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Instructional Hand-Out for **Applying Color with an Airbrush**

You've got your pattern; now make it 'sing' by adding color. Either hand-painted or using an airbrush, a beautifully turned and textured form can become extraordinary by carefully and selectively adding color.

1. I prefer acrylic paints. Good quality paint, brands like Golden and Createx are all good quality acrylic paints that are light-fast, reliable and can be used in an airbrush or with a paint brush. If the paint is not specifically formulated to use in an airbrush, you may need to thin it, using airbrush medium.

Golden Acrylic Hi-Flow



Createx Acrylic Airbrush Colors



2. I don't recommend a cheaper quality airbrush. For this work, you need a brush that has the ability to lay down paint in small areas. Cheaper brushes won't do that very well. I prefer the Grex Tritium line of airbrushes. It is gravity feed, rather than siphon feed. It has a trigger below to activate the brush, rather than the trigger on the top. I find the bottom trigger is more comfortable to use and easier to control. I get my equipment from [Joe Fleming, Airbrushing on Wood](#)

Tritium Dual Action Airbrush



3. If you intend to use a single color, and if you have a steady hand, think about whether hand-painting will work. It may seem like it will take longer, but when you consider the time spent masking with frisket, and cutting away the areas to be painted, there won't be much time saved.
4. If you desire several colors, an airbrush may make that easier to shade and blend.
5. Decide what areas will be painted, and what areas will not. Use paper or painters tape in large areas that will not be painted. No sense in wasting frisket when you don't need to see the surface underneath the frisket mask,
6. Begin by masking off areas that you don't want to have paint. You'll want to wear over-the-head magnifiers for laying down and cutting/removing frisket.
7. If applying frisket on tightly curved or radius surfaces, smaller sections of frisket are easier to work with. Use an Exacto knife with a fresh new blade to cut sections and carefully lift the frisket tape away from the backing. Lay the frisket down, and slice pie shaped wedges where the curves are very tight. This will allow you to get a good seal, without several layers of frisket tape on top of each other. You may need to cut through several of those layers, and each layer makes a clean cut more challenging.
8. Replace that blade in your Exacto knife with a new one (Yes – buy them in bulk), and carefully cut away the areas that will be airbrushed. This is where re-burning those lines is important. You have a channel for the blade to follow, making it easier to cut away the area that will be painted. Lift each cut away section using the tip of the knife blade.

9. When you have removed the frisket from all the sections that will be painted, use your fingers to press the frisket down firmly on the wood. You want to be sure that the frisket tape has good adherence to the surface and will not lift when you begin applying paint.
10. Decide the color scheme you want on your turning. Pay attention to the color of the wood in relation to the color patterns. If some of the wood is visible, you may want the colors to complement the color of the wood. For example, if your wood is maple, your color choices may be limitless because the wood is a light neutral tone. If your wood is walnut (a brown tone) you may want to choose colors that will complement that tone. In some cases, your wood may benefit by using wood bleach to whiten it. For example, using wood bleach on maple can make that wood appear to look like holly.
11. Set your air compressor gauge to between 18-20 PSI. If your PSI is too high, you'll go through a lot of paint. You also risk lifting the frisket, which will push paint under the edges.
12. The consistency or viscosity of the paint should be like milk. If it's thicker, you may have difficulty getting it through the brush. You'll need to increase the PSI of your compressor or thin it with airbrush medium. Using water may dilute the color; airbrush medium is a clear binder that will thin the paint without diluting the color. If you prefer to use a thicker viscosity of paint, consider moving up to a size 5 or 7 needle.
13. Start with lighter colors. If you want some of the wood to show through, choose transparent paints. If you seek to completely conceal the wood, you can use opaque.
14. Add colors going darker as required. If you are blending colors, you can add the new color into the cup so that when the previous color is nearly gone, it will begin to blend with the new color.
15. Apply the paint using slow steady movement, ensuring even coverage. Erratic patterns or quick, jerky hand movements will result in blotchy applications of paint.
16. When you have finished laying down color, set the work aside to allow the paint to dry sufficiently before removing frisket. If you've put down several different layers of color, leave the piece to dry overnight.
17. Using an Exacto knife, lift the frisket away from the turning.
18. Oops! Your frisket lifted from the air pressure when you were laying down color, and there's paint where it shouldn't be!! Here's how to fix that. Using your Exacto knife, lightly and carefully scrape the wood in the direction of the grain, and you should be able to remove that errant spray of paint.
19. Clean your dirty airbrush. Run water through the brush several times to clear as much paint as possible. Use airbrush cleaner until the liquid coming through the brush is clear.
20. Remove the rear cap from the back of the brush, unscrew the needle lock, and remove the needle. Place it down on a flat surface, where it can't roll or fall.
21. Remove the nose and nozzle caps and drop them into a small glass jar filled with denatured alcohol. Depending on the airbrush, you may need to use one of your supplied wrenches. If you

have a removable fluid reservoir or paint cup, place that into the jar as well. Use pipe cleaners folded in half to clean out small reservoir on top of brush. Use plastic dental picks to clean nose.

22. Carefully clean your needle using water or alcohol. Clean the nose cap, cone, and paint reservoirs, and replace them on the brush.

23. Apply a small amount of airbrush lubricant on the needle (a drop or two) and spread/wipe with a clean cloth. Only a small amount of lubricant should remain on the needle. Replace the needle in the brush. Re-assemble the brush by replacing the needle lock and rear cap.

Tools and supplies used

- Your wood turning to color
- Airbrush, compressor and regulator
- Acrylic airbrush paints
- Over-the-head magnifiers
- Frisket, Frog Tape, Exacto knife and lots of new blades
- Self-healing mat for cutting frisket and painters tape.
- Denatured alcohol and small glass jar.
- Paper towels
- Airbrush medium
- Water and airbrush cleaner
- Airbrush lubricant
- Pipe cleaners and plastic dental picks