How to Draw a Rainbow

12 easy steps for beginners



What you'll need

- A pencil
- An eraser
- A ruler
- A black marker
- 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 →

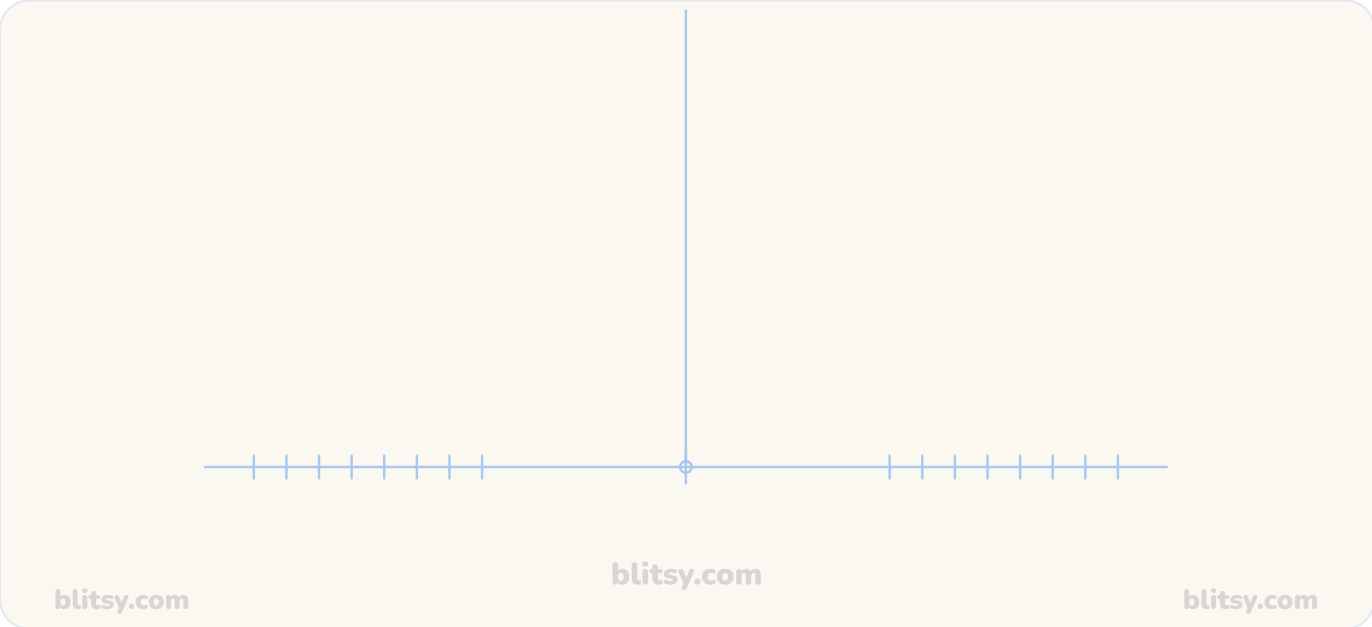
STEP 1 Draw a baseline and a center point



Draw a long, light line across the lower part of your page. Put a small dot right in the middle of it. That dot is the center of every arc you'll draw, so it matters more than anything else on the page. A light line straight up from the dot helps you keep both sides of the rainbow even.

💡 **Tip:** Leave a good margin under the baseline. The clouds will hang a little below it.

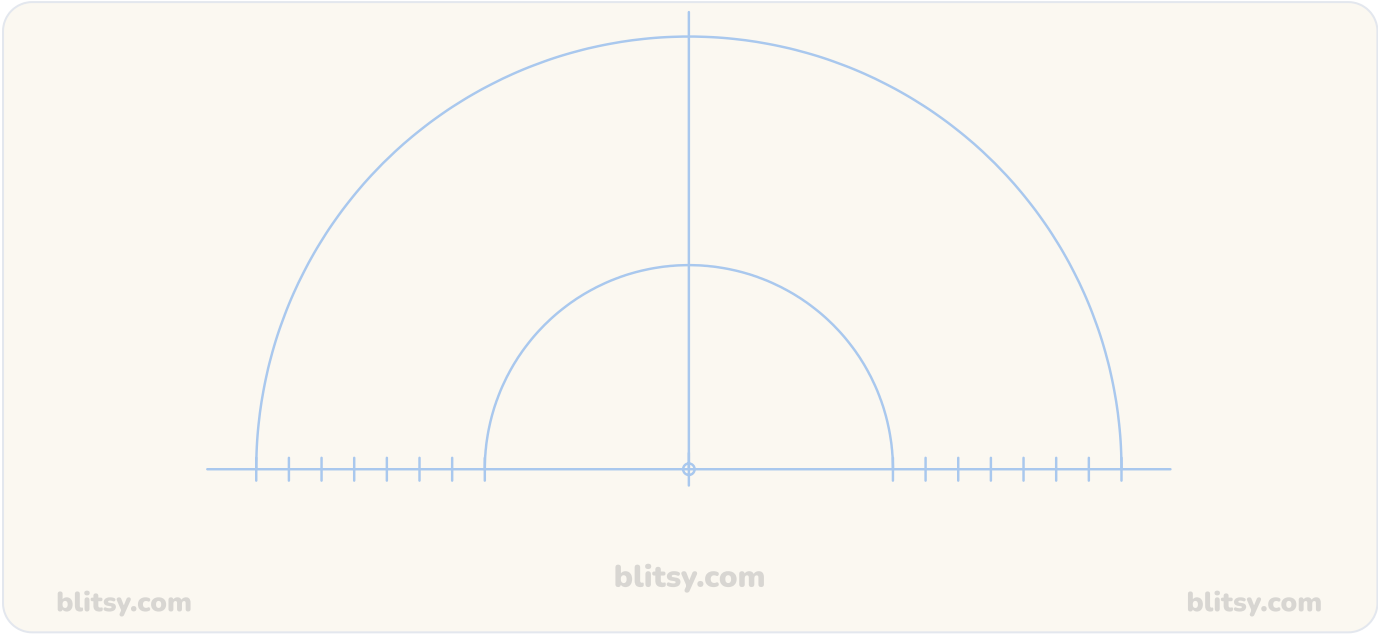
STEP 2 Mark eight evenly spaced points



On the left side of the baseline, near the end, make eight small tick marks with the same gap between each one. Then measure the same distances from the center dot on the right side and copy them. Eight marks give you seven bands, one for each color. I use a ruler here and put the marks about a finger width apart.

💡 **Tip:** Count the marks out loud. Seven or nine is the most common slip, and it only shows up when you color.

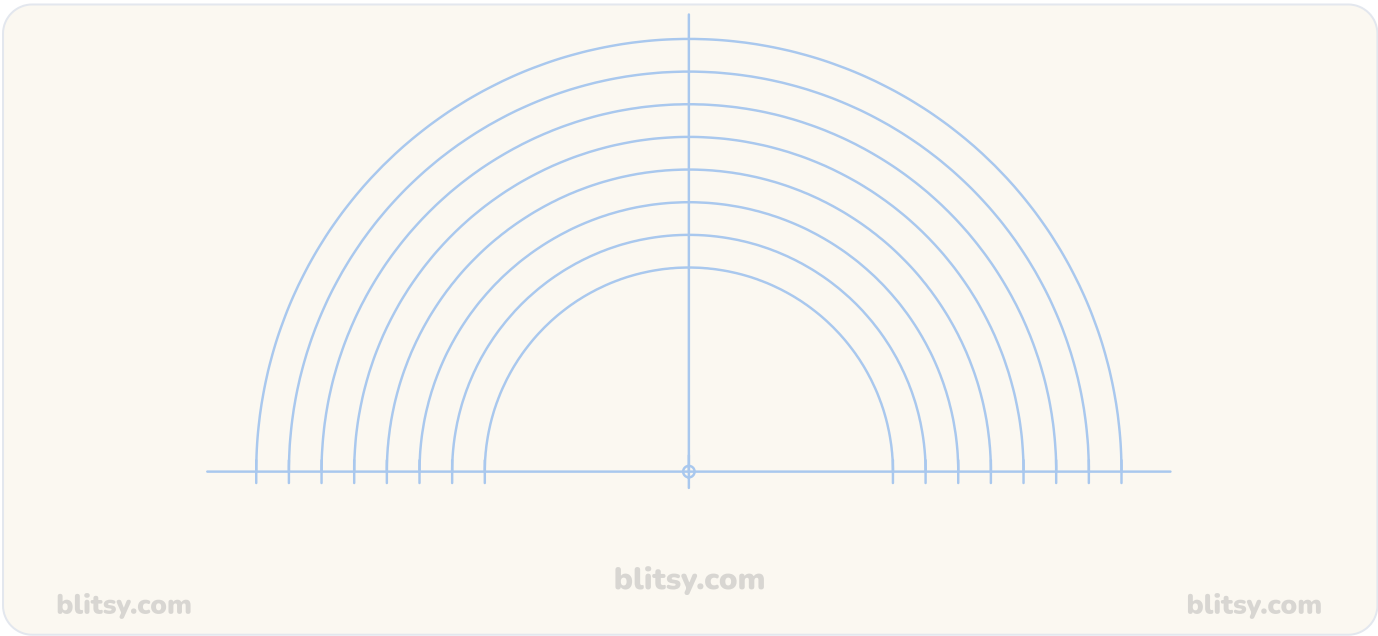
STEP 3 Sketch the outer and inner arcs



Join the outermost left mark to the outermost right mark with a big, light half circle. Its top should cross the center line. Do the same with the two innermost marks for a much smaller arc. I always get these two right first, because then the rest just fit between them.

💡 **Tip:** Turn the paper as you curve, or tie a string to the pencil and pin the other end on the center dot like a compass.

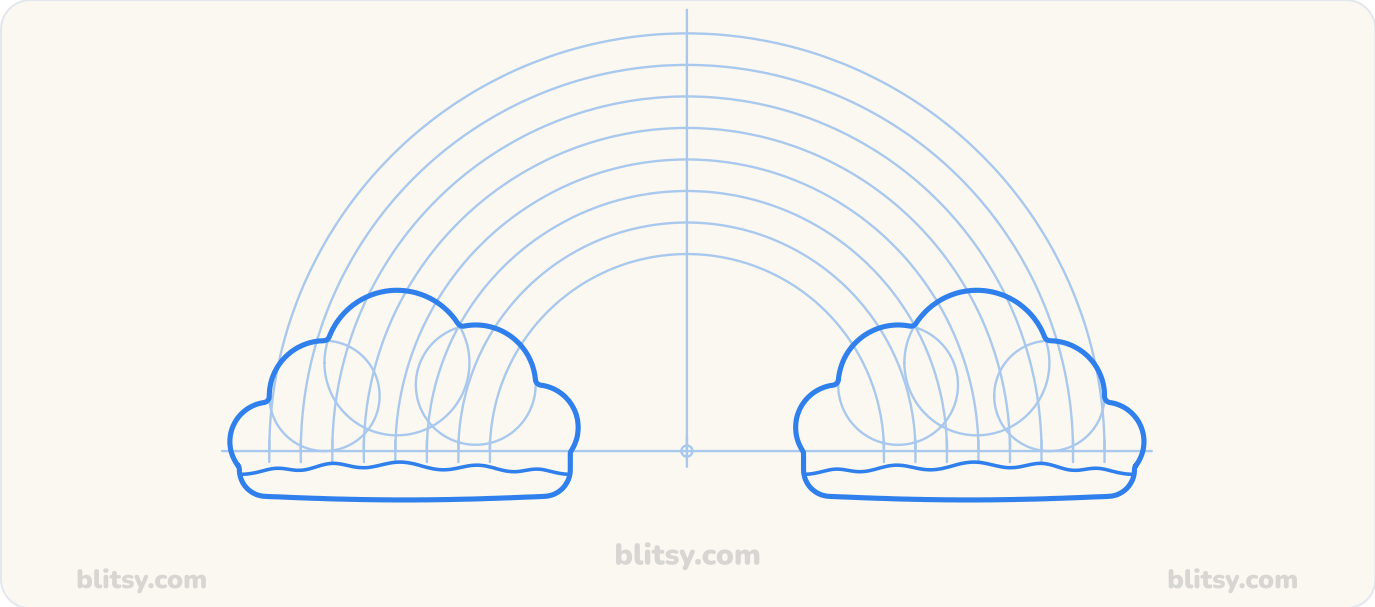
STEP 4 Fill in the six arcs between



Now connect each remaining pair of marks with its own half circle, working from the outside in. Each new arc should stay the same distance from the one above it all the way around. If two arcs start to squeeze together near the top, lift that arc a little and redraw it lightly.

💡 **Tip:** Check the gaps where the arcs cross the center line. They should match the gaps on the baseline.

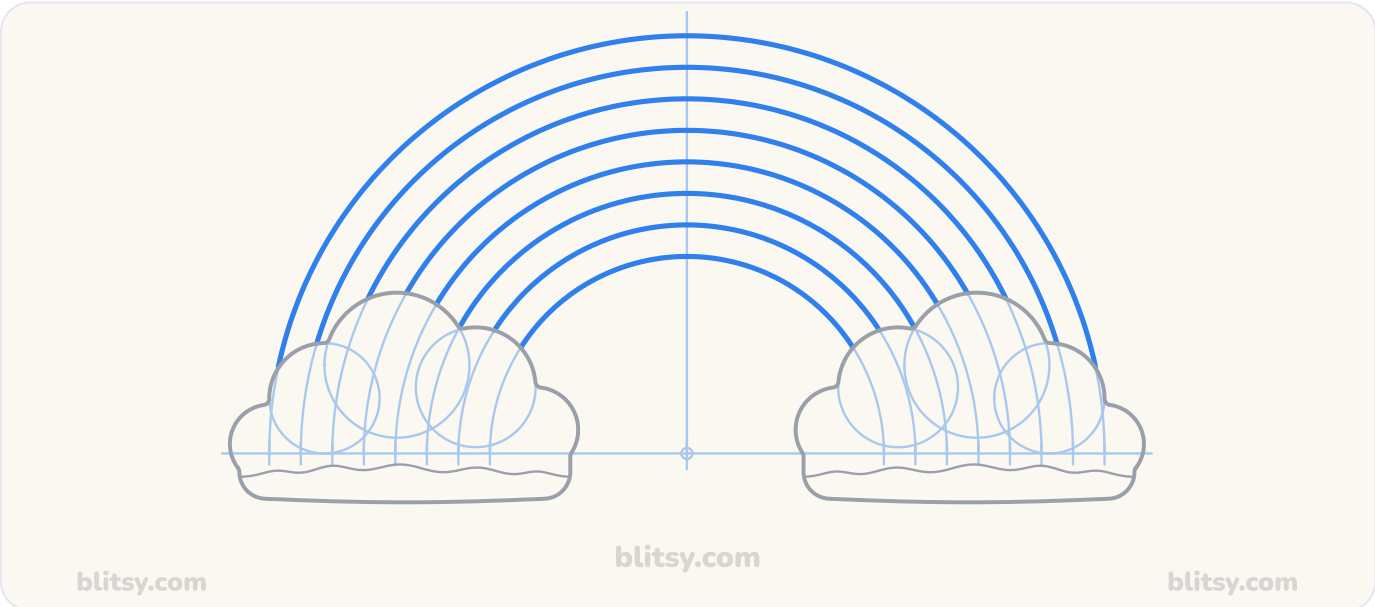
STEP 5 Add two fluffy clouds over the ends



Sketch three overlapping circles over each end of the rainbow, the middle one biggest. Then draw one bumpy outline around the outside of each group, with a flat bottom that sits a little below the baseline. A wavy line near the bottom of each cloud marks a soft shadow. The clouds hide the rainbow's feet, so you don't have to worry about how the bands end.

💡 **Tip:** Make the clouds wide enough to cover every band, from the outer arc to the inner one.

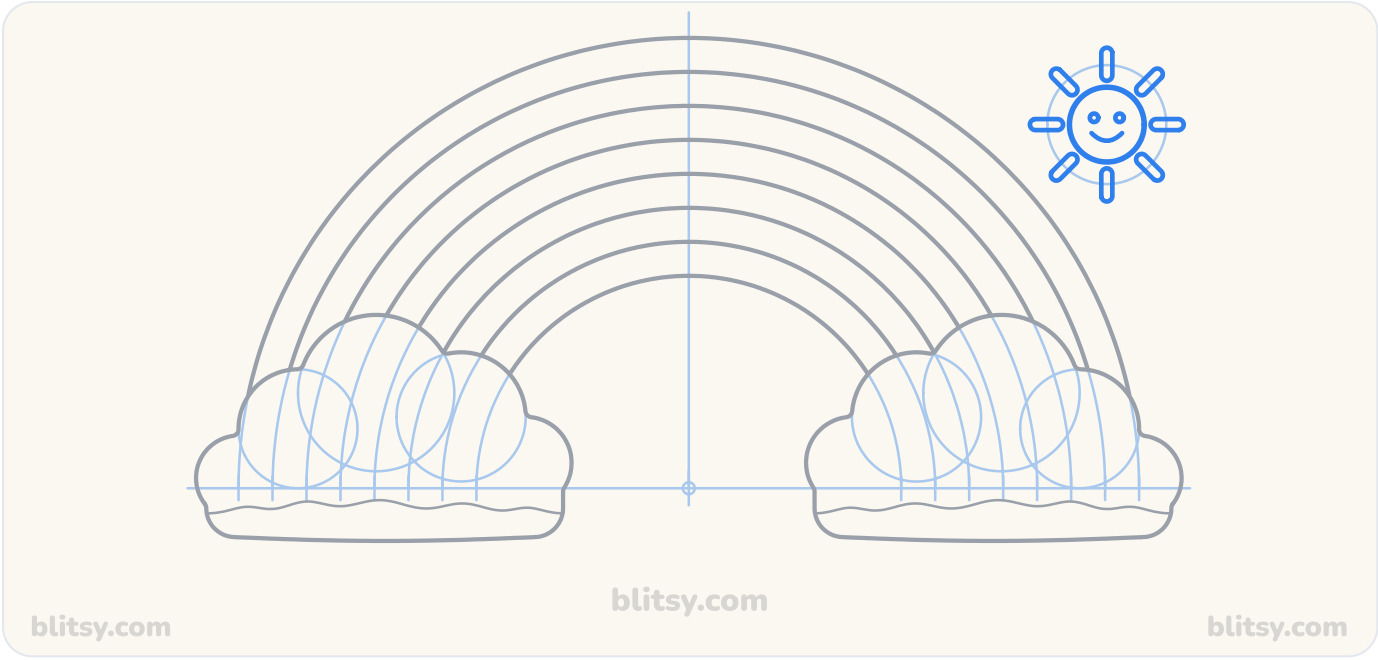
STEP 6 Trace the arcs firmly between the clouds



Go over each light arc with a firmer pencil line, starting at the top of one cloud and ending at the top of the other. Stop at the cloud's edge every time. The parts of the arcs inside the clouds stay light so you can erase them later. I like to start each curve from the left cloud, since that's how my hand moves most comfortably.

💡 **Tip:** Rest the side of your hand on the paper and pull the curve toward you. It wobbles less than pushing.

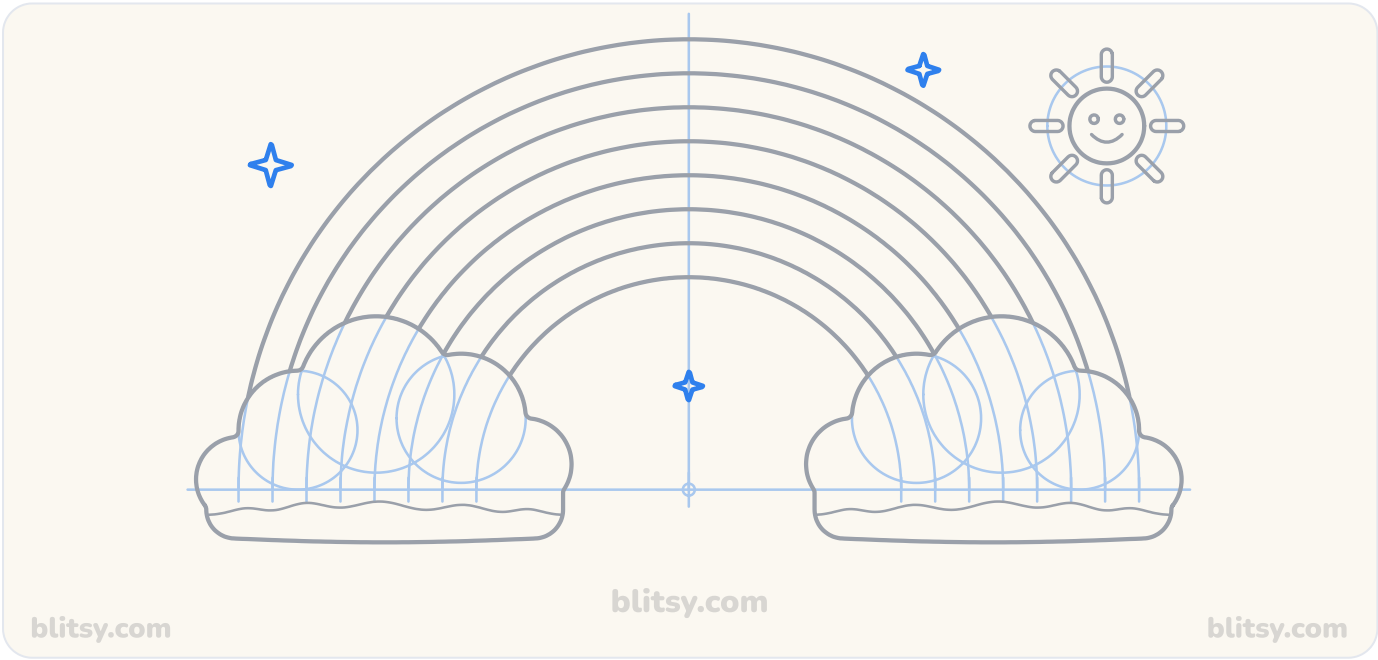
STEP 7 Draw a small smiling sun



In the top right corner, away from the rainbow, sketch a light circle as a guide. Inside it, draw a smaller circle for the sun. Add eight short rounded rays around it, four pointing straight up and down and out to the sides, then four more in the gaps. Two dot eyes and a little smile finish the face.

💡 **Tip:** Keep the sun small. A big sun pulls the eye away from the rainbow.

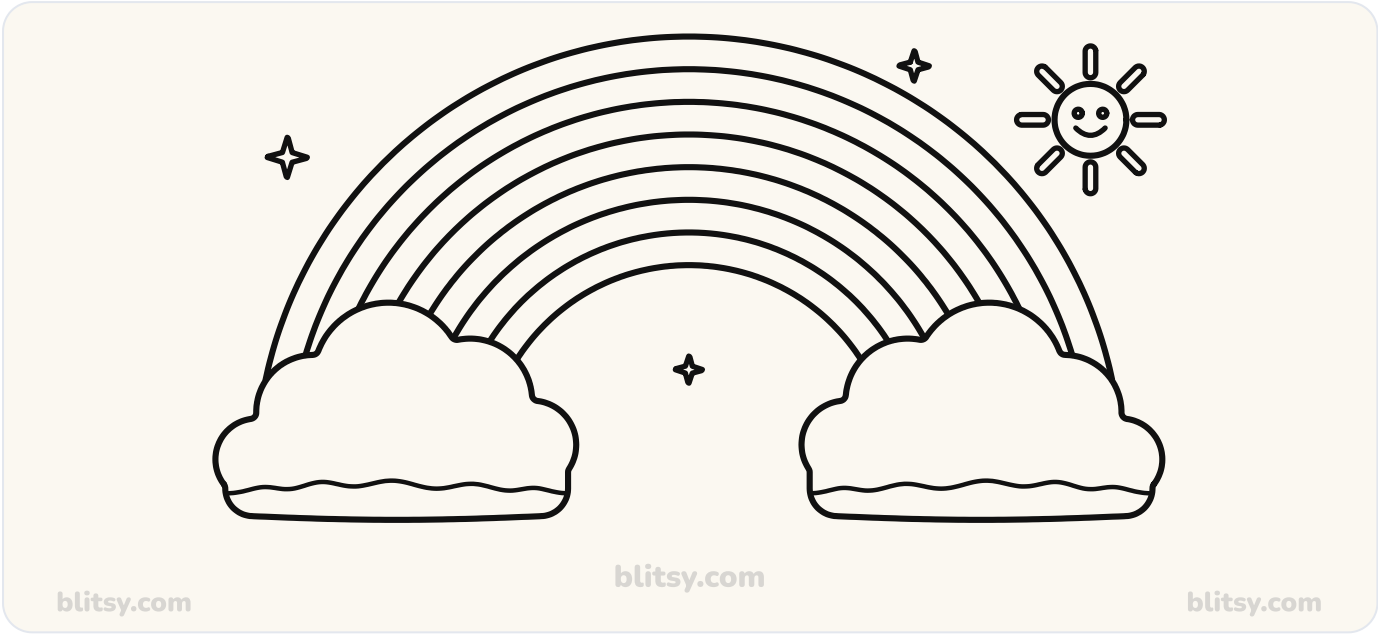
STEP 8 Add a few sparkles



Sparkles are four-pointed stars with curved, pinched sides. Put one up on the left, one near the top of the rainbow and a tiny one under the arch. Three is plenty, and different sizes look more natural than three matching ones.

💡 **Tip:** Draw the tall point first, then the short sideways one. The star stays balanced that way.

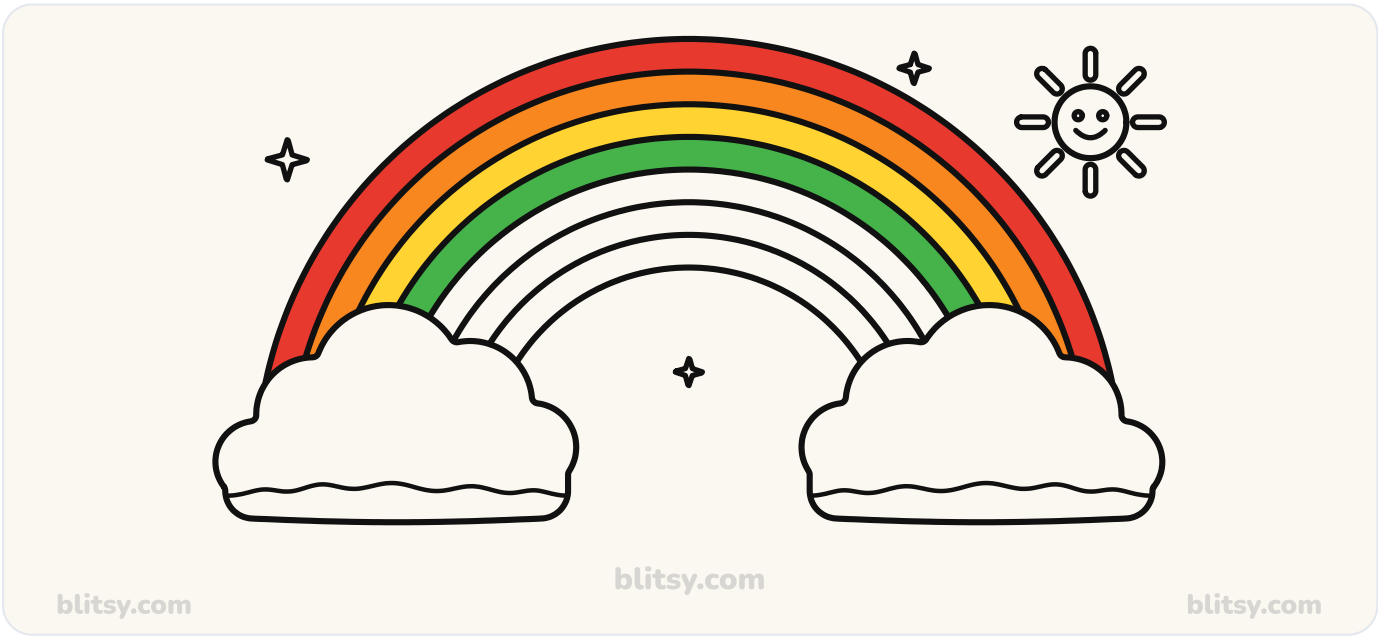
STEP 9 Ink the lines and erase the guides



Trace every keeper line with a black marker: the eight arcs, the clouds, the sun and the sparkles. Skip the baseline, the tick marks, the center line and the light circles. Let the ink dry for a minute, then erase all the pencil. The bits of arc inside the clouds disappear too.

💡 **Tip:** Ink the arcs in one smooth pass each. Stopping halfway leaves a little blob where you started again.

STEP 10 Color the four warm bands



The order always runs from the outside in. Red goes in the top band, then orange, then yellow, then green in the middle. Color each band along its curve rather than across it, and stay inside the black lines.

💡 **Tip:** Remember the order with the name ROY G BIV: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet.

STEP 11 Finish the three cool bands



The last three bands are the cool colors. Use a bright blue for the fifth band, a darker blue for indigo and purple for violet, the smallest band at the bottom. Indigo and violet sit next to each other, so make sure they look clearly different.

💡 **Tip:** If your blue and dark blue look too alike, press harder on the dark one to deepen it.

STEP 12 Color the clouds and the sun



Leave the clouds white and add pale blue under the wavy shadow lines. Color the sun yellow with orange rays, fill in its eyes, and make the sparkles yellow too. That bit of blue under each cloud makes them look puffy instead of flat.

💡 **Tip:** Color lightly under the clouds. A soft shadow looks fluffier than a dark one.