

STARTING A PAINTING – Questions to ask yourself

1. What **interests you**? Examine the scene, still life, reference material, etc. to find the most interesting area or what drew you to paint the subject.
2. What are the main positive and negative **shapes**? **Do a quick, simple thumbnail sketch breaking down the composition into geometric shapes, finding both the positive and negative shapes.** Is there contrast/variety of shapes, sizes, color, round, oblong, square, movement, etc.? Add or delete items to simplify, or make a stronger design.
3. Have you placed the focal point in the “sweet spot?” (Divide the paper into three equal horizontal and three vertical sections like a tic tac toe grid—the sweet spot is where any of the lines cross). Plan your painting so that your primary interest is in the “sweet spot” and/or there are lines or shapes pointing to it, not in the middle of the page
4. What is the overall design of the composition? Cross, triangle, (diagonal more interesting), s-curve, etc.?
5. **Do value study/sketch.** Squint or use value scale tool to find darks, lights, medium. Make shadows 40% darker than in light. Photocopy your reference photo in black and white or convert photo to gray scale in Photoshop and use “Posterize” to see the values. Think about hard edges vs. soft edges and where they’ll be-- make some shapes blend into each other.
6. **Do you understand what you see?!!!!** Do little **studies of each of the individual elements** (fog, trees, cows, hills, eyes, glass, shadow, waves) until you understand what you are seeing. **REMEMBER:** The biggest pleasure is in the **SEEING...**and that means **drawing to really see.**
7. What techniques and paper will work best for the different elements? Do little studies of the individual elements first to determine what paper and techniques (wet on wet, wet on dry, spatter, etc.) will work best.
8. **Choose the color family**—will the picture be predominantly cool/warm, red/blue/yellow etc.? Do little studies using different color schemes to see what will be interesting and convey the feeling you want to convey. Consider using the “four hour” (color wheel as clock) analogous color scheme with a dominant hue and a complement thrown in for interest. Will the painting be pale, bright, intense, greyed, dark, high or low contrast?
9. **Transfer the drawing**—exaggerate, emphasize, enjoy the drawing process. Draw freehand, or use a grid or use Saral transfer paper. Start with an original drawing even if using a photo reference if possible.
10. **Mask areas to remain white.** Use toothpick, cheap childrens’ brush or other funky old brush or an “Incredible Nib”.
11. **Start by painting from big to small**—exaggerate, emphasize, enjoy.