



# Brush Strokes



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## A STUDY IN PRIMARY COLORS

**Learn the primaries and complements and how they work**—Try this exercise described below and learn more about color combining only 3 objects. Use only red, yellow and blue to make the colors you'll need. Dark colors can be made by combining all three or just two in the proper order mixing with less water and more paint. The secret to watercolor painting is always how much water and how much paint.

**How to Prepare:** First select your three objects. Make sure the objects have three different shapes and at least two different textures with some type of design or shape within one of them to help the composition. Draw the objects as thumbnails in order to get the proper proportion and location. Think composition and how they will appear. When the thumbnails are finished (at least 3), choose the best one for the painting.

*My first step is to decide what colors to use in this painting to get the desired effect. Since I can only use three colors, I have chosen Winsor Red, Winsor Yellow and Ultramarine Blue.*

*I'll paint a thin wash of Winsor Yellow over the whole thing, except I'll skip the tall vase. The reason is purple and yellow are complements, and if I paint a yellow wash over the vase, then when I add the purple, it will be muddy.*

*Why am I painting the thin wash of yellow as my first layer? I want the whole thing to glow so I'll start there.*

*When painting your composition on watercolor paper, be sure to test your colors on a piece of scrap watercolor paper. The thickness of the color is extremely important to this painting. The glazes on this piece of pottery on the right are very uneven, and using Ultramarine is perfect as it separates with a lot of water and I will be mixing it with the Winsor Yellow. Choosing Winsor Yellow instead of any of the other colors of yellow is because of its chemical Benzimidazole, giving it more power and more consistency while remaining transparent.*

Now that I have finished the painting, you have an idea of what you can do with just three colors. You can even make the darks darker by mixing the yellow with the blue to get a thick green and paint it over any of the purple colors that you want to change. Also you can use the three colors together (blue, red and yellow) in that order to get a rich brown tone wherever you need it.

This is a lesson you **MUST** do so that you will understand better how complements work. The lesson limits your color choices but in the end will help you more with choosing color. Mixing a flat green by using Ultramarine Blue and Winsor Yellow with very little water you can paint over any area and it becomes darker and less transparent. Now it's your turn to try something different. You may wish to go another step and use another yellow such as New Gamboge and another blue such as Winsor Blue.

*"Compliments on Complements."  
By Mary Baumgartner*

