



Build confidence, banish doubt and transform into the artist you know you can be!

Your Free Download from [www.Rachel Duffield Art.com](http://www.RachelDuffieldArt.com): Artists Starter Kit Shopping List

Thanks for downloading my pdf. You'll find it extremely helpful when putting together your artist's kit for watercolours, drawing, or oil painting, and the same principles will apply for other art media, too, whether it's acrylics, pastels or any of the millions of types of exciting art stuff you can buy.

Before we start, please remember that all art materials are provided in all my classes, so you don't need to buy any of the lovely stuff listed below in order to join any of my sessions. This list is to help get you started in making your own art in your own time and space.

My first rule is: start where you are, with what you have.

There's an old joke that goes, creatives have two hobbies; one is making art, the other is buying art materials. We've all met people with all the gear but no idea...

Don't get me wrong, I love buying art stuff as much as anyone, but I've learnt it's more important to just get on and make the art, and you definitely don't need a lot of fancy equipment to do that.

So, before you go and buy any of the things on this list, check all your cupboards (and down the back of the sofa) for any long-forgotten or unused art materials to see what you've already got. You'll save money, feel less guilty about splashing paint around with wild abandon and, let's face it, it's more environmentally sustainable to buy less, so everyone's a winner. Hurrah!

This guide will give you general advice. Where I've recommended specific items, they are all things I have tried and tested myself, so you can absolutely trust me on this. I'm not affiliated to any particular brand and I've found some great bargains in budget shops like B&M and The Range. Inexpensive stuff is great for trying materials out before you decide whether or not to upgrade your kit.

I also use a lot of Winsor and Newton products because for me, they are like the M&S of the art world: reliable, decent quality and mid-priced. When I've bought really cheap items, I'm often disappointed, and when I've bought really expensive items, the fear of wasting them can sometimes suck the joy out of making the art. So, I tend to stick with my tried and tested favourites.

So here goes. First, your starter kit shopping list for drawing.



This delicious tin-ful is the Winsor and Newton Studio Collection Sketching Set which contains 3 soft graphite pencils, charcoal pencils, sepia pencil, white charcoal pencil, putty rubber, pencil sharpener and a blendy thing.

Personally I think putty rubbers are overrated and on balance I enjoy a clean, firm, white eraser more. But this set is a great place to start.

A simple HB 'school' pencil of the type you've probably got knocking around at home (or came free from Ikea) is fine for basic sketching jobs, but you'll want a wider range for more finished drawings. Artist pencils are graded in softness or hardness: B means soft and H means hard. The number next to the H or the B denotes how hard or soft it is; for example, 8B is softer than 2B and 6H is harder than 4H. Hard pencils are

great for technical drawing and fine detail, and soft pencils are great for shadows and blending.

This set has soft pencils in 2B, 4B and 6B. It also has charcoal pencils, which are a great way to sketch on a larger, freer scale without the messiness of ordinary charcoal, and you've got the red sepia and white charcoal to create really Da Vinci-ish 'trois crayons' style sketches if you draw on tinted paper.

The studio sketching set currently retails at around £15 which I think is great value, and it will last you for years and years. I'd recommend keeping the set in the tin it comes in, too, because the packaging will prevent a lot of breakages. I've still got my 1989 GCSE art pencil set in their original tin, and they are now very short but still going strong as I write this in December 2025. I know - unbelievable, right?

Sketchbooks.



I recommend spiral bound sketchbooks with a hard cover. This one is A4, has 50 sheets of 150gsm cartridge paper and is currently available from Hobbycraft for £8.

The gsm denotes the thickness of the paper; the higher the number, the thicker the paper (standard photocopier paper is around 100gsm, if that helps you imagine).

Cartridge paper has a slight texture or 'tooth'

which grabs the graphite from your pencil and gives a nice effect in drawings, and the thickness means pens are less likely to bleed through so you can use both sides of each page.

Spiral bound means it will lay flat, and you can use the hard cover as a firm base when drawing on your lap in front of the telly, or while out and about.

There are loads of different styles and sizes of sketchbook and every artist will have their own preference. For me, the paper thickness is the most important factor.

Or, if you prefer, an option which would work ok for both drawing and basic watercolour painting is 240gsm multimedia paper like this (Amazon £10, A3):



I use multimedia paper in a lot of my classes; as a teacher it's very cost effective.

Watercolours Starter Kit Shopping list.



The Cotman watercolour sketchers pocket set (currently on Amazon for around £13) is the one I use in all my classes. You can get watercolour sets with a million colours at a cheaper price, but the quality of the very inexpensive paints is often quite low, with very gritty, badly behaved paint and obvious pigment particles. I recommend that it's worth getting these. The teeny brush is very good too.

[Daler Simply Watercolour Short Handle 5pc Brush Set](#)

Daler Rowney also make decent quality watercolours and brushes. The link above is for their basic 5-piece brush set, which I'd recommend to all beginners; unlike a lot of beginners sets, the Daler Rowney set includes a wide brush for watercolour washes- very useful indeed!

Watercolour paper



You COULD use your watercolours in your drawing sketchbook, but you'll get a lot of puddles, and the paper will crinkle, and your picture will spoil, because the gsm is only 150.

If you use the gsm240 multimedia paper I recommended earlier, your watercolour results will start to improve.

However there's no denying that 'proper' watercolour paper does the best job. The choices are endless and prices can get silly on some brands, but my recommendation for keen starters is for the Daler Rowney Aquafine 300gsm shown here, retailing at around £18 at Hobbycraft.

When I'm learning a new watercolour technique, I tend to practice on multimedia paper then switch to the posh stuff for more finished pieces.

Oil Painting Starter Kit Shopping List.

There's no denying that oils are a bit of a commitment because they're expensive compared to other media- my students have told me that's one of the things that puts them off trying. It's also the reason I developed my 'Get Started With...Oil Painting' workshop. Everything's provided, so you get to try out this fabulous medium without too much risk.

Suggested starter kit: Winsor & Newton Oil Colour Set. It covers all the basics and you get a lovely carry case too.



- **8 x 37ml Winton Oil Colours**
- **75ml Bottle Liquin (a medium to make your paint go further and dry quicker)**
- **75ml Bottle Sansodor (odour-free thinners, can be used to thin paint and/or clean brushes)**
- **Winsor & Newton Palette Knife No. 13 Inch, great for mixing paint colours on the palette and for applying paint thickly to the canvas.**
- **Winton Hog Brush Short Flat No. 2 –for larger areas**
- **Winton Hog Brush Round No. 2 –for detail**
- **Winsor & Newton Cloth – for wiping dirty fingers and brushes**
- **Godet Double 08 –little containers for your thinners and mediums.**

It retails at £140, only from the Winsor & Newton website.
If you don't want the cute case, you can still buy all the contents individually.
You can also sometimes find oil paint sets in charity shops (I think people get scared and give up). If the lids are on the tubes tightly the paint will last for years, so it's worth giving donated sets a try. Personally, I'd rather have a second hand set from a quality brand than a new, cheap set, but I reckon it's better to use lower quality materials than not paint at all.

The Range does great cut price bulk tubes which are probably more filler than pigment, but do the job for base layers which can be finished off with better paints later (purists will be turning in their graves at this notion, but life's too short IMHO).

In my experience, oil paint colours and textures vary wildly between brands and I've found my favourites only through trial and error. As always, Winsor & Newton provides a reliable and dependable option.



Additional things:

- **Alternative environmentally friendly thinners/brush cleaners are Zest-It or Clean Spirit; Murphy's wood cleaner /Da Vinci brush soap to thoroughly clean brushes. I give brushes a good dip and wipe in thinners or clean spirit for mid-session cleaning and then a really good, thorough wash with the Murphy's every few sessions. Every artist will have their own favourite products and methoss which they insist are the best; these are just mine!**
- **Gesso. It used to be made from boiled animal skin, I think, but now it's a thick white acrylic primer to create a good base layer on canvas, card or wood before you start painting.**
- **Reuseable bamboo kitchen towel www.musthaveideas.co.uk Let's face it. Oil painting isn't the most environmentally friendly medium so we do what we can where we can.**
- **Palette of personal choice. At the moment I'm feeling lazy so I'm using disposable palettes, but I use them for more than one painting session, if I can.**

You could use wood, glass, plastic, whichever you prefer- I've used old shiny cardboard, the covers of sketchbooks, plastic carton lids- use whatever comes to hand- non-absorbent is generally better.

- **Aprons/ overalls/ smocks.** Oil paint is very messy and does not wash out. Saying 'I'll be careful' never works, in my experience. And if you have long hair, get it out of the way before you start, unless you want rainbow streaks in weird places.
- **Mirror.** Good for checking paintings in reverse (works every time) and checking how much paint you have on your face before you leave the easel.
- **Something to paint on.** Personal preference. Prepared canvases are a great place to start. You can always add another layer of gesso if they feel too dry.

Lastly, people often ask me how water-based oils compare to the real thing. I find them ok to use but not as flexible as the real thing – a bit stodgy and grainy.

However, they are odour free, much less messy and do not need any solvents and other paraphernalia. If you like them, use them!

What next...?

You can try watercolour and oil painting in my 'Get Started With...' workshops. It's your chance to try many of the products listed here, without any of the risk.

My beginner's courses are held at Artpocket Studios, Norwich. All the information and booking details are available at www.rachelduffieldart.com and www.artpocket.co.uk. In 2026 each workshop will cost £45.

Get Started With...Watercolours 1

This tutored workshop is ideal for beginners or people who are nervous about trying painting in watercolours. In a friendly, relaxed atmosphere we will have a go at different ways to apply paint using a range of methods, papers and brushes.

This 2.5 hour workshop will be packed with straightforward explanations and fun exercise, and the opportunity to create your own mini masterpiece using the techniques you've learned.

You'll leave brimming with confidence and enthusiasm for the gentle medium of watercolours. Everything you need for the workshop will be provided, but if you have your own materials, you're welcome to bring them along.

Get Started With...Watercolours 2

This tutored workshop is an ideal follow-on from Get Started With Watercolours 1' or would be great for people who already paint but want to gain confidence.

Building on the basics and in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere, we will take our time to create two slightly more challenging paintings – a seascape and a landscape – each with stress-free, step-by-step guidance.

This 2.5 hour workshop will be packed with straightforward explanations and fun exercise, and the opportunity to create your own mini masterpiece using the techniques you've learned.

You'll leave brimming with confidence and enthusiasm for the gentle medium of watercolours. Everything you need for the workshop will be provided, but if you have your own materials, you're welcome to bring them along.

Get Started With... Oil Painting

This tutored painting class is ideal for beginners or people who are nervous about trying oil painting. In a friendly, relaxed atmosphere we will take the mystery out of the materials and equipment used in oil painting, try out simple colour-mixing and have a go at different ways to apply paint using a range of methods.

This 2.5 hour workshop will be packed with straightforward explanations and fun exercises, and the opportunity to create your own mini Monet masterpiece using the techniques you've learned. You'll leave brimming with confidence and enthusiasm for the wonderful, adaptable medium of oil paints.