

## How to correct mistakes in watercolor

Watercolor is one of the most beautiful mediums on the market. Since we don't live in a perfect world, we don't have a perfect medium either. The only problem with watercolor is the difficulty to correct or patch a mistake. In general terms, it is uncommon to completely correct something that goes wrong with watercolor as far as overlapping or removing paint. Here I will give you a few techniques that will greatly help you correct some of the problems.

### Removing paint or regaining white paper with a sponge or oil brush

I was unhappy with the fluffy part of these clouds so I decided to merge them more into the sky and change their forms.



Step 1. Wet the area you intend to correct with a fine mist bottle. Wait a couple of minutes for the paper to absorb the water.



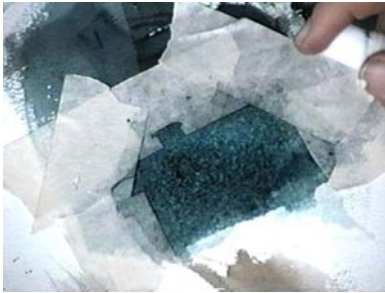
Step 2. Rub the paint off using an oil brush in a circular motion until you're satisfied with the result. A sponge can be used if a specific area doesn't have to be corrected. In between this procedure constantly suck up unwanted pigment with a paper towel.



Final result

## How to remove paint where straight lines are present

There may be times when unwanted paint may invade an area where you intended to add a man-made structure such as a barn or a chapel. To regain this image you can place masking tape next to the straight line. This will also work if you intend to correct something that is not straight edged. In which case, you would have to cut out the form by using a knife and carving out the silhouette with the masking tape already stuck on the paper. Here is an example where I decided to add a house once the area had been painted in.



Step 1. Place masking tape around the area you wish to wipe out. Make sure you press down firmly so the masking tape will not allow water to seep under it. Next, wet it with the fine mist bottle. Allow a minute for the paper to absorb the water.



Step 2. Rub out the unwanted pigment with a clean oil brush. Remove what you can without ruining the paper.



Step 3. During this procedure constantly wipe up the residue of loose paint so it won't go back into the paper. Do this in intervals between scrubbing.



Step 4. Watercolor paper contains a sizing on the surface that will be removed during this Rubbing off procedure. If you wish to regain control of your lines, you will need to replace the sizing with an opaque white. (not acrylics) Examples of this could be gouache, Windsor & Newton titanium white, etc



Step 5. Apply the white paint into the area with a watercolor brush. After doing this remove most of the opaque white leaving just a glaze of it. This will be sufficient to get back the control you need for your shapes. Also the white paint will help "bleach out" the unwanted residue of pigment.



Final result

## Using bleach to further remove unwanted pigment Example without bleach



Alizarin Crimson

Hookers Green

Prussian Blue and Windsor Yellow

I created three separate swatches(above). The first two are staining colors, thus difficult to remove. The third swatch contains a mixture of Prussian blue and Windsor yellow which is a perfect substitute for Hookers green. This is a very

good alternative if you intend to do corrections such as lifting off highlights. By substituting hookers green in your palette for Prussian blue you will anticipate any problems and be ready for them. An ounce of prevention equals a pound of cure. It is extremely difficult to remove Hookers green from the white paper. The above example is the outcome after having removed what I could with a sponge. If this residue is still existent on your white paper you may want to resort to using bleach to even remove more. Take into account that bleach will eat up the top layer of your paper and damage it. Also opaque white will need to be added to regain the sizing of the paper.



Use a sponge to remove unwanted paint.



Apply bleach with an eyedropper to a wet sponge.

### Example with bleach



(above) Here is a result after having applied bleach to water in the sponge

There is a product on the market called Windsor and Newton Lifting Preparation. If you intend to paint a difficult subject that might require redoing it, nothing is more frustrating after having done all the drawing and even most of the painting to only find out that you are unsatisfied with that subject. What you can do is after you do the pencil drawing, add a glaze of the lifting preparation to the bare white paper, allow it to dry and proceed with your painting. If you are unhappy, it will be much easier to remove the paint with the pre-layer of lifting preparation.



These colors were done on top of the lifting preparation. As you can see it will give you practically the same results as using bleach but without damaging the paper. So again, preplanning your work could save you a lot of hassles of unnecessary removal of paint.

## How to soften a hard edge once it's dried



Step 1. Wet the entire area you wish to soften. Wait a minute. Use a damp soft brush.



Step 2. Lightly rub off the edge. Constantly rinse and remove the excess water. Use a zigzag motion.



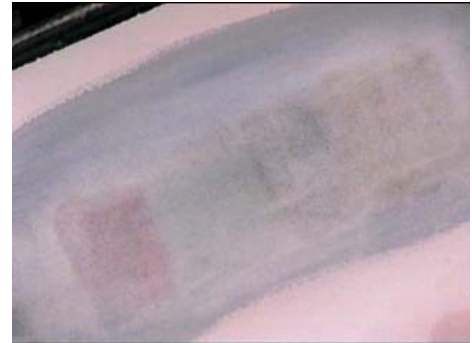
Final result

## Removing a layer of paint on top of another layer

Fortunately it is much easier to remove paint on top of paint. The reason for this is because the cotton fibers grasp the first layer of paint. This is important to know because in case you decide to remove a tree or something similar that's been painted on top of a blue sky, darker paint on lighter paint, you know you can easily get away with it. If that paint was done originally on bare white paper it will be more difficult. For this to work the way I described the underpainting must have dried first before the second later.



First I put in a wash with ultramarine blue. Then I let it dry. To prove my point that paint can be easily removed if placed on top of another layer of paint, I used alizarin crimson and hookers green which are very staining colors.



After pre-wetting the area, I lightly rubbed off the paint. As you can see, only a faint amount remained.

## How to correct a hole

Sometimes we are too caught up in the midst of the painting procedure and don't pay attention to the small details. In this case here's an example of masking fluid that was not placed correctly within its dimensions. After having removed it I noticed a section of white paper that I didn't want. This is more common than you think.



I accidentally ended up with this hole.



Step 1. Wet the area with the mist bottle.



Step 3. Soften the hard edge that appears Where the white paper meets the paint with Soft brush. Only diffuse that hard edge. Allow to dry.



Step 4. Rewet around the hole. The inner part of the hole should be dry. Add paint to the hole only. Some of the paint will go into the water and merge with the rest. This is fine.



Final Result

## How to fix a backrun

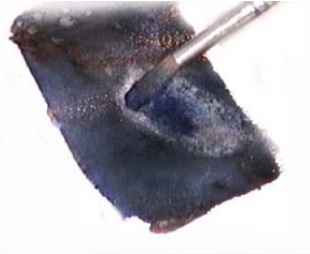
Follow the same procedure as above.



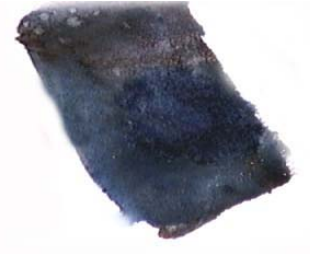
Step 1. Wet the area.



Step 2. With a soft brush. Remove the ring that forms around the backrun. Allow to dry.



Step 3. Wet the area around the spot. Apply paint only to inside of the hole.



The backrun is history

## Correct with Pastels. Why not?

I am a strong advocator of correcting a watercolor with pastels and call it mixed media. Some puritan watercolorists will raise their eyebrows at the notion and clear their throats. In my book the final outcome and whatever it takes to increase the beauty of a painting is what counts. Unless you intend to enter your art work in a watercolor contest, by all means use other mediums to enhance it. The transparency of the watercolor will hardly be committed because only a low percent of it will have pastels. Pastels is better than acrylics or gouache because it won't leave a shiny surface which cannot easily be concealed making the intention of the correction too obvious.

A word of caution, if you do use pastels, make sure you don't apply it to only one area. Even if other areas don't need it find an excuse to add it. That way the application of the opaque medium will look intentional rather than a patch up. Good reasons to use pastels would be to add some individual leaves to flat foliage, some strands of grass in the field, weeds and flowers will pick up a dull grassy foreground. A pastel pencil to make thin twigs and trees is much easier than using the rigger. The same applies to cracks in boards and rocks. You can even soften a hard edge by lightly applying the equivalent color in pastel of the surrounding. For example hard edged trees against a blue sky that were painted on dry paper can be softened by lightly glazing the matching blue color with a stick of pastel. This would be much more suitable than merely leaving that hard edge for the sake of purity.