

BASIC MINIATURE PAINTING

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Why paint a miniature?

-It is fun and relaxing.

-Makes a great group activity.

-It is easy to learn.

Have you ever colored in a coloring book? If so, remember how much fun that is?

Well, imagine a coloring book in 3-D! To me, that is the most descriptive way that I can describe miniature painting. 3-D coloring with some technique and supplies involved.

In this class, we will be discussing all the basics of miniature painting from preparation to sealing. Please feel free to ask any questions along the way. No question is a stupid question and chances are, someone else has the same question that you do.

Now let's have some fun!

What do I need to start painting and where do I get these items?

- ❖ Cup filled about halfway with water (paper or plastic, maybe even a jar)
- ❖ Paper towel (used for taking excess water and paint off of a brush)
- ❖ Paint brushes (water color brushes can be used in sizes 2, 1, 0, and 000 and dry brushes) - Can be purchased at Hobby Lobby, Games Workshop, Reaper, Amazon.com, and Michael's.
Brands I like to use- Windsor and Newton series 7 and Reaper.
- ❖ Paint Palette- A Styrofoam paper plate can be used, there are also paint palettes in plastic and ceramic. (Can be purchased at Hobby Lobby, Michael's, Games Workshop, and Reaper)

Wet Palette- Can be purchased at Michael's and Hobby Lobby. The best brand is Masterson's and consists of a thin sponge and palette paper with a plastic box/case. Palette paper refills can also be purchased.

A wet palette can also be made by taking a Styrofoam plate, wet a paper towel or sponge and put a piece of parchment paper on top.

- ❖ A desk lamp (for best results use a **daylight bulb** or use an **Ottlite** lamp which has high definition day lighting) Available at any housewares store such as Bed Bath and Beyond. Ottlites are available from Michael's, Hobby Lobby, and Amazon.com.
- ❖ Glue- such as Zap-A-Gap (available at Reaper, Games Workshop and all craft stores)
- ❖ An X-acto knife (or a hobby/ craft knife) this is used primarily in the preparation process.
- ❖ A set of small files. (diamond files work best) They are available at Reaper and Games Workshop.
- ❖ Small cutters (i.e. - small wire cutters) available at hobby stores and home depot.
- ❖ Spray-on and/or brush-on primer. Available from Reaper, Games Workshop, and craft stores and other stores such as Home Depot.
Spray on brand I like to use- Tamiya, Brush-on brand- Reaper.
- ❖ Spray-on and/or brush-on sealer. (Available at Reaper and Games Workshop)
Spray on sealer I like to use- Testor's Dullcoate, Brush-on brand- Reaper (for matte) and Games Workshop in "ardcoat" (for high gloss)
- ❖ Acrylic Paints- Available from Reaper, Games Workshop, Privateer Press, and Coolminiornot.com.
- ❖ A brush cleaner- such as "Mona Lisa Brush soap" or "The Masters" brush cleaner and preserver. Available at Michael's and Hobby Lobby.
- ❖ A dropper bottle. (Used for watering down the paints) can be purchased through Reaper and craft stores.

How do I prepare the miniature for painting?

When you first take the miniature out of the package, take a look at the miniature. You might notice that there is a little extra metal in places that it doesn't belong or that there are lines in certain places. This does not mean that there are any defects on your miniature. It just naturally happens while the miniature is being manufactured. The thin excess metal that is usually located by the arms, legs or any other part with a small opening is called "flash". The excess metal that is usually in place to hold a part that is to be detached and glued on to the miniature is called "sprue". The lines that you will see in certain places on the miniature are called "mold lines". Fortunately, in most cases flash, sprue and mold lines are easy to remove using cutters, an X-acto, and files.



Photos obtained from Google image search.

Removal of sprue can usually be done with cutters and smoothed out with files. Be careful not to cut or file out details. Removal of flash and mold lines can be done with a hobby/ X-acto knife and then smoothed out with files. Always be gentle when using these tools, let them do their job and most importantly remember to **be safe**. When using any sharp object like an X-acto knife, make sure you cut **away** from yourself to prevent injury.

Sometimes, when we assemble a miniature, there also might be some “pitting” (small holes which can accidentally occur from the casting process) or gaps where a piece is attached such as an arm. Those gaps and small holes can be filled with milliput or green stuff. I find that I like the gray/yellow milliput best because it is easy to use and easy to shape with water and brush. When it comes to filling gaps, always use less putty than you think you will need so that you can just add as needed and in the end waste less. Mix the milliput together with your fingers, roll into small ball shapes and apply with your hobby knife. Shape the putty to fill the gap as desired, use water and a flat shaped brush to smooth it out the area until it is as flush and even as you can get it.

Now that we have removed the mold lines and filled the gaps where needed, we can prime the miniature.



Photos obtained through Google Image Search.

Primers come in different colors and come in spray-on or brush-on. The colors of primer most often used in miniature painting are white and black. As a beginner, the safest bet is to use white primer since you will also be spending a lot of time experimenting with different colors.

When priming a miniature with spray primer, always be sure to work in a well-ventilated area such as a garage or in some other area outside like a patio. Since spray paint can get all over, it is best to also make sure that you cover everything in the surrounding areas and prime the miniatures in a medium- large sized, open box. Once you have a priming area set up, take your miniature, shake the spray can well, and spray in light even coats 8-12 inches away from the miniature. The best way to spray is in short strokes because if you accidentally spray for too long on the miniature, it will become “gunky” and take away from the miniature’s detail.

After you have primed the miniature, I find that is a good time to double check and make sure that all mold lines are minimal and everything is even. The primer can make whatever you missed stand out. If for example, you miss a mold line and don’t fix it during the preparation and priming process, then it will stand out in the paint.

Ok, I’m ready to paint, what do I do next?

If you have not already, now is a good time to take a look at your miniature and envision in your head how you want it to look. This is your masterpiece so don’t be afraid to be creative. Think about the setting of where your miniature would be (in a forest, in tundra, in a desert, etc.). Think about what color you envision the hair color, what colors you want to use for the clothes, the accessories, the weapons, etc.

Once you have all that planned out, it is time to get started on base coating. Set up your palette and put a drop of paint in the color of your choice. It is very important to water down the paints so that it brushes smooth and even onto the miniature. The typical ratio is one drop of water to one drop of paint and being sure to mix well. Flow improver can be mixed into the paint and used as well for added smoothness. When base coating, it is much better to brush on 2 or 3 coats of color, than one thick coat because the results will come out much better. While painting, do your best to stay within the area (same idea as “stay within the lines” when coloring), but if you accidentally go outside the area, not to worry because you can always paint over it.

Two things to keep in mind: only use a little paint at a time on the brush and NEVER, EVER leave your brush in your water cup because it will damage the brush bristles!

When you finish base coating, you are possibly going to want to apply a wash as an easy way to put in shadowing. You can also paint in shadowing if you like, but washes are

the easiest way to go especially if it is a piece that will be used for gaming. Washes have a thinner consistency than paint so that it can easily just fill in the recesses on the miniature. Washes can be purchased from Reaper and Games Workshop. The main colors that you would need to start off with are brown, black, and flesh wash.

You can use different washes with different colors. For example, blue wash looks great on silver armor, brown wash is good to use for a warm shadowing effect on a cream or beige colored shirt, brown wash is also good as a warm shadowing for red or orange. You can also mix wash colors for different effects. Always feel free to experiment and have fun with colors. When applying the wash, just concentrate on getting the recesses, pleats in a cloak, in chainmail, etc. If you look at the picture below of the Dark Sword female warrior that I painted table top gaming quality for a client, a brown wash was applied to the red cloak and gold chest armor to create good shadowing. Notice how the red stands out in the highlighted areas and how well the gold circles stand out in the chest armor.



Dark Sword Female Warrior, photo by Lyn Stahl. Painted by Lyn Stahl.

Now that we have base coated and applied the washes, it is time to start highlighting. Before you start highlighting, take a look at the miniature and think about where light would realistically shine on the figure. Does the miniature look like it is facing toward light such as sunlight? What direction is your figure standing in? Where are all the raised areas on the figure? These are all things to consider when planning highlighting. I believe that highlighting is the one aspect of miniature painting that requires the most

amount of practice. There are 2 types of techniques for highlighting: brush in highlights and dry brushing. Dry brushing is usually easiest to use when highlighting most hair, fur, feathers, rock, chainmail, bunched up pleats on a cloak, and sculpted grass. Brush in highlighting is usually best for everything else such as a dress or other smooth material, pants, shirt, face, eyes, hair, weapons, etc. The highlighting is what makes everything stand out on your miniature.



Photo obtained through a Google Image search.

Take a look at the picture above of the man's face. Notice that there are parts of the face that are highlighted and features such as the nose and cheek bones stand out because they are the raised areas of the face. As you can see, highlighting will add definition and dimension to your figure.

Dry Brushing

Dry brushing is a very easy technique to learn and it takes practice as there is brush control involved. Here's how to dry brush:

- ❖ Take a little paint onto your dry brush.
- ❖ Gently take off approximately 90% of the paint on the brush by rubbing it onto your paper towel. (Until there is almost no paint left on the brush)
- ❖ With a feather touch of the brush, gently go over the raised areas. You will have better results if you do light coats and layer on the dry brush highlights little by little.

Brush on Highlights/ Blending

Brush on highlighting is where you paint in the highlights. For example, when you look at the cloak on the female warrior that I painted, you see that there is dark red on the inner folds and then bright red on the raised parts of the cloak. The picture I took is actually pretty dark so you actually cannot see that the cloak is highlighted up to a red/orange. Not counting the primer, there is a total of 6 colors layered on for the highlighting. When painting in the highlights, it is best to water down the paint a little more than you would for a basecoat (about the same consistency as a wash.) The same

applies that you will have better results if you layer the paint on little by little and blending as you go along. Since acrylic paints dry quickly, you can add drying retarder to the paint to give you more time in between layers so that you can blend them better. Reaper makes a very good drying retarder that you can purchase. As you paint in the layers of highlight, you would typically want to make your highlighting area smaller and smaller and the colors lighter and lighter as you go toward the highest part of the raised area (basically just like the highlighted face, the colors are lightest at the tip of the cheek bone).

What is another way that I can make features on my miniature stand out?

There is a technique called lining. This is where your 000 brush will come in handy aside from using it for painting eyes and other really small details. There are liner colors that Reaper makes that you can use or you can just use a dark brown color or a chestnut brown in most cases depending on the piece and what colors you are using. Lining is a technique that also requires practice with brush control and a steady hand, but when done right can make a world of difference.



Lyn Stahl. Painted by Lyn Stahl.

Dark Sword Blue Dragon. Photo by

In this picture above of the dragon, you will see that I used liner for the claws. As you can see liner can show where there is a separation between two parts. In this case there is a separation between the scales on the feet and hands and the claws. The lining also helps the claws stand out better. Lining is also a great technique to make facial

features on the miniature stand out and make the face much more expressive, especially the eyes!

Now that I am done painting, what is the best way to seal the miniature?

Just like when priming, you want to do it in a well-ventilated area and you want to keep the spray 8-12 inches from the miniature. However, keep in mind that sealing tones down some of your highlighting especially with brush on sealer. Also sealing can be done in between coats (i.e.- between base coating and highlighting) just in case a mistake is made while highlighting, then all you have to worry about is removing just that mistake and not all the paint below it.

Are there any websites that I can visit to get more ideas and learn more?

Absolutely! Here is a list of some sites to visit to start you off:

- ❖ www.Coolminiornot.com
- ❖ www.Reapermini.com- Reaper has a forum as well.
- ❖ <http://chestofcolors.com/>
- ❖ [http://wamp-forum.com/wiki/index.php/Main Page](http://wamp-forum.com/wiki/index.php/Main_Page)
- ❖ www.dndlead.com