

Art educators have long debated the value of having students learn to draw by copying other works and images. There are those who believe copying is an effective tool in the process of learning to draw and those who are against imitation and copying from any sources, including nature. Take a stand in this debate and justify your position.

In Mary Ann Stankiewicz's (2001), *Roots of Art Education Practice*, she presents a quote by Mary Ann Dwight, an art educator in the mid 1800s, that creates an analogy arguing that one does not learn how to write original works by copying other people's writing, much the same as one does not learn how to create original art compositions by copying either (p. 6). I love this analogy and I completely agree...but I do believe there is a place in the learning process for copy work. First of all, when I teach realism, I provide a mixture of drawing exercises, some of which is copy work and some drawing directly from observation. I follow a lot of Betty Edward's methods, so we do upside down contour line drawings, and some copy work of contour line drawings to practice measuring by sight. Once students understand the concept of measuring and drawing "what they see, not what they know," then we move on to drawing from observation. After two weeks of working from observation, I do a value reduction drawing project in which they work from a black and white photograph. By this point, they understand how to measure and draw from observation, but what beginner drawers also still need practice on is mastering a dynamic range of values, which is equally important to achieving proper placement and proportions in the quest to achieving realism. So, I absolutely believe that copying is an effective tool, but it is *just a tool*. It is essential to teach students the learning objectives of copy work, and make sure they completely understand that the only way to make something look realistic is to work from observation. I am an advocate of always having visual aids when creating compositions and often those visual aids take the form of photographs. My students leave my classroom with the skills of working directly from observation as well as compiling (appropriating) a variety of images to create a new original piece of work. Copying cannot be the end all be all of the art making process, but it definitely has its place in the learning process as a valuable tool.