

Acrylic Painting — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into studio practice. Each section pairs with a course module and gives you exercises, fill-in worksheets, and checklists to build real skill on canvas. Work through it with paint actually in hand — the goal is finished swatches, studies, and one complete painting, not just notes.

Materials, Surfaces, and the Acrylic Mindset

Set up a working kit, prepare a surface correctly, and run your first drying-behavior tests.

Exercise: The Drying-Down Test

Mix five small puddles: pure Titanium White, a mid-gray, a saturated color, that same color plus white, and a dark mix. Paint two swatches of each on a primed scrap. Photograph them wet, let them dry fully, then compare to judge exactly how much your paints shift darker as they cure.

- By how many value steps (on a 1 to 9 scale) did each swatch darken once dry?

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- Which mix shifted the most, and why might that be?

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- How much lighter will you now mix your lights to compensate?
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Worksheet: My Starter Kit Inventory

List the actual products you own or plan to buy, with brand, grade, and cost, so you know your kit and what is missing before you start painting.

Paint tube 1 — color name and pigment code (e.g. PB29)

Paint tube 1 — brand and grade (artist / student)

Paint tube 1 — price paid

Brush 1 — shape and size

Brush 1 — brand and bristle type

Palette knife — shape number

Surface type and size

Mediums owned

Total kit cost to date

Gaps still to buy

Checklist: Surface Prep Before You Paint

- Chosen a support suited to the work (rigid panel for pours/detail, canvas for general)
- Applied at least one extra gesso coat over the pre-primed surface
- Let each gesso coat dry fully before the next
- Applied the second coat in the opposite direction for even tooth
- Decided on white versus a toned ground and tinted gesso if toning
- Sanded lightly between coats if a smooth surface is wanted
- Set up two water jars (rinse and clean) and a spray bottle
- Set up a stay-wet palette so paint will not skin over

Color, Value, and Brushwork

Lock in value-first thinking, systematic color mixing, and a deliberate vocabulary of marks.

Exercise: Notan and Value Study

Pick a reference photo. Make a two-value notan thumbnail no larger than 3 by 2 inches, then a four-value grayscale study of the same scene using only white, light gray, dark gray, and near-black. Squint at your reference constantly to simplify into big value shapes.

- In the two-value notan, where is the focal area and is the pattern strong?

- Which four-value shapes were hardest to assign, and how did you decide?

- When you photograph your study in black and white, do the forms still read?

Exercise: Mix-the-Target Drill

Choose six target colors from objects around you (a leaf, a mug, a denim sleeve). Mix each from your limited palette, diagnosing hue, value, and chroma separately. Hold the mixed swatch against the object to check, adjust, and record the recipe.

- For each target, which of hue, value, or chroma was you off on first?

- Which complement did you use to neutralize an over-bright mix?

- Which recipe will you reuse, and what were the rough proportions?

Worksheet: Color Recipe Log

Record successful mixes so you can repeat them. Fill one row per color you want to keep.
Target color / what it is for

Hue (dominant tube used)

Value (light / mid / dark)

Chroma (vivid / muted / neutral)

Tubes and rough proportions

Neutralizer added (complement / earth)

Notes after it dried

Checklist: Brushwork Vocabulary Practice

- Painted one stroke at three pressures (heavy, medium, dry-brush)
- Created a hard edge against a dry boundary
- Created a soft edge by blending wet-into-wet quickly
- Created a lost edge between two similar-value shapes
- Laid a transparent glaze over a dry layer to shift color
- Scumbled opaque light paint thinly over a dark dry layer
- Used a retarder or misting to extend blending time

Texture, Impasto, and the Palette Knife

Build physical surface with mediums, thick paint, and confident knife work.

Exercise: Medium Sampler Board

On one primed board, make labeled test patches: paint plus gloss medium, plus matte medium, plus heavy gel, plus modeling paste, plus a texture gel, and a glaze over a dry color. Let it cure and study how each changed flow, sheen, transparency, and texture.

- Which medium changed the sheen the most once dry?

- Which gave you usable texture you would build a painting around?

- Where would each medium earn its place in a real piece?

Exercise: Palette Knife Mark Library

With heavy body paint, fill a board with the core knife moves: flat smears, thin edge-lines, scrapes/sgraffito, tap-and-lift peaks, and two-color broken-color slabs. Keep the paint thick and wipe the blade between marks.

- Which knife mark felt most natural, and which needs more practice?

- How did loading two colors at once change the result versus pre-mixing?

- What subject would suit each mark (water, foliage, sky, branches)?

Worksheet: Impasto Mix Planner

Plan a thick passage before committing paint, so you control cost, color shift, and cure.

Passage to paint thickly

Base color and tubes

Extender used (heavy gel / modeling paste)

Paint-to-gel ratio

Expected color shift (paste lightens)

Application tool (knife / stiff brush)

Layering plan to avoid cracking

Checklist: Texture Work Safeguards

- Used heavy body or extra-heavy paint, not fluid, for thick passages
- Extended expensive color with gel rather than using tube paint alone
- Built extreme thickness in layers to prevent cracking
- Applied the thickest passages last so I did not drag through them
- Let lower layers dry before knifing over them
- Wiped the knife blade clean between fresh slabs
- Allowed extended cure time for thick areas before moving on

Fluid Acrylics, Finishing, and a Complete Painting

Run a controlled pour, take one painting to a resolved finish, and present it professionally.

Exercise: The Consistency and Cell Test Pour

Mix three or four colors separately with pouring medium to a warm-honey ribbon consistency. Do a small dirty pour on a rigid panel raised on cups, tilt to all corners, and optionally torch the surface. Note your ratios and what produced (or failed to produce) cells.

- Did your ribbon sink back into itself in a few seconds, or was it too thick/thin?

• What encouraged cells — density differences, silicone, or the torch?

• How would you adjust the recipe or color count next time?

Exercise: Complete Painting — Order of Operations

Take one subject from blank canvas to finish following the course sequence: tone the ground, sketch big shapes, block darks and mid-values, build lights, adjust relationships, refine edges, then add thick highlights and details last. Photograph each stage.

- Where did you reserve your strongest contrast and sharpest edges?

• What told you the painting was finished rather than just tiring you out?

• Comparing stage photos, which step most improved the piece?

Worksheet: Painting Provenance Record

Document the finished work for the back of the canvas and your own records.

Title

Artist name

Date completed

Medium (e.g. acrylic on canvas)

Dimensions (h x w, units)

Ground and key colors used

Varnish type and sheen applied

Checklist: Finishing and Presentation

- Let the painting cure at least 72 hours (longer for thick passages)
- Signed in a value and scale that does not compete with the work
- Applied an isolation coat of gloss medium before varnishing
- Chose a varnish sheen deliberately (gloss / satin / matte)
- Applied varnish in thin coats, second coat at 90 degrees to the first
- Wiped any silicone off a cured pour before varnishing
- Photographed straight-on in even light with a gray/color reference
- Saved both an archival high-res file and a web-sized version

Your Action Plan

1. Buy or confirm the seven-tube limited palette, three quality synthetic brushes, an offset palette knife, and a stay-wet palette.
2. Prepare two or three surfaces: add gesso coats and make at least one toned ground.
3. Run the drying-down test and build a personal two-color mixing chart of your actual tubes.
4. Make a notan plus four-value study, then complete one small value-and-color study from a reference.
5. Fill a medium sampler board and a palette-knife mark library, labeling every patch.
6. Paint one small impasto study using gel-extended heavy body paint and knife work.
7. Do a test pour on a rigid panel, dialing in ribbon consistency and cell formation.
8. Complete one full painting following the seven-step order of operations, photographing each stage.
9. Cure, isolation-coat, and varnish the finished painting; sign it and record provenance on the back.
10. Photograph the work properly and save both archival and web versions for your portfolio.

