Male vs. Female Proportions

The Shoulders/Hips Ratio
The primary difference is the relationship of shoulder width to hips. Women have a much broader pelvic bone than men.

This one, central fact has consequences throughout the body. It means that in women the hip line is the broadest part of the body, and a narrower waist appears by contrast, while in men the broadest part is the shoulder line, and the waist is hardly different from the hips.

The overall female silhouette, then, is an hourglass as opposed to the male trapeze shown below.
To give an idea of measurement, on our basic figure below (middle) I have dropped down guidelines from the sides of the head, and then again from a distance equivalent to one head from the central axis. These lines define two yellow zones where the figure's shoulder and hip bones are contained.

To make this neutral figure female, the pelvic bone is broadened so that the hip joints are closer to the outer side of the yellow area. The shoulders may vary but always within this zone. (Notice what this does to the legs: the thighs taper in much more from the hips to join the knees, which haven't changed position. Men's legs look more vertical relative to women's).

To make the neutral figure male, the pelvic bone remains narrow while the shoulders joints are actually just outside the yellow area.

This again translates in the way the two sexes hold their arms, which you can glimpse in the previous image and observe in daily life: women's elbows tend to be held close to the body, and the arms at rest naturally follow the body's contours. Meanwhile, men's shoulders being "further out",

[Diagram of a neutral figure with guidelines indicating the shoulders and hips, and arrows showing the differences between a woman, neutral, and man figure.]
the arm at rest dangles away from the body and is not naturally held close.

**Smaller Differences**

**Waist Line and Elbows**
A woman’s waist line is level with the belly button but a man’s appears much lower. This makes the torso on a male look longer. Be careful not to align the elbows with this lower waist; the reference for the elbow joint remains the belly button, so that unlike the female figure, if the impression we have of a man’s waist is where his trousers start, the elbows will look much higher.
**Rounded vs Angular**

In anticipation of the fleshed-out body we'll eventually be drawing, it can be useful to sketch women with rounded shapes and men with more angular trapeze shapes as this reflects the general impression of each body type.

Generally speaking, a woman's body is made up of soft rounded shapes, but also the fact that when not modified, the female body stocks more fat under the skin. Men's bodies are more angular and have harsher lines when they are muscular. This of course is subject to great variation, and this device is eminently adaptable—using angular shapes for a skinny woman, for instance, and soft ones for a fleshy man.
The Hip Joints
A small detail, but significant: draw a woman's hip joints outside the pelvic bone. They jut out visibly in the body and this helps to capture this feature. In contrast, keep a man's hip joints inside the pelvic bone.

Other Details
- In both sexes, the palm of the hand and sole of the foot are about half as wide as the face. But they are longer, relative to the face, in men than they are in women.
- A woman's spine tends to be more flexible, and is visibly more arched, than a man's.
- And finally, on average, men are taller than women
How Important is All of This?
To illustrate this point, this is what happens when a man is drawn with female proportions and vice-versa.

Even with the addition of gender stereotypes of hair and breasts, due to the proportions and hip/shoulder ratio, the bodies look different to the norm.

Men and women’s bodies can range all the way from the marked characters we have just seen, to an androgynous figure, meaning one
that does not strongly display them in either direction.

Proportions and Age
This section details the way proportions change from birth till the end of physical growth, which marks the end of adolescence and start of adulthood. There is wiggle room, as people don't grow at the same speed even within the same family, let alone around the world. Still, an average model is very useful to anyone who has trouble showing a character's intended age, and we will revisit this for other details of the body and face in due time.

Newborn (0 to 1 Month)
Notice how short the legs are at this point: in adults, the knee would reach the shoulder in this position, but here the legs and arms are nearly the same length, and the knee and elbow just meet. As babies, at this age we are still in fetal position most of the time, the legs are not counted when I say that the total length is about 2.5 heads. Indeed a newborn's head looks disproportionately large compared to everything else in their body.

Baby (1 Month to 1 Year)
By three months the proportions may not have changed much but the
body is noticeably chubbier, and as the legs unfold they increase the feel of dramatic growth. If held up (it may be too early to stand alone), a 10-month-old would look close enough to a toddler, but with definite baby features such as the lack of neck.

**Toddler (1 to 4 Years)**
Apparently, someone’s adult height can be roughly predicted by doubling their height at age 2. In any case, toddlers are the littlest people that can stand upright like the rest of us. The head is still very large for the body (already close to its adult size), the legs are short (a little over a third of the total height, as opposed to a half for an adult), and there is the beginning of a neck.

**Child (5 to 11 Years)**
Growth is of course continuous during childhood, and this image only
illustiates someone that could be between 7 and 9. Children this age can look skinny because the baby fat is gone. Note that the slim neck grows out of a nearly horizontal shoulder line because the trapezius and neck muscles are not developed.

**Adolescent (12 to 17 Years)**

Up till this stage, we didn’t differentiate between boys and girls because sexual dimorphism doesn’t really appear until then.

On a structural level:

- The difference between waist and hip size increases. As fat may increase in the stomach, buttocks and legs, there is an increased volume in this whole block that is the sign of a fully grown woman.
- A boy’s shoulders broaden.

In both sexes, the head is still larger than in adult age, and the extremities (hands, feet, even arms and legs) may grow faster than the rest of the body, causing a gangly look and clumsy feel.

The next stage of growth is early adulthood, where the final proportions set in as they were explained in the section on men and women.

There’s no need to go into other age groups at the moment because the structure no longer changes. I’ll just mention that in very old age the bones start losing mass, so there is a loss of height, and the body may slump, making the neck look shorter and the arms fall lower.
Again, How Important is All of This?
Here's a lineup of four people...
The first two figures are accurately proportioned for their size. The third shows what you get if you draw a child using adult proportions: a tiny grown-up! This works if you’re drawing a fairy or Ant Man, but it definitely doesn’t evoke a child.

The reverse is also true: the fourth figure shows a supposedly fully grown adult drawn with childish proportions. An adult shaped this way would look out of place, if it were even possible for their cranium to grow this large.

Despite the inevitable wiggle room due to human diversity, there is a certain minimum height below which generic adult proportions just look different from the norm. Petite women are only "scaled-down" women down to a point; if extremely short, their proportions would have some childish characteristics. The reverse is also true: extremely tall people look elongated and not just scaled up.
Despite the rough stage of this sketch, we can make out a strongly built, tall man, an adult woman of small stature, and a teenage boy (or possibly girl). How can we tell when there are no outer features and the teenager is about as tall as the woman? Proportions carry a lot of information. The aspiring artist who has to study all the above diagrams to know them consciously may find it hard work, but unconsciously, we all carry a full catalogue of proportional clues and what they mean. In this image, your unconscious can't miss the tell-tale clues of the woman's wide hips (sign of adulthood) and the undeveloped body of the teenager (neither shoulders nor hips have broadened).

**Practice Time**
Here's some ways you can apply them so you're prepared for your next Human Anatomy Fundamentals session:

- Observe, observe, observe! Look at people around you, men and women, this time with an eye for what in their build makes them different. Look at children of different ages, at people of different ethnic backgrounds, online or in person.

- Dig out photos of your childhood (or your children) at different ages, and sketch their basic figure. Don't trace—use a combination of impression and skeleton as we've been doing so far. It may be particularly interesting if you can find photos in a similar pose at different points in time, as you'll be able to see how the proportions change.

- Draw a crowd of figures with varying proportions without reference. Do any look wrong? If so, can you tell what is off?