Airbrush Cleaning Manual

It's true of anything with working parts: proper upkeep means a longer life. One of the keys to keeping your airbrush in good working order is keeping it clean. Clean it after every use.

Table of Contents

1. **Do's and Don'ts of Airbrush Cleaning**
2. **Airbrush Cleaners**
3. **Fixing Tip Dry**
4. **Cleaning Between Colors**
   - Gravity Feed
   - Siphon/Side Feed
5. **End-of-Day Cleaning**
   - Gravity Feed
   - Siphon/Side Feed
6. **Periodic Thorough Cleaning**

**1. Do's and Don'ts of Airbrush Cleaning**

Cleaning your airbrush is an integral part of maintaining it in good working order. Don't neglect any cleaning, and follow these quick do's and don'ts as a brief introduction to keeping your airbrush clean. Then check out the following sections for more detailed information.

**Do:** Clean your airbrush between color changes and at the end of the session; periodically give the airbrush a good, thorough cleaning. This keeps the airbrush in working order to extend its life.

**Don't:** Get lazy and neglect to clean the airbrush when a cleaning is in order. It's very easy to plop the airbrush onto the table and walk away after you're done for the day. But it's also very easy to give the airbrush a quick end-of-day cleaning to keep it at its best.

**Do:** Use the appropriate cleaner. We'll go into this more in Section 2, but it's very important that you always use a cleaner that is safe for whatever you're using the airbrush to do, e.g. decorate food or apply body art.

**Don't:** Use a cleaner that is not safe for your purposes. If you're decorating food with the airbrush, that airbrush should be used only with food colors and should be cleaned only with an appropriate cleaner such as dish soap and water.

**Do:** Remember safety. Wear your mask and respirator at all times, even if after you're done airbrushing and performing an airbrush cleaning at the end of the day. As you clean the airbrush, it's still possible that overspray gets into your lungs. Be cautious and wear your mask or respirator.

**Don't:** Ignore safety because you do not want to buy a mask or are too lazy to wear it. It takes about a second to put on a mask, and they are relatively inexpensive. Respirators work best, and even they are
relatively cheap compared to the potential medical costs associated with breathing harmful material into the lungs. So just wear the mask.

**Do:** Use the right tools. We list the tools you'll need to perform a proper cleaning of your airbrush, so make sure you have them. You could get away with substituting paper towels for cotton swabs, for instance, although in certain circumstances the cotton swab may make it much easier to clean hard-to-reach areas. Use your judgment.

**Don’t:** Use inadequate tools to clean your airbrush. No matter the job, you should always use the proper tools to do it right. Otherwise, you're only going to make things more difficult for yourself, or sacrifice the finished product. Cleaning is an important part of airbrush maintenance. Do it right.

**Do:** Refer to your manufacturer's instructions when taking apart the airbrush or removing the needle for cleaning. Most airbrushes are dissembled in a similar manner, although it's important that you refer to the instructions to make sure you do not damage or weaken the integrity of the airbrush.

**Don’t:** Take apart your airbrush without having read the instructions for doing so. The instructions will also ensure that you put it back together correctly.

### 2. Airbrush Cleaners

If you're flushing your airbrush in between colors or at the end of the day, water works well as a cleaner for water-based paints, or paint thinner for oil-based paints.

If you're giving your airbrush a thorough cleaning, try to use an airbrush cleaner specifically designed to clean your airbrush. You could get by using a household cleaner (without ammonia) for water-based paints, or paint thinner for oil-based paints.

If you're using food colors or working with inks for the skin, water is good for color-change and end-of-day cleanings. For the temporary tattoo artist or spray-on tanner, a good thorough cleaner is isopropyl alcohol. For food coloring, try diluted dish soap and water.

Over time, you'll find a cleaner you trust.

### 3. Fixing Tip Dry

Inevitably, paint will at some point get stuck to the tip of the needle.

**Materials:**
- Appropriate cleaner (depends on the type of paint you use)
- Cotton swab or clean cloth
- Paint respirator or mask

1. Wear your paint respirator or mask.
2. Remove the needle per manufacturer instructions.
3. Take a cotton swab, and dip it into a little cleaning solution.
4. Use the cotton swab or clean cloth to carefully wipe the needle until it is clean.
5. Replace the needle per manufacturer instructions.
6. Spray some air to get rid of any cleaning solution that may be left on the tip of the needle.

4. Cleaning Between Colors

For airbrush cleaning between colors, make sure you have the indicated materials ready whenever airbrushing, and follow these steps.

**Gravity Feed**

Materials:

- Water bottle filled with warm water (or paint thinner for oil-based paints)
- Cloth or paper towel
- Bowl half filled with water
- Paint respirator or mask

1. Wear your paint respirator or mask at all times.
2. Empty the current color back into its bottle so as not to be wasteful, unless you’re working with a mixed color in which case you can empty it into the water bowl.
3. Spray any excess color from the airbrush into the water bowl.
4. Add water from the water bottle to the color cup.
5. Spray the water through the airbrush into the water bowl until you no longer see the previous color.
6. Empty any remaining water from the color cup into the bowl, and spray out any remaining water.
7. Add your new color to the color cup.
8. Spray onto cloth or paper towel to make sure new color is not compromised by the previous color.

**Siphon/Side Feed**

Materials:

- Detachable bottle filled with warm water (or paint thinner for oil-based paints)
- Cloth or paper towel
- Bowl half filled with water
- Paint respirator or mask

1. Wear your paint respirator or mask at all times.
2. Detach current color bottle from your airbrush.
3. Spray any excess color from the airbrush into the water bowl.
4. Attach the bottle filled with water (or paint thinner for oil-based paints).
5. Spray water through the airbrush into your bowl until water is clear.
6. Detach the water bottle and spray out any excess water.
7. Attach new color bottle.
8. Spray onto cloth or paper towel to make sure new color is not compromised by the previous color.

5. **End-of-Day Cleaning**

End-of-day airbrush cleaning is similar to cleaning between color changes with one additional step at the end.

**Gravity Feed**

Materials:

- Water bottle filled with warm water (or paint thinner for oil-based paints)
- Cotton swab or clean cloth
- Bowl half filled with water
- Paint respirator or mask

1. Wear your paint respirator or mask at all times.
2. Empty the current color back into its bottle so as not to be wasteful, unless you’re working with a mixed color in which case you can empty it into the water bowl.
3. Spray any excess color from the airbrush into the water bowl.
4. Add water from water bottle to the color cup.
5. Empty any remaining water from the color cup into the bowl, and spray out any remaining water.
6. Carefully remove the needle (refer your airbrush’s manual for instructions) and wipe it with a cotton swab or clean cloth and water.
7. Replace the needle.
8. Spray into the bowl until no water comes out.
9. Put your airbrush in a safe place where it cannot fall or get damaged such as on an airbrush holder.

**Siphon/Side Feed**

Materials:

- Detachable bottle filled with warm water (or paint thinner for oil-based paints)
- Cotton swab or clean cloth
- Bowl of water
- Paint respirator or mask

1. Wear your paint respirator or mask at all times.
2. Detach current color bottle from your airbrush.
3. Spray any excess color from the airbrush into the water bowl.
4. Attach the bottle filled with water (or paint thinner for oil-based paints).
5. Spray water through the airbrush into your bowl until water is clear.
6. Detach the water bottle and spray out any excess water.
7. Carefully remove the needle (refer your airbrush’s manual for instructions) and wipe it with a cotton swab or clean cloth and water.
8. Replace the needle.
9. Spray into the bowl until no water comes out.
10. Put your airbrush in a safe place where it cannot fall or get damaged, such as on an airbrush holder.

6. Periodic Thorough Cleaning

A thorough airbrush cleaning should be performed periodically. If you use your airbrush constantly, you should do the thorough airbrush cleaning very often. The steps for the thorough cleaning are the same for gravity and siphon/side feed airbrushes.

Materials:

- Bowl filled with cleaner (Choose an appropriate cleaner. If you are working with food or skin (body art, makeup, etc.), the cleaner should be safe for such use. If the cleaner does not specify that it's safe for those applications, do not use it.)
- Water bottle filled with warm water
- Pipette
- Microfiber cloth/towel
- Empty bowl
- Cleaning brushes
- Q-tips
- Nozzle wrench (necessary with threaded nozzles for disassembly and assembly; should come with your airbrush if it’s needed)
- Paint respirator or mask

1. Wear your paint respirator or mask at all times.
2. Complete the following steps after giving your airbrush an end-of-day cleaning as described in Section 5. (See appropriate tutorial: gravity feed or siphon/side feed. Materials for end-of-day cleaning not included on list above.)
3. Disassemble your airbrush. Every airbrush is different, so refer to your airbrush's manual for specific instructions.
4. Put your airbrush’s components in a bowl filled with cleaner. Keep them in the bowl for about five minutes. (Do not soak the whole airbrush, and avoid soaking the body.)
5. Use your cleaning brushes and Q-tips to wipe paint off of the components. Make sure that the opening between the color cup and the airbrush is not obstructed by dried paint.
6. Make sure you clean the needle with the airbrush cleaner and brushes, removing all paint. The needle is very important, so make sure that you inspect it for damage. (Note: This step is part of the end-of-day cleaning, but we recommend using brushes to clean the needle when you do your period cleans for a more thorough job.)

7. Use your water bottle or pipette to rinse all components with warm water after cleaning them with the brushes. Hold the components over your empty bowl to catch the water.

8. Use your microfiber cloth to dry the components.

9. Reassemble your airbrush per manufacturer instructions.

10. Put your airbrush in a safe place where it cannot fall or get damaged, such as on an airbrush holder.