

# Stippling

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## BEGINNER

Stippling means building tone and texture using dots rather than lines. More dots closer together equals darker tone. Fewer dots further apart equals lighter tone. It is the technique behind old-fashioned newspaper illustrations and engraved currency portraits — look closely at a dollar bill. Stippling is slow but the results are beautiful: a warm, organic quality that feels handcrafted in a way pencil blending cannot match. Start with a simple sphere and build the shadow side using dot density alone, varying only the spacing between dots.

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## HOBBYIST

Stippling rewards patience and punishes impatience. Dots in stippling should be roughly uniform in size, with density variation coming from spacing rather than size changes. Varying dot size introduces unwanted texture weight shifts. Work from light to dark: start with a very sparse field in the lightest areas, then build density systematically into the shadows. Stippling in layers is more controllable than trying to hit the right density in one pass. In pen and ink, the size of your nib determines the dot size; a finer nib gives you finer stippling and a greater tonal range.

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## PROFESSIONAL

Professional stippling is a time-intensive commitment used where its distinctive visual character justifies the investment: scientific and natural history illustration, engraving reproduction, and fine art prints. Artists like Alphonso Dunn developed stippling vocabularies that blend into hatching in a hybrid system — using stippling in the transitions between values while hatching in the core dark areas. The key professional consideration is reproduction scale: dots that read beautifully at original size can either disappear or clump into gray blobs at reproduction size.