



POFF STUDIO

# 7 Essential Tips for Oil Painting Success

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## *Tip One*

Practice drawing skills.

All good paintings start with good drawing fundamentals. Although painting is a different process than drawing, your painting will improve as your drawing ability grows. Make it a regular practice to use your sketchbook to record observations and plan your work. If you are not yet confident with your drawing skills, take a class online or in your community. Also try seeking out group drawing opportunities.



## *Tip Two*

Try toning your canvas to start.

Starting with a blank white canvas is generally intimidating while adding a transparent tone can give you a head start and unify subsequent paint layers. This underlayer is one time that thinning your paint with a solvent like OMS (odorless mineral spirits) is ok for application. Otherwise, OMS alone is not acceptable for applying subsequent layers as it is drying and can cause additional paint layers to crack.

### *Tip Three*

Oil paintings are built in layers.

Part of the beauty of oil painting is the translucent nature of many pigments and application methods that give the work depth and luminosity. As you proceed, consider how each layer might contribute to the next.

It's often wise to work from dark to light values and thin to thick. Keeping your dark areas thin and light areas thicker will build depth.



### *Tip Four*

Oil paints are often thinned with a medium like linseed oil or other paint quality plant oils. These improve the flow of the paint. Fast dry mediums like Gamblin's Galkyd or Winsor and Newton's Liquin perform the same purpose but reduce drying time.

Mediums are an option and not all artists use them as they reduce the texture of the paint and almost all add gloss. If you use them, thin the paint with no more than 25% of the medium to the paint to retain stability. Consider the pure paint you start with to be somewhat fat, using medium reduced by half with OMS (solvent) to be more fat, and pure medium mixed in with the paint as the fatest.

Save the pure medium for the final layers to avoid problems with paint adherence. Also, fat layers dry slower than leaner layers. Heavy layers of lean over fat can produce cracking.

## *Tip Five*

Try a limited palette of color.

As a beginning painter, I thought I needed to amass a large selection of colors, but in the last few years, I've found that limiting my palette has improved my color sense as my knowledge of what each color can do has expanded. These days, my favorites have become:

Titanium White

Cadmium Yellow Light

Cadmium Orange

Permanent Rose – Winsor & Newton

Dioxazine Purple

Olive Green - Gamblin

Burnt Umber

Ultramarine Blue

I occasionally add small amounts of Cadmium Red Light, Naples Yellow, Yellow Ochre, Pthalo Blue, Monochrome Tint Warm, or Cobalt Blue when the subject calls it. Also Chromium Black is a good shortcut when you are using a lot of black, but nice blacks can be mixed from Burnt Umber with the addition of Ultramarine Blue or Dioxazine Purple. You will develop your own favorites as you go along.

## *Tip six*

Blend if you will, but don't overdo it.

I love to use a large, inexpensive, synthetic brush for softening edges. Don't overdo the blending though. New painters may try to blend too much to make their subject look more real, but over-blending can make the painting look dull and lifeless.



## *Tip Seven*

Paint as much as you can and practice lifelong learning.

There is no substitute for experience. With time, you will develop knowledge of your materials and a muscle memory for the process. Continue to hone your skills by looking at lots of art and studying with professionals where you can.

I have heard some painters say that they don't look at other's art because they don't want it to influence their work. I disagree completely with that notion. As it is said, "Nothing good happens in a vacuum." Short of copying (which is only defensible for learning technique and not to present another's work as your own), we expand our ability through a ceaseless desire to be inspired and to learn from the success of others.

Best wishes to you on your journey! For more painting tips and inspiration, subscribe at [www.poffstudio.com](http://www.poffstudio.com).

Feeling like you don't know where to start or wish you had more confidence in your painting skills? Try my online course, "Jumpstart to Oil Painting Mastery" at [www.poffstudio.com/challenges](http://www.poffstudio.com/challenges).

