

**DEEP DIVE**

# Positive & Negative Space

*Positive space is your subject. Negative space is everything around it. The shape of the negative space is just as designed as the subject itself.*

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Positive space is the space your subject occupies. Negative space is the space around and between your subject. Most beginners only see positive space. Experienced artists see and design both simultaneously, using negative shapes as actively as positive ones.

## SEEING NEGATIVE SPACE

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The classic exercise: draw a chair without drawing the chair -- draw only the shapes of the spaces between the legs and rungs. This forces you to see the negative shapes as real shapes with their own contours and proportions. Negative space observation is also one of the most effective accuracy tools: instead of drawing what you think a hand looks like, draw the negative spaces between the fingers.

## DESIGNING WITH NEGATIVE SPACE

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In composition, negative space gives positive elements room to breathe and creates rhythm. A figure pressed against the edge of the frame with no negative space on one side feels trapped. A figure with unequal negative space on each side creates visual tension and movement -- the eye expects something to happen in that empty space. This is called lead space and is fundamental in character illustration.

## POSITIVE-NEGATIVE REVERSAL

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A powerful design technique: create a composition where the negative space reads as a recognizable shape. Many logos use this principle. In fine art, artists like Escher explicitly designed positive-negative reversals. Training yourself to see these opportunities starts with simply making negative-space drawings a regular practice.

## EXERCISES

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Day 1: Draw the negative spaces of three objects from life -- do not draw the objects themselves. Day 2: Draw your hand twice: once focusing on fingers, once focusing on the gaps between fingers. Compare accuracy. Day 3: Design a composition where the negative space creates a readable secondary shape. Day 4: Evaluate whether the negative spaces in one of your existing drawings have interesting shapes or boring uniform ones. Day 5: Draw a figure with deliberate lead space -- consider what the negative space implies about narrative.