

Creative Field Sketching Prompts by Christine Elder

Keep this list handy in your field journal so you'll never run out of ideas or inspiration!

Recommended supplies: art kit, journal, binoculars, camera/cell phone, magnifying lens.

1. Use your camera/phone to take photos, videos, sound recordings and voice notes for later reference.
2. Find some interesting quotes from authors and naturalists to use in your journal. See www.brainyquotes.com
3. Depict a plant or animal reacting to the weather or season, like a fluffed-up robin in the snow, a basking lizard.
4. Include all your senses in the sketching and description of a subject; sight, sound, scent, texture.
5. Find something 'ugly' that you wouldn't normally consider drawing; a rock, a bone, a dead leaf.
6. Draw a subject from 3 or more angles to really get a feel for its 3-dimensional form.
7. Compare/contrast 2 or more individuals of the same species: courting, feeding young, competing.
8. Compare/contrast 2 or more individuals of different species: symbiosis, mutualism, parasitism, competition.
9. Find a small subject and observe it using a magnifying lens or take a photo and enlarge it once you return home.
10. Use mixed media on a subject: pencil + water-soluble pen, ink + watercolor, watercolor + gouache, etc.
11. Use found objects as alternative drawing and painting media or tools: sticks, sedimentary rocks, charcoal.
12. Draw the stages of a life cycle, such as flowers opening, fruits maturing, or the metamorphosis of a butterfly.
13. Draw a subject at different levels of either detail, size, or distance like a bird at your feeder and one in a treetop.
14. Find interesting textures or color patterns and use a viewfinder to isolate a section to focus on and sketch.
15. Experiment with various ways to show values and shadows; shaded pencil, or cross-hatched, stippled pen.
16. Choose a moving subject like a bird and do quick thumbnail sketches of it without looking at your paper.
17. Observe a subject intently until you feel you've memorized it, then try to sketch it without looking again.
18. Draw a subject at various sizes; life-sized, twice as big, half-sized.
19. Find something seasonal or migratory that might not be around next time you visit a habitat or location.
20. Observe and sketch a subject at dawn, noon, and dusk focusing on how shadows change throughout a day.

21. Find animal sign to study and sketch; wildlife tracks and scat, a nibbled leaf, owl pellets, shed snake skins, spider's webs, nests and middens, slime tracks of slugs, insect exoskeletons, plant galls, beaver dam.
22. Draw a subject from a unique viewpoint; like a tree's canopy when you're lying on the ground looking skyward.
23. Depict the weather or a weather phenomenon: a cloudy sky, mist over a valley, raindrops on a leaf, icicles.
24. Draw on a mid-toned paper (sandy, brown or grey). Let its color be your middle value and use white and black media to flesh out the 3-d form of your subject.
25. Find as many shades of a color in nature as you can. Challenge yourself to match each exactly with a chosen media; like the lime green of young grass vs the camouflage green of aquatic rushes.
26. Study and sketch a subject with an interesting growth pattern, such as the Fibonacci sequence shown in pinecones, sunflowers and seashells.
27. Choose a subject or species you find especially challenging and sketch it multiple times.
28. Choose a subject that has a wide value range and depict it solely in 3-5 values of a chosen media.
29. Ask questions about your subject as a news journalist would: who, what, where, when, how and why.
30. Draw a map, diagram, cross section and/or block landscape of a habitat or location you visit.
31. Consider adding some of the following elements to your journal in addition to sketches: date, location, weather, time, habitat descriptions, labeling of anatomical parts, words describing your subject that you might want to include in your sketch later; like behavior, color, size, patterns, textures, etc.
32. Do a rubbing of a 3-dimensional object, like a leaf, to depict its patterns and textures.

Christine's General Field Sketching Hints

Draw light and loose, keep your pencil moving, avoid too much erasing, glance back and forth at your subject frequently to ensure accuracy, squinting one eye helps to visually 'flatten' a 3-d object. When drawing think of six concepts: blocking in, negative shapes, angles, alignment, relative proportions and flow lines. My mottos: 'value the process over the product' and 'sketch to learn while learning to sketch'.

Find this handout and more resources on my [website](#).