

# How to...

FREE  
information

## Paint in acrylics

### Introduction

Acrylics are probably the most versatile of all paints and are used by artists at all levels, from beginners to top professionals. There are many good reasons for artists to choose acrylics as their preferred means of artistic expression. They are fast drying, waterproof once dry, can be used on almost any non-oily surface, and allow the employment of a wide range of artistic techniques from transparent watercolour type washes, through thin glazes, to thick impasto. Being water based paints, no toxic solvents or media are used in acrylic painting. Acrylic colours are also permanent and non-yellowing.

### Equipment Needed

To begin painting in acrylics you will need paints and mediums, some painting accessories, a subject to paint, and a basic technique.

### Additional supplies:

Brushes - synthetic hair and hog bristle brushes are suitable for acrylics

Canvas surface or acrylic pad

Easel

Palettes and painting knives - to mix paints and apply paint to your canvas or board

Water pot - for cleaning brushes

Cloth - for absorbing excess water from brushes

Container - to hold water for painting

Charcoal or water soluble pencils - to outline your composition



## Choosing a Palette of Colours

Some artists use as few as three or four colours for an entire painting while others select a dozen or more. Most colours can be mixed from reds, yellows and blues, and these can be made darker or lighter by adding black or white. As you gain experience with colours you will create your own individual palette.

## Which Brushes

Synthetic hair brushes are becoming increasingly popular for acrylics but hog bristle brushes are also suitable. Hog bristle brushes leave more pronounced brush marks than synthetic hair brushes due to their greater stiffness. There is nothing to stop the artist making use of both types of brush. It is important to avoid paint drying on the brush during or after a painting session and to clean brushes after every painting session. Water with a little soap is fine for cleaning but you can also purchase specialist Brush Cleaners. Once acrylic paint dries on a brush it is very difficult to remove.

For beginners a minimum of four brushes for painting is recommended; one large and one medium flat brush, a medium round, and a small round. You may also wish to consider buying a broad flat synthetic hair brush for varnishing the painting once it is finished.

## Which Surface

Suitable painting surfaces include canvas, canvas board, paper, hardboard, and MDF. All surfaces should be dirt and grease free and ideally have a slight texture. While not absolutely necessary it is normal practice to prepare surfaces which are not already commercially prepared, with acrylic primer in order to improve adhesion and to give a pleasant surface to work on. These are available in white, colours and some give a rougher surface texture.

## What to Paint

When choosing a subject matter a simple scene without complex compositions is a good start. Decide on the focal point and sketch out the basic outlines with a soft pencil.



## Techniques

There are almost no limits to the techniques that are possible with acrylics. You can thin colours with glaze medium and paint in layers of transparent glazes. Equally, using gels, you can thicken the colours to produce solid hard-edged layers. You can also use your favourite watercolour techniques.

## Blending

Most subjects you paint will vary in colour and require shading. This can be achieved by using blobs of different colours or by blending the paint.

Put the two colours you want to blend on your palette. Build a few different mixes, so that you have about five different colours on the palette. Apply the paints quickly, before they dry as it will be difficult to get the same colour again.

## Glazing

Glazing can add variation to a large area that has been painted in the same colour. Dilute a pale colour such as yellow or white until it is transparent and paint over selected areas. This can be repeated to give a stronger glaze.

## Scumbling

Use a completely dry, stiff brush to apply a very thin uneven layer of paint on top of another colour, allowing the colour from the layer below to show through. This will produce a blotchy, atmospheric effect.



## Speckling

Speckling is another technique used to apply texture to an area. Cover all areas you don't want sprayed using newspaper or masking tape. Mix your colour using water to make it very dilute. Using an old toothbrush, dip in the paint and run your finger along the bristles, splashing paint onto the painting.



## Hints & Tips

Fast drying - once dry, mistakes must be painted over rather than wiped out

Can be used opaquely – ie. light colours can be painted over dark colours

Experiment with colours on a piece of scrap board or paper

To achieve narrow strokes, use the edge of the brush

Masking tape can be applied to dried acrylic paint making it easy to produce a straight edge

Always clean brushes thoroughly in water before paint dries

Visit our website  
**[www.hobbycraft.co.uk](http://www.hobbycraft.co.uk)**  
for more ideas, information  
and top tips