

Life Drawing Notes

What do you learn in a life drawing class?

Life drawing classes are the artistic equivalent of going to the gym. You are not here to produce a masterpiece but rather to exercise your hand-eye co-ordination and improve your ability to create a convincing likeness quickly.

And much like going to the gym, you shouldn't expect to get toned and lose a stone overnight. The real benefits will only come over time, with regular attendance and focus.

The Life Drawing Room is a Quiet Space so no Ear Buds or Headphones

The life drawing room is a special place, all about drawing. A quiet space (unless your tutor plays music as part of the session). You need to concentrate fully on the model and your own work without external distractions.

What should I take to a life drawing class?

As the **hand in** for your **Visual Studies Life Drawing** modules are digital you will need to bring a camera (mobile phone camera is fine) and photograph your work as you go along – don't leave this until the end. When you photograph we want to see the whole of the paper so we can see where you have placed the figure so don't crop your images within the paper edges.

If you are new to life drawing or returning after a break, choose a medium that you feel comfortable with. Charcoal is popular, as are graphite pencils or pastels.

Don't scrimp on materials – cheap products are a false economy. If you buy good quality pencils or charcoal, you are likely to be happier and more encouraged by the results.

Life drawing classes can be a little daunting when you have never done them before, so we have put together some tips to help you,

Look at the Figure Closely and Measure

Start by just looking at the figure and taking everything in. Make mental notes of little details you must remember when drawing too. Next choose a dominant element of the body such as the head and measure it by holding out your pencil or charcoal stick and placing your thumb at the end of it. To achieve accurate measurements follow these tips:

- Hold your charcoal, pencil or straight edge at arm's length to ensure consistency
- Use a consistent measuring system throughout the drawing
- Compare your measurements regularly to ensure accuracy
- Take your time and be patient - accuracy is more important than speed

This will be demonstrated to you during the classes and can also be explained again at any point in the module, just ask the tutor.

Plan Your Composition

You want to plan your composition before you draw anything. Measure regularly (as outlined above) to understand the proportions and general shapes of the figure.

Sketch the Entire Figure Quickly, and Lightly, First

Before you start looking at any detail and finer touches, you want to ensure that you have quickly sketched out the entire figure before going further. This will help you with the proportions, and you will

get everything accurate a lot easier by doing it this way. Get this correct before you start adding detail and you will have a much more accurate drawing.

Think About Line Economy

To keep things as effective as possible it is important to think about the concept of line economy:

"The concept of the economy of line is a familiar one to anyone who has studied figure drawing. Basically, it means that we should strive to draw efficiently by using fewer lines to say what we need to say, rather than a lot of unnecessary lines that lack a sense of intent." – [Realism Today](#)

Erase as Little as Possible

Sometimes erasing things can do more harm than good (unless you are purposely using the eraser to add highlights). Erasers can damage the paper and sometimes highlight the line you were trying to remove. Instead, go over the line with smaller, thinner lines to remove the distraction from the error. And erasing things can take time, which means less time drawing.

Add Shadows and Highlights (unless the session is just for line work)

Shadows and highlights are an addition that shouldn't be missed as it gives the figure as much of a life like feel as possible. There are so many ways you can add shadows and highlights, but the simplest way to do so is with some charcoal or using the side of your pencil for shadows, and then using an eraser rubber for highlights. However there are some sessions where you will be told to work only with line (no shading).

Draw the Entire Pose

With this experience, you want to get as much as possible from it, so you shouldn't avoid any difficult bits of the model and their pose (unless you are instructed otherwise). Always make sure you draw their head, face, hands, and feet, as there is no way you will improve unless you draw everything. After all, you will only get better as you go on.

Don't Have a Floating Figure

If you go straight into drawing your figure, you might need to remember this vital part of the finished piece. You don't want it to look like your figure is floating around on the page, so make sure you ground them even with just a simple line to create the floor. Anything is better than nothing to give some dimension to the drawing.

Look at the Model more than Your Paper

The model is there for a reason; there is no point in having a model there if you don't learn from them. Make sure you take the time to familiarise yourself with the features, weights, proportions, pose and shadows that all come with the model and the pose. That way, you are getting the most you can out of the experience.

Handing in your Work for Assessment

The hand in is digital (hence why you need to photograph your work as you go along). You will submit all of your work for the semester in one PDF on the course One Drive. All we want to see is your life drawing and sketchbook work so keep writing to an absolute minimum. Also, no fancy borders or decoration, just let the drawings speak for themselves.