

Learn To Paint with Watercolors



Presented by West Cedar Studio
www.westcedarstudio.com

Watercolor Supplies

This is a good list of supplies to begin with if you intend to keep painting.

(Supplied) Watercolor Paper

The heavier the better, 140 lb. or more. Heavy paper warps less when wet with paint. Experiment with smooth or rough texture (Called "hot" or "cold" press.)

(Supplied) Watercolor Paint

Cadmium Yellow, Cadmium Red, Ultramarine Blue, Phthalocyanine Green, Burnt Sienna, and Burnt Umber are good colors to start with.

(Supplied) Palette

For mixing paints with water.

(Supplied) Brushes

Have a collection of flats and rounds -- have #4 and #8 rounds, and a 1" flat to begin with.

Spray Bottle

A small spray bottle for water.

Small Squirt Bottles

Get a couple to store salt and bleach in.

Sponges

Natural sponges the best. Have several synthetic ones as well.

Drawing Pencils

Have several pencils in your kit to draw your idea on paper.

Eraser

Have a collection of several erasers, soft to smooth.

Drawing Board

Have a smooth 11 x 14" plywood or masonite board to stretch your wet watercolor paper on. WalMart has plastic cutting boards that work nicely.

Toothbrush

A fun tool to use for splattering paint on paper.

Paper Towels

Good for blotting out paint and general clean up.

Painting Towel

A smaller towel works great to put underneath your water bowl and drawing board.

Water Bowl

Have 1 or 2 bowls for fresh water - Cool Whip container-size bowls are good.

Masking Tape

A roll of blue low-tack masking tape to fasten paper on drawing board.

Blow Dryer

Helps you paint quicker by speeding dry time between layers of paint and water.

Crayons & Candles

Grab a few colored crayons for your kit, and an old white candle too. These items work great for special effects in watercolor.

Box (or Bag)

A box or bag with a handle is useful to carry brushes, paint and other supplies in.

Watercolor Brushes

Brushes in this kit include a Round Liner 3/8", Fan 5/8", Filbert 3/4", Round 1-1/8" which is the best all-around brush, a Flat 3/8", a Cant 5/8", and a Flat Truncated 5/8".

Taking Care of Brushes

After use, wash in warm water and dish soap, working the paint out with your fingers. Rinse with fresh water and squeeze excess water out with a napkin or towel. Lay flat to dry in a ventilated area. Store vertical when dry.

When painting, do not leave your brushes standing in water as it will damage the bristles.

BRUSH TYPE	HAIR LENGTH		0"	1/2"	1"	*
ROUND LINER	3/8					
FAN	5/8					
FILBERT	3/4					
ROUND	1 1/8					
FLAT	3/8					
CANT	5/8					
FLAT TRUNCATED	5/8					

Watercolor Paper



There is a wide variety of paper available to the painter. Each paper has its advantages. A smooth paper (like Bristol) works well for detailed subjects. Rough paper has a texture that works well for painterly effects.



A good “weight” of paper is #140 pound - anything below #140 is flimsy and will buckle quickly. A #300 pound paper is the best and heaviest, but very expensive. Always buy “acid-free” paper as it will not yellow with age.

Types of paper are known as Smooth (Hot Press), Medium, and Rough (Cold Press).

Paper should be taped to your painting board to avoid buckling, unless you are using a watercolor “block.” This is a selection of papers that are glued together on all four sides.

Watercolor Paint

Watercolor paint contains two main ingredients: finely ground pigment (which provides the color) and gum arabic (which acts as a binder). Manufacturers also add a wetting agent to facilitate flow and absorption, and a moisturizer to prevent the binder from becoming brittle.

The great thing about gum arabic as a binder is you can thin watercolor paint to create translucent, transparent washes without compromising its ability to adhere to the paper. Although this allows you to create interesting effects, the fluidity of watercolor paint sometimes makes it a challenge to work with... but most watercolorists consider this part of the fun!

Watercolor paint is sold in artists' quality and students' quality. Artists' watercolors have a higher concentration of finely ground pigment with high permanence ratings. Students' colors may contain cheaper pigments and more fillers and extenders.

Your choice depends on your budget and your artistic aims. Artists' quality watercolor paint is obviously more expensive, but you get your money's worth in terms of permanence, intensity, and superior transparency. *Artist's quality paint is included in the supplies of West Cedar Studio classes.*

Four Basic Washes

Once you have mastered doing “washes,” the basic part of the process, you will have a fresh and luminous painting every time. The “wash” is the basis for each of your paintings. It is color laid into an area usually too big to accomplish with only one stroke. Skies, backgrounds, and any space requiring an application of smooth or integrated color, can be achieved by a successful wash.

There are four basic washes, with variations on each one. In this article, we will focus on the four basics:

1. THE FLAT WASH

This wash is useful for skies, and any area requiring smooth color with no visible brush strokes.

2. THE GRADIENT WASH

Also great for skies, soft transitions of light to dark or vice versa, used often in Asian watercolor and prints.

3. THE BLENDED WASH

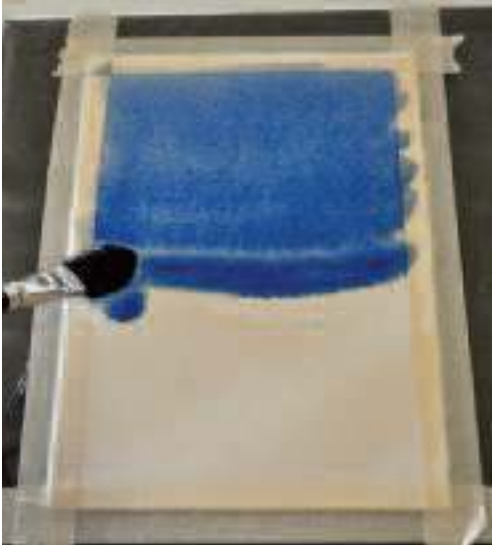
This wash is used when you need a transition of one color to another. It can be very useful, for example, when painting a sunset where the color in the sky transitions from blue to orange.

4. THE WET-INTO-WET WASH

Probably every artist’s most favored wash, I always enjoy “playing” with color to see how it reacts with another or several other colors. When working wet-into-wet, we apply color mostly by “dropping it into” a wet surface and allowing adjacent colors to mingle on their own and exhibit their own individual properties.

Along with these four basic washes, there is the **GLAZE**. A glaze is really a flat wash done with very diluted pigment. Thin, transparent layers are applied over an existing DRY wash. Knowing the properties of your pigments will help ensure a clean, translucent effect. It is a very good thing to make your own and discover how each pigment will appear on a piece of watercolor paper.

I. The Flat Wash



First, tape a sheet of paper to your board which I place on a slant using a two or three-inch binder under it for support. Next, I mix up a puddle of pigment much larger than I think I will need. Using a wide flat wash brush I wet my paper. I do not wet it to the point of it being sopping wet (or I will cause my wash to dry unevenly and may create runs and backwashes), but ensuring it is equally wet over the entire surface, I begin.

I load my brush with pigment and pull it evenly across the top of my paper. Begin on whichever side is most comfortable for you, but remember to start at the same edge each pass. When I reach the opposite edge, and have completed my first stroke, I repeat this step by re-loading my brush and continuing with the next stroke

just below the one above it. Gravity will help pull the color down, and if your paper is not too wet, your wash will begin to even out as you come to the bottom of your paper.

Pick up excess pigment and/or water at the edges with a slightly damp pointed round brush or paper towel, being careful not to disturb your wash. When the shine has left your paper, set it flat to dry, being careful not to leave any excess moisture on your edges or on your tape.

Some artists like to do flat washes on dry paper. It is the same procedure as above, except you do not wet your paper first, and you must mix a puddle that is a little thinner (more water, less pigment than above) to ensure a smooth wash. With each stroke, you will also want to catch the bead of water and pigment that will form at the bottom edge of each prior stroke.

The goal is to have a solid, clean, stroke-free wash. Be careful not to use too much pigment. It is easier to do a second wash if greater intensity or darker value is desired, than to try to get it too dark with the first wash. This can result in streaky, uneven washes.



II. The Gradient Wash



Providing an ideal background for most landscapes, the gradient wash may be created from top to bottom, then turned “upside down” for use as the artist wishes. A graduated wash typically progresses from dark to light (more water, less pigment). Most artists prefer to achieve this wash by beginning with dry paper. I find I can accomplish it just as easily with damp paper. For this lesson, start with dry paper taped to the board and set at a slant as we did with our flat wash. Mix a large puddle of pigment. *The puddle should not be too thick, and remember to MIX your pigment with the water to eliminate particles and dark specks in your wash.*

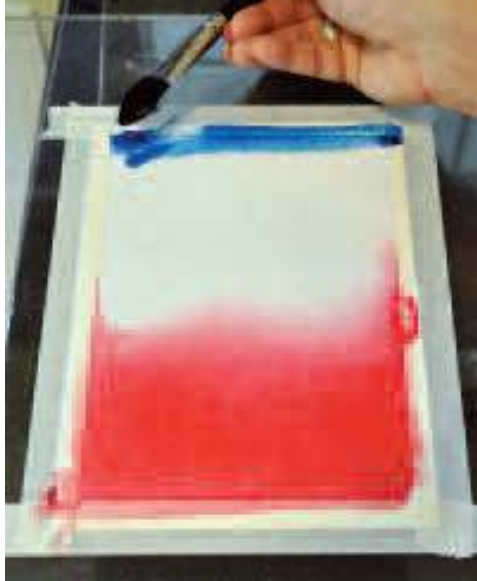
Begin with a loaded brush the same as you did with your flat wash, ensuring the brush is loaded enough to leave a bead of paint at the edge of the completed stroke. Reload your brush after each pass, and, touching the bead, begin the next stroke ensuring that your stroke goes the entire way across the surface of your paper. Continue about one-fourth the way down your paper, then begin adding water to your wash with every other stroke. You want to dilute your puddle of pigment so that it is progressively less pigment and more water. When you reach the area, you want to be mostly (or all) water, simply use clear water and no pigment. The pigment will want to flow downward, so be aware of the amounts of liquid you are applying, and once again, be sure to clean off any excess from your edges.

This wash may take a couple of attempts to perfect, but once you do, you will be able to use it in many, different ways. For example, you can try turning your paper and doing the wash horizontally, then turn it vertically to create the look of light coming from one side of the painting.

Don't be afraid to try this wash on damp paper. You will require slightly less water, and it's a good idea to control the flow with your free hand.



III. The Blended Wash

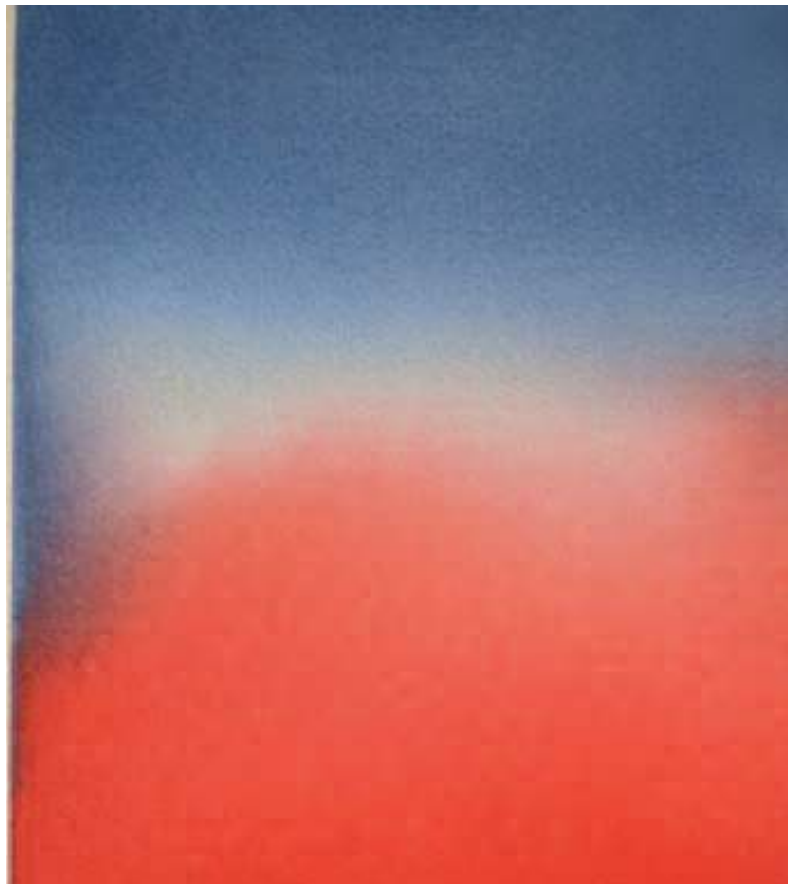


We will first mix TWO puddles of different pigments in each. This wash is best applied on damp (not overly wet) paper. As with our other washes, we will begin by taping down a piece of watercolor paper, and setting it on a slant. Dampen the paper with clean, cool water.

I usually prefer to begin a blended wash with my lightest color. I will start at the top, same as if I were going to do a flat wash. Remember to apply each stroke from the same direction, and to reload your brush with pigment for each pass. You will want to move quickly. If the pigment is moving too rapidly down your paper, control the flow with your free hand by slightly lifting the “downhill” edge of your board. As you approach the center of your wash, turn your board/paper “upside down,” or so that you can apply your color from the opposite direction you

began with your first hue.

Repeat the steps above, ending with your second color about an inch or so above the first. Again, be sure to wipe away any excess color/water from the edges of your wash. Set it flat to dry, ensuring you do not have a puddle in the center of your wash. If you do, take a thirsty round brush (one not loaded with either pigment or water) and using the point, carefully allow it to extract the excess. Notice how beautifully the two pigments join in the center of your paper? This wash can create a gorgeous sunset when used together in a blended wash. Begin with the blue at the top. Notice the glowing neutral where the two hues join?



IV. Wet-Into-Wet Washes



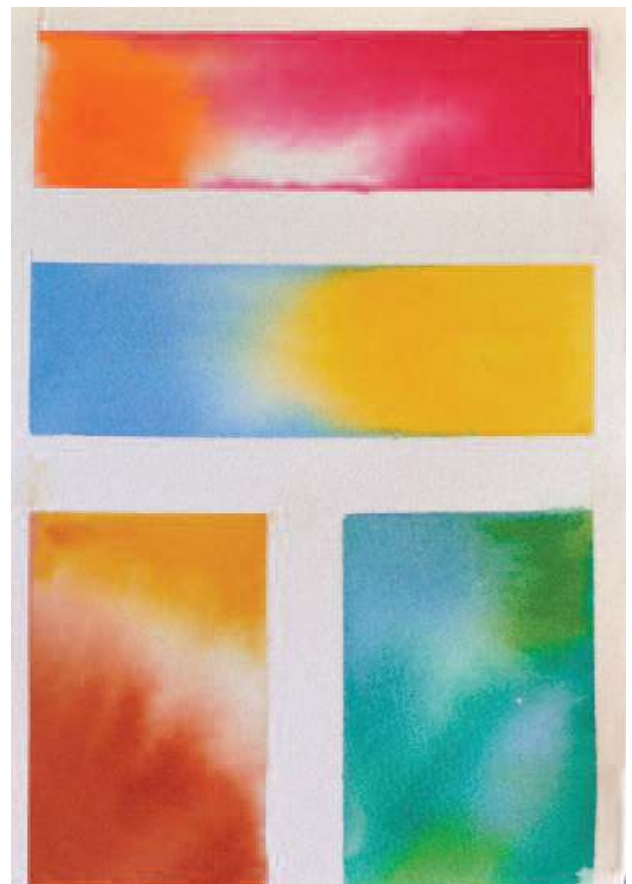
First tape down a sheet of paper. Next, using a ruler and a #2 pencil, create a series of either rectangular shapes, leaving at least a half-inch space between each shape. Now, mix puddles using two different pigments of your choice.

Working from the top of your paper to the bottom, and on a flat surface, wet one of your shapes. Be careful not to use too much water. We do want it damp, but not sopping wet to avoid puddles of water in the shape. If you do put in too much water, use your flat sponge to extract the excess. Load your brush with one of the pigments. Using the tip only, touch your brush to one side of the shape you have dampened. If you have used enough water, the paper should pull the pigment off your brush. This is called “dropping in.” Once you are satisfied with the

amount of this color in your shape, clean your brush and dip into the next pigment puddle. Repeat step one above, ensuring that you drop the color NEXT to the first one, or on an opposite side of your shape. Do not drop it on top of the previous color. Sit back and watch the magic happen. Depending on which pigments you chose, you will see them seek each other out, as it were, and mingle. You can lift or tilt your board. When the shine has disappeared from the paper, you can proceed to your next shape. Try it with two different pigments.

As you work your way down your paper, you may even wish to try different combinations of pigments. For example:

- Try three different pigments.
- Use two complementary colors (opposite one another on the color wheel).
- Try three analogous colors and one complementary color (a color opposite one of your analogous colors on the color wheel).



V. Dry Brush Technique

One of the brush strokes most often missing in beginners' watercolor paintings is the Dry Brush Technique. This technique can add a great deal of energy and interest to a painting.

Dry brush edges can add a great detail of variety to your painting. Some dry brush strokes can be hard edged on one side and broken on the other; something I find very useful when creating sparkle on water in seascapes and river paintings. They can be broken edged on both sides, a stroke I use when creating texture in clouds and on the sides of Venetian and other old buildings. By modifying the typical straight edged stroke to one with curves you can use it to quickly and easily create the impression of foliage in certain trees, like Australian gums, and fluffy clouds in the sky.

A dry brush stroke can start on a portion of your watercolor paper which is dry and lead into a wet area acting as a nice connection between a textured region of ground moving towards a shadowed or more dense area. This stroke can also start from a wet area of your painting and be dragged into a dry one.

Quick dry brush strokes can be made to represent breaking waves in a beach scene or textured areas of a road surface. One stroke and you're done; in my view, nothing conveys confidence in a watercolor painting more than dry brush strokes placed in just the right spot.

Dry brush technique does not necessarily mean that you have to use a brush with very little paint or water in it however. The variables you have to work with when painting a dry brush stroke are these:

1. The texture of your watercolor paper: is it rough, medium or smooth? It is much easier to create a dry brush stroke on rough paper, but it can be produced on any texture.
2. The speed of your brush movement determines how much of a dry brush effect you create: speed is more important the smoother the texture of your paper. If you are using very smooth paper you need to move the brush very fast to create this type of stroke.
3. How wet is the paper you are painting on? If your paper still has a shine on it then you cannot produce a dry brush stroke. It can only be produced on dry or maybe damp paper – though this requires a greater degree of skill as it can lead to a muddy work of art.

4. The angle of your brush and how hard you press: a brush held with the hairs parallel to your paper will create a different dry brush effect than one which uses the tip of your brush. The pressure you apply with also have an effect on your final dry brush result.

5. Finally the amount of watercolor paint as well as its consistency on your brush is important. This point works in conjunction with the points above. If you have a fully loaded (almost dripping) brush you have to move it quite fast to achieve a dry brush stroke. If you have less paint on the brush you may need to move the brush slower. If you are using smoother papers then you may need to reduce the amount of watercolor paint to get a creditable dry brush effect.

Points 1 to 5 above are all interrelated. You can't have a single rule for creating a dry brush stroke with watercolor because all five factors have to be taken into account along with what statement you are trying to make with a particular brush stroke. Remember you are not just coloring in when you paint a watercolor painting – you are making some statement and the various edges you create are part of your language!

VI. Watercolor & Other Media

Watercolor Pencils are almost magical - they can be combined with traditional watercolor paintings to enhance or strengthen color in certain areas. Although they look just like ordinary colored pencils, a touch of water instantly transforms their marks into beautifully spreading color that looks for all the world like watercolor paint.

Colors from watercolor pencils often look very different after they've been activated with water. We recommend making a sample chart that shows what each of your colors looks like when it's dry and when it's wet so that you won't be caught off guard by unexpected hues. Always start with lighter colors and then move on to darker areas when you activate pencil colors. This prevents the darker colors from overwhelming the light areas.

Watercolor Crayons

Watercolor crayons are a unique cross-over between drawing and painting. You draw with them as you would with any crayon, but then if you run a wet brush over your drawing, the color is dispersed and turns into a watercolor wash. These are like watercolor pencils, but are usually a bit "waxier" in texture. Being they are larger, nearly 1/2" thick in some cases, broad areas of color can be laid down and smoothed out with water for a nice effect.

Oil Pastels

Although not water soluble, oil pastels can be used on top of dried finished watercolors to enhance certain areas. The oily nature of the pastel can also be used as a type of "resist" to repel watercolor paint. In this case, the pastel is used first or between dried layers of watercolor paint.

VII. Advanced Skills



Splattering Textures and...

Some people do it on purpose. A fun technique for the playful at heart. With Spray (below)



...Spray Textures

Recycle your toothbrush for some fun spraying action. Don't use it for your teeth again, that's just gross.

(old format here)



Sgraffito Textures and...

A light scratch, a burnished caress, an aggressive knife attack...linear texture. With Stamped (below)



...Stamped Textures

Sponges, tissues, and anything you can get your paint to stick to can be a "handy" tool.

(old format here)



Back Wash Textures

Intentional drips or controlled back washes. There's lots of texture in simple water.

(old format here)



Alcohol Texture

It's not just for boo-boos. Flick a bit on your watercolors and watch what happens.

(old format here)



Salt Texture

Kosher or not, you'll see salt in action and the problems it can create. You want fries with that?

(old format here)

VIII. Advanced Skills



Tissue Paper Texture

Next time you unwrap a present, save that tissue! It does fascinating things to paint.

(old format here)



Plastic Wrap Texture

It's not just for leftovers. See how this common item makes unique textures.

(old format here)



Painting with Frisket

Painting using basic liquid frisket masking techniques for saving the lights in your watercolor painting.



Using Wax Resist

From crayolas to candles, an irresistible technique. You get the idea.

(old format here)



Color Grid Exercise

An exercise to learn about how your colors work with each other as transparent (or not) glazes.

(old format here)



Tracing Paper

Testing ideas and adding elements using a tracing paper transfer made with graphite..

(Part 2 here)



Blow Dryer Tips

Learning to dry and not fry when your artistic patience is wearing thin.

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