

# Acrylic Paint Tutorial

By Brenda Rowe

[www.brendarowe.ca](http://www.brendarowe.ca)

One of the most common questions I am asked is "What paint brand should I use?" Many times it comes down to personal preference, but there are many things to consider: quality, colour, lightfastness/permanence, viscosity, and price. The brands I list in this document are reputable and mostly available locally in Newfoundland. You will have to experiment to see what brand you will favour. I have used all of those listed, but my favourites are Golden Acrylics and Winsor & Newton Artists' Acrylics. Hopefully this guide will help clear up some of your questions....

## **ANATOMY OF A PAINT TUBE LABEL - HOW TO READ THE LABEL**

There are many pieces of information listed on a tube of paint. Some of these are not easy to understand, so I will explain the various terms you can encounter. Not all paint tubes will have all of the information listed.

### **Colour Name**

Many manufacturers have slightly different names for each of their paint colours, while other colour names are standard (i.e. Burnt Umber). However, those paints with the same name are not made equal! Although the pigment chemical names will be the same there will be subtle differences in shade. Which is why a Paint Conversion Chart can be useful. I have included a Conversion Chart at the end of this workbook.

### **Pigments**

These are coloured, dry powdery substances that come from a variety of natural and synthetic sources, which when combined with a binder become the colouring agents for paint. You can determine if the paint is a Pure colour (only one pigment listed) or a Mixed colour (more than one pigment listed). The more pigments listed means mixing that paint with any other paint colours you are using will increase the risk of mudding the colour that you are mixing.

### **Chemical Index Name / Number**

Every pigment has a Name and Number so that you can compare colours more accurately, and also to help you determine any health concerns related to certain pigments (i.e. Cadmiums). It consists of a Pigment Code and a Unique Number.

### **Pigment Codes**

The Pigment Codes used are:

PB = Pigment Blue  
PG = Pigment Green  
PR = Pigment Red  
PY = Pigment Yellow

PBk = Pigment Black  
PM = Pigment Metal  
PV = Pigment Violet

PBr = Pigment Brown  
PO = Pigment Orange  
PW = Pigment White

### **Vehicle / Binder / Medium**

The three terms above are used interchangeably to define what is used to bind the pigments together in a liquid suspension, known as paint. Most binders are milky in consistency, which causes a colour shift when dry (paint dries darker) as the binder itself dries clear, leaving more pigment visible.

### **Lightfastness / Permanence**

Permanence, often called lightfastness, refers to the ability of the pigment in the paint to resist gradual fading or darkening when exposed to light. Pigments that fade or darken over time are often called fugitive colors. Many student grade or low cost acrylics will often use less permanent pigments, which will fade or darken, sometimes within months. This is particularly notable in the red, yellow and violet colours.

ASTM International (formerly known as the American Society for Testing and Materials) classifies artists' colors based on a test that simulates 20 years of gallery exposure:

ATSM I = Excellent

ATSM II = Very Good

ATSM III = Not Sufficient

Some manufacturers also have their own permanence ratings. For example:

AA = Extremely Permanent

A = Durable Colour

B = Moderately Durable

C = Fugitive Colour

### **Opacity**

This is the covering power of the pigments used in the paint. Covering power is the ability of a pigment to a) go a long way or b) cover previous layers. Some pigments are naturally opaque and can hide what is underneath it (i.e. titanium white) while others are naturally more transparent and allow the colours underneath to shine through (i.e. many reds). If you want to cover something, it is best to use a colour that is opaque.

The following codes are used to indicate relative opacity and transparency:

O = Opaque

SO = Semi-Opaque

T = Transparent

ST = Semi-Transparent

### **Swatch of Paint**

These hand-painted examples of colour show you not only the dried colour of the tube of paint, but also enables you to judge the opacity or transparency of the paint.

### **Viscosity**

Viscosity refers to the consistency or thickness of the paint. Heavy body acrylics have a thick, buttery consistency (similar to oil paints) that retains brushstrokes and facilitates color mixing and blending. You can thin out the heavy body paints with water or other acrylic thinning mediums. Artist grade paints are usually heavy body while student grade are not as thick.

## **Finish**

Usually a scale of Matte (dull) to Glossy (shiny) is used for acrylic artist paints, as opposed to other terms you usually hear when referring to house paint (i.e. eggshell).

This scale is more than just how much shine there is. A paint with more gloss will have more pigment in the paint and provides more light bounce, which show imperfections and brush strokes more easily. Matte paint evens out rough surfaces and can look muted in colour. If you end up using a mixture of paints that are matte and glossy in the same painting, you can even out the surface by applying a protective varnish that can unify the surface. These varnishes also come in Matte or Glossy.

## **Series**

Manufacturers group colours into various price bands depending on the cost of the pigment used to produce the paint. The Series number of a colour indicates the relative price of the colour with the price increasing with the higher the Series number. Series has nothing to do with the quality of the paint.

Certain colours are in the same series regardless of brand. For example, Yellow Ochre paint is relative inexpensive to produce, so it will always be Series 1 no matter the brand. Alizarin and Cerulean are expensive pigments, so they will always have a higher Series number.

Some manufacturers use letters (e.g. Series A, Series B) and others numbers (e.g. Series 1, Series 2). The higher the letter or number, the more expensive the paint.

## **PURE COLOURS VERSUS HUES / MIXTURES**

As I mentioned in the section on Pigments, Pure colours have only one pigment used in the formulation of the paint colour, while Mixed colours (more commonly known as Hues) consist of more than one pigment. Most Mixed colours will list the word HUE as part of the paint colour name, but some will not. So you should always check the pigments listed to know for sure. Pure colors are better for mixing colours yourself because they won't muddy as fast as hues.

Hues are made for a variety of reasons including:

- emulating a "masters" colour (one that was used by the Masters as far back as the 1600s) as the pigment is now considered toxic,
- the original pigment does not mix well with acrylic binders or mediums,
- the original pigment is expensive and paint companies offer you both the Pure colour as well as a Hue made from a mixture of pigments that are cheaper to save you money for base coating (i.e. Cerulean Blue),
- convenience and consistency, for example mixing secondary (i.e. greens) and tertiary colours consistently by hand yourself will always produce a slightly different mix no matter how careful and good at colour mixing you are.

## STUDENT VERSUS ARTIST GRADE PAINTS

What is the difference between Student and Artist Grade paints? The difference mainly is in quality. If you produce art professionally as I do, you must use Artist quality paint. If you are not producing professionally, it comes down to personal preference and pricing. Artist Grade paints will be higher in price than Student Grade paints. However, if you want to build your paint collection gradually, you can always watch for sales and/or coupons and switch out your colours as you run out of your existing paint colours.

### **Artist Grade**

- highest pigment levels
- varied price range
- widest colour choice
- limited colour shift
- generally higher viscosity

### **Student Grade**

- less paint coverage
- more affordable pricing
- greater colour shift
- good for beginners

## PAINT BRANDS AVAILABLE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

Below you will find a Conversion Chart of the Student and Artist Grade paints available in NL.

I have included the Delta paints for those who are/were using these in case you wish to convert to tube paints.

I have never used Artist's Loft, but what I have seen of it, the colours are very far from the other brands, so I have also classified it as craft grade. White and Black will be fine in that brand for sure and the Burnt Umber looks ok. Mixing with this brand will result in muddy colours. The covers of Artist's Loft are a flip lid and easy to open.

I have limited experience with Liquitex brand. I find it is the thickest paint of the brands listed below. This means you should get better coverage, but you may have to thin it out more to use it. The covers of Liquitex Basics are a flip lid and easy to open. The covers of Liquitex Heavy Body are large screw-on caps which are easy to use and doesn't seem to get stuck as much.

Golden is my favourite brand. They do also produce Golden Open (Student Grade) and Golden Fluid (Artist Grade) neither of which is available locally. The covers of Golden Artist Acrylics are fairly large and easy to use. They do sometimes get stuck, but not often.

Winsor & Newton Galeria is the Student Grade of this company's paints. It is good to use, but I hate the covers. They are octagonal in shape and hurt when you are trying to twist them off, especially as they tend to stick quite often. Pliers are needed frequently.

I have also included Winsor & Newton Artist's Acrylics even though you cannot purchase them locally. I like them and use them frequently and they are second only to Golden in my preferences. The covers of Winsor & Newton Artist's Acrylics are also fairly large and easy to open, but they can get stuck but are small enough usually to use pliers to open instead.

Grumbacher is a great paint and was only locally carried in limited supply by Dicks and Company. They do not sell art supplies anymore, but Michaels is now carrying this brand. It was my favourite for a while, but the small covers on the paint are prone to spilt. I suspect a lot of artist's had this same complaint, as the new version now comes with a slightly larger cap, but they aren't as large as the other brands and I don't know if that has fixed the splitting issue. They were also getting stuck a fair amount, which I suspect also contributed to the splitting problem.

**Paint Conversions**

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Delta</b>	<b>Artist`s Loft</b>	<b>Liquitex Basics</b>	<b>Liquitex Heavy Body</b>	<b>Golden Acrylics</b>	<b>Winsor &amp; Newton Galeria</b>	<b>Winsor &amp; Newton Artist's Acrylic</b>	<b>Grumbacher Academy Acrylic</b>
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Craft</b>	<b>Craft</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Artist</b>	<b>Artist</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Artist</b>	<b>Artist</b>
<b>Where to Purchase</b>	<b>Not Available in NL</b>	<b>Available at Michaels</b>	<b>Available at Michaels &amp; Curry's online</b>	<b>Available at Michaels and Art Cansel</b>	<b>Available at Urchin Art &amp; Curry's online</b>	<b>Available at Michaels, Art Cansel &amp; Curry's online</b>	<b>Available at Curry's online</b>	<b>Available at Michaels</b>
<b>White</b>	White	White	Titanium White	Titanium White	Titanium White	Titanium White	Titanium White	Titanium White
<b>Black</b>	Black	Mars Black	Ivory Black	Mars Black or Bone Black	Mars Black	Mars Black	Mars Black	Mars Black
<b>Dark Grey</b>	Charcoal	Gray	-	Payne's Gray	Payne's Gray	Payne's Gray	Payne's Gray	Payne's Gray
<b>Dark Red</b>	Tomato Spice	Brilliant Red	Alizarin Crimson Hue Permanent	Alizarin Crimson	Alizarin Crimson	Permanent Alizarin Crimson	Permanent Alizarin Crimson	Alizarin Crimson
<b>Medium Red</b>	Naphthol Red Lite	Crimson	Cadmium Red Medium Hue	Cadmium Red Medium	CP Cadmium Red Medium	Cadmium Red Medium	Cadmium Red Medium	Cadmium Red Medium
<b>Orange</b>	Orange	Orange	Cadmium Orange Hue	CP Cadmium Orange	CP Cadmium Orange	Cadmium Orange Hue	Chromium Orange	Cadmium Orange
<b>Dark Blue</b>	Midnight Blue	Brilliant Blue	Phthalocyanine Blue	Phthalo Blue	Prussian Blue	Prussian/Winsor Blue	Phthalo Blue (Green)	Thalo Blue
<b>Medium Blue</b>	Phthalo Blue	Ultramarine	Ultramarine Blue	Ultramarine Blue	Ultramarine Blue or Colbalt Blue	Ultramarine Blue	Ultramarine Blue	Ultramarine Blue
<b>Sky Blue</b>	Laguna Blue	Cerulean	Cerulean Blue Hue	Cerulean Blue Chromium	Cerulean Blue Chromium	Cerulean Blue Hue	Cerulean Blue	Cerulean Blue
<b>Purple</b>	Purple	Violet	Dioxazine Purple	Dioxazine Purple	Dioxazine Purple	Winsor Violet	Dioxazine Purple	Dioxazine Purple
<b>Gold Yellow</b>	Antique Gold	Yellow Ochre	Yellow Oxide	Yellow Ochre	Yellow Ochre	Yellow Ochre	Yellow Ochre	Yellow Ochre
<b>Bright Yellow</b>	Straw	Brilliant Yellow	Cadmium Yellow Medium Hue	Cadmium Yellow Medium	CP Cadmium Yellow Medium	Cadmium Yellow Medium Hue	Cadmium Yellow Medium	Cadmium Yellow Medium
<b>Dark Green</b>	Dk Foliage	Sap Green	Phthalocyanine Green	Chromium Oxide Green Dark	Chromium Oxide Green Dark	Hooker's Green	Hooker's Green	Hooker's Green
<b>Dark Green</b>	Deep River Green	-	Deep Green Permanent	Phthalo Green	Phthalo Green	Permanent Green Deep	Perylene Green	Thalo Green
<b>Olive Green</b>	Avacado	-	Hooker's Green Hue Permanent	Green Gold	Green Gold	Olive Green	Olive Green or Green Gold	-
<b>Light/Yellow Green</b>	Light Green	Bright Green	Light Green Permanent	Light Green	Chromium Oxide Green	Sap Green	Chromium Oxide Green or Cobalt Green	Thalo Yellow Green
<b>Dark Brown</b>	Burnt Umber	Burnt Umber	Burnt Umber	Burnt Umber	Burnt Umber	Burnt Umber	Burnt Umber	Burnt Umber
<b>Golden Brown</b>	Raw Sienna	Raw Sienna	Raw Sienna	Raw Sienna	Raw Sienna	Raw Sienna	Raw Sienna	Raw Sienna
<b>Dark Brown</b>	Raw Umber	-	Raw Umber	Raw Umber	Raw Umber	Raw Umber	Raw Umber	-
<b>Golden Brown</b>	Burnt Sienna	Burnt Sienna	Burnt Sienna	Burnt Sienna	Burnt Sienna	Burnt Sienna	Burnt Sienna	Burnt Sienna

\* Artist`s Loft colours are usually very far from matching the respective colours in the other paint brands.