

# Smooth Gradients

---

## BEGINNER

A smooth gradient is a gradual, even transition from light to dark with no visible jumps. It is what makes a sphere look round instead of striped. Gradients are hard because the natural tendency is to make them in steps — several distinct bands of tone rather than a continuous flow. The trick is to build them slowly, in many very light layers, working back and forth across the transition zone rather than committing all the tone in one pass. Using the side of a pencil gives you a softer, more easily blended mark ideal for gradient work.

---

## HOBBYIST

Gradient quality is directly related to your medium's tonal range and the consistency of your marks. The critical mistake is a value jump — usually caused by applying too much pressure in one pass. Work in successive light layers, each one slightly darker than the last and extending slightly less far into the light area than the previous. This builds a natural, organic gradient that avoids banding. Always test on scrap paper before committing to the final drawing.

---

## PROFESSIONAL

Gradient control in traditional media is a measure of medium mastery. Nineteenth-century academic oil painters built luminous gradients by applying successive transparent glazes — each adding a tonal shift without completely covering the layer below, creating optical mixture of great depth. For digital artists, gradient quality often suffers from overuse of the airbrush tool, producing soft but flaccid transitions with no texture. The antidote is to add mark-making texture back into digital gradients through textured brushes, breaking up the mechanical smoothness while retaining the tonal transition.