



COLORED PENCILS & MATERIALS

By Amy Weller Art

If you are a beginner to colored pencils, then this guide is definitely for you! This comprehensive guide runs through all you need to know about colored pencils, and what materials you need to get started!

When I first looked into using colored pencils in my own drawings, I didn't know where to start!

I was sucked into buying products that I didn't need, and if I knew what I know now, I could have saved myself a lot of time and money.

That's why I've created this guide – to prevent others from making the same mistakes as I did.

KNOW WHAT TO BUY, AND WHAT TO AVOID

The biggest problem I found on the internet was that it's oversaturated with information and products. I must have come across hundreds of colored pencil brands, reviews, and materials, and it was really difficult to know what I should spend my money on, and what I should avoid.

I remember making a list of materials I thought I needed, and the list ended up being around 3 pages long and the total value of products came to well over \$500.

I bought the largest sets of colored pencils I could find, various types of paper I thought I needed, all the little extras that was recommended... and the truth is, **4 years later there are still some items I haven't touched.**

This may shock you, but a little does go a long way when it comes to colored pencils. You may think you need a lot of supplies, but the truth is you don't – you can create stunning drawings just from limited supplies.

That's why colored pencils are a perfect medium for beginners!

PENCILS

Let's first look at colored pencils! What pencils are the best types for you?

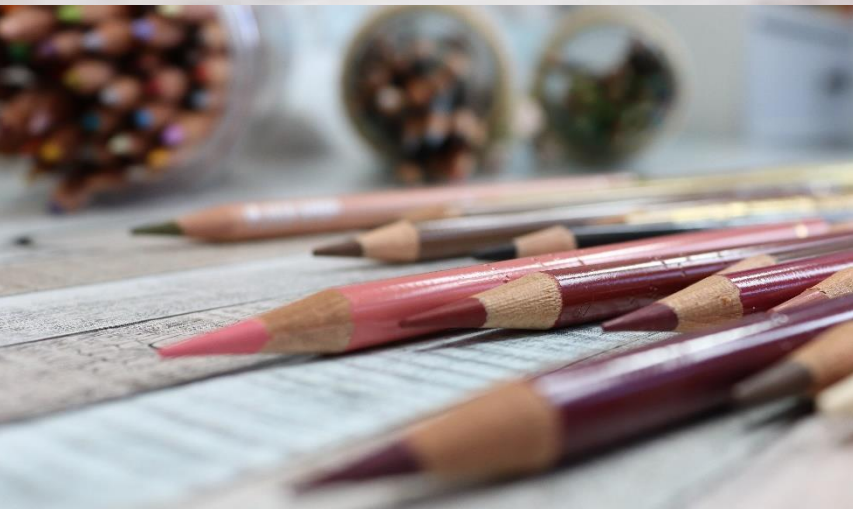


COLORED PENCIL BUILD

When first researching colored pencils, one of the most important things to consider is their build. This is because the better build a pencil is, the better quality it will be. You need to consider a pencil's pigment, binder, and casing – the core parts of what makes up a pencil.

In general, cheaper student grade pencils will be lesser quality than artists grade pencils as they contain more binder and less pigment – this means color pigmentation is not as vibrant, and cheaper brands are more prone to discoloration.

The casing of a pencil is also extremely important. Casings help protect pencils from breaking. One of the biggest problems with cheaper pencils is that they do not have a protective casing on the end of them meaning they are more likely to break than artist grade pencils.



WAX & OIL

Binders are usually wax or oil based.

- Wax based pencils are more creamy and softer, and great for blending. They are best used for adult coloring, drawing cartoons, blurry backgrounds, and portraits due to their soft core. However, they are less good for creating details as they struggle to retain a sharp point.
- Oil based pencils are great for details! This is because they have a harder lead and can retain a sharp point. They are best used for drawing animals, detailed work, and textured drawings. However, they are less good for softer core work.



COLORED PENCIL SETS

Pick the set that is right for you!

Remember what I said earlier? I bought many drawing supplies that I didn't need including huge pencil sets that still to this day I hardly use!

The important things to remember is that you can create incredible drawings just from limited supplies. A little goes a long way, and you can find a great pencil set that suits your budget.

1. **Your budget:** You can find pencil sets that suit your budget. Most pencil brands can be purchased in open stock which means you can just buy individual pencils. This is a great way to try different pencils from different brands without breaking the bank! Small pencil sets start from around 12 pencils. These sets are very affordable, and may be an option for you if you are trying to save money. (Remember, you can stretch colors further by mixing colors together!)
2. **Color range:** Many beginners feel overwhelmed by large sets of pencils due to the amount of colors available. You do not need a large set of pencils to create incredible pieces of art – as I said, you can still achieve great results with a small set of pencils! A set of 12 pencils is a great starter set, but if you can afford a set with slightly more variety of colors I would recommend sets of around 24, 36, and 48 pencils. This will give you a fantastic variety of colors that are still affordable!
3. **Quality:** Remember that quality is an extremely important factor when choosing colored pencils. Many cheaper student grade pencils entice you to buy them due to their low cost, but they often compromise on quality. It's always best to invest in artists grade colored pencils, as they are better quality (and more affordable than you may think!)

RECOMMENDATIONS

So, let's talk about some of the colored pencil brands that I personally recommend. I have picked these sets as I feel they are best suited for beginners, are great quality, with affordable options.

Here's a quick run down of the pencils that made the list, with more details on my top picks on the next page.

- **Wax based pencils:** Prismacolor Premier Pro, Arteza Professional, and Derwent color soft pencils.
- **Oil based pencils:** Faber Castell Polychromos pencils, Derwent Lightfast, Koh-I-Noor Polycolor pencils.
- **Mix of wax and oil pencils:** Caran D'ache Luminance pencils.

TOP
PICKS

PRISMACOLOR PREMIER PRO



These pencils are wax based so are a creamy, soft core pencil, and are easy to blend! They are able to get in some detailed work, but are best suited for softer textures such as drawing skin.

The downside to these pencils is their lightfast rating (lightfast = resistance against discoloration) which for some pencils in the set is low. These pencils do not have a protective casing on the end of them meaning they are prone to breaking. They also have an uncentered lead which means if you apply too much pressure, the lead can break. To minimise breakages, extra caution is advised and I'd recommend using a helical or electric sharpener to sharpen them (as it sharpens them more evenly)

FABER CASTELL POLYCHROMOS



These pencils are oil based so are great for details and textures! They are able to retain a sharp point and are perfect for drawing animals and more textured pieces. They also have an excellent lightfast rating, apart from just 2 pencils which are graded at a fair lightfast rating.

The downside to these pencils is that they are not so good for softer textures and blending. This is due to their hard lead. The other issue with these pencils is that they are not as opaque as other brands. The white pencil in particular is very translucent so is not good for adding highlights – I'd recommend switching this pencil for a white Caran D'ache Luminance, Prismacolor, or other white pencil from another brand.

CARAN D'ACHE LUMINANCE



I contemplated on adding these pencils into this guide for one major factor: their price.

These pencils are expensive, and I understand may not be a first option for beginners as there are other good quality colored pencils on the market that are cheaper. The reason why I decided to include these pencils in my top picks for beginners is because:

- They are one of the best colored pencils on the market. They are superior quality and 100% lightfast.
- Some beginners have the intention to sell/ or do sell their artwork.
- They are a mix of wax and oil so a great all round pencil.
- Some other pencil brands such as Prismacolor premier pro pencils can be prone to breaking, and you may need to pay to replace them more often.
- You can buy Caran D'ache Luminance pencils individually.
- There are smaller sets of these pencils which may be more affordable for beginners.

These pencils are a classic case of you get what you pay for. They are more expensive than most colored pencils out there, but I feel the quality makes up for that and there's still affordable options to choose from if you are a beginner and want to try them for yourself.

Because the Caran D'ache pencils are a mix of wax and oil, they are versatile and can be used for a whole wide range of different art pieces. For example, these pencils are perfect for portraits because not only are they creamy and create soft skin textures, but they have the ability to create fine details – for example hair, wrinkles, freckles, and more.

The downside to these pencils is that they really are best suited for artists that want to sell their work or display their work. I'd definitely recommend these pencils if you are a beginner with intentions of selling your work as they have an excellent lightfast rating meaning they are resistant against fading under normal museum conditions.

However, if you just want to practise using colored pencils and are keeping your own private portfolio of work then I wouldn't recommend using these pencils as there are more affordable pencils available, and these pencils are best reserved for selling purposes.





LIGHTFASTNESS

Lightfastness is a pencil's ability to resist against discoloration/ fading under normal museum conditions.

Lightfastness is a particularly important thing to consider if:

- You are selling your artwork.
- You are displaying your artwork.

Imagine that you spent hours and hours on a commission, you worked hard and completed your commission to the highest possible standard, but just a few weeks later your client has contacted you to let you know their drawing doesn't look the same as when they first got it and wants a refund.

This is a common and frequent problem for artists that create drawings to sell using pencils with a poor lightfast rating.

As a beginner, you may not know what lightfastness is or what it means but it's extremely important to research lightfast rating charts for pencil sets before you buy them if you are wanting to branch out and sell your work.

Lightfast rating charts should be easy to find per pencil brand, and it will give you a clear indication on the best colors to use, and which to avoid.

Remember that lightfast ratings are specific to each pencil, not the set. This means that lightfast ratings may be different for each pencil and some pencils may be more lightfast than others.

A classic example of this is the Prismacolor Premier Pro pencils. Some pencils in their sets have a good lightfast rating, whilst others have a poor lightfast rating. In fact, some pencils in the set of Prismacolor pencils can discolor within weeks if exposed to light.

Of course, Prismacolor pencils aren't the only casualty here, this is a common problem for many brands, so you need to be careful when choosing pencils to use in commission work.





TYPES OF PAPER

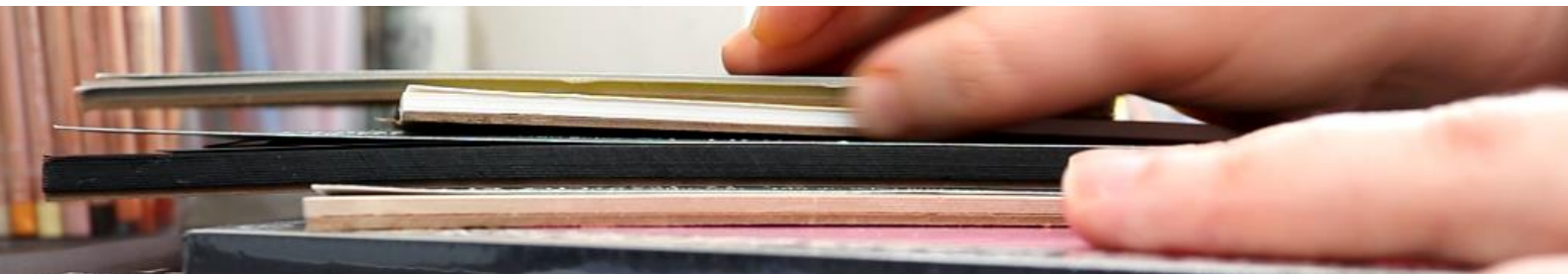
Choosing the right paper is equally important to choosing the right pencils! If you are creating certain techniques and textures, then it's extremely important that you are using a paper type that is suited to your style of art, otherwise it will affect your drawing results.

It can be overwhelming as a beginner when you come across so many different types of paper when researching the best paper to use, but that's why I'm here to help you decide which paper is right for you based on the type of art you create!

WHAT TO CONSIDER

There are a few things you should consider before you buy your paper. These are:

- 1. The size of paper:** Make sure that you are working on a suitable sized paper for what you are doing – paper that is too small can be hard to focus on details, and paper that is too large can be really time consuming when drawing.
- 2. The thickness of paper:** Using paper that is thick enough to handle colored pencil layers is essential as paper that is too thin could tear easily when you apply lots of pressure. You also need to make sure you are using paper that is suitable for wet mediums when using materials such as solvents and paint thinners. Paper in general, should be around 100lb – 140lb depending on what materials you are using
- 3. The paper texture:** You need to think about the type of texture you want your paper to have, depending on what style of drawing you are creating. For example, if you are drawing portraits using a smooth paper texture is best to allow for soft and easy blending. Just be careful that you are not buying paper that is too smooth though. You need some tooth to the paper so the pigment can grip onto the paper. For wet pencil blenders such as solvents, you should use paper with a little more texture to it and that is at least 140lb in paper thickness so that it doesn't seep through the paper. Using paper that is too rough isn't a good type of paper to use with colored pencils as it can be hard to add details and create realistic drawings.
- 4. The color of paper:** There's many color variations of paper that you can choose from, so don't limit yourself to just using white paper if you want to experiment with other toned paper!
- 5. The longevity of paper:** A really important thing to consider when buying paper is to make sure you are purchasing paper that will last, and won't discolor over time. That's why you should consider buying paper that is acid free. Also make sure that if you are mounting drawings that you use acid free, PH neutral mounts to prevent the mounts and artwork from discoloring.





TOP PAPER BRANDS

WHAT DO I RECOMMEND?

I have compiled this list of some of my personal favourite brands of paper. I believe these papers are best suited for different colored pencil mediums, and are great options for beginners!

Colored Pencil Work:

- Strathmore Bristol Smooth 300 series: for portraits due to the smoothness of paper, not suitable for wet blenders.
- Strathmore Bristol Vellum 300 series: for all colored pencil work/ subjects, and mixed media drawings. Also suitable for use with wet blenders.
- Strathmore toned tan/ grey paper: suitable for all colored pencil work/ subjects, and mixed media art. Not suitable for wet blenders.
- Faber Castell black paper: for all colored pencil work/ subjects, and mixed media drawings. Not suitable for wet blenders.

Wet blenders/ mediums

- Fabriano Artistico hot pressed watercolor paper (140lb)
- Arches hot pressed watercolor paper (140lb)
- Daler Rowney Langton hot pressed watercolor paper (140lb)

(I would not recommend using a cold pressed watercolor paper for use with colored pencils as it's too rough for fine details)

OTHER PAPER

There are lots of other great paper brands that I haven't mentioned in the list, so don't feel that those are the only brands of paper you can use. You can use any brand of paper you like, just make sure the paper is suitable for the type of drawing you are doing as you could run into problems if you are using the wrong type of paper.





OTHER SUPPLIES

SUPPLIES THAT MAY COME IN HANDY

Colored pencils are a flexible medium that can be used in combination with a lot of other supplies and tools – some supplies you may even have lying around your home!

Using certain supplies alongside your colored pencils can help to transform your art – and it often doesn't cost a lot of money to get your hands on them. Below is a list of some helpful tools you may find useful to use with your colored pencils.

- **Pencil sharpeners:** Personal favourites are the Swordfish Ikon & Derwent Superpoint Manual sharpener.
- **Pencil erasers:** Personal favourites are the Faber Castell kneaded eraser, Derwent art eraser, and Tombo Mono eraser.
- **Pencil extenders:** Use these when your pencils are becoming small and hard to use.
- **HB graphite pencil:** For light sketching outlines.
- **Nail dotting tool/ embossing tool:** Fantastic for creating highlights by indenting the paper.
- **X acto/ craft knife:** Perfect for lightly scratching away layers of pencils revealing base layers underneath.
- **White gel pen:** To create highlights in your drawings. My personal favourite is the Sakura gelly roll
- **Solvent/ paint thinners:** For blending colored pencils. My personal favourite is the Zest It pencil blend.
- **Rounded paintbrush:** Use this to blend out solvents with your colored pencils.
- **Cotton buds:** Use these to blend out solvents with your colored pencils.
- **Blending stumps:** Use these to blend out solvents with your colored pencils.
- **Touch up texture:** For adding highlights into your drawing. This amazing product is archival with colored pencils. I use the Brush & Pencil touch up texture in titanium white. Use a small precision brush to apply.
- **Powder blenders:** To blend out backgrounds (perfect for blurry backgrounds!).
- **Clear tape:** Such as washi tape or magic scotch tape. This is handy to have as you can tape your drawings to your work space and don't need to worry about your paper moving.
- **Drawing lightbox:** For creating accurate sketches of reference photos without having to draw by hand.





