

Fingernail Airbrushing, retention and durability

“When airbrushing fingernails, one needs to consider both design and function. Here are some tips on how to get your airbrushed nail art to go the distance”.

By Laura Morgan

General Knowledge as it relates to nail color retention-

- Natural nails versus artificial enhancements.
- Enamel versus water base airbrush paint.
- Water base acrylics for airbrush versus general purpose acrylics

Trained nail technicians know that a beautiful polish-job is only as good as the nails beneath it. Meaning a stable base of support (healthy natural nail or sturdy artificial enhancement) will retain any type of color applied better than an unstable base of support (chipped, thin, or peeled natural nail or poorly applied enhancements). How many days a traditional or airbrushed manicure will last depends largely on the condition of the wearer's nails and if she handles them with care after the color is applied. Anyone who has gotten a professional manicure knows that nail professionals sing the praises of daily topcoat application after a finished manicure. This is a clear and noticeable way to extend the longevity and shine of the nail color. This is very much the case with airbrushed nail art. A little TLC goes a long way.

- Traditional nail polish is enamel or lacquer.
- Airbrush colors are water base acrylic.

It is important to compare traditional nail polish to airbrush colors and know why they are different. If you went to a salon for a traditional polish you would likely get an enamel topcoat following an enamel base coat and two coats of enamel color for a total of four coats. Water does not penetrate enamel or lacquer nail polish. It must be removed with nail polish remover. What makes it chip is that it is a hard inflexible covering on a flexible or uneven surface (natural nails). The flexing of the nail underneath causes the chipping of the color on top. The other factor relating to chipping is the wear-and-tear that nail color must endure. Artificial nail enhancements are generally stronger than natural nails, allowing the wearer to be much harder on her nails- with less breakage than a natural nail wearer. Because of this, enhancement wearers will see the color to wear-off the ends of the nails after 1-3 days. This is considered normal wear-and-tear.

Average wear

- Natural nails- 2-5 days using either traditional nail polish or airbrush color, with wearing and some chipping on the ends.
- Enhancements- 5-10 days using either traditional nail polish or airbrush color, with mostly wearing-off on the ends. Enhancements that are thicker on the ends

will dramatically show more wear and have more chipping than those with very thin ends.

Airbrush colors are water base, therefore water-soluble. To successfully use them on nails, they are carefully sealed between a layer of paint-on enamel base coat and several layers of enamel topcoat. Once sealed properly, the colors will wear comparable to enamel nail polishes. Airbrush nail color may then be removed by using nail polish remover.

- Never spray enamel nail polishes through an airbrush.
- Never spray general purpose acrylics- only those formulated specifically for airbrush.

Basic Airbrush Manicure Steps

1. Prep nails
2. Apply paint on base coat
3. Spray airbrush color/s & Varnish (if recommended by the manufacturer)
4. Apply Topcoat (2-3 coats) Fan dry for 2 minutes between coats.

Prepping the Nails

Like with traditional polish, nails must be properly prepped prior to airbrushing. They must be ultra clean and free from all residues from polish removers, lotion, oil, or soap. It is beneficial to use a professional nail dehydrator or prep product.

The high-gloss sealers used on gel nail enhancements will cause color retention problems with airbrush and traditional enamel nail polish because of their ultra glass-like surface. Take the shine off with a fine buffer to make the surface more retention friendly.

Pay attention to detail when prepping, as sloppy prep-work will negatively affect color retention.

Base Coat Application

- Apply paint-on airbrush basecoat in a thin layer. Take care to get it close and even at the cuticle and wrap it around the free-edge and sides. A good basecoat designed for airbrush will fan-dry in 2-3 minutes.

Spraying Airbrush Colors

Spray technique does affect retention. Spray airbrush color in light layers, gradually building color to desired intensity. Avoid puddles or shiny wet-looking paint as it will not set-up properly. Even after the paint appears dry, retention has been compromised. Airbrush color will look matte and dry almost instantly when properly sprayed. Mist paint along the ends of the nails by bending the finger slightly upward while you spray along the edge.

It is important to note that virtually all beginner nail artists spray too heavily. This is commonly due to lack of control over the airbrush and a lack of understanding for how heavy-spraying will adversely affect the look and durability. Heavy-handedness will improve with time and practice. It generally takes a few months to gain consistent and correct spray technique. Allow time to practice regularly.

Varnish

Varnish is a water base spray-on clear coating. It is not a topcoat. Its purpose is to form a light protective barrier over the airbrushed nail paints so that the paint-on topcoat can more easily be applied without leaving brush strokes. Varnish is applied like color, with a light misting. Avoid wet looking spray. It is clear-colored so is difficult to see as it is being applied. Test varnish by spraying on the top of your hand. (You will be able to see it on your skin- looking slightly shiny). When you get it flowing lightly go straight to the nails without changing you trigger position. Spray on each nail. If you are not sure if Varnish is still coming out, repeat test procedure on hand and then go back to misting the nails.

- When in doubt, less Varnish is better.
- Wet and heavy varnish application will result in crackling when topcoat is applied.

Topcoat Application

Apply Medea Wet Glaze Topcoat with a feather-light touch and a generous supply on the brush. Hold your brush horizontally to the nail so the tip of the brush does not dig into the fragile paint. Be sure to seal edges and ends with a generous amount of topcoat.

- Avoid letting your brush become dry so that it does not leave brush strokes in the paint.
- Apply fairly quickly and avoid excessive strokes over the paint or running may occur.
- Fan-dry for 2-3 minutes.
- Apply extra topcoat daily for added retention and shine.

Apply second coat of the Airbrush topcoat. At this point you may also use a Professional UV light-cure or Heat Coat such as Pro Finish brand. Ask your local beauty supply store. These state-of-the-art super-topcoats increase durability on airbrush and traditional nail polish.

Beginners get nervous during topcoat application, adding to a heavy-handed effect. Proper technique takes practice.

Clean up

After fan drying nails, spray *Medea Airbrush Cleaner* (solvent) from a pump bottle on nails and cuticle area. It will not dissolve enamel topcoat, or harm skin. Run cool water over nails and repeat if necessary. If color has been sealed on the skin with topcoat, use cotton on an orangewood stick with polish remover or polish remover corrector pen to remove it.

Clean airbrush per manufacturers recommendations using manufacturer recommended cleaning solvent.

Trouble Shooting & Tips

- Crackling paint- most commonly too much varnish. Sometimes wet paint application.
- Streaking- Heavy-handed topcoat technique. Review topcoat section.
- Color washing off during clean up- Spots were missed with top coat or there was oil residue on nails prior to base application and/or sealing.
- Chipping- Inadequate sealing of ends of nails with basecoat or topcoats, oil residue under nails, or excessive wear-and tear in which case daily top coating would help.
- Use the manufacturer recommended base and top coatings for airbrush.
Substitutions may cause crackling or delay in drying..
- Allow adequate time for topcoat to set up completely. Studies show that if the wearer is hard on her nails within 1-2 hours of polish application, retention will suffer. This applies to regular nail enamel as well. Coatings need ample time to thoroughly set up.
- Practice and experiment on yourself. Spray simple color fades or mask designs on your own nails and test for wear.

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