

[This is an edited version of a class that I first developed and taught on the Internet in 2006.]

## INTRODUCTION

*"You can't do sketches enough. Sketch everything and keep your curiosity fresh."*

John Singer Sargent

*"It is only by drawing often, drawing everything, drawing incessantly, that one fine day you discover to your surprise that you have rendered something in its true character."*

Camille Pissarro

*"It's amazing how loose some people become in their sketchbook drawing simply because they have a carefree approach and don't become locked down in trying to make finished works"*

Robert Wade

**This is an intermediate level class aimed at developing your existing drawing knowledge and skills with a view to sketching – outside, in public without any photographs or visual aids. Well maybe the odd one or two – but there are definitely no reference photographs in this class!**

**At the end of this class you will understand better how to apply your existing knowledge to help you to:**

- **Draw more quickly so you can sketch within time constraints**
- **Sketch outside**
- **Sketch in public**

This class will not teach you to draw. The class instruction assumes that people have existing drawing skills acquired through study elsewhere.

There is a lot to read – please take your time.

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## SO WHY SHOULD I DO THIS CLASS?

Drawing from life, sketching outside and sketching in public – maybe you’ve never done at least one of those things before? Why not? Here are some of the explanations offered by some people:

- You don’t ‘sketch’ or at least you don’t think you do; you’re maybe not even very sure what sketching is (see ‘*What is a Sketch*’).
- Maybe you don’t draw very quickly. You just KNOW you’d never be able to get finished in time – whatever that is.
- Maybe you’re a bit afraid. They have people in public places!
  - They’d ask you to do their portraits.
  - They might creep up behind you / look over your shoulder and give you a fright!
  - Or maybe the dreaded “critique critters” will be out in force saying really rude things about your drawing (because you’re drawing what’s in front of you and don’t have a reference photograph).
  - Or maybe you had a ‘not so happy’ experience – once, a long time ago – and you’re scared of starting again
- All in all - it’s just too nerve-wracking! You lack confidence - and that’s why you’ve never had a go.

If this is you, let’s look at the experience of others – which might help to make you think again.

- [A poll in 2006](#) of nearly 600 artists and would-be artists suggests that only 2% of people have actually had a bad experience which stopped them sketching in public – and a further 60% already sketch in public.
- A similar [poll “Do You Ever Sketch in Public?”](#) (of members of Wet Canvas) indicates that the majority also sketch in public.

**This class can only be a jumping off point. People who become good at sketching do it on a regular basis. However, this class will help you to address many typical concerns and you will start to learn how to:**

- **sketch objects or scenes within a time constraint**
- **sketch outside, from life (without photographs) and in public.**

Imagine there is a way to draw every day. You know you should be doing this as you know how much it is reputed to improve your drawing skills. But there’s a problem - you know you just don’t have the time, not with all your other commitments.

Imagine now that you can learn to draw more quickly so that even 5 minutes or 10 minutes out of the day can be used to sketch something new – imagine how much you might gain from this.

Imagine you’re on a holiday. You’d like to be able to sketch what you see. People tell you that if you do you will always have a much better memory of the scene, a much better record of the true colours and values than any photo can provide and that any painting you do will be improved by having done a preliminary study from life.

But there’s a problem. You know you’re quite accomplished at drawing – because everybody back in your drawing community/forum is very complimentary about your drawings. However, you know how long they take – and you only know how to draw from photographs.

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So – do you want to tackle these problems? Are you ready to have a go at sketching?

- Assignment 1 will help you with capturing things quickly.
- If you want to sketch in public then assignments 2 and 3 will help you to do this.

And what's more, before you know it, you'll be having such a good time you'll wonder why you never did this before; you'll have started your daily sketching blog, be making lots of new friends and going on sketchcrawls!

## WHAT IS A 'SKETCH'?

A sketch, in art terms, can be:

- a way of practising and refining your skills in drawing and mark marking
- an exploratory drawing – exploring how something works/might work
- a quick drawing – e.g. sketching in public tends to be time-limited rather than open-ended
- a rough description – it's OK if they lack detail; don't fill the page or are not even completed
- a record of something you've seen
- a record of one or more aspects of something you want to develop into a painting e.g. a colour study
- a preliminary study – for a later painting (done before you start to check how your painting will work rather than as an underdrawing on your final support)

A sketch may be an imaginative or a creative interpretation of reference material – but it does not involve meticulous copying of a reference photo.

Very often a sketch is a study of a subject that the artist can see – and consequently involves working and drawing from life. This is the sort of sketch we will focus on in this lesson.

## WHY SKETCH?

**Sketching broadens and enhances your basic skill base.**

As you practice and progress, sketching will also help you to:

- Develop your freehand drawing, mark making and observational skills
- Draw something everyday – an exercise which will bring fluency and confidence to your drawing
- Get a better record of the colours and tones you see
- Practice how to crop a scene and compose a picture
- Develop finished artwork without relying totally on a reference photo

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## PEOPLE WHO SKETCH GAIN VALUE FROM THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:

- **Practicing freehand drawing skills** – tracing reference images and using grids can mean that some artists lose their fluency in freehand drawing skills or fail to develop them at all. Sketching improves freehand drawing. With practice comes fluency and the ability to draw more quickly and make more creative and interesting marks.
- **Drawing with minimal aids** – when the only drawings aids you have are your pencils and maybe a viewfinder, you soon learn to develop your observational skills. Looking more carefully means you get better at measuring judging by eye alone. You also understand much better ‘how’ a view works – you understand the [architectural perspective](#), the [aerial perspective](#) and grasp the recession which often gets flattened in a photograph.
- **Improving their ability to see values and colours** – unless you are an expert photographer, once you start to sketch and compare your sketch with photos you took at the same time, you will learn very quickly just how poor photographs are at capturing the true range of tonal values that you have seen. In addition, because you learn to look more carefully at colours, you will also begin to understand how most photographs can distort both contrast and colour, particularly on very bright days. Take photographs to record details and check drawing and sketch to get values and colours correct.
- **Developing their ability to see ‘pictures’** - Once you start to sketch and practice looking at your environment more, you will start to “see pictures” everywhere you go. For many people this marks the point when they know they are beginning to think like an artist. You’ll find you will start using your very own fingers and thumbs to construct a viewfinder to check out potential images to sketch. (Do try to avoid driving the car at the same time!) You will soon find yourself wanting to learn more about about the design and composition of your drawings and paintings. You will want to practice sketching to develop your skills in making choices in this area.

## ASSIGNMENTS – THE BASIC APPROACH

## THE BASIC APPROACH – PRINCIPLES RE COMMENTS, CRITICISM AND ASSISTANCE

- **Self-assessment is the name of the game.** Out of the classroom and in the field, you’re on your own – so you need to develop skills in self-assessment. So with every assignment, post your work and then say what you think you did well, what you learned and what you think you can improve.
- **Nobody should identify and comment on weaknesses in anybody’s sketch unless they have a very good understanding, through experience, of the differences between drawing from a reference photo and sketching from life.** Sketching from life is a very, very different experience from drawing from reference photos. What you can achieve in your own personal ‘comfort zone’ and what you might produce ‘in the field’ are always going to be two very different results – for every artist, not just those learning how to sketch. So they shouldn’t be compared. People also tend to feel much more sensitive about their sketches as they won’t have the degree of finish they know they can achieve when working in other ways. It’s important to be positive about what has been achieved.
- **In an online context, I won’t ever criticise your sketches** as (1) I can’t compare it to a photo; and (2) no photo can possibly portray exactly what you will have been able to see in front of you.

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- **See if you can work out what you need help with if you identify a weakness** – and how this might be addressed. Very often, drawing more of the same enables progress to be made. I will also try to help with some constructive suggestions and respond to any queries you have and any difficulties you encounter. However I won't know all the answers – but we can try and work it out together.

### THREE ASSIGNMENTS

There are three assignments

- **Assignment 1: So You Want to Sketch.....**
- **Assignment 2: The First Field Trip - sketching the familiar from life and outside**
- **Assignment 3: Getting Out of Your Comfort Zone – Sketching in Public**

The reference threads (or “field trips”) for each assignment are posted after the details of all three assignments.

### LEARNING - THE MOST IMPORTANT RESULTS

The results of this class will include:

- **You will learn how to make time for your sketching**
- **You will feel comfortable about sketching and how to sketch in a way which suits you**
- **You will learn about what your personal signature style might look like when sketching; and**
- **If you also get to sketch in public and thoroughly enjoy it, that's a bonus.**

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