

beginning to paint in oil

- Oil painting “remains standard because the majority of painters consider that its advantages outweigh its defects and that in scope and flexibility it surpasses [other media]” *
- Most of the paintings we know from the history of art were painted in oil.
- Painting pictures in oil was developing in the 15th and 16th centuries and became common early in the 17th century.
- It is typically painted on canvas stretched over wooden bars.
- It was originally painted on wood panels.
- Care must be taken to ensure permanence of oil paintings.
- Gesso must be painted on the support to prepare the surface for painting.
- Acrylic gesso has replaced traditional gesso in most contemporary painting.
- Oil painting often includes the addition of linseed oil, solvents and mediums.
- Toxicity is an issue with oil mainly because of the solvents.
- Turpentine was the solvent used originally but it is highly toxic. Some people object to its scent.
- Do not bring turpentine to the classroom.
- It’s best to work in a well-ventilated room, or outdoors.
- Painting “fat over lean” helps ensure that the paintings remain stable and long lasting.
- Traditionally artists mixed their own mediums using oil, varnish and solvent to add to the paint to adjust its consistency.
- Various ready-made mediums are available commercially.

- Some mediums are alkyd based and reduce the time required for the painting to set up. (Liquin, Galkyd)
- Oil paint does not really 'dry' as it is not wet. Oil does not evaporate. It oxidizes, or changes chemically. This takes up to six months depending on the pigment, the oil used or solvents used, the volume of paint and the environmental conditions.
- Oil paintings require a protective varnish after they are thoroughly 'dry'.
- New varnishes are greatly improved over earlier traditional products.
- It is important to remember that, when painting in oil, layers of paint must be less oily to start with and more oily as you build up. This is known as "fat over lean".
- A preliminary drawing can be made directly onto the support with charcoal or paint thinned with solvent (mineral spirits).
- Oil cannot be mixed with acrylic as they are incompatible but it is possible to make an under painting in acrylic as long as it is completely dry before the oil is applied.
- Oil painting can be done in one sitting or *Alla Prima* as the Impressionists tended to do. Or it can be done more slowly in many layers allowing each to set in between as the old master tended to do.
- Oil brushes are long-handled and either soft or stiff in a variety of shapes.

* Ralph Mayer, "The Artists Handbook of Materials and Techniques" (rev., 1991)