

MIKE ASHEY
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TIPS ON AIRBRUSHING



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TIPS ON AIRBRUSHING

Good airbrushing technique evolves as you gain experience using it. You will find that your finger and wrist control are important in achieving good results with an airbrush. The distance between the tip of the airbrush and the surface to be painted is also very important. If the tip gets too close to the surface too much paint will be applied resulting in paint runs. If the tip is too far away the paint will dry as it hits the surface of the model resulting in what is commonly called the orange peel effect as the painted surface will appear rough, almost as though fine sand particles were deposited onto the painted surface. The orange peel effect can also be caused by bad thinner, or the wrong thinner, old paint, painting in a high humidity environment (above 55-60 percent) or airbrushing with high pressure air. I usually set the pressure regulator on my air tank to 15psi –20psi for general airbrushing and for corners and around protrusions I reduce it to 10 psi.

Flat surfaces are the easiest to paint as you can simply sweep back and forth across the surface to get light coats. Push the air button before the paint tip hits the surface, continue across the surface and then after the airbrush tip leaves the surface release the air button. Do not try to achieve complete coverage in one airbrushing session. Usually two or three light, thin coats are better than one thick coat. For surfaces that have corners, protrusions or elevated surfaces, lower the air pressure and carefully apply light coats rotating the airbrush so that the paint emitting from the airbrush tip will hit the intended area head on. If the paint hits the surface at an angle you may get the orange peel effect in some tight areas due to over spray so be careful how you position the tip of the airbrush as you apply the paint.

If you are going to use more than one color during an airbrushing session you can clean out the airbrush and paint bottle connection point with a Q-Tip soaked with thinner and by running thinner through the airbrush to remove the paint from the inside areas. I can usually do this three or four times during an airbrush session before I need to actually take the airbrush apart to clean it and remove the dried paint which is clogging the tiny tip. After each airbrushing session take the time to disassemble your airbrush and clean all the parts by soaking them in thinner. Every few months I also soak the parts in lacquer just to be sure tiny paint residue is removed.

If you take care of your airbrush it will last for years. Also if your airbrush has seals, bearings and washers, which are usually Teflon, buy spares and replace them every six months.



Scale modelers usually stick to an airbrush type when they find one they feel comfortable with. I like a Badger 200 single action airbrush. The chrome and brass construction of this airbrush just feels comfortable in my hand. Whether you like to use enamels or water base paints keep an ample supply of thinner on hand. Always use the paint manufacturers recommended thinner. I also keep a supply of spare airbrush jars for mixing paint colors. The copper bee bees are dropped into the paint jar to agitate and mix the paint.



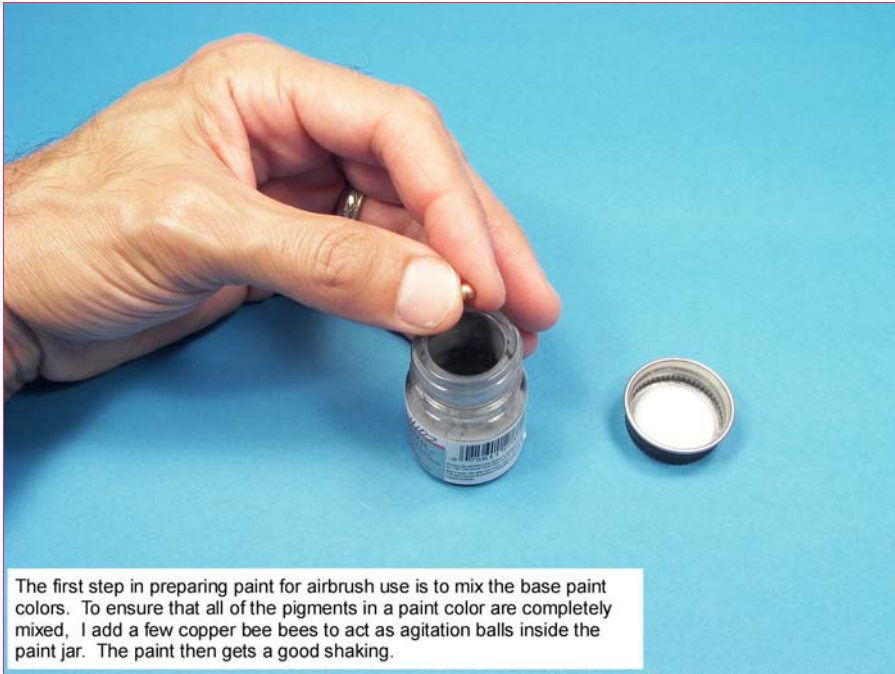
My air source for airbrushing is a CO2 tank with a pressure regulator. The regulator allows me to adjust the air pressure between 1 and 100. The air is always dry and its very quiet. This tank can last up to 2 years.

If you have a stove vent that pushes the air outside you can make a spray booth from a large cardboard box. To protect the vents filters I tape an air-conditioning filter over it. Clip on lights provide all the extra light necessary. I do recommend draping towels over the stove and the surrounding cabinets to protect them from over spray.



I like to have all my tools organized and in easy reach when I need them especially my airbrushing tools. Having multiple airbrush jars allows me to apply several colors in quick succession. I also keep a thin length of brass wire handy for clearing out clogs in the airbrush tip during painting. The droppers are used for the controlled application of thinner for paint mixing. I also use various diameters of pipe cleaners for airbrush cleaning which I recommend after each airbrush session.

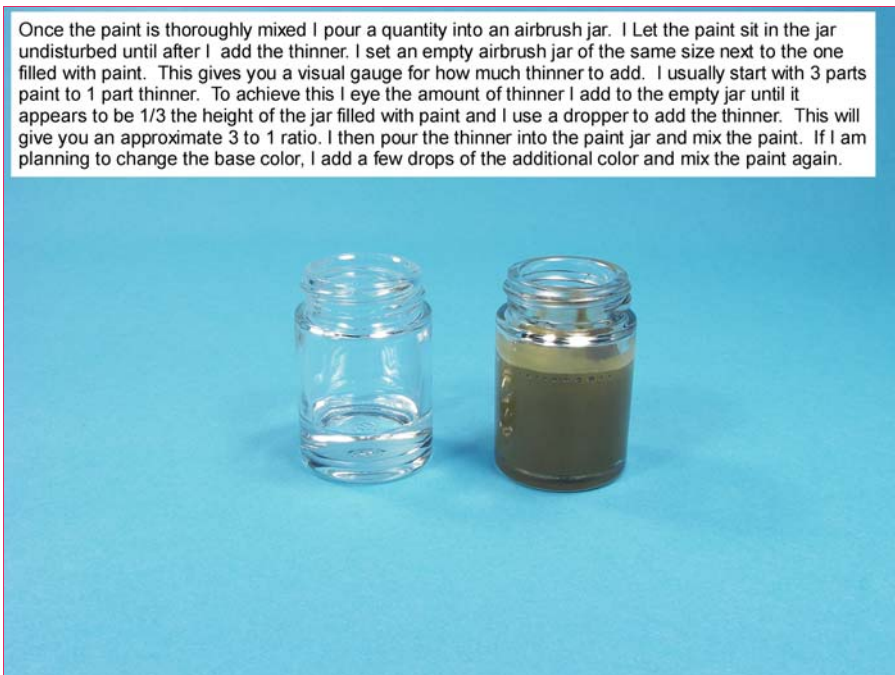




The first step in preparing paint for airbrush use is to mix the base paint colors. To ensure that all of the pigments in a paint color are completely mixed, I add a few copper bee bees to act as agitation balls inside the paint jar. The paint then gets a good shaking.



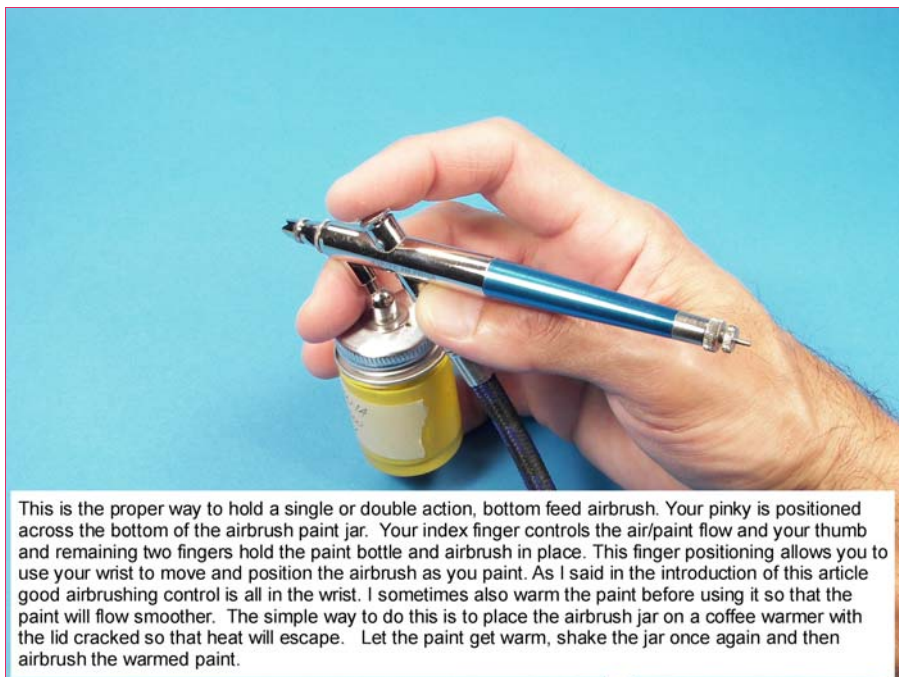
To ensure that the paint cap is properly sealed, always clean the inside cap area as well as the lip of the paint container. The paint will last longer and the caps will unscrew easily as dried paint will almost glue a cap to the top of the container. I follow this practice for every type of paint container.



Once the paint is thoroughly mixed I pour a quantity into an airbrush jar. I let the paint sit in the jar undisturbed until after I add the thinner. I set an empty airbrush jar of the same size next to the one filled with paint. This gives you a visual gauge for how much thinner to add. I usually start with 3 parts paint to 1 part thinner. To achieve this I eye the amount of thinner I add to the empty jar until it appears to be 1/3 the height of the jar filled with paint and I use a dropper to add the thinner. This will give you an approximate 3 to 1 ratio. I then pour the thinner into the paint jar and mix the paint. If I am planning to change the base color, I add a few drops of the additional color and mix the paint again.



I usually end up with about a dozen paint colors for a modeling project. Each jar also gets a label. When mixing paint colors I use a Q-Tip with the end cut off to add paint to a base color. I dip the tip into the paint and let a few drops fall into the base color at a time. I mix the paint to check the new color and then add more until I achieve the color I want. Remember that changing paint colors is a slow iterative process of adding small amounts of paint and then checking the new color.



This is the proper way to hold a single or double action, bottom feed airbrush. Your pinky is positioned across the bottom of the airbrush paint jar. Your index finger controls the air/paint flow and your thumb and remaining two fingers hold the paint bottle and airbrush in place. This finger positioning allows you to use your wrist to move and position the airbrush as you paint. As I said in the introduction of this article good airbrushing control is all in the wrist. I sometimes also warm the paint before using it so that the paint will flow smoother. The simple way to do this is to place the airbrush jar on a coffee warmer with the lid cracked so that heat will escape. Let the paint get warm, shake the jar once again and then airbrush the warmed paint.



Sometimes during airbrushing the tip can collect paint which will splatter all over your model. This usually happens when the paint is slightly thicker than it needs to be or when you are airbrushing large models that take some time to complete. I frequently check the tip and wipe it with a Q-Tip to remove these dangerous globs of paint before they create a disaster.

The best way to ensure that your airbrush will function properly and last for years is to keep it clean. If I am using several different colors during one session, I clean the base of the airbrush and the tip and then I run thinner through the entire airbrush to remove residual paint before using another color. When I am done with an airbrush session I completely clean the airbrush. I start by removing as much paint from the base of the airbrush using a Q-Tip as I can and then I take the airbrush apart and soak the parts in thinner.



To ensure that all of the paint is gone from the tiny airbrush tip I run a thin stiff brass wire through it. This usually removes the tiny paint particles that tend to cling to the inside area of the tiny tip. I also keep this length of wire handy during airbrush sessions to clear clogs in the tip.

A small diameter pipe cleaner soaked with thinner will remove residual paint from the airbrush tip where it screws into the airbrush body. Be careful not to force the pipe cleaner to far into the tip as it will distort the tiny tip opening.



The airbrush paint jar cap and the siphon tube also need to be cleaned. I soak these parts in thinner after each session and then I further clean them with a pipe cleaner soaked with thinner to help remove any residual paint.



Your airbrush should be taken apart after each painting session and the parts soaked in thinner. The individual parts will need to be cleaned, dried and then the airbrush can be reassembled.



About every six months I remove the two teflon washers from my airbrush and replace them with new ones. In addition I keep a small supply of new tips and needles on hand as they tend to wear out over time. This Badger 200 airbrush has lasted me almost 15 years.

