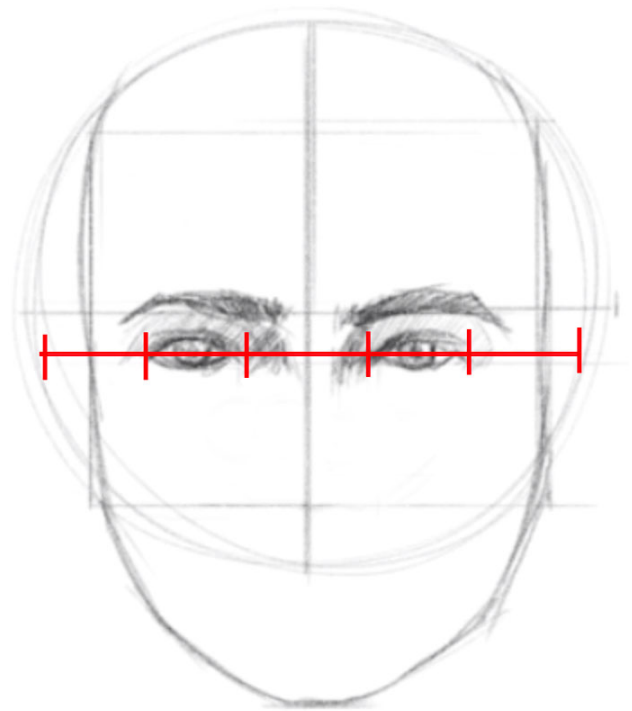
Step 6 - Locate and Draw the Nose

Moving down the face, we'll next draw the nose. The bottom of the nose can be found on the bottom line of the square that we drew in step two. The width of the nose varies from person to person, but is generally as wide as the inside corners of the eyes.

It may be helpful to draw two light lines down from the inside corners of the eyes to help you find the width of the nose.

How to draw the nose with graphite:

https://thevirtualinstructor.com/graphitenose.html
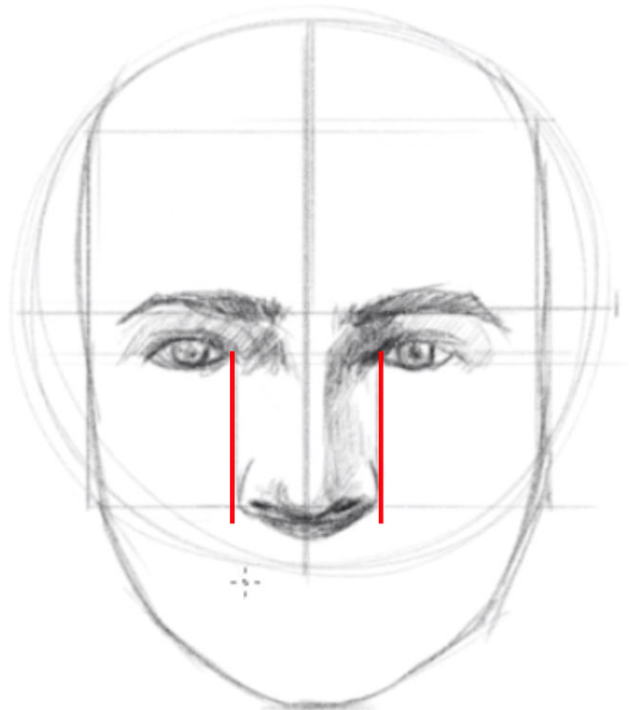
Step 7 - Locate and Draw the Mouth

We find the mouth slightly higher than half-way between the bottom of the nose and the chin. Of course, this measurement varies from person to person. We can draw a line to mark the positioning of the mouth.

We can use the eyes to help us determine the width of the mouth. The corners of the mouth generally align with the inside edges of the pupils. It may be helpful to draw light lines from the pupils to the "mouth line".

How to draw the mouth with graphite:

https://thevirtualinstructor.com/graphitemouth.html
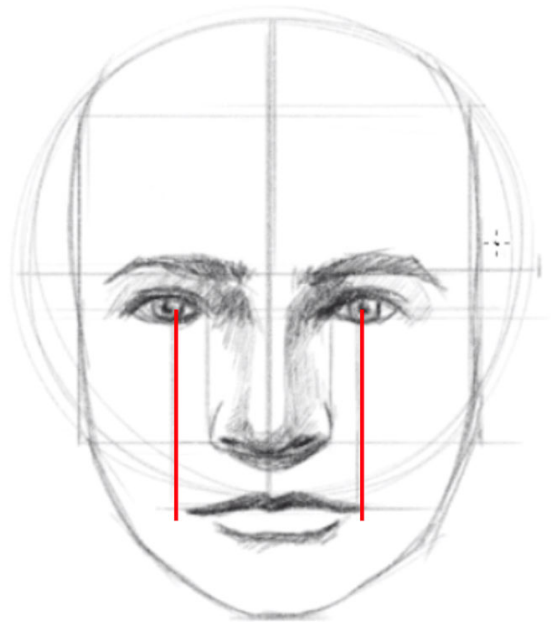
Step 8 - Draw the Ears

Next, we'll draw the ears. Here again, we can use the locations of the features of the face to help us determine the location of the ears. The top of the ears will generally align with the brow line, while the bottom of the ears align with the nose line.

Keep in mind that the ears come out of the head and extend upward slightly. This means that the ears will extend outward from the head, near the eye line.

How to draw the ears with graphite:

https://thevirtualinstructor.com/graphiteear.html
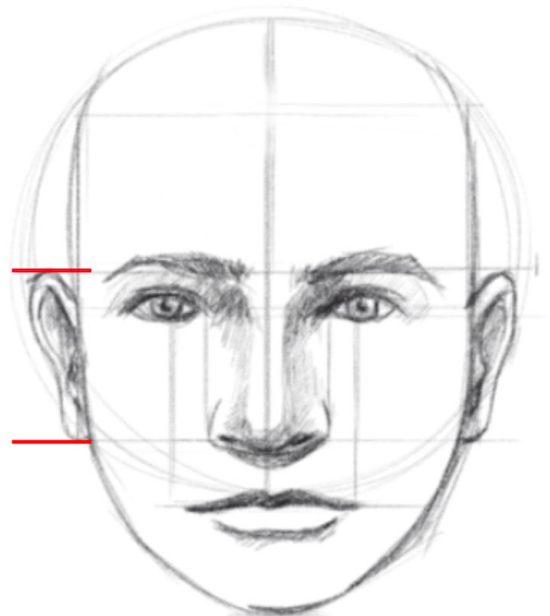
Step 9 - Draw the Hairline

Now we'll draw the hairline. If you're drawing someone that has long hair that overlaps the forehead, the hairline may not be visible, but it's still important to know where it's located. The hairline is found on the top edge of the square that we drew in step two.

Hairlines vary greatly from person to person. In this example, we'll draw a widow's peak pattern.
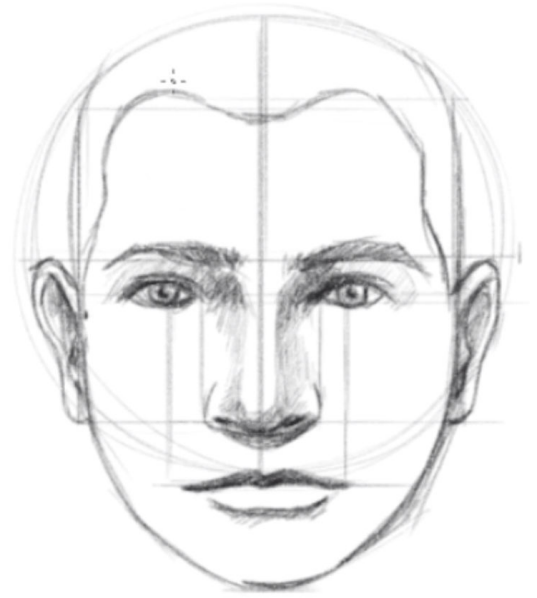
Step 10 - Draw the Hair

Now that we have the hairline in place, we can draw the hair. Shorter hair extends only slightly off of the top of the head, while longer or bushier hair may extend quite a bit. In both cases, however, the hair extends out from the head and should not be drawn directly on the head.

How to draw the hair with graphite:

https://thevirtualinstructor.com/how-to-draw-hair.html
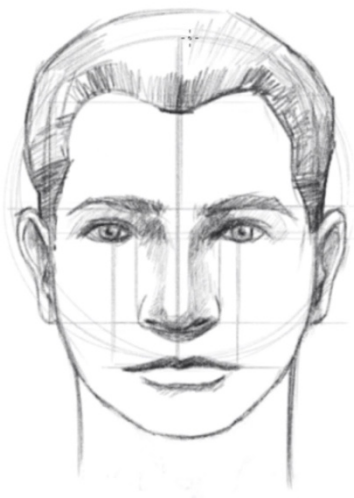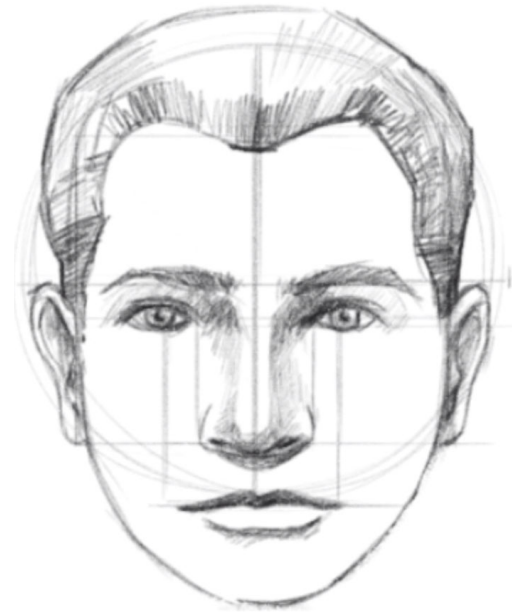
Step 11 - Add the Neck

Now we need to add a neck to our floating head. The tendency of most beginning artists is to make the neck too narrow. Generally speaking, the neck extends down from the bottom of the ears. Female necks are slightly more slender, while the necks of males are broader. To draw the neck, we'll simply extend two lines down from the bottom of the ears.

If you want to draw a face from the side or profile view, these same proportional measurements apply. We'll simply alter the location of the features, positioning them on the side of the head.

In fact, we can start the process in exactly the same way - starting with a circle with intersecting lines.

Step 1 - Draw a Circle, a Square, and Intersecting Lines

We'll start in the same way that we did before by drawing a circle, two intersecting lines, and a square that makes contact with the circle at all four corners.

Here again, the top line of our square will become the hairline. The middle line will become the brow line and the bottom line will become the nose line.
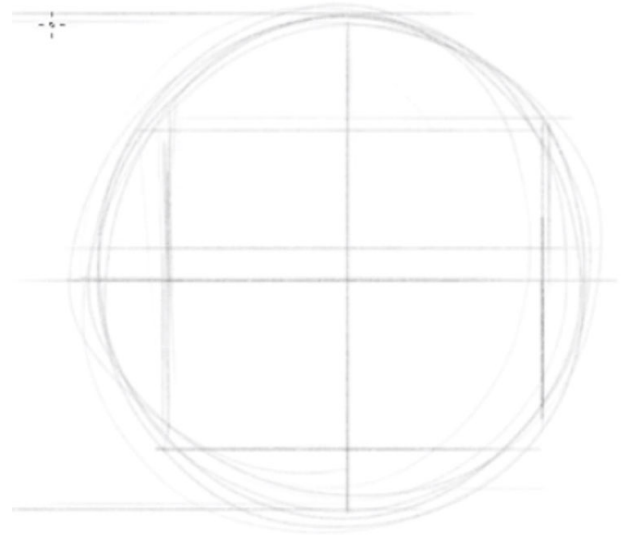
Step 2 - Draw a Line from the Top of the Head to the Chin
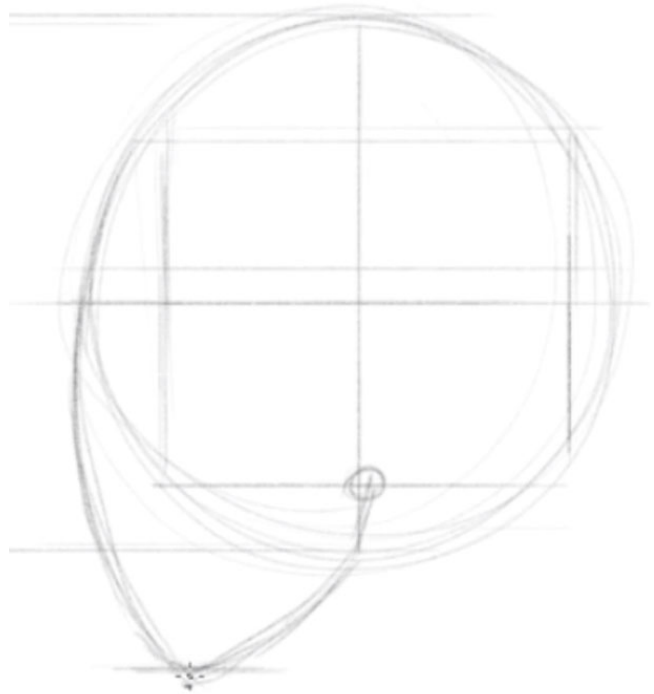
We'll next mark the location of the bottom of the chin. We can measure the distance from the center of the square to the bottom and use this measurement to mark the bottom of the chin.

With a mark in place for the chin, we'll draw the front edge of the face. In this case, our subject is facing to the left, so we'll bring a curved line down from the top of the head to the bottom of the chin.
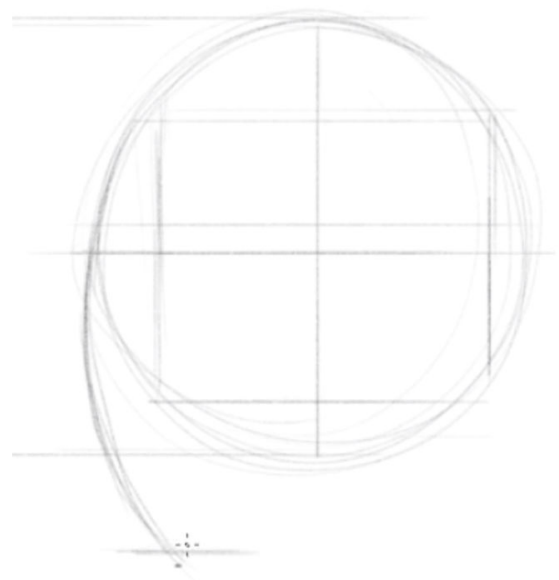
Step 3 - Add a Line from the Bottom of the Chin to the Center of the Square

Next, we'll draw a line from the bottom of the chin to the center point on the bottom of the square. This line represents the jawline. This line will curve slightly in most cases.

Step 4 - Determine the Location of the Eyes

Now we'll measure to the center of the head and place a line to represent the eye line. Again, this line should be drawn just underneath the brow line.

We can also use the circle that we drew with the bottom of the square to draw the backside of the head. Think about the structure of the skull here as you draw this line.
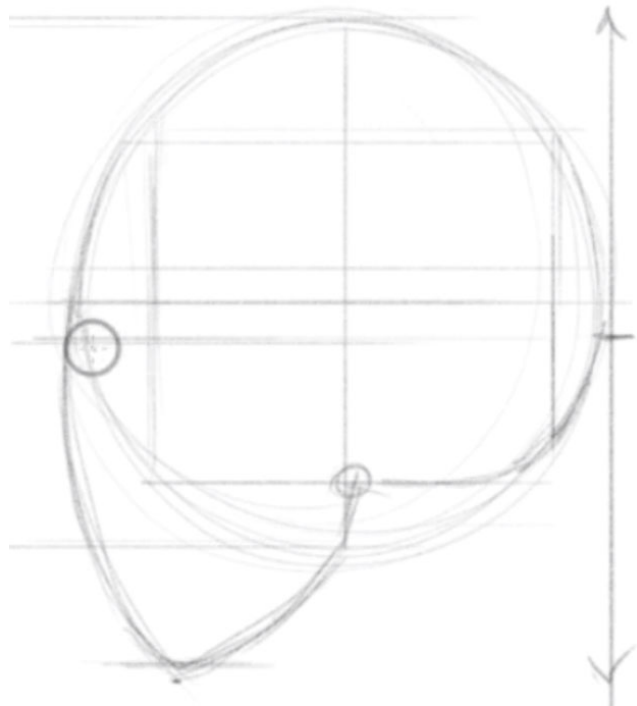
Step 5 - Draw the Facial Features and Add Shading

Now that we have an idea of the location of the facial features, we can draw them in using contour lines. We'll also add a bit of shading here to make the face have a sense of form.
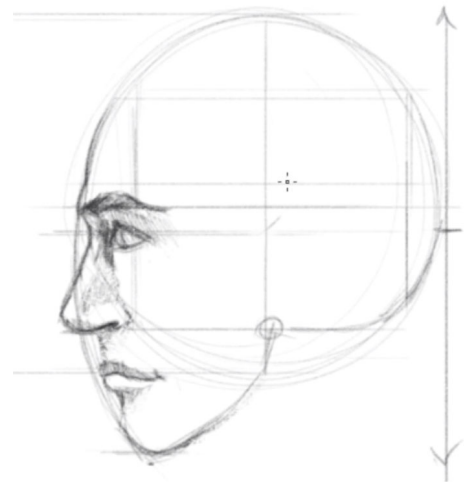
Notice how the eyes are set back from the front edge of the face and how the lips and mouth recede at a diagonal towards the neck.

Step 6 - Draw the Ear on the Side of the Face

We can use our center line, nose line, and eye line to draw the ear on the side of the face. Since our subject is facing towards the left, the bulk of the ear will be found on the right side of our center line.

As we discussed before, the line drawn for the ear will start on the eye line, extend up to the brow line and then curve down, touching the nose line.

We'll also go ahead and draw a contour line for the outer edge of the hair and a couple of contour lines for the neck in this step.

Step 7 - Add the Hair

We'll keep the hair style consistent with our first drawing and draw the hairline. In this case, the line extends back before making its way down to the ears.

We'll also add a few hints of shading to make the hair feel like a form.

Summing Up the Andrew Loomis Approach to Drawing a Face

Andrew Loomis is revered for his step by step approach to drawing heads. As we covered above, his approach divides the head into manageable geometric shapes. Each feature on the face has a specific location relative to the geometric configuration set up in the early stages of the drawing process. Because this method is so accurate, it's great to use for drawing a head from imagination.

But this approach is not limited to drawing faces from imagination. It also works when drawing a face from observation. We just have to keep in mind that every person is different and variations of these specific proportions will be noticed.
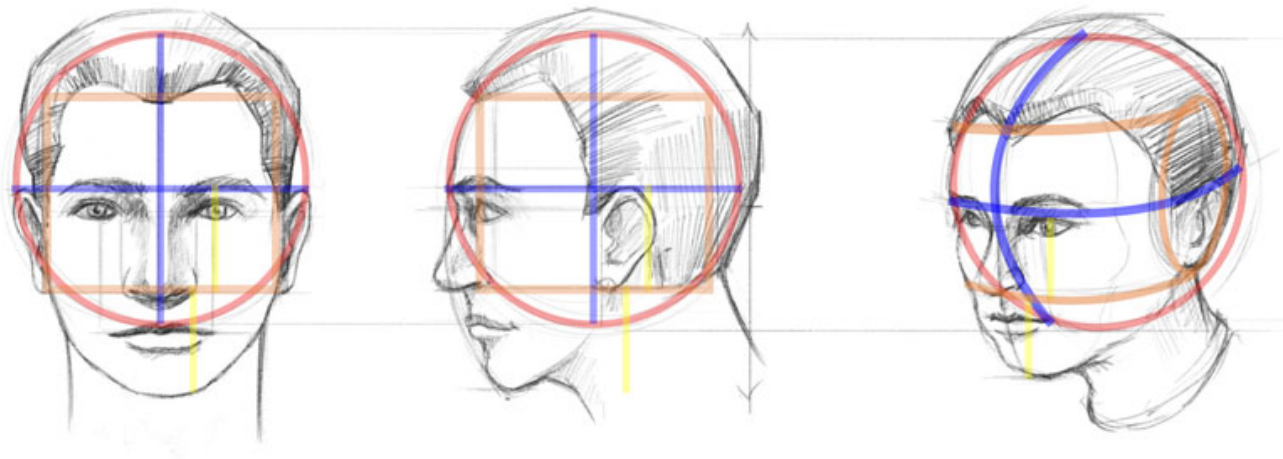
Here's a look at a face and head drawn from imagination using the Loomis approach combined with a simpler approach which we discuss a little further down this page. All of the relationships and proportions are identified with the guidelines discussed.
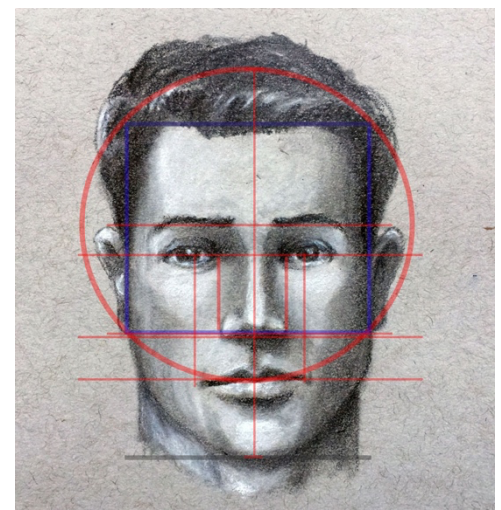
A SIMPLE APPROACH TO DRAWING A FACE

Some may find the Loomis Method a little cumbersome for drawing. Luckily, there is a simpler approach. This approach borrows ideas from the Loomis Method, but simplifies a few of the steps. This formula should be used to help you see and compare. In each stage of the formula, analyze each feature and draw what you see. The result will be a representational portrait of the person you are drawing with all of the features in the right place.

Drawing a portrait is very much like drawing any other subject matter. You have to closely observe the subject in order to draw it accurately. Of course portrait drawing is especially delicate because the goal is to make the portrait resemble the subject closely.

I've taken all of the steps to drawing a face with this simpler approach and put them into one image. The step by step instructions can be found underneath the image. You'll notice that some of the steps are the same as we discussed before, with the exception of using the square to determine the hairline, brow line, and nose line.

The first step is to draw a circle to represent the cranium. Next, a line can be drawn to determine the length of the face (**Step 1**). For most faces, this line should be approximately double the length of the original circle.

Next, lines are drawn from the bottom of that line to the edges of the circle creating the shape of the face (**Step 2**). From here, we can locate the positions of the facial features.
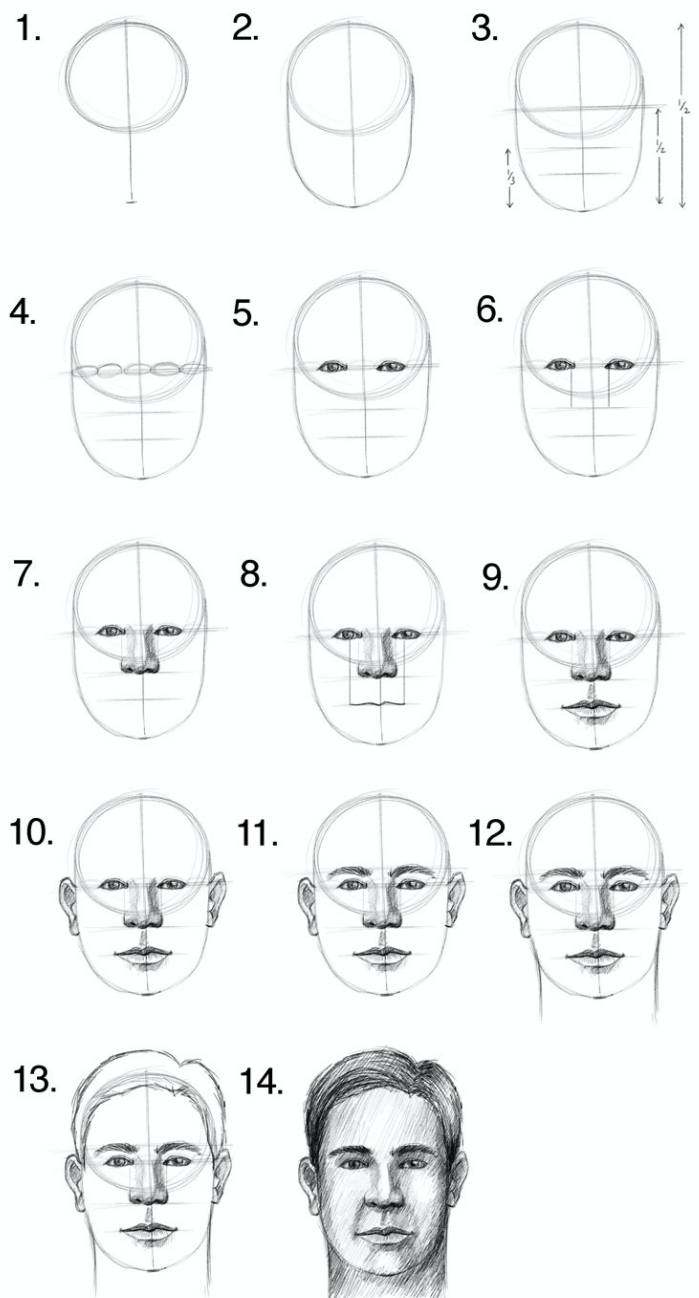
The "eye" line is in the middle of the face. (Your eyes aren't way up on your forehead, so resist the temptation to put them there.) A line is drawn to represent the eye line (**Step 3**).

The "nose" line is found in the middle of the "eye" line and the bottom of the chin. When it comes to facial proportion, most noses will end at this line (**Step 3**). However, there are exceptions to every rule. Some people have really long noses and some have really short ones.

The mouth line is found approximately one-third of the way down in between the nose line and the bottom of the chin. A line is loosely drawn for its location (**Step 3**).

Next, we'll concentrate on the eyes. To find the overall width of the eyes, draw five oval shapes across the eye line. Most faces are about "five eyes" wide. Obviously, people only have two eyes. The "five eyes" just help to determine the width of the eyes (**Step 4**).

Once we know the width of the eyes are accurate, we can draw them in the proper location (**Step 5**).

Now, we'll determine the width of the nose. For most people, the width of the nose will align with the inside corners of the eyes. We can simply draw two lines down from the inside corners of the eyes to the nose line to find the relative width of the nose (**Step 6**).

Once we know the width of the nose, we can draw it in place (**Step 7**).

Now, we can figure the width of the mouth. This measurement varies from person to person, but for most folks, the width of the mouth aligns with the inside portions of the iris or the pupil. So, we'll simply draw a line straight down from this location to the mouth line to find the corners of the mouth. We'll draw a line here to indicate where the upper lip meets the bottom lip (**Step 8**).

Then we can draw the upper and lower lips, knowing that the mouth is in the right spot (**Step 9**).

Now for the ears. We'll extend the eye line out to determine the location where the top portion of the ears meet the head. They extend upward a bit and line up with the brow line. The bottom of the ears conveniently align with the nose line (**Step 10**).

Once we have the ears in place, we can add the eye brows. We'll use the tops of the ears to make comparisons. For most people, the brow line aligns with the tops of the ears (**Step 11**).

Before addressing the hair, we'll add a neck. The neck extends down from the bottom of the ears. For females, this lines extends inward a bit - resulting in a smaller neck. For males, this line still comes in a bit, but to a lesser degree. It's nearly straight down from the bottom of the ears (**Step 12**).

The shape of the hair is added next. In most cases, the hair extends off from the top of the cranium and may overlap portions of the forehead (**Step 13**).

Lastly, shading is added to develop the illusion of form (**Step 14**).
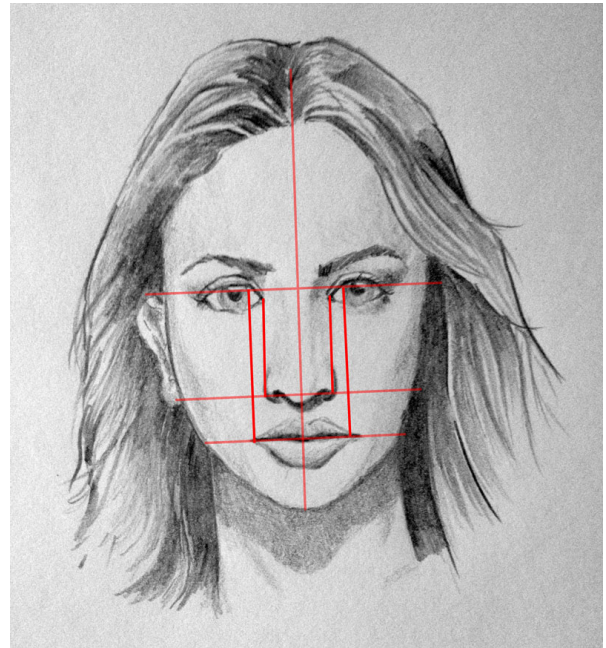
Reviewing the Generalized Locations of Facial Features

- The eyes are found in the middle of the head.
- The corners of the inside of the eyes generally line up with the edges of the nose.
- The "mouth" line is about one-third below the "nose" line and the bottom of the chin. This line represents where the top lip meets the bottom lip.
- The inside portions of the pupils or the iris generally line up with the corners of the mouth.
- The ears are usually found between the "eye" line and the "nose" line, but extend up to the brow line.

When drawing faces, use these standards to help you get your facial proportions correct. Remember, you must look and study your subject. While these standards apply to most of us, they do not apply to all of us.

Shading a Face

Knowing where to place the facial features is clearly important, but in order to communicate a face in a drawing, we'll also need to add some shading. Shading is simply the process of manipulating value (the darkness or lightness of a color).

The form of the face is developed though the use of value and tone. The relationships of specific values inform the viewer of the location and strength of the light source. It is ultimately the behavior of light on the head which creates the illusion of form.

To better understand how light behaves, we can consider the planes of the head and face. By breaking the face down into simple planes, we can better comprehend how light behaves.

When shading, it's helpful to think of the head in terms of flat planes. We can see these planes illustrated below...
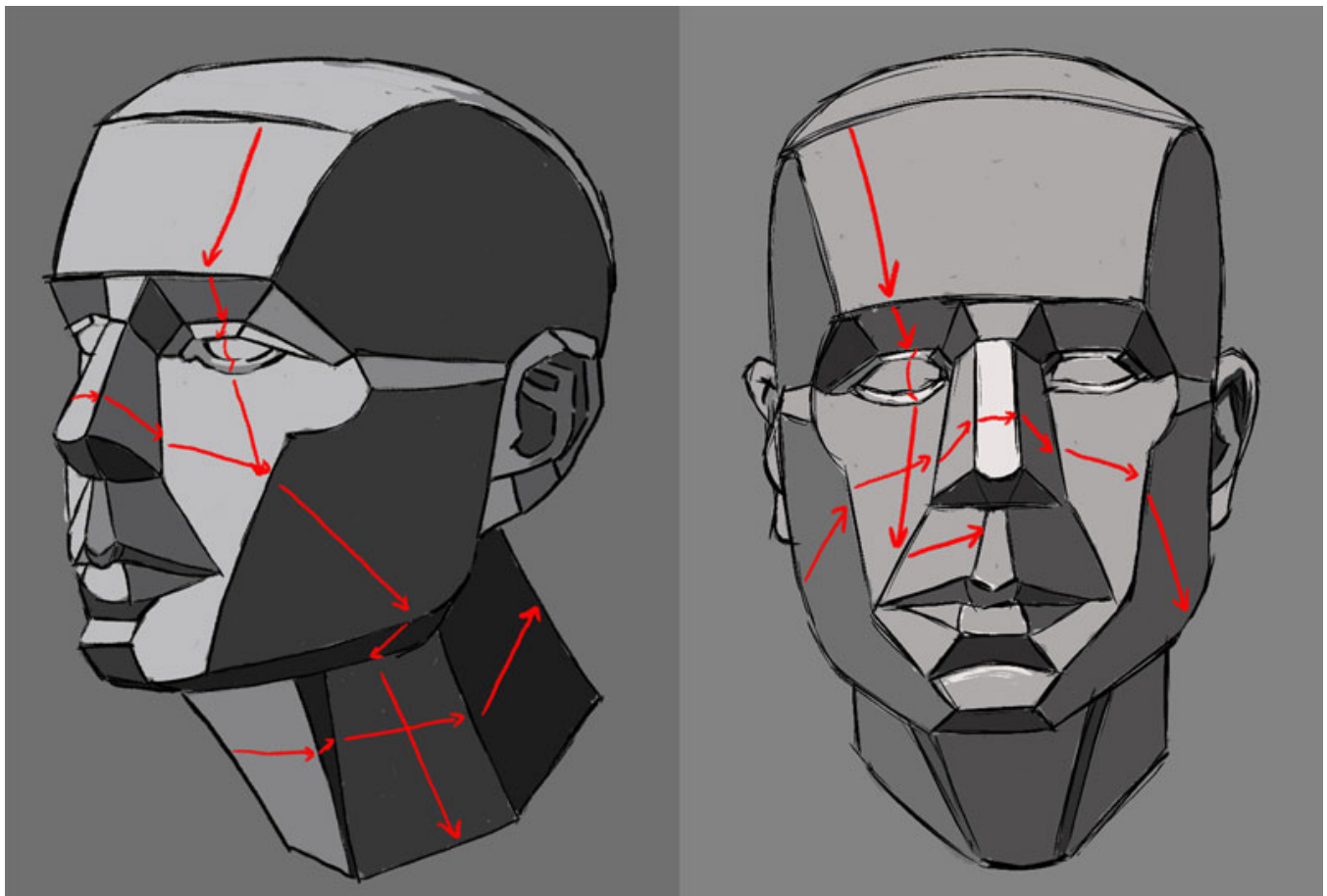
The planes of the face change direction in space. These changes in direction produce different values depending on the location and strength of the light source. In most cases, the light source will originate from above. This produces areas of darker tone in locations that recede and lighter ones in locations that protrude.

This means that recesses around the eyes, under the nose, bottom lip, and chin are mostly shaded with darker values. Areas that protrude, such as the nose, cheek bones, chin, and lower lip consist mostly of lighter values.

Most faces will have smooth transitions or gradations from light to dark. Creating smooth transitions in value are essential for communicating the texture of skin.
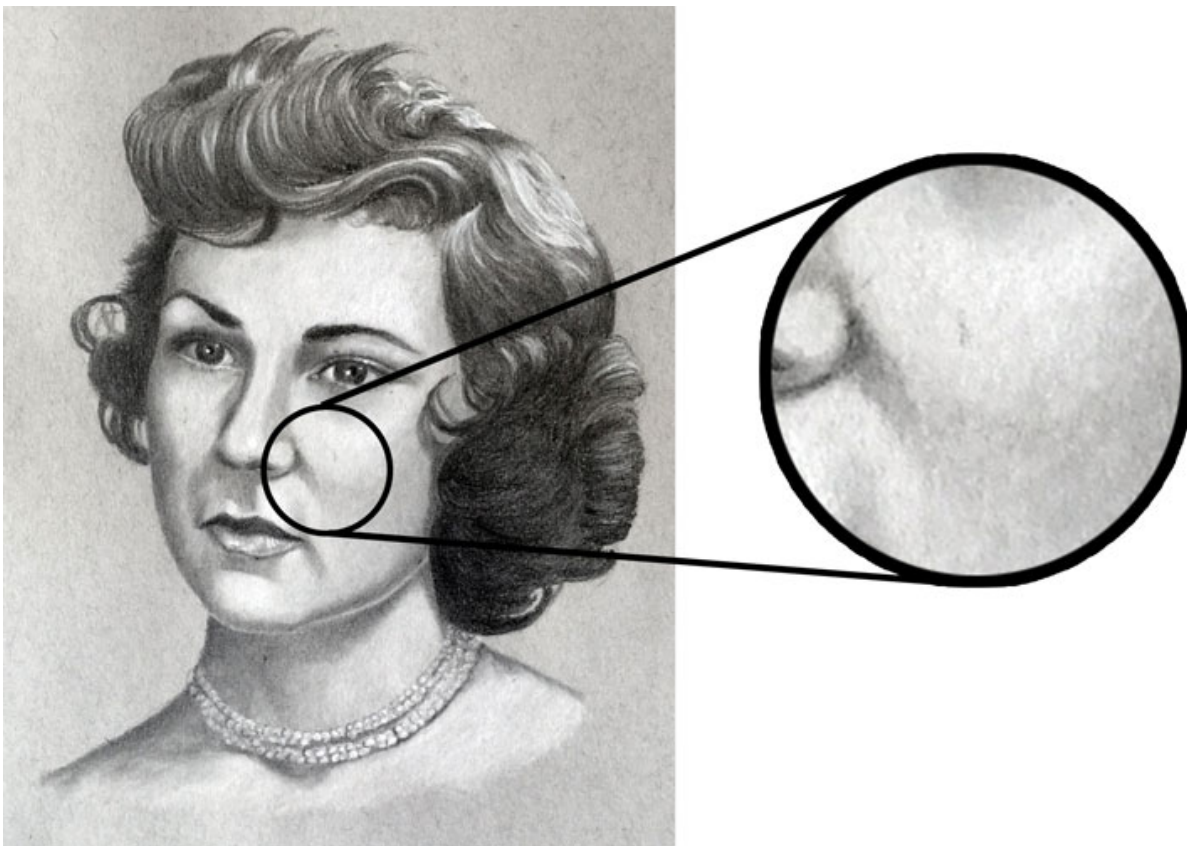
How you approach shading a face will depend on the medium that you use to draw the face. For graphite, or pencil, you can simply adjust the amount of pressure that you place on the pencil. For very smooth or subtle transitions, you may choose to use a blending stump.