

GUIDE



Getting Your Line Art onto Paper

A no-nonsense guide to every method that actually works

By Bonny Snowdon



WELCOME

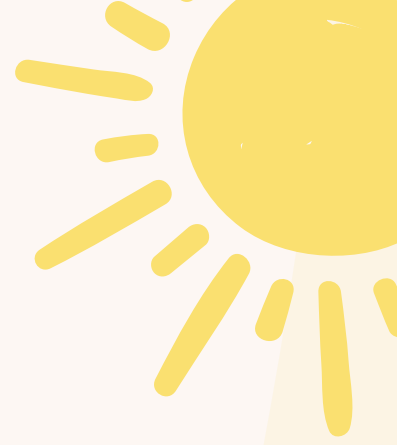
Introduction

Let's be honest. Before a single pencil stroke goes down, there's that slightly nerve-wracking moment of getting your image onto your paper. I've seen more people put off starting a drawing because of this step than almost any other. And that makes me a bit sad, because it really doesn't have to be that complicated.

The good news is there are several ways to do it, and none of them require you to be a technical genius or have a studio full of expensive kit. This guide walks you through every method I know and use, from the very simple to the slightly more involved, so you can pick the one that works best for you.

I'll also share a technique I'm currently trialling myself that solves one of the most frustrating things about traditional transfer methods. So even if you've been doing this for years, there might be something new here for you.

Bonny x



Creating Your Line Art

Before you can transfer anything, you need a line art to work from. This is simply a clean outline drawing of your subject, usually printed out at the size you want to work at. Here's how to get one.

Option 1: Using Photoshop (what I do)

I work in Adobe Photoshop on my iPad, using the Sidecar feature on my Mac. This lets me use my iPad as a second screen alongside my Mac, so I can use my Apple Pencil to trace directly around my reference photo. I then flip the image (more on why in Part 3), print it out, and transfer it to my paper.

I know not everyone has Adobe software, and that's absolutely fine. It's not a requirement by any stretch. Read on for the alternatives.

A note on Procreate

Procreate is another popular iPad app that lots of artists use for creating line art. I'll be completely honest with you though, I find it really difficult! So I won't be teaching it here. If you already know your way around it, brilliant, crack on. If not, don't worry at all. The options below work just as well.

Option 2: Autodesk Sketchbook (free and much friendlier)

Autodesk Sketchbook is a free drawing app available on iPad, Android tablets, and desktop computers. It's genuinely beginner-friendly and does everything you need for creating a simple line art outline. You just import your reference photo, reduce the opacity so you can see through it, and trace the main lines on a new layer above it. Then hide the reference layer, and you've got your line art ready to print.

- ✓ Available free on iPad, Android, and desktop
- ✓ Import your reference photo and trace over it on a new layer
- ✓ Hide the photo layer when done, then export or print your outline



Option 3: Your phone's photo editor or Microsoft Word

No apps, no drawing required. If you just want a simple outline to work from, you can open your reference photo in your phone's photo editor and increase the contrast dramatically until the details simplify into strong shapes. It won't be a perfect line art, but it can be enough to get your proportions right.

Alternatively, open your reference photo in Microsoft Word or Google Docs, insert it onto the page, resize it to the size you want to draw at, and print it. You can then use it as a tracing guide directly (more on that in Part 3).

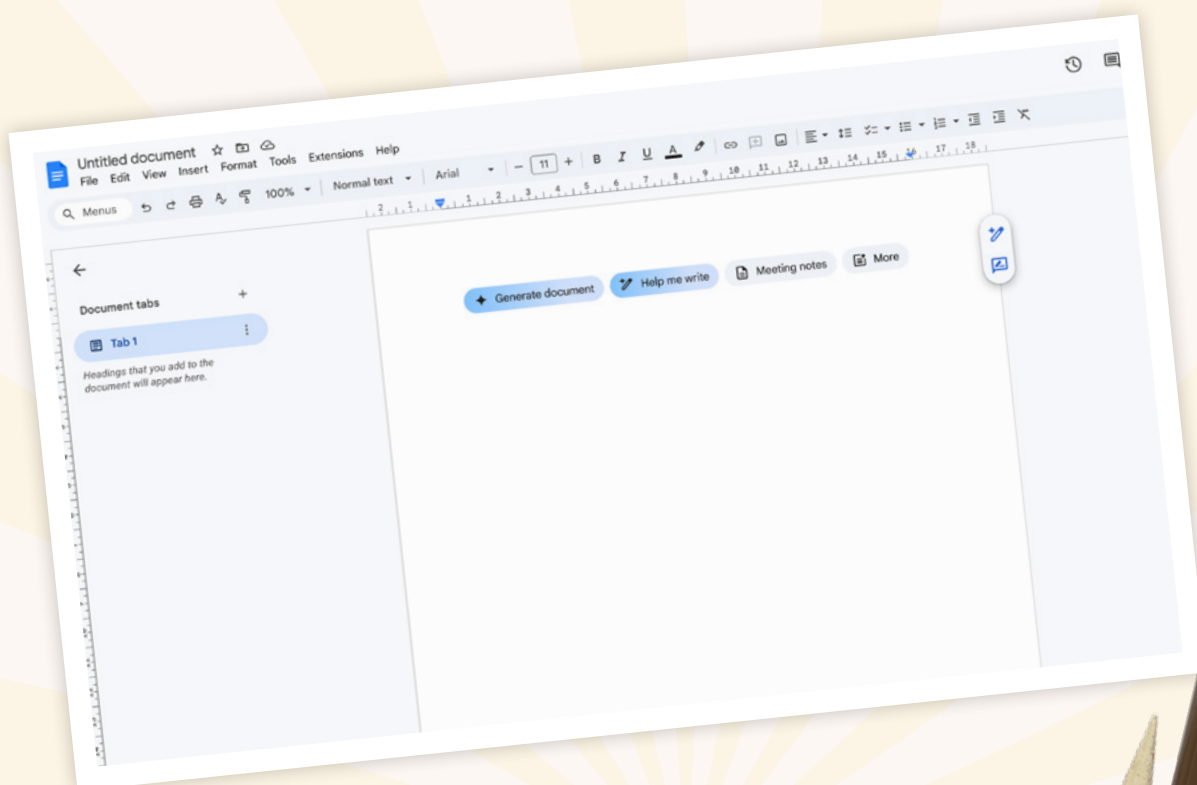
Getting the size right when printing

This catches people out more than anything else. If you're printing from Photoshop or a proper image editor, it'll handle the size correctly. But if you're opening a JPEG directly and printing it, it can come out at the wrong size because it switches from dots per inch to pixels per inch and everything gets bigger. The fix is simple: import your image into a Word document or Google Doc, resize it to the measurement you want (I usually work at around 6.5 inches), and print from there. Job done.

Option 4: The grid method (no technology needed)

This is the traditional artist's method and it works brilliantly, especially if you want to scale your image up or down. Draw a grid of equal squares over your reference photo (or print one on top of it). Then draw the same grid, at whatever size you want to work at, lightly onto your paper. Copy what you see in each square, one at a time. It sounds painstaking but it's actually quite relaxing once you get going, and it trains your eye beautifully.

- ✓ Works at any size and needs nothing but a ruler and pencil
- ✓ Great for scaling up a small reference to a larger drawing
- ✓ Erase the grid lines gently once your outline is complete



Getting Your Line Art onto Your Paper

Right, so you've got your line art printed out. Now the fun bit. Here are the main methods for transferring it to your drawing surface.

Method 1: Graphite transfer (the classic way)

This is the method most people start with and it works really well on most surfaces. Here's how it goes.

Step 1: Print your line art.

Step 2: Flip the paper over and cover the back with graphite, using the side of a pencil to shade broadly over the areas where your lines are.

Step 3: Flip it back over and place it graphite-side-down onto your drawing surface. Secure it so it doesn't slip, either with tape, a magnet, or by holding it firmly.

Step 4: Using a sharp pencil or a biro, trace firmly over your outlines. The graphite on the back transfers onto your paper below.

Step 5: Lift the paper carefully to reveal your transferred outline.

Read on for the alternatives.

Watch your pressure

The biggest trap with this method is pressing too hard when you trace. Firm enough to transfer the graphite, but not so hard that you indent the paper. Those indented lines show up as white channels in your finished drawing and are very hard to fix. A light but deliberate touch is what you're aiming for.

Method 2: The reverse graphite method (what I'm trialling right now)

This is my current experiment and I'm really excited about it because it solves that indenting problem. The principle is essentially the opposite of the classic method.

Step 1: Before you print, flip your line art horizontally so it's a mirror image. Most photo editors and Word documents have a flip/mirror option.

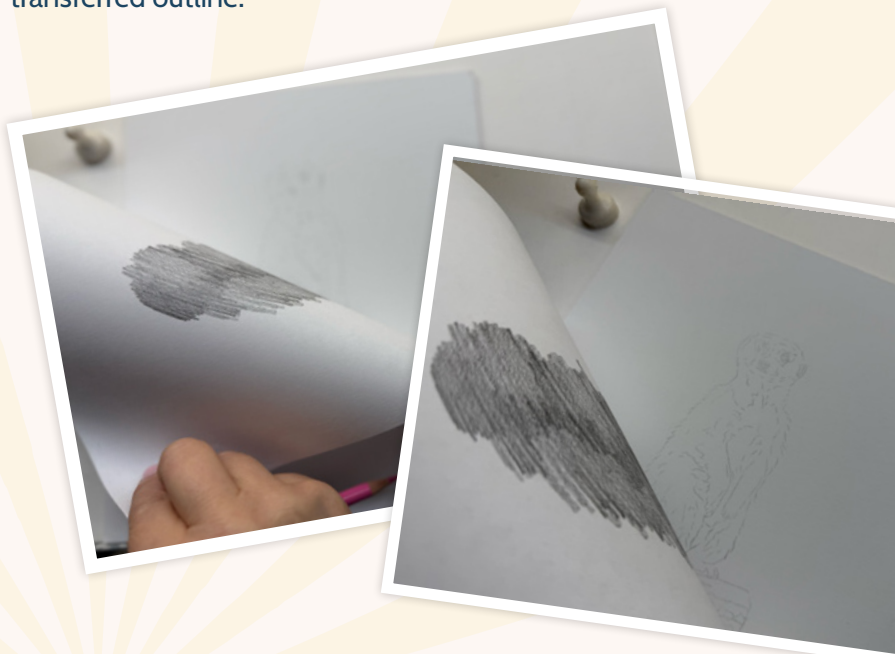
Step 2: Print the flipped image.

Step 3: On the printed side (the side with the lines), cover the whole thing with graphite using the side of your pencil. You're essentially coating the lines themselves rather than the blank back.

Step 4: Place the paper graphite-side-down onto your drawing surface, so the graphite is sandwiched between the printout and your paper. The image will now be the right way round because you flipped it at the start.

Step 5: Rather than tracing individual lines, rub firmly over the whole back of the page with the side of a pencil, a bone folder, or even a spoon. The pressure is distributed evenly across the whole sheet rather than being concentrated on individual lines.

Step 6: Lift carefully to reveal your transferred outline.



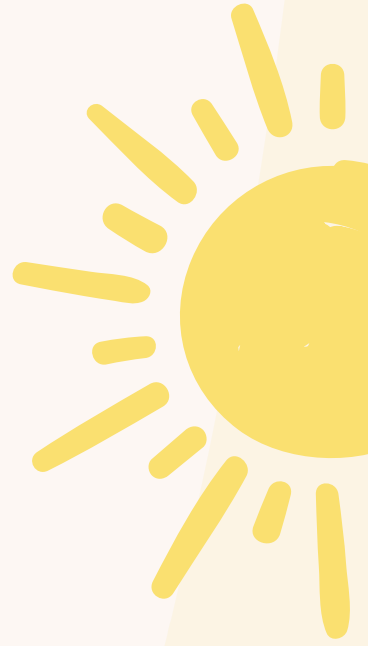
Method 3: A light box or a sunny window

If you're working on a surface that lets light through, this is the simplest method of all. Tape your printed line art to a light box (or a window on a bright day) and tape your drawing paper on top. The light shines through both sheets and you can see the outline clearly enough to trace it directly onto your paper with a light pencil.

This works well with thinner hot press papers and is completely indent-free because you're drawing onto the surface itself, not via a transfer layer.

Worth knowing

A note on specific surfaces: white Pastelmat can work with this method if your line art is strong and dark enough for the light to pick it up clearly. Drafting film, on the other hand, doesn't need any transfer method at all. It's semi-transparent, so you can simply place your printout underneath it and trace directly. You can see right through it! If you don't have a printer, you can use a laptop or iPad screen instead. Display your line art on the screen, place the drafting film on top, and trace away. Just make sure your device is fixed firmly and can't slide around while you're working.



Method 4: A projector

This is brilliant if you want to scale up significantly or if you do a lot of drawing and want to save time on transfers. A small portable projector (I've used the Pico Genie Impact 2 and it's fantastic) connects to your iPad or phone and projects whatever's on your screen down onto your drawing surface.

You just display your line art or reference image on your device, adjust the projector so the image is the size you want, and trace directly onto your paper. No printing, no transfer, no indenting. Just a clear projected outline to draw around.

- ✓ Set up the keystone correction so your image is square, not skewed
- ✓ Use a reference square in the middle of your image to check it's properly aligned
- ✓ Keep your hand away from the main beam so you can always see the projected lines clearly
- ✓ I'd recommend projecting from a clean line art rather than straight from a photo, it picks up much more clearly

Cost note

Portable projectors have come down dramatically in price and a decent one doesn't have to cost a fortune. I'll share links to ones I've used and recommend in the resources section of the Ignite library.

Projectors

Projectors are really useful when it comes to creating line art.

Click on my affiliate links and enter ImpactBSnowdon for a £10 discount when you buy one of these projectors from Personal Projector.



PICO GENIE M550 PLUS 2.0 LED PORTABLE →



PICO GENIE IMPACT 2.0 ULTRA PORTABLE 1200 LUMENS →



PICO GENIE L700 LED 1080P SMART PROJECTOR →



PICO GENIE IMPACT 4.0 ULTRA PORTABLE →

Which Method Should You Use?

Honestly, it depends on what you've got available and what you're comfortable with. Here's my quick cheat sheet:

- ✓ **Complete beginner, no extra kit:** Graphite transfer is your friend. Take your time, keep your pressure light, and you'll be fine.
- ✓ **Working on Pastelmat or drafting film:** Graphite transfer or reverse graphite method. And if you're on drafting film, great news: skip the transfer entirely and just pop your printout (or a screen) underneath it.
- ✓ **Worried about indenting your paper:** Try the reverse graphite method or use a light box if your paper allows it.
- ✓ **Want to scale up your drawing:** Projector or the grid method. Both give you full control over size.
- ✓ **Just want to get started as quickly as possible:** Projector wins every time once you've got it set up.

Whatever method you choose, please don't let this step put you off starting. A slightly wobbly outline is nothing to worry about. Coloured pencil is incredibly forgiving and once you've got a few layers down, nobody is going to be scrutinising your transferred lines. They're just a starting point, not a finished piece.

Now get that pencil in your hand and let's draw something gorgeous.

