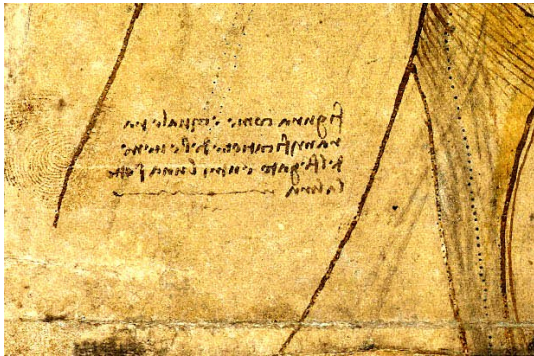


## Studio Craft: Keeping Drawings Clean



Anatomical drawing by Leonardo Da Vinci with thumbprint (contrast boosted)

**Ask the Experts:** “I work long hours on my drawings, and they look kind of dirty after all that work. What can I do to keep my drawings looking clean?”

**A:** Keeping drawings clean and smudge-free is a skill every artist needs to acquire. One of the first rules of the craft of drawing is put marks where you want them, not where you don't. This is easier said than done, but there are tools and techniques that can make the job simpler.

**Paper mask:** A piece of paper placed under the hand can serve as a shield to prevent transferring skin oils to the drawing, and can protect against smudges. Any piece of paper will do in a pinch, but thin, smooth stock is best. Carefully place the mask over the drawing, under your hand, and move it gradually as needed.

**Bridge:** A drafting bridge is a slim rail spanning a drawing board, against which the artist's hand rests. A bridge steadies the artist's hand while preventing it from touching the paper.

**Mahlstick:** In painting, a mahlstick is a rod with padded ends which rests against the edge of a canvas. This tool can also be used with a drawing board, to steady the hand and prevent unwanted contact across the surface. Rest one end against the edge of the board, place the working hand on the rod and move hand and mahlstick together.

**Be careful with tape:** Not just any kind of adhesive tape is suitable for contact with paper. Using the wrong kind, or leaving any kind of tape on for too long can cause permanent staining and damage. Avoid using any type that is irreversible, and no matter what kind of tape you use, remove it as soon as it's no longer needed. Common clear and “invisible” tape are totally unsuitable for artistic drawing. Specialty tapes for artists include instructions for how long it is safe to leave the product in contact with artwork. Consider using drafting or binder clips for long-term contact with art.

**Wash your hands, and your drawing instruments:** The first part is pretty obvious- clean hands are less likely to stain paper- but it's surprising how often artists forget to clean the other objects that touch a drawing. Rulers, triangles, eraser shields, french curves, and stencils can carry residue from drawing materials and transfer them to clean paper. Drafting instruments are generally made of waterproof materials, so they can be cleaned with soapy water as needed.

**Erasers:** When prevention has failed and it's time to clean up a drawing, most artists reach for an eraser, but it's important to select the appropriate tool for the medium and surface.

**Kneaded Rubber:** As much a drawing instrument as a correction tool, the Kneaded Rubber Eraser is an elastic putty which can be molded to any shape for fine adjustments and crisp details. A kneaded eraser is “cleaned” by working it like dough until pigment on the outside is absorbed into the mass. Can be rubbed across the paper surface like a writing eraser, but works best by pressing and lifting. Can lighten passages of graphite or charcoal without smudging, or remove marks completely with repeated dabbing. May cause minimal change in paper texture when rubbed. Produces no dust or crumbs.

**Gum:** Crumbly block that is sometimes called a “bread eraser”. The gum eraser is gentle, and causes very little alteration of paper surface, but produces large amounts of crumbs and dust.

**Pink Rubber:** Classroom staple eraser with the same composition as the tip of a standard writing pencil. This type is abrasive and will alter the paper surface, so use conservatively. Produces a lot of dust.

**White Vinyl:** Smooth eraser, gentle on paper surface. Best for hard graphite, smooth paper and film. Tends to smear soft lead. Produces a moderate amount of dust.

**Solvent impregnated:** Synthetic eraser intended mainly for plastic film, with a solvent component that loosens ink lines.

**Typewriter:** Eraser material encased in a wooden pencil barrel, which can be sharpened like a pencil. Highly abrasive with rough, sand-like inclusions, occasionally used for removing marks that would not yield to any other material. Causes significant abrasion of paper surface.

**Drafting Mouse:** Mostly used in architectural and engineering applications, a drafting mouse is also a great tool for artistic drawing. The classic mouse is a mesh bag filled with a rubbery dust, like eraser crumbs. The mouse is extremely gentle on paper surfaces, and is best used for removing light, superficial marks from areas that have not received any drawing marks.

**Drafting Brush:** After erasing, don't just sweep the dust with the edge of your hand, or take a big breath and blow the crumbs away. Instead of risking a smudge or accidental droplets of moisture landing on the paper, use

a gentle brush intended for cleaning drawings. A drafting brush has moderately stiff bristles set in a narrow wooden handle for controlled application of pressure.

### **Portfolio**

Most artists don't have flat files in the studio, but storing loose drawings safely is still possible on a budget with a traditional string-tied portfolio. The type used for storing drawings should allow each piece of artwork to be lifted off the stack without sliding or dragging it across other objects. A hinged folio with string ties and side flaps is an affordable, professional-looking option. For larger drawings, make folders out of museum board or 100% rag foam core.

### **Glassine Paper**

If it's necessary to stack drawings for storage, interleave glassine paper between sheets. Glassine is a translucent, crisp tissue safe for long-term contact with artwork which can protect against accidental smudges. Glassine also prevents stains from transferring between objects.

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