

# Learn to Paint



Alfred Daniels

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by  
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# Chapter 1

## Before We Begin



### Painting Overview

In this book, we'll be talking about several different kinds of painting. You may want to try them all, or you may want to focus on just one approach. We'll introduce tools, techniques and exercises for getting to know each of these painting methods.

The first painting technique we'll discuss is painting on paper with both transparent watercolors and opaque watercolors (gouache). Next we'll move on to painting on canvas with oils or acrylics. We'll also spend some time on composition: how to look at paintings by other artists and the elements needed to put a picture together that's both interesting and pleasing to the eye.

This is not one of those books that gives you step-by-step instructions to paint some pre-existing picture. Instead, you'll learn what you need to know to set out on your own artistic journey of discovery. Each section offers several exercises to help you get used to the different types of paint, learn more about color and composition, and master the various tools and techniques.



# All About Color

Whether you're using transparent or opaque watercolors, oils, or acrylics, painting is all about color. Before you start mixing your paints, take a moment to review the primary colors, their secondary opposites, and the tertiary (or third level) colors found in between.

## PRIMARY COLORS



The primary colors are red, blue, and yellow. They are called "primary" (which means "first") because they cannot be divided into other colors. All other colors can be made out of these three colors.

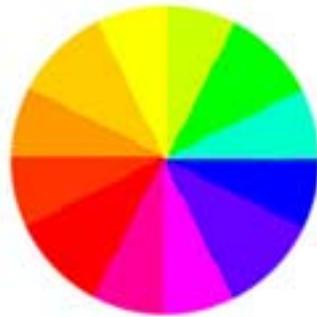
## SECONDARY COLORS



The secondary colors are formed by mixing two primary colors together. They are green, orange, and violet. The secondary colors are the opposite

of whichever primary color is not used in its makeup. Green consists of blue and yellow, so its opposite is red. Orange is a combination of red and yellow, so its opposite is blue. Violet is a blend of red and blue, so its opposite is yellow. Opposite colors are interesting—when placed near each other on your canvas or paper, they set up a vibration or “pop.” One appears to recede while the other appears to come forward. The primary and secondary colors together form the colors of the spectrum (or rainbow).

### **TERTIARY COLORS**



There are actually an infinite number of tertiary colors. These are the colors that come between the primary and secondary colors on the color wheel. Tertiary colors are mixtures, like secondary colors, but they lean more toward one primary color than another. Some examples would be blue-violet, red-violet, yellow-green, blue-green, red-orange, yellow-orange.

# Supplies

Whether you're painting in transparent or opaque watercolors, oils or acrylics, there are certain supplies you'll need. We'll talk about the paints themselves in the next sections.

Paints, brushes, and papers all have their part to play and when we use inferior art supplies, it shows in the results. Good, brilliantly white paper, high quality canvas on stretchers that won't warp, flexible brushes that hold paint well, high-quality colors that dry without too much change of tone and flow easily off the brush—these are essential to good painting. Old splayed brushes or paper that wrinkles when it gets wet will ruin your efforts. On the other hand, there is no good reason for a beginner to splurge on the absolute best materials. Aim for the middle path.

## Papers



### **FOR WATERCOLOR**

You can buy good quality watercolor paper in any art supply store. It comes in pads (bound on one side), blocks (glued on all four sides) or loose sheets. To begin with, buy a small glue-bound (not spiral bound) pad of watercolor paper, around 9" x 12" and a larger pad, say around 15" x 22" or even 18" x 24". As you gain experience, branch out into individual sheets

of higher quality, acid free watercolor papers. One hundred percent cotton rag is the best and most long lasting. These papers come in a variety of dimensions and weights. Try a few to see which you like best. On page 19, we'll talk about how to prepare watercolor paper for painting.

### **FOR GOUACHE**

Gouache (opaque watercolor) can be used on almost any kind of paper from highly textured watercolor paper to smooth drawing papers to rice paper or other specialty papers. Gouache works particularly well on Bristol board, a very smooth, stiff stock that holds up well to water and dries flat. You can stretch your paper (as above), coat a piece of wood, cardboard, mat board or brown wrapping paper with gesso to paint on with gouache, or just paint directly on the paper.

## Canvas

Canvases are usually cotton duck stretched over wooden stretcher bars and fastened along the outer edge or the back. Stretched canvas can be bought in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, either in your local art supply store or online.

For the beginner, canvas panels are a great way to get started. They are less expensive and stand up to any accidental mishandling. Canvas can also be bought in rolls or by the yard.



To stretch your own canvas:

1. Lay the canvas on the floor or a large table.
2. Smooth out the wrinkles (if it's very wrinkled, use an iron or a steamer).
3. Place the stretcher on top of the canvas.
4. Take hold of the canvas in the *center* of one edge.
5. Fold it up over the stretcher and, using a heavy-gauge stapler, staple once on the back of the stretcher.
6. Repeat the process on the opposite side of the canvas, again in the center of that side—pull the canvas as taught as possible before stapling.
7. Repeat in the center of one side, and then the other.
8. Go back to the first staple. Pulling the canvas as taught as possible, staple once several inches to the left of your first staple, and again several inches to the right.
9. Repeat this process first on the opposite side, then on the two remaining sides.
10. When you reach the corners, tuck the fabric under itself so that it lies flat. Put several staples at the corner to finish.

## **GESSO**

Canvases need to be prepared with gesso as an undercoat or ground before you can paint on them. Pre-stretched canvases and panels have gesso pre-applied. If you stretch your own canvases, you must gesso the entire surface. This makes the canvas “shrink to fit” the stretcher tightly. Apply at least two coats of gesso, sanding lightly in between each coat. Even if you buy gessoed canvases, it's a good idea to keep a small jar of gesso in your studio for touch ups. It also makes a good ground on paper, cardboard, wood, or anything else you might want to paint on.

# Brushes



Brushes are called “round” or “flat” in reference to the place where the bristles attach to the handle. Within those two categories, there are many different brush options. These recommendations are for the basic brushes a beginner should have, depending on the medium you’ll be working in.

Experience and experiment will help you find the brushes that suit you best. Once you get used to the basic brushes, feel free to branch out into other shapes, sizes, and fibers to see what they’ll do for you.

## **FOR WATERCOLOR**

Sable brushes are best for watercolor painting, but very expensive. While you’re learning, don’t invest in sable brushes. There are many excellent synthetic brushes on the market. Use round brushes with pointed tips (called “pointed rounds”) for lines and details, and larger round brushes for

