How to Draw with Erasers

An introduction to beginner erasing techniques that are used by pencil artists to create basic textures and creative effects

This resource has two sections:

- Introduction to Erasers
- Basic Erasing Techniques

Introduction to Erasers

In this section, the five types of erasers are discussed specific to their applications to graphite drawing.

Hard Typewriter and Ink Erasers

Avoid at all cost! They were not formulated for drawing and inevitably push most of the graphite so deep into the paper that it shows through on the reverse side.

Save yourself the embarrassment of drilling a hole right through your paper! Been there, done that, got the T-shirt.

Semi-Hard, General Purpose Erasers

The general-purpose erasers, or rubbers, are not much better. All "rubbers" work by… well, rubbing. And rubbing requires pressure that simply forces graphite deeper and deeper into the surface of your paper.

Tip!

Black tones are your best friends:

- They open up a wide choice of greys for you.
- They add impact to your drawings.
- They increase the three-dimensionality of your work.

Blacks are what turn an overcast, grey day, flat and uninteresting drawing into one that dances in bright sunlight.

Soft Vinyl Art Erasers

Soft vinyl art erasers are a definite improvement; ideal for removing graphite smudges, and cleaning up the margin around a drawing. However, vinyl erasers cannot tackle heavily applied soft grades; they simply smear and push the graphite into the paper.

Kneadable Erasers

Kneadable erasers require a minimum of mechanical movement to remove graphite - perhaps a light rubbing action but no more. They can also be pinched into edges and points for fine erasing.

They will perform the task of removing 2B and softer grades but only with some work on your part. Graphite grains, you may remember, are flat plates that readily slide over each other, so regular cleaning of the eraser is required. As soon as the erasing face becomes graphite-coated, it won't accept any more. At this point, the eraser deposits the graphite sitting on its face over top of the graphite on the paper.

Blu-Tack Wall Putty

Fortunately, a magical product exists that performs the job with none of the listed problems. I discovered Blu-Tack many years ago when I used it in exasperation after a batch of kneadable erasers I'd purchased crumbled in use.

Blu-Tack is the original wall putty – the semi-sticky, kneadable putty used for affixing posters to walls.

Unlike all other erasers, Blu-Tack works without any mechanical action at all. The slightest touch causes graphite to adhere to it, which can then be lifted clear. More importantly, successive touches don't redeposit the graphite but simply lift more.

That action is exactly what you need – the ability to lift graphite right out of the paper's tooth without applying damaging pressure. When creating a section of a drawing that consists of delicate and subtle line work, it is often easier to broaden your range of available tones (to draw too dark). Then, you can progressively and gently remove the top-most layer of graphite until the desired look is achieved.

This is where conventional erasers will let you down, and kneadable erasers may disappoint. Neither can gently remove half a layer of graphite without disturbing the remainder beneath as well as Blu-Tack can.

Tip!

Many have tried other brands but only Blu-Tack fulfils the needs of the graphite artist.

It is manufactured in the UK and available in Australia, Finland, and meagerly online in America. Because of that I make Blu-Tack available worldwide from my website.

http://www.sibleyfineart.com/blu-tack.htm

Tip!

While you draw keep a ball of Blu-Tack in your free hand. It will be warmer, softer and slightly stickier, and will pick up graphite more readily with the lightest touch.

However, a kneadable eraser may serve you very well. Try one and experiment; it may be your Wonder Tool in the way that Blu-Tack is mine.

Basic Erasing Techniques

Almost every beginner artist I've met (and even some professionals) has a fear of drawing "too dark". This fear prevents the establishing of deep black tones at the outset.

Consequently, artists who apply lighter values first become overly cautious when building up tones. Their shading attempts sometimes fail because they can no longer create deep black tones with the desirable intensity.

Timidity dictates that an area that would benefit from intense blacks begins as a mid-grey – perhaps a non-threatening HB is used. Next a layer of 2B is added, and then perhaps a 4B. But the available tooth is already partially full of HB, so the softer grades are not fully accepted. Always aim to layer hard over soft!

Artists need to overcome that reluctance to "go dark". Why does that fear exist? Well, probably because dark shading is seen as being non-reversible. Suppose, I could show you a way of taking an intense black tone back to white? Would that help? You bet!

Erasers do, of course, remove mistakes, but, erasing is actually an integral part of the drawing process, not just a means of correcting errors.

Think of erasing, not as a means of removing unwanted sections of a drawing, but of removing graphite. This extends its use to the removal of deliberately over-applied graphite, and the adjusting of tonal values. The pencil applies graphite; the eraser removes it – two tools that perfectly complement each other.

From Dark to Almost White

This technique can return a dark section of shading to almost white without destroying the surface of the paper (refer to Figure 1 on the next page):

Step 1: Roll your kneadable eraser or Blu-Tack wall putty into a cylinder. To achieve a very smooth face, try rolling the eraser on a smooth, flat surface.

Step 2: Gently roll the cylinder over the area to be lightened to remove as much graphite as possible. Repeat as required but never rub; just roll the eraser.

Tip!

Once you own Blu-Tack you need never again feel afraid of over-darkening an area of your drawing.

You can load an area with as much graphite as you desire because you now have the means to remove it.

Tip!

You will need to occasionally clean a kneadable eraser or Blu-Tack wall putty.

Just pull it out into a thick rope, fold it back in on itself, and then roll it into a ball between your palms.

You can also lightly rock a clean face (surface) of the eraser across the graphite, or dab it, although dabbing creates hard edges that might cause problems.

This may take some time and application. Just imagine you're trying to save a magnificent drawing from total failure – that thought should help you develop enough patience!
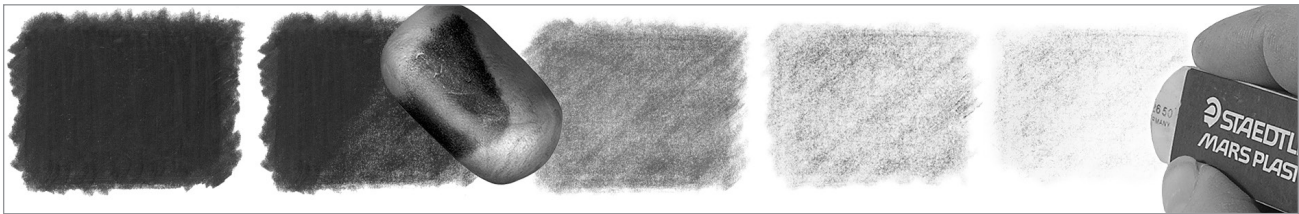
Step 3: Use a soft vinyl art eraser to complete the job.

Tip!

Always use a light touch with Blu-Tack; it removes graphite because it's slightly sticky and never needs to be pressed into the surface.

Figure 1

From a Mid-Grey Tone to White

This technique works best on lightly-drawn shading lines (such as the locks of hair in Figure 2) that were gently rendered with the flat face of a 4B or 2B chisel point.

Step 1: Prepare a sharp edge on a vinyl eraser (such as the click eraser in Figure 3). You can use the manufactured sharp edge of the core, or extend the core and use your craft knife or blade to cut a chisel end.

Step 2: Erase along and across your drawing, cutting white lines (Figures 4 and 5). In this case they were formed to represent stray hairs.

Figure 2
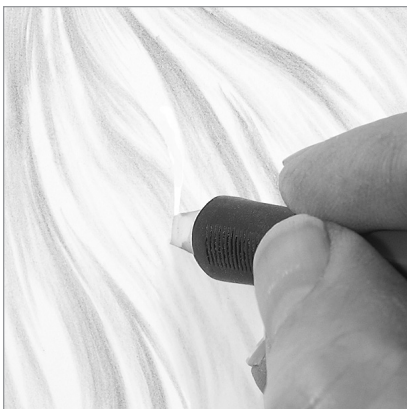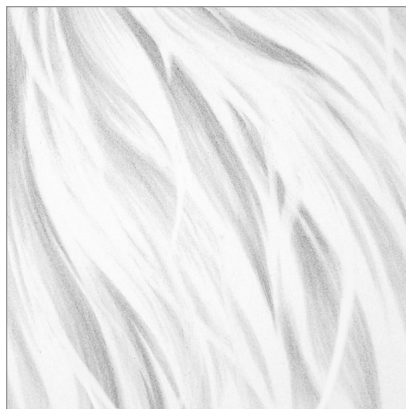

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Be aware that this method has inherent faults.

An eraser may push some graphite deeper into the surface, and smudging is to be expected, especially along both edges.

The eraser will pick up flat graphite grains until it cannot pick up more and then slide what it has over the flat plates still on the paper. Inevitably, it will drag some graphite along with it and smear the edges of the line it's erasing.

From Very Dark to Very Light

This technique removes sections of heavily applied graphite cleanly, without a rubbing action.

Step 1: Pinch your eraser into a sharp, straight or curved edge – about .5 in (1.3 cm) long will do.

Step 2: Use the eraser to gently draw. You may have to gently pull a Kneadable eraser across the area, but do not drag Blu-Tack - just gently roll your edge across the graphite to cleanly pick up a line or spot.

You can mould your eraser into any shape, from a straight or curved edge to a sharp or blunt rounded point.

Examine and compare each set of two drawings in Figures 6 to 8. The drawings on the left are rendered with a kneadable eraser and those on the right are rendered with Blu-Tack.

You can take this technique one step further by using additional shading lines to refine the edges of the erased marks.

In Figure 9 (on the next page), the shapes of the leaves are refined, the edges of the branch and twigs are sharpened, and some leaves are shaded so they recede into the background.

> **Tip!**
>
> To experiment with and/or practice using erasers as drawing tools, refer to the more detailed instructions in:
>
> - *1.2.A7 Lighten Values by Removing Graphite*
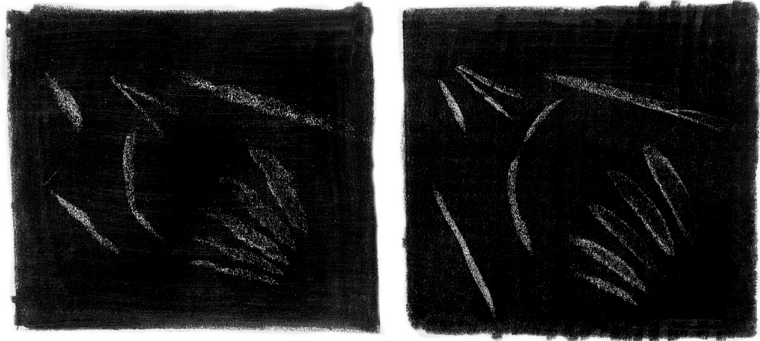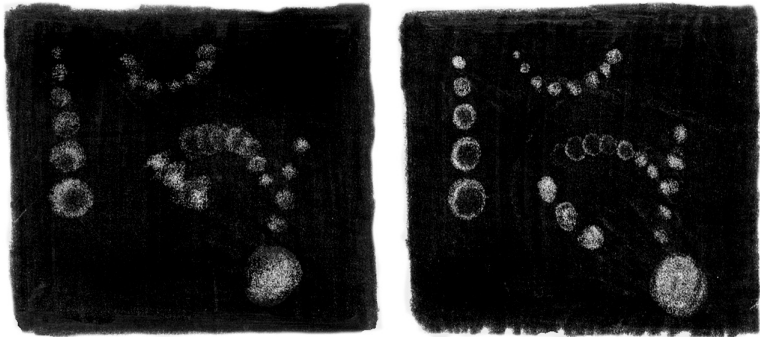> - *1.2.A8 Create Drawings with Erasers*.

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

Imagine the subject of this drawings as a branch of an old, dying tree in a dark forest.

This branch represents a part of the background behind more detailed and dominant trees. A shadowy idea of a tree gives depth to the drawing, and helps to convey a sense of mystery, or even menace, to the viewer.

Tip!

All erasing techniques discussed in this resource work best if used spontaneously. You can plan and execute, but I find the most pleasing and natural curves, the most mysterious shapes, and the feeling of a natural realism come from allowing your erasing to fire your imagination.

Tip!

This technique has many uses from "cutting in" foliage in dense shade, to suggesting hair inside the large ear of an animal, to restoring balance with the introduction of a new element in an already completed area.

Tip!

Use harder grades of pencils to refine edges. For example, 4B is essentially a soft grade that crumbles easily and, as a result, produces a line with broken or soft edges.

The solution is to use a harder grade but applied with enough weight so the tone it produces matches that of the softer adjacent grade.

Have fun!

Cheers……….   *Mike*
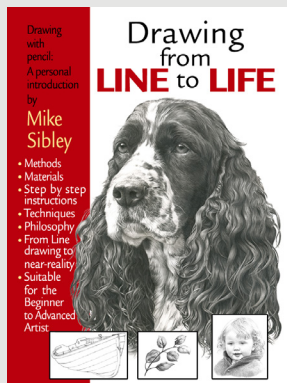
Drawing from Line to Life (the book) by Mike Sibley

Over 280 pages of pencil drawing tips, tutorials, demonstrations and much more...

- More than 625 illustrations
- Tools, techniques, methods
- Step-by-step instructions
- For the Novice and Advanced student
- From pure line drawing through to near-reality

Based on Mike's experience of over 30 years as a professional artist and graphite pencil specialist.

www.SibleyFineArt.com/pencil-drawing-book.htm