

# Foreground, Mid-ground & Background

*Three distinct spatial zones that create depth in a composition — each requiring different levels of detail, value, and edge quality.*

---

## BEGINNER

---

Every environment drawing benefits from thinking in three spatial zones: foreground (closest to the viewer), mid-ground (middle distance, usually where the main subject lives), and background (distant space). Each zone has its own visual character: the foreground has the highest contrast, sharpest edges, and most detail. The mid-ground has medium contrast and detail. The background has the lowest contrast, softest edges, and least detail. When these zones are clearly differentiated, the drawing reads as spatially deep. When they are all treated with the same level of contrast and detail, the drawing looks flat. This three-zone thinking is a simplification, but it is a practical one — even experienced artists use it as a starting framework.

## HOBBYIST

---

The three-zone structure comes from how atmospheric perspective actually works, but it is useful even in interior environments where atmospheric effects are minimal. In an interior, foreground objects are darker and more detailed, middle-ground elements are the primary subject with medium treatment, and background elements (far walls, windows, distant doorways) are lighter, softer, and less detailed. The compositional implication: your most important element should almost always be in the mid-ground — surrounded by supporting elements but not competing with them. The foreground creates entry into the image; the background creates exit and depth.

## PROFESSIONAL

---

In cinema and animation, the three zones of environment design are treated as separate art direction challenges: foreground design, midground design, and background design are typically handled by different artists or at different stages of production. The foreground must frame and focus attention on the midground subject; the background must create context and depth without competing with the subject. This three-tier separation is explicit in traditional cel animation — background paintings were literally separate from the character cels, allowing independent adjustment of each zone.