

## A summary of perspective techniques

Perspective is synonymous with depicting depth. Paintings, sketches, printed illustrations and photographs are all two-dimensional objects. They have width and height but are essentially flat surfaces with no appreciable third “receding” dimension. Yet many artists want to depict things in such a way as to have our eyes “see” the third dimension. To accomplish this, artists of the period immediately preceding the Renaissance, and during the Renaissance itself, began to experiment with techniques that would make it appear to the eye as if a two-dimensional depiction really did have the third dimension of depth.

The technique most commonly associated with producing the illusion of depth is **linear perspective**. An understanding of this was pioneered by Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) in the fifteenth century. Brunelleschi evolved his understanding of linear perspective by creating a realistic painting of a building and then drawing lines on it to follow the way the building sides and the streets receded into the distance. The illustration of page 46 shows a similar sketch. You can do this now very readily by taking a photograph of a street scene and analyzing it this way. Once you understand how linear perspective works, to prepare a drawing you draw lines receding to a point first, and then use them to map out the way that objects diminish in size in an orderly way as they become more distant. The homework in this chapter deals with linear perspective.

Yet four other perspective techniques also exist! It’s also important to know about them! Let’s briefly summarize these additional techniques of achieving perspective:

### **Atmospheric perspective**

In outdoor scenes things in the distance appear to take on a bluish cast. The farther away they are from the sun the bluer they appear. This is due to the way the molecules in the earth’s atmosphere scatter the shorter (blue) wavelengths of light. This is also why the sky is blue. Technically this is known as Rayleigh scattering. An outdoor scene seems to have depth if the distant parts of the scene are pictured with a bluish cast since our eyes and minds are conditioned to this scattering effect.

### **Light perspective**

The technique of light perspective is known as *chiaroscuro*, the gradual shading of a circular or spherical surface when it is illuminated on one side by an intense light source. For example, the shading on a tennis ball in bright sunlight reveals its three dimensional shape to the eye. The sunlit side is brilliant and the ball shades gradually to the dark side.

### **Focus perspective**

Objects closer to us appear with more detail than objects that are far away. If all parts of a scene are painted with a high degree of detail the painting looks “phony.” To give a scene the illusion of depth a skillful artist will make objects in the distance a bit fuzzier.

### **Positional perspective**

Positional perspective is the simplest but it’s easy to overlook. It was the first technique of perspective that artists such as Giotto di Bondone (1267-1337) pioneered. This consists simply of conveying a sense of depth by placing some objects in front of others, allowing some parts of the object behind to be obscured by the object in front.