



Tip #133

Testing Your Paints

Whether you're a newcomer to watercolor an old hand trying new things (or overwhelmed by all the NEW offerings), testing our paints is a great exercise. Put them through their paces! See what they're capable of, how they work on different papers, whether they stain or granulate, how transparent they are, how many colors you can mix with them...

I guarantee you'll be much more prepared to grab just the color or pigment you want for the effect you're after!

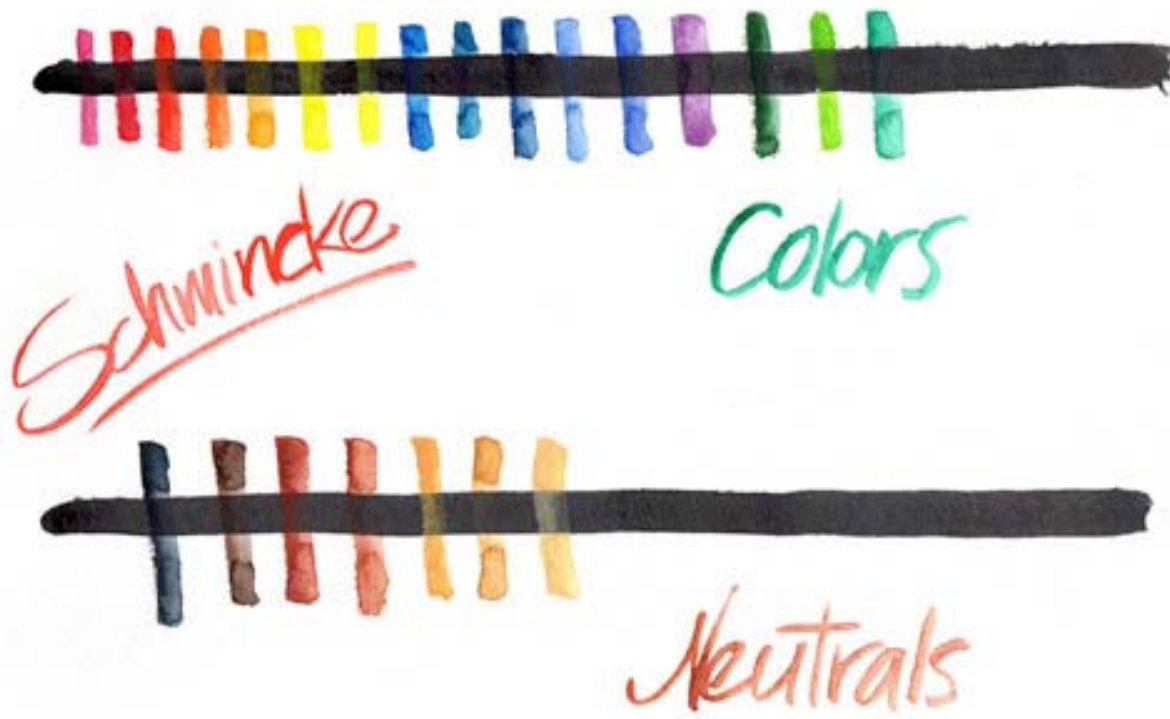
133-1

Take a peek at the video on mixing greens I did for Danny Gregory's "Sketchbook Skool"! (http://youtu.be/FRj2XHS4OIk?list=UU-0C-TE8q6f-AM_GadOvo7A) And of course you can do that kind of testing with ANY color!

Find color swatches boring? Make a graphic for yourself using a tree with different colored leaves, make a row of colored fruits or balloons or butterflies, make a basketweave of color as one of my students did – it was gorgeous! Just be sure to label the colors you're using so you remember!



132-2



I've shared this image before in a variety of places, but it's great exercise for finding out just how transparent the colors you have really are. You can check with the manufacturer's webpage of course, but I've found that once in a while they aren't that accurate – and I like my own hands-on tests, anyway.

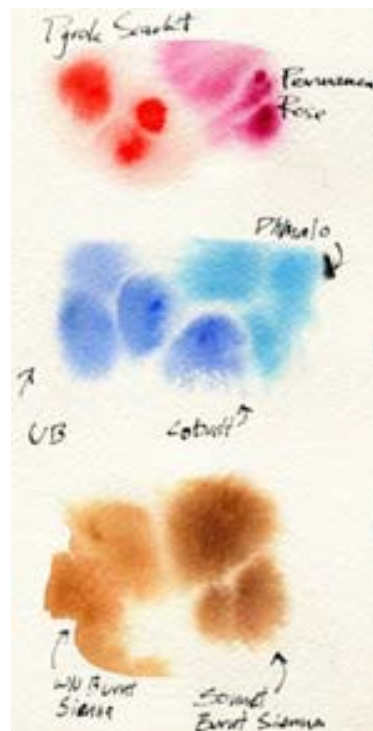
Make a bar of black ink – India or one of the Acrylic inks so you know it won't lift, and let it dry thoroughly. Then paint a line of each of your colors over it and let those dry as well. You may be surprised! (Some artists want all transparent colors but personally I prefer variety – you may, too.)

This particular color test was on Schmincke paints, but you can do the same kind of test not only with whatever brand you have, but with watercolor pencils or sticks as well.

Compare brands using the same basic color, too – it's amazing how different they may be. Quinacridone Red from Daniel Smith is cool, but feels warm from Winsor & Newton.

133-3

Test how your colors disperse in water. Make a rectangle of clear water and drop paint into it to see what it does. You can get some delightful effects that way.



133-4

See how different your pan colors are if you pre-wet them. First, touch the dry pan with your wet brush and make a stroke. Often, it's pretty wimpy! Now, spray with water and let it set for 10-30 seconds, then make that stroke again. LOTS more intense, yes?

And DO explore the granulating colors, like Manganese Blue Hue, Ultramarine Blue, Lunar or Mars Black, Magnesium Brown, Lunar Blue and others. Lovely textures...and remember they often show up better on rougher papers as the granules settle into the tiny valleys.



Take a peek at Mary Coryell-Martin's blog post on the subject of granulating colors, located at <http://expeditionaryart.com/blog/2013/07/from-the-field-to-the-studio/>. (She's the manufacturer of the fun little Pocket Palette I've enjoyed playing with, so DO check her web page!)

And yes, of course testing can get expensive! Daniel Smith offers pages of dots of their colors to play with ... tiny mounds of tried paint you can re-wet and explore.

But you can also simply test the colors you already have on hand – ones you've bought in tubes, ones that came in whatever little set you may have.

Get to know your tools and they'll serve you well. (And of course watercolor will STILL sneak up on you and surprise you sometimes – that's part of the fun!)

I'd love to have you visit my newly re-born artist's blog at <http://cathyjohnsonart.blogspot.com>, my Etsy store at <http://www.etsy.com/shop/CathyJohnsonArt> where I'll be offering some of the demos from my classes, my catalog at <http://www.cathyjohnson.info/catalog.html> where you can find instructional CDs and downloads for artists, or drop by for a visit on Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/cathy.johnson1>! Check out my YouTube videos for lots more art tutorials at <http://www.youtube.com/user/KateJosTube>.