

Gouache **watercolour's** more confident cousin?

Gouache is a delightful companion to watercolour. Think of it as **watercolour's more confident cousin**—still water-based, but **opaque, matte, and wonderfully forgiving**. You can paint light over dark, correct things easily, and build solid shapes. Many illustrators and landscape painters adore it for exactly that reason. Here is a **similar starting guide for gouache**.

1. Understand the Nature of Gouache

Gouache is essentially **opaque watercolour**.

Key characteristics:

- **Matte finish** (no shine)
- **Opaque coverage**
- **Re-wets easily**
- **Colours dry slightly lighter**

Because it's opaque, you can **paint dark first and add lighter shapes later**, which is very freeing.

2. Use Less Water Than Watercolour

Beginners often add too much water.

Think of gouache as somewhere between:

- **Cream**
- **Melted ice cream**

Too much water makes it streaky.

Too little makes it chalky.

A good habit is to **mix a puddle of paint before touching the paper**.

3. Work From Big Shapes to Small

Gouache rewards **simple blocky painting**.

Typical approach:

1. Block in large shapes
2. Add mid-tones
3. Add highlights and details on top

This is why gouache is brilliant for:

- landscapes
 - architecture
 - illustration
 - sketchbook work
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4. Good Paper Still Matters

Although gouache is forgiving, good paper helps.

Recommended:

- **200–300gsm paper**
- Watercolour paper (cold press)
- Mixed media paper

Because gouache sits on the surface more than watercolour, it doesn't need quite as heavy paper.

5. Keep the Palette Simple

Just like watercolour, a **small palette teaches mixing** and keeps colours harmonious.

Essential Gouache Starter Palette

● Reds

- **Alizarin Crimson**
- **Cadmium Red**

● Blues

- **Ultramarine Blue**
- **Cerulean Blue** or **Phthalo Blue**

● Yellows

- **Lemon Yellow**
- **Yellow Ochre**

○ Titanium White (*very important*)

White is used constantly in gouache to:

- lighten colours
 - create pastel tones
 - paint highlights
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Extremely Useful Additions

Many gouache painters add:

- **Burnt Sienna** – warm earths, buildings
 - **Raw Umber** – tree trunks, shadows
 - **Sap Green** – quick landscape greens
 - **Payne's Grey** – soft shadows
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6. The Magic Mixing Habit

Because white is used often, colours are mixed differently from watercolour.

Examples:

Landscape Greens

- Lemon Yellow + Ultramarine + a touch of White

Soft Sky Blue

- Cerulean + White

Natural Stone Colour

- Burnt Sienna + Ultramarine + White

White allows you to **control tone easily**.

7. Use the Right Brushes

Gouache likes brushes with a bit of strength.

Good choices:

- **Round size 8–12** for general painting
- **Flat brush** for blocks of colour
- **Small round** for details

Synthetic brushes work very well.

8. Embrace the Matte Look

One of gouache's great strengths is the **beautiful velvety surface**.

It gives paintings a lovely quality often seen in:

- vintage posters
- illustration
- plein-air studies

Artists like Edward Hopper and John Singer Sargent both used gouache for studies and sketches.

9. Ideal Subjects for Beginners

Gouache excels at clear shapes.

Try painting:

- cottages and churches
- fields and hedgerows
- village streets
- coastal scenes
- pub interiors (good excuse for field research!)

Architecture and landscapes suit the medium beautifully.

A Perfect Small Gouache Kit

You could paint almost anything with:

- Ultramarine Blue
- Cerulean Blue
- Alizarin Crimson
- Lemon Yellow
- Yellow Ochre
- Burnt Sienna
- Titanium White

Plus:

- Round brush (size 10)
 - Small detail brush
 - Watercolour paper sketchbook
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A Tiny Gouache Secret

Professional gouache painters often say:

Paint boldly, then simplify.

If a passage becomes messy, just let it dry and **paint a clean shape on top**.

It's one of the great pleasures of the medium.
