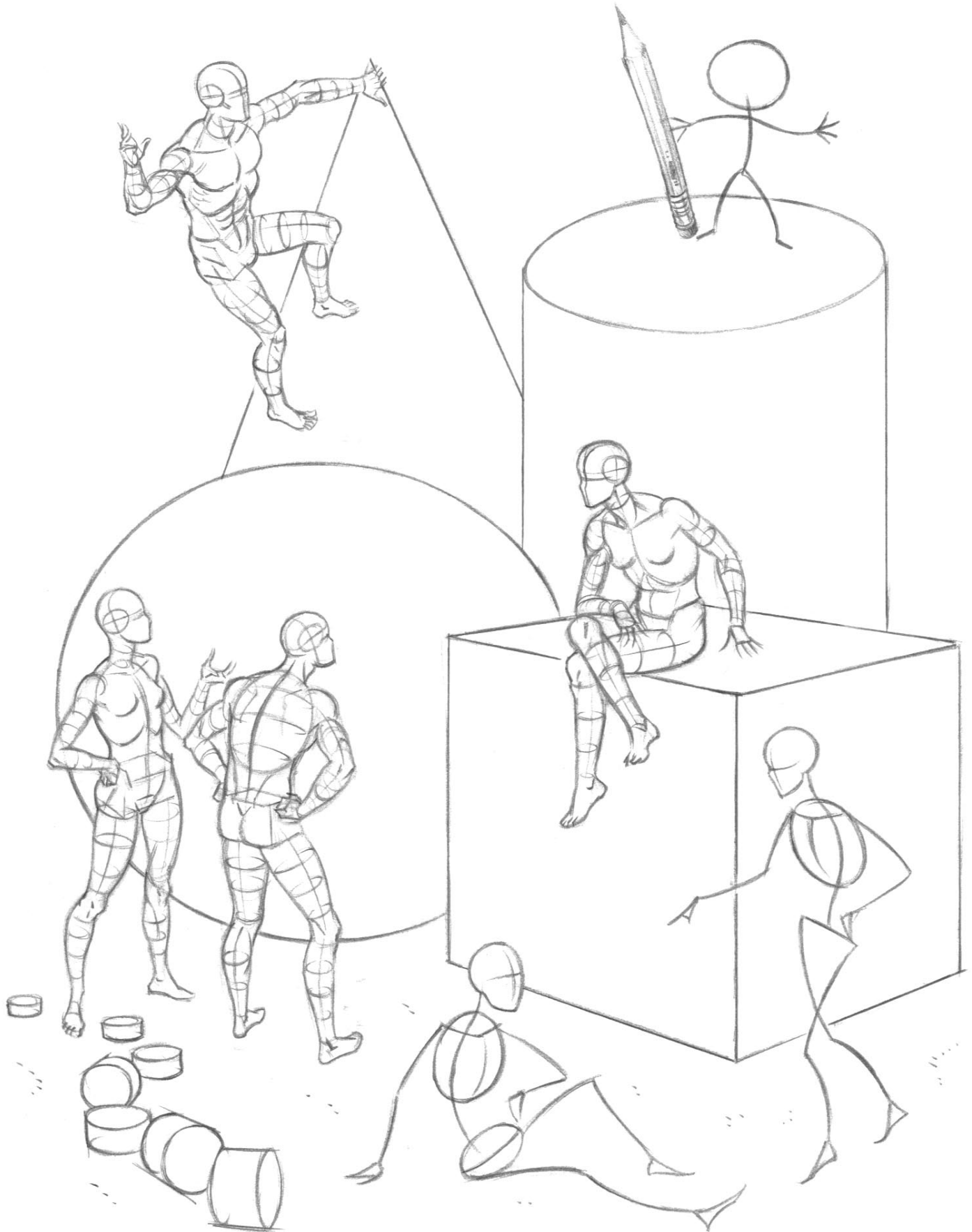


Part 1: Figure Drawing Basics—Action & Structure



The Stick Figure

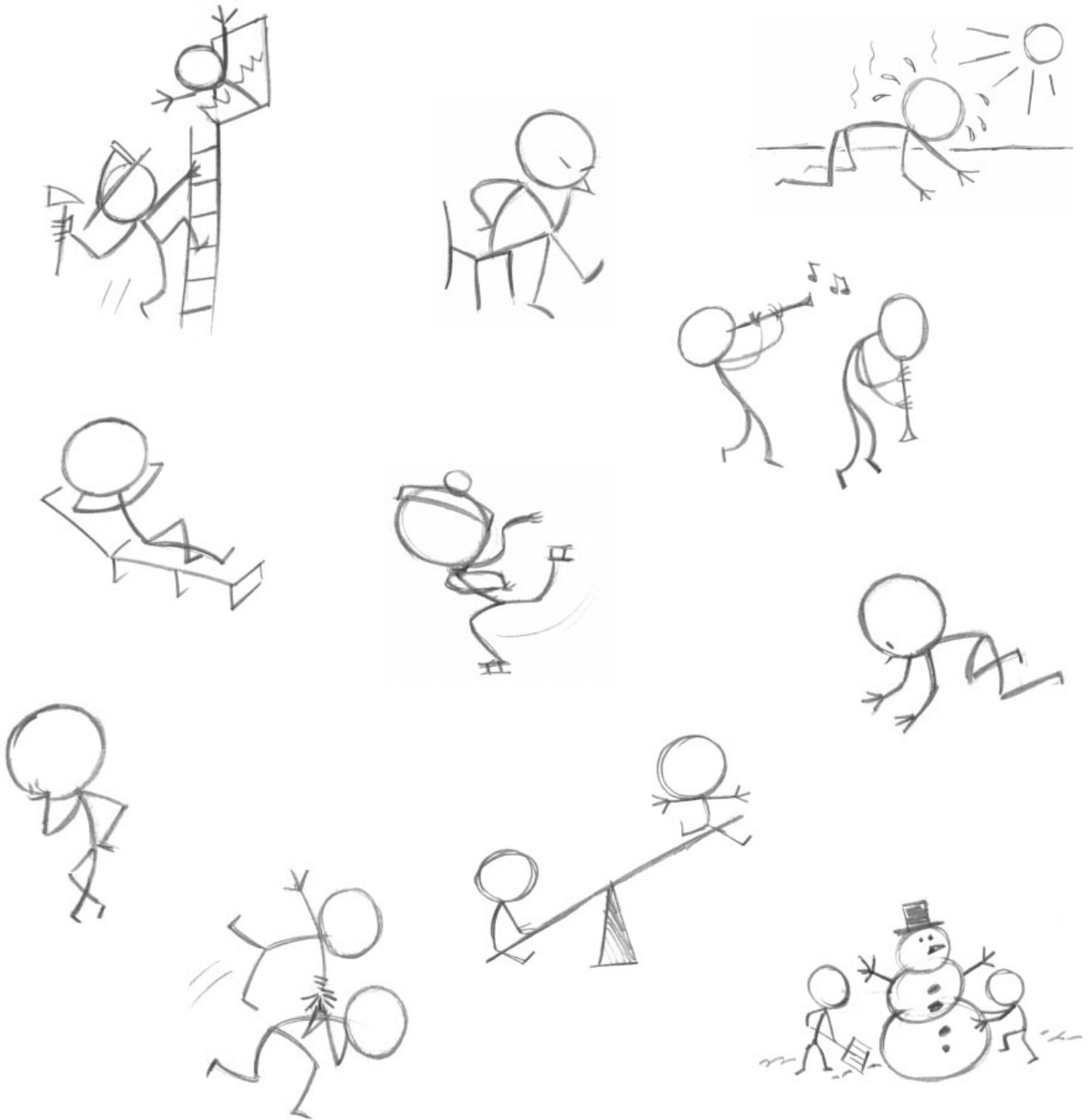
In our methodical approach to building up your confidence as an artist, we're going to tackle something simple at first—our friend the stick figure. Go ahead, draw one right now!

A reasonable stick figure at this point should contain a midline for the spine, two arms, two legs, and a circle for the head. Fingers for hands and lines for feet are optional, but being the conscientious craftsman that you are, I know you'll want to include them.

Now draw your stick figure running, jumping, falling, walking, running, climbing—see how many poses you can come up with. The record is 4096!

Don't worry about niceties like exact proportions at this point. Getting your point across is everything. We'll be getting fancier a little later on.





Okay, so anybody can draw a simple stick figure. But the point I'm trying to get across here is that, more importantly, everyone *recognizes* what a stick figure represents—a *person*! Isn't that amazing?

Cartoonists are able to communicate even with the most elementary of pictures. Show your drawings to your friends and see if they can tell what your stick figures are doing. If they misidentify some of your drawings, that's okay. Many poses will be open to interpretation. Just compliment them on their keen perception and head back to the drawing board!

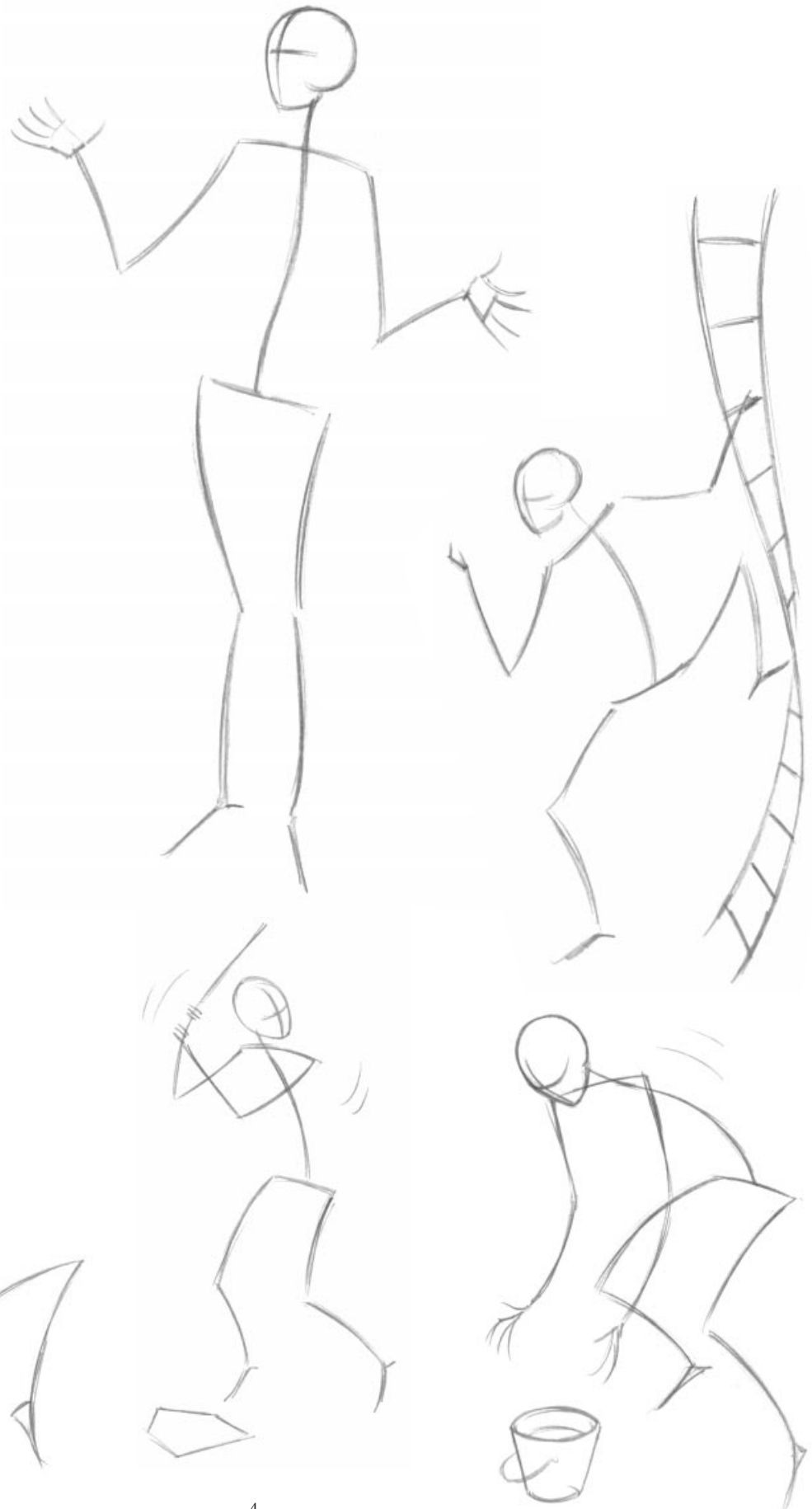
Conveying specific actions and even emotional states of mind with a few quick lines—and I dare say as few lines as possible—is an important first step towards drawing fully realized figures. If you can accomplish that with your limited stick figures, think of what you can accomplish with even more tools at your disposal.

A More Sophisticated Stick Figure

Let's use a slightly more sophisticated stick figure, one that is shaped a little more like an adult person. As before, don't be overly concerned with correct proportions right now. Stay focussed on depicting actions--leaping, swinging, golfing, rowing, sitting, etc.

We've added a line across the shoulders and a line across the hips, as well as definite elbow and knee joints. Don't worry about making your sticks perfectly straight lines, either—in fact, slightly curvy lines are more human. And don't even worry about getting the curves right, either—just go with whatever feels right.

Again, test your drawings out on others. If people can tell what activities your stick figures are involved in, you're doing great!



Our new, sleeker stick figure seems to lend itself to more graceful and athletic themes. But try comical situations as well. You may even use some of your 4096 poses you came up with for the shorter, stubbier stick figure and see if they can be translated to the more sophisticated model.

Your friends may tell you they like your older, funnier work better—don't be discouraged! Keep right on drawing.



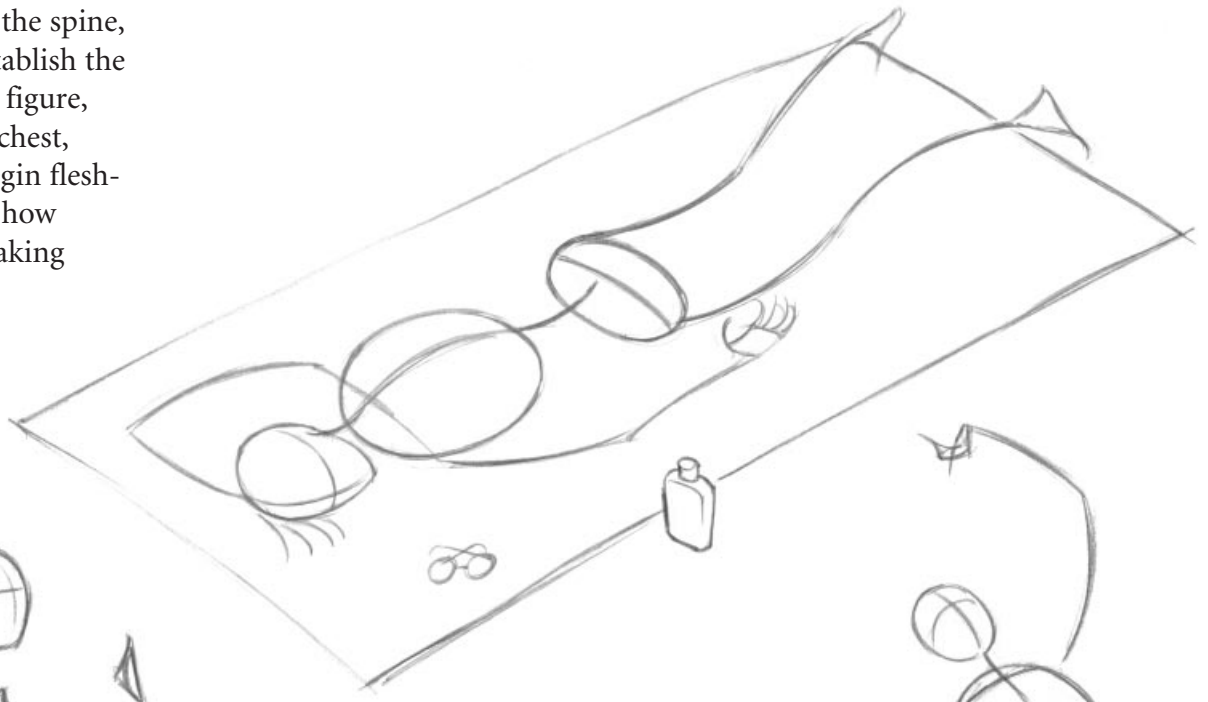
The 3 Basic Solids

It's time to let you in on a little secret. The stick figure makes such a convincing person because it represents, in a minimalistic way, what all people have got inside them—a skeleton! The spine, the arms, the legs—all are represented in a simplified way in a stick figure.

With the skeleton in mind, we can now add three shapes to our stick figures to make them more real, one of which we already have: the skull (the head), the rib cage (the chest), and the pelvis (hip bone). These are the three largest bony masses in the body. Use simple ovals for right now.



After you've drawn the spine, arms and legs to establish the action of your stick figure, proceed to add the chest, hips and head to begin fleshing things out. See how quickly things are taking shape?



Keep the focus on the action, first and foremost. If your drawings don't communicate the story your trying to tell, all the ovals in the world aren't helping you.



Build on a solid foundation: action and emotion!

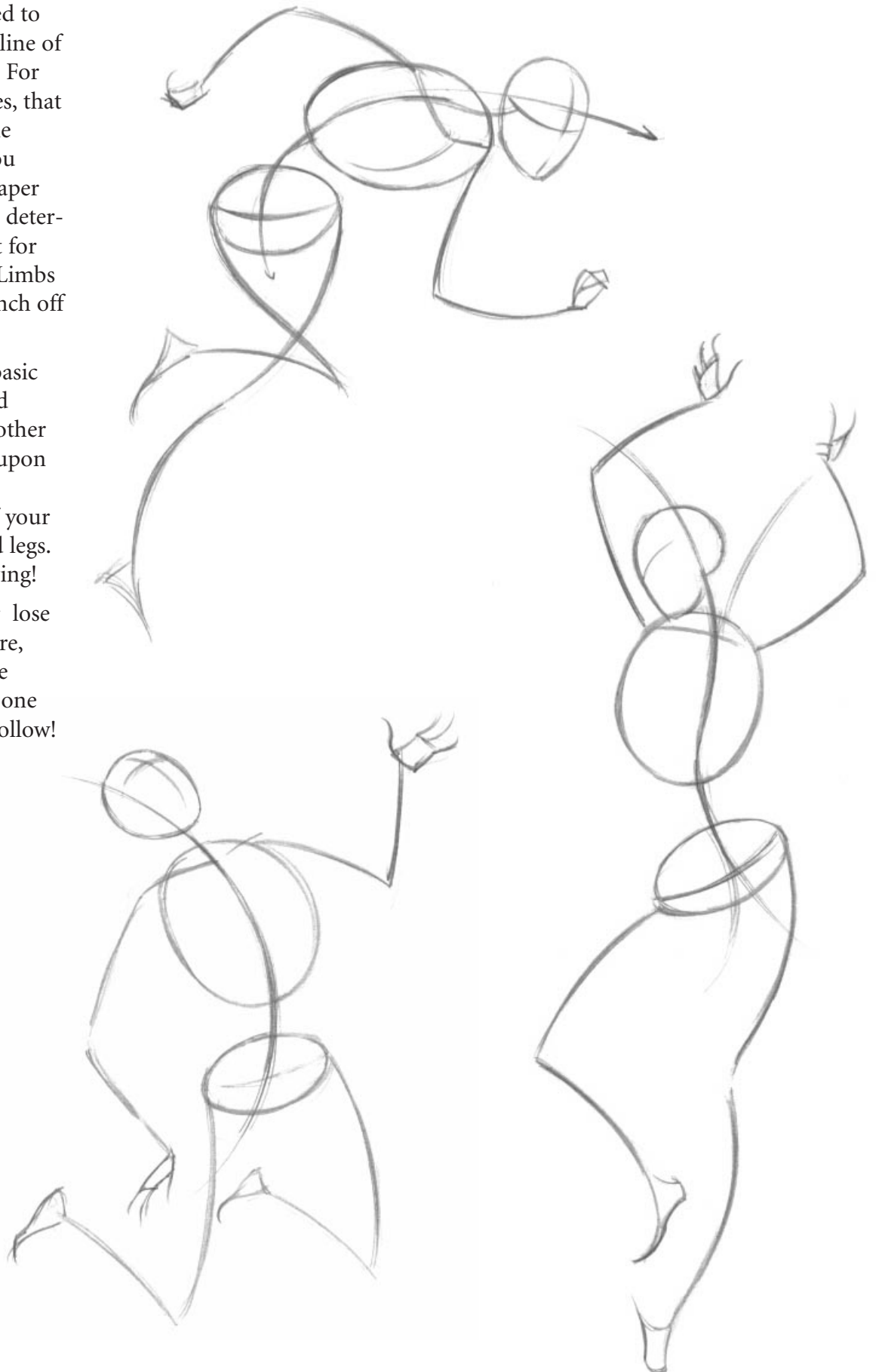
The Main Line of Action

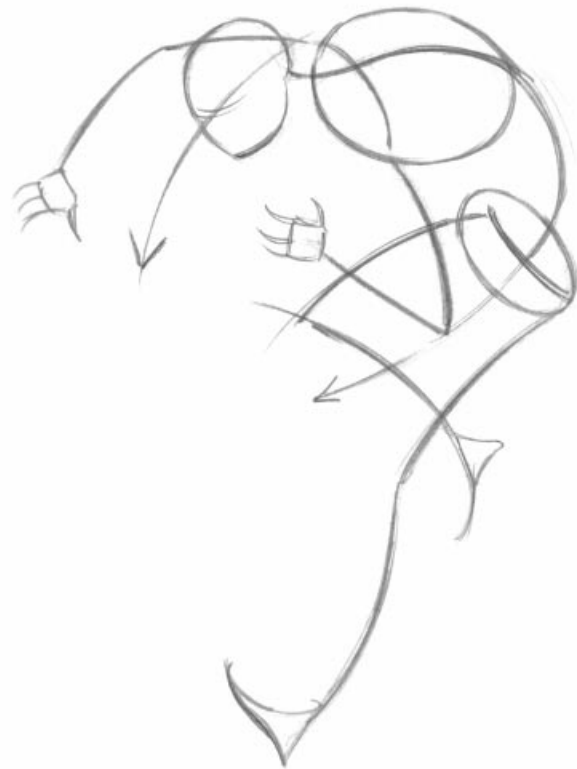
The first thing you need to determine is the main line of action for your figure. For all intents and purposes, that is synonymous with the spine. The first line you should put down on paper should be that line—it determines the entire thrust for the rest of the figure. Limbs and even the head branch off from that.

Notice how the three basic solids—chest, skull and pelvis—relate to each other differently depending upon the arc of the spine.

Continue the sweep of your pose into the arms and legs. Keep your figures moving!

It's important to never lose sight of your stick figure, because it represents the skeleton. And where bone goes, flesh will surely follow!





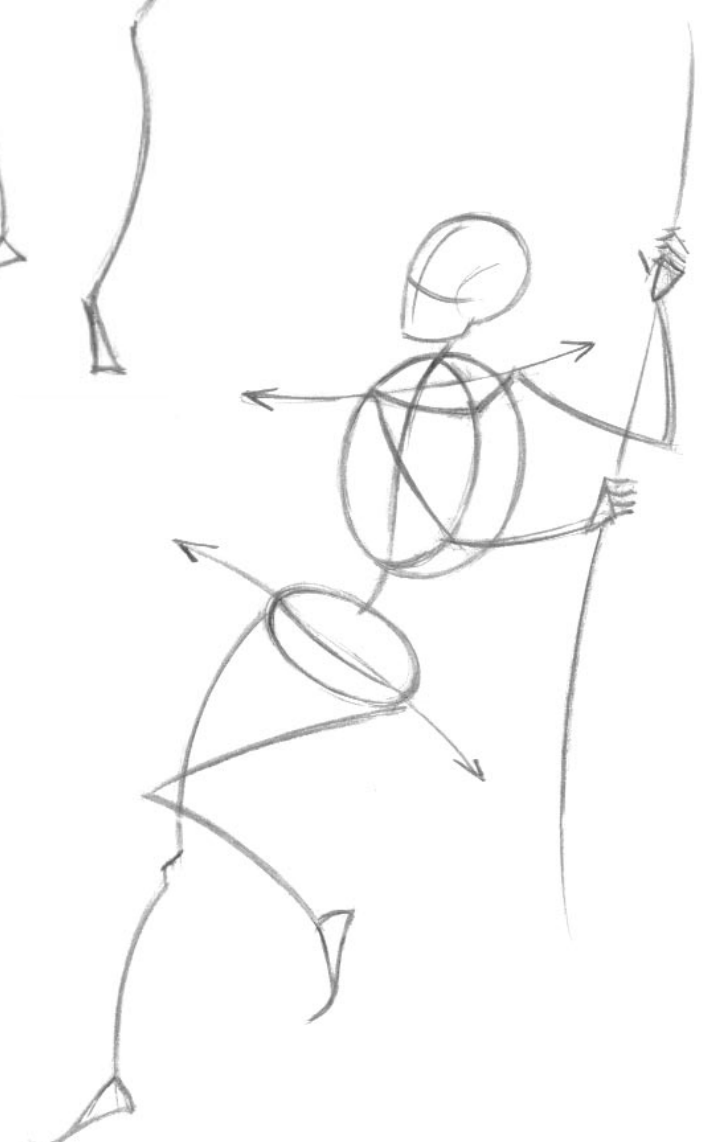
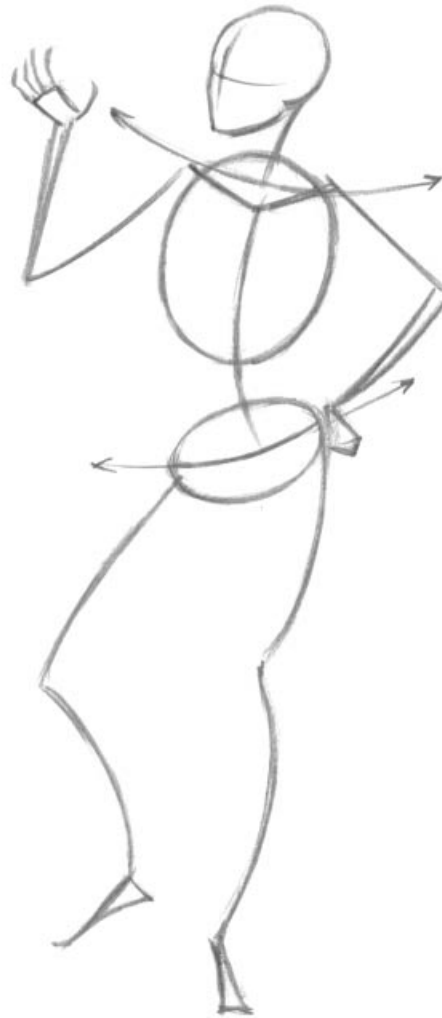
Okay, so now every pose is starting to look like dancing. Oh well. You get the point.

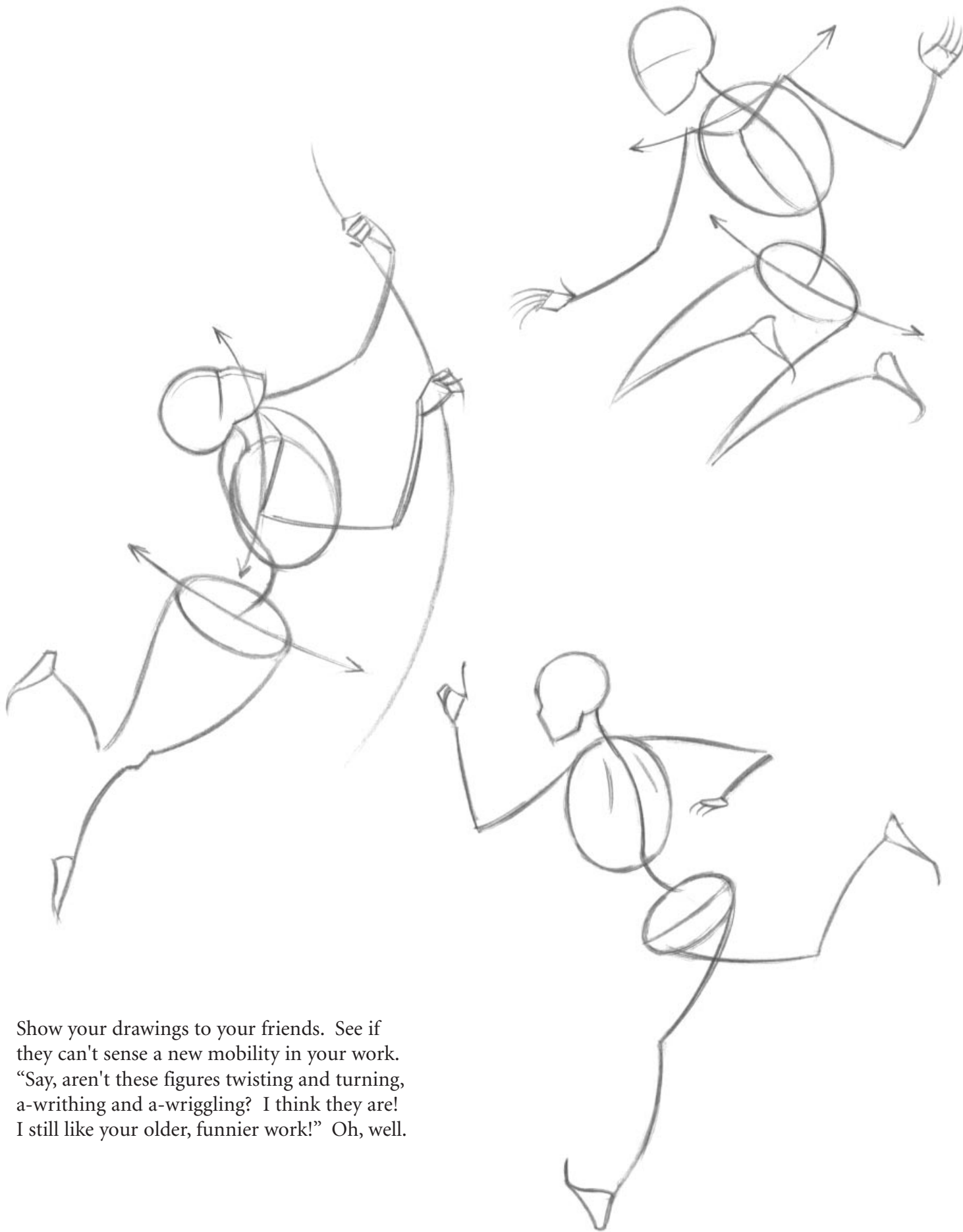
Twisting and Turning Along the Spine

The spine conveys the main action of a figure because it's highly flexible. The back bends, twists and turns at the waist, and the head bobs all around—and it's all thanks to our friend the spine.

Don't draw your figures with a single solid body mass. Move the shoulder in relation to the hips, get your figures to twist and turn. Get your figures to boogie!

Draw several figures where the shoulders are twisting and turning in relation to the hips. Make use of the flexibility of the spine.





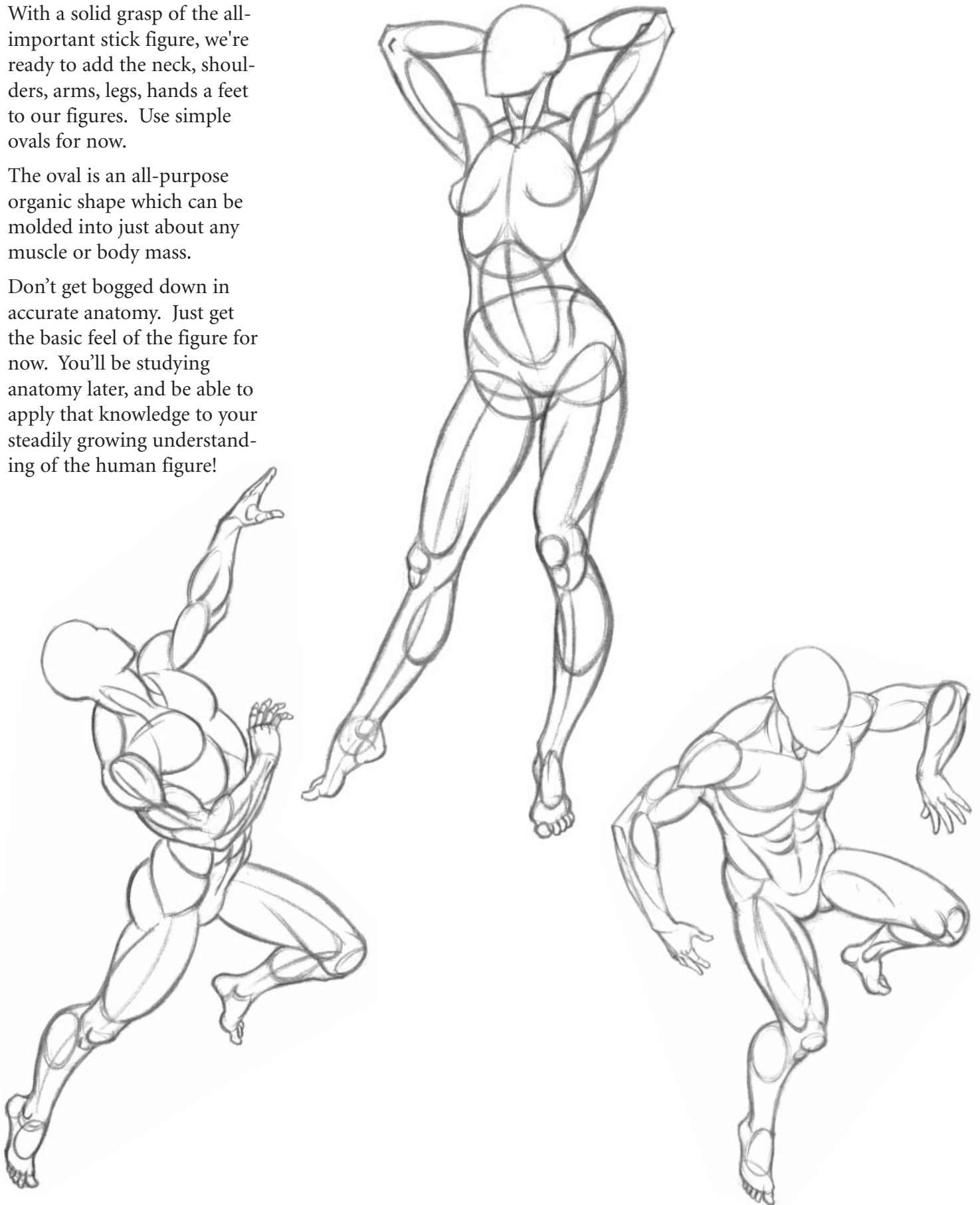
Show your drawings to your friends. See if they can't sense a new mobility in your work. "Say, aren't these figures twisting and turning, a-writhing and a-wriggling? I think they are! I still like your older, funnier work!" Oh, well.

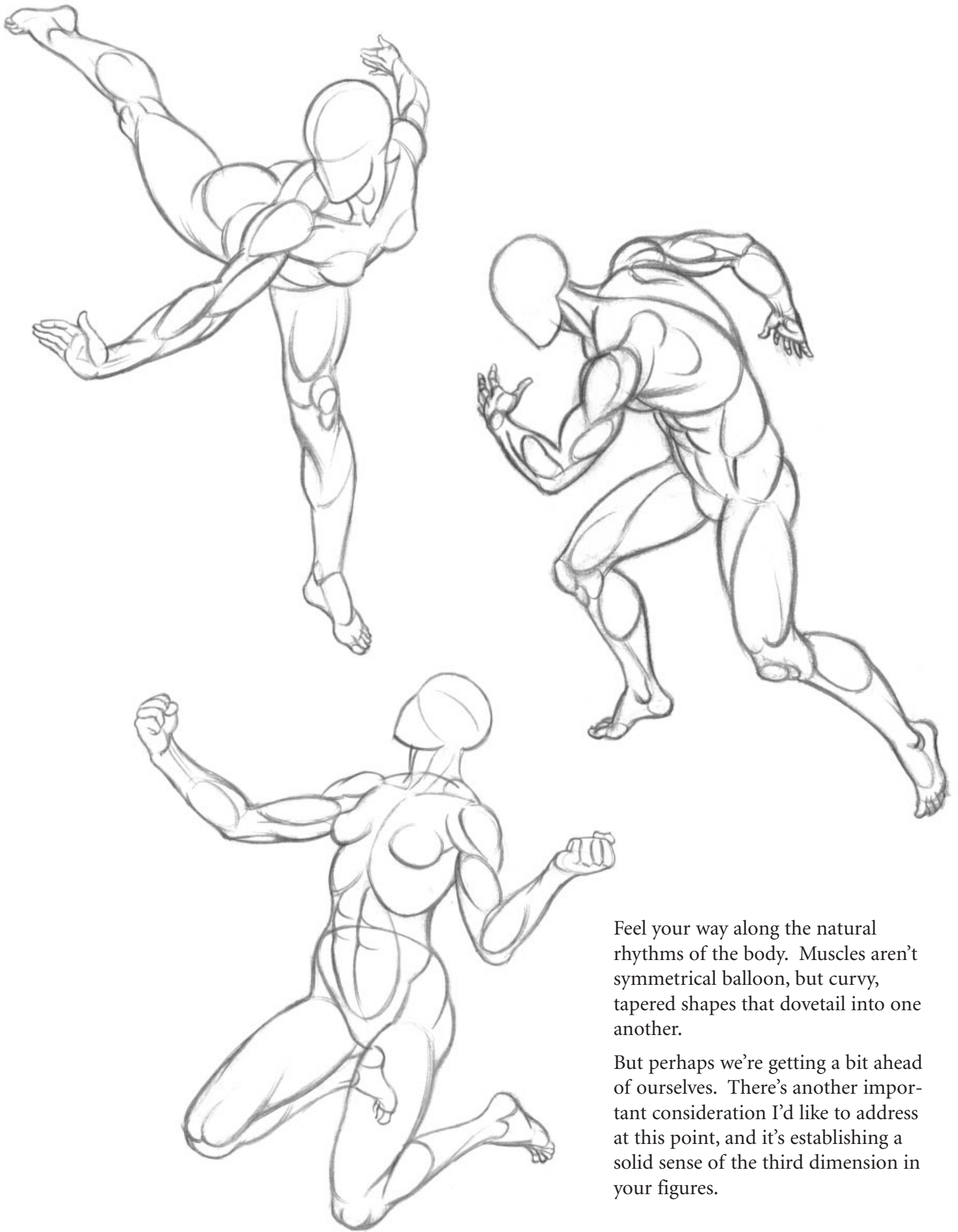
Fleshing Out the Figure With Ovals

With a solid grasp of the all-important stick figure, we're ready to add the neck, shoulders, arms, legs, hands, and feet to our figures. Use simple ovals for now.

The oval is an all-purpose organic shape which can be molded into just about any muscle or body mass.

Don't get bogged down in accurate anatomy. Just get the basic feel of the figure for now. You'll be studying anatomy later, and be able to apply that knowledge to your steadily growing understanding of the human figure!

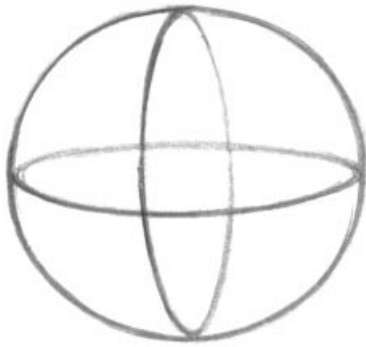




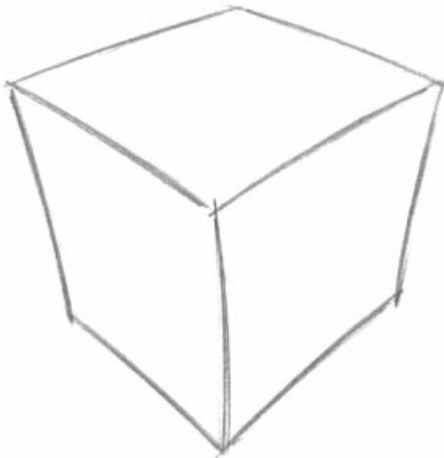
Feel your way along the natural rhythms of the body. Muscles aren't symmetrical balloon, but curvy, tapered shapes that dovetail into one another.

But perhaps we're getting a bit ahead of ourselves. There's another important consideration I'd like to address at this point, and it's establishing a solid sense of the third dimension in your figures.

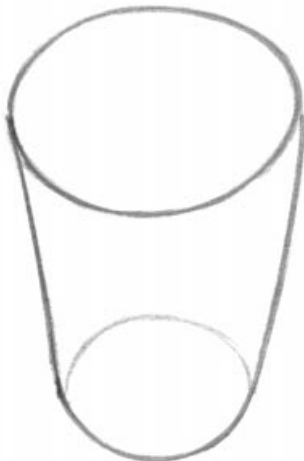
Adding the Third Dimension



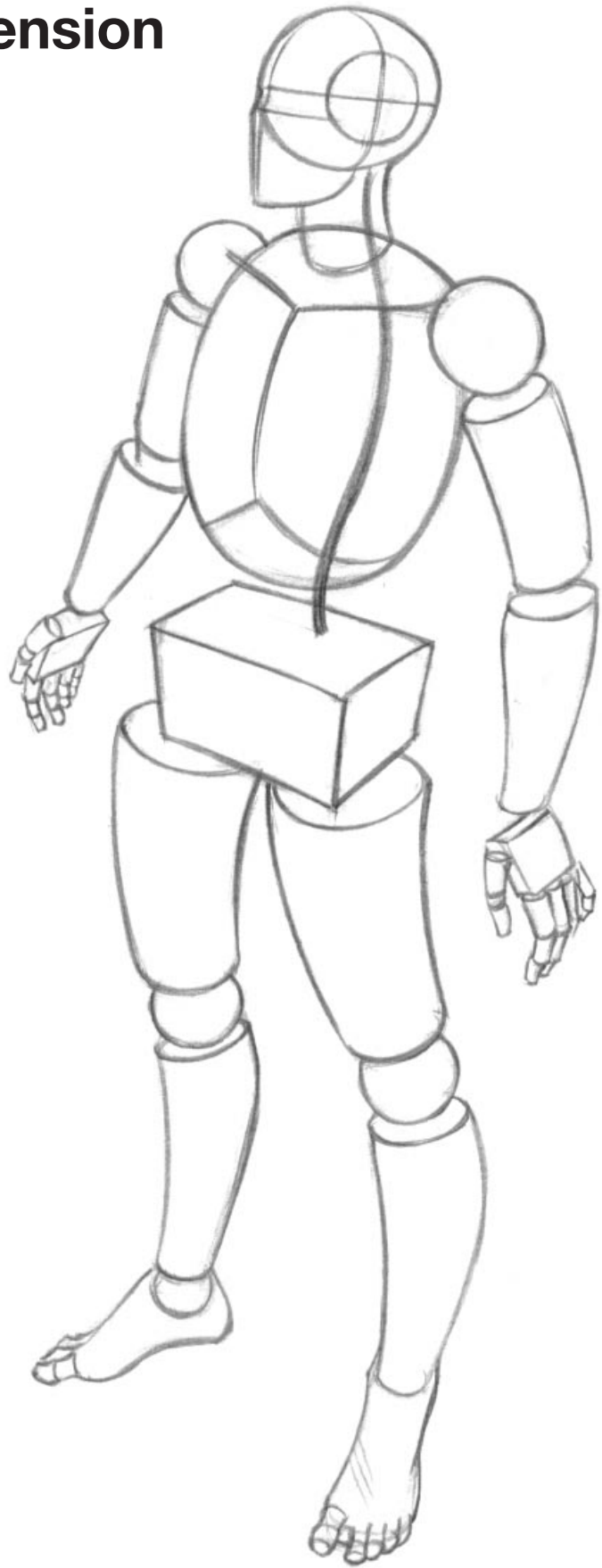
Sphere



Cube



Cylinder



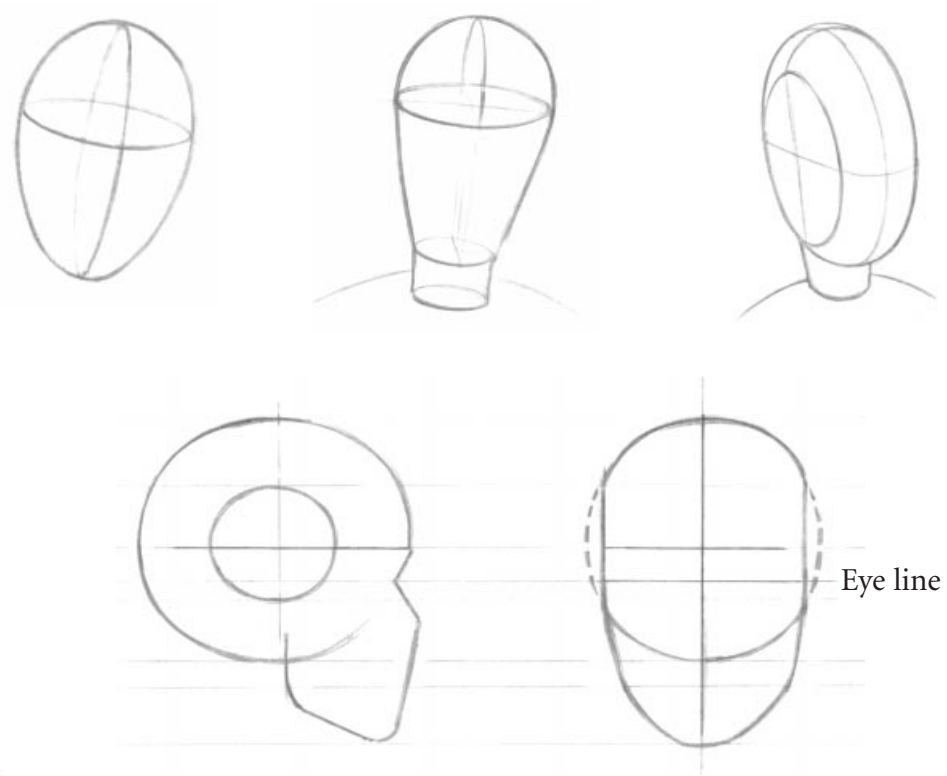
You can make your figures suddenly burst off the page and come alive in three dimensions very easily—no complex shading or heavy-handed lighting tricks involved. Just use variations of the three simple geometric shapes at left—sphere, cube and cylinder—and you'll be amazed at how your figures fill up space!

The Head

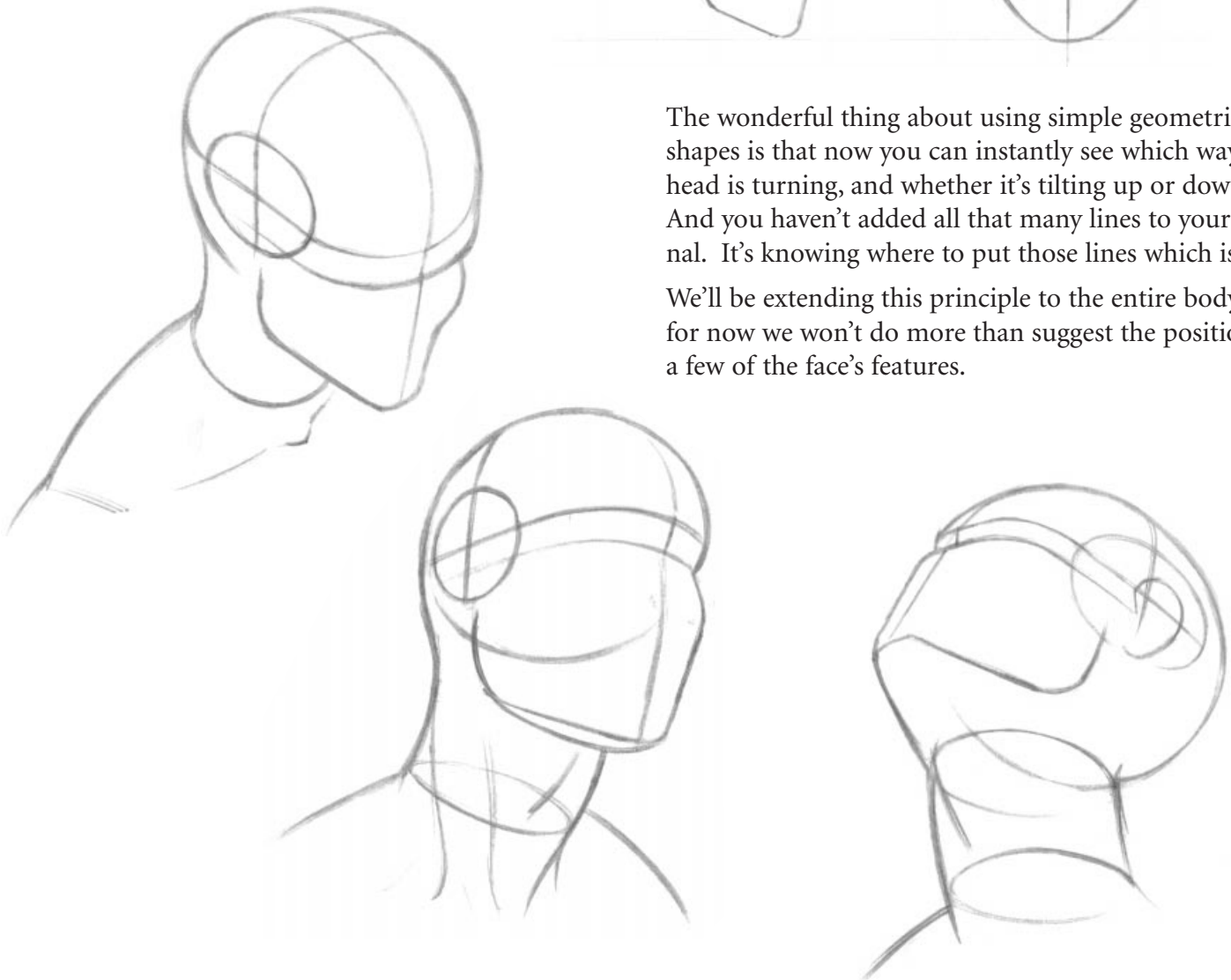
Of our three basic solids, head, chest and hips, let's start at the top.

Conceiving of the head as an egg is good for starters, but it will only get you so far. A light bulb shape is a bit better, and a wheel of cheese is interesting, too.

There are two main parts to the head: the skull and the face. The skull is somewhat like a sphere with the sides flattened (like a wheel of cheese, while the face is triangular.



The wonderful thing about using simple geometric shapes is that now you can instantly see which way the head is turning, and whether it's tilting up or down. And you haven't added all that many lines to your arsenal. It's knowing where to put those lines which is key. We'll be extending this principle to the entire body, so for now we won't do more than suggest the position of a few of the face's features.

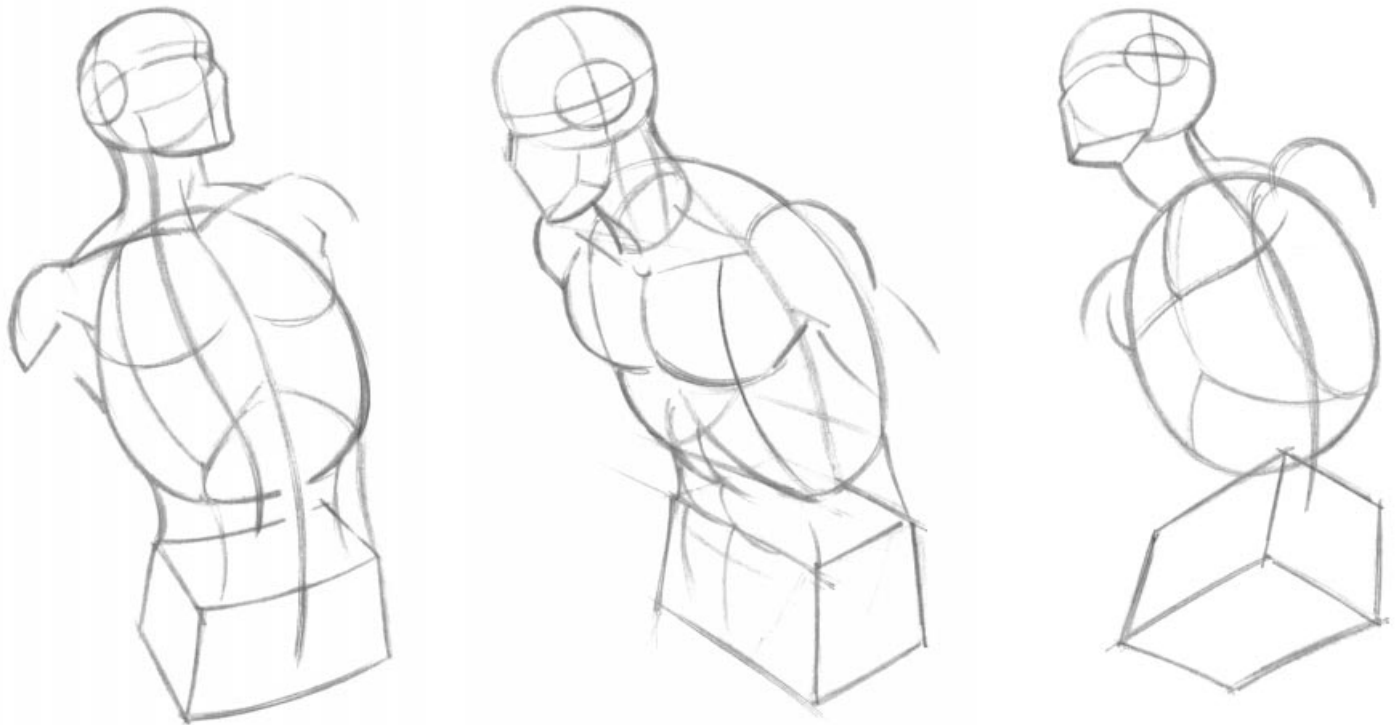
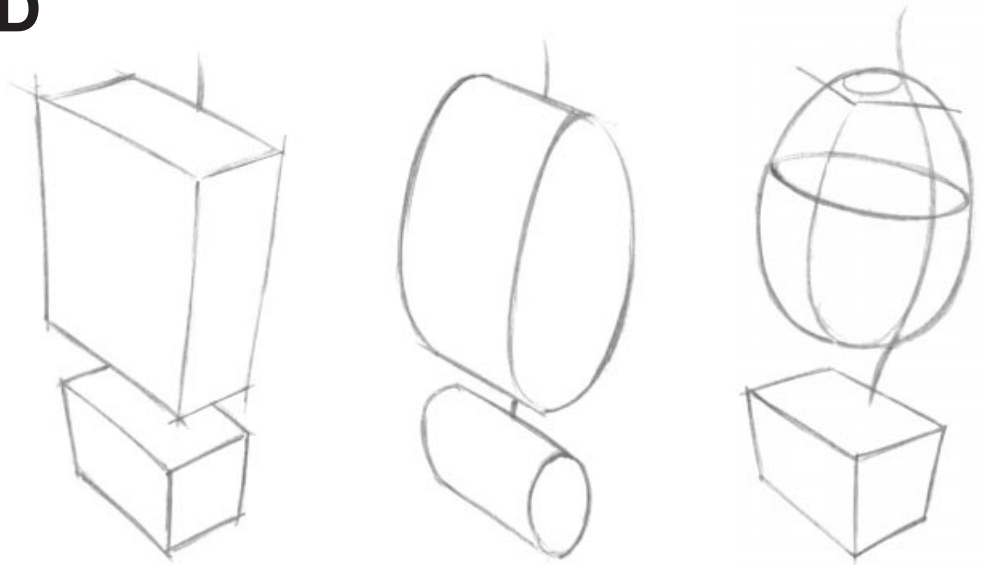




I don't have much to say on this page—kinda like these guys.

The Torso in 3D

It's popular in artistic circles to think of the chest and hips as two boxes. It's also equally in vogue to think of it as two cylindrical shapes, or even 3D ovals. Personally, I've settled on a hybrid set of shapes of my own devising—a box for the hips, and a chest that is a cross between a beehive and a Chinese lampshade. That's the best I can explain it.



Whatever shapes you decide on—and it's important because these are two of our three basic solids here—the main thing is to keep the spine in mind. Notice how the geometric shapes really make clear the twisting, turning and bending of the torsos below. There's really no ambiguity as to which way the figure is moving. And such clarity only adds to the impact of your figures, their actions, and the stories they're involved in.



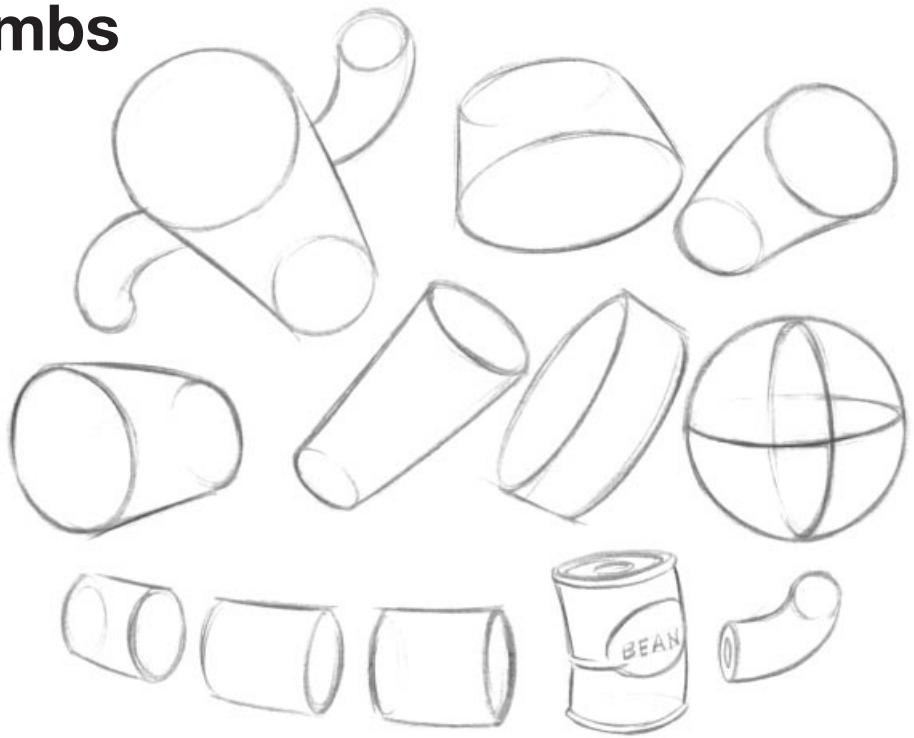
Follow the same routine we've established. First, draw the main line of action, or the spine, to determine the main thrust of your pose, Then continue with the limbs of your figure as stick lines. Only now, flesh out your three basic solids (**head, chest and hips**) with geometric shapes to make your figures come alive in three dimensions. Work with it!

Cylinders for Limbs

Both cylinders and spheres are types of 3-dimensional circles. By using them on our figures' limbs, they become 3-dimensional. Like their 2-dimensional cousin, the oval, they can be endlessly tapered and distorted into all sorts of organic shapes, like those found on the human body.

Don't be afraid to bend and curve your cylinders, and again, don't be concerned with anatomical accuracy at this point. The main thing is getting those limbs to bend and fold through 3-dimensional space, right off the page!

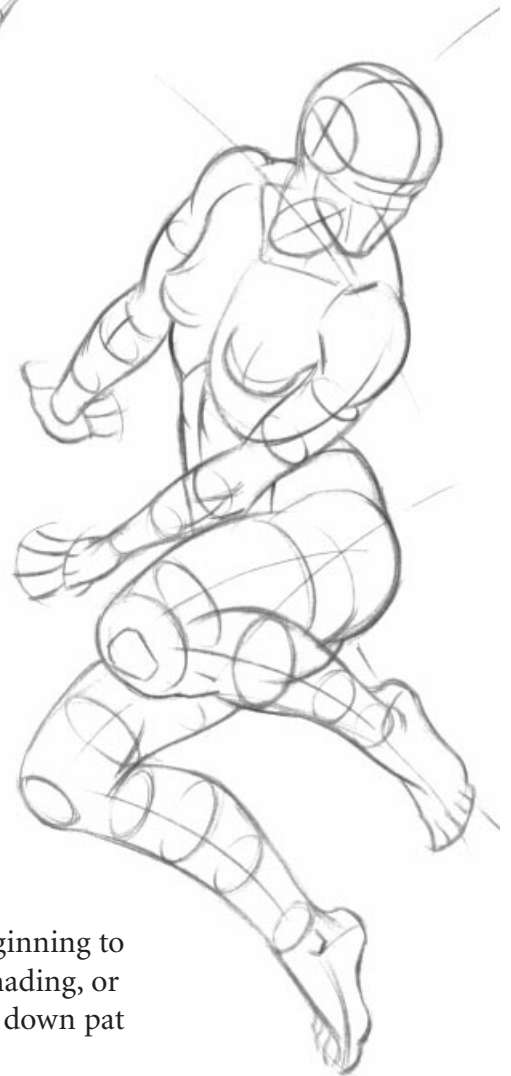
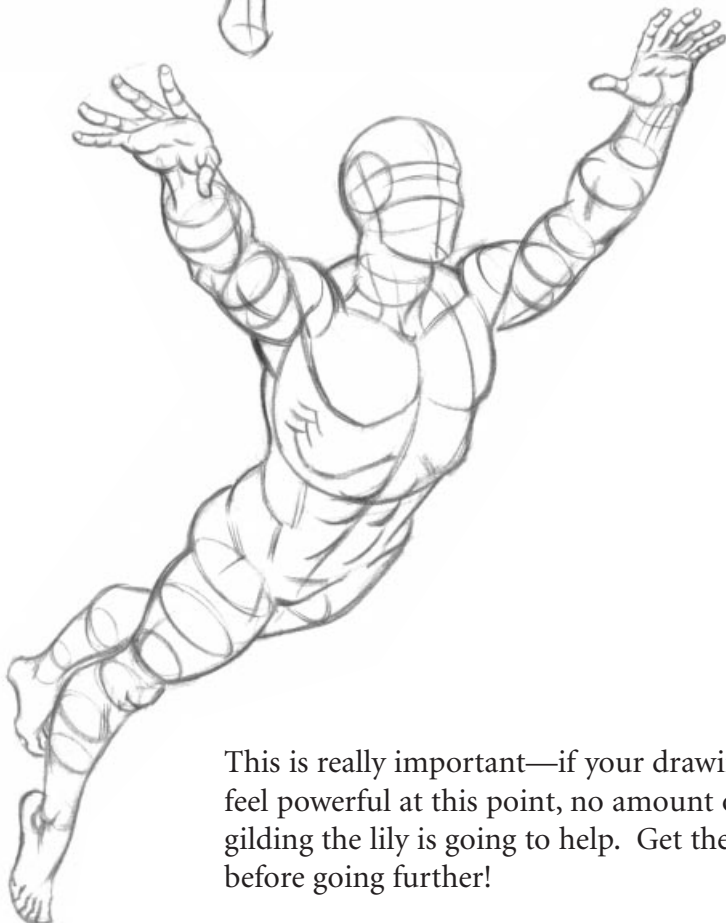
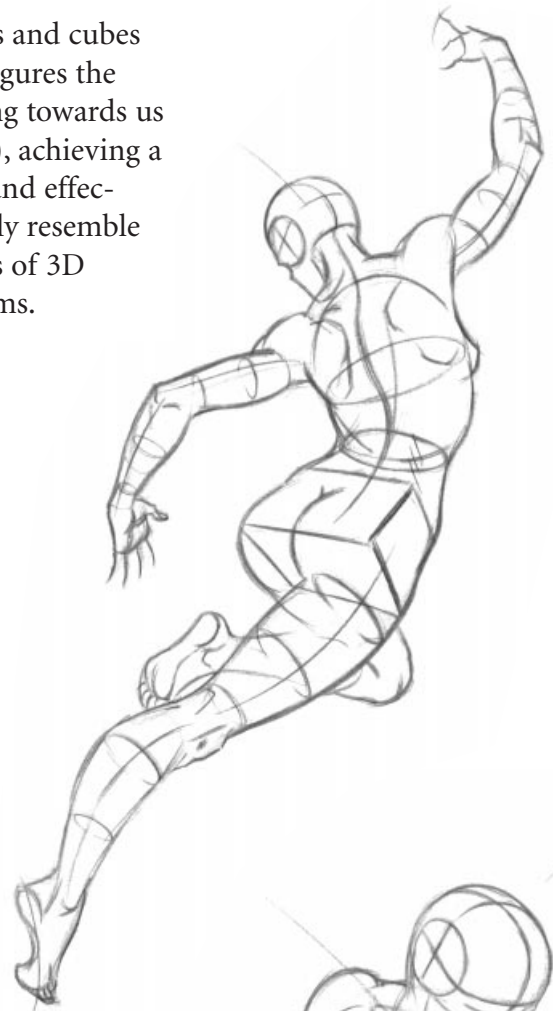
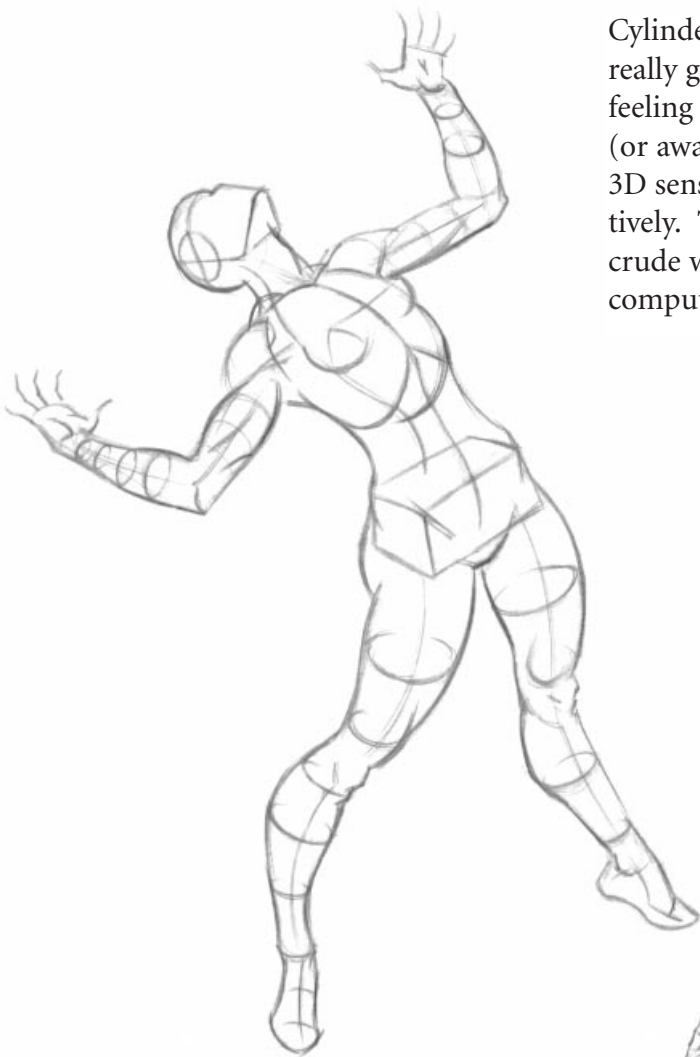
Use the 'stick' limb as the center line, or core, of your cylinders.



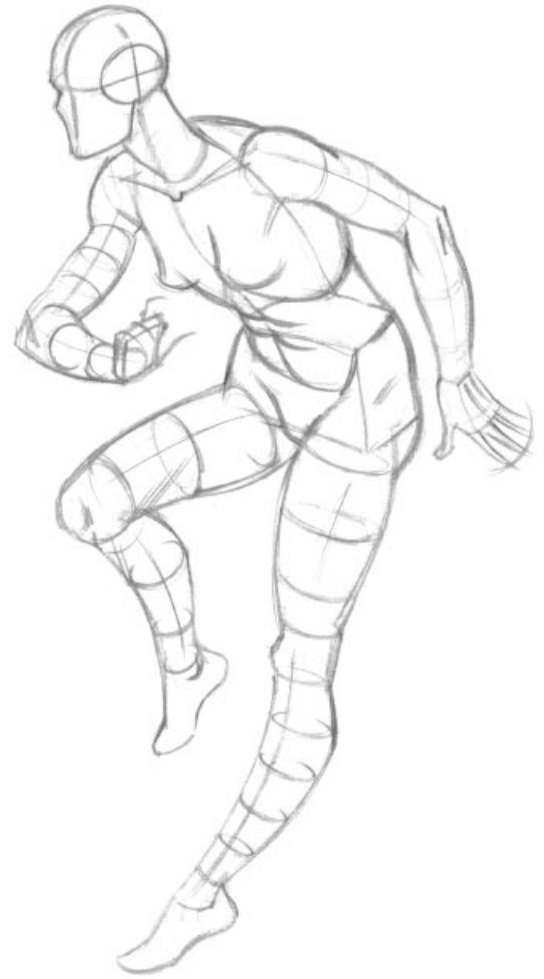
Notice how the flat the stick figure above is. In the fleshed out 3D figure, there's no question as to which parts of the body are closer to us, and which are further away.



Cylinders, spheres and cubes really give these figures the feeling of thrusting towards us (or away from us), achieving a 3D sense simply and effectively. They closely resemble crude wire frames of 3D computer programs.



This is really important—if your drawings aren't beginning to feel powerful at this point, no amount of lighting, shading, or gilding the lily is going to help. Get these principles down pat before going further!



You're going further? That's okay, here's still another page of 3D figures. I'll just keep beating the drum for cylinders...

A Select Bibliography

Most of what I know about drawing I've learned from books. Below is a list of books I recommend for every artist's library, particularly if you're in it for the long haul. These are all books that I have learned from, and in many cases, continue to learn from. Study them closely.

Comparative Anatomy (Human/Animal)

Cyclopedia Anatomicae by György Fehér, Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, Inc., ISBN 1884822878.

Human Anatomy/Figure Drawing

Atlas of Human Anatomy for the Artist by Stephen Rogers Peck, Oxford University Press, ISBN 0195030958.

Drawing the Head and Figure by Jack Hamm, Perigee Press, ISBN 0399507914.

How to Draw the Human Figure : An Anatomical Approach by Louise Gordon, Viking Press, ISBN 0140464778.

How to Draw the Human Figure (Famous Artists School : Step-By-Step Method) by Howard Munce, Henry Holt, ISBN 0805015280.

The Human Figure : An Anatomy for Artists by David K. Rubins, Viking Press, ISBN 0140042431.

How to Draw What You See by Rudy De Reyna, Watson-Guption Publications, ISBN 0823023753.

Dynamic Anatomy by Burne Hogarth, Watson-Guption Publications, ISBN, 0823015513.

Dynamic Figure Drawing by Burne Hogarth, Watson-Guption Publications, ISBN: 0823015777.

Figures in Action (How to Draw and Paint Series) by Andrew Loomis, Walter Foster Publications, ISBN 1560100095.

The Figure in Motion by Mark Smith and Thomas Easley, Watson-Guption Publications, ISBN 0823016927.

Animal Drawing/Anatomy

How to Draw Animals by Jack Hamm, Perigee, ISBN 0399508023.

The Art of Animal Drawing : Construction, Action Analysis, Caricature by Ken Hultgren, Dover Publications, ISBN 0486274268.

Animation

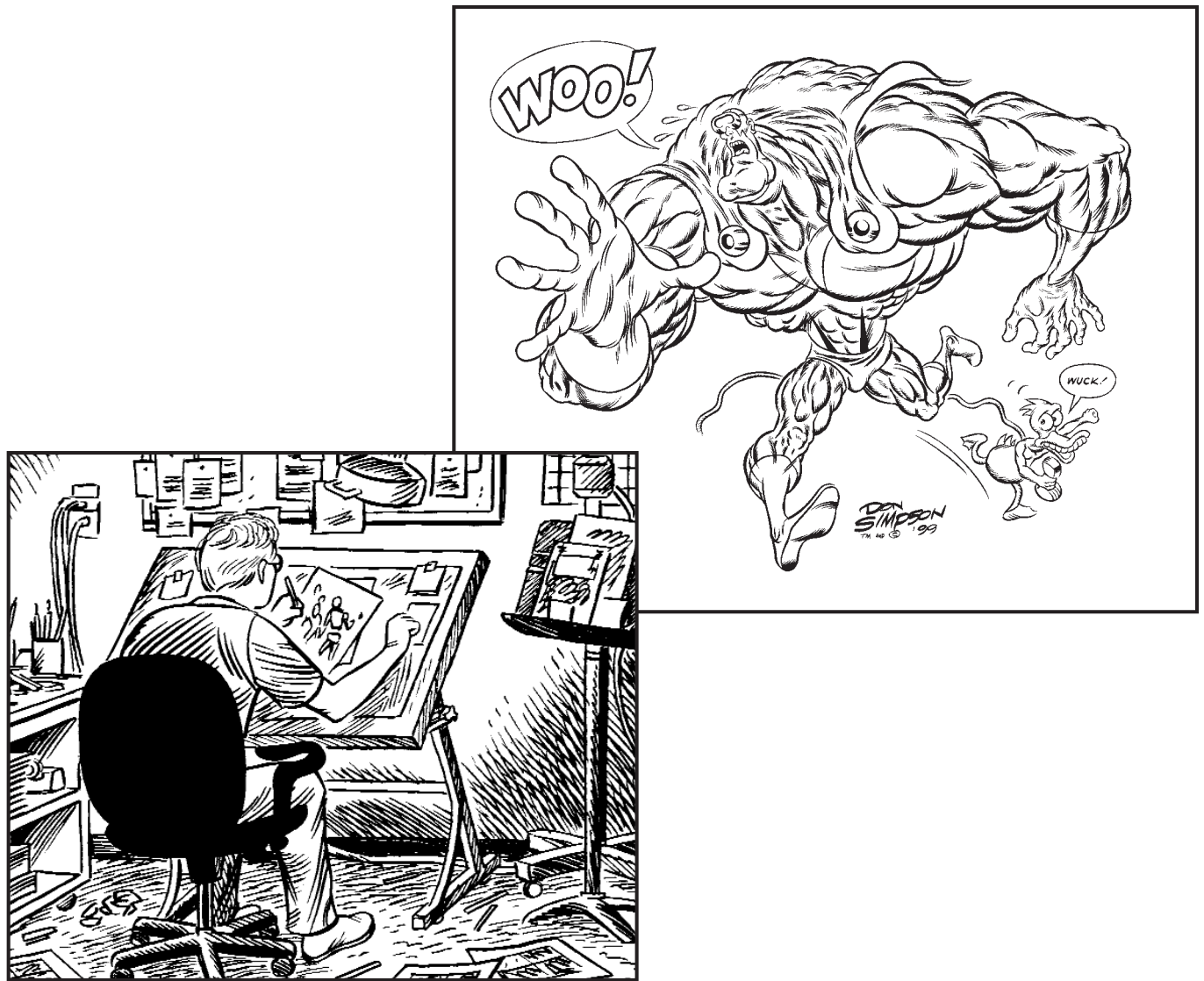
Cartoon Animation by Preston Blair, Walter Foster Publications, ISBN 1560100842.

Comics

Understanding Comics by Scott McCloud, Harper perennial Library, ISBN 006097625X.

Your Career in the Comics by Lee Nordling, Andrews & McMeel, ISBN 0836207483.

How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way by Stan Lee and John Buscema, Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0671530771.



Cartoonist Don Simpson is the creator of Megaton Man, Border Worlds, Bizarre Heroes and many other comic books. Since 1996, Don has been creating Megaton Man adventures exclusively for the Internet at www.MEGATONMAN.com.

Figure Drawing Basics is the first chapter of *Cartooning—Concepts and Methods*, an instructional book Don is creating to convey his approach to writing, drawing, storytelling and other aspects of making comic book art. Future chapters will delve into human anatomy, animals, perspective, inking, lettering and writing, among other things. For more information and updates, please check with www.MEGATONMAN.com.

This book is dedicated to my wife, Judy.

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