



How to Spray Varnishes & Fixatives

Proper Technique & Application

Aerosol varnishes apply two to three times faster, easier and more evenly than brush-on varnishes, and won't change the look of your original brushstrokes. Another important benefit is that aerosol varnishes can be applied without touching the painted surface.

Aerosol fixatives also apply more evenly and easily than other options. You have more control over the amount applied and are less likely to have droplets that haven't been properly atomized.

Directions

Read directions thoroughly before beginning your project. Not every product recommends the same spray distance or method, so for best results, always follow the manufacturer's directions.

Dry Surface

Surface must be completely dry and cured.

Paintings:

- Art should be dust free. A wide, soft haired good quality brush should be used to dust the painting from the top down, going side to side.
- Follow the manufacturer's recommendation for dry time. A general rule of thumb for acrylic dry time is 3 days to 2 weeks and for oil 6 months to 1 year.
 - The thickness of paint application affects dry time and may require waiting additional time.
 - Consider the environment that the painting is stored in – any humidity will increase the drying time.

Dry media:

- Be sure that there aren't a lot of loose pigments on the surface of the drawing. If necessary, hold the artwork over newspaper and lightly tap artwork from the back to shake off any excess dust.

Ideal Spraying Conditions

Use aerosol products in good weather, ideally when temperatures are 50°F to 90°F, and relative humidity is below 85%.

- Do not spray in high humidity. This can cause bloom, a white cloudy haze that remains under the varnish where moisture is trapped.
- Both the artwork and the can of varnish or fixative should be at room temperature.
- Always spray in a well ventilated area, preferably outside. When spraying indoors, you want the ventilation to provide 6 to 10 complete air changes per hour. If necessary, open windows and doors and use a fan to keep air circulating.
- Spray environment should be clean and dust free to prevent particles from settling in the varnish. When spraying outdoors, try to spray in an area protected from wind and sun.



How to Spray Varnishes & Fixatives (continued)

Ideal Spraying Conditions (continued)

- Try to spray in an area separate from your studio. Sometimes it takes a while for odors from drying varnishes and fixatives to go away, so it's better if you can leave the artwork to dry in another area.
- Protect the area from overspray by using a drop cloth.

Position of Artwork

Artwork should be kept in a fairly upright position. Do not place your artwork flat because the varnish or fixative will not apply evenly.

Paintings:

- Position either straight up and down or slightly tilted.

Dry Media:

- A slightly tilted position is better. You should spray fixatives further from the surface and allow the particles to fall onto the drawing.

Shake, Shake, Shake

Shake can thoroughly for at least 2 minutes to ensure that all material that has settled over time in the can is thoroughly mixed. Most artists don't shake the can long enough. It's important not to skimp on this step because you don't want settled material clogging the can or clouding the finish of your artwork. Additionally, a well shaken can will apply more evenly, giving you a better finish.

Test Your Technique

Always test the product and your spray technique on a scrap painting or surface to ensure you'll be satisfied with the results on your artwork. This is especially important when trying a new finish or using over a different media for the first time. Even for products you use regularly, it's still a good idea to test to be sure that the can is well shaken and that all products continue to interact in the way you expect.

For fixatives, lighter is better. You want to use the minimum amount of fixative needed to keep the dry media on the surface. For varnishes, several coats will be needed to provide the best protection to paintings.

- Take your time. Always use thin, multiple coats instead of one thick coat, and move the can at a slow, consistent pace.
- Hold the can of varnish or fixative parallel to the surface at the distance recommended on the label to ensure the product sprays evenly. Maintain this distance continuously while spraying.
- Always begin and finish spraying off the artwork to ensure that the entire surface, including the edges, have an even application of varnish or fixative.
 - Placing a slightly larger piece of cardboard behind your artwork can help you remember to spray past the edges of your artwork.



How to Spray Varnishes & Fixatives (continued)

Test Your Technique (continued)

- Begin at a far top corner just off of the artwork, and spray horizontally across the surface using an even motion continuing off the other side of the artwork. Then spray back across again, continuing in an even, side to side motion.
- With each pass, try to slightly overlap the area you just sprayed by about one-third until you've covered the entire surface.
- Varnishes usually require multiple coats. Wait a minute or so for any solvents to evaporate off the surface, and then spray the next coat in a vertical, up and down motion instead of side to side. Alternate directions with each coat for an even finish.

How Does It Look?

When using a fixative, it should generally be invisible and not appear as a coating. If it looks like a coating, you've applied too much. Varnishes should have a consistent, even finish across the entire surface when dry. If it is not even, apply another coat of varnish. Be aware of recoat times stated in the directions on the can which might prevent you from applying additional coats at certain times.

After Use

Clean the spray valve after use by turning the can upside down and spraying for 5 seconds until only clear gas comes out of the valve. This helps prevent the spray tip from clogging.

Label the back of your artwork with your name, date, all art materials used (brands and product names), and the varnish/fixative used. This information will ensure that your artwork will be properly restored if any conservation work needs to be completed in the future.

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