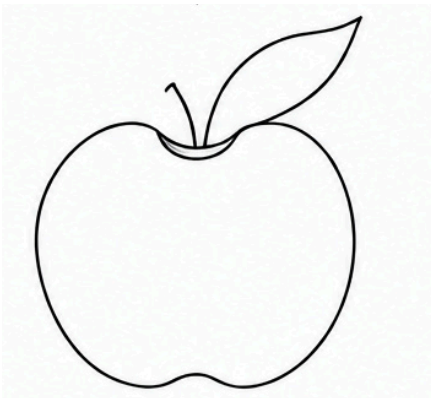
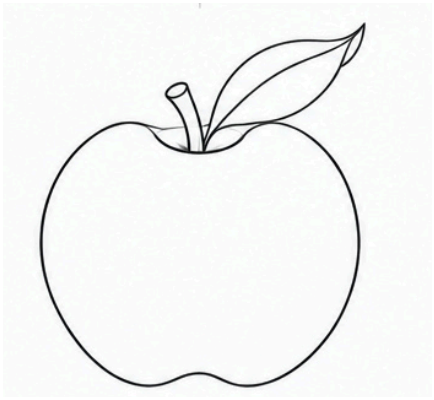
How to draw an apple: from outline to volume

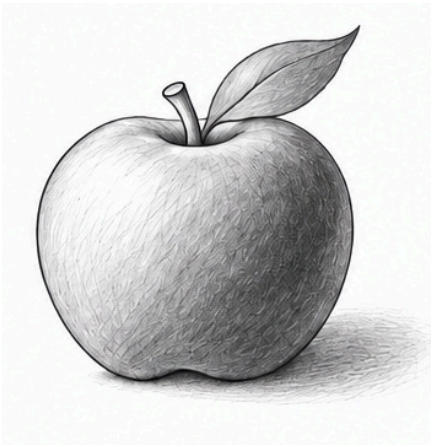
Start with a light circle, find the apple shoulders and hollow, then add the stalk and leaf. Choose a clean outline, more precise construction or pencil volume. Your sizes and slight irregularities may differ.



Simplest



A little more detail



Best version

Simplest: Clean outline, simple hollow, short stalk and plain leaf; no tone. Finishes at step 6.

A little more detail: Recess ellipse, cylindrical stalk and a turned leaf tip: two construction decisions without shading. Finishes at step 6.

Best version: Intermediate construction plus three pencil tones and a cast shadow from the contact. All 12 steps.

The simplest and intermediate routes finish at step 6. Steps 7–12 teach shading in the detailed route; the two finished outline cards remain for checking. Step 1 shows the support; later pairs show “before the action → after the action”. Illustrations are AI-generated; no classroom trial has been performed.

What you will practise

Build the apple from a large mass, place details inside its hollow and remove temporary edges. For pencil volume, preserve a light area, build the form shadow and construct a separate cast shadow. Start with the ability to draw a circle and a curve; smoothness is optional. Use paper, an HB or 2B pencil and an eraser. Allow roughly 15–25 minutes for an outline or 25–45 with shading; this is not a promise of mastery. Simplify with the first route without an axis or tone. Extend the task by changing the light in the independent exercise, without adding fine texture.

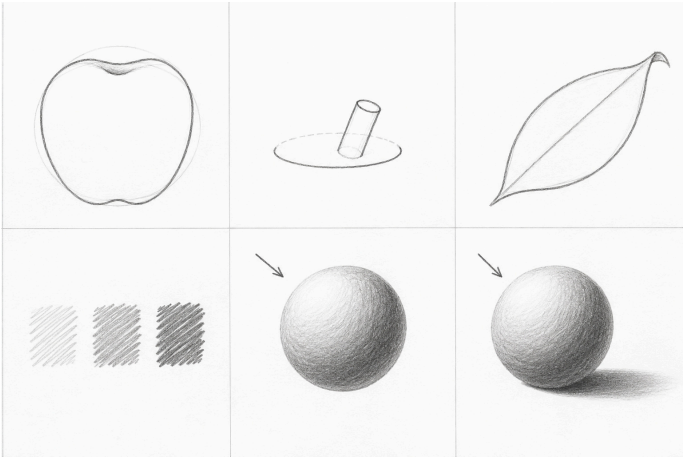
Technique 1. Construct the form

A circle describes the large mass, not the finished edge. Adjust its top and bottom with curves. In the detailed construction, a small ellipse describes the hollow and a short cylinder grows inside it; a bent leaf needs a chosen front edge and removal of hidden lines. Try a contour over a circle, a cylinder in an ellipse and a bent leaf. Check: is the chosen edge connected and is each detail rooted in the form? If not, move only its base or erase a short trial edge.

Technique 2. Light and shadow

For the detailed route choose one light at upper left. Keep paper light on the surface facing it; light curved strokes make a midtone and another layer darkens the turned-away side. A cast shadow is a separate shape on the plane to the right of the contact. Try three tones, then the warm-up ball and shadow. Check: is the light side still light and does the shadow touch the base? If not, lift excess tone with an eraser or move the shadow’s beginning to the contact.

Warm-up

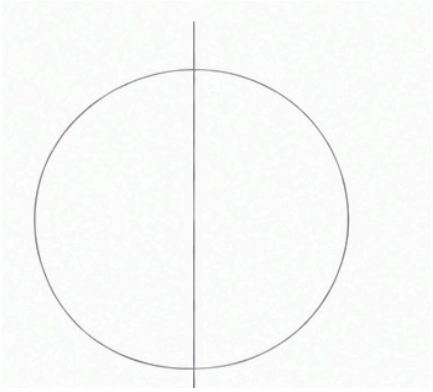


Form supports, a bent leaf and three pencil tones

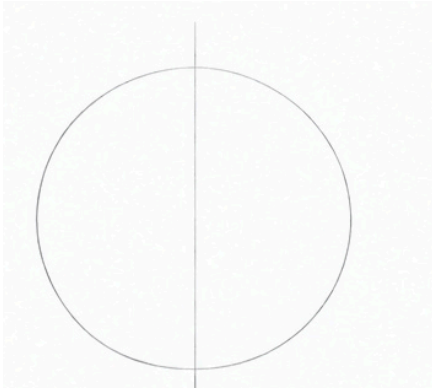
Top row, left to right: a circle with a chosen contour; a recess ellipse with a short cylinder; a bent leaf. Try all three in the margin. Change only the circle’s top and bottom, keeping the sides round. Put the cylinder base inside the ellipse. Run a leaf direction curve from base to tip and join the turned edge to its outer edge. Check: can you point to a temporary support and a chosen edge? If an edge is doubled, erase only its support.

Bottom row: three tone swatches; a ball with curved strokes and upper-left light; the same ball with a rightward shadow on the plane. In your own trial leave the paper light, add a light layer, then a second layer on the turned-away side. Avoid pressing to black. Next place the shadow from the contact point away from the light. Check: are there three tones and does the shadow touch the base? If everything is grey, lift tone at upper left with an eraser; if the ball floats, connect the shadow to its base. Why is a shadow on the table different from one on the ball? The first lies on the plane; the second describes the turning surface.

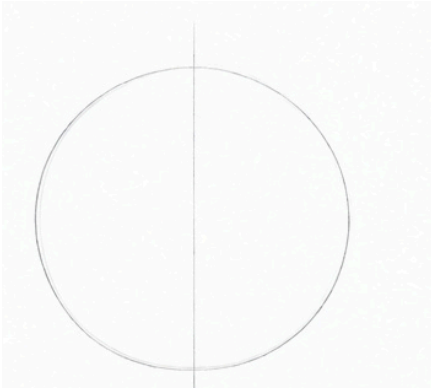
Step 1. Place the mass



Simplest



A little more detail



Best version

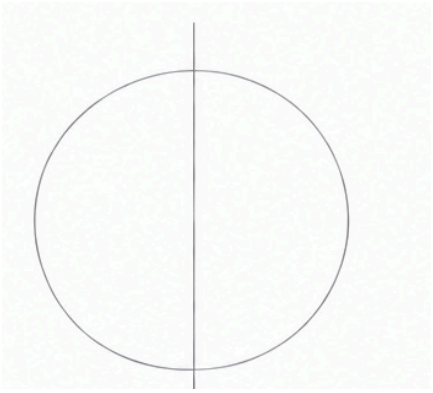
Simplest: Action: Place one light circle slightly below the paper centre; leave room above for the apple leaf. You may omit an axis. Why: A large mass sets size before details. Check: Is roughly a third of the circle height free above it? Repair: Soften the circle and move it lower; the simplest route does not require an axis.

A little more detail: Action: Place a light circle slightly below the sheet centre with a faint vertical axis; leave room above for the leaf. Why: A large mass sets size before details. Check: Is roughly a third of the circle height free above it? Repair: Soften the circle and move it lower; the simplest route does not require an axis.

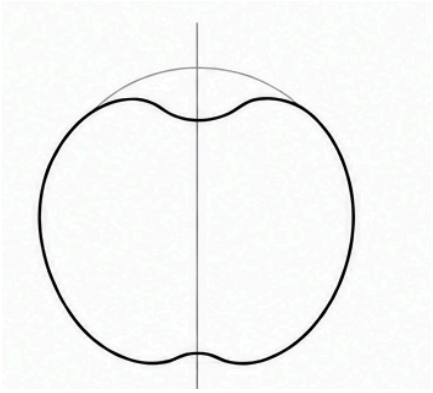
Best version: Action: Place a light circle slightly below the sheet centre with a faint vertical axis; leave room above for the leaf. Why: A large mass sets size before details. Check: Is roughly a third of the circle height free above it? Repair: Soften the circle and move it lower; the simplest route does not require an axis.

Step 2. Find the contour

Before the action

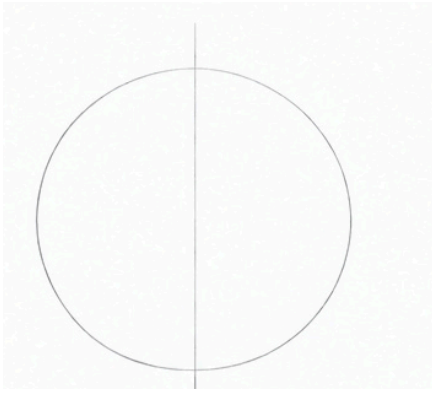


After the action

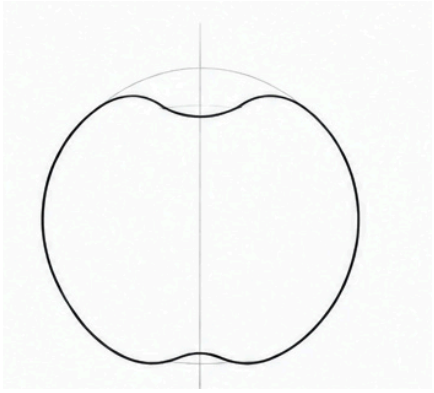


Simplest

Before the action

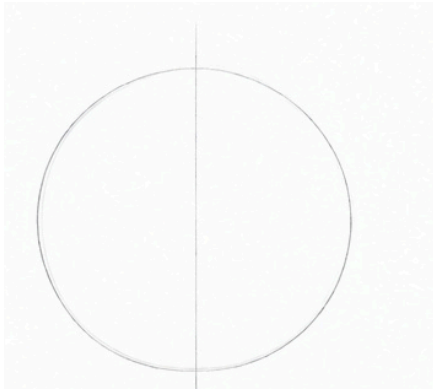


After the action

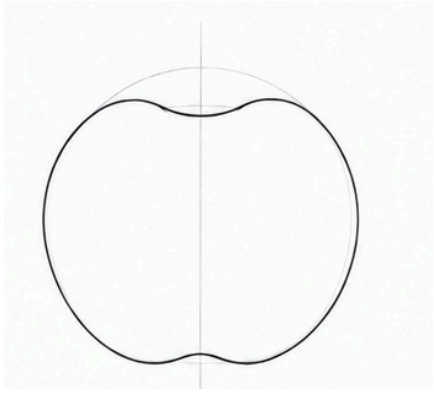


A little more detail

Before the action



After the action



Best version

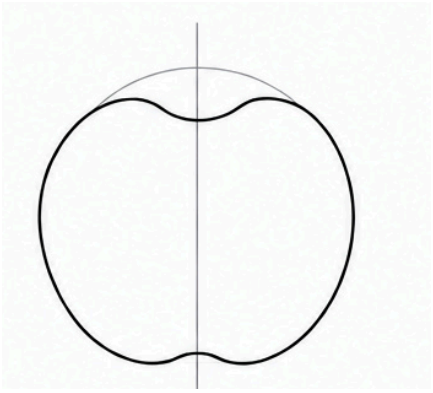
Simplest: Action: Choose two round shoulders above the circle with a shallow hollow between; join the sides with a gentle bottom notch. Keep the circle light. Why: The apple differs from a circle through its large shape before details. Check: Are the sides round while the top and bottom differ from the circle? Repair: Soften only a pointed shoulder or an overly deep bottom notch.

A little more detail: Action: Choose two round shoulders above the circle with a shallow hollow between; join the sides with a gentle bottom notch. Keep the circle light. Why: The apple differs from a circle through its large shape before details. Check: Are the sides round while the top and bottom differ from the circle? Repair: Soften only a pointed shoulder or an overly deep bottom notch.

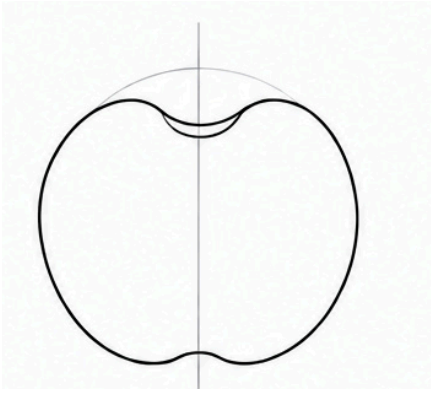
Best version: Action: Choose two round shoulders above the circle with a shallow hollow between; join the sides with a gentle bottom notch. Keep the circle light. Why: The apple differs from a circle through its large shape before details. Check: Are the sides round while the top and bottom differ from the circle? Repair: Soften only a pointed shoulder or an overly deep bottom notch.

Step 3. Construct the hollow

Before the action

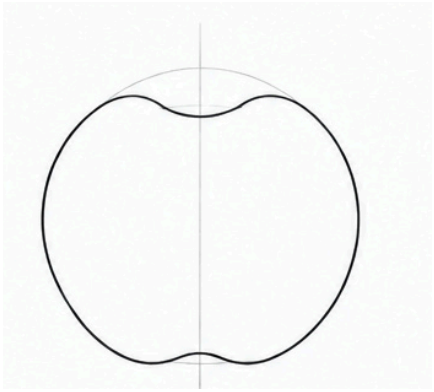


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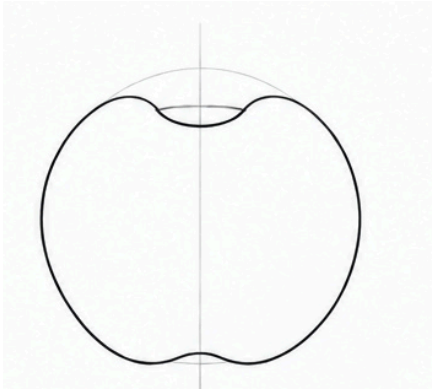


Simplest

Before the action

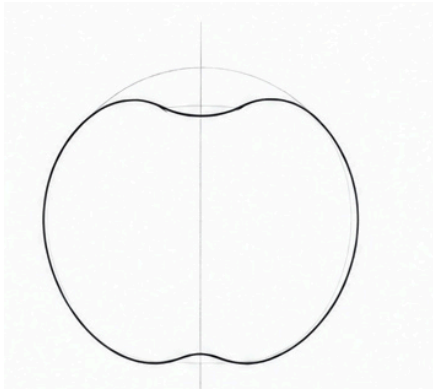


After the action

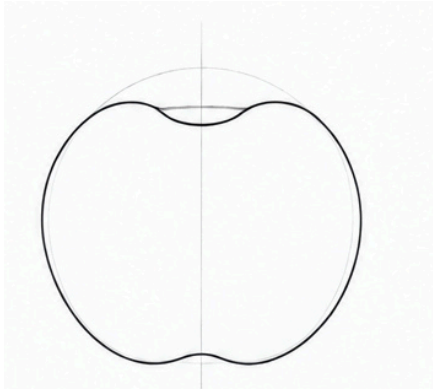


A little more detail

Before the action



After the action



Best version

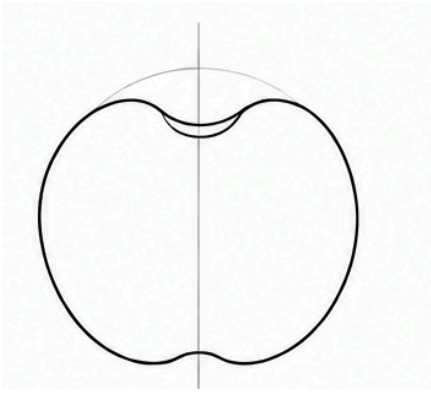
Simplest: Action: Draw one short shallow curve inside the top hollow; this route needs no detailed ellipse. Why: One curve marks where the stalk will start. Check: Is the curve between the shoulders rather than on a side? Repair: Shorten only an end that extends beyond the hollow.

A little more detail: Action: Place a small shallow ellipse about a quarter of the apple width in the top hollow; its lower curve lies inside the mass. Why: The ellipse describes a rounded recess for the stalk. Check: Does the recess fit between the shoulders rather than float above them? Repair: Erase one ellipse end and narrow it between the shoulders.

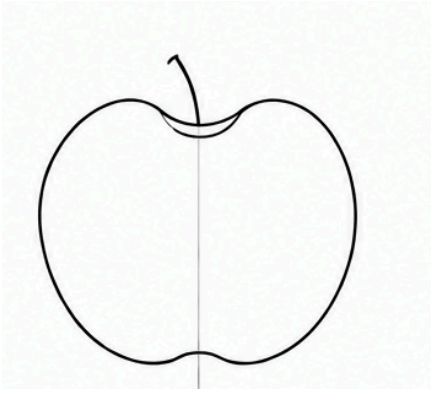
Best version: Action: Place a small shallow ellipse about a quarter of the apple width in the top hollow; its lower curve lies inside the mass. Why: The ellipse describes a rounded recess for the stalk. Check: Does the recess fit between the shoulders rather than float above them? Repair: Erase one ellipse end and narrow it between the shoulders.

Step 4. Root the stalk

Before the action

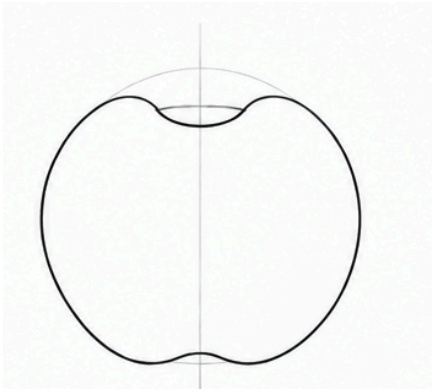


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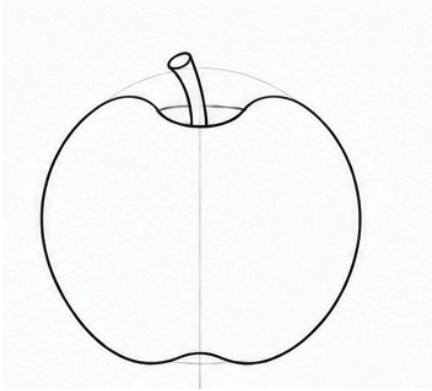


Simplest

Before the action

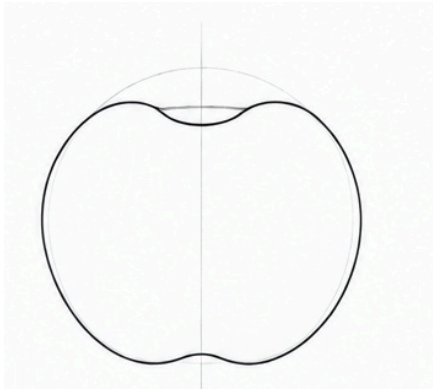


After the action

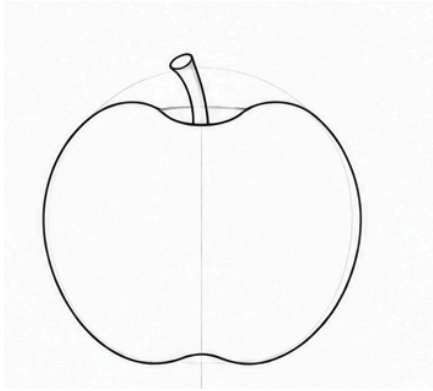


A little more detail

Before the action



After the action



Best version

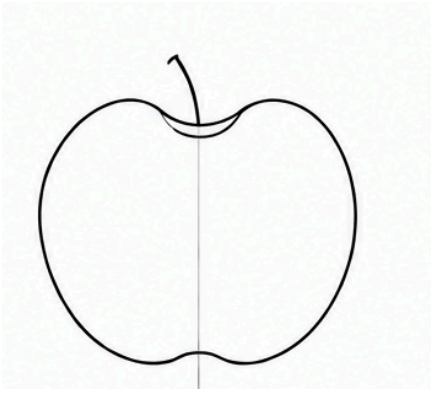
Simplest: Action: From inside the hollow draw one short stalk line leaning slightly left. This route needs no detailed cylinder. Why: One line keeps the apple’s essential feature; a cylindrical stalk is a new task at the next level. Check: Does the line start in the hollow rather than float separately? Repair: Move only its lower end into the hollow.

A little more detail: Action: From inside the hollow draw two close slightly slanted edges; join their tops with a tiny cut-end oval. Remove the recess arc hidden by the stalk. Why: Two edges and a cut end show a short cylinder; the hidden arc cannot pass through it. Check: Is the base inside the recess, the top joined and the rear arc stopped at the stalk? Repair: Move only the base or erase the short hidden arc.

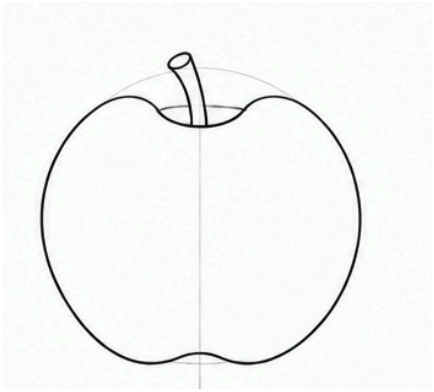
Best version: Action: From inside the hollow draw two close slightly slanted edges; join their tops with a tiny cut-end oval. Remove the recess arc hidden by the stalk. Why: Two edges and a cut end show a short cylinder; the hidden arc cannot pass through it. Check: Is the base inside the recess, the top joined and the rear arc stopped at the stalk? Repair: Move only the base or erase the short hidden arc.

Step 5. Place the leaf

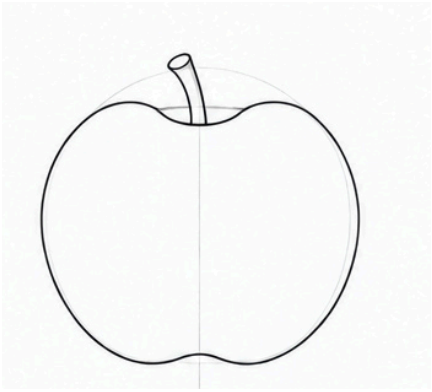
Before the action



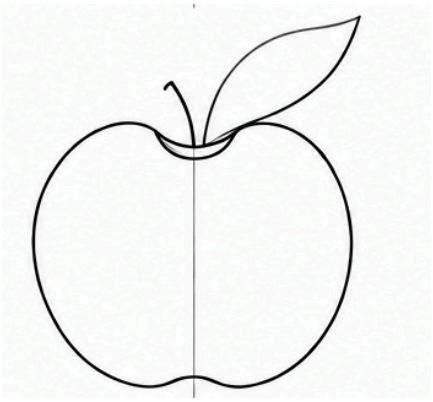
Before the action



Before the action

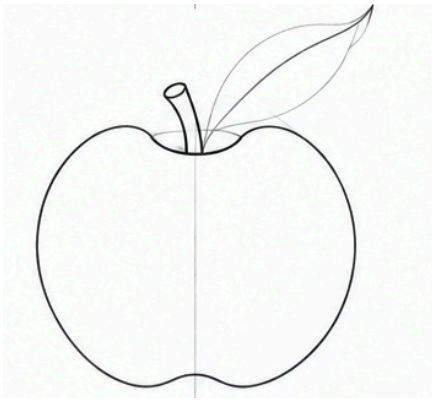


After the action



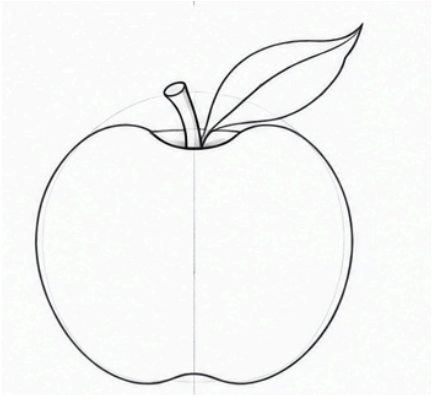
Simplest

After the action



A little more detail

After the action



Best version

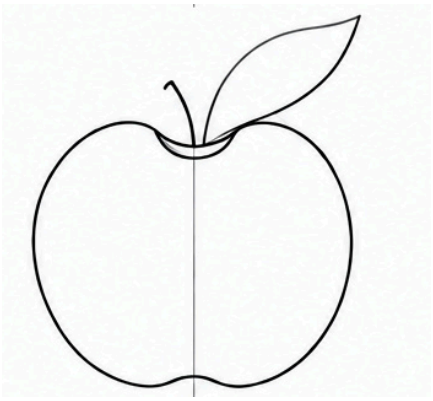
Simplest: Action: Lightly place a plain almond leaf up-right from the stalk. Any inner curve is only a temporary support. Why: A curve sets direction before the chosen edge. Check: Does the leaf start at the apple top and fit on the paper? Repair: Soften only its tip and shorten the leaf without moving its base.

A little more detail: Action: From the right of the stalk base direct a light curve up-right. Place one elongated almond leaf around it. Why: A curve sets direction before the chosen edge. Check: Does the leaf start at the apple top and fit on the paper? Repair: Soften only its tip and shorten the leaf without moving its base.

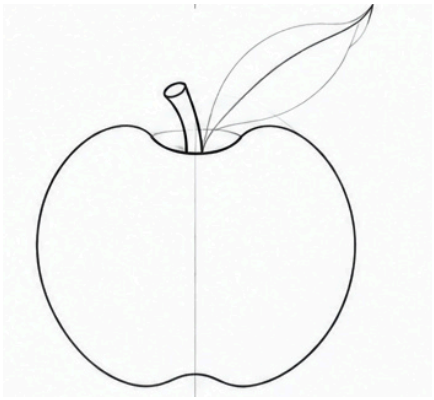
Best version: Action: From the right of the stalk base direct a light curve up-right. Place one elongated almond leaf around it. Why: A curve sets direction before the chosen edge. Check: Does the leaf start at the apple top and fit on the paper? Repair: Soften only its tip and shorten the leaf without moving its base.

Step 6. Choose edges and erase supports

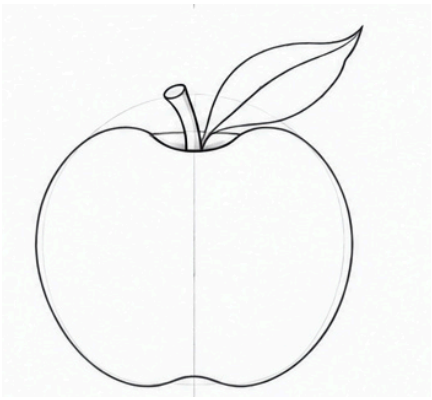
Before the action



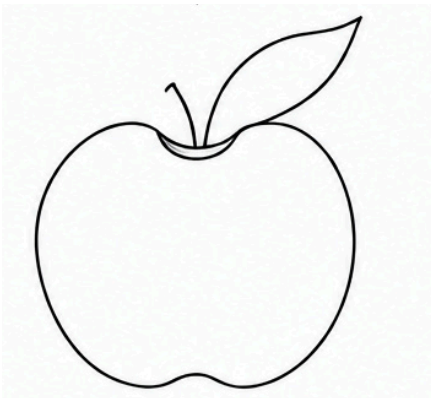
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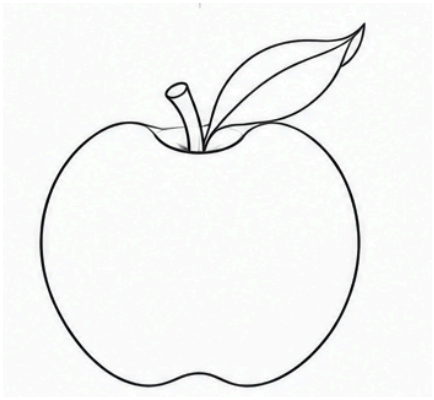
Before the action



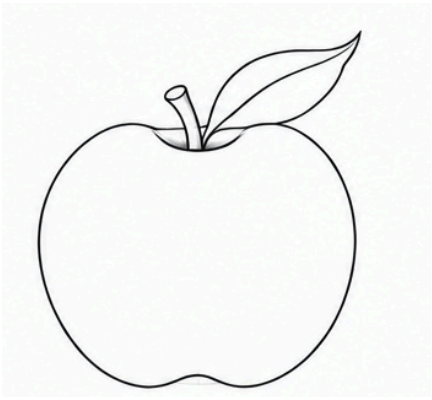
After the action



After the action



After the action



Simplest

A little more detail

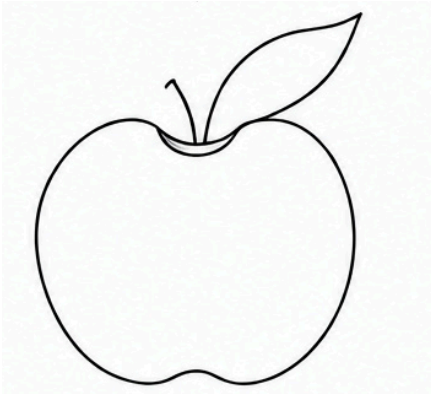
Best version

Simplest: Action: Choose one plain leaf edge. Erase the circle, axis, trial edges and inner leaf guide. Keep the leaf blank; the simplest route is finished. Why: Supports helped find a connected silhouette and can now be removed. Check: Is there no second apple outline, axis or midrib, with the leaf attached at the top? Repair: Erase only the remaining support; restore a short visible edge if damaged.

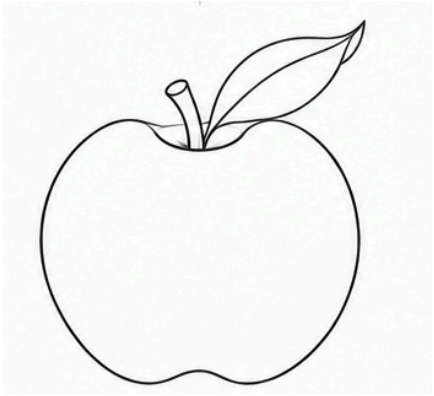
A little more detail: Action: Choose the leaf edge: a small tip bend joins its outer edge and the central curve remains one midrib. Erase the circle, axis and trial leaf edge; retain the stalk and recess. Why: Supports helped find the form but are not a second apple outline. A leaf bend shows a surface turn. Check: Are the circle and axis gone, is the bend connected, and does no apple line pass through the leaf? Repair: Erase one remaining support; if a visible edge was damaged, restore only that segment.

Best version: Action: Choose the leaf edge: a small tip bend joins its outer edge and the central curve remains one midrib. Erase the circle, axis and trial leaf edge; retain the stalk and recess. Why: Supports helped find the form but are not a second apple outline. A leaf bend shows a surface turn. Check: Are the circle and axis gone, is the bend connected, and does no apple line pass through the leaf? Repair: Erase one remaining support; if a visible edge was damaged, restore only that segment.

Step 7. Choose the light

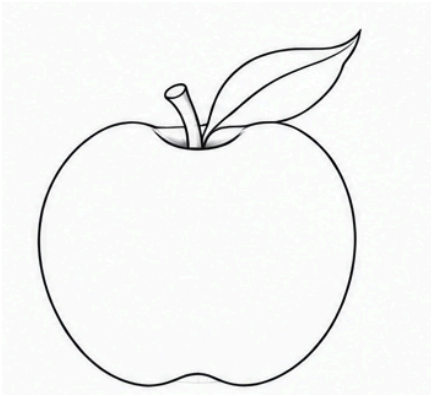


Simplest

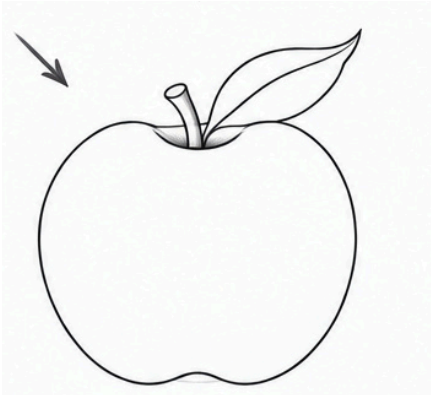


A little more detail

Before the action



After the action



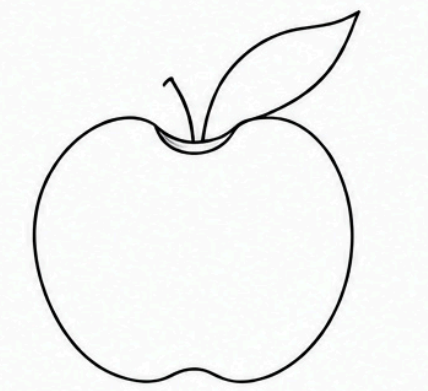
Best version

Simplest: Action: Your outline drawing is finished. Keep it unshaded; optionally practise the detailed route's new action on a separate warm-up ball. Why: This route does not need extra details merely to fill later stages. Check: Are temporary supports gone, the leaf attached and the stalk rooted in the hollow? Repair: Repair only a remaining support or a gap in a visible edge.

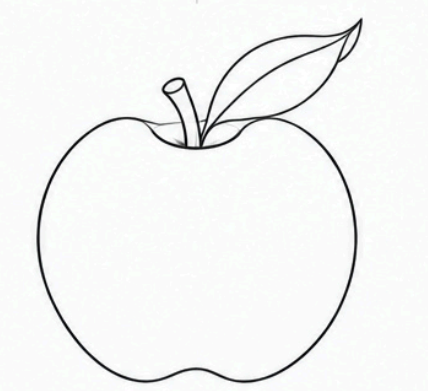
A little more detail: Action: Your outline drawing is finished. Keep it unshaded; optionally practise the detailed route's new action on a separate warm-up ball. Why: This route does not need extra details merely to fill later stages. Check: Are temporary supports gone, the leaf attached and the stalk rooted in the hollow? Repair: Repair only a remaining support or a gap in a visible edge.

Best version: Action: Mark an upper-left light arrow in the margin as shown. Add no tone yet; choose the upper-left area to remain paper light. Why: One source coordinates the apple, leaf and ground shadows. Check: Can you point to the light side and the opposite lower-right side? Repair: Move only the arrow and choose one light side before shading.

Step 8. Lay a light tone

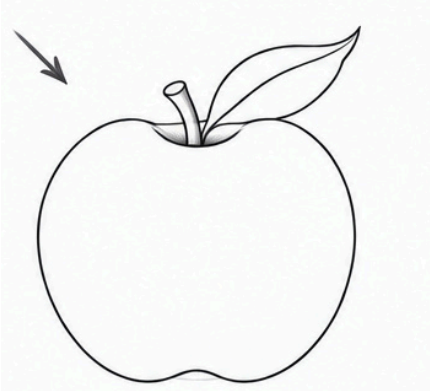


Simplest

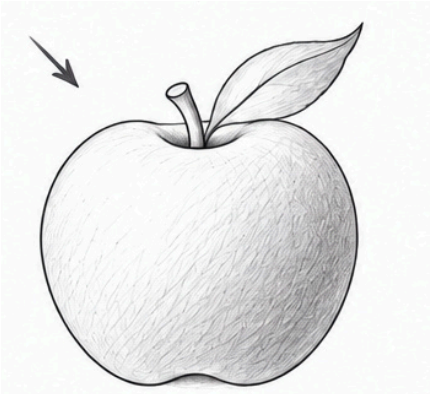


A little more detail

Before the action



After the action



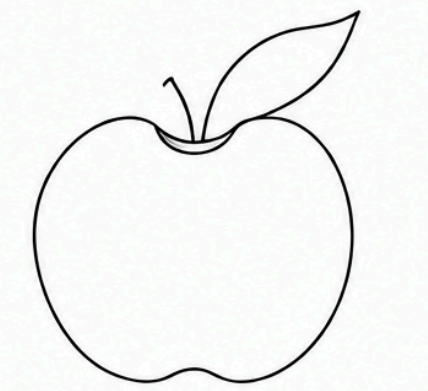
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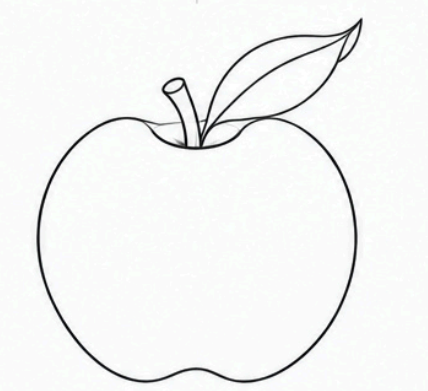
A little more detail: Action: Your outline drawing is finished. Keep it unshaded; optionally practise the detailed route's new action on a separate warm-up ball. Why: This route does not need extra details merely to fill later stages. Check: Are temporary supports gone, the leaf attached and the stalk rooted in the hollow? Repair: Repair only a remaining support or a gap in a visible edge.

Best version: Action: Use light pressure for spaced curved strokes across the middle and right apple; use short lengthwise strokes on the leaf. Preserve upper-left paper light. Why: A first layer checks the surface turn before darkening the shadow. Check: Is the first layer lighter than the future shadow and is the light area still blank? Repair: Lift excess tone on the left with an eraser; do not add another layer yet.

Step 9. Build the form shadow

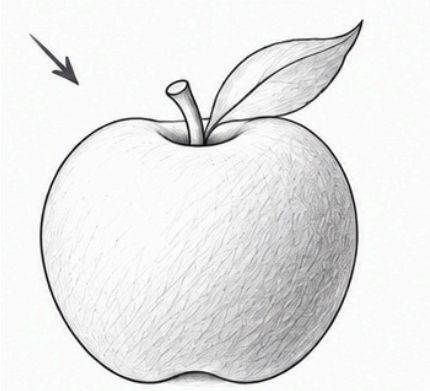


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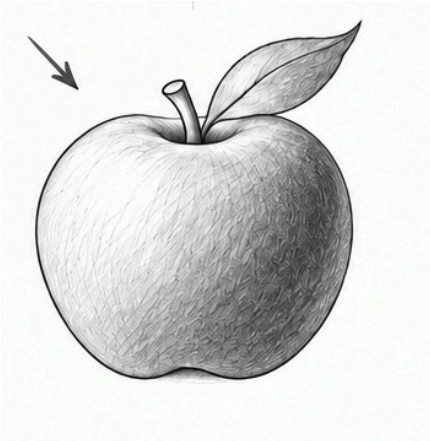


A little more detail

Before the action



After the action



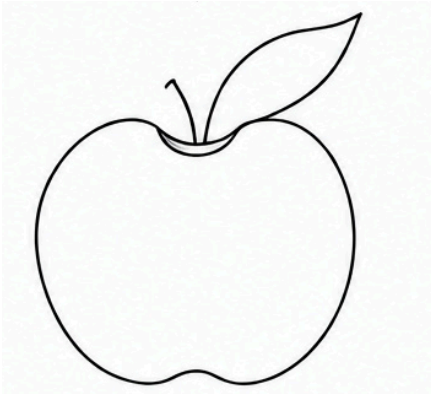
Best version

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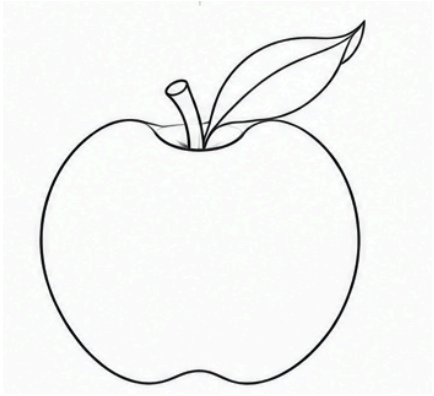
A little more detail: Action: Your outline drawing is finished. Keep it unshaded; optionally practise the detailed route's new action on a separate warm-up ball. Why: This route does not need extra details merely to fill later stages. Check: Are temporary supports gone, the leaf attached and the stalk rooted in the hollow? Repair: Repair only a remaining support or a gap in a visible edge.

Best version: Action: Add a second curved-stroke layer at lower right; darken the recess depth and turned-away leaf edge slightly. Avoid a black outline all around. Why: Stroke density separates midtone from form shadow on the surface. Check: Can you read paper light, midtone and the darker right side on the apple itself? Repair: Lift a dark outline stripe or add a little tone inside the right-hand area.

Step 10. Place the cast shadow

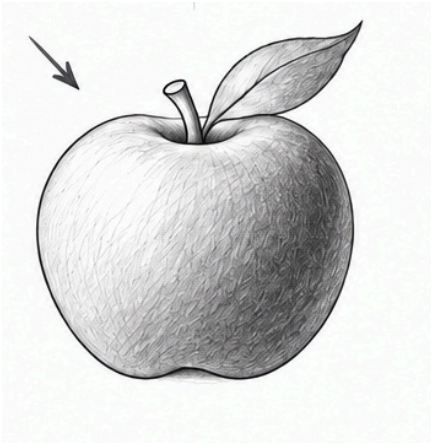


Simplest

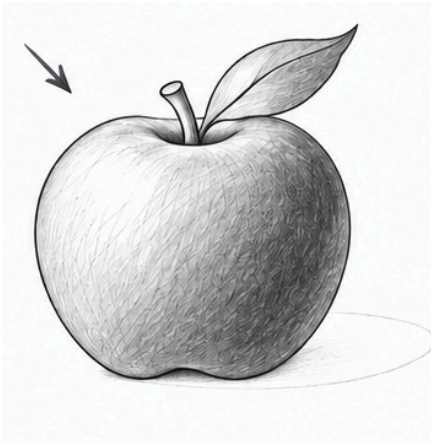


A little more detail

Before the action



After the action



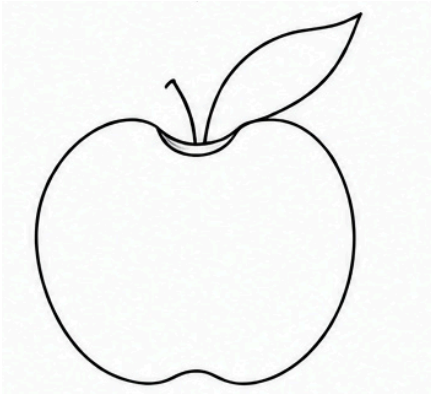
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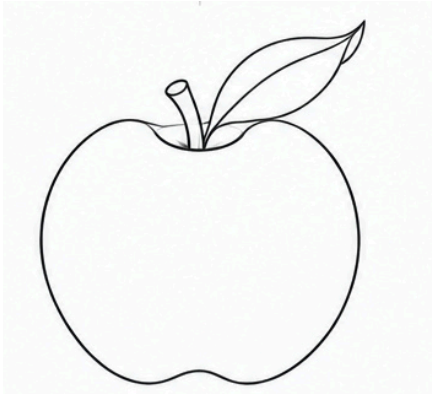
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Best version: Action: From the bottom contact place a shallow oval boundary to the right on the plane; leave it unfilled. This view uses a simplified rounded shadow. Why: A shadow on the plane needs its own position; it is not a stripe on the apple. Check: Does the oval start at the base and extend right, away from upper-left light? Repair: Move only the near oval edge to the contact or correct its direction.

Step 11. Fill from the contact

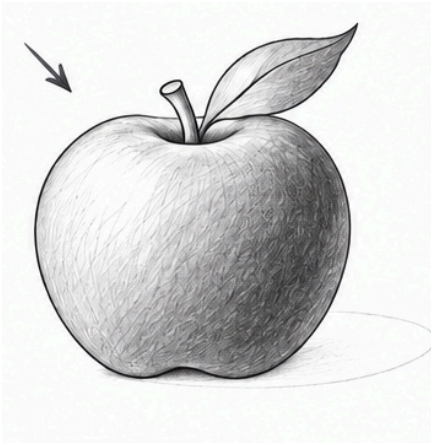


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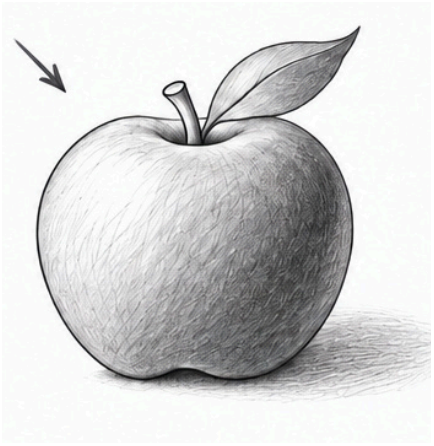


A little more detail

Before the action



After the action



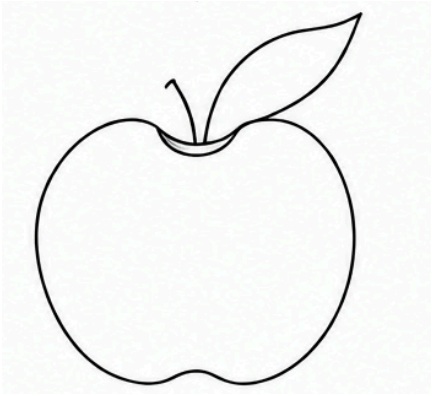
Best version

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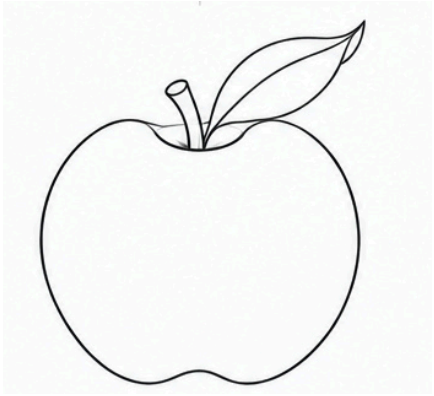
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Best version: Action: Fill the oval with light slanted strokes; darken near the contact and keep the far-right end softer and lighter. Why: Contact darkening joins the object to the table; the soft far edge does not read as a new outline. Check: Is there no white gap at the base, with the far edge lighter than the near contact? Repair: Join a short contact segment or lift the far edge with an eraser.

Step 12. Clean and check volume

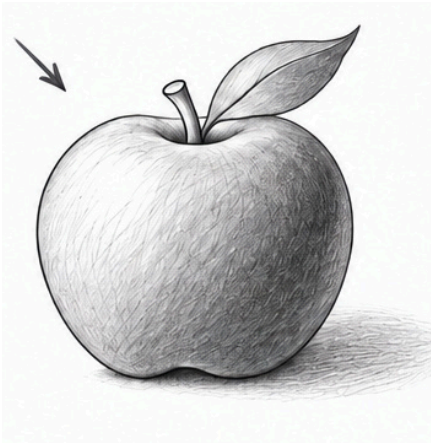


Simplest

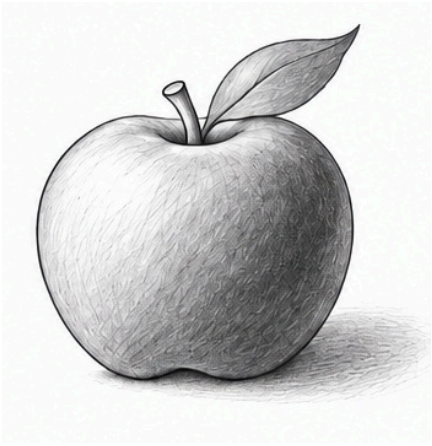


A little more detail

Before the action



After the action



Best version

Simplest: Action: Your outline drawing is finished. Keep it unshaded; optionally practise the detailed route's new action on a separate warm-up ball. Why: This route does not need extra details merely to fill later stages. Check: Are temporary supports gone, the leaf attached and the stalk rooted in the hollow? Repair: Repair only a remaining support or a gap in a visible edge.

A little more detail: Action: Your outline drawing is finished. Keep it unshaded; optionally practise the detailed route's new action on a separate warm-up ball. Why: This route does not need extra details merely to fill later stages. Check: Are temporary supports gone, the leaf attached and the stalk rooted in the hollow? Repair: Repair only a remaining support or a gap in a visible edge.

Best version: Action: Remove the arrow and faint shadow oval boundary, retaining its soft strokes. Check the light area, form shadow and contact; add no new details. Why: The finish preserves chosen decisions rather than outlining every guide. Check: Are three tones visible on the apple and a separate connected shadow on the plane? Repair: Lift excess tone in the light area or remove one remaining trial boundary.

If the drawing is unclear

The apple has a double circular edge. Cause: The temporary mass became a second finished outline. Repair: Soften the circle, retaining the chosen shoulders and bottom notch; keep the side.

The stalk floats above the apple. Cause: Its base missed the hollow. Repair: Move only the lower ends of its two edges into the recess.

The leaf looks transparent. Cause: A rear apple edge remains inside the foreground leaf. Repair: Erase the short covered segment, retaining the outer leaf edge.

The light area disappeared. Cause: The first layer covers everything evenly. Repair: Lift tone at upper left until light paper reappears.

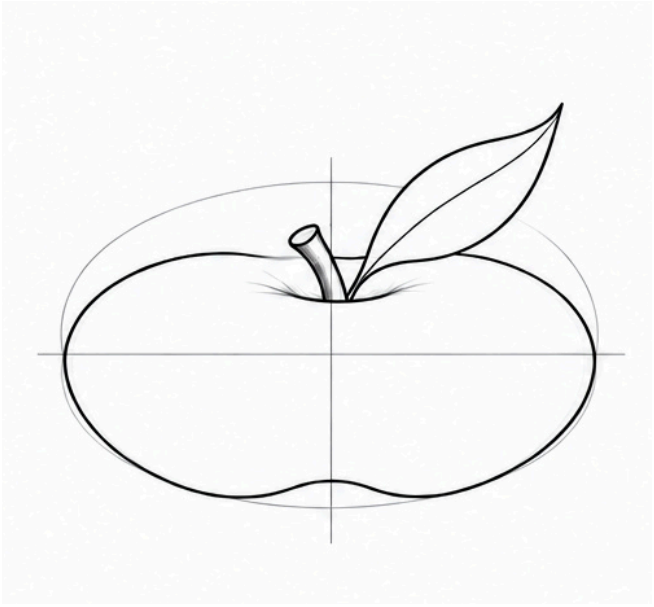
The form shadow became a dark outline. Cause: Pressure increased only along the perimeter. Repair: Soften the edge and build strokes inside the lower-right area.

The apple floats or its shadow contradicts the light. Cause: The shadow is detached from contact or points toward the source. Repair: Join its near edge to the base; with upper-left light place it to the right.

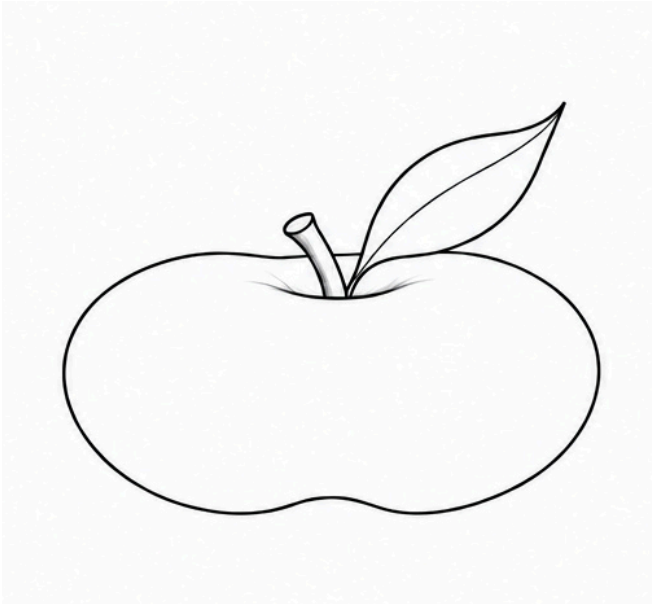
Independent tasks

Choose a new condition and first place your own supports. The upper picture shows construction; the lower one is an example after checking. All three tasks remain available to outline routes: for the light task, keep the apple unshaded and use a separate small warm-up sketch to mark the light side and shadow position. The detailed route adds tone. Exact copying is unnecessary.

1. A flatter apple



Supports in a new condition



Example after removing supports

Action: At the same width place a lower oval with shoulders nearer its centre. Place the hollow, stalk and leaf again, then erase supports.

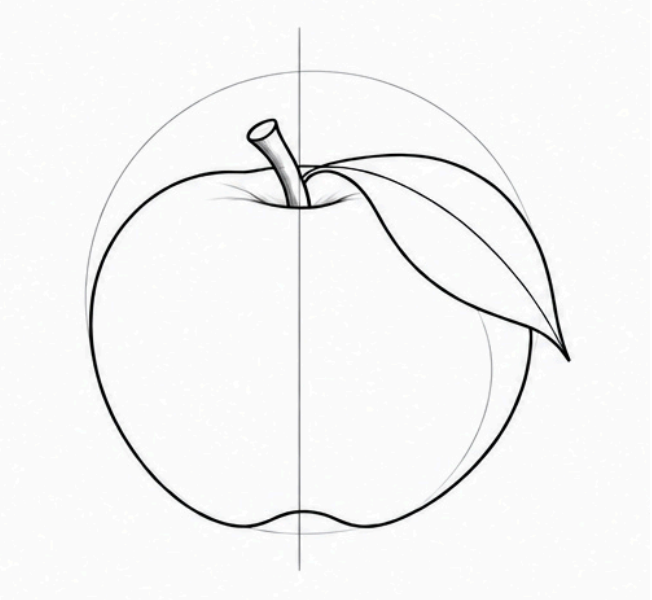
Why: A new mass height changes the top landmarks rather than just a colour.

Check: Is the mass visibly lower, with the hollow on its new top?

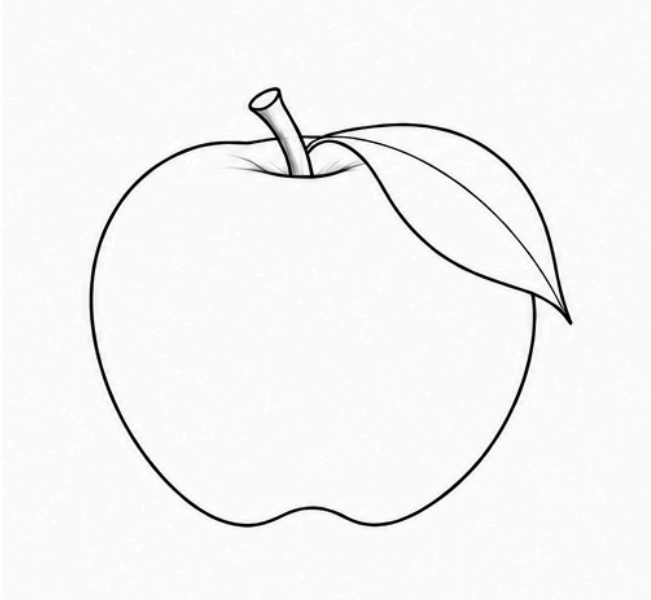
Repair: Raise the lower support and move only the stalk base.

Why cannot the old top support stay? The new mass top lies lower; the detail must be rooted in it again.

2. A lowered foreground leaf



Supports in a new condition



Example after removing supports

Action: Direct the leaf down-right from the top across the apple side. The construction shows a rear edge; identify and erase only its covered segment in your drawing.

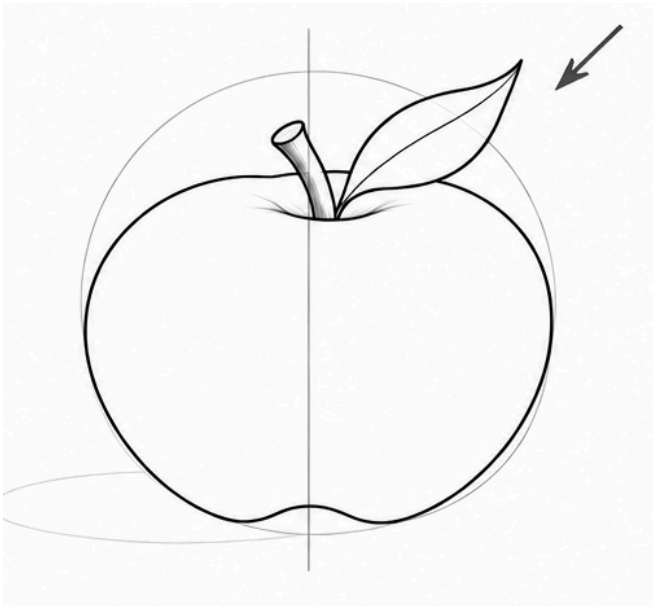
Why: A new overlap order requires deciding where the apple edge ends.

Check: Does the side stop at both foreground leaf edges and stay invisible inside?

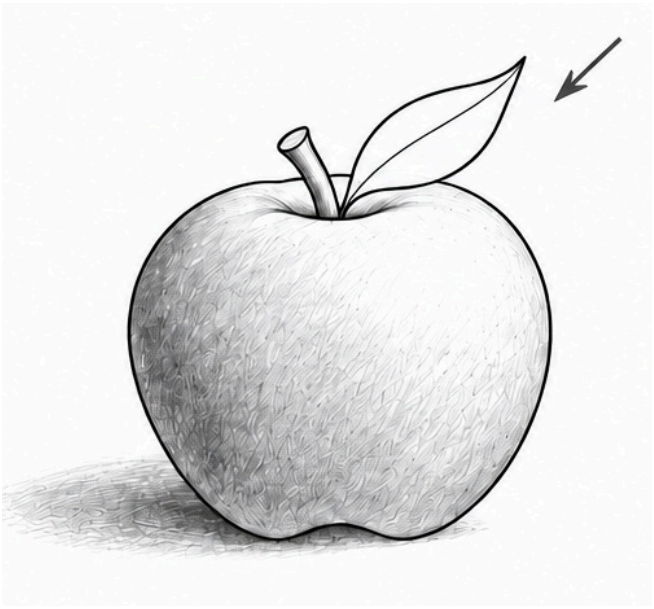
Repair: Remove the short covered edge without erasing the leaf outline.

Why erase the apple line rather than the leaf? The leaf is in front, so it hides that apple segment.

3. Light from upper right



Supports in a new condition



Example after removing supports

Action: Keep the form but move the light arrow to upper right. First use a small trial to choose the light right side, form shadow on the left and ground shadow left of the contact. Then build your own apple; tone is optional for outline routes.

Why: Changing light requires a new tone arrangement even with the same silhouette.

Check: Is upper right lighter, the left side darker and the connected cast shadow directed left?

Repair: Lift the former right shadow and move only the ground-shadow boundary.

Must you mirror the apple? No. The light source changes; keep the form and decide the light and shadows again.

Check your work

The apple has a connected rounded edge; its stalk starts inside the hollow and its leaf attaches at the top. The temporary circle and axis are gone. In the intermediate route, the recess and bent leaf read without extra lines. In the detailed route, paper light, midtone and form shadow differ; the cast shadow touches the base and extends away from the light. Point to one decision and one local repair. Matching the example is not a criterion.

Why are a form shadow and a cast shadow separate decisions? The form shadow lies on the apple surface turned away from the light. The cast shadow lies on the plane where the apple blocks light; in this view it starts at the contact and extends away from the source.