

Art Framing and Hanging Best Practices

A discussion about aspects of framing including hardware, attaching wires, matting, labeling and glazing.

The goal is to help members prepare their artwork for our shows and present their work in the best way possible go over the appropriate framing for different mediums - such as; Matting or no matting, glass or no glass.

Mat cutting with freehand Dexter Mat Cutter (\$33-\$66)

Mat cutting Logan 301 Compact Mat Cutter (\$125, 32" max)

Watercolor Mats and Frames

1. Mat board selection, cost considerations, availability, Ph neutral (\$10-\$12) vs archival rag (\$30)
2. Freehand Dexter mat cutter, use backing cardboard or cutting mat, layout on front (marks), backer mat
3. Logan 301 Compact mat cutter, sizes, backer mat, layout on back (cleaner front)
4. Mat borders (1 1/2", 2", 2 1/2")
5. Standard sizes can be purchased in quantity
6. Measuring mats, layout pieces and windows from two square edges (waste), layout tools
7. Watercolor paper sizes: Full Sheet, 22"x 30", (\$25) Half Sheet, Quarter Sheet, decide on certain size and mat/frame to match
8. Watercolor blocks versus sheets. No soaking and stretching (staple, tape to a Gatorboard) Arches Aquarelle, Fabriano Artistico, 100% Cotton, 7"x10", 9"x12", 12"x18" (140#, 300#), Cold Press, Rough, Hot Press. Traditional White, Extra White, Bright White (\$2-\$3 per painting)
9. Mat tape comparison, Scotch Blue, Dick Blick, Pro Artist Tape
10. Metal frame kits (Neilsen Bainbridge, 1" lengths, cost, allow time for offshore supply chain delivery, assembly)

11. Glass, have cut to size (Debbie Supply), cost varies depending on size of the glass sheet, best buy is using the whole glass sheet, e.g.
two 8"x10" from a 16"x20" sheet
12. Wood frames, kit example, assembly

Online frame shop recommendation

Kathy Lindsley has used **Frame it Easy** (Frameiteasy.com) numerous times in the past three years and highly recommend this company for these reasons:

- Quality is comparable or better than frame shops I have used.
- Cost is less than typical frame shops.
- Their online "Design Your Frame" tool is easy-to-use.
- Many choices of frames and mats.
- Most, if not all, materials are US-made.
- Speedy service, typically delivery within two weeks of order placed.
- Outstanding customer service: Once I had a problem with one frame piece not cut correctly. The company replaced it immediately, no questions asked.
- Orders are packed with care and arrive with all hardware needed and complete assembly instructions.

Framing Hacks:

Using an inexpensive frame from a retail store

Appropriate, attractive, standard-size frames can be found on the shelves at various stores. However, there can be some drawbacks.

Typically, these frames are not set up for attaching a hanging wire, and the frames may be plastic or thin wood that will not accommodate screw eyes.

Solution: Such frames often have a back made of a fiberboard type of material. You can drill two small holes approximately 1 inch from each side and about one-third of the of the length down the backing board. Run the hanging wire through the holes on one side, then across and through the holes on the other side. Cut the wire, twist and tape.

Hanging Hardware:

1. Metal wire fasteners, distance from the top, 1/3 guideline
2. Wire types
3. Taping wires (electrical tape, blue tape)
4. Bottom corner bumpers, examples
5. Wood frame tool for push pins or brads

Protective Cover

1. Single Strength Glass (\$7-\$12)
2. Plexiglass (2x SS glass)
3. UV glass (5x SS glass)
4. Framing Watercolors without Glass

Framing Watercolors without Glass

Free Videos by Brienne M. Brown, Traveling Watercolors

Video 1:

Preparing Watercolors for Mounting. Adhering watercolor paintings to Gatorboard

https://youtu.be/UGaDh7lffYk?si=K5Fq9H4QLF1d_9rN

Video 2:

Making Watercolor Panels

https://youtu.be/fvQOa8W0kDA?si=48r_rUbb80PKQHY

Video 3:

Varnishing Watercolors

<https://youtu.be/8Mf1O-yxcHI?si=F3YlCFwoRKfu35eC>

Explains how to seal watercolor paintings using cold wax medium so they can be mounted on panels without traditional glass framing.

Signing and Labeling:

1. Photograph before signature
2. Signature, traditionally at lower right, however, no rule
3. Mat back title, signature, artist contact card

Oil and Acrylic

1. Painting to frame size
2. Frames and reuse of frames
3. Gallery wrap painting example and considerations
4. Varnishing
5. Waxing
6. Drying time considerations

Four Reference articles: Suzanne Markham

How Professional Artists

Finish the Edges of a Canvas

3 Key Strategies

By [Julien Delagrange](#), [Published on February 23, 2025](#)

Painting a Canvas Instead of Framing It

How to Varnish an Acrylic Painting

How to Varnish an Oil Painting:

A Complete Guide for Artists

Reference:

PAA Show Prospectus:

"Framing must be done in a professional manner and have no saw-tooth hangers or cording, and must be supported by picture wire only. Frames must be in excellent condition--no rips in paper backing, no chips on wood frames, or dirty mats. Canvases must be free of tears or surface flaws. No wet paintings will be accepted.

Wire and screw eyes/fasteners need to be used, with NO wire loops attached to the backing of the frame. Wires should be installed one-third of the way down the sides of the back of the frame and must be secure and able handle the weight of the artwork, especially if it is a large piece with glass. The wire should be tight enough so that the point of the wire where it hangs on the hook is at least 2 inches below the top of the frame. Wire ends must be taped.

All works must have an ID tag attached to the upper left-hand corner of the back of each work.

Fill out the appropriate tag, cut and attach with tape.

Watercolor Examples

1. Frame It Easy on line kit
2. Bad plastic frame example
3. Bad wood particle board example (not able to use screw eyes for wire)

Highlight the cost of framing.

Online source, highly recommended

[:https://www.frameiteasy.com/](https://www.frameiteasy.com/)

They are not cheap, but their prices are less than local custom framing, their online tool is easy to use, their quality is excellent and their service is outstanding.

Stick to standard sizes so you can buy inexpensive mats and frames from Michaels, etc., but the quality tends to be mediocre and sometimes tricky to attach the hanging wire.

Frames often have chipboard or manufactured board backs. Instead of trying to put screw eyes in the frame (impossible with plastic or flimsy frames), drill two tiny holes on each side and run the wire through. This actually works well.

Four Reference articles:

Article 1

How Professional Artists
Finish the Edges of a Canvas
3 Key Strategies

By [Julien Delagrangue](#), [Published on February 23, 2025](#)

A common question and practical issue all painters face at a certain point is how to finish the edges of a canvas. As a result, in this article, we will provide a definitive answer based on in-field experience by learning from the masters and sharing how established artists in today's art world finish the edges of their canvases. Using one of the three suggested strategies, you can elevate your paintings from a mere image on the wall to a collectible object with a high-end appearance.

Problematically, across the web, from blog posts to YouTube videos, people are being advised to either continue the painting onto the sides of the canvas, similar to commercial canvas prints, or to paint the edges in a single color, such as black or one that matches the painting. In fact, the first two pages of Google advise this, as do the majority of YouTube videos. However, in the professional art world, this is almost never the case. So, if you enjoy painting and consider it a hobby, you can paint your edges. However, for those who want to enter the art world and want to professionalize the appearance of their works, you might consider one of the following strategies instead.

In a nutshell, there are three main ways to professionally deal with the edges of your canvases: First and foremost, leave the artwork unframed with the edges untouched. Second, frame the artwork following the current framing trends. Third, aim to stand out with more experimental and creative alternatives. Let's expand on these three strategies by discussing specific examples and case studies in today's art world.

1. Unframed: Leaving the Edges Untouched

Perhaps the easiest and cheapest option is to simply present the artwork unframed and leave the edges completely unfinished. You might be surprised that this approach is actually very common in the high-end art world, but there is a bit more to it. If you go for this strategy, I do not recommend you use wooden stretcher bars of only 1 inch or 2.5 centimeters deep—otherwise, the artwork will look too light, and it will not have a high-end presence in the gallery space. Instead, use aluminum stretchers that are 2 inches or 4.5 centimeters thick so they have a more convincing and physical presence on the wall.

You can either go for a looser approach with some paint splatters on the sides such as the examples of Gerhard Richter and Nicole Eisenman, or you could go for a more controlled approach having an almost perfectly straight line at the edge of the canvas by using masking tape to protect the white edge or painting more carefully around the edges as is the case with the example of Laurent Proux at Christine König Galerie. However, leaving the edges untouched does not mean they always have to be white. Think of the example by Louise Bonnet where the canvas is unprimed and therefore brown, or Michaël Borremans's sides that show the toned *imprimatura* underpainting of raw sienna.

2. Framed: Wooden Floating Frames

One of my favorite strategies is framing the artwork. A frame will immediately give your painting a more professional, physical, high-end appearance. With a frame, you cannot go wrong—especially when following the latest framing trends that are dominating the art world today. Some paintings do not have that high-end presence without a frame, whereas others can stand their ground in the gallery space without one. However, it is without a doubt the best and risk-free option of all our strategies. If you use stretcher bars of 1 inch or 2.5 centimeters, you can place them in a floating frame so the total depth of the final object is once more around 2 inches or 4.5 centimeters. If you use stretcher bars of 2 inches or 4.5 centimeters, you can also attach the wood directly against the side of your canvases.

When it comes to the color of the frame, wooden frames are currently trending in the art world, particularly blank wood and especially walnut, whereas in the past, we used to see frames that were painted white or black. So, if you decide to frame your works, please have a look at the following examples by Cornelia Baltes, Xie Lei, Neo Rauch, Jonathan Wateridge, and Ben Sledsens. As a result, I strongly advise you to go for a walnut or blank wooden frame, depending on the color palette of your work, as the dark walnut can sometimes be too dominant for minimal, white, or very bright pieces.

3. Stand Out with Creative Artist Frames

To conclude, one can take things a step further when considering framing their artworks, and instead of going for a professional and safe option such as the floating frames, approach framing as an opportunity to distinguish

yourself and to stand out in the crowd. Creative or experimental handmade artist frames can give a sculptural dimension to your paintings that will make them stand out in the exhibition space from the very first glance. It can actually become what you are best known for and the art world is currently loving artists who creatively go the extra mile with their frames, from painting them to sculpting them.

Think of Emily Weiner's carved and often painted artist frames of glazed stoneware and the playful use of walnut by Dabin Ahn in which the sides are used to depict his characteristic candles so the light can emanate from the edges of the canvas onto the surface. Or what about Roy De Forest using his background as a sculptor to create increasingly complex frames to support the painted image, as is the case with Stephanie

TemmaHier's [ceramic](#) sculptural motifs encapsulating her painterly subjects focused on consumption. With Guadalupe Maravilla we see a similar approach in which he places devotional images in an otherworldly frame.

It is safe to say this option requires skills beyond being a painter. It is also a risk, as there is a fine balance between creating artist frames that are unique and refreshing, and quirky frames that feel sloppy and too crafty.

However, when these experimental frames hold up in the gallery space, it is what sets them apart from the abundance of paintings out there. If not for their unique framing strategies, the recited artists would not be where they are now, illustrating the power of this unique approach.

Last Updated on October 2, 2025

Article 3

Painting a Canvas Instead of Framing It

Yes — you can absolutely paint the sides of a canvas to eliminate the need for a traditional frame. This approach is common in **gallery wrap** and contemporary art, where the finished edge is part of the artwork's presentation

Why Paint the Sides Instead of Framing

- **Professional finish:** A painted edge makes the piece look complete from all angles, even when viewed from the side.
- **No framing needed:** If you want to hang it directly on the wall, a painted edge keeps it secure and clean.
- **3D effect:** Painting the sides can give a sculptural feel, especially with solid colors or textured finishes.
- **Protection:** A painted edge can hide fingerprints, smudges, and dust, and protect the canvas surface.

Common Side-Painting Options

1. **Solid color** – White, black, gray, or a complementary tone for a clean, polished look.
2. **Image extension** – Continue the main subject around the edges (works well for landscapes or abstracts).
3. **Design or pattern** – Add abstract elements, stripes, or decoupage for a unique touch.
4. **Stain or pour** – Use diluted paint or pouring techniques for a textured, organic edge.
5. **Leave raw** – Keep the canvas edge unpainted for a minimalist or “unfinished” look (less common for gallery display).

Tips for Painting the Sides

- **Masking tape method:** Tape the edge to create a sharp line, then paint over it. Use matte medium to prevent paint bleed.
- **Dry brushing:** Apply thin layers for a subtle, textured effect.
- **Consider composition:** Avoid extending figures or complex scenes that might look awkward when viewed from the side.
- **Protect the edge:** If you plan to hang it without a frame, consider adding a molding or floating frame for extra protection.

When to Skip Painting the Sides

If you’re exhibiting in traditional galleries or want a “handmade” look, leaving the sides raw can be intentional and appealing. However, for most contemporary or unframed wall displays, painting the sides is the standard choice.

Bottom line: Painting the sides is a valid and often preferred alternative to framing, especially for modern art and gallery wrap pieces. It enhances presentation, protects the work, and can be customized to match

Article 3

How to Varnish an Acrylic Painting

Artists varnish paintings to protect them from damage, enhance color vibrancy, and unify the surface finish.

Varnishing a painting involves applying a **transparent protective layer** over the finished artwork, typically made from resins, oils, and solvents, which dries to form a durable film that shields the painting from dust, dirt, scratches, and UV light exposure. This protective layer helps prevent **photochemical damage**, which can cause colors to fade over time due to sunlight. For oil and acrylic paintings, varnish can be removable, allowing for cleaning or reapplication without harming the original paint.

Aesthetic Benefits

Varnish also **enhances the visual appearance** of a painting. It can deepen and enrich colors, making them appear more vibrant and saturated, and can provide a consistent finish across the surface, whether matte, satin, or glossy. This process, known as **saturation**, improves the overall presentation and can make the artwork look more polished and professional.

Protective Functions

Beyond aesthetics, varnish **protects the painting from environmental factors** such as moisture, grime, and physical abrasion, which is especially important during transportation or display. Some varnishes include **UV inhibitors**, which prevent sunlight from causing permanent fading.

For acrylic paintings, varnishing is recommended to prevent yellowing and to maintain the integrity of the paint surface, even though it is not strictly mandatory. **Considerations**

Not all paintings are suitable for varnishing. Watercolor and gouache paintings, for example, can absorb varnish and become discolored, making varnishing inadvisable. Choosing the right type of varnish—natural or

synthetic, removable or permanent—is crucial to ensure both protection and desired visual effects. Proper application, including using an isolation coat when necessary, ensures a smooth, even, and long-lasting finish.

How to Varnish an Acrylic Painting

Varnishing is the final step in protecting and enhancing your acrylic artwork, offering benefits like dust and UV protection, color enhancement, and a uniform finish.

When to Varnish

- **Wait until the painting is fully dry** — at least 72 hours after the last paint layer, or longer for thick impasto work.
- Test by pressing a fingernail into the paint; it should not leave a mark .
- Take a photo before varnishing, especially if using gloss, as it can change the surface reflectivity.

Application Tips

- Ensure the painting is **completely dry** before varnishing, especially if thick textures are present.
- Consider applying an **isolation coat** (a thin layer of gloss medium) first to create a smooth surface and prevent the varnish from soaking into uneven areas.
- Apply **thin, even coats** with a soft, wide brush to avoid streaks or bubbles.
- Allow each coat to **dry fully** before applying the next; water-based varnishes typically dry faster than solvent-based ones.
- Choose the finish according to your preference: **gloss** for vibrant colors, **matte** for subdued tones, or **satin** for a semi-gloss effect.

Safety Considerations

- Water-based varnishes are **non-toxic and safe for indoor use**.
- Solvent-based or resin varnishes require **good ventilation** and protective gloves.
- Always test your homemade varnish on a small sample before applying it to your final artwork.

By using these methods, you can create a **homemade varnish that protects your acrylic painting, enhances its colors, and allows for future maintenance**, without relying solely on commercial products.

Types of Varnishes for Acrylic Paintings

This Article cited these links: loveacrylicpainting.com+1.

And acrylicpaintingschool.com.

For acrylic paintings, it is best to use a removable varnish specifically formulated for acrylics, available in gloss, satin, or matte finishes.

Types of Varnish

1. Removable vs. Permanent:

- **Removable varnishes** allow for future cleaning and restoration of the painting, making them ideal for preserving artwork over time. They can be removed without damaging the underlying paint
- **Permanent varnishes** are not recommended for acrylic paintings, as they can yellow over time and are difficult to remove without risking damage to the artwork

2. Finish Options:

- **Gloss Varnish:** Enhances color vibrancy and adds depth, making it suitable for artworks where a shiny finish is desired.
- **Satin Varnish:** Offers a balanced sheen that reduces glare while preserving color integrity, making it a popular choice for many artists .
- **Matte Varnish:** Provides a non-reflective finish, which can be useful for artworks where a flat appearance is preferred. However, it may dull darker colors.

Application Tips

- **Choose the Right Type:** Select a varnish that is specifically designed for acrylic paints to avoid issues like cracking or discoloration.
- **Application Method:** Varnishes can be applied using brushes or sprays. Spray varnishes provide an even coat and are excellent for textured surfaces, while brush-on varnishes allow for more control.
- **Consider Environmental Factors:** When choosing a varnish, consider where the painting will be displayed, as some varnishes may be more suitable for certain environments.

Recommended Products

- **Liquitex Gloss Varnish:** A popular choice for its durability and non-toxic properties, providing a clear, glossy finish.
- **Golden Acrylic Polymer Varnish:** Known for its protective qualities and ability to enhance color depth.

By selecting the appropriate varnish and applying it correctly, you can protect your acrylic paintings and enhance their visual appeal for years to come.

Article 4:

How to Varnish an Oil Painting: A Complete Guide for Artists

Varnishing your oil painting is an essential step in preserving its beauty and ensuring its longevity. Whether you're a professional artist or a hobbyist, understanding how and when to apply varnish can protect your artwork from dust, dirt, and UV damage, while also enhancing the final finish. Topics covered in this feature

1. [When to varnish an oil painting](#)
2. [Temporary protection: retouching varnish](#)
3. [Tips for faster drying](#)
4. [How to apply varnish to an oil painting](#)
5. [Special considerations for water-mixable oil paints](#)

Why varnish an oil painting? Applying varnish serves several important purposes:

- Protects the paint surface from dust, dirt, and environmental pollutants
- Unifies the colors, giving the painting a consistent finish
- Provides UV resistance, helping to prevent fading from sunlight Varnishes are available in a range of finishes—from matte to gloss. The most commonly used type is Dammar varnish, a pale yellow varnish that dries quickly and provides a high-gloss effect. However, gloss varnishes can be overly reflective. Many artists prefer a satin finish, which offers a balance between matte and gloss, often with built-in UV protection.

When to varnish an oil painting: Timing is crucial

One of the most common mistakes is varnishing too soon. While an oil painting may feel dry to the touch in 10 to 14 days, the paint layers underneath continue to cure. Applying varnish prematurely can cause cracking or interfere with the painting's long-term preservation. For traditional oil paints, a safe rule of thumb is to wait 3 to 6 months before

varnishing. If you've used thick layers or water-mixable oils, drying time may extend to 9 to 12 months.

How to know it's ready

Use a clean, lint-free cotton cloth to lightly wipe the surface. If any paint transfers onto the cloth, the painting isn't ready and needs more time to dry.

Temporary protection: Retouching varnish

If you need to display or sell your painting before it's fully dry, consider applying a retouching varnish. This temporary layer offers light protection and allows the painting to "breathe." However, it doesn't provide the full protection of a final varnish, so it's advisable to apply a proper artist's varnish once the painting has completely cured.

Tips for faster drying

- Use alkyd-based oils or alkyd white mixed into your palette to accelerate drying.
 - Thin paint layers dry faster than thicker applications made with palette knives.
 - Always store paintings in a well-ventilated, dry environment to aid curing.
- How to apply varnish to an oil painting: Follow these steps for best results:**

1. Ensure the painting is fully dry.
2. Let both the painting and varnish reach room temperature to avoid condensation.
3. Use a lint-free cloth or a high-quality brush designed for varnishing.
4. Apply varnish using light, even strokes, checking under a raking light to ensure uniform coverage.

DEFINITION:

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[Wikipedia+1](#): **Raking light is illumination directed at an object from a low or oblique angle to emphasize surface texture and topography.**

Raking light refers to a lighting technique where a light source is positioned at an acute or nearly parallel angle to the surface of an object, such as a painting, drawing, or artifact . This angled

illumination creates strong contrasts of light and shadow, highlighting surface features like brushstrokes, impasto, indentations, relief, or tool marks that might be invisible under diffuse lighting. It is particularly useful for examining the texture, condition, and technique of artworks and cultural artifacts.

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[conservation-wiki.com+1](https://www.conservation-wiki.com+1).

5. Frequently inspect the cloth or brush for any paint transfer—this indicates the painting may still be too wet.

Special considerations for water-mixable oil paints

Brands like Cobra offer water-mixable oil paints, which can take longer to dry. Cobra recommends waiting 9 to 12 months before applying varnish. They also provide aerosol-based varnishes specially formulated for their product line.

Varnishing is the final touch that elevates an oil painting from finished to gallery-ready. By following proper drying times and application techniques, you'll ensure your work remains vibrant and protected for years to come.

This Article was copied from "Artists Online", with the exception of the definition of "Raking Light", from Wikipedia.