

# Care of artist's paint brushes

## TEACHING ART & DESIGN

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Take great care of all paint brushes. This will prolong their life and give you better tools to work with. You will probably come across ones that have not been looked after and you will see what I mean. Good brushes can be expensive to buy and whilst no brush will last for ever, you should make the best use of them.

1. Always clean brushes **thoroughly** after use. Water colour and acrylic brushes should be washed in **clean** water. Oil-painting brushes should be washed in **clean** white spirit and then rinsed in hot soapy water.
2. Take particular care to **remove as much paint as possible from under the metal ferrule** (where the hairs of the brush are held together) by gently bending the hairs (whilst in the water or white spirit) so as to squeeze the paint out from under the ferrule. Take care that all the hairs are bent the same way otherwise the hairs may 'spread' apart from each other.
3. Always use the right brush for the type of paint you are using: water-colour brushes with water colours, acrylic brushes with acrylic paint and oil-painting brushes with oil paints. Using the wrong type of paint with a brush will in most cases ruin it for its intended purpose. If you do need, for example, to use a fine water-colour brush for fine detail with acrylics or oils, great care must be taken to **thoroughly** clean the brush afterwards.
4. Never leave an acrylic brush with paint on it if you are not actually using it. Acrylic paint dries quickly and a brush left this way can easily become ruined since acrylic paint cannot be re-softened once it is dry.
5. Please note that the hairs of a brush may become stained by the paint, particularly acrylic brushes. This is unavoidable and does not affect the brush to any great extent as long as the actual paint is removed.
6. After cleaning a water-colour brush make sure that the hairs of the brush are straightened by shaping it carefully with your fingers.
7. **Never leave brushes standing in water.** It very quickly bends the hairs of water-colour brushes in particular and ruins the shape of the brush. It also removes the varnish from the handle and makes them more likely to fall apart later.
8. Take care if replacing brushes in storage boxes. Make sure the hairs are not bent over otherwise they will remain in that shape as they dry out.

A little care will save a lot of ruined brushes!

**Andrew Newland**