

Painting with Watercolours

Beginner and Intermediate

Topic 2: Building a Good Foundation

Instructor: Allan Loder



Techniques for Mounting and Stretching Watercolour Paper

Any sheet of watercolour paper less than 300 lb weight will warp as water is absorbed into it during the painting process. This is called “cockling.”

The best way to avoid “cockling” and get a perfectly flat surface on which to work is by stretching your paper.

A piece of watercolour paper that is stretched will stay relatively flat even when you apply large amounts of water to it, and the finished painting will dry perfectly flat.

It takes practice to do it consistently, but you will soon learn that the extra effort and dedication is well worth it.

How “Stretching” Works

When you soak a piece watercolour paper the fibers absorb water and expand. Consequently, the overall size of the paper increases slightly.

When the paper dries it tends to shrink back to its original size. If it is not mounted to a rigid surface such as a stretcher board, it will warp.

When you mount the edges of the paper to a stretcher board the paper pulls against the edges as it dries. This prevents the paper from shrinking all the way back to its original size. When dried, it becomes tight like a drum and will remain flat as you paint on it.

There are 4 ways to stretch watercolour paper:

1. Using a frame and staples (i.e., similar to stretching canvas)
2. Pasting the watercolour paper to a board
3. Using a stretcher board and pins or staples
- * 4. Using a stretcher board and gummed tape (a.k.a. butcher's tape)

* In my 30+ years experience, the method I find works best is the stretcher board and gummed tape method. This is what I recommend.

Tools and Materials Needed



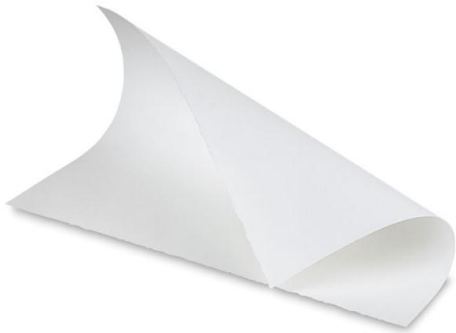
Stretcher Board



Gummed Tape



Scissors



Watercolour Paper



Pan of Water



Clean Dry Cloth

How to Stretch Watercolour Paper

- Step 1:** Cut four strips of gummed tape, one for each side of your piece of watercolor paper. Cut these about 4" longer than the sides; long enough so they overlap at the corners. Put them aside for now.
- Step 2:** Wash your hands before handling your paper.
- Step 3:** Soak your sheet of watercolor paper in cold water (about minute or two is fine). This will cause the fibers in the paper to expand.
- Step 4:** Lift the sheet of watercolor paper and gently shake off the excess water. Place it on a flat surface and blot off the excess water.
- Step 5:** Carefully lay the paper flat on your stretcher board. Try to lay it perfectly flat as to avoid any air pockets.

How to Stretch Watercolour Paper (cont'd...)

Step 6: Use a dry cloth to ensure all the excess water is blotted off the edges of the paper.

Step 7: Moisten a strip of gummed tape and stick it down firmly along one side so that about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of the tape is on the paper and the rest is on the board. Tape down all 4 sides of the paper in the same way. Start with the longer edges first, followed by the shorter edges or your paper. This will prevent the watercolor paper from pulling off the stretcher board as it dries.

Step 8: Leave to dry for a couple of hours, away from direct heat. As the water evaporates, the fibers in the paper contract, causing it to tighten like a drum.

How to Stretch Watercolour Paper (cont'd...)

Step 9: Keep the board flat while the watercolor paper dries, otherwise your paper will drive unevenly.

Step 10: Keep pressing down the edges with your fingers for the first minute or two to prevent the tape from lifting off the paper and stretcher board.

Tips:

- 1.** Only use cold or lukewarm water to soak your watercolor paper.
- 2.** Don't soak your paper for too long because it will remove the sizing, which is added to watercolor paper to control how it absorbs water and paint.
- 3.** If the edges of your gummed tape start to lift, use an old brush to reach under the lifted area and rewet the glue. Then, press it back down.

👉 Exercise:
Stretching Watercolour Paper



