

Watercolour Paint and Brush Control Exercises

To achieve: smooth areas of colour; smoothly applied glazes of colour; cleanly painted areas; clean edges; effective blending, modelling and texturing

To avoid: muddy and patchy areas, ragged edges, back runs, modelling and texturing that disappears on drying out. Usually these effects are caused by fiddling with painted areas for too long, as they are drying out, and not enough strength contrast of colour in paint layers.

How to fix? By keeping wet edges moving; using smooth brush contact with the paper (not dabbing); not going back into areas that are half dry; clean wet on dry textures; using the appropriate concentrations of colour mixes; using a brush size that suits the size of area you are painting.

1. **Even Infill** : Draw a curvy shape and fill it in with paint as evenly as you can, spreading out the wet edge of the paint to cover the area. Try and achieve crisp smooth edges. Leave to dry. (Application -for any first washes)
2. **Repeat above** a few times and leave them to dry.
3. **Even Glaze:** Using a dried shape of colour from above, glaze over smoothly with another colour, aligning the edges of both colours smoothly (to avoid ragged edges when doing modifying glaze work). Repeat.
4. **Varied Tonal Infill** : Draw another curvy shape and infill with different intensities of the same colour i.e. some areas darker, some areas lighter, by whatever means Eg you could pre-wet first using the light shade, then add the richer colour wet into wet, so using two concentrations. You can also add water to change the concentration in certain areas to desired effect. (Good for flower petal and leaf first washes, skies, lots!) Again, smooth edges wanted.
5. **Variegated Infill 1:** Draw a curvy shape and mix up two different colours, A and B, where B is a little more concentrated than A. Infill with A, then add in B wet into wet, so the two colours are combining here and there. Don't play with the paint and aim for smooth edges again. (Good for petals, leaves, skies, lots!)
6. **Variegated Infill 2:** Draw a shape and mix up two colours again, as above, but this time complementary ones (eg red and green, yellow and violet, blue and orange) . This time pre-wet the area with water, drop in A from one side of the shape, then drop in B from the other side of the shape, and let them meet softly but not merge. If they merge try to solve it, lifting off for eg. (Good for petals, leaves, skies, in which opposing complemenarties are needed, but if meeting and mixing will create a muddy colour)
7. **Sectional gradations:** Draw a shape and divide it into sections. Do a first wash in a light tone, then while moist, introduce areas of a stronger colour wet into wet (similar to 4. Above), leaving fine white lines of the paper between the sections. (Good for leaf segments, wall stonework, roof tiling)
8. **Edging 1, Fine line:** Paint a fine line edge, as fine as you can make it (for stems or any delicate edging) To Dry.
9. **Edging 2, Graduated wash line:** Paint a line, then dilute one side of the line with water, pulling the colour down to fade away. So you have a distinct edge and a gradated edge. (stem shadow sides, any delicate shading of edges of structures)
10. **Broader shape gradations:** Paint a series of shapes, and pull out one side of each shape with water so it fades away. (For colour treating certain areas of existing dry washes, softening textures, all sorts!)

11. **Dry edged texturing:** Do a pattern of mark making with your brush on top of a colour area from experiment 2. So maybe a darker version of the colour. The edges should be un-blended, crisp and not raggy, but let them overlap here and there. (lots of landscape applications such as grasses, trees, water ripples)
12. **Wet and dry texturing:** Do a pattern of mark making using a fairly strong colour into a wet wash, allowing the shapes to blur. When dry add some stronger coloured paint shapes to build up the texture - result is a soft and hard textured pattern with three tones (for trees, hedges, walls, centres of flowers). The trick is not to play with the paint for too long, or you will lose the contrasts that make the patterned texture.
13. **Drawing with brush:** Any shapes you like, but keep the brush in contact with the paper, applying firm pressure, then light, and twisting and rotating the brush. (Chinese - style, grasses, waves)
14. **Sky experiment:** Pre-wet a shape, apply sky colours wet into wet, leaving some areas white. Leave to dry. To intensify the colours softly, wet the whole again (very lightly and quickly so as not to disturb the washes too much) then add some stronger colour here and there where it became too pale in the drying. Leave to dry.
To add some dramatic hard edges, choose some appropriate areas, eg the blurred edge of a white cloud which would look more dramatic if more distinct, and do exercise 9/10 on it using graduated blend outs of edges/shapes.
15. **Easing out ragged edges/dried edges:** Find some rough edges in your samples that have dried out. With a moist brush try to ease away the ragged overlaps to make the edges smooth, dabbing off the released paint with some kitchen roll (So wet, ease away, dab off, and repeat until the edge is smooth). The quicker you get to these unwanted features after drying, the better the results will be.
16. **Lifting off paint evenly.** Paint a large shape, then lift off the paint evenly by applying a flat area of kitchen roll to the shape, smoothing it over with the back of your hand, then lifting. (Not a dabbing action.). You can also do this when the paint is dry by glazing first with water, then lifting off. Try both.
17. **Stipple:** With a hogs hair brush overlay about three different colours/intensities, allowing each layer to dry in turn. Work from light to dark. Don't cover the whole of the first and second layers with the third - all three should be visible for three-dimensional texture. (Trees, rock surfaces, pebbles, moss, creative effects)
18. **Dry brush dragging:** Using a brush with very little paint on it, skim it lightly across the paper so that the colour just adheres to the surface texture of the paper. The quicker you move the brush, the less the paint will adhere (bark textures, rough walls). You can also try rolling the brush across the paper (needs a little more paint on the brush for this). (Tree bark, distant water shimmer, foreground textures in landscapes)

Can you think of any more to try??

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