

Watercolour Painting for Beginners – Tutorial 1: What Are Watercolour Paints?

What Are Watercolour Paints?

Watercolour paints are a type of paint made from pigment (colour) mixed with a water-soluble binder, usually gum arabic. When mixed with water, they create transparent or semi-transparent washes of colour. This allows artists to layer light and shadow in unique, soft, and beautiful ways.

Watercolours come in two main forms:

- **Pans** – dry, solid cakes of paint in small trays. Just add water and you're ready to paint!
- **Tubes** – soft, paste-like paint squeezed out onto a palette and diluted with water.

Why Use Watercolours?

- They are **light and fluid**.
 - You can **see the paper through the paint**, which makes paintings look airy and fresh.
 - Mistakes can sometimes be lifted or softened with water.
 - Great for **layering, blending, and soft gradients**.
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Step-by-Step: Getting Started With Watercolour

Step 1: Gather Your Materials

- Watercolour paints (pans or tubes)
- Watercolour paper (thicker than normal paper, 190gsm+)
- Brushes (start with a round brush, size 6 or 8)
- Water pot (for rinsing)
- Mixing palette (plastic or ceramic)
- Cloth or paper towel

Step 2: Learn to Use Water

Water is the magic ingredient in watercolour painting!

- Try using **more water** to make lighter colours.
- Use **less water** to make the colour richer and darker.

- Practice making a **gradient** from dark to light using just one colour and water.

Step 3: Test a Wash

- Load your brush with a watery colour.
- Swipe it across your paper.
- Try again with more or less water. What changes?

Step 4: Try a Simple Shape

- Paint a circle or a square.
 - Fill it in with a smooth wash.
 - Let it dry.
 - Try adding another colour over the top to see how they layer.
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Watercolour Painting for Beginners – Tutorial 2: Flat and Graded Washes

What is a Wash?

A **wash** is a smooth layer of diluted paint spread across your paper. It's the basic building block of watercolour painting and helps you make skies, backgrounds, and soft colour transitions.

There are two main types of washes:

- **Flat Wash:** One smooth colour from edge to edge.
- **Graded Wash:** A colour that fades from dark to light.
- Variegated wash: two colours blended together



Step-by-Step: Flat Wash


What You Need:

- Watercolour paint
- Watercolour paper (taped down if possible)
- Round brush (size 6–10)
- Water pot and palette
- Paper towel

Steps:

1. **Mix Paint:** Mix plenty of watery paint in your palette. It should flow easily.
2. **Load the Brush:** Dip your brush into the mix so it's full but not dripping.
3. **Start Painting:** Begin at the top of your paper, pulling your brush across in one stroke.
4. **Reload and Repeat:** Slightly overlap the last stroke. Keep going down the page.

5. **Keep Edges Wet:** Don't let the edge dry while painting – this avoids streaks.
6. **Let It Dry:** Once you've covered the area, let it air-dry completely.

 Tip: Practice with different colours and paper angles. Keep the paper flat for even coverage.

Step-by-Step: Graded Wash

What You Need:

- Same as above

Steps:

1. **Mix Paint:** Mix a puddle of strong colour.
2. **First Stroke:** Start with a full brush of strong paint at the top of the paper.
3. **Add Water:** Dip the brush in water only (no paint) and make the next stroke underneath, blending it into the first.
4. **Repeat:** Keep adding clean water to your brush and pulling the colour down. It should get lighter as you go.
5. **Practice:** Try making the fade longer or shorter. Use different colours.

 Tip: Try turning your **graded wash into a variegated wash** by starting with two colours from opposite ends

Watercolour Painting for Beginners – Tutorial 3: Wet-on-Wet and Wet-on-Dry Techniques

What Are These Techniques?

These are two of the most important ways to apply watercolour paint. The look of your painting changes depending on whether the paper is **wet or dry** when you apply the colour.

Wet-on-Wet Painting

This means applying wet paint **onto wet paper**. It creates **soft, blurry edges** and colours that blend beautifully together.

You'll Need:

- Watercolour paper
- Brush
- Water
- Paint
- Mixing palette

Steps:

1. **Wet the Paper:** Use clean water and a brush to cover a section of paper.
2. **Load Your Brush with Paint:** Mix a watery colour.
3. **Touch the Wet Paper:** Dab the brush onto the wet area and watch the colour spread!
4. **Add More Colours:** Try adding a second colour nearby. Watch them merge and swirl.
5. **Experiment:** Tilt the paper or add more water for fun effects.
6. **Let It Dry Naturally:** You'll get soft shapes, perfect for clouds, water, and backgrounds.

 Try This: Mix your colours. Let them flow into each other on the wet paper.



Wet-on-Dry Painting

This means putting wet paint **onto dry paper**. It gives you **crisper lines and edges**.



Steps:

1. **Use Dry Paper:** Make sure your paper is completely dry.
2. **Load Your Brush:** Use strong paint (less water).
3. **Paint a Shape:** Try a leaf, a house, or a star.
4. **Add Details:** Once it's dry, layer more shapes or outlines on top.
5. If you are using tube paints **try not using water at all**, for a very dry effect and total colour separation – this won't work with pan paint



 Try This: Paint a tree trunk with wet-on-dry, then use wet-on-wet to make soft leaves.

Practice Exercise: Fireworks!

- Paint a circle with clean water (wet-on-wet).
 - Drop in colours like blue, red, or yellow.
 - Let them spread.
 - Once dry, use wet-on-dry to paint crisp lines or dots over the top.
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Watercolour Painting for Beginners – Tutorial 4: Colour Mixing & Creating a Colour Wheel

Why Mix Colours?

Mixing colours helps you make *new*, *exciting*, and *personal* shades using just a few basic paints. Watercolours are perfect for mixing because of how easily they blend with water.




Primary Colours

There are 3 colours you cannot mix – they are called **primary colours**:

-  Red
 -  Blue
 -  Yellow
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Mixing Secondary Colours

These are made by mixing two primary colours:

-  Green = Blue + Yellow
-  Orange = Red + Yellow
-  Purple = Red + Blue

 Try it! On a palette, mix small puddles of:

- Red + Yellow
 - Yellow + Blue
 - Red + Blue
- Use more or less of each colour to make different versions.
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Make Your Own Colour Wheel

Let's paint a simple 6-section colour wheel to see how colours relate to each other!

You'll Need:

- A pencil
- Watercolour paper
- Brush
- Red, yellow, and blue paint
- Mixing palette
- Ruler or round object (for tracing a circle)

Steps:

1. **Draw a Circle:** Use a cup or lid to trace a circle.
2. **Divide Into 6 Sections:** Like slices of pizza! Label each section:
 - Red
 - Orange
 - Yellow
 - Green
 - Blue
 - Purple
3. **Paint the Primary Colours using minimal water**
 - Fill in Red, Yellow, and Blue sections
 - Wait until these are dry before continuing
4. **Mix and Fill Secondary Colours:**
 - Orange = mix red + yellow
 - Green = mix yellow + blue
 - Purple = mix red + blue

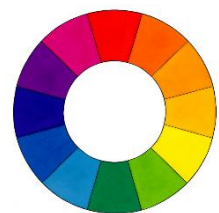


Let each section dry before moving your paper.



Bonus Challenge: Try adding Tertiary Colours

- Try mixing a secondary colour with more of a primary to make *tertiary colours* (e.g., red-orange, blue-green).
- Mix all three primaries together (just a little) to get a range of **neutral** colours in browns and greys.



Watercolour Painting for Beginners – Tutorial 5: Layering and Lifting Techniques

Add depth, shadows, and highlights with these next-level watercolour skills!

What Is Layering?

Layering means painting over a dry layer of watercolour to build up colour slowly. Because watercolours are transparent, you can *see through the top layer*, which helps you create shadows, depth, and beautiful blends.

Step-by-Step: Layering


You'll Need:


- Watercolour paints
- Watercolour paper
- Round brush
- Mixing palette
- Water pot



Steps:

1. **Paint a Shape:** Start with a simple shape (like a leaf or a circle) in light colour.
2. **Let It Dry:** Wait until the paint is completely dry.
3. **Paint Over It:** Add a second layer in a slightly darker colour, or the same colour with less water.
4. **Repeat:** Try adding 3–4 layers, each time letting it dry. You'll see the shape gain more form and richness.

 Tip: Start with lighter tones and build darker ones gradually.

 Try This: Paint a lemon – start with light yellow, then add shadows in golden yellow or soft green on the edges.

What Is Lifting?

Lifting means *removing* some paint to make a highlight or fix a mistake. You can lift paint while it's wet or dry.

Step-by-Step: Lifting Wet Paint

Steps:

1. **Paint a Wash:** Lay down a colour.
2. **While Wet, Use a Dry Brush or Tissue:** Gently dab or sweep the area to lift paint away.
3. **Create Clouds or Highlights:** This works well in skies, eyes, or shiny surfaces.

Step-by-Step: Lifting Dry Paint

1. **Wet the Area You Want to Lighten:** Use clean water and a brush.
2. **Wait a Few Seconds:** Let the water soak in.
3. **Blot With Tissue or Brush:** Gently remove some colour.
4. **Repeat If Needed:** Be gentle to avoid damaging the paper.



Try This: Paint a blue sky and lift little cloud shapes while it's still damp!



Practice Activity:

- Paint three overlapping circles using different colours.
 - Let them dry.
 - Add a darker ring to one, and try lifting a highlight from another.
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Watercolour Painting for Beginners – Tutorial 6: Fun Texture Techniques

Let's get creative and explore exciting ways to make texture with watercolours!

Why Use Texture?

Texture adds **interest**, **movement**, and **surprise** to your paintings. You can use everyday objects like salt or cling film to create magical effects!

Technique 1: Salt Crystals

Salt absorbs water and pigment, creating a **snowflake or starburst** effect.



What You Need:

- Watercolour paint
- Watercolour paper
- Table salt or sea salt
- Brush, water, palette

Steps:

1. **Paint a Wet Area:** Use lots of water and colour.
2. **Sprinkle Salt on Wet Paint:** Lightly scatter salt while the paint is still wet.
3. **Let It Dry Fully:** Don't touch it!
4. **Brush Off the Salt:** When dry, gently remove the salt crystals to reveal the pattern underneath.

 Tip: Try different kinds of salt (table, rock, sea) to see different textures.

Technique 2: Splatter Painting

This adds a **playful spray or speckled** effect.

What You Need:

- Paint

- Brush or old toothbrush
- Paper towel or apron (it can get messy!)

Steps:

1. **Load the Brush:** Use watery paint.
2. **Tap or Flick:** Tap the brush above your paper or flick bristles with your finger.
3. **Use Multiple Colours:** Try layering different splatter colours for fireworks or energy effects.

🎨 Try This: Make a night sky and splatter white or silver for stars.

☀️ Technique 3: Cling Film (Plastic Wrap)

This creates **abstract, crackled, or crinkled** textures.



Steps:

1. **Paint a Large Wet Area:** Use plenty of watery colour.
2. **Lay Down Cling Film:** Press it onto the wet paint and scrunch it a little.
3. **Leave to Dry:** Let it dry completely.
4. **Remove the Film:** Peel it off to reveal amazing patterns.

🎨 Try This: Use it in backgrounds, rocks, or clothing folds.

🧠 Practice Activity: Texture Sampler

Create a rectangle divided into 3 boxes. Try one texture in each:

- Salt in the first
- Splatter in the second
- Cling film in the third

Label each one and keep it as your "texture test sheet."

Watercolour Painting for Beginners – Tutorial 7: Water resist

What Does "Water Resist" Mean?

Water resist is when something **blocks** or **repels** water. Since water and oil don't mix, anything oily or waxy will stop watercolour paint from soaking into the paper.

That means if you draw with something oily or waxy first, like a crayon, and then paint over it with watercolour, the paint **won't stick** to those areas!

Why It Works

- Wax crayons and oil pastels are made with oily or waxy ingredients.
 - Watercolour is made with water.
 - Because **oil and water don't mix**, the waxy lines push the watercolour away.
 - This leaves your drawing visible and the colour slides off like magic!
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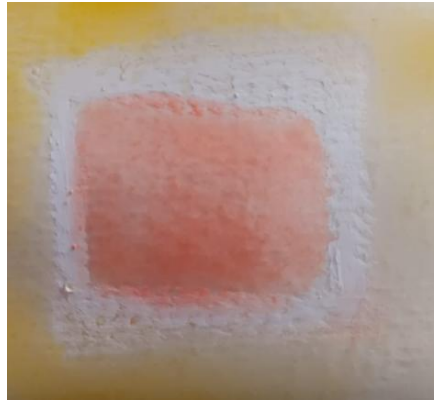
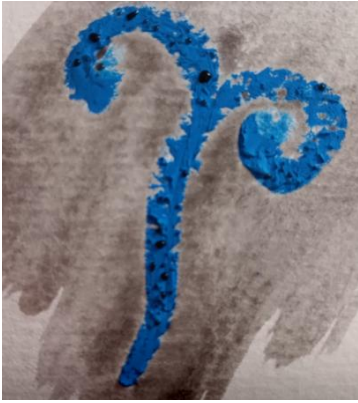
Try It Yourself: Crayon Resist Activity

You'll Need:

- White crayon or wax crayon
- Watercolour paints
- Watercolour paper
- Brush and water

Steps:

1. **Draw a Picture with Crayon:** Try stars, flowers, or write your name.
2. **Paint Over It**
3. **Watch the Magic!** The paint won't stick to the wax lines.



💡 **Practice activity - Art Ideas Using Water Resist**

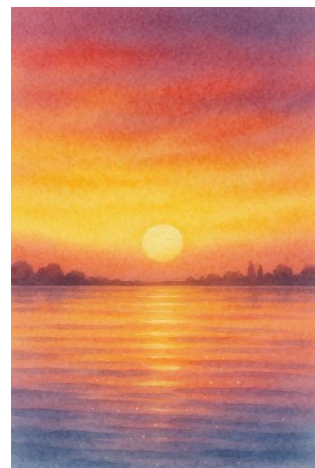
- Snowflakes with white crayon and blue watercolour
- Fireworks using bright crayons under a dark night sky
- Secret messages that only appear with paint

Watercolour Painting for Beginners – Tutorial 8: Your First Finished Painting

Let's bring everything together into a simple, beautiful piece of art!

Project: Sunset Landscape Over Water

This project uses washes, layering, wet-on-wet, lifting, and blending – everything you've learned so far!



What You'll Need:

- Watercolour paper (taped down if possible)
 - Paints: Yellow, Red, Blue, Purple (or mix from primary colours)
 - Round brush (size 6–10)
 - Palette and water pot
 - Paper towel
 - Pencil (optional for sketching horizon)
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Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Light Sketch (Optional)

Lightly draw a horizon line across your paper (about $\frac{1}{3}$ from the bottom). Add a sun halfway down the sky or behind the water.

Step 2: Wet-on-Wet Sky Wash

1. Wet the top $\frac{2}{3}$ of the page with clean water.
 2. Drop in yellow near the horizon.
 3. Add red above it and blend into yellow to make orange.
 4. Add a bit of blue or purple at the top to darken the sky.
 5. Let the colours gently bleed together.
 6. While still damp, **lift out** a circle for the sun with a tissue.
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Step 3: Reflected Water

1. Use the same colours but in reverse: purple or blue at the bottom, fading to red and yellow near the horizon.
 2. Keep strokes horizontal to mimic water.
 3. Let dry completely.
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Step 4: Distant Shoreline (Wet-on-Dry)

1. Mix a dark blue or purple.
 2. Use wet-on-dry to paint a thin line across the horizon.
 3. Add tiny vertical dabs for trees or buildings.
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Step 5: Final Details

1. Add shadows in the water (under the sun) with light grey or purple.
 2. You can splatter white paint (or use a white gel pen after drying) for stars or shimmer.
 3. Add gentle ripples with a nearly dry brush.
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Tips:

- Work slowly and let each layer dry before adding more.
 - Keep your water clean to avoid muddy colours.
 - Step back and admire your progress!
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