

# How to Draw Realistic Hair: The Ultimate Tutorial

By Darlene Nguyen - June 17, 2015



Are you struggling when it comes to drawing hair? Drawing hair can be an intimidating task for those who are just learning how to draw. With the overwhelming amount of detail and commitment required, many people lose their patience and resort to a series of sloppy scribbles.

To some of us, drawing hair can be a nightmare. But a change in your approach can help you leave those fears behind. In this tutorial, I will introduce 4 simple steps for drawing realistic looking hair.

**Note:** This tutorial has been updated with more images and explanations.

## Tools ([You can find all my recommended tools here](#)):

- Pencils by Derwent
- Mechanical Pencils with 0.5mm HB and 4B Ain lead by Pentel
- Kneaded Eraser

## Tutorial Breakdown:

- 4 steps for drawing hair
- Close look at drawing a small lock of hair
- How to draw curly hair (Mini tutorial)
- How to draw short hair (Mini tutorial) **Expanded tutorial is now available!** With over 2000 words of valuable content + detailed images!

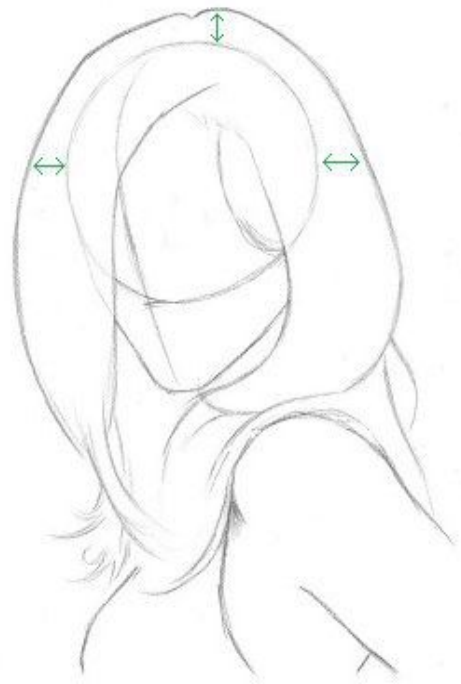
The steps below can be used for drawing all sorts of hairstyles from short to long and straight to curly hair. So without any further ado, let's jump right into the lesson! Here are 4 things you need to keep in mind when it comes to drawing realistic hair:

## Volume, Flow, Value and Texture



### 1. Volume

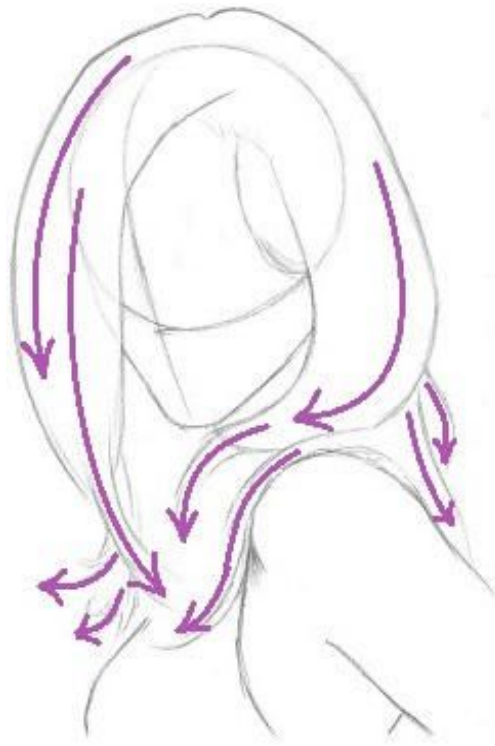
It helps to make loose outlines of the skull before you start drawing hair. If you draw hair without the 3 dimensional shape of the human head in mind, it will lack volume and you risk chopping off a part of the skull. Hair hugs the head, but it isn't plastered to it. For most people with long hair, you can expect at least 2 centimeters of "hair height" on top of their actual height and at least 2 centimeters on the sides as well.



Having difficulty drawing heads? Click [here](#) to learn how to draw one from the [front](#) and here to draw one from [side](#).

## 2. Flow

In order to draw hair with flow, you need to be aware of the structure underneath. For long hairstyles in their resting state, the hair flows down, hugs the head and wraps around the shoulders. Somewhat like a liquid. You want to begin by sketching the basic structure of the hair and keep your strokes loose and simple.



### 3. Value (Shadows, Midtones, Highlights)

A head of hair contains many shades, so before you start scribbling away, take some time to determine where the light source is coming from and how it will affect the tonal value of the hair.

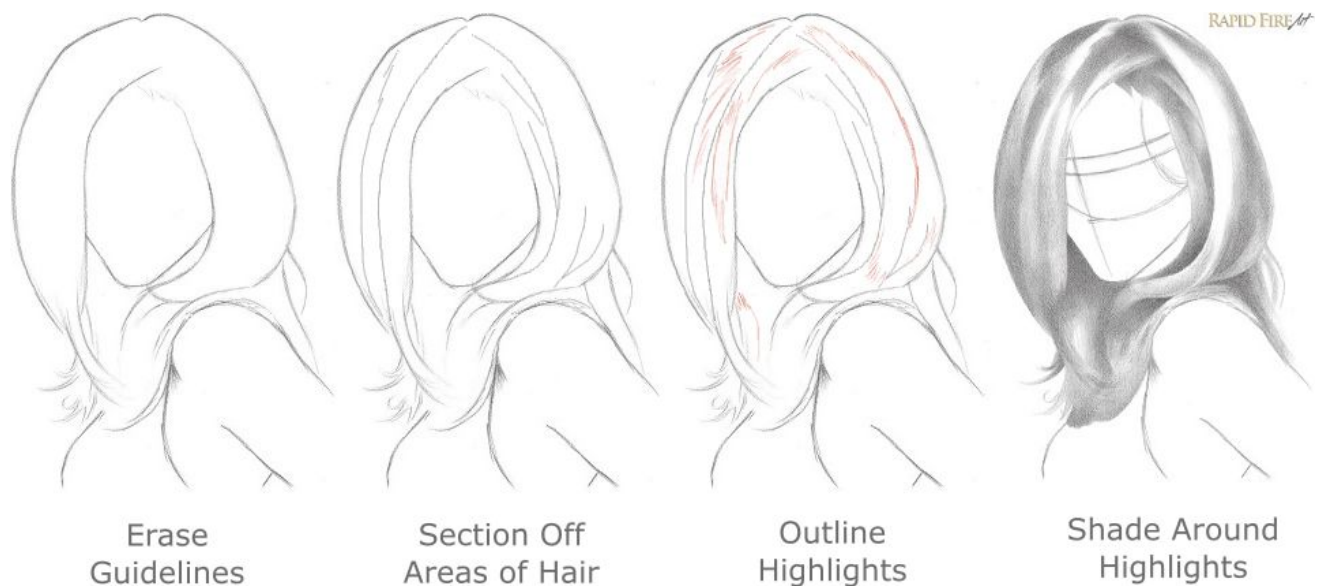
If you are working off a reference image where the lighting is too soft, posterize the image or turn up the contrast using a free image editing program such as gimp in order to exaggerate the 3 different shades – Making them much easier to identify.

Posterized reference image made in GIMP image editing software:



Once you have the lighting down, start drawing boundary lines between groups of hair that appear to be overlapping. Decide where you want the

light to fall and then outline those areas using the [shadow lining technique](#). Shade your way around the highlights. If you often find yourself getting lost in the details, this step will help you keep track of the overall lighting so you can be more confident when drawing the individual hairs.



[Click here to learn more about light and how to shade.](#)

#### 4. Texture

An average human head contains around 150,000 strands of hair. Just the thought of this can be very discouraging. First of all, you don't need to spend 90% of your time meticulously drawing your subject's hair. In fact, this step can be done so quickly it might even become your favorite step. The key to adding texture is using confident, steady strokes and maintaining a consistent flow.



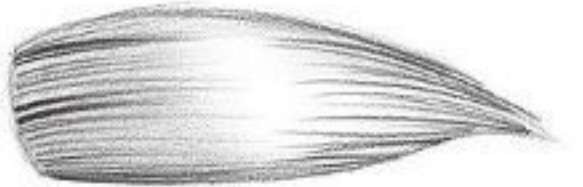
**Tip:** You can produce long, continuous and smooth lines using an overhand grip on your pencil while harnessing the power of your elbow and shoulder instead of your fingers and wrist.

Work on one part of the hair at a time, while following the general direction in which the strands flow. In dark areas, don't be afraid to press hard (I used a 6B to 8B for these areas). To bring out highlights, flatten your kneaded eraser and swipe it in the desired direction. The eraser will become too dirty after the first swipe, so fold it in and flatten after each stroke.

You can add more or less detail depending on the level of realism you are trying to achieve.

## Let's take a closer look at drawing a small lock of hair:

When creating your first layer of pencil strokes, mix it up with a variety of



different line weights. I use a mixture of dull and sharpened pencils as well as mechanical pencils. As you are creating each stroke, remember to press and then lift as you approach the area you want to highlight. Work your strokes inwards so they fade in the middle of the lock.

Add a second layer of strokes. In this stage, I usually opt for a 0.5mm HB-4B for touch-ups and a very dull 6B to fill some white space without making it look too busy.

Keep doing this until you achieve desired results. If you want to create a shiny look or replicate harsh lighting, try to keep the highlights fairly clean. You can use an eraser if need be.

For hair ends, work outwards so your hair tapers nicely without looking too blunt and dull.



## Useful Techniques

Drawing hair isn't just a bunch of lines in boring repetitive patterns. Use the 4 techniques below to make your drawings more interesting to the eye.

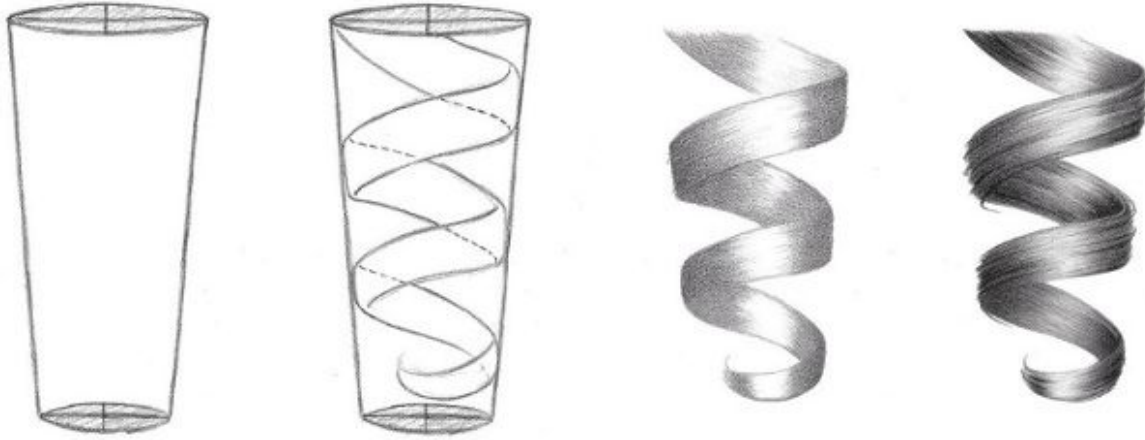


If you're having difficulties drawing long hair because your pencil strokes are too short or choppy, try holding your pencil further away from the tip. This will give you more range of motion, producing longer, smoother strokes.

Are you ready to draw some hair? Let's implement the steps and techniques above in the 2 mini tutorials below! Pencils I will be using: 4B, 6B, 8B

## How to Draw Curly Hair

Drawing curly hair is really fun and absolutely great for building confidence when it comes to adding texture.



1. Practice drawing curls using a cylindrical shape. This will help you achieve realistic curls with plenty of volume.

2. Sometimes it helps to make associations. So think of a curl as a ribbon. They have many ringlets which stretch further apart near the bottom. Use curvy lines and avoid any straight lines in order to achieve a more realistic feel and flow. (4B)

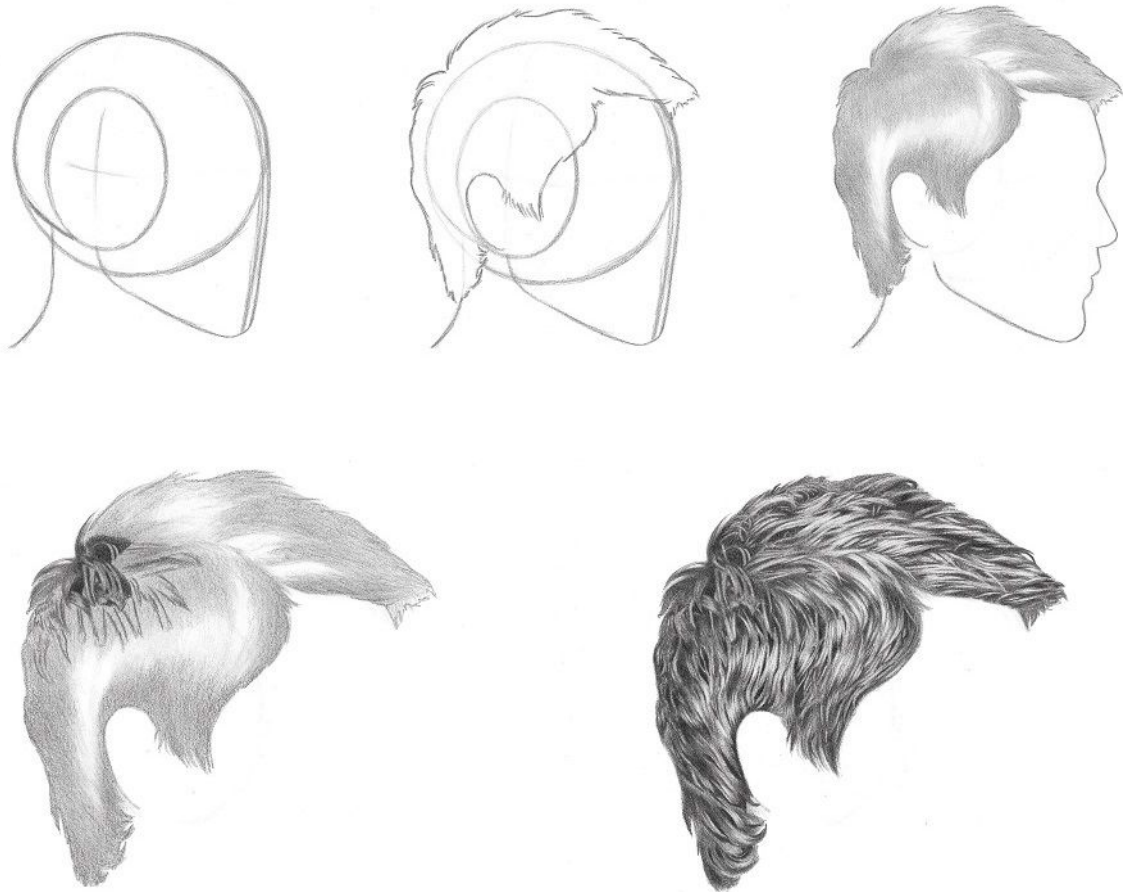
3. Pay attention to the highlighted areas of the hair and keep it consistent. For this example, the highlight is in the center. As you can see, the hairs closest to the front have more prominent highlights than the back. (6B)

4. Use swift strokes to add texture. Break free from patterns and boring lines by overlapping or adding stray hairs. Be creative and look to reference images or even the mirror for inspiration. (4B, 8B)

## How to Draw Short Hair

Drawing short hair is really no different than drawing long hair, except that you will find yourself covering less ground in the same amount of time because the strands are much shorter.

[Click here to go to the expanded version of this mini tutorial \(more than 2000 words and tons of detailed images\)](#)



1. Construct the shape of the head and position the ear in the correct place. (4B) Click here to learn how to [draw a head/face from the side](#) and where to draw the ear.

2. Draw a loose outline of the hair using strokes that flow in the actual direction the hair is pointing. (4B)

3. Shade the dark areas, keeping in mind this step is for helping you see the big picture. (6B)

4. Add texture by working on one area of the hair at a time. Outlining groups of hair and then adding texture is also a good technique. For thin hair, use 'v' shapes to taper most hair ends. Keep in mind that thick hair usually does not taper at the ends. Instead, most hairs will stand on their own. (4B, 6B, 8B)

This is my longest tutorial to date! I hope it covers everything. If you want to see more tutorials like this one, please let me know. Also, don't forget to share the love using the share buttons below :) Does the thought of drawing hair make you cringe? Let me know in the comments!

### **Other Hair Tutorials:**

- [Braids](#) (Exclusive Tutorial)
- [Stubble](#) (Exclusive Tutorial)
- [Short Hair from the Side](#)
- [Eyebrows](#)

- Eyelashes