Pastels come in two distinctively different varieties. Soft pastels are finely ground pigments in powder form that have been molded together with a cellulose binder. Oil pastels are held together by an oil binder and behave differently on the drawing surface than soft pastels. While pastels are a drawing medium, the finished image is often referred to as painting. This is because the approach to applying the medium is similar to painting and the finished result often resembles a painting. Next, we’ll look at some of the materials, surfaces and tools that we’ll be using in this series.
The first and most obvious material that will be needed are soft pastels. Pastels are manufactured by a variety of different brands. Some brands are rather expensive, while others are quite affordable. The more expensive brands will usually have higher concentrations of pigment. Fortunately, many of the less expensive brands still provide rich colors. For beginners, it is recommended to start with affordable pastels before graduating to more expensive brands.

NuPastels are a harder variety of soft pastels. Easily blended on the drawing surface, they are less powdery and less likely to crumble like traditional pastels. NuPastels are great for details. NuPastels can be used along side other forms of pastel including traditional pastels and pastel pencils.

Pastel pencils are simply the pastel material encased in a wooden shaft. Pastel pencils, once added to the surface, can be spread and blended like traditional pastels. Additionally, pastel pencils can be sharpened to a point making them great for precise details.
The majority of this video series focuses on the use of soft pastels, but we won’t leave out oil pastels. It will be a good idea to have some oil pastels handy as this material will be addressed later in the series.

There are a variety of different surfaces that the pastel artist can choose from. Canson papers provide a nice tooth or texture for accepting and layering soft pastels. Most of the demonstrations in this series feature papers made by Canson. Occasionally, smoother surfaces are used depending on the subject matter and desired texture.

No pastel artist should be without blending tools including blending stumps, tortillons, and q-tips. A knife will be used for sharpening and splattering techniques and a kneaded eraser will be used to clean up mistakes. A variety of soft brushes are also considered necessary tools. Occasionally, pastels will be used as a wash and soft brushes can be used to move the material on the surface.