

## How to draw a horse



I've drawn horses all my life. There was just something about them—I can't look away! When I was in elementary school, I found *Draw Horses with Sam Savitt*, a well-known illustrator and author. I read what he did and copied what I saw. At that time, I also read *Just About Horses* magazine, published for members of the *Breyer Model Horse Collectors Fan Club*, and *Horse Illustrated*. Both had articles about how to draw horses.

To help you draw, you can look at a picture or 3-D model like a Breyer Horse (photo, Prancing Arabian Mare #426). I used this model for the drawing process I will describe. Breyer has great sculptors working for them, and unlike a real horse these models won't wander off halfway through your drawing. Also look at a diagram of a horse skeleton so you can see how the body works through bones, and joints that link the bones.

You will need drawing paper, pencils, colored pencils, and an eraser. Use paper with a smooth finish because we will work with pencil, a “dry” medium, and we don't want the pencil to “jump” across rough paper. For the pencils, I recommend a HB pencil, its hardness is like a school test #2 that you may have used as a child. You can also try 2B or 4B pencils, they leave a darker line; for a lighter line a 2H or 4H. For erasers, I use a white plastic or gray kneaded eraser—either will work.



### Guidelines: Drawing a basic outline

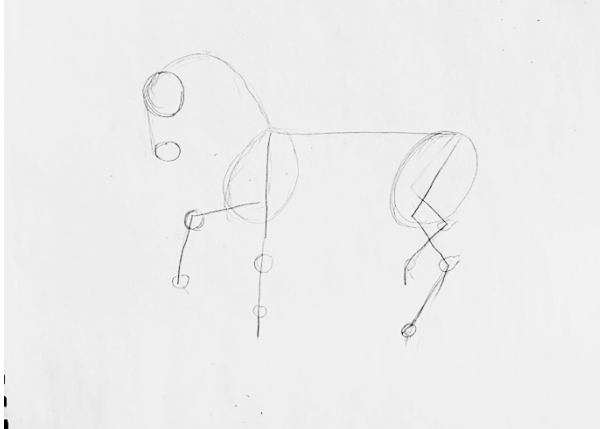
Look at your model to see basic parts, and positions of parts. See the two legs on the side you are viewing and the two legs on the other side. In the model above, two legs support the horse. Then see the basic outline and draw it—no details at this point. The outline is best done with a few lines, straight or curvy. The outline will also help in capturing proportions. I start with a line defining the back, neck, and head. You can place a line for the tail at this time, but I save that for later.



From the back line (spine), draw guidelines for the 4 legs. Sketch the legs where the neck and back line meet—the leg from your viewing side is raised, while the one in back is the support leg. Draw lines for legs at the rear of the horse using the same viewing technique—the support leg is on your viewing side. Think of these lines like a skeleton, the lines acting like bones and angles of the joints.

### **Body circles: Filling in the flesh**

To get the general shape of the body (muscles and flesh) draw one circle for the



shoulder/chest and one circle for the hip area. The circle for the shoulder is a teardrop shape, narrow at the top and wide at the bottom. Slant the teardrop so it leans toward the raised leg (facing you). This shape helps when you shade the muscles later.

The hip circle also helps determine what horse breed you are depicting. A *Quarter Horse* or any draft horse breed will have very rounded rumps, but the shape for a *Thoroughbred*

racehorse is very lean and almost triangular. For most horses, use a circle that's a little narrower at the bottom, and pointed toward the leg.

Next draw an oval for the chest. Overlap the shoulder circle but barely touch the hip circle.

### **Head Circles**

Next draw the two circles for the head. The cheek and muzzle (nose/mouth) circle for most breeds are nearly the same, with the muzzle slightly smaller. *Arabians* have a much smaller muzzle compared to other breeds.

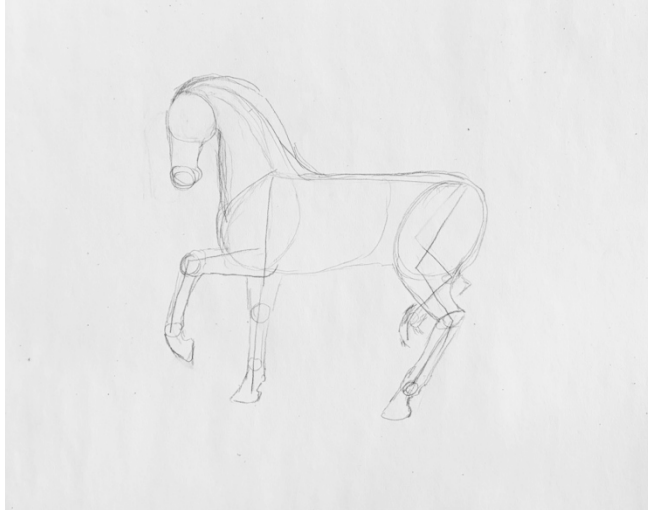
For the cheek circle, find the halfway point between the top of the head and bottom. Then draw a line above it, but not fully through the circle. It should look like the capital letter “G”, or reversed G if the horse is looking in the other direction. Above this line, draw an oval for the eye. Remember, horses have the largest eyes of all land mammals, so it should be big.

### **Leg Circles**

From the body to the hoof joint, each leg bends at the knee joint approximately in half—helping with proportions. The front knee bends are a bit “boxy” and should bend to the front of the horse. The back knees are teardrop shapes and the leg bends backward. The hoof joints are slightly smaller represented by a circular shape.

## Body Lines

Now that you have drawn the guidelines and circles; draw the body outline. The outer line of the circles is the starting point. You can draw straight lines or curves, either will work. Let's start with the head.



Most horse's heads are slightly cone-shaped—the nose is narrow and the cheek a bit bigger. Keep the line that is the face as flat as possible, unless you are drawing an *Arabian* with its distinct dished, or concave, profile.

Next draw the neck. Start at the head and make a smooth curve to the back line. The bottom line of the neck in a modified S shape. From the head circle it slowly curves forward so its fuller at the base

before quickly curving back around and under the chest.

The back, where a rider sits, is a straight line. The line where the neck meets the body is called the *withers* which can be defined with a raised area before transitioning to the back. Draw a slight curve from the back up and over the hip. If the curve sags toward the ground, it looks like a *sway back* and is common for older horses.

Follow the bottom of the chest oval to guide the belly line to the hip circle. Draw a slight rise in the line.

The front leg top sections are cone shaped; wider at the top narrowing to the knee. The back leg top of the cone curves towards the front. The back of the knee beds in a sharp angle.

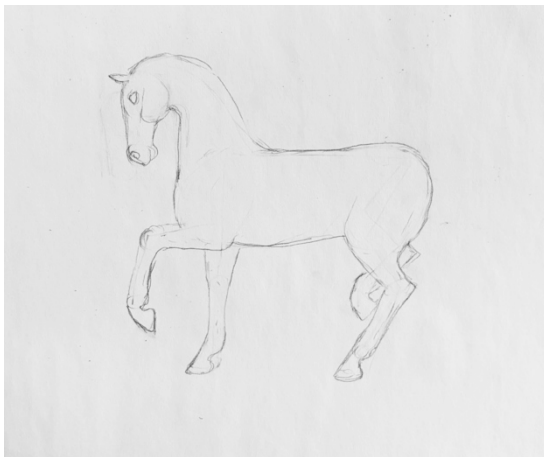
The lower leg sections are all similar with slim muscles and no bulges. Draw straight lines with slight concave curves.

Draw the hoof in a single continuous line. Start at the front of the hoof from the joint down. Then draw a line for the base of the hoof, stop and draw the back of the hoof, at about halfway stop and draw a C-shape curve to connect with the joint at the back.

A horse's ears convey lots of information. How you draw them will show what the horse is feeling: from interested, to angry, to at ease. If the ears are pinned back flat to the head, the horse is angry! We will draw "pricked up ears"—an alert horse! A small, thin inverted "V" will work—look at your model for placement on the head. On my model, the ear is in profile. If the ear is facing you, draw a comma shape—the rounded end of the comma is the base, and the comma "tail" is a concave curve ending at the ear peak. A slight curve works for most breeds, but the ear tip of the *Marwari* of India breed (photo, Wikimedia Commons) has an exaggerated curve! I like drawing this curve on unicorns.



### Clean up



You now have drawn a very basic horse. If you drew straight lines, go back over them and make them more curved and realistic. Look carefully at your model, see how each line moves and connects. Pretend you are using your pencil to trace the horse outline.

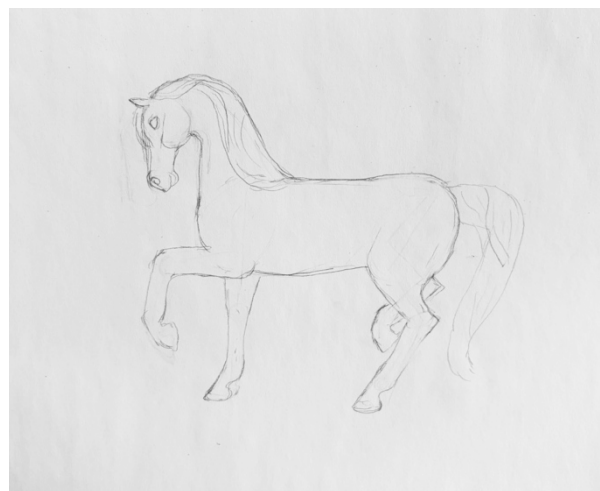
Your drawing might look cluttered at this point. Use your eraser to remove guidelines and most of the circles. Leave some lines to use as guides for shadows. Look at the model and draw lines where

you see muscle edges.

### Mane and Tail

Apply what you've learned to draw the mane and tail. Block out shapes, then work in details. Do not focus on individual hairs until you have the shapes.

The tail is easy. If the horse is standing still, the tail hangs down, like a long thin rectangle. However, horses have vertebrae in their tails which allows motion and position. The tail will be positioned differently if the horse is running or excited—in those cases draw the tail as a triangle.



A long mane can be outlined as a triangle. The top of neck will be one long triangle side, the triangle's short side at the shoulder. The other long line is drawn from the base to the ears. Don't forget to draw in the forelock, part of the mane that grows from between the ears and covers part of the face.

Mane "styles" vary a lot. Some styles conform to a breed standard, while others are styled to work with what the horse does. *Dressage* and *show jumping horses* might have their manes styled in tight little braids. *Race* and *rodeo horses* might have their manes cut short. *Norwegian Fjords* have their thick manes cut into a crest that looks like a Mohawk haircut. To show off their long, graceful necks, *Arabian* show horses' manes are long with an area of the mane clipped—a "bridle path"—for the bridle to fit snugly behind the ears.

Now that you have the basic tail and mane shapes blocked out, refine the shapes and define the bulk of hair. Don't try to draw individual hairs; draw simple sections following the lengthwise curves of the hair.

### Shading

Now for the fun part! Color your horse. I'll describe coloring a horse with one main coat color, one color a shade darker and one color a shade lighter. Select three color pencils: your main color, a darker color, and a lighter color. For example, main coat colors for some breeds are a reddish brown for *Chestnuts* and *Bays*, yellow ocher for *Palominos* and *Buckskins*. Use a blue or gray pencil if your horse has white markings. You can vary pressure on the pencil or overlap pencil layers to shade an area. It's a good idea to experiment with various shading techniques before coloring the horse.



Study your horse model to identify shadows and highlights. You will be working from the shadows to the highlights, coloring over the darker color to blend towards the lighter color.

Start with the dark color pencil. Color in the darkest shadows of the muscles and shadows on the body, like under the belly. Use heavier pressure at the edge of those shadows then lighten pressure as you move to a lighter area.

Now use the main color. Start in the darker shadows lightly coloring over them. When you come to the edge of the shadow, apply a little more pressure, then lighten pressure when you are closer to the highlight area.

With the light color, start in the main color and work towards the highlight. If the highlight is dull, color lightly over it. If you see a bright highlight, leave the white paper uncolored.



For the body, you can work back and forth in a scribbling motion to create a solid shape. With the mane and tail, long, sweeping strokes will convey long hairs.

Fill in details for the lower leg. I left the leg white and used a blue pencil to highlight the outline. The hooves on the model are black. I used bright white highlights to give them more definition.

### **Trail's End!**

Now you have completed your first horse drawing. Congratulations! Your first attempt might not look just like you want it, but you have taken the first steps in learning a new skill. The best way to improve is to keep practicing. Try drawing parts of the horse like the legs or the face, looking more carefully at each part: the way the neck bends, how the lips jut out, the eye highlights and eyelashes. The best teacher is yourself—developing your observation skills and drawing skills. Add your own personality and bits of whimsy if you like.



Have fun on your artistic journey!

*NK LaBat*