

Airbrushing Essentials

Equipment needed:

Airbrush
Paint cup – container to hold paint
Paint
Compressed Air (compressor or pressurised air can)
Paint thinners and cleaners
Materials to clean airbrush after use
Item to paint

How does it work?

Airbrushes are basically mini spray guns. Compressed air, either from a compressor or pressurised container, is fed into the airbrush. This air is directed through a small hole in the nozzle of the airbrush. As the air is forced through the airbrush it draws the paint from the cup and sprays it in a fine narrow mist. The nozzle in the tapered point of the airbrush focuses the spray and controls the amount of paint sprayed. The finished result is a surface covered by thin, smooth layers of paint. Because you never get in contact with the surface, airbrushing can create professional paint finishes on a wide range of surfaces.

Types of airbrushes:

Single Action

This refers to airbrushes on which the trigger controls only the air flow. The amount of colour is regulated by turning the needle adjustment screw. When the trigger is depressed, a pre-set amount of colour is sprayed.



Double Action

This refers to airbrushes on which the trigger controls both air and colour (down for air, back for colour). This style allows for varying line widths while spraying.



Internal mix

This indicates that air and paint mix inside the airbrush, producing a thoroughly atomised “fine” spray pattern.



External mix

This indicates that the air and paint mix outside the airbrush producing a larger, coarser spray pattern than the internal mix airbrush.



Gravity Feed

This refers to airbrushes with top mounted colour cups in which paint is fed into the airbrush by gravity.



Bottom Feed

This refers to airbrushes on which paint enters through the siphon tube or bottle attached to the bottom of the airbrush.



Nozzle configurations:

Airbrushes are available in varying needle/nozzle configurations,

Fine: best suited to spray thinner materials such as water colours, inks, dyes etc.

Medium: The most popular choice will spray airbrush ready paints and other properly reduced acrylics.

Heavy: Ideal for heavily pigmented paints such as enamels and varnish.

Air sources:

Canned Air: - Ideal for beginners or people who want to try airbrushing for the first time. Has the disadvantage of pressure reducing as air is used, due to can freezing.



Compressor: – more economical for long term use and gives a more consistent supply of air.



Hints and tips:

- Ensure the item you intend to paint is clean, grease free and dry.
- Airbrushing will not cover blemishes on the surface of the item you are painting, so to ensure you achieve a beautiful smoothly painted surface, make sure you have a smooth surface on which to paint.
- Before starting to paint, always test spray the paint flow from your airbrush away from the item you are painting. Test spray on a non absorbent surface, so you get a good representation of how the paint is going to cover the surface of the item you are painting.
- Spray in a well ventilated area, particularly if using solvent based paint.
- Always use in a workspace that can be made messy.
- Begin spraying away from the surface to be painted and then gradually move into the area to be painted. This helps to prevent paint build up or splatter. Do the same when finishing your painting, always finish away from the surface you are painting.
- If you are new to airbrushing, it is advisable to stick to a single colour scheme on your first project. Start by lightly misting the paint on, holding the airbrush no more than 4" to 5" away from the surface of the item you are painting. For the second coat, move the airbrush closer to the surface and spray an even coat of paint by sweeping the brush over it. Ensure that the entire surface is dry before applying additional layers of paint.
- The best finished results are achieved by building up paint in light even coats.
- Paint should be the consistency of milk making the airbrush less likely to clog. To get the right consistency: acrylics – 1 part acrylic / 2 parts water, enamels- 1 part enamel / 1 part thinner.
- If paint is applied too quickly or too heavily it can form drips.
- When you're happy with your painted surface, leave your item to dry overnight. Any missed spots can be retouched with the airbrush, the following day.
- Take care to thoroughly cleanse your airbrush after using each colour. This will prevent the previous colour mixing with the new colour.