



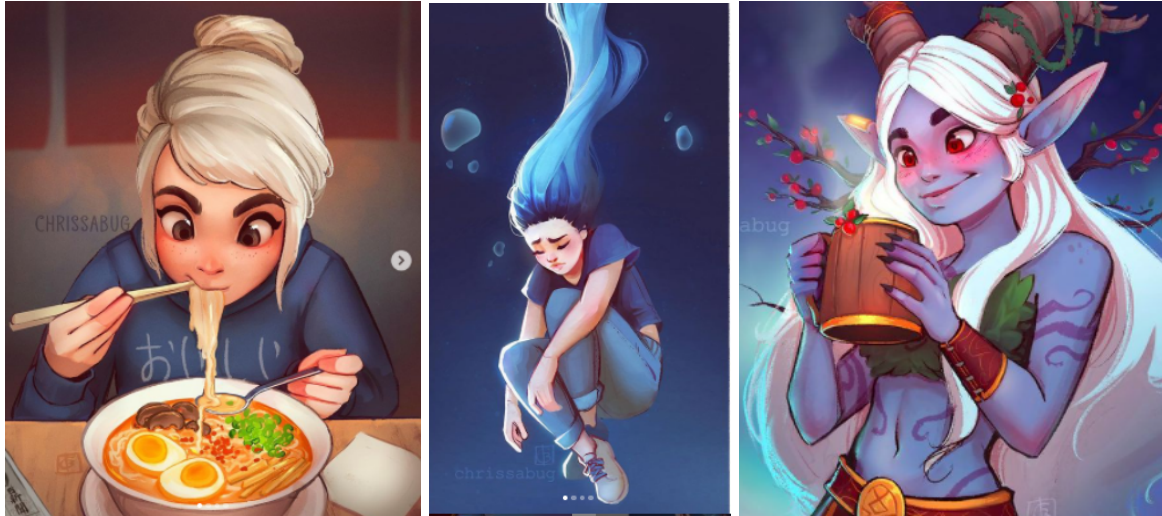
In my view, the core purpose of creating and showing artwork is to make some sort of emotional impact on someone. Making that emotional impact is what helps people actually connect to your work. It is what will make someone stop scrolling to actually look at your art and connect to your work. It may even move them on a deeper level.

Of course, the emotions don't always have to be deep. It can range from despair to joy to even something as simple as "aww! How cute!" Even quick shallow emotions like that make an impact on someone and might be exactly what that person needed to see that day!

[patreon.com/chrissabug](https://patreon.com/chrissabug)

Now let's go over ways to incorporate more of that emotional impact into your work!

## Draw from your own feelings and experiences



Have you ever heard the phrase “write what you know?” It means that: when writing, no matter the genre, ‘writing what you know’ means finding aspects of your story and characters that you deeply relate to. Now just replace the word “write” with “draw”, and I think we have a good jumping off point!

Before anything more specific and technical, the core principle you **must** keep in mind, is to **draw from your own soul and feelings**.

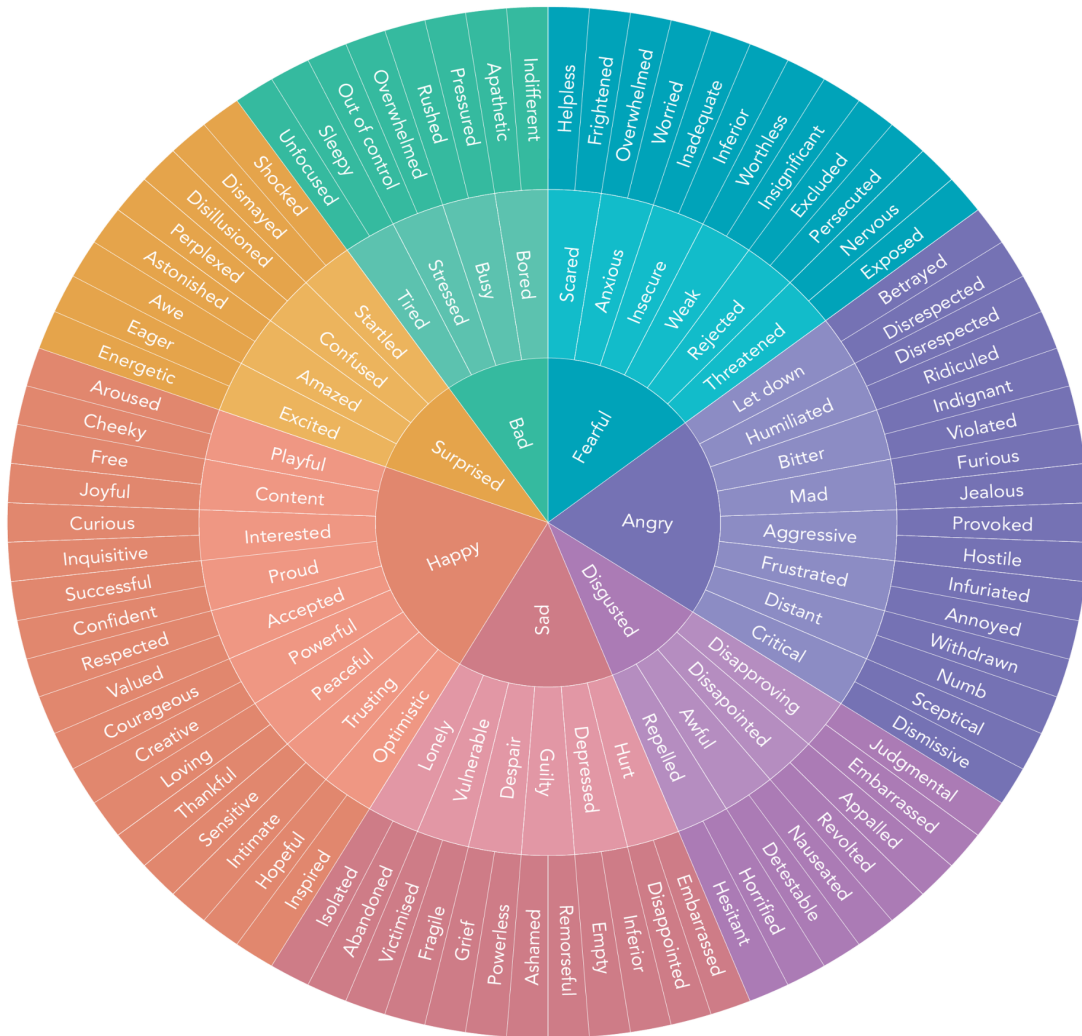
If you are forcing yourself to draw something just to keep up with trends or because you think it's what you **should** draw, but your heart isn't in it and you don't relate to it, those apathetic emotions will come through your work, and it is very unlikely to make an impact.

## What if You Don't Know What Emotion to Communicate?

Understanding what you truly want to draw and even what feelings you both relate to and want to convey can be challenging sometimes, especially since many of us are so used to pushing our feelings down.

Now, you don't always have to be so specific about identifying feelings to communicate in your work but I thought this might be helpful or even inspiring!

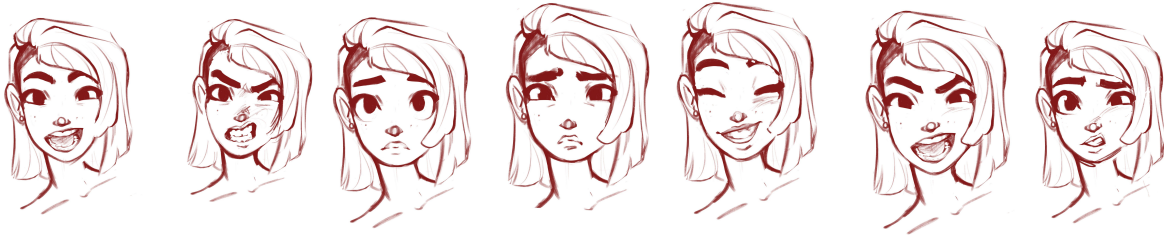
This is an **Emotion Wheel**. It can be used to help you identify your own specific emotions, but I thought that it could also be helpful to identify emotions that you relate to and want to show in your art!





# Expressions

## Facial Expressions

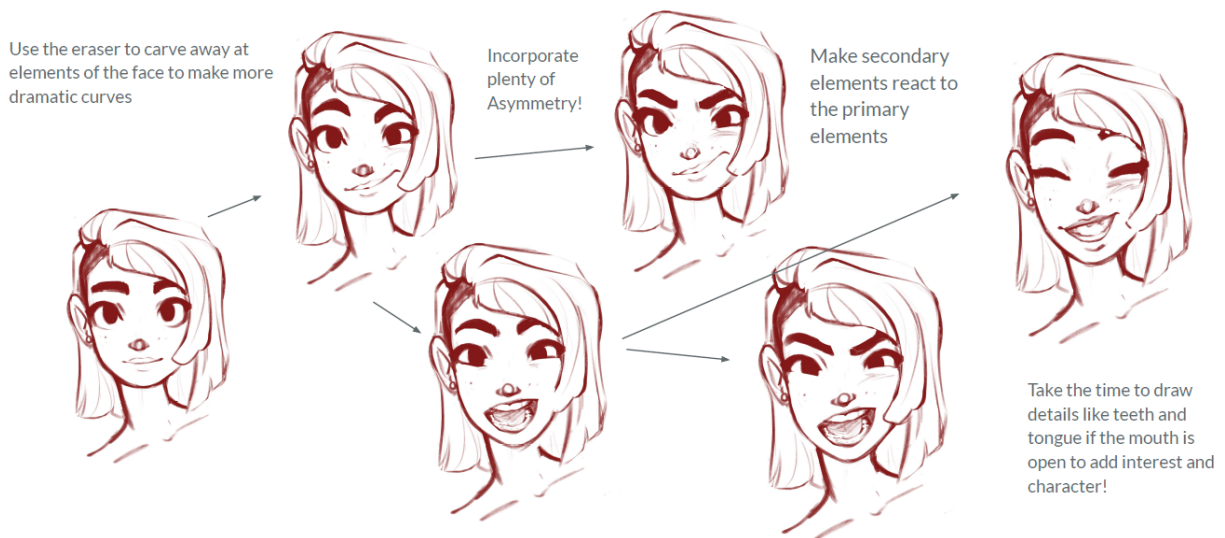


The first thing most people look at when they see a photo or an artwork containing people is the face. A facial expression is the easiest way to detect how a character is feeling. And although it is a spectrum, most people naturally empathize to some degree. We have all felt happy, angry, sad, confused, curious, etc. before, so we naturally relate to these expressions when we see them.

This is why it is important to start getting comfortable with drawing a variety of facial expressions and learning to push those expressions on your characters. (Check out my [Facial Expressions Tutorial](#) if you haven't already!)

The stronger the emotion, the more extreme the expression!

## Pushing the Expression





## Body Language



If your art has more of a full character in it, body language should also support the emotion. Sometimes we can tell how a character is feeling even from behind!

Start noticing what kinds of shapes do people make with their body depending on the emotion they are feeling. Are they sad and feeling small so they curl their body into themselves to seem smaller? Are they confident so they stand up taller and extend their elbows to take up space? Are they angry so all their muscles are tense and rigid?

Reference is going to be your best friend here! I find [Pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com/) to be extremely helpful by just searching the emotion that I'm looking for.

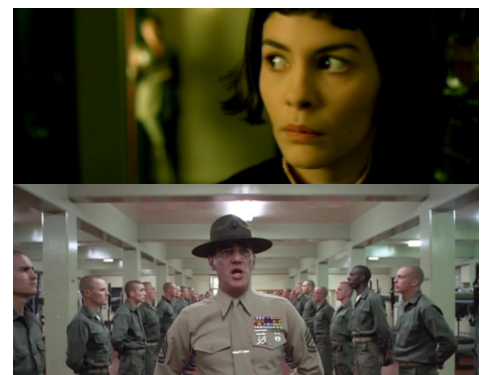
## Techniques to Support Emotional Impact!

Now we are getting into a little bit more technical territory! The different skills you develop as an artist can all help support the emotion in your work! Here are a few big ones that can really influence how strong that emotion comes across!

### Composition

Composition can really help sell the emotion of the entire scene!

- A good reference to understand this is to take a look at how shots are framed in **film** depending on the emotion of the scene.
- A well balanced scene with an eye level-angle can be more stable and even help the audience feel more at ease and relate to the character.



- A perfectly symmetrical scene can either emphasize the focus and power of a character

OR it can put the viewers on edge and make the character seem overwhelmed depending on how perfectly symmetrical everything is and the subject matter.



- A dutch angled camera can create a psychological unease and instability.



It can also emphasize action in a scene.



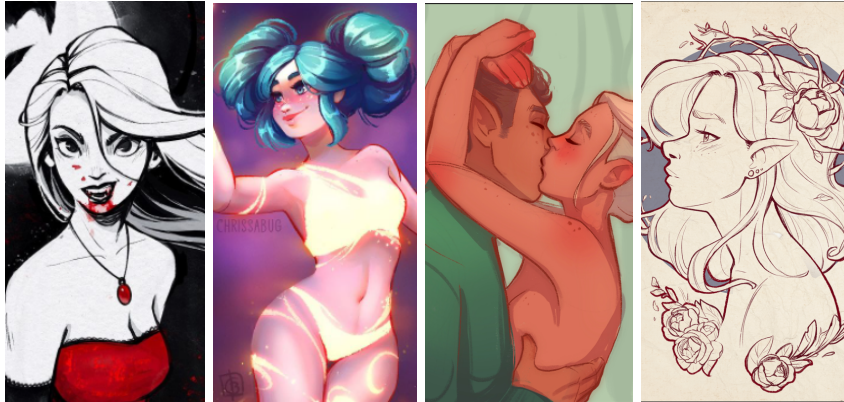
- A "High Angle Shot": meaning a perspective angled down at a character can make them seem small and less powerful. It may indicate that they are in danger!



- A "Low Angle Shot": meaning perspective angled up at a character can make them seem big and more powerful.



## Rendering Technique



How you decide to render your art can actually increase the emotional impact. I wouldn't say that it is the most important aspect of communicating the emotion but it can play a part!

For example, if a character is in emotional distress, what if instead of rendering everything to perfection, you only rendered the most important aspects, like the face and expression of the character, and then left everything else loose and with more energetic and unstable quality to it? That way the loose and unstable rendering of the artwork is actually reflecting the unstable emotions of the character!

Or for a calming scene where the character is serene, perhaps you do take the time to render everything neatly, therefore reflecting the calm state of the character's mind.

Using the technical aspect of how you actually render your work can help support the emotional state of the scene to further communicate that emotional impact!

## Lighting



Lighting can play a huge role in communicating emotion in an artwork and there is a lot to learn about lighting but for now, I will just go over 2 main aspects that I think are good to focus on when it comes to supporting the emotion in your art.



## Soft vs Hard Lighting

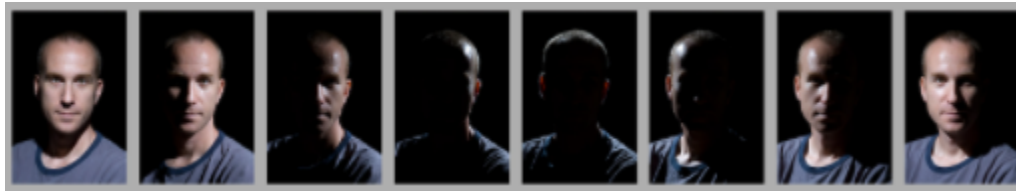


More diffused lighting is softer and appears more smooth, while harder light makes shadows more intense and sharper.

Soft and less intense lighting gives artwork a sense of calm and peace.

Hard and Intense lighting adds to the tension and unease in a scene.

## Direction of the Light



Another key to keep in mind when it comes to how light influences emotion is the direction that the light source is coming from.

A more **comfortable** light will often come from the upper front of the subject, usually offset slightly to the right or left. This is a very standard portrait lighting setup that we are used to seeing and it is aesthetically pleasing.

But lighting from behind that casts the subject from behind can add more mystery and can make viewers feel more anxious or uneasy.

Underlighting is also a setup that makes viewers feel very uneasy because we are not used to seeing that sort of lighting. So it is often used to illuminate villains to help communicate the danger and unease.

## Color



You don't need to color your work to make an emotional impact. Some artwork that has spoken to me deeply on an emotional level is in black and white!

But if you are coloring your work, it is important to keep colors in mind because color can be an amazing tool for setting mood and emotion!

Film is another great place to look at how color can be used to influence mood. One of my favorite examples is the film: **Crimson Peak**.

At the beginning of the movie, when things are safe and the main character 'belongs' in the setting the colors are warm and comfy!



As the movie progresses and the character moves into an environment that is dangerous to her, the lighting turns more cold and even eerie!



The scenes in Crimson Peak also demonstrate how you can use the color scheme of a character vs the color scheme of their environment to show how comfortable the character feels in the situation!

Does the character's color scheme fit in with the environment? If they do then it shows that this character might be more comfortable in that environment because they belong. If the character's color scheme contrasts the environment, that might show that the character is uncomfortable with the environment and does not belong.

So when you are picking color schemes, keep in mind whether or not the colors are supporting the emotion you want to convey and also keep in mind the context of the colors. For example, red can mean anger or it can mean romance! It all depends on the context and the surrounding elements!

## Exercise!

Now that I have laid out what I like to keep in mind for making more of an emotional impact, I want to give you an exercise that will help you figure out what resonates with you! Here is the exercise!

1. Find artwork done by other artists that resonates with you.
2. Try to identify what feelings this artwork brings up (use the emotion wheel if that helps!)
3. Try and pick apart what aspects of the work are helping communicate the emotion that you are feeling!
4. How can you incorporate those aspects into your own work?

### Example:

I really love this character painting by [Vanessa Palmer](#). It is pretty simple but it really speaks to me on an emotional level.



- **What feelings is this art resonating with for me?**

Desperation, Courage, Power, Insecurity  
I know it seems like there are some conflicting emotions in there, but to me this piece resonates with my own feelings of desperate struggle and fighting to get through... whatever the obstacle may be.

- **What aspects of the work help communicate the emotions?**

The 2 main aspects communicating these emotions are the expression and the body



language. Her expression feels desperate and even though her pose is a fighting pose it isn't a typical open and confident stance, but more closed off as if she is drawing from her last reserves.

I don't think the lighting and color really play as much of a role in communicating the emotion in this piece but I suppose you could argue that the warmer color scheme helps give the piece more energy.

**How can I incorporate those aspects into my work?** Something I hadn't thought of until now is how that slight adjustment of body language can make an action pose appear more desperate. So when communicating a more desperate or less confident scene I want to pay attention to if I should adjust the pose to be a little more closed off.

## Final Thoughts

I feel like a lot of topics were covered in this article! If it is overwhelming, don't worry. Just pick a couple things to focus on.

Start with facial **expressions and body language!** Once you start feeling more comfortable with that, begin using more and more techniques to add more emotional impact to your work!

And remember, the most vital point is to draw from your own feelings! That is where the heart of your art comes from and that's what will shine through for others to see!

