

DRAWING ON THE  
RIGHT SIDE OF THE  
BRAIN WORKBOOK

*Guided Practice in the Five Basic  
Skills of Drawing*

*Betty Edwards*

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# Foreword

Learning to draw is very much like learning how to play a sport or how to play a musical instrument. Once you have mastered the fundamentals, advancement in skills is based on practice, practice, practice. Drawing is always the same task, requiring the same five perceptual skills that, with practice, become integrated into the whole skill—called a “global” skill—of drawing. Only the subjects and mediums change. Therefore, after you have learned the five basic component skills of drawing, it really does not greatly matter *what* you draw. Any subject will do, and any medium will do. This is not surprising; all global skills are composed of basic component skills that are always activated when the global skill is being used—think of driving a variety of automobiles, playing tennis on different courts, or reading one of many books. No matter what car, court, or book is involved, you effortlessly use the skills you have developed over time.

This revised workbook is designed as a supplement to my book *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*.<sup>\*</sup> Its purpose is to provide convenient and effective guided practice for the five basic skills of drawing described in more detail in the book. The workbook and the book can stand on their own, or the two can be used in tandem to combine the underlying ideas with practical exercises.

The exercises in this workbook include many of the subjects from the drawing book, including some unfamiliar kinds of drawings (upside-down drawing, for example) and a variety of subjects appropriate for practicing each component skill, including working with subject matter beyond that in *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. For your convenience, this workbook contains an essential drawing tool, a plastic Picture Plane/Viewfinder, which will help you to understand the basic nature of drawing.

This current workbook is smaller and more portable than the first edition, so that you can put it to use in those odd moments of available time while waiting in the dentist’s office or at the airport. As you complete the exercises in these pages, you will be creating a permanent, bound record of your progress in drawing.

<sup>\*</sup>Betty Edwards, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, Souvenir Press, 2013

I have found, however, that many of my students who have learned the basic drawing skills find it difficult to choose subjects to draw. Often, feeling the urge to draw something that catches their eye, they hesitate for fear that the subject may be too hard or that they will not have time to finish. This workbook is designed to solve such problems by providing suitable subjects for practicing each skill. In addition, the workbook offers brief instructions, an estimate of the time required (though this will vary somewhat according to your own pace), and suitable drawing paper, with ready-drawn formats and guiding crosshairs in correct proportions for each drawing. For most of the exercises, I have added post-exercise remarks that provide additional information, suggestions, or helpful pointers.

I would guess that the biggest difficulty you will experience in working through these pages is finding the time to draw. It rarely works to tell yourself that you will draw for an hour each day, or even an hour each week. The commitment of even that much time will probably seem too great. You must remember that your brain's language mode—the left-hemisphere, verbal-analytic brain mode—does not want you to draw at all, because it is “set aside” while you are drawing. The language mode is very good at presenting reasons why you should not draw: you need to pay your bills, call your mother, answer your e-mail, or just tend to whatever other business is at hand.

Once you actually “get into” drawing, however, time passes seamlessly and productively. Therefore, I recommend to you what has worked for me: a version of the so-called two-minute miracle, a technique physical therapists use to enable people to exercise even when they don't want to. They are taught to say to themselves, “I don't have time to take a walk right now, but I *will* walk for just two minutes.” Once they are actually walking, of course, they forget their objections and continue walking.

Here is my version of the two-minute miracle. Keep this drawing workbook in a convenient place, along with your pencils and erasers. Sit down for a moment and take the workbook in hand, saying to yourself, “I'm not really going to draw now, but I'll just turn to the next exercise.” Then, take the next step: “I'm not really going to draw, but I'll just pick up the pencil

and make a few marks to start this drawing.” Then, “I’m not really going to draw, but I’ll just sketch in some of the main edges in this drawing...” and so on. You will soon find yourself with a completed drawing—*and unaware that time has passed.*

I realize that this may sound simplistic, but it does work. I have completed entire projects using this technique—a technique of (let’s face it) tricking the language mode of the brain into allowing creative work. You may find this hard to believe, but the single most difficult problem for art students and even for working artists is *getting the work done*. One is always fighting the delaying tactics of the verbal system, whose mantra is “Not now.” At its most extreme, the result is writer’s block or artist’s block; a milder version is called procrastination.

These drawing exercises are designed to give you success at every step. I have high hopes that you will enjoy the process.

***Note to the reader:***

You will find more information on the relationship of drawing to the brain and creativity in my book, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, which is widely available in bookstores and libraries.

# Materials

The art materials needed for these exercises are available in any art supply store. They can also be purchased by mail or through the Internet, by doing a search for “art materials” or “art supplies.”

<b>Pencils</b>	#2 yellow writing pencil with an eraser top #4B drawing pencil, Turquoise, Faber Castell, or a similar brand
<b>Erasers</b>	A white plastic eraser (Staedtler) or a Pink Pearl eraser
<b>Hand-held pencil sharpener</b>	
<b>Graphite stick</b>	#4B
<b>Charcoal pencil</b>	#4B
<b>Synthetic charcoal</b>	1 stick
<b>Conté crayons in pencil form</b>	one #3B black and one red (sanguine)
<b>Erasable felt-tip marker</b>	1 black (Crayola, Sharpie, or a similar brand)
<b>Ink</b>	1 small bottle of black India ink
<b>Brush</b>	#7 or #8 inexpensive watercolor brush
<b>Mirror</b>	A small, lightweight, unframed mirror, about 5" × 7" or 6" × 8"
<b>Masking tape</b>	Artist's Low Tack
<b>Alarm clock or kitchen timer</b>	
<b>Paper towels or tissues</b>	
<b>White computer (or bond) paper</b>	About 12 sheets
<b>Lightweight cardboard</b>	1 piece, 8" × 10", to make a frame for the Picture Plane/Viewfinder



# Glossary of Terms

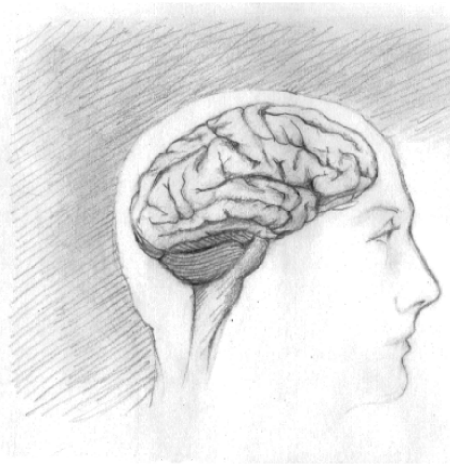
**Abstract drawing.** A translation into drawing of a real-life object or experience. Usually implies the isolation, emphasis, or exaggeration of some aspect of the real world. Or: Uses a visual language of form, line, or color to create a composition that may exist with a degree of independence from visual references in the world.

**Awareness.** Consciousness; the act of “taking account” of an object, person, or surroundings. Possible synonyms are “seeing” or “cognition.”

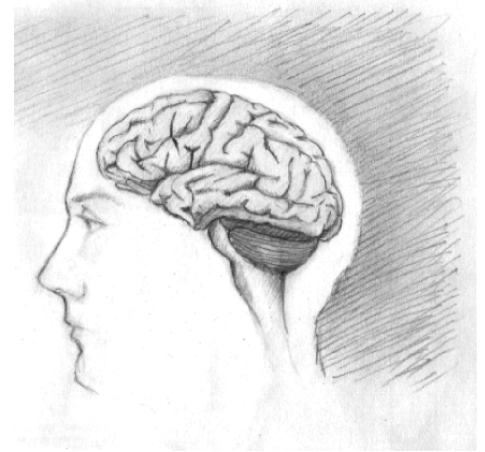
**Basic Unit.** A “starting shape” or “starting unit” chosen from within a composition for the purpose of maintaining correct size relationships in a drawing. The Basic Unit is always termed “one” and becomes part of a ratio, as in “1:2.”

**Brain mode.** A mental state, implying emphasis on particular capabilities of the human brain, such as language processing or visual spatial processing.

**Cognitive shift.** A transference of the predominance of one mental state to another, e.g., from



Right brain hemisphere.



Left brain hemisphere.

verbal, analytic left-hemisphere mode to visual, spatial right-hemisphere mode, or vice versa.

**Composition.** An ordered relationship among the parts or elements of an artwork. In drawing, the arrangement of shapes and spaces within the format.

**Contour.** In drawing, a line that represents the shared edges of shapes, or shapes and spaces.

**Crosshatching.** A series of intersecting sets of parallel lines used to indicate shading or volume in a drawing. Also called “hatching.”

**Edge.** In drawing, a place where two things meet (for example, where the sky meets the ground); the line of separation

(called a contour) between two shapes or a space and a shape.

**Eye level.** In portrait drawing, the horizontal proportional line that divides the head approximately in half. The eye-level line is located at this halfway mark on the head. In perspective drawing, eye-level line is synonymous with “horizon line.”

**Foreshortening.** A means of creating the illusion of projecting or receding forms on a flat surface.

**Format.** The particular shape of a drawing surface (rectangular, square, triangular, etc.); the proportional relationship of the length to the width of a rectangular surface.

**Image.** *Verb:* To call up in the mind a mental copy of something not present to the senses; to see in the mind's eye. *Noun:* A retinal image; an optical image received by the visual system and interpreted or reinterpreted by the brain.

**Imagination.** In art, a recombination of mental images from past experiences into new expressive patterns.

**Intuition.** Direct and apparently unmediated knowledge; a judgment, meaning, or idea that occurs to a person without any known process of reflective thinking; an idea that seems to "come from nowhere."

**Left-handedness.** About ten percent of the population prefers using the left hand for motor activities such as writing or drawing. Hemispheric location of brain functions may vary in both left- and right-handers.

**Left hemisphere.** The left half of the brain. For most right-handed individuals, verbal functions are mainly located in the left hemisphere.

**Light logic.** In art, the effect caused by a light source. Light rays, falling in straight lines, can logically be expected to cause the following: highlights, cast shadows, reflected lights, and crest shadows.

**L-mode.** A mental state of information processing characterized as linear, verbal, analytic, and logical.

**Negative spaces.** The areas around positive forms that, in drawing, share edges with the forms. Negative spaces are bounded by the outer edges of the format. "Interior" negative spaces can be parts of positive forms.

**Pencil grades.** The grade number stamped on drawing pencils indicates the hardness or softness of the graphite. "h" indicates "hard"; "b" (illogically) indicates "black" or "soft." "hb" divides grades between hard and soft by a middle grade, thus you will find pencils marked 8h (the hardest), 6h, 4h, 2h, hb, 2b, 4b, 6b, 8b (the softest). The #2 yellow writing

pencil is the equivalent of the hb or, more commonly, the 2b drawing pencil.

**Perspective and proportion.**

Also known as perceived *relationships*. In art, how the parts of an artwork are organized and connected to create the illusion of space and distance on a flat surface. Specifically, the relationship of angles to vertical and horizontal and the relationship of sizes to each other.

**Picture plane.** An imaginary transparent plane, like a framed window, that always remains parallel to the vertical plane of the artist's face. The artist draws on paper what he or she sees through the plane as though the view were flattened on the plane. Inventors of photography used this concept to develop the first cameras. (Note: a Picture Plane/Viewfinder is included with this workbook.)

**Realistic drawing.** The objective depiction of objects, forms, and figures attentively perceived. Also called "naturalism."

**Right hemisphere.** The right half of the brain. For most right-handed individuals, visual, spatial, relational functions are largely located in the right hemisphere.

**R-mode.** A state of mental processing characterized as visual, spatial, simultaneous, global, and relational.

**Sighting.** In drawing, sometimes called “informal perspective.” Measuring relative sizes by means of a constant measure (the pencil held at arm’s length is the most usual measur-

ing device); determining the location of one part relative to another part; determining angles relative to vertical and horizontal, and sizes relative to a Basic Unit.

**Symbol system.** In drawing, a set of symbols that are consistently used to form an image—for example, a face or figure. The symbols are usually used in sequence, one appearing to call forth another, much in the manner of writing familiar words. Symbol systems in drawn forms are usually established in child-

hood and often persist throughout adulthood unless modified by learning new ways to draw one’s perceptions.

**Value.** In art, the darkness or lightness of tones or colors. White is the lightest, or highest, value. Black is the darkest, or lowest, value.

**Viewfinder.** A device used by artists to frame a view and provide bounding edges to a composition; similar to the framing device on a camera that enables the user to compose a planned photograph.

# **The Exercises**

## EXERCISE I

# Pre-Instruction Self-Portrait

### *Materials:*

Wall mirror

Masking tape

#2 yellow writing pencil

Hand-held pencil sharpener

Chair to sit in

### *Time needed:*

About 30 minutes, more if desired

### *Purpose of the exercise:*

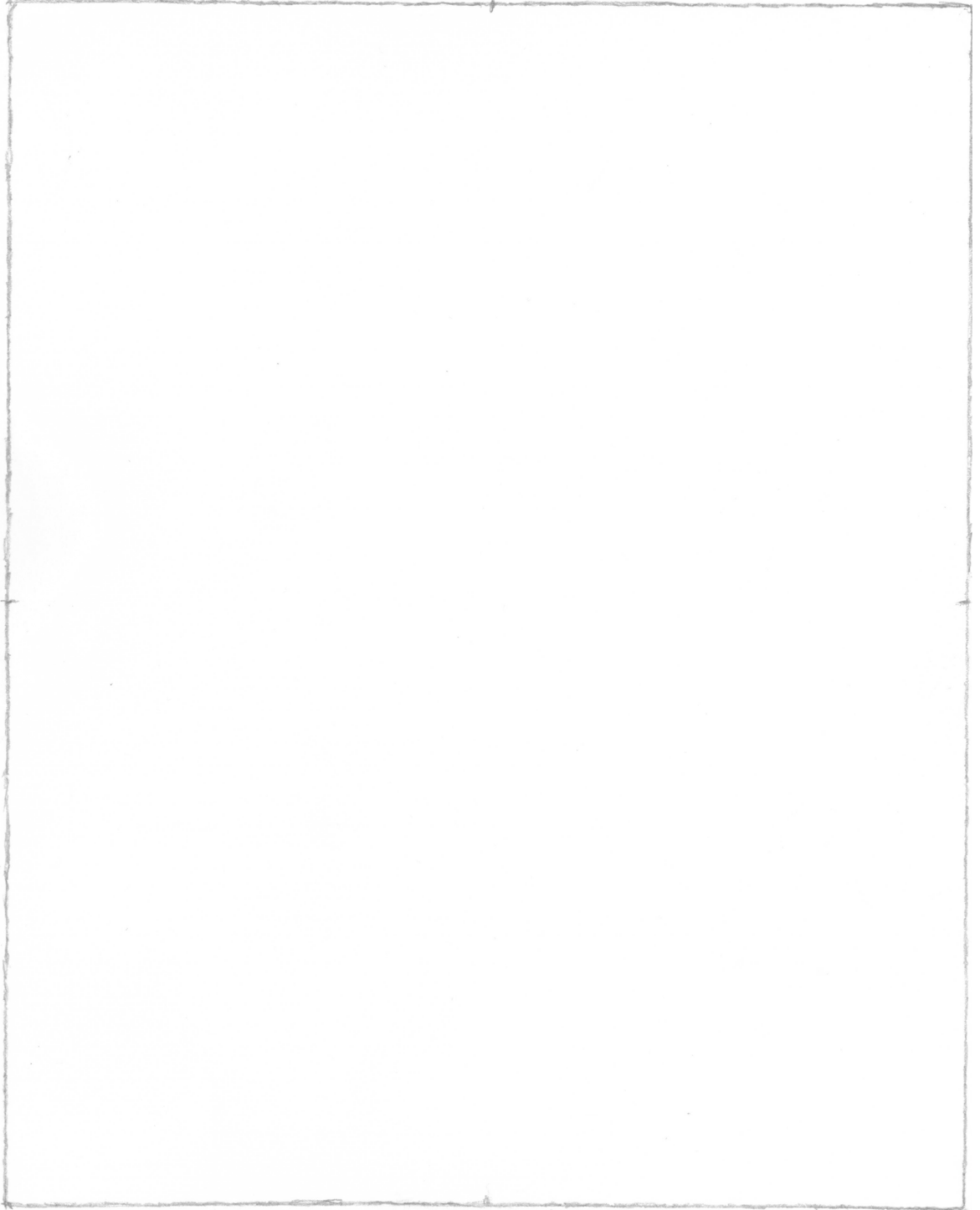
Pre-instruction drawings provide a valuable record of your drawing skills now, a record that will enable you to appreciate your advance in skills at a later date.

### *Instructions:*

1. Place a chair in front of a mirror on the wall or tape a small (say, 6" × 8") mirror to the wall.
2. Sit at arm's length from the mirror, leaning your workbook against the wall and resting the bottom of the workbook on your knees. If necessary, adjust the mirror so that you can see your head and face.
3. Draw your self-portrait to the best of your ability, using the format printed on page 3.
4. When you have finished, date and sign your drawing.

### *Post-exercise remarks:*

People are often highly critical of their pre-instruction self-portrait, but if you look closely, you will see areas where you were truly drawing your perceptions—perhaps the turn of the eyelid, the shape of an ear, or the line of a collar. The quality of the drawing may surprise you. Or, if you can find no more to say than “Ugh!” about your drawing, be patient. Drawing is a skill that can be taught and can be learned; it is not magic, and it does not depend on genetic good fortune to be “born an artist.”



**Pre-Instruction Drawing #1: Self-Portrait**

# Pre-Instruction Drawing of Your Hand

***Materials:***

#2 yellow writing pencil

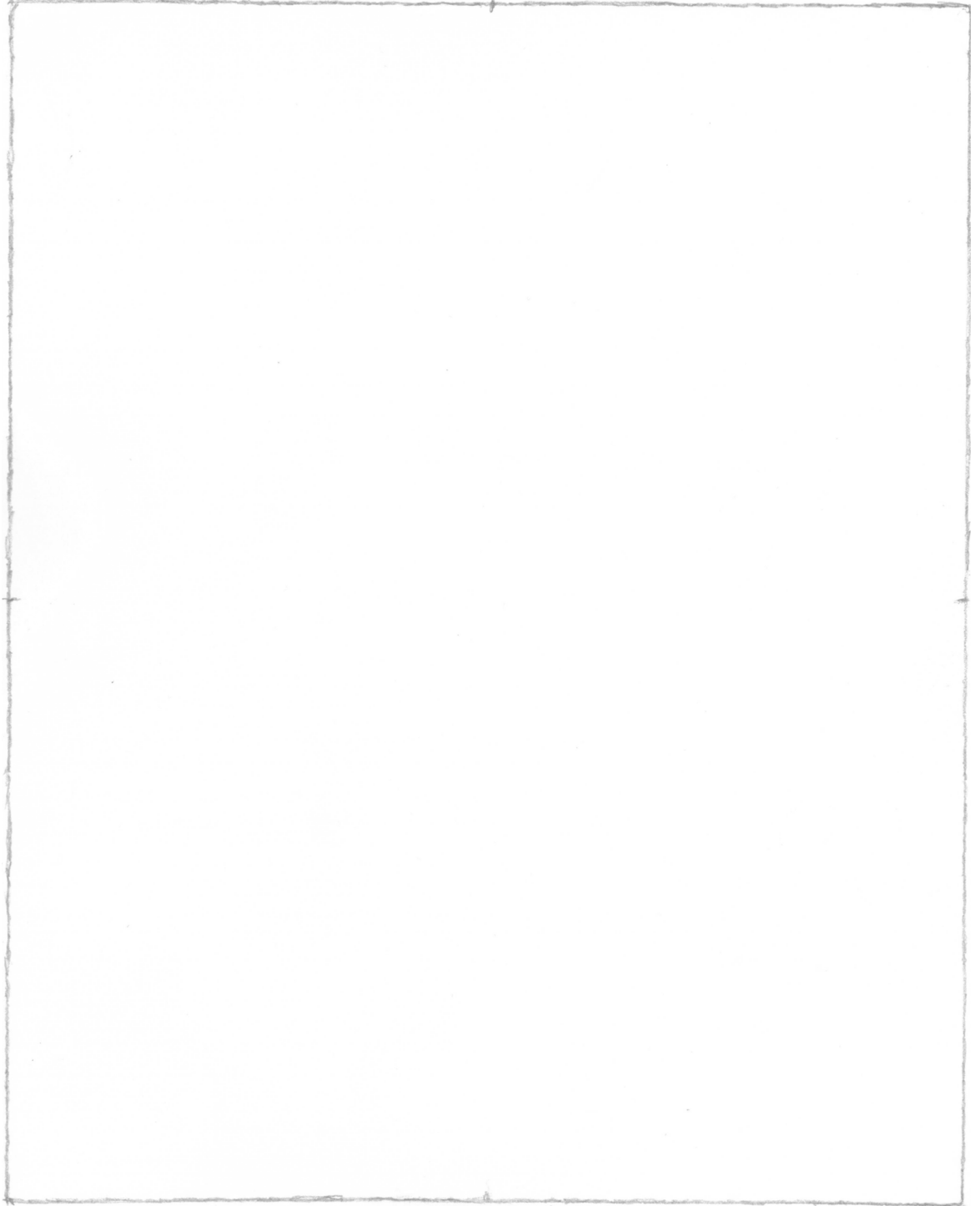
Pencil sharpener

***Time needed:***

About 15 minutes, more if needed

***Instructions:***

1. Sit at a table with the workbook arranged at a comfortable angle.
2. Try out various positions of your non-drawing hand (the left if you are right-handed, or the right if you are left-handed), and choose a position.
3. Hold your posing hand still and make a drawing of it, using the format printed on page 5.
4. Sign and date your drawing.



**Pre-Instruction Drawing #2: My Hand**



EXERCISE 3

# Pre-Instruction Drawing of the Corner of a Room

*Materials:*

#2 yellow writing pencil

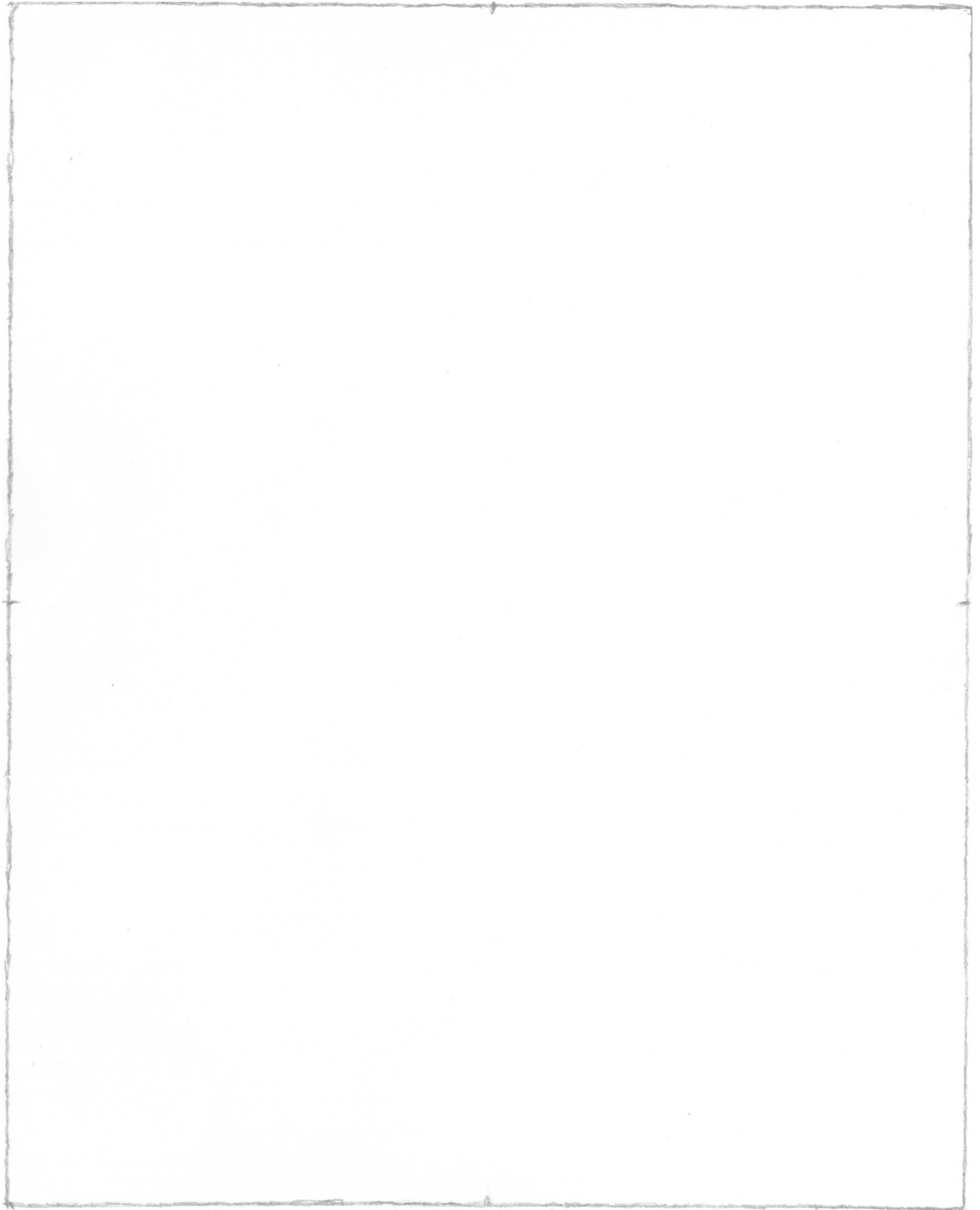
Pencil sharpener

*Time needed:*

About 20 minutes, more if needed

*Instructions:*

1. Look around the room in which you are working and choose one corner to draw. It can be a simple, empty corner, a corner with a few items, or a very complicated scene.
2. Sit in a chair with the workbook on your lap, facing the chosen corner at a distance of about 8 to 10 feet.
3. Draw the room corner to the best of your ability, using the printed format on page 7.
4. Sign and date your drawing.



**Pre-Instruction Drawing #3: A Room Corner**

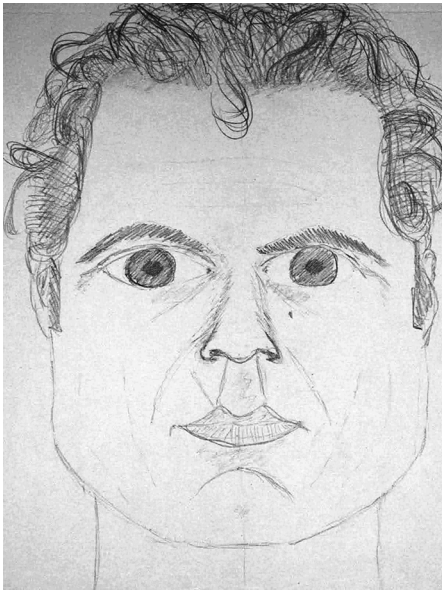
*Some examples of student progress*



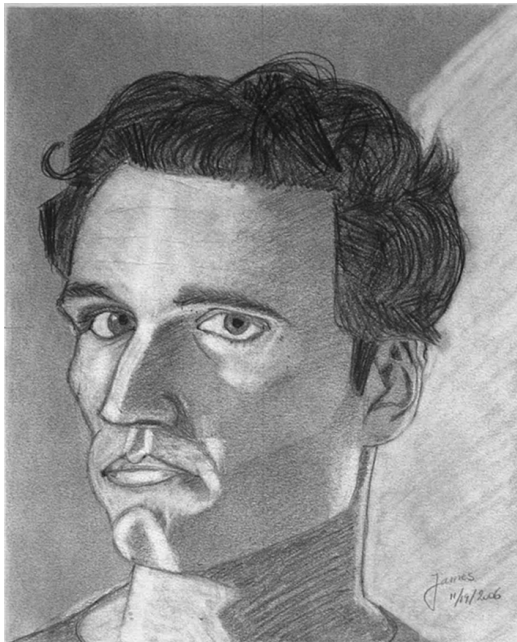
*Maria Catalina Ochoa*  
Pre-instruction "Self-Portrait."  
May 30, 2010



*Maria Catalina Ochoa*  
Post-instruction "Self-Portrait."  
June 3, 2010



*James Vanreusel*  
Pre-instruction "Self-Portrait."  
November 13, 2006



*James Vanreusel*  
Post-instruction "Self-Portrait."  
November 17, 2006