

Drawing Materials

What We Use and Why.

Graphite Pencils



Graphite pencils are the cornerstone of our approach to drawing. They offer a degree of precision and control unmatched by other drawing media, and are inexpensive and widely available.

Our preference is for the *Staedtler Mars Lumograph* pencil, which is easily recognizable by its bright blue casing. These pencils range from very soft (9B) to very hard (9H). Having a broad range like this available makes it possible to control values very carefully. For achieving values that are just *a whisper* darker than the paper, for example, a 9H is much better suited for the task than a 2B. This kind of control, in turn, makes the complicated business of modeling 3-dimensional form that much more manageable.

Staedtler Mars Lumograph Black Pencils



We love graphite here at Vitruvian, but it has two main draw backs (pun intended): First, graphite isn't very dark. At best, it can achieve around a value 3 on a Munsell scale, which is nowhere near black, and limits our "vocabulary" of values in drawing. Second, graphite is easily "burnished" – the effect of the material becoming "shiny" on the page. Burnishing can be ugly, and we try diligently to avoid it.

The *Staedtler Mars Lumograph Black* pencils offer a solution to these problems in the darker values. These feature leads with a black pigment added to the graphite, allowing them to draw darker than conventional graphite pencils without burnishing – a real advantage for creating drawings with a high degree of contrast.

2mm Lead Holders (a.k.a. “Clutch Pencils”)



Graphite pencils sharpened in conventional pencil sharpeners are fine for 85% of the drawing process. But... Sometimes it's necessary to have something *really* sharp to reach into small spaces or draw extremely fine lines. When a sharper point is required, we reach for a “lead holder” containing a 2mm graphite lead. These can be sharpened in rotary “lead pointers” which produce a much sharper point than any other pencil sharpener available.

In addition, there are 2mm leads available that are *much* harder than the Staedtler *Mars Lumograph* 6H – the hardest lead available in that product line. Consider the *Faber-Castell TK 9400* leads in the 8H variety for an extremely hard alternative... If you can find them.

White Chalk Pencil



If you're drawing on any sort of mid-value paper, it's necessary to have something lighter than the paper to capture lighter values. Our preference is for white chalk or pastel pencils. These offer a fine-grained, buttery white that is easily built up to full opacity, and also responds well to blending tools like stumps and brushes, allowing the chalk film to be spread thin for subtle transitions.

Divider



Key to drawing

well is getting proportions right. This can be weirdly tricky sometimes, and having a way to measure precisely can be an asset. A good academic divider is a handy tool for gauging distances on the page with high precision. It's not a tool we use often, but when needed, it's indispensable.

Kneaded Eraser

The eraser we use most often is a common “kneaded” or “kneadable” eraser with a soft, pliable, putty-like consistency. There are two primary advantages to using this type of eraser. First, the surface is soft and a little bit sticky, making it possible to “lift” material off the page without damaging the delicate tooth of the paper. Second, as it’s name implies, this eraser can be “kneaded” endlessly, making it possible to fashion it into just the right shape to extract material from small or awkward places in a drawing.



Stick Eraser



As versatile as a kneaded erasers can be, sometimes it’s necessary to have a little more precision. The *Tombow Mono Zero* is what’s known as “stick eraser” – a long, slender filament of flexible vinyl that erases cleanly and thoroughly. The plastic housing can be held like a pencil, allowing for incredible precision. This is an eraser you can draw with!

Brushes



Brushes are a good alternative to blending stumps. They do much the same thing, but the bristles of a good, stiff hog hair brush can be better at pushing graphite and chalk down in to the tooth of the paper. They’re particularly good for larger passages that require blending, such as large shadow masses or simple backgrounds. As with stumps, however, over-use can be detrimental to a drawing. Use brushes, or any other blending tool, with caution.

Blending Stumps



Achieving continuous and smooth tonal passages with graphite pencils can be tricky – sometimes hatch strokes or the tooth of the paper are too prominently visible, creating unwanted disruptions in the tonal fabric. One way to mitigate this is to use blending tools. These come in a variety of forms, but the most common is the paper “stump” – a long, slender, pencil-shaped tool made from paper fibers. A stump can be used to gently soften and blend pencil strokes together, leaving behind a more unified tone that can be appealing... But be warned: over-use of blending tools can be counter-productive. It’s very easy to blend away all the structure in a drawing, so use them with care.

Graphite Powder

One of the down-sides to drawing with pencils is that it can take a long time to develop large, dark areas in a drawing using nothing but the point of a pencil – it can feel about as efficient as scrubbing the floor with a toothbrush.

Graphite powder offers a solution. It’s dark, fluid, easily moved around with a brush, and can cover large areas relatively quickly. Because it’s pure graphite, it integrates seamlessly with the other graphite passages in a drawing.

But be warned... It’s messy and easily becomes airborne. Use it with care, and try to avoid breathing it in.



Paper

“What kind of paper do you use?”

This is, by far, the most common question we get from new and prospective students. When answering this question, we try to convey that while paper choice is important, it’s far from the *most* important factor in learning to draw. There is no magic paper that will substitute for good drawing skills.



The paper we’re currently recommending is Canson *Mi Teintses* paper, in a color called “Flannel Gray”. It presents a good mid-value between the darkest darks and lightest lights in a drawing, has a moderate “tooth” that isn’t too pronounced, and it’s durable – it can take a lot of punishment. It comes in 19” x 25” sheets or 8.5” x 11” sheets in packs of 10. **Be sure to use the “smooth” side of the page, as the other side has a pronounced laid pattern.**

But there are many options out there... Experiment, and find a paper that you like!

Pencil Sharpener

Truth be told, we haven’t noticed a huge difference between pencil sharpeners with respect to the quality of point they produce – there are many good options out there. Our current choice for sharpening wooden pencils is the **Mitsubishi KH-20**. It’s one of a category of sharpeners that provides a longer point than the more conventional sharpeners to which you may be accustomed. A longer point means a sharper point, and that’s why we like it. It also features some nice extras, like a spring-loaded, self-centering carriage that grips the pencil and guides it into the cutter at the right angle to prevent breaking the lead.



Lead Pointers

Conventional pencil sharpeners are intended for use only with traditional pencils with wooden casings. If you're using a lead holder with 2mm leads, you'll need a rotary *lead pointer* for sharpening.

We use one of two options: small plastic lead pointers are readily available at most art supply stores. Made by Staedtler, Dahle, and others, these pointers feature an abrasive cylinder around which the pencil lead is rotated to create a point. They work well enough, and are inexpensive.

An even better option, however, is the old-school lead pointer made by *Tru Point*. This is a larger unit with an abrasive cup inside around which the lead is rotated to fashion a razor sharp point. It's a much more substantial device than the alternatives, and its fluid, gliding rotary motion makes it fun to use.

There's only one catch: they don't make them anymore. *Tru Point* is out of business, so buying used is the only option. Look for these on eBay or Etsy. You might get lucky! Also, be sure to buy some replacement abrasive cups, too... Those aren't being made anymore either :(



Staedtler lead pointer



Tru Point lead pointer.

Itemized List

Vitruvian Studio may receive a small commission on purchases made via the links below.

- [Staedtler Mars Lumograph pencils, 9H to 9B set](#)
- [Staedtler Mars Lumograph Black pencils, 2B to 8B set](#)
- [Sanford Turquoise Lead Holder](#)
- [Generals Charcoal White Pencil](#)
- [Kneaded Eraser](#)
- [Tombow Mono Zero stick eraser](#)
- [Blending Stumps](#)
- [Brushes](#)
- [Divider](#)
- [Graphite Powder](#)
- [Canson Mi Teintes paper, Flannel Gray](#)
- [Mitsubishi KH-20 Pencil Sharpener](#)
- [Staedtler Mars rotary action lead pointer](#)

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