

Art Journaling — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a daily practice. Each section pairs with one course module and mixes hands-on exercises, fill-in worksheets, and checklists so you build real pages and a real habit, not just notes. Keep it open at your table with your journal, pens, and a glue stick nearby. The editable templates give you a kit-and-budget sheet, a 30-day practice tracker, and a prompt bank you will reuse on every page.

Foundations: The Journal, the Kit, and the Permission to Make Bad Pages

Choose suitable paper, build a compact archival kit on a budget, and run your first deliberately imperfect page.

Exercise: The Five-Minute Ugly Page

Open your journal to a middle page, not page one. Set a timer for five minutes and cover the whole spread with anything: scribbles, a glued scrap, a smear of paint, one large word. The only rule is that it must look unfinished and messy when the timer rings. The goal is to break the fear of ruining the book, so resist the urge to make it nice.

- What did you feel when you made the first mark, and did that feeling change by minute five?

- Why is starting in the middle of the book less intimidating than starting on page one?

- What is one belief about your art that this ugly page proves wrong?

Worksheet: Journal Selection Scorecard

Evaluate a journal you own or are about to buy against the criteria from the course. Fill in each field, then do the wet-brush test on one page before committing a whole book to a project.

Journal name / brand

Paper weight in gsm (140 minimum, 200 to 300 for heavy wet media)

Surface (smooth / hot press or toothed / cold press)

Does it lie flat when pushed open? (yes/no)

Page size (A5 recommended for daily filling)

Wet-brush test result (buckled / held up / bled through)

Verdict (use as-is / prime with clear gesso first / not suitable)

Worksheet: Starter Kit Build Sheet

Plan your kit against a target of 40 to 60 US dollars. Note what you will buy or already own, what it is for, and its cost. Mark the waterproof pigment pen as the one purchase quality matters most on, so you do not under-spend on it.

Fine waterproof pigment pen (e.g. Sakura Pigma Micron 01) — cost

Medium waterproof pen or brush pen (e.g. Pitt Artist Pen) — cost

Paint set (student watercolor or primary craft acrylics) — cost

Brushes (one round, one flat, one chip brush for gesso) — cost

White gesso and clear gesso — cost

Adhesive (glue stick + matte gel medium) — cost

Black acrylic paint pen (Posca PC-5M) — cost

Total spend vs 40 to 60 dollar budget

Checklist: Ready-to-Start Checklist

- My journal paper is at least 140 gsm and survived a wet-brush test
- I own at least one waterproof, pigment-ink pen for line work
- I have a tube of gesso for priming backgrounds
- My whole kit lives in one pouch with the journal so setup takes under a minute
- I have given myself explicit permission to make bad pages
- I have already filled one page so the book is no longer pristine

Mark-Making and Expressive Backgrounds

Loosen your hand with timed mark drills, then build fast forgiving backgrounds with gesso, gelatos, glazes, and watercolor.

Exercise: The Ten-Minute Mark Alphabet

Fill one spread with five mark types, two minutes each: lines, dots, circles, cross-hatching, and loops. Vary pressure, size, and speed. Then redo one mark type with your non-dominant hand. Do not erase or fix anything. Save the spread as a future background.

- Which mark type felt most natural, and which felt awkward?

- How did the non-dominant-hand marks differ from your dominant-hand ones?

- Which area of this page would you most want to collage or paint over later, and why?

Worksheet: Three-Color Background Plan

Plan a background before you make it so you avoid the muddy-brown trap. Choose an analogous trio plus one accent, pick your medium, and define one texture move. Then make the background in five minutes flat. Three analogous colors chosen (sitting near each other on the wheel)

One accent color

Primary medium (gesso + gelatos / Neocolor II / acrylic glaze / watercolor)

Blending tool (damp finger / baby wipe / wet brush)

One texture or variation move (splatter, salt, wiped-back area, stamp)

Actual time taken (target five minutes)

Exercise: Wet-on-Wet Watercolor Bloom Study

On watercolor-weight paper, wet a rectangle with clean water, drop in one color, then drop a second color into the wet area and tilt to let them bleed. Sprinkle salt into one corner while damp and brush it off when dry. Let it fully dry before adding any waterproof line.

- Where did the colors do something you did not plan, and did you like it?
 - What happened where the two colors met in the wet wash?
 - How does collaborating with the water feel different from controlling a pen?
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Checklist: Background-Building Checklist

- I primed the page with a thin coat of gesso before adding color
- I limited myself to two or three analogous colors plus one accent
- I kept the background under five minutes so it stays disposable
- I added at least one texture or variation move
- I let each layer dry before adding the next
- I resisted the urge to call the background a finished artwork

Collage, Image Transfer, and Hand-Lettering

Add collage and transfer mid-layers with the right adhesives, then letter words that integrate with the image.

Worksheet: Focal-Point Collage Plan

Plan one collaged spread before gluing. Choose a single focal element, place it off-center using the rule of thirds, and decide what supports it. Lay it out dry and photograph it, then commit with gel or matte medium. Focal element (the one image that dominates) and why it dominates

Focal placement (which third / off-center zone)

Three supporting scraps and how they point to the focal point

Adhesive chosen (gel medium / matte medium / PVA — not a glue stick for keeps)

Edge strategy (torn for soft blend vs cut for crisp)

Knock-back plan if it gets too busy (thin gesso or paint glaze)

Exercise: Two-Method Image Transfer Test

Run one gel-medium transfer (thick gel coat on a toner print, press face-down, cure overnight, then wet and rub off the paper) and one packing-tape transfer from a magazine image. Compare which is cleaner and which feels more embedded in the page.

- Which method gave a cleaner result, and which felt more woven into the page?
 - Did your print type (laser/toner vs inkjet) cause any smearing, and what would you change?
 - Why can a partial or broken transfer look better than a perfect full one?
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Exercise: Faux Calligraphy Word Practice

Pick one short word. Write it in relaxed cursive, then thicken every downstroke and leave upstrokes thin. Repeat the word six times, getting bolder each time. Then letter it into a real spread so it wraps around or anchors your focal point, not floating in empty space.

- How did the thick-down, thin-up contrast change the look of your letters?
 - Which of your six attempts was best, and what made it stronger?
 - How did integrating the word with the image change the feel of the page versus captioning it at the bottom?
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Checklist: Mid-Layer and Lettering Checklist

- I sealed collage with gel or matte medium under and over, not a glue stick
- I kept collage imagery copyright-clean (my own, public domain, or true scraps)
- I built around one clear focal point rather than an even scatter
- I treated transfers and stamps as supporting texture, not the whole page
- I used faux calligraphy and varied lettering scale dramatically
- I integrated words with the image instead of captioning in dead space

Reflection and a Practice That Lasts

Pair pages with reflective writing, build a personal prompt bank, and design a habit that survives a busy week.

Exercise: Image-First Reflective Page

Make the visual layers of a spread first so you are warmed up and unguarded. Then write directly on or beside the image in your real handwriting, using a sentence stem to start. If the words feel too private, paint a translucent glaze over them once dry so only you know they are there.

- Which sentence stem did you use (Today I noticed / I am letting go of / What I am not saying is), and where did it lead?
 - Did making the image first make the writing easier or more honest?
 - If you buried the writing under a glaze, how did hiding it change what you were willing to say?
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Worksheet: Personal Prompt Bank Starter

Seed your prompt bank with at least two prompts in each category so you never face a blank page. Favor constraints over vague themes. Add to this list every time a technique excites you.

Two technique prompts (e.g. gel-medium transfer, wet-on-wet wash)

Two theme prompts (e.g. a place I miss, a sound from today)

Two constraint prompts (e.g. three colors only, one repeated motif)

One random-source prompt (e.g. first line of a book opened at random)

One mood prompt (e.g. a page that looks like how I feel)

How I will choose one each day (index cards / notes app / roll a die)

Worksheet: Habit Stack and Streak Plan

Design the habit so consistency does the work. Write your habit-stack sentence, set a tiny minimum, and decide how you will track the streak. Apply the never-miss-twice rule.

My daily anchor (after my coffee / after the kids are in bed / after I brush my teeth)

Habit-stack sentence (After I ____, I will open my journal)

Where the open journal and kit will live in my sight

My tiny minimum on a hard day (one mark / one scrap / one line)

Timer length (10 to 15 minutes)

How I will track the streak and honor never-miss-twice

Checklist: Sustainable-Practice Checklist

- I pair most pages with at least a line of honest reflective writing
- I have a prompt bank I can pull from faster than I can deliberate
- My prompts lean on constraints, not just vague themes
- I have attached journaling to a daily anchor habit
- I have a tiny minimum version for busy or low-energy days
- I track my streak and never skip two days in a row

Your Action Plan

1. Choose or rescue a journal with at least 140 gsm paper and confirm it with a wet-brush test
2. Assemble your compact archival kit against a 40 to 60 dollar budget and store it with the journal
3. Fill one deliberately ugly five-minute page to break the fear of the blank book
4. Run the ten-minute mark alphabet, including a non-dominant-hand pass, and save it as a background
5. Make three fast backgrounds limited to three analogous colors plus one accent
6. Practice one wet-on-wet watercolor bloom and let the water surprise you
7. Build one focal-point collage with gel or matte medium and try a gel and a tape transfer
8. Drill faux calligraphy on one word, then integrate it into a finished spread
9. Make an image-first reflective page using a sentence stem, burying the words if needed
10. Seed a prompt bank and set up a habit-stack sentence with a 10 to 15 minute timer and a streak tracker

