

Setting up a Usable Workspace for Watercolor©

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Dancing Through the Process

Creativity happens when painting is a joy. Setting up a workspace so that you feel as if you are dancing through the process allows you to forget your troubles and concentrate on the steps that bring the joy of accomplishment. A usable workspace is setup in a manner that gives you the area to move quickly from water to palette to paper. It helps to have your tools placed in a direction that allows you to smoothly move through the painting process. Knowing the arrangement of the desired colors can be either an enjoyable or frustrating effort. Setting up your workspace correctly enables you to dance with your creativity.

Placing Your Tools

Are you right-handed or left-handed? It makes a difference! If you are right-handed, place your palette to the *right* of your right hand. If you are left-handed, place your palette to the *left* of your left hand. Your brushes should rest above your painting so they are out of the way. Arrange your water bucket to be placed directly above your palette, with a paper towel, tissue or towel between the palette and water bucket. Leave space under and around your paper, keeping the area clear of tools so you can keep your paper on the table and easily move it around without painting on it when it is off the table.

Example A

This arrangement is easier for a left-handed person to use.



Example B

This arrangement is easier for a right-handed person to use.



Watercolor Paper

Arrange your paper so that you can turn it in a full circle (360°) to the left or right, keeping it on the table. Your hands and paper must have full range of motion in directions that feels comfortable to you. Having the room to move your paper will help you keep your shapes concise and sharp without bending your hand in odd positions. Make sure there is nothing in the area on the table where your painting should sit or you will hold your painting up in the air, which can cause wobbly lines and mistakes.

Location of the Palette

My favorite palette is foldable and has a lot of mixing areas. Keep the mixing areas closer to the paper and the wells of paint on the far side, away from your paper. This arrangement keeps your colors true to the paint value that comes from the tube. I like to paint lights to brights to darks. Yellow colors are the lights, red and green colors are the brights and blue and violet colors are the darks. Try writing the names of the colors inside the mixing area, next to each well of paint on the palette, using an ultra-fine sharpie. Write the names so you can read them, like you would read a written page, from left to right, top to bottom. Do not fret that the paint will cover the names. By the time that happens, you will have learned the value of each color. If you do not use a color for a while, you can always wipe the paint off the name to familiarize yourself with the color name again.

To learn more about setting up the palette, see www.valerietoliver.com/setting-up-usable-palette.

Water Buckets

Fill two large 32 oz containers with water until they have one inch of space from the top of the container to the top of the water. The large cottage cheese or yoghurt containers work the best. They are just the right height to allow your hand to move from the water to the palette or paper. Paint is heavier than water so having the container full of water allows the paint to float to the bottom, so you do not have to change the water as often. One container should be full of clear water. Use it to dilute paint on your paper or when you must lift paint to clean a problem area.

Towels

Placing a thin white terry cloth towel under your painting keeps tools and the paper from wobbling or moving, plus, you can wipe your brush on it. Make sure the towel is white. Using colored towels will subconsciously change the color of your painting. Think of it like this. When you place different colored mats around your painting, doesn't it bring out different values? So will the color of the towel under your painting! A white towel will allow you to see the true color in your work.

Viva paper towels are the best for lifting paint from the paper because they do not have embossing and they absorb water and paint beautifully. I use them often to paint clouds and wick paint from my paper. There are a many ways to use a Viva to paint!

Brushes

If you have ever been in one of my classes, you know that I am a stickler for treating your brushes with care.

The brush holder that you see in Examples A and B are an old Corelle microwave cooking dish that one of my students gave me! It may be heavy but my brushes can stay loaded with paint, ready to use without contaminating color from each brush head. If you are traveling, you can use a plastic binder like this one.

Here are a few rules that will keep your brushes in good shape:

- Do not leave watercolor brushes in the water. If you do, the paint will peel off the handle and sooner or later, the head will fall off because the glue has been softened.
- To clean brushes, do not pinch the hairs. The water will clean them thoroughly if you bang them on the bottom of the water bucket. I know that sounds crazy, but it gets the paint out of the ferule. Paint in the ferrule tends to spread the hairs. Swish the brush in the water after banging it on the bottom, then roll it on the side of the water bucket to see if the paint is totally out of the brush. Gently touch the ferule on a paper towel but do not pinch the hairs, allowing a round brush to keep its shape. When the hairs spread, you lose you're the pointing capability of the brush, like this one.
- Store the brushes in a container that keeps the heads from touching each other, so the round brushes keep their points and hairs do not pull away from their shape. A sturdy cup that is 6 to 8 inches high works well.



Moving Quickly from Water to Palette to Paper

Setting up your workspace so you can move *with* the drying time of the water is the secret to dancing with your creativity. You can easily dip your brush into your water and get the correct amount if the water bucket is full. Knowing the location and name of the watercolors in your palette give you the confidence to think about what shapes on your paper need to be light, bright or dark instead of wasting valuable drying time searching for a color. Using towels that are properly placed allows you to wipe your brush so you will have the correct amount of water or paint. Having the room to move your paper around so you can get the best angle without bending your hand in odd positions will help you keep your shapes concise and sharp. Without realizing it, your painting will be less frustrating and enjoyable as you subconsciously move through the painting process!

For more information about Valerie Toliver's classes, workshops and demonstrations, see www.valerietoliver.com