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## Lesson 1: Lines, Ellipses and Boxes

### Lines: Using Your Arm

[f](#) [t](#) [v](#)



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## Understanding how to use your arm



As promised, we'll be starting from the absolute basics: the mechanics that drive your arm, and how it can be used from different pivots to make different kinds of marks.

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## Drawing from your wrist and shoulder



This video demonstrates the difference between drawing from your wrist, elbow, and shoulder, the benefits of each, and why in this course we focus primarily on drawing from your shoulder.

As always, watching the video first, then later reading through the text will help you absorb the material more efficiently than just doing one or the other. Don't be afraid to come back and rewatch or reread material either, to help refresh your memory later on.

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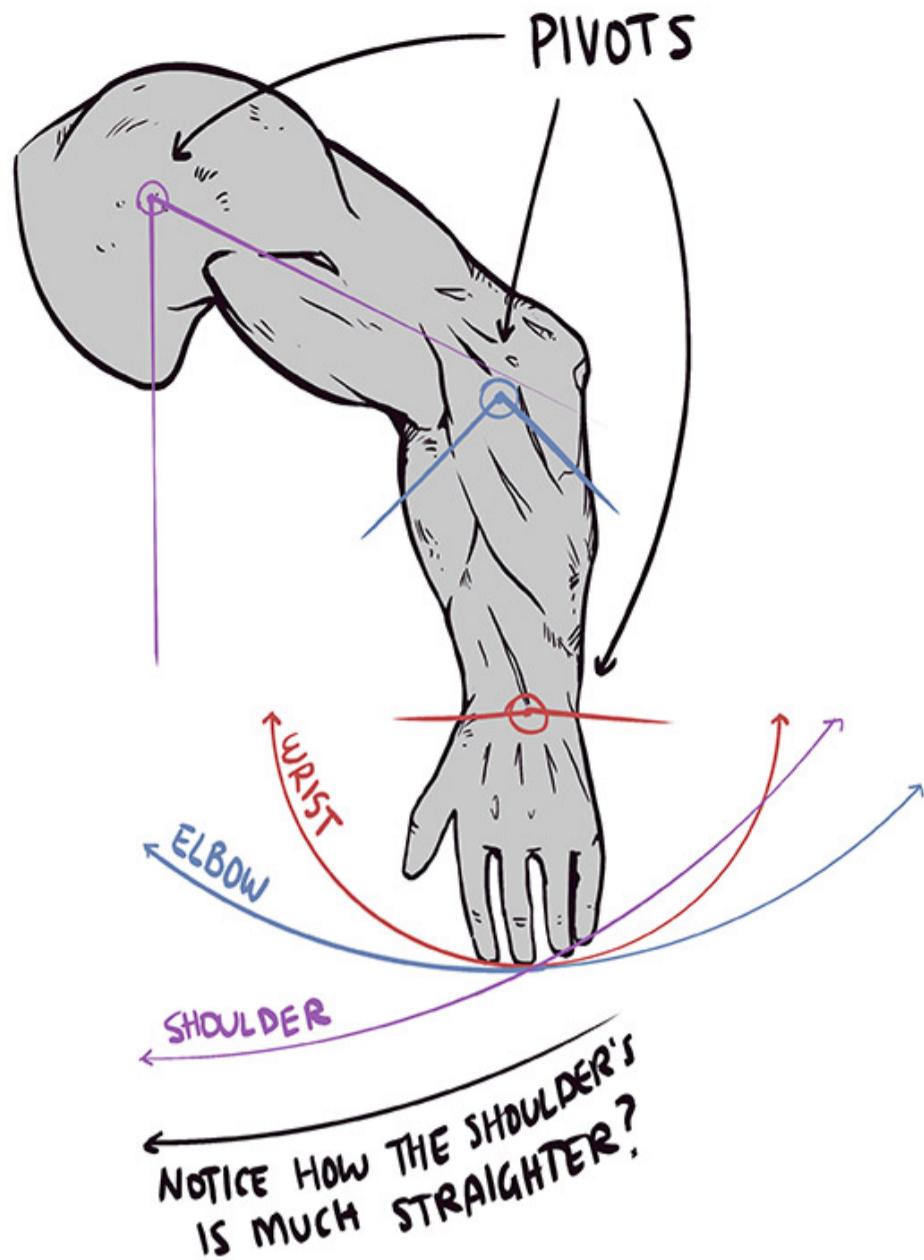
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## The pivots of the arm



As you likely know by now, your arm has three major joints, and when we hold an object in our hand, we can manipulate the position of that object in space by bending our hand at any of the following pivots:

- Wrist
- Elbow
- Shoulder

The specific pivot you choose will determine the range of motion you can achieve. Moving from the wrist will only allow you to move across a more limited distance, and will quickly start following a very obvious arc.

Moving from the elbow, and even more so from the shoulder, will allow you to maintain a straighter trajectory longer before the arc of the motion becomes more obvious.

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For the sake of simplification, we can ignore the elbow, and focus instead on the idea of either:

- **Drawing only with your wrist**, where your hand moves but the wrist remains pinned in place. This allows us to have very tight, stiff control, and it's good for tight details and writing.
- **Drawing with your *whole* arm**, where everything, including your upper arm, is moving as you draw. This is great for smooth, fluid linework, even when drawing smaller marks, because it emphasizes a consistent trajectory and minimizes erratic wobbling.

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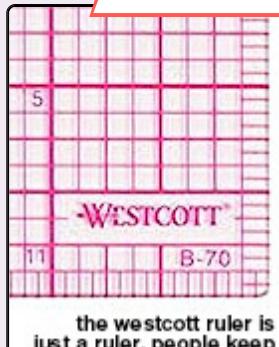
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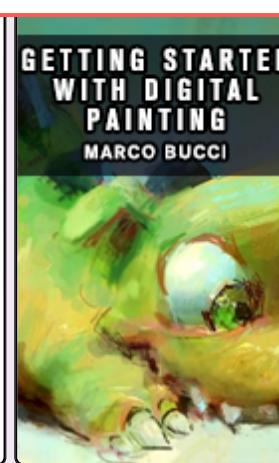
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## Do you mean I can't ever draw with my wrist or elbow?



That's not what I'm saying at all.

Every pivot serves its purpose, and while the majority of this course will focus on marks that need to achieve a smooth, confident flow (which is best achieved from the shoulder), there are situations where you'll use your wrist. For example, in the few areas where we delve into texture, the wrist's capacity for stiff precision will be an advantage.

And of course, when doing your own drawings outside of Drawabox, you're welcome to draw however you feel most comfortable. The rules presented here apply only to work done for this course. You'll be able to choose which parts you want to use outside of it yourself.



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Drawing with your whole arm is, frankly, difficult. Or more accurately, it's unfamiliar and unpracticed. We've spent years writing from our wrists, and so the muscles involved are far better developed than those needed to draw with your entire arm. As such, we end up facing more resistance, especially as beginners, when we try to use it. It gets exhausting, and we get sore quickly. That muscle weakness can also make it harder to be confident with our linework.

That's why when we face the choice of how we're going to use our arm to make a mark, when we're faced with two paths to choose from, using our whole arm poses far more resistance. We naturally want to go down the easier road, to draw in the familiar fashion, from the wrist. **It is for this reason that this course forces you to draw from your shoulder in most cases.**

I cannot stress this enough: **be patient with yourself.** Do not rush, do not force yourself. Take breaks, and allow the work to take as long as it needs to. You only have one body, and to break it so early would be a tragedy.

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Resting some part of your arm on the page is a pretty normal thing people do, as it provides additional support and helps us draw for longer without as much fatigue. This can result in more friction and dragging, however, which can make it easier for us to fall back to drawing from certain pivots and not engaging our whole arm.

**Gently resting the side of your hand or a finger on the page as you draw is fine.** It will drag a little, but as long as you're aware of it and catch yourself whenever you slip back to drawing from your wrist, it'll be okay. The added support is well worth it.

Resting your elbow against the table as you draw however is not a good idea. It creates a very heavy anchor that basically forces you to draw from your elbow and freezes your whole upper arm. Avoid this wherever possible.

Drawing with your whole hand and arm hovering will result in no such dragging or friction, but it's not always worth the exhaustion especially as we're still developing our shoulder muscles. You may want to practice this in the future, but for now, don't worry about it.

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## How to hold your pen



Some people are familiar with the 'overhand' grip one might use when drawing with a pencil, or painting with a brush. While it is often presented as "the correct grip that no one taught you!" it isn't as simple as that.

The grip serves a function. Pencils for example can be used to make marks from the tip as well as from their side edges, and often you'll see artists exposing more of their pencil's lead to get more of those broad, flat sides. Using an overhand grip allows us to access those surfaces more easily while drawing.

Pens on the other hand have just one point of contact - the tip - and we can vary our mark through the pressure applied to it. For this, the tripod grip-type (which is basically how you hold your pen when writing) is more suitable, and is how you should be holding your pen when drawing as well.

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If you're interested in learning more about different tools and the way in which they're best used, check out this course from our sponsor, **New Masters Academy**:

- **Beginner's Guide to Drawing with...** everyone, it seems!

This course, which is a collaboration between some of the biggest names in art instruction, serves as a one stop shop for one's traditional drawing fundamentals. They introduce you to a variety of tools, explaining each one's use, and push through concepts like value scales, perspective, light and shadow, texture and markmaking, figure drawing, and more. With just short of 24 hours of video, they cover a lot, but they do so in depth, and provide 23 exercise-based assignments to complete.

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