

What to do when you don't know what to draw



WHAT TO DO WHEN
You Don't Know What to
DRAW

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“I want to draw but I just don't know WHAT to draw!”

Sound familiar?

Occasionally we feel a drive to create and work on art but then get stuck because when we sit down to work our mind kind of just goes blank.

I have definitely experienced this throughout my artistic journey and I feel like I have learned a bit about why that happens and how to get past that stuck feeling. Maybe they will help you as well!

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Expectations



Often when I get stuck in the feeling of not knowing what to draw, it actually doesn't have anything to do with a lack of ideas.

It's pretty easy to just come up with ideas of what to doodle: self-portrait, your pet, a photo study, random stuff around your house, a tree.. and on and on. There's no lack of subjects!

But the problem is even when I have those ideas or someone offers those suggestions, I feel a resistance because my expectations of my next drawing are too big or unrealistic. "I want my next

artwork to tell a story, be beautifully rendered, have multiple subjects in it and communicate emotions!" I might not consciously think this, but thoughts like this are under the surface.

Notice

So, start to NOTICE... when You "don't know what to draw", do you actually mean something more along the lines of: **"I have this expectation and I might not meet that expectation or my ideas aren't yet perfect for that expectation so I'm not going to draw"**

I'm not saying it's this way for everyone all the time, but for ME, this is the main issue when I run into the "I don't know what to draw" feeling.

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So, this is actually just a form of procrastination and fear, and the way to move past it is to first **NOTICE** it.

Adjust Your Expectations

After you notice what's going on, adjust your expectations to be more bite sized.

Easier said than done, I know...

What this looks like for me is often just saying to myself, "Y'know what! I'm just gonna draw something super simple like a cute cat, and maybe I'll have an idea for a larger artwork later."

Draw It

Then I sit down and quickly doodle that simple thing! And even that will help me get out of the "I don't know what to draw" funk because **actually drawing** and putting even a **simple idea** into action often generates more ideas!

And of course, if you need a reference, don't feel shy about looking one up!

Bite Sized Drawing Ideas

If you need some more bite sized drawings ideas you can start with, here's a list of my go-tos:

- DTIYS Challenges
- Toon Me Challenge
- Redraw an old artwork (see how much your style has evolved!)
- Cute Cats
- Portrait of an OC
- Sketch of an animal based on a photo
- Plant doodle

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- Cylinders and other simple shapes
- Stick figure gestures
- Chibi face
- Random Portrait
- Facial features: lips, eyes, noses, etc.
- Anatomy features: hands, feet, arms, bellies, muscles, etc.
- Fanart of a character I like (usually just a simple portrait)

Illustration/Story Premise Brainstorm

If you are dead set on doing a larger illustration and you just can't think of ideas, here is my favorite brainstorming method. It is pretty simple and it might look familiar from the: [How to add more story to your Illustrations](#) Article

Here is what to focus on:

WHO is doing **WHAT WHERE?**

On top of this, you could also ask yourself WHY but the WHY would be more for your own internal knowledge of the emotional state of the character as you work rather than a major new element in the illustration.

If you already have a general idea of what you want to draw, then you can easily construct the **sentence**.

For example: "A student **witch** is **casting a spell** in the **woods**. "

It's a very general idea but it conjures up a lot of imagery ideas and gives me a place to start.

If you have absolutely no ideas of where to start, that's when sitting down and brainstorming can help. You can just start writing subjects that interest you. There are lots of ways to tackle brainstorming but here is what I like to do.

I like to make the **3 columns** of what I need and then I just start writing down

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any ideas that pop into my head for each column. And the more I write, the more ideas come!

WHO?	ACTION	WHERE?
STUDENT WITCH	READING A BOOK	THE FOREST
FEMALE KNIGHT	CASTING A SPELL	A MOUNTAIN OVERLOOK
ELVEN DRUID	SAYING GOODBYE	A GARDEN
EXPLOROR GIRL	COOKING	A THRONE ROOM
SORCERESS	LOOKING IN THE DISTANCE	CASTLE RAMPARTS
CAT	SEEING SOMEONE FAMILIAR	A CAFE
MAGIC CAT	SLEEPING	A LIVING ROOM
DEMON GIRL	LOOKING AT A MAP	A BALCONY
A GRUMPY PRINCESS	DRINKING WINE	A STUDY
A CUTE THIEF		A READING NOOK
ONE OF MY OCS		A WINDOW SEAT

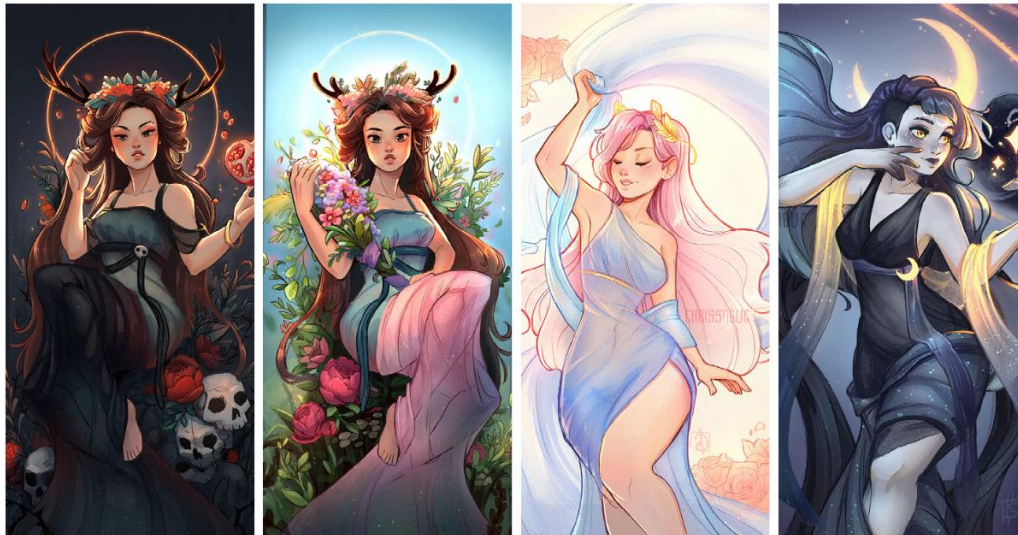
Eventually you have **3 long lists** in front of you that you can start matching to make an interesting premise for your illustration. Some matches will be really obvious and some won't fit well at all, but then there will be some that are both unexpected but also interesting!

I think it is a pretty fun exercise to come up with new ideas!

Also remember that just because you have an environment in mind, that doesn't mean that your illustration HAS to be a big full character piece. You can do a portrait that includes story elements but it is still important to know where this story is taking place, even if the camera is zoomed in.

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Work in Series



I have recently come to appreciate how nice it is to be working on a SERIES of artworks that all are in the same theme (the Goddess Series is what I'm working on right now).

There are a lot of benefits to working in a series and an especially huge benefit when it comes to tackling the "I don't know what to draw" topic. I always have the next piece in the series to work on if I want to because it is already loosely planned out.

If this feeling of "I don't know what to draw" is something that comes up a lot for you, it may be worth sitting down and brainstorming a series that you want to work on medium-long term.

Some classic series topics are:

- Zodiacs
- Mythology
- Elements
- Seasons
- Locations
- Foods
- Colors
- Emotions
- Fanart

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Keep an ideas Journal



If you don't already, start writing down your ideas when they strike! Our best ideas don't usually hit us when we are sitting at a desk trying to figure out what to draw.

Usually ideas hit when we are doing other stuff like taking a shower, laying in bed, out for lunch, or exercising. And you don't always remember the idea, even if you make a mental note about it. So if you can, pause what you are doing when those ideas hit, and pull out your journal or phone to quickly write it down so that you will for sure have it for later when you are trying to decide what to draw! (I just use the notes app in my phone)

It's tempting not to, but TRUST me, you won't remember every good idea you had if you don't write it down.

Wait it Out

Sometimes taking a step away from artwork for the day can be all the solution you need. It is true that sometimes our brains just aren't feeling it and need a little refresh.

Know that a lack of ideas or motivation doesn't have to last forever and taking a little break isn't giving up.

Taking some time to do an activity unrelated to art can be very helpful in generating ideas, so don't be afraid of taking a break. The ideas will flow again, and you'll be back to drawing in no time!

The more you work through this challenge of not knowing what to draw, the better you will get at it!

You got this! Happy Drawing!