

Tan Huaixiang

Second Edition

# character costume figure drawing

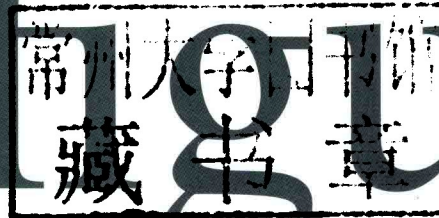


*Step-by-Step Drawing Methods for Theatre Costume Designers*

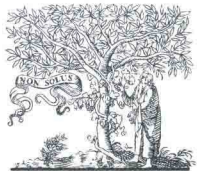
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*Step-by-Step Drawing Methods for Theatre Costume Designers*

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Focal Press is an imprint of Elsevier



Focal Press is an imprint of Elsevier  
30 Corporate Drive, Suite 400, Burlington, MA 01803, USA  
Linacre House, Jordan Hill, Oxford OX2 8DP, UK

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#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Tan, Huaixiang.

Character costume figure drawing / Tan Huaixiang.—2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-240-81184-0 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Costume. 2. Costume design. 3. Drawing—Technique. I. Title.

PN2067.T36 2010

792.02'6—dc22

2009035047

#### British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-0-240-81184-0

For information on all Focal Press publications  
visit our website at [www.elsevierdirect.com](http://www.elsevierdirect.com)

09 10 11 12 13 5 4 3 2 1

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Second Edition

# Foreword

*Character Costume Figure Drawing* is not a book about costume design. Design isn't even mentioned in the title or the text. The book does not address the elements and principles of design, script or character analysis, color theory, or history of fashion. This is a book devoted to one single aspect of the costume designer's process: drawing the character.

Since *Character Costume Figure Drawing* was first published in 2004 it has sold over 8500 copies. A few of those copies have made their way to my classrooms, where, because of its unique contributions to the art of drawing characters and its invaluable assistance to the young designer, this book remains a required text. Tan addresses in-depth and shows by example the sometimes dreaded but indisputable necessity of putting one's design ideas on paper, not simply drawing clothes, but drawing characters.

I know that I am not alone when I applaud Tan's efforts to create a straightforward and step-by-step drawing process that focuses on character. There are many good figure drawing texts available, but none of them are designed for theatrical application inasmuch as they are not intended to address character. It can be overwhelming for a student of costume design to assemble the necessary drawing information and apply it to a character analysis, all the while keeping in mind their vision for telling the story. Tan's simple and direct drawing process can be of great assistance. It is often easy for a student designer to become consumed by a

historical period, or so lost in a "concept" that they forget *who* the people are wearing these clothes. One of the biggest misnomers of our profession is that costume design means, simply, clothing, but nothing could be further from reality. It is only by knowing who the characters are that we can begin to discover what they wear and, equally important, how they wear it. In order to effectively communicate those ideas, we must not only learn to draw the clothes, but also to firmly establish the character's physical presence on the page.

Once you look past Tan's beautifully crafted drawings and renderings, *Character Costume Figure Drawing* supplies us with a method and outlines a practical approach to the process of drawing the character. Chapter 2's in-depth look at facial expressions and ethnic diversity as they relate to drawing the character is invaluable and long overdue in the world of costume design.

No faceless, cardboard, paper doll drawings here; after all, what role do the clothes play if they aren't relating to a specific character? As she demonstrates in this book, Tan believes as I do: riding on the back of analytical and creative thinking, drawing is perhaps the designer's most valuable communication tool. Furthermore, because drawing is a skill, with practice it can be learned, though sometimes with much practice. Over the course of my teaching career, while preaching "learn to draw ... learn to draw better," I've had a few "graphite challenged" students tell me in a profound way that "drawing is not design!" Their

purpose is usually to enlighten me, but occasionally their revelation is presented as a challenge. I readily inform them that I could not agree more, but drawing is a language with which we “speak” about design, a visual language that is a strong, provoking form of communication. It is a way of describing thoughts and ideas about character and design that transcends words; it is not to be used as a replacement for words but as an accompaniment. This explanation will usually send most students back to the tablet, but a few seem to insist that I further the explanation of why developing drawing skills is important. By likening drawing to verbal communication, the rudimentary stick figure is like an infant’s attempt at forming words and the well-developed character sketch is like communication with an articulate vocabulary.

Tan shows us the importance of the drawing by visually capturing that specific moment from the text with regard to the character’s gesture, body language, and facial expression; that moment tells us everything we need to know. Her characters

rarely stand still unless that stillness speaks to who they are; rather they dance, leap, and move about the page with specific intention, sometimes flippant, sometimes brooding, but always telling us exactly who they are through their actions. A further study of Tan’s drawings gives us insight into the artist’s approach to the production, the style, how she views the characters, their relationships, and the piece as a whole. Tan emphasizes the concept that the style of drawing and presentation should always be selected to reflect the mood of the play; a shift in genre of plays results in a shift of the drawing style, sometimes realistic, sometimes caricature, reinforcing her vision of the characters and the story. This approach to drawing is more than a skill set, it is a philosophy.

In this highly anticipated second edition, Tan gives us a new chapter on style. This chapter specifically addresses how the “style” of drawing can differ from drama to comedy and musical theatre, enhancing and aiding the communication process. The second edition also boasts 200 new

images, of which we can never get enough. Focal Press gives us an affordable book full of color graphics to supplement our other texts, allowing every student of costume design to own a copy. The book continues to serve as the only costume-related text on the market dedicated solely to drawing the character, and more than a text, the book provides all designers, student and professional, with an inspirational collection of work from an exceptional visual artist and costume designer, Tan Huaixiang. I’m sure that you will add this new second edition of *Character Costume Figure Drawing* to your library and enjoy it as much as you have the first edition. I know I will.

Bill Brewer

Professor of Costume Design  
School of Design and Production  
University of North Carolina School of the Arts

# Preface

I genuinely appreciate the valuable suggestions and advice from all my friends, colleagues, and readers, which helped me to develop this second edition. After completion of the first edition, I was lucky enough to have had opportunities to work on many different types of productions over the past five years. This provided me with the resources to cover the subjects I wanted to for this second edition.

As an instructor, I have been working with theatre costume design students for many years. I know how students become frustrated when drawing human figures, and I understand their needs. I feel like I have a responsibility to write this book in order to help students who have trouble drawing, and I hope that this book will greatly help all prospective designers out there. Because English is my second language, writing this book has been a very difficult task. Some days I felt like it was impossible and wanted to give up. But the desire to help my students—future designers—encouraged me to continue.

The development of both editions was based upon years of experience with educational theatre, and, more specifically, upon my teaching experience

with college students. I know that they need a guide they can use in their free time to educate themselves and practice figure drawing to become skilled costume designers. I tried to make this book instructional and fundamental. I tried to keep it simple, direct, and straightforward. It is difficult for me to express myself exactly the way I want in English, so I hope the visual images speak for themselves. The various illustrations demonstrate my step-by-step processes. I have incorporated a number of examples of my costume designs into each subject to give more visual explanations on the topic and to show how to utilize line quality, form, and texture to create facial expressions, body language, and to explore variations in characters and garments. I have tried hard to make this book easily comprehensible and easy to follow. I hope this book is both useful to students and entertaining to casual readers. It can be used as a reminder or inspiration by college students and professionals who are interested in character drawings in all different types of character creations. I hope that this second edition will encourage and foster students to enjoy the process of figure drawing and design artwork. If this is achieved, it will be very rewarding.

# Acknowledgments

I thank Focal Press for allowing me the opportunity to write and publish the second edition of *Character Costume Figure Drawing* and for their unending support and encouragement along the way.

I extend a special thanks to Bonnie J. Kruger, who introduced me to Focal Press for my first book; otherwise, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to write this second edition.

Special thanks to Professor Bill Brewer for all his support and mentoring regarding this edition and to Linda Pisano for her valuable suggestions.

I thank all my professors at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, China, including: Hou Qidi, Ma Chi, Xing Dalun, Wang Ren, Li Chang, Zhang Bingyao, Qi Mudong, Zhang Chongqing, He Yunlan, Yie Ming, An Lin, Wang Xiping, Sun Mu, and Li Dequan. They are the ones who laid the foundation for me to pursue my dreams and achieve what I have today. They nurtured and motivated me to start my costume and makeup design career and their influence has changed my life.

I thank the professors in the Department of Theatre Arts at Utah State University—Colin B. Johnson, Sid Perks, Voce Call, and Bruce E. McInroy—for their kindness, advice, patience, and support. They helped me endure and overcome graduate school, a difficult period in my life. They provided opportunities for me to work on many productions and created many learning experiences for me. Their guidance has led me to accomplish what I have today.

I thank all my former theatre department chairmen in the United States with whom I've worked for encouraging and guiding me: Sid Perks, Utah State University; Bruce A. Levitt, Cornell University; Buck Favorony, University of Pittsburgh; Wesley Van Tassel, Central Washington University; and Donald Seay, Joseph Rusnock, and Roberta Salon, University of Central Florida.

I thank Ryan and David Retherford and Jon Findell at the Faculty Multimedia Center at the University of Central Florida for all their expertise, constant help and availability whenever I needed them.

I thank the entire faculty and staff at the UCF Conservatory Theatre Department. I specially thank Arlene Flores and Samuel Waters for helping me when I needed it most.

I thank my dear friends Xiangyun Jie, Julia Zheng, Helen Huang, Peiran Teng, Dunsu Dai, Liming Tang, Haibou Yu, Wenhai Ma, Lu Yi, and Rujun Wang for their unconditional love and support and wise advice. You all put a smile on my face when I needed it most.

I thank my parents for teaching and disciplining me to become the strong person I am today. I owe a big thanks to my dear, talented daughter, Yingtao Zhang, for proofreading my manuscript. Her inspiration and creativity continually sparked ideas for the book. I owe additional thanks to my husband, Juli Zhang, for helping me succeed in my professional career.

Finally, I thank all my students for their tolerance in allowing me to be their instructor and allowing me to continue to learn and grow in my career.

# Introduction

**T**he second edition contains the following new visual images: (a) three pages of ballet sketches added to the “Figures in Dance” section, Chapter 1; (b) nine pairs of working-class figures added to the “Figure Poses Change Through Time and Fashion” section, Chapter 1; (c) a new Chapter 7, *Character Costume Figures in Style*, which demonstrates how to incorporate and develop demeanor, attitude, body language, and facial expressions into each individual character and type of the production.

The second edition, just like the first, provides a simple, visual guide that focuses on the principles and format of characteristic costume figure drawings. Throughout all the illustrations, you will see dimension and diversity in the characters. Facial expressions, body language, body action, and props are incorporated to clearly characterize each figure.

## **WHAT MAKES A GOOD THEATRICAL COSTUME DESIGNER?**

I would never say that a person who draws beautiful pictures is a good costume designer. A good costume designer must have many other qualities and capabilities, such as imagination and knowledge of theatre, world history, theatre history, costume history, and literature. The designer must retain

good communication and organization skills; possess research and technical skills like drawing, rendering, computer graphics, costume construction, crafts, millinery, and personnel management; be a good team player; and even be in good health. All these factors make a wonderful, even ideal costume designer. Drawing and painting skills are tools for helping a designer develop and express visual images and design concepts. Renderings are not the final product—the final product is the actual stage costume made suitable and proper for the actors.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONALITY AND BODY LANGUAGE**

To capture the impression of a character’s spirit is always a goal when developing character figure drawings. By nature, we all relate to human emotion, because we all experience it. Characters are human beings, and human beings all possess personalities. To portray a character’s emotions and personality on paper is a challenge, but well worth the results. When I create costume designs, I try not only to illustrate the costumes, but also to portray a completed characterization. I try to manipulate every body part to build compositional beauty and artistically express the power of a character’s substance. Every gesture, action, facial

expression, and accessory will add meaning and entertainment to the design. People say that we should not judge a person by his or her appearance, but when an actor appears on stage, his or her appearance becomes significant. The character's body language reflects the soul and spirit of the character, and an interesting gesture helps display the style of the costumes. Using body language to emphasize the personality and status of a character is to give the character an exciting appearance. Character figures enhance and adorn the costume designs, and they communicate with the director, actor, other designers, and the production team.

Expressing the personality of the character in your drawings is like the saying that "a picture is worth a thousand words."

## PHILOSOPHY FOR DRAWING

Drawing human figures should be fun. Nobody was born an innate artist and nobody will become one overnight, but I believe that with some effort, anybody can draw. Although improving your drawing skills requires tremendous effort, enjoying it and being interested will greatly help. When you

are driven to do well, you will. Watch, listen, and absorb.

To develop a more positive attitude, consider this: just do it. Work helps. Avoid a pessimistic and sluggish attitude. Desire and dedication are the discipline of a career, and work is the language of that discipline.

POSITIVITY!

CONFIDENCE!

PRACTICE!

SUCCESS!

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# 1

## *Drawing the Figure*

**M**y objective in writing this book is to show how to draw figures using a simple and easy drawing method. Specifically, the book is intended to help theatre students improve their drawing skills so that they can give effective design presentations. Most theatre students do not have any solid drawing training, or any human anatomy or figure-drawing courses in their curricula. Drawing requires a lot of practice and knowledge of the proportions of the human body. I believe that with effort, anybody can draw.

Theatre students typically have to do production assignments and work in the shops, helping to build either scenery or costumes for the production. Their time is occupied with those assignments, leaving them little time to improve their drawing skills. That is why I am trying to find a short, easy, and fast way to help them improve their drawing abilities. The methods in this book can be used without a model. However, if theatre students have the opportunity to draw the human figure from live models, they should do so. Drawing live models is a tremendous help in understanding the human body.

## PROPORTIONS OF THE BODY

There are many concepts or methods for measuring the divisions of the human body. The eight-heads-tall figure proportion method is often used by artists or fashion illustrators. Some fashion drawings may use eight-and-a-half- or nine-heads-tall figures to demonstrate the garments, using a slim, sophisticated image. Realism is not the intent of fashion designers or illustrators. Rather, their objective is to create a stylized or exaggerated version of reality, which today is a tall, slim, and athletic figure, with a long neck and long legs. Fashion illustrations emphasize the current ideals or trends of fashion beauty. The thin body and specific poses are designed to enhance the garments. Fashion illustrators are creating the images of fashionable products to stimulate customers to purchase the garments. Beautiful illustrations can impress and influence customers to buy and wear the advertised clothing.

Costume designs for theatrical productions are quite different from fashion illustrations. The costume designer uses the history of fashion as a reference for creating costumes for many varieties of characters or groups of characters in plays. The characters are everyday-life people: young or old, thin or heavy, short or tall, with different nationalities and particular personalities. Costume design for productions requires creating practical garments that are going to be worn on stage by believable characters who have well-defined personalities. Sometimes a well-defined character costume design can inspire the actors and enhance the design presentation for the production team. In my drawings and designs, I try to emphasize a realistic style of body proportions, but I use slightly exaggerated facial features and body language to create characters with personality. The real creative challenge is how to express personalities of characters.

Most of the proportions of the body that I used in this book are based on the theories of proportions used in many other art books. There are fantastic art books from which you can learn about the proportions of the body and about figure drawing techniques, such as *Bridgman's Complete Guide to Drawing from Life*, by George B. Bridgman (Sterling, 2001); *The Complete Book of Fashion Illustration*, by Sharon Lee Tate and Mona Shafer Edwards (Prentice Hall, 1995); *The Human Figure: An Anatomy for Artists*, by David K. Rubins (Penguin, 1975); *Drawing the Head and Figure*, by Jack Hamm (Perigee, 1982); and *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, by Betty Edwards (Tarcher, rev. ed. 1999). These books helped me improve my understanding of the human body and taught me how to present the body well. You can study the rules and principles of figure drawing, but you have to learn how to use them through *practice*.

To give my characters a realistic appearance, I slightly change the size of the head. Compared to the eight-heads-tall proportions, I enlarge the head to extend outside the usual boundary of the first head area. This enlarges the head in proportion to the top half of the body. I keep the feet within the bottom-half portion of the body. When I start the foundation of a figure, however, I still start with the eight-heads-tall method because it is an even number and easier to divide for calculation purposes. My divisions on the body may differ from other books, but the measurements work for my figure drawings. My primary intent is to have a system that is easy to use.

The key for developing a character figure drawing that is in proportion is to keep the top half (from the crotch up to the top of the skull) equal to the bottom half (from the crotch down to the bottom of the feet). The crotch is the main division point. The head can actually be made either a little

bigger or smaller. A small head will make the figure look taller or thinner; a bigger head will make the figure look shorter or chubbier. When keeping these measurements in mind, the figure will always look right.

I recommend that you use the following steps to create a figure drawing until you become familiar with body proportions. Refer to Figures 1-1 and 1-2 as you complete these steps:

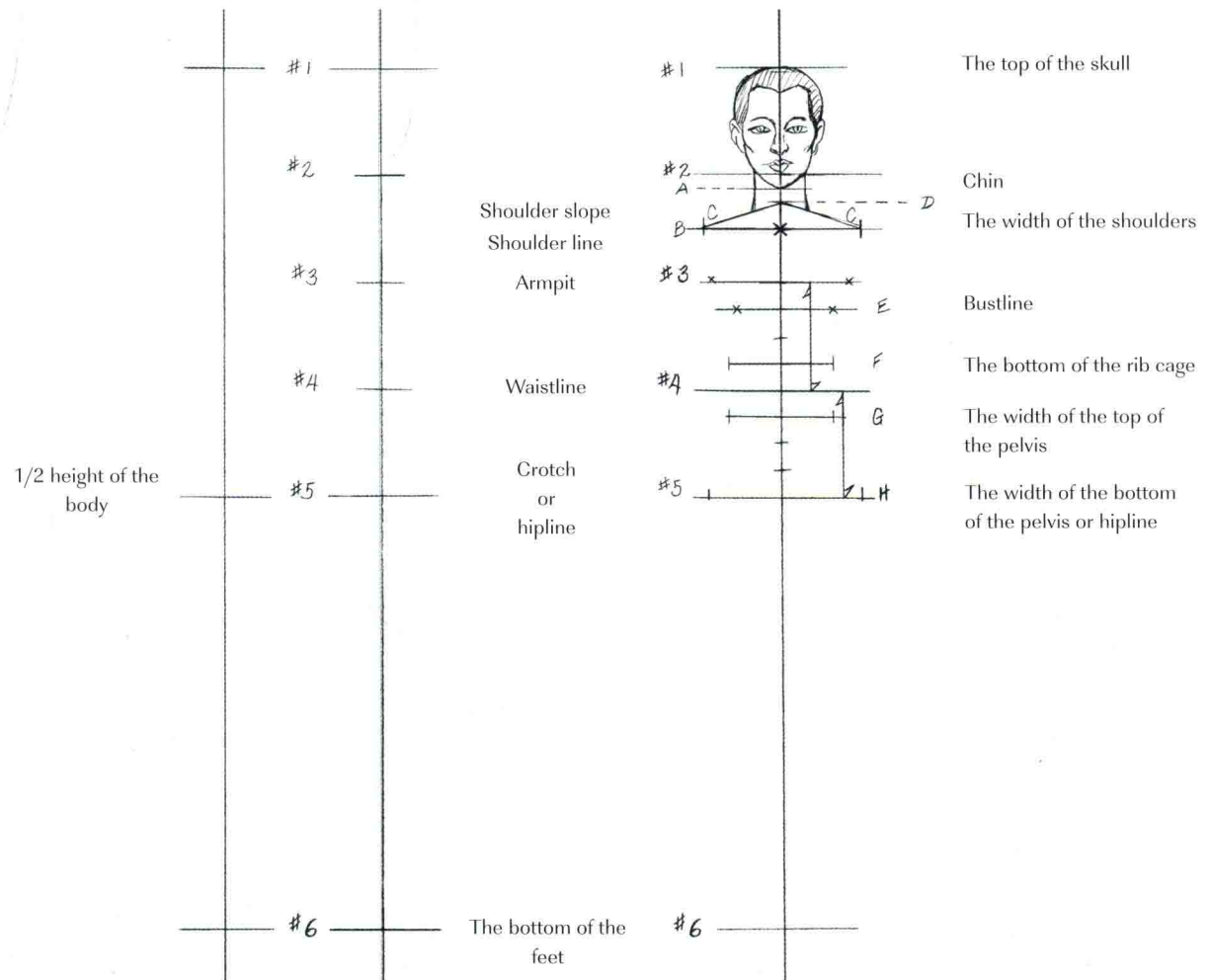
1. Place two marks on the paper—one on the top portion of the page, one on the bottom portion of the page—to indicate the height of the body. Then draw a vertical line from the top mark to the bottom mark. The composition of the figure should be considered; that is, keeping the figure centered or off-centered, more to the left or to the right side, and so on. These guidelines control the figure height.
2. Draw a mark at the middle point of the vertical line to find the middle point of the body. This mark is where the crotch is located and is also the half-height of the body. I am going to call the area from this mark up the upper half of the body. To me, this mark is the most critical reference point for good proportions of the body. (See Figure 1-1, mark #5.)
3. Divide the upper body from the top mark to the crotch line into four equal parts. This creates five marks but four portions. Number all the marks: The very top mark, mark #1, is the top of the skull; we won't use mark #2; mark #3 is the armpit; mark #4 is the waistline; and mark #5 is the half-body mark (it is also the crotch, pelvis, or hipline). The very bottom mark drawn in step 1 is mark #6. I will refer by numbers to these six marks extensively in the discussion that follows.

4. Make the head bigger compared to mark #2 (usually considered the chin in measurement systems used in other drawing books). The head will be increased by adding a distance approximately the size of a chin from mark #2 down (see letter A on the sketch in Figure 1-1). This shortens the neck. Fashion drawings usually are just the opposite, showing a longer neck. The mark at letter A is going to be the bottom of the chin.
5. Draw an egg-shaped frame between the top mark and the chin mark, A, to indicate the shape of the head.
6. Divide the distance between mark #2 and the armpit line (mark #3) in half and mark it as letter B; this mark is going to be the shoulder line or collarbone. Generally speaking, the width of the shoulders is a measurement about two heads wide for females and two-and-a-half heads wide for males. Measure the width of the shoulders and add two marks (see letter C in Figure 1-1).
7. Divide the distance between mark #2 and the shoulder line, B, in half and add another mark. This mark helps to establish the shoulder-slope line (see letter D in Figure 1-1). Look at the sketch and review this in detail.
8. Divide the distance between the armpit (mark #3) and the waistline (mark #4) into four equal parts. Now you have drawn three marks to create four parts. The first mark from the top of this group is the bustline (see letter E in Figure 1-1); this mark usually refers to the nipples position or bustline. The third mark from the top is the bottom of the rib cage (see letter F in Figure 1-1). The second mark is not used.

9. Divide the distance between the waistline (mark #4) and the crotch or hipline (mark #5) into four equal parts. The first mark is the top of the pelvis (see letter G in Figure 1-1). The male pelvis width is different from the female. The female hip width is usually wider than her

shoulders. The male hip width is less wide than the shoulders. For both males and females, the width of the top of the pelvis usually equals the width of the bottom of the rib cage or chest. The bottom of the pelvis/hipline/crotch line is wider than width of the the top of the pelvis

## 1-1 Proportion of the Body, Marks A through H

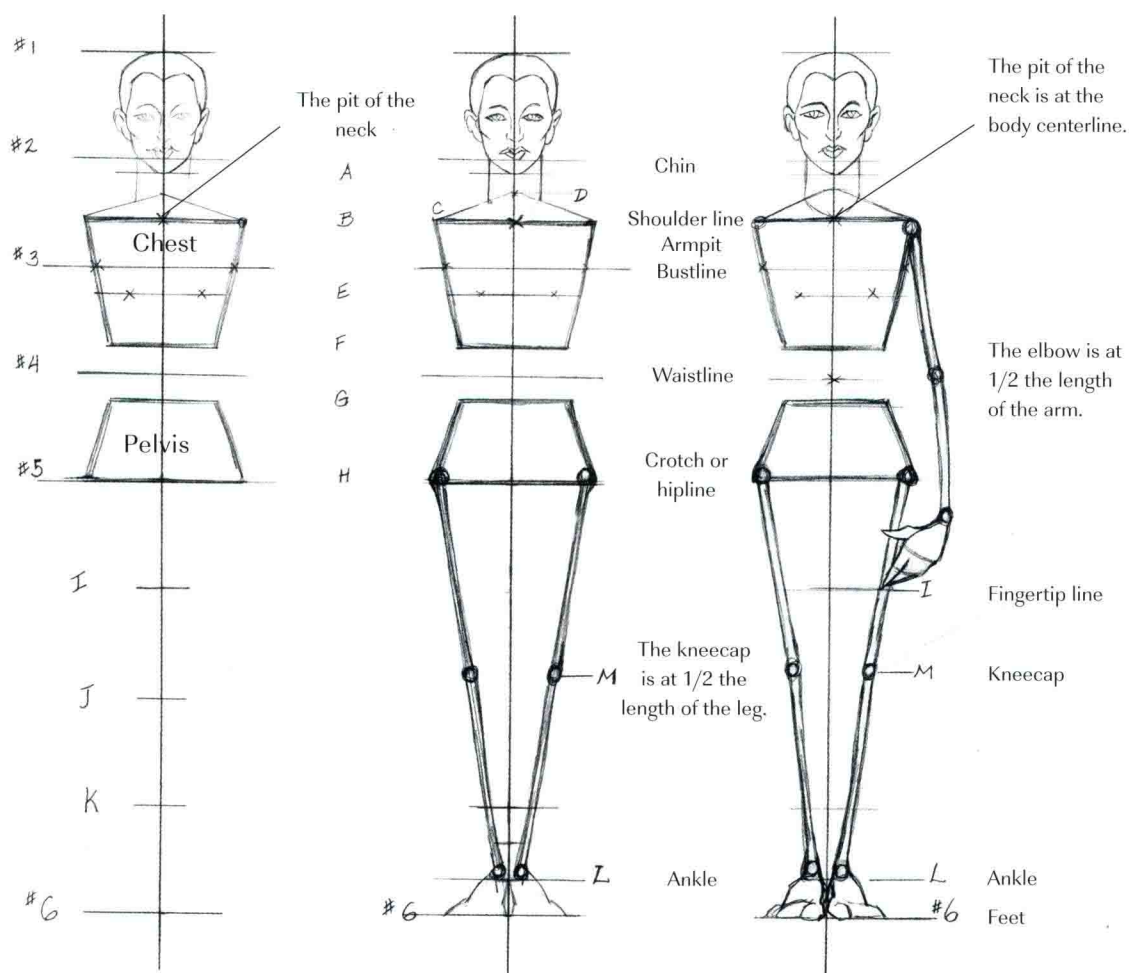


(see letter H in Figure 1-1). The hipline's width will depend on whether you are drawing a female or male. The other two marks are not used.

10. Treat the chest/rib cage as a tapered box (refer to Figure 1-2). Connect the shoulder line with

the bottom of the rib cage to make a tapered-down box. The shoulder should be wider than the bottom of the rib cage. Keep both sides of the body symmetrical with the body centerline. The pit of the neck is at the middle of the shoulder line—it is the body centerline.

## 1-2 Proportion of the Body, Marks I through M



11. Treat the pelvis as a tapered-up box. Connect the top of the pelvis line with the bottom of the pelvis line (mark #5, also the hipline/crotch line) to draw a tapered-up box. The female hipline is wider than the male hipline.
12. The area from the crotch down will be for the legs and feet. The legs join the pelvis at the hipline. Before starting to draw the legs, divide the distance between mark #5 (crotch line) and mark #6 (the bottom of the feet) into four equal parts. Then mark them from the top down (see letters I, J, and K in Figure 1-2).
13. Divide the distance between K and mark #6 into three equal parts. The feet are drawn in the bottom third (see letter L in Figure 1-2).
14. Draw two lines from both corners of mark #5 (hipline/crotch) down to letter L to indicate the legs. Keep them symmetrical. Then divide these two lines in half; the middle marks on these two lines are the knee positions (see letter M in Figure 1-2). This method of drawing leg length avoids the leggy look of fashion-illustration figures. Our objective is to create a realistic look corresponding to the actors, rather than a fashion ideal.
15. The arms join to the chest at the shoulder line. In human anatomy theory, the upper arm from the shoulder to the elbow is longer than the distance from the elbow to wrist. In my method, I treat them as two equal parts in length for an easy calculation ratio. When the arm is hanging down, the elbow usually lines up with the waistline. The measurement from the shoulder to the elbow should equal the measurement from the elbow to the wrist. From the elbow joint, measure down to indicate the placement of the wrist.

16. Add hands to the wrists. The fingertips usually stop at letter I (the fifth head in other books). Asian people often have shorter arms, African people usually have longer arms, and Caucasians often have arms that are longer than Asians' but shorter than Africans'. There are many variations and exceptions to any racial generality.

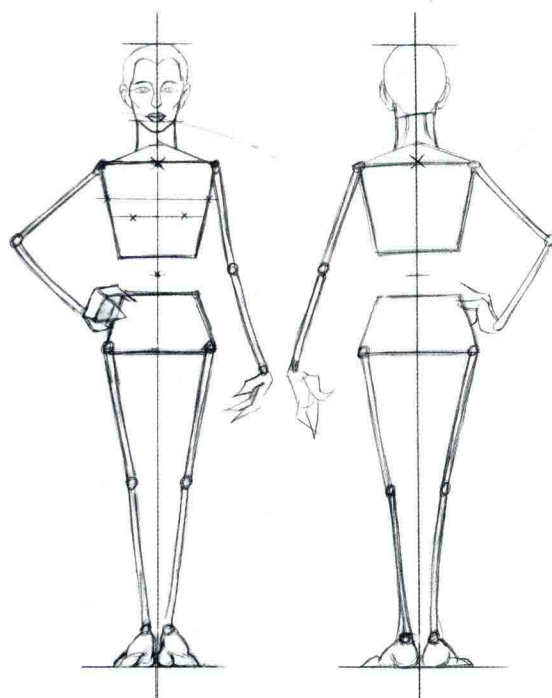
17. As shown in Figure 1-3, contour the body according to the basic bone/stick structure (see the section, "Contouring the Stick Figure"). Figures 1-4 and 1-5 show the contouring lines for the male and female body, respectively.

The proportions of the body, either seven or eight heads tall, work only for the body standing in

a straight position. When the body is bending or the head is facing up or down, you cannot apply the measurements to the body because of foreshortening.

The body measurement methods used in this book are not the only methods you should follow, but I recommend you use my system as a guide or reference for drawing stage costumes.

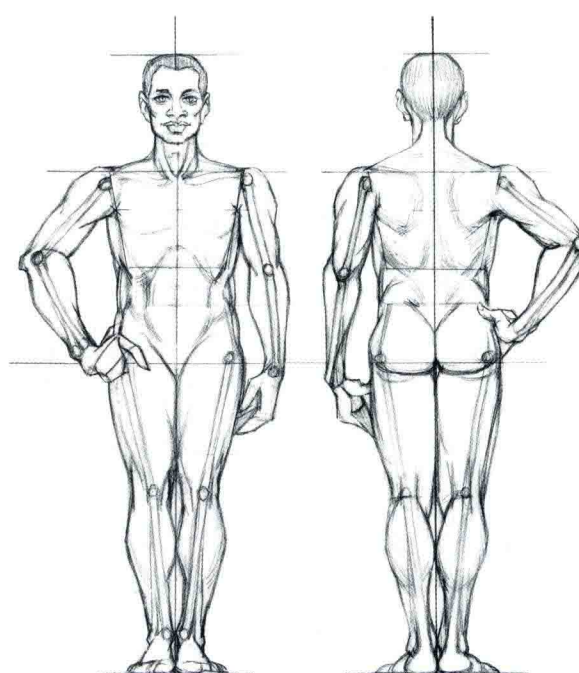
### 1-3 Proportions of the Body, Stick Structure, Front and Back Views



Front View

Back View

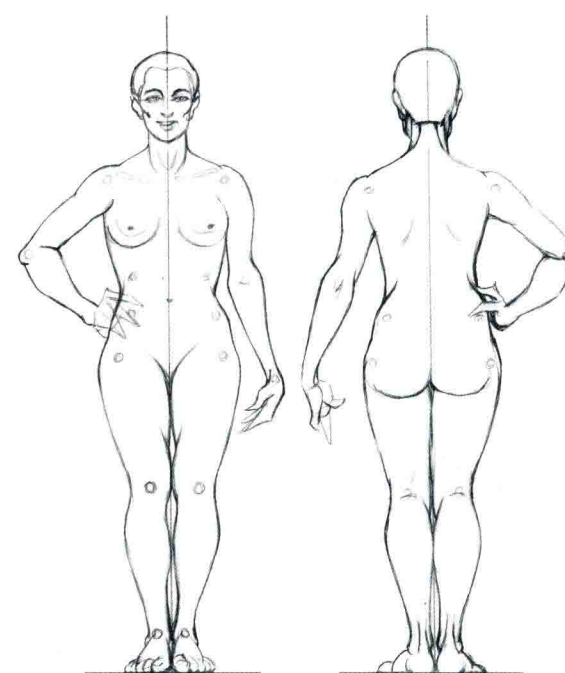
### 1-4 Contouring Lines for the Male Body, Front and Back Views



Front View

Back View

### 1-5 Contouring Lines for the Female Body, Front and Back Views



Front View

Back View