

Watercolor Affair

Watercolor Glossary



A HANDY REFERENCE GUIDE TO WATERCOLOR VOCABULARY

Introduction

Watercolor painting has its own special vocabulary and it can be tricky to understand certain terms when you first start learning this medium.

I put together this glossary of terms as a quick reference guide to remind you what I'm talking about as you progress through the course!

Feel free to read through this list to revise your vocabulary, or print it out for reference whenever I start babbling on about things you don't understand :-)

The list is in alphabetical order...

Archival

The term **archival** is used to describe watercolor paper which is acid-free and has a neutral pH. This characteristic means that watercolor paint will not fade over time and your paintings will be around for future generations to admire !

Back runs

A **back run** produces a spidery “cauliflower like” texture and occurs when a wet brush mark “runs back” into a settling wash of color. You’ll see examples of this in the lessons. A back run is often considered an error because it shows a lack of control over the paint, but when you know how back runs happen, they can also be produced on purpose as a way to add texture and interest to a painting.

Bead

A **bead** is formed when you paint a wet shape and excess moisture collects in a part of that shape. This often happens at the end of a wet brush stroke. The brush usually distributes the paint evenly while you paint, but at the end of the stroke an extra blob of paint can remain on the surface. Beads need to be controlled because the surplus moisture can result in a back run (see above). You can use blotting (see below) to remove any beads of excess moisture.

Blooms

Blooms produce a similar textured appearance to back runs. They happen when an area of paint is much wetter than the surrounding drying painted surface. The wetter paint flows into the drying painted surface and results in a spidery texture.

Blotting

Blotting is a term that has two applications in watercolor painting. You can either “**blot**” your brush using a cloth or paper towel to control the level of moisture on your brush head. Or you can “**blot**” a damp watercolor wash using a rinsed and dried brush tip. Blotting color from the surface of the paper like this is also referred to as “**lifting**”. You’ll see examples of me “blotting” throughout the various lessons.

Composition

Composition refers to the arrangement of visual elements in a painting. Composition can be used to enhance a painting. Good composition can help give a feeling of balance and unity to your work. Composition can also help set up a rhythm in a work of art, and you can use things like contrasting colors to help create focal points and draw the eye to a subject. You’ll find examples of composition explained throughout the different lessons.

Convenience Color

A **convenience color** is watercolor paint which includes two or more pigments in the ingredients. For example most green colors are convenience colors because they can only be created by mixing a few pigments together. Brands often produce paint colors like this because they are more “**convenient**” and save time if you use a particular color often.

Cold press (Hot press & Rough)

This is a characteristic of watercolor paper. During the manufacturing process the paper pulp gets squeezed through a set of felt covered rollers at low temperature (hence the term **cold press**). The felt gives the paper a slight texture.

Hot press paper is run through smooth heated rollers (hence the term hot press). This results in a smoother paper finish.

Rough paper is treated similarly to cold press, but the felt has a coarse texture.

Colors

In art, colors are usually referred to as **primary**, **secondary**, and **tertiary**.

Primary colors include **yellow**, **red** and **blue**.

Secondary colors are mixed using the primary colors and include **green**, **purple** and **orange**.

Tertiary colors are produced by mixing primaries and secondaries together.

Pigments

Pigments are one of the fundamental ingredients in watercolor paint. Pigments produce the color appearance of the paint. They are often made from minerals or other natural substances like plants, and occasionally using synthetic products.

Pigments are labeled using a **Color Index Name**. These pigment numbers tell you exactly which pigment was used in the ingredients. For example PB28 is traditionally used for Cobalt Blue. The “PB” means “pigment, blue”, and “28” means that it’s the 28th blue pigment listing in the color index

Color Temperature

In art certain colors are considered warm and others cool. This association stems from certain psychological triggers. For example we think of the sun as producing warm colors and shade produces cool colors.

Color temperature is a way to describe the color bias of any particular color. Paints themselves have a color bias. They can be more “cool” or more “warm” depending on the pigments used. This is because “pure” colored pigments (without a color bias) don’t exist.

Color Harmony

The idea of **color harmony** is related to **color theory**, which tells us that certain color combinations produce more balanced and “**harmonious**” results. Using color harmony and selecting a limited range of color combinations can help enhance a piece of artwork.

Color wheel

A color wheel is a tool which helps us understand color relationships. It can also be used as a guide for color mixing. You’ll learn a lot more about color wheels in the course lessons.

Dry brush

The term dry brush refers to a brush technique where you paint with a very dry brush head. On textured watercolor paper this kind of brushmark looks fragmented, creating broken edges and gaps where the white paper shows through.

Flat wash

A flat wash is one of the three generic types of wash in watercolor painting (see also graded wash and variegated wash). You lay down a “wash” of color when you paint any kind of shape on paper.

A **flat wash** has uniform color and tone. It doesn't vary and has a smooth appearance across the whole of the painted surface.

Depth

In art, **depth** refers to the feeling of three-dimensional space that a painting imparts. Depth is also related to the values and contrast you use in a painting. In general, the wider the range of values you use, the greater the sense of depth of the painting.

Glazing

Glazing in watercolor painting is another word for layering paint. A **glazing technique** is when you paint a shape, let it dry, then paint a new shape over the top of the previous color. Because watercolor paint is transparent, any new brushmark lets the underlying colors that were previously painted show through. The combination of the two layers of color produces a new appearance which has a modified color and “value”.

Graded wash

A **graded wash** (also known as a **graduated wash**), changes in tone from dark to light across the surface of the wash. The transition in tone is gradual and smooth.

Gum arabic

The basic ingredients of any paint include colored pigments plus a binder. The binder used in watercolor paints is **gum arabic**. Gum arabic is water soluble and completely transparent and it's the qualities of gum arabic which help provide many of the unique characteristics of watercolor paints.

Hot Press

This version of watercolor paper has a smooth finish. See “cold press” for more details.

Hue

The term “**hue**” applies to colors. I have to admit I tend to use the words “**color**” and “**hue**” interchangeably.

Strictly speaking a hue usually refers to the most vivid colorful version of a color. For example a pure red color would be a “red hue”. But if you change the appearance of the color by making it more gray (lowering the saturation) or by making it look lighter (diluting paint with more water to make a weak mixture), then the result is no longer a “hue”.

Lifting

A **lifting technique** can be used to remove color that has been applied to the paper surface. This is usually done using a rinsed and blotted brush, but you can use anything which will absorb paint from the surface of the paper, such as a paper towel or a sponge. Lifting lightens the tonal value of the affected area. Lifting tends to work better when a colored wash is still damp.

Masking

Masking is a technique which allows you to protect the paper surface while you paint over the top. It helps preserve the white or lighter parts of a painting while you apply a darker wash. I use **masking fluid** in some of the lessons of this course. This is a liquid latex product and a very handy device for watercolor artists.

Value (Tone)

Value (also referred to as tone) is the lightness or darkness of a color. For example, white is a “light value”, and black is a “dark value”. Every color you mix has a “value”, and the way you represent values in your paintings makes a huge contribution to the realism of a finished painting. You’ll learn much more about values in the lessons.

Transparency

Watercolor is generally considered a transparent medium. But each individual paint has slightly different levels of **transparency**. This is because each pigment is unique, and certain pigments result in more transparency than others.

Transparent watercolors are often the **most preferred type of paint**. They are known to produce vivid, brilliant hues and are the best for glazing techniques.

Granulation

Granularity is another characteristic which varies from pigment to pigment.

Granulation is a grainy, mottled appearance that some watercolor paints have when dry. Granulating paints are an excellent way to produce wonderful textures when painting.

Staining

Staining refers to a paint's ability to adhere to the paper. Some paints will stick to the paper, even if you try to scrub them off, whereas other paints can be **lifted** easily.

Staining is a characteristic of the pigments used in the paint. Each pigment has its own specific staining properties.

Variegated Wash

A **variegated wash** has a smooth and progressive shift in color and is painted using two or more different hues.

Wet-on-wet

A wet on wet technique simply means wet paint applied to a wet surface. You'll see lots of examples and explanations of wet-on-wet painting in the lessons.

Wet-on-dry

Yep... You guessed. Wet-on-dry means painting with a wet brush on a dry surface. You'll learn all about the characteristics of this painting technique during the course.

Conclusion

I use a lot of these terms throughout my Watercolor Masterclass. On the videos I use this vocabulary alongside real-life demonstrations. So don't worry... You will become familiar with these ideas pretty quickly !

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