

# HOW TO DRAW A FACE

By Samantha Bell



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To draw a face (or portrait), you will need:

- [Pencils](#) (2B is a good one to start with)
- Pink Pearl or Art Gum [Eraser](#)
- [Kneaded Eraser](#)
- [Drawing Paper](#)
- Copies of Reference Picture

When you begin drawing faces, it's important to have a photo reference or other picture to draw from. This helps you see shapes and lines how they really are, not just how you remember them. For this practice lesson, you can use the photo of the girl below:



Photo by [BBoomerinDenial](#)

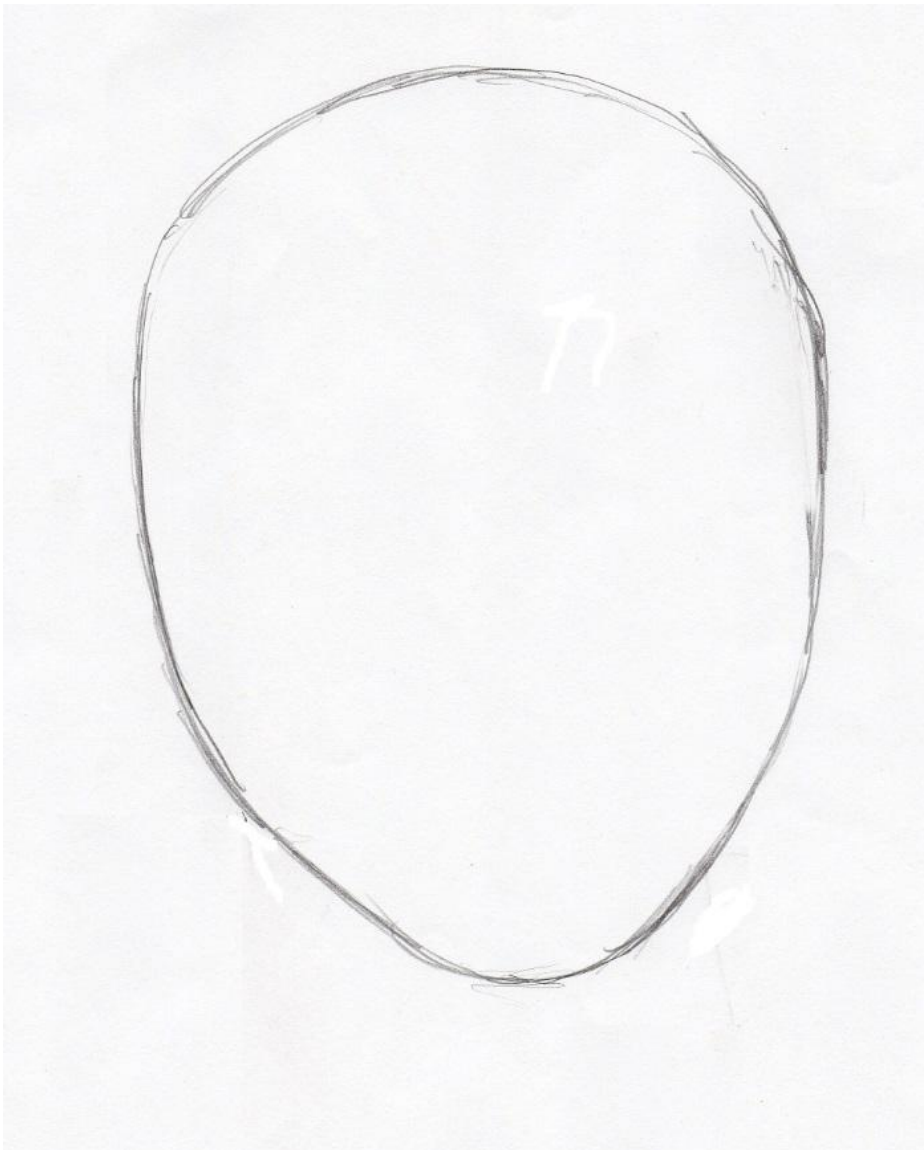
When drawing in graphite, it's easier to see the shadows when the reference picture uses a grey scale instead of color. Here's the photo again in black and white:



## 1. The Shape of the Head

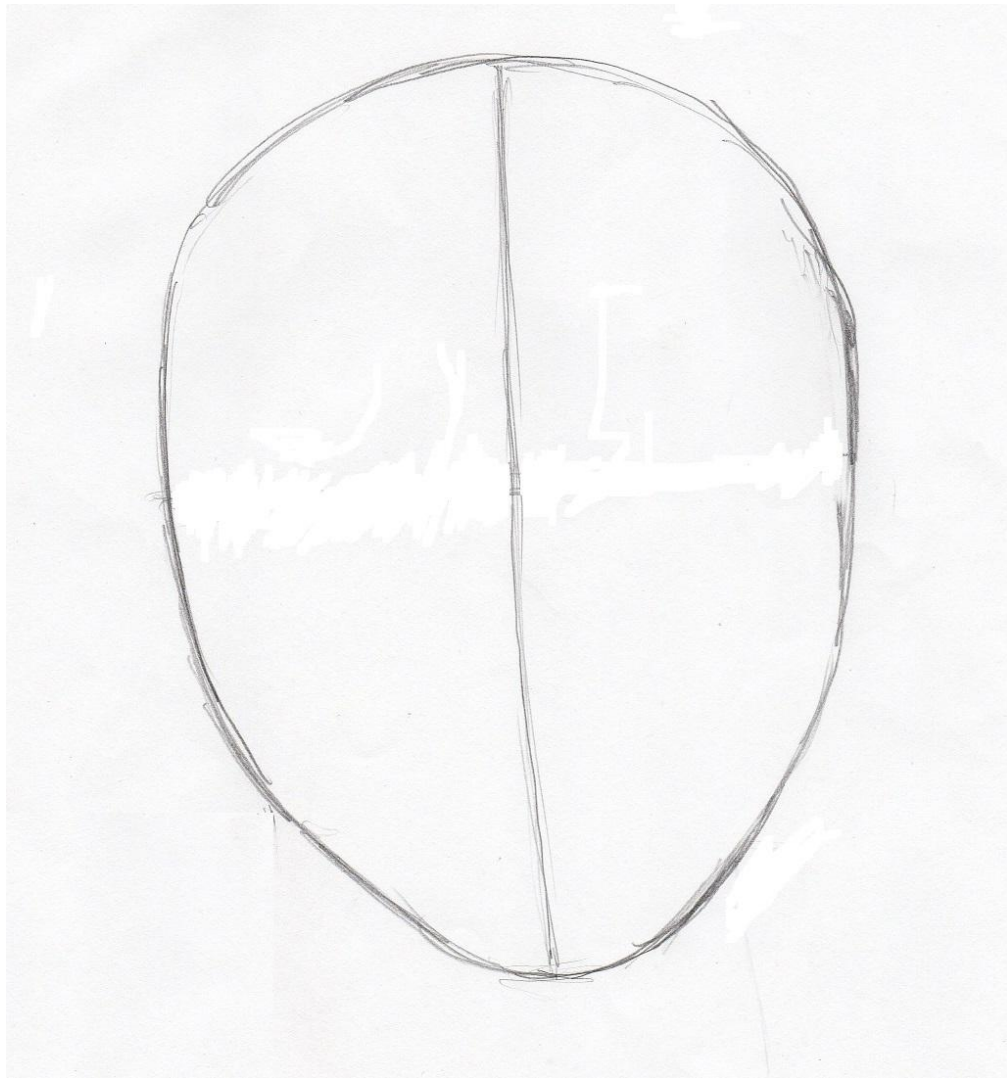
Before you begin, decide what shapes you see when you draw a face. Look at someone else in the room, or look at your own face in a mirror. What shape is your head? People's heads actually come in a variety of shapes, from a long, thin oval to a round circle to an egg shape.

Look at the picture of the girl. What is the shape of her face? Draw this shape on your paper, making sure it fits well on the page. (In my sketch, I didn't include her hair.) Sketch it lightly -- you might have to make some changes before you're finished. The lighter you draw, the easier it is to erase.



## 2. Setting the Features

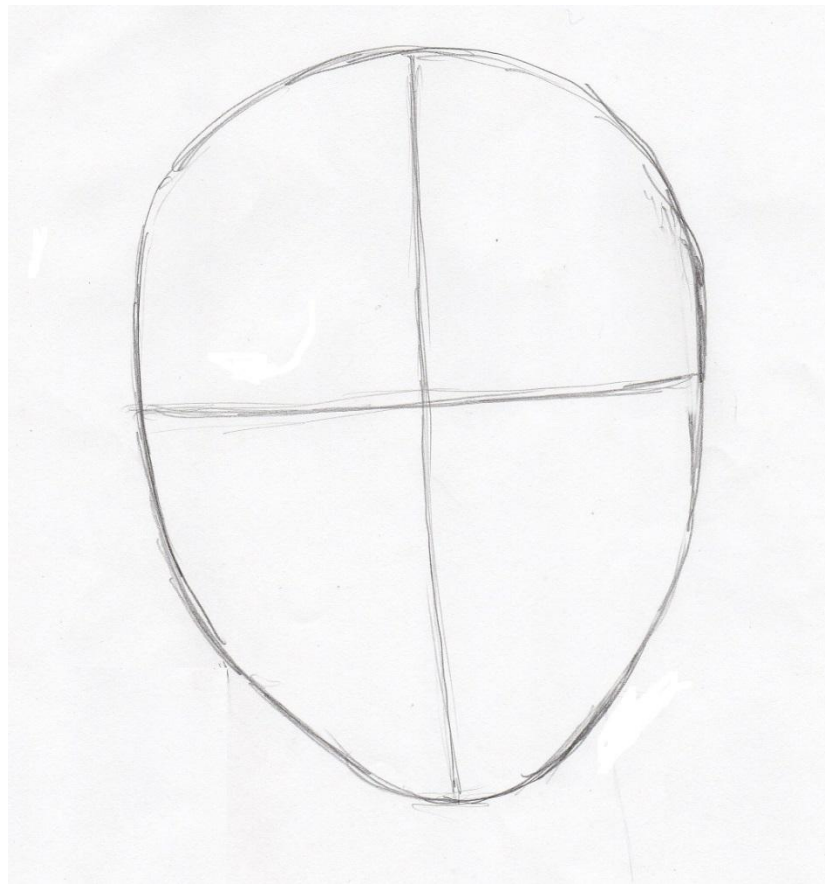
Now that you have the shape of the face on the paper, let's see how the features -- the eyes, nose, and mouth -- line up. To do this, place a finger in the center of your forehead. Move your finger straight down from the center of the forehead to the center of the chin. Notice that it goes right between the eyes, down the center of your nose, and divides the mouth equally. Now draw this line LIGHTLY on the face on your paper -- this will be one of our "guidelines," and we'll erase it later.



Next, place your finger at the top of one of your ears where it connects to the side of your head. Move it slowly across your face from the top of the first ear to the top of your other ear. Notice this line runs through the middle of one eye, across the bridge of the nose, then through the middle of the next eye.

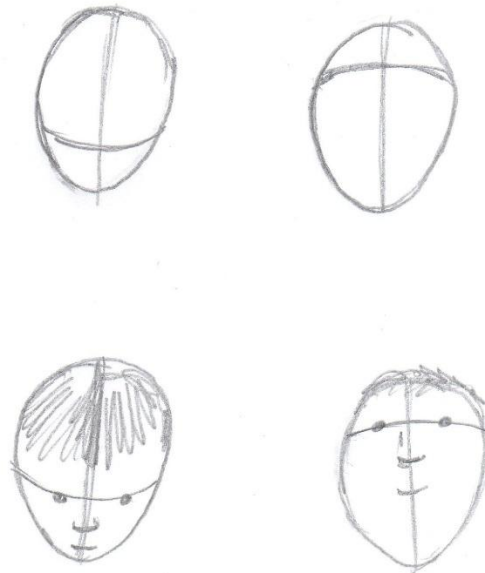
This line isn't always in the center of the head. The eyes, nose, and mouth of a baby or young child are close together, so the line will be lower. The older someone is, the farther apart the features are, and the line will be more in the middle. You can find a great tutorial on that [here](#).

In this photo, the girl is a little older, so draw your horizontal line across the middle of the head. Remember to draw this line lightly -- you'll be erasing this one too.

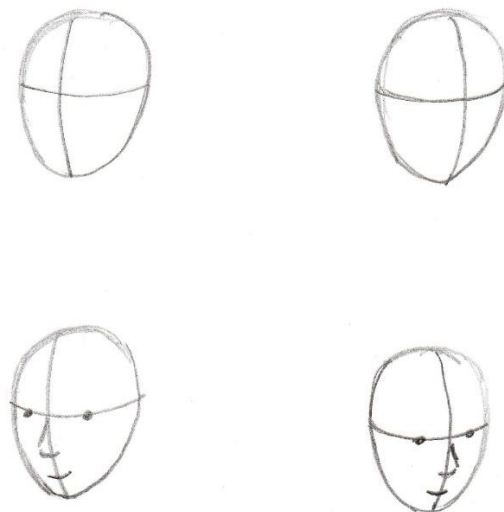


Great! Now that you have the basic shape of the head and the guidelines, you know where the facial features will go (on these two lines).

This technique will also work when you draw a face that is turned to the right or left, up or down. If the subject is not looking straight-on, you will simply need to move the lines. For example, if the subject is looking up, we move the horizontal line up; if the subject is looking down, we move the horizontal line down.



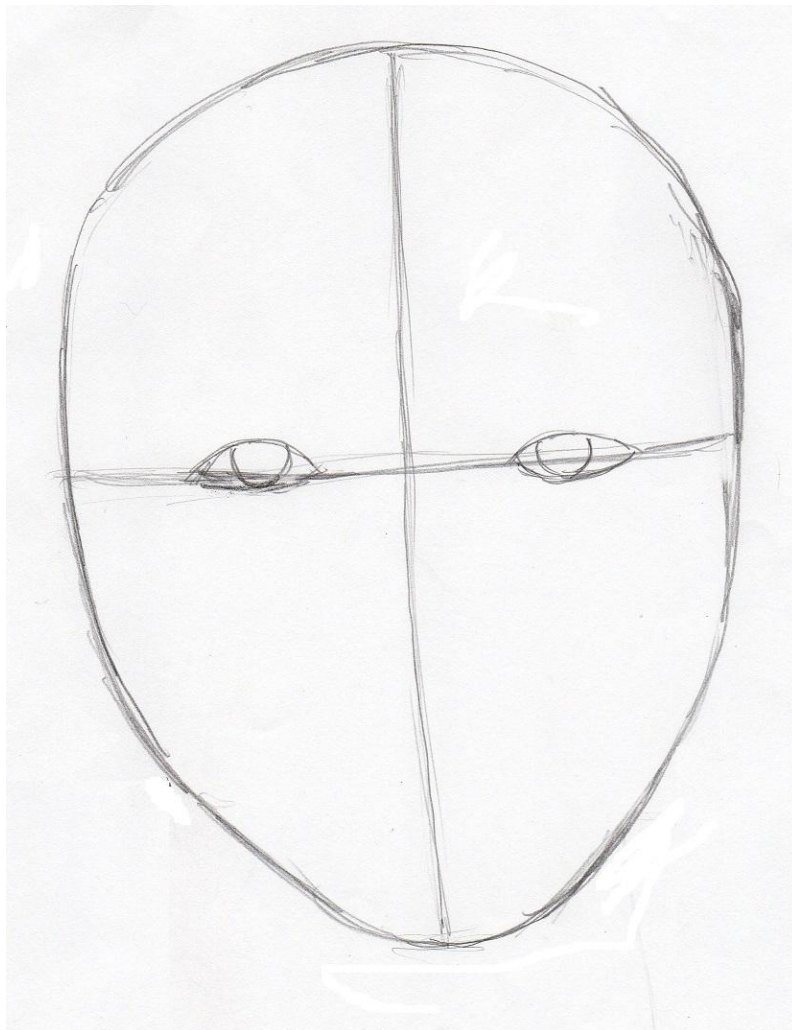
If the subject is looking to the left, draw a face with the vertical line to the left; if the subject is looking right, move the vertical line to the right.



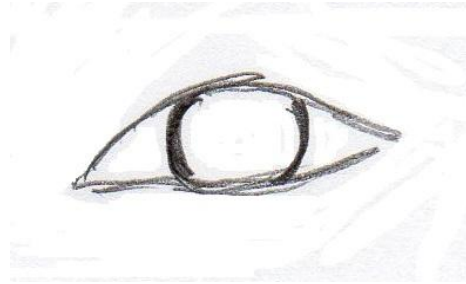
### 3. Drawing the Eyes

It's time to start sketching in the features. I like to begin with the eyes. Remember to consider the proportions of the features as you draw. I've found that as a general rule, the space between the eyes is about equal to the length of one eye; a nose is approximately 1 ½ eyes long.

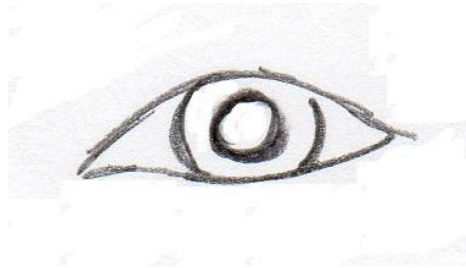
When drawing eyes, work first with the shape of the eye, placing it on the center of the horizontal line. Once you have one eye completed, measure it (you can [measure it using a scrap of paper](#)). Then mark the space for the width of the nose (remember, the length of the eye is about the same as the space between the eyes). Mark the length of the second eye before you begin so the two eyes match in size. Draw the second eye.



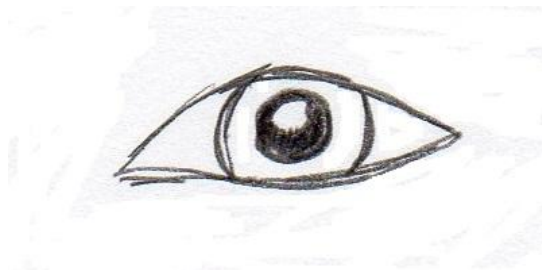
Note that the iris, the colored part of the eye, fills up the whole eye and is a perfect circle (although some of it might be concealed by the eyelid).



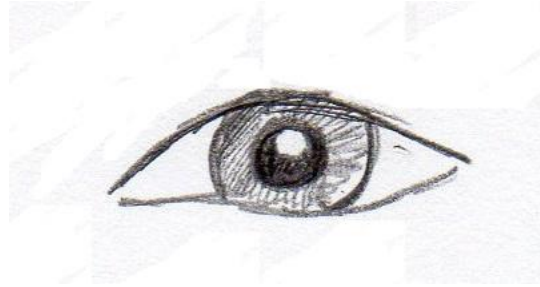
Time to give those eyes some more detail! Pupils (the dark center of the eye) are perfect circles as well. Large pupils give your portrait a friendlier appearance, while small pupils give the person a more menacing look. (Mine isn't a perfect circle here because I drew it freehand. To get a perfect circle, find something small that you can trace around or use a stencil.)



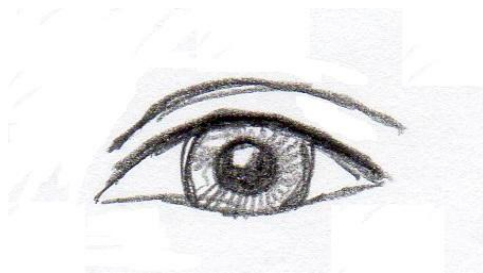
Color the pupil black. Be sure to leave a small white spot on the pupil (sometimes you will see it on part of the iris as well). This is called the catchlight, and it's where the light is reflecting off of the eye.



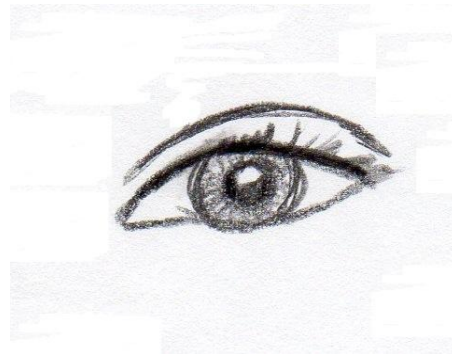
You can create a “colored” effect for the iris with graphite by filling it in. I often use a [tortillon](#) to smudge the graphite so there aren’t any blank spaces in the iris. You can also color it in by using hatch marks that go around the pupil; these look like the streaks of color often seen in blue or green eyes.



Because we can’t often see individual lashes, you can draw them by simply making thick dark lines on the upper lid.



If the subject does have some longer lashes (like the one here), add those in as well.



Don’t forget to draw the eyebrows!

## 4. Drawing the Nose and Mouth

Now measure for the nose. Mark the length of the eye again; the nose is about 1 ½ eyes long. Mark this on your paper.

We don't really see "lines" for the sides of noses -- those lines are really shadows. For this reason, we'll just draw the lower part of the nose. We'll come back and add the sides later.

Noses look different depending on the person. For example, a baby's nose might look like this:



while an adult's nose might look like this:

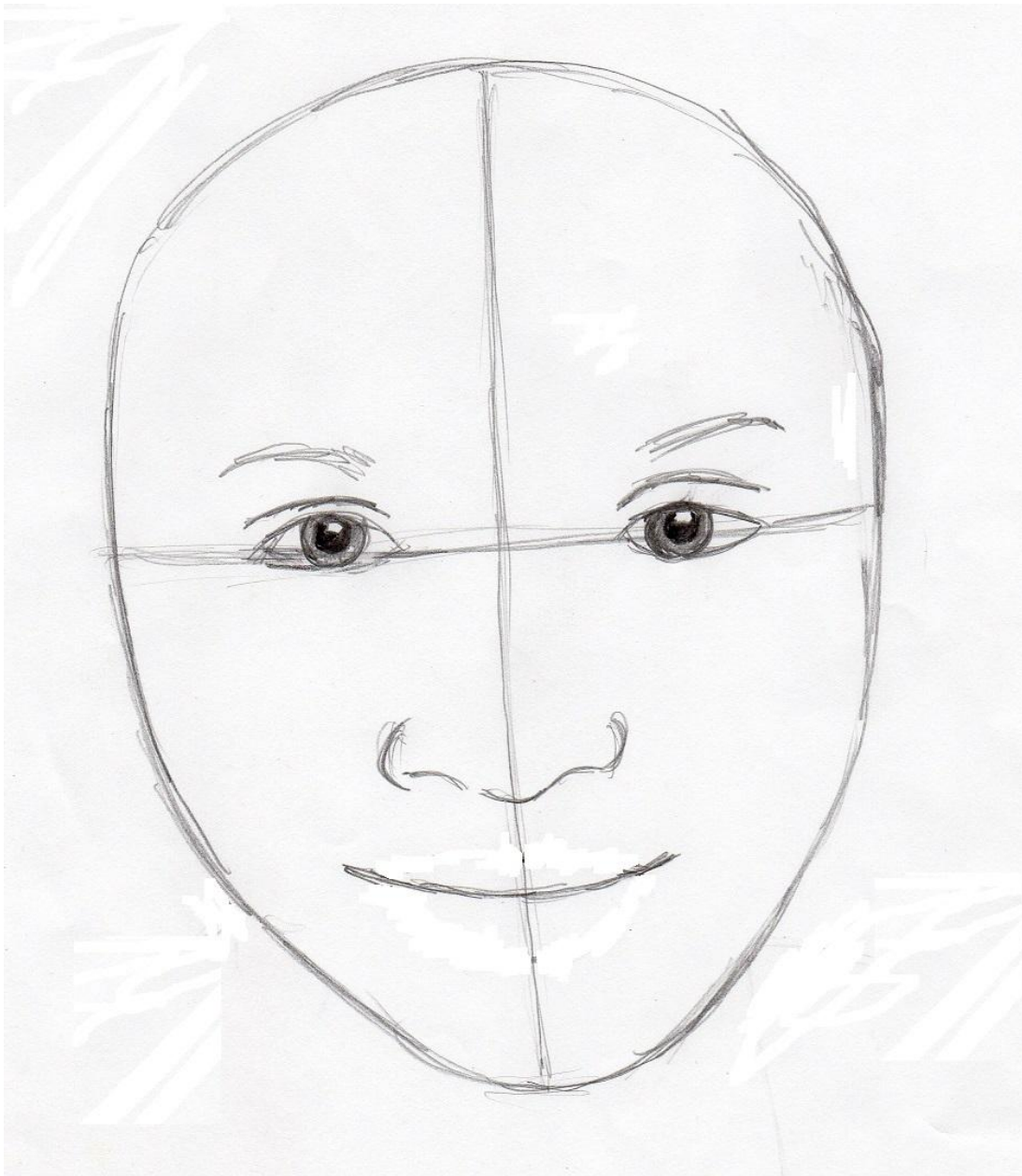


The girl in our photo has a nose that looks something like this:

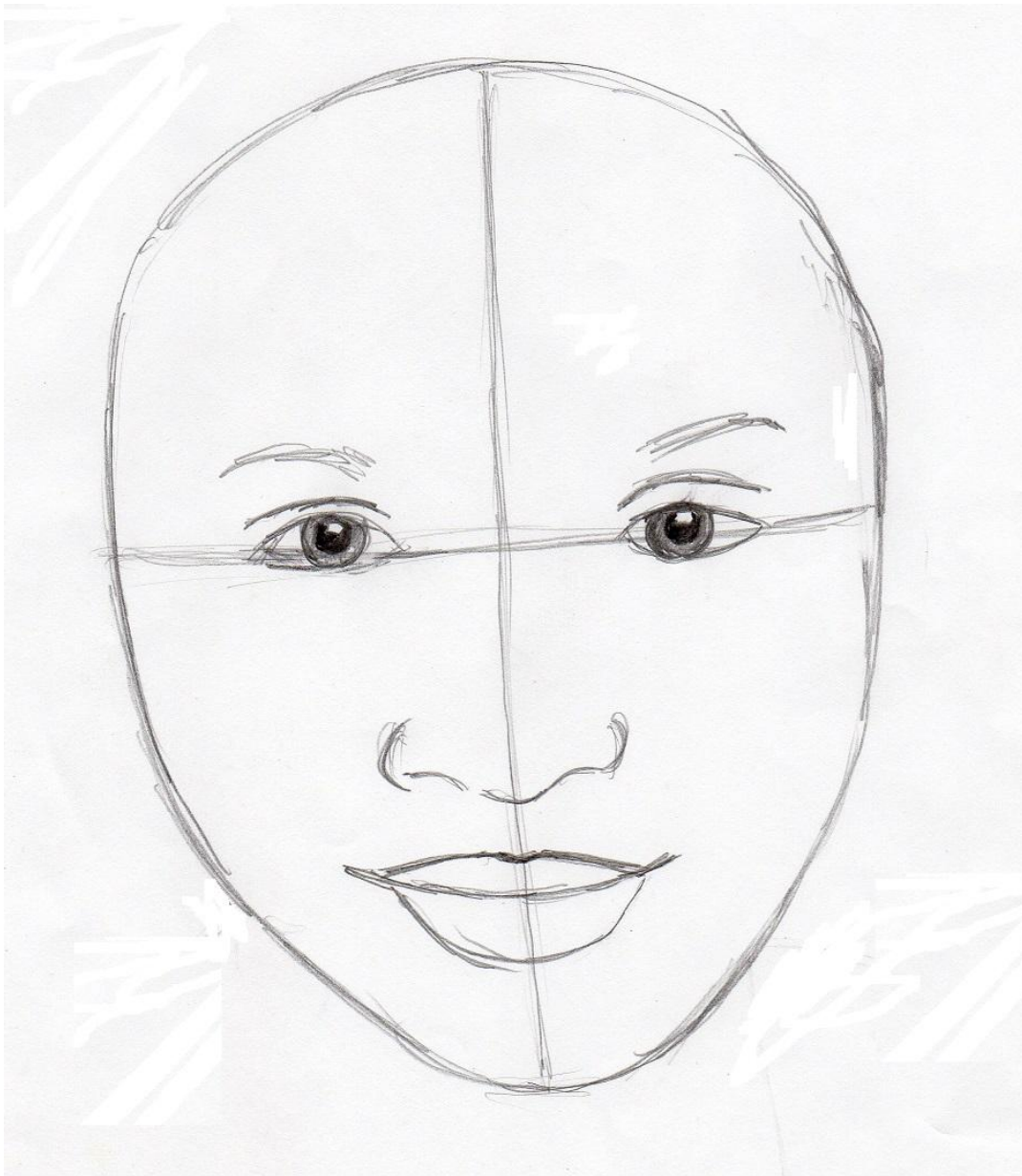


Before drawing the mouth, measure the distance between the nose and the mouth. We've been using the length of the eye as our standard of measuring, so measure to see how many "eyes" there are from the bottom of the nose to the top lip.

You can start drawing the mouth by first drawing the line between the lips. Notice this line extends past the lips, about to the center of the eyes. Remember the lips will be cut in half by the vertical reference line you drew at the beginning.



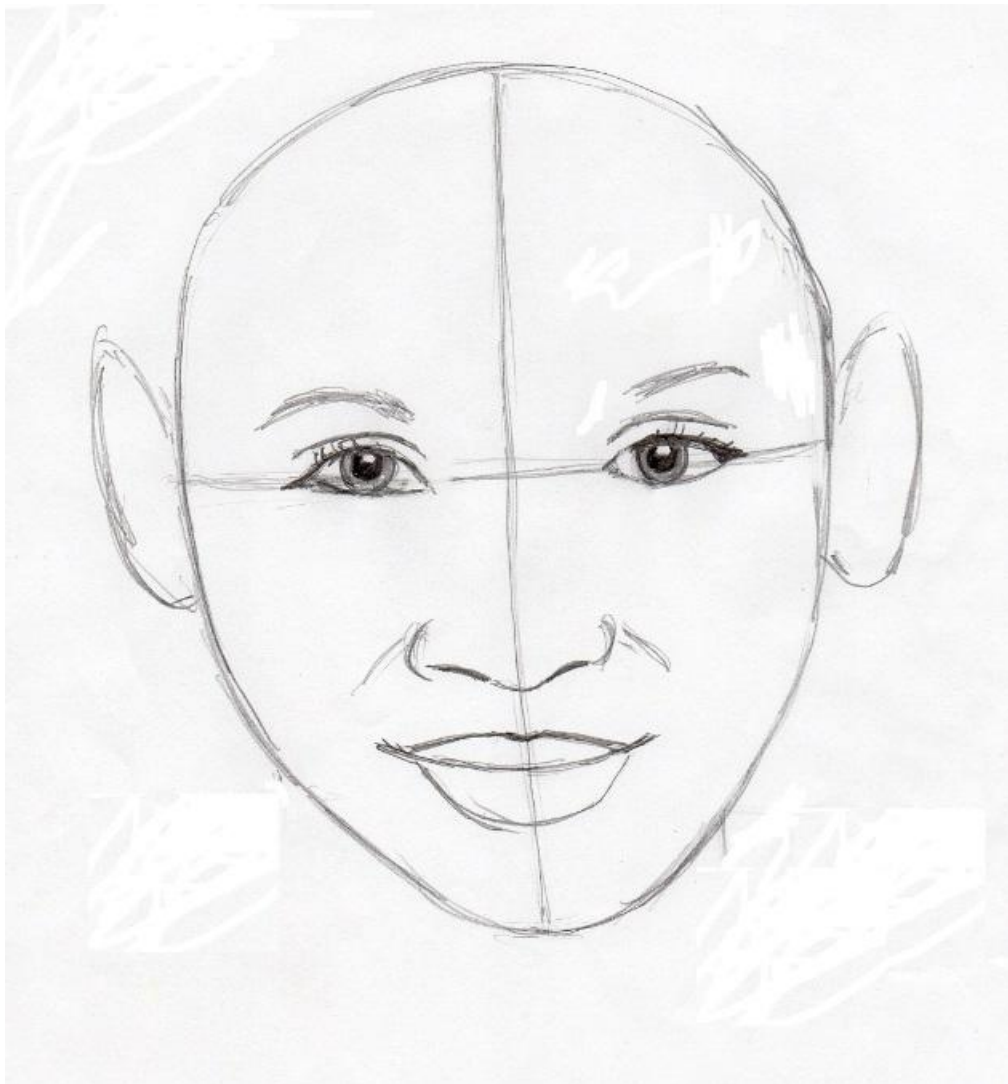
Once you have this line drawn, draw the lips.



## 5. Adding Ears, Hair, Neck, and Shoulders

Good work getting the features on. As you continue to draw, pay close attention to the distance from the mouth to the chin, as well as the distance from eyes to the sides of the face. You may need to change the original shape of the head to make these measurements more exact.

To add the ears, remember that our horizontal line marked where the top of the ear was connected to the head. This is where you will start the ear -- notice the ear goes up from there and then comes back down to reconnect. Most ears reconnect somewhere around the nose and mouth. Note that in this photo, the tops of the ears are covered by her hair.



Next, erase the guideline you made to place the features on the face. Be careful not to erase the eyes, nose, or mouth. If they do disappear, fill them in again where they were before.



Now it's time to add the hair. When you draw a face that has hair, draw your lines for the hair in the direction the hair is going. For long hair, draw long lines, and for short hair, short lines. Curly hair needs curvy lines.

Don't forget to add the neck and shoulders. When you draw a face, you don't want a head floating around without anything attached to it. You can add her arms and hands, too, if you'd like.

## 6. Shading

Last but not least, add some shading. Shade the parts of the face where you see shadows, including the sides of the nose. Then, use your finger, a cloth, or a tortillon to blend it in. If you make a shadow too dark, just use the [kneaded eraser](#) to pick up some of the graphite.



If something in your drawing doesn't look quite right, try turning the drawing [upside down](#) or holding it up to a mirror. If there are lines or shadows out of place, you'll be able to see them more easily. (My drawing was missing some hair.)

Older art students may also want to [use a grid](#). This technique helps the artist put the subject's features in exactly the right places so the drawing looks even more like the photograph.

Once you're satisfied with the basic drawing, you can add even more shading to make it more realistic. Try to match the various values of grey in the original photograph. If you're having trouble, you can print and use a [value scale](#).



Finished? See -- you can draw a face! It may not look exactly like the photograph, but as you practice, your drawings will get better and better. You can find lots of other "models" to practice drawing portraits in magazines, or you can use your own photos.