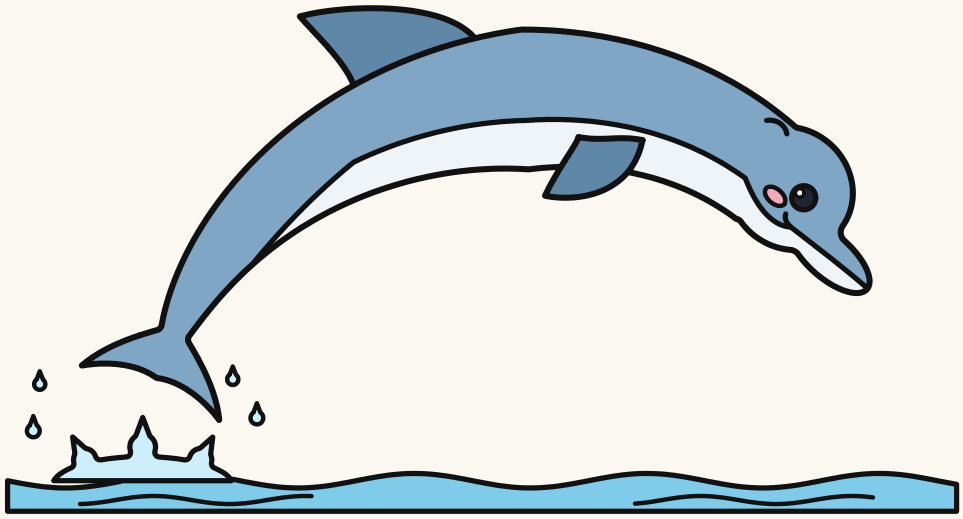
How to Draw a Dolphin

12 easy steps for beginners



What you'll need

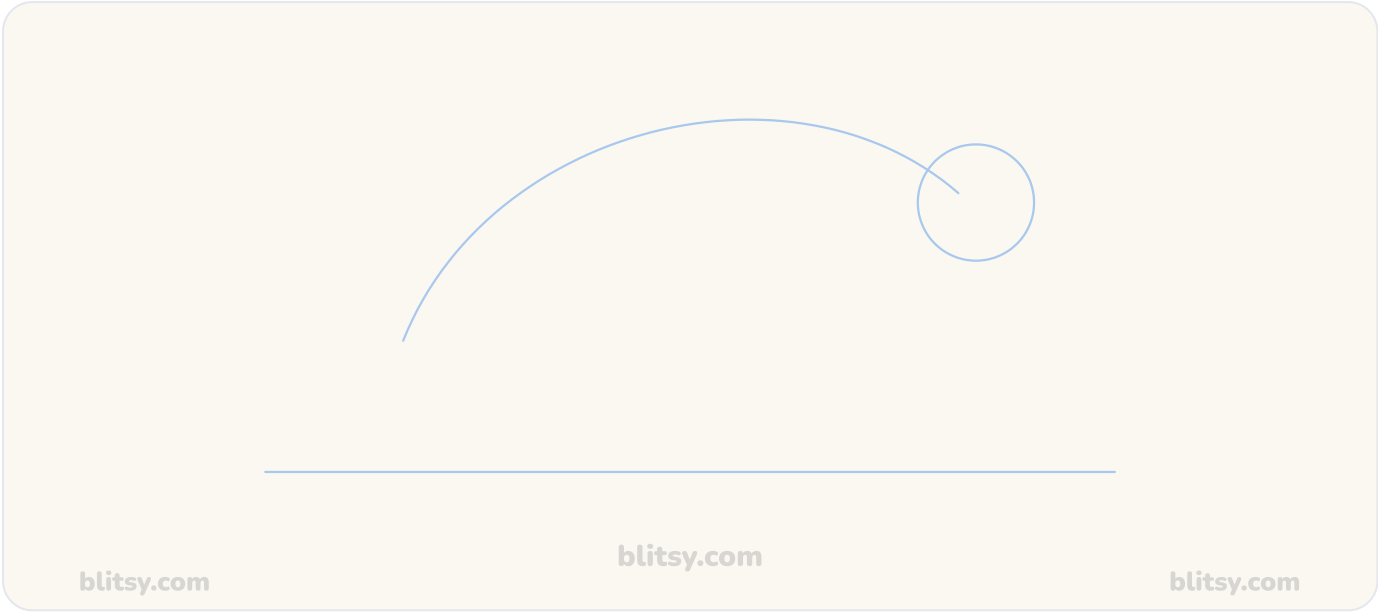
- A pencil
- An eraser
- A black marker or fineliner
- Colored pencils or crayons
- Plain paper

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 →

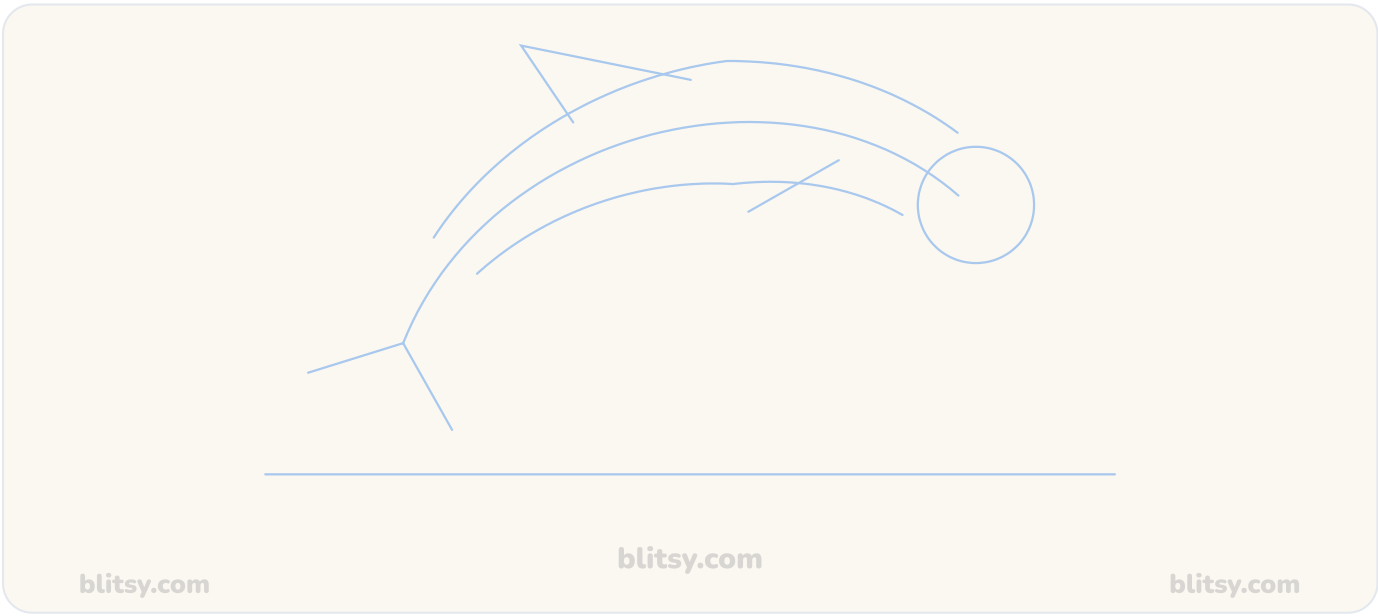
STEP 1 Sketch the arc, a head circle and the water line



Draw a straight line low on the page for the water. Above it, sketch one long curve like a rainbow that starts near the left of the water line, rises to its highest point a little left of center, and comes down on the right. Where the curve ends, draw a circle about as wide as your thumb is long. That circle is the head.

💡 **Tip:** Keep the curve smooth and in one stroke if you can. A wobbly arc makes a wobbly dolphin.

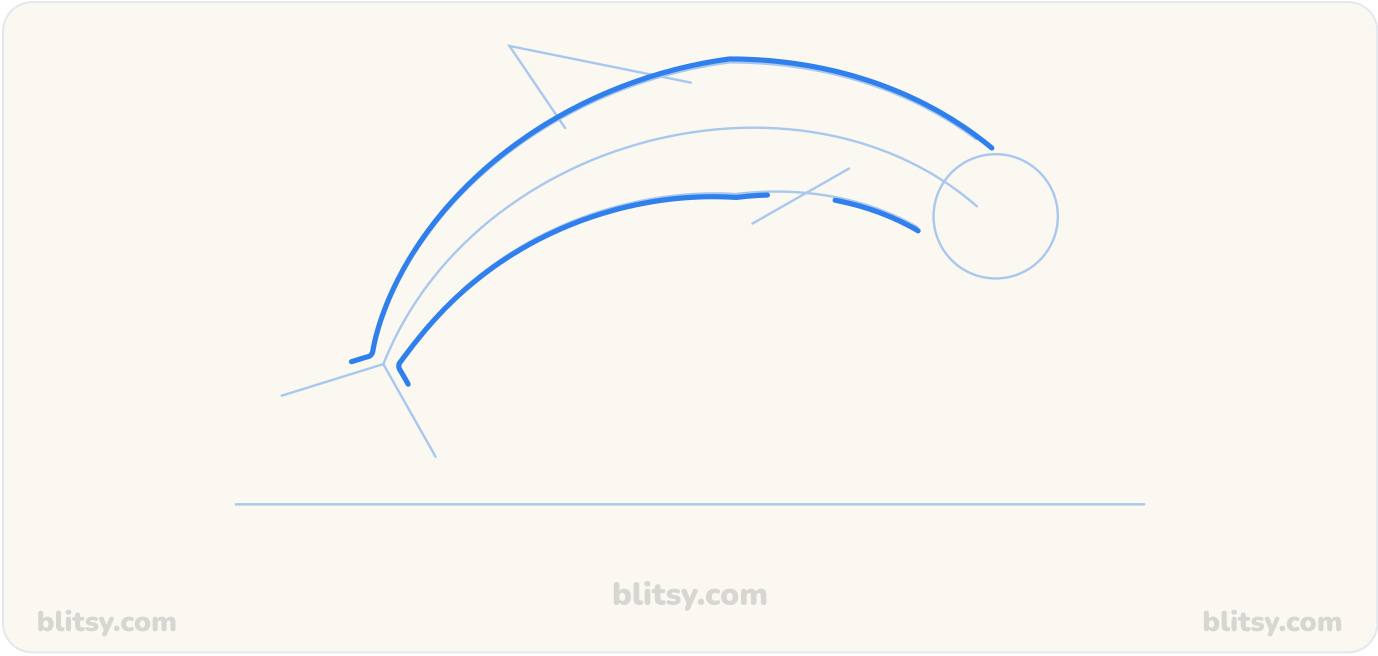
STEP 2 Add body guides and fin lines



Draw two more curves along the arc, one above it and one below, so you get a long band that is thickest in the middle and narrows to the left. Near the middle of the top, sketch a small triangle for the dorsal fin. At the left end draw a V for the tail, and under the chest one short slanted line for the flipper.

💡 **Tip:** The band should be about as thick as the head circle at its widest point and very thin at the tail.

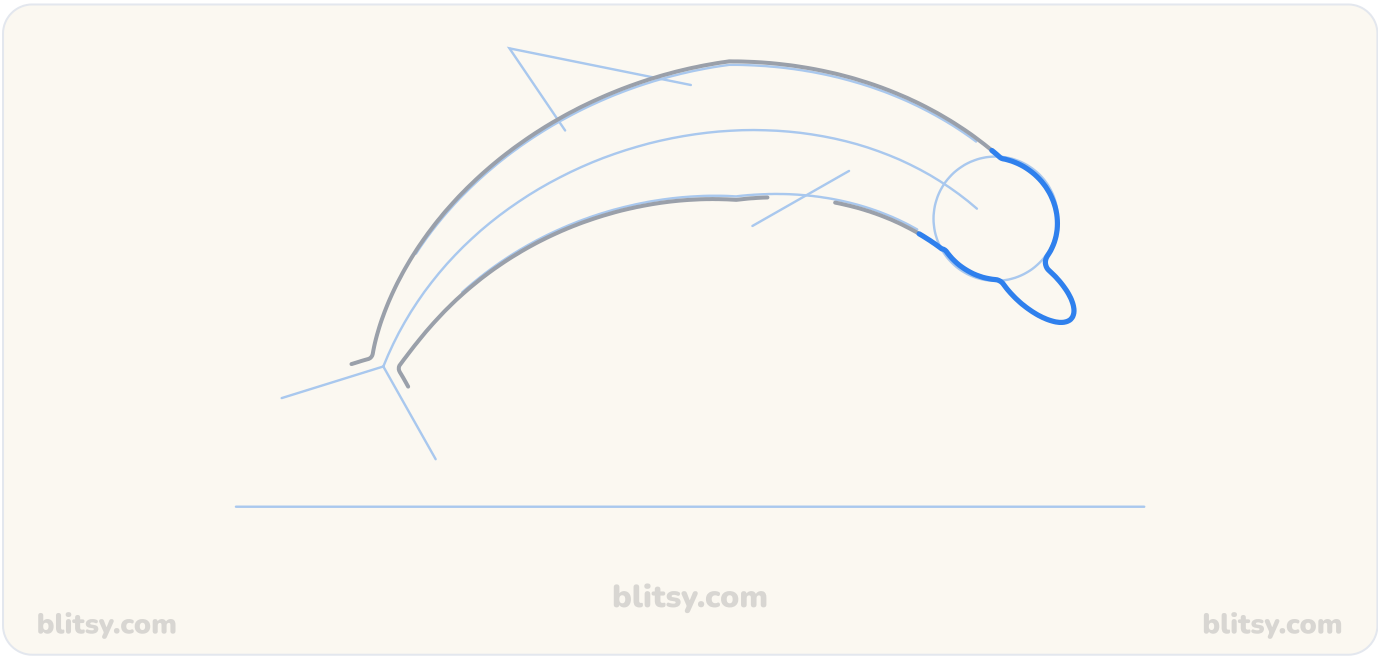
STEP 3 Draw the long curved body



Now go over the top and bottom of the band with firmer lines. The back line runs from the tail all the way to the head circle. The belly line is shorter, and I leave a small gap where the flipper will sit. At the tail end, let both lines pinch in until they almost meet.

💡 **Tip:** Stop the lines at the head circle. The head gets its own shape next.

STEP 4 Shape the melon head and the short beak



A bottlenose has a round, bulging forehead called the melon. Trace the front of the head circle to make it, then add a short, rounded beak at the lower front, a bit like a thumb. I always connect the bottom of the beak back to the belly line with one smooth curve under the chin.

💡 **Tip:** Keep the beak short. A long thin beak turns your bottlenose into a different kind of dolphin, or even a swordfish.

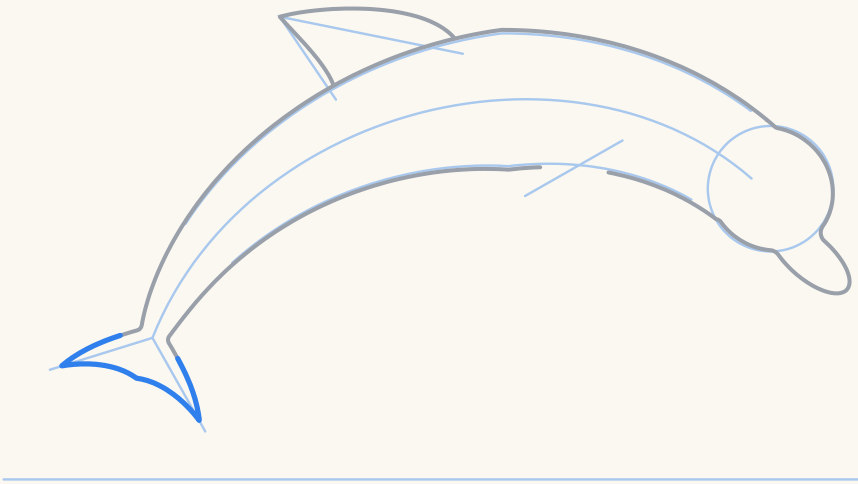
STEP 5 Draw the curved dorsal fin



Use the triangle guide on the back. The front edge of the fin bulges out in a gentle curve, the tip points back toward the tail, and the back edge curves inward like a hook. Its bottom tucks behind the body line, so you don't draw a line across the base.

💡 **Tip:** If the fin stands straight up, it looks stiff. Leaning it toward the tail adds speed.

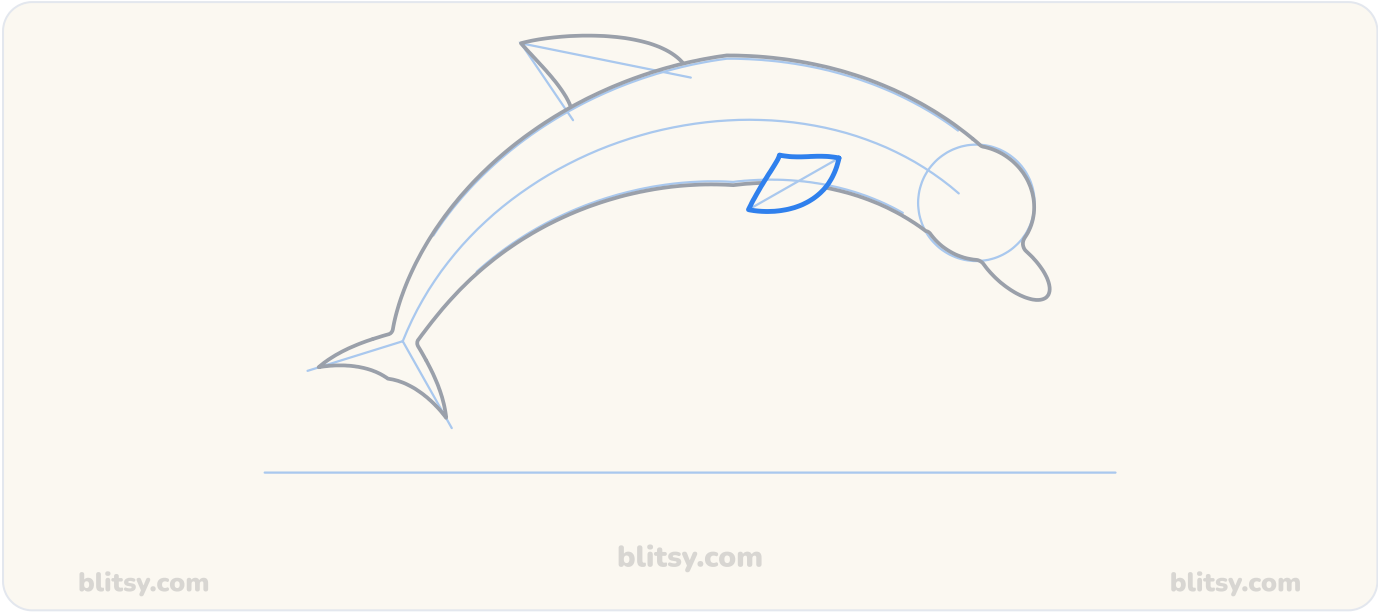
STEP 6 Add the tail flukes



At the narrow end of the body, draw two pointed lobes that spread out along your V guide. Each has a curved front edge and a slightly scooped back edge, and they meet in a little notch. My test: together they should look like a wide, soft letter V.

💡 **Tip:** Make both lobes the same size. Uneven flukes are the first thing people notice.

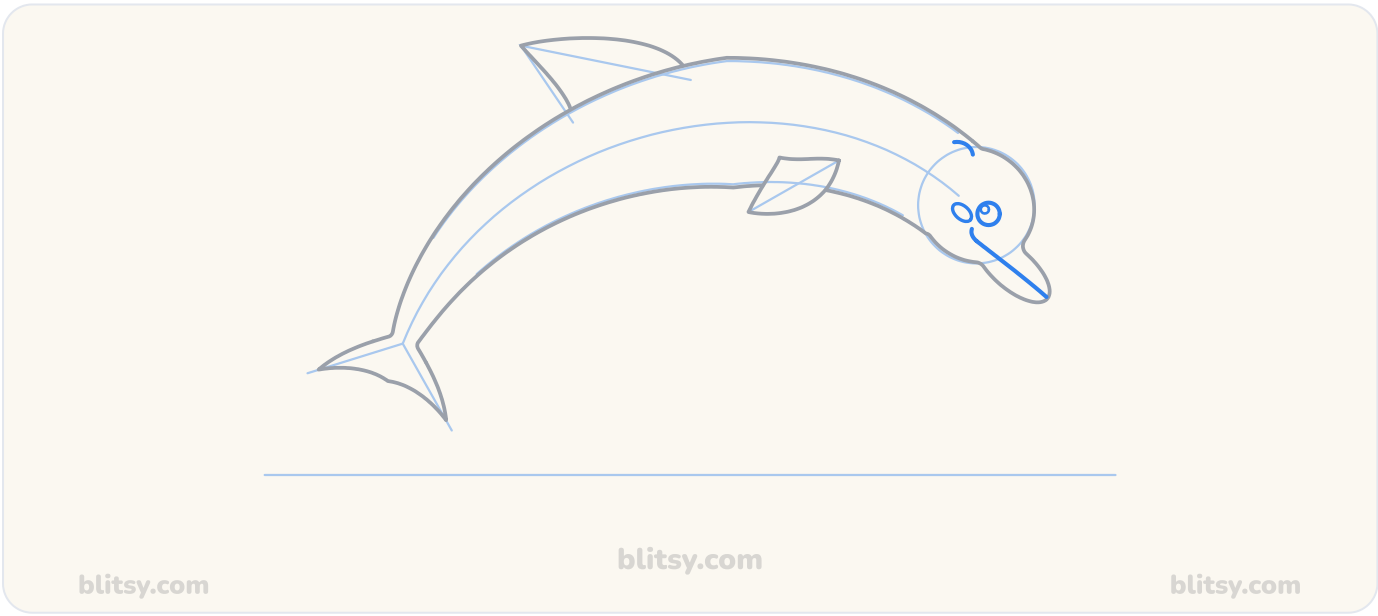
STEP 7 Draw the flipper under the chest



In the gap you left in the belly line, draw one flipper. It starts wide where it joins the body and tapers to a rounded point that sweeps back toward the tail, like a small leaf on its side. The other flipper is hidden on the far side.

💡 **Tip:** Point the flipper backward, never forward. Forward flippers make the dolphin look like it's braking.

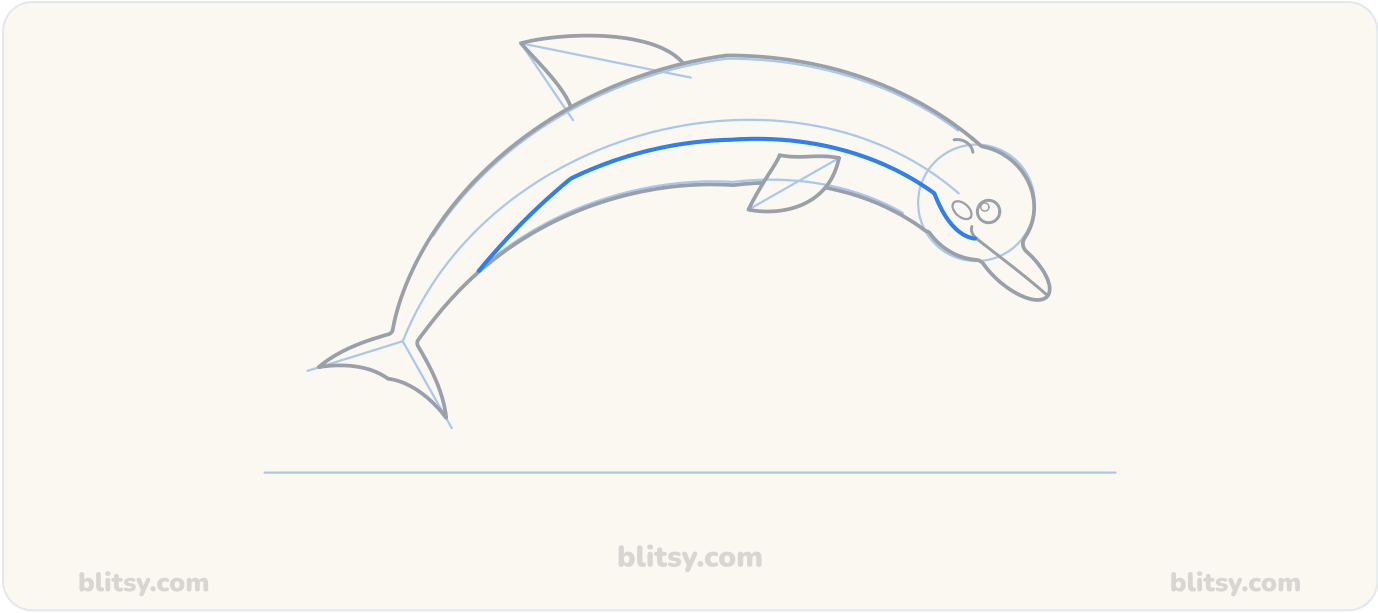
STEP 8 Give it an eye, a smile and a blowhole



Place a round eye just above where the beak meets the head, with a small shine circle in its upper corner. Draw a line along the middle of the beak for the mouth, ending with a tiny upward curl near the eye. That curl is the smile. Add a small oval cheek behind it, and on top of the head, behind the melon, a short curved line for the blowhole.

💡 **Tip:** Keep the eye small. Dolphins have little eyes, and a big one quickly makes it look like a cartoon fish.

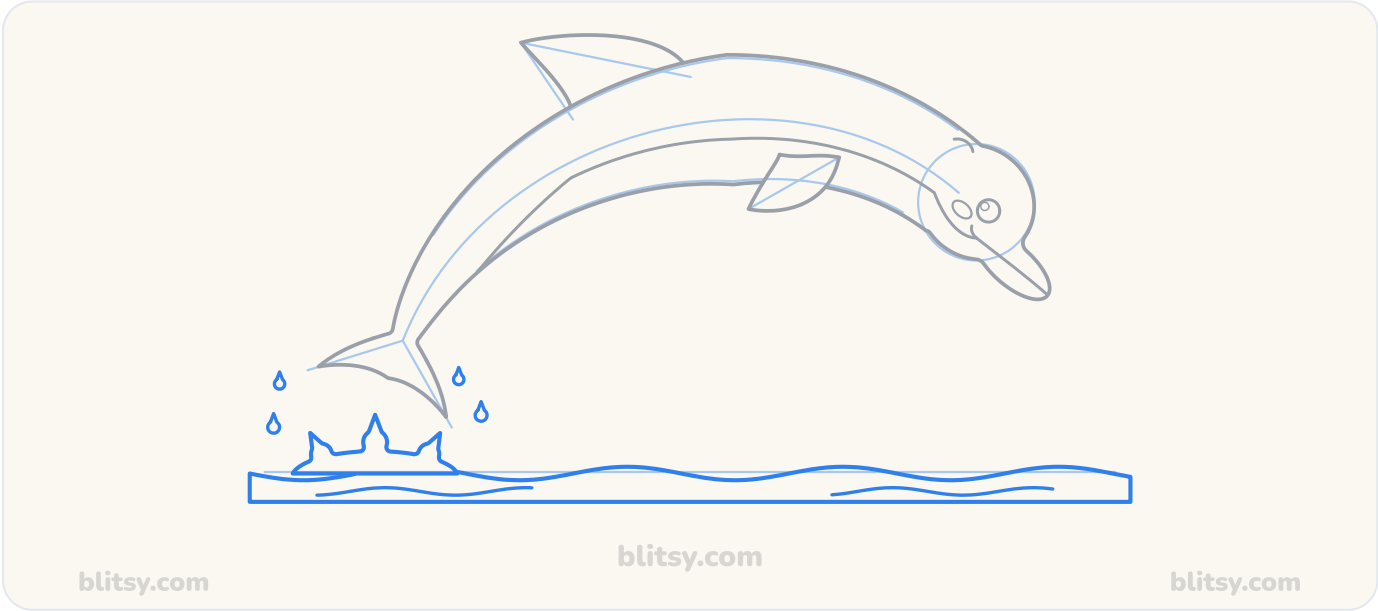
STEP 9 Draw the light belly line



Start near the tail, right at the bottom edge, and draw a soft curve forward through the lower part of the body, a little below the middle. It runs under the flipper and up to the corner of the mouth. Everything below this line will be colored light later, and that two-tone look is what makes it read as a bottlenose.

💡 **Tip:** Let the line drift down to the edge near the tail instead of stopping in the middle of the body.

STEP 10 Add waves and a splash



Turn the water guide into a wavy line, then draw a second line under it for a strip of sea, plus two short wave lines inside. Below the tail, I draw a low mound of splash with three rounded points rising from it, and a few small drops around the flukes.

💡 **Tip:** Put the splash under the tail, not under the head. It shows exactly where the dolphin left the water.

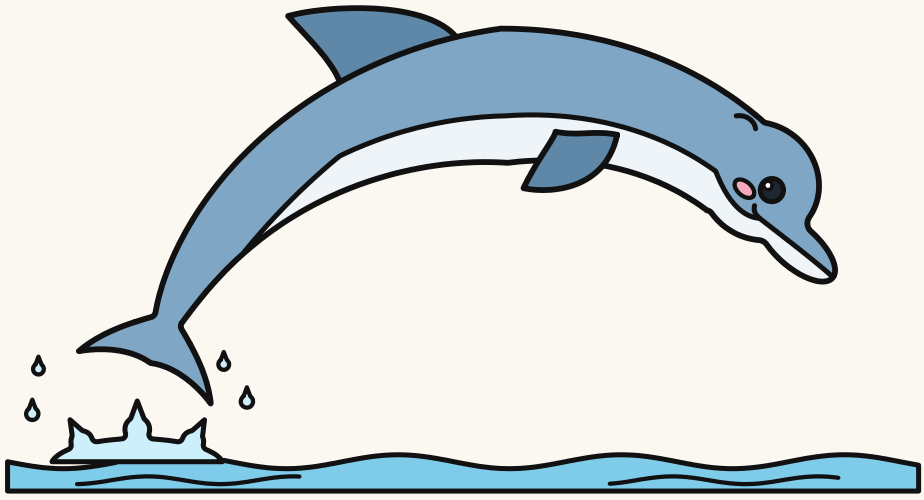
STEP 11 Ink the outline and erase the guides



Trace all of the keeper lines with your black marker. I do the head and face first, while my hand is steady, then the long body curves in slow, even strokes. Wait a minute for the ink to dry, then erase the arc, the band guides and the fin lines.

💡 **Tip:** On the long body curves, move your whole arm instead of just your wrist. The line comes out smoother.

STEP 12 Color your dolphin



Color the back, head and tail flukes blue gray. The dorsal fin and flipper get a slightly darker blue gray so they stand out. Leave the belly and lower beak white or color them very lightly. Add a pink cheek, a black eye with its white shine, sky blue water and pale blue for the splash and drops.

💡 **Tip:** Press harder along the top of the back and lighter toward the belly line for a soft rounded look.