

Artist's Guide

By Sara Paxton

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide will be your best friend once you take the plunge into the world of painting and art. The information is a collection of knowledge I have acquired over many years of painting and being a full time artist.

The Internet has given artists a huge opportunity - everyone in the world is reachable and access to information is limitless. As an artist we can have our own online galleries, write about our views and opinions and spread the word on new art pieces we create.

This guide will go into a few core principles of being an artist, look into what you need to get started and using the Internet to your advantage!

*** Please note that this guide does have some links to purchase certain products. My recommendations are based entirely on my personal use and I would only recommend products I consider excellent.*

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CHAPTER 1

GETTING STARTED

A guide to the basic and best materials you will need to get started on your first painting!

WHERE TO START

Here's a quick list of everything you will need to get started on your first oil painting. There is also a resources [page](#) on my website if you need further information.

PAINTS

Oil paints come in two qualities - student quality, and artist quality which contains more pigment and therefore produces more intense colour. For starting out, student

quality is fine and you don't need to purchase every colour - start with a few basic colours (make sure you include white) - all the fun is in the colour mixing.

I use [Art Spectrum](#) paints which are good quality but won't break the bank.

BRUSHES

Brushes come in many shapes and sizes. You don't need many to start, just a few good quality ones. There are some basic shapes:

- › filberts (flat with a rounded oval end)
- › flats
- › rounds
- › angle heads

Each shape produces a different type of stroke. They also come in different, numbered sizes, generally if you are painting big, you need big brushes! As you go along you will work out which shapes you like to use. Personally I use mostly flat and angle heads, but there are no hard and fast rules, it's what works best for you. A palette knife is also useful.

CLEANING

Cleaning your brushes properly is really important. They are quickly ruined once paint collects and dries in them. I use a product called 'Art Clean' (similar to turps but less toxic) for daily cleaning. Then once a week I give them a really good clean using 'Incredible Brush Cleaner' which, like its name, does get out the paint incredibly well.

Save old glass jars for this purpose, and save old towels and t-shirts to cut up and use as cloths. Baby wipes are great for cleaning your hands.

MEDIUM AND VARNISH

A medium, when mixed with the oil paint will improve the flow and stretch out the paint. I generally use an Art Spectrum No. 1 medium for this purpose.

I use those little tiny 85g cat food tins (carefully washed of course!) which my cat is so addicted to, for putting the medium in - they are the perfect size! Once your painting is completely dry (and this can take weeks), it is worth varnishing to protect the surface and give it a nice even finish. Varnish comes in [matt](#) and [gloss](#). I like to use Winsor and

Newton Artists Gloss [Varnish](#).

PALETTE

Your palette needs to be BIG to give you room to mix colours. You can buy one or make your own using an old tray or piece of masonite. I use a large piece of sturdy cardboard and cover it with good quality, heavy duty kitchen baking paper. Then when I've finished I simply throw it away and roll out a new piece of paper, transferring any unused paint. No cleaning!

If you are away from your painting for a day or two, covering the

board with plastic wrap will help prevent your paint drying out.

CANVAS

Most oil painters prefer to use canvas which is the traditional painting surface. Commercially pre-primed stretched canvasses are available in a variety of shapes and sizes and are inexpensive. They vary in quality though, so go for a better quality one and be aware that the larger sizes have a tendency to warp. Canvas is also available by the metre so you can cut the size you need and just tape it to a board, which is good

for just practising when you're starting out.

EASELS

The easel is an important part of your equipment. If you are going to paint outdoors it needs to be compact, lightweight and easy to assemble, but sturdy enough not to fall over. In the studio an easel can be either [table top](#) mounted or [free standing](#).

The table top is convenient but you are limited with the size of your painting. With the free standing easel, look for something solid and

adjustable. These can be expensive, so look around at various styles, or maybe even try and find a second hand one.

AT A GLANCE

- › Even more painting resources can be found on my website.
- › It doesn't take much to get started, you just have to commit, from then on it gets easier
- › Take product recommendations from more senior artists, it will save you a lot of time and money
- › Develop a good relationship with your local art supply store, they are an endless source of good information on products.

CHAPTER 2

ARTIST BRANDING

As an artist, creating a brand identity is essential. This chapter will give you a starting point and make sure you take off on the right foot!

YOUR BRAND AND SOCIAL SET UP

Every artist has the desire to express themselves creatively and to get a pat on the back for it. This used to be done over the family dinner table and if you were lucky a family friend was also included. However, times have changed and now there is an easier way, I will list several sites and tips that artists may use to share their artwork with a larger

network of people.

SOCIAL MEDIA

I have been drawing, painting, printing and producing artwork for many years, but have only recently had the opportunity to share it with the world at the click of a button.

For example I have been using [Facebook](#), [Pinterest](#), [Tumblr](#), [Twitter](#), [Stumble Upon](#), [blogs](#), forums and more which have allowed artists like myself to share my art. Check out my social media profiles for a reference on how to set up these accounts. Don't be

afraid to start small as social media is a marathon not a sprint.

THE INTERNET

At first, I found the concept of the Internet was overwhelming, however the sites above are fantastic to start with. They are formatted for people like you and me who are possibly not the world's greatest computer experts (take no offence, if you are good with computers, well done. I am still learning. If you have found this article you're probably doing a little better than I was when I

first started.)

FINDING FOLLOWERS

Now that you've signed up to a few sites you might be wondering who is going to see your work when you have no fans, friends or customers. The easiest way to get the ball rolling is usually to:

- › Search for other artists with similar skills and techniques, follow them and see what they post and follow!

- › Ask friends and family to like and follow your pages.
- › If you have the skills and money you can do some paid advertising on Facebook
- › Join artist forums and put your social media links in your signature

Once you have followed these people there is a chance some of them will follow back, so this is just a good place to start. It also helps having a good thumbnail picture of yourself at work or of

one of your artworks, this helps people recognise your brand. It also makes your web identity seem human, no one is going to follow someone with the default thumbnail with no posts or tweets.

Of course you are able to follow your favourite celebrities as well but don't rely on them to construct your audience.

WHAT NEXT?

Once you do have a few followers, start updating your pages a couple of times a week, making sure to react to every comment as this adds character to your

account. Once you start you really can't stop, keep updating your page with your new works and your own followers will gradually increase. Don't expect followers to dramatically increase unless you have created the new Mona Lisa, just be patient and it will all happen.

AT A GLANCE

- › Sign up to Pinterest, Tumblr, Facebook and art forums
- › Fill out all areas of the profile information and select a good thumbnail
- › Post a few things to start off your profile, make it interesting!
- › Follow others using the same artistic approach or mediums

- › Connect with followers and people through comments
- › Update when you create new artworks

CHAPTER 3

MUST READ ARTIST BOOKS

Painting and reading are my two most time consuming activities. I have put together a list of a few excellent art books that should be on all artists' bookshelves.

MUST READ BOOKS FOR ARTISTS

1. Problem Solving for Oil Painters

Author: Gregg Kreutz

Some paintings flow easily from beginning to end, while others feel more like a battle ground that one has to struggle through. Painters are often isolated in their individual studios and when confronted by a painting in progress that just isn't "working",

what to do next becomes an issue. Sometimes, even figuring out what the problem actually is isn't even obvious.

Kreutz tackles these issues head on with concrete suggestions that help the artist look at their work with fresh eyes. *Problem Solving for Oil Painters* is a book you will want to keep handy on your studio bookshelf. You may find yourself pulling it out for a refresher when a painting has you stymied and you need a little help.

2. Oil Painting – The Workshop Experience

Author: Ted Goerschner

A good step-by-step workshop style book for artists. The book explains the colour palette well and how to keep your paintings fresh and vibrant. His example painting critiques are also great for painters learning to use oils.

3. Art Effects

Author: Jean Drysdale Green

A great book as a visual reference for all artists. It covers experimentation with all the

mediums and combines them to achieve fantastic effects in your paintings. If you are stuck for an idea this is the book for you – it will expand your creativity enormously. I am constantly picking this book up for some inspiration!

4. The Oil Colour Book: A Comprehensive Resource for Painters

Author: Winsor & Newton edited by, David Pyle and Emma Pearce

For artists on a budget, the price of this one can't be beaten! This eBook is a freebie so it would

have been silly for me to leave it off the 'Must Read Art Books' list. The ebook was published by the well-known art material company *Winsor & Newton*. While obviously this book is somewhat skewed towards the company's own products, I include it in this list because it is full of valuable information for anyone interested in learning about oil paint products and basic painting techniques. There's even a brief history of oil painting included. The 91 page eBook is downloadable in pdf format [here](#).

5. The Oil Painting Book: Materials and Techniques for Today's Artist

Author: Bill Creevy

This book is another book that oil painters will want to include in their art book library. While seasoned artists can keep this book handy for reference, it is artists who are just starting to experiment with painting in oils who will find the material covered invaluable.

Creevy evaluates numerous oil paint brands and delves into the whole world of mediums in detail. It's a fascinating read.

6. Cities

Author: Stephen Wiltshire

I have actually written a detailed [article about Stephen Wiltshire](#), who is a remarkable artist. I found some of his feats almost unbelievable. *Cities* is a book of Wiltshire's geographical scope, filled with drawings of buildings and cities, whether real or fantasy. If you are looking to pick up a copy of his fascinating book, it is quite a hard book to track down. So most likely you just have to get lucky in an art book store, or if you can't find it anywhere local, there is

always [Amazon](#) which has a copy every now and again. Good Luck finding it!

7. Colour Mixing Bible

Author: Ian Sidaway

If you work with colours or are just looking for a beautiful book to browse through, this is the book for you. Do you ever find yourself wasting time, trying to mix up the right colour to find that perfect fit for your latest masterpiece? *The Colour Mixing Bible* features endless amounts of tips and techniques for color mixing with oils, watercolors, acrylics, inks,

pastels, and pretty much any other art medium you could possibly use.

I personally have this book sitting on the shelf in my art studio and it is completely covered in paint from the countless times I have drawn upon it. So if you are looking to kick-start your repertoire of art books, this is the perfect book for your new collection.

8. Studio

Author: Lloyd and McDonald

One of my all time favourite books is a publication called 'Studio. Australian Painters on the Nature of Creativity' (Photography by John Lloyd, Text by John McDonald). It's a fascinating look at artists and the nature of their studios. The photographs depict the relationship between the working environment and the artist and it certainly makes you

wonder whether it's the artist who creates the studio or the studio that creates the artist.

They are normally very private creative spaces so it's a great privilege to be able to see these inner sanctums. A great book for browsing and reading about their individual work practices

AT A GLANCE

- › 8 of the best artist books I have come across
- › Even if you do not do a lot of reading, try and aim for one book a year
- › I constantly go back to these books while painting
- › Book number 4 is free so there are no excuses

CHAPTER 4

WHY YOU NEED TO JOIN AN ARTIST GROUP

Being an artist is a journey and no one should ever complete the journey alone. This chapter will tell you why you need to join a local artist community / group NOW!

JOIN AN ARTIST GROUP TODAY

Painting is essentially a fairly solitary occupation. Not lonely at all, but mostly it's just you, the canvas and the cat. To save your sanity it's a really good idea to link up with other artists to paint together as a group. Not only is an artist-painting group beneficial for the social interaction with like-minded people, but there is also a whole lot more to gain from the group.

BENEFITS OF BEING PART OF AN ARTIST PAINTING GROUP

- › Constructive critiquing of each others work
- › Group problem solving
- › Group brain storming and exchange of ideas
- › Mutual support
- › Group enthusiasm and encouragement to do your best

I've painted with a small core group of eight people, every

week, for the past 15 years (I know that is a very long time and yes, I consider it a pretty good effort. Until I read about the [Wapping Group of Artists](#) in the UK. A group of 25 have painted together every Wednesday afternoon since 1946! It's the oldest plein-air (painting outdoors) group in Britain and becoming a member of this esteemed group is no easy task.

Applicants have their work closely examined and those who pass this test may become a candidate for a year. Then they submit more work and a vote is taken on the

possibility of becoming a full member. Serious stuff.

Our group works on a less strict approach – if you want to join in, just turn up.

FINDING A GROUP

So there are many places to look for a painting or art group and I would suggest you start by looking through your friends, family, colleagues, gym partners and any other group you are a part of. Then take note if any of them paint.

If you do not have many artists in your network you can turn to artist

forums (look up members in your area), group websites like [MeetUp.com](https://www.meetup.com) or even Craigslist. Look to see if your local council runs any community groups. You will be pleasantly surprised how many people are actually artists in your local area. The key is to keep it local as well. The more you can meet the better!

So if you are not part of a painting group I would suggest you look into it as it has been one of the best decisions I have ever made. Having that support network to critique your work and help you improve is something you cannot buy. Not to mention you gain an

amazing group of friends that you could be spending the next 15 years with ;)

AT A GLANCE

- › Bouncing ideas and works off each other to improve and adjust your works in progress
- › Check out MeetUp.com for a list of local artist groups if you do not have anyone in your direct network
- › Try and include people that are better than you in your group, this will push you to improve

CHAPTER 5

TIPS FOR OVERCOMING CREATIVITY BLOCKS

Stop staring at the canvas wondering what to paint! This list will help you overcome mental blocks, I use some of these methods on a weekly basis.

CHECKLIST FOR BREAKING DOWN CREATIVITY BARRIERS

If your studio is all tidied up and the artistic painting ideas or inspiration is still yet to strike, here are a few ideas to consider:

1. Read art books and magazines.

2. Visit the library, kindle or Amazon store and check-out new release art books.

3. Go online and peruse other artist's websites, Pinterest or even give Reddit a go if you can figure it out!

4. Take your camera for a walk.

5. Check out a new show at your local art gallery.

6. Make a collage using materials that are easily at hand – magazine clippings, scraps of material, wall-paper, sections

of old paintings and drawings.

7. Paint on top of your collage work. Also good to reuse canvas boards

8. Listen to music and paint what you hear.

AT A GLANCE

- › Follow this list when you are stuck on a painting, drawing, sculpture or anything that involves any sort of creativity
- › I highly recommend activities in numbers 3 and 5, as these always spark some creative thoughts

Final Take A Ways

You can find a lot more information on my website <http://www.SaraPaxtonArtworks.com>. There is also a gallery and store page featuring my latest art. Please feel free to contact me on Facebook with any questions you might have. Also check out the [resources page](#) for reviews and recommendations on selected products that I use, this page will save you money!

Here are a few of my oil paintings:



If you enjoyed this guide, please share it with as many people as possible because the world always needs more creative people!