

Gels, Pastes, Liquid Mediums & Additives



There are far more acrylic mediums available than you may ever want to explore. It can get somewhat confusing. So, I will try to simplify it as much as possible, and leave it up to you to decide how far you wish to experiment with this very versatile medium. The most popular and most often used acrylic mediums like some of those in the above photo will be discussed. They are often available in several brands and can be found in most art supply stores.

It is important to have at least a basic understanding of how they work and the few limits they do have. There are only a few simple rules that cannot be broken or manipulated for creations sake when using acrylic paint and mediums.

- ❖ Do not allow acrylic to freeze in its wet state.
- ❖ Do not mix acrylic with oil base mediums
- ❖ Specific surfaces have to be properly prepared before applying acrylics. For example,
- ❖ Do not paint over oil base mediums. You may however paint oil base over acrylic

I have noticed recently that less expensive acrylic gels and pastes are becoming more readily available in student grade. While somewhat limited, they are worth exploring for experimenting and learning purposes.

Student grade mediums unlike the above professional grade mediums may feel tacky to the touch, even when allowed to dry for longer periods of time. This is something to strongly consider if you live in a humid climate like along the east coast as I do. Environmental elements will adhere to the tacky surface so cover your work until completely dry. Adding some GAC 200 will reduce the tack if necessary.

While some acrylic mediums may appear similar, don't be fooled. What an acrylic medium can do determines its identity. Adding an acrylic medium to paint can:

- ❖ Increase the paint's open time thus allowing you more work time
- ❖ Change the paint's viscosity while maintaining its saturation
- ❖ Increase its transparency or opaqueness
- ❖ Open the door to new and innovative approaches to painting

Applying acrylic mediums without pigment added can also create some unique effects; opening the door to further possibilities.

A "ground" or "size" provides a surface for painting or drawing onto. There are specialty grounds available for specific applications thus allowing for a more absorbent surface to paint or print on. For example, a ground that allows for printing ink onto an acrylic sheet, or even a ground that allows for printing on canvas or textile. Even though gesso is considered a primer, it may also be used as a ground onto which the paint is applied. Acrylic pastes and gels can also be used as grounds, depending on what the artist wants to achieve.

Drying times vary depending on the medium and thickness of each application. Environmental conditions such as humidity, temperature levels, and air circulation also determine drying times. A thicker application in humid conditions can actually take months to totally cure.

The consistency and sheen of each medium may also vary according to the manufacture's recipe. The following is a brief description of their uses and abilities. You will notice that different manufacturers assign their own name for basically the same medium as another manufacturer. Golden's molding paste is basically the same medium as Liquitex's modeling paste. Another example is Golden's glazing liquid verses Liquitex's glazing medium. There may be some slight chemical differences. You can visit their sites for more technical information.

Have fun experimenting with different brands. Use them interchangeably to see which best meets your needs.

Acrylic gels and pastes can be used alone or mixed together. Mix them with water base paints and inks, dry pigments, and other inclusions. Each can be used for multiple purposes as you will see in their descriptions that follow. They are also perfect for creating acrylic skins and sheets, for use as a ground, or for bas relief work. (see also the acrylic techniques section)

While gels and liquid mediums have many technical uses, some may also be used as an extender or retarder when added to paint to help extend the paint's volume or drying time. However, take note that a true extender or retarder usually works best as it is structured solely for that purpose.

A gloss liquid medium or gloss gel will dry as a transparent high sheen layer, were as the same medium in satin or matte will dry as a semi-transparent layer with a lower sheen. An acrylic paste will dry as a flat opaque layer. A medium's sheen and viscosity can be altered with inclusions, depending on the amounts added.

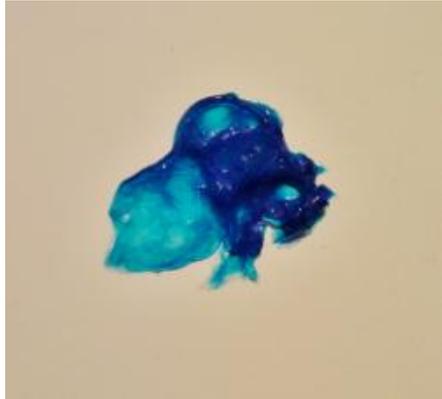
GELS

There are varying weights and sheen of gels available. For example, there are soft gels, regular gels, heavy gels and even super heavy gels. They are usually available in gloss and matte. Gels are used for glazing, gluing, extending a paint's drying time or changing its viscosity. Gels can also support inclusions for special effects, be used to create texture and impasto techniques, and even for producing image transfers. The list goes on and is only limited by your own creativity.

Gels are also perfect for increasing the dry film integrity of weak paint systems. For example, adding gel to paints with too much chalking or water will strengthen the paint and allow for better adhesion once dried. Gloss gels work best for this as it hasn't any matting agent and allows for the true color to remain.

Because gloss gel is transparent when dry, it is the best choice when a clear glaze is desired, and is especially effective when transparent paints are added to it.

Semi-gloss and matte gels are translucent when dry due to the matting agent added to it. This is a good choice when a soft translucent effect is desired or when an opaque paint is used. Matte gel has more matting agent added to it than does the semi-gloss gel.



Soft Gel - Holds only moderate texture, extends the working time, and is useful as glue for collage techniques. It can be used to increase the viscosity of soft body paints. It also holds fine or lightweight inclusions and softer impasto peaks. Soft gel can be mixed with water and used as an isolation coat before varnishing for archival purposes. Soft gel is flexible when dry. It can also be used to create skins and transfers. The second photo is that of a cured layer of gloss soft gel applied over a color background. It became transparent once completely cured. The third photo demonstrates a mix of soft gel and transparent acrylic paint.



Regular Gel - Has the consistency of heavy body paint. It holds a moderate texture and is most useful when transparency for glazing and impasto is desired. It works well for blending with paint, increasing paint viscosity, and as an extender. It is also good for transferring printed images and creating skins. It can hold fine or lightweight inclusions and texture.

The second photo is regular gel while still in its wet state. The third photo is an example of completely cured regular gloss gel. It is flexible when dry.

Heavy Gel - Is thicker than heavy body paint and extends the drying time. It can be blended with colors to increase the paint's viscosity for high peaks and heavy texture. This heavy gel is suited for impasto and building up a relief, although not as dominate as the results achieved using the super heavy gel. It is also capable of holding coarse or heavier inclusions for special effects. It can be used to transfer images, create textured skins, and is excellent as a glue for collage and decoupage. It is flexible when dry.



Super Heavy Gel - Is thicker than a heavy body paint. Is best used to blend with colors to increase the paint's viscosity for high peaks and heavy texture. This gel is best suited for building up a relief and is capable of holding heavier inclusions for additional texture and effects. It will keep paints opened longer than most gels. It is good for creating heavy textured skins. Notice the 2" peak that is possible with this super heavy gel. It is flexible when dry.



Matte Gel - Dries to a matte finish and increases the paint's translucency. It is close to a high viscosity paint consistency and is intended for opaque paints. It can double the amount of the paint while still maintaining its color (may lighten its value slightly). Especially useful when covering large areas as in a mural. It is also very useful for mixing with heavy body paint when an oil paint appearance is desired. Works great for impasto effect and as a glue for collage, and is good for creating skins.

Matte gel can also provide a good tooth and adhesion when used as a ground in place of gesso. It is flexible when dry.



Coarse Texture Gel - Dries to a hard yet flexible sandpaper like surface. Is translucent up to 1/8" thick when dry. It is a good ground for wet or dry mediums. It can be mixed with paints for a sandpaper like surface. Dries between a matte to satin sheen. It is flexible when dry.



Clear Tar Gel - Will produce a clear high gloss level film. It has a stringy consistency and is perfect for creating drizzling color effects. Can be mixed with all viscosity of acrylic paints but works best with soft body paints and inks. Can create thin skins. It is very flexible when dry.



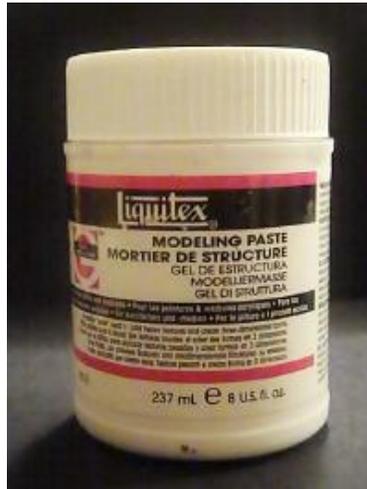
Black Lava Gel - A high viscosity texture gel used to mix with acrylic paint to produce a unique dimensional and reflective effect. Can also create unique skins. It is flexible when dry.



White Opaque Flakes - A texture gel containing aggregates to achieve an unique dimensional and reflective effect. Can be mixed with paint or painted over once completely cured. Can also create unique skins. It is flexible when dry.

Pumice Gel - Dries to a hard film and is useful when a granular type textured surface is desired. Useful as a ground for pastels and other dry mediums.

PASTES





Molding/Modeling Paste is available in light, heavy, coarse, hard, and flexible. A paste is basically a gel with varying amounts of marble dust added which determines its weight, hardness, and flexibility. The heavy or hard pastes work best when applied to a rigid support, but they can also be applied in small amounts to a flexible support if some additional gel medium is added first. However, it is best to use the lightweight paste or flexible paste if applying large amounts or applying to a large flexible support such as a stretched canvas. The hard or heavy pastes have larger amounts of marble dust added, thus causing them to be more rigid and less flexible once cured.

Modeling/Molding Paste can be applied as a ground or when texture is desired. Once completely dry, its surface can be further manipulated by sanding, carving, and painting. Coarse media can be added for additional texture and effects. Unlike gels, pastes are opaque and contain fillers that allow for techniques different than those possible with the gels. Some brands are more flexible than others. Paste can also be added to gesso and applied as an absorbent ground. A small amount can be added to paint when an opaque paint is desired. Do keep in mind that this may cause a lower chroma color and a lighter value; depending on the amount of paste added.

Always take the time to properly seal the surface of a canvas before applying a paste or other medium. Use a large flat brush or foam roller. You need to press somewhat so that the mixture is embedded into the canvas fabric. Use one of the following three techniques to prepare the surface for modeling paste.

1. Mix a sealer of either a liquid GAC100 or polymer medium/emulsion with water 70/30. Apply several coats to the canvas. Dry between applications. Once the sealer has dried, apply several coats of gesso. Dry between coats. The support is now ready for applying the paste.
2. Mix some paste with thinned gesso (consistency of heavy cream). Apply several layers. Dry between coats. The support is now ready for additional applications of paste.
3. This technique adds more tooth for the paste to adhere to, and the canvas also becomes more solid and less flexible.
Mix 50/50 the paste with either #1. GAC100 and water or #2. Polymer medium/emulsion and water mixture. Apply several coats. Dry between layers. The support is now ready for additional applications of paste.

Light Paste - Is lightweight and dries to a hard, yet flexible, opaque film. It holds texture and can be mixed with acrylic paints and water base inks to add body and create tints. As a dry ground, it can be painted or stained over. Using light paste is a good choice when heavy texture and high peaks are desired and when weight is a concern. It holds the highest peaks and retains its structure due to the least weight of all the pastes.



Flexible Modeling Paste - Dries to a very hard yet flexible surface once completely cured so it can be used on either a rigid or flexible support. Can be mixed with desired amount of acrylic medium or paint to alter the sheen, opacity, and body. It can be used to build heavy texture and 3D formation. Has a matte finish and can be mixed with paint to tint it or mixed with transparent paint to make the paint more opaque. Can also be painted over once dried.

Heavy/Hard Paste - Is heavier and more ridge than the light paste. Holds texture, making it perfect for low bas relief sculpting and impasto techniques. Can sand and carve into the dry surface. Dries to a hard, opaque matte finish.

Coarse Paste - Dries to a hard, yet flexible sandpaper like surface. Is translucent up to 1/8" thick when dry. Is a good ground for wet or dry mediums. Can mix with paints for a sandpaper like surface. Dries between a matte to satin sheen.



Fiber Paste - Appears to look like rough handmade paper when dry. A smoother surface can be applied with a wet trowel or painting knife. It is a very absorbent ground when dry, making it perfect for applying acrylic paint, ink, and watercolor washes. Glazes work beautifully on its dry surface. Saturated colors maintain their brilliance as seen in the third photo. Also perfect for creating skins and 3D structure for bas relief work. It is flexible when dry.



Crackle Paste - Is opaque with cracks on its surface when dry. Apply to a rigid support. It is best to coat the support with several layers of gel or acrylic medium and allow to dry before applying the crackle paste. You can mix color into the gel or medium before applying it to the support. Once completely dry then apply the crackle medium. No more than 10% paint should be mixed into the crackle paste if you desire to tint it. Environmental conditions and the thickness of the application, as well as the time it takes to cure will all determine the size of the cracks. Let the crackle dry overnight for best results. Gently apply a thin layer of paint onto the surface making sure to embed it into the cracks. Rub the desired amount of paint off the top surface while it is still wet, leaving behind the color in the cracks. Once dried, use a soft flat brush to gently apply a thin layer of glazing medium or polymer/acrylic medium or even a diluted soft gel over the entire surface. You can also lightly spray over it with a can of acrylic sealer. Let this dry completely before applying the next color on the raised surface.

The crackle is still delicate and can be easily damaged. Seal the final painting with several layers of an acrylic medium to protect it and add durability to the cracked surface.

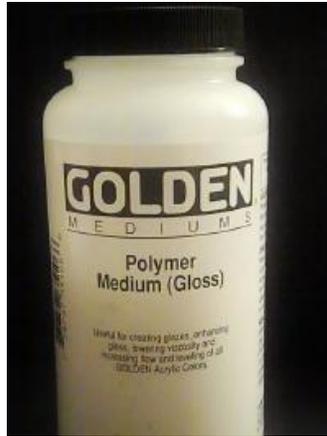
LIQUID MEDIUMS & ADDITIVES

Allow the application to completely dry before applying the next layer. A blow dryer (not to be confused for a heat gun or an embossing heat tool) may be used to speed up the drying process for acrylic mediums and gesso.



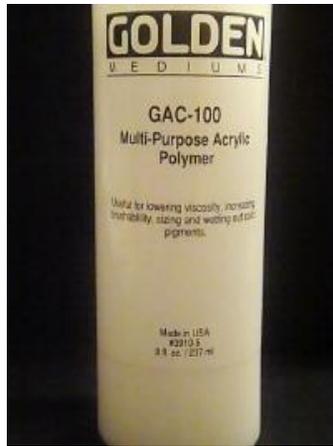
Glazing Medium/Liquid - Comes in gloss or satin. It dries rather quickly, allowing for quicker layering compared to slower drying gels and liquid polymers. Opaque colors may be used but it works best with transparent and semi-transparent colors. When gloss is mixed with paint, it enhances the brilliance and depth in color and texture. May use up to 30% glazing medium and water for best results as a thinning agent for colors needed for brushwork. Never use more than 50/50.

Glazing medium can also be applied directly to a surface without color added to enhance the painted surface beneath it. Fine mica powders and pigments can be added to created beautiful glazes as well. Always gently stir satin glazing medium before using.



Polymer Medium/Acrylic Medium - The Polymer Medium comes in gloss or matte. It can be used for multiple reasons as follows:

- ❖ lower the viscosity of heavy body paint
- ❖ As a sealer applied to the surface before priming
- ❖ To increase the flexibility and strength of lightweight bas relief surface
- ❖ To create glazes
- ❖ Change the sheen of a paint or medium
- ❖ Increase the flow and leveling of paint.
- ❖ Can be used as a glue for collage and decoupage.
- ❖ Useful as a ground (size) instead of gesso when the color and texture of the support needs to show through. It does have tooth and adhesion but not like that of clear gesso.
- ❖ Can also be used as a substitute for rabbit skin and hide glue used for oil painting.



Gac 100 - Is a multi-purpose acrylic polymer.

- ❖ A great sealer to prevent support induced discoloration (SID) caused by impurities that are drawn up through a substrate as the acrylic paint dries.
- ❖ Can use to make your own paint by simply adding fine dry pigment or mica to it.
- ❖ It may also be used as a diluent. Adding some GAC 200 will reduce the tack if necessary.

[For more information on all GAC Specialty Polymers.](#)

goldenpaints.com/justpaint/jp12article3.php



Pouring Medium - Will produce a clear high gloss level film when poured onto a leveled surface. Can be mixed with all viscosity of acrylic paints but works best with liquid/soft body paints.



Gesso/Primer - A primer with a good tooth and adhesion that is applied between the support and the paint. It provides a ground for the paint to adhere to. It can be tinted for a variety of colored grounds. Gesso is most readily available in the traditional white but also in black. The newer clear formula that has even more tooth. The clear gesso is also a perfect ground for pastels and other dry mediums.



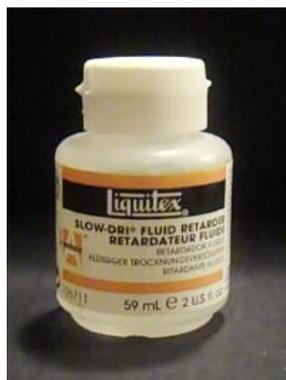
Airbrush Medium - Is a specific blend of liquid polymer emulsion and flow agent used to thin acrylic paints for airbrush or spray techniques while maintaining the color's chroma.



Flow Agent - Improves the flow and workability of paint and mediums while reducing viscosity. Add to paint for smooth colors with less drag, allowing for fine detail and blending. Never add more water than directed. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when using this additive.



Slow Dri Blending Gel - Can be used as a medium or as an extender. Extends the drying time as much as 40%. Slows drying time for surface blending. Unlike a liquid retarder, any amount can be added to the paint to enhance and intensify the color. Increases its transparency. Dries to a flexible clear gloss. Can be added to heavy body paint to extend volume, or to soft body paint to thicken it. It can also be useful as a glue for collage and for creating skins.



Retarder - An additive that increases the open time allowing more time to work. Very useful for working with the "wet on wet" technique and fine line and detail work. Also helps to reduce the skin formation of paint on the palette. Can be added to acrylic paints and gels. Never add too much retarder as the paint will remain tacky indefinitely. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when using this additive.

There are two types of retarder. The fluid type will decrease the paint's viscosity while the gel type will not alter the paint's viscosity as much. The two types can also be mixed.