

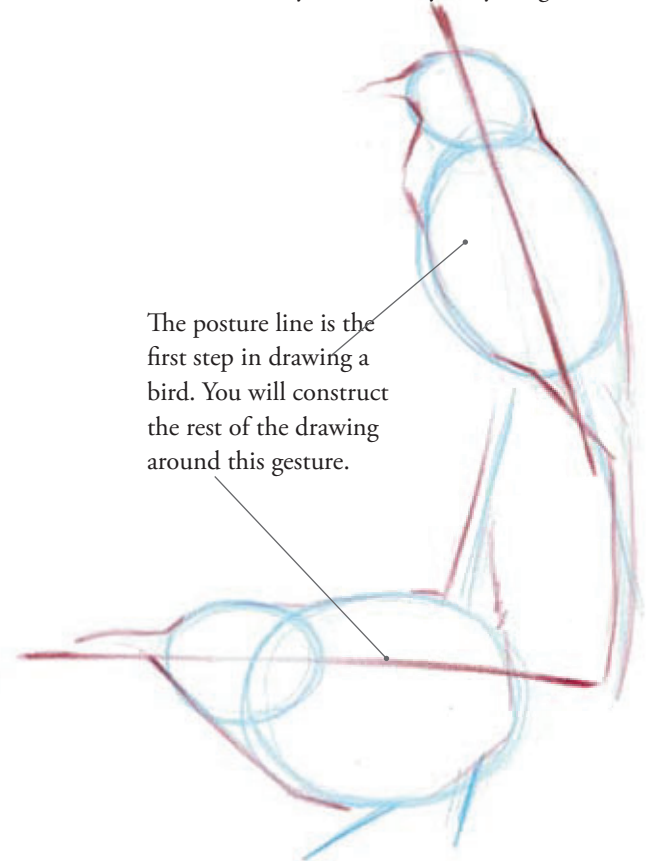
DRAWING BIRDS

SIMPLIFY A COMPLEX SUBJECT

Start a bird drawing by capturing the posture, proportions and angles. These first strokes create the framework over which to draw details and final lines. Instead of starting with details, begin your drawing by capturing the basic shape of the bird with as few lines as possible. Keep your first lines light and loose. You are not committed to those early marks. They are your guides.

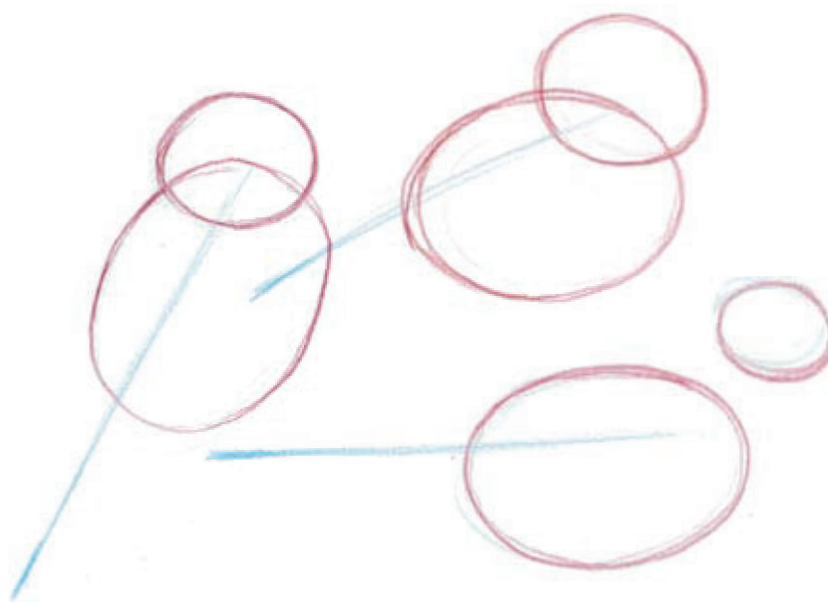
POSTURE- THE FIRST LINE

Your bird drawing starts to fly from the first line. Start it by capturing the angle of the body. Birds rest at characteristic angles: Scrub Jays sit vertically while a shrike or kingbird will often sit at a 40 degree angle. Postures change as birds perform different behaviors or face into the wind. Begin by drawing a faint line that indicates the angle of the head and body. You will build the drawing up over this line. If your drawing starts with a proper indication of posture, your completed bird will also hold its body at the right angle. If you just start by drawing a beak and work your way to the tail, it is very unlikely that your resulting bird will convey the attitude of the live bird. If your subject flies away after you have drawn this first line, you have already conveyed something important about the subject. Write “jay posture at rest” or a similar note in your sketchbook. This may be useful to you some other day.



PROPORTION

Proportions differ within a species as it fluffs its feathers and between species with different size bodies. Generally, smaller birds will have larger heads. The three illustrations (below left) show the relative proportions of a shrike, chickadee and magpie. The body shapes have been resized so that the body sizes are the same. Note the differences in the sizes of the heads.

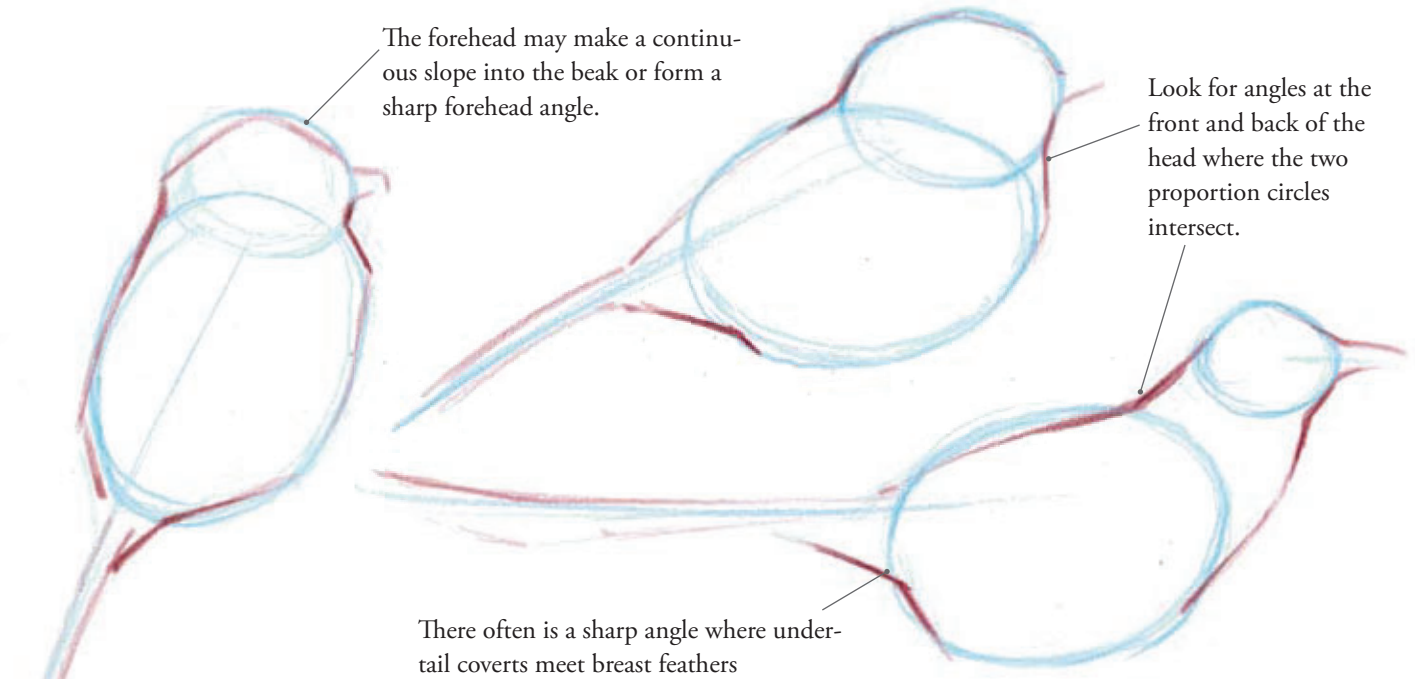


Build the body around the posture line and then add the head. It is easier to make the smaller circle proportionate to the larger one.

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ANGLES

Because you have built the body with circles, it is easy to “over round” it. Look for angles where the head meets the body and the tail meets the body. Carve these into your proportion circles with straight lines. This is the point at which your drawing begins to look like the real bird.

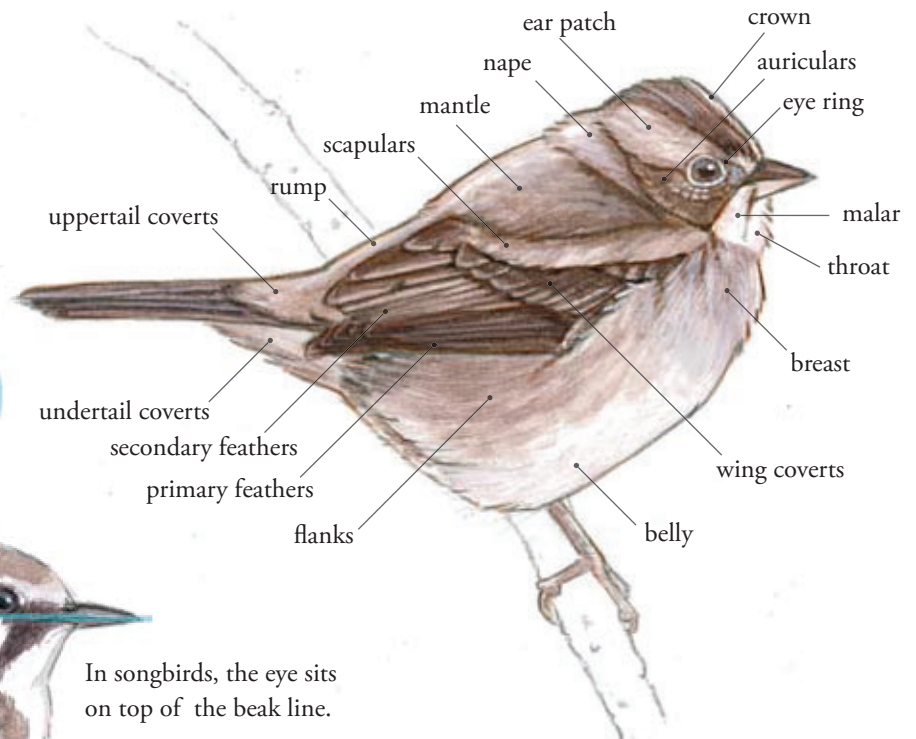
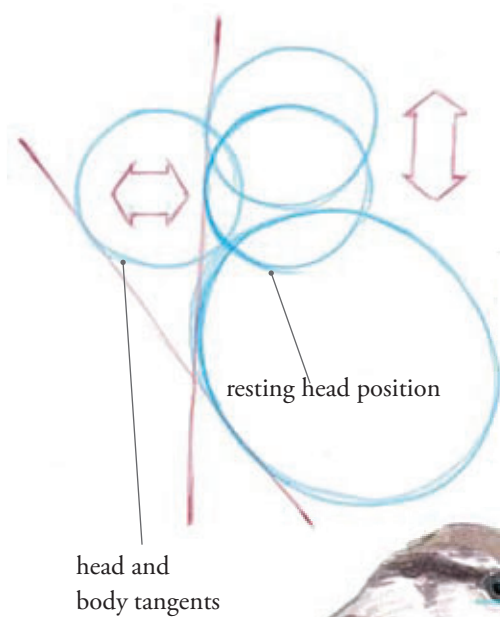


HEAD POSITION

The head and the body are relatively fixed skeletal structures but the neck connecting them is extremely flexible. Head position will dramatically change the shape of the bird. Place the head with care.

FEATHERS COME IN GROUPS

Feathers emerge in distinct masses or feather groups. The boundaries between these groups are often marked by subtle creases or color changes.

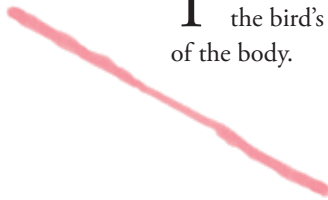


In songbirds, the eye sits on top of the beak line.

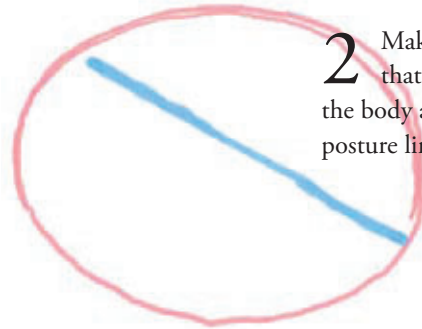
CREATING FOUNDATION LINES

Do not start your drawing by putting in details. Your initial strokes create a structure on which you can add detail later. Start lightly and loosely. Make your initial lines as faint as you can. Once you have established the shape, you can add eyes, beak, feathers and other details. You do not have to draw every bird from a step-by-step formula but this approach will help you key in on important aspects of drawing. These basic concepts of starting with posture, proportion and angles (contour) before drawing detail can be applied to any subject.

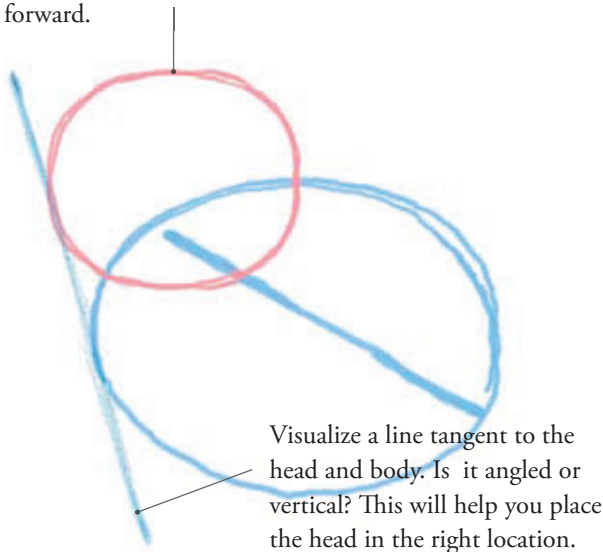
1 Start with one line indicating the bird's posture or long axis of the body.



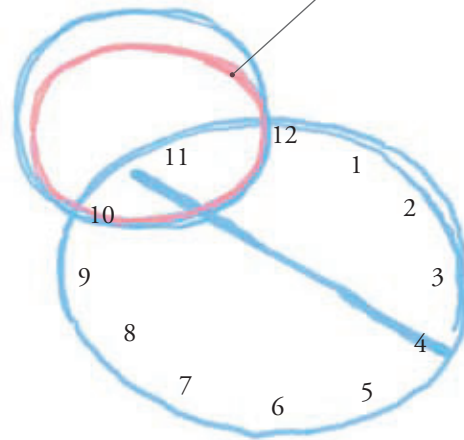
2 Make an oval or egg shape that reflects the form of the body around the axis of the posture line.



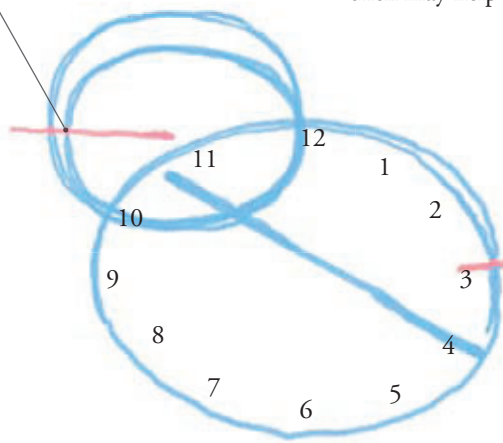
3 Add a head, paying attention to size and location. It is easy to make the head too big and to place it too far forward.



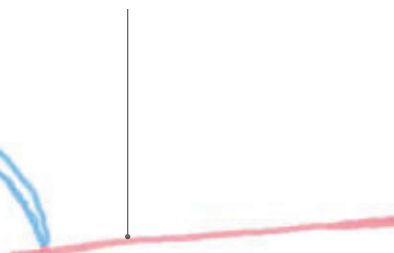
4 Stop and check your proportions. Here I realized that the head was too large and drew it smaller. If you had already added detail, it would be more difficult to change. It may be helpful to visualize a clock to say to yourself, "this head settles between 10 and 12".



5 Add the eye-bill line indicating which way the bird is looking. The eye will sit on top of this line.



6 Draw the tail from the upper part of the body oval. The tail originates from a point inside the body. The clock trick may help you insert the tail at the right place.



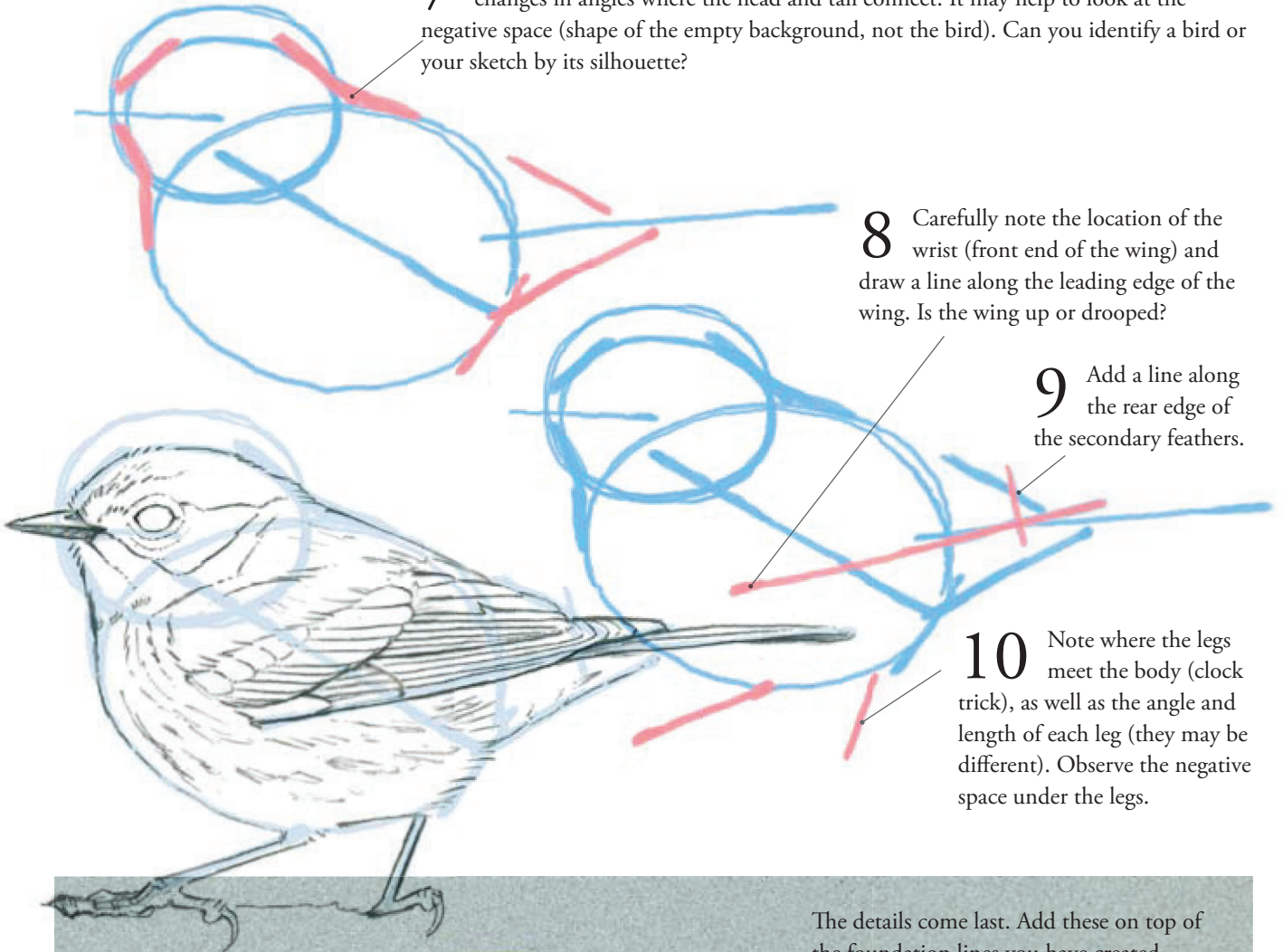
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7 Carve in the angles on the contour of the edge of the body. Pay attention to changes in angles where the head and tail connect. It may help to look at the negative space (shape of the empty background, not the bird). Can you identify a bird or your sketch by its silhouette?

8 Carefully note the location of the wrist (front end of the wing) and draw a line along the leading edge of the wing. Is the wing up or drooped?

9 Add a line along the rear edge of the secondary feathers.

10 Note where the legs meet the body (clock trick), as well as the angle and length of each leg (they may be different). Observe the negative space under the legs.



The details come last. Add these on top of the foundation lines you have created.

