

Lesson 1. Getting familiar with the tools

One of the most important things before you start drawing is to take some time to get familiar with the tools you are using. Everyone who draws has different preferences for the tools they use. Quality varies between brands and often come in different grades (i.e. student; professional). Favorite brands can only be determined by experiment and experience but here I will outline the basic equipment, their purposes and what you need to get started.

Paper

Paper comes in many different styles and weights. When shopping for paper or drawing pads, you might see paper labeled as sketching pad, drawing paper, bristol board etc. The difference between each type of paper is the material the paper is made from, weight of the paper and tooth.

Paper is made from fibers. The type of fibers used varies and is usually labeled on the pad. Fiber content is solely a personal preference of the artist. The main thing the beginner needs to look for is that the paper is acid free. A lot of paper (like what you put in your printer) is bleached to get its whiteness, however, this process can contain an acid which over time degrades and yellows the paper. The last thing you want after you have spent time on a drawing is to have the paper ruin over time. Picking up an acid-free drawing sketchpad is a good choice to begin with and can get you through the exercises in this book. Look for nicer grade paper when doing a piece you want to frame.

The weight of the paper refers to how much fiber is in the paper. Sketch pads tend to have a lower weight to keep the thickness of the pad down. Bristol, which is often used for finished pieces intended for framing, has a higher weight. The lightest weight papers are used as tracing paper. The heaviest weight paper is often used for watercolor.

The tooth of the paper is how much 'grab' the paper has to the medium applied to it. A rougher paper will hold onto more graphite, charcoal or paint. Whereas a smoother paper will not have as much grip but will give a smoother appearance. Most artists who draw portraits will choose a smoother paper so that the texture of the paper will not show through when rendering the skin. Watercolor paper on the other hand has a lot of tooth and is very rough to the touch. The amount of tooth is personal preference and based on the finished look desired for the piece. I would recommend trying out a few different types to determine your personal preference.

A final note, date your sketch book. It's nice to be able to look back and see where you've come from.

Pencils

Pencils come in many different brands and grades and can be found at craft stores, art stores and online. All graphite pencils are labeled with letter grades combined with numbers (i.e. 7H, H, HB, B, 2B etc.) "H" stands for hard and "B" stands for black.

H pencils are just that, hard. Because of this, they will not leave as much graphite on the page. The higher the number in front of the H the harder the pencil is and the lighter mark it will produce. 7H being the hardest pencil. H pencils are great for fine lines and finishing.

B pencils are softer graphite and will produce a darker mark. 8B is the softest and darkest pencil. B's are great for shading and contrast. HB is in the middle of these two extremes and is the type that is commonly used for writing, also referred to as your standard Number 2 pencil.

To start, you will want a range of these pencils. They are often sold in sets. I recommend that you start with 2-3 different H's and 3-4 different B's. One important note is that a good quality pencil should sharpen easily without the tip breaking off. A quick word about mechanical pencils. You can purchase lead for mechanical pencils in all the same hardness (H-B) range as standard pencils. Many artists choose this route and there is no 'right' way to go. In this book, I use standard pencils for the examples.

Blending Tools

There are two main different types of blending tools – blending stumps and blending tortillons. Stumps tend to blend darker and more evenly and tortillons tend to blend finer. Some artists forgo the blending tools altogether and simply use multiple layers to achieve the blended look. Blending Stumps can be cleaned with sandpaper; however, I usually keep one dirty one for my darkest blending. We will practice a few different techniques with these tools so you can choose what you like best.

Erasers

Ignore anyone who says erasers aren't important in drawing. Some techniques require the use of erasers to 'lift' graphite off the paper. This technique of lifting is especially useful when drawing clouds. There are a few different types of erasers but I recommend starting with two types; the kneaded eraser and the tough stuff drawing stick. The kneaded eraser looks like a grey rectangular piece of clay and is commonly included in drawing kits. It can be manipulated like clay and molded to a flat or fine point as needed. When it gets dirty from the graphite, it can be kneaded to be cleaned and used again and again. It is used mostly for lifting techniques and will not remove firm lines. The tough stuff eraser stick comes in a mechanical pencil form. It's harder to find in stores but can be ordered online. It will erase much more thoroughly than most erasers and is especially useful with gridding. We will go over the gridding and lifting techniques later in this book.

Pencil Sharpener

It is useful to invest in a nice metal pencil sharpener. I prefer to sharpen my pencils by hand rather than with an electric as it is easier to control. Metal will be more durable and give the ability to get to a finer point than a plastic sharpener. Make sure the pencils and sharpener you buy don't break the graphite tip when sharpened and that you can get the tip to a fine point.

Brush

A soft paintbrush is used to remove excess graphite or eraser dust off your paper. The brush need not be anything fancy. A simple nylon flat brush will suffice. ***IMPORTANT: Never use your hand to brush debris off your work.** Oils from your fingers are the enemy. Once oils get on your paper the graphite will react to the oils ruining your hard work. Avoid this by getting in the habit of brushing away any debris with a brush.

Also, it is important to get into the habit of washing your hands prior to drawing and do not use lotion. Clean hands, free of lotion, and care will help avoid accidents that can ruin a drawing. There are also times when you must rest your hand on the paper to finish a section. A good tip is to place a loose piece of paper under your hand where it rests to avoid smudging or placing oils onto the drawing.

Example of drawing supplies:

