



Mastering Sunsets

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/122-Mastering-Sunsets>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you to explore the captivating world of sunsets, a subject that has fascinated artists for centuries with its vibrant colors and fleeting beauty. As we delve into the art of painting sunsets, you'll discover that capturing their essence is both a rewarding challenge and a profound learning experience. One of the key lessons here is recognizing that high chroma colors in sunsets often appear to have a higher value than they actually do. This can lead to the common mistake of painting them lighter than necessary, resulting in a chalky appearance. To maintain the vibrancy and depth of your sunset colors, it's crucial to avoid using your lightest value too early in the painting process. Remember, those bright reds, while striking, have a fairly dark value and can disrupt the harmony of your painting if not carefully balanced with the surrounding lighter values. Through this journey, you'll learn to master the delicate interplay of light and color, transforming your canvas into a breathtaking sunset that captures the magic of the moment.



"Mastering Sunsets" by Richard Robinson.



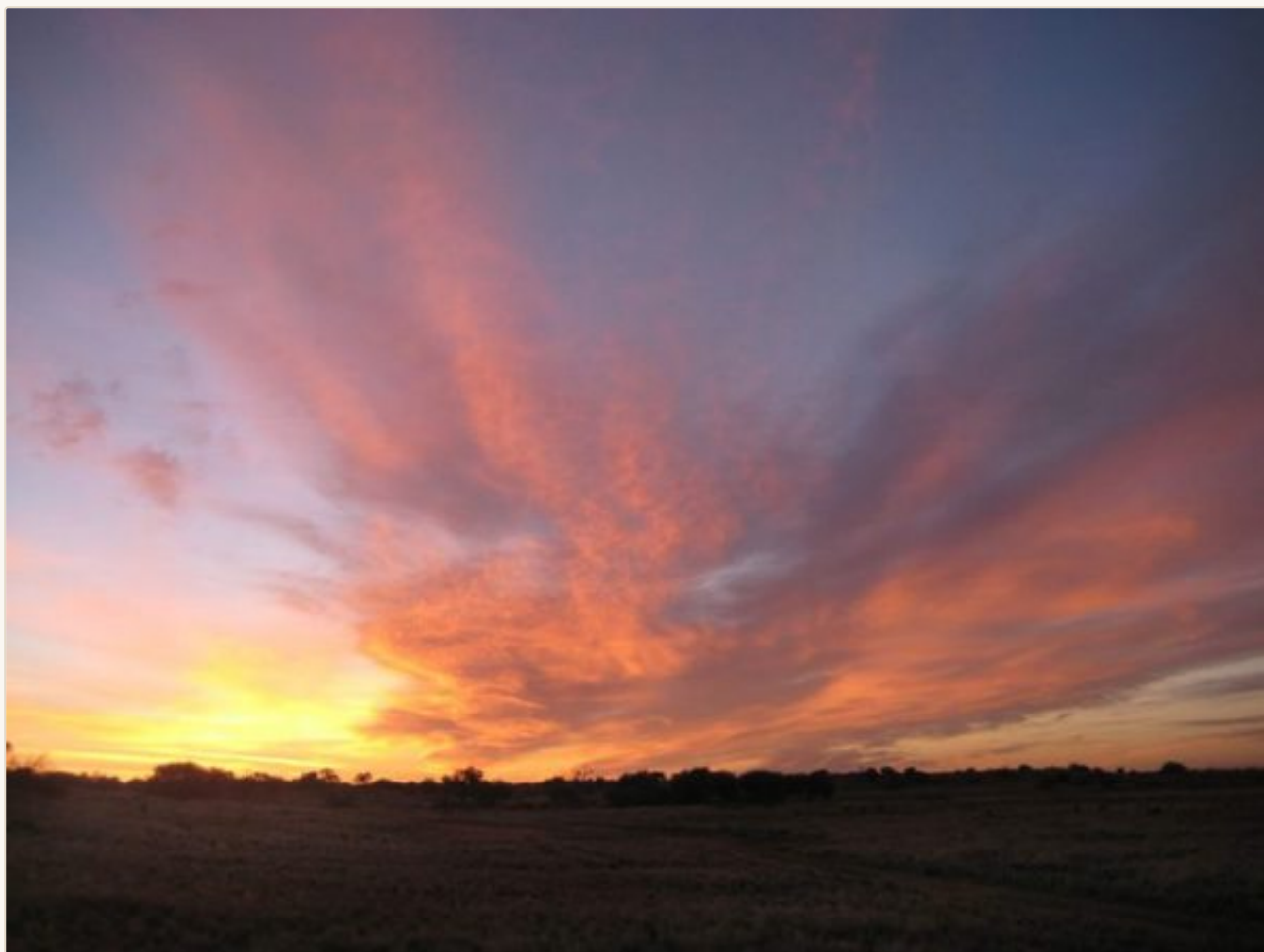
REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 2

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 3

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 4

The scene as Richard found it.

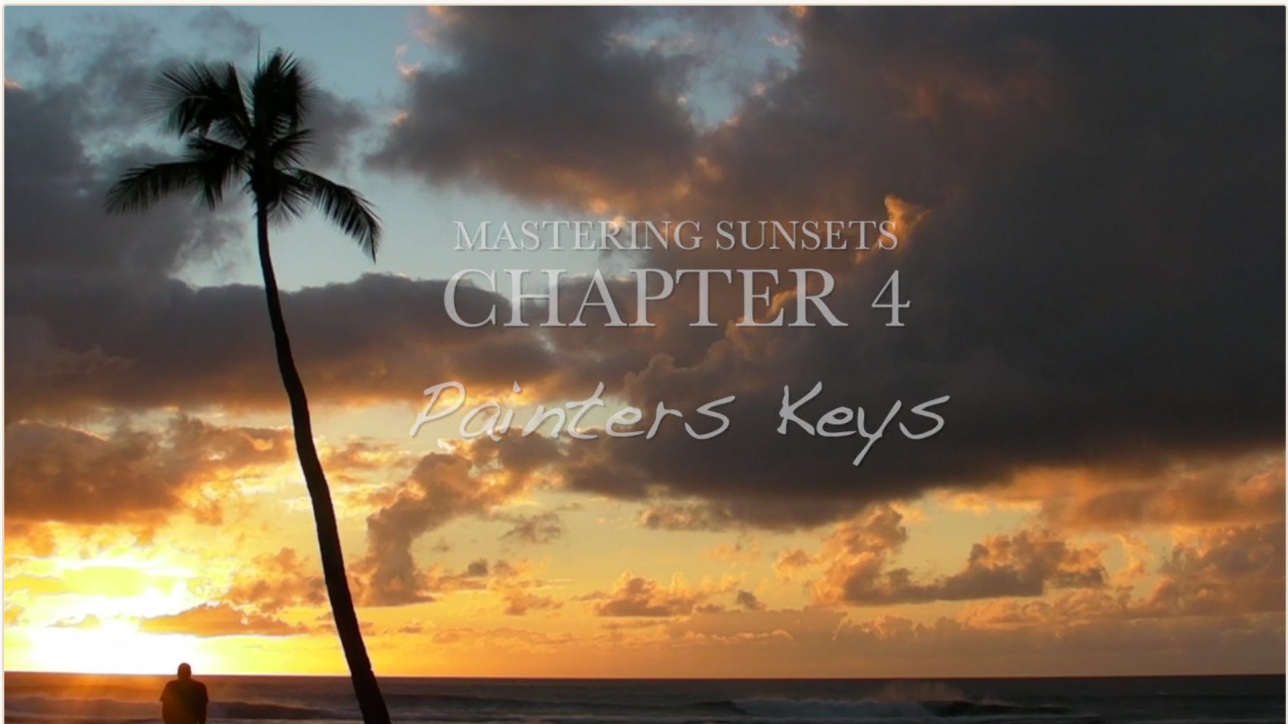
Materials

Gather these materials before you start. If you don't have the exact same supplies, use what you have and substitute freely.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Alla Prima means 'at once', better known as the wet in wet technique. This is how you get the painting looking so fluid and passionate.

1 Understanding values in sunsets



Understand Value Perception

Recognize that high chroma colors in sunsets often appear to have higher value than they actually do. This can lead to painting them lighter than necessary, resulting in a chalky appearance.

Reserve Lightest Values

Avoid using your lightest value too early in the painting process. This helps maintain the vibrancy and depth of the sunset colors without making them appear washed out.

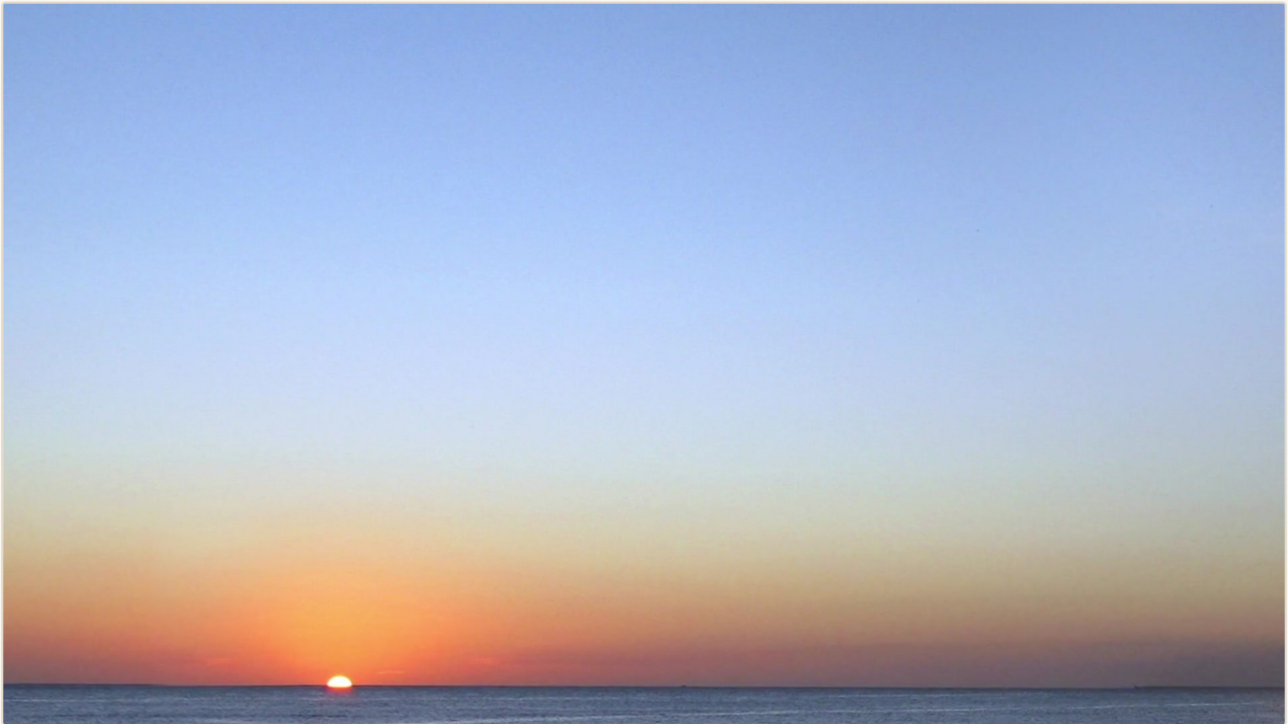
Be Cautious with Bright Reds

Remember that bright reds have a fairly dark value. Adding them to a sunset can disrupt the harmony if not carefully balanced with the surrounding lighter values.

PRO TIP

Hold off using your lightest value until the last possible moment to maintain color vibrancy.

2 Painting light gradients



Understand Sky Gradients

Recognize that painting light involves capturing gradients. Notice that each section of the sky has at least two gradients: a vertical linear gradient where the sky gets lighter towards the horizon, and a radial gradient where it gets lighter and warmer towards the sun.

Capture Vertical Gradient

Focus on the vertical linear gradient first. Gradually lighten the color as you move towards the horizon to create a believable sky.

Incorporate Radial Gradient

Add warmth and lightness to the sky as you approach the sun's position. This overlapping radial gradient enhances the realism of your sunset.

PRO TIP

Always consider both vertical and radial gradients when painting skies to achieve a natural look.

3 Warm light and cool shadows



Understand Warm and Cool Colors

Recognize that sunsets are a prime example of the painting guideline where warm light creates cool shadows and vice versa. Observe how clouds can shift from neutral colors during the day to dramatic color complements at sunset.

Identify Complementary Colors

Notice the bright orange hues where clouds are touched by the sun, and the deep blue tones on their shadow sides. Violet is another common complementary color in sunsets, adding depth and contrast.

Avoid Oversaturation

Be cautious not to oversaturate your colors, as this can make your painting appear too gaudy. Aim for a balance that captures the natural beauty of the sunset without exaggeration.

PRO TIP

Balance warm light and cool shadows to capture the natural beauty of a sunset.

4 Avoiding oversaturation



Understand Color Perception

Recognize that your eyes can be tricked into perceiving colors as brighter and more saturated than they actually are. This happens because the warm, bright colors of a sunset cover a small area compared to the larger, darker, cooler sky.

Analyze Color Locators

Observe the color locators from a photo. Note that the further the color point is from the top right of each locator, the more grey the color has, indicating lower chroma. For example, the blue of the sky may appear nearly grey.

Balance Saturation

Be cautious not to make grey colors too vibrant in your painting. Over-saturating these colors can detract from the beauty of the sunset. Aim to keep the colors balanced and true to their natural appearance.

PRO TIP

Avoid making grey colors too vibrant to maintain the natural beauty of the sunset.

5 Overcoming symbolic painting



Adjust Your Perception of Sunset Colors

Recognize that sunsets are often greyer and less saturated than they appear. Avoid relying on symbolic colors from memory, such as overly bright blues for skies.

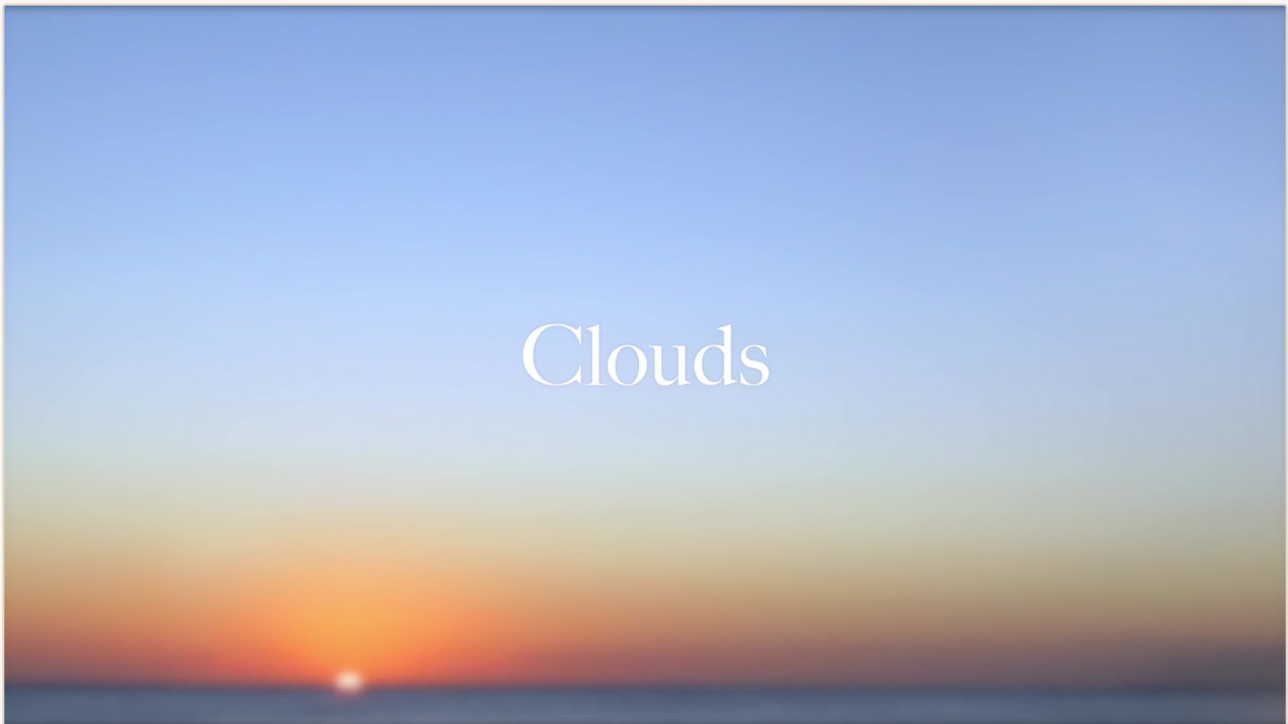
Analyze Real Sunset Colors

Observe real sunsets to understand their true colors. Notice the subtle greys and lower contrast to accurately represent them in your painting.

PRO TIP

Stop painting from memory and symbols; instead, study real sunsets to capture their true colors.

6 Role of clouds in sunsets



Understand the Importance of Clouds

Recognize that clouds add drama and excitement to a sunset scene. They transform a simple gradation of color into a dynamic and captivating view.

Avoid Overworking Clouds

Be cautious not to let clouds get out of control. Overworking them can muddy the colors in your sky, detracting from the vibrancy of the sunset.

PRO TIP

Use clouds to add drama to your sunset, but avoid overworking them to prevent muddy colors.

7 Mixing warm and cool colors



Understand Color Mixing

Recognize that mixing warm and cool colors can quickly gray or muddy your painting. This is especially important when painting clouds in a sunset.

PRO TIP

Avoid mixing warm and cool colors directly to maintain vibrant hues in your sunset painting.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your sunset painting journey by understanding the interplay of values and colors. Begin with a focus on maintaining the vibrancy of your colors by reserving your lightest values for the final touches. This will help you avoid a chalky appearance and preserve the depth of your sunset. As you progress, pay attention to the gradients in the sky, both vertical and radial, to capture the natural transition of light and warmth.

Incorporate the dynamic relationship between warm light and cool shadows, especially when painting clouds. This contrast will add depth and drama to your scene. Be mindful of the natural saturation levels in your painting to avoid an exaggerated or gaudy look. Instead, aim for a balanced representation that reflects the true beauty of a sunset.

Finally, let real sunsets guide your palette choices. Avoid symbolic painting by observing the subtle greys and lower contrasts in nature. Use clouds strategically to add excitement without overworking them, and be cautious with color mixing to maintain the vibrancy of your hues. With these techniques, you can create a stunning and realistic sunset painting.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Hold off using your lightest value until the last possible moment.
- Consider both vertical and radial gradients when painting skies.
- Balance warm light and cool shadows to capture the sunset's beauty.
- Avoid making grey colors too vibrant to maintain natural beauty.
- Stop painting from memory; study real sunsets for true colors.
- Use clouds to add drama, but avoid overworking them.
- Avoid mixing warm and cool colors directly to maintain vibrant hues.



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