

# Mastering Colour Pencils Drawing & Layering Techniques

A Practical Introduction for Artists, Teachers & Retailers

Artburst Australia



# Introduction

## Why Colour Pencils Matter

Coloured pencils are one of the most versatile and approachable tools in any artist's kit. Whether used by beginners, illustrators, or professional artists, they offer unmatched control, vibrant colour, and the ability to blend and layer beautifully.

## This guide is designed for:

- Emerging artists looking to refine their skills
- Teachers and workshop leaders who want to explain the process
- Retailers who want to better understand the products they stock

We'll cover pencil types, surface pairing, layering techniques, and a few tips that make all the difference.



# Drawing Basics

## Types of Colour Pencils


Wax-Based: Smooth application, great blendability. May produce “bloom” (a waxy film over time).

Oil-Based: Excellent for layering and fine detail. Less smudgy.

Water-Soluble: Acts like paint when water is added. Great for mixed media.






## Choosing the Right Surface

 Heavier paper with a bit of tooth (texture) holds more pigment. Try hot-pressed watercolour paper or high-quality drawing paper.

Smooth bristol is ideal for detail work, but less forgiving with layering.

## How You Hold the Pencil Matters

-  Holding the pencil close to the tip gives control for details.
-  A looser grip allows lighter strokes and layering.
-  Try circular motions to fill gaps smoothly.



# Layering & Blending Techniques

## Start Light, Build Slowly

🔄 Use light pressure and build layers gradually.

This keeps colours bright and paper undamaged.

🔄 Start with base tones and slowly build midtones and shadows.

## Burnishing

🖋️ A technique where you press hard (usually with a light or colourless pencil) to blend all pigment layers into a smooth finish.

🖋️ Do this after layering—once you burnish, you can't add more pigment.

## Blending Tips

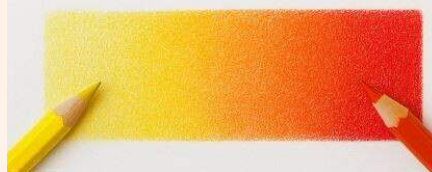
- ✓ Use a blender pencil for smooth transitions.
- ✓ Try blending with a bit of solvent (like odourless mineral spirits) for a painterly effect.
- ✓ Crosshatch to visually blend two colours while preserving texture.

## How to Create a Smooth Gradient with Coloured Pencils

**Start with Yellow:** Use light pressure and small circular strokes to lay down an even layer of yellow on the left side. **Add Red on the Right:** Begin from the opposite side with red, again using gentle, circular strokes. **Blend with Orange:** In the middle, lightly layer orange to bridge the two colours. **Go back and forth to smooth the transition.** **Layer and Adjust:** Repeat the layers to deepen the colour and smooth any harsh lines. **Keep pressure light to avoid damaging the paper.**

### Mini Demo: Gradient from Yellow to Red

- Use light, even layers to gradually blend colors.
- Blend in small circles with an orange pencil



# Common Mistakes & How to Fix Them

Even experienced artists run into trouble with coloured pencils.

Here are a few common mistakes—and how to avoid or correct them:

## 1. Pressing Too Hard Too Soon

The Mistake: Starting with heavy pressure flattens the paper's texture, making layering nearly impossible.

Fix It: Always begin with light pressure. Build depth gradually with multiple layers.

## 2. Over-Layering Until It Gets Muddy

The Mistake: Too many colours layered can result in a dull, greyish mess.

Fix It: Plan your palette. Stick to 2–3 hues per area, and test blends on scrap paper first.

## 3. Using the Wrong Paper

The Mistake: Smooth printer paper or glossy surfaces can't hold pigment or allow blending.

Fix It: Use a heavier, textured drawing paper or hot-pressed watercolour paper for best results.

## 4. Over-Sharpening or Breaking Leads

The Mistake: Frequent breakage wastes time and materials.

Fix It: Use a high-quality sharpener and rotate the pencil gently while sharpening. For fragile pencils (like soft wax-based), use a handheld sharpener rather than electric.

## 5. No Way Back – No Erasing Plan

The Mistake: Mistakes happen, but without a light hand or a soft eraser, you're stuck.

Fix It: Use a kneadable eraser or slice off pigment carefully with a blade. Always test before applying pressure.



# Using the Right Paper for Coloured Pencils

## Why paper matters

The type of paper you use can make or break your artwork—especially when working with coloured pencils. Unlike paint or markers, coloured pencils rely on friction and layering. That means your surface needs to hold the pigment properly without wearing down too quickly.



## The Mistake: Using the Wrong Paper

Many beginners start with printer paper or sketchbooks designed for graphite or ink. These papers are too smooth or too thin for coloured pencil techniques.

Pigment won't grip properly

Blending becomes streaky

Layering is limited

Colours appear dull or faded

## ✓ The Fix: Use the Right Paper for the Job

Look for heavier, textured papers designed to accept layers of dry media. The texture—known as “tooth”—helps trap pigment and allows you to build vibrant, blended colours.

### Top Paper Options:

**Hot-Pressed Watercolour Paper:** Smooth but sturdy; ideal for detailed work with light blending.

**Cold-Pressed Watercolour Paper:** More texture, great for layering and burnishing techniques.

**Bristol Board (Vellum Surface):** Perfect for smooth colour transitions and crisp detail.

**Drawing Papers (200gsm+):** A good all-rounder with enough tooth to layer and blend. 

*Pro Tips: Test swatches before starting a full piece. Use a fixative if your paper sheds pigment or smudges. Avoid using textured paper with very hard pencils—they won't deposit enough pigment.*

# Tools, tips & Product Picks

## Coloured Pencils:

Holbein Artists', Faber-Castell, Primo

## Paper:

Arches, Stonehenge, Fabriano

## Blenders & Accessories:

Colourless blender, blending stump, solvent, kneadable eraser, soft cloth

## Care Tips:

Keep pencils sharpened (use a good quality sharpener to avoid lead breakage)

Store flat and away from heat Fix finished artwork with a fixative spray

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