



WATERCOLOR TIPS & TECHNIQUES

By Amy Weller Art

GETTING STARTED

Watercolor is a loose, expressive, vibrant, and versatile medium that can create a range of stunning effects just by using simple techniques! In this guide, I will be running through important tips to get you started with watercolor and showing you how to use unique techniques to transform your paintings.

Before we jump into the main tips and techniques highlighted in this guide, I'll run through all the materials I used to create these techniques/ effects so that you know exactly what you need if you want to re-create any of these techniques.

MATERIALS YOU NEED

1. Watercolor paints.
2. Watercolor brushes (I'd recommend a few variations of shapes & sizes, more on that later)
3. Watercolor paper .
4. 2 jars of water (I recommend using 2 as it keeps brushes cleaner for longer).
5. Tape.
6. Paper towels – to dab away excess water if needed.
7. HB graphite pencil and/ or watercolor pencils – for sketch outlines.
8. Eraser (any eraser will do but I love using a kneaded eraser) – in case you need to erase mistakes.
9. Scrap paper – to practise techniques first.





THINGS TO CONSIDER

I know you are probably itching to try out new techniques with your watercolors, but we need to consider a few things first before we dive straight into the painting process. It's really important to plan and prepare for painting in watercolors as failing to do this can result in getting results we don't want in our painting.

Don't worry! There's no complicated set up steps here – we just need to consider a few basic things before we get started.

- **Sketch outlines** – firstly, make sure that when you are drawing sketch outlines with a graphite pencil that you sketch lightly. If your outlines are too dark they will show through your painting! If your outline sketches are too dark, simply use an eraser to lighten up your sketch and make sure to brush away any residue. Alternatively, you can use watercolor pencils for sketch outlines!
- **Tape down your work** – unless you are painting on a watercolor block, you need to make sure you are taping down your paper to your work surface otherwise your paper may warp when you apply water.
- **Paper towels** – have a few paper towels to hand! Paper towels are great for cleansing brushes but also for soaking up excess water from your paper. If you have too much water on your paper it can create puddles which you don't want!
- **Paint palette** – make sure you are using a paint palette so you can easily use your colors. Many paint pans have a palette that comes with them which is handy!
- **Pre-mixing colors & color palette** – it's really important that you prepare all your colors prior to painting. This is because watercolor layers dry very quickly, and you can run into problems when trying to create certain techniques if certain parts of your paper dries before new applications of color. Pre-mixing also helps with wastage as you are just mixing what you need! (you can mix more colors later if needed) it's also important to consider your color palette as using too many colors can muddy your work!
- **Water to paint ratio:** water to paint ratios will change depending on the techniques you are trying to achieve, but it's important to note that too much water can create puddles, lighten colors up too much, and spread colors into areas that you don't want. By contrast, too little water can result in harsh colors that show streaks, and do not flow easily on the paper!
- **Working from light to dark:** considering light and dark areas is essential with watercolors. It's important to preserve white space for crisp highlights, and always work from light to dark. This is because it's difficult to add light colors over dark colors and your painting can easily become muddied if you go in too heavy with dark colors first. Working from light to dark also helps add contrast and values into your paintings!
- **Dry time:** dry time varies depending on what techniques you are using. If you want colors to flow more easily then you can add more layers of color over wet layers, but be careful you don't add too many colors as colors can become muddy. If you want to add details over the top of layers, make sure the paint has fully dried before you do this as details can bleed if the paper is still wet. It is essential to make sure your paintings have completely dried before you attempt to mount or frame them as disturbing a painting when it's still wet will ruin it!

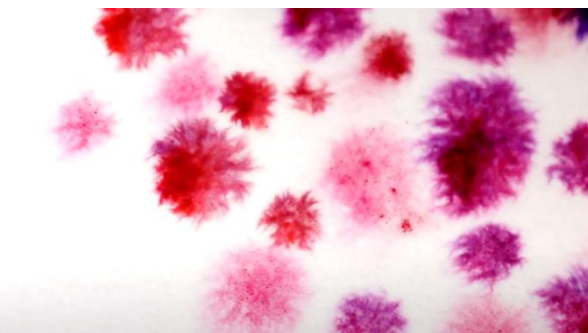


WET ON WET TECHNIQUE



The wet on wet technique is amazing for creating subtle transitions of color, bleeding effects, and soft textures.

1. Make sure you have 2 jars of water as it'll keep your brushes cleaner for longer and prevent colors from muddying.
2. First, apply a generous amount of water to your paper. Make sure your paper is not soaked in water though as you don't want puddles! You want your paper wet enough so that colors will bleed when you apply them.
3. Once you have wet down your paper, start dropping in colors and you will start to see them spread out across the wet surface!
4. Watch your colors spread across the wet paper, and even mix with other colors! Add more colors if you like, but be careful not to add too many as colors can become muddy & no longer vibrant.
5. As the paint starts to dry, you will see colors bleeding less then when you first started applying colors. This allows for more variation of bleeds & textures!



WET ON DRY TECHNIQUE



The wet on dry technique allows you to have more control over the flow of paints and is great for bolder colors, and more textured paintings.

1. Mix a small amount of water with your paint and start applying colors directly to the paper. colors will be a lot more vibrant and will not spread around the paper too much, allowing for better control over where your paint goes.

2. Start introducing more colors and gently tease the colors into each other. You should see a subtle transition of colors, but clear definition of each color. Be careful not to add too many colors as this can result in colors becoming muddied and a loss of vibrancy & definition in your paintings.



3. As the paint starts to dry you will find colors don't mix as well so be careful if you want more flow to your paintings. It's best to work quickly and then add more layers of paint over the top once the first layer has dried!

DRY BRUSH TECHNIQUE



This technique is fantastic for creating rough textures such as trees & foliage!

For this technique, you will not be using any water – just a couple of paintbrushes & watercolor paint!



- 1. Dab your paintbrush directly into a color and dab off any excess water onto a paper towel. This is a dry technique, so you will just be using your paint and no water! Start by gently applying paint directly to your paper.**

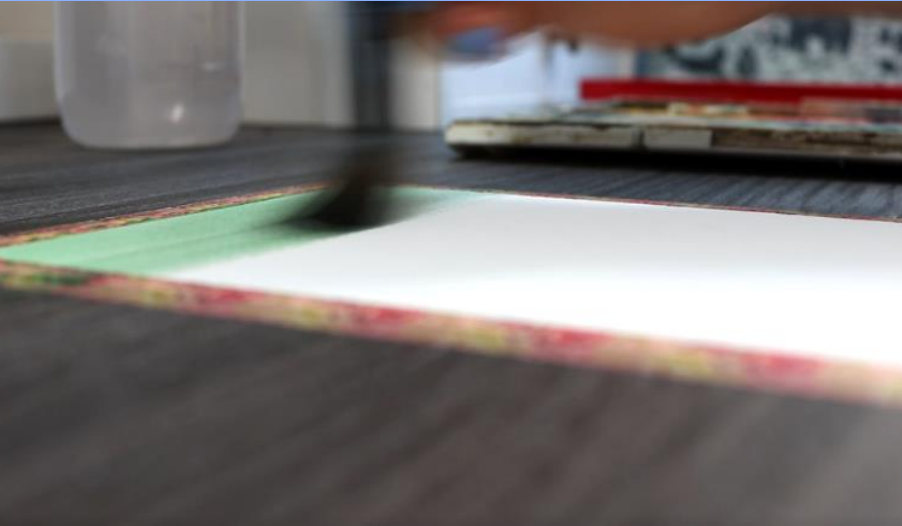


- 2. You can start adding in new colors to your painting and what you will see is that there is little to no movement of watercolor – this is why this technique is great for heavy textures such as trees & foliage as you will be building up a lot of layers!**



- 3. You can use a wide range of brushes for this technique – just play around and have fun with this technique and see what type of textures you can create!**

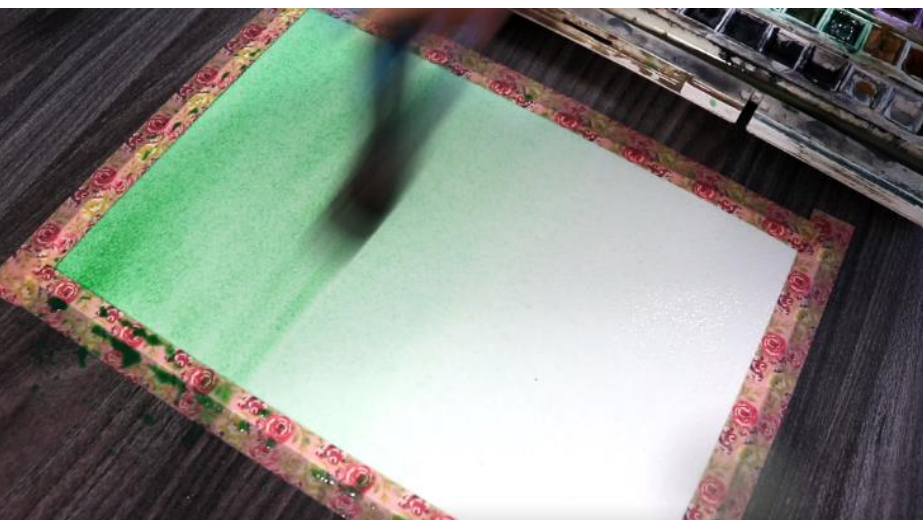
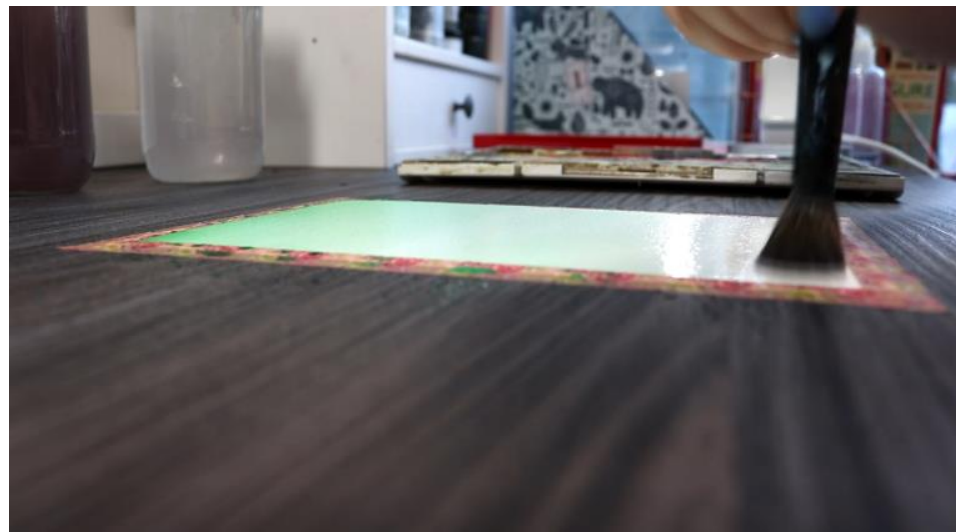
GRADIENT TECHNIQUE



Creating gradients is a great way to smooth transitions of color and value changes. This technique is particularly useful if you are creating washes of color or creating paintings of skies or water!

1. Use a large sized paintbrush for this technique as it will be easier to cover a large surface area of paper. Start by picking up your chosen color of paint, and directly apply to the top of the page.

2. as you start to glide down the paper, your color will become softer and more translucent which creates the gradient effect. You can drop more color in at the top of your page if you want to intensify colors, but only do this if your paper is still wet. Trying to add more layers in when the paper starts to dry will result in a cauliflower effect (where wet paint mixes with dry paint)



3. When your paper starts to become dry, this is when to stop! If you want to add another wash of color, wait for the paper to dry completely and then simply repeat the same steps as before!



FINALLY, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY

HAVE FUN!

It may take you some time to get used to watercolors, and this is a process I went through myself. But don't be too hard on yourself! Try and enjoy the creative process and feel proud of all the paintings you create. Even if you are unhappy with your results, don't throw your paintings away. They can help you grow and learn from your mistakes.

Trust in your own skills & abilities and you will soon notice improvements and everything coming together!

I hope this guide has given you the encouragement that you need to experiment with new watercolor techniques, and I truly hope these tips helped you! I've included a handy shopping list below of some of my favourite watercolor materials in case you wanted to purchase any supplies. There are plenty of other brands out there, but these will give you a good starting point as a beginner!

