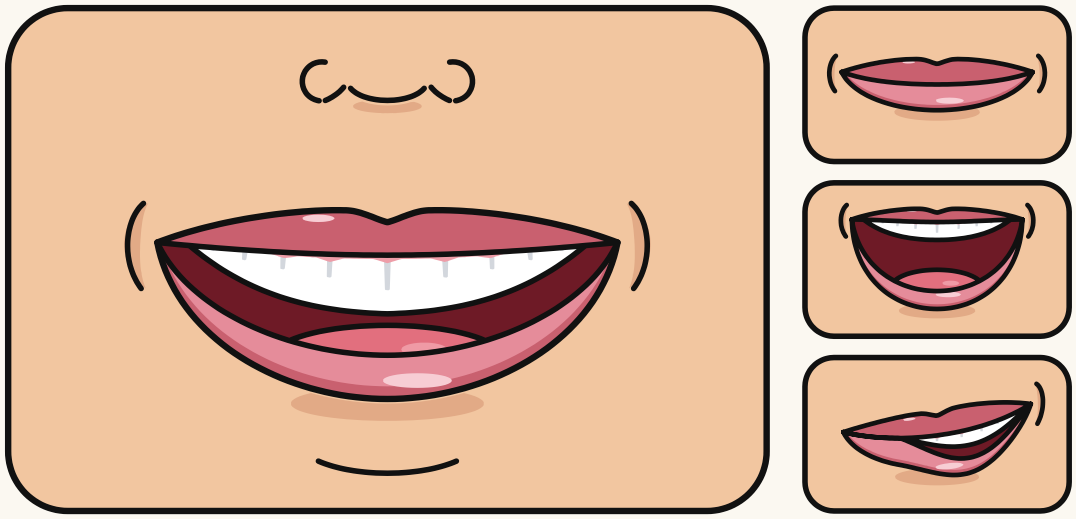
How to Draw a Smile

11 easy steps for beginners



What you'll need

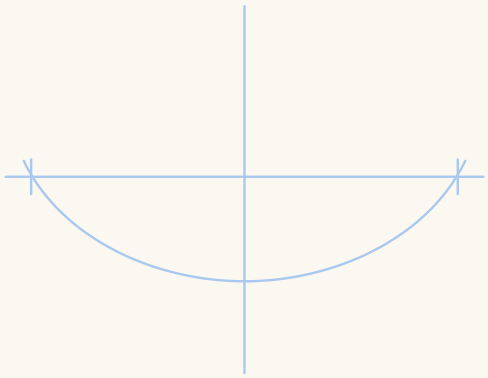
- A pencil
- An eraser
- A black fineliner
- Colored pencils
- White paper

How to use this guide

New lines for each step are shown in **blue**; lines you already drew are gray. Draw lightly first, then ink and erase near the end.

Read the full tutorial online →

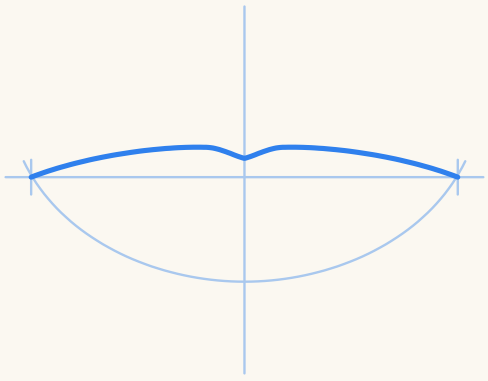
STEP 1 Sketch the smile curve and center line



Press lightly and draw a vertical center line, then a level line across it for the mouth corners. Tick each end; the gap between ticks is your smile's width. Now swing a wide U from tick to tick. That U is the bottom of the open mouth and decides how happy the smile looks: a deeper U means a bigger grin.

💡 **Tip:** Draw the U in two halves, each starting at a corner tick and meeting at the center line.

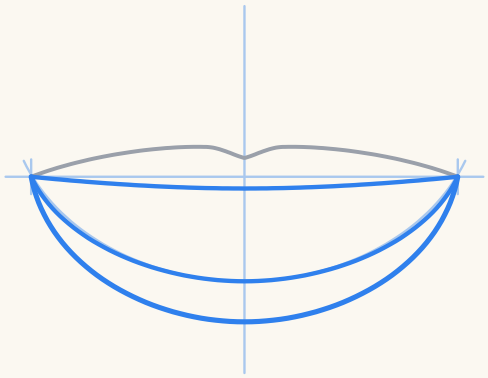
STEP 2 Draw the upper lip with a cupid's bow



From the left corner, sweep a long, gentle curve up and toward the middle. Just before the center line it peaks, dips into a small V, and rises to a matching peak on the other side. That little M shape is the cupid's bow. In a wide smile the upper lip gets stretched, so I keep its top edge low and smooth rather than tall and puffy.

💡 **Tip:** Keep the two peaks close to the center line. Spread them too far apart and the lip looks like a mustache.

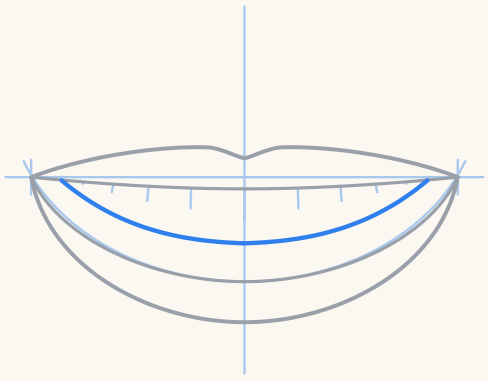
STEP 3 Add the mouth opening and a fuller lower lip



Join the corners with a shallow curve that dips slightly in the middle; that's the underside of the upper lip and the top of the opening. Then trace your U guide for the bottom of the opening. Below it, draw a second, rounder curve for the lower lip. Make the lower lip noticeably thicker than the upper one, because on most faces it is, and it gives the mouth weight.

💡 **Tip:** All four lip curves meet at the same two corner points. Let them pinch together there.

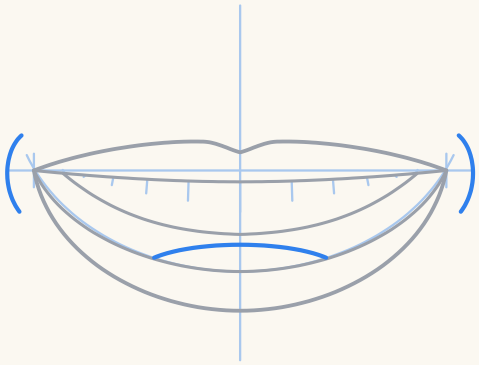
STEP 4 Draw the top teeth as one band



This step makes or breaks a smile. Draw one curve inside the opening, sagging in the middle; everything above it is the upper teeth. Stop it a little short of the corners so a dark gap stays there. Then mark where teeth meet with a few short, faint strokes, wider apart at the front and closer toward the sides.

💡 **Tip:** Never draw a box around each tooth. A grid of boxes is what makes cartoon teeth look creepy.

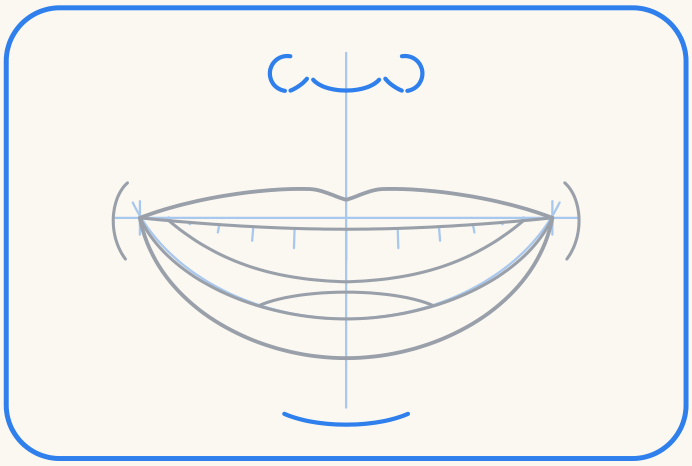
STEP 5 Add the tongue and smile creases



Near the bottom of the opening, draw a low, rounded arch for the top of the tongue. It should fill only the lower part, with dark space left between it and the teeth. Next, put a short curve just outside each mouth corner, shaped like a bracket. Those creases show the cheeks pushing up, and they're what makes a smile look real rather than painted on.

💡 **Tip:** Keep the creases short and a small gap away from the corners. Long ones add age to the face.

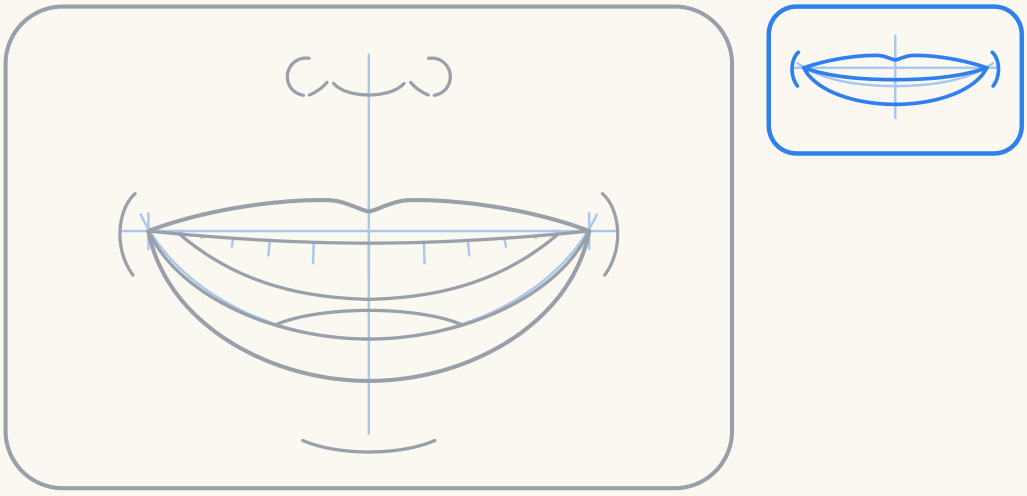
STEP 6 Frame the skin patch, nose and chin



Draw a large rounded rectangle around the mouth to hold the skin color. Above the cupid's bow, leave a clear gap and sketch the nose base: a soft curve for the tip, a bracket for each nostril wing and two tiny hooks. Below the lower lip, a short curve marks the chin crease. These hints put the mouth on a face without drawing a whole head.

💡 **Tip:** Line the nostril wings up roughly above the cupid's bow peaks, not above the mouth corners.

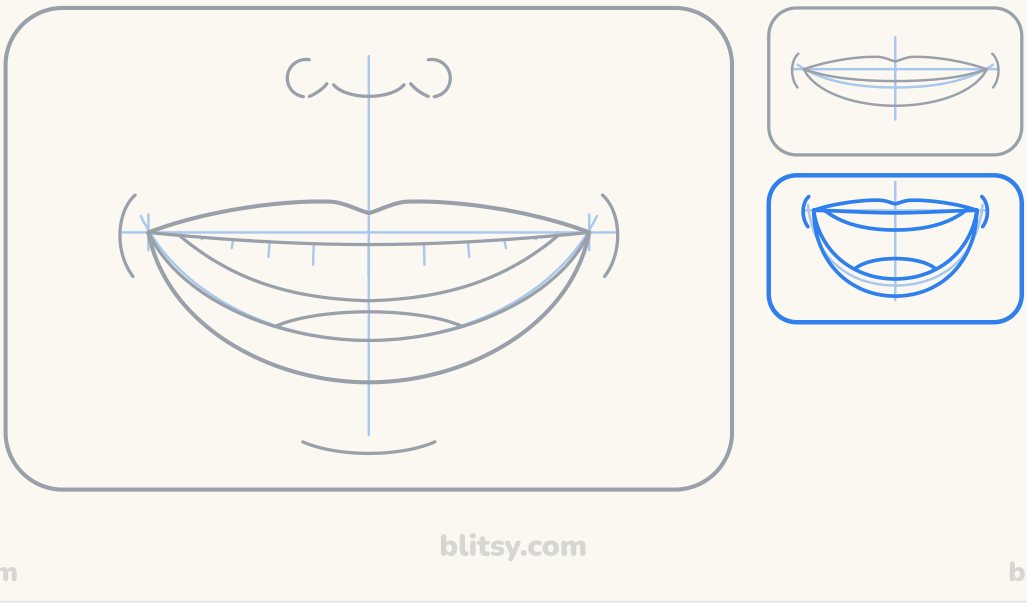
STEP 7 Try a closed gentle smile



In the top small frame, make tiny versions of the step 1 guides with a much flatter U. The lips stay together this time, so you only need three curves: the upper lip with its bow, one line where the lips meet curving up at the ends, and a full lower lip. Add the two corner creases. It's the smile for a calm, kind character.

💡 **Tip:** The meeting line between the lips does all the smiling here, so lift its ends clearly.

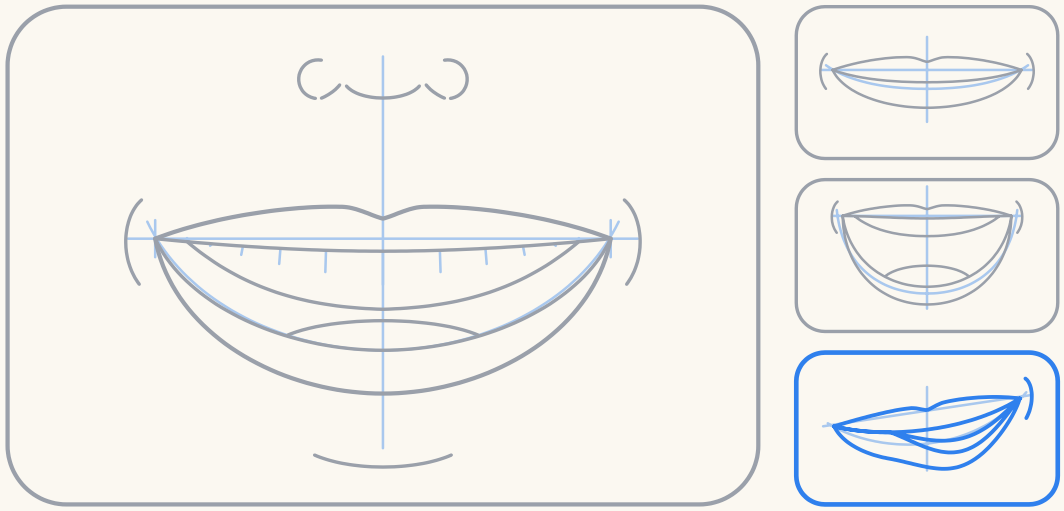
STEP 8 Draw a big open laugh



For the middle frame, keep the top of the opening almost straight and drop the U very deep, nearly into a half circle. The upper teeth become a thinner band at the top, and the tongue sits low with lots of dark mouth above it. Wrap a lower lip around the bottom and add the creases. A laughing mouth opens downward, not sideways.

💡 **Tip:** If your laugh looks like a scream, raise the corners and shrink the opening a little.

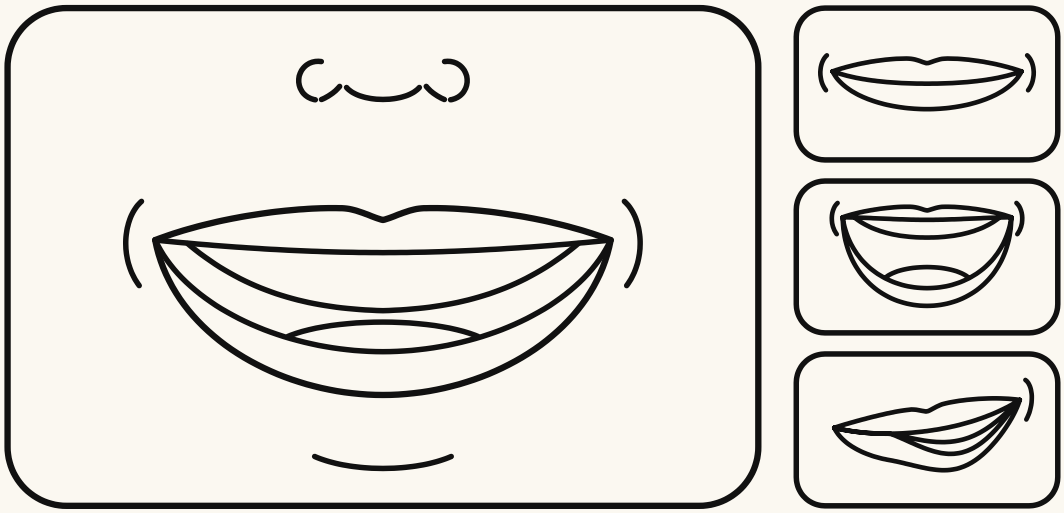
STEP 9 Finish with a lopsided grin



Tilt the guides in the bottom frame so the right corner sits higher than the left. On the left side the lips stay closed; on the right they part just enough to show a sliver of teeth. Only the raised side gets a crease. I like this one for cheeky or confident characters, though it takes a couple of tries to get the tilt right.

💡 **Tip:** Exaggerate the tilt in pencil first. A small tilt reads as a mistake, not a grin.

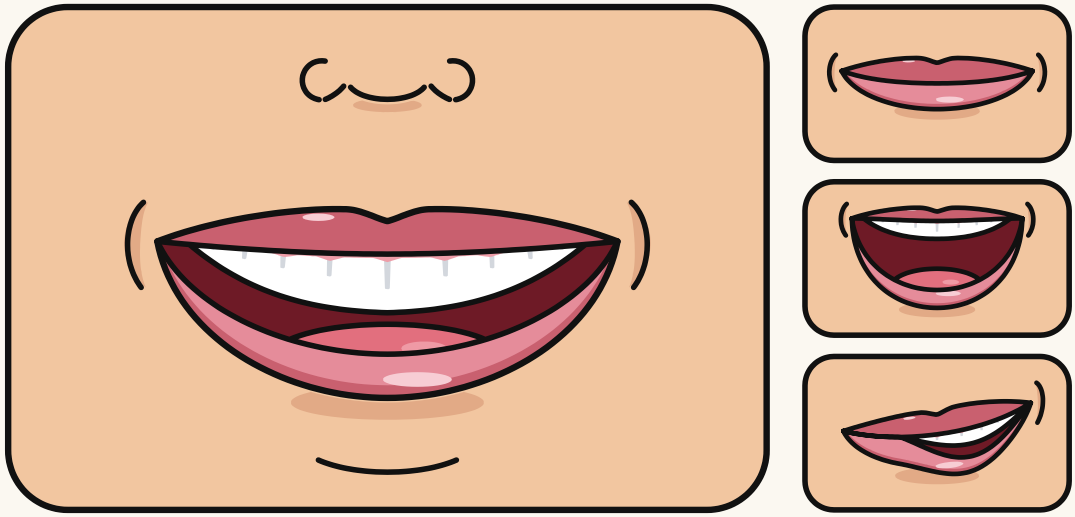
STEP 10 Ink the lines and erase the guides



Trace every keeper line with your pen: lips, teeth curve, tongue, creases, nose, chin and the frames. Skip the faint tooth gap strokes and all the guides. Give the ink a minute to dry, then erase the pencil. The tooth gaps come back in the next step as soft gray, which looks far gentler than ink.

💡 **Tip:** Go slowly around the mouth corners, where four lines meet in one point.

STEP 11 Color the smiles



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Start with peach skin and add tan below the nose, under the lower lip and inside each crease. Fill the mouth with dark red, then a rose red tongue. Leave the teeth white and touch in light gray only where teeth meet. Color the upper lip a darker pink than the lower lip, deepen the bottom edge of the lower lip, and leave a small unshaded spot on it for the shine.

💡 **Tip:** Color the dark mouth first, then the teeth. It keeps red from smudging into the white.