



Tips & Demos

**Watercolor and Watermedia
painting tips & demonstrations
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From Sketchbook to Painting: Enlarging Your Ideas

I strongly encourage my students to get in the habit of using a sketchbook...not only for planning watercolor paintings, but also for recording thoughts and ideas about painting, about your subjects, about your feelings, about anything that may help you discover your own voice in painting. Learning to be technically proficient just requires dedication to the PRACTICE OF PAINTING. Learning to speak with your own voice through your painting is an ongoing process, and your sketchbook/diary can help you find the recurring patterns in the things you respond to and want to paint, and in how your experiences, education, and feelings contribute to your interpretation of your subjects. If you aren't in the sketchbook habit, get one (or two...keep one in your car), and then use it!

In no time, you will have lots of ideas that can be developed into finished paintings. To help me edit my observations or imaginings, I have made several templates from scrap watercolor paper (you could use matboard pieces too), that are scaled down versions of 1/2 sheet and full sheet watercolor paper. If you have other favorite sizes of paper you regularly use, you can make templates for these too. On the templates, I've made "tic" marks to divide the templates into a grid. I keep these templates tucked into an envelope glued to the inside back covers of my sketchbooks, so that they're always handy (below left).



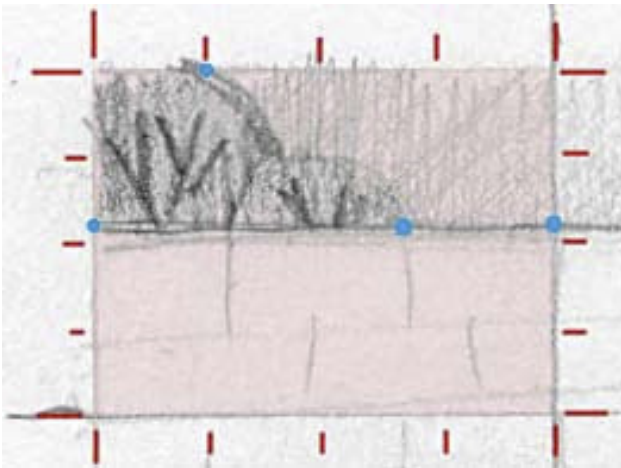
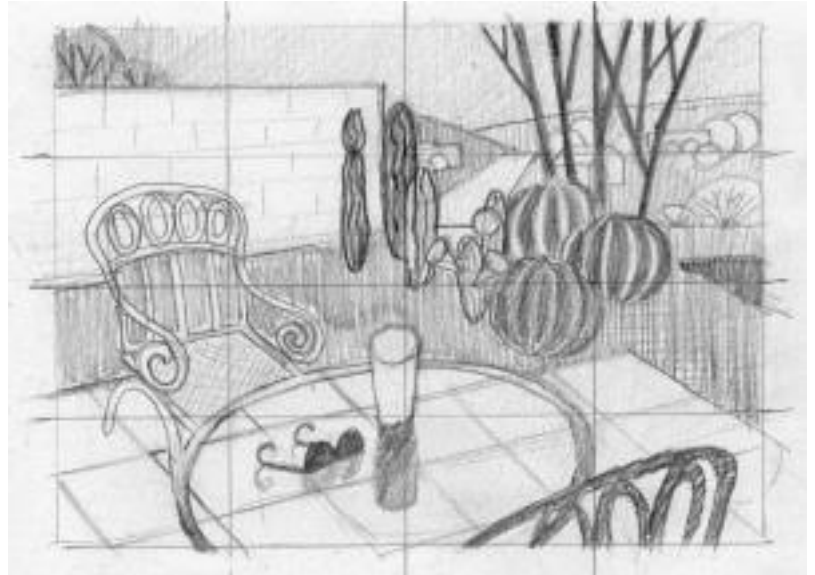
I begin my planning / thinking by tracing around the edges of a template onto a page of my sketchbook, and making matching tic marks around the edges so that I will know where to draw the grid lines after the sketch is worked up. The photo above shows what some of these templates look like. You can use a calculator to figure out different scale measurements for your templates.

I use the smaller templates for quick thumbnails...often to play around with preliminary simple value patterns (above). Then I will use a larger template to make a more complete drawing, with a more detailed value pattern. This page from one of my sketchbooks shows the tic marks in place before the grid is drawn over the sketch.



I drew around a full sheet template to begin my sketch. When I was happy with the drawing, I connected the tic marks to make a grid over my drawing (below). At this point, I was ready to enlarge the drawing onto my stretched watercolor paper.

I first divided my watercolor paper into a grid, making very light pencil lines with an HB pencil. This grid on my watercolor paper has the same number of sections as the grid drawn over my sketch.



When I'm enlarging, I note where major lines of my sketch intersect the grid lines, and mark those intersections with dots in the corresponding place on my watercolor paper grid. For example, taking the top upper left section of my sketch (shaded in pink, left), you can see that the line which represents the top of the brick patio wall intersects the right grid line a little above the half way point from top to bottom. The red tic marks represent the visual quarter points and half way points that I visualize on each section of the grid to help me establish the points of reference I need (blue dots) as I enlarge the drawing. The curved edge of the tree shape starts about a quarter of the way across from left to right and ends a little more than 5/8 of the way across. I continue this visual "measuring" for each grid section, adjusting as needed.

Beginning in the upper left corner, and I draw what I see in that section into the corresponding (but larger) section on my watercolor paper. When the first section is enlarged, I go onto the next adjacent section, working from left to right, top to bottom, one section at a time until the drawing is enlarged. I will then make any additions or corrections I want to the drawing before I start painting. In the photo (right), you can see a couple of my grid lines as well as unpainted parts of the painting.

This is a simple, quick and easy way to get your ideas from your sketchbook to your painting surface, and in addition, it is good visual training for your eye and mind.

There are other ways to enlarge your sketches. If you have a scanner and a computer, you can scan your sketch, pull it into an image editing program, enlarge it to be the same size as the watercolor paper you want to use, print it out as a "tiled" image, reassemble the tiled pieces, and then use transfer paper between the computer assemblage and your watercolor paper. You then trace over your computer enlargement, and the transfer paper will transfer your drawing to your watercolor paper.

Some artists also use an opaque projector to enlarge their sketches onto their watercolor paper; others take slides of their sketches and then project the slide onto their watercolor paper to enlarge it. Use whatever method works best for you.

