

Planning Lost and Found Edges

To avoid a rigid painting, you must lose some edges. There's so much to think about when painting—everything from color and paint consistency to value and proportion—that your natural desire will be to define every boundary. To prevent that, plan where you'll need to lose edges before you begin painting. If it helps, you can make a contour drawing, using the lines to identify these edges. You can pencil an X over a line, erase the line or leave the line off entirely wherever you have a lost edge.

I've come back to the black-and-white photograph of John Singer Sargent to illustrate how to plan the placement of lost and found edges.

Squint at the photo for about five seconds and then look away. Where are the three most obvious contrasts you remember? I'm limiting you to three; there are many contrasting forms in the picture, but I'd like you to find the three most essential ones.



Hopefully you'll have chosen:

1. The light side of the hat next to darker umbrella.
2. The right hand and light coat and vest next to the darker umbrella, scarf, and shadows in his left arm and clothing.
3. The left side of the umbrella where the light meets the cast shadow.

Squint again for five seconds, then look away. What areas seem to merge together? Remember them, and leave those lines off of your edge placement drawing.

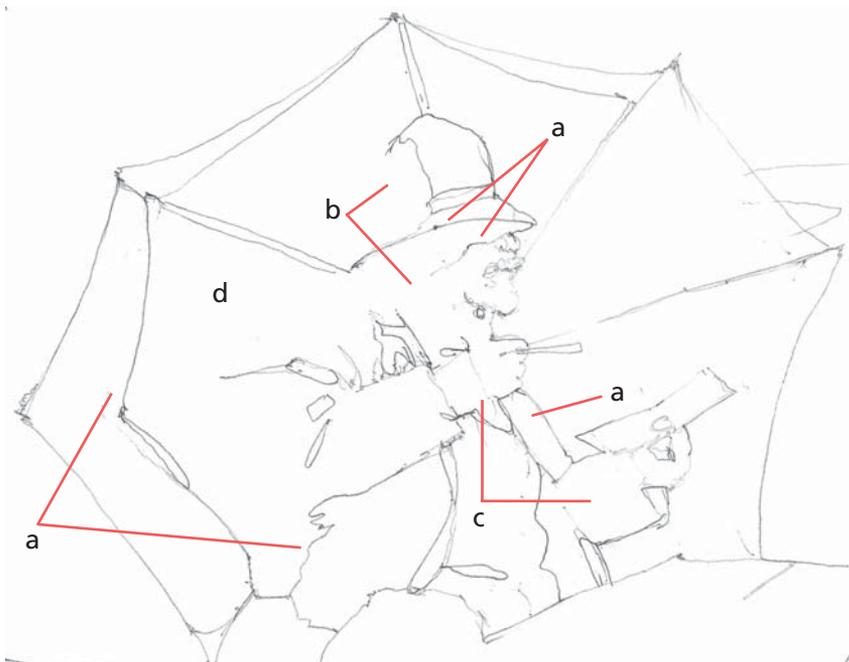
I've left out "in between" boundaries such as the one where Sargent's back meets the umbrella's cast shadow. I usually lose a boundary if it's difficult to see when I squint.

Simplify the Search for Edges

Black-and-white photographs make locating boundaries easy. True contrasts (which will become your hard edges) are obvious, while darker midtones merge seamlessly with darks (areas where you can lose edges).

Keep Values Distinct

Make clear decisions between light lights, mid-darks and darks, with no "almost" lights or "almost" darks. Repeat to yourself, "Light is light and dark is dark."



Planning Your Lost and Found Edges
When planning edge placement, I draw the obvious contrasting values and leave out boundaries between areas of similar value.

- a.** Found edges
- b.** Lost edges
- c.** Bridges between areas of similar value
- d.** A choice between lost and found

