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Drawing: Working shadows and light

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Going from shadow to light is easy! Learn to liven up your drawings with just a few pencil strokes.

What you need to know

The shadows and light in a drawing are called values. Shaded areas absorb light and lighted areas diffuse it. Making use of shading contrasts allows you to represent the volumes.

Supplies: white paper, 2B graphite pencil or charcoal, a quite simple object (an apple or a pear) lit by a desk lamp.
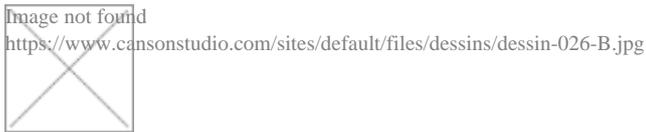
1. Define the values areas

- Start by drawing the object's contours.
- Locate the various values areas:

  - directly lit areas will appear white

- shaded areas are black or dark gray

- between the two, you can distinguish a gradation of intermediate shades.

- Use light strokes to draw the contours of these various areas.

That little extra: if you are having trouble distinguishing contrasts, look at the object by blinking your eyes. The values areas will show more clearly.

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2. Defining values areas

If your model is predominantly dark, start by filling in the darkest areas and finish with the lightest ones. Otherwise, do the opposite.

Apply the various values using a tight squiggle technique: hold your pencil in the middle of the shaft and use sweeping back and forth movements

- Press down hard on your pencil for the darkest areas.
- Apply the pencil lightly to the lightest sections.
- Create a gradation for the intermediate areas by varying the pressure.
- Shade off the contours in the various areas using your finger or a stump.

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How should you hold a pencil? How far from the sheet of paper should you be? These are the ABCs of drawing. With a little practice, you can master the right way to hold your pencil.

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