"Jump Start" Tutorial

Transferring an Image to a Painting Surface
(1:1 Same Size Reference and Artwork)

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Introduction:

There are several ways you can transfer an image from a reference to your painting (or drawing) surface, here are some examples:

- You can simply eyeball it and draw it freehand… this is the classic way employing measuring techniques but that requires skill and patience! A foundational skill worth pursuing if you choose to get serious with your art.

- You can trace the reference image:

    - Using transfer paper (thin paper coated on one side with graphite or colored dry pigment) between the reference image and your painting surface.

    - Projecting the image onto your substrate and trace the image if you own a projector.

- You can use a grid on both the reference and painting surface as a guide to simplify the "free hand" drawing process as you transfer the lines and shapes from each grid block on the reference to the corresponding grid block on your painting surface. This is what I do most of the time and would like to share with you in this "Jump Start" Tutorial!

Objective:

To give you step by step instructions for using the grid technique to transfer the **same size** reference image from a reference photo or sketch to your painting surface. I refer to it as the 1:1 Transfer Grid Technique. I will be demonstrating with a 7" x 10" reference photo (My own photograph of an ambassador red-tailed hawk at a wildlife center.) and watercolor paper.

NOTES:

- This technique works for transferring reference images to any artwork substrate surface (paper, board, or canvas.)
- The basic grid technique can also be used to transfer reference images that are a different scale (larger or smaller) than the intended artwork size but that will not be covered here.
- You also do not have to use even sized squares for your grid. The key is having the identical grid on your reference image and your paper for 1:1 transfers or same ratio for scaled transfers.

"If you have the courage to begin, you have the courage to succeed." -- David Viscott

"The question isn't who is going to let me; it's who is going to stop me." -- Ayn Rand

Supplies Needed:

- Reference Photo (8.5" x 11" or smaller)
- Plastic sheet protector for 8.5" x 11" paper
- Thin Sharpie Markers (black is fine but colors can be easier to see)
- Ruler
- Watercolor paper sheet or Pad big enough for up to 8.5" x 11" image
    - Use larger size pad or paper than the reference since will want a border to apply tape to.
    - 140lb typical weight (lighter weight warps more when wet, heavier warps less.)
- Backing board if using single sheet of watercolor paper (tape watercolor paper to the backing board around all edges to hold firmly.)
- HB or #2 pencil
- Kneaded Eraser (any eraser can work but kneaded erasers do not leave crumbs and are gentle on the paper!)
- Tape - White artist tape or masking tape (lower tack is less likely to rip paper when pull off.)

1:1 Transfer Drawing Process:

- In this example my reference image is in "portrait" orientation (longer top to bottom than left to right.)

- We will be creating a 2" grid for this example.

NOTE: You can make your grid blocks whatever size you like but you want to use as few as possible to avoid a ton of lines to erase before you start to paint!
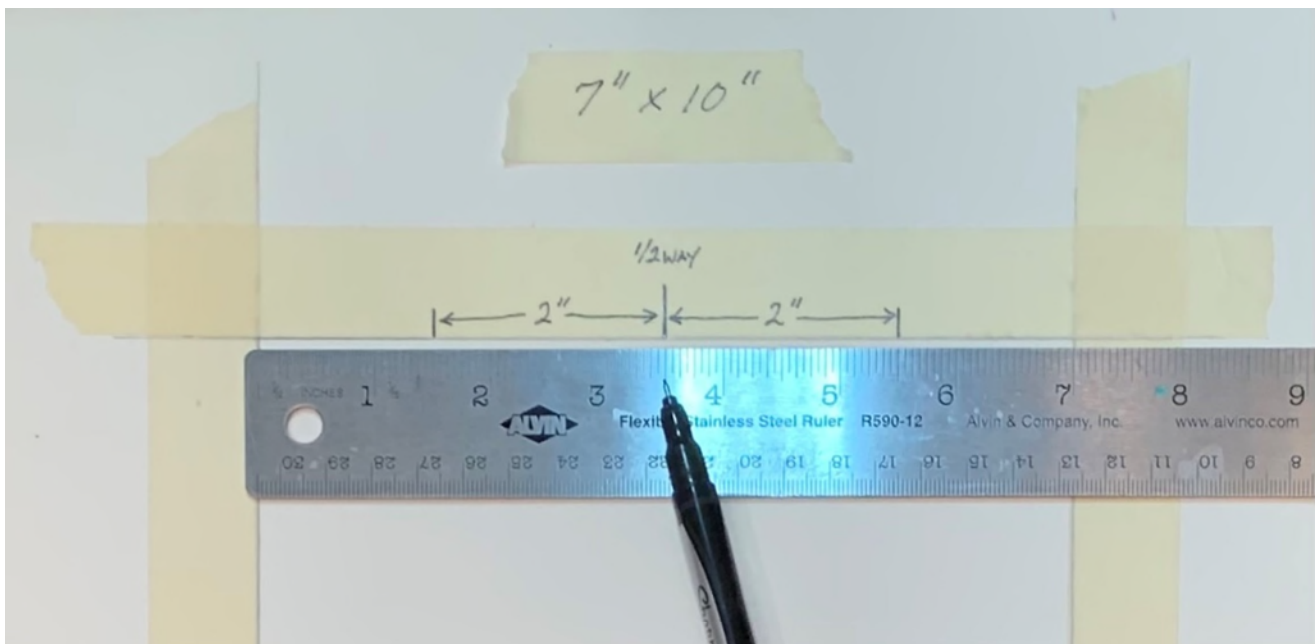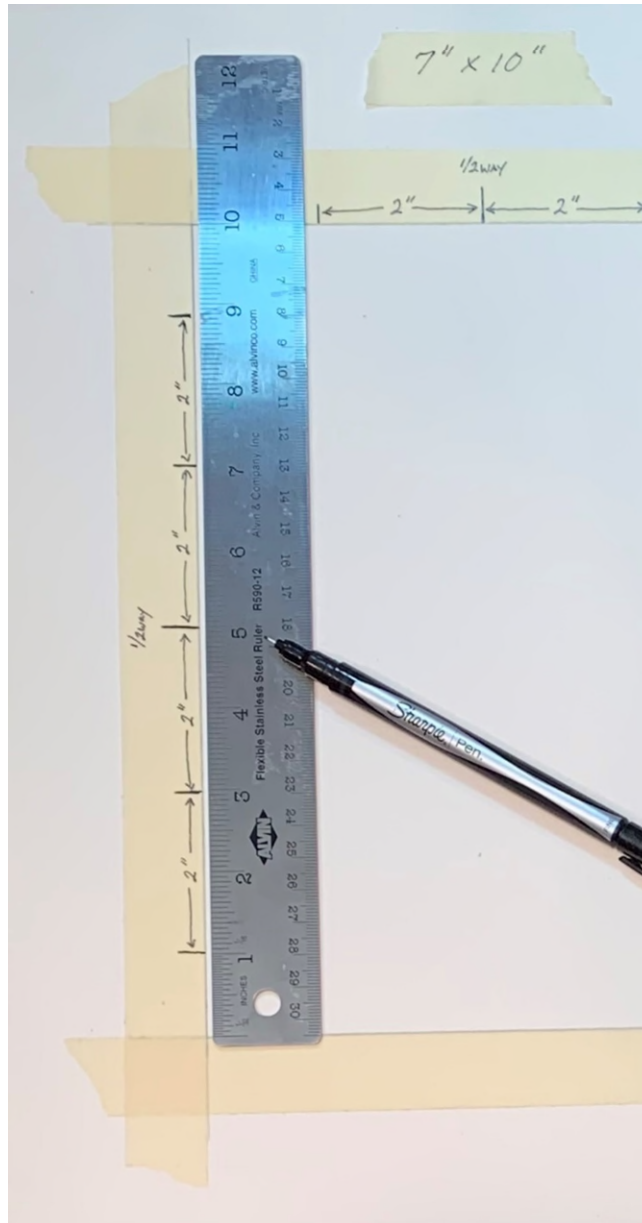
Step 1 - Prepare Watercolor Paper -

1. Measure out your image area using the ruler and HB/#2 Pencil. In this example my reference image is 7" x 10".

2. Tape off your image area on the watercolor paper lining the inside edge of the tape along the outside of your image area space.
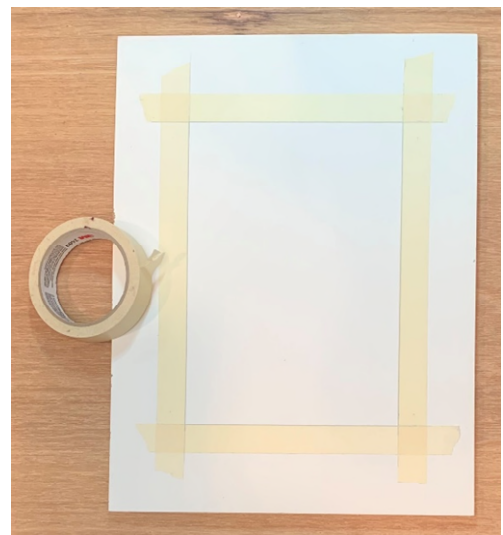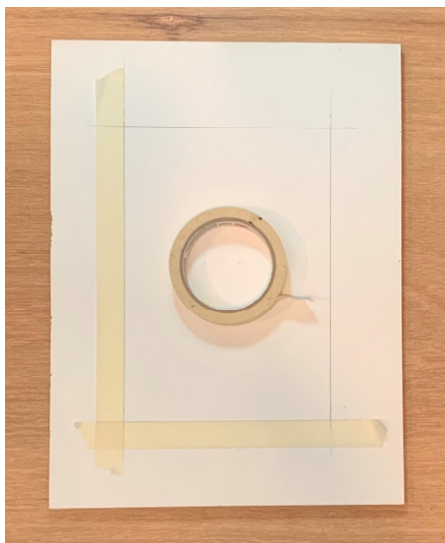
3. Measure and mark where the 2" gridlines will go on the tape. You can use pencil or a sharpie pen since you are marking the tape and not the painting surface.

    a. Top:

        i. Start on the **top** piece of tape and find the halfway point where the vertical centerline will go. Make a **small** mark.

        ii. Now make a small mark 2" to the right of the centerline mark and 2" to the left of the centerline mark.

        iii. If there is room, Repeat, making a small mark 2" to the right of the right-hand mark and 2" to the left of the left-hand mark.

    b. Bottom:

        i. Repeat the measurements along the bottom piece of tape just as you did the top.

    c. Left:

        i. Find the halfway point where the horizontal centerline will go. Make a small mark.

        ii. Now make a small mark 2" above the centerline mark and 2" below the centerline mark.

        iii. If there is room, Repeat, making a small mark 2" above and below the outer marks.

    d. Right:

        iv. Repeat the measurements along the right-hand piece of tape just as you did the left-hand piece.

4. VERY LIGHTLY draw out your 2" grid with your HB/#2 pencil using the marks on the tape to place your ruler.

HINT: USE A LIGHT HAND! If you use too much pressure on the watercolor paper, you will "score" it with the pencil point leaving a groove.
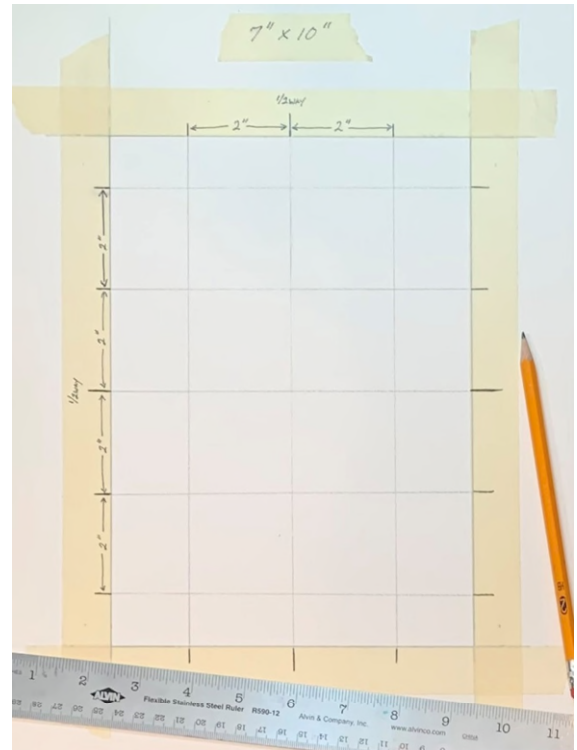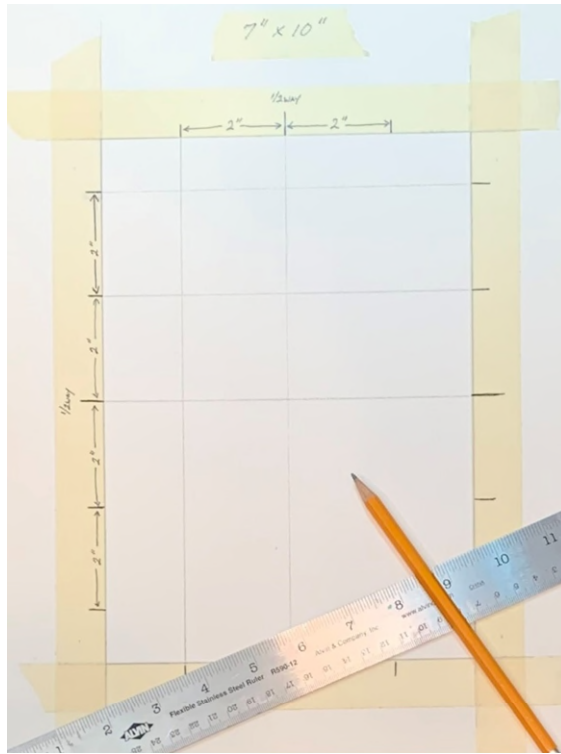
Step 2 - Prepare Reference Image -

1. Place your 8.5" x 11" or smaller reference image into the plastic sleeve.

NOTE: If you do not have the plastic sleeve you can mark directly on your reference image by following the instructions above.

2. Measure and mark directly onto the plastic sleeve where the 2" gridlines will go using a colored sharpie marker that shows up well (black is fine but depending on the reference image it can be hard to see.) You are repeating the same grid markings you just completed on your painting surface this time on your protected reference image.

    a. Top:

        i. Start on the **top** of the image and find the halfway point where the vertical centerline will go. Make a **small** mark.

        ii. Now make a small mark 2" to the right of the centerline mark and 2" to the left of the centerline mark.

        iii. Repeat the measurements along the bottom just as you did the top.

        iv. If there is room, repeat, making a small mark 2" to the right of the righthand mark and 2" left of the left-hand mark.

    b. Bottom:

        i. Repeat the measurements along the bottom just as you did the top.

    c. Left:

        i. Find the halfway point where the horizontal centerline will go. Make a small mark.

        ii. Now make a small mark 2" above the centerline mark and 2" below the centerline mark.

        iii. Repeat, making a small mark 2" above and below the outer marks.

    d. Right:

        i. Repeat the measurements along the right-hand side just as you did the on the left-hand side.

3. Draw out your 2" grid directly on the plastic sleeve with your colored sharpie marker using the marks you made to place your ruler.
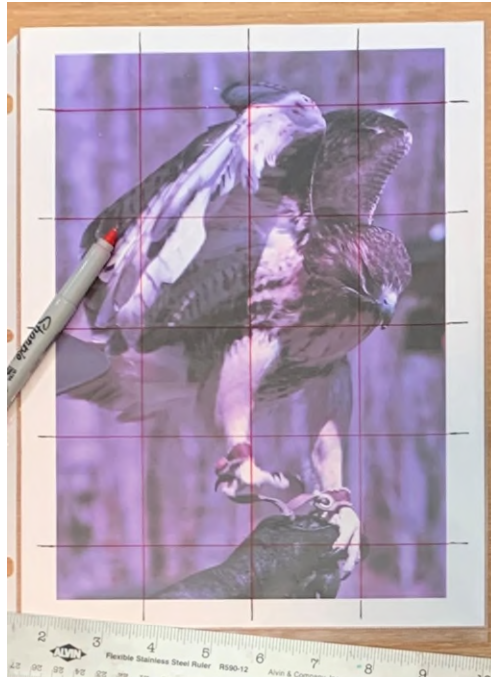

4. OPTIONAL - Trace the OUTLINE of the major elements in your reference image with a different colored sharpie. This can help you focus on the outline you are transferring instead of all the other visual information in your reference image.

Step 3 – Transfer the Drawing -

1. Choose a grid block to begin with. You can start anywhere but I like to start at the top left grid block and go from there.

2. Find the edges or outlines of the subject or elements you are transferring within the block, if any. If there are none, simply move to the next grid block.
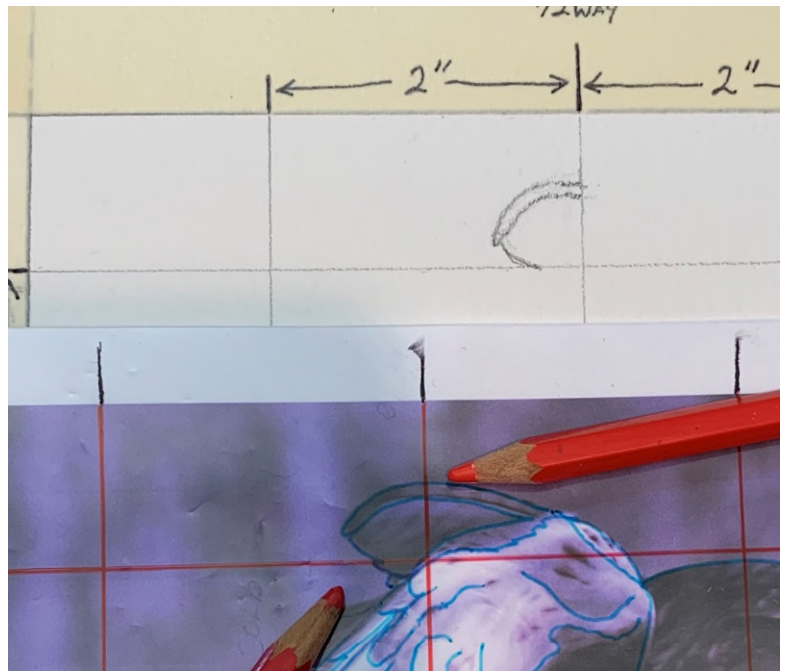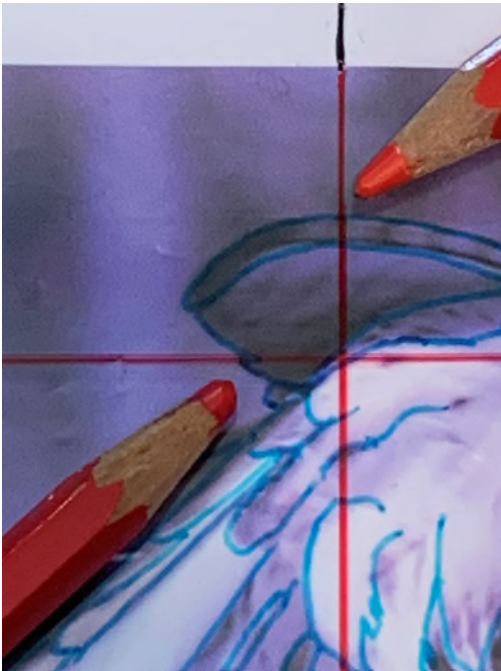

3. Transfer the outline you see within the grid block of your reference image to the corresponding grid block on your painting surface.

    a. Look for where the outline or edge of your subject crosses a side of your grid block and make a light mark.

    b. Now look for where that same edge of your subject crosses a different side of your grid block and make a light mark.

    c. Now look at the shape and curve(s) of the edge between those two points on your reference and draw that same shape and curve(s) in lightly within the corresponding grid block on your painting surface.

    d. When drawing remember to:

        i. Use a LIGHT HAND in case you need to adjust your line placement!

        ii. Keep your pencil sharp so your lines stay clean.

        iii. Keep a sheet of paper or paper towel under your hand if you rest it on your paper since the graphite will smudge and get on the side of your hand and spread all over the paper.

e. HINT: For a complicated area of your reference image you can create a smaller grid within a grid block to give yourself additional reference points. Simply create the same grid within a single grid block on both your reference and on your painting surface…

f. NOTE: When I create a "mini-grid" within a grid block on my reference image, to avoid having MORE lines to erase on the painting surface, I often simply make small light "tic" marks along the grid block line marking halfway, 1/4 way, and 3/4 way for reference.
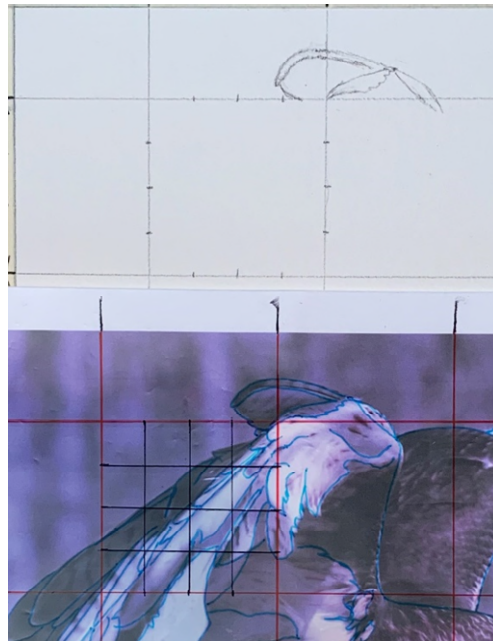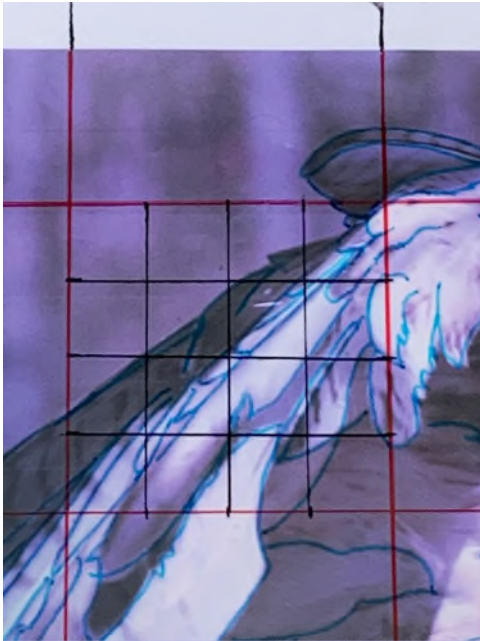

4. Repeat transferring the edges of your subject for each grid block!
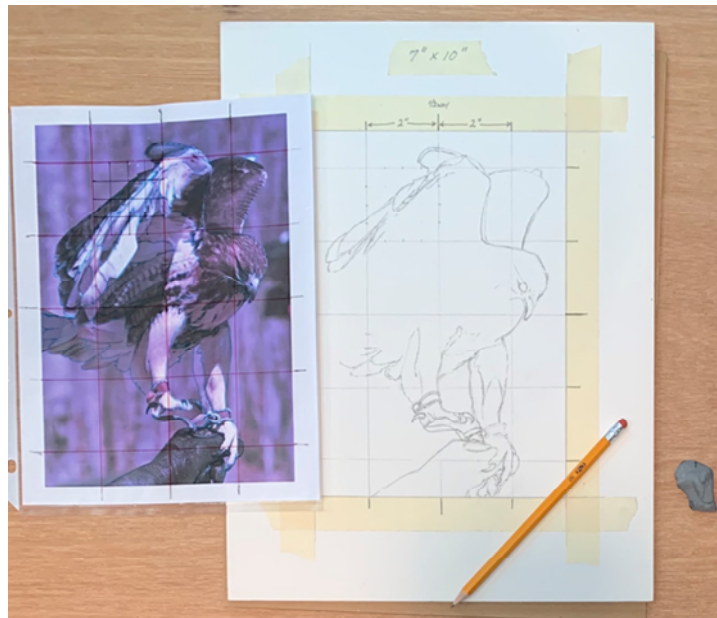
5. When you have completed transferring the entire image to your painting surface via the grid blocks, take a moment and look at the overall subject and elements in your reference image that you transferred.

    a. Compare it to the overall outline now visible on your painting surface.

    b. Check for any distortions.

    c. Adjust drawing as necessary to match your reference image.

    d. Gently erase the erroneous marks or lines.

NOTE: You can "refresh" your kneaded eraser by pulling it apart and kneading back together a few times. This absorbs the graphite and gives you "fresh" eraser to work with.
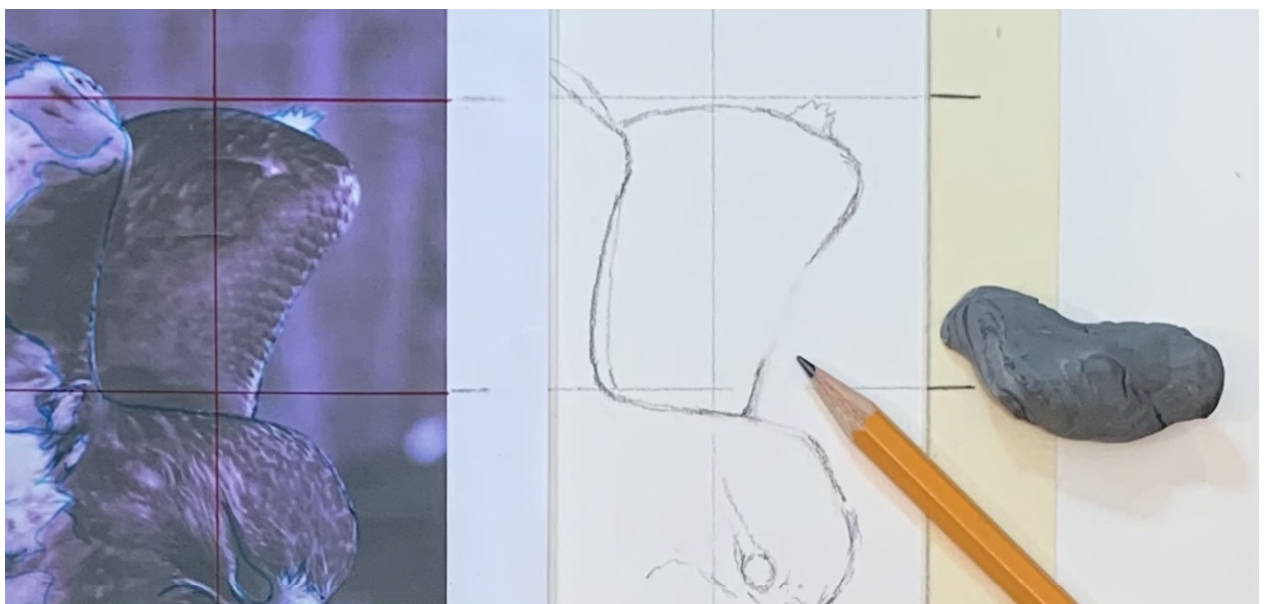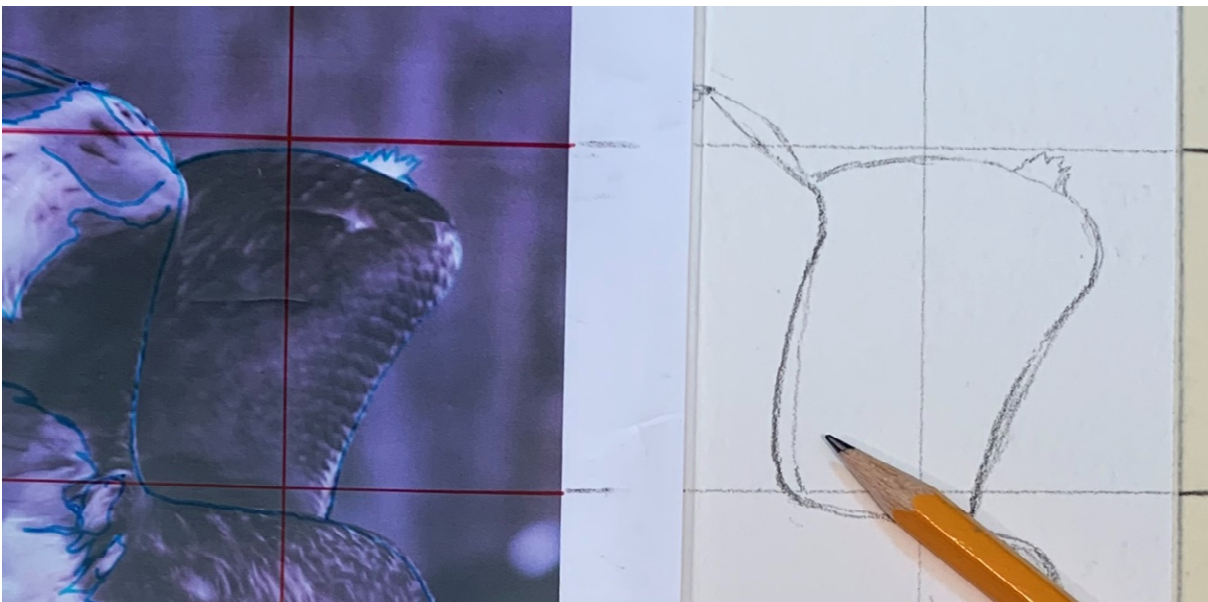
Step 4 - Erase Grid Lines -

1. Now you are ready to remove the grid lines from your painting surface.

2. Using the kneaded eraser, mold the eraser into a shape that will fit each area you are erasing to minimize erasing your transferred drawing.

3. Carefully erase all the grid lines.

4. Gently redraw any subject lines that were partially erased; it is inevitable you will erase some while erasing the grid lines!
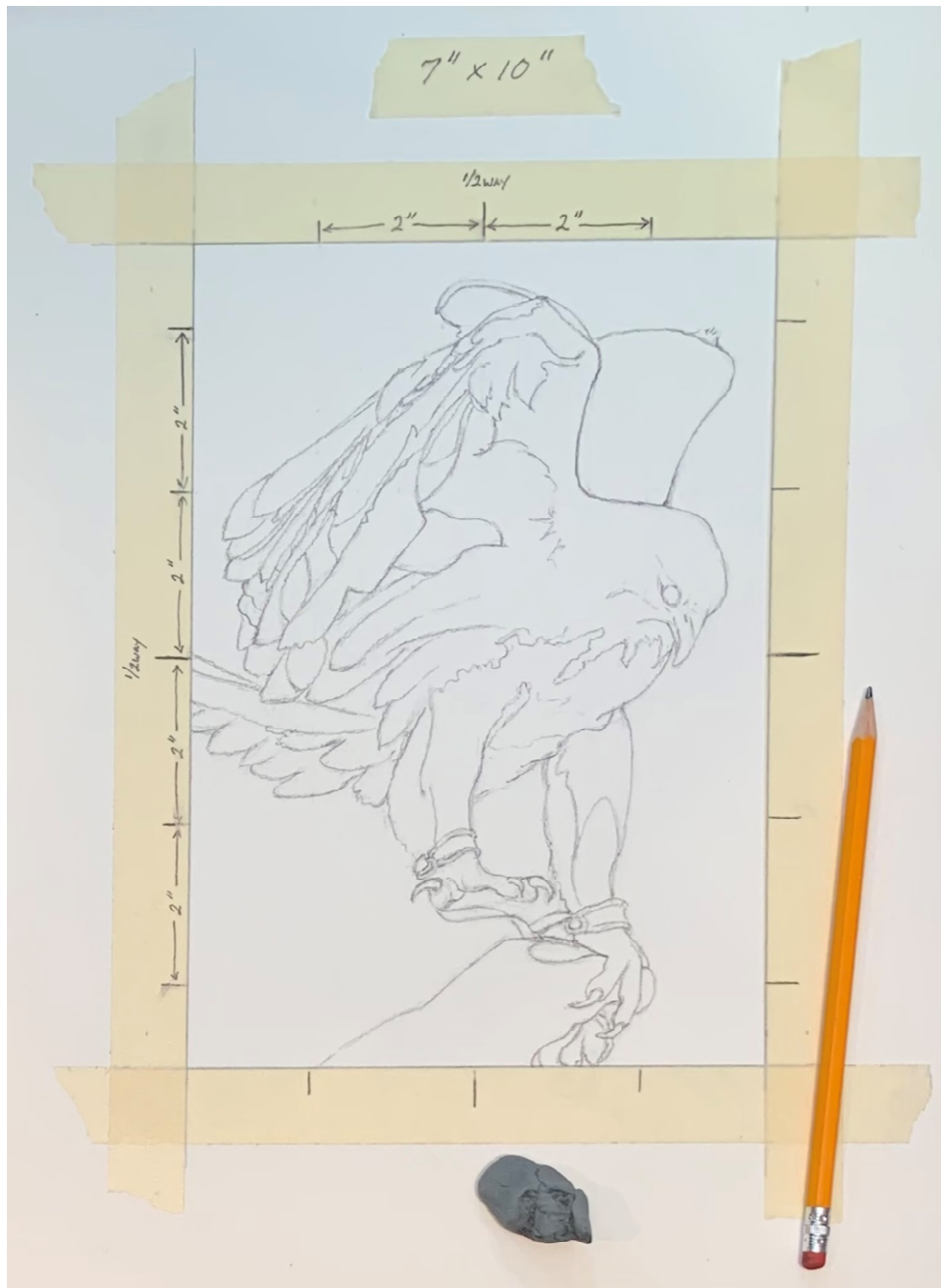
Step 5 – Success! You Can Now Begin Painting!

Summary:

I hope you enjoyed this "Jump Start" Tutorial and that I was able to effectively demystify the process for transferring a reference image to a drawing on your painting surface. Happy drawing and painting!

Stay tuned for additional tutorials and learning opportunities as we celebrate the joy of creating together!

"If we use our imaginations, our possibilities become limitless." -- Jamie Paolinetti

"Never be limited by other peoples limited imaginations" -- Mae Jemison

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