

Painting Skies and Clouds

In practice 'less is more', don't work the paint for too long, let the colours and shapes remain fresh.

Particularly for cloudy skies, use reference material i.e. photographs of skies you are attracted to or that complement the landscape you are painting. It is much easier and more realistic than trying to work them from imagination.

Mix your chosen colours in advance, a weak and a strong concentration of each may be useful. Try to be bold with your colours and application as the paint and created effects will fade when dry.

Plain sky (graduated wash)

Try a mix of ultramarine, cobalt blue and a little paynes grey. Pre-wet the whole sky area to a little below the horizon, then brush in the colour from the top downwards working from left to right, picking up the wet edge of paint and diluting the colour as you go. For more drama, tilt the paper towards the horizon to push the paint down into the pre-moistened area to create a flared effect.

Plain sky (variegated wash)

Blue, as above, to a pale crimson and ochre, or burnt sienna colour.

Pre-wet the whole area as above, then drop in the sienna colour from the horizon to about half way up, working left to right. Then drop in the blue colour downwards from the top to meet the sienna colour. Tilting the paper may help the two colours combine.

Sunset/winter sky (multiple wash)

Mix colours to approximate your chosen reference.

Method 1: Pre-wet the whole area, then brush in bands or broad areas of vivid colour. Characteristic colours could be rosy hues, oranges, yellows, grey purples. **You may be better doing this in stages of colour washes.**

Method 2: You could try a grey monochrome treatment, leaving white areas for the vivid colours, then glazing with the brights when the first 'grey' wash is dry.

Method 3: A variant of above. For an early sunset with blue sky and sunset pink/gold edging on lower clouds - leave the latter as white areas just working using the blue tones. Leave to dry, then tint over the white areas with the glowing highlight colours.

Clouds

These can be created by lifting them out of the sky colour, or by painting negative shapes around them, to bring them into being. Try for a sense of direction and movement to the clouds.

Lifting out - pre-wet the sky area, apply your chosen shade, then lift out cloud shapes by using a clean squeezed out large wash brush, rotating and dragging it to pull out the cloud shapes. You can also try dabbing out cloud shapes with kitchen roll, tissue or a sponge.

To put shadows into your clouds to give them three dimensional form e.g. a grey-blue worked into them here and there especially near the bases:- wait until the sky is dry, then pre-moisten just the clouds and work the shadow into them wet into wet. The shadow colour should not run into the blue of the sky, and any resultant edges can be lifted out/softened with your brush.

Negative shapes - pre-wet the sky area, apply your chosen shade where you want the sky colour to be, **WORKING AROUND CLOUD SHAPES THAT YOU ARE CREATING**. The negative space around the clouds is what you actually paint. Wet into wet white clouds are the result, then you can drop in shadows as above.

Combined approach (I like best)- pre-wet, paint negative shapes of sky to create white clouds. Wait a little, add more colour here and there, lift off paint here and there, add shadows into the clouds. Some dried edges of thin glazes are fine, but backruns (weak wash running into strong) are to be avoided completely. Be free and light in your applications.

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