

General Guidelines for Fine-Art Modeling

The Profession of Fine-Art Modeling

To most artists, there is probably nothing as fascinating as the human form. While no one knows when an artist first used a model to create art, it was certainly thousands of years ago. The creators of the statues of Greek antiquity obviously used a real human body as a guide, even though the result was often an idealized figure.

The nude human body is an expression of energy as well as form, a powerful statement of what it means to be human. In seeking to render the undraped human figure, the artist hopes to capture the essential qualities of the human being: gesture, proportion, expression, and relationship with the eternal, and to elevate the nude figure as a metaphor for what it means to truly be alive at a certain time, in a certain place.

Such creations are only possible with the participation of a professional fine-art model. Modeling is an artistic profession as well as a respectable one. A model serves as both a living example of a human body and an inspiration for the creation of fine art.

The model is a participant in the artistic process, and infuses energy and personality, as well as a physical body, into that process. While the physical human form is certainly a significant part of the model's contribution to a work of art, a model is not just another physical prop; he or she is, rather, a total human being—most likely the only living being, and hence the main character, in the scene. Ideally, a model brings his or her total self to the artistic process, inviting the artist to capture his or her unique energy and character. Modeling is an active, not a passive, activity.

A model should conduct him/herself in a professional manner, and be treated as a professional by those they work with. A freelance model is **not** an employee, but a consultant who provides modeling services and works as a partner with the artist or art instructor.

Modeling can be a physically and emotionally stressful activity. To perform at their best, models need a safe and respectful environment in which to work.

Individual capabilities and comfort levels can vary a great deal from one model to another; human bodies are not interchangeable. While a particular pose can be requested of a model, it is the model's choice whether to accept the pose or to modify it to one that is acceptable for them. A pose could also be emotionally, as well as physically, stressful to a model. If a model declines to do a particular pose, that request needs to be honored. It is therefore never appropriate to demand that a model do a specific pose, with no option to modify it.

Moreover, artists will do their best work from a model whose pose is not only comfortable for them but also expresses that model's energy and character. Negative energy from a model, such as pain, stress or resentment, will detract from the artistic character of the pose.

If, however, a model has such extreme limitations that they cannot perform a particular type or class of poses, such as standing or reclining, they need to make that limitation clear to any artist or institution they approach for modeling work.

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In addition, the studio environment needs to be both physically and emotionally comfortable for the model. Models, like artists, will do their best work when they can feel free to be expressive without being judged or subjected to undue stress.

Qualifications for being an art model

The main qualification for being an art model is to be comfortable in, and able to be expressive with, the body. And of course, a model needs to be able to hold reasonably still for long periods of time.

Having a sense of what constitutes an artistically interesting pose is also very helpful; this is a skill that a good model develops over time, if they don't come into the modeling profession with it.

It also helps to look interesting in some way; blandly good-looking people, while they are in great demand in fashion and commercial modeling, are **not** good candidates for art modeling. They are boring. It is better, however, not to be extremely over-weight, or even worse, under-weight. A body with a lot of contrasts in it will be most interesting to draw, paint or sculpt.

It is **not** necessary to have a "great" physique (however that is culturally defined at the moment) to be an art model. Neither is it necessary to be a contortionist or to be able to hold "difficult" poses for long periods of time. That type of modeling is a specialty, and many models pride themselves on such capabilities. But it is not a requirement for modeling in general.

While there is a lower age limit of 18 to be a nude model, there is no upper age limit for any type of modeling. Young, middle-aged and older human bodies are all interesting in different ways. Whatever their age, nude modeling will be most enjoyable to persons who are able to get in touch with their "inner toddler"—the one who loves to be the center of attention, show off and be expressive, and hates to wear clothes. (This does not mean being irresponsible, however.)

Posing is a stressful activity

The human body, like all animal bodies, is designed to move, not to remain still for long periods of time. Immobility puts a tremendous strain on the human body, that it is not designed for. Models are not super-humans who can perform extraordinary acts of contortion or endure more physical stress than the average person. Neither are they objects to be manipulated into whatever positions the artists desire.

Standing poses put particular strain, not just on the feet, but also on the back and legs. To maintain balance while standing still for any length of time requires continual adjustments—adjustments performed, for the most part, by the muscles of the lower back and legs. While these adjustments may not be visible to an outside observer, the model is well aware of them. Moreover, such adjustments are not what the muscles are designed to perform. Back muscles are designed to help the human body remain upright while moving, not while standing still, and leg muscles are designed to move the legs, not, again, to hold them still.

Sitting poses (except for sitting "Japanese-style" on the haunches) also put strain on the back, because they disrupt the natural curvature of the spine that normally holds up the back and head. (And even sitting on the haunches creates some of the same problems as standing poses.) This lack must be compensated for in long sitting poses, by providing direct support for the back. Most

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chairs are not designed to provide such support; additional cushions behind the back may be needed.

In addition, short-legged models often need an elevated surface to rest their feet on. Most chairs are designed for people with “standard” adult-sized legs, AND wearing shoes. If the model’s legs are dangling, or only their toes are touching the surface beneath the chair, they need a footrest. Sometimes a block of wood is available. A thick book (or several thinner ones) can also work. Providing insufficient support for the feet will put additional strain on the back.

Sitting poses can also sometimes cut off circulation to the legs, or even, in certain positions, to the arms.

Reclining poses, while relatively comfortable, can cut off circulation to the arms, legs or buttocks, and can also put strain on the neck, if the head is not properly supported. (See *A word about the head in poses* below.)

A word about the head in poses

When we sit or stand in a normal upright posture, the head is supported by the spinal column. When the head is moved off the top of the spinal column by tilting either the head or the body, this support disappears, and the head must then be held up by the neck muscles. Even turning the head, without tilting it, puts some stress on the neck muscles.

The human head is heavy! (partly because the skull is the densest bone in the body). Neck muscles will tire easily when they are given the job of holding up the head. Any pose that requires moving the head off the center of the spinal column will, therefore, be stressful on the neck. Reclining poses can be particularly deceptive in this way. While they may appear to be relaxing, they can be stressful if the neck and head are not properly supported. If the model is not experienced enough to realize this potential problem, it is helpful if the artist or instructor is aware of it and takes steps to mitigate the stress by providing proper support for the head and neck.

Some observations about nude modeling

Nude models deserve special respect. Working with a nude model is a privilege, not an entitlement. Just because someone removes their clothes does not mean they are removing their boundaries, or giving up their rights. The converse, in fact, is true: they need stronger boundaries, and acquire more rights.

In mainstream American culture, nudity is generally associated (incorrectly, to those of us who value the human figure in fine art) only with sexuality and vulnerability. In addition, a model, while posing, is immobilized—almost as if they were physically restrained. Finally, in a culture where nudity is not the norm, a nude person in a room full of clothed people becomes a powerful magnet for attention.

For someone to take a position where they are exposed, restrained, and at the center of attention, is to put themselves in an extremely vulnerable position. Please appreciate the risk a nude model is taking, to perform the valuable service of posing for fine art work.

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Remember that the model is posing for the artists, who are (or at least should be) focused on their art. Non-artist visitors, including children, are inappropriate in a studio where a nude model is posing. Since such persons' focus will **not** be on art, it will by default be on the nude body of the model, because that is such a powerful presence in the room. The model is not there to be on display for curious onlookers. He or she is there to provide material and inspiration for the artists.

Rights of Models

The following guidelines should be followed in conducting the modeling session:

- Personal Respect: The modeling session should be conducted with dignity, and the model should be treated with respect.
 - Frequent communication with the model is helpful. Information such as the structure of the session time, the type and length of poses desired, etc., can help the model plan ahead during the session and do a better job.
 - Crude remarks, gestures or facial expressions directed towards the model should not be tolerated. If a model feels uncomfortable with a remark or action by an artist participant in the session, that evaluation should be honored. Instructors or session organizers are responsible for the conduct of their students or participants, and for enforcing this guideline. Any individual who violates this guideline should be given a warning; a second offense by the same individual should be grounds for barring the offending individual from the rest of the session.
 - Sexual harassment or any inappropriate physical conduct on the part of artist participants is not tolerable and should result in the immediate expulsion of the offending individual from the modeling session.
 - Only artists whose focus is on their artwork should be present in the studio while a model is posing nude. Extraneous visitors, including children, are not appropriate and should not be allowed in the studio without the model's consent.
- Working Conditions: The studio environment needs to be safe and reasonably clean and comfortable.
 - The model stand should be reasonably clean and free of toxic substances. Charcoal or clay dust should be cleaned off the stand, or a covering provided. Art materials, books, debris, food or food containers, or any other extraneous material, must be removed from the model stand before the session starts. This task is the responsibility of the instructor or session organizer, not of the model.
 - The studio should be as clear as possible of toxic substances that could cause serious health risks to the model. This standard is higher for a nude model than for other occupants of the room, since their direct skin exposure is greater.
 - A functional space heater needs to be provided if the studio is too cold for the model's comfort. Conversely, a fan should be provided if the temperature is too high.

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- If possible, adequate equipment should be provided for poses, such as cushions for sitting or reclining poses, poles or podiums for standing poses, if the model requests them.
- Sufficient privacy will be provided to the model during the posing session. It is up to the model to determine what is sufficient for him or her.
- The only appropriate place for a nude model to be nude is on the modeling stand (or in the designated area, if there is no stand). A nude model on the stand is an object of art; a nude model outside of the designated modeling area is a naked person in a room full of clothed people.
- Posing Standards: Poses must be acceptable to the model. While a specific pose can be requested of a model, it is the model's choice whether to accept the pose or to modify it to one that is acceptable for them. Under no circumstances is a specific pose ever to be arbitrarily dictated to a model.
- Length of sessions shall be reasonable, and sufficient breaks provided. It is up to the model to determine what is reasonable and sufficient for him/her. At least one fifteen-minute break should be provided after no longer than two hours of modeling, but a model can, within reason, request more frequent breaks.

Sessions, and individual poses, will not be extended beyond the time agreed upon in advance, unless the model consents and is provided with additional remuneration for extended session time. An exception can be made if the model arrived late at the session and agrees to make up the lost time. Delays in starting a session caused by persons or circumstances other than the model, however, do not warrant extension of the session without agreement of, and additional remuneration to, the model.

- Consent of photography: No photograph will be taken of the model without prior notice to and agreement of the model.
- Consent for exhibition: No photograph or representative work of the model in which the model is recognizable, will be exhibited or submitted for publication without the model's written and witnessed consent.
- Remuneration: Payment is due at the end of the modeling session, or by a previously agreed-upon schedule, and is expected for cancellations of the session with less than 24 hours' notice.

Responsibilities of Models

- Promptness: Models should arrive at the studio in sufficient time to be prepared to start modeling at the scheduled beginning of the session.
- Reliability: Models should provide at least 24 hours notice of cancellation, and suggest an alternate. Models will not leave before the end of the modeling session unless given permission to do so by the instructor or session organizer. Exceptions can be made for emergencies.

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- Posing: Model shall hold poses, with minimal movement, for the agreed-upon length of the pose (subject to cancellation if the pose proves too physically difficult to hold). Model will not engage in excessive disruptive movements such as turning the body or gesturing, during the pose.
- Artists' privacy: Artists' work and ideas are private and need not be shared. Models will respect artists' requests for confidentiality.