

A collection of Leonardo da Vinci's anatomical sketches. On the left, a large sketch shows a man's torso and arms, with lines indicating measurements and proportions. On the right, there are smaller sketches of a face and a hand, also with measurement lines. The sketches are drawn in brown ink on aged, yellowish paper.

As he measured and drew human bodies, Leonardo noticed that we generally have standard proportions. He noted that “the span of a man’s outstretched arms is equal to his height.” Other observations he noted about human proportions:

- In an adult, the head is one-eighth of the person’s height.
- The face is divided into three equal parts—from the chin to the nostrils, from the nostrils to the eyebrows, and from the eyebrows to the hairline.
- The distance across the face from one ear to another is the same as that from the eyebrows to the chin.
- The ear is as long as the nose.
- The length of the forearm up to the elbow is one fourth of the body’s height.
- The foot is one-half as long as the distance from the heel to the knee.
- The distance from elbow to wrist is one-half the length of the thighbone.

Now is your chance to test Leonardo’s observations and maybe make some of your own.

MATERIALS

Newspaper
Tape
Black marker
Measuring tape

Spread several sheets of newspaper on the floor so that it is longer and wider than you are. Tape them together. Lay down on the paper with your arms held out away from your body and have a friend draw the outline of your body with a black marker on the paper. Measure the different parts of your body and see if they fit into the general proportions that Leonardo noted. Have your friend measure the parts of your face to see if those proportions Leonardo noted are true.