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How To Manage Overspray! (A Detailed Guide)





Using an airbrush is a great hobby for many. However, one of the major struggles many face when working with an airbrush is trying to manage the overspray. Overspray can make an excellent idea render into a subpar piece...

That is why today we will be discussing some of the best practices used by professional airbrush artists in order to avoid overspray as much as possible. Given that you're here reading this, I'm assuming your having some troubles with overspray.

If that's the case, don't fret. Many struggle with overspray, including myself... My hope is that by the end of this article you'll walk away with some actionable ideas to better help you manage overspray.

To begin, What exactly is overspray in relation to airbrushing?

In simple terms, overspray is atomized paint particles that stray from the focused spray pattern of the airbrush.



- The second being, preventing overspray from getting on items within the vicinity of where your airbrushing. (Managing overspray in your workspace)

Below I have gone ahead and split the overall techniques for managing overspray into the above 2 parts. This is because some techniques will call for adjustments to your airbrush, while the others will call for adjustments to your workspace.

Techniques To Avoid Overspray On your Artwork

First we will discuss the techniques commonly used to prevent overspray on your artwork, simply because many struggle the most with overspray ending up on sections of their artwork, including myself.

First and foremost, ensure your paint is reduced correctly, and your PSI (Air pressure) is set properly. Having either one of these incorrectly mixed / set will result in many troubles ahead. One of those being significant overspray both on your artwork, as well as in the vicinity of where your airbrushing...

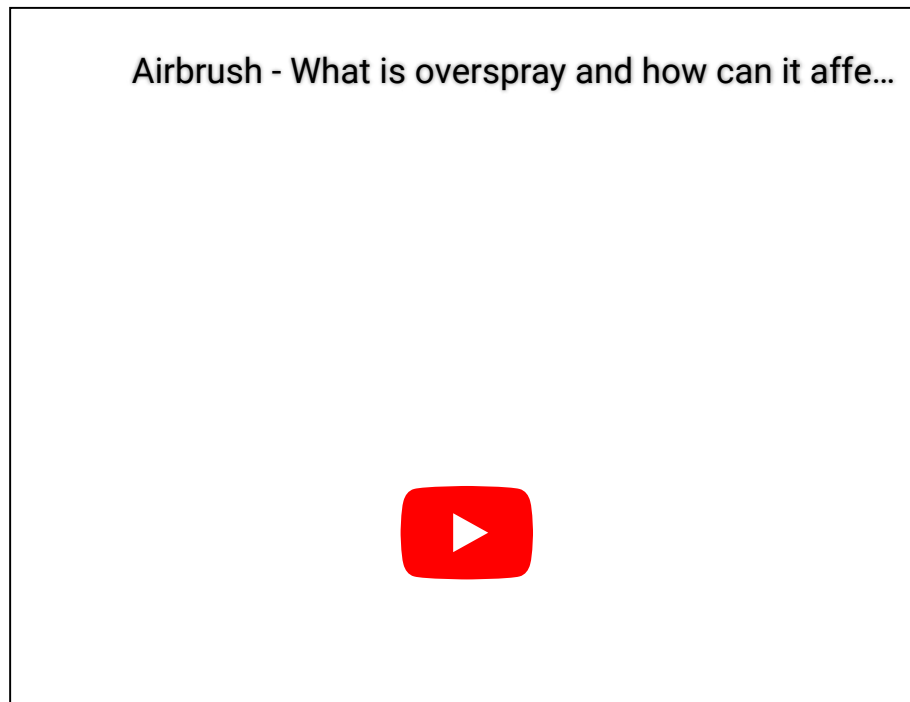
If you feel your paint reduction ratio may be off I strongly recommend you take a look at my



It can't tell you how important proper paint reduction and PSI levels are when it comes to painting with an airbrush.

Anyway, lets begin...

Below is a video discussing some important information on how overspray is produced when using an airbrush, and how it can impact your work. Shortly after we will discuss how to go about managing it...



Over Reduce Your Paint

By over reducing your paint, the paint will flow much better through the airbrush, which will result in a smoother, more reliable spray pattern, and best of all less overspray assuming you lower the PSI as well.

By over reducing your paint, you'll be able to lower your PSI to a greater extent, which in turn will reduce the amount of overspray being produced.



Leading on from the previous, Lowering your PSI (Air pressure) will result in less overspray being produced.

Simply because, the greater the PSI, the more the paint will atomize, making the micro paint droplets even smaller, and the smaller the paint droplets (atomized paint) gets the easier it will be for the paint to flow within the air stream produced by the airbrush. Rather than break away at the appropriate time and stick to your artwork.

Simply meaning, airbrushing at a high pressure will result in a greater likelihood of paint being blown into areas you'd rather it not be...

- The lower the PSI, the less overspray you'll have...
- The higher the PSI, the greater amount of overspray you'll have...

It's important to note, In order to lower your PSI to a greater extent, and avoid clogging of the airbrush. It's important that you over reduce your paint to maintain good flow. As discussed above.

So I guess you could say, "Lowering your PSI", and "Over reducing your paint" go hand in hand with each other...

Use Stencils





Stencils can be made using a simple cut out of the image you intend to airbrush. As well, they can be purchased from different retailers. I personally cut out my own using a utility knife, and a printout of the image I intend on painting.

If you'd like to learn how to make your own stencils, check out my latest guide: **How to make your own stencils (Cheap & Easy)**

Anyway, stencils are typically used to create the base of an artwork. Meaning, Get a rough layout as to where the lines should be. But they also double as a way to manage overspray. As long as you leave the stencil on the artwork (lined up) you will be able to airbrush fine details without the worry of getting overspray where you'd rather it not be.

But you've got to ensure the stencil does not move, otherwise you'll end up with multiple lines, and a mismatched appearance.

Use A Shield

A shield is similar to a stencil. However a shield will be held in the users hand rather than stuck to the artwork. It's very common for people to use, say, a scrap piece of paper as a shield to protect specific areas of their artwork from overspray.

Or when looking to form a hard / sharp edge on an artwork. A similar effect is achieved when using stencils.





You can create your own shields just by cutting a random shape out of a sheet of paper, or you can opt for a “[French Curve](#)“.

Get Closer

Get closer to the surface being painted. The closer you get, the smaller the spray pattern will be, and the less overspray that will make its way outside the parameters to which you intend to paint.

For example, note how a line looks when airbrushed close to the object vs. at a distance. The line painted in close proximity will have much sharper of an appearance. where as the line painted at a distance will appear very faded, and blended within its surroundings.

This is because overspray is greater when at a distance from the subject being painted then when in close proximity.

So to reduce overspray simply work in closer proximity to your piece.

Tilt The Airbrush

By simply tilting the airbrush you can control the direction to which the overspray goes. This means you can not only control the overspray, but make it benefit your piece.



say you're looking to paint a straight line, but you run into one edge of that line to raise it, forming what appears to be a shadow. While keeping the other edge sharp.

Now of course this could easily be done using a shield. However, in this example you will be doing it free hand.

In order to achieve this, you'll use the overspray to your advantage by simply tilting the airbrush 45 degrees or so. this will allow the overspray to skim across the surface on the side you desire to form the shadow.

While preventing it from getting on the edge you intend to keep sharp.

Think of it like skipping a rock across a pond. But in this case your skipping the air & paint across your artwork...

Opt For A Smaller Needle & Nozzle

You may have noticed airbrushes come with different sized needles and nozzles. One might come with a 0.5mm, while another will come with a 0.2mm...

While these differences aren't just numbers on a sheet. There are reasons for the size difference that impacts the users intended outcome.





- A 0.5mm needle will produce a thicker line
- A 0.2mm needle will produce a thinner line.

An airbrush artist is commonly going to use a 0.5mm needle for creating specific appearances such as shadows, or gradients, along with working at larger scale. While a 0.2mm will likely be used for working at smaller scale or on detail within an image.

If you find you have a lot of overspray when working on smaller scale projects, or when working on detail. Odds are, a smaller needle & nozzle size will reduce the impact of overspray (assuming your using a larger size to begin with).

Methods To Prevent Overspray In Your Workspace

Next in line is managing overspray within your workspace to prevent damage to items in the vicinity, harm to yourself and others, as well as creating a better environment to be in...

Overspray is notorious for floating in the air for extensive amounts of time. If you are able to smell the paint, odds are, overspray is getting on items nearby, and in your lungs...

Below are a few tactics to help manage overspray in a manor that protects you and others in the vicinity, as well as, any valuables that may be near

Wear An Approved Respirator

First of all, you should always be wearing an approved respirator any time you airbrush. I don't care if your using a spray booth (discussed below) or other means of removing overspray from the



When it comes to inhaled overspray out of the air, nothing does better than an approved respirator. I can't stress how important it is that you wear a respirator any time you airbrush. Overspray will make its way inside your lungs if you don't do so...

I have heard countless stories of people wishing they had consistently worn the proper safety equipment starting when they began airbrushing. Now days, they have all sorts of problems cuz they didn't...

For more about safety when airbrushing do take a look at my [airbrush respirator guide](#).

Buy Or Build An Airbrush Spray Booth

Using a spray booth will likely reduce 80% if not more (assuming the spray booth is setup properly) of the overspray given off when using an airbrush.

A spray booth works by utilizing a fan that creates a constant suction effect that pulls overspray and filters it out of the air.

Its similar to using a vacuum to suck up overspray and filter it out of the air. Just on a larger scale.

If you do a significant amount of airbrushing inside a home, or apartment I strongly recommend the use of a spray booth. Especially if you live in a colder climate that doesn't allow you to open





A spray booth commonly used by hobby model painters, cake decorators and so forth is listed [here](#) on amazon.

Use A Bed sheet

If you have items of value in the room where you'll be painting I suggest you use a simple bed sheet to cover up those items to prevent overspray from getting on them.

Keep in mind, overspray can travel. So if you have any items of value to you in the vicinity of where you'll be airbrushing, take the precautions to protect them from the overspray... Even if those items are some distance away.

Conclusion

In final, while you can't completely avoid overspray, you can manage it to the point it works for you. I mean part of the benefits of using an airbrush is using the overspray to work in your favor.

But it requires specific techniques in order to make the overspray work in your favor. Such as those listed above...

Anyway, I hope you were able to find some value here! If you have any further questions regarding the airbrush do be sure to take a look around the website. Airbrush Insider is dedicated to helping all in the airbrush community!

This is Colt signing off!





Check Out Some Of My Favorite Airbrush Equipment:

- [My Favorite Airbrush To Date!](#)
- [The Air Compressor I Currently Use, And Why I'm Never Going Back To A Traditional "Airbrush Compressor"!](#)
- [My All Time Favorite Airbrush Paint's For Ease Of Use & Versatility!](#)

Colt

Hello, My Name Is Colt. I have always had an interest in the artistic, and creative side of things. But personally, I enjoy the process of shading and using gradients in order to achieve a photo realistic, 3D image of my choosing! That is the why I employ the airbrush every time I work! I have found the process of Airbrushing to be very therapeutic, and allows me to utilize the creative side of my brain to a greater extent! If you'd like to learn more about me, be sure to check me out over on my [About Page](#)

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Welcome, my name is Colt. Airbrush Insider is essentially a reflection of my mind. Here you'll find everything I know on the topic of airbrush. My hope is that the information on this site serves you well in your personal airbrush journey.

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