

# Instantly Improve Your Drawings With 3 Simple Questions



A Workbook



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We all agree that drawing is amazing, right? But you and I both know that it's also really easy to get stuck during the process. You start out all fired up and before you know it you hit a wall and don't know where to go next. It can be so frustrating when you can't figure out why your drawing isn't heading in the right direction.

To get you around that wall of stuckness here is a simple set of questions that'll help you clarify a) Why you are stuck and b) What you need to change in your drawing to get it back on the path you had in mind for it.

Before we dive in, a word of caution. Getting to the bottom of these two seemingly harmless questions isn't for the faint of heart. Why? Because we'll be dealing with truth seeking, and that my friend takes courage. But I also know that **you** are up to the task. So take a deep breath, settle in and commit to going deep.

Let's do this!

## Question #1: Who's it for?

The answer to this question dramatically affects how you'll answer the following two. The only possible two answers are: yourself or someone else.

### A) Yourself

*Proceed through the next two questions and take YOUR instincts, curiosities and delights as the guiding principle for declaring your answers. Don't answer from a place of "thou shalt". You know... those voices from former teachers, and parents that declare what "good art" is supposed to be. None of that! You are the artist and YOUR answers will lead you to drawings that are uniquely and inimitably YOURS.*

### B) Someone Else

*Take the question from #2 with you, when you meet with the person you're creating the drawing for. Use them as a jumping board to lead and guide your conversation. These questions will help you, together with your client, to come up with a clear and concrete agenda for the drawing.*

## Question 2: What's it about?

*This may seem basic, but to get you unstuck this is where you have to begin the dialog with your drawing. But watch out, not all answers are created equal. Here is a list of 3 possible categories. Each category comes with possible sub-categories. Use them to craft a quality answer. Be aware that the most remarkable drawings combine 2-3 subcategories:*

### Category 1: The Subject

This is self-explanatory, but it's important to know what EXACTLY you sat down to draw.

*For example: When you're drawing a scene it's important to know if you're more interested in the spacious landscape or the two trees in the foreground.*

Here are some possible subject choices:

- Figure
- Tree
- Portrait
- Animal
- Everyday object

## Category 2: Formal Qualities

Choosing the formal qualities as the main focus of your drawing means you get clear on what aspect of the subject is most captivating to you, and then drawing it in a way that highlights this feature.

*For example: Is it the silhouette of the two trees or the volume of the tree's foliage?*

Here are some possible formal qualities to choose from:

- Space
- Contrast
- Flat Shapes and/or Patterns (silhouette, light/shadow patterns ,...)
- Volume
- Gesture
- Contour
- Color (saturation vs neutral, warm vs cool)
- Value
- Texture
- Light & Shadow
- Mark making style (gestural and energetic, or subtle and nuanced)



Texture



Contour



### Category 3: The Narrative

What about the subject intrigued you? If it wasn't so much about a formal element, then what story, or story fragment did it spark in you?

*Possible example: You want to draw the two previously mentioned trees because their position to each other makes you think of a big sister with her little sister. The thought of them looking like a pair of sisters is the story fragment that peaked your interest.*



Your next steps to craft a quality answer to “What’s it about?” and to improve your drawing

**1. Write out your answers using the last page of the workbook.**

You can pick one of every category i.e. Tree, + Silhouette + Sister Narrative.

Not all drawings need all three categories. You can also have a drawing that’s purely formal in nature.

*For example a tree drawing that’s solely interested in the color fluctuations between the foliage and the trunk.*

**2. Eliminate/downplay ALL competing formal qualities.**

*For Example: If the drawing is about shape you’ll want to downplay volume and texture.*

**3. Assess if your current drawing is set up to support your intention.**

Going back to the tree sisters, you’d have to draw them zoomed out far enough to see their hugging silhouette, but not too far out, or they’ll get lost in the vastness of the landscape... unless you want to tell the story in which the two sisters are lost and alone. Remember, you get to control the story.

- What materials will best support your intentions?
- What “style” will best support your intentions? Rendered or gestural, cartoony or realistic,...?

**4. Experiment with different versions.**

Rather than giving up after one try, have several goes at it. Try the drawing zoomed in, zoomed out, shifted to the left of the frame, etc. Embrace the exploration process and welcome the journey of discovering YOUR answer.

*Seeing the different versions will bring you clarity. Any judgmental chatter in your head won’t.*

### Question #3: What's it for?

This is another deceptively simple, yet immensely powerful question. Here are four possible answers that will require different strategies from you:

#### Killing Time

*This is when you draw to do just that. You grabbed your sketchbook for the mere sake of enjoyment. No strings attached.*

Success Strategy: Hang loose and enjoy whatever may come. If you drew and enjoyed making marks on the page you succeeded.

#### Technical Practice

*Are you creating this drawing to practice a certain technique? Do you have a specific technical quality you're aspiring to in your drawing?*

Success Strategy:

Embrace the drawing as a practice session instead of seeing it as a performance. Practice means experimenting, making mistakes, emulating masters with a clear goal in mind, until you get it right. Practice doesn't mean ending up with a frame-worthy end result. Practice doesn't mean doing the same thing you always do when you draw.

Success looks like:

- Actively trying out new ways
- Numerous false starts and dead ends
- Knowing what your goal result looks like

#### Investigation/Experimentation

*This is when you draw with the intention to explore. It's similar to the above mentioned practice strategy, except that in this case you don't have a set goal for what you are striving for. Instead your goal is discovery. This can be the discovery of new and exciting mark making techniques, of new storylines, creatures, material combinations, etc.*

Success Strategy:

Strap on your explorer's boots and welcome surprises. Try unexpected materials (draw with branches dipped in ink), mix techniques, subjects or materials in ways you haven't before.

Lead with: “Wouldn’t it be fun to try...?!” And then do just that. Write down insights you ended up with at the end of the session. These are your raw treasure materials. Take them with you so you can craft them into future works of art.

Success looks like:

- Full-hearted commitment
- You experienced child-like moments of play immersion
- You didn’t shut down ideas before you tried them
- Your hands might turn up empty or laden in treasure. Both are good outcomes.

## Producing Finished Work

*This is the kind of drawing you intend to take to its highest and fullest expression given your current level of technical skill.*

Success Strategy:

- Get clear on Question #1 & 2
- Have a creative process in place allowing you to build the drawing in phases
- Have dedicated, uninterrupted chunks of time set aside in your day
- Execute methodically
- Pause often
- Assess often
- **Upon completion ask yourself this:**

“Given my current skill set, what do I love about this piece? What do I wish I could do better for it?” Write down your answers and take them with you to motivate your next drawing sessions.

Success Looks Like:

- Considering the time you made available for the drawing and the technical training you’ve had so far, do you feel like this is a good reflection of your current best work?
- If you are dissatisfied with your outcome pinpoint with the preceding success strategy where you got off track.



# SOME VISUAL EXAMPLES



## INK SKETCH

### **What's it about:**

- a) Subject: Tree sketch
- b) Form: Volume of the foliage  
Texture of the foliage
- c) No narrative

### **What's it for:**

Technical practice in pen and ink

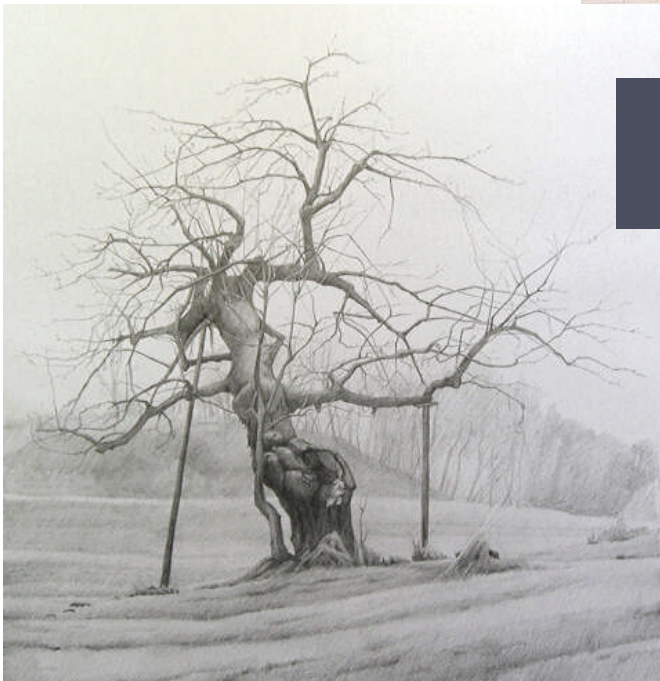
## NARRATIVE SCENE

### **What's it about:**

- a) Subject: Tree scene
- b) Form: texture, sketchy style
- b) Narrative:  
Making them feel like sisters

### **What's it for:**

Exploration



## RENDERED DRAWING

### **What's it about:**

- a) Subject: Gnarly tree in sparse winter landscape
- b) Form: Capturing the subtle details of the limbs
- c) Narrative: Making it feel like an old lady

### **What's it for:**

Finished drawing

## Your Answer Chart

## Who's it for?

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1

## What's it about

Fill in your answers on the left.  
Use the checkboxes to rank  
what's most important to you.

[illegible]

# 2

Super excited

Interested

Mildly curious

a



## Subject

b



## Formal Qualities



## Narrative

## What's it for

Play, practice,  
experimentation, finished  
product?

# 3

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