

Art Journaling

What is Art Journaling?

Art journaling is the practice of combining visual elements—such as drawings, paint, collage, or lettering—with written thoughts, reflections, or ideas in a single sketchbook or journal. Unlike a traditional sketchbook focused mainly on drawing practice, an art journal blends art and personal expression, becoming a space where ideas, emotions, observations, and experiments can coexist on the page. There are no strict rules: each page can look different depending on the artist's intention, mood, or curiosity that day.

Why do artists art journal?

Art journaling helps artists strengthen their creativity, develop visual thinking, and explore new techniques without the pressure of creating a perfect finished piece. It provides a space to test materials, record inspiration, brainstorm, or simply reflect through visual means.

Because the pages are personal and private, artists often feel more freedom to experiment, make mistakes, and discover what ideas interest them. Over time, an art journal can become a record of artistic growth, thought processes, and personal development.

How to Start an Art Journal

1. Choose a journal that matches your needs

Any sketchbook or mixed-media notebook works, but the paper quality should suit your preferred materials—thicker paper for paint and markers, thinner paper for ink or pencil.

2. Begin with small, low-pressure entries

Instead of aiming for a detailed composition, start with something simple: a color palette you like, a small sketch from your day, or a single sentence paired with a doodle.

3. Incorporate a variety of materials

You can use pencils, markers, watercolor, collage paper, stickers, photos, or found objects like receipts or ticket stubs. The idea is to build pages that feel layered, personal, or expressive.

4. Use writing to complement visuals

Your writing can be anything—notes, observations, questions, quotes, or reflections. Some artists write a lot; others use only a few words. There is no required format.

5. Let the process guide you

Art journaling is less about planning a perfect layout and more about exploring ideas as they come. Allow your hand and mind to move freely, responding to color, shape, or text without overthinking.

Common Mistakes in Art Journaling

Overplanning the page

Some artists freeze because they feel pressured to make something polished. An art journal is meant to be imperfect—contrast this with a final portfolio piece.

Feeling the need to “fill every space”

Empty space can create balance and breathing room. Not every page has to be densely covered.

Comparing pages instead of learning from them

Each entry serves a different purpose. One page might be messy experimentation; another might feel more refined. Both have value.

Using materials the paper can't support

Warping, bleeding, or tearing can happen if the paper is too thin for wet media. Matching materials to the journal helps avoid frustration.

Treating mistakes as failures

Smudges, uneven paint, or misaligned collage pieces are common. Often these mistakes become part of the page's character or lead to new ideas.

The Value of Art Journaling

Art journaling encourages creativity, experimentation, and reflection. It helps artists practice making decisions, combining visual and written elements, and developing personal style. Most importantly, it becomes a space where ideas can grow without the pressure of perfection—a private laboratory for creative thinking.

Finished examples





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