



Fig. 1
A sketch of the trowel shape I begin with for the drawing of an outstretched hand.



Fig. 2
The saddle shape created by the curve of the fingers as they grip.



Fig. 3
Notice the upturned tips of the fingers and the opposing curve that the thumb creates as it flows away from the fingers.

Hands are one aspect of figure drawing that beginners, (heck, everyone!) seem to have trouble with. And for good reason, hands are very complicated structures.

Fingers can arrange themselves into any number of poses in relation to each other, and the thumb throws a monkey wrench into the works with a completely opposite range of movement. Our hands are extraordinarily versatile, performing incredibly delicate maneuvers like threading a needle, or they can be a window into our personalities and emotions with just the crook of a single finger. But the process of drawing these complex tools of ours (and nearly everything else we'd like to draw) can be made much easier by first distilling the major elements into simple shapes, then breaking down and expanding those shapes as you progress through the final stages of your drawing.

My method is to initially approach the cartoon hand as a rounded rubber trowel: flat, flexible and triangular (Fig 1). Once I've established the placement of the 'blade' of the trowel, I draw a rough circle to indicate the palm area and begin to divide the remaining portion lengthwise to make individual fingers. At this point, the decision needs to be made, how many fingers? Do we want the classic cartoon three finger and thumb like Mickey Mouse, or a more realistic treatment? Your choice may hinge on the size of the final image, the type of character you are striving for, or just a personal preference. If your cartoon will be published at a fairly small size, the three finger version may be the better choice for readability.

While you can get away with treating the individual fingers as simple hot dogs with little or no underlying skeleton, (Fig 2) when the size allows, I usually prefer to give them a bit more life with some extra touches. As I draw the hand, I turn up the fingertips ever so slightly, especially on the thumb. Draw a rounded pad on the palm side, then bring the line gracefully up, then back over the top with a tight curve that starts at the edge of the nail. From there, the line swoops down slightly and then back up to the knuckle, giving the fingertip a complex curve similar to the shape of a saddle.

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When the whole hand grips an object, the middle and ring fingers take on the bulk of the work, while the index finger and pinky, because they have less pressure exerted on them, rise a bit above the other two. Seen from the side, we again create a rough saddle shape, but on a larger scale than before (Fig 2).

Remember that the fingers have a range of motion independent of each other and more than just flat to the palm. You can give life to the hand if the fingers flow, or cascade in their action (Fig 3).