Cityscape in one-point perspective

Learn how to draw a city scene using one-point perspective

The Tutor

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The furthest buildings are fainter and less detailed due to aerial perspective (light scattering in the atmosphere). This helps create depth, and is why distant objects look misty in real life.

Try adding different features to each building to break up the monotony of a long street. Roofs, windows, signage and broken elements add character to the scene.

People often say "I can't even draw a straight line!" But really, nobody can. You'd need to be a robot. Don't be afraid to use a ruler for your drawings.

The objects closest to the foreground are drawn with bolder, thicker lines. This also helps to create a sense of depth and distance, drawing the eye into the picture.

Cities seem big and daunting at first, but everything can be broken down into straightforward lines and blocks. This workshop will show you how to draw a cityscape using simple perspective guidelines in a one-point perspective, which is ideal for a beginner, but it can go a long way when constructing a detailed background or a busy urban scene. A solid sense of perspective really brings the scenery to life.

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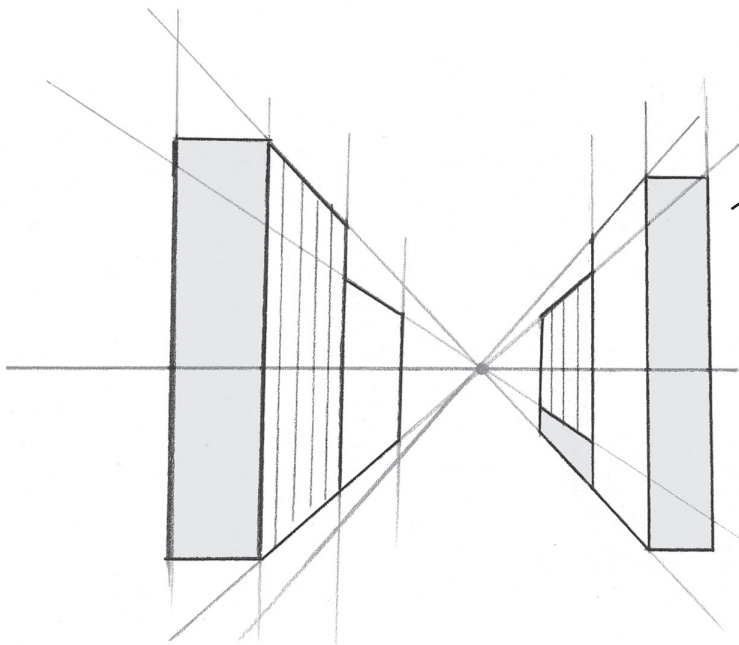
Even a towering skyscraper is easy to draw if you just think of it as a big block. Here, we'll begin with some simple guidelines to establish the correct perspective. You can make blocks of all sizes and proportions using the same rules – and eventually a whole street of them.
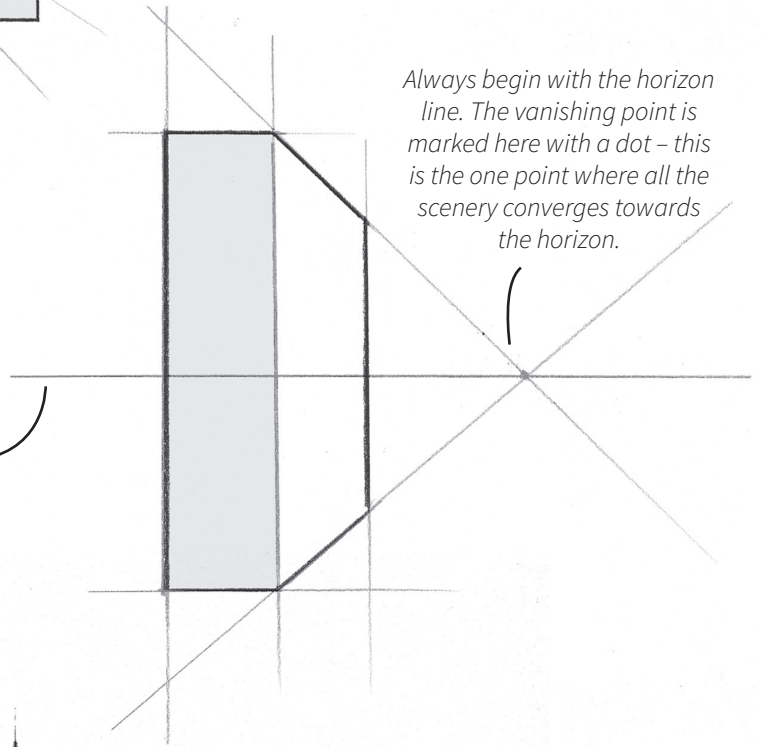
Always begin with the horizon line. The vanishing point is marked here with a dot – this is the one point where all the scenery converges towards the horizon.

The horizon line can be set low or high in the picture. Do you want more ground or more sky in your scene? The horizon here is roughly at eye-level.
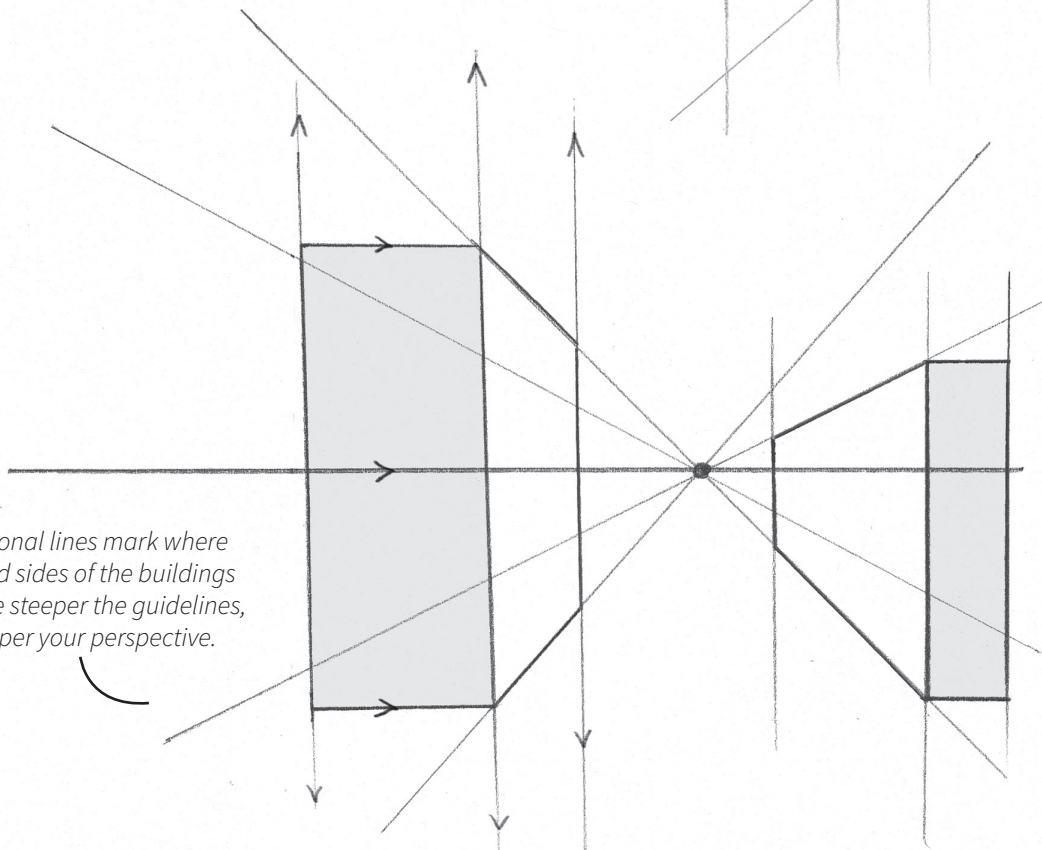
The diagonal lines mark where the angled sides of the buildings will be. The steeper the guidelines, the steeper your perspective.

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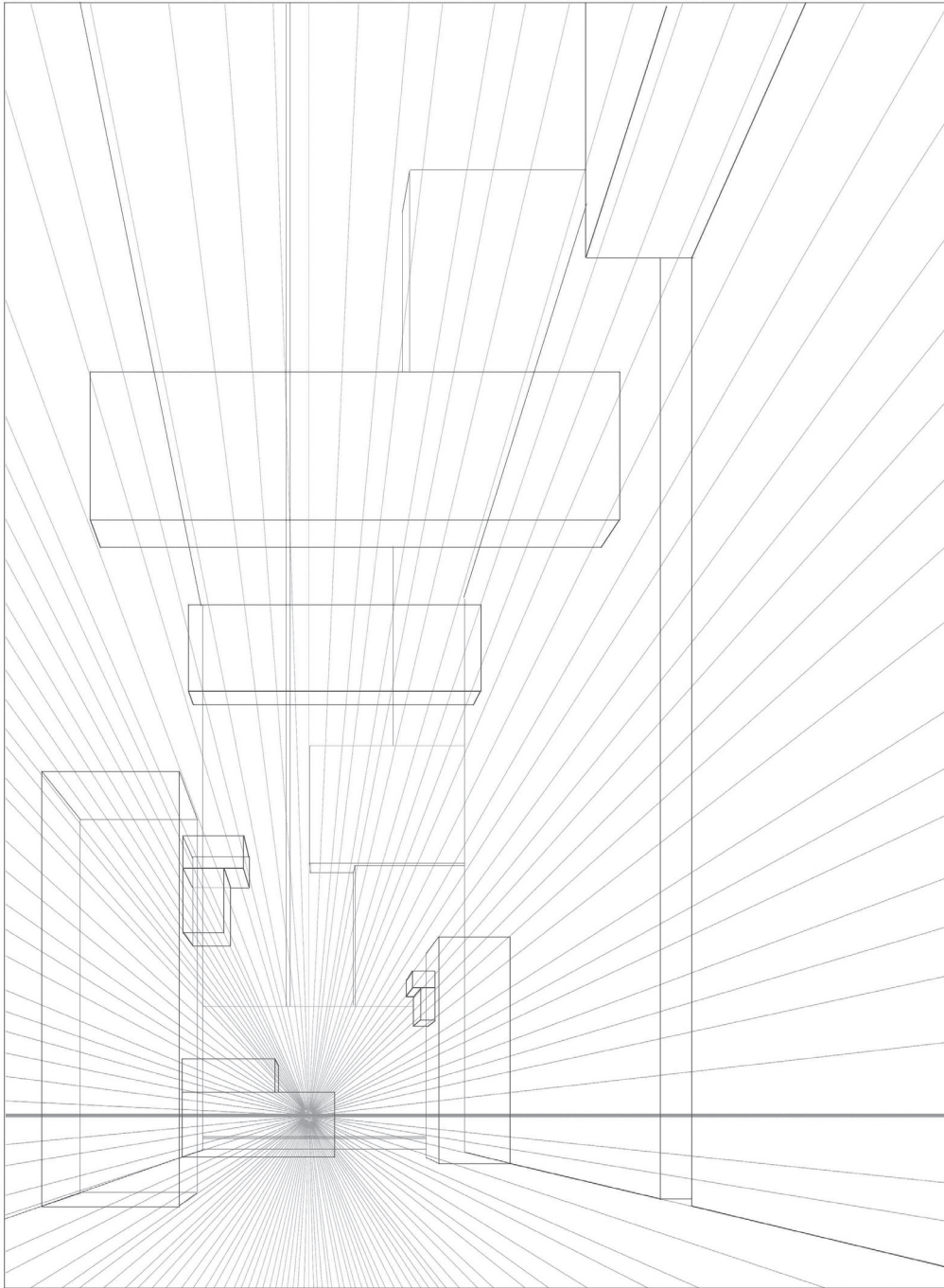
You can use a ruler to draw your lines and boxes, or try to get them down freehand if you're feeling brave. There's nothing wrong with using a ruler at this stage.

The hardest part of one-point perspective is the vanishing point, because everything converges very fast. I prefer to just block it in.
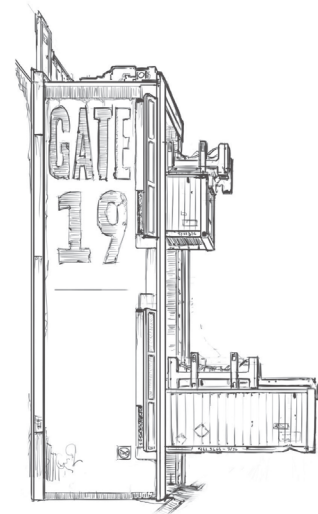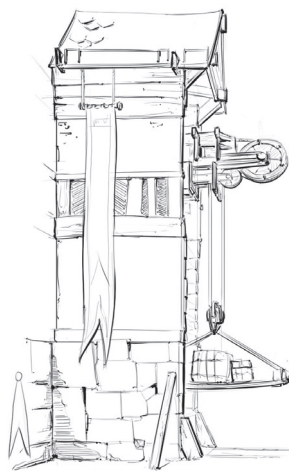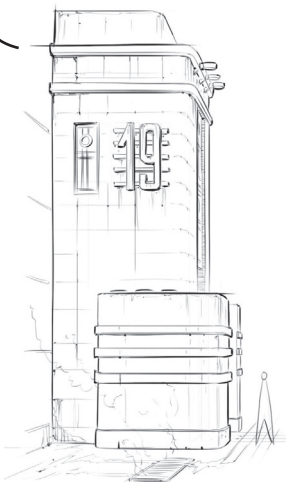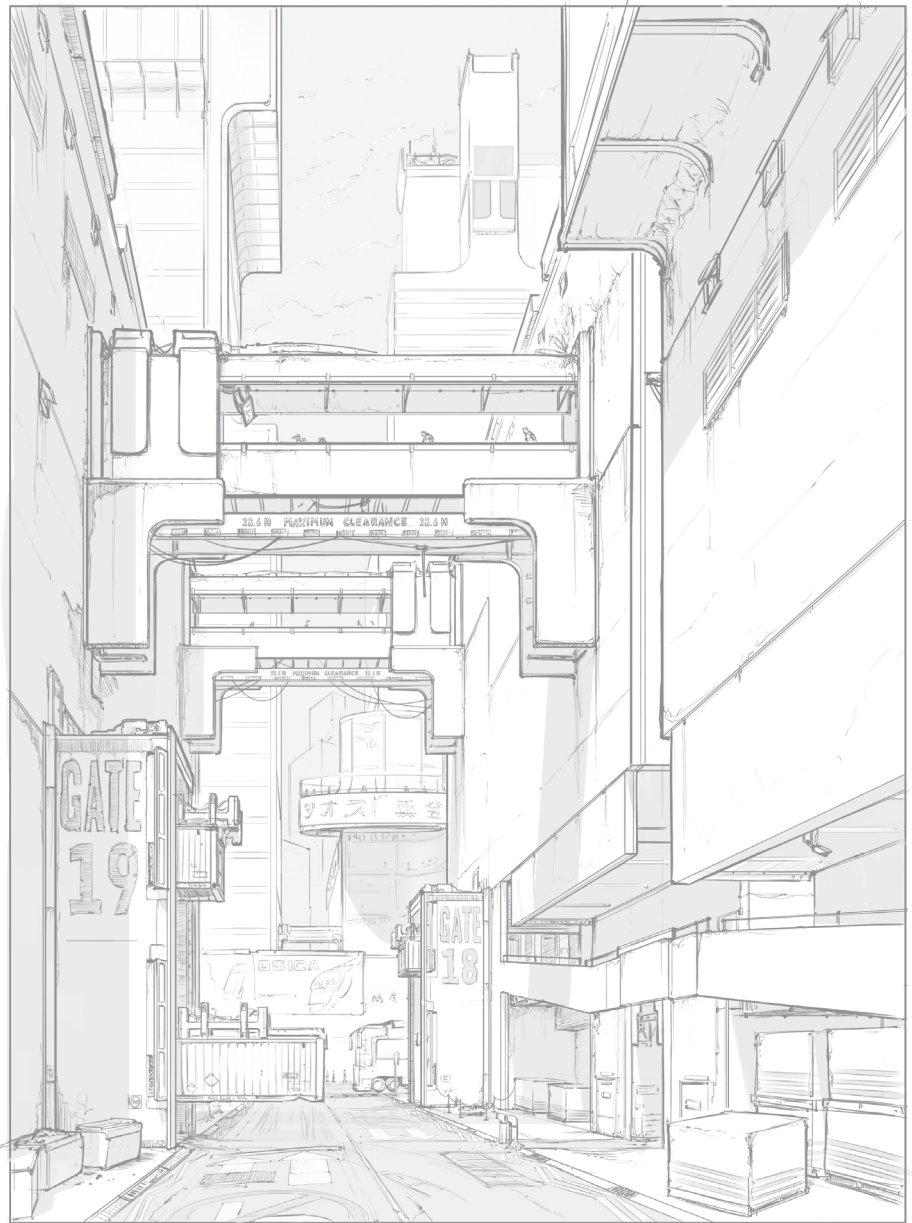
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I always think about the functionality of objects, and how they work in different time periods or genres, such as a gate mechanism. In a sci-fi world it would work in a mechanical way and in a medieval design it would be made from wood and ropes.

To add visual interest, I use the rule of thirds, which is when you imagine your image divided into nine equal parts – you can do this by imagining two equally spaced horizontal lines and two equally spaced vertical lines running through your image.

When you decide how to break or divide the big shapes, think about functionality. Where would the main function or empty space be?
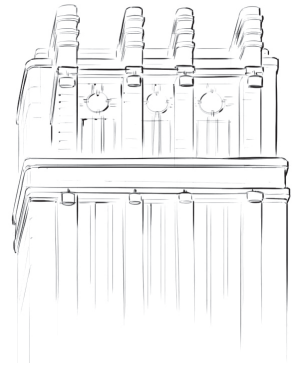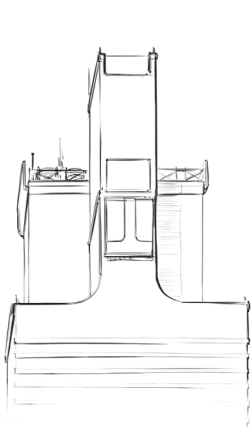
*Try adding more overlapping shapes to improve your designs.*

You can dress up your buildings any way you like. Here are some different themes and variations to inspire you, such as Art Deco, medieval fantasy and sci-fi.

You can show depth by using lines with different thicknesses, or by drawing double/triple lines. To show that the object is closer or overlapping other objects, use thicker lines.

As the sci-fi reference is the side alley of a mall, they might keep some crates outside, under the slope.
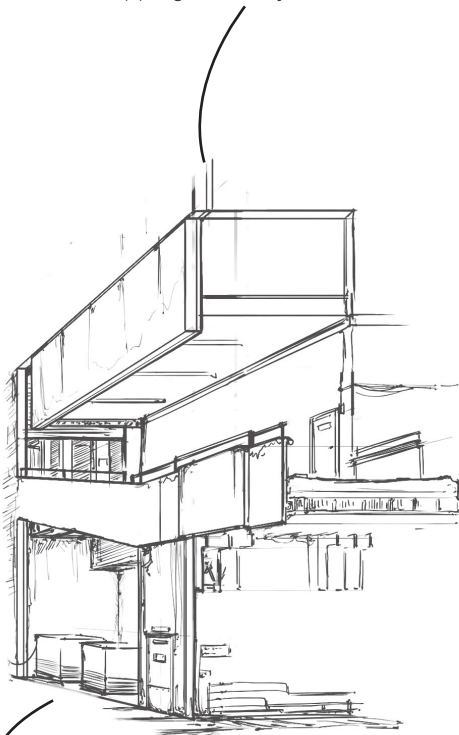
Remember: everything you draw is a 3D object that has thickness, like doors, windows, railings and so on. Don't just draw flat textures on the wall.

When I add detail I always keep in mind how it would be used by people, or how it was built.

Even when I draw small cables, I keep in mind where and how they would bend, so I can emphasize the shape by drawing some lines across it. It's the detail that will add realism to your work.
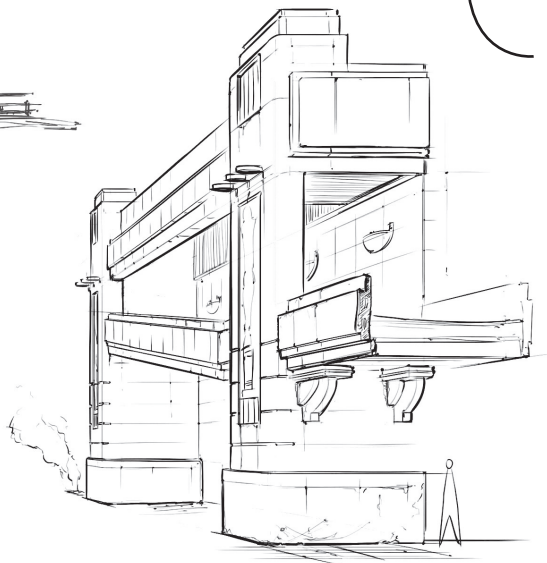
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This exercise gives you a chance to utilize everything you've learned in the previous steps. This time try to use your own unique references to create a completely new environment.
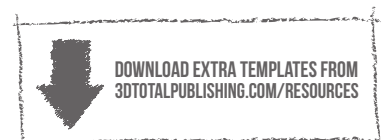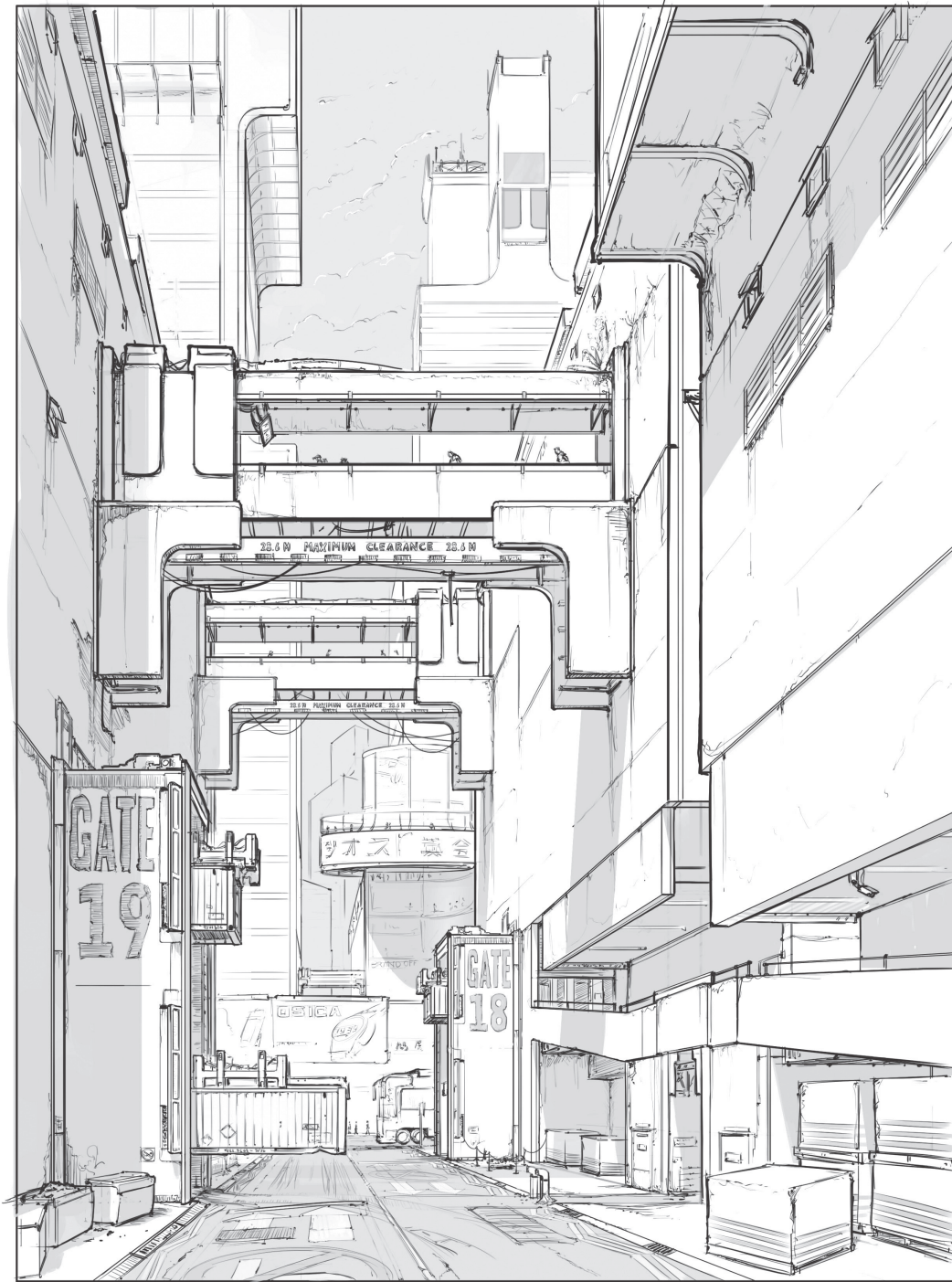
Gridlines and horizon lines are helpful, not only to sketch the cubes, but they also define the viewer's position. If you lie on your side the horizon line seems to be vertical.

Please remember that gridlines are there to help you. Do not draw a complex network of gridlines as you will lose the overview.

To make your work with a multipoint perspective easier, you can draw supporting curves first. Use curves to sketch gridlines and cube lines.

Gridlines should be drawn very gently – you can use an H pencil for this. They should not distract the viewer or collide with the shapes.

Depending on the position of the horizon line, we can get a bird's-eye perspective or a worm's-eye perspective.

Please note that when drawing a cube, it is four parallel lines intersecting at one vanishing point, while the other four parallel lines have different intersection points. Remember the vanishing points are placed on the horizon line.

While drawing a city, don't over-complicate your work with complex 3D structures. Try to build your composition based on the simplest shapes and cubes.

Hyper-precision is not the most important thing. Sometimes it is the composition dynamic that plays the key role. Don't hesitate to play with gridlines and try to bend them.

You can find perspective lines here that you have to draw in the very beginning of your work. You can also see cube outlines that we are going to use to draw buildings, but let's start with the horizon line. It's the main line on the picture, as you place the vanishing point along this. You may plan more vanishing points, but you should always put them on the horizon line.

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Draw your own set of cubes using the gridlines provided and the reference above as a guide.
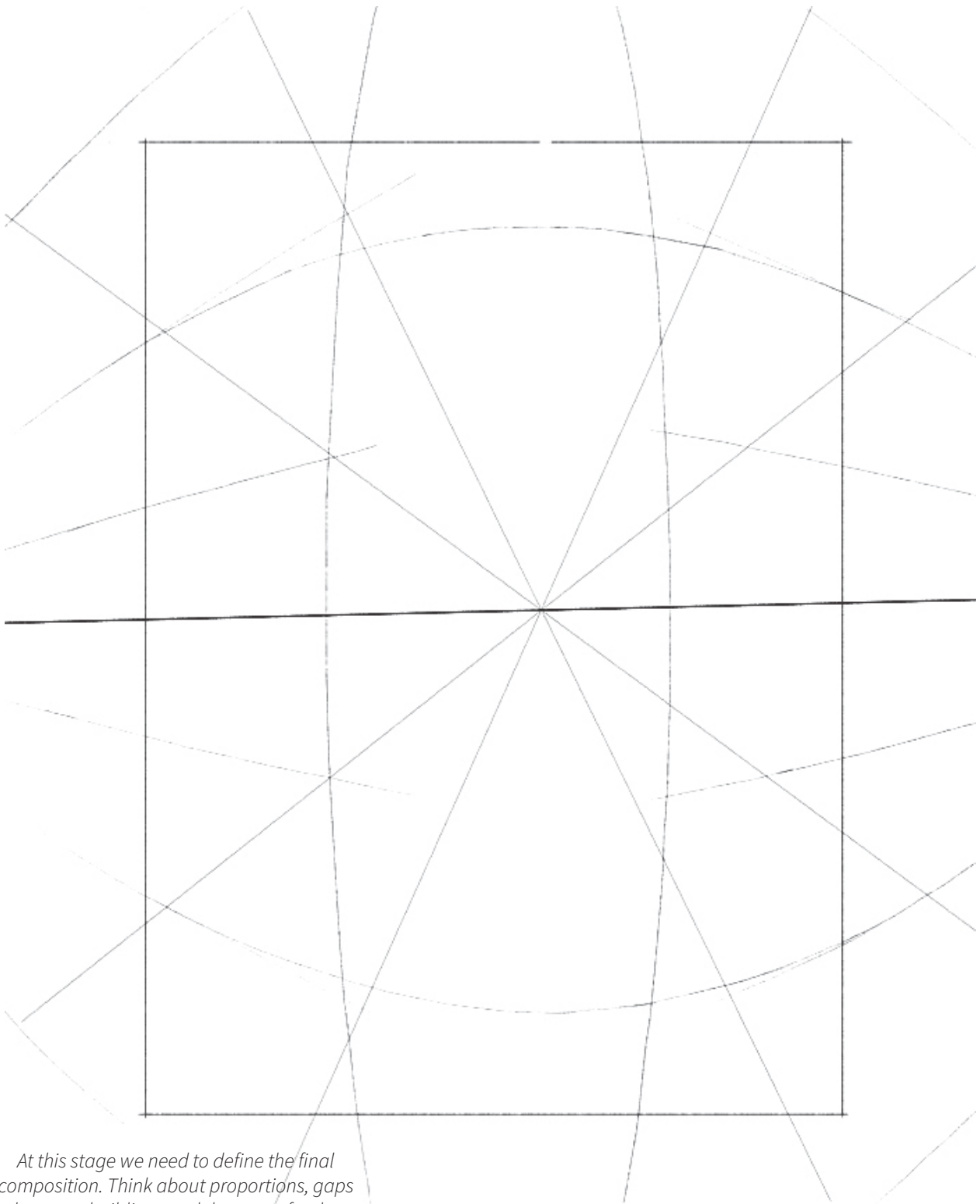
At this stage we need to define the final composition. Think about proportions, gaps between buildings and the space for the background. Cubes, even when drawn gently, should be more visible than perspective lines. To control proportions, you can also sketch a figure next to the buildings.

You should now have more confidence in drawing perspective and how to play with it. In the next exercise, we will define the main characteristic points and shapes of the composition – elements that give the city its identity…
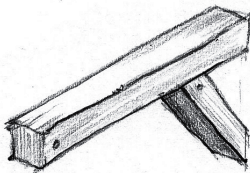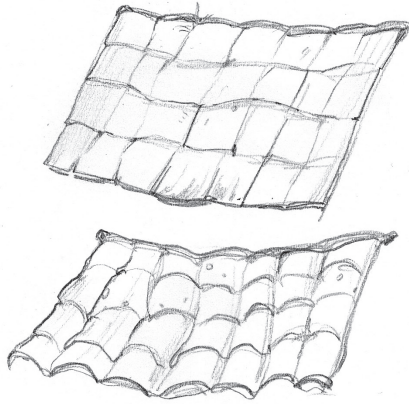
Bricks and mortar make a building look solid, but there's more to a lived-in place than just walls, which can look monotonous without the extra detailing. Now you can add some roofing, beams and banners to decorate your buildings.
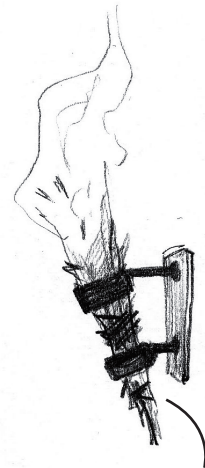
Roof tiles sit on top of each other, overlapping slightly, so the line they make won't be totally smooth. Add some zig-zag to your edges so the tiles don't look flat.

Who knows how long this banner has been hanging around! Make it look tatty and stained by fraying and shading the edges.

You can brighten up your walls with some torches, but remember to leave a bright area around them where the flames light up the surroundings.

Some ramshackle huts can make the place look inhabited and give the bigger buildings a sense of scale. They're not well-built, so a bit of wonkiness doesn't hurt.
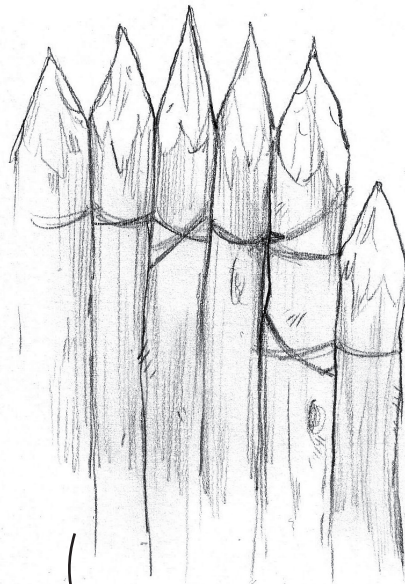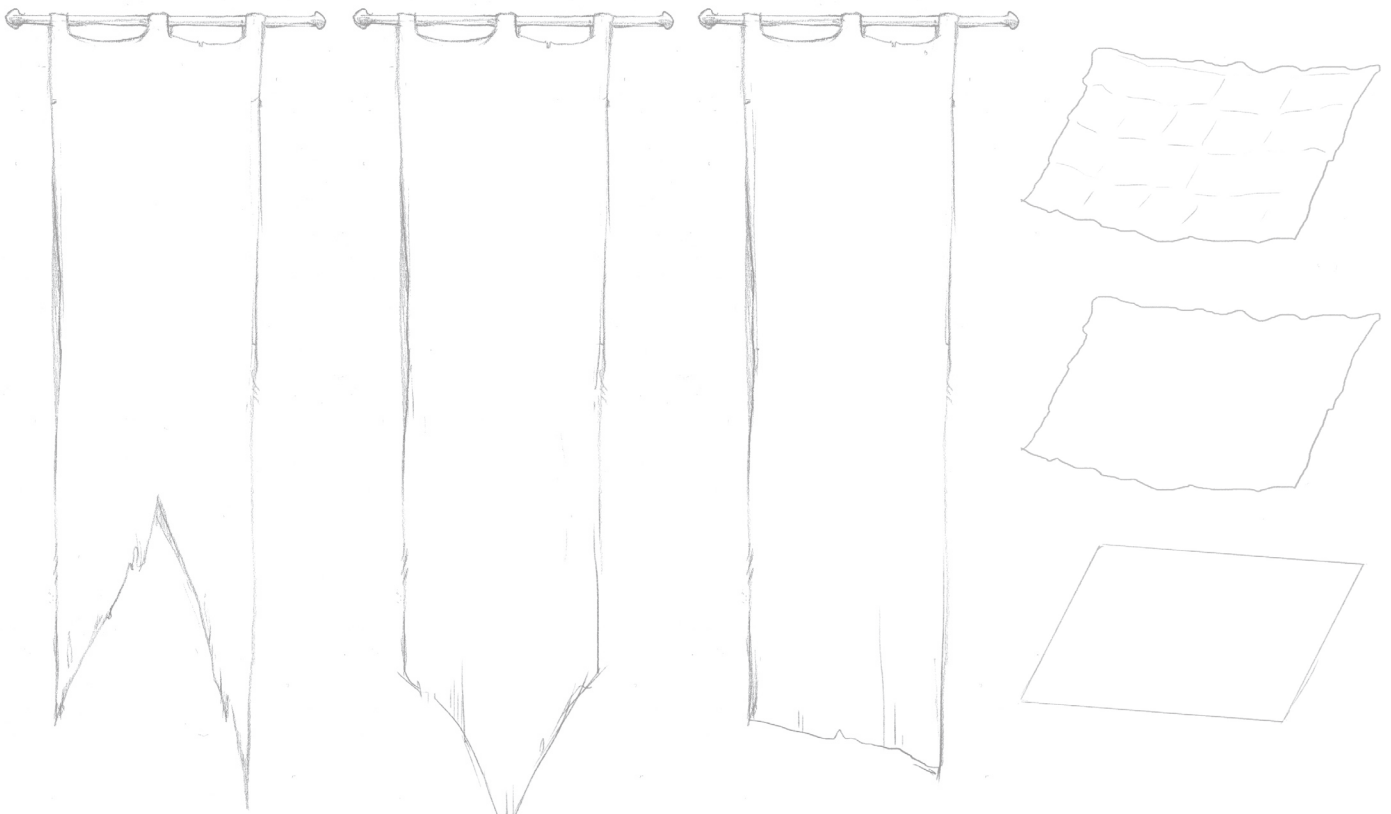
An unfriendly fortress town needs a wall of sharp stakes. Make them rough and jagged, and add some knots and bumps so they look like real tree trunks.
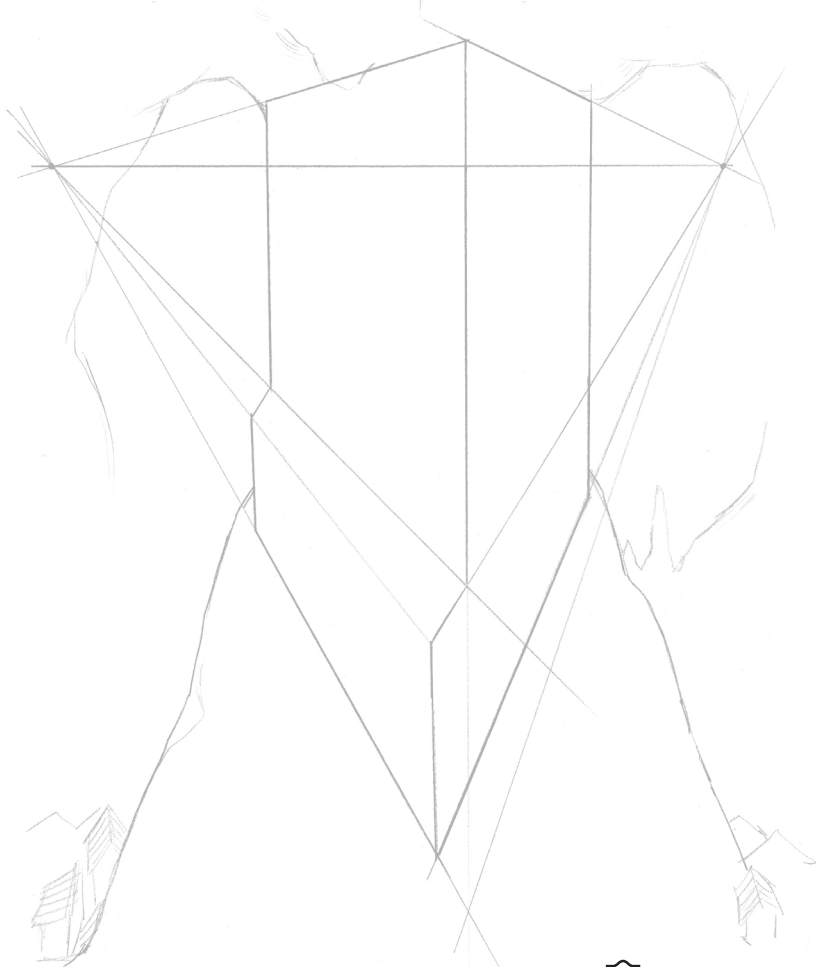
Practice some wall textures, tiles and shading on these templates. You can even add some emblems of your own on the banners.

A bit of wonkiness adds character to your buildings, so keep your guidelines faint: it makes it easier to go over them with linework and shading later. Try miniaturizing your details to make it work to this scale.

Now you've drawn all the parts you need, in the next exercise you can have a go at completing a whole scene, adding in your own textures and details…