

# THE OTA REGIMEN

vol. 1

by  
HOWARD



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Recently, I have been getting a lot of requests for a complete, one stop, beginner guide.

I often forget about this stage of learning, as I typically assume whomever I'm giving advice to has been drawing for at least a bit of time and is looking for ways to bypass roadblocks.

But arguably the biggest roadblock of all is encountered right at the start, because that's the stage where you simply have no history of feedback and thus no way to know what to commit to or what to expect from it.

The purpose of this guide will not only to be that complete beginner guide, but also to simultaneously provide a set of exercises AND routine that people of almost any level would benefit from, but are specifically built to be accessible and build all necessary foundations as quickly as possible.

**I can say, with 100% certainty, there is no better way to start than this guide.**

I won't rant about mindset concepts much at all here, because there are the Ota Clinic videos for that, but I will clarify exactly how to think about each exercise and aspect of the routine as far as is practically necessary.

Drawing is a very physical act, but it's half mental. **The same exercise can yield very different results depending on what you are aware of while doing it.** When stretched over a span of years, this can result in huge variance in what one person is able to perform vs another despite both putting in the same number of hours and doing practice methods that are not wildly different.

**This is why bad beginner advice is so destructive.**

Energy and time are not infinite, both short term and long term. Wasting these resources on

methods that don't help and lack of awareness (or even worse, misconceptions) can result in lots of energy spent for no gain or even negative gain.

This more than anything contributes to a lot of (honestly warranted) fear around the act of drawing altogether and naturally leads to a early quitting, or even worse, intermediate level quitting.

**I used to often say, “just enjoy yourself for a year or 2 then worry about building skill.”**

**I now realize all the issues with that idea.**

In short, if you follow this guide, I can promise your time and energy will be fully rewarded with the best returns in skill and understanding, only limited by how much time you choose to put in.

## **HOW MUCH TIME?**

This is one of those subjects where you're almost always going to hear one extreme or the other. Either you need to be drawing 24/7 or you're not gonna make it, or a simple 15 minutes a day will make you the next Da Vinci. Both of these are manipulative answers.

As someone who cannot afford to solely dedicate himself to visual art, it's been very important for me to find the exact line of how much reward to expect from how much time spent.

I'm going to breakdown exactly what you can expect from various hour thresholds with drawing.

**Despite factors like talent and areas of focus playing a role, these benchmarks are surprisingly consistent.**

A lot of people prefer to hide these benchmarks, again, because it makes manipulation

easier, but if you plan on doing anything serious with art (or even having it be a rewarding hobby), not knowing these benchmarks means you can't form a long term game plan for how much time and energy you put in, which is not only stressful (produces energy spend with no return), but also can lead to years you wish you had spent differently.

## **HOURS**

### **1000:**

- A level of deliberateness will show up in everything you do, no longer having that raw beginner look.

- Simple pixel art and 3D graphics will be much easier to wrap your head around than had you approached them prior.

### **4000:**

- Your art will showcase your personal identity consistently.

- You will be able to make “not good but charming” art if you put a few hundred additional hours into refining a simple approach that plays to your strength.

- Simple enough pixel art may appear flawless.

### **8000:**

- There will be blatant flaws in every aspect and a big lack of impact compared to professional work, but you will be able to create work that has the general broad traits of professional work.

- With enough practice put specifically into non-complex pixel art or 3D graphics, you will be able to produce work that will be suitable for a video game without giving it a distinctly amateur feel.

- With enough composition and inking practice, you can produce “not great but readable”

manga.

### **13000:**

-Your work will appear to be properly professional work, but there will be little issues that the average person has a hard time putting their finger on or only subconsciously notices.

-3D graphics are highly accessible and professional work will be relatively easily producible after building up 1 or 2 thousand hours in 3D specifically.

-Flawless pixel art will not be difficult as long as it is not too complex.

-Professional manga is doable, although it will lack a lot of impact compared to the best looking manga, and you will need some practice specifically for drawing fast enough if you want to produce manga regularly.

### **20000:**

-You can produce flawless, professional work in any avenue. Although your work will clearly pale in comparison when placed beside kami eshi, it will not be in a way that is obvious to the average viewer.

### **30000:**

-You may be able to produce work at the highest level or somewhat close to it, although you will lack versatility and speed compared to the best of the best.

### **???????:**

-Remember, the best of the best in the industry have 100000+ hours that were specifically deliberately purposed toward being the best they can be.

**What makes knowing what you should roughly expect from hour count so helpful is**

**you can choose an exact amount of time to put on an hourly, weekly, or monthly basis, to gauge expectations for your performance when committing to projects.** This can largely remove the emotional roller coaster of bouncing back and forth between thinking you're going to be a god tomorrow and wondering if no amount of practice will ever be enough. Thrashing between these extremes is by and large the main reason for people quitting.

Art is not about being the best, but being good enough to do what YOU specifically want to do with it. Make sure you have clear goals.

**Without a clear goal, you will start to coast, and no amount of hours will produce meaningful improvement.**

If you don't have a goal, I will give you one.

Get good enough to make a pixel art game that looks like Orkastle.

## **THE MOST IMPORTANT EXERCISE**

It's not drawing boxes.

It's drawing faces. Specifically, anime faces.

More specifically, anime animation settei faces.

The reason is threefold.

First is that faces contain every single art principle in a very demanding way.

Second is that faces are the easiest thing to judge how well or poorly you did.

Third is that animation settei is done at an extremely high standard and utilizes a consistent, hyper organized approach to drawing that is ideal for learning from.

However, we will not be stressing the little details for this volume.

**In fact, we are only going to focus on 2 things:**

**Proportion and direction.**

There are 9 faces we are going to be looking at.

Specifically, we will be studying simplified traces of existing settei drawings, 6 of which are from Blend S, and 3 of which are from Onda's Berserk film designs.

Settei themselves won't be included in this guide itself, but I'll attach a rar file with relevant reference materials.

**Our goal is to gain a strong feel for the main angles between and including straight on and profile.**

The simplified traces I did are carefully designed to ensure that they convey the essence of the angle in question. By copying these, you'll internalize the characteristics of each angle.

## **EVERY DRAWING IS VOCAB (NO SILVER BULLETS)**

So what are we trying to accomplish by internalizing these angles?

Are we simply trying to paint by numbers until we can produce these specific angles consistently while never training versatility and universal understanding?

A common piece of advice is that you derive different angles via understanding perspective and form. This will not yield a proper result.

**While the ability to visualize forms consistently and mentally rotate them is not irrelevant, it develops naturally by memorizing the design of each specific key angle, not by thinking in crude shapes without design power.**

There are VERY specific rules and systems when it comes to deriving the shapes you need when rotating a face and figure in anime.

We can't go over those until you first have a strong familiarity with the most key angles first, which is why this volume is dedicated to that.

This is why key angles are so important and why settei exist to show off these key angles.

They are the road map to understanding how to draw in the style correctly.

However, learning how to read that road map is quite esoteric.

This is why the main way to improve in drawing (not just anime, any form of drawing) comes from careful study of refined art work that already exists and deeply understanding the design solutions for problems they already solved.

Every single subject and angle and situation is a different problem.

The better you get, the more easy of a time you will have solving these problems, but there is no silver bullet. You have to simply internalize tons of info showing specific subjects in specific angles and situations and memorize what the solution for these are.

**Just like learning a language, after enough of imitation, you will gain intuition and freedom to solve problems yourself with no reference, but this is only after very deep understanding of what the best artists have already figured out.**

To reiterate, what we care about for the time being is proportion and direction.

**Direction is the angle the line is running in.**

**Proportion is the natural product of the directions of the lines.**

Do not think of proportion in the sense of size first and foremost.

Always focus on the concept of the angles producing them.

An isosceles triangle is the product of lines diverging downward at a narrow angle, not “a



very thin triangle.”

This will increase your standards of precision and keep you looking for the big picture cause and effect of lines rather than thinking of each shape as its own isolated creature.

This also brings us to the next point.

## **DON'T BEND YOUR LINES**

For this exercise, we will be using entirely straight lines.

Don't make them obsessively straight. **It's not important that they're literally perfectly straight, but it is important that you do not intend to bend them at all.**

This is for the sake of building a firm understanding of the relationship between lines and proportions. Use of curved lines will delay your understanding of this, which is the single most detrimental thing to an early learner.

## **THE FACES**

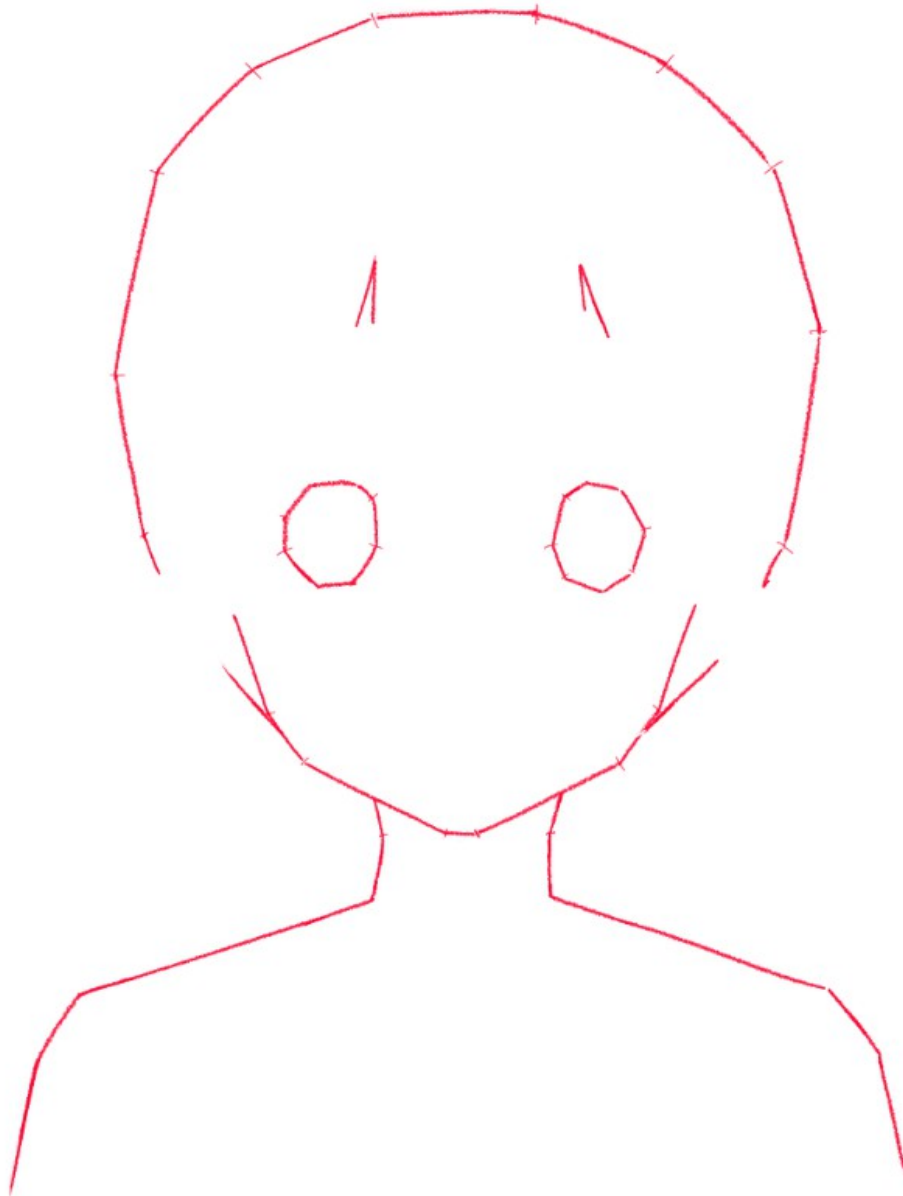
First, we'll look at the Blend S faces.

I chose Yousuke Okuda's Blend S designs because I have a good amount of familiarity with them and because they easily articulate a lot of ideas that are very universal to anime styles at large.

It's very easy to interpret other styles if you have a strong understanding of this one.

Note that with all the drawings, there are little marks made to indicate directional changes in cases I felt it might be hard to see or hard to keep track of.

### **The Straight On:**



Straight ons are very difficult for early learners.

The reason is because they put a high demand on symmetry while not looking good if one half is simply a mirror of the other.

The triangular marks above the eyes mark the hairline, which is important to keep track of for balance.

The most important relationship to keep track of though, is the iris's distance from the cheek, both horizontally and especially vertically.

The boundaries around the head actually mark the edges of Kaho's pulled up hair, not the boundaries of her skull.

Remember how balance is the product of the relationship of the literal lines/shapes on paper, not some abstract concept of the physical form like some people might say.

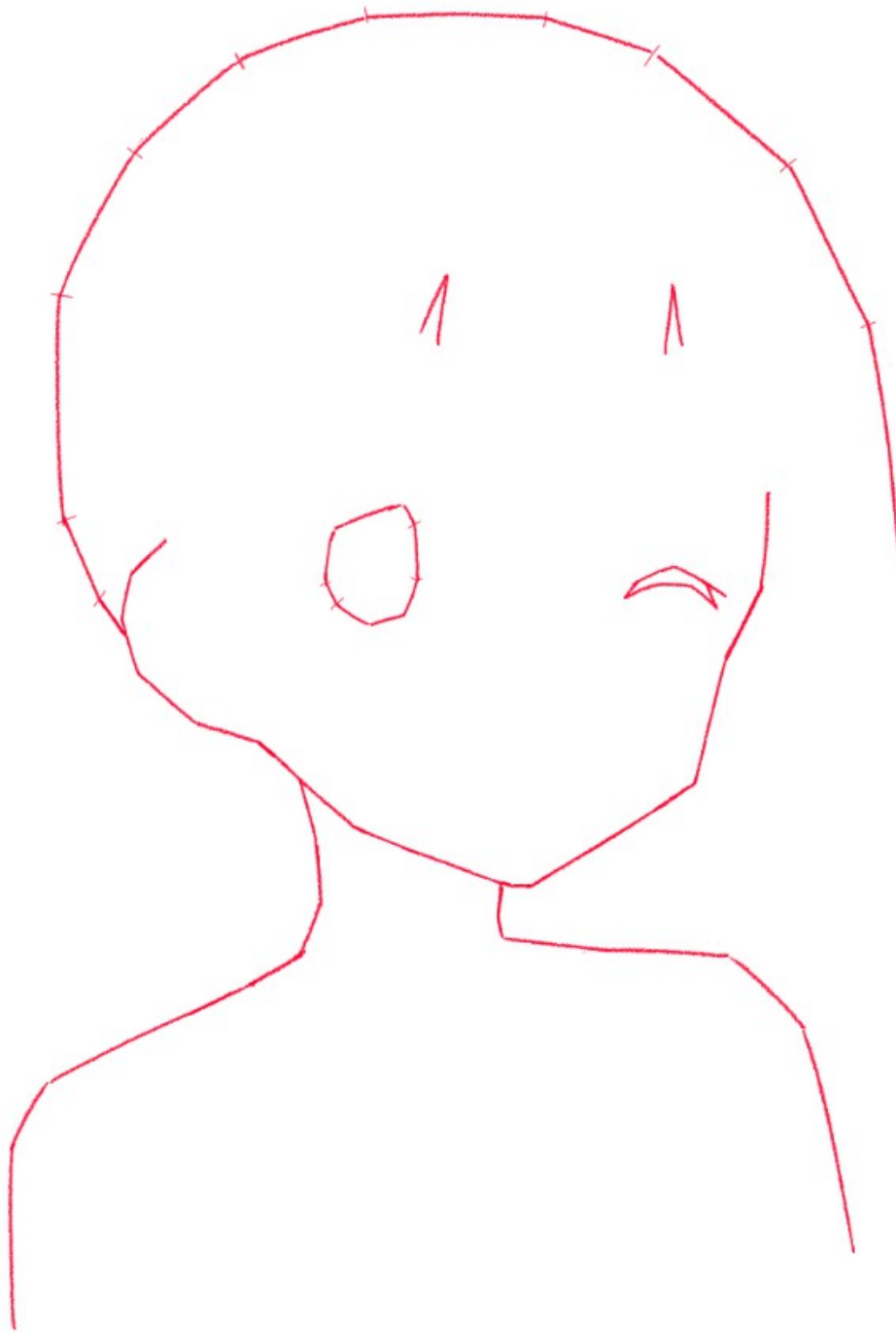
Hair is not an attachment to a head in art. It is simply the boundaries of the head itself.

**The Almost Straight On:**



This angle can be tricky because it can be easy to lose track of proportions laterally. It gets very subtle.

**The Somewhat Three Quarter:**



Notice how the head shape has fundamentally started to really change compared to the previous two. One side of the face is explicitly jaw, and one side is cheek and forehead.

I took the opportunity to use a face with a closed eye. This is the best angle to showcase the difference between a closed and open eye in terms of placement on the face. It's something you want to get used to early if possible because it will help when making characters emote.

**The More Three Quarter:**



The angle is very slightly at a lower angle for this specific drawing.

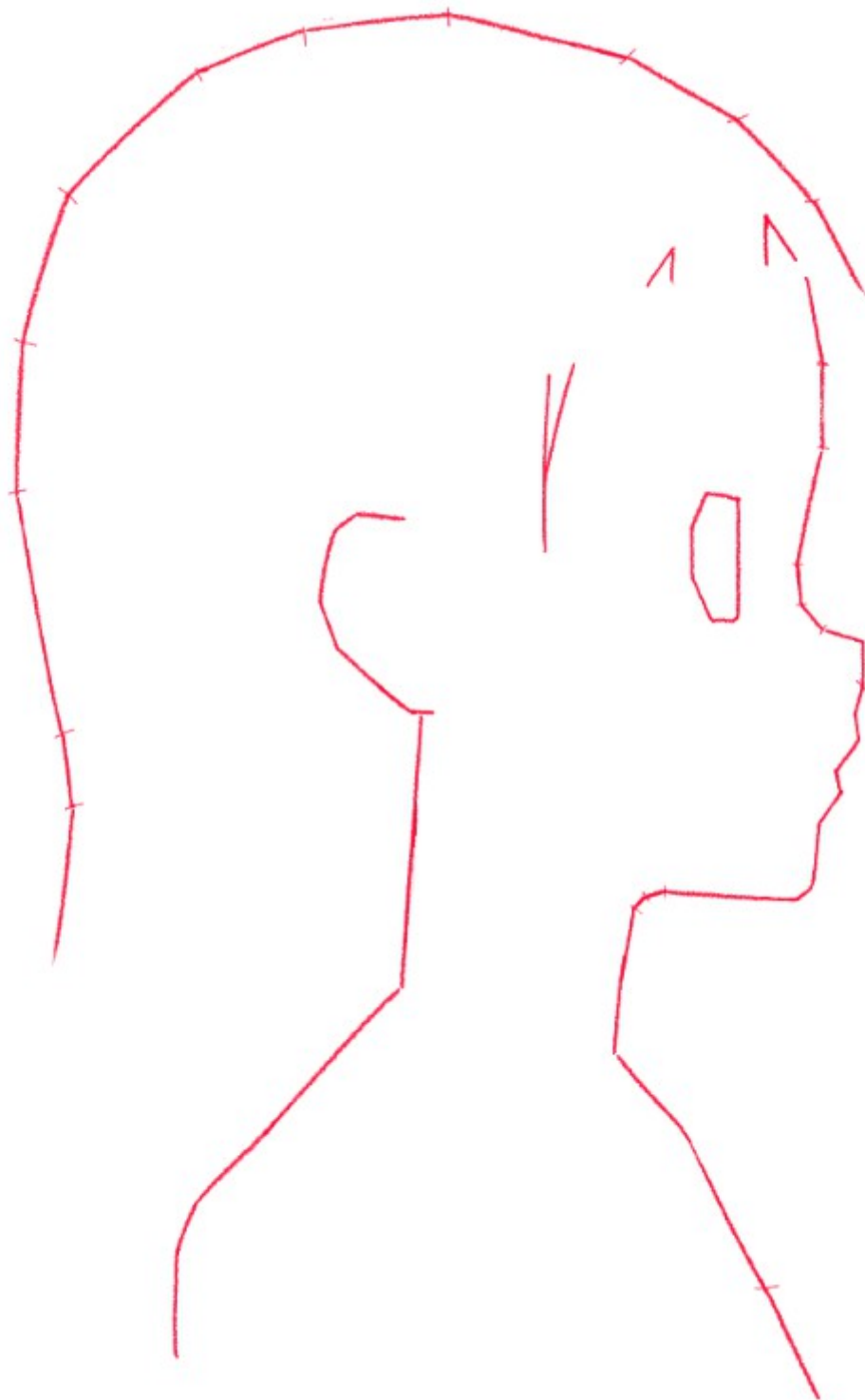
It's actually very common to opt for this angle when having a character turn their head, because it makes it more easy to tell they're turning their head.

**The Near Profile:**



The little directional changes that make up the nose and nose bridge are extremely important to get right on this one or it will look very wrong.

**The Profile:**



Pay close attention to the alignment of everything horizontally.

Next, let's look at the Berserk drawings. All 3 are of Zodd.

The reason for this is that Zodd has a very verbose face in terms of lines and shapes.



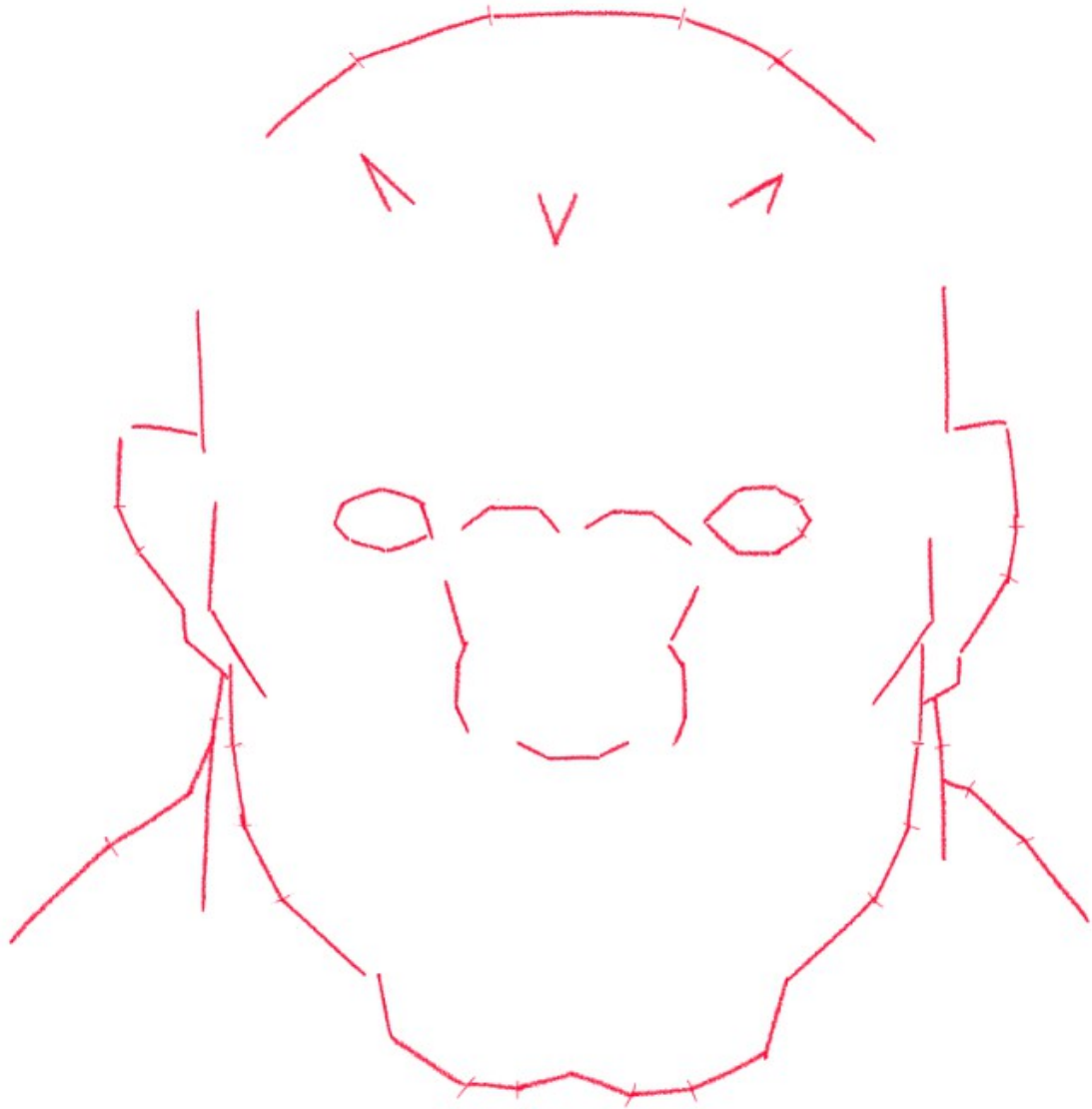
The directional changes that make up his face are also somewhat easier to see than on conventional styles.

While technically being a monster design, he is derived from a realism style and clearly showcases all the features that go into a face.

Copying these will help you get a feel for all the little things that go into a face so that you don't fall into the trap of thinking of faces as simple and not having detail, which is a common problem that can happen when studying conventional cuter anime styles.

**Every trait on Zodd's face has either explicit but VERY subtle representation on a conventional anime style face or is implied through the shape relationships.**

**The Zodd Straight On:**



In this case, the bald boundaries of the head are being defined because he's a short-haired spikey-haired character and the hair comes out relative to where the boundary of the bald head would be.

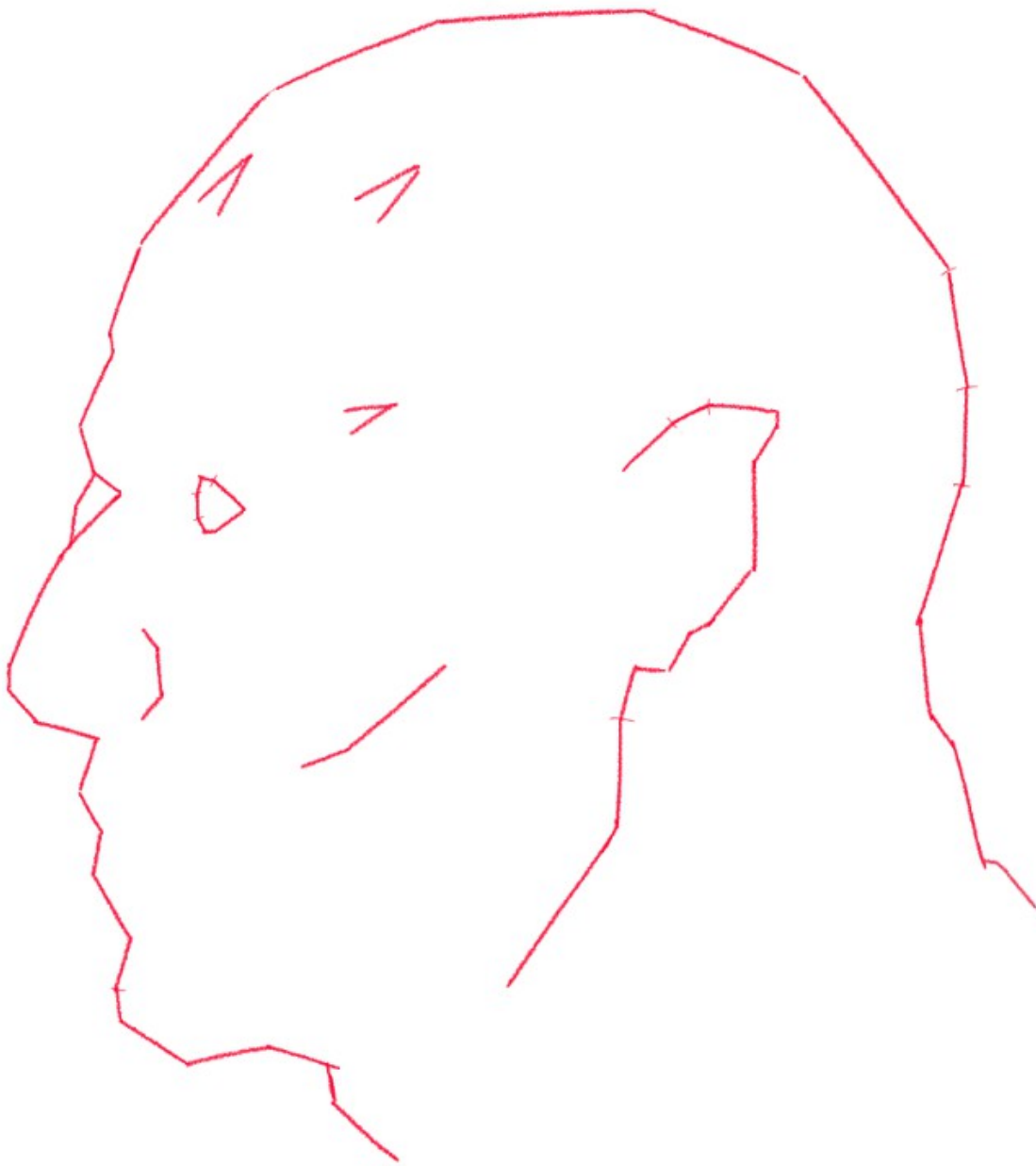
Pay very close attention to where things align with each other vertically as usual, but it should feel a bit easier here compared to Blend S due to the more explicit directional changes.

### The Zodd Three Quarter:



This is a slightly high angle, which helps show off the directional changes that make up the cheek and jaw,

## The Zodd Profile:



Note the explicit position of the nostril and the cheekbone, as it will help get a sense of space for profiles, which can be hard to judge the negative space with.

When doing copies of any of these faces, flip the reference image and do a copy of the mirror of it after you've done a few copies of it the default way.

I wouldn't recommend going back and forth between it and its mirror every time you copy,

but there may be times where this is helpful.

## **HAIR IS THE SECOND FACE**

We're going to go through every face again now, but with more details filled in, particularly important parts of the hair.

Hair may seem like a less sensitive part of the drawing, but it's actually fairly strict to get right. It has a huge impression on the character, which is why I call it the “second face.”

**Do not ONLY copy these ones after getting comfortable with the ones with less detail. It will focus training on different shape relationships by continuing to use both.**

## The Straight On:



Seeing the bangs in will help emphasize how the straight on is already naturally asymmetrical. It's about balance, not literal symmetry.

Pay attention to negative spaces.

## The Almost Straight On:



Having the double braids can be a good way to keep track of the proportion with the shoulders.

### **The Somewhat Three Quarter:**



The boundaries of the bangs are very important with this one, note the lateral distance from the eyes/forehead.



### **The More Three Quarter:**



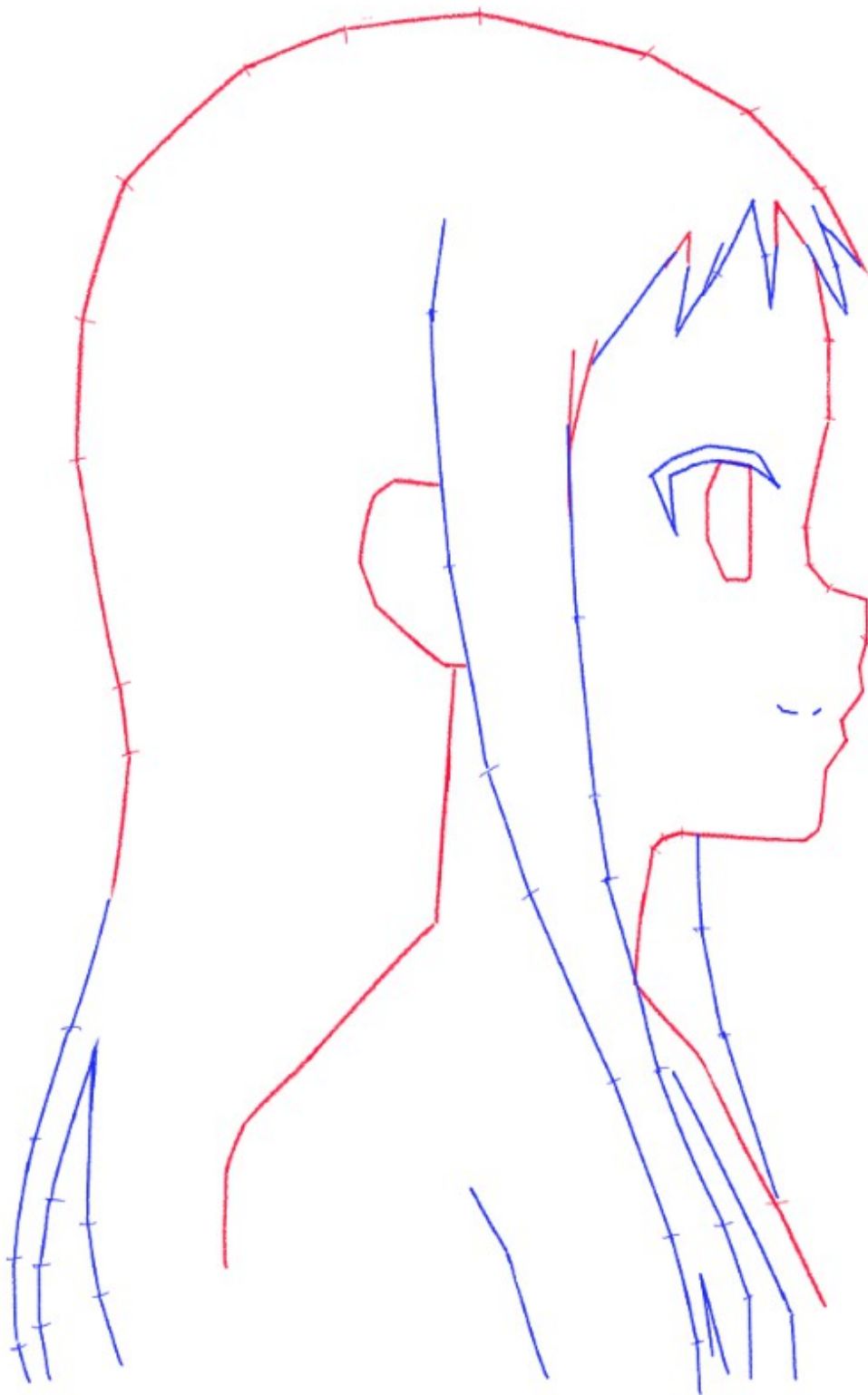
The back of the head is particularly important to pay attention to here. Getting it wrong will make the head easily feel back heavy or front heavy.

## The Near Profile:



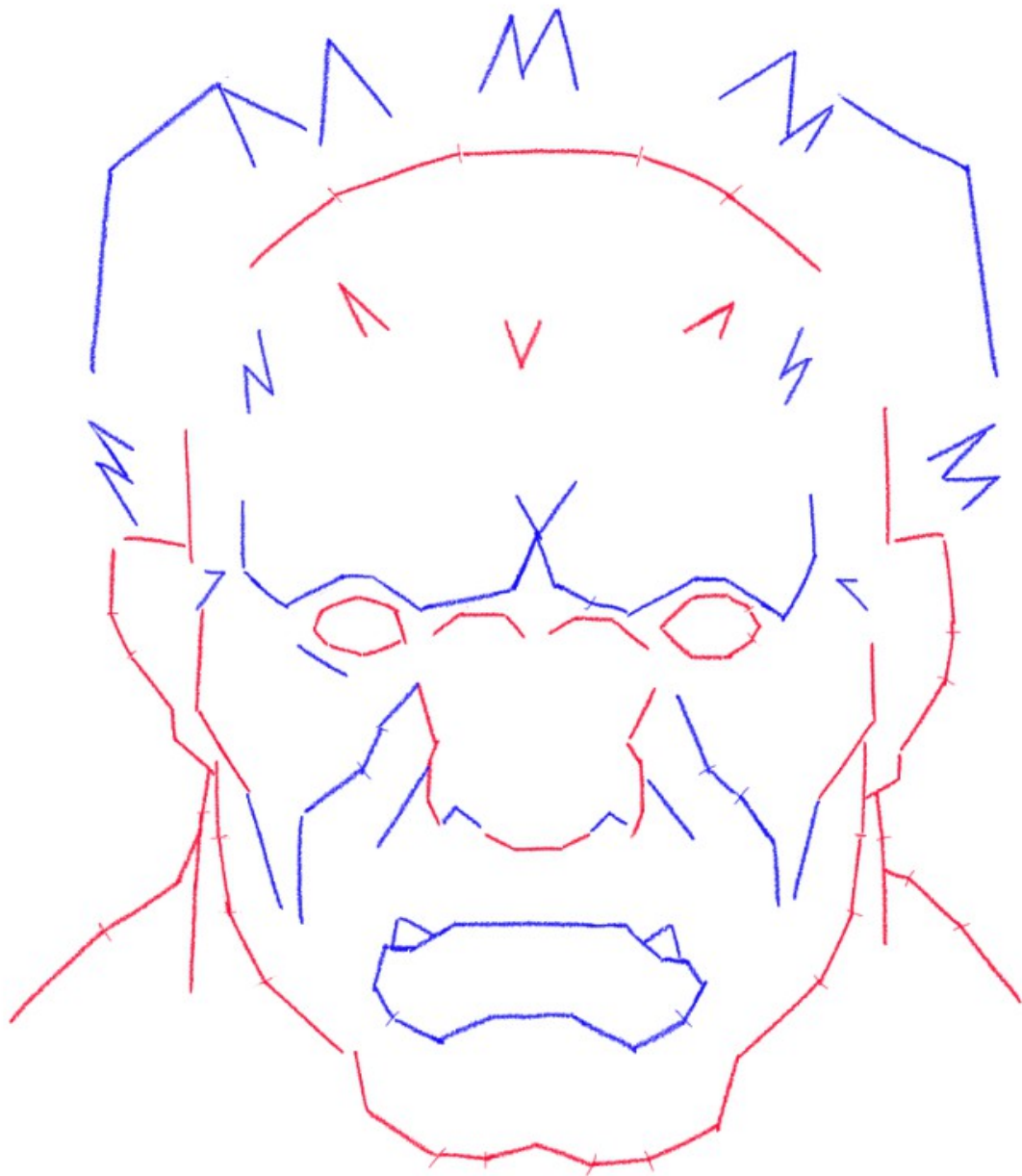
Pay attention to where the bangs overlap with the eye and the negative spaces between each bang.

## The Profile:



The relationship between the side hair, ear, eye, and nose is highly sensitive here.

## The Zodd Straight On:



Try to form a sense of each element leading to the other, mouth into cheek bone, into nose, into eye.

### The Zodd Three Quarter:



This angle helps emphasize how the mouth has forward-moving dimension to it. This holds true for conventional styles as well, but it is expressed a bit differently.

## The Zodd Profile:



Like with the straight on, note the flow from mouth into nose into eye.

Keep this feeling of relationship in mind even when doing the Blend S ones to feel out a sense of purpose to the negative space.

## BALANCE EVERYTHING

I said to not focus on literal shape symmetry, but when it comes to balance, a large factor is often balancing the number of directional changes with one side of a shape with the other.

In most of these cases, any number of directional changes, for example on one side of a lock of hair, are often matched by the same number of directional changes on the other side.

This is something you'll think about a lot when drawing, and it's something to look out for when copying especially.

Think of balancing your directional changes in this way as default and not doing it as creating a certain unbalanced effect (where the balance must come from elsewhere).

## THE BODIES

We're going to look at bodies in roughly the same way we went about the faces.

When it comes to drawing bodies, something we won't cover in this volume but will cover in future ones is gesture.

For the time being, just think of gesture as the sum of all the directional changes.

**Arguably, the single most important factor in gesture is balancing the actual individual shapes.**

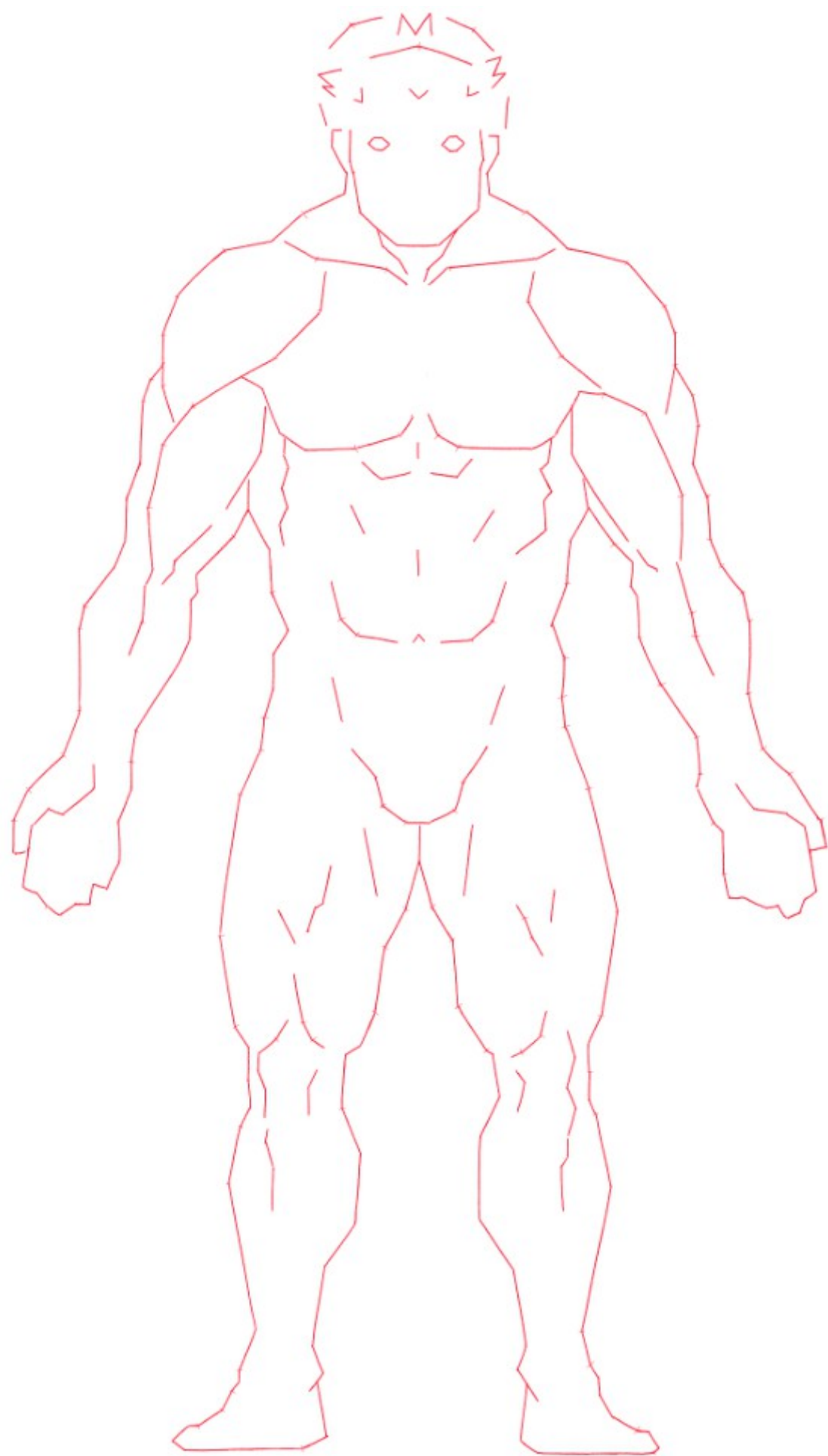
In this case we are actually going to look at the Zodd bodies first.

Just like with the faces, and even more so here, the Zodd bodies do a great job of making what is extremely subtle more clear.

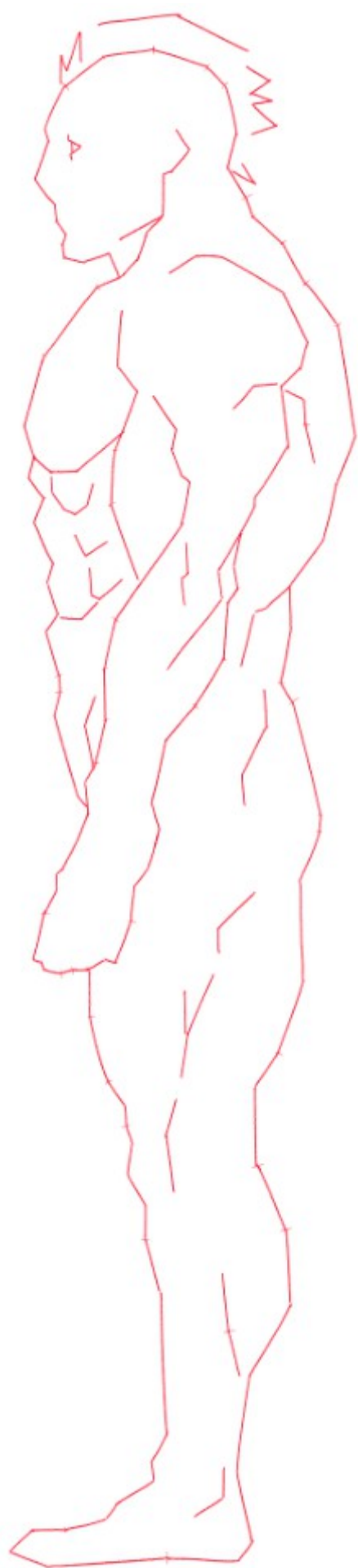
**In fact, especially when it comes to cute girls in conventional anime styles, even the simplified model has very subtle directional changes.**

This is one of the main factors in making anime such a difficult nut to crack.





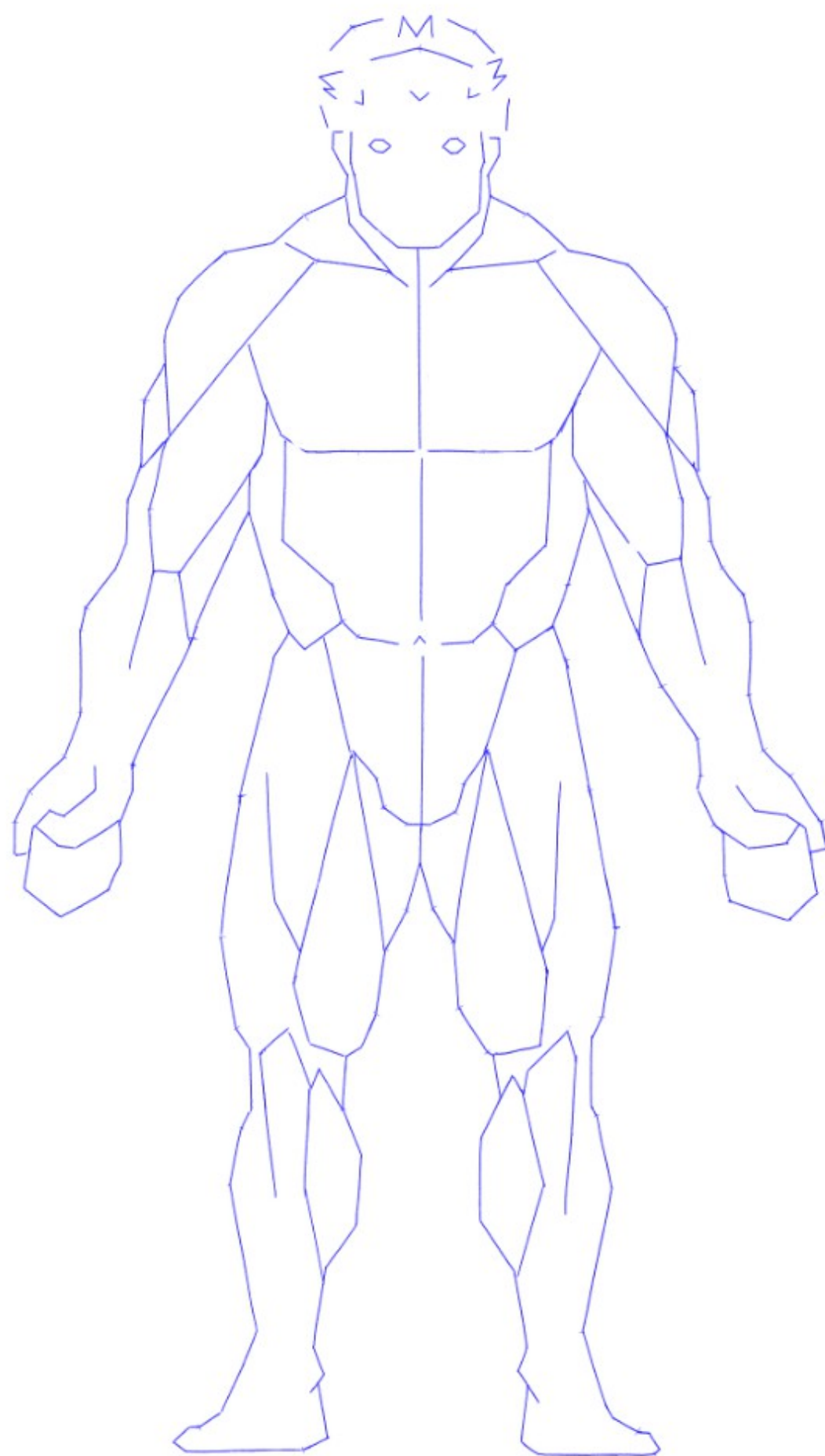


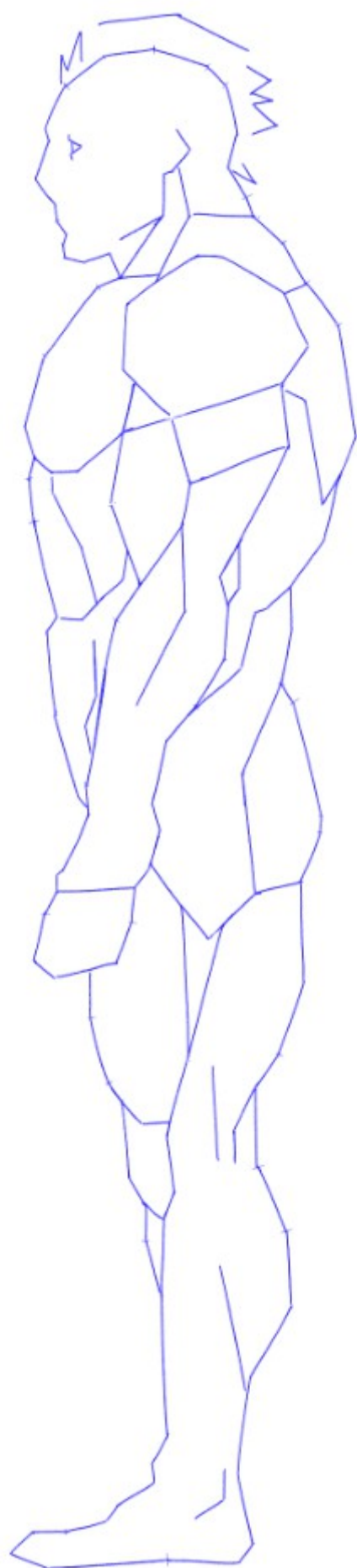




For Zodd, I made additionally simplified versions, but these versions also show the relationship between different parts of the body more clearly with more explicit connecting lines.

Copy these ones when you feel you are having a hard time understanding how the whole body flows together or having a hard time making the body feel balanced.



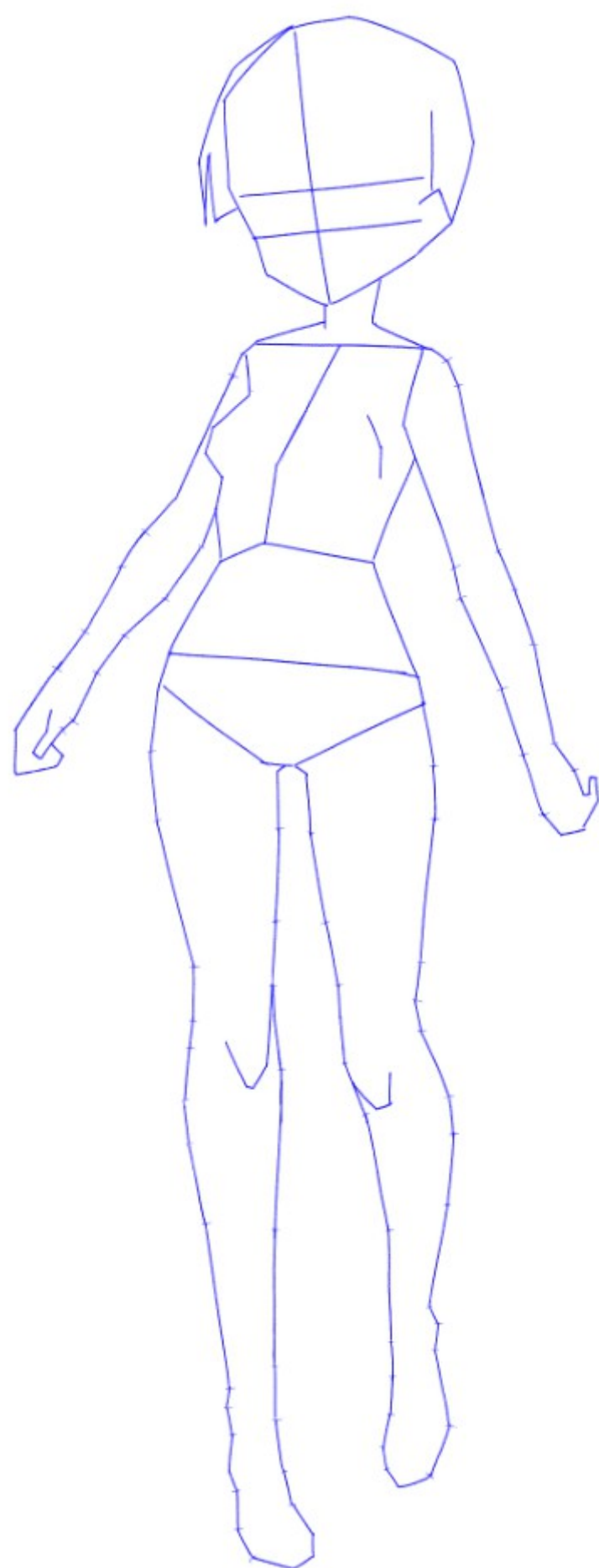




Now for the Blend S bodies.

Remember, the directional changes are subtle here and are still cutting out many of the directional changes seen on the actual settei.

I don't recommend even attempting drawing these until Zodd is somewhat comfortable.

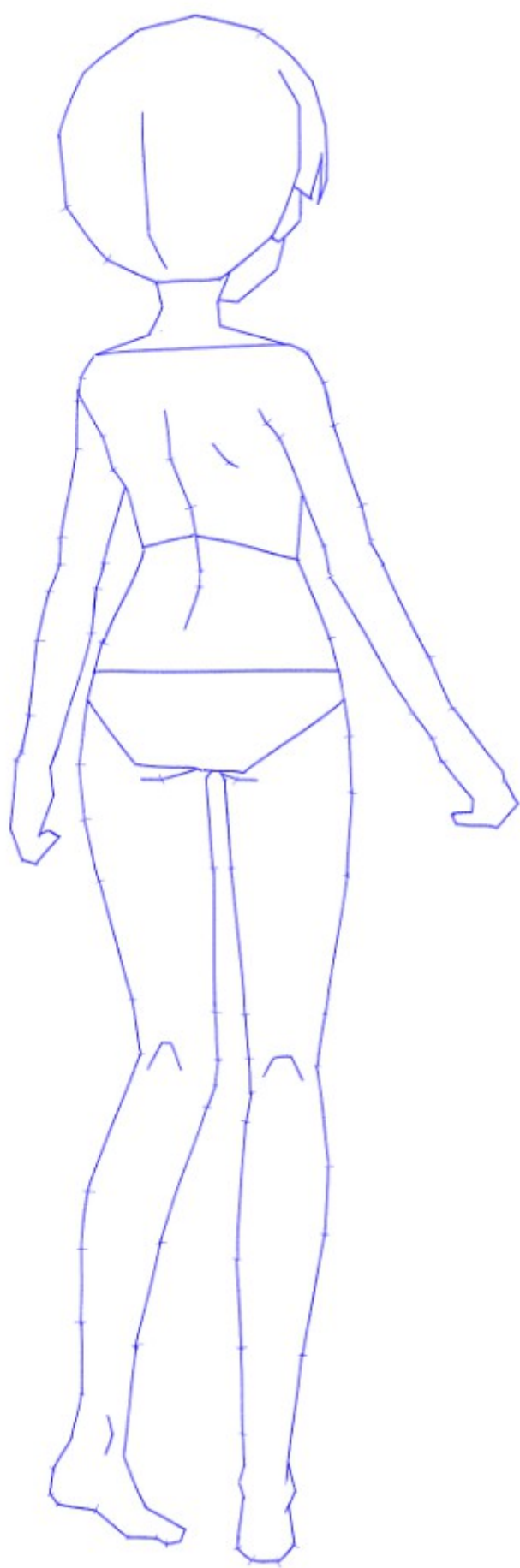


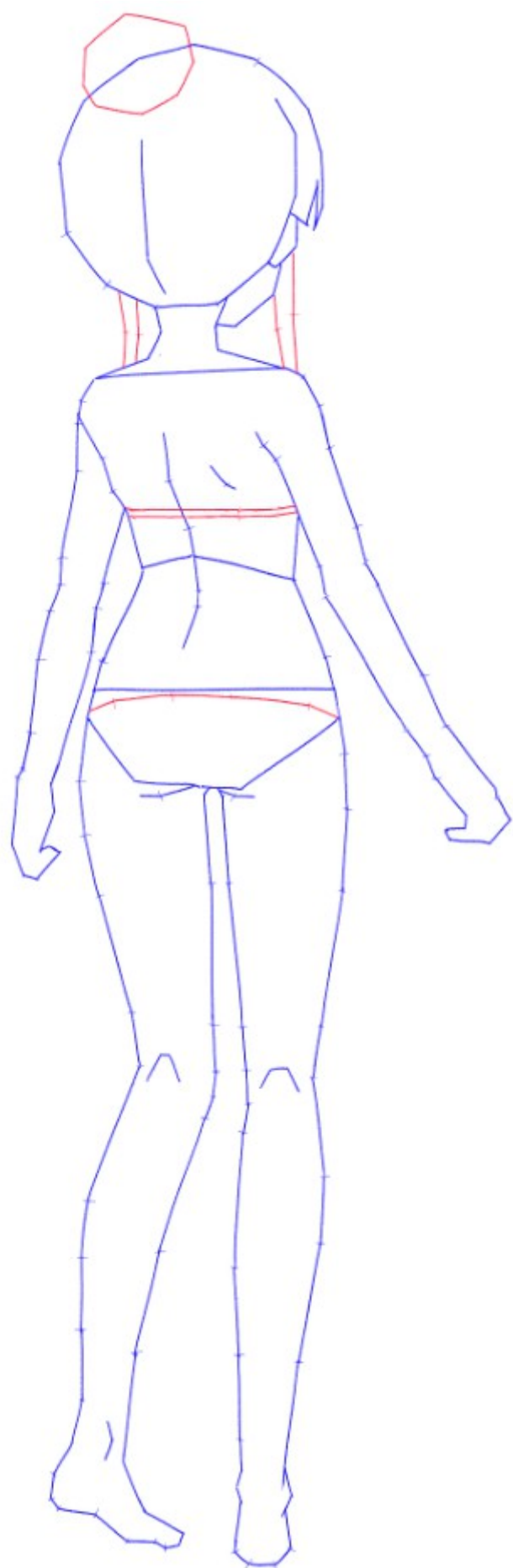












## CHECK THE SCORE

While it's not necessary to do every single time, especially when you already know what aspects you are trying to improve at, it's very important to line up your copy exactly on top of the original and see how it compares.

Use different anchor points. For example, choose the right eye, size your copy so the right eye is the exact same size as the original, overlay it, and see what misaligns on the rest of the drawing. Those are your mistakes. Then align by the chin, or shoulders, etc.

## THIS IS YOUR ROUTINE

Careful copies of these will be the heart of your improvement.

You should do other things too if you want to improve, such as copy whatever interests you, practice gesture drawings, and generally experiment drawing stuff from imagination.

**However, the exercises in this book will be the bread and butter of your improvement until they are effortless for you to do fairly accurately.**

Start every drawing session with a few blendies and a few zoddies.

They will set your mind in the right spot and made you unlock more experience points out of anything you do after.

## DON'T COUNT HOURS – COUNT EXERCISES

Your standards for accuracy will become stricter as you get better. There will be times you want to spend more time on an exercise compared to how fast you would get through it in the past.

Let this happen. It is important for your growth to answer questions as you naturally get the

urge for them.

Moving more slowly through copies is the result of your brain desiring to check more information, not loss of ability.

For schedule reasons, there will be times you can only fit a certain amount of time into art for a given day, but generally speaking, a given art practice session should always be based on giving yourself a set number of exercises to do start to finish, NOT a set amount of time to draw and then stop when time is up.

**You might not be able to immediately feel it, but each time you do an exercise, it's a tangible increase in knowledge and physical ability.**

It's crucial that the exercise is actually done to completion, because each stage provides different answers, especially the last parts of the exercise as you see what kind of copy you produced and figure out why your copy looks the way it does.

## **MACHINE FOR NOW, CREATOR LATER**

Remember, art is highly physical.

**Creativity in art is far more the product of the skill you built up from drills than it is some kind of spark of inspiration.**

Think of art as a grind game with a slowly filling exp meter.

**Ask yourself which of these drills you feel weakest with any given day, and do that drill over and over and over, tangibly correcting things each time.**

The more you can just become an exp acquiring machine, the faster it will just be a part of your life, and the faster art practice will become a relaxing activity you do to remove stress, not one that creates stress.

Most of stress in art comes from butting your head against something you can't do and/or

don't know how to learn to do.

These drills will not betray you. If something you attempt from imagination is too difficult, just return to the drills, relax, and grind out some more exp.

When you attempt what you failed at again, you will ALWAYS see a difference.

Next volume we will get into finer aspects of shapes and how angles relate to other angles.

The more you have mastered this volume in the meantime, the more you will be able to get out of the next one.

Stay based and otaku.