

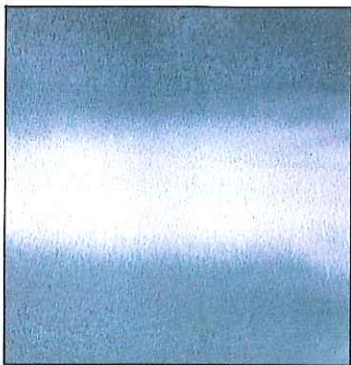
GRADATIONS

Gradations occur wherever there is a gradual transition from light to shadow or from one color to another. It is important to know how to render subtle gradations, because they occur in most painting subjects — portraits and figures, still lifes (in the rounded forms of vases, fruits, vegetables, and softly folded drapery) and in skies, where one color fades gradually into another.

In water-based media (ink, watercolor, and acrylic used as watercolor) gradations can be rendered by means of a graded wash. In opaque painting, they are handled by “knitting” together the various tones or colors, using carefully controlled brushwork.

Watercolor • Inks • Gouache

With water-based media, smooth gradations are achieved by working WET-IN-WET.



Gradations • Watercolor

Here the artist wanted to paint a soft highlight on a metal object. He started by applying two strips of Payne's gray on damp paper, allowing them almost to touch. Then he ran a clean, soft, just-damp brush between the two bands to lift off some color and soften the edges between them.

Oil

The soft, pliant consistency of oils and their prolonged drying time, mean that you can brush and re-brush the tones or colors together to achieve almost imperceptible gradations. Examples of wonderfully subtle gradations can be found in the works of Titian (c 1487-1576), Rubens (1577-1640) and Vermeer (1632-75).

Alternatively, colors can be roughly blended together so that the brushstrokes are more evident: this achieves a more lively effect (see BLENDING).



Gradations • Oil

1 Analyze the tones of the graded area very carefully and prepare on your palette a color mixture for each change in tone. Begin the gradation by painting the darkest tone. Here the artist uses a mixture of sap green and ivory black, and blocks in the darkest tone with a No. 4 flat bristle brush. The color is applied beyond the point where the color turns lighter, so that it can be blended with the next color.



2 With a clean brush, the artist mixes a slightly lighter color by adding a touch of titanium white to the first mixture. He applies this tone adjacent to the first one, then fuses the two tones by moving the brush in a zigzag manner. This drags the lighter color into the darker, and the darker color into the lighter one, creating an even gradation between the two tones.



3 The artist continues in this manner, adding more white to each successive band of color until he reaches the lightest tone.



4 The finished effect. Notice the subtle, even gradation from the dark area at the bottom to the light area at the top. Keeping the length and direction of the brushstrokes consistent over the whole area helps to achieve this effect.

Acrylic

Because acrylic dries so much more quickly than oil, subtle gradations are trickier to achieve. If you work quickly, however, you can scumble two colors into one another while they are still wet, using quick, scrubbing brushstrokes (see SCUMBLING). Rather than a smooth, even gradation, scumbling produces a more casual, exciting blend, typical of this modern medium.

To obtain a smoother gradation, you can add acrylic medium to the paint. This gives it a consistency more like oil and prolongs the drying time. Adding retarder will slow down the drying process still further.

GRADED WASH

In watercolor and other water-based media, the purpose of a graded wash is to create an area of color that moves gradually from dark to light, from light to dark, or from one color to another. The method of application is exactly the same as for a **FLAT WASH**, except that with each successive stroke, the brush carries more water and less pigment (or vice versa if you are working from light to dark).

It takes a little practice to achieve a smooth transition in tone with no striations; the secret is to apply a sufficient weight of paint and water so that the excess flows, very gently, down the surface of the paper and merges with the next brushstroke. When the bottom of the paper is reached, the excess paint should be lifted off, using a clean, dry brush.

As with all fluid washes, make sure to mix up plenty of paint so that there is no danger of running out of color halfway through. If you are gradating from dark to light you will also need an ample supply of clean water.

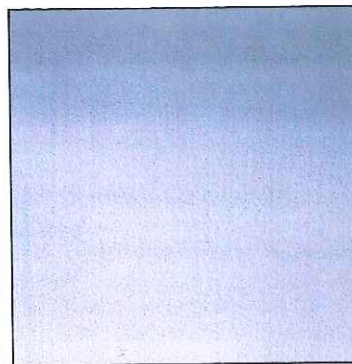
Graded washes are extremely useful, especially when painting landscapes and figures which contain soft edges and gently merging areas. In skies, for example, where the color is most intense at the zenith and fades gradually toward the horizon, a graded wash will render this effect with great economy of effort.

Acrylic

When heavily diluted with water, acrylic paints can be used in the same way as watercolors can. When laying a graded wash in acrylics, add a little matte medium to your jar of clean water. This will not affect the color, but it lengthens the drying time of the paint, making the gradation easier to control.

Watercolor

Watercolor washes always dry lighter than they appear when wet, so remember to take this into account when mixing your colors. Only with experience will you be able to judge how light an area will be when dry.

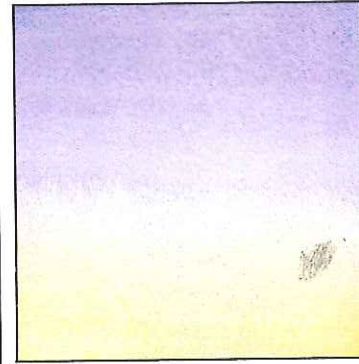


Watercolor

Be sure to mix up plenty of paint, especially if you are covering a large area. Use a large, soft brush or a sponge to dampen the paper, which should be stretched and taped firmly to the board. Make sure the board is tilted at a slight angle to enable the wash to flow freely down the paper.

Load a brush with paint at full strength and lay a line of color across the top of the paper, taking care not to lift the brush until you reach the end of the stroke. Allow the color to spread and even out. Working quickly, before the first stripe dries, add a little more water to the paint on your palette. Then lay a band of this slightly lighter color directly beneath the first one and slightly overlapping it.

Continue working in broad sweeps of color. To achieve a graded effect, add water to the paint in increasing quantities with each successive band of color. Always allow the lines of paint to blend into each other.



Grading two colors

You can also grade one color into another, which in effect involves applying two graded washes. Here the artist began with a graded wash of cobalt blue, tapering it down almost to pure water halfway down the paper. When the blue wash was dry, he turned the board upside down and worked a graded wash of lemon yellow down toward the blue wash, again tapering it down almost to pure water.

GRANULATED WASHES

In watercolor painting, certain pigments have a tendency to separate out when mixed with others in a wash and allowed to dry undisturbed. This separation is caused by the different physical qualities of the pigments — the earth colors for example, are coarser by nature than most other colors. As the wash dries, tiny granules of the coarse pigment floating in the water settle on the raised tooth of the paper, and the result is an area of flat color with a natural granular texture which can be used to great effect in a painting. For example, a mixture of burnt sienna and ultramarine creates a very attractive gray which dries with a subtle granular pattern. This makes it a favorite mixture for painting skies, because this pattern gives hints of the texture within clouds.

Other pigments which granulate in this way when mixed with other colors include yellow ocher, burnt umber, manganese blue, cobalt blue, and ultramarine. You could use these colors when painting buildings, allowing the granular texture to indicate the pitted texture of stone. Manganese blue is often used for painting the shadows in snow scenes: the granular nature of this color resembles the powdery appearance of new-fallen snow.



Granulated washes • Watercolor

In this example, a strong, fluid wash of ultramarine was flooded onto a piece of Bockingford 140lb paper, followed by a wash of burnt sienna. The two colors were allowed to merge wet-in-wet and then the paper was left to dry flat. It is important not to disturb the wash while it is drying. In this close-up, you can see the attractive grainy texture that forms; this effect is unique to watercolor, and is highly atmospheric when used in skies and landscapes.