

Stretching Paper

Always advisable to avoid puckering of the paper when applying generous washes, working 'wet in wet', or when background atmospheric washes around the main subject are desired.

Suitable for 'not' papers (not hot pressed, but with a slightly bumpy texture), which take wet washes well.

'Hot pressed' smooth papers are less forgiving as they stain very easily, however stretching raises the grain a little and helps enormously to make the paper more receptive to washes, good generally for more detail.

1. Cut 4 lengths of gummed, brown paper strip to fit generously around the paper to be stretched.
2. Identify/mark the right side of the paper. Submerge and soak the paper in water in a sink or bath for about 30 seconds to 1 minute for light weight papers, about 3 minutes for heavier papers. (Long soaking can remove the protective size and damage the surface)
3. Drain off the excess water holding the paper by one corner.
4. Place it flat onto the drawing board/MDF right side uppermost.(the board must have a slight tooth for the tape to stick to, varnished or melamine surfaces are not practical). Gently blot off the excess moisture with a towel/tea towel by patting down onto it. Dragging the towel across will damage the surface.
5. Wet a length of gummed strip. A small sponge dipped into warm tap water and thoroughly wiped along the strip works well, as it become really sticky after a few seconds. Place it onto one edge of the paper, half the width of the tape over the edge of the paper and smooth down with the squeezed sponge to remove excess glue and moisture. Do the same for the other edges working on opposite side pairs at a time, work quickly, before the paper puckers too much.
6. Leave to dry thoroughly with the board horizontally positioned for even, flat drying. All puckers should disappear as the paper shrinks flat, held taut by the tape. Leave it in a cool room rather than a centrally heated one – if it dries out too fast, it the tape tends to pull away.
7. Leave the paper stuck to the board until the painting itself is completed and dry, then remove the painting from the board with a craft knife, cutting around the edge of the paper. Do not try to remove the brown tape.

Important Tip Keep an eye on the paper drying out whilst stretching and if small areas of tape are becoming unstuck due to not enough glue being on the tape, you can insert some glue (e.g. PVA) under the tape with a small paintbrush, but ensure that no glue enters the area to be painted. (If the tape becomes unstuck during the drying out of the paper, then you have wasted your time).

NB Using masking tape to hold down paper that has not been wetted is not 'pre-stretching' it. Neither is a manufactured pad of paper glued around the edges – they may be called 'stretched' but this is misleading. Both these methods *will* hold the painting down so that it *may* dry out evenly during the drying process, but some cockling is inevitable.

NB Soaking your paper, then taping it down with masking tape (as opposed to gummed tape) doesn't work and is pointless.

NB You can stretch paper that has a pencil drawing already on it, but for florals probably a good idea to lighten the pencil lines first with a putty rubber, as soaking the drawing seems to bed the pencil into the paper.

NB You can get rid of cockles on unstretched paper afterwards by spraying the back of your painting with water, covering with some kitchen roll, then leaving it face down sandwiched between 2 boards and weighted with books to slowly dry out for about two days.