LESSON 7 - FACIAL PROPORTIONS

Introduction

It is said that if you can draw or paint a likeness in a portrait, you can draw anything. Perhaps that is because through years of practice the portrait artist has managed to seamlessly integrate all of the concepts I cover in this series (e.g. understanding basic shapes and values, blocking in correctly, gauging relative proportions accurately). Portrait artists have refined their ability to really see and judge distances down to minute details. They understand how rendering correct values is absolutely critical to getting a likeness. The experienced artist's eye has been trained to pick up every detail in every part of the face, and every feature is examined and rendered according to its unique shape. Their right brain is firing on all cylinders when they are drawing or painting.

When you are drawing or painting a face, you will want to study the overall shape of the face before beginning your drawing, as well as each feature. The face is a wondrous thing, something to appreciate in its uniqueness. The artist who can somehow capture the essence and personality of the sitter in a portrait is a true master.

You may not be that experienced yet, but you can begin to draw faces by learning some general rules to help you understand the proportions of the human face. These guidelines will be the norm, but you will want to examine each face individually for the slight variations they will inevitably have which makes each person's face unique. Then you can tweak your drawing accordingly to represent those changes.

Note: For this lesson, it may be especially helpful to print out the Lesson Summary before watching the video and follow along with the hard copy.
Lesson Demonstration

I’ll use Fig. 7-1 to show you the basic guidelines you should be aware of:

- A vertical axis line goes down the center of the face (Fig. 7-2).

- The eyes are generally halfway between the top of the head and the chin (Fig. 7-3). Many people are surprised that the eyes are not higher, but most people are looking at the face, not the whole head. If the eyes were halfway between the top and bottom of the *face* without taking into account the hairline and scalp, the face would likely look less proportionate.

- The bottom of the nostrils is halfway between the start of the eyebrows and the chin (Fig. 7-4).
Additional guidelines are generally true:

- The bottom of the lower lip is halfway between the nose and the chin (Fig. 7-5).
- The top of the ears are in line with the start of the eyebrows (Fig. 7-6).
- The bottom of the ears line up with the bottom of the nostrils (Fig. 7-7).

- A typical face is five eye-widths wide: there is an eye width between the eyes, and from either side of the eyes to the sides of the head (Fig. 7-8).
- The corners of the mouth line up with the pupils of the eyes (Fig. 7-9).
- The inside corners of the eyes line up with the outside of the nostrils (Fig. 7-10).
Using these rules you should be able to position the facial features correctly. But always keep in mind: **these measurements and positions are idealized!** In reality they will differ slightly. **That is what makes up the uniqueness of a human face.** Even in my example (Fig. 7-11), some lines are just slightly off from what they “should” be, but as you can see, this face is very well-proportioned.
In this lesson, I am going to show you some sketches by Andrew Loomis as well as some photos I took of heads and faces at different angles so you can make note of how each feature’s shape changes as the angle changes. Women's faces generally have softer lines and shadows; men's faces have sharper angles with more protruding browbones and chins, and often stronger noses.

The diagram below looks daunting at first but the axis lines were applied the same way I applied them with Fig. 7-1. You will soon learn these measurements and apply them instinctively to your portrait work.

The guidelines of the frontal view are the same as previously stated and several remain visible in the profile view. For the profile view, notice the following:

- The ear sits just behind the center vertical axis line in the lower right-hand quadrant (Fig. 7-14). Most artists don’t set the ear back far enough.
- The pupil lines up with the corner of the mouth, same as in frontal view (Fig. 7-15).
Try this for yourself on Fig. 7-16: take a ruler or your sewing gauge and measure the following increments:

1. The eyes are roughly halfway between the top of the skull and chin.

2. The tops of the ears line up with the start of the eyebrows; the bottom of the ears line up with the nostrils. (Some people’s ears are shorter or longer than the norm and age sometimes causes earlobes to grow longer and the tip of nose to dip.)

3. The bottom of the lip is halfway between nostrils and chin.

4. The corners of the mouth line up fairly closely with the pupils.

5. The sides of the nostrils line up with the inner corner of the eyes.

6. Also examine closely the shapes of the ears, nose, mouth, forehead, and chin.
When the face is looking down as in Fig. 7-17, the brow line and ears are no longer on the same horizontal level. You’ll notice the brow line is no longer a straight horizontal line to the ears but rather it starts at the point between the brows and angles up to the ears like a loose V so that the ears appear higher than the brows. Even a slight upward or downward tilt of the head will change the placement of the ears.

The line of the mouth and nose remain parallel with the eyes and eyebrows no matter what direction the face tilts in. See Fig. 7-17a.
Observe the shape of the ears from a front view; they appear flattened whether the head is tilted up or down or is looking straight-on. The shape of the nose changes as the tip lowers and the opening of the nostrils is hidden. The line of the mouth may curve up slightly at the ends. You see more hair on the scalp.

Observe what parts of the face receive the highlights with the light source coming from high and to the left.

Also closely examine the shapes of the ears, nose, mouth, forehead, and chin on the photo on the left.
The face is looking up in Fig. 7-18. As in Fig. 7-17 with the face tilted downward, the brow line and ears are not on a horizontal line but now with the head tilted up in Fig. 7-18, the line starts to curve downward from the point between the eyes all the way to the ears, which now appear lower than the brows – almost at chin level.

**Again, the line of the mouth and nose remains parallel with line of the eyes and eyebrows no matter what direction the face tilts.** See Fig. 7-18a.
The tip of the nose at this angle is almost at eye level and note the downward slant of the mouth; the nostrils are prominently seen. There is just a rim of hair seen around the face and it extends a little below the ear.

Observe the shape of the neck as the skull is tilted back and see how the throat is shaded. You see the highlights on the left side of the chin and throat.

Examine carefully the shapes of the ears, nose, mouth, forehead, and chin on the photo on the left when the head is at this angle.
Fig. 7-19 and 7-20 are straight-on three-quarter views. The side of the skull is a rather flat plane so observe how the two axis lines on the top of the skull on the sketches are shaped as they cross the skull then drop straight down on the sides, (Fig. 7-20). Carefully examine in the left photographs how the shapes of the ears, nose, mouth, chin, and forehead have changed from the previous view.
Fig. 7-21 and 7-22 are down-tilted three-quarter views. Imagine how a pair of sunglasses is shaped – flat across the front then straight back over the ears; you can see in the sketch on the right of Fig. 7-22 that side of the skull is rather flat so the line goes from the eye socket straight back over the ear. The ear sits behind and below the side axis lines’ center point, position in the lower-right quadrant. With this new view, examine how the shapes of the facial features have altered from other views.
Three-quarter views when the face is looking up, as in Fig. 7-23 and 7-24, will show that the tip of the nose is almost at eye level and note the downward angle of the mouth. The nostrils are prominently seen. The shapes of the eyes and eyebrows curve downward at the sides. Yet again, examine carefully the shapes of the ears, nose, mouth, forehead, and chin on the photos on the left when the head is at this angle.

Fig. 7-25 are some more sketches to view. They are available below this lesson’s video, in a document entitled “Multiple Sketches to Trace” because I want you to trace each of these using tracing paper to get your hand and eye familiar with
noticing all the angles and axis lines I demonstrated in this lesson. The boxed image in Fig. 7-25 is a special sketch because it illustrates the different planes of the face which affect the shadows.
Lesson Practice

Now that you have carefully examined the shapes of the features and head at different angles, try your hand at sketching the head Fig. 7-26, using the document titled, “Lesson Practice Face” below this video’s lesson. Some people start with an egg shape but let's start with a square-ish rectangle. Then sketch the face by following the guide points below in this order:

- Very lightly, draw a vertical line through the center of your drawing space; this is where the nose will be placed. Then determine where the top of the head (not the top of the hair) is so that you can draw a horizontal line halfway between the top of the head and the bottom of the chin on which to place the eyes. Lightly sketch a basic oval for the head within the drawing space.
- Sketch lightly the eye shapes remembering that there is approximately one eye width between the eyes and one on either side of the eyes for a total of five eye widths across the head.
- Remember to line up the top of the ears with the start of the eyebrows, and the bottom of the ears with the bottom of the nostrils.
- Then place the bottom of the mouth halfway between the bottom of the nose and the chin.
- If you draw a line straight down from the pupils, that will mark the corners of the mouth, and the nostrils line up vertically with the inner corners of the eyes and the start of the eyebrows.
- Women's eyebrows are usually thinner and more arched. Men’s brows are thicker and less arched and their necks are not as slender as women’s. Fill in the hairline. Experiment with different hairlines to get an idea of how faces’ appearances change.

Remember: These proportions are general guidelines, not rules.
Andrew Loomis has drawn many variations of the face (Fig. 7-27 below). One standard won't work for everyone – it's a jumping-off point to start – but you can see how you may have to tweak your portraits too. Everyone's face is unique.
Squinting for Face Values

Another way to start a face after lightly sketching the outline of the shape is to squint while looking at the face. If there is strong lighting from one side, you will notice how the main areas of a face are shadow (e.g. eye sockets, under and side of the nose, the upper lip, chin, cheekbones). Although I hesitate in encouraging you to starting shading too early, sometimes you can lightly sketch those values in first. See Fig. 7-29 (left). If you keep squinting, then you can add more detail or erase in lighter areas to bring up the value. See Fig. 7-29 (right).

**Fig. 7 - 28**

**Drawing Secret:** Always try to take photos of people without the camera flash. No one goes around with a bright flash on their face – so don't draw a person who has been photographed with a flash; it’s unnatural. It flattens out the features and gives harsh shadows. Try to use natural light, if possible.
Conclusion

Many people are drawn to faces, and it’s not hard to understand why: faces are a reflection of their owners’ souls and an expression of their personalities. Usually portraits are the thing that inspires people’s desire to learn how to draw and paint. I’ve said many times you must have a solid drawing foundation before picking up a paintbrush, and this lesson is vital to that foundation. If you have any desire to paint figures and faces, this lesson and the next one on Body Proportions will prove instrumental in your development as an artist.

Practice Before Next Lesson

• Use the document entitled “Facial Guidelines Practice” and your ruler and sewing gauge to draw all the guidelines on the photograph as demonstrated in Fig. 7-16 through 7-24. You can use Fig. 7-30 to check yourself.

• Sketch the face in Fig. 7-31 using the “Lesson Practice Face” document.

• Purchase a pad of tracing paper and trace the faces in “Multiple Sketches to Trace,” shown in Fig. 7-32, available below the video. Tracing is a wonderful tool to refine your drawing skills and teach your eyes how to observe. You would obviously not want to pass off as an original work of art something you traced. This would just be for learning purposes. I recommend doing this any time you’re struggling with capturing a likeness from a photograph. Even down the line, long after this lesson, using tracing paper can remind you of some of the concepts presented here.