

# CLASS HAND OUT

## 11



### Brush Talk

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Do you sometimes find brushes a conundrum? Which brush should you use? How do you use it? Have you ever looked at the plethora of brushes available now in the marketplace and thought, what's that for and would I use that brush? Hopefully this handout will help to demystify some of those questions. We will not only look at the different styles of brushes but investigate the varying fibers used, and why in some instances some brushes are more useful than others. After all, would you use a broom to baste your turkey at Christmas?

Firstly, we look at what makes a brush a brush, and then we will talk about various brush styles and how they can be utilized.

### *What makes a Brush?*

There are three components which are assembled to make a brush.

- The Handle
- The Ferrule
- The Fibres, Heads or Filaments



**Handle:** The most popular material selected for brush handles is timber, however, plastic or acrylic have also been popular. Wooden handles require careful selection by the manufacturer for the correct timber with the appropriate moisture content which is vital to ensure that the paint when applied remains in contact with the wood for the life of the brush. Soaking brushes in water containers can very quickly saturate the wood causing it to swell and the paint to crack and fall off. Soaking can also negate the glue which holds the handle to the Ferrule to be compromised and the two components become separated.

**Ferrule:** This section of the brush which holds the fibres or heads onto the handle is normally metal. The metal can be of differing compounds and some compounds are more rust and corrosive resistant than others. Nickel plate is probably the better of the compounds used in the brush manufacturing sector today. Many years ago, when the technology to make metal ferrules did not exist brush makers made ferrules from the feather or quill of ducks. A very small portion of brushes are still made today using this old method. The quill is placed in boiling water to make it soft and pliable and while soft, it is slipped over the head and handle joining them together. These are then tied with wire or strong cotton to secure in place.

**Fibres, Heads or Filaments:** Made from a variety of natural or synthetic hairs or fibres the heads are shaped, secured together and glued into the ferrule then crimped or clamped to the handle.

### **Let's Look at the Fibres First**

#### *Bristle or Hogs Hair:*

Brushes made from Bristle or Hog's Hair can sometimes be referred to as 'student or craft' grade brushes due to their low cost, however, you can get good quality bristle brushes which do not come cheap but will be a dream to use. Bristle brushes have very course fibres which have split ends and do not hold their shape as well as Taklon or sable brushes, however, once again the more expensive ones do hold their shape extremely well. They are quite stiff and used

for pushing large quantities of oil or acrylic paint around particularly on textured surfaces like that of canvas. Sometimes referred to a ‘scrubby’ brush they can also be used for dry brushing or applying gesso or texture paste to create interesting surfaces. Their stiff attribute is excellent when painting with oils as the bristles are stiff enough to push the oil paint around the canvas.

***White Taklon:***

A synthetic fibre which gives good quality results, it has the ability to hold their shape and a good choice for the painter who is wanting an economic brush which performs well. Mainly used in conjunction with acrylic paints, however, manufacturers are now making stiff synthetic Taklon brushes especially for the oil painter and these are just terrific. If we look very closely at the bristles every hair is of a uniform size giving this brush the ability to hold a good quantity of paint while keeping its shape. Taklon brushes have good spring and bounce back into shape as soon as they are released from the painting surface.

***Golden Taklon, Sablelene or Imitation Sable:***

Also, a synthetic fibre made from Taklon which has been dyed a golden colour to represent the natural colour of sable. Some dyeing techniques will deepen the colour of the fibres on the tips making the brush look more attractive. The major difference between true golden Taklon and white Taklon is the fibre size. While the white Taklon fibres are of all the same diameter the golden Taklon fibres are of differing diameters imitating natural hair. This differing of sizes or thicknesses of the fibre imitates the natural size differences which occur brushes like sable and squirrel. The main advantages of golden Taklon over white Taklon is its ability to hold more paint, has less tendency to leave brushstrokes, points and chisel edges are more precise and it has better spring back ability. These brushes are ideal for use in detailed paintings as they are resilient, hold their shape well, are excellent value and can take rougher treatment than sable brushes can. As painters become more experienced, they may tend to use more Golden Taklon than White Taklon as they become more aware of the subtle differences in their performances. Be aware however, some cheaper white Taklon brushes are now being dyed to look like golden Taklon so choose your brushes carefully and if it is priced too cheaply it is probably in disguise.

***Sable:***

Sable brushes are no doubt the Rolls Royce of the brush world, however, there are differing qualities of sable hair available. The sable, mink or weasel is shaved for its hair and the quality of the hair depends on a great number of factors. What part of the animal did the hair come from? Was it the tummy region or the back or some other part? Different areas of the animal will produce different qualities.

- Was the animal shaved in winter or in summer? Winter pelts are more luscious and thicker than the summer pelts.
- Was the animal stressed at the time? We all know now that cuts of meat are more tender from an animal which is less stressed than it is from a stressed beast. So stress plays a major role in the hairs quality.

All these factors and more will influence the quality of the sable hair which is used in the brushes. Sable brushes give excellent shape and are especially wonderful when doing stroke work as they have the ability to give an excellent fine tip or chisel. Sable flats and angles are an excellent choice for fine detailed oil painting as well. Liner brushes made from sable are a must for those extra fine lines. Watercolour techniques can be achieved beautifully with sable as they hold a great deal of water and paint while maintaining its fine point. The ability to hold their shape at the same time giving excellent ‘snap’ or ‘spring’ are two great advantages of this hair. Remember there are a lot of imitators out there and only Pure Kolinsky Sable or red sable is best.

***Squirrel:***

The squirrel hair brushes are very similar to the sable, however, at a slightly cheaper cost. They are very soft and are normally not used by general painters but are preferred by China and Glass painters who are working on a slick surface. Squirrel does not have the excellent ‘snap’ or ‘spring’ associated with that of the sable.

***Shapes:***

The tufts or heads of a brush can be a variety of shapes and these shapes when used correctly can assist the painter to achieve wonderful effects. Shaped are made by tapping hairs into a mold and they tied off before being placed into the ferule.

**Does Size and Shape matter?**

**Round/ Extended Round:** A good round brush will be full bodied with the fibres forming a fine point and have good paint holding ability. Used for comma and stroke work when thick to thin strokes are required. They can also be used for filling or blocking in and detail work. Round brushes can be multi loaded with different colours at the same time to achieve interest to your work.

*Extended Rounds* are slightly longer in their bristle length and are ideal when the length of the stroke you are trying to achieve is longer than normal. These extended rounds can travel a greater distance than the average round brush as they can hold more paint. Sizes generally range from 6/0 right up to #40. The larger rounds are popular with watercolour painters as they hold good quantities of watery paint for backgrounds etc.



**Liner/ Script Liner/ Mini Script/ Mini Liner/Rigger:** There are 5 different styles of liner brushes: script liner, liner, mini liner, rigger and mini script. Script liners are one of the longest in length and do require practice to master its use, however, once mastered you can paint for miles without a break. The length of the brush enables the script liner to hold copious amounts of watery paint enabling you to produce long unbroken lines. Liners are shorter in length but do the same job, however, do not go quite as far as their cousin the script liner. While the mini script and mini liner are shorter than their name's sake with the mini script being one of the most popular liner brushes as it falls between the script liner and the liner. It has to be my favourite. It has good length without being overly long allowing it to give the painter the ability to paint long unbroken lines while at the same time giving good control over the brush. The rigger is extra-long and often used by sign writers and pin stripe painters. No matter what length you prefer these brushes are ideal for fine detail work, scrolling,

painting tendrils and fine stroke work. Sizes can vary from 30/0 to #4.



**Long Shader/ Short Shader/ One Stroke/ Wash/ Long flat/ Bright's:** No matter what you choose to call these brushes they technically look basically the same as each other. They are wide and flat with the end of the bristles forming a sharp chisel edge ranging generally in size from 1/8" to 1 1/2".

*Short Shaders or Short Flats* are also known as *Bright's* and are designed to push the paint around a little more fiercely than the longer Shaders. Highly sort after by oil painters as they are used for wet-on-wet blending, short controlled strokes, chisel work and sharp edges.

*Long Shaders or Long Flats* are mainly used for stroke work, blending, floating and broad stroke work. These brushes can be multi-loaded and often used to paint large flat areas much more.





*One Stroke of Wash Brushes* are slightly longer in length than the long flats and can be used for larger areas requiring washes like skies and water as well as being used as a base coating and varnishing brush. Watercolour techniques can be achieved by using this brush as its extra length will hold more water and paint than its shorter bristle cousins. Used for base coating, varnishing, watery backgrounds, watercolour effects, large floats to anchor your designs. And much more.



**Mops:** A soft natural haired brush ranging in sizes generally from 1/8” to 1”. A must for all painters. This brush gives the artist the tool required to soften harsh edges and floats which are not quite perfect. Floated colour can be softened by gently touching the mop to the surface while it is still wet. Try softening your scumble background with a large mop to give a smoke look or why not use it to soften your sky when painting sunsets or sunrises. Remember your mop brush is a natural hair brush so loss of hair is a natural occurrence. If this happens while you are painting do not try to remove the hair, simply leave it until the paint has dried thoroughly then with a slight rub with the finger the hair will be able to be removed.



**Filbert/ Cat's Tongue:** A filbert brush is basically a flat brush with a rounded chisel end, sometimes referred to incorrectly as a Cat's Tongue. A Cat's Tongue has a pointy tip not the flat wide tip of a filbert. Ideal for base coating or filling in items in your design. The rounded tip enables you to manoeuvre around the shape of flowers and fruit etc. easily while the flatness of the brush gives good coverage leaving no brushstrokes. Used for base coating or filling in, soft edge floats or one stroke flower petals. I find the filbert ideal for use when dry brushing. .



**Spotters:** These brushes are small, short round brushes which are often used to create spots or dots, hence their name. Often used to paint tiny flowers and small detail work where not a lot of paint will be required. They look just like a small round. The short bristles give excellent control; however, they do not hold a lot of paint. Sizes range from 3/0 to 1.



**Angle Shaders:** No painter should be without a range of these wonderfully versatile brushes. Ranging in sizes from 1/16" to 3". They can be used for floating or blending, cutting in or stroke work. To use load the brush with either paint or retarder and picking a little contrast colour up with the tip blend well on your palette, remember that what you see on your palette is what you will get on your piece. You may also use the angle shader for cutting in around seams or for getting in hard-to-reach places.





**Comb and Feathering Filbert:** Combs and Feathering Filberts are designed with the bristles cut at different lengths, so your strokes give a feathered appearance rather than a complete stroke. Combs have a straight chisel end like that of a flat brush while Feathering Filberts have a chisel end cut like a filbert, rounded at the corners. The rounded corners of the Feathering Filbert help prevent ‘hit’ marks and I find blend better than the comb. To correctly load and use either of these brushes the paint generally must be of an ink like consistency. Hold the brush as upright as possible so the paint can ‘flow’ down and wisp the strokes onto your piece. Both brushes are ideal for painting hair, foliage, bird feathers and animal fur. Sizes range from 1/4” to 1/2”.



**Fans:** Fan brushes are similar to Feathering Filberts and Combs in respect to their ability to create wispy strokes. The bristles are cut all the same length, it is the shape of the fan which creates the wispy effect, hence their name. Also used for foliage etc. the fan shape will give you a wider coverage and is more useful when a larger area is to be painted for example backgrounds or large foliage areas. Oil painters often use a fan instead of a mop to soften areas. Sizes range from 1-4



**Deerfoot or Stipplers:** Deerfoot brushes are made with natural hair which is strong in texture and quite stiff. The ferule is shaped like the foot of a deer or hoofed animal with the longest end called the toe. Generally, Deerfoot brushes are loaded with paint when dry and are not rinsed out with water until the use of the stippler is complete. To clean the brush, it is wiped or scrubbed on a lint free paper towel. The brush can be either gently pounced onto your piece or ‘smashed’ depending on the effect you are wanting to achieve. It can be double loaded with the toe dipped into a contrasting colour. Used for painting foliage, trees, teddy bears, filler flowers, flower centres and much more. Sizes range from 1/16” to 1/2”.



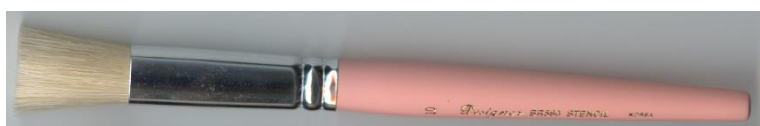
**Oval Wash:** This would have to be one of my favourite brushes. Shaped like an oversized filbert with a good body of fibres. An alternative to the base coating brush it has properties which make it a better choice when varnishing or base coating. The filbert shape reduces the chance of ‘hit’ marks when the brush encounters your piece giving you a better finish. Ideal for scumbling and washes. Generally made from Golden Taklon fibres it is soft and a dream to work with. Sizes range from 3/4” to 1”.



**Smooching:** The most versatile brush in any painter’s brush box. Sizes range from 4 to 14 they are usually made from soft Badger hair and are short, round and stubby in appearance. Used to create highlights, shadows, base coating, foliage and much more. When loaded dry with very little paint, scrub on a lint free paper towel to remove excess and working in a circular motion create highlights on fruit, vegetables, flowers etc. building up the intensity of the highlight slowly. It can also be used as a stippler and even used to basecoat. Since discovering the Smooching brush there has been no piece which I have painted which did not contain some form of Smooching in it.



**Stencil:** Not generally regarded as a brush which Artists would use, however, I have chosen to include these brushes as they are a great assist to us painters in creating interesting background techniques etc. Try stencilling leaves, roses or shells or other complimentary designs on your background in a colour one or two shades different to your base colour before painting on your design. Or why not place your stencil on your piece and fill the cut out with texture paste, swipe a ruler across the surface removing excess texture paste and remove stencil and when dry replace your stencil and add colour to your raised design. Used in addition to your favourite painting styles you can greatly increase the range of affects you are able to achieve. Stencil brushes are used dry also, picking up just a touch of paint and work well on a piece of lint free paper towel to remove excess paint. Working in a circular motion scrub over the cut out of the stencil gradually building up the desired colour/colours.



**Sash:** Last but by no means least the Sash Brush. Often referred to as the ‘best brush in the world’. It is a highly versatile brush which can be used in multiple ways. I use it for stippling, blending and blocking in just to mention a few. Used with acrylics or oils. I discovered this brush only about 12 months ago and my only regret is that it comes in just 3 sizes 0, 2 and 6



Shapes of brush heads are numerous and there are probably more out there than what I have covered here today. When used correctly brushes can enhance your work and assist you to achieve even greater results. An incorrect brush or a brush in poor condition will result in a less than satisfactory performance. Always clean your brush well after each use and wash in clean water regularly during your painting session. After painting rinse your brushes well in clean water or odourless solvent (if removing oil paints) then clean well with a good brush cleaner until all paint residue is removed. Reshape the bristles and dry well. I use Chroma's Brush Soap.

If you have any questions I can be contacted on  
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Cheers and happy painting

