

# Paper for Watercolour painting

## A Few Thoughts on the types and choices

You can use any paper for painting, but, it's far better to use a paper especially made for watercolour painting.....because:

- They have unique surface textures which respond to a brush.
- They have absorbency characteristics which hold paint and respond well to the water content.

There are many types, makers, weights,sizes but they all have **TWO** things in common:

They are all finished with one of three types of surface texture,

- 1) Rough, Not (sometimes called cold-pressed) , and Hot Pressed.
- 2) They are all graded by weight.

### Surfaces.

**Rough:** Has a pronounced texture, a coarse surface (known as "tooth"). It is ideal for strong broadly painted washes, textured lines and dry brush work. It is NOT suitable for detailed work, pen and ink or soft pencil.

**Not (cold pressed):** Has less tooth, a semi-rough surface for medium grain which accepts washes without too much absorption. It is the paper most commonly used by amateurs and professionals alike.

**Hot Pressed:** Is very smooth (but don't confuse it with cartridge paper) It has very little tooth and is ideal for very detailed work, pencil and wash, botanical work and fine brush work. Paint runs very quickly on this paper so you have to know what you are doing!

### Weight.

Until relatively recently the weight of a paper came from how much a ream (480sheets) of it weighed (useful trivia fact!). But now it's the weight of a square metre of a single sheet of paper given in grammes (gsm) So that's just confusing isn't it!

What you need to know is that the heaviest paper in common use is 330lb (or 638gsm).

The average for watercolour pads in use is 140lb (or 300gsm).

The advantage of heavier weighted paper is that you probably don't need to stretch them which avoids hassle if you like your watercolour wet!

You can use the paper straight out of the pack or pad and it won't cockle as much as a thin paper. If you are doing something really special it's probably best to stretch it anyway.

So what's this stretching I hear you say....

### Stretching:

Paper cockles as it gets wet and the thinner the paper the greater the buckling caused by the absorption of the water you apply. The pigment in the paint pools on the paper and it all gets really horrible. **Stretching avoids this.**

**METHOD:** Take your piece of paper, find a wooden board (ply is best) larger than your paper, some brown gummed paper (not parcel tape, not masking tape not sellotape) and fill a large sink or bath with water (cold).

Soak your paper in the bath/sink until it goes a bit transparent at the edges (about 5 minutes) and take it out holding it up to let the excess surface water drain away.

Lay it on your wooden board Whilst the paper was soaking you had cut 4 lengths of the brown gummed paper into 4 lengths greater than the sides of the paper.

Now lay the paper flat on the board , damp it down with an old towel and fix each edge of it to the board with the damped gummed paper. The gummed paper should be for the whole of each edge and a bit longer, and half on the paper and half on the board. If you try to economise and do say only a third of the gummed strip on the paper and two thirds on the board, the paper will pull away from the strip and make all your efforts pointless! Leave the board on its edge to dry naturally overnight. Next day the paper will be as flat as a pancake and an absolute dream to paint on. The bonus being It will not cockle when you apply your washed colour.

### **Back to the Paper:**

Papers can be bought loose, in pads or in blocks.

Blocks come in various sizes and are fixed on all four sides which means they do not cockle and are easy to use if you are on your travels and painting "*en plain air*" which is painter-speak for outdoors. You do however pay a premium for this.

Loose paper is best used in the studio and will work out cheaper than the equivalent paper made up into pads or blocks.

Finest quality and hand-made papers are usually loose but are the Rolls Royce of papers and it is best to know what you are doing with them before you make the investment.

Experiment with papers, coloured paper, heavyweights, cotton rich, handmade....etc etc.

As with paints you will settle eventually on a paper that suits you and your style, and as with paints and brushes the better you know the inherent qualities the more fun you will have in pursuing your hobby and will begin to produce the results you are happy with.

[grahamthewart.uk](http://grahamthewart.uk)

