Many of your sketches will contain quite similar things – a sketching vocabulary of shapes. This sketching vocabulary serves as the basic elements of most sketches. If you practice creating this vocabulary, you will be able to rapidly compose your sketches. This chapter reviews several elements in the basic sketching vocabulary: objects, people, activities, emotions, and posture.

1 Basic Sketch Elements

Lines, rectangles, triangles, and circles will be essential visual elements of many of your sketches. Sketching and drawing tutorials often begin with ‘warming up’ exercises of filling a page with a random collection of these basic shapes. Become familiar with this variety of shapes. Play with line thickness and hatching styles.

Tip

People Who Sketch on Computers

Libraries of Sketch Elements
Designers sometimes use tablets instead of paper to compose sketches. If this is something you want to do, take advantage of software that lets you save and reuse your sketch elements as a library. For example, and similar to clipart, you can create a variety of elements and save them on a slide in PowerPoint. You can then copy, reuse and maybe even alter them later for use in particular sketches.

Objects
Most drawing software includes a range of drawing primitives: rectangles, circles, arrows, callouts, etc. When choosing software to support your sketching, consider if the range of drawing primitives available suffices to help you in your sketching process.

Clipart
If you use computers for your sketches, you can also take advantage of the many clipart or equivalent libraries of images out there. For example, if you search for ‘stick men’ on the web, you will likely find many images that fit your purposes.
Composing Objects
By combining these basic sketch elements you can compose a variety of shapes and objects that will form part of your sketching vocabulary. Below is a collection of such composed objects – some drawn as simple two dimensional outlines, others in a perspective side view. Remember that simplicity is key: in many sketches it is better to draw objects as simple shapes rather than as detailed and fine grained objects. Note that many of the examples below are in fact very simple combinations of a few rectangles, circles, and lines, but that the level of detail is sufficient to clearly identify the object’s function (e.g., the mobile phone, or the photo).

**Tools**
(pencil, pen, magnifying glass, wrench, scissors)

**Digital Devices**
(camera, phone, cell phone, computer, mouse)

**Documents**
(paper, books, photos, piles)

**Physical Objects**
(tables, chair, boxes, light bulb, clock)

**Abstract Shapes**
(arrows, signs)
3 People
Many sketches in interaction design include people performing their actions, motions, and activities while interacting with information technology. There are many different techniques to draw people: from simple stick figures to detailed and realistic outlines of a person. Often, simple stick figures are preferable to detailed drawings of people: they are expressive enough to illustrate people and their actions in a variety of situations.

Alternatively, even comic-like sketches or abstract shapes can represent people in your sketches. The choice of drawing style depends on your preferences, but also on the type of sketch you create. For example, in a drawing that just suggests the presence of people, abstract shapes can be sufficient. But in a sketch of (say) a multi-user tabletop interaction, details about people's postures might be important to portray the interaction techniques.

4 Activities
By varying people's poses you can express a variety of different activities. For example, the sketches below show a person's activities, e.g., running, pointing, lifting a box. Notice how two of the sketches use action lines (also called motion lines) to illustrate the movements of the person's activity (also see Scott McCloud's Understanding Comics).
Bodies and Emotions
Different postures can also show the state of the person: surprised, puzzled, disgruntled. Here, we also used symbols above the head of the person (in addition to posture) as an additional indicator of a person’s state.

Faces and Emotions
Through simple variations of how you draw people’s faces (in particular their mouth and eyebrows) you can let your sketched people express their emotions. The 3x3 grid illustrates 9 different combinations of how to draw people’s faces, simply by the way you remix 6 eyebrow and mouth shapes. The result is expressions such as: happy, relieved, sad, angry, confused, or surprised.
Combining Postures and Faces
Adding a body posture matching the person’s facial expression can amplify how you communicate the person’s current emotional state. For example, this sketch shows a person in three different moods: happy and waving the hand, angry and raising the arms, and scratching the head while being confused.

Combining Different Sketch Elements to Illustrate Situations
You can combine these postures of people and the simple objects to compose simple sketches that illustrate specific situations and actions. For example, the sketches below illustrate a person in different moods and situations: happy while being on the phone, confused while deciphering a map, and sad while searching the floor for a lost item.
Exercise

Draw a person interacting with a tablet computer in three different situations. For example, you can draw the person while sitting on a chair and reading a book, while showing a document on a tablet to a second person, and while placing the tablet on a table to write a text. Try to vary people’s poses and facial expressions.

Our Solution:

References


YOU NOW KNOW

You learned how to build up a sketching vocabulary of simple shapes, objects, and people. By varying postures and facial expressions you can illustrate people in different situations. The sketching vocabulary functions as a starting point for many of your sketches about people’s interaction with technology.

But don't stop here! Look for the many primers that teach people how to sketch, especially those oriented toward kids and comic books. As we keep on repeating, you don't have to be a superb artist to sketch. But you will find that knowing and practicing a few of the basics will help you immensely over time.