

Techniques for Paint Application

The beauty of acrylic paint is that it can look totally different depending on how you apply it. The more you experiment, the better it gets!

1. Drybrush

When you apply straight-outta-the-tube paint to a canvas using a dry brush, you'll create a strong stroke of color on the page. Your lines will be uneven (because there's no water to soften the edges), but dry brushing can give you a purposeful painterly effect.

2. Washing

If you water it down enough, acrylic acts a bit like watercolor! You can use the diluted paint to apply translucent washes on your surface. But unlike watercolor, the acrylic paint will set permanently. Try mixing the wash and dry brush methods — you'll end up with plenty of textures in a single piece.

3. Stippling

This common drawing method can be used with paint, too! (Georges Seurat's work is a fine and famous example.) Just add a mass of tiny dots to create a shape or texture with subtle variations in color.

4. Splattering

It doesn't get more fun than this! Using a fairly wet brush, you can flick or splatter paint onto a work surface for an uneven splatter effect. It's fantastic for creating an abstract landscape or a starry night or for just adding texture to a piece.

5. Dabbing

Think of dabbing like very artistic sponge painting: Using the corner of a sponge or even a piece of paper towel, dab on accents of color. This creates a texture that can't be replicated with any other applicator.

6. Palette Knife

Applying paint with a palette knife is an instant way to make your work look painterly. And since it's no different from spreading frosting on a cake, even beginners can do it. Simply use the palette knife to scrape up a bit of paint and apply it to your work surface — you'll get the hang of it pretty quickly.

If you want to get even more creative, try adding some gel medium to your paint and playing around with different household objects to add fun textures to your work.

7. Detailing

If you're after sharp, realistic details, you'll need a small, fine brush to carefully paint them in.

8. Underpainting

Start your painting by creating a "sketch" of the image in paint. Choose a color that contrasts with the palette you have in mind for the finished piece. Then, you can paint over the underpainting entirely. If you use opaque acrylic, you'll cover any evidence of the paint below, but you can also let parts of it shine through for a dimensional effect.

9. Glazing

If you want your paintings to shine (of course you do!), turn to a matte medium. When you mix a medium with your paint, it gives the paint new properties that add depth and complexity to your paintings.

10. Layering

Layering is as simple as it sounds — you'll apply paint in one layer after another, working from the bottom up. You'll start by painting big blocks of color, often as washes, and then adding more and more refinement as you add layers.

11. Paint in Blocks of Color

This is a fantastic method for beginners. Trace your image, separating each color or tone into separate shapes. Then paint in the shapes as if it were your own DIY paint-by-numbers piece. This is an easy method with monochromatic palettes or can be used with a variety of colors, too.

12. Color Mixing Techniques

Mixing acrylic colors really isn't rocket science — just combine colors and swirl 'em up. Once you've mastered color mixing, you can explore some more creative methods.

13. Partially Mix Colors Before Painting

Instead of fully mixing the two colors, just give them a brief stir with your palette knife. Then, use the partially mixed colors to paint. You'll get a fascinating mingling of colors as you apply the paint to your work surface.

14. Create a Family of Colors

Choosing a family of colors or tones to work with in a painting can help you create subtle variances in your painting. Whether it's creating slight varieties of skin tones or varying shades of pink, having a family of tones pre-mixed before you paint can really help streamline the process.