

Learn How to Draw Step-by-Step MULTIMEDIA Course

By Paul Wagner, Art Training International

Lesson 8

Lines, Angles, and Streams

The Basic Building Blocks of a Composition

Art is not cold. And is not calculated. And it is not *necessarily* precise.

But good art DOES catch your attention.

Art is any of inspiring, motivational, encouraging, warm, exciting, expression-full, dramatic, thought-provoking, and/or moving.

It is for all of these reasons why controlling the elements of your drawing is so vital. Because it is the vitality you put into your drawings that will people to weep, to laugh, to think and to feel the hundreds of ways that people feel. And you, as an artist are in a unique position of helping them feel that way with your drawing.

If you know how to draw with precision, you WILL be able to control the emotions of the viewer.

Here's why: When many people look up into the sky and see clouds, they are seeing whether it is going to rain.

You, the artist, look up and see special lines, colors, patterns, form, and such things as faces, animals, objects, sensual colors, wind direction the direction of birds and you might even feel the work of God. (Review Sensing, Lesson 3 for all of this).

It is this innate AND practiced skill that enables you to see things that others may miss, yet allows you the ability to help them appreciate these things through your drawings.

Lines

As you work with different lines, you'll come to understand that beyond just the normal drawing lines there are 3 specialty types of lines: **Directional lines**, **Non-stop lines**, and **Fluid lines**. Understanding how to apply these to your drawings will help you build a better and more balanced drawing.

Directional Lines.

Simply, a **Directional Line** is that 1-dimensional, imaginary form that denotes direction. Any direction. These lines don't actually appear **on the drawing**, but they are a powerful way of seeing, and creating movement, resolve and/or importance.

In this first simple example, the direction of a spoon on the table below has 2 imaginary lines (in red) to help you see direction of the 2 parts of the spoon, the ladle and the dipper, and the orientation of the bend between them.



To see these lines without actually drawing them significantly orients your perspective and therefore draw the spoon with better perspective. (Without directional line the spoon may appear twisted).

Here's another use of directional line. Consider the direction that this man is pointing in this drawing.



Simple right? Yet, there is **another line of direction**, or flow, which could easily be missed, and is **actually more important**. It is the man slightly leaning forward into the direction of the pointing finger and shows his determination over a more relaxed vertically-standing person. The second red line shows this "flow".



See how subtle that effect is. Yet, you know instantly the man is being more forceful than he is relaxed by the forward leaning motion alone. As soon as you "see" that forward line before beginning your drawing, you'll be able to draw his body much more easily as you'll get the desired effect. (When you are just beginning to draw it DOES make sense to draw that imaginary line).

Here's another usage of **Directional Line**.

In this painting by Homer Winslow (Fresh Air, 1878) notice the wind coming from the left. How do you know? It flutters the ribbons in her hair and blows back the tassels in her sleeves, dress, and even the foreground leaves.



The clouds help the viewer easily see that this is no doubt, a blustery day. All by applying a single Directional Line.

And by **Directional Line**, I don't necessarily mean a straight line.

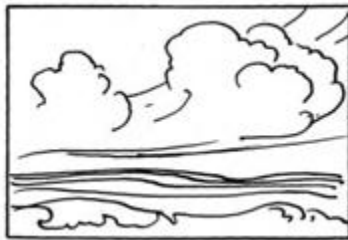
A directional line can be a dramatic sweeping curve, a small curl, or a vast view into a great expanse, whether it's straight or not.

Consider the drawing below demonstrating rather flat directional lines. The directional lines below may represent clouds, rays of light, a horizon, waves, a shoreline, and sand.



This may be used when you want a sense of calm and peace.

But now consider something bolder.



In this second view, you can definitely feel a heightened sense of energy. It may not be calm, but it certainly can move the viewer to vastness far better than the first one.

Here's the point of this concept. Start thinking and feeling in terms of **Directional Lines** that express your energy, mood or desire and those lines will help build for you an **emotional navigational blueprint** for the picture that is in your mind.

For the more scientific types, note that directional lines can also accurately be interpreted as **Euclidean Vectors**. A vector is the mathematical breakdown of forces. Here's what [Wikipedia has to say](#) about them.

Non-stop Lines.

Let's go back to the apple and the cup. Recall that the cup was behind the apple. One of the techniques that will help you is that it's OK to physically draw the back line of the side of the cup right through the apple. The reason is simple—you want the edge of the cup to be aligned and not misshapen. You can always come back and erase the line where it disappears behind the apple.

The same is true anytime you are lightly sketching and you want consistency of shape—circles, ovals, ellipses, and so on.

Non-stop lines, then, are mostly a technique for making your drawing smooth, uniform, and easier to get right. They are real, not imaginary like directional lines, but they are useful and can be erased as you work.

Now, non-stop lines also play in when you are doing your fast or rapid-sketching. Here you are moving your pencil around and you would be unconcerned that "good" lines are mixed in with "bad" lines.

Taken to the extreme these almost become more like squiggles:



Bert Dodson

Fluid Lines.

When you are past the One Big Shape and Secondary shapes begin to lay down your final detail with your pencil, consider using smaller strokes. They will add interest to your drawing lines. This is demonstrated in the video.

NOTE: Fluid lines are a more advanced technique that you may want to hold off on until your sketches are big enough and your hand confident enough to use them. But it is worth mentioning.

And in a more exacting way, when you start drawing people, you will soon realize that beyond the (fairly straightforward) eyes, nose, lips, and hair, there are small fluid lines that can define young or old, wisdom or foolishness, determination or apathy, courage or cowardliness. We know these as people who know our own kind, and yes, it is possible for you to put those expressions into your drawings.

All Lines come from just having full control of your drawing line. This is why understanding the concepts are so important. And of course, practicing your concepts is equally important.

Angles

You have already seen how angles are used to check proportions and size of objects you are drawing. Here's an example where lines are used to map the angles of the body and relate points. How many triangles do you see? (Your answer should be "infinite").



But **angles also have another purpose**. They can be used to show direction, mass and even geometric balance.

Here's an example from G.F. Watts. Notice the curl of the figure on the right which helps heighten the entire "submissive" effect against the rigid dominant angles of the figure on the left.



Consider, too, in many of the drawings that come down through the ages, the curvature of lines often are used as a "softening" technique. Think about the drawing of a bridge vs. the drawing of a baby and I think you'll see how that logic works.

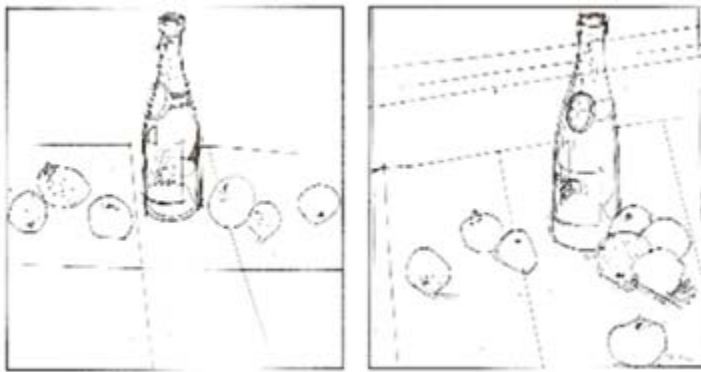
Streams

Have you ever driven on a very straight long road? You certainly know how tiresome and boring it can be. The monotonous "Are we there yet?" is what you'll hear from your kids.

Conversely, if you've ever gone on a drive up to the mountains I'm sure you've at least travelled a road by a river. Do you remember the sense of excitement you got rounding each bend, thrilled by each new view of the rocks, the splash of the water, the dips, waves, calm eddies and raging torrents. Even the trees you were playing hide-and-seek with created a tumbling sense of variations, each second a snapshot of lines (remember the last lesson about taking the snapshot of 2-dimensional space?)

Your lines in your drawing can become that same stream for the viewer.

Let's take a simple example.



Notice that the drawing on the left sort of has that "long road" effect, whereas the drawing on the right where the fruit appears more dynamically placed into the clusters has a much more interesting effect—the stream "meanders" and intrigues the viewer much more.

Now take one of your drawings from Lesson 6 on Midpoints, and look at it again. You'll likely notice that from a compositional standpoint it may not be that interesting. Don't worry, the purpose of the exercise was to see proportions and we simply were not focused on such things as compositions. That comes later.

But do notice HOW you placed your objects (just remember that I intentionally placed mine nearly evenly spaced to keep it simple).

As you continue your drawings through the remainder of this course I'd like you to add in the additional thinking about how your drawings will take on the special effects that ultimately make them uniquely "YOU".

Now, [go watch the video](#) and let's have some more fun.

Paul