

# Blind Contour Drawing

To help you concentrate on the work you choose, take a full five to ten minutes to do one or more blind contour drawings *of the same figural group*.

- *Draw one consistent line*, never lifting your pencil or other drawing instrument from the page.
- *Keep your eyes on the subject*. This is a challenge, but *don't look at your drawing until you have completed your one continuous line*.
- *Imagine your pencil is guiding your eye* as it moves through the composition you're looking at while recording the contours and changes in surface, texture, or value.
- *Keep your hand and eye moving at the same speed*.
- Your final result will look disjointed and not aligned with real space. That's good! *The point of this exercise is not to replicate the work of art but to hone the process of observing*.



# Mark-Making

We use the term “mark-making” to emphasize that drawing is not just about lines and tones.

Artists have their own vocabularies of marks. Look at any of the works listed above to identify the marks the artist uses. How do artists vary their marks? Imitate the different marks you see.

1. Make multiple drawings *of a single motif* to discover different interpretations by varying the marks you use.
2. Create a glossary of distinctive marks as you investigate different paintings or drawings in the National Gallery.
  - Build your own personal library of marks and use them to interpret an artwork you’re looking at as you draw on your own page.
  - Be inventive. As you draw objects and figures, avoid reproducing only their contours.
  - Build your marks from the interior of a shape and move outward.
  - Pay attention to the emergence of the drawing as a whole, not just one section at a time. Add details to all sections so the drawing develops in a more unified way.

Mark ideas: straight lines, contour lines, hatching and cross hatching, stipples or dots, side of pencil strokes, round scribbles.



# Abstraction

1. *Abstraction from reality*—Select an object or a part of an artwork to draw as realistically and with as much detail as you can. In a second drawing, draw it again with less detail. Continue to simplify the object in two or three subsequent drawings, moving increasingly from reality to abstraction.

2. *Contour drawing as a pathway to abstraction*—Describe how a figure or an object form an artwork using contour lines. Unlike silhouettes, contour lines convey volume and interior forms. Reduce characteristics—edges, shifts in texture or surface, or decoration—to lines that vary in weight and thickness. Translating a work into contour lines requires concentration. Imagine as you draw that you are following the edges of the subject with your pencil point. To give weight to a contour line drawing, emphasize some of the lines by darkening them. Consider what needs emphasis and why. Is it weight bearing?

# The Figure

1. *Capturing gesture*—With quick directional lines you can capture and express the movement in a pose. With a few expressive lines you can show weight, mass, and momentum. Don't try for detailed accuracy. Gesture drawing is a quick response to the overall sense of movement. Work with the interior of the sculpture, not just the outline. Take note of lines that convey weight.
2. The *blurred-line technique*—Use smudged and indistinct lines to imply a shape or attitude. Explore the blurred-line technique by rubbing, smudging, erasing, and blending your lines. Redraw or darken lines as you wish.
3. Discovering shapes *on a toned page*—Create a tone with the side of a soft pencil to surround the represented sculpture; make this “halo” large enough to include the total pose. Then, use your eraser to pull out the shapes you see in the sculpted figure by creating highlights. Use your pencil to add marks that darken edges and define the shapes of shadows.
4. Try a *humorous approach*—Use exaggeration and gesture to suggest character or point of view. Quick outlines, comical distortions, and fanciful contour can create a playful interpretation.

## Personal Response

These exercises have less to do with drawing *technique* than with articulating your personal response to the art subject. Your goal is to explore a traditional landscape or still life and then experiment with your own version.

1. In the painting you've chosen, what's going on? Does anything in the artwork suggest a story or some association that might lead to a narrative? In your sketch, include more than just the drawing; add marginal notes, comments, quotes—any sort of text or content that will help you document your relationship with the painting.
2. Choose one object from your still-life sketch. Make it big enough to fill the entire area you are working in.
3. Landscape offers a rich opportunity to create analogies or metaphors. Add imagined or invented images to your landscape sketch to create a new place. Your interpretation of a landscape is not limited by the traditional compositional strategy of foreground, middle, and background.

*Idea for drawing: Capturing gestures* of trees with quick directional lines and express the movement of trees in a landscape. With a few expressive lines you can show weight, mass, and direction. Don't try for detailed accuracy. Gesture drawing is a quick response to the overall sense of movement. Take note of lines that convey weight.