

Class Notes

Drawing

1. Start Loose and Light

- Sketch lightly using big, continuous, loose lines rather than tiny, jagged ones.
- The lighter you draw, the less you need to erase. You can simply lay new, darker lines over the old ones until you find the shape you want.
- Avoid pressing hard at the beginning. It limits your ability to erase, experiment, and play.
- The goal is to let your lines dance and move. The more comfortable you become with movement, the more enjoyable, productive, and efficient your drawing will be.

2. Work in Layers

Layer 1: Loose and Light

- Keep your lines loose, light, and rough.
- Don't worry about details or perfection.
- Focus on loose accuracy. You're getting a feel for the shapes rather than trying to get everything right.

Layer 2: Refine Your Lines

- Begin cleaning up your shapes and erasing lines you no longer need.
- Check the edges and angles of your subject.
- Look at the negative space, the shapes formed by the spaces around and between objects.
- Compare these spaces carefully. Does one space look like the space you're observing?
- Lighten unnecessary lines and gradually firm up the ones you want to keep.

Layer 3: Finalize Your Drawing

- Clean up and strengthen your lines.
- Decide which lines you want to emphasize and what you want your finished drawing to look like.
- Give yourself time. Sometimes I'll spend months on a drawing, playing with it, taking breaks, and coming back with fresh eyes. This is especially important with my illustrations before I begin painting.

3. Learn to See

- Drawing is about 90% learning to see differently and 10% putting pencil to paper.
- The key is practice. You're training your eye to notice shapes, proportions, angles, and the relationships between things.
- Start by learning to draw what you actually see. Once you can do that, you can begin intentionally changing it.

4. Learn the Technique, Then Play With Them

- Once you're comfortable drawing what you see, start experimenting!
- Change the proportions, the width, the angle, the tilt of a head, or the size of a feature.
- There are a million ways to play with a drawing once you understand its basic shapes and proportions.
- You can't intentionally change something until you understand how to draw what you see.

First, learn to see. Then, learn to change what you see.

Being able to do both opens up a whole new world of creative possibilities, including drawing from your imagination.

5. Drawing From Imagination

- Most artists use picture references, especially when drawing unfamiliar subjects.

- If you want to draw from your imagination, you need to build up a mental library of what you've observed and practised.
- For example, if you want to draw birds from memory, study and draw hundreds of birds from different angles. Learn their proportions, how their beaks work, and how their wings move.
- The more you understand a subject, the more confidently you can draw or paint it from your imagination.

6. Practise Often and Keep It Fun!

- Draw subjects you genuinely love. Choose things that excite you and make you want to draw.
- Draw lots and draw often. You learn by doing.
- Keep a sketchbook somewhere convenient. I keep a notepad in my purse so I can draw whenever I have a moment.
- Try keeping one beside your bed to wind down at night, or put it somewhere that connects naturally with an existing habit or routine.
- Just 10 minutes a day can make a surprising difference.

Most importantly, let yourself play. You don't need to create a masterpiece every time you pick up a pencil. The more you experiment, the more you'll learn.

Colours: Watercolour Colour Mixing

Colour mixing is one of the most complex parts of watercolour, and it can take longer to mix your colours than it does to paint! The goal is to learn how to mix the colours you want, in the right consistency and quantity, before you begin painting. The more you understand your paints, the less guessing you'll need to do.

Mixing Your Colours

Watercolour is a mixture of pigment and water. The amount of each determines the colour's intensity and how it behaves on your paper.

- Start by putting the desired amount of clean water into a mixing well on your palette.
- Dry your brush before picking up pigment so you don't introduce excess water into your paint pans.
- Mix pigment into the water, adding small amounts of colour until you achieve the shade you want.
- Mix thoroughly, then test your colour on a scrap piece of watercolour paper.

Always test your colours on paper before painting. You can't accurately judge a watercolour just by looking at it in your palette. It will look different on paper and generally dry lighter than it appears when wet.

Keep your paint pans relatively dry. Excess water sitting in them for long periods can encourage contamination or deterioration, particularly if the water isn't clean.

2. Adjusting Your Colours

Think of water as your lightener and pigment as your source of colour intensity.

- Want a lighter colour? Add more water.
- Want a darker or more intense colour? Add more pigment.
- Want to change the colour? Add a little of another pigment.

Always add new colours gradually. A tiny amount of a strong pigment can dramatically change your mixture.

When testing your colour, aim for a smooth, even wash rather than a thick, bumpy layer of paint. Allow it to dry so you can see how the colour will actually look.

3. Mixing for Wet Paper vs. Dry Paper

Before mixing your colours, decide whether you're painting onto wet or dry paper. This affects how much pigment you'll need.

Painting on wet paper

- Water helps the paint spread and blend.
- Colours may appear lighter as the pigment disperses.
- You may need a more concentrated mixture to achieve the intensity you want.

Painting on dry paper

- Paint stays more contained, giving you greater control over where it goes.
- When painting a large area, mix enough paint beforehand to cover it without stopping halfway through.

The amount of pigment you'll need depends on the colour, the size of the area, and the effect you're trying to achieve. Test your mixture on the same type of paper whenever possible.

4. Prepare Your Colours Before You Paint

When you're working wet-on-wet, you have a limited window of time before the paper begins to dry. If you stop to mix a new colour, you may lose the opportunity to blend it smoothly into your existing wash.

- Mix enough of your main colour to cover the area you're painting.
- If you need highlights or shadows, prepare those colours ahead of time, too.
- Keep your mixtures ready in separate wells so you can reach for them quickly.

Highlights are lighter areas that catch the light. You can often create them by leaving the white of the paper untouched or lifting some pigment from a wash.

Shadows and lowlights are darker areas that add depth and dimension. Mix a slightly darker version of your main colour so you can introduce it while the paint is still wet.

As you gain experience, you can also learn to mix small amounts of colour on the fly. For beginners, preparing your colours ahead of time gives you more control.

5. Avoiding Muddy Colours

One of the challenges of watercolour is mixing colours that become dull or muddy when you want them to stay bright.

- Start with a small number of pigments and learn how they interact.
- Add new colours gradually rather than mixing several together at once.
- Keep your brush and mixing areas clean to avoid introducing unwanted colours.
- Avoid overworking your paint on the paper. Too much brushing can disturb the wash and make colours look dull.

Generally, the fewer pigments you mix together, the easier it is to maintain a clean, vibrant colour.

6. Use References to Learn Colour Mixing

My recommendation, especially when you're starting out, is to copy colours you love before trying to invent your own colour schemes.

- Find a painting or photograph with colours that appeal to you.
- Look closely at the colours you want to recreate.
- Experiment with mixing your paints until you find a close match.
- Test your mixtures on paper and compare them with your reference.

A colour-mixing chart is another excellent resource. It shows you what happens when you combine different paints and gives you a reference to return to.

Working from a reference gives you something specific to aim for and helps you learn how colours interact. As you become more familiar with your paints, you'll develop an instinct for which colours to combine and how much of each to use.

The Big Takeaway

Mix your colours before you paint, test them on paper, and learn how your pigments interact.

Watercolour gives you an incredible range of colours, even with a relatively small palette. The key is understanding how much water and pigment to use, preparing enough paint for the area you're covering, and learning which colours work together.

The more you experiment with colour mixing, the more confident and intentional your painting will become.

Painting: Watercolour Foundations

1. The Foundation of Watercolour: Water and Edges

Watercolour is all about learning to work with the water, rather than fighting against it. Unlike acrylics, which you can physically blend on the surface, watercolour relies on how water carries pigment across the paper.

Think of it a little like chemistry. The amount of water on your paper, the amount in your brush, and the timing of your brushstrokes all affect what happens.

The first skill to learn is edge control. Once you understand how to create different edges, you can control how colours blend, how shapes are defined, and how texture develops.

2. Understanding Hard and Soft Edges

An edge is where one colour or shape meets another.

Soft edges

- A soft edge is where two colours meet and blend without a distinct line between them.
- The transition is smooth, creating a gradual change from one colour to the next.
- Create soft edges by applying paint to wet paper or joining two areas of paint while they are still wet enough to blend.

- Soft edges are useful for skies, soft backgrounds, distant mountains, and gentle transitions between colours.

Hard edges

- A hard edge is a clear, distinct line where one colour or shape ends and another begins.
- Applying wet paint to dry paper generally creates a hard edge because the dry paper prevents the paint from spreading freely.
- Hard edges are useful for defining shapes, adding details, and creating crisp boundaries.

Remember: Wet-on-wet creates soft edges. Wet-on-dry creates hard edges.

These are the two main techniques to begin with. As you gain experience, you'll discover many variations between them.

3. Learn to Read the Water

One of the most useful skills you can develop is learning to see how wet your paper is.

Tilt your head and look across the surface. The light reflecting off the paper helps you judge its moisture level.

- Wet and glossy: Paint spreads freely, and colours flow into one another.
- Evenly wet with a gentle sheen: Often ideal for smooth blending with some control.
- Damp, with little or no shine: Paint spreads less, and edges become more defined.
- Completely dry: Paint generally creates crisp, hard edges.

When aiming for a smooth blend, look for an even sheen without puddles or dry patches.

The amount of water on your brush matters, too. Too much water can push pigment around and create unwanted blooms or irregular edges.

Your goal is to learn how different amounts of water affect the way paint moves.

4. Blending Colours

When blending two colours, the goal isn't to blend everything together. It's to blend the line where the colours meet.

For example, imagine painting a sky that transitions from yellow to pink.

- Apply yellow to one part of an evenly wet area.
- Apply pink to another part while the paper is still wet.
- Let the colours flow toward each other and gently soften the boundary where they meet.
- Allow the transition to develop without overworking it.

The result should be a gradual transition from yellow to pink, rather than one colour mixed across the entire area.

You can also introduce a second colour into an existing wash while it's still wet.

The key is to keep the area you're blending wet enough for the colours to flow together. If part of the paper dries while you're working, you may get a hard line where the wet and dry sections meet.

5. The Secret to Smooth Blending: Match the Wetness

When blending colours, pay attention to the moisture on your paper and the amount of water your brush carries.

- A very wet brush on slightly damp paper can push existing pigment around, creating unwanted marks.
- A brush that's too dry may not allow the paint to flow smoothly into the surrounding colour.
- A spray bottle can help keep a larger area moist for longer, giving you more time to work. Use it sparingly to avoid making the paper too wet.

You're learning to find the right balance between the water on your paper and the water in your brush.

Aim for a smooth sheen, not puddles.

6. Build Up Colour With Highlights and Shadows

Once you're comfortable blending colours, you can begin creating more depth and dimension.

Highlights

- Highlights are the lightest areas of your painting.
- In transparent watercolour, the white of the paper often provides the brightest highlights, so plan ahead and leave these areas unpainted.
- You can also lift some colour from a damp wash with a clean brush to create lighter areas.

Shadows and lowlights

- Shadows are darker areas that help define shapes and create depth.
- Introduce darker colours while a wash is wet for soft shadows.
- Wait until the first layer is completely dry before adding another layer for more defined shadows.

Think about a flower petal, a mountain, or a cloud. By introducing lighter and darker areas, you can make simple shapes feel more three-dimensional.

Always consider the effect you want. Do you want a soft transition or a distinct line? Your answer will help determine when and how you apply the paint.

The Big Takeaway

Watercolour is about learning to control the water so you can create the effects you want.

Start by learning to recognize how wet your paper is, how your brush carries water, and how these affect your edges.

Once you understand how to create smooth blends and crisp lines intentionally, you can begin experimenting with texture, movement, highlights, and shadows.

The more you practise, the more you'll learn to work with the water rather than against it. And that's when watercolour starts to become really exciting!

Mindset: Our Class Philosophy

Paint for fun, not perfection! Art isn't about proving what you can do. It's about discovering what you can do when you give yourself permission to play.

Whether you dream of becoming a skilled painter or simply want to enjoy the magic of creating, you belong here. Our goal is to make fun your first priority, because when you enjoy the process, you can't lose. You'll learn, you'll grow, and you might just surprise yourself along the way!

1. Let Go of the Pressure

- Think of painting like going to a movie. You're doing something simply because you enjoy it, not because you need to produce something worthwhile at the end.
- If you want to become a skilled painter, you absolutely can! It takes time, practice, and intentionality.
- But if you simply want to paint for the joy of it, that's wonderful, too. Creating is valuable in its own right, regardless of the finished product.

2. Reconnect With Your Creativity

- Every child draws, paints, sings, and dances with abandon. They create for the sheer delight of it.
- As we get older, we often learn to measure our worth by our productivity, our achievements, and how well we do things.
- We start believing that everything needs to be perfect and that our time only counts if we produce something worthwhile.
- But creativity can be rediscovered! It's never too late to reconnect with your curiosity, delight, and sense of wonder.
- Creating gives us space to see the world differently, try new things, and reconnect with a part of ourselves that may have been pushed aside.

3. Give Yourself Permission to Make Messy Paintings

- Beautiful paintings often come after many, many messy ones.
- Mistakes are part of the process. Be curious about them. Experiment and see what happens.

- Learning takes practice, patience, and self-compassion. Be kind to yourself along the way.
- You don't have to get everything right. You just have to give yourself permission to begin.

4. Grow in Your Own Way

- Every time you paint, you learn something. You discover new things, develop skills, and grow in confidence.
- But growth doesn't always mean becoming a better painter. You can grow in your ability to enjoy yourself, experiment freely, and find delight in the process.
- You don't have to get better at painting. You can simply get better at enjoying painting!
- Our class motto: Have fun as you grow!

5. Train Your Eyes to See the Good

- Our natural instinct is often to look for what's wrong with a painting. We focus on what we don't like, what we need to fix, or what we wish we'd done differently.
- Instead, practise looking for what you do like.
- What worked? What surprised you? What part makes you happy?
- This doesn't mean ignoring the things you'd like to improve. It means not allowing them to overshadow everything you love.
- When you learn to recognize and appreciate the good in your work, you begin to see more possibilities and approach your next painting with greater confidence.

Look for what you love, and give yourself permission to do more of it.

6. Make the Experience Your Own

- What do you enjoy about painting?
- What do you enjoy about yourself and the way you create?
- How could you make the experience even more fun?
- Put on music you love. Make a fun drink. Create a cozy atmosphere with lighting you enjoy.

- Be intentional about making painting something you look forward to.

7. Celebrate the Act of Creating

Whether you finish a painting that makes your heart thrill or end up with something you're not quite sure what to do with, you've still participated in something beautiful.

Creating gives us space to explore, experiment, play, and discover. It can be one of the most fulfilling and life-giving things we do, especially when we release the pressure to make everything perfect.

Have fun painting!