



*It's Totally Possible to Learn*

# HOW TO BECOME AN ARTIST

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## INTRODUCTION

This guide is to help you realize that you *definitely* can be an artist and specifically a painter. You don't have to have an abundance of talent. In fact, right here at the beginning let's ditch the word "talent". Every professional artist understands there is a process that far surpasses what is in your DNA. I have a surprise for you: Art is a technical craft – right! A technical craft and you can learn it .

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## **Your First Brush with Art – No Pun Intended**

It was autumn and my first-grade teacher said our art project was to draw a pumpkin and color it with crayons. She told us she'd be inviting our parents to an open house and our artwork would be hung up on a wire across the front of the room. She passed out the drawing paper and it was really big – I guess the large size would be easier to see.

I don't remember creating the pumpkin, but I know I was very excited. Later that week when all the pumpkins were finished, the teacher stung them up. I could hardly wait for my mother to see mine. But hanging there among all the other drawings it looked despicable. Open house afternoon arrived and when mom came into the room, she looked at all the drawings and asked me which one was mine. I told her to guess. My cheeks were getting really hot.

She pointed to a beautifully drawn and colored pumpkin and asked if that was mine. I was devastated and feeling very ashamed, pointed out my inferior gourd.

Do you remember your "first brush with art"? Did you have artists in your family? How about art books at home? Did someone take you to the art museum? Were there original paintings at your grandparent's house? Did you take art classes at school or after school? Did you study art at college?

We all had a beginning with art. Some of us had wonderful encounters with the art world and some of us had few or none.

Remember the paintings of animals on the cave walls in Lascaux in southwestern France? They date to between 15,000 to 10,000 BC, and there is art that was done earlier than that. Which brings us to the fact that we are hard-wired for creativity. That includes you. You are creative. You have something to say that no one else can say. You can *learn* the techniques of painting so your creative voice can be heard.

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## The Difference Between Talent and Technique

I can't begin to tell you how many people I have heard say they'd love to be able to draw or paint, but simply have no "talent". Many artists had parents who were painters or family members with art in their DNA. But ask accomplished artists and they will tell you art is made up of learning the craft – the techniques. They will tell you it includes lots of trials that end up in the waste basket and enormous amounts of practice.

It was Rembrandt who said, and I paraphrase, "If you could see all the art I made that ended up as trash, you would not call me a great painter." He was learning the techniques of creating light on canvas. I like this quote: "The only man who never makes a mistake is the man who never does anything."

Many of us fail to accept the challenge of being an artist for fear we might screw up. Mistakes are part of an artist's life. We have to develop an acceptance of them – even a welcoming attitude toward making them. You can't just step up to a blank canvas, your brush loaded with paint and expect awesome art to result. It would be like someone who had never been in a swimming pool thinking he could swim like Mark Spitz, the nine-time Olympic champion swimmer. Like Mark or other masters of their dreams, without learning the techniques you aren't going to be an artist or any other person who excels his field.

What I am saying is *talent* will only take you so far. My dad had an amazing amount of artistic talent. The Walt Disney Company offered him a drawing position. He didn't feel he was good enough and he refused to pursue their offer. Looking back over his life, it was a very poor choice.

And that brings us to the mental mindset that we just aren't good enough to be an artist.

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## Not Being Good Enough

Through Ancestry.com I learned a family secret. My great grandfather impregnated a young girl and before she bore him a son, he married her. He divorced her five years later. Their little boy was my grandfather. He lived alone with his mother and rarely saw his dad. As she was the sole provider, she was unable to stay at home to care for their young child. So, she sent him to a boarding school.

Ancestry doesn't say how terribly lonely he was or how angry he was at the absence of his father. Neither my mother nor dad ever spoke about my dad's grandmother. It was a well-kept family secret. There is no listing of her or her name in our family records.

When my grandfather was 19, he and my grandmother eloped. He brought all the childhood bitterness in his heart to the marriage. When my father was born, his anger eventually spilled onto his own son.

I will never know why dad didn't choose the better path, but he carried that family habit of verbal abuse into our family. He pommelled my little brother with it. Only when my brother and I were adults did he tell me about the constant cruel words. If it had happened today, our dad would have been arrested for child abuse. The ramifications still reverberate in our family.

### HOW DID THIS AFFECT MY ART?

Though I grew up usually escaping my father's worst bouts of anger, I absorbed that "not good enough" paradigm or framework of thinking. It spilled into my desire to create art. Though dad was an excellent artist with an "I'm not good enough" mentality, he never could bring himself to say anything positive about *my* art – ever. Even when I graduated university with honors at 42, with a minor in art, he couldn't congratulate me. There were no smiles or fatherly words of praise. This is so common among our society. We are enmeshed in dysfunction, but the good news is that we can escape. It is actually possible to break the patterns and become an artist.

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## So How Do You Change Your Mindset?

Feeling unworthy is a deeply embedded habit. It was taught to us by the people whom we trusted. The people who cared for us let us know we weren't adequate in many ways. The general rule is 10 bad comments for every 2 good ones. As we grew older, six is the usual age, we began to act as if we *weren't* good enough because they told us so.

Like me you might have become shy, had a hard time making friends and definitely preferred to be alone. Somewhere inside you became certain that you were inferior. You probably have never been able to overcome the idea of not being "good enough". This is called your worldview, mindset or paradigm.

But the hope is learning how to change that framework. It happens in tiny steps. It isn't a marathon. It's you and I becoming the people we know we should be. I have struggled with this feeling of not being a good enough artist for most of my life. But I am changing my paradigm and I'd like to tell you what I've learned.

As long as we stay in our comfort zones, we are safe from the terrible things we think might happen to us. So, here is the first step – ask yourself what habits you have created to keep yourself safe. As a potential artist, it might simply be refusing to do any art at all. No art, no criticism, no rejection, no more blows to your ego. So here is the first step to the solution. Just get a notebook and a pen and write those habits down.

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## **New Habits Are Made Step-by-Step**

Did you know that it takes an average of 60 days to break a habit and replace it with a new one – right! Sixty days. So, with that information you can see that changing your paradigm doesn't happen all at once. I like that. If I think about changing a pattern in my comfort zone, I know it isn't going to be easy. If I commit myself to change, I just might back out. I'm pretty good at rationalizing why to do something or not to do it. Maybe you are an expert at that, too.

After you have written out your "comfort zone" habits, choose the strongest one – the one that has the greatest hold on you. It is probably the "I'm not good enough" argument. With pen in hand, write down your "not good enough" framework. Exactly how did you get that mindset? You will most likely have to travel back to your childhood. Since you are the only one who will read your discoveries, you can be very honest with yourself.

Now, focus on the habit that is the most powerful. You can create one that is the exact opposite. Make it simple and easy. In regards to my production of art, the strongest habit that prevented me from a regular painting schedule was procrastination. Broken down to its essential element, procrastination is saying "it's not really that important".

I made a plan. Concentrating on a painting routine would get me into the studio. I made three rules. The day before I would start my new painting habit, I would:

1. Choose exactly what it was I would paint and put it next to my easel.
2. Set up my easel and get out the paints and pallet I would be using.
3. Put a canvas on the easel or tape paper to a board.

That was it! That wouldn't be too hard and wouldn't scare me to death. I could manage that. It was a really tiny step. Not being good enough wasn't involved in this preparation. My ego wasn't part of the equation. Setting up for a painting was like getting out all the ingredients to make blueberry buttermilk pancakes. Preparation was a skill set well known to me.

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I was on my habit-changing journey. I opened my journal and wrote down what habit I was going to change and my set-up procedure. I wrote down how I would be different after seven days.

You can do something similar. If you never have painted, you might want to start with learning how to draw. Your first step would be to get some basic art supplies. You'll need a large pad of paper for drawing, a box of pencils with varying degrees of hardness, and a rubber eraser. You can add a drawing pen and a box of watercolors for variety.

The large pad of paper can be cut into smaller work sheets. It's fun to do four drawings within the same sitting time. Pencils with varying degrees of darkness are a great help in creating lights and shadows. The harder a pencil is, the lighter it is going to appear on paper. The darkest pencil is excellent for putting in deep shadows.

The kneaded rubber eraser is a marvelous tool. It picks up pencil areas you want to change, and used repeatedly in one area, it can create a perfect lighting effect.

Artist's pens add a whole new dimension to your drawings. If they have permanent inks, you can wash over the drawing with watercolors. When the ink isn't permanent, applying water to the drawing can make a creative wash.

If money is an issue, you can often find art supplies in thrift shops. The point is to get supplies with which you can begin practicing. Someone said, "Make your first 500 mistakes quickly so you can get on to the really good stuff."

Below is a basic list of what you'll need. It is your first step to creating the artist within you.

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## Drawing Supplies You Might Consider

Here are some basics supplies for drawing and all can be purchased on Amazon.com, DickBlick.com or a Michael's Store:

Pad: <https://amzn.to/2G5sV1N>

Pencils: <https://amzn.to/2WPCvvl>

Eraser: <https://amzn.to/2U1Hw27>

Pens: <https://amzn.to/2I7DIQZ>

Paints: <https://amzn.to/2UKTHoi>



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By taking small steps goals can be met. When you have your supplies, concentrate on building a routine – nothing earth shaking!

In your notebook, describe what you think the average artist's day looks like. From that description, under the title *day one* and the date, imagine yourself as an artist. Jot down how your day should go. Remember this is a private journal.

Make a list of what you could do today to begin your art career. To get your engine going you could watch how-to-art videos on YouTube. You can sign up for an online drawing course. You can read about artists on Wikipedia.org. You can plan a trip to the library and check out art books. As you progress write down your successes. And before you go to bed say, "I was successful today in completing my first steps of my new routine" and name them out loud. Praise yourself for starting a life change and for those first baby steps you took to escape your comfort zone.



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