

The Head & Facial Landmarks

The Loomis head construction method — breaking the skull into a sphere and a plane — places all facial features in consistent spatial positions.

BEGINNER

The Loomis method is the most practical approach to drawing the head consistently. Start with a sphere — this represents the cranium. Slice off a flat plane on the side (the cheek plane), and attach a simplified box for the lower face. The horizontal midline of the sphere is eye level; the eyes sit on this line. The bottom of the nose is halfway between the eyes and the chin. The mouth is one-third of the way between nose and chin. These are approximations, not rules, but they give you a framework for placing features before you worry about likeness. The landmark: the brow ridge, cheekbones, and chin are the three bony promontories that define the head's three-dimensional shape.

HOBBYIST

Once you have internalized the Loomis sphere-and-plane construction, the challenge becomes turning the head in space. The center line of the face curves with the sphere — it is not a flat straight line. Placing features along this curved center line keeps them correctly positioned regardless of the head's orientation. The most common error: placing the far eye at the same distance from the nose as the near eye in a three-quarter view — it should be narrower because it is farther away. Study Loomis's head drawings in *Drawing the Head and Hands* — the progressions from construction sphere to finished head are among the clearest demonstrations available.

PROFESSIONAL

Portrait painters and character designers both work from a thorough understanding of facial anatomy beneath the skin. The skull determines the overall shape; the fat pads and muscles create the surface variations; the skin wraps over both. At a professional level, you can look at a face and immediately identify which structural features are creating which surface forms — the prominent nasolabial fold is fat pad compression; the hollowness under the eye is the edge of the orbital bone. This structural literacy allows portrait artists to achieve likeness quickly by identifying the few truly distinctive features and capturing those precisely while letting everything else be approximate.