

5 top tips for new artists in pastel

By Margaret Shaw



Pastels – Student Quality v's Artist Quality

Student Quality pastels such as Inscribe, Faber Castel Studio and Jacksons Square soft pastels are bought in sets which means that you can end up with colours you never use. Student quality pastels are considerably less expensive than artist quality and are good value for learning, experimenting, or sketching.

Artist Quality pastels can be bought in sets, but you can also buy individual pastels. If you buy a set, you only have to replace the used ones. They are expensive compared to student pastels but that can be offset against having pastel colours you never use. Or just buy the colours that you do use. Because of the quality you use less pastel when working. There are lots of different brands and most artists have a personal preference.

Paper Type

Paper needs to have some tooth to it to take pastel layers. There are several pastel papers and you'll find something that you prefer as time goes on (some are quite sandpaper like and can be wearing on the skin). It needs to be a decent weight (160gsm or 72 lbs plus) so if you get vigorous with the eraser you don't end up with a hole in the middle of the picture.

Paper Size

Most beginners start too small so A4 minimum.

Protect the finished artwork

To seal or not to seal? Is a matter of personal preference. Sealants can dull the picture. As a beginner cheap hairspray can be used. Sealant is to hold the pastel in place. You'll still be able to smudge the picture with sealant on it. Best protection is into a mount / frame behind glass or at least into a mount with something to protect the artwork.

Other Materials

You don't need to spend a fortune on the extras. A smooth board to work on – a piece of hardboard is fine. Instead of an easel something to lean the board on – a rolled up towel. Putty Rubber for erasing – can be bought for £1 at some outlets. Cotton buds for blending and lifting. Pastel or charcoal pencils for drawing and fine details– buy individual colours but start with a black and a white. Blending sticks from some outlets £2.00 for 4. A piece of kitchen foil tucked under the board to catch the dust. A ruler for those that can't draw straight lines (also useful for marking out a grid). Dry and damp rags for cleaning up (you and your work area). Hairspray to seal work.