

## Your Materials

### Watercolour Paper

Watercolour paper is available as single **sheets**, **pads** and **blocks** and is made specifically for painting watercolour. It is a tough paper with properties that aid the flow of wet colour to give those special effects we all know and love. You can paint on cartridge paper, printer paper or any other type of paper but the results are normally much less satisfactory. It comes in various sizes and thicknesses with a choice of surface textures and plays an active part in the painting process. It is important to buy only recognised makers names of quality or upon recommendation.

### Watercolour Sheets

Single sheets of watercolour paper are sold in traditional inch-based paper sizes and have suitably quirky names like 'Imperial' and 'Double Elephant'. The most widely available is **imperial**. A single **imperial** size sheet of watercolour paper measures 22 x 30 inches (55.9 x 76.2 cm) and is considered the 'standard' size. The word 'Imperial' is not normally used, being simply referred to as sheets, half sheets and quarter sheets. By the way the Double Elephant size measures 26¾ x 40 inches (67.8 x 101.6 cm) – you can buy it (and bigger) if you wish!!

### Watercolour Pads

Gummed (right) or spiral bound (below) pads of watercolour paper are made in 'photographic' sizes 10 x 8 inches, 16 x 12 inches etc. You can buy ready-made frames for these sizes. Some manufacturers also produce pads in 'stationery' sizes, A4, A3 etc. Pads are less economical than buying single sheets, but are much more convenient. This is easily the most popular way to buy watercolour paper.

### Watercolour Blocks

Watercolour blocks are made in the same sizes as pads but are glued on all four edges. There is a small gap in the gum in one corner or along one edge so that a blunt knife can be inserted to separate the sheets. When you wet any paper, it will buckle. There is a simple process (described later) referred to as **stretching** paper which will prevent the paper buckling. Watercolour blocks are often described as 'stretched' paper, but, in my experience, you still get buckling although the painting will dry much flatter. Blocks are more expensive than pads.

### Paper Thickness

The thickness of watercolour paper is measured in **weight**. If you look at the Cotman pad (right), in the pink square (bottom right hand corner) you will see **140lb / 300g/m<sup>2</sup>**. 140lb indicates the weight of 500 imperial size sheets. The alternative metric weight is also shown - being 300grammes per square meter.

140lb / 300g/m<sup>2</sup> is easily the most popular weight of paper sold. Lighter weights are less expensive but are more prone to buckling. Generally speaking buy the heaviest weight paper you can afford. When I paint to half imperial size I normally work on 200lb / 425g/m<sup>2</sup> paper.

### Paper Texture

Also indicated in the pink box is the paper's surface texture. Watercolour paper comes in three basic textures. The type of watercolour painting you do usually determines which you choose. There is no precise 'standard' and textures do vary between manufacturers.



**Hot Pressed (HP)** is the smoothest paper surface available, and the most specialised. The paper is passed between smooth heated rollers which, quite literally, irons flat the paper fibres resulting in a texture-free surface. Hot pressed paper suits artists who work in detail, botanical illustrators for example. It takes flat washes really well, but is not suited to many of the techniques used in general watercolour painting. This makes it the least popular choice and, for beginners is best avoided.

**Cold Pressed, (CP)** or **NOT** (which simply means not hot pressed). On the Cotman watercolour pad, shown above, both names are used – Cold Pressed/NOT, this often being the case. The paper is passed between felts on cold rollers which leaves a texture impressed on its surface. This paper takes all washes well, the texture producing irregularities that artists find desirable. This is the most common type of paper locally available and the most popular. I would recommend cold pressed/not papers for beginners.

**Rough** is the third texture and is self explanatory, being the only name that actually describes the paper surface. Most watercolour effects become more pronounced on rough paper and is popular with artists whose paint in a 'looser' style. It does not take detail well.

### Stretching Watercolour paper

I personally would always soak and stretch watercolour paper although I appreciate the views taken by others who do not use this process.

As mentioned, all papers will buckle. This can make the painting process more difficult and the finished painting look unsightly when mounted and framed. Stretching is fairly straightforward, although it may take a bit of practice - even then there will go wrong from time-to-time. However the pleasure of painting on a taught, flat surface more than makes up for the small amount of effort, and occasional frustration, involved.

Stretching requires the paper to be soaked in cold water long enough to allow the fibres to saturate and expand. It is then taped around the edges in order to prevent it shrinking back to size as it dries. The result is piece of taut, receptive paper that will take very wet washes and will dry without further buckling.

You will need a sturdy wooden board no smaller than ½ inch (12mm) in thickness. Anything thinner is liable to bow under the considerable forces created when the paper shrinks. The board needs to be about 1 inch (25mm) wider all round than the paper. Also needed is a roll of gummed tape, about 2 inches (50mm) wide, a knife or scissors to cut it with, a wash-up sponge and some kitchen roll.

Also needed is a vessel large enough to immerse the paper in cold water. Most people use their bath, but wash it around with clean water to remove any soap residue first. You only need enough water to cover the paper. immerse it and let it soak. St.Cuthberts Mill, who make Saunders Waterford and Bockingford papers recommend the following times:-

72lb (150g/m<sup>2</sup>) – 3 minutes

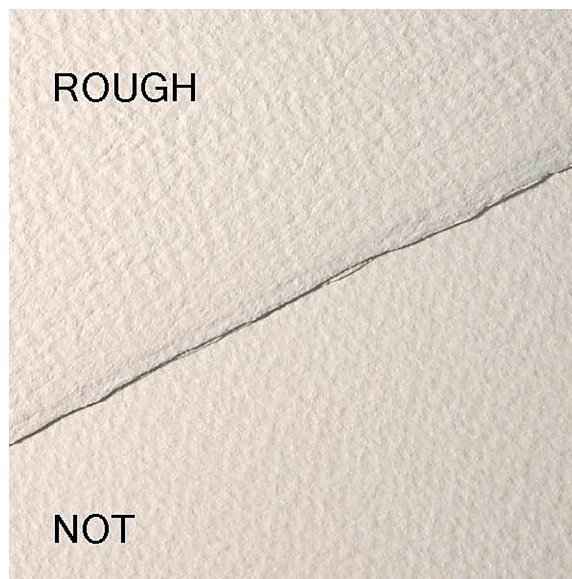
90lb (190g/m<sup>2</sup>) – 3 minutes

140lb (300g/m<sup>2</sup>) – 8 minutes

While the paper is soaking cut four strips of the gummed tape (each a bit longer than the sides of the paper). Use gummed tape as self adhesive tapes don't stick very easily to wet surfaces. Drain your paper and place the soaked sheet on your board. Dry a 1 inch (25mm) border round the edge of the paper with some kitchen roll.

Wet the gummed tape, using the wash-up sponge, and apply firmly to each edge of the paper. Half the width of the tape should cover the paper, the other half your board. Don't over-wet the tape as it can remove some of the gum. You need to try it a few times to get the 'feel' of it because under-wetting or over-wetting is likely to result in part of the tape not sticking to the paper.

Lay the board flat and allow the paper to dry naturally. It's nice to stretch your paper in the evening and have it ready to paint the following morning. (go to my website, click on youtube for my video on paper stretching)



**Watercolour Paint**

Quality is the keyword when buying your art materials. You will need to know more about paint than simply its colour so buy from a reputable manufacturer with a reputation to lose. I recommend Winsor & Newtons Cotman range of student quality watercolours for beginners and will be using this range in my beginners watercolour classes. Daler Rowney produce an equally good student quality paint in their Aquafine range.

**Artist Quality Paint**

Paint is made from pigment mixed with gum arabic. The cost of raw pigment can vary considerable. Artist quality paint is more expensive than student quality because no compromise is made with the pigments used. Prices of colours can therefore vary depending on the pigment used and they can cost over five times the student quality equivalent. Certainly for a beginner I feel it is more important not to worry about 'wasting' expensive paint. In the early stages it won't actually make much difference to your paintings. You can experiment and learn equally well with student colours.

A Winsor & Newton Artist Colour Chart can be downloaded from my website.

**Student Quality Paint**

It is doubly important to buy student quality paint from a reputable manufacturer. Student paint is made to a single, economical price. The more expensive pigments are substituted with less expensive ones. On top of this filler is added to even out the price. Less scrupulous manufacturers will add more filler and gum arabic than is necessary so beware 'cheap' paint.

You can easily tell when a substitute has been made because the word **Hue** is added. For instance, cadmium is an expensive pigment so will appear in the student range as Cadmium Red Hue. A Winsor & Newton Cotman Colour Chart and a Daler Rowney Aquafine Colour Chart can be downloaded from my website.

**Pans or Tubes**

Watercolour paint comes in tubes or pans and pans are available as half pans (illustrated right) and full pans. As a beginner I would recommend buying tubes, they are clearly labelled and the paint is soft and easy use. Pans should be softened before use with some hot water and an old brush otherwise it can be difficult to make large, full colour washes.

As you become familiar with your colours you will find you can work more quickly using pans because they are neatly arranged and immediately available. I always buy tubes but often use pans. When my pans get used up I simply refill them from my tubes. You can buy empty half and whole pans and most paint tins will accept either. One tin could hold 24 half pans or 12 whole pans or a mixture of each. One of the pleasures of painting is customising and arranging your own tin of colours

**A Basic Colour Range**

A selection, or range of colours, an artist uses is known as a palette. The most basic colour palette consists of just three primary colours. My choice for these are:-

**Cadmium Yellow Pale Hue**  
**Cobalt Blue Hue**  
**Cadmium Red Hue**

To this I would add the following colours to increase versatility.

**Ultramarine**  
**Alizarin Crimson Hue**  
**Raw Sienna**  
**Burnt Sienna**  
**Viridian Hue**

The reasons for this colour choice and suggestions for some additions will be described in detail later on.

