

ABC Sketching

Featuring the work of Ashish Goel, with inspiration from students at the Nueva School

When you and I are chatting, we both have ideas in our heads. Our words are creating more ideas, also in our heads. When communicating with spoken language, you are creating dual concepts—at least one in each person's brain. They might be similar, or they might not. That willow tree in your mind might be a palm or a redwood or even a family tree in mine.

If our ideas are fundamentally different, it skews our understanding of what we're discussing. You and I might each misinterpret a lot of what the other is saying.

Drawing, sketching, making chicken scratches—whatever you call it, representing your ideas in a physical form is incredibly helpful for clearer communication. When you draw something, the idea moves out of your brain and into someone else's with less chance for it to drastically mutate, helping you avoid misinterpretations and wasted time. As soon as you visualize something externally, you know what you're working on together.

Adults are oddly scared to make something visual in front of others, but if you can draw the alphabet, you've already got some basic sketching skills. A great way to get started with visualizing is by sketching stick figure people, and this

assignment helps you turn the alphabet into every form of person you'll ever need to draw.

There are lots of resources out there to refine your drawing skills if you've already got the basics. This assignment is for taking your very first steps.

Letters of the alphabet are great building blocks for drawing stick people. Don't even think of them as drawing.

Start by writing your name in the middle of a sheet of paper. Use whatever pen or pencil you want. Then write each letter of the alphabet three times, all upper case.

Do the same thing with all lowercase letters.

AAA BBB CCC

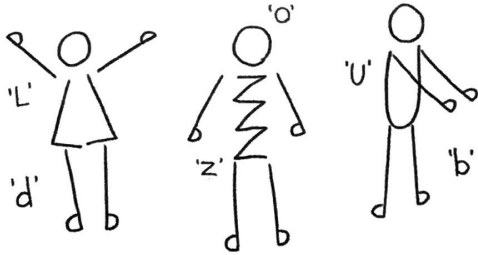
LLL OOO ZZZ

WWW ddd

UUU ooo



Okay! You're ready to start combining letters (and a few other strokes) to form the basis of your stick people. Here are a few Z people and U people:



You're about to bring your stick people to life and get them to do things.

Look in a mirror. Get into the pose of a confused person. Or an excited person. A person on the phone. How about a person in love? Look at the shapes your body is making each time.

Look back over your alphabet and pick a letter that resembles the body shape you were making, or draw a new shape based on what you saw.

Now that you've practiced a bit, assign yourself a mini challenge to use your new skills. Over the course of the next day, find three moments to communicate something visually that normally you would express verbally. Add a few instructional stick figures to the family chore board at home, sketch a little message of thanks to a friend and snap a photo of it rather than sending a text, or make a visual shopping list.

If you routinely practice your drawing, it will become second nature, and you will find that the more you complement writing with visuals, the more people will tune into and remember your ideas clearly.

I learned this brilliant technique from a group of fourth graders who once visited the d.school, and I've never needed another one.

—Ashish Goel

