

Ruskin Drawing Exercises III & IV

Adapted from John Ruskin's The Elements of Drawing – Letter I

Exercise III: Gradual Value with Pen Hatching

Purpose: To master gradation—transitioning smoothly from light to dark using only pen.

1. Draw a horizontal rectangle (about 1" high by 4–6" wide).
2. Begin on the left side, leaving a bit of white paper for the purest light, and begin with very light, widely spaced parallel lines.
3. Gradually decrease the space between the lines and add layers (cross-hatching) as you move right.
4. The right side should be much darker than the left.
5. The transition from light to dark should be as smooth and even as possible. It takes practice! Even after many years I cannot do this perfectly.

Goal: To eventually develop as much control and sensitivity in creating tone with line as possible.

Exercise IV: Gradual Value with Pencil Shading

Purpose: Same as Exercise III, but using pencil to achieve a subtler and smoother tonal transition.

1. Draw another horizontal rectangle (1" high x 4–6" wide).
2. Begin shading lightly on the left side using the side of the pencil, leaving a bit of untouched paper for the purest light.
3. Gradually darken the tone toward the right with overlapping strokes, keeping the pressure soft so as not to destroy the texture of the paper.
4. Avoid visible lines as much as possible—aim for a seamless gradient from white to dark grey. This can take quite a bit of practice. Even after many years I cannot do this perfectly.
5. Do not smudge with your fingers—work only with pencil strokes.

Goal: To refine your sense of tone and touch using the pencil's full range.

"Truth before beauty." – John Ruskin

Practice Page – Exercises III & IV

Exercise III – Pen Hatching Gradation



Exercise IV – Pencil Shading Gradation

