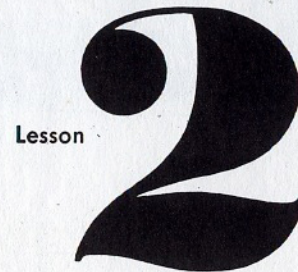


Famous Artists Cartoon Course
Westport, Connecticut

The comic figure



Rube Goldberg

Milton Caniff

Al Capp

Harry Haenigsen

Willard Mullin

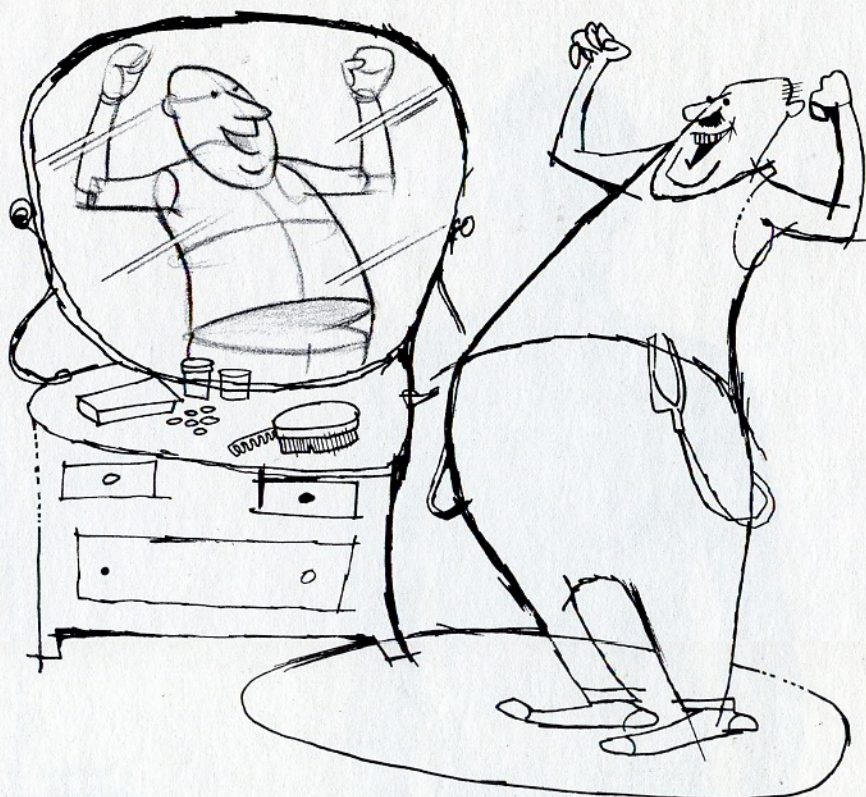
Gurney Williams

Dick Cavalli

Whitney Darrow, Jr.

Virgil Partch

Barney Tobey



The basic cartoon figure

The human figure is a wonderful structure, made to order for cartoonists. It consists of six basic parts — the head, the torso, two arms and two legs. As a cartoonist, you will not be held to the strict rules of anatomy. You may lengthen, shorten or otherwise distort any part of the figure you please — if it will help you portray the character you are trying to create.

Very few people have perfect figures, and it is by exaggerating the imperfections of the average figure that the cartoonist makes his figures funny. The man who lives next door to you probably gets up every morning and looks with pride at himself in the mirror. In his own eyes he is quite a hunk of man, but you see him as he really is, and would draw him in such a way that — if he saw the drawing — you would have to move out of the neighborhood or meet him out behind the garage. If he has a small potbelly and short arms, you would exaggerate these parts. He wouldn't like it, but the odds are that the rest of the neighborhood would recognize him in the drawing.

So — going behind the physical appearance, you should capture the subject's personality in your drawing. A lazy person, for example, would not be shown standing erect with bulging muscles — he would be drawn stooped over in a wilted position. Nor would a sloppy woman sit on a stool in the same manner as a prim school teacher. This capturing of personality in your characters is very important — just how important you can prove to yourself by studying the work of successful cartoonists.

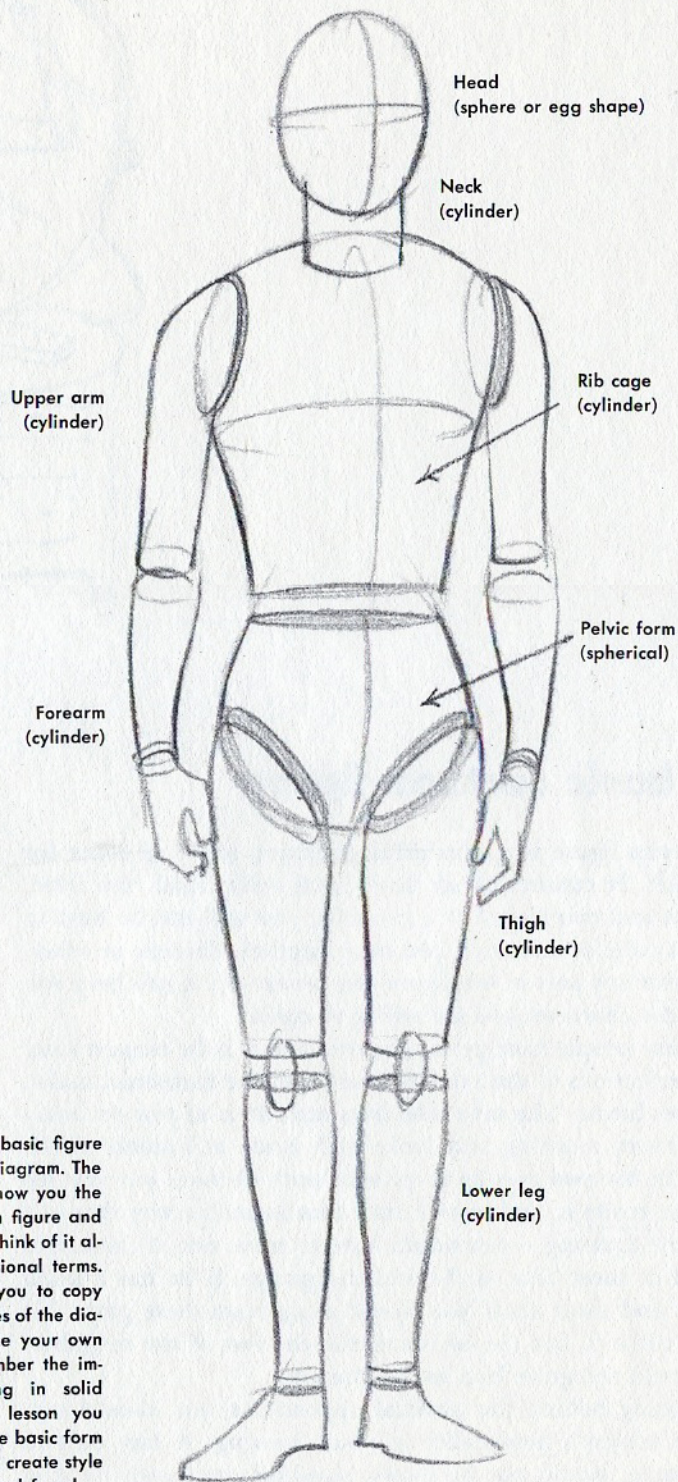
For the same reasons that we reduced the comic head to a simple balloon in our Lesson 1, in this lesson we will reduce the human anatomy to a simple basic form figure. Because the basic form figure, like the balloon, has depth as well as width and height, it gives you a solid, three-dimensional form to build your cartoon characters on. It keeps them from being flat outlines and enables you to create the illusion of figures that have real bulk and exist in space.

In drawing the basic figure you must construct it solidly by “drawing through” to the other side. This means that you draw the figure as if it were transparent. Even though a shoulder or arm will be hidden by another part of the body in the finished drawing, you must be aware that they exist and, in the basic figure stage, draw them in their correct location. When all of the figure parts are accounted for by “drawing through” in the basic figure stage, the end result will be a figure that is convincing in structure and action.

The wonderful usefulness of the basic form figure is best explained by the examples on the facing page. Here three different cartoonists — each with a different style — have used the basic form to give their figures solidity and believable action. Each has used different proportions, depending upon his style, but each has used the same method of planning and constructing the figure.

Because of the importance of the basic figure to your career as a cartoonist, we want you to devote, throughout your Course, a good portion of your practice time to the mastery of this method of figure drawing. It is a tool which will prove invaluable to you. Once you have a good command of the basic figure, you can draw cartoon characters in any pose you can imagine — walking, running, jumping, squatting, climbing, or standing on their heads — and at the same time be sure that the figure will appear solid and convincing and the pose or gesture true to life. For this reason the study of the basic figure deserves every minute of your time that you can devote to it.

For your practice work and for your assignments for this lesson, you will find the HB or B pencil best to work with. Strive for freedom with your pencil. Avoid tightening up and cramping your hand. Remember, the lines you sketch in freely as you “feel out” the form will many times give you a suggestion or an inspiration for a new and different type of character.



The drawing of the basic figure here is essentially a diagram. The main purpose is to show you the solidity of the human figure and to encourage you to think of it always in three-dimensional terms.

We do not want you to copy the rather precise lines of the diagram when you make your own drawings. Just remember the importance of thinking in solid forms. Later in the lesson you will be shown how the basic form figure is cartooned to create style and action in male and female

The basic form figure

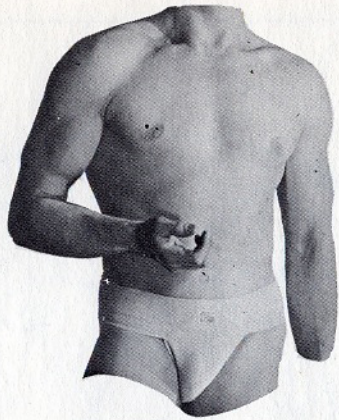
The basic form figure at the right demonstrates the all-important principle emphasized throughout this lesson — that the human body is made up of simple, solid forms. The basic form figure reduces the body to its essential masses. Every distracting element has been eliminated. Think of the form figure as if it were carved out of heavy wood — it is solid, three-dimensional.

Now compare the form figure with the photograph of the living model to the left. Both are similar in basic construction. In both model and form figure, the neck, the arms and legs, and the rib cage are essentially modified cylinders, while the head is

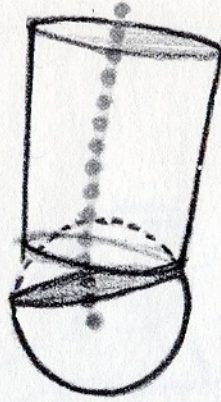
basically a sphere or egg shape and the pelvis is spherical.

It is extremely important in the beginning to view the body in terms of these simple, basic forms — to understand the essential masses of the separate parts and place these in their proper relationship. In cartooning, you can exaggerate individual parts of the basic form figure to create humorous characters and to give action to the drawing. But regardless of your style of drawing or the exaggeration, you should adhere to the principles of three-dimensional form. With a solid form to build on, the adding of figure details and clothing is greatly simplified.

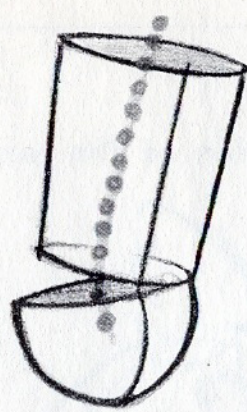
The torso



The human torso is essentially two forms — rib cage and pelvis — joined together by a flexible spine which permits movement in all directions



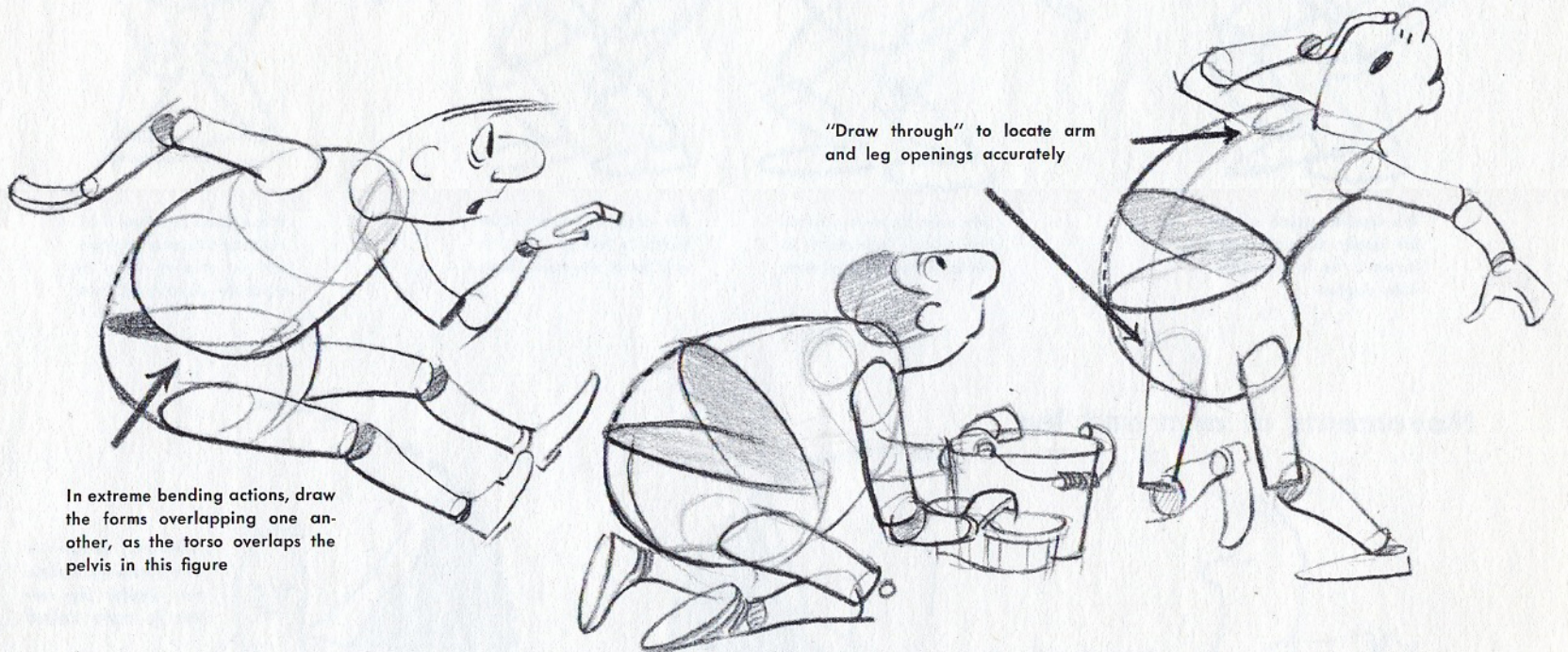
The upper torso is basically a cylinder like a drinking glass. The lower form is more like a sphere cut in half. When the two forms tilt, the spine curves



Center lines on both forms establish the degree to which each form is turned away from dead center (just as the center line on head shows direction it faces)

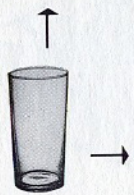
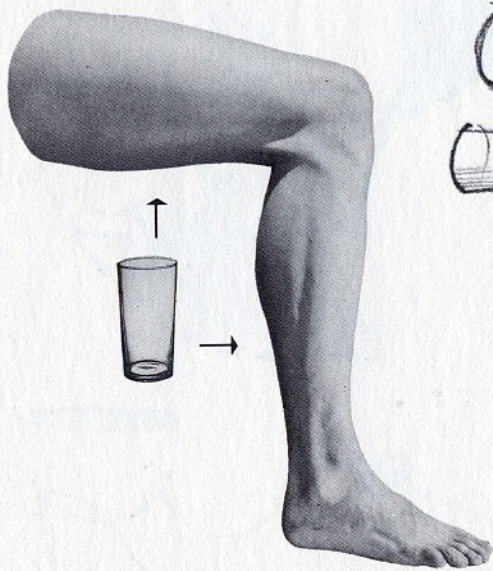


Openings for arms and legs are drawn diagonally across the forms to allow arms and legs to be attached at proper angle

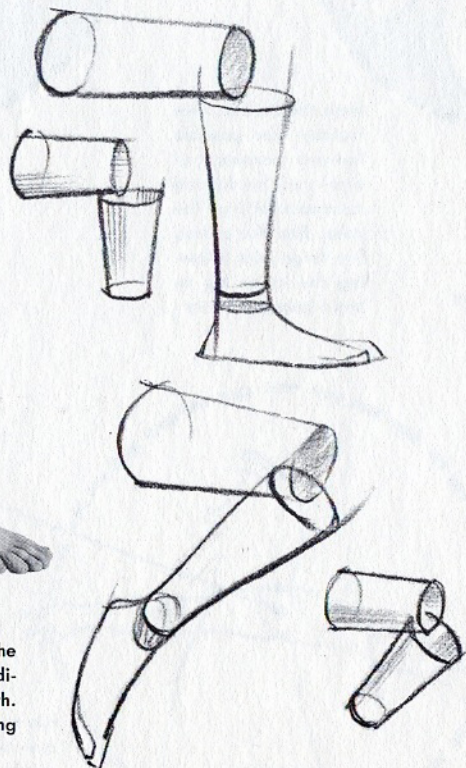


In extreme bending actions, draw the forms overlapping one another, as the torso overlaps the pelvis in this figure

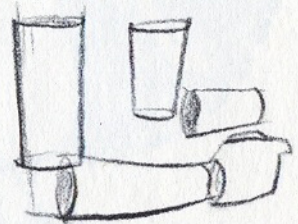
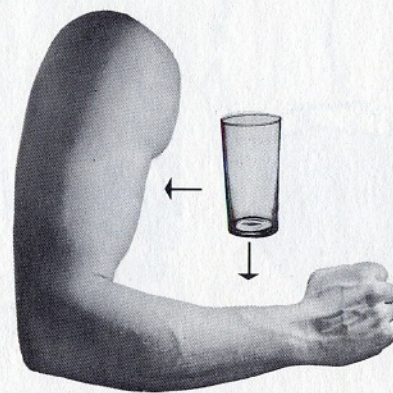
The leg



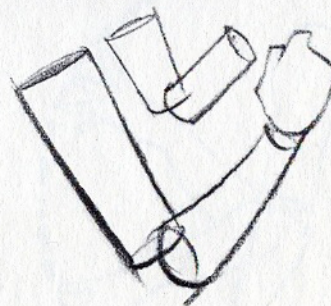
Reduced to their basic forms, the upper and lower leg are both modified cylinders about equal in length. Keep in mind the simple drinking glass form



The arm



The upper and lower arm are also modified cylinders. The chief difference between the arms and legs is that they bend in opposite directions



Movements of rib-cage section of the torso



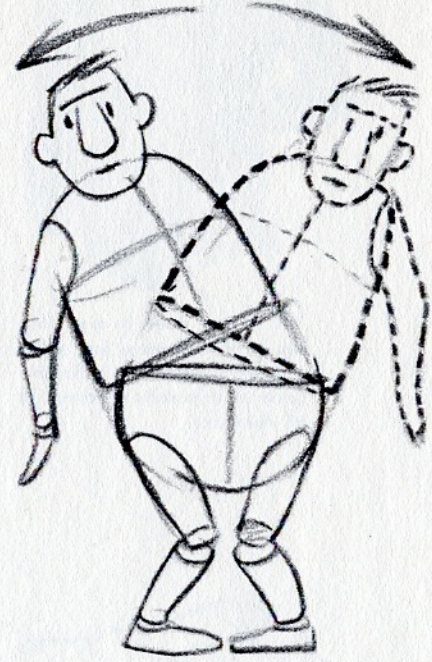
The flexible spine allows the upper torso to bend forward to a considerable degree



While the figure can bend backward, movement is limited in average person

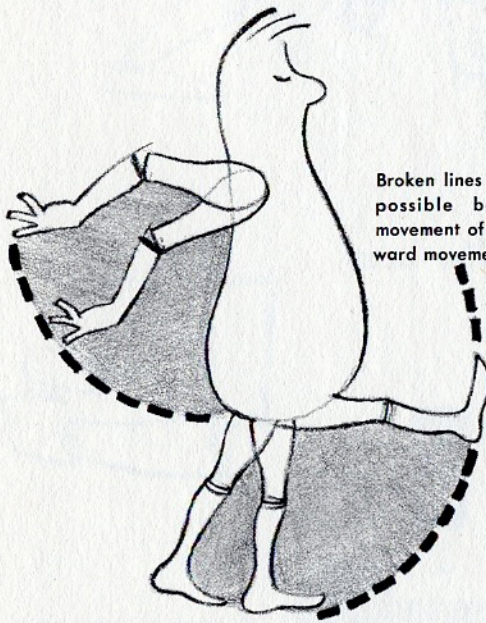


Rib cage can twist sideways to left or right in relation to the pelvic form

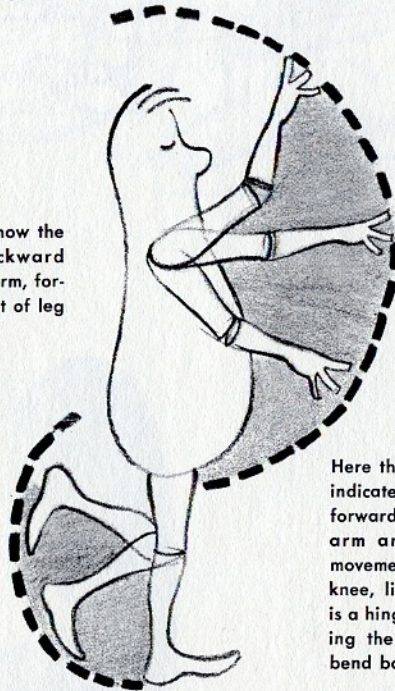


It can bend to either side. Try these movements yourself or observe them in others to understand them

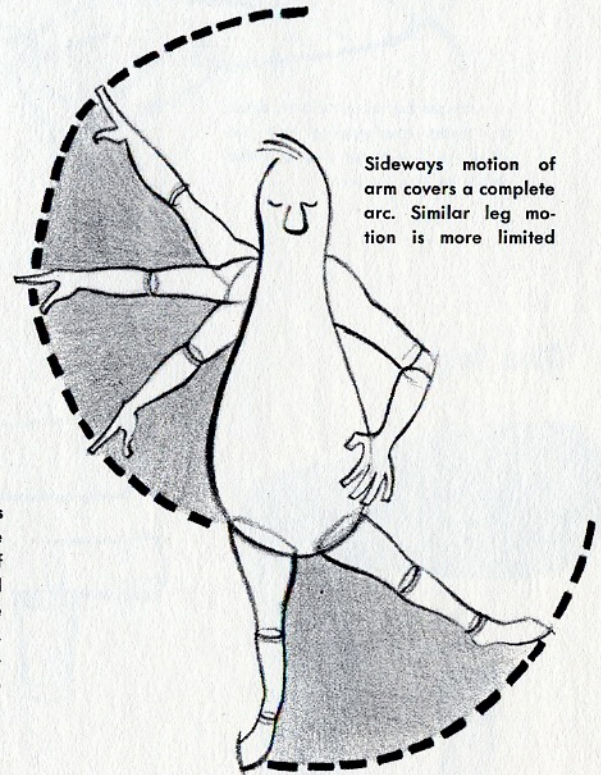
Movements of arm and leg



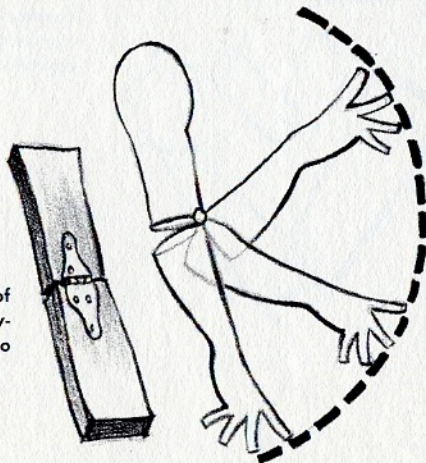
Broken lines show the possible backward movement of arm, forward movement of leg



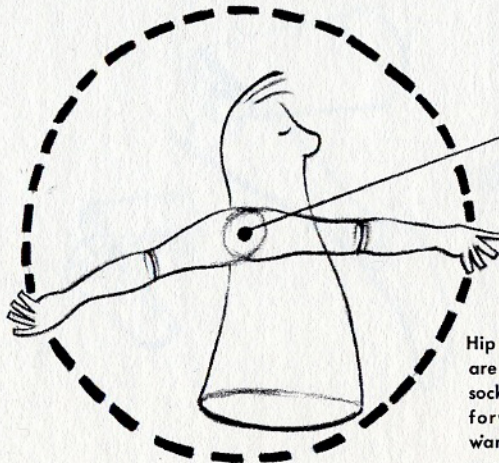
Here the broken lines indicate the possible forward movement of arm and backward movement of leg. The knee, like the elbow, is a hinge joint, allowing the lower leg to bend backward only



Sideways motion of arm covers a complete arc. Similar leg motion is more limited



The elbow joint is of the hinge type, allowing the forearm to bend forward only



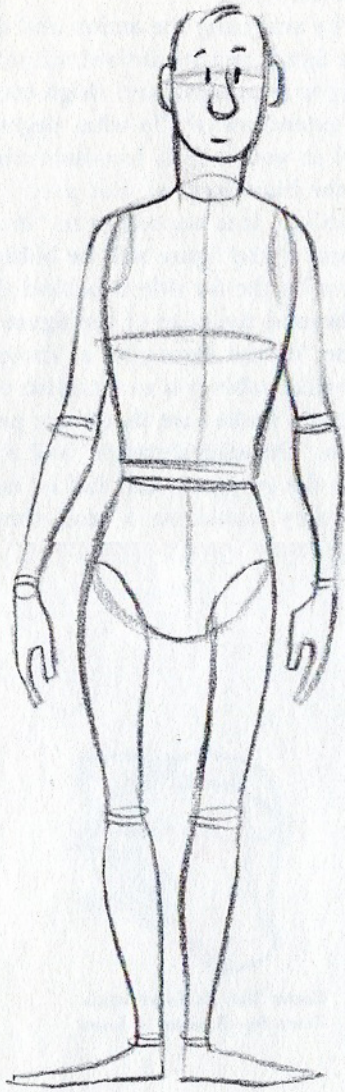
Hip and shoulder joints are of the ball-and-socket type, allowing forward and backward as well as rotary motion



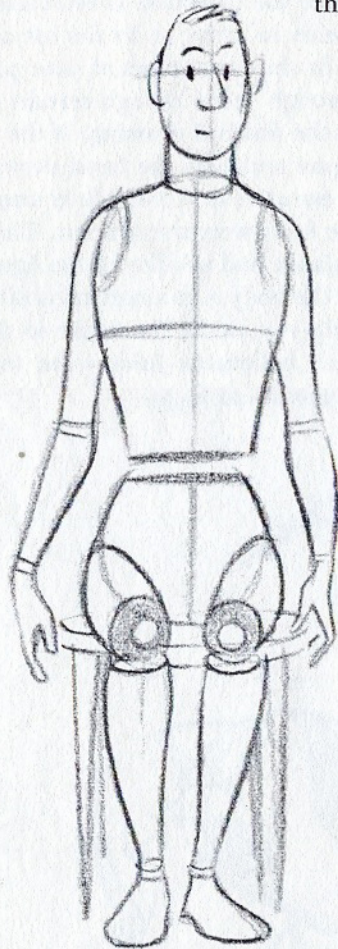
Foreshortening

When you view an object from one angle, you may see it at its full length. View it from a different angle, however, and it appears to become much shorter than it actually is. For instance, a cylinder held crosswise in front of you might have an actual length of twelve inches, but turn that same cylinder so that it points toward you and its over-all length appears greatly reduced. This is known as foreshortening.

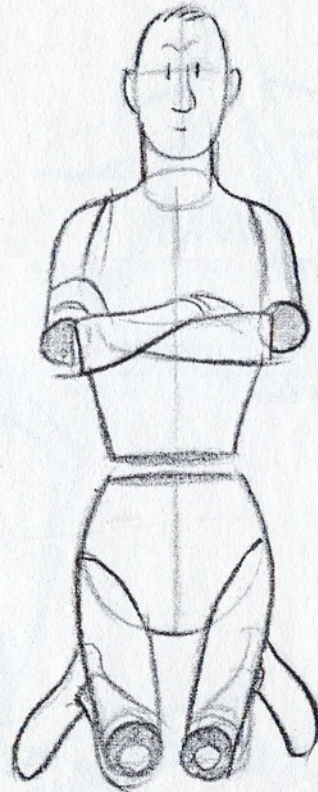
The careful use of foreshortening will help you give your figures a convincing feeling of three-dimensional form. Whether your figures are merely sitting or are engaged in some violent action, foreshortening will really make them seem to exist in depth.



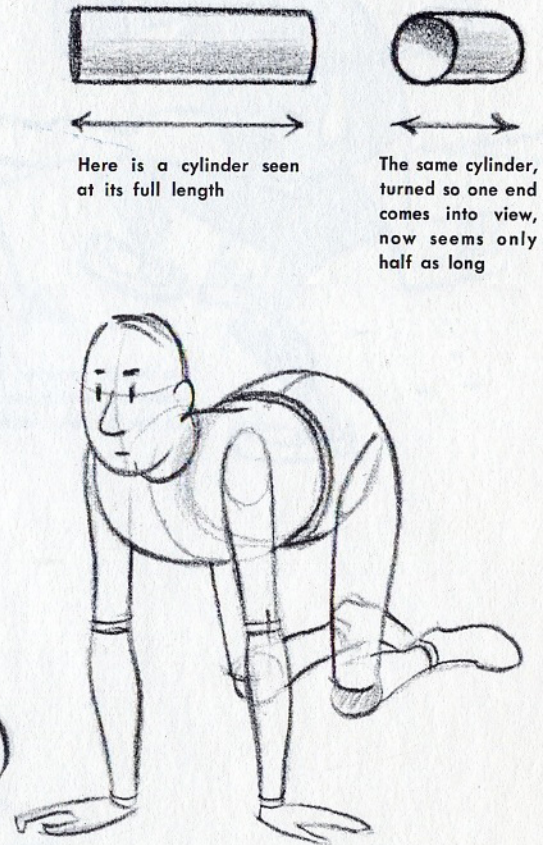
Here a figure is drawn so that each individual form is seen at its actual length. Even the feet are turned sideways so that their length is evident



Seat this same figure with feet turned toward the viewer and the thighs and feet appear to become relatively short. The other forms still retain their original length



Here the forearms are full length, but the upper arms, projecting toward you, seem short. The thighs come forward at an angle, look shorter than in standing figure



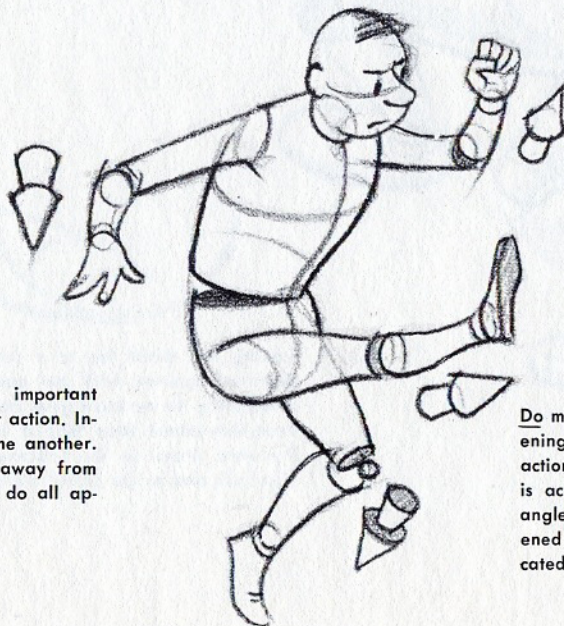
In this position the figure seems shorter since the torso is drawn in a greatly foreshortened pose. The lower legs, angled back, also are decisively foreshortened



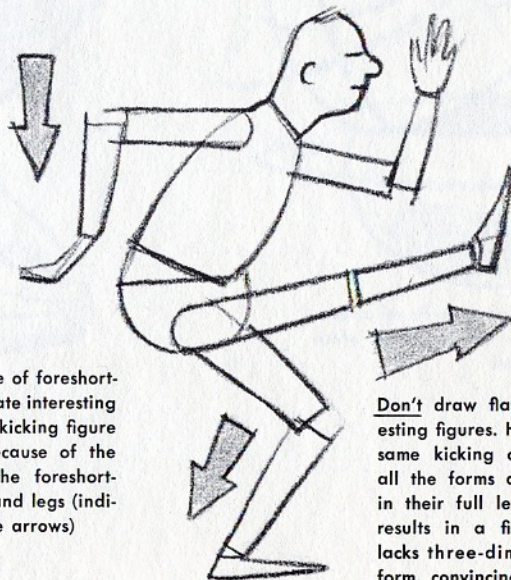
Here is a cylinder seen at its full length



The same cylinder, turned so one end comes into view, now seems only half as long



Foreshortening plays an important part in expressing violent action. Individual forms overlap one another. They extend toward or away from the viewer. Very seldom do all appear in their full length



Do make use of foreshortening to create interesting action. This kicking figure is active because of the angles of the foreshortened arms and legs (indicated by the arrows)

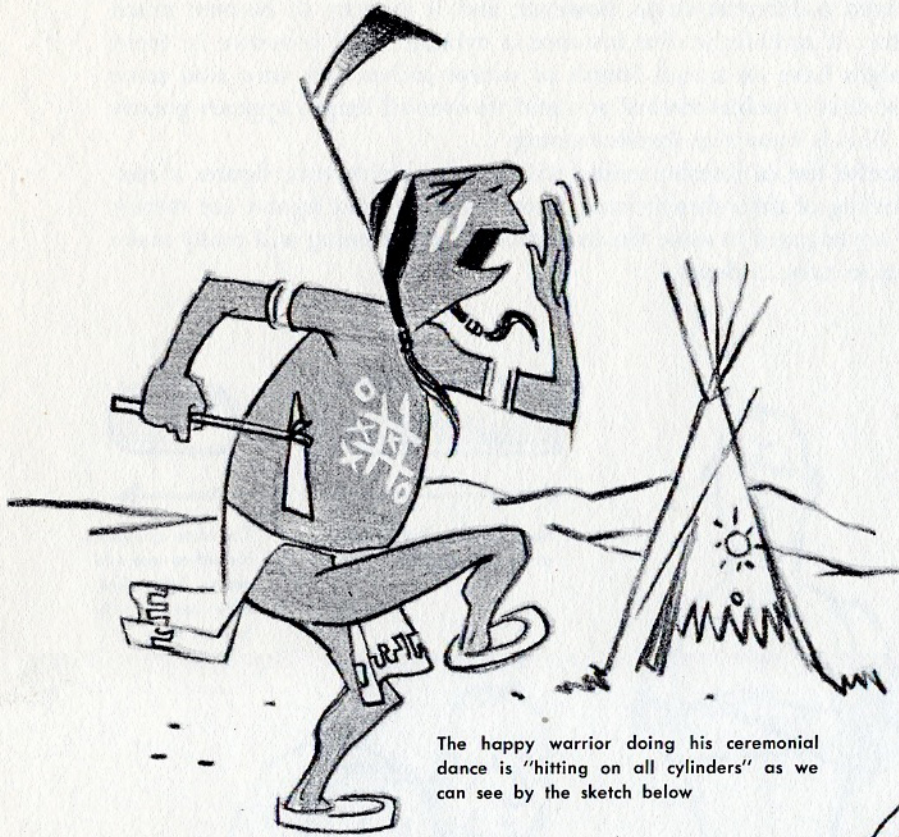
Don't draw flat, uninteresting figures. Here is the same kicking action but all the forms are drawn in their full length. This results in a figure that lacks three-dimensional form, convincing action

The basic forms in action

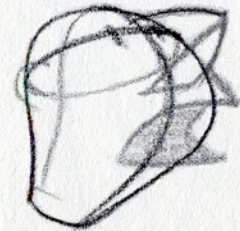
Because the cylinder and sphere are three-dimensional forms, they work perfectly in helping you establish the action and direction of the individual parts of the figure and of the figure as a whole. Just as we used the center line in Lesson 1 to "turn" the comic head, we can use a center line on the torso to help us turn the body in the proper direction.

When you draw a figure, start by analyzing the action and determining in which direction the figure and its individual parts must go. Ask yourself: Do the upper arm, torso, and thigh come toward me? Do the upper arms extend away? To what degree? Once the direction is established in your mind, foreshortening is easy to arrive at by the use of the basic form of that part.

In the early stages of your penciling, it is important to "draw through" even though certain parts of the figure will be hidden in the finished drawing. If the arm on the far side is behind the figure and only the hand shows beyond the edge of the figure it is essential that the whole arm be "drawn through," as though the body were transparent. This will enable you to establish the balance and solidity of the figure and make sure that every part of the body is in a natural position. "Drawing through" will also help you clothe the figure so that the garments will fall in normal, believable folds—the way they would on a real, three-dimensional figure.

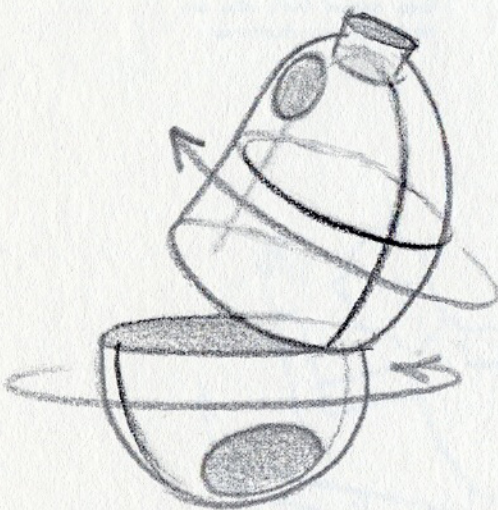


The happy warrior doing his ceremonial dance is "hitting on all cylinders" as we can see by the sketch below



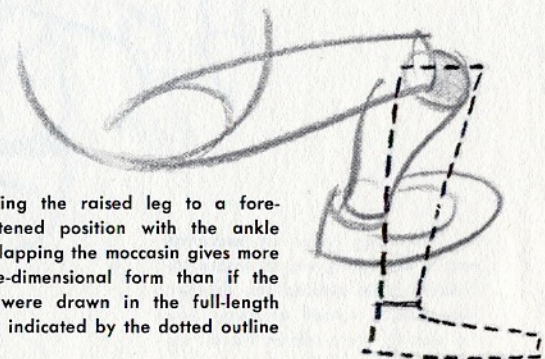
Center line on head establishes the direction it faces

To emphasize the definitely solid form of the figure, we have drawn the individual forms of this Indian much more precisely than we would in making the average basic figure drawing. A sketchier, more casual handling, as illustrated on the following page, is better at this stage.



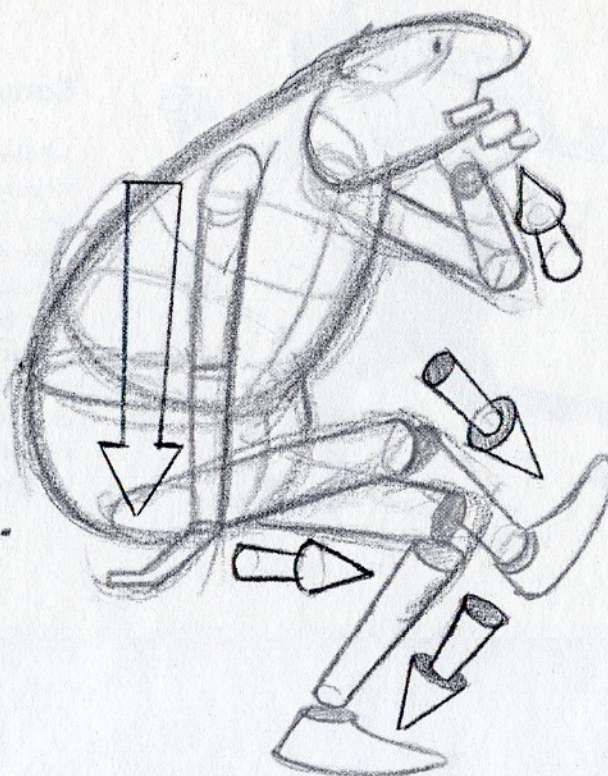
Center line on torso forms establishes the direction and degree to which they are turned

Turning the raised leg to a foreshortened position with the ankle overlapping the moccasin gives more three-dimensional form than if the leg were drawn in the full-length view indicated by the dotted outline

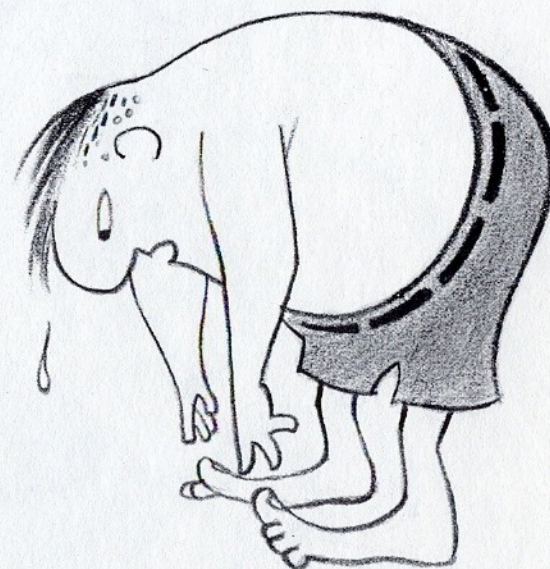
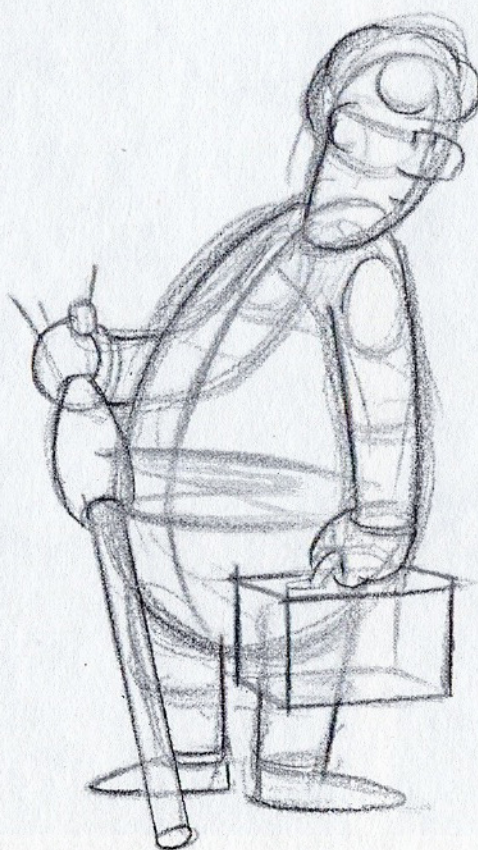




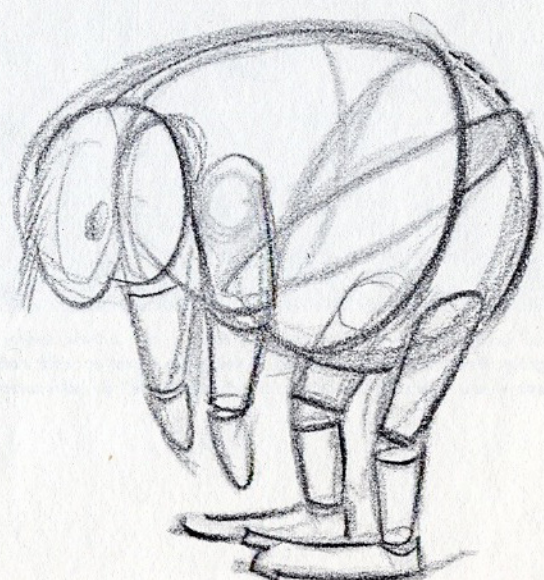
Differences in the direction and angle of the individual parts of the figure above can best be established by the use of the cylinder forms. These differences go a long way toward creating interesting and convincing action



Note that some of the forms come forward — others go back



Figures can assume some odd poses, but, no matter how unusual the action, you will find the basic figure method of construction invaluable in planning and drawing it



See how the "drawing through" has been used in these figures to locate the body parts properly. Even though an arm or leg will be only partly visible in the finished inked drawing, it should be penciled in completely if you want it to look right

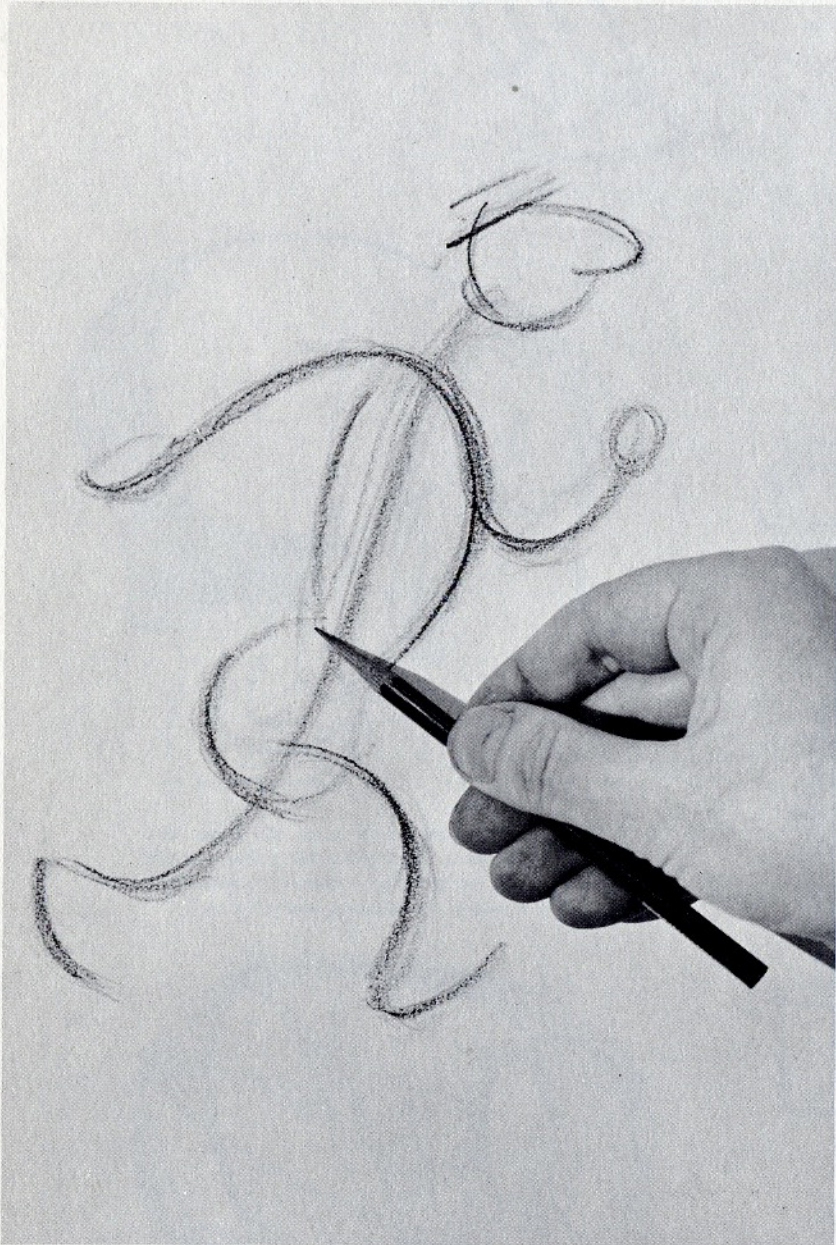


The finished figure

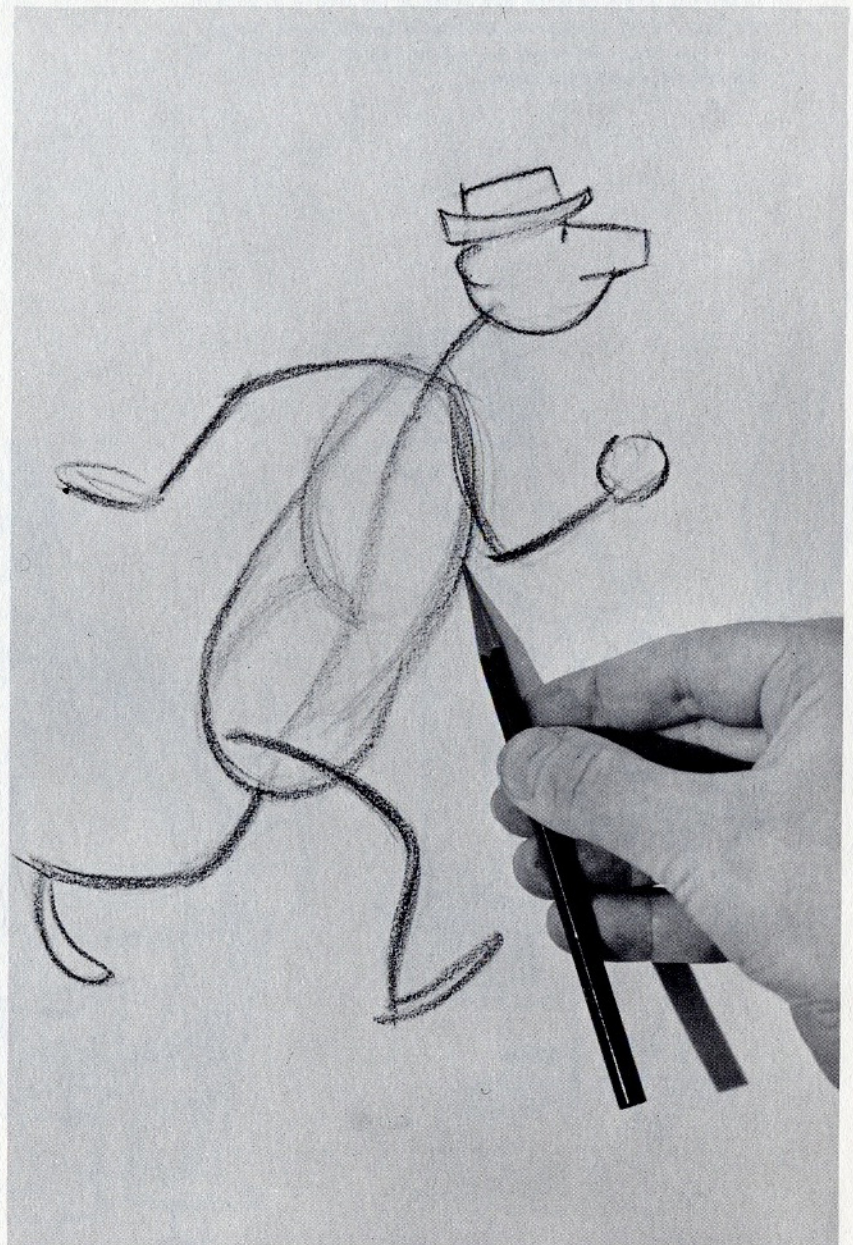
Constructing the comic figure—step by step

While there are many ways to construct cartoon figures, the step-by-step method demonstrated on these pages is, we feel, the best. It not only gives you a procedure for constructing solid three-dimensional figures, but it also helps you to think and feel the character while you construct it.

It is in the first stages of the drawing of any figure that the action must be determined. Any action involves the whole figure, not just individual parts of it. A standing figure cannot be changed into a running figure by giving a running action to the legs only. The result would be a stiff, unconvincing drawing. So be sure, when you start to draw any action, that you first think



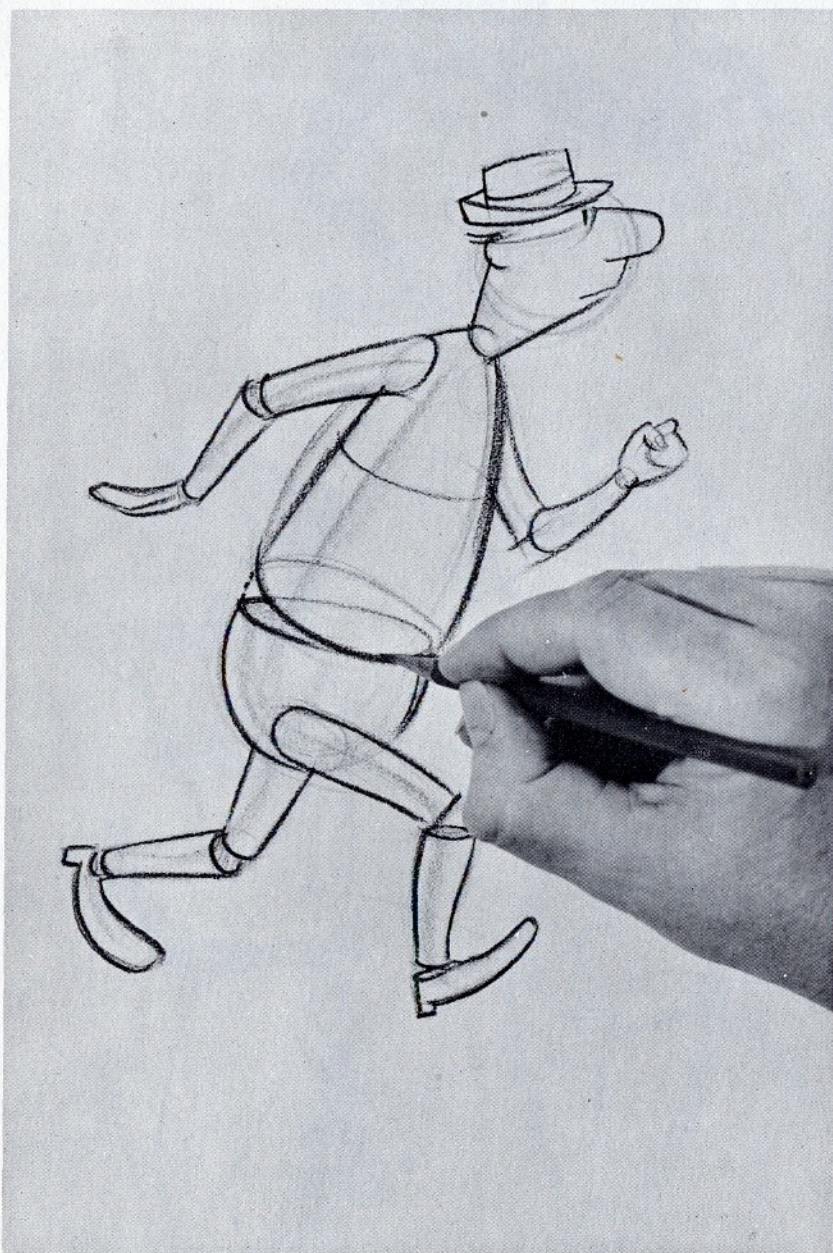
1 Once you have determined the type of character and action, swing in the general form lightly. Hold the pencil as shown—using your arm or wrist rather than finger movement—and establish the action in a “stick figure” or gesture-action sketch



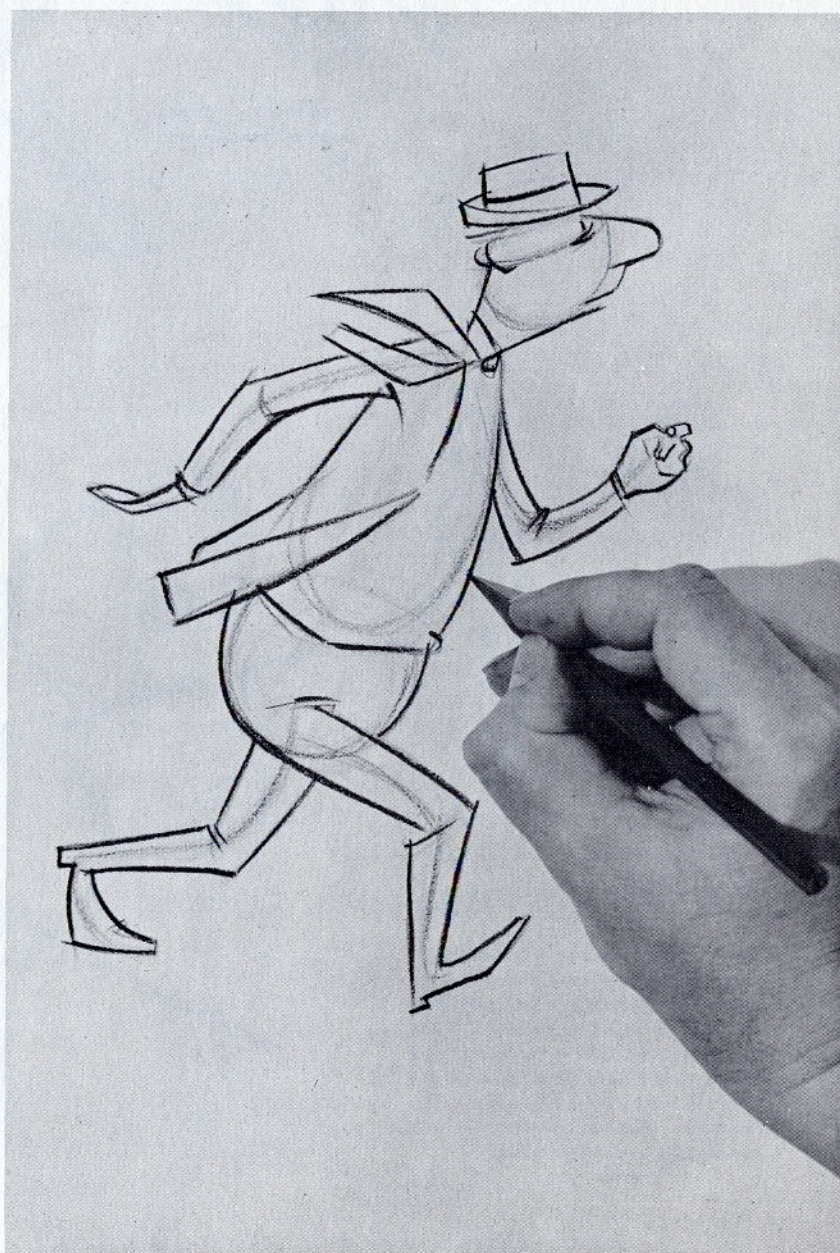
2 Still holding the pencil as shown (especially if the figure is of fairly good size), indicate the action of arms, hands, legs, and feet more specifically. This will give you an accurate basis for building the solid forms in the next step

it out carefully and then, from the very first sketch, show the action in the figure as a whole.

Action and character are inseparable. As you think out the action of the character, you must also feel his emotional makeup and how it is reflected in the action. There is no substitute for knowing and understanding the kind and type of people you are drawing. Any cartoonist can draw a sloppy fat man, but the cartoonist who can make the reader feel the emotional sloppiness of the character above and beyond the physical messiness of dress is the one who gets the jobs with the big fat pay checks.



3 Draw in the solid forms. These help you give dimension to the loose shapes you sketched in "feeling out" your cartoon. At this stage you may find you have more control of the pencil if you hold it as you would in writing

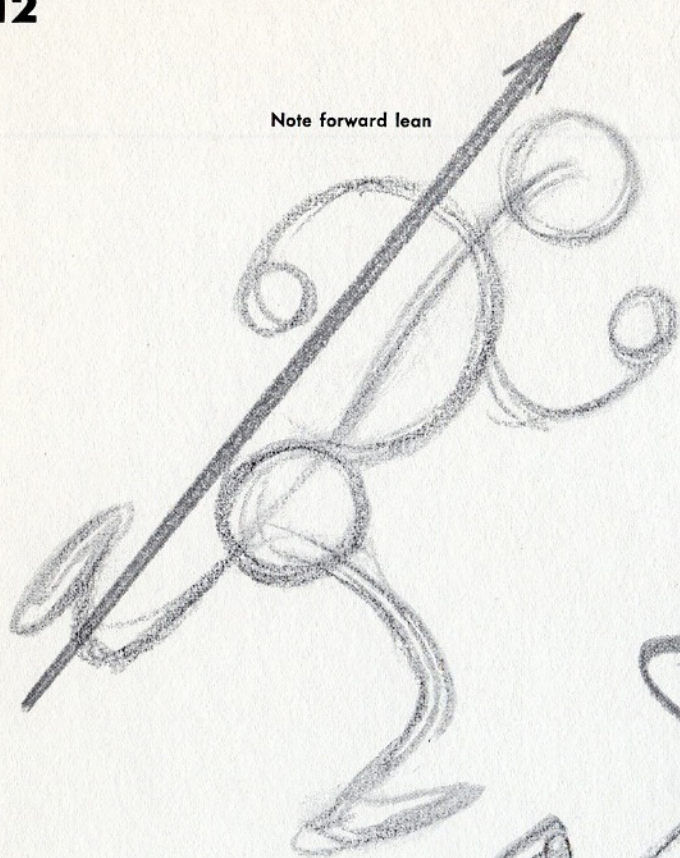


4 Now that the figure has been solidly constructed, you have a sound basis for drawing the clothing on it and developing your character. Keep in mind that the clothing should follow and reveal the solid figure underneath

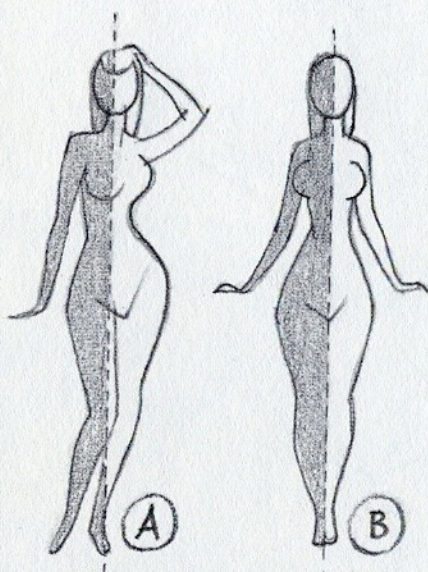
Drawing the figure in action

Form in your mind as clear a picture as possible of any action you wish to draw before you pencil in the preliminary action sketch. In a running action, for example, visualize the forward lean which suggests speed and the opposing twist of rib cage and hips which occurs (see arrows). The clearer the mental picture, the easier it will be to put it down successfully on paper.

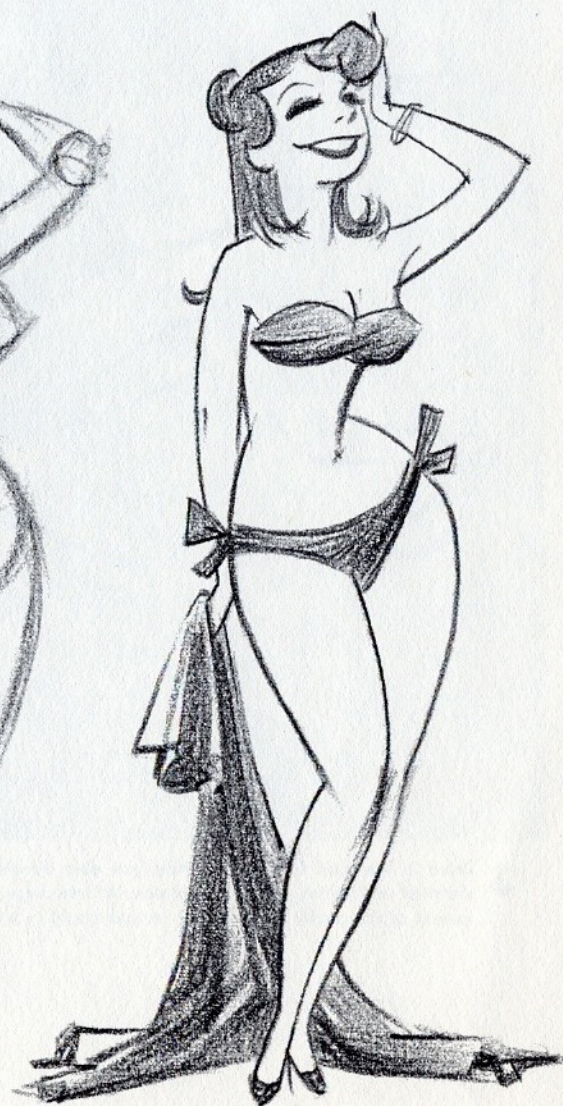
Note forward lean



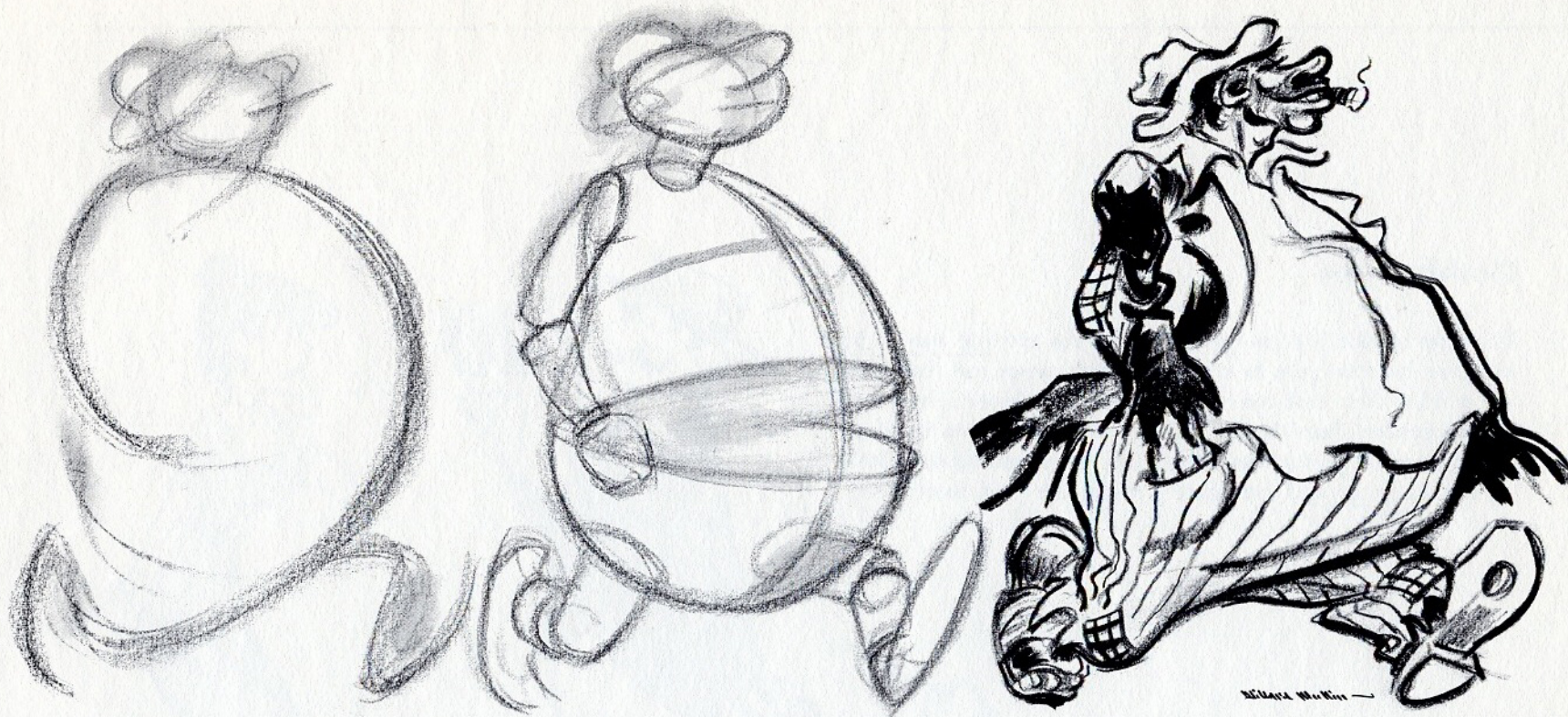
Emphasize opposing twist of shoulders and hips



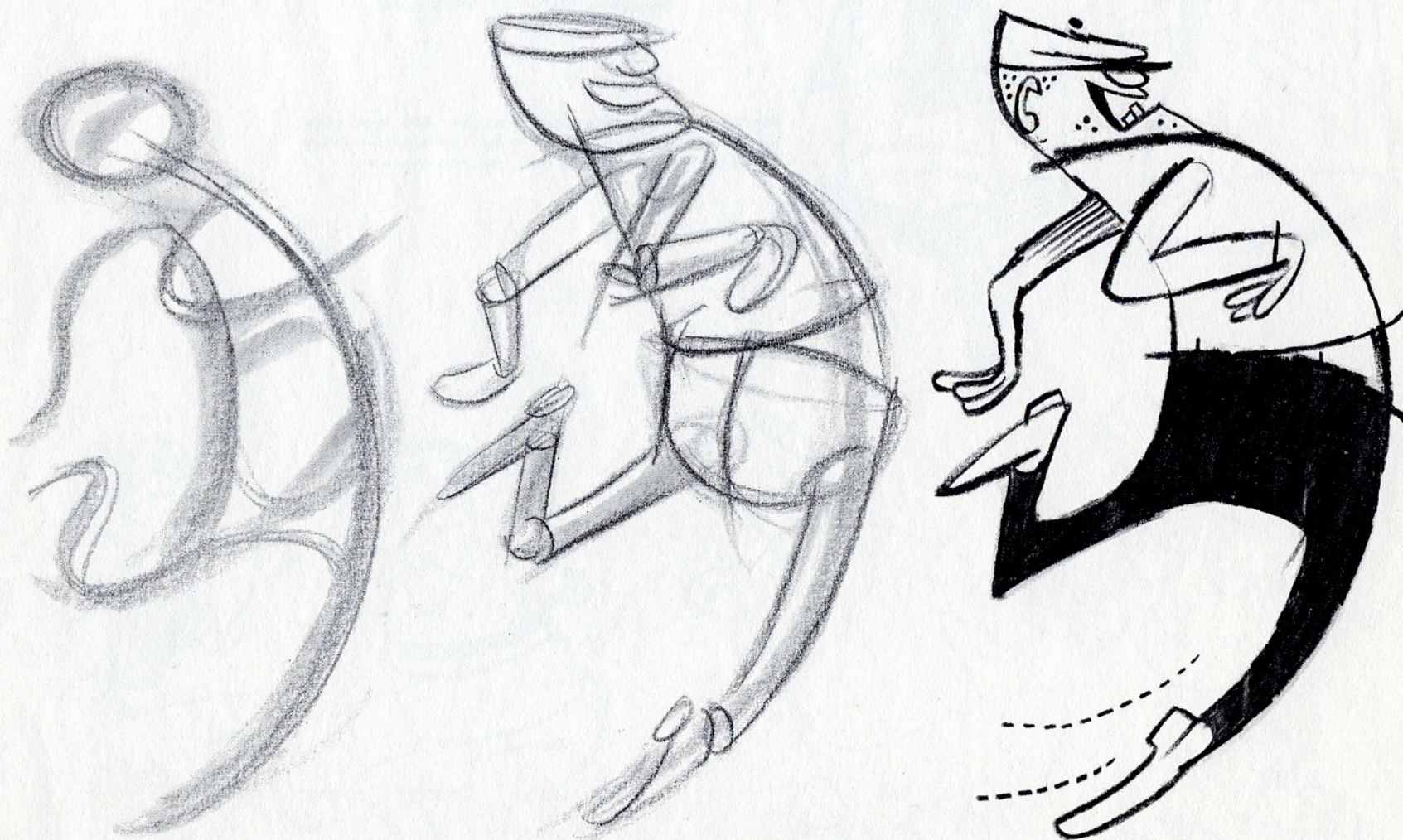
When you draw figures in a direct front view, make them more interesting by getting variety into the action of arms and legs. In Figure A the shape of the figure on one side of the center line differs considerably from that on the other. In Figure B the two halves of the figure are identical, creating a rather monotonous, repetitious effect



Even in static standing poses the figure can be given interesting action. For instance, when the weight of the figure is on one leg, the hip on that side tends to rise and the shoulder drops. The resulting opposite slant of shoulders and hips creates a feeling of animation



No matter what type of clothing you intend to give your finished figure — tight or loose fitting, stylish garb or ragged hand-me-downs — you will find that the more accurately you construct the basic figure and its action in the second stage of your drawing, the easier it will be to drape the clothing on it correctly



The emphasis in much of contemporary cartooning is on pattern or shape rather than solid three-dimensional form — but the same planning and procedure can be followed to create an active though stylized figure

Clothing tips

The type of clothing you give your figures and the way it fits will play the final part in creating specific types and characters and making them look convincingly solid and three-dimensional. The suggestions listed below will prove helpful to you in giving your figures the professional touch. Always remember that clothing should go around the figure — reveal the form underneath.



Pay attention to current styles of men's, women's and children's clothing. Unless there is a particular reason for doing so, don't dress your characters in out-of-date duds

When you pencil in hats, collars, belts, etc., draw them going completely around the figure. It will help give dimension to the figures and make the clothing itself look more convincing



Be careful to give the proper curvature to sleeve and trouser cuffs, bracelets, socks, etc.

Any pattern or design on clothing should be carefully drawn to follow the contours of the figure underneath

FAMOUS ARTISTS CARTOON COURSE
Student Work
Lesson 2

To study and practice

This lesson is designed to let you in on the ground floor of how to draw active, solid, simple cartoon figures. You learn to set up their action and general proportions by using gesture-action sketches as a foundation for solidly drawn figures. Then, when you add simple clothing, your characters look right because you planned them that way.

For practice, draw many simple figures in every conceivable pose. Check your method by referring often to the text. Have fun with these drawings. Make a point of creating actions in which some of the forms are foreshortened.

Your grade on this lesson will be based on your understanding and use of the gesture-action figure shown on page 10 of the text, as well as on how you draw the basic and completed figures. There are three assignments for this lesson, and they are to be done in pencil only.

The assignments you are to mail to the School for criticism

ASSIGNMENT 1

On a sheet of 8-1/2 x 11-inch bond typewriter paper, plot out two gesture-action sketches similar to those on page 10 of the text. These sketches should merely establish the size, general proportions and actions of the figures described below. Make these figures large on the paper -- about 5 inches from head to foot.

- A. Side view of a fat man walking hurriedly toward the left-hand side of the page.
- B. 3/4 front view of a man hanging by his hands from a tree branch. Try to make your sketch show that the man is hanging in midair, his weight supported by the arms as he clings to the branch.

IMPORTANT -- Mark this sheet ASSIGNMENT 1.

ASSIGNMENT 2

On a sheet of 8-1/2 x 11-inch bond typewriter paper and using the gesture-action sketch at the right as a guide, draw the basic form figure of a seated man about 5-1/2 inches high. Your drawing should be similar to those on page 2 or at the top of page 6. The left arm supports the figure, which leans back slightly. Head and torso are twisted as he looks back over his shoulder with a puzzled or surprised expression. The right hand is raised to his head to emphasize this attitude of surprise.



IMPORTANT -- Mark this sheet ASSIGNMENT 2.

ASSIGNMENT 3

On a third sheet of 8-1/2 x 11-inch bond typewriter paper, draw a complete, clothed figure, using either of the two figures you drew for Assignment 1. Follow the procedure outlined on pages 10 and 11 of the text. This figure should be the same size as your gesture-action drawing in Assignment 1.

IMPORTANT -- Mark this sheet ASSIGNMENT 3.

Present your assignments in the same clean, professional manner you would use if you were submitting them to the cartoon buyer of a publication. Letter your name, address and student number carefully in the lower left-hand corner of each page. In the lower right corner, place the Lesson Number and Assignment Number. Mail to:

FAMOUS ARTISTS CARTOON COURSE
Westport, Connecticut