

Watercolour One Pager

Watercolour is a wonderful medium; light, lively, and occasionally a bit mischievous. It rewards patience but also embraces happy accidents.

1. Think Light First

Unlike acrylic or oil, with watercolour you **preserve the white of the paper** for highlights. AND OR USE MASKING FLUID!

Practical tip: Before you begin, decide where the lightest areas will be and **leave them unpainted**.

A useful habit:

- Light washes first
- Darker tones later
- Details last

2. Water Control Is Everything

You are essentially **painting with coloured water**.

Three basic states to experiment with:

- **Wet on Wet** – soft edges, skies, mist, foliage
- **Wet on Dry** – sharper shapes, buildings, branches
- **Dry Brush** – texture (stone walls, tree bark)

If something looks too strong, a clean damp brush often **lifts the colour back out**.

3. Start Light and Build Slowly

Watercolour darkens easily but **lightening is harder**.

A good rule:

Always mix colour slightly lighter than you think you need.

Layering thin washes gradually creates depth.

4. Use Good Paper

Paper matters

Look for:

- **Cotton paper if possible**
- **300gsm (140lb)** weight
- **Cold pressed / NOT** surface (slight texture)

This prevents buckling and allows colours to flow beautifully.

5. Keep Your Palette Small

A limited palette teaches you **mixing** and keeps colour harmony in your paintings.

A classic beginner set is **six colours**.

Essential Starter Watercolour Palette

Warm & Cool Primaries

- Reds
 - **Alizarin Crimson** (cool red)
 - **Cadmium Red or Scarlet Lake** (warm red)
- Blues
 - **Ultramarine Blue** (warm blue, great for skies & shadows)
 - **Cerulean Blue or Phthalo Blue** (cool blue)
- Yellows
 - **Lemon Yellow** (cool yellow)
 - **Yellow Ochre or Cadmium Yellow** (warm yellow)

With these you can mix nearly everything.

Optional but Very Useful Additions

Many painters also add:

- **Burnt Sienna** – fantastic for landscapes and neutral mixes
- **Raw Umber** – earth tones, tree trunks
- **Payne's Grey** – gentle alternative to black

- **Sap Green** – quick foliage colour

6. Learn Three Magic Mixes

These appear constantly in landscapes:

Natural Greens

- Lemon Yellow + Ultramarine

Soft Greys

- Ultramarine + Burnt Sienna

Warm Earth Tones

- Yellow Ochre + Alizarin Crimson

7. Use a Big Brush

People often use brushes that are **too small**.

Try:

- **Round brush size 10 or 12**
- A **smaller round (size 4–6)** for details

Big brushes encourage confident, loose painting.

8. Let the Water Do the Work

Watercolour often looks best when **not overworked**.

Put down the wash... then leave it alone. (Fiddling is the sworn enemy of sparkle.)

9. Practise Simple Subjects - Like our Devon picture!

Great early subjects:

- Skies
- Trees
- Church towers
- Fields and hedgerows
- Old cottages

Perfect practice for washes and colour mixing.

A Tiny Starter Kit

You could begin with just:

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

Plus:

- Size 10 round brush
- 300gsm paper
- Mixing palette

That's enough to paint an entire landscape sketchbook.

A final encouraging thought: Many good water-colourists say the same thing — *the medium teaches you as you go*. The small surprises, blooms and textures become part of the charm.

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