

Getting started with Airbrushing - BASIC Guide

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This is not a comprehensive full guide on airbrushing. It's a basic guide intended to give the foundation for anyone waiting to start airbrushing.

The Airbrush

It's a small, air-operated tool that atomizes and sprays various media, most often paint but also ink and dye, and foundation. Spray painting developed from the airbrush and is considered to employ a type of airbrush.

Little History

Up until the mid-2000s, it was widely published that the airbrush was invented in 1893, but according to the research prepared by Professor Andy Penaluna, the first instrument to use a compressed air supply was named the "paint distributor" was developed by Abner Peeler "for the painting of watercolors and other artistic purposes" and used a hand-operated compressor to supply continuous air. It was rather crude, being based on a number of spare parts in a jeweler's workshop such as old screwdrivers and welding torches.

It took four years of further development before a working prototype was developed by Liberty Walkup of Mt. Morris, Illinois. Walkup repatented the work under the name of "air-brush", a name his wife Phoebe Walkup came up with.

The formal birth of the name 'Air Brush' can be traced to a documented stakeholders' meeting of the new Air Brush Manufacturing Co. at 7:00 p.m. on 6 October 1883, when the name was formally born.

Technique

Airbrush technique is the freehand manipulation of the airbrush, medium, air pressure, and distance from the surface being sprayed in order to produce a certain predictable result on a consistent basis with or without shields or stencils. Airbrush technique will differ with the type of airbrush being used (single-action or dual/double-action).

Applications for Airbrushing

Airbrush techniques are extremely versatile, permitting you to create beautiful and great designs on almost any surface or material. Correspondingly, artists can take advantage from learning how to use different types of airbrush guns and paints. Here I show some of the very interesting applications of airbrush to you as a beginners and professional:

- Art and Illustration
- Photo retouching
- Scale Modeling
- Custom painting on cars, motorcycles, and helmets
- Body art, temporary tattoos, and face painting
- Shirts and other items of clothing
- Food art and decoration on cakes, biscuits, and pastries
- Painting models and statues
- The list is endless

Techniques Examples

Priming models

Base coating the first few layers of paint

Glazing

Varnishing

Stenciling, masking, tonal-gradient designs, color modulation

Tools

These are some required equipment pieces that you will need.

You will need an airbrush gun, the accessories such as the hose and connections, and of obviously an airbrush compressor. It is also suggested to begin with two to four three nozzle sizes, which will give you versatility in your artworks.

Let us have a look at these pieces of equipment:

Airbrush Types

Basically, there are two different operations of airbrush guns:

Single Action and Double Action.

Both come with their pros and cons. The single-action airbrush has two separate controls that allow you not only to control the pressure and airflow, but also gives a constant flow of air and subsequently paint.

Single Action is the perfect airbrush for starters, very simple to work with. Not recommended for airbrush artists who want to commence exploring more difficult and technical skills.

Pros

- Low Maintenance
- Less Expensive
- Easy Operation

Cons

- Less control
- Limited flexibility
- Rough spray

Double Action airbrush is the great option for artists who want to develop and improve their skills over time. It is not as easy to use as the single-action airbrush, as it only has a single button for regulating the paint and air volume.

The Double Action, on the other hand, is especially suitable for artists who want to develop and improve their skills. It has only one button to regulate both air and paint volume. Although more complicated to use, it allows the creation of more complex and beautiful work.

Pros

- More Versatile
- Low pressure operation
- Better control

Cons

- More Expensive
- Complex operation
- More maintenance

Compressor

Composed of a motor, some cases a chamber, a filter or water separator and pressure gauge. It compacts the air to create strong, constant, and adjustable air pressures. By pressing the pistol button, the compressed air flows out of the pistol and pushes the paint out of the gun.

Achieving constant air pressure and flow is one of the most important aspects of airbrushing, apart from choosing the right airbrush and the right paint. Be a little rigorous when selecting your air compressor as you want it to perform well and last for a long time.

The pressure used when airbrushing varies depending on different factors, generally speaking the ideal pressure should be between 1.5 and 2.2 bar.

Water separator, or filter, is an important component of an air compressor. It makes sure that there's no condensation water drops being pushed through the airbrush gun, diluting your color and creating unwanted speckles.

The recommendations are to use an air compressor with a pressure gauge that will regulate pressure with precision.

Paint

There's an enormous variety of paint types and brands for airbrushing. You choose the right airbrush paint for the job as it's directly related to the result you are aiming for. It depends on the project you have. For cake decoration and other food items, you need to use food-safe paint. For military scale models or other game miniature painting, matte colors usually are your best option.

In general there are two general types of paints that you can use for airbrushing: water-based, or lacquer-based paints.

Lacquer-based paints can be hazardous to your health, always wear protection, a respirator when working with them. To clean lacquer-based paints from your airbrush gun you will need acetone or another suitable cleaning agent. Water-based paints, on the contrary, can be removed with clear water. They are not considered hazardous to your health, but always consider your safety when working with them too.

Make sure you research which paint you plan to use as well which diluent work with them. If you plan to paint multiple layers you also need to consider if a different paint and brand can affect the previous layer as they may have different chemical components on their formula. It's always a good practice to test if they work together on a separate piece before painting the final object to avoid damage, loss of material and extra work.

Consider the nozzle size. Paints with large pigment particles are not suitable for a very fine nozzle. The nozzle can get clogged interfering with the quality of the work. Consider using high-quality paints.

Other Tools

Diluents & Cleaner

The recommendation is to use paints, diluents and cleaners from the same manufacturer when possible because of their formula. The type of cleaner and diluent depends on the paint you use.

Masking tape

It's a flexible adhesive material on one side allowing it to spray on sharp corners and edges, it comes in different sizes.

Respirator

Safety first, always. It's essential to use a respirator is a must, even more when working with lacquer-based paints.

Painting booth

It helps to contain the extra spray and keep your working area clean.

Tips for Airbrush Care

1. Use an Airbrush cleaning pot for practicality, specially if you don't have a sink near your work station.
2. Avoid harsh solvents, they may damage parts internally.
3. Use water to clean your airbrush when using water-based paints.
4. Avoid cleaning internal parts with metal brushes, they may scratch fragile interior parts.
5. Never dilute paints with windex or alcohol-based products.
6. Have an air compressor that has a water-trap, or tank. It reduces the water condensation in your air hose preventing water from mixing with paint.
7. Have a small tray to hold small parting when disassembling the airbrush for cleaning. I don't want to lose any parts.