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# HOW TO DRAW SEA CREATURES

BY MITCH LEEUWE

**YOU'LL LEARN:**

- DRAWING WITH CONSTRUCTION
- HOW TO USE SHAPE LANGUAGE
- DRAWING DIFFERENT SEA ANIMALS



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Printed in the Netherlands  
First Printing, 2021

Graphic design: Harmke Leeuwe  
[harmke.com](https://harmke.com)

# HOW TO DRAW SEA CREATURES

**BY MITCH LEEUWE**



**Hi THERE!**

Let me introduce myself. I'm Mitch Leeuwe and am an illustrator from the Netherlands. I always drew a lot as a kid. I even had the childhood dream to become an animator at Disney. During my teenage years, I lost that dream. Luckily, I slowly started drawing more and more. When I was 19, I began to do some freelance work as a graphic designer, which made me consider picking up drawing again. I attended several drawing programs at schools but I learned most from online resources. Now, I'm a freelance artist working on visual development. This means I design characters, props and backgrounds for games, animation and toys. However, you probably know me from my Instagram where I release tutorials and more. My goal is to create a place where people can learn the things I wanted to learn when I started out.

## ABOUT THIS EBOOK

Let's dive into the world of sea creatures! Under the sea live not only fish but also shellfish, mollusks, mammals, invertebrates, and other marine species. These animals are great for practice drawing with construction and line of action because their shapes are quite basic. They don't have complex limbs, just fins or other quite clumsily shaped limbs. This makes them also suitable for studying shape and line language.

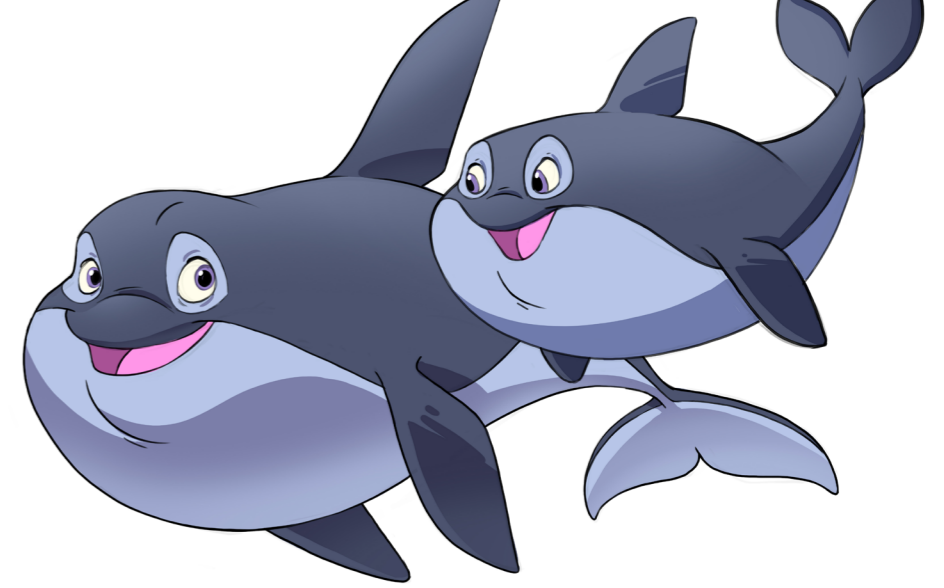
In this ebook, I'll show you many types of sea creatures and how to draw them. Along the way, I'll teach you about construction, line of action and shape, and line language. You can decide for yourself how to study my tutorials and breakdowns. However, I would recommend following the tutorials step by step. It doesn't matter whether you use paper and pencil or a digital device. The most important part is to understand why I make these steps and what

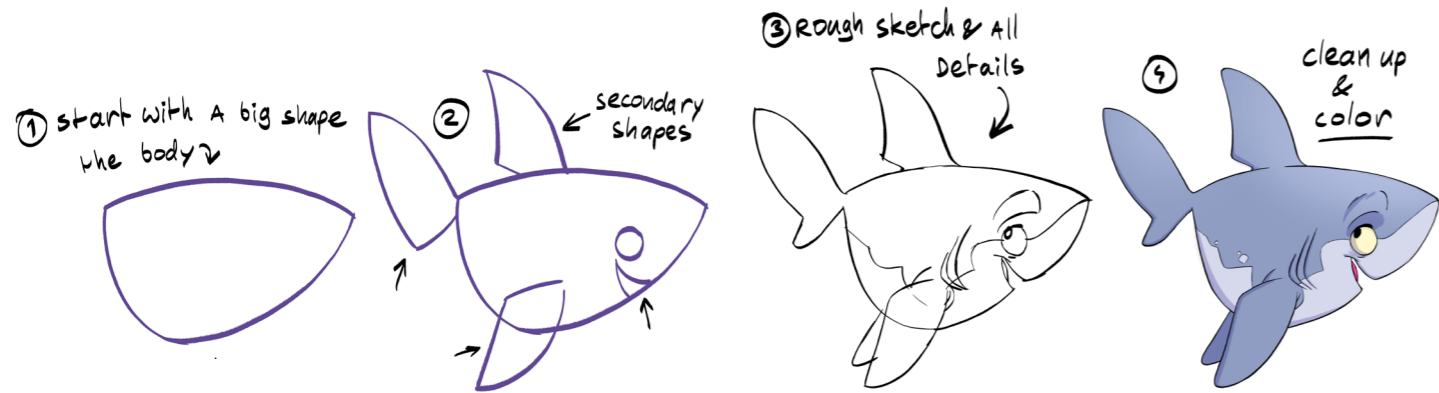
they mean. By "copying" my drawings and the steps, I hope you learn how to apply the drawing principles yourself.

However, the creatures in this ebook are based on real-life, they may differ from their real-life form. When I draw cartoony characters, I like to make my own interpretation of the creatures and freely add or remove

some elements. The key message of this is to be inspired by nature but stay as creative with his as you want! I'd like to avoid focusing too much on whether the drawn creature, for example, is a humpback whale or a fin whale, not all the names of the animals are in this ebook.

Now, let's get started! Happy drawing!

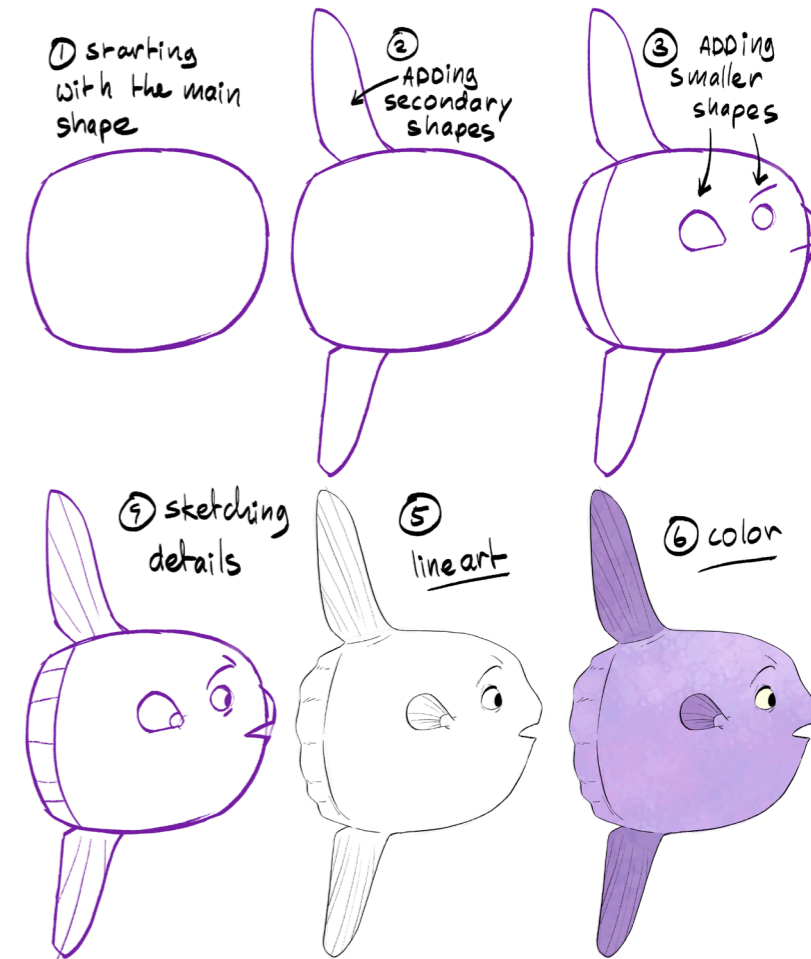




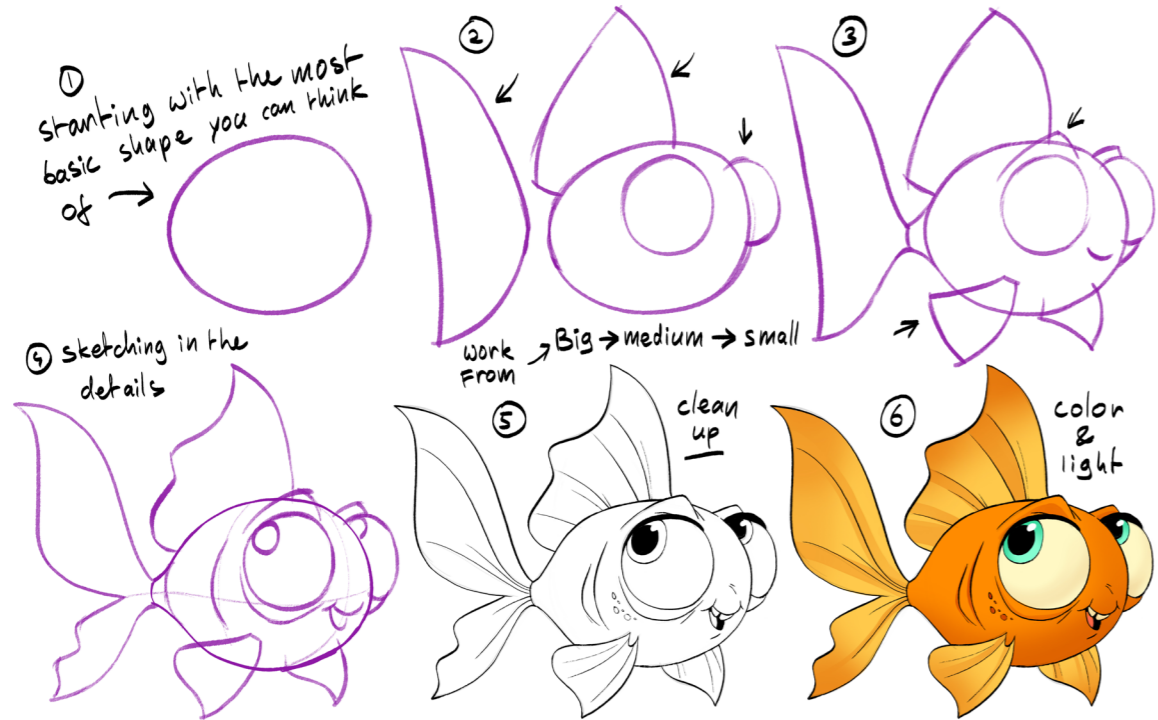
To get started, we're going to draw a shark from a side profile. See how I first draw with one large triangular shape and add smaller shapes to this shape. The large triangular is actually the foundation we're building on.

That's the first thing I want you to focus on: Start thinking of your character in one basic shape first. Look for this shape in other characters.

When you use one shape as the foundation of your character, it supports the readability of the character. Here I picked a more square-shaped main shape for this character. On top of this shape, I add the secondary shapes. Make sure the secondary shapes feel really attached to the main shape by letting them flow into each other a bit. In this example, I did this by adding a slight curve to the top and bottom fin, making the shapes flow into each other.



Let's turn the character around and draw it from a ¾ (three quarter) view. For this character, I started with a sphere and attached the secondary shapes to it. If you watch closely, you can see that the eyes don't lay flat on top of the body but pop out of it. Think of the eyes as spheres, which are partly sunken into the body and the eyelids wrap around it.



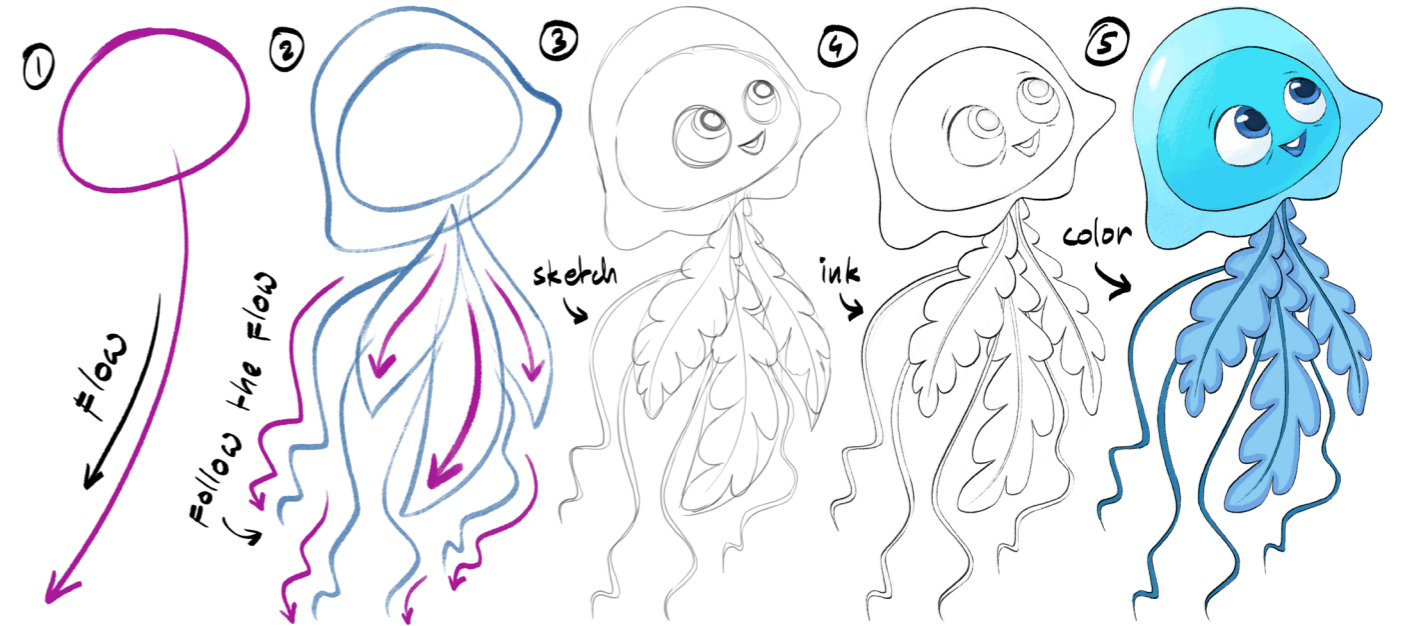
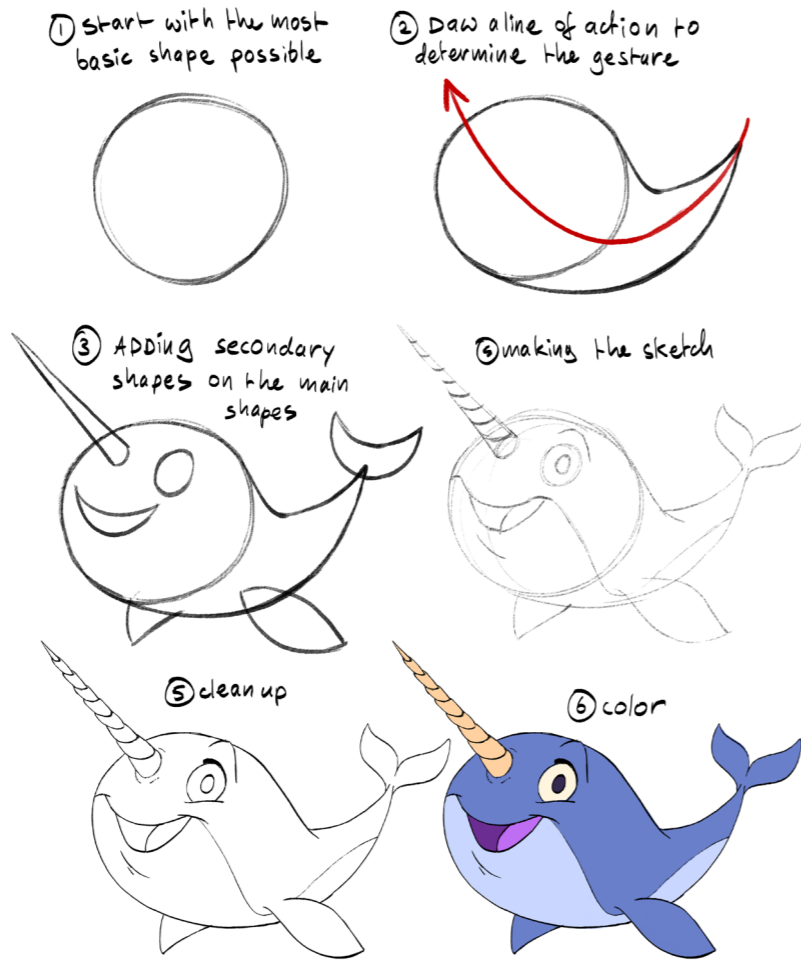
These two other characters are both drawn with the same main-shape principle. Try to draw them step by step. Try to understand how they are 3D even when you're drawing them on a 2D sheet of paper.



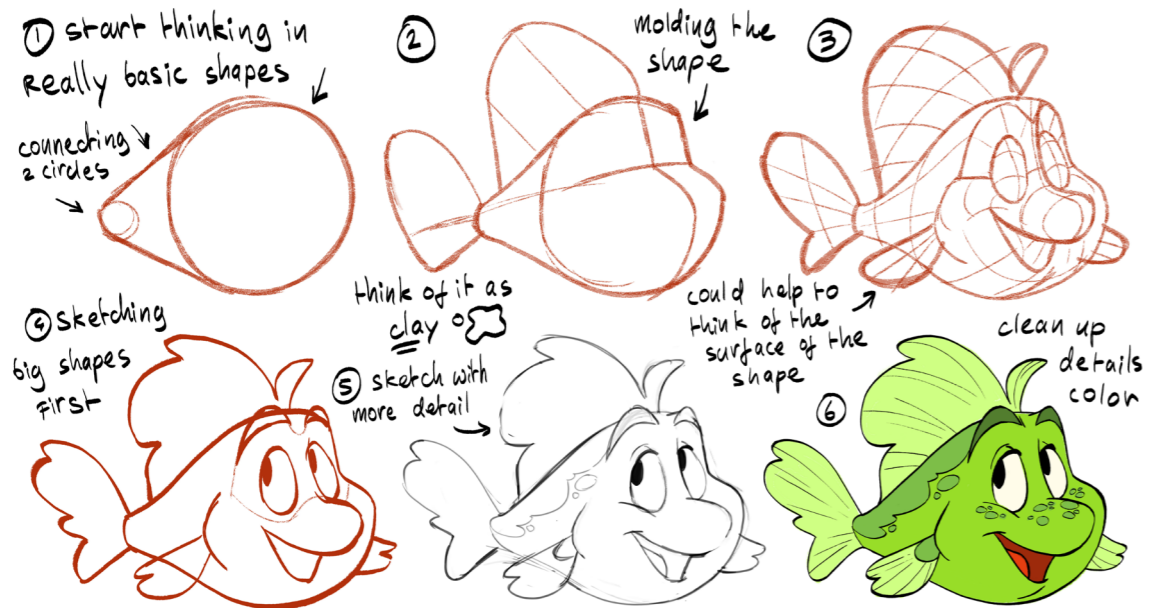
## EXERCISE

Do you have a rubber ducky? Use it as a drawing reference! Study it by drawing it from different angles. Try to maintain the 3D look and feel while drawing it.

For this cute narwhal, I started drawing the head as a sphere. In the second step, you can see a red line called the 'line of action'. I use this as a guide to create a flow in the character. Can you see how the shapes of the character follow the line of action?



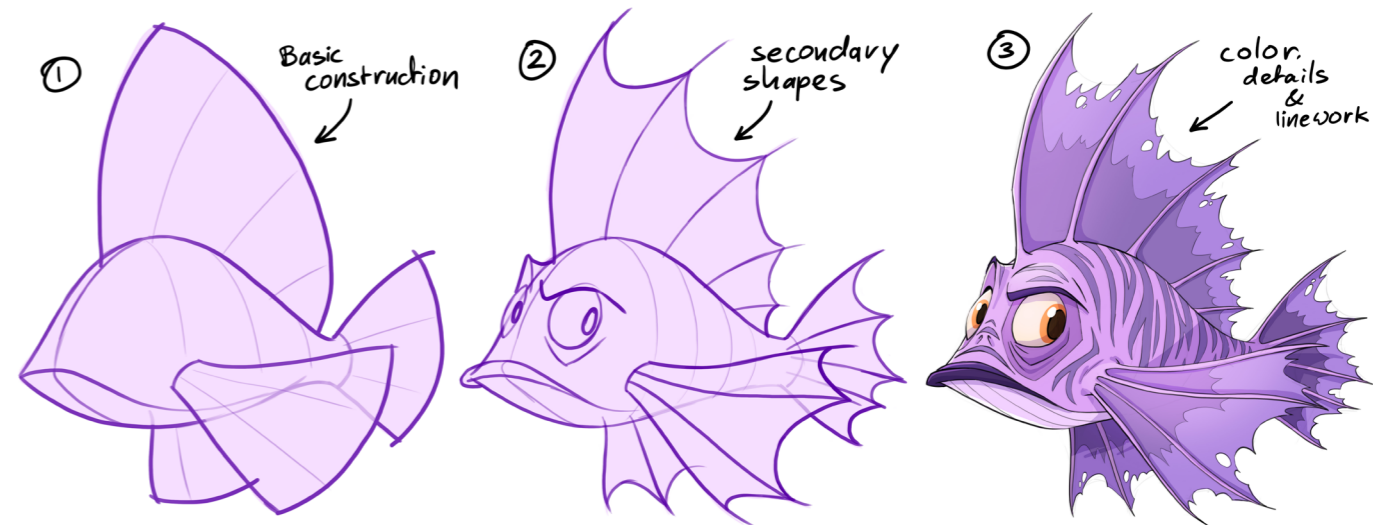
In the drawing of this jellyfish, I applied the line of action too. You can see that the shapes follow that line. Not everything has to strictly follow the action line; it can also follow it loosely.



For the construction of this character, I started with two spheres. A big one and a small one connected them with two lines to create a cone shape. In step 2, you can see me adding secondary shapes and defining the

head. See how I mold the head to create the cranium and the cheeks. Think of it as if it is clay. By adding perspective lines on top of those shapes, you can create a three-dimensional shape.

In step 3, I added even more details and perspective guides. From this point, it's time to clean up the drawing! Follow the steps of the example.

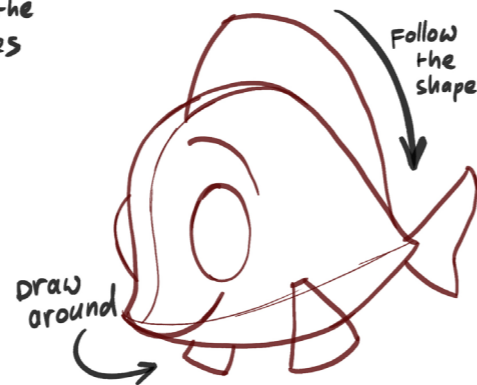
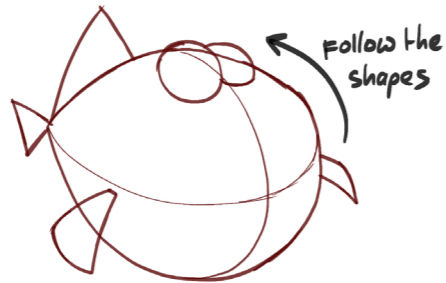
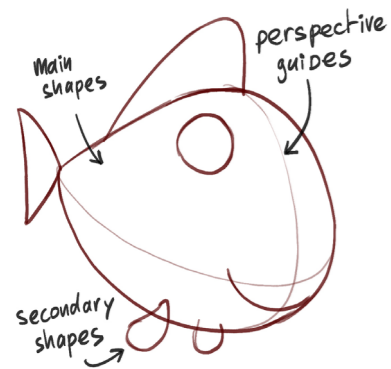


This character may look more complex than the previous one, but you can draw this by applying the same steps and principles. It all starts with the main shape and build your character up from there step by

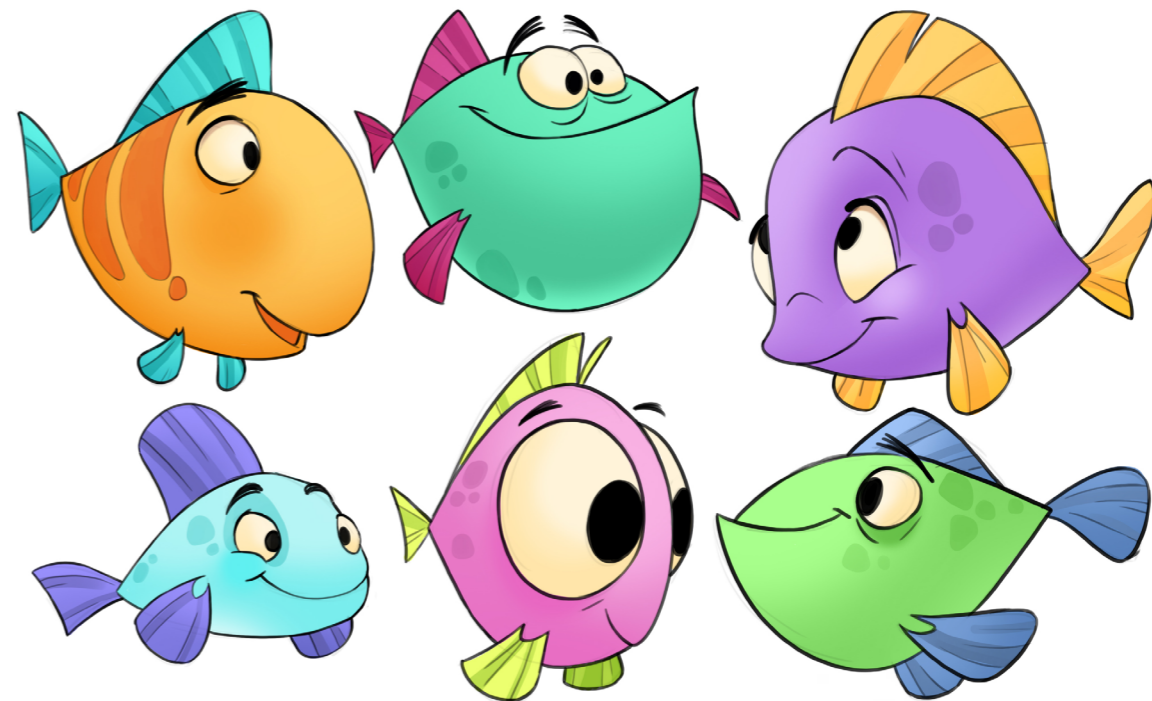
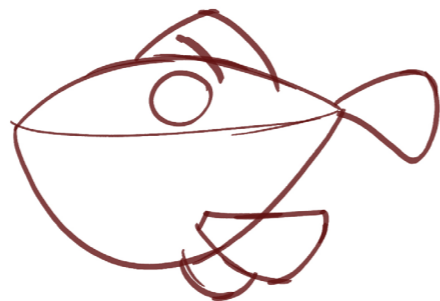
step. In the last step, you define the little details like the pattern and the rough edges of the fins.

When this looks too difficult, don't worry. Be sure to get the large

shapes down on paper first. When that looks good to you, move on to the next step and so on. It can take some time to get it right and understand these techniques.

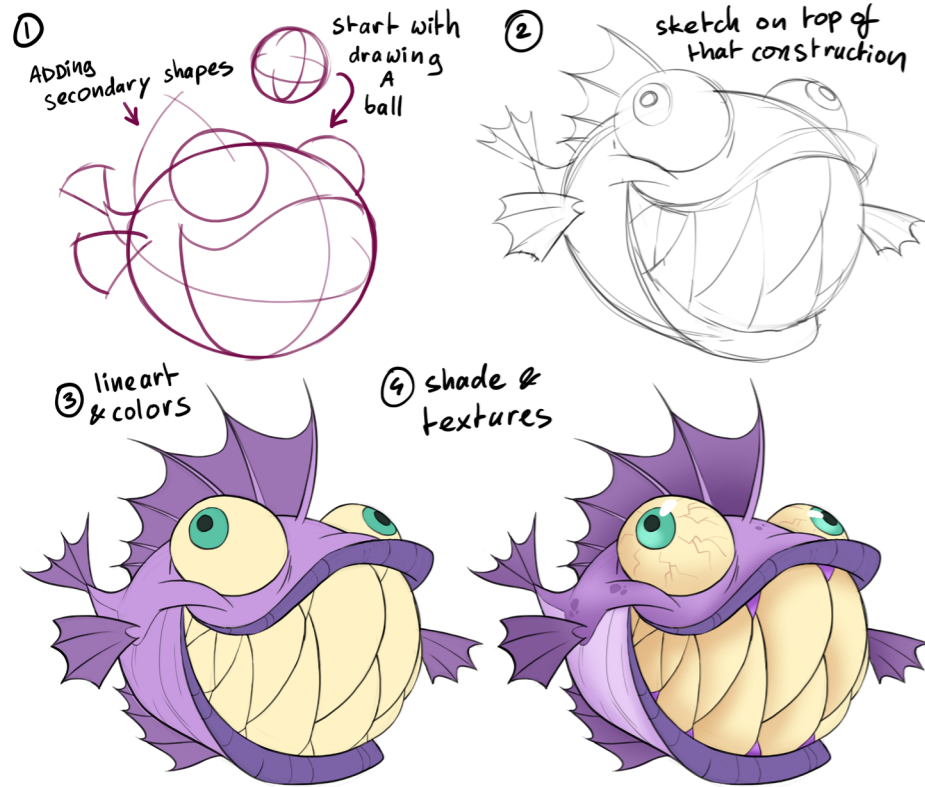


Let's practice some more construction! Take a sheet of paper and draw these characters' construction as I did here. Draw from big to small: Start with the biggest shapes and after that, add smaller shapes until you've added the smallest shapes. Make sure your construction is 3D, which you can check by adding perspective guides (like I did).

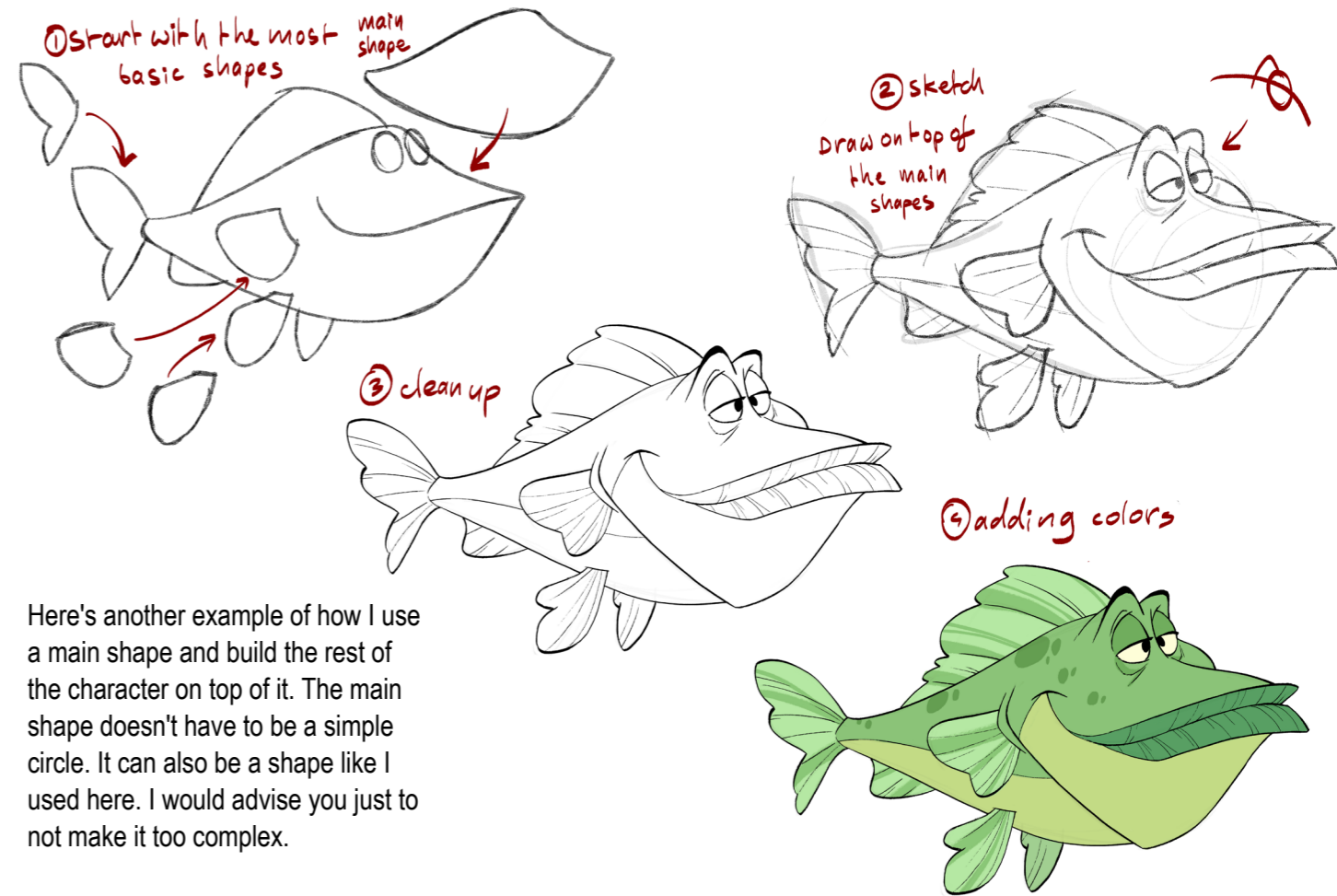


## EXERCISE

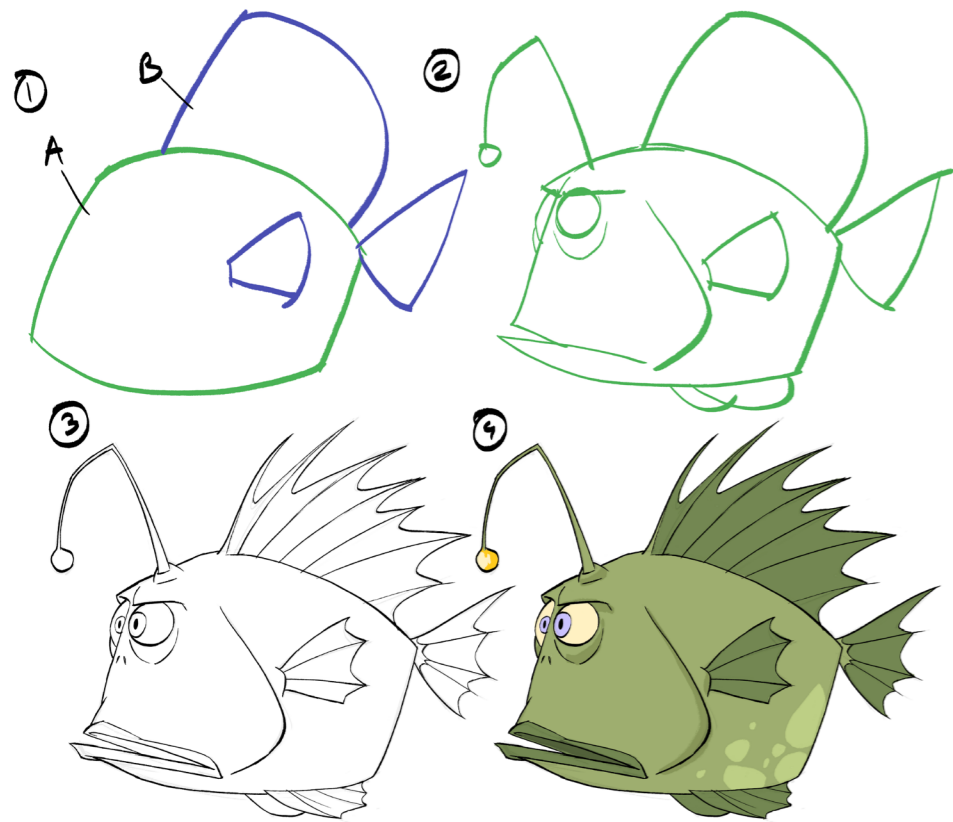
Now you can draw the details on top of those construction shapes to create the final drawings. You can draw them like this example but also create your own version of these fish!



This character basically is a ball!  
See how the teeth, eyes, and other shapes wrap around that ball shape. Follow the steps to create this deep-sea creature.



Here's another example of how I use a main shape and build the rest of the character on top of it. The main shape doesn't have to be a simple circle. It can also be a shape like I used here. I would advise you just to not make it too complex.



Deep-sea anglerfish are typically known for the angler on top of their head. They use this to lure a prey towards their mouth. With their angular, funky shapes, you can create many crazy variations in the design of this type of fish.

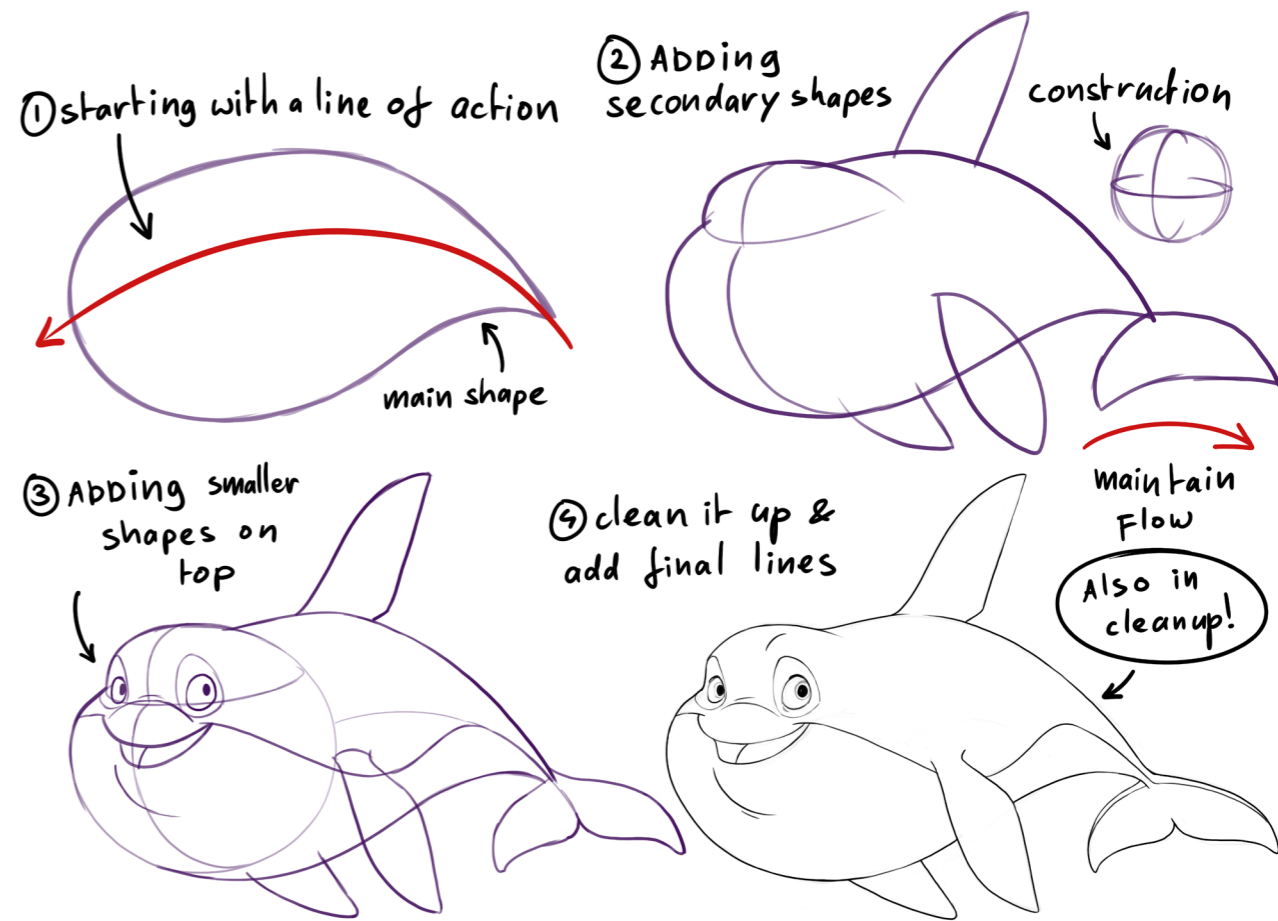
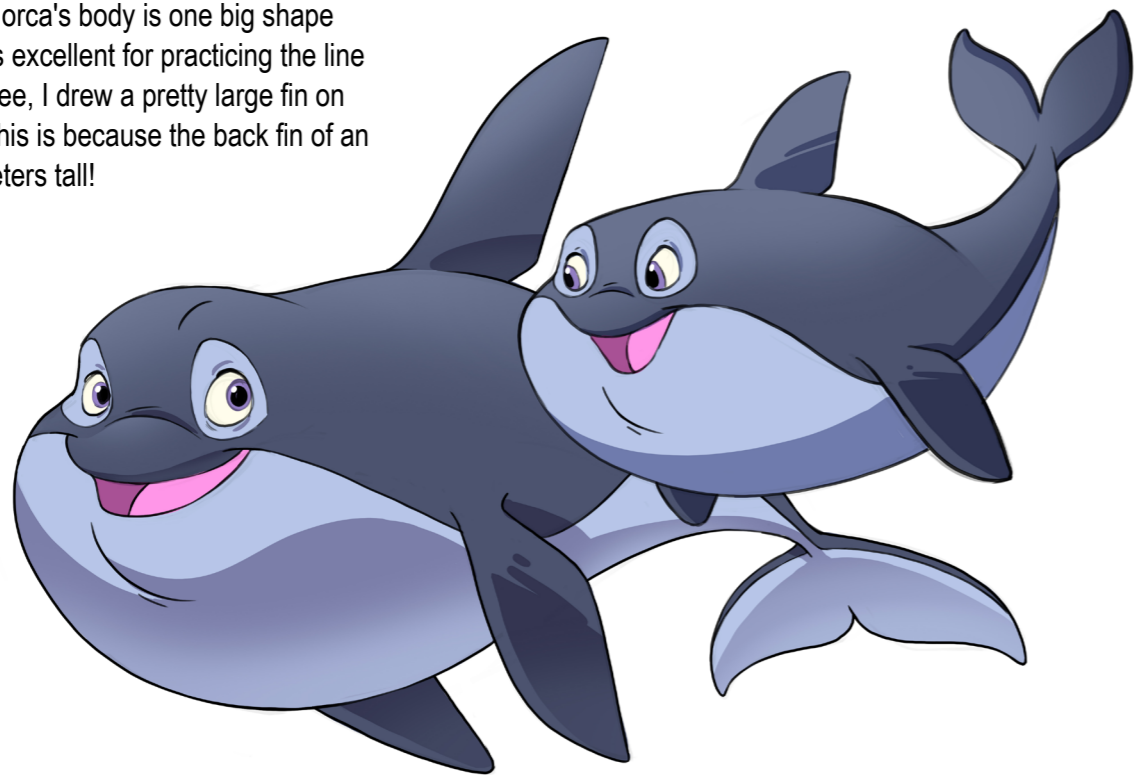
In this other angler fish, I experimented with different shapes and proportions. Look at the large fang-like teeth, for example. Deep-sea anglerfish often have big beaks with sharp inward angled teeth. These are used for grabbing large prey.

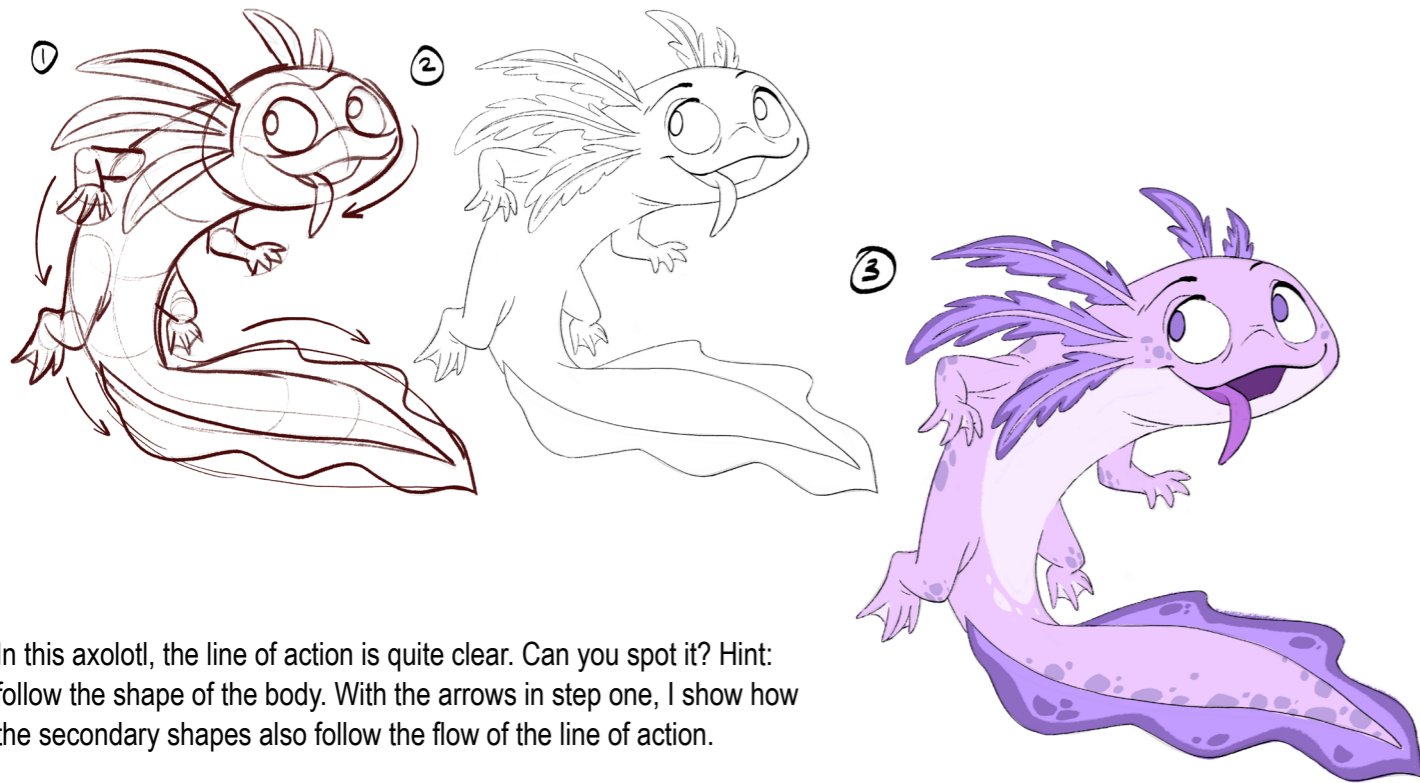
## EXERCISE

Create your own version of a deep-sea anglerfish. Experiment with the shape, proportions, sharpness of corners, and of course, color.



Let's draw an orca! In this example, I started with a line of action. Because the orca's body is one big shape that flows naturally, it is excellent for practicing the line of action. As you can see, I drew a pretty large fin on the back of the orca. This is because the back fin of an orca can be up to 2 meters tall!

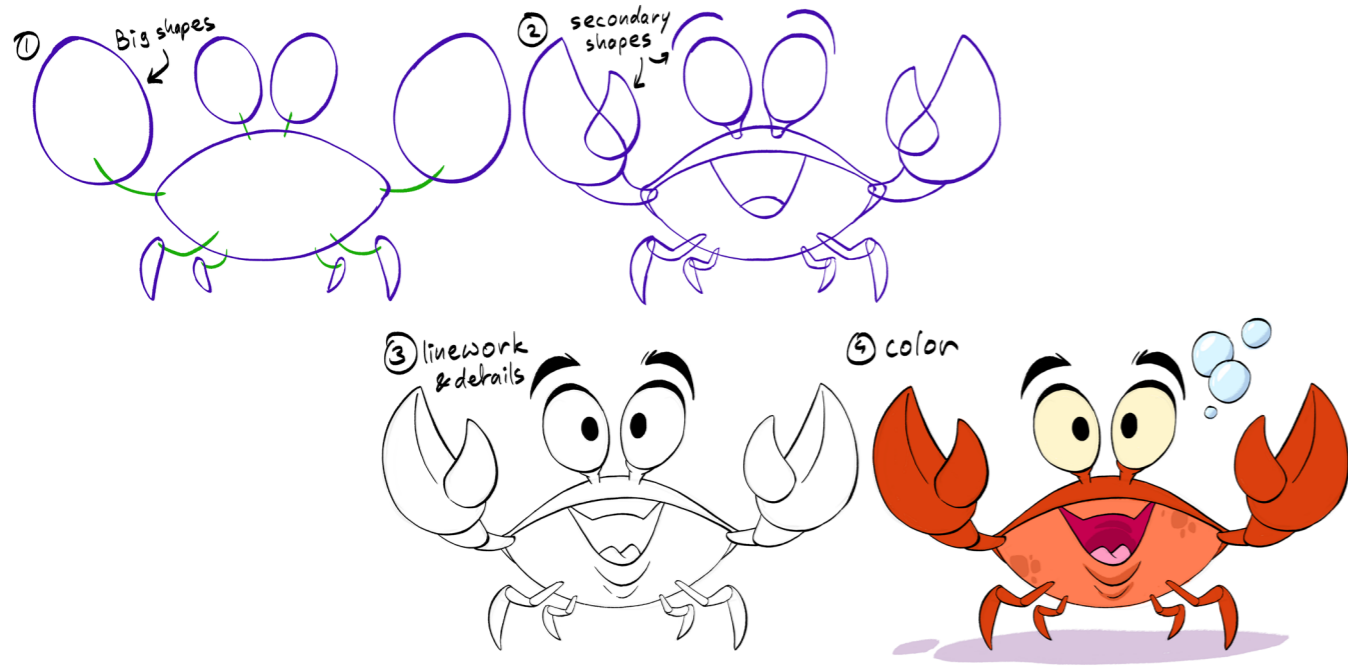




In this axolotl, the line of action is quite clear. Can you spot it? Hint: follow the shape of the body. With the arrows in step one, I show how the secondary shapes also follow the flow of the line of action.



Two more examples of some weird water creatures! For the design of these two, I searched the internet for some pictures of sharks and combined elements of multiple sharks. This way, you can design your own species!

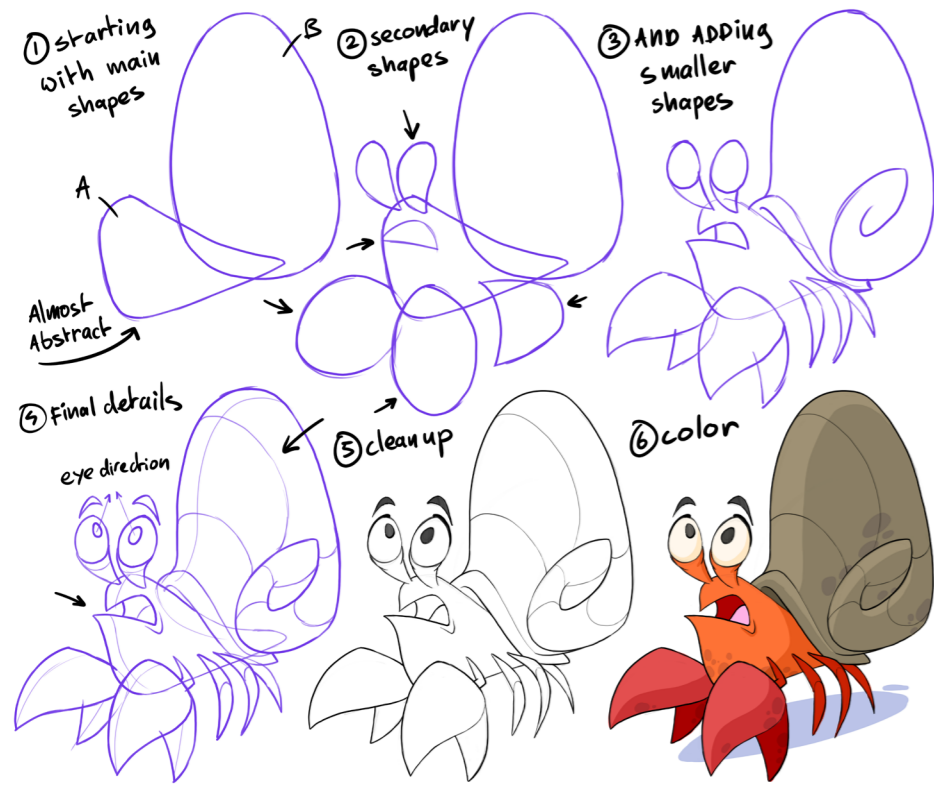


Let's draw a crab. Even though this is an entirely different animal, the same construction rules apply! You can start with the big basic shapes and add secondary shapes to them.

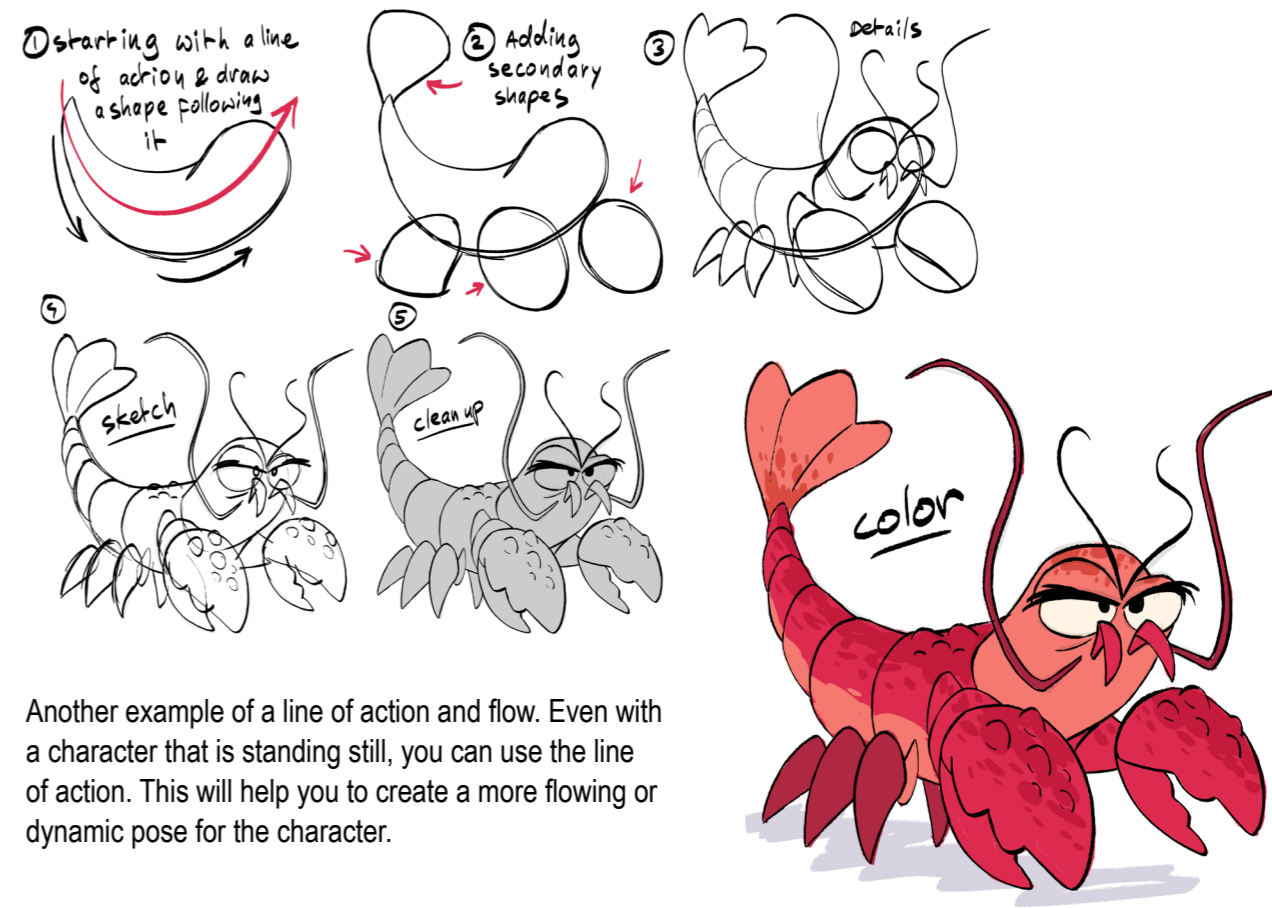
I think this one is great for starting to learn to draw because it's a front view (so no difficult construction and perspective).

From this crab, you can see the side and the front of the creature. This is called a  $\frac{3}{4}$  view, and it's a bit harder to draw than the front view. When drawing a character in  $\frac{3}{4}$  view, try to think about the construction I talked about on previous pages.

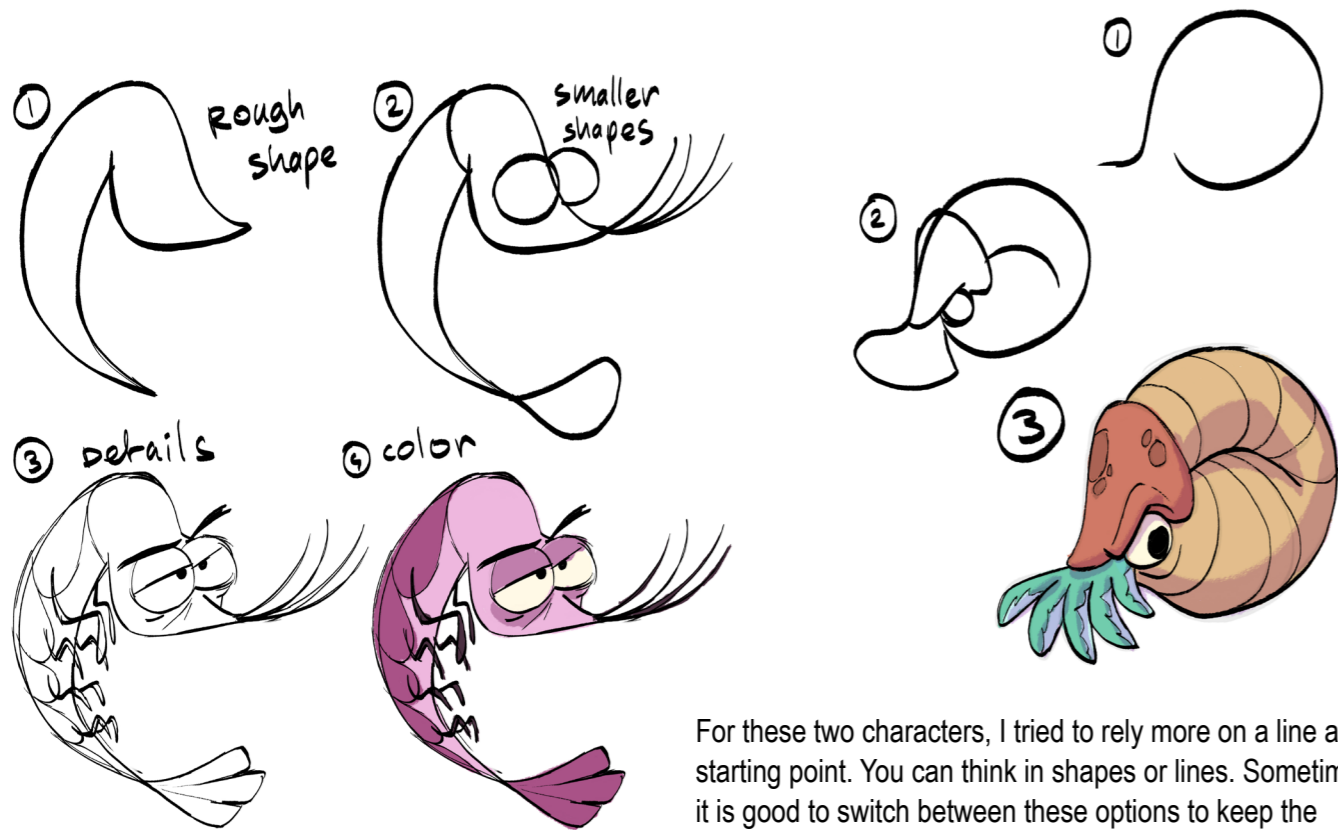




When it comes to character design, I always try to find a nice balance between primary shapes like a circle, triangle, square, etc. I use these shapes as a foundation for the construction. In the end result, these shapes are way more nuanced. For example: Look how the shell started as an ellipse and ended up a little bit different. The same for the body, which started like a triangle.



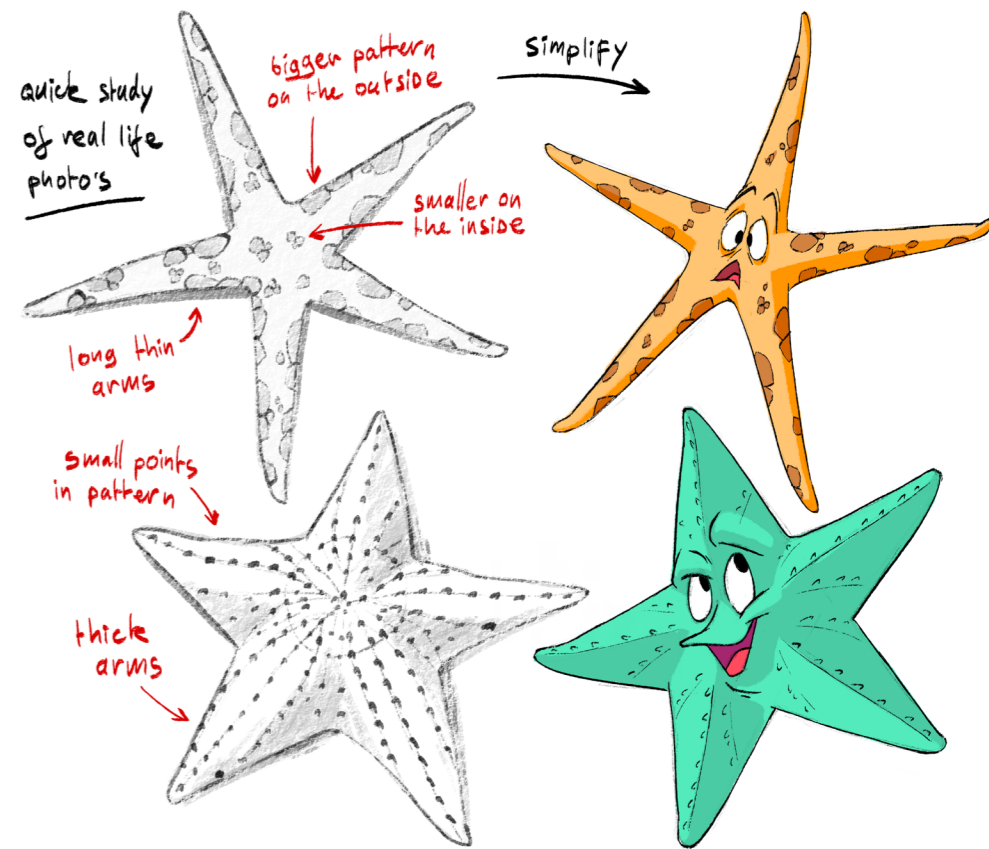
Another example of a line of action and flow. Even with a character that is standing still, you can use the line of action. This will help you to create a more flowing or dynamic pose for the character.

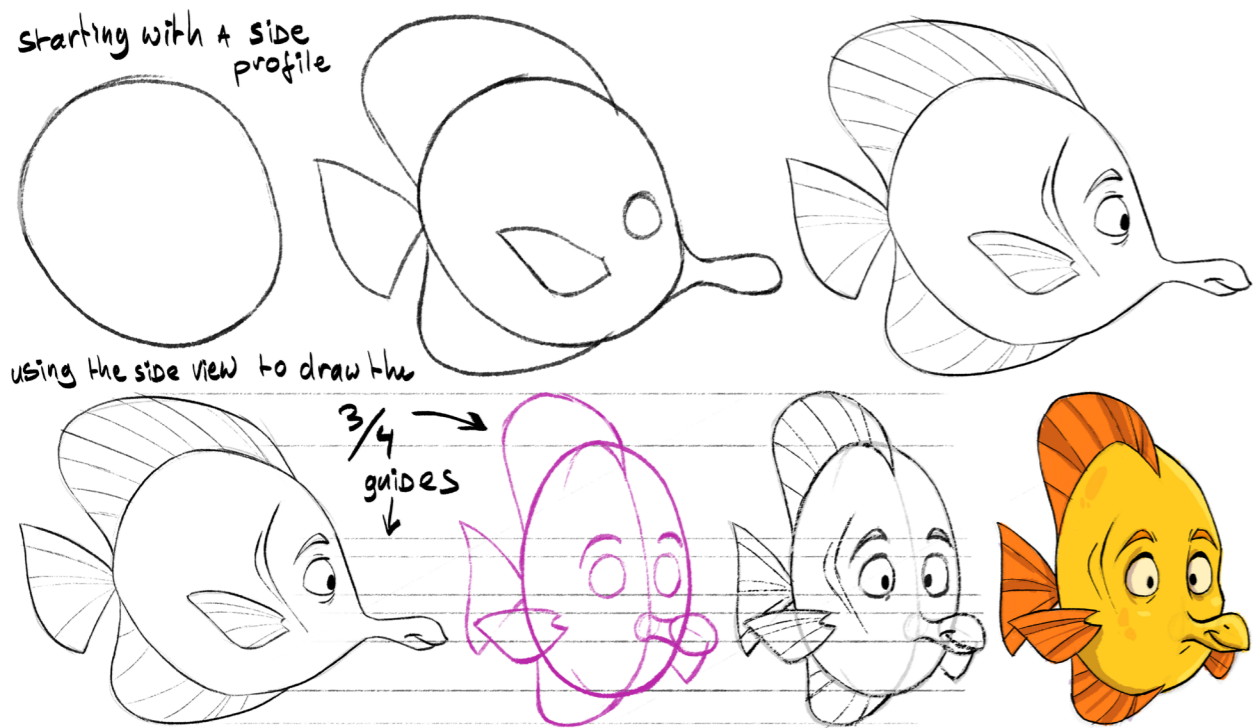


For these two characters, I tried to rely more on a line as a starting point. You can think in shapes or lines. Sometimes it is good to switch between these options to keep the creativity going.



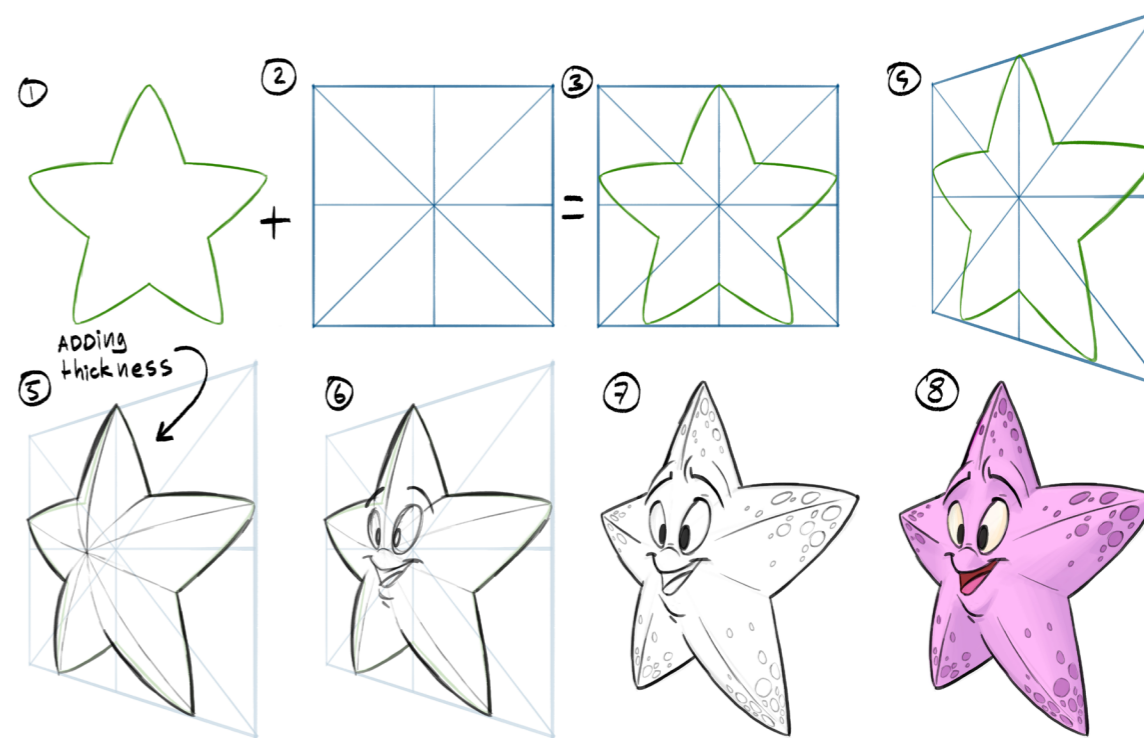
In this example, I'd like to show how you can use references. On the left, I started with a study of the real creature. After making the 'realistic' drawing, I try to simplify that to create a cartoony version. My goal with the realistic drawing isn't to make a perfect drawing, but more an observational sketch that helps me to understand the creature's construction and design.

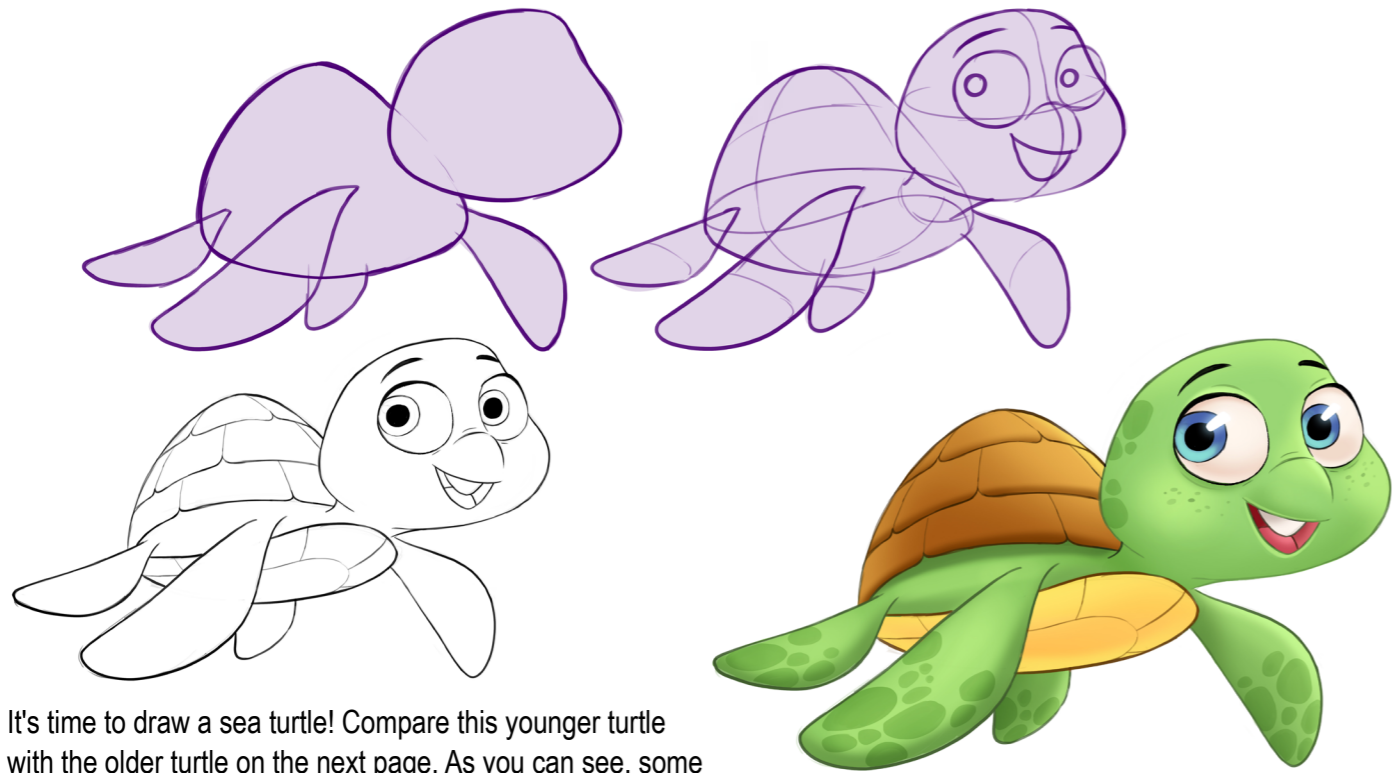




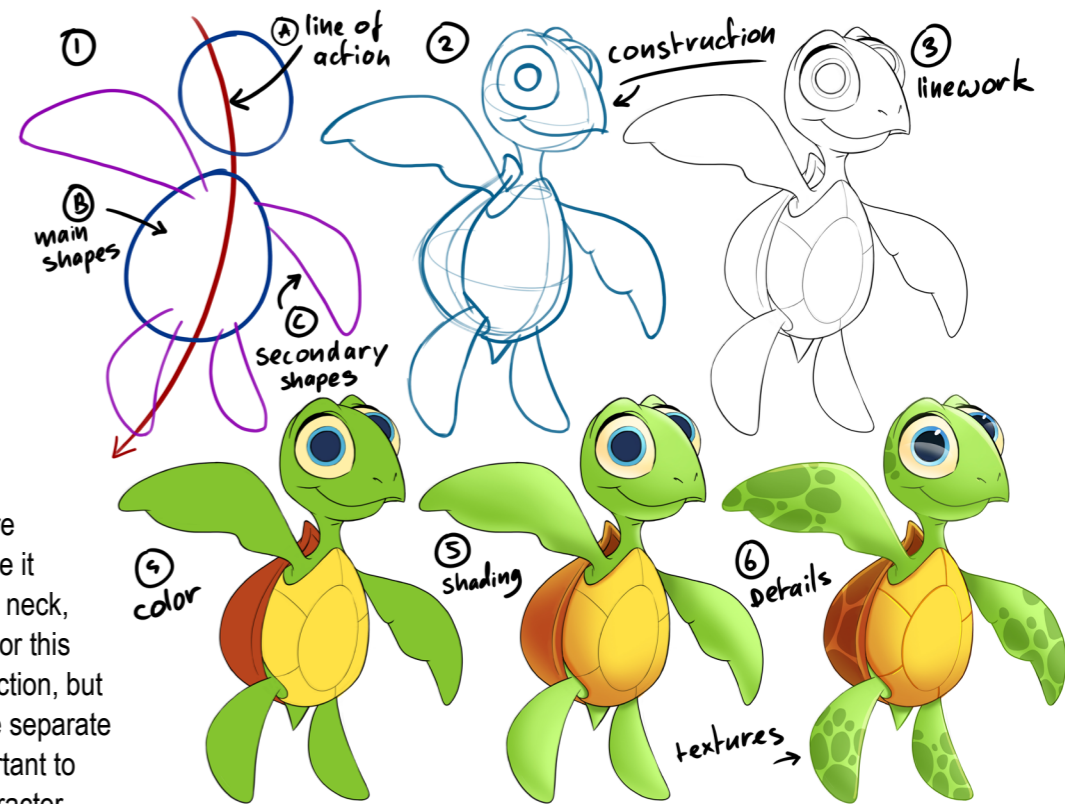
With this tutorial, I explain how to start with a side profile and use that to draw a  $\frac{3}{4}$  character. This is a great exercise when you have difficulty with drawing a character from  $\frac{3}{4}$  view.

You can also approach this transition from front to  $\frac{3}{4}$  even more technical by using a grid like I show here. By putting that in perspective, you can create the  $\frac{3}{4}$  view.

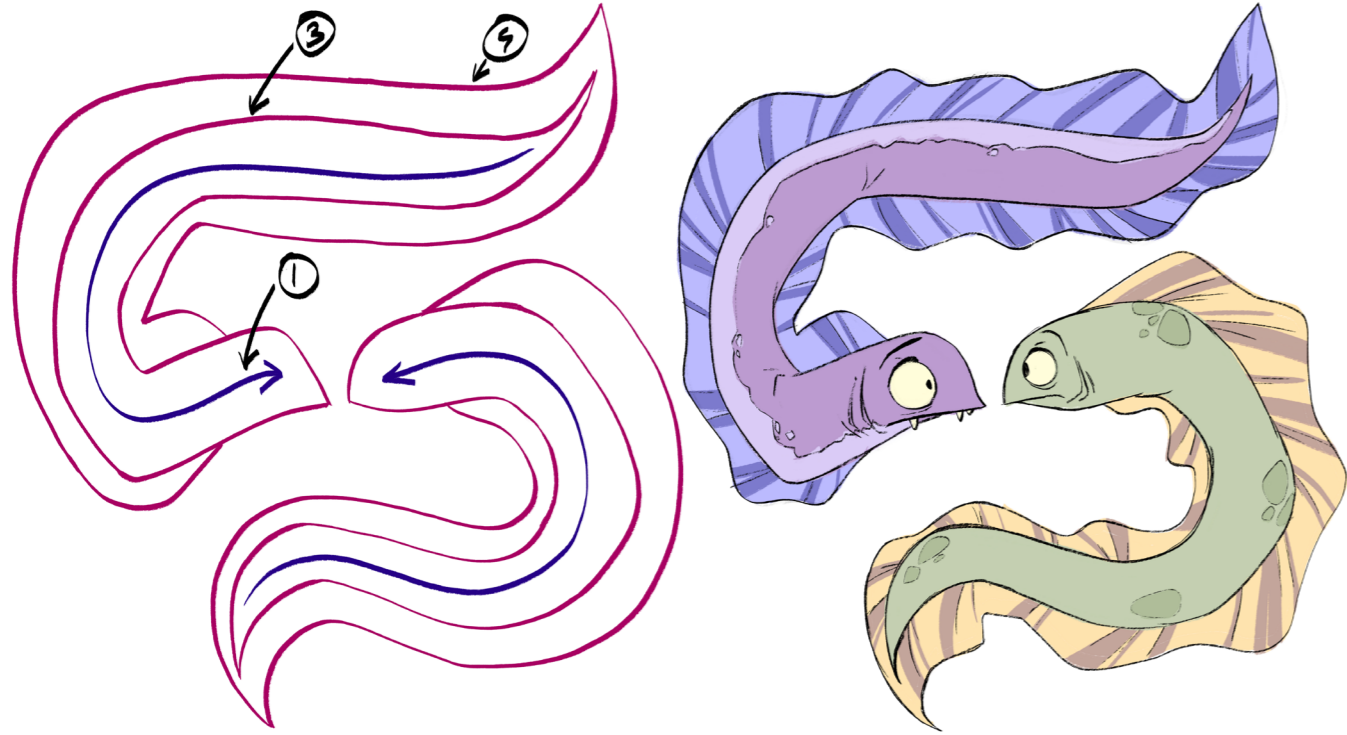




It's time to draw a sea turtle! Compare this younger turtle with the older turtle on the next page. As you can see, some differences make the younger turtle look younger. I made the shapes of the little turtle rounder, shorter, and less angular to achieve this more youthful look.

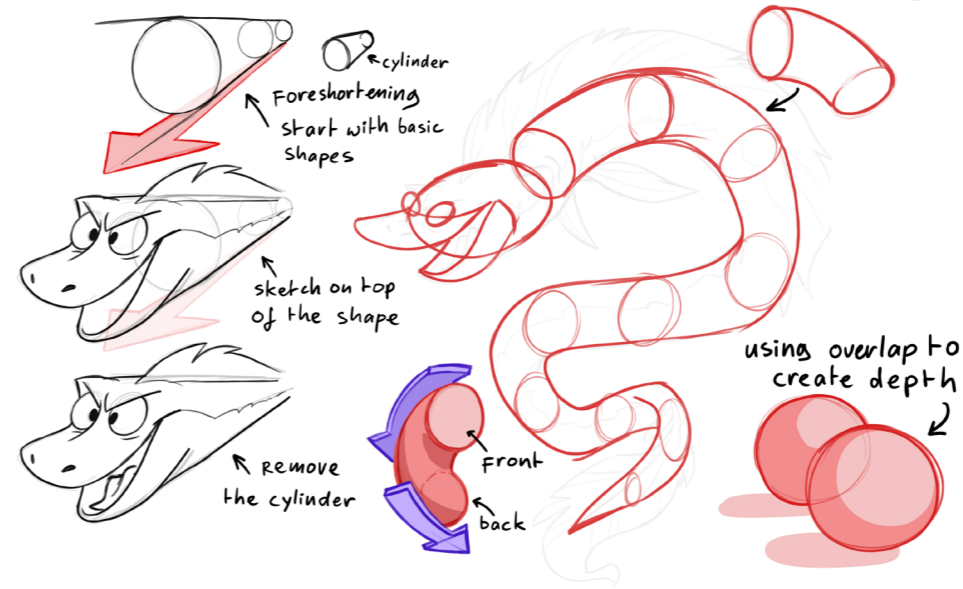


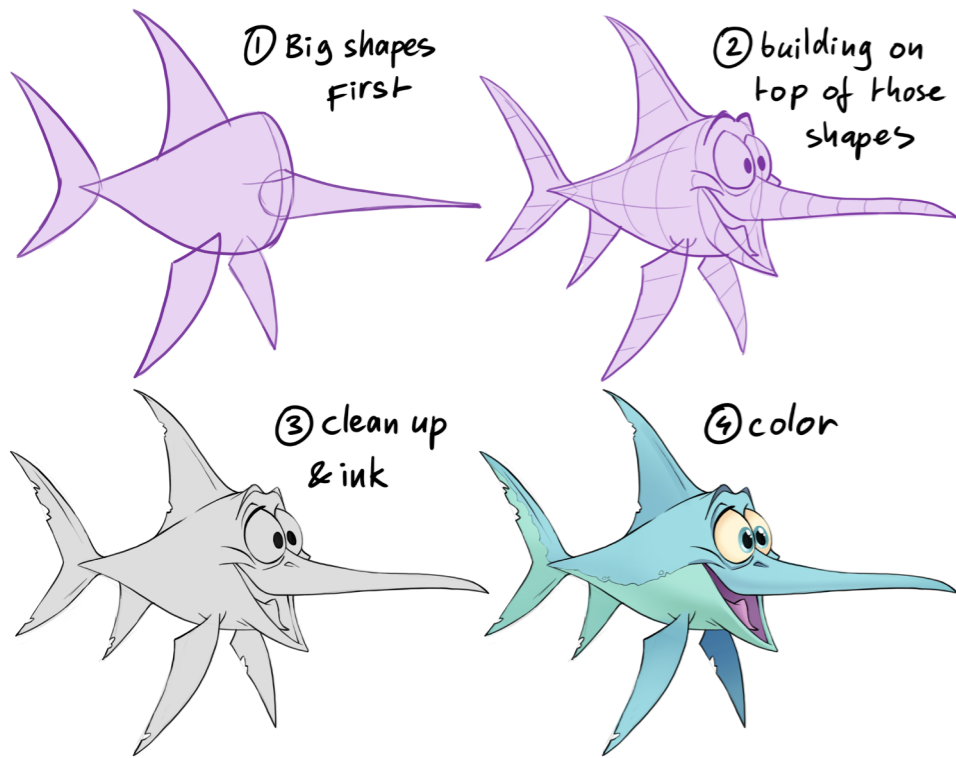
Drawing a turtle is a bit more complex than a fish because it has more 'body parts' like a neck, arm- and leg-like flippers. For this character, I drew a line of action, but the arms and legs are more separate from that. But still, it's important to make a whole from the character.



These two eels are another example clear line of action in it. Because eels don't have limbs, the whole body follows the action line.

To create a sense of depth, I use foreshortening and depth. You can see an example of this in this eel character. If you didn't apply it, the character would look flat.

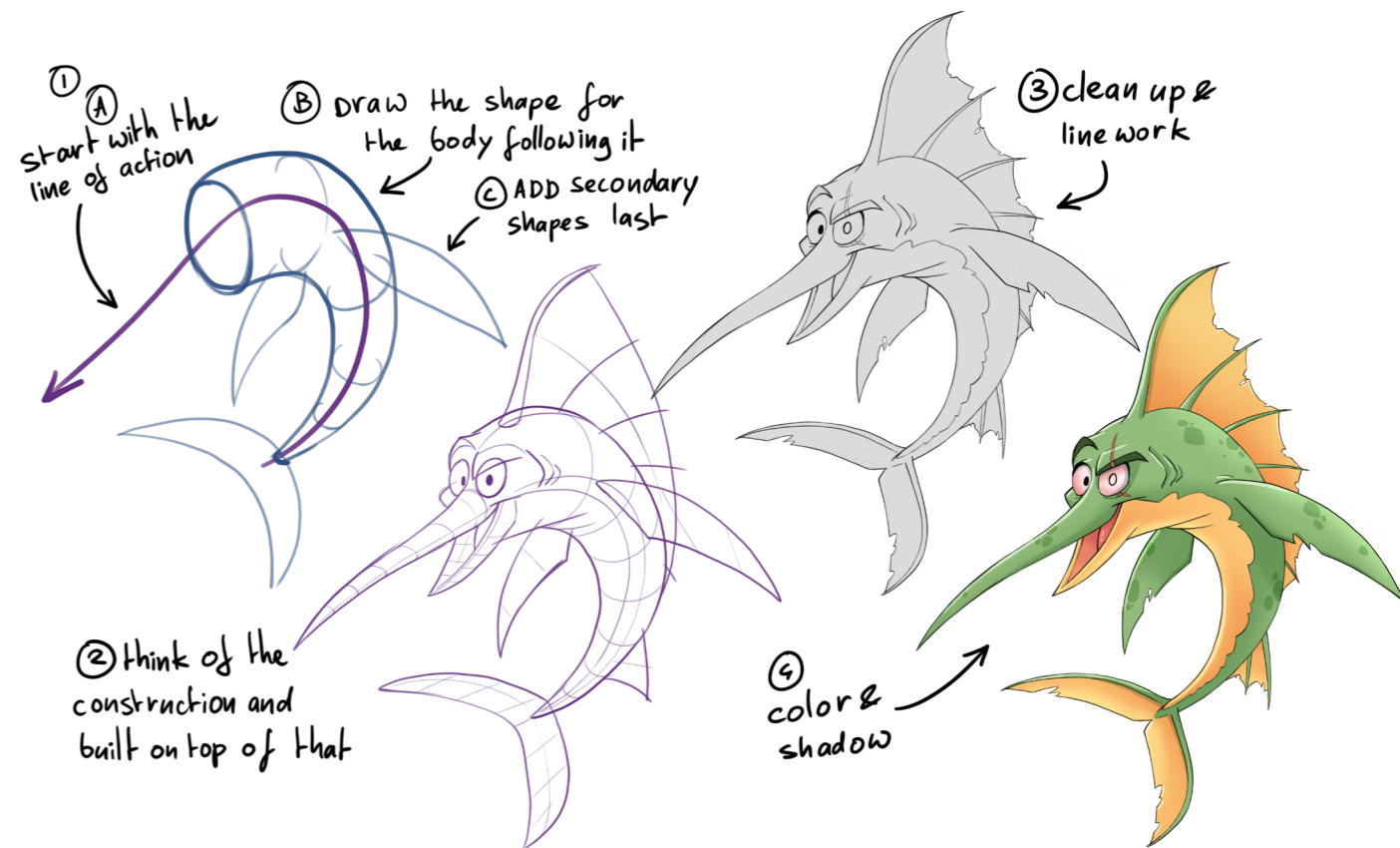




Swordfish are one of my favorite fish to draw because of their funny long nose!

## EXERCISE

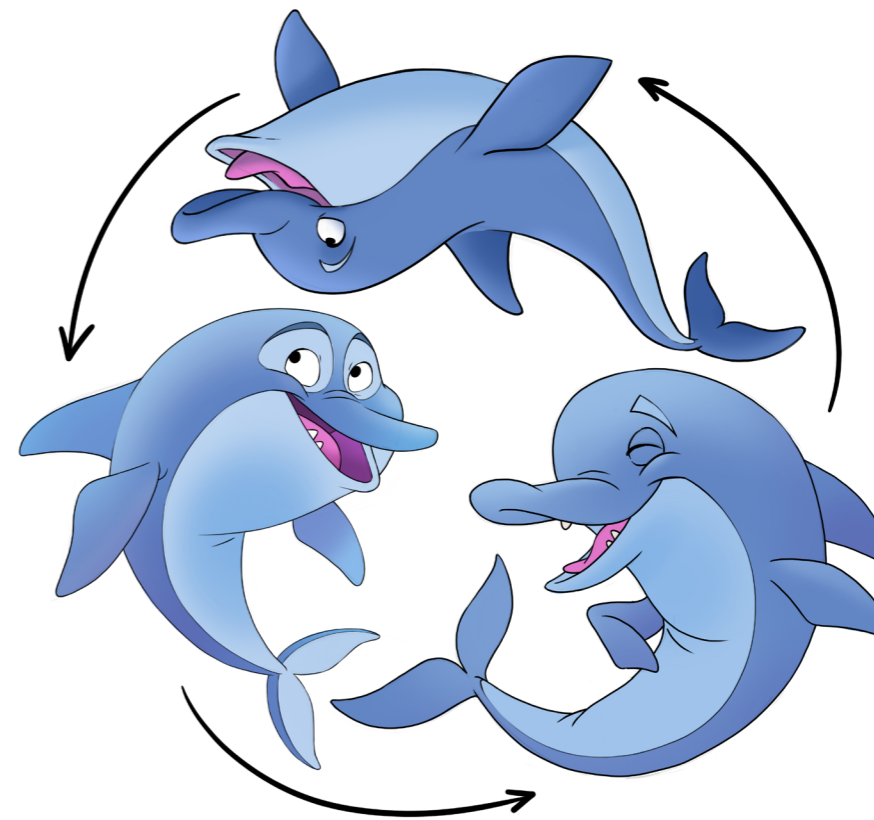
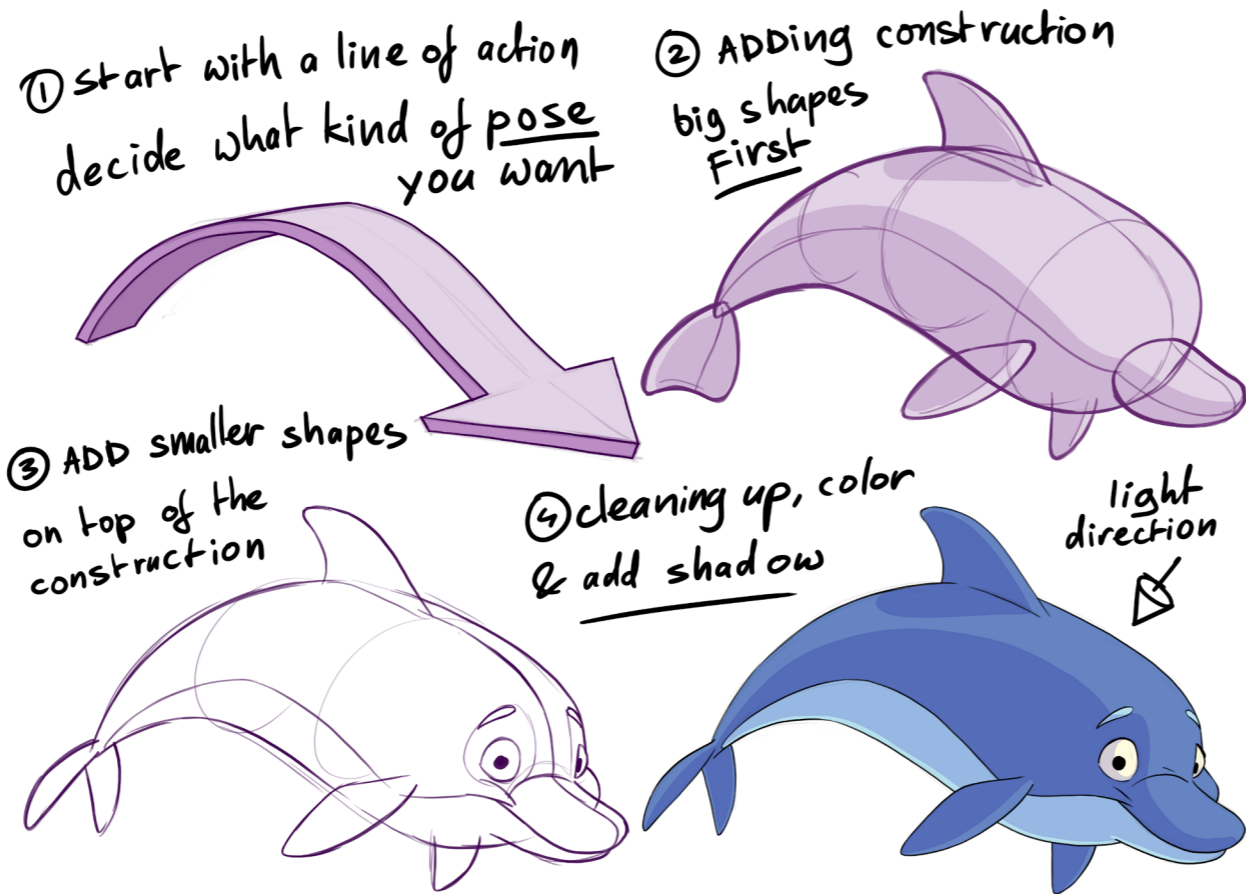
Use these examples to practice or create your own version. You can do this by changing the proportions or the shapes.

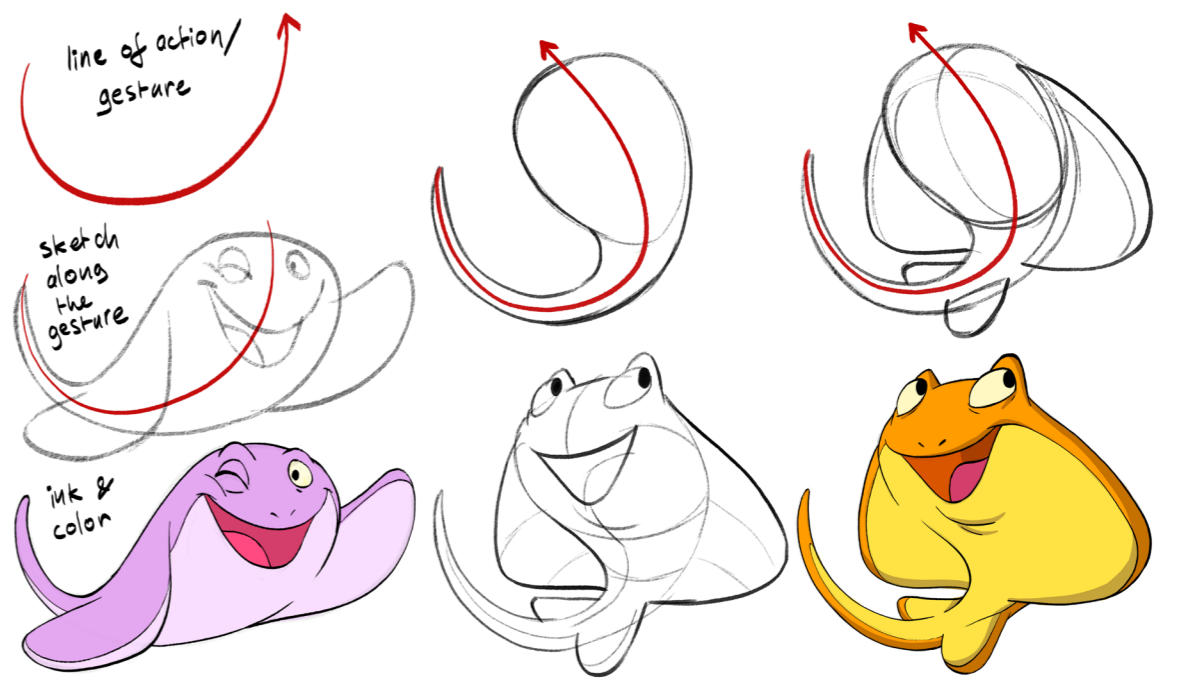
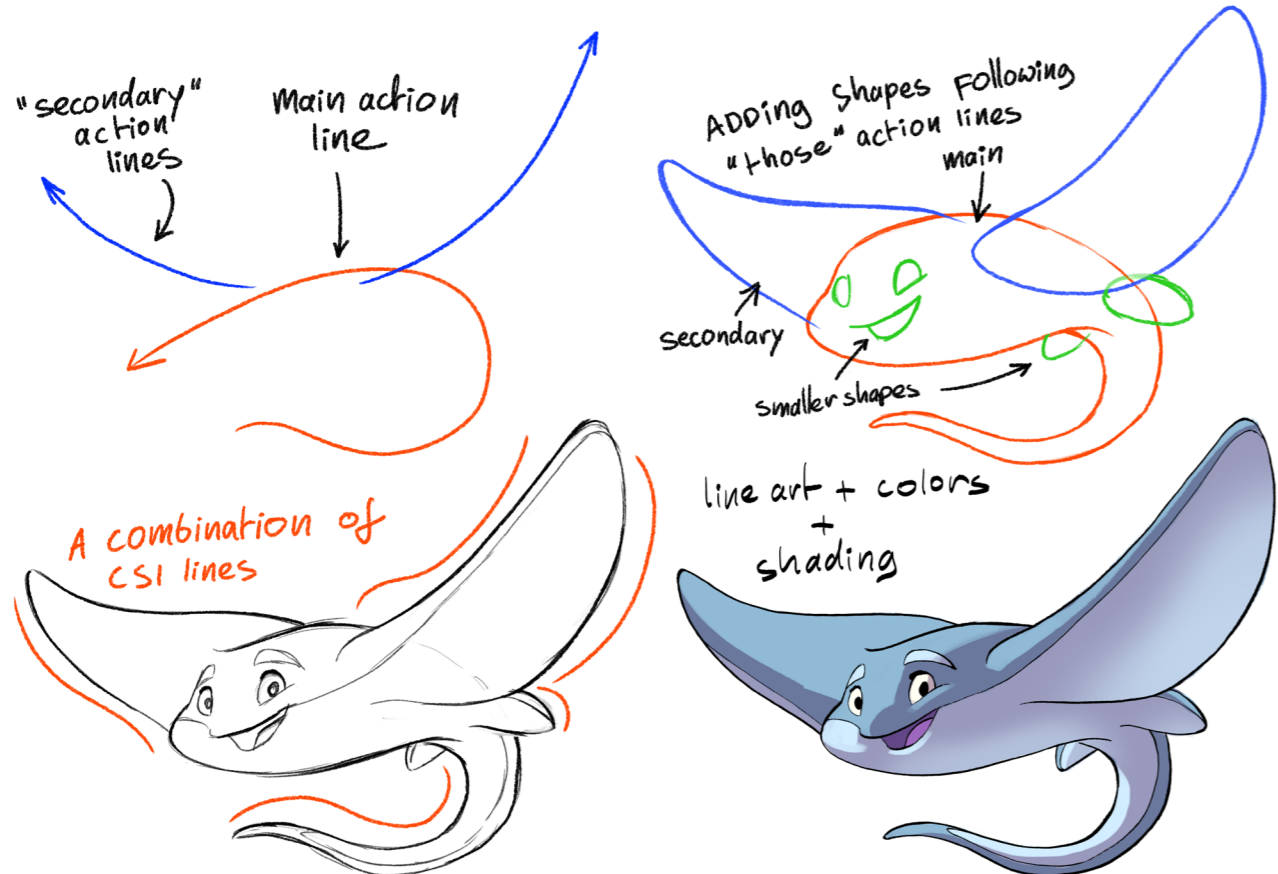


Another great creature to practice the line of action is a dolphin! That's because the dolphin doesn't have any limbs. See how I placed the dolphins in the circle; they follow the flow of the circle.

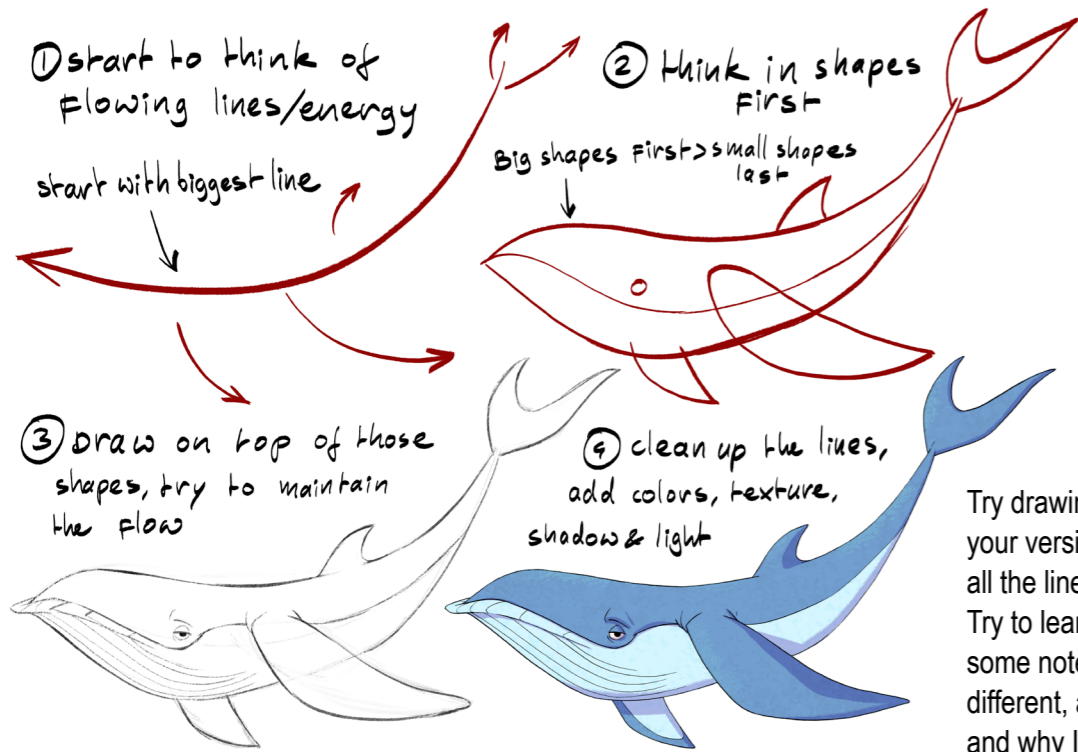
## EXERCISE

I didn't draw a breakdown of these dolphins, but that's a fun exercise for you: draw these dolphins' construction and try to find their line of action.

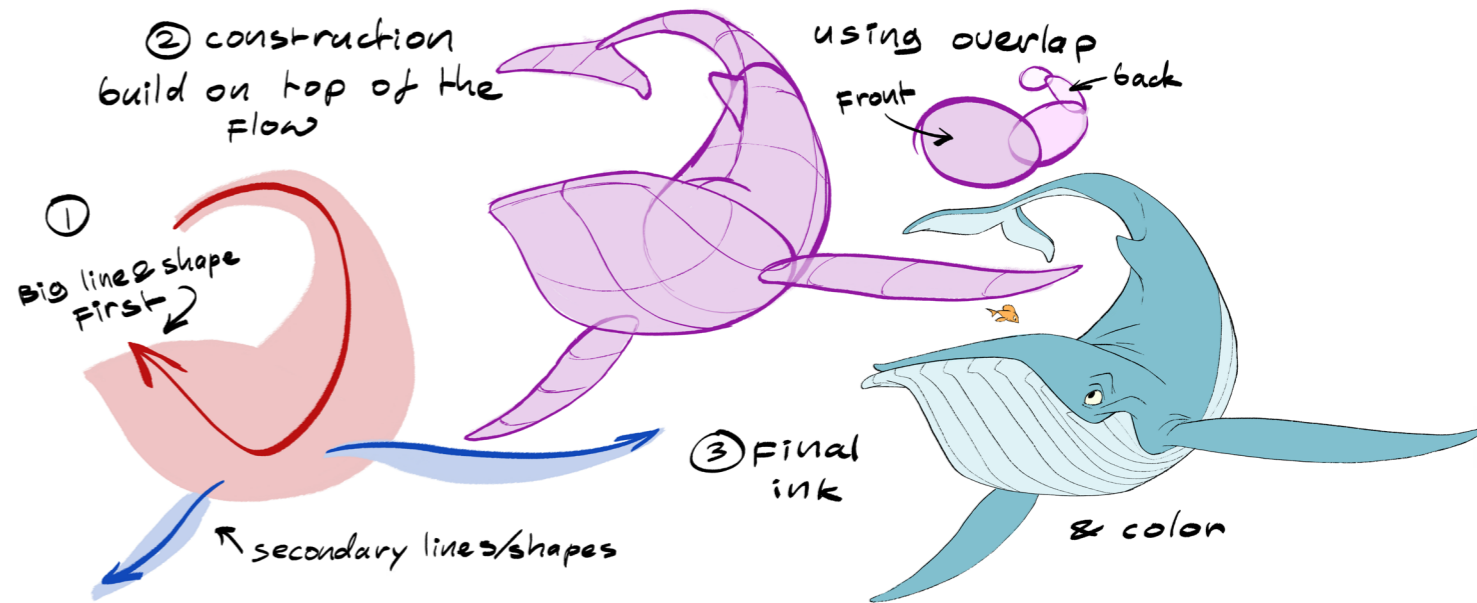




Maybe you're wondering: "More line of action!? When does it stop?". I hope these examples show that it's always good to focus on flow and line of action. Another way to approach it is to see it as flowing energy, not only in the main body but also on the fins.

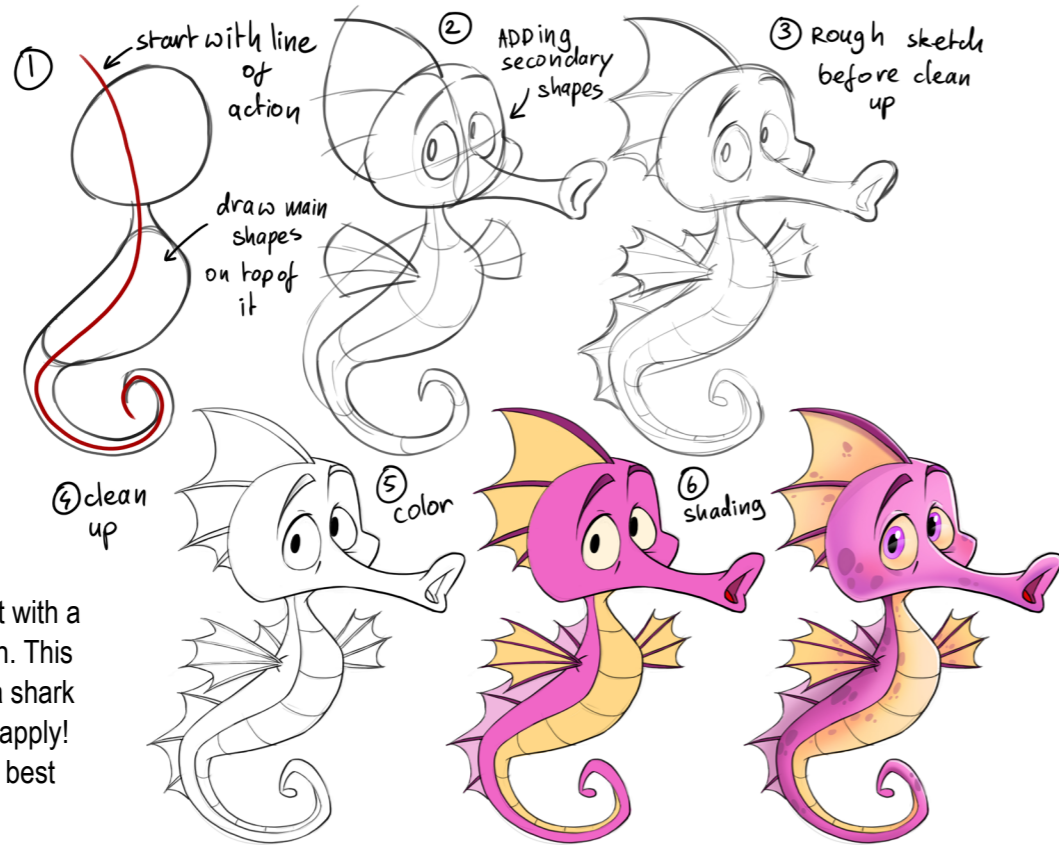


Try drawing this whale and compare your version with that one of mine. Are all the lines and shapes the same? Try to learn from that, maybe make some notes. When you see something different, ask yourself why it's different and why I drew it that way.



A couple of pages ago, I explained something about overlap and foreshortening. In this whale, it's even more clear in the head and tail area. Can you see it? This helps to add depth and scale to the character.

To draw this sea horse, I start with a line of action and construction. This may look more difficult than a shark of a seal, but the same rules apply! Don't be afraid to try it. In the best case, you'll learn from it.

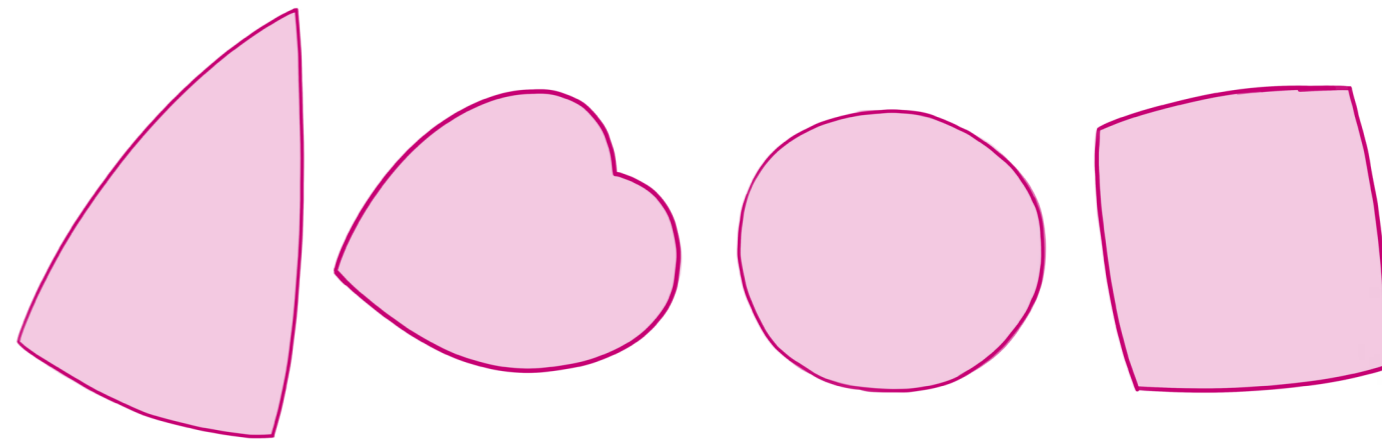


Here are three different sea horses. The major difference between them is the shapes.

## EXERCISE

Draw these three characters. Once that is done, try drawing one with a different shape. I'm curious to see what you can come up with!



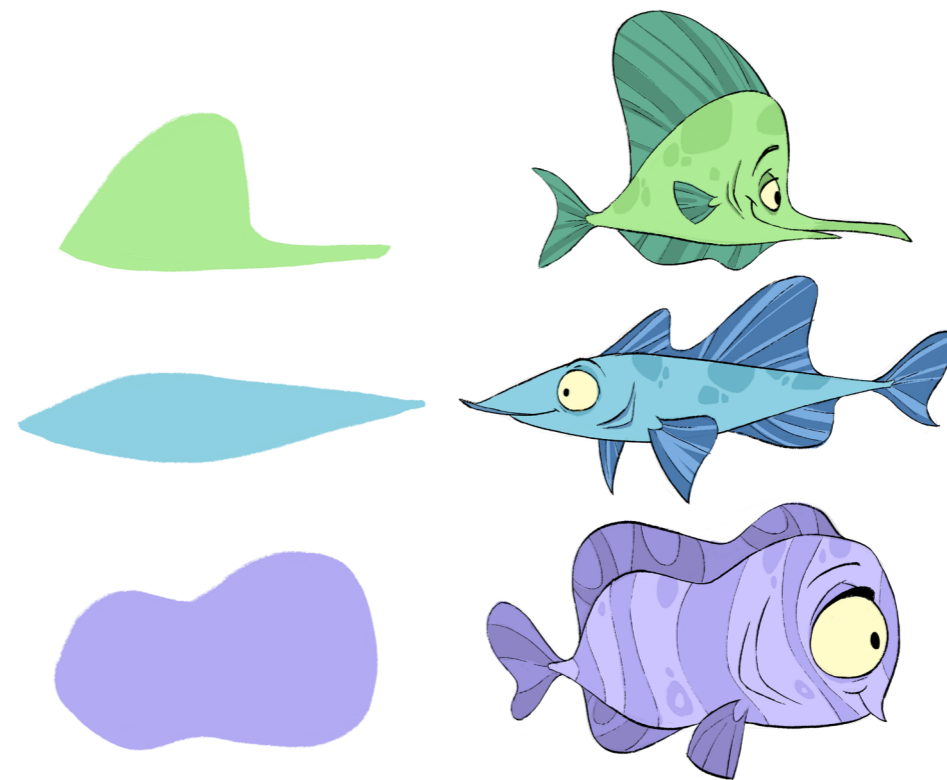
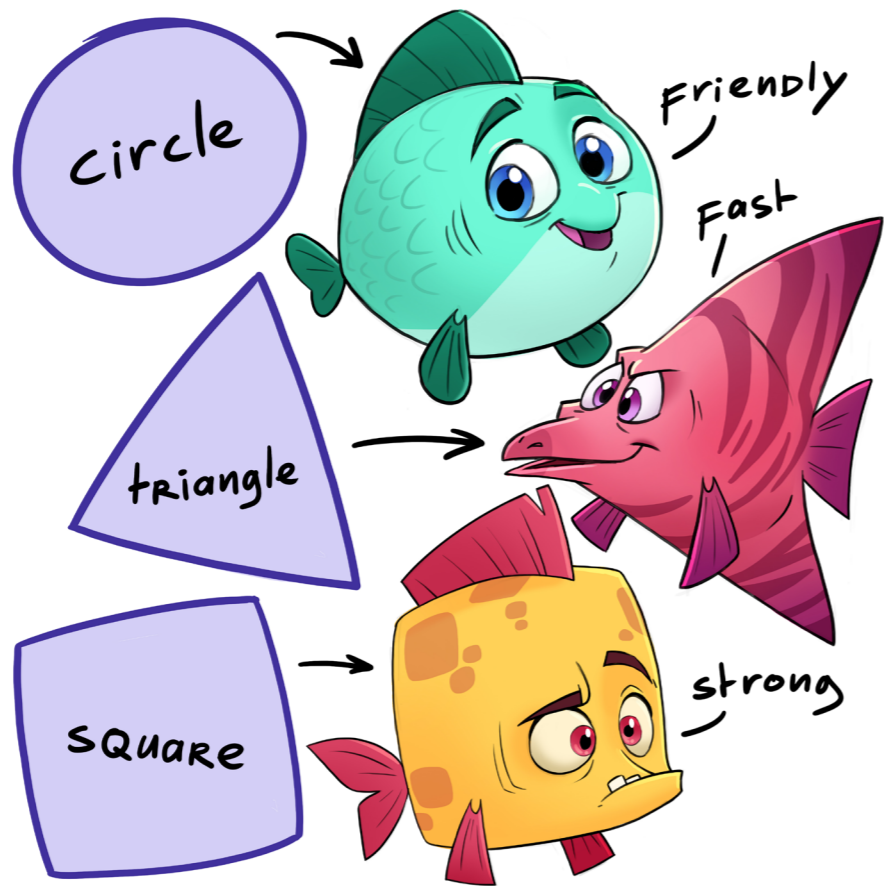


Some examples of how to use shapes for the foundation of your character. See how I used these shapes to draw these fishes. You can also take these shapes and try to draw some different fishes for yourself.

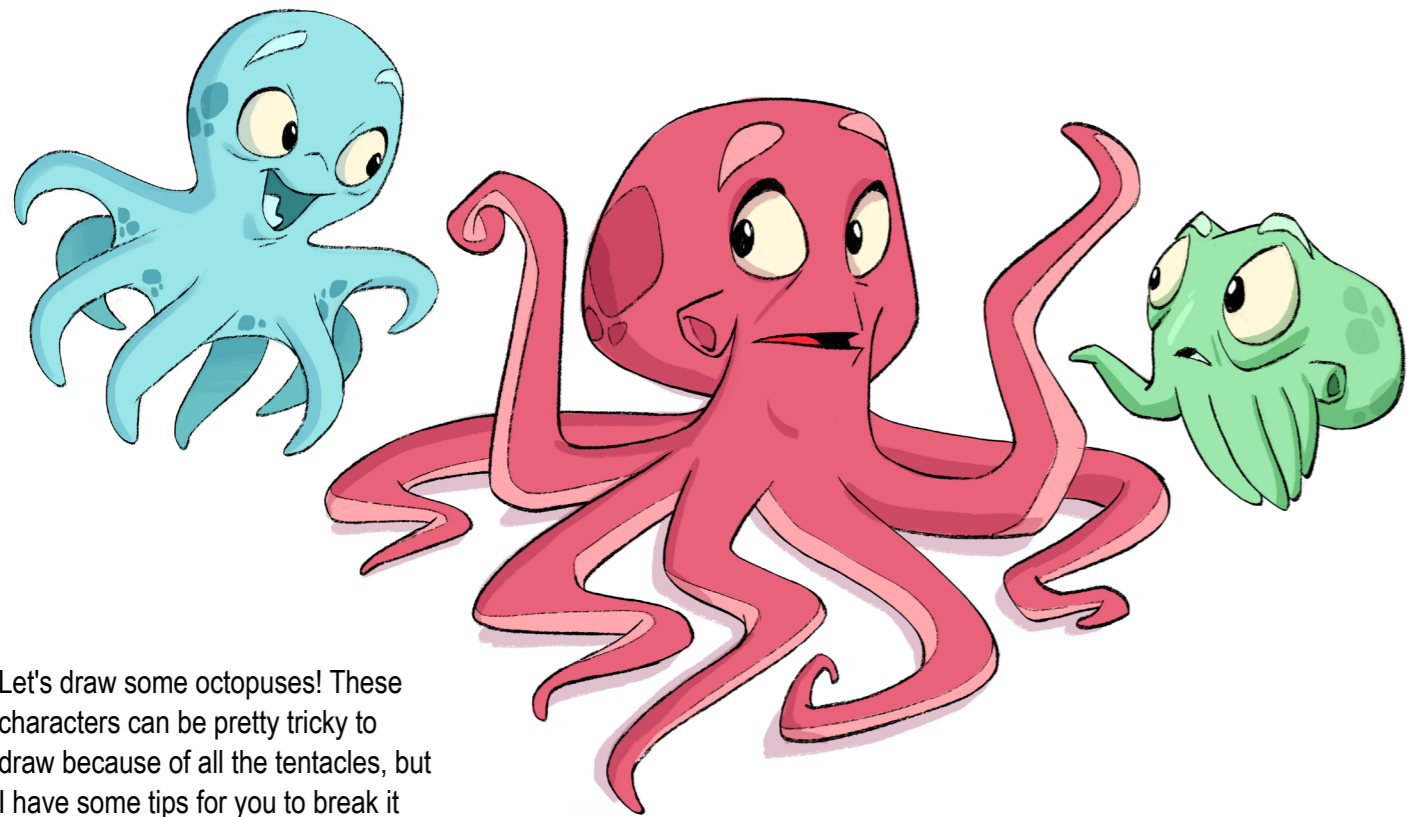
## EXERCISE

I don't show the construction of these fishes in this example; you could study these characters and try to draw the construction of them for practice.

Have you ever heard of 'shape language'? Shapes can also have some meaning. Round is friendly and great for young characters. Triangles can be great for fast, smart, or dangerous characters. Square characters can be used for powerful characters. This is not set in stone, but this visual language is often used.

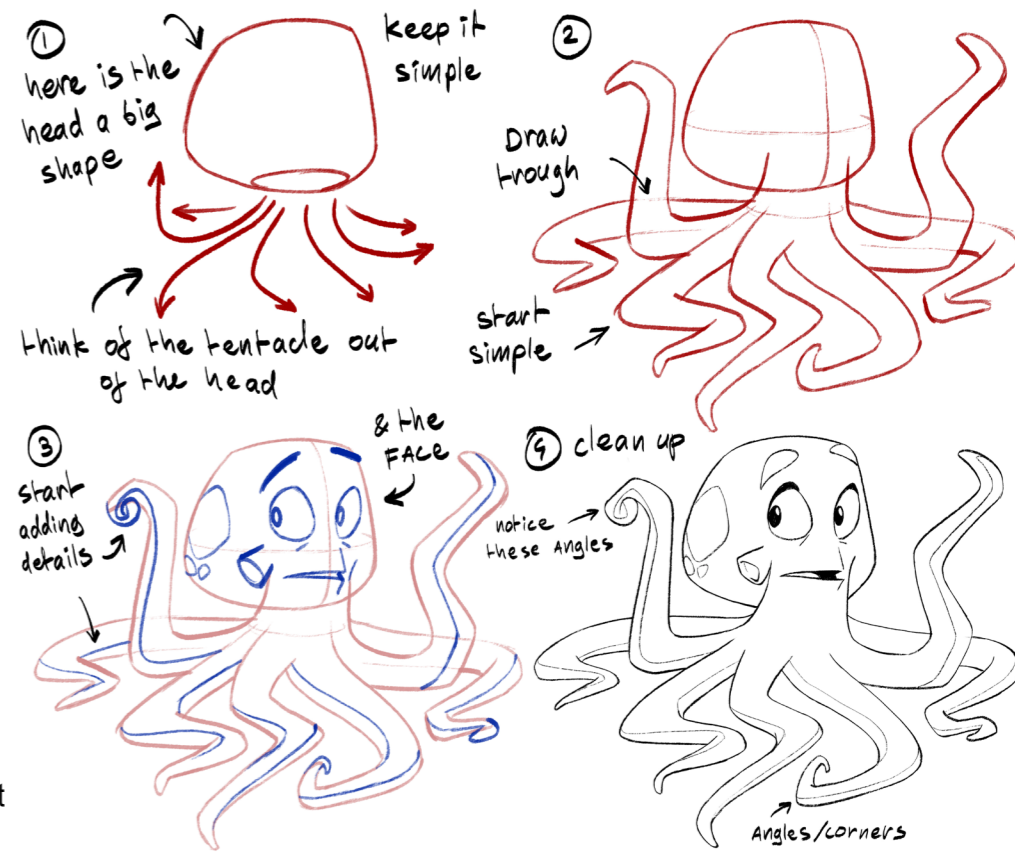


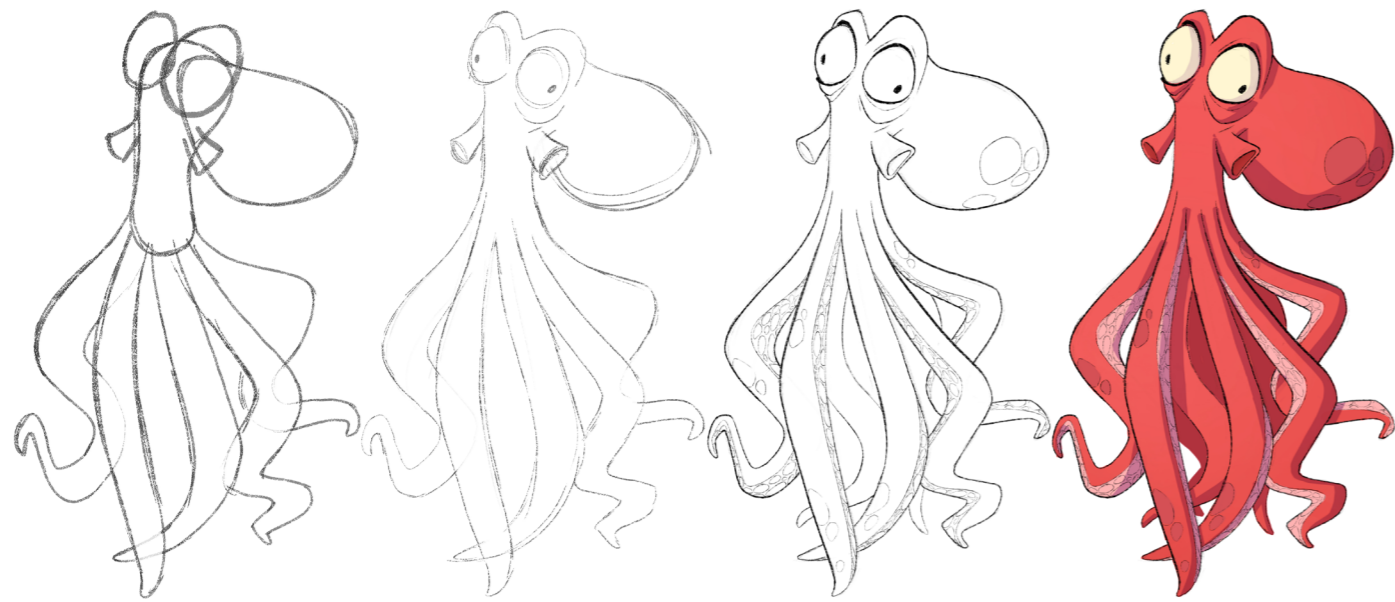
Shapes don't always have to be circles, squares, and triangles. You can see this in this example with funny fish. Their shapes are more abstract or a mix of the basic shapes. Try to draw some weird shapes and see if you can create a fish with it.



Let's draw some octopuses! These characters can be pretty tricky to draw because of all the tentacles, but I have some tips for you to break it down to a few easy steps.

How I approach drawing an octopus is by starting with a shape for the head. The head is carried by the tentacles; they are attached under the head. I start drawing the tentacles as simple lines, but I already keep the gesture of the octopus in mind. Once I have put that down, I start adding volume to them.





This is another octopus with a different personality. Can you tell what kind of character it is and how this is related to the design? You can learn a lot from observing characters this way!

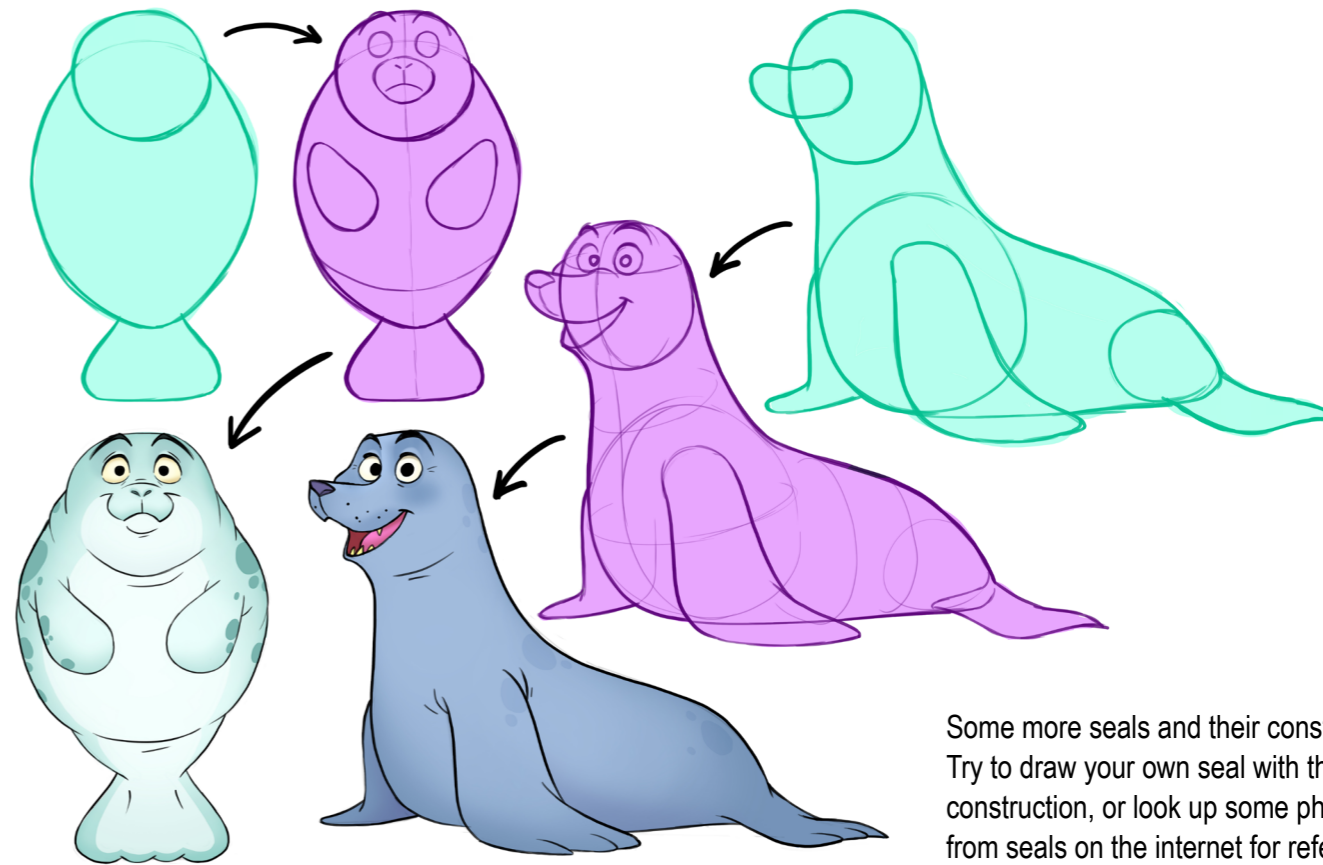
Notice how I start with simple basic shapes and build the character upon this.



## EXERCISE

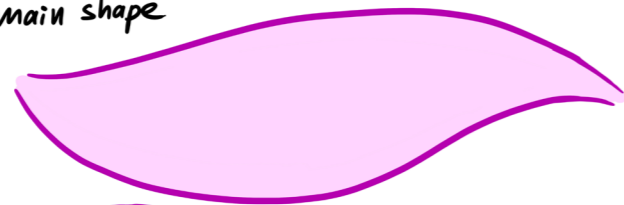
Here I changed the proportions of the previous octopus to create a small grumpy one. See how the construction is basically the same, only the proportions are different. Can you create a new one with this same trick?

Look at these cute seals. See how the line of action influences the whole body.

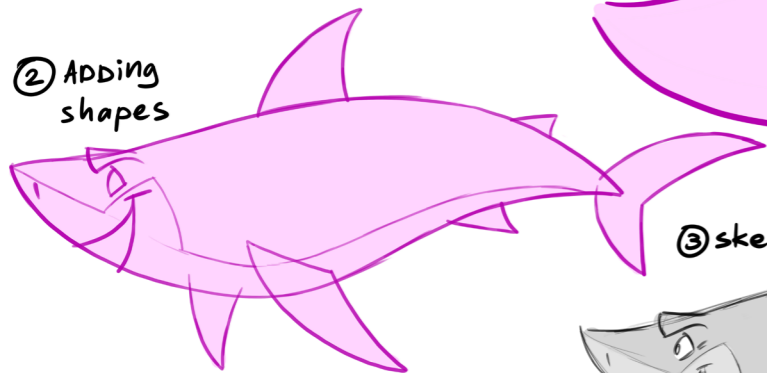


Some more seals and their construction. Try to draw your own seal with this construction, or look up some photos from seals on the internet for reference.

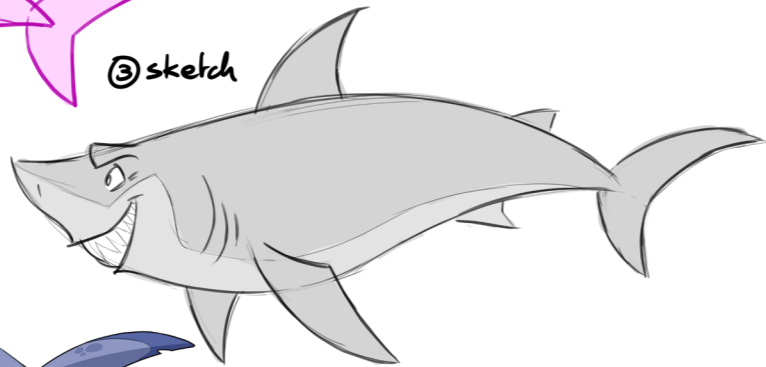
① start with the main shape



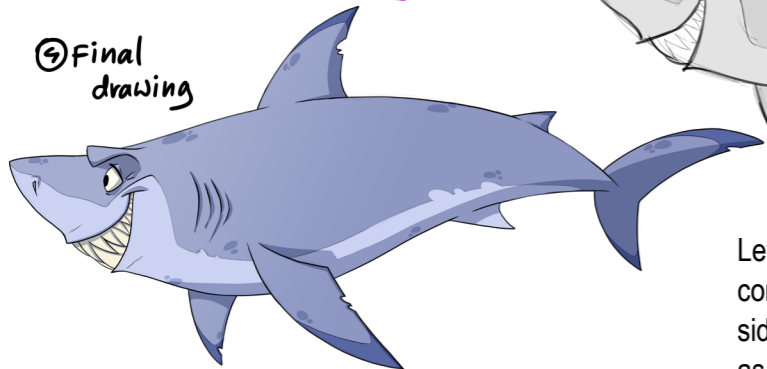
② Adding shapes



③ sketch

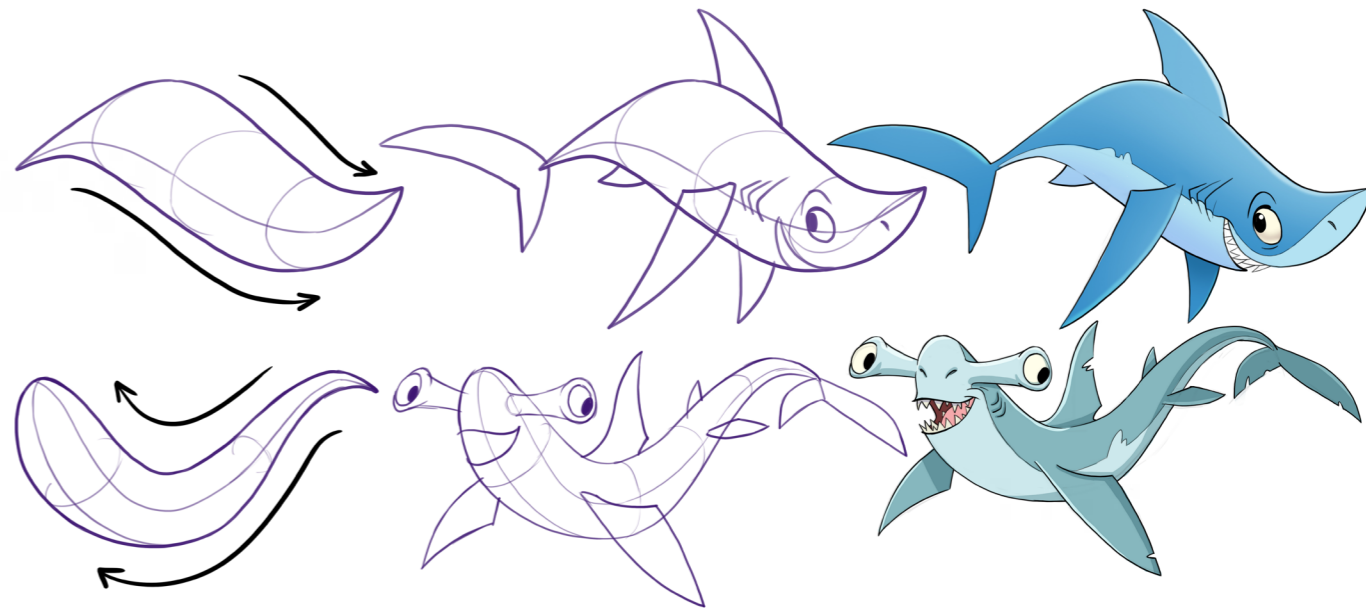


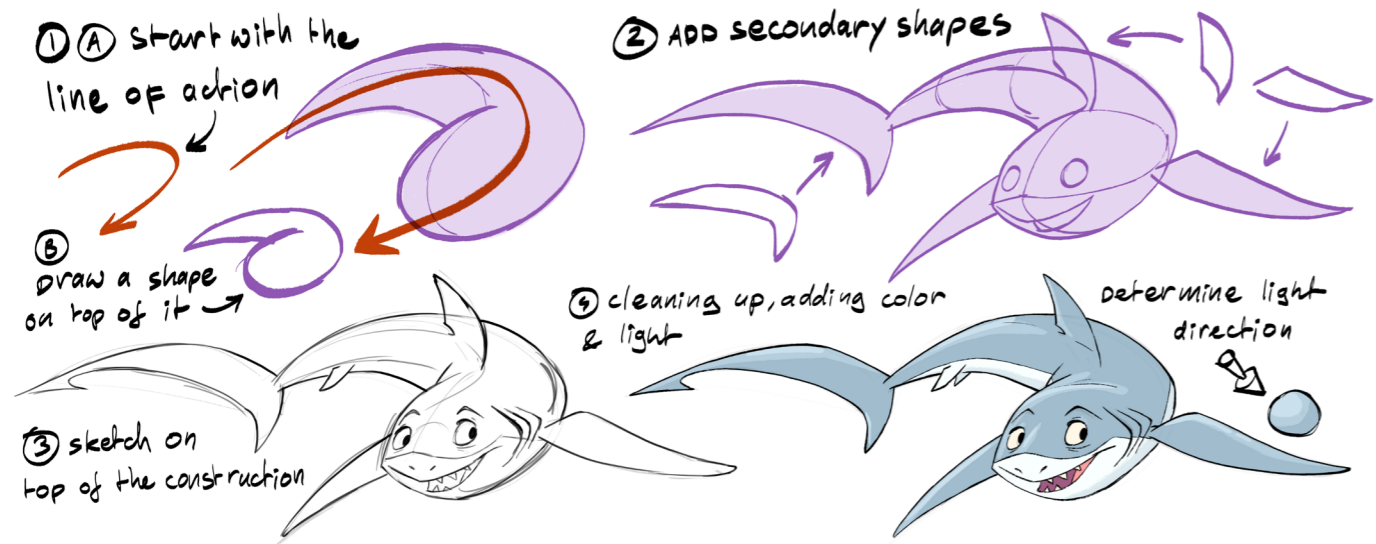
④ Final drawing



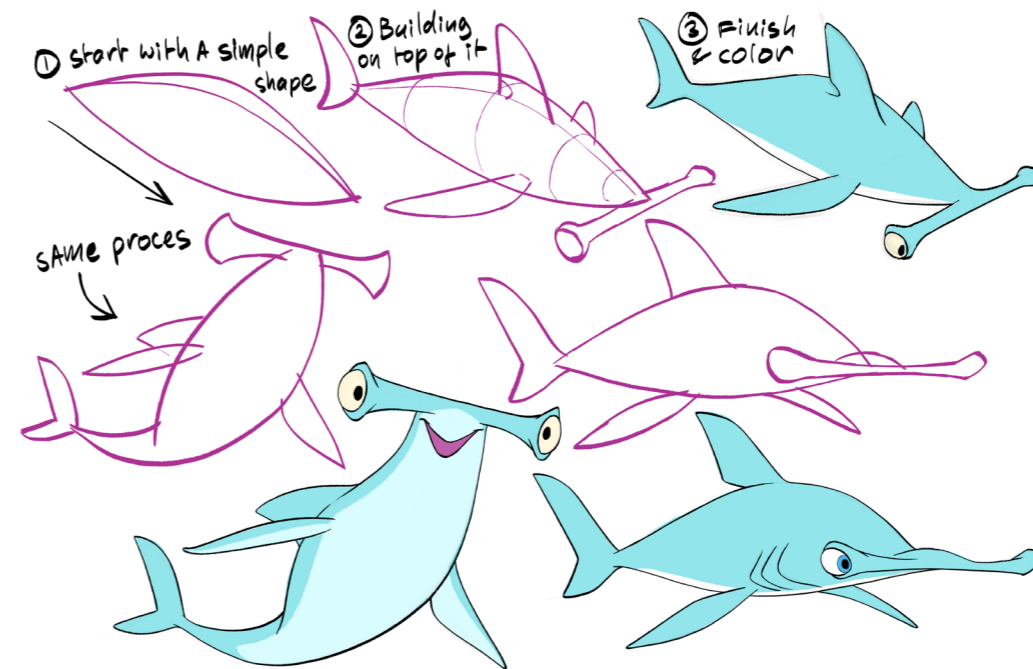
Let's draw a shark! When you find a character complicated to draw you can start with drawing a side profile. Start with one big shape you can use as a foundation for the character.

See again how I started with a flowing, dynamic shape as a base for these two sharks.

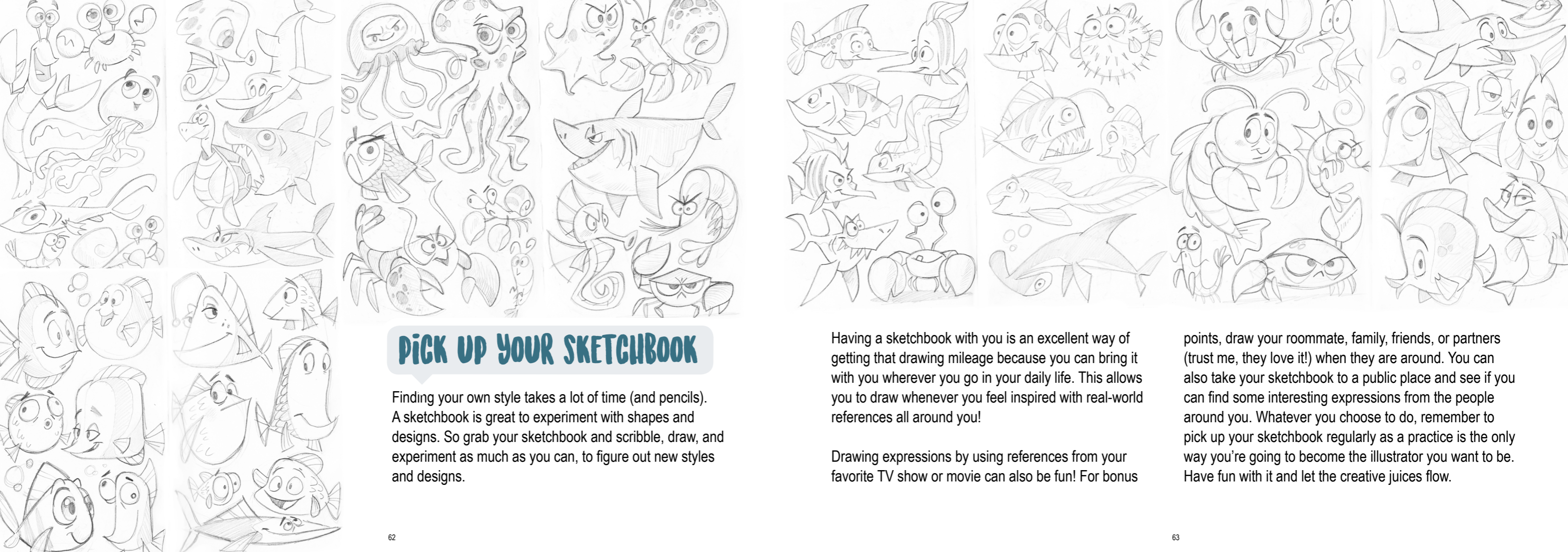




Here I drew this shark with his head overlapping a part of his body because it is bent. This creates depth. It can be quite challenging to draw; try breaking it down into some basic shapes.



Three hammer sharks! See how I start with the shapes and using perspective lines/ guiding lines to create depth to build on top of. Feel free to take these characters and draw them in different poses. That's actually an excellent exercise for you to do with any character.



## PICK UP YOUR SKETCHBOOK

Finding your own style takes a lot of time (and pencils). A sketchbook is great to experiment with shapes and designs. So grab your sketchbook and scribble, draw, and experiment as much as you can, to figure out new styles and designs.

Having a sketchbook with you is an excellent way of getting that drawing mileage because you can bring it with you wherever you go in your daily life. This allows you to draw whenever you feel inspired with real-world references all around you!

Drawing expressions by using references from your favorite TV show or movie can also be fun! For bonus

points, draw your roommate, family, friends, or partners (trust me, they love it!) when they are around. You can also take your sketchbook to a public place and see if you can find some interesting expressions from the people around you. Whatever you choose to do, remember to pick up your sketchbook regularly as a practice is the only way you're going to become the illustrator you want to be. Have fun with it and let the creative juices flow.

CONCLUSION  
*and* THANK YOU

## THAT'S IT!

Thank you for reading this book. I hope you liked it and found some inspiration from it. The best way to learn how to draw is to make drawing milage. By this, I mean you have to draw and practice as much as you can, receive feedback from others and gain experience as an artist. Sometimes it can be challenging to come up with something to draw. When I'm experiencing an art block, I usually do some studies. If you need inspiration for subjects to draw, you can use tutorials from this ebook. Simply follow the steps and learn from them. Don't be disappointed if it isn't perfect in one, three, or maybe ten or more attempts. Try to figure out what you can improve and focus on that the next time. That makes you grow as an artist!

To make sure you can draw anywhere, take a sketchbook with you wherever you go. When I had to travel to the office by train, I always had my sketchbook with me to draw in the train. My goal was to fill two pages every day. Learning how to draw characters is great! First: it's super fun to do. Drawing characters can be a great hobby, but it can also turn into a job. You can create characters for toys, comics, theme parks, commercials, storyboards, animated movies and tv shows, and many more. I always worked in the Netherlands, a small country in Europe. There aren't many big animation studios here. Despite that, it is still possible to work remotely as a freelance artist for animation studios worldwide. There are also many job/work opportunities outside the animation industry, no

matter where you live. Think of all the commercials being made by agencies or awesome game companies. Try to research studios and job opportunities in your country and figure out how to get your foot in the door.

It took me years to get where I am now. When I started, I doubted a lot. I want to tell you not to worry too much about whether you will 'make it'. And when you do worry, use that as an extra motivation to keep working and don't give up. Have fun, and never stop drawing. There is always more to learn.

Best,  
Mitch Leeuwe



