Right level of detail

Why: Photographs can be overwhelming. One of the advantages of illustration is that you can ignore irrelevant details, and pick out just the important parts.

How: Think about the purpose of the illustration. Ask yourself: does this contribute to the purpose? If you can’t think of how a particular element contributes to the purpose, don’t draw it.

Tip: It’s always best to start with the overall shape, then add detail later. As you add the detail, ask if it is adding meaning. If not, consider if you need it.

An illustration of a Gecko’s foot.

If the important element is the shape...

...show the silhouette.

If the important element is the shape of the lamellae...

...just show a toe.

Task: Draw this leaf. Choose the appropriate level of detail given these research project briefs. You can choose to draw the whole leaf, or just parts of it.

Brief: The top of a Grape (Vitis) leaf slightly resembles the Swiss Alps.

Brief: This is it: this is what a Grape (Vitis) leaf look like.

Brief: Secret code found in Grape (Vitis) venation (vein pattern).

Dr. Erin Walsh | www.negaleg.com
Taking the average

**Why:** Real animals and plants in the wild or captivity experience damage (e.g. missing scales, or broken leaf) or may be unusual for their species (e.g. albinos, or grafted plants). You are likely to be given several references of the same plant or animal, but they will all have slight differences.

**How:** Look at all of the references at once and pay attention to differences between them. Draw what is common to all of the references. If you're working for someone else, be sure to ask them if you're not sure.

**Task:** Draw an average version of these foods.
Mental rotation

Why: A common task is drawing animals or plants from a particular angle (e.g. top down, or side on), or in a particular pose. You will rarely be given reference material that shows that exact angle or pose.

How: Use the reference images to form a three-dimensional picture in your head. Look at the images for a while. Then close your eyes and imagine picking up the animal or plant you need to draw and turning it around until you have the angle you need. Start by drawing the overall shape, and make sure it looks right before you fill in the details.

Shape: Draw the shape of the ladybug as if you were looking at it directly from the side. Start with an oval, then add the legs. Detail: Add the spots and smaller detail to your ladybug.

Shape: Draw the shape of the bird as if you were looking at it from above.

Detail: Add the outline of the plumage on to the bird.

Tip: Think about overall shape before you focus on detail. This makes mental rotation much easier.
Advanced detail: Add the scales and fin patterns to the fish below.

Tip: Mental rotation of detail like this can be tricky. It can help to start with lines showing the three-dimensional form of the object, and then using that as a guide for placing detail.

What now?
Practise! Set your own assignments and draw regularly. Draw from life, and for more variety, try a 3D model viewer website.

All of the examples in the mental rotation exercise are from https://sketchfab.com/, a great resource for practising mental rotation. Models used were:
http://tinyurl.com/3d-eastern-bluebird
http://tinyurl.com/3d-goldfish
http://tinyurl.com/3d-ladybug

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