

Exercise 1 – Holding the Pencil

Skill Level: Very New to Drawing

What: Holding the drawing tools

How:

Here are several different grips to try:

Writing Position - You know this grip well. It is good for doing detail work. This locks the wrist and prevents looseness in the line work. Small shapes and technical drawings are best achieved with this grip.



The Cradle – Drop the pencil into the palm of the hand from the back end, close the fingers around the pencil and draw with it at length. This will loosen up the lines, give a more organic feeling, lighter touch to the lines, and vary the range of values leaning towards the lighter end of the value range.





The Baton – Hold the pencil on its side pinching the thumb and index finger together and cradling the pencil with the other fingers. This approach offers the most freedom of mark width taking advantage of the side or belly of the exposed material. It can cover a surface in moments if it is leaned completely on the side including the shaved wood. When using the point this way it has a certain softness to it that holding it like when writing does not offer.



The Chopstick – This is another loose handling approach. Drop the pencil into the webbing between the thumb and index finger. Rest the side of the pencil against the middle finger and use the index finger to hold it in place but DO NOT squeeze on the finger tips. Press down with the thumb and keep the length around the upper knuckle of the finger. This will give a loose feeling to an otherwise familiar way we already know to hold the pencil.



The Almost Writing 1 – Hold the pencil between the middle and index finger. Press on the other side of the pencil with the thumb, and rest the other two fingers against the pencil. No matter how hard you squeeze, you can't get the same stiffness in the pencil strokes like when holding the pencil to write. It relaxes the hand more, and keeps the index finger and thumb from going numb over time.



The Almost Writing 2 - Hold the pencil between the middle and ring finger. Press on the other side of the pencil with the thumb, and rest the other two fingers against the pencil. No matter how hard you squeeze, there is even less stiffness holding the pencil between these two fingers. It also relaxes the hand more and keeps the thumb and index finger from going numb.



Why:

Mark making is how we create images and there is a wide variety of them that can be better crafted if the tools are held to benefit the mark. The flexibility in the type of lines and marks that can be made will only benefit an artist if they know that the tools we use are dynamic, flexible, and have no real formal way of being used unless formality is a part of the process.

Practicing holding different grips on the pencil also instructs on how to hold a paintbrush. Many of these mark making approaches are considered painterly, or expressive, attributed to painting.

It takes some time to get use to this practice, sort it out from how we write words, and hold the tools in an uncomfortable position until it becomes second nature.