Mastering the Watercolour Wash

1. A wash uses more water to create a light, translucent layer, while a concentrated application uses less water for a deeper, more opaque colour. A wash is used for backgrounds like the sky, while concentrated paint is used for details like the robin's feathers. (2 marks)

Working: Definition of wash vs concentrated application.

1 mark for defining the difference (water ratio), 1 mark for providing two distinct examples.

2. Zara should start with a light wash at the top, then gradually add more pigment to her brush as she moves down towards the horizon to increase the intensity of the colour. (2 marks)

Look for: The concept of increasing pigment or decreasing water to create a gradient.

Good: She should paint the top light and the bottom dark.

Better: She should start with a light wash at the top and add more paint to the mixture as she paints downwards to make it darker.

Best: Zara should use a wet-on-dry technique, starting with a light wash at the top and gradually increasing the pigment-to-water ratio as she paints towards the horizon to create a smooth gradient.

What moves an answer up: The 'best' answer uses technical terminology and explains the specific ratio change required.

3. It is important to let the first layer dry so that the colours do not bleed into each other, which would cause the edges to become blurry and the colours to turn muddy. (2 marks)

Working: Explanation of the 'bleed' effect in watercolours.

1 mark for mentioning drying prevents colour mixing/muddying, 1 mark for using the term 'bleed'.

4. To show distance, Zara should use a light, translucent wash for the tree, as distant objects appear paler. For the robin in the foreground, she should use more concentrated, opaque paint to make the colours look vibrant and sharp. (2 marks)

Look for: Understanding that distance is shown through lighter/less intense colour and foreground through darker/more intense colour.

Good: Paint the tree light and the bird dark.

Better: The tree should be a light wash because things far away look paler, and the robin should be painted with more pigment to make it stand out.

Best: Zara should use a light, translucent wash for the distant oak tree to create depth, while using a more concentrated, opaque application for the robin in the foreground to make it appear closer and more detailed.

What moves an answer up: The 'best' answer links the properties of watercolour (translucency/opacity) to the artistic goal of creating depth.

5. £28.75 (2 marks)

Working: Total cost: £12.50 + £8.75 = £21.25. Total revenue: 4 x £15.00 = £60.00. Profit: £60.00 - £21.25 = £28.75.

1 mark for correct calculation of costs/revenue, 1 mark for correct final profit.

What a secure answer looks like

A secure answer demonstrates an understanding that water ratio controls opacity and that layering requires drying time to maintain clean edges. Students should be able to apply these technical rules to artistic scenarios.

If your child is stuck

Ask the child to imagine the paint as a squash drink: how much water would you add to make it taste very weak versus very strong? This helps them visualise the pigment-to-water ratio.

Common mistakes to watch for

Students often forget that watercolours are transparent, meaning you cannot paint light colours over

dark ones easily. They also frequently underestimate the drying time needed to prevent colours from bleeding.