

A PRACTICAL FIELD GUIDE FOR ARTISTS

Artists FAQ Pack

8 questions. Useful answers. One next step.

For the days when you need clearer direction, a helpful studio check, or a little less friction between an idea and the work.

HOW TO USE THIS PACK

Find the question that fits. Read the short answer. Follow the four observations. Choose one action. You do not need to complete the whole pack.

You are an artist, even here.

Is my painting finished?

A painting is finished when its main idea reads clearly, its important relationships work, and further changes are unlikely to improve the intended experience. Finishing does not mean resolving every brushstroke.

01. See the whole

Stand back until the painting looks small. Identify the first place your eye lands. Is that where you intended?

02. Check the structure

Squint. Do the major light and dark shapes make sense? Does the focal area remain clear without relying on details?

03. Look for interference

Notice only obvious distractions: an accidental bright spot, a hard edge pulling attention, or a shape that confuses the subject.

04. Test the next mark

Name the exact improvement you expect from one more change. If you cannot state it, pause instead of painting.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

If one specific change would strengthen the idea, make only that change. If you are unsure, photograph it and revisit tomorrow. If the focal idea already holds, sign it and stop.

TRY THIS NOW

Write: 'This painting is about ____.' Identify one element that supports that sentence and one that competes with it.

Why isn't my painting working?

A painting that feels wrong usually needs a clearer diagnosis, not more detail. Many problems come from relationships—value, shape, scale, edges, or color temperature—rather than a lack of painting skill.

01. Name the intended experience

Complete this sentence: 'I want the viewer to notice or feel ____.' Keep it to one idea.

02. Check it in grayscale

Squint or photograph the work in black and white. Are your important shapes distinct, or have the values crowded together?

03. Inspect the pathway

Trace where your eye moves. Are several bright areas, sharp edges, or highly detailed passages competing for attention?

04. Choose the smallest test

Cover a distracting section with a paper scrap or make a tiny study before changing the original.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Change one underlying relationship first. Reassess from a distance before adjusting anything else. Avoid fixing five things at once—you will not know what helped.

TRY THIS NOW

Take a grayscale photo and circle the area with the strongest contrast. Does it belong to the subject you meant to emphasize?

I want to paint. Why can't I start?

The desire to make art and the capacity to begin are not always available at the same time. Unclear choices, fatigue, competing responsibilities, or fear of disappointing yourself can make starting feel bigger than the actual first step.

01. Notice today's weather

Is your energy clear, changing, foggy, or stormy? Choose an activity that fits rather than demanding your best-day pace.

02. Check your pack

What responsibilities are pulling at you? Put one on paper so it does not have to stay in your head.

03. Shrink the starting line

Choose a no-pressure action: open the sketchbook, set out two colors, or look at one reference. Five minutes is enough.

04. Leave a return marker

Write exactly what the next tiny action will be. That makes returning easier even if today ends here.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

If you have usable energy, take one five-minute creative action. If your weather is stormy, recovery and reducing demands may be the appropriate action today. Neither outcome is failure.

TRY THIS NOW

Place your materials within reach and make one mark—or write 'Next time I will ____.' Stop at five minutes if that's all you have.

Am I overworking this painting?

Overworking often starts when you can no longer name the purpose of the next mark. Repeatedly correcting a passage can flatten value variety, remove lively edges, and weaken marks that were already doing their job.

01. Stop touching it

Set the brush down. Look at the painting from across the room, not only from arm's length.

02. Find what still works

Name two passages you would keep untouched. These are anchors, not areas to 'improve.'

03. Identify the impulse

Are you changing something because it needs a specific correction, or because you feel uncomfortable stopping?

04. Protect the painting

Take a photograph. If you must adjust a passage, decide the location and purpose before picking up the brush.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

If your next mark has a clear visual purpose, test it once. If you're searching for certainty through more detail, stop and let the work rest.

TRY THIS NOW

Circle one area on a photo—not on the painting—that truly needs work. If you cannot justify it, leave the original alone today.

What makes my art mine?

An artistic voice is usually a pattern of preferences and decisions, not a signature trick. What you notice, simplify, exaggerate, preserve, and return to can be more revealing than which medium or subject you choose.

01. Collect evidence

Choose three of your own pieces you still feel connected to, including imperfect ones.

02. Name recurring decisions

Look for repetitions in light, color, edges, composition, atmosphere, subjects, or emotional tone.

03. Separate influences from preferences

Notice what you admire in others, then ask which qualities you genuinely want in your own work.

04. Try one deliberate variation

Pick a recurring quality and exaggerate it in a small study. Notice whether it feels natural or forced.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Keep the patterns that feel purposeful, and give yourself permission to experiment. A developing style is evidence of continued choices, not proof that you must paint the same way forever.

TRY THIS NOW

List three qualities your favorite personal painting has. Underline the one you'd like to explore next.

What should I paint next?

The best next subject is not always the most impressive idea. It may be the one that helps you investigate a visual question you care about with the time and energy you actually have.

01. Choose a question

What are you curious about right now—reflected light, winter color, atmosphere, movement, or a particular mood?

02. Match the scale

If you have an hour, choose an experiment. If you have several sessions, a more complex composition may be appropriate.

03. Make three candidates

List three subjects or references without evaluating them yet.

04. Choose by usefulness

Pick the idea that is interesting *and* gives you an opportunity to explore your current question.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Start with the smallest version of the idea. A thumbnail or color study can test it before you commit to a full painting.

TRY THIS NOW

Write 'I want to find out how ____ looks when ____.' Choose a subject that lets you investigate it.

Is my artwork ready to sell?

Being ready to sell requires more than liking the painting. The work should be physically ready for safe handling, accurately described, priced intentionally, and supported by clear sale and delivery terms.

01. Inspect condition

Confirm the surface and edges are clean and stable, the work is sufficiently dry or cured for handling, and any finish is appropriate for the medium.

02. Document the work

Record title, medium, dimensions, year, price, and a clear photograph. Note whether dimensions include the frame.

03. Decide terms

Identify who is paying for tax and shipping if applicable, how the work will be delivered, and your return or refund policy.

04. Prepare presentation

Make an accurate label or collector sheet, plan secure packaging, and provide a receipt or bill of sale as appropriate.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

If any critical condition or sale detail is unresolved, finish that item before accepting payment. If the work and terms are ready, make it available with confidence; selling is not a final judgment of your worth.

TRY THIS NOW

Write the artwork's title, medium, dimensions, year, and price. If any are missing, begin a Studio Record.

Am I ready for my first art show?

You do not need a flawless portfolio or years of credentials. You need a suitable event, work you can present safely and accurately, and a plan for basic logistics and conversations.

01. Know the event

Check the application requirements, deadlines, fees, commission, display limitations, and audience.

02. Choose a coherent selection

Start with a manageable set of finished work rather than showing everything you've ever made.

03. Prepare the facts

List each title, medium, size, and price. Have labels, inventory notes, and a way to record a sale.

04. Rehearse the practical day

Plan transport, hanging or display, payment acceptance, protective materials, and an easy sentence about your work.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

If the requirements are clear and the logistics are manageable, you may already be ready to apply. Choose an approachable first event rather than assuming every opportunity must be a major juried show.

TRY THIS NOW

Make two lists: 'Already ready' and 'Before the show.' Choose only the next item from the second list.