For today’s in-demand figure artists—comic creators, animators, video game artists, concept designers, etc.—being able to quickly draw the human figure in a variety of action-packed poses is a requirement. But they don’t always have models or photographic reference to use for figure drawing. In Freehand Figure Drawing for Illustrators, artist and instructor David H. Ross provides an alternative solution, showing readers how they can master freehand figure drawing without visual reference by using a modern twist on the classic technique of blocking out the human figure in mannequin form. Step-by-step lessons guide aspiring illustrators from basic poses (standing, running, jumping) to extreme motions (throwing punches, high kicking). For on-the-go artists, Freehand Figure Drawing for Illustrators allows them complete freedom to bring their figures to life at any time.

**Draw the Human Figure Anywhere, Anytime**

**DAVID H. ROSS** is an illustrator who has worked with all of the major North American comic book publishers including Marvel Comics, DC Comics, and Dark Horse Comics. He has produced storyboards for feature films, and prepared artwork and advised on special projects for television. He holds workshops on drawing for comic books (such as the Toronto Cartoonists Workshop) and, for the past five years, has acted as co-coordinator and instructor of a three-year Sequential Arts diploma program at Max the Mutt College of Animation, Art, and Design in Toronto, Canada.
INTRODUCING THE GLASS MANNEQUIN

In this chapter I will introduce you to a simplified model of the human figure. This mannequin figure will help you with all types of poses, from low-key to high action ones. It works by removing details so you can focus on placing the figures in perspective and on working out their posing. Using this method, you will learn to break down a figure to its simplified component parts, then to rebuild it into whatever pose you wish. The aim is to give you the versatility to draw whatever you imagine and to do it off the top of your head.
Outlining the Freehand Process

Typically an illustrator begins with a gestural line— a loose unstructured line used to capture the essence of the intended pose. She then builds a mannequin framework based on the gestural line, blocking in the basic structure of the body in a simplified form. The next step is to feature up the figure, by adding the detailing of costume and anatomy. The finishing stage, requires a darker, more controlled line and some general shading.

Look at this example of gestural lines. Considerations of anatomy or proportions are not particularly important at this stage.

With the mannequin framework, the figure still lacks anatomical detail. Faces remain featureless and the hands and feet are likewise unfinished.

In order to complete the drawing, add shading. The requirements of each project lead to different levels of finishing, but these are the basic steps for working up convincing figures from your imagination.

Add linear details here. Lock in the facial features. You should also refine the hands and feet.
Meet the Glass Mannequin

The construction of a basic mannequin figure is at the center of the freehand process. I call this figure the glass mannequin. It’s a simplified model of the human body that allows you to visualize a wide range of complex actions from varied angles. It maintains the body’s mass, overall shape, and three-dimensional volume, but lacks anatomical detail.

WHY A GLASS MANNEQUIN?

Typically the mannequin is drawn as either transparent or semi-transparent. This method makes it easier for you to draw an arm or leg that projects out from behind another part of the body. Being able to see that arm or leg, which may otherwise be hidden, will help you to position and scale that limb correctly.

EXPLODED VIEW

Mastering the drawing of individual parts in perspective from every conceivable angle is less daunting than trying to tackle the whole figure at once. Here is a look at the component parts of the mannequin figure: Practice the individual parts until you feel ready to move on to the next step.

For the head, start with a sphere with crosslines for eye placement.

Note the mannequin’s torso, which is sometimes described as wineglass shaped.

Draw simplified caps to represent knees, elbows, and the deltoids connecting the arms to the torso.

For the feet, use wedge blocks with rounded corners.

Compose limbs and fingers with blockier shapes.

Use blockier shapes to make up the hips and the palms of the hands.

Define the jaw with a simple block form.

Note the relative simplicity of its individual parts.

Here is a first look at the glass mannequin. While it is without features, it maintains realistic human proportions.
In this chapter, you will examine the figure in both walking and running poses. Both share many of the same attributes, but each also has its own distinctive features. One key feature of both is the opposing action of the arms and legs.

One opposing action occurs when one leg swings forward and the opposite arm comes forward at the same time. When one leg pushes back, it is the opposite arm that swings back with it. Inevitably this leads to a twisting action running through the torso and hips—subtle in a walking figure but more obvious in a runner.

Before you embark on a serious study of walking and running figures, you must understand another primary concept behind freehand figure drawing, one that is very pertinent to this chapter—the tipped line of balance.
A CLOSER LOOK AT THE EYE

The structure of an eye is essentially that of a ball within a socket. Skin flaps (eyelids) stretched across the top and bottom of the ball give the visible portion of the eye a more elliptical appearance. Graphically, both the eyes and the sockets that they fit into are composed of concave and convex curves. Simply put, a concave curve assumes the shape of a bowl while a convex curve is its opposite, a dome shape.

As the two lids come together at the outer edge of the eye, the upper lid overlaps the lower. The pupil—the black, highly reflective center—is surrounded by the iris, the colored part of the eye. This three-quarter view illustrates how the pupil appears imbedded in the iris.

Multiple light sources are suggested by placing dual highlights into the irises and pupils. This will add a reflective quality to your drawn eyes.

Placing the Eye Within the Socket

The socket is a hollow form bordered by the brow above, the bridge of the nose on the inside, the upper edge of the cheekbone below, and the temple along the outer edge. Within this socket, the bowl-shaped form of the eye is centrally positioned as illustrated below.

This eye-level POV clearly demonstrates that the eye is centrally located within its socket.

DIREX, I chose a three-quarter view to illustrate a point regarding the effect of perspective on circular forms, such as eyes. In this example, the far eye appears a little narrower than the near one and the iris appears smaller. This approach helps create the impression of a surface curving gently away in perspective. The far eye becomes more elliptical and less circular in shape.

Detailing the Eyes

Let’s look at one approach to rendering detail around the eyes. To add the shadow cast by the upper eyelids, darken the irises and the whites of the eyes but also add highlights to give the eye a reflective quality. In the inner corner of the near eye, draw in the tear duct—a detail that adds naturalism to your overall image.
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