

Plein Air Painting with Acrylics

FOUR MAIN STEPS:

Steps from: <https://blog.mitchalbala.com/the-approach-four-essential-steps-to-plein-air-painting/>, with my own comments

1. Site Selection

- Find a scene that you enjoy. Don't be afraid to be selective, and spend time looking.
- Look for depth (foreground, midground, background) & look for contrasts. Think about whether it will translate well from 3D to 2D.

2. Compositional Thumbnail(s)

- Viewfinders and phone photos can be helpful. Draw/paint mini versions of your piece to test compositions.
- Artistic License - if moving something would improve composition, feel free to try it.

3. Underpainting

- *"This is a step that is overlooked.... However, skipping this step would imply that you have enough skill to do the following: place varying colors down on a white canvas, of the correct value, hue, and intensity, all in a single stroke.... It's extraordinarily difficult for all but the most seasoned painters to consider composition, drawing and value at the same time they are thinking about color.... What's more, the pigment color you choose for the underpainting can be the first step toward a color strategy."* - Mitchell Abala
- Toned Canvas - an alternative. Working on a flat neutral color (grey, brown, tan) can also help you judge color and values more accurately, as well as prevent white spots that poke through as you paint.

4. Paint Handling and Color Application

- Work in layers - as your early layers dry, you can create additional depth with later layers
- Use less-watered down, more opaque paint to add background in on top of your objects (ex: painting light blue marks on top of a solid green tree will make it look like the sky is peeking through)
- Don't "overwork" the painting - sometimes a loose, impressionistic style can be the most engaging, and attempting to produce a hyper-realistic detailed piece can be detrimental

HELPFUL TIPS:

- **Bring a friend!** Even having a friend nearby reading a book can reduce the pressure of getting the painting "just right," and help you relax and enjoy the experience outside.
- Experiment with **quicker, loose paintings** (think: gesture figure paintings from class), before moving on to longer, more thoroughly developed paintings.
- Keep your canvas **out of the direct sun** (can skew color, and dry paint way too fast).
- Wear **sunscreen** and **bug-spray** if needed
- **Bring your painting into focus slowly.** Begin with big shapes and backgrounds, and save the highlights and the details for last. Or, as Andrew Tischler puts it, **"Start loose, and then refine."**
- **Cools recede, warms advance** - Distant objects are typically cooler, and more neutral (think: purple mountain majesties), while closer objects are often warmer and more saturated.

Some of this content was sourced from these additional websites:

<https://www.artistsnetwork.com/art-mediums/oil-painting/11-tips-for-painting-en-plein-air/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frGJEjKff7Y> - helpful plein air painting video by Andrew Tischler