

Expressive clay portrait step-by-step

1. Choose a specific emotion that you want to communicate in your portrait. You may wish to choose a specific person to sculpt at this stage as well. Choose from:

sadness
anger
disgust
surprise
fear
contempt
derision
confusion

2. Divide your clay in half. One half will be for creating the sphere of the head, and the other half will be for the features and neck.

3. Create a hollow sphere that will act as a foundation for your portrait. Divide the clay for the sphere in half, and create a hollow hemisphere of clay with each one. The walls should be about 8mm thick. Use a plastic knife to roughen the edges and then join the two halves together without squishing either hemisphere. Carefully smooth over the seam without deforming the hemispheres. You want the sphere to be airtight at this stage.

4. Paddle the sphere into an egg shape with a wooden spoon. This will both shape and strengthen your clay.

5. Mark out the general proportions of the face.

- Eyes will be near the halfway mark between the top of the head and the bottom of the chin.
- The bridge of the nose will start between the eyes and the tip will stop a little short of half the distance from the eyeline to the chin.
- The lips will be halfway between the tip of the nose and the chin.
- The space between the eyes is usually equal to the width of one eye.
- The mouth is usually as wide as the space between the two pupils of the eye.

6. Add the features. The order is not critical. Add the clay roughly at first. Smoothing too quickly will squeeze the moisture from the clay and make it much harder to mould and shape. Then add and remove clay to refine the features.

Keep observing a real person's face. Choose a photograph to work from - or much better: choose someone in the class.

- nose
- brows
- cheekbones
- fill in forehead
- lips
- chin
- cheeks
- eyes
- hair

7. Adjust the features of the face to express emotion. You will be tempted to simply make a blank face. Keep looking at real people with obvious emotions. Look at how the parts of the face are different from emotion to emotion. There is a huge difference between a sad chin and a disgusted chin.

8. Smooth and refine the features. Keep adding and removing clay as needed. Smooth the parts of the face together so that there is a seamless transition from one part to another. Keep working from observation and keep focused on communicating your emotion.

9. Add a neck to support your sculpture. Make sure it is not looking up.

10. Add hair to your sculpture. Observe from real life to help you get the shape and texture.

11. Discreetly puncture your portrait so that the air can escape during firing.