

**DEEP DIVE**

# The Skeleton as Armature

*The skeleton determines every proportion, movement range, and surface landmark. Understanding it is the foundation of consistent figure drawing.*

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For artists, the skeleton is the fixed structure beneath the variable surface. It determines proportions, constrains movement, creates landmarks on the surface, and defines the overall volume of the figure. Artists who understand the skeleton draw figures that feel like they have bones inside.

## LANDMARKS YOU CAN SEE

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Many bones create landmarks on the surface: the clavicles (collarbone), sternum (breastbone), acromion process (tip of the shoulder), iliac crest (top of the hip bone), greater trochanter (outer hip), patella (kneecap), ankle malleoli, and the knuckles of the hand. These landmarks are consistent across all body types and are the anchor points for all figure construction.

## MOVEMENT CONSTRAINTS

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The skeleton defines what moves and what does not. The ribcage is a rigid unit -- it cannot bend. The pelvis is also rigid. Movement happens at the joints: hips, knees, ankles, shoulders, elbows, wrists, and spine (which flexes between vertebrae). Understanding these constraints prevents drawings where the torso bends impossibly or legs rotate in ways knees do not allow.

## THE SKELETON AT DIFFERENT BODY TYPES

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Fat, muscle, and bone create different surfaces on different body types, but the skeleton remains the same. A very thin figure shows bones protruding at every landmark. A heavy figure has soft contours but still has skeletal landmarks beneath. A muscular figure has the muscles prominently visible but the skeletal landmarks anchor the muscle groups. The skeleton is the constant; everything else is variable.

## EXERCISES

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Day 1: From memory, draw the skeleton in a standing pose, labeling as many bones as you can. Day 2: Draw the skeleton in three different poses (sitting, running, reaching up). Day 3: Draw a figure in contour, then draw the skeleton overlaid in a different color. Do the joints line up? Day 4: Draw the 10 most visible bone landmarks on a figure from reference -- mark them on the surface. Day 5: Working from imagination, draw a figure in extreme motion and verify that every joint movement is anatomically possible.