

TRACING & TRANSFERRING

Free Resources | Tips & Techniques



Start with trace and transfer to create a masterpiece!

Generally Speaking

Trace and transfer techniques help artists of all ages and levels — budding, aspiring, and yes, even masters. The size and proportion of the subject matter often form the foundation for works of art. Tracing and transferring lines and shapes allow the artist to build a masterpiece upon that foundation. But, you'll still need an artsy eye for fine details.

Just the Outline

A line drawing is probably the simplest way to practice tracing and transferring. Check out more Free Resources | Box Boosters for fun designs to practice the different techniques. Tracing from photographs is another option — perhaps a little trickier. If you'd like to try tracing from photographs, be sure to choose those that give you apparent and defined contours. As you're tracing — especially if using a photograph — you only need to concern yourself with the subject matter's outline. Pay no attention to anything other than line and shape. Once you set your foundation, you may add fine details. If you carefully trace the lines and shapes as they appear in the image, the size

and proportions will be perfect, fine details will fall into place flawlessly — and you will be a very happy artist.



Helpful Tools & Materials

- **Reference Image** — Either a drawing or a photograph to trace and transfer. The fewer the lines, the simpler the tracing.
- **Pencil** — The best medium for all the tracing and transfer methods is a graphite pencil. A No. 2 pencil works just fine.
- **Ruler** — A measuring device used for the grid drawing method.

- **Drafting, Blue, or Washi Tape** — Tape is used to keep the paper from shifting while tracing and transferring. All three types of tape remove easily without tearing and marring the paper or the substrate.

- **Paper** — Tracing paper is not necessary, but it sure does make things a little easier. 20# or lighter-weight white copy paper works too!

- **Substrate** — The surface on which an artist creates art including canvas, paper, canvas boards, wood, fabric, etc.

- **Light Table** — It is convenient if available; however, a picture window and a computer screen offer similar lighting.

- **Art Projector** — Handy when a trace and transfer is not possible or practical. For instance, when working on extra-large art.



Method#1: Table Top Tracing

The first method uses tracing paper and is probably the most common.

1. Securely tape your reference image to the work surface.
2. Lay a piece of tracing paper over the image, tape the tracing paper securely to the work surface.
3. Trace the lines and shapes onto the paper.
4. Carefully remove the tracing paper from your image and the image from your work surface. Leave the tape attached to the tracing paper.
5. Turn the tracing paper over onto a flat surface. Be aware that some graphite may rub off onto the surface during this step. Now, holding the pencil almost horizontally to the tracing paper, color back and forth, making a heavy coating of dark grey graphite by covering only the lines that you

traced on the front side.

6. Lay the tracing paper (heavily-coated side down) on the substrate so that the subject matter is in position to transfer.

7. Press the attached tape to the substrate firmly and secure the tracing in place.

8. Retrace the lines once more, and voilà the design magically transfers to the substrate.



Method#2: Light Tracing

Tracing with light requires a source of illumination from beneath the reference image — such as a non-touch computer screen, a picture window, or a light table. Windows are readily available; however, a computer screen has its advantages too. Because you can use an online image, you don't have to tape an image to the screen. Remember, don't press down too hard, though! No matter which you choose, the nice thing about light tracing is that the light source makes many papers translucent, eliminating the need for tracing paper.

1. When using an image from a computer screen, skip to No. 2, below. When using a window or light table, securely tape the reference image to the window or light table.

2. Lay a piece of paper over the image, tape the paper securely to the window, light table or computer screen.

3. Trace the lines and shapes onto the paper.

4. Carefully remove the paper from the image. If applicable, remove the image from the light source as well. Leave the tape attached to the paper onto which the image was traced.

5. Turn the paper over onto a flat surface. Be aware that some graphite may rub off onto the surface during this step. Now, holding

the pencil almost horizontally to the paper, color back and forth, making a heavy coating of dark grey graphite by covering only the lines that you traced on the front side.

6. Lay the tracing paper (heavily-coated side down) on the substrate so that the subject matter is in position to transfer.

7. Press the attached tape to the substrate firmly and secure the tracing in place.

8. Retrace the lines once more, and voilà the design magically transfers to the substrate.

• PLEASE NOTE • When tracing a disposable image using a light source, eliminate steps 1-4. Simply start with turning the image over onto your light source. Holding the pencil almost horizontally to the paper, color back and forth, making a heavy coating of dark grey graphite by covering only the needed lines from the front side. Attach the reference image (graphite side down) to the substrate using tape and trace the lines to transfer. Easy peasy lemon squeezy!

Method#3: From the Mind's Eye

The third method for transferring an image to your substrate is called grid drawing. Dating back to ancient Egypt, artists have used the grid method for centuries as a tool for creating correct proportions. Even the great Leonardo da Vinci drew grids when creating his works of art! Here's how it works!



1. Assuming you are using a disposable reference image — either a line drawing or a photo — begin by making a one-inch square grid directly onto the image. To create a one-inch grid, start with the ruler at the top of the image, and draw a visible dot at every inch mark. Place the ruler at the bottom of the paper and repeat. Using the pencil with the ruler as a guide, connect the

dots from top to bottom. Now, place the ruler on the left side of the image and draw a visible dot at every inch mark. Place the ruler at the bottom of the image and repeat. Using the pencil with the ruler as a guide, connect the dots from left to right.

2. Next, determine the size ratio between the image size and the substrate size. It is imperative to get the ratio right. Otherwise, the subject matter will look distorted. If the reference image is the same size as the substrate, meaning it's a 1:1 ratio, draw a one-inch square grid onto the substrate using the same method as you did in the first step. Take care in making the lines on your substrate light so that they are entirely erasable.

3. What's nice about this method is that the final artwork does not have to be the same size as the original reference image. With a few slight adjustments to the grid, it's possible to enlarge or reduce the original image's transfer size. If the substrate is twice as big as the image; in other words, it's a 2:1 ratio, draw a two-inch square grid on the substrate as in the first step, except draw a visible dot at every two-inch mark. Likewise, if the substrate is half as big as the image, making it a 1:2 ratio, draw a half-inch square grid onto the substrate by drawing a visible dot at every half-inch mark.

4. Two quick questions will reveal any problems with ratios. Are there an equal number of rows and columns on the substrate as are on the reference image? And second, are all the squares perfect squares?

5. If everything checked out, it's time for you to start transferring the image by onto the substrate using your mind's eye to draw what you see square by square.

6. Start at the top left-most square on the reference image and the substrate. Pay attention to one square at a time. Don't worry about the other squares - focus on only that one square.

7. Now, copy what's in that first square from the image to the corresponding square on the substrate. Focus on getting the placement of each line just right! By focusing on the elements that make up the image one square at a time, you can better transfer the image from your mind's eye to the substrate. Continue from square to square until the entire image has been transferred to your substrate.

8. Gently erase the grid lines from the substrate and finish your artwork!