

Drawing Pencils

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Drawing with a pencil is a good beginning for anyone interested in art. The materials are easy to find and practice can make for rewarding results.

Pencils are usually made of graphite (generally called lead) as a core and cedar is the preferred wood. A powdered graphite, clay, and water are blended, shaped into thin rods, dried, and kiln-fired. Varying the amount of clay determines the degree of hardness.

The degree of hardness is indicated on the pencil by a number-letter code. The code is standardized and has the following ranges:

H Hard Range - the lead becomes harder as the H number increases and the harder the pencil, the fainter the lines that are produced with it. Hard pencils are best for fine details and technical drawing.

F Medium range - this is sometimes indicated by HB as well as numbers of F.

B Soft range - the lead becomes softer as the B number increases. The higher the number, the darker the lines will be, and the more easily smudged. Generally, household pencils are 2B and good for drawing. Softer, 4-6B pencils are used for larger quick sketches or figure studies. The softer the pencil, the faster it will wear down and the more it will need to be

sharpened. Soft pencils can produce good results shading but will not hold a point for long.

'Woodless pencils' are solid graphite except for a thick varnish coating to protect the core. These pencils can be used on their sides as well as a point. Graphite is very brittle so a woodless pencil will likely shatter if dropped. A solid graphite pencil should not be sharpened the usual way but can be shaped with a sharp blade or sandpaper. An emery board is useful for getting a fine point.

Erasers are often used with pencils and can be of various types: kneaded erasers are pliable and good for picking up stray smudges. White erasers are soft and good for general erasures while pink eraser types are generally harder and may damage soft papers. Pencil lines can be softened by rubbing gently with a stump or tortillon that are made of paper or cotton fibers molded to a wide point.

Other drawing devices are also shaped as pencils: Carbon pencils are made of compressed carbon encased in wood so it can be sharpened. Pastel pencils have pastel incased in wood for use in detail work. Colored pencils can be wax based or watercolor based and have color pigments instead of graphite as a 'lead'.