

HOW TO START
YOUR
ART JOURNAL

Mindful
Art
Studio

Art journaling does not have to be expensive or complicated. **It's one of the most forgiving ways to make art because in an art journal, everything you make is safely contained within your own personal book.** You may choose to never share any of your pages with anyone (or everyone!) so it's a space where you can let loose and explore with colors, shapes, lines, and your words all at once. You may choose to leave your journals more free-form and expressive, or you may want to have more of a "finished" art product on each page. Here's some ideas on how to get started. If you'd like to see a video with some live examples of art journaling, you can check out my video, [How Art Journaling Heals](#) for some inspiration and then continue on with the prompts here.

STEP 1: GATHER SOME BASIC ART JOURNALING SUPPLIES

- **Unlined art journal**, (If you like the tan-paged journal in the photo above, you can find it [here](#).)*)
- **Paint** – acrylic and/or watercolor are good choices
- Permanent artist **pen in black**
- **Pencil**
- **My Favorite Art Journaling Supplies:** There's a lot you could do even with this short list of supplies, but if you are interested in a more complete set of choices, check out some of [my favorite art journaling supplies](#).

STEP 2: MAKE A BACKGROUND

A beautiful background is always a great place to begin. **The art journal can feel a lot less intimidating when you are not staring at a white page** like this one:

Background #1: "Messy Acrylic

Background"

Start with this very easy tutorial for making ["messy" but beautiful background with acrylic paint](#). You just have to be able to scribble with paint.

Background #2: "Tissue Paper Painting"

I've heard from so many people about how much they love the [tissue paper painting](#) technique. All it requires is tissue paper, a brush, and water. It's simple and fun.

Background #3: Watercolor Dots

(If you have watercolors, here's a third option.)

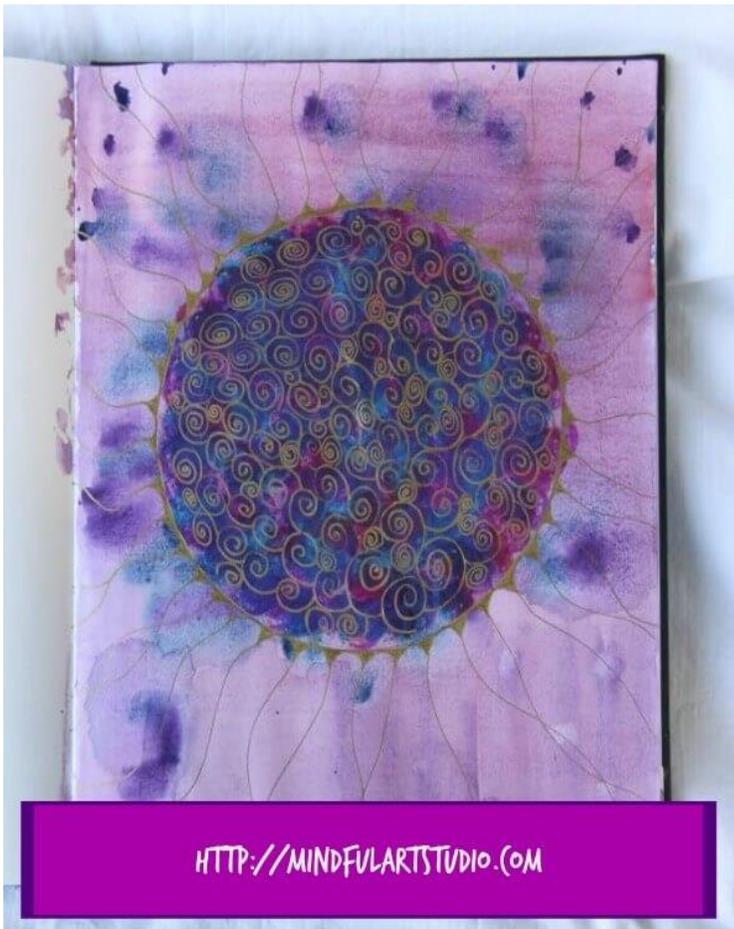
1. **Wet the entire page** with water, and then brush on purple watercolor paint.



2. Next **make “dots”** with your **watercolor brush** of *blue* and *purple* all over the circle until it's filled with color. You can let a few of the dots come out of the mandala like mine did if you wish.

STEP 3: CHOOSE A THEME FOR YOUR PAGE AND CREATE!

Once you have a background, you have a great base upon which to layer images and/or text. Here's some art journaling “prompts,” both visual and written, to get your creative juices flowing.



- **Create a Mandala**

Mandala is a fancy word for a circle. In art, they frequently have patterns, though they don't have to. To make your own, trace a bowl or cup to make a circle in the middle of your page. You can break up the mandala into pizza slices, concentric circles, or fill it with a series of smaller shapes, like I did with these swirls.

1. Use the **watercolor dots background** described above to make yours like mine, or a [messy background](#) with acrylics to change it up.
2. Once the page is dry, **use a pen to make swirl shapes** until you fill the circle. I like to use a [gold metallic marker](#) or [white gel pen](#).
3. Make the mandala your own! **Experiment with different shapes, colors, and sizes.** Make a series and see which mandala you like best.

For a different mandala pattern, check out this step-by-step post on [creating a flower petal mandala](#).

You might also like to check out some of the simple doodle patterns in this post: [Doodle and De-Stress](#).

- **Trace Your Hand**

Like the circle, our hand is a very familiar shape. Our hands are also one of the most expressive parts of our bodies, second only to our faces. Knowing this, **you might choose to “pose” your hand in a particular way and trace this shape, rather than the traditional open palm with spread fingers.** Let your imagination have a little fun with the metaphors connected to hands.

Even if you trace your open hand, you can get very creative with what you put inside. Use your hand to express something about your mood today, **what you are “holding” emotionally**, or **what you would like to let go**. For example, if I write about things I am holding emotionally – I might write words and phrases about the things that are weighing on my heart – I had a fight with a friend, I snapped at someone and felt bad, etc. Sometimes letting out my worries helps, and other times it makes me feel worse.

Pay attention to what you need. **If I’m feeling down, often it’s helpful for me to journal about the positives**. In this case, I might write words and phrases in my hands that help me to focus on what is going well. Inside my traced hand, I might write about feeling proud of how far I ran this week, that I made a delicious meal, or that I felt good about supporting someone through a tough time.

You can also fill the hand by journaling about your dreams and desires, or fill it with magazine photo collage images or drawings that speak to you.

- **Use Paper Cutouts**

I’m a huge fan of using “failed” art pieces in my journal. There’s always at least some small part of an art piece that works. I save most art pieces for this reason. I keep a baggie in a drawer with watercolor paintings, drawings, doodles, etc. When I’m not sure what to do in my journal, or I’m doing a collage project either in my journal or on something else, I pull out this bag of tricks!



1. You can either cut or tear bits and pieces out of your art piece. Look for tiny areas that catch your eye. **Using a hole punch is another fun way to create smaller art pieces out of a larger piece.**
2. Next, **place the mini art pieces on your journal page**, playing with what feels right.
3. **Paste** your collage bits in place.
4. I’ve left this page more minimalistic, but you could **doodle, paint, or write around these pieces** to pull it all together.



- **Paint a Quote**
Quotes are a great way to express what you're feeling, but without the work of coming up with just the right words. The quote I used for this piece is such a great reminder of how much power we have over our feelings and perceptions. I love this quote, I find it so empowering.

- **Create a Gratitude List**

Make a list of at least **5 things you feel grateful for this week.**

- **Create a Dictionary of Your Feelings**

Think about the word that describes the way you are feeling, or the way you want to feel, and **look up the definition.** Write this definition on your page and decorate around it. If you have an old dictionary, you might even cut and paste the definition onto your page. I find this exercise sometimes solidifies my feelings, and sometimes makes me re-evaluate them. You might even do one page per feeling in a particular journal such that you end up with a "dictionary" of your feelings. You can just write or use a combination of words and images on each page.

- **Record Something Meaningful About Your Day**

Rather than telling yourself that you need to write down everything that happened on a particular day, why not **use the space to think about something small, but important?** For example, you might ask yourself one of the following questions:

***What's one moment that I felt content today?**

***What do I wish for most right now in the world?**

***In 10 years, I hope that I look back and think, "I'm so glad that I..."**

***One thing I really appreciated about this week was...**

***What makes me feel really happy/anxious/angry/sad/excited right now is...**

Give yourself permission to mix writing and drawing freely. Don't worry about the quality of your drawings, let the journal be a space for experimentation.

You might write about seeing a horse on your drive to work and how it was beautiful and that the colors of the sunrise inspired you to journal today. Perhaps you write, and then paint orange and yellow watercolors over the background. You might then draw a little horse head next to your writing. **Let it be free and imaginative, like a child would do.** Trust me, when it comes to art, the younger they are, the more they know about artistic freedom and play.

- **Free Write**

Once you have a beautiful background, you may want to **create some interesting lines on your page and use them as a space to write down your thoughts and feelings**. I sometimes try to boil it down and write the “point” of what I’m thinking and feeling in big CAPS like this.

