

Figure drawing with Carl Chapple

In this workshop you you will have the opportunity to draw Ballet Cymru dancers Beth Meadway and Andrea Battaglia, though if you do not have access to the online videos you can use the same techniques to make drawings of your friends, family, or anyone else! This could be drawing from life - where the model(s) stay very still while you draw them - or you could work from video or photographs.



You can use whatever materials you like to draw your pictures – pencils, crayons, pastels, and so on – or, like me, you can use charcoal. For my drawings I used:

- **Charcoal sticks** – short pieces of burned willow. An ancient and extremely versatile drawing medium that's great for drawing quickly
- **Sugar paper** – affordable, and with more 'tooth' (rougher) than cartridge paper. Available in different colours

- **A straight stick for checking measurements and angles** – this could be a pencil, a paintbrush, a chopstick, or anything else that comes to hand
- **A rubber.** I use a putty rubber, which can be moulded into different shapes and is particularly useful when working with charcoal
- **Fixative/hairspray,** to ‘fix’ the drawing when it is finished, helping to protect it from accidental smudging

There are many different approaches to drawing figures that you can explore as you develop your own style. Here are some tips which may be useful:

- **Find a pose that you find interesting.** Does the pose reflect stillness or movement? What ideas or feelings might it convey? Does it suggest a story? (If working from life, make sure the pose is comfortable for your model!)
- **Before you begin, try to imagine how you would like your picture to look when it is finished.** Will you draw the whole scene, or only part of it? What size will things need to be so everything fits nicely on the page?
- **Unless you’re planning a very quick drawing, roughly sketch out the entire composition before working on any one area too precisely.** This can help you avoid problems later on, such as finding things you’ve already carefully drawn aren’t quite the right size or are in the wrong place
- **Think about proportions** – what size are individual elements of the figure compared to others? For example, from most angles, a leg will be larger on the page than a head, but how much larger? To find out, you can take a measurement of the head and count how many times it fits into the leg. Use a straight stick (such as a chopstick) to do this
- **Sometimes you might make a mistake, or change your mind about something in your drawing. This is fine. It’s part of the creative process.** If you’re working with charcoal you can simply use your thumb to smudge over something you need to change, and then draw over it. If your drawing starts getting too messy, you can clean things up with a rubber, but try not to worry too much about that until the end

- **Identify the lightest and darkest areas.** If it's tricky to figure out, try squinting at the figure, which simplifies the tonal range and can help you see the main areas of light and shade
- **Think about the space the figure is in.** Can you see the floor? Is the figure casting a shadow? Do you want to include things from the background in your drawing?
- **Don't be afraid to use 'artistic licence'.** If you think your drawing would be better if something were a bit different, change it! (I did this when drawing Beth's trousers in my sketches, making the stripes much thicker and bolder in the drawings than they are in real life)
- **Regularly step back from your picture as it develops,** so you see it from a little further away and can check that the different elements all 'work together'
- **Know when to stop!** Don't feel that you have to draw every detail, especially with very complicated things like hands or faces. Too much detail in some areas can distract you and the viewer from seeing the picture as a whole, so think about how some things might best be simplified, or left 'not quite finished'

And if you use charcoal, don't forget to fix your work when it is finished. Just give it a light, even spray of fixative/hairspray to keep it safe from smudging. (Make sure you do this outside or in a well ventilated room).

Drawing is all about experimentation, playing with ideas, and learning from experience. With practice you will get better and better!

If you make some pictures that you would like to share, we would love to see them!

Carl Chapple

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