

Acrylic Paint Brushes Tutorial

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One of the most common questions I am asked is "What brush should I use?" Sometimes it doesn't matter and you use the one that "fits" the area size you have to paint, and other times it matters immensely which brush you use. Hopefully this guide will help clear up some of your questions....

ANATOMY OF A BRUSH

There are 3 main parts of a brush:



The **Handle** can be made from wood (traditional) or acrylic/plastic. The main advantages of the newer acrylic or plastic handles are that if you leave the brush in the water, the handle will not absorb the water and split, and secondly many of these handles also come with a gel-like grip that makes it easier and more comfortable to hold the brush.

Handles can come in various lengths as well, most commonly noted as short-handles or long-handled. *Generally long-handled brushes are used for oil painting whereas short-handled brushes are used for watercolour and acrylic painting.*

The **Ferrule** is the metal piece that connects the handle and the bristles of the brush. The bristles are inserted into one end of the ferrule and glued into place. the other end is then glued and/or crimped onto the handle.

The **Bristles** (also known as hairs) and can be natural hairs or synthetic bristles. Some brushes will have a combination of both natural and synthetic hairs on the one brush.

Some brushes have a **Chisel Edge** which is the part of the bristles that would touch the painting surface first if the brush was held vertically. Using the Chisel Edge will give you a skinny stroke, like that from a liner brush, as seen above. These brushes also have a **Flat Side** which gives you a much wider paint stroke and can cover a larger area, which is helpful when laying down basecoats of paint.



Chisel



Flat

HAIRS & BRISTLES

Many different types of hairs and bristles are used in making brushes. Some of the more common types are listed below. For acrylic painting, you may have heard me refer to "Regular" and "Specialty" brushes. Regular brushes are made from synthetic bristles while most of the specialty brushes I use are made from natural hair.

Synthetic - Made from nylon and polyester fibres, and are usually called Taklon. The individual bristles can be made to have points similar to natural hairs, but never works quite like natural. All synthetic fibres are white to start with and are dyed to imitate natural hairs. Synthetic bristles gives the smoothest finish when applying paint. Usually less expensive than natural bristles, less prone to damage, extremely durable, and easier to clean.



Natural Hairs - Made from a variety of sources, can be a variety of colours, and can be used when applying paint using various techniques. The most common natural hair brushes are described below.

Bristle - Hogs and boars provide us with Bristle brushes. These bristles are quite stiff and can have a long life. Bristles can be black, brown, grey, spotted, or white. The best quality are the naturally white.



Goat - Goat hairs can be black, grey, or white. Bristles are quite versatile and retains large volumes of water. Best used for watercolours.



Fitch - From an Asian Weasel and can vary in colour from tan to dark brown. Good for glazes and washes.



Ox - Ox hair is usually dark brown or tan and is not good for round or pointed brushes, so it is usually only found in flat brushes. Very strong and resilient.



Sable - Also from an Asian Weasel and is reddish brown in colour. Best used for watercolours.



BRUSH SHAPES

As you know, there are many different brush shapes. The most common types are listed below with their most common uses.

Round

This is the most traditional brush shape. Should come to a sharp point. Good for sketching, outlining, detailed stroke work, controlled washes, filling in small areas. Creates thin to thick lines - thin at the tip, becoming wider the more its pressed down. Use with thinned paint rather than thick paint.



Liner/Script Liner

This is a round brush, just smaller. Liner brushes can have shorter bristles or longer bristles (a script liner). Liners are usually used for stroke work, outlining, spotting, retouching, and detailing. Script liners hold more paint and is good for lettering, signing your name, and longer stroke work.



Wash/Flat/Bright/Shader

These brushes are just as they suggest - flat with squared-off bristles. The length of the bristles can vary, with some flat brushes having long and some very short bristles, for example a bright brush has bristles that are about equal in length width.

Not only will a flat brush create a broad brushstroke, but if you turn it so you're leading with the narrow edge, it'll produce thin brushstrokes. A short flat brush is ideal for small, precise brush marks.

Used to basecoat, blend, float, shading, and stroke work.



Angle/Dagger

Basically constructed the same as flats, except the bristles are cut on an angle. Used for reaching hard-to-get-to areas and corners, curved strokes, shading, and highlighting.



Filbert

Also similar to flat brushes, except the bristles come to a curved edge. The curved edge offers exceptional control and is useful for softening edges and lines. Used on its side, a filbert gives a thin line; used flat it produces a broad brush stroke; and by varying the pressure as you apply the brush to canvas, or flicking it across, you can get a tapering mark. Used for blending, and soft rounded edges like flower petals.



Fan

This brush has bristles that fan out from the ferrule. It is commonly used to blend colours, but also perfect for stippling, hair, fur, feathers, and grasses. Best results with natural bristles.



Mop

This brush has thick, fluffy bristles that are highly absorbent. Excellent for wetting large areas of paper, blotting or blending paint. Also perfect for painting clouds. Best results with natural bristles.



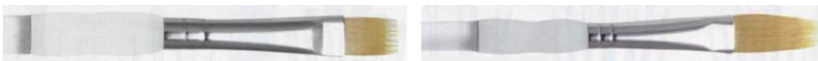
Deerfoot/Stippler/Foliage (and Stencil)

These brushes have full bristles cut at an angle (except stencil brushes which are cut straight). Used for pouncing fur, trees, bushes, foliage, and grasses. Best results with natural bristles.



Comb/Rake

Basically constructed the same as a flat brush, with fewer bristles which are different lengths to give "comb-like teeth". Used to create hair, fur, grass, and wood grain. Best to use paint thinned out.



Scruffy Brush

Any old brush that has past its usefulness for what it was intended, but can be used for a variety of other purposes. Best when bristles are well worn down and spanned out. Use to create texture, fur, bushes, foliage, and dry brushing.

SIZES

The size of a brush is indicated by a number printed on the handle. Liner brushes start from 10/0, 5/0, 3/0, 2/0, 1/0, 0, 1, and 2. Once you reach 2 and up (usually go up in intervals of 2 - so 2, 4, 6, 8, etc), the brushes are considered Round. Flat brushes start at 2 and also go up in intervals of 2 (2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12). Sometimes, depending on brand, the flats will then start to be "numbered" in inches (i.e. 1/2", 3/4" or 1").

The higher the number, the bigger or wider the brush. Unfortunately, there is little consistency between brush manufacturers as to what these sizes actually are, so a number 10 in one brand can be a different size to a number 10 in another brand.

Sizes in long-handled brushes are generally completely different than sizes in short-handled brushes.