

# The Colour Pencil Confidence Workbook

7 Small Wins Every Artist Needs ❤️

Build confidence one layer at a time

Art4heart

*Grab your pencils, a cup of coffee, and let's create something beautiful!*



# Welcome

## Why this workbook is different

### Why artists struggle with confidence

Fear of mistakes can make every mark feel risky, even when you know the technique.

Comparison to other artists can quickly drain motivation and make progress feel smaller than it is.

Perfectionism turns practice into pressure, so the page feels like a test instead of a place to learn.

Confidence grows when you allow room for experiments, uneven layers, and learning as you go.

You do not need flawless results to become a stronger artist.

### Why every artist has an awkward stage

Every finished artwork passes through a messy middle where the drawing looks unfinished, flat, or uncertain.

That stage is not failure, it is part of the natural progression from first marks to polished work.

Colour pencil pieces often look rough and unfinished before they look rich and beautiful because layers need time to build depth.

What feels awkward in the middle often becomes the part that makes the final result believable.

Trusting the process helps you stay calm while the picture slowly comes together.



## **What you'll achieve today**

You will complete 7 focused exercises that build skill and confidence step by step.

Each small win helps you notice pressure, blending, layering, and colour choices more clearly.

By the end, you will have practical experience you can repeat in future artwork.

You will also learn how to keep going when a drawing is not perfect yet.

The goal is not just better colour pencils, but a steadier mindset at the easel.



# Your confidence check-in

## Before we begin

Rate yourself:

Pressure control -

Blending. -

Layering. -

Confidence. -

Colour mixing. -

Give each area a score from 1 to 10, with 1 meaning **very unsure** and 10 meaning **very confident**.

Try to answer **quickly and honestly** so you capture how you feel right now.

These scores are only for you, and they will help you notice your progress at the end of the workbook.

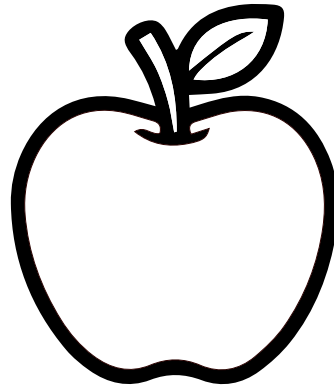
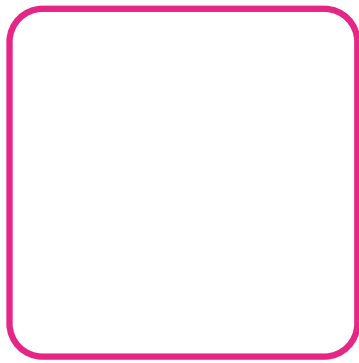
When you finish the exercises, come back and compare your new scores to see how far you've come.



# Quick win challenge

## Your first success in 3 minutes

Start with a small shape such as a **circle, square, or leaf** and choose **one colour** pencil you enjoy using.



Fill the shapes slowly with the even colour, keeping your strokes close together so the surface looks smooth.

Do not worry about perfection; the goal is simply to begin and to notice how the pencil feels on the page.

Use light, steady pressure at first, then add a second layer if you want the colour to look stronger.

If your hand feels unsure, make a few quick practice strokes beside the shape before you begin filling it in.

Try to cover the whole shape without rushing, and watch how each layer builds a cleaner finish.

This small win helps you move past hesitation and proves that starting is often the hardest part.

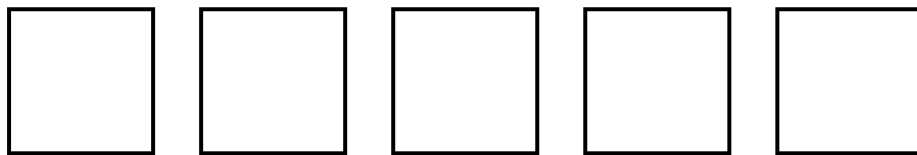
Once the shape is filled, you will already have momentum for the next exercise

*Colour pencils are like friendships. Start gently.*

# Exercise 1

## Pressure control

Create five value boxes in a row, moving from the lightest shade to the darkest shade with the same colour pencil.



Keep the first box very soft, then gradually increase pressure as you move across the page.

Aim for smooth transitions between each box so you can see how little changes in pressure affect the result.

Hold the pencil slightly farther back for lighter marks and move your grip closer for firmer, darker marks.

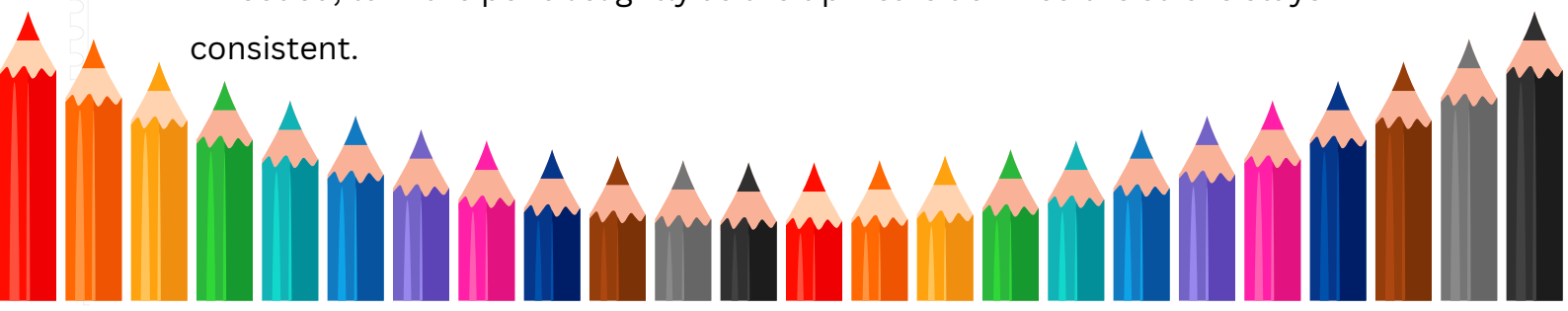
Rest your hand lightly on the page and let your wrist stay relaxed so your strokes stay controlled.

After the boxes, shade one long gradient bar that shifts smoothly from pale to vibrant colour without obvious jumps.



Work in short layers instead of pressing hard right away, especially if the pencil starts to feel scratchy. If you pressed too hard, the colour pencil will slip over the down-pressed pigment and add nothing to it.

If needed, turn the pencil slightly as the tip wears down so the stroke stays consistent.



# Exercise 2



## Smooth gradients

Draw three long gradient strips on the page, one for each practice run.

For the first strip, begin with a very light touch and slowly build toward a dark finish.

Use small circular motions and overlapping strokes so the colour blends evenly.

Keep your pressure steady and add layers gradually instead of trying to reach the darkest tone at once.



For the second strip, start dark and gently ease off pressure as you move toward the light end.

Let your strokes cross over each other so the edge of each layer disappears into the next one.



For the third strip, blend from colour into the paper by letting the pigment fade naturally as you work.



This exercise helps you feel how gradual layering creates smoother transitions than force.

*Smooth comes from layers, not force.*



# Exercise 3

## Layering magic

Draw six circles across the page and choose a different colour combination for each one.

Start with the lightest colour first, then add the next colour on top in thin, even layers.

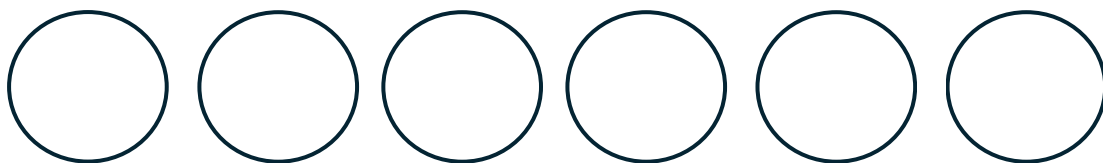
Build each circle in two to four layers so you can see how the colours change as they stack.

Try one circle with warm colours, one with cool colours, and others with unexpected pairings.

Let each layer settle before adding the next so the surface stays smooth and easier to control.

Use gentle pressure on the first pass, then deepen the colour slowly as the circle develops.

Notice how the first colour influences the final look even after the later layers go on top.



This practice teaches you how colour pencils mix through layering instead of blending all at once.

***Colours mix in layers, not on the pencil.***

# Exercise 4

## Colour discovery



Create a simple colour chart to see how different pencil combinations behave on the page.

Choose two colours and test them together in small swatches so you can compare the results clearly.

Keep each swatch neat enough that you can repeat the same mix later if you like the effect.

Notice whether the colours feel bright, muted, warm, cool, soft, or intense when placed side by side.

Use this exercise to build a personal reference for future drawings and layered pieces.

Take your time and focus on observation rather than perfection.

The goal is to discover how your pencils respond when you combine them in different ways.

Colour Mix	Result
Yellow + Blue	Creates green tones
Red + Blue	Creates purple tones
Yellow + Red	Creates orange tones

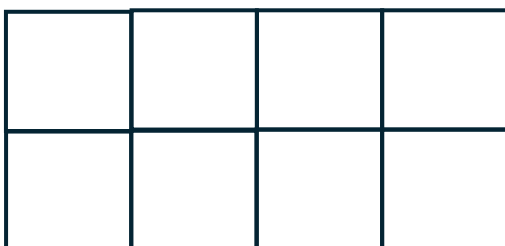
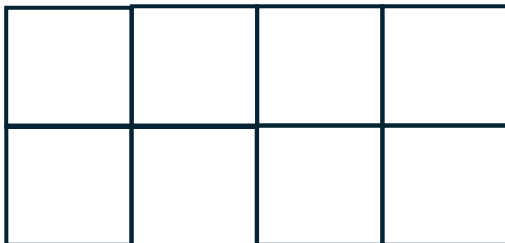
Try reversing the layer order to see which colour takes over more strongly.

Apply light pressure first, then test a firmer pass to compare how the mix changes.

Make a few extra swatches with slightly different pressure so you can study the range.

The same two pencils can produce very different results depending on how you build them up.

*Some of your best colours are waiting to be discovered.*



# Exercise 5

## Texture explorer

Practice drawing four common textures so your colour pencil marks become more controlled and expressive.

Each surface needs a different kind of stroke, so focus on how your hand moves rather than on making a perfect image.

Work slowly and notice how pressure, direction, and spacing affect the look of each texture.

Try each texture in a separate box or strip so you can compare them side by side.

Repeat the exercises with different colours if you want to see how texture changes with hue.

Use light layers first, then deepen the marks only where the texture needs more contrast.

This practice will help you choose marks more confidently in future finished pieces.

**Fur** (look for reference photos to practice with)

Use short directional strokes that follow the way fur would grow on an animal.

Vary the length slightly so the surface feels natural instead of too neat.

Layer a few strokes on top of one another to suggest softness and depth.



## Wood

(look for reference photos to practice with)

Draw long parallel lines to suggest grain and let them shift gently as the surface turns.

Add subtle variations in pressure so the texture looks organic and worn.

Break the lines in a few places to keep the wood from looking too mechanical.



## Stone

(look for reference photos to practice with)

Make irregular marks with uneven spacing to suggest roughness and small surface changes.

Use varied pressure so some marks stand out while others fade into the background.

Leave a few lighter gaps to help the stone texture feel believable.



## Glass

(look for reference photos to practice with)

Build smooth gradients with minimal visible strokes so the surface feels reflective and clean.

Leave sharp highlights where light would catch the edge or curve of the glass.

Keep the colour transitions soft, but preserve a few crisp accents for contrast.



# Exercise 6

## The magical leaf

Colour a simple leaf shape with a clear center vein and gentle curves on both sides.

Keep the outline clean and easy to follow so the form stays calm and natural.

Add colour in smooth layers to suggest texture without losing the leaf's shape.

Let the lines of the leaf guide your strokes so the drawing feels organic and alive.

### **Focus:**

Direction – follow the leaf's natural lines from the stem to the tip so the shape feels graceful and believable.

Layering – build depth with multiple light passes instead of pressing hard right away.

Light – leave small highlights open so the leaf looks fresh and softly reflective.

### **Challenge:**

Use yellow and light green layers to make it look as if sunlight is shining through the leaf.

Keep the edges lighter so the center feels fuller and more luminous.

Blend gently where the colours meet to create a glowing, translucent effect.

Add slightly richer green near the vein to show structure without making it heavy.

Finish by checking that the brightest areas still breathe and feel open.



# Exercise 7

## Feather confidence challenge

Start with a simple feather shape and a clear center spine to anchor the drawing.

Keep the form light and flowing so the feather feels soft from the beginning.

Work outward with gentle marks that follow the natural curve of each barb.

Focus on creating movement instead of perfect symmetry.

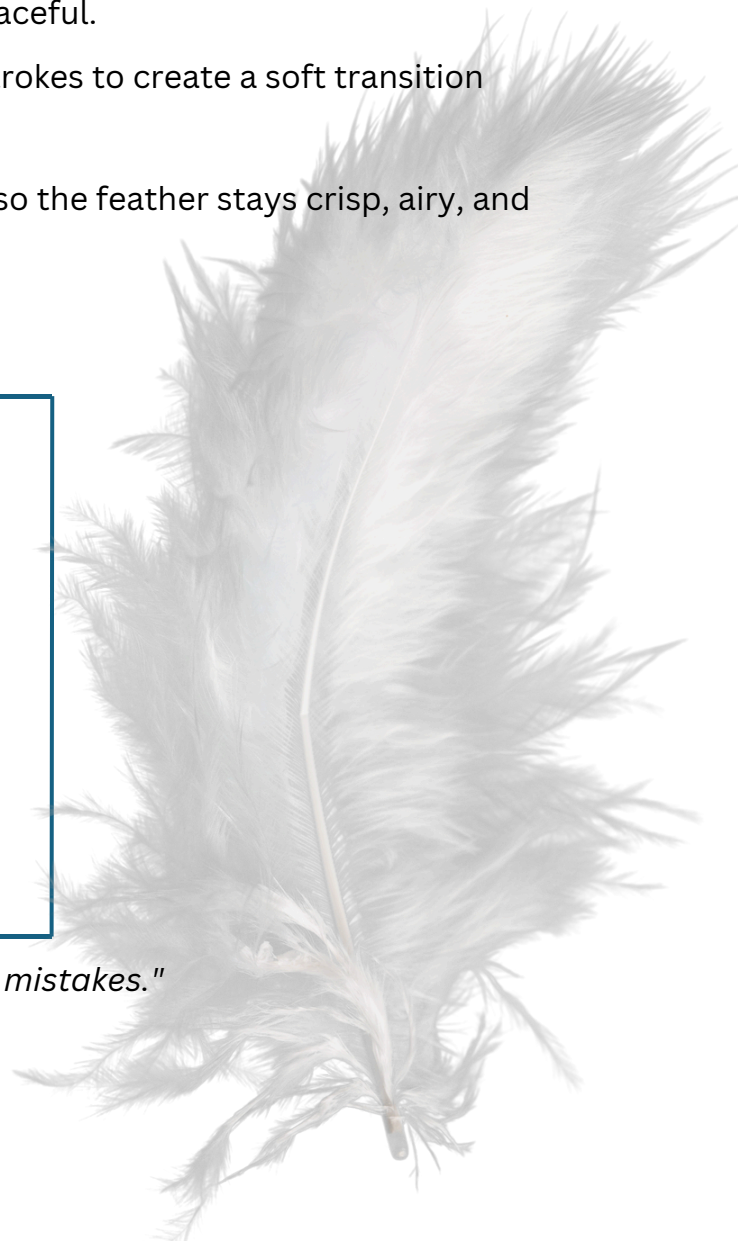
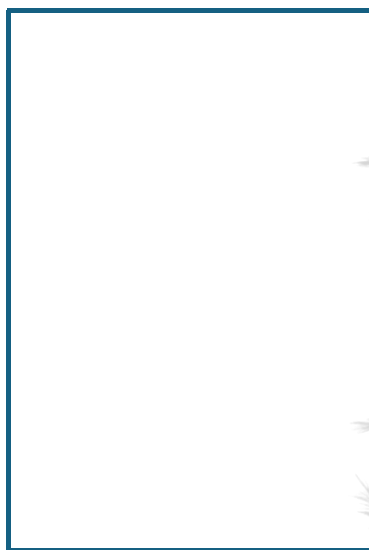
Let the feather taper gradually so it looks airy and realistic.

### Focus:

Stroke direction – follow the feather's natural flow from the center spine outward so the shape looks smooth and graceful.

Soft blending – layer gentle overlapping strokes to create a soft transition between tones and texture.

Light pressure – keep your touch delicate so the feather stays crisp, airy, and realistic.



*"Feathers forgive mistakes."*

# The awkward stage

## This is where most artists quit

Every artwork passes through an ugly middlestage where the drawing looks uncertain, uneven, or incomplete.

This happens because the first shapes are only a foundation, not the finished result.

At this point, values may still feel off, colors may look patchy, and details may seem confusing.

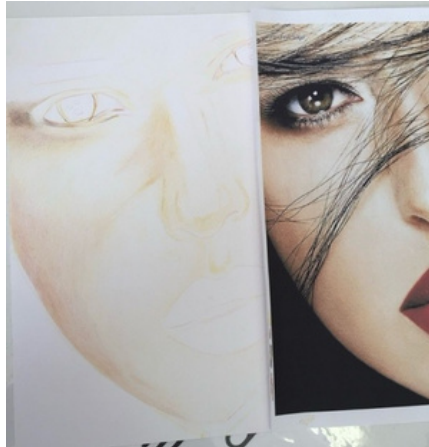
That discomfort is normal and expected in the process.

The awkward stage appears in every artwork because refinement always takes time.

It is the part where the piece is being built, adjusted, and improved before it can settle into its final form.

The initial sketch stage often looks simple, loose, and incomplete, but it gives the artist a starting structure.





The lines may feel uncertain at first, yet they are the base for everything that follows.

#### Mid-stage photo

The rough middle phase can look patchy and awkward because the artist is still correcting shapes and adding layers.

This is often the moment when the work feels most unfinished.



#### Finished portrait

The polished final result brings all the corrections together so the image feels balanced and complete.

Details, values, and edges start working together in a way that looks intentional.

*You did awesome!*



Unfinished work always looks disappointing because it does not yet show the full plan.

At that stage, the drawing still exposes every mistake, gap, and awkward transition.

The brain naturally compares the current version to the finished vision and notices what is missing.

That is why artists must keep going even when the piece looks worse before it looks better.

Progress often becomes visible only after more refinement, not before.

**It will look horrible before it looks amazing.**

# Trust the process

Professional artists do not finish beautiful work in a single pass.

They move through several stages of observation, correction, and refinement before the final image appears.

Each stage helps the artwork become clearer, stronger, and more confident.

What looks uncertain at first is often just a step toward something better.

Learning to trust that progression makes the process less frustrating and more productive.

### Evaluate your art yourself

Step back from the work and look at the overall balance before making more changes.

This helps you notice what is working and what still needs attention.

### Make adjustments

Make small corrections to improve the shapes, colours, or values that feel off.

Careful changes often have a bigger effect than rushing ahead.

### Changes

Be willing to modify your original idea if the artwork needs a better direction.

Flexible artists make stronger decisions as the piece develops.

### Reworking

Add more layers and refine areas that still feel unfinished or weak.

Reworking is what turns an early study into a polished image.



## Good artists don't get it right immediately.

**Good artists keep refining.**

Patience helps you stay calm while the artwork moves through awkward and uncertain stages.

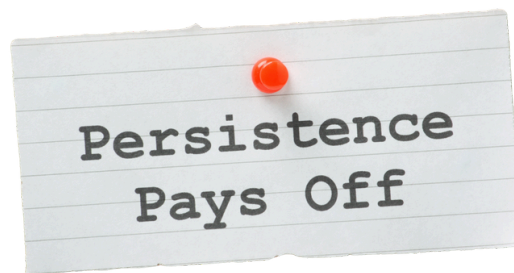
Persistence allows the image to improve little by little until everything starts to come together.

Trust that each pass is helping the drawing grow closer to its final form.

The more willing you are to continue, the stronger the result will be.



Patience



Persistence  
Pays Off



T R U S T

# Gallery wall

Take a moment to look back through the workbook and notice how your work has changed from the first page to the last.

Reflect on the exercises that felt most enjoyable, the ones that challenged you, and the moments where your confidence grew.

Use this page to record the ideas, techniques, and discoveries you want to remember.

This is your space to celebrate the journey and capture what matters most to you.

**My favourite exercise:**

**The biggest thing I learned:**

**The skill I want to improve next:**



# Confidence check-out

## Rate yourself again

Take a moment to rate yourself again using the same skills you checked at the start of the workbook.

Compare your new scores with your first ones and notice what has shifted as you practised.

Be honest, encouraging, and ready to spot even small improvements.

The goal is not perfection – it is to see your progress clearly.

Pressure control -

Blending -

Layering -

Confidence -

Colour mixing -

**Compare scores.** Look for any increase, no matter how small, because each step forward matters.

Celebrate the areas where you feel stronger and give yourself credit for sticking with the process.

Remember that growth often happens gradually, through practice and patience.

Even a little improvement is a real achievement, and it shows your skills are developing.

Take pride in how far you have come.





# Certificate of completion

This certifies that

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completed

**The Colour Confidence  
Workbook**

**Art  Heart**

Signed - *Susan van Zyl*

Art4heart

Congratulations on completing the workbook and taking each page one step further.

Your progress is a real achievement, and your dedication deserves to be celebrated.

Keep this certificate as a reminder of how much confidence and skill you have built.



# Keep growing

## Meet Susan

Susan van Zyl is an artist and teacher who believes creativity grows through patience, practice, and gentle encouragement.

Her work is shaped by a love of observation, expressive mark-making, and the quiet confidence that comes from doing the basics well.

She enjoys helping learners turn simple exercises into finished artwork they can feel proud of.

Her teaching style is calm, practical, and focused on building real skill step by step.

Through Art4heart, she shares a creative approach that makes drawing feel accessible and rewarding.

Portrait - This portrait work focuses on careful observation, structure, and capturing character with sensitivity.



Graphite work - This graphite drawing explore tone, texture, and the beauty of strong value contrast.



Rose painting - The rose artwork is known for its soft layering, delicate colour, and elegant floral form. It went through many changes until it hit the sweet spot, do not be scared to change your painting mid-way



Marker work - The marker illustrations use confident shapes and values, and lively colour was used to create bold, playful results.



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Visit my website – [www.Art4heart.co.za](http://www.Art4heart.co.za)

Thank you for completing this workbook and giving your creativity the time it deserves.

We hope the exercises have helped you feel more confident, more capable, and more curious.

Keep drawing, keep practicing, and keep trusting your progress as it unfolds.

Your next artwork is waiting, and you are ready for it.

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