The keys to shade and shadow are the sun (or other light source) and its direction and angle.

Shade and Shadow

Shading and shadows give volume to a shape and make it more interesting.

Shading and shadows in drawings are often overlooked and their importance forgotten. But if there is enough light for you to see an object there is shading and a shadow present.

Shading is the varying degree of value from light to dark which is created on an object by the light which strikes the angled and curved planes of that object. All objects have varying degrees of value of shaded portions.

Subtle variations in lighting can create many degrees of shading on a single object. You may find it helpful to mentally simplify the shading by thinking of it as having only four values—light, light gray, dark gray and dark. These four variations should be sufficient to provide shading for most drawings.

On a rounded surface, such as a sphere or cylinder, these shaded areas blend gradually from light to dark.

Cast shadow is the darkest portion on the drawing of an object. It is darker than any surface of the object because it receives less reflected light than do the surfaces of the object.

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The length and direction of the light source forms a triangle which has the shadow as base. This imaginary triangle is an easy method for establishing the shadow of any object.

The height of the light source dictates the angle of the triangle which forms the cast shadow.

The height of the light source determines the length of the shadow and its direction.

All shadows are indicators of the height and direction of their light source.

Solid objects (walls, plane surfaces, etc.) form cast shadows in the same manner as a single pencil.

Shadows often look complicated and difficult to draw, but they aren’t. The simple illustrations on this page show that the triangle method is easy to use and fool-proof. Triangles form the basis for all shadows. In order to draw the cast shadow find the light source and determine the triangle formed.

Make a shadow that complements the shape rather than detracts from it.

Even the shadows of complicated objects are formed by one or more triangle shapes.