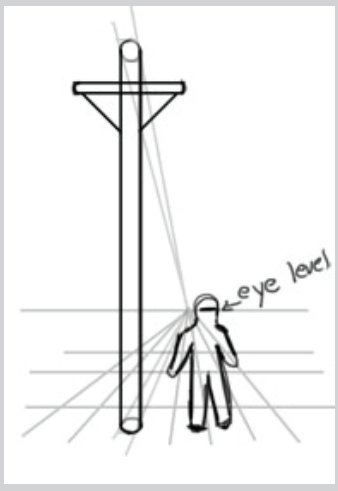
A Word on Eye Level

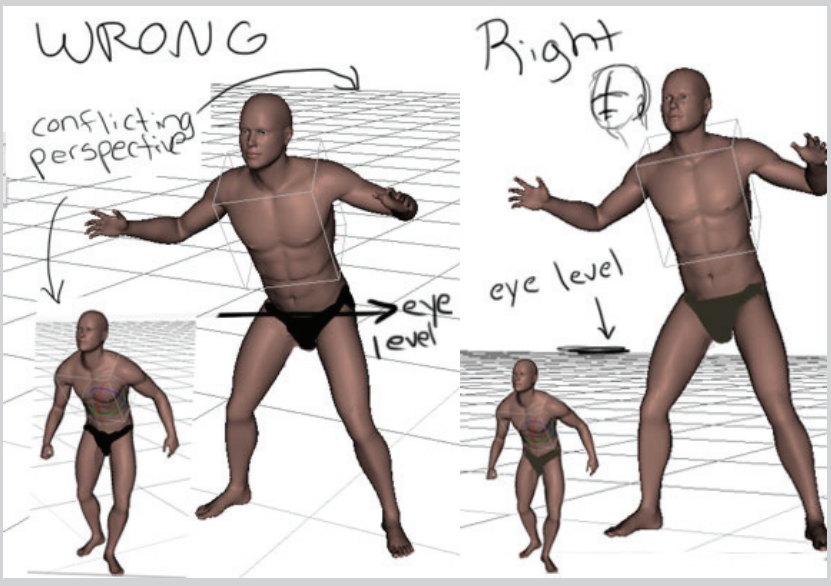
by Lithriel

Many times in illustration we need to draw several subjects and objects in one scene. One mistake I have seen even the pros make is having multiple eye levels in one piece. *What's the big deal* you say? Well if your entire scene has the same perspective then **eye level should be the same across the entire piece**. There should only be one eye level.



What does eye level even mean? **Eye level is the point at which you, the audience, is viewing something straight ahead.** So if you were looking at a telephone pole at just 2 feet away you would have to look down to see the bottom of the pole and up to see the top but if you looked directly ahead you would see the middle of it.

How does that translate into the art world? If you are drawing a medieval dwarf up close at typical eye level (most people are about 5 to 6 feet tall) you would need to draw him as if the audience were looking down on his head. If you were drawing a tall monster terrorizing that same dwarf at close range, your eye level would hit maybe at the monster's knees and you would be looking up at said monster's chin. The problem occurs when you are **looking down on both the monster and the dwarf because that's not possible** unless you as the audience is viewing the scene up in the sky, get me? You need to draw the monster in perspective in relation to the perspective already established in the rest of the scene.



Another time I see a problem is when I am looking at say, an illustration of a group of really cool people all standing behind the hero in an awesome v formation (because in the hero world everybody stands like this naturally). The illustration is looking so awesome, until I look at their feet. *What's wrong* you ask? I'm seeing everyone's head at eye level **and their feet too**. You can't do that remember? One eye level only please. I only have one set of eyes and they happen to be right next to each other not at my feet too.

In the case of looking at feet at eye level the bottom of the feet would be straight across. But if I am already looking at their heads at eye level, the feet should not be straight across. It's either/or not both. If their feet are straight across then we need to be looking up at their heads.

Think of it like taking a picture of really tall buildings from ground level.

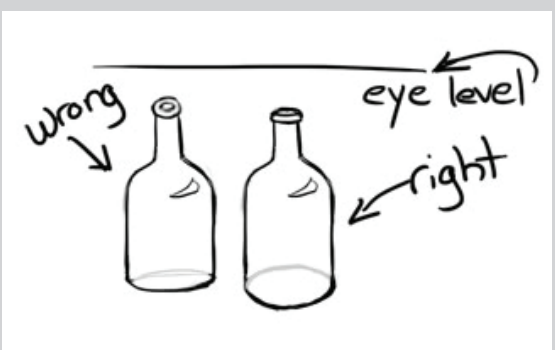
See that crazy perspective? Figures are the same way when you are looking up from feet level.

http://kafirwall.deviantart.com/art/buildings-13090220

The effect is reduced the further you stand back. If you were looking at the tallest man in the world face to chest, the effects of perspective looking up would be drastic whereas if you were looking at him from 50 feet away, it would be more subtle. If you happen to be looking at him from miles away and from up ontop of a hill, you would actually be looking down on him **because the eye level is the horizon.**

Another quick word about ellipses. Just FYI- they follow perspective too. Go get yourself a cup, yes really, go grab one. It will help you understand this principle.

Now hold it right in front of your eyes. You should be seeing the cup straight across. Now hold it at elbow level and closely watch the shape of the opening. It goes from a straight line and morphs into an ellipse. Now set the cup at your feet. The shape of the opening is now a full circle. Now pick up the cup and hold it above your head. Look at the shapes of the ellipses. **You can't see the opening anymore.** Remember that as you illustrate. All too often I see the tops of cups I shouldn't see the tops to. Any cylindrical object above eye level you won't see the top to unless it is tilted forward. And notice how the **ellipses are wider the more you look down**. Most people draw them in reverse. They draw the top of the bottle sitting on a table with a nice wide ellipse and the bottom nearly straight across. This is wrong.



Let's recap.

1. There is only one eye level.
2. If you have already established eye level with one figure, the other figures in the scene need to be in perspective relative to what you have already established.
3. Feet should never be straight across unless you are looking at feet level
4. The eye level is the horizon.
5. You can't see the tops to cylindrical objects above eye level unless they are tilted.
6. Ellipses get wider the further you get from eye level.

Yes, you can break the rules. Just make sure you know you are breaking them and break them on purpose. Happy illustrating!

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