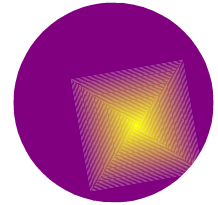


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The Short and Fuzzy

Beginner's Guide to Miniature Painting

by: Ryan Ambrose

<http://www.ebookwalkthrough.com>

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The Short and Fuzzy What?!

I once had a web site called *The Short and Fuzzy Gallery*. It was my wargaming miniatures fan site, and it was named after my largest and most favorite painting project: My dwarf wargaming army.

Unfortunately, I ran into some unrelated troubles, and was forced to take it down. However, I still had it on my computer, so I decided to reincarnate my beloved and much-mourned (at least by me) web site into an ebook.

So I give you *The Short and Fuzzy Beginner's Guide to Painting Miniatures*, now named after my late, great web site, along with my largest and most favorite painting project. It's a collection of what I've learned through either study, practice, or just plain hard knocks about how to paint miniatures with watercolors. It doesn't matter what types of miniatures they are, you'll be able to use these techniques to make your own well-painted wargaming armies, fan miniatures, display pieces, or any other type of painted miniature you want.

Let's start with what you'll need to begin.

The Basic Tools of Mini Painting

You don't have to spend a fortune to get ready to paint miniatures. Much of what you'll need, like spray boxes or brush cleaning cups can be made from ordinary household items you can get cheaply.

A good brush, on the other hand, can't be helped. The cheap ones won't give you good results, but even the good ones aren't that expensive.

I'm not going to tell you that you need to go out and buy something made from super-rare yak hair or other expensive non-necessity. However, you'll need to find several quality brushes and take care of them so that they stay good quality brushes. Otherwise, you'll just get a big mess once you've painted your models, or will find it difficult at best to do a good job.

As tempting as it may be to buy the cheaper ones, they have ends that don't come to a point, irregular bristles, and simply won't do a good job when you're trying to layer or paint details on miniatures. Trust me. I've been stingy enough to attempt it with a cheap brush, and it was a complete waste of my money and time.

Brush Types

The bulk of your miniature painting will be done with round brushes. The ones I use are [Kolinsky sable](#) rounds, and that particular type has worked well for me. You'll only need two of these.

- The first is a larger general purpose brush. It has a brush length around 3/8-1/2 of an inch long (9-12 mm) with which you will do most of your painting.
- The second one is a detail brush. This is a much smaller round with a head about 1/4 of an inch (6 mm) long. It tapers to a very small point and is used to highlight or paint details. If you want to do extremely fine detail work, detail brushes are available with heads no longer than an 1/8 of an inch (3 mm).

Then, there are a couple of other types you may want to get if you do other specific things.

- A **drybrush** is used specifically for the drybrushing technique. There are two ways to get a drybrush. You can go out and [purchase one](#), as they do make brushes with stiffer bristles for just this purpose. Or, you can also wait until you've irreparably frayed the end of your general use round brush, clip the frayed bristles, and use it only for drybrushing.

I personally love the drybrushing technique, but it is **very, very hard** on the brush you'll use for it. Therefore, I recommend keeping one specifically for this purpose, because an ordinary brush won't keep its point for long if you start drybrushing with it.

- If you are going to paint models with large surface areas, like model tanks, use the larger version of a round brush or a flat-tipped brush. Granted, you can use a smaller brush to paint them if you have epic levels of patience or a penchant for self-punishment. However, if larger models are what you most enjoy painting, I recommend either a larger version of general purpose round brush or flat-tipped brush.

Now there are other types of painting implements, such as exotically shaped brushes, sponges, and other things that put texture and detail onto surfaces like canvas. You won't need them, so don't waste your money buying them.

You don't have to have boxes full of exotic brushes to start painting miniatures, but those two round brushes will be required. If you want to drybrush, you should get one for that too. I personally love the drybrush technique, and so I keep a brush specifically for it.

Brush Care

Brushes suffer wear and tear like anything else that is used.

To be usable, brush bristles will have to taper to a point. If the brush gets so damaged that this is not the case, you'll have to clip the end and use it for a drybrush or broad strokes applicator. If it's a detail brush, you'll have to discard it. If you chose a sable, which work quite well, you won't want to trash them anytime soon.

The good news is that brush care isn't hard. Brushes used for water based acrylics can be cleaned with soap and water, but personally I use a combination brush cleaner/bristle preservative that can be found in a craft store. I wash the brushes using this soap, then put another layer on the bristles when I'm done, reshape the point, and cap it with the soap still on it. When I'm ready to use it again, I just rinse the soap from the bristles and paint. My brushes have shown far more longevity than they once did after I started doing this.

Be nice to your brushes. If you do, you can get long, productive life out of them, which will prevent you from having to

1. Replace them far too frequently for your budget, or
2. Use damaged brushes to paint your models.

Neither type of brush malfunction has proven very pleasant for me, so don't inflict it on yourself by forgetting your brush care.

Work Area

Nothing special is required, but a few basics are a must.

You'll need a stable workstation of some sort, like a table, some paper towels, water to clean your brushes, and a chair. Keep some comfort in mind when selecting a chair, because painting for hours on end can be hard on your back. This means choosing a chair in which you won't mind sitting for hours, because you may well be painting that long in a night.

A good light source is an absolute must, because dim light is hard on your eyes and doesn't allow you to see your subject properly. I've found that something that looks gorgeous in dim light may well look awful in brighter light, and that is not a fun surprise at all.

You can go to a hobby store and buy a sunlamp, but I've never done it and don't recommend it to you. An ordinary light source will do, just lots of it. I've found the newer fluorescent light bulbs in particular glow like small suns, and are excellent to this purpose.

Model Preparation Tools

It's a fact of life. All of those models that shine so magnificently on the front of their boxes don't come that way. Many of them are in pieces or on sprues. Those that come in one piece still have flash from when they were molded, and like it or not, they'll have to be prepared and assembled before you can paint them.

Fortunately, this task is not so onerous as it sounds. You only need some basic equipment and a bit of patience to properly prepare your subjects for painting.

- A small file or file set. You can buy one at a craft store, hobby shop, or comic shop with wargaming material. Mine are riffler files, and came from a surplus store.
- A pair of clippers. This type of clipper should have one side completely flat, otherwise it will just leave a big pinch mark you'll have to file or sand. Games Workshop makes a nice pair of these for just this purpose, but you can find them elsewhere.
- I've found fine grain black automotive sandpaper handy from time to time. This can be found at a hardware or automotive store.

- You might want a small, cheap utility knife, available at a hardware store. These are the types with the disposable blades that can be pushed up and broken off as they dull.
- Quick drying, all surfaces glue. Some brands refer to it as superglue. It's clear, comes in a small tube, and can be found all over the place. It's by far and away the most versatile of the adhesives you can use on plastic and metal models.

If you intend to mass spray primer or finishes like me, a big cardboard box will keep you from spraying all over the place. Put the models inside, spray them, then leave them there to dry so junk doesn't blow all over them when they're wet.

If you like larger larger miniatures requiring assembly, like the pewter sorts, you should get these as well:

- A pin vise set, like the one below.




It's useful for **pinning**, which is a technique for holding larger parts together securely. Mine came from a X-Acto woodcarving kit, but they can also be purchased separately from a hobby shop or online.

- Polyurethane glue is a heavy-duty sort of glue which has two good properties related to pinning. It's very strong, and it expands as it dries, which means it fills in pinning holes and holds everything snugly in place. It's not an absolute necessity, but it did wonders for my pinning projects, particularly with regards to custom pinning to a thick base.
- Modeling putty. Occasionally you need to use this on smaller models, but most kinds of gaps that require it will be found between the pieces of

larger models, like monsters. Some come in solid strips with two colors like the blue and white 'green stuff'. One side is the putty, and the other is the hardening agent.

I've also seen putt that comes in a gel consistency in tubes, but that hasn't worked so well for me. It's was more obnoxious about sticking to modeling tools than the ribbon variety.

-  A modeling tool, like the ones in this picture. They're used to mold putty into shape, and can even help you sculpt it to look like the original model.

As shown here, the can take the shape of anything looking like a miniature spade to a dentist's pick. I used them to mold the wings of one large model into the main body, and though it took a little work, it would be hard to tell where the putty actually starts and stops.

I found these at [Micromark](#).

Miniature Preparation

Before you can paint your miniature, you have to prep it. They don't come ready to go.

First thing to do is remove the model pieces from the sprues. This is easily done with a pair of clippers. Some of the wargaming types have entire units in sprues, boxed in a single container, which will have to be assembled in a mix-and-match fashion.

These pieces come with flash, which is the collective hanging bits and seam lines created in the molding process. To remove it, use a small file, a pair of clippers, or a small chisel-tipped utility blade. Some of the flash will be located in tight corners, so some patience may be required.

Once this is done, assemble the pieces. Unless your model has large pieces with some weight (such as pewter), glue will be all that's required to keep them together. Try to avoid spilling over, but if you do, you can always sand or file back to the detail level. I've tried paper towels, but the glue usually dries so fast it's hard by the time I get one, or the towel sticks.

For pieces so large that a few drops of glue will not create a reliably strong joint, you should pin them. This technique adds a pin between the pieces for extra reinforcement. You don't need any special materials for this, as a piece of a small pin, a paper clip, or wire clipped to size will work. I've recently taken a liking to paper clips myself, as they are cheap, bend and trim easily, and still more than sufficient to strengthen a joint with a minimum of fuss.

To get more information on pinning, you can visit:

- [Techniques: Drilling and Pinning](#)
- [Reaper: The Craft](#)
- [Miniature Pinning \(video\)](#)

Once you have completely assembled the model, look for recesses or places where the joints don't quite fit or left odd cavities. While this is rarely a problem for miniatures that come complete out of the box or for smaller figures, large models assembled in pieces do suffer this on occasion.

When this happens, use modeling putty to fill in the recesses and mold it to shape with a modeling tool. Remember to lubricate the modeling tool to keep the putty from sticking. I use water, and some use an oil of some sort. Do as much modeling as you can while the putty is still moist, but if necessary, putty like green stuff harden to a consistency that can be filed or sanded.

Now, in the end, if you've used plastic, pewter, and putty in a model, it's looking something like Frankenstein's Monster fully assembled. This will change once you've primed it. If you've taken the proper amount of care with any fillings you may have made, no one will ever know that it's anything but a seamless model. All of the different materials mentioned above can be primed for painting.

Glue the model (or pin it if it's large) to a base and prime it with your favorite type of primer. This will give the paint a surface to which it can properly stick. You can use paint-on primer, but I tend to reserve that for any repairs I might make, and just spray the models to cover them evenly and quickly. Prime your model in a well-ventilated area either way, as the stuff stinks and contains chemicals that are none too good for you.

One other word of warning about primer. While I use the all-purpose gray primer you can buy from a hardware store, not all primers are meant for all surfaces. Some types of primer contain acetone and are meant for metal surfaces only. If you use them on plastic, the result will be similar to the Wicked Witch of the West meeting a bucket of water. Simply put, acetone + plastic = melted ice cream cone look.

I may be the only person I know that uses gray primer on models this size. White primer makes it difficult to tell the raised details from the recessed ones, and makes the model's final paint job brighter than I like. Black also makes it difficult to distinguish details, and makes the painting too dark for my taste. Gray primer...

- Catches shadow and makes it easy to tell raised details apart from recessed ones, makes it easier to catch any flash or flaws I might have missed (much to my occasional chagrin)
- Leaves the final paint job my personal favorite kind of bright. And if I want something brighter or darker than the rest of the model, I don't find the addition step of a painting a white or black basecoat on it all that much of a problem.

Overall, model preparation takes some patience, but rushing it will give you a model that looks substandard even if you do an excellent paint job. While the small models may not need all of the required steps, those that do will benefit from the proper amount of attention.

Basic Painting Tips

Yes, most of what you'll do is painting, but that's not the end of it. You can add pieces, subtract pieces, and decorate bases. Someday, you might even get so adept at miniatures that you'll chop them up and custom resculpt them into pose conversions, or even make your own from scratch.

But for now, let's just go over the basics of painting the ones you'll find out of a box. You have your project, your paints, your brushes, and you're ready to begin your quest to delight the world and your friends with your newest masterpiece. But you'll need to keep a few things in mind to insure you can do the best job you can.

Thinning

This has been my perennial big mistake before I finally got good at miniature painting. Paints are sold thicker than they should be used, especially if you're buying watercolors in a craft store. They squeeze out of their tubes in a near-gel, and if you try to paint with this consistency, your once-sharp model details will suddenly look like squashed putty. Plus, the paint itself will leave unwanted textures on your surface.

To use the paint, put a couple of drops in a mixing pot or on some aluminum foil and thin until it become less of a gel/paste and runs like a thickish liquid. For obnoxious colors like red, orange, and yellow, which refuse to show any kind of useful coverage at all, thin with an ink that's the same color for the best results.

Mixing pots are extremely useful for thinning and a good idea in general to have around. I'm not talking about giant, jar sized mixing containers for the mass production of a given color. The ones I use are some of the cheaper, small all-plastic ones I bought from a craft store. Games Workshop also sells a useful type of mixing pot with a very handy lid, and that type can be found in wargaming shops or Games Workshop stores. They keep the paint from drying and prevent having to re-thin it (or re-thin it much) when using it for multiple days.

Paint Mixing Tips

If you don't happen to have the desired color of paint on hand, or don't see the one you want, you can mix paint to get the desired color. Some pointers if you do this:

- When darkening red, orange, or yellow, you can either mix them with **brown**, or mix them with their compliments. Compliments are the colors across from them on a color wheel, but for your reference, **green** is a compliment of **red**, **blue** is a compliment of **orange**, and **purple** is a compliment of **yellow**.

Mixing them with black won't look good. That only works with cooler colors (**blue**, **green**, and **purple**), though you can darken these types of colors by mixing them with their compliments as well.

- I highly recommend mixing the paints you're using for a larger project in a mixing pot with a lid. You don't want to find yourself in the position of having to remix dried paint off the cuff and hope you guess the right

proportions. Not only will mixing pots keep you from remixing paint, they will also allow you to make a sizable quantity of it, so that you can use it again.

- Don't be afraid to experiment with mixing colors. At worst, you only get a color you can't use, and no harm comes from it.

Brushing Tips

Using a brush isn't rocket science, but a few things are helpful.

- When painting, insure your brushes come to a point unless you want to inflict massive inconvenience on yourself painting with a frayed brush. Simply dip into water and twist gently to get or restore a point. If that doesn't work, your brush is trashed.
- Clean your water regularly. If you're painting with metallic colors in particular, change your water any time you wish to switch back to a normal one. Otherwise, you may find your new color is suddenly metallic too from all the flakes floating around in your water.
- If you have trouble keeping your hands from shaking while painting, brace the heel of your palm against a solid surface. If you have to lift the model to paint it, brace the heels of your palms against each other. That's the technique I use the most, as most of the models I paint are less than two inches tall, and I like to hold them up to lights to paint them.
- To avoid detail blunders, paint the bottom details first. If you overpaint when painting an inner detail, it makes no difference, because the upper surfaces have not yet been painted. Do this with eyes especially, since you can give them razor sharp lines simply by overpainting around them with an upper layer coat.

Keep these tips in mind, and you can avoid giving yourself a hard time when you're painting miniatures.

Patience

You're going to need a lot of this. Painting is not an instant gratification hobby. It's a hobby where you work hard over a period of time, and get satisfaction in the finished

project. Remember that 'haste makes waste' applies in great measure here, and if you rush, you'll find you haven't gotten what you wanted out of your miniatures. Don't find this out the hard way as I did.

If you keep these things in mind, you'll be well on your way to preventing blunders that can make a real mess of your work.

Nifty Painting Tricks

Regardless of how neat you are, and how well you can apply a basic paint job, you'll find that your miniatures only look like a flat, uninspiring, neatly painted bore if it's all you can do.

Fortunately, there are a few tricks you can use to spice up your paint jobs which don't involve paying a professional to do it for you. Some mix and match of these techniques are how most of the skilled painters make such beautiful miniatures, and even a basic understanding of them can help you improve on yours.

Drybrushing

This is among one of my favorite techniques. Basically, drybrushing is a quick way to give raised details a good-looking highlight, or add a sense of wear and tear to something. It's also the best alternative with details which are impractical to paint individually. Examples of good drybrushing candidates are fur, hair, beards, feathers, and chainmail armor.

Here's how you do it.

- Apply paint to your brush and then wipe it off until it barely leaves color on a surface. It's helpful to test this on a piece of paper towel before starting.
- Brush quickly across the surface at an angle nearly parallel to it. In the case of hair, where the feature has an easily identifiable 'grain', paint perpendicular to the detail for best results.
- Apply as many drybrushings across the surface as required to get the desired contrast. This will produce anything from a faint pastel highlighting over the original color to a sharply contrasting color on a basecoat.

There are several ways you can use drybrushing. You can drybrush a bright color over a dark basecoat. A good example of this is a metallic gray drybrushed over black for chainmail. If you are looking to create sharply contrasted highlights over a darker coat, or get a decent paint job quickly for the mass production of wargaming units, this is a good way to go.

For more depth, you can do multiple drybrushings over a basecoat. Take a gray beard for instance. For some real depth, paint it black, then drybrush gray. Afterward, drybrush with a lighter gray on its raised portions, then drybrush over the edges with white. This will give you a lot of depth without killing too much of your time.

Lastly, you can drybrush over a washed surface. Put down a basecoat and then wash with an ink or thinned paint to shade the recesses. Once it's dry, drybrush with the original color to restore some of the brightness to the uppermost portions. I'll discuss inks a bit more later.

When using this technique, you should beware of two things. I'll remind you again that drybrushing **kills brushes dead**. Nothing will take the point off a brush faster than drybrushing, which is why you should dedicate a brush for this purpose. That way, you don't trash your way through your general painting brushes in order to use this technique. Second, drybrushing can produce a grainy look. To defeat this, either use multiple passes over the same surface, or if you want a pastel look, use successive light drybrushings.

With a little practice on your part, this technique can be used to produce beautiful results.

Highlighting

Highlighting is the technique where you apply a bright color to the outermost features and edges of a model. This picks out the edges and imitates the way light would reflect off of an object if it was real.

Table-grade highlighting can be accomplished in two main ways. The first is to paint them on with a detail brush. Buttons, rivets, or edges can be highlighted this way by painting a brighter version of the base color along them. If it happens to be a button or a rivet, put the brighter color on top and in the center. This will create a sharp, distinct highlight that is easily distinguished from its surrounding features.

The second way is to simply drybrush over the basecoat. While the first technique produces sharp, striated lines, the second highlights over the raised surfaces of your subject with a more muted, pastel look. While the paint with which you drybrush may be significantly brighter than the basecoat, the appearance will still look like a fairly natural change.

The way you should highlight depends solely on which look you prefer. You are, in the end, the best judge of your own tastes, and either way works.

Using Washes

Washes, once called inks, are translucent, watery colors used for several types of effects over paint. The only ones I have ever seen is produced by [Games Workshop](#), and I have found those to be useful and quite spectacular. By themselves, they have no coverage, but are used along with paints for several effects.

Washing

This is a quick way to create shading in a model. Paint over the area to be washed, then apply a wash over that. The wash will run over the flat surfaces and then dry in the crevices, creases, and other recessed areas. The effect will be to create shading in these areas, and leave the higher details more or less untouched. If you combine this with a highlight over the topmost details, it makes for a quick, effective way to get a decent amount of depth to your painting.

If you choose this technique, use a wash color similar, or at least complimentary, to the painted color. If it's painted purple, for example, use a purple wash. Yellows, reds, and oranges also go well with brown washes, black for grays, but for everything else, use the same color wash as the paint, or as close as you can get.

The bad news is that washes aren't perfect. The technique takes a fair amount of practice to master. Washes have less surface tension than water, which insures that they will run all over a surface very quickly. When wet, the lines it leaves are sharp and easy to see, but become less distinct once the ink dries. They'll also tint the topmost paint, leaving it slightly off of its original color. And if the paint is too dark, using a wash will be useless, as you won't be able to see it over the basecoat.

Despite this, washes work well with faces, beards, or anything else with large numbers of recesses. I have lately moved away from this technique myself in favor of layering and drybrushing, as it produces a level of definition I personally prefer. Which one you want to use is a matter of your personal preference.

Glazing

This technique is a deliberate color tint over an undercoat. I don't use it much, since the only use I've found for it is to get around colors with weak coverage (like yellow) by tinting over white. You can also use it for special effects, such as brown over metallics for a rust effect. But mostly I've found it's a very specific purpose technique.

To glaze a color, paint a thin coating of wash over the surface, and don't allow it to collect or puddle. If you do, it will create a mottling effect that will break the smooth coloration of your tint.

Thinning Paint

This is my preferred way to get around colors with weak coverage, like yellow. Instead of thinning the paint to a proper consistency with water, use a similarly colored wash. The result will be paint with far less pesky surface tension than the watered variety with a lot more color 'kick' to it. I did this with yellow, and the resulting hybrid was brilliant, covered beautifully, and dried more quickly than it would have with water.

Just be careful when you do this. Add too much, and you get paint that acts like a wash. That's when it starts running into places you wished it didn't go, like the paint job you just placed on that detail next to it. And, if the ink doesn't exactly match your paint, you may create a different color this way. But by and large, this is a good way to thin weak coverage colors to consistency and make them far more cooperative at the same time.

Guide Coats

Guide coats are for models with white basecoats. White basecoats make it nearly impossible to see the inner and outer details of a model, so you wash it with a dark color to make them easier to tell apart. This allows you to see what you're doing if you like white basecoats because you want the brighter paint jobs it will give you.

Washing with Watered Paint

You can create a wash with paint, and to do this, mix with water until it is exceptionally runny. This is not the equivalent of a packaged wash, which comes thinned with a liquid far less subject to surface tension. Watered paint tends to puddle, which is good for some effects, but not quite the equivalent of a wash. The up side is that you don't have to buy anything extra if you do this.

Overall, washes and their uses are worthwhile skills to master. It's up to you to decide if you prefer the look of washes and what they can do, or if another technique better suits your tastes. It all depends on the desired end result and how much time and effort you intend to spend.

Layering

Have you ever seen pictures of painted models where the colors appear to seamlessly fade from one to another? I personally spent the longest time trying to deduce how that was done. Was it magic? Technique? A shrine to the Gods of Hobby Painting?

Nope, it was **layering**. This is the process by which one layer of paint goes on top of another until you get to the topmost details, which get the brightest coat. If you use enough layers, you can create the illusion of a gradual fade of one color to another that appears to change like magic.

There are two main ways in which this can be done:

- **Gradually:** This technique starts with a basecoat. Then you successively paint on a slightly brighter shade until you get to the top coat. Each layer goes over the one below it, and each time you leave a little of the lower coat showing around the edges.

To get a gradual effect, you will need at least five layers of paint, and the more layers you use, the closer you can be to the model and still see the illusion of a gradual fade. The more sharply the base and final colors differ (for example, midnight blue and sky blue), the more layers you need to make the change look gradual.

You can also make the mistake of not changing each successive layer of paint enough, and you won't notice any change if that happens.

- **Sharp contrast:** This uses only a few layers, the lowest of which is sharply different from the top coats. This will get you a decent paint job quickly for when you wish to mass produce or simply don't want to spend a lot of time. The result is a sharp contrast between the upper layers of paint and the bottom most layer, which gives the appearance of sharp lines in your surface. If you want to leave sharp distinctions or put dark lines between a set of similar features without lining in, like a quiver of arrows, this is a good way to go.

A three layer paint job is good for giving miniatures table-top painting quality quickly, and is a good solution when you mass produce unit members for wargaming. Faces, pouches, pieces of clothing, or any other feature which you wish to give depth without a lot of trouble are candidates for this kind of layering.

Whichever way you choose is up to your personal preference. Most of the award-winning display pieces use very gradual layering, and while that takes the most effort, also produces beautiful results. I personally find sharper distinctions pleasant, and have used sharp contract layering instead of washes for some of my projects.

Finishing Your Miniature

You're done with your miniature. All of your hard work and long hours have come to fruition, and now you want your glorious paint job to remain intact. This will require a finishing coat.

You have three choices: gloss, semi-gloss, and flat. Which one should you use? That depends on the look you want. Gloss finishes produce shiny models, flat (matte) coats are far more muted, and semi-gloss (satin) is in-between. The type of finish has no effect on the protection received by the paint, just the end look. So, whichever type you prefer is fine.

You can also mix them. You can make only certain parts glossy and flat, or gloss and semi-gloss, or flat and semi-gloss. If you're feeling really industrious and want to triple finish something, you can choose what gets the gloss, what's only semi-shiny, and what stays flat. I couldn't tell you the result of this, though, since I've never used more than a gloss and flat mix myself.

The not-nearly-exhaustive list of good candidates for it's own gloss coat are:

- Shiny, polished armor and weapons
- Shiny dragon scales
- Wet sea monster skin
- Jewels and jewelery
- Eyes
- Obsidian
- Polished Marble

Well, you get the picture by now.

If you want to go this route, it's easier if you just coat the whole model with gloss coat, then paint over the parts you want flat with a flat finish. It has been my experience that painting gloss over flat finishes produces an odd look.

Application

Finishes come in spray or paint application. If you want to mix finishes, you will have to paint a matte coat over its shinier base, and so that much can't be avoided. However, if you're only interested in a single finish, I personally recommend spraying. In fact, all I ever do is spray on a basecoat and if I want to dull something out, paint on flat finish once its dry.

Here's the good and the bad of each way.

Spray Finishes

The Good	The Bad
Covers the whole model evenly	Can't pick and choose what to finish
No chance of brushing off paint unless you drown it	Can't do touch-ups with a spray can
Far faster than brushing	

Paint Finishes

The Good

The really tough stuff comes in paint-only
Can be used to pick and choose finishes and so can create mixed finishes

The Bad

Chance to brush off paint
Need extra effort for even coverage
Takes a fair amount of time
Requires additional solvents to clean brushes

Don't forget the finishes on your miniatures. The additional effects and extension to your paint's life span is well worth the effort.

Stripping Old Paint Jobs

Sooner or later, you'll get to the point you want to strip an old paint job.

With practice, you'll get so good you realize all of your earlier models can be done better. Some of them, might even look like the victims of a paintball battle. Your new stuff is exactly where you want it to be, but the earlier stuff? Great models, but the painting leaves much to be desired.

Don't feel bad. You wouldn't have had any later work without the earlier work. Just think of them as practice, because that's what they were. Besides, you have options when this is the case. Which one you'll use will depend on your circumstances.

Do nothing

Uh, no.

Unless you're willing to endure your earlier miniatures as they are, the answer to this is "Yeah, right". Wimping out is unnecessary.

Paint over it

This option is only viable on surfaces without tightly sculpted details, like hair. You simply paint over the old with the new. Quick and dirty, but effective under *very specific* circumstances.

The reason you can't do this with tight details is that sooner or later, you **will** build up enough paint to drown them, properly thinned or not, and probably have already. Not to mention the finishes contribute to this too. So save this method for surfaces that lack details, like the flat sides of model tanks.

Sanding

This is specifically for flat surfaces suffering the effects of thick paint. This type of paint job leaves textures on the surface that look like lines of amorphous channels and bumps. These lines can be sanded flat with fine-grit, automotive sandpaper, and create a surface ready for another attempt.

Just be careful with this, because that fine-grit sandpaper will also happily remove paint, primer, and details like rivets or sharp corners. So if you do sand, don't simply brush the paper across the surface without a care, because it will indiscriminately shred everything on the miniature it touches if you do.

Total strip

This is the best option, and the only one I really recommend for a bad paint job, but it's the tac-nuke of paint repair. If you use a total strip, you will throw out any baby that happens to be in the bathwater, proverbially speaking.

Stripping miniatures is not a heavy-duty job. Don't use harsh chemicals, grinding tools, hot air guns, and certainly not a steel brush. Miniatures are made of plastic (which will melt in acetone or under a hot-air stream) or pewter (a beautiful but weak alloy made of antimony, copper, and lead) and will not withstand the same processes used to strip furniture, cars, houses, boats, and the like. So, unless you like plastic blobs or using a wire brush to give your miniature the amorphous furball look, I recommend against the above.

I use Simple Green to strip miniature paint. I've heard of other chemicals, but I use this because:

- It has a nice smell.
- It's harmless to humans and miniatures alike. I've put my fingers in this stuff concentrated, to no harm at all. Plus, I've left miniatures in it for days on end, and it doesn't hurt them whether they're plastic or pewter.
- It will grind right through finish, paint, and primer. It's only a question of time. On the down side, it will also chew through superglue, so you may have to reassemble your miniature.
- It has no time limit. I've left models in this stuff for days to remove all the paint without any damage to them.

I personally have found that pewter miniatures strip far more quickly than plastic ones, but this method will take the paint off of either type. Strangely, it won't appear to have done anything at all to your miniature until you use a toothbrush on it, and then the paint will brush away with little effort.

To strip the model using Simple Green:

- Fill a container with Simple Green high enough to immerse your miniature. Nothing special is required. I cut out the bottom of a plastic gallon milk carton for my last project, and it did the job beautifully.
- Place your miniature or miniatures in the cleaner and leave them there overnight. If you must keep this container indoors for some reason, put a cover over it, unless you love the smell of pungent cleaning goodness.
- Remove the miniature the next day and begin removing paint with a soft brush. I use a cheap toothbrush I bought from a dollar store with medium bristles, and if you intend to do a lot of stripping, you may burn through several of those.

Some paint is prone to stick in the recesses of corners or tight details, and you may have to remove it with the point of a modeling tool or a toothpick. Leaving it there will simply leave a glob in your detail, and you will find it muted, if not eliminated, in the next priming.

Rinse the model clean. I have found no difference between rinsing the model under a faucet and soaking it in water to insure you remove all the cleaner. The primer stuck as well to the stripped miniature either way.

Dry, or allow to dry, then reassemble as required. Once this is done, it can be primed as if it was out of the box.

In this way, you can recover earlier miniatures that are perfectly good but for their paint jobs. If you feel really industrious, you can refurbish all of your practice paint jobs this way. Someday, I certainly will.

Basic Basing and Base Decoration

Yes, you can decorate the bases of miniatures too. Since they need them to stand, you should do something to them in any case. A beautiful miniature on an unfinished base will defeat the purpose of making a beautiful miniature in the first place.

The making of the more ornate terrain panoramas that you'll see basing the models entered in contests or display pieces is a subject worthy of its own treatment. These kinds of bases require the same sorts of painting skills you would use on a model plus some additional modeling and construction, and their creation takes as much time if not more than the original miniature.

Preparing the Base

A single model base for a wargaming figure about one to two inches tall comes unpainted and unprepared. The bulk of the ones I've seen are either square or round, and they have to be prepared before using them. Some of them are slotted for use with models that come with the bars across their feet, but the more general purpose ones come without them.

To prepare a base, remove it from its sprue (if it comes in one). Cut, sand, or file the flash from its edges and, if you want to paint the whole model at once, glue the model to the base. If it's a slotted base with a slotted model, you may find that the model doesn't completely fill the slot and leaves gaps. If this is the case, use modeling putty to fill in the gaps, insure it is level with the surface and wait for it to harden before priming the whole thing.

If by chance you happen to have a model with the bar across its feet, and want to place it on a base without a slot, simply remove the bar with pair of clippers, file the former contact points flat, and glue to the base. You can also use this technique when you're making bases from scratch. I've used wood, and I've seen people use small tiles for them. Anything with enough width and weight to keep your miniature standing will do, so you don't have to settle for anything specific unless you need your miniatures to rank.

Now, even if you don't want to spend a lot of time turning your base into the central exhibit of an art museum, it doesn't mean that some basic decoration is out of reach. There are a few simple things you can do beyond a single color paint job that will leave you with an attractive base devoid of massive time expenditures.

Flocking

Flocking is the process of putting sand, grass, small stones, or other material on the top of a base to make it look more like terrain. You can acquire flocking material from any hobby shop or comic shop that sells wargaming materials. I've even found some decent flock from the terrain building materials used to make railroad sets.

To flock a base:

- Apply basic white glue to the top of your base after you've painted and attached everything. Be careful to avoid gluing your model, otherwise you'll get flocked model instead of just a flocked base. The thinner white glues work best for this, and personally I would discourage the use of anything else. To apply, just cut a strip of cardboard or card stock and clip a point onto its end, as a brush to spread glue is overkill.
- Pour a small pile of flocking material into a cardboard box, on a paper plate, or anything else that will hold it until it's deep enough to immerse your model's base.
- Dip your model in the flocking material until the entire top layer of glue is covered.
- If you happened to flock a bit of your model by accident, remove the excess with a paper towel before it dries.

Or, you could flock it with more than one material. I flocked the bases on one of my units with pebbles, and found out I didn't get the coverage I wanted. So, while the glue was still wet, I flocked over the pebbles with sand, and together, they gave it the look I desired.

This will give you a simple but appealing addition to your model.

Flocking with Sand

Sand is a good way to decorate a base with a versatile painting surface that can be used to create a wide variety of terrain looks. I mention it separately because it is a subject worthy it's own treatment. And if you do want to go this route, the process works differently than that above.

To prepare a sand flock:

- When you originally prepare the base, put the model on the base, flock the base with sand *and then* prime everything. The sand should be primed just like the rest of the model.
- Once you have decided on a look, paint the sand with the desired basecoat and then drybrush layers of paint over it. Here are some examples.



From the top left, they are grass, snow, crusted lava, and plush purple carpet =).

For a little extra effort, you can attain a wide variety of model-complementing bases using sand. While it does take more time than a basic terrain flock, it can prove to

be the most rewarding. Whichever way you decide to go, good base preparation and decoration can help make your model better.

Wooden Basing

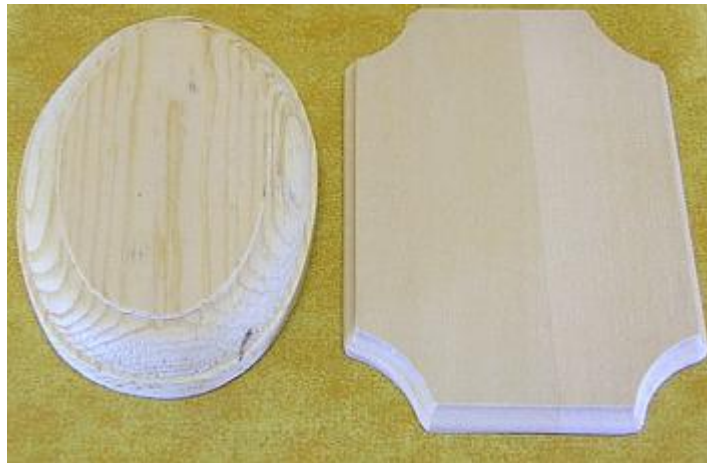
Plastic bases are ok but little else. Certainly, they have the advantage of coming with most of the miniatures, and hence that big plus of being FREE. If you're so inclined, you can decorate them with anything (flock, paint-on decorations, features modeled out of Green Stuff, 24K gold leaf if you don't like owning money). And if you want your units to rank or you play games with your miniatures, the square plastic bases are a must.

But for a more noble-looking base for a display piece within the budget of the average miniature painter (like me), I highly recommend wood.

Why wood?

It's durable. Unless you're buying balsa wood, which can be used to make model airplanes but has no practical purpose in miniature basing, it can easily hold up to even pewter miniatures. Basswood in particular is light and durable, and is easily acquired from any hobby shop.

It comes in a variety of shapes. I'm speaking of the small or larger sized plaque pieces that come in the interesting shapes and sizes, like these:



They're usually used to mount a piece of brass that tells everyone how phenomenal the recipient is. For those that come unfinished (although you can buy the finished variety), you have a solid, well-shaped base that will mount a large pewter miniature

with ease. Plus, it leaves plenty of space for any decorations you may wish to add onto the rest of it.

Again, I live within about 15 minutes from a craft store that sells these sorts of pieces in just the right sizes for a large miniature. They also sell them in sizes for small panoramas, so you can construct scenes or mount vehicles if you choose.

You can do all sorts of things to decorate wood you can't do with plastic. Wood that is thick enough to have sides can be decorated in multitude of ways not available with the simple plastic bases. While the details of each type are out of the scope of this ebook (as whole books have been and can be written about some of them), I'll list them here for those who may wish to pursue them in more depth.

- **Woodburning:** This is the art of basically "drawing" designs and shapes into wood with a burning tool. This leaves a burned-in design on the surfaces in which this is done, and with some practice, can produce beautiful results. I personally have only seen pictures of this sort of work and have no experience in doing this.
- **Woodcarving:** I actually have some real experience in this one. It's been a while since I've carved reliefs into wood, but this allows three-dimensional decorations to be placed on bases that can then be painted or stained (I mention staining below). If you want to learn or can already carve wood, you can really bat for the rafters and turn a wooden base into it's own work of art.

When carving wood, you face a tradeoff in the ease with which you can work it and the amount of smaller details it will hold. The hardwoods can hold lots of tiny details, but will take forever to shape and dull your tools quickly. Pine is a softer wood and carves with relative ease, but you won't be giving it much florid work. I've carved basswood without much trouble and had it hold all the details I wanted, but it's still a fairly soft and very dull-looking wood without a lot of visible grain.

- **Staining:** Unless you're working with a wood with no discernible grain, staining is a good choice. This will color the wood while letting the grain show through, which is a simple way to get a beautiful base quickly.

I've seen two forms of stains so far. The first is the liquid variety, which can be bought from a hardware store in any number of colorations. Most

of them can be found in the smaller cans that aren't vastly more than you need (like the sizes used to stain entire deck porches or large pieces of furniture) and are inexpensive. They can be applied evenly with a rag, but can be a bit messy. It can also be smelly, so if you use this type, do so in a well-ventilated area.

The second is the gel variety. The gel version of which I'm speaking comes in a tube like paint. I have some of these is sizes of about two ounces (59 ml), which is more than enough for my purposes. It squeezes out in beads, which can be spread by a rag as above, but not as much of it is required. It's also neater, and far less smelly.

Either version will give you a beautifully stained base.

In all other regards, wood can be decorated just like plastic, and the thicker pieces can be drilled, which means pinning is an option to help support your model and features. It can also be finished like plastic, so your wooden base can be a shiny, muted, or satiny wooden base if you like. So if you're ever looking to create a display piece rather than a table-grade miniature, wood basing is a good way to go.

Where to Get Miniatures

Chances are you can get miniatures from your local comic, wargaming, or hobby stores. If you can't, or happen to want a larger selection to paint, here are a few places you can go.

- [Mithril Miniatures](#): A miniatures company out of Ireland with a nice line of Lord of the Rings miniatures.
- [Games Workshop](#): This is the link to the official Games Workshop web site. They sell their own lines of miniatures, paints, and miniature painting and modeling supplies, including the dwarf army units that are the namesake of this ebook. This link takes you to their gateway page, which can send you to your desired country section.
- [Wargaming Miniatures](#): A selection of wargaming miniatures and books, many from Games Workshop.

- [Fantasy Miniatures](#): A selection of fantasy miniatures mostly made by Reaper.
- [D&D Miniatures](#): If you're a fan of this genre of fantasy, you can find some to paint here.
- [Star Wars Miniatures](#): All kinds of Star Wars miniatures, including some from the Star Wars games. Painted and unpainted.
- [Model Tanks](#): Model tank kits.
- [Model Planes](#): Model plane kits.
- [Model Ships](#): A bit large to paint, but if you like them, you can get model ships here.
- [Micromark](#): They don't sell miniatures, but if you're into miniatures enough to *make your own*, this company makes molding products and sculpting tools that can help you.

Bonus Section: Displaying Minis on the Internet

Love your miniatures? Want to show them off? Display them on the Internet.

All this is good, but there is one thing you need to know: The miniatures you buy are the copyrighted intellectual property of the companies that make them. Those companies may have some restrictions on how you display photographs of them, because those photographs are derivative works of their copyrighted products.

Games Workshop in particular is a stickler for how you display pictures of their miniatures, but other companies might have different standards. If you're ever in doubt or simply don't know, **ask the company first**. I can *all but guarantee* they **won't** let you use their stuff for any commercial purposes without their permission.

On the other hand, I displayed my miniatures on a personal web site without any trouble after I complied with the Games Workshop copyright restrictions. I had fun showing them, and no one had their rights trampled. Just make sure you take the companies that make them into account, and they won't give you any trouble.

If you love your painted miniatures enough to want to display them on your own web site, making one isn't as hard as you think. Here are a few resources that can help you.

- [Bluehost](#): It's an affordable web hosting company. You can even get a domain name with them. Plus, it will help you set up things like a blog with ease using their Simple Scripts menu option, and you can display your latest project just by adding a post.
- [Digital Photography Secrets](#): If you're not happy with the digital photographs you're taking now, get some tips on how to improve them with this guide.
- [One Hour HTML](#): A quick start guide to HTML, which is a simple language used to make web sites from scratch if you don't want to use something like WordPress.
- [Web 2.0 Traffic Stampede](#): While this ebook is tuned to making money with traffic, you'll still want people to see your new site. Here's how to get it.
- [Turn Words Into Traffic](#): A guide to a free way to get backlinks to your web site with Article Marketing.

About the Author

My name is Ryan Ambrose, and I've been painting wargaming miniatures on and off for a few years now. I hope you found my tips useful, and good luck with your new projects!