

Reverse Engraving

Back Painting/Color Filling

Color filling is a term used by all engravers to describe several techniques to add color or contrast to engraving. Although there are a wide variety of engraving materials to choose from, we sometimes can't find the exact color we want. If we are trying to architecturally match a color and the engraving stock is not available in that specific color, we may be able to engrave a neutral color material. Later, we can add color in the text and graphics with a PMS matched paint.

Methods of Adding Color

Paint Sticks:

Paint sticks look much like an adult size crayon. They are usually found in primary colors and are easy to use. Paint sticks are great for small areas that need to be filled, but are not recommended when coloring front engraved plates. The paint really never dries and can easily damage clothing if used on a name badge. Paint Sticks, however, work well in reversed engraved tags or small plates.

Paint sticks tend to dry out from storage, and we want to get down to the soft area of the stick for painting. Here's how to do that.

The first step is to remove the dry paint skin that has formed using a utility knife. Paint sticks can be very messy, so be prepared by having an old rag handy. Once the dry paint is removed, simply rub the paint stick over the engraved area. The paint will be forced into the material and the excess can be buffed off. The plate should then be allowed to dry overnight before use. If the paint has smeared into unwanted areas, a little paint thinner or alcohol may be used for clean up.

The areas painted will never completely dry, so take special care if you plan to use this method on name badges or any surface that can come in contact with clothing etc. If you must use this technique for a name badge, mount the badge onto another thin plate to protect clothing.

Paint sticks are very inexpensive and are great for the occasional job. Don't try these with large characters or large graphic areas because the appearance will be dull and getting a complete fill can be difficult.

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Paint Filling:

Paint filling requires a little bit of technique and sometimes a great deal of clean up. The best approach is to take time to prepare the piece before painting or color filling. Mask the edges of the plate to avoid over-spray damage (this is a must for substrates that will be painted by a spray can). It is important to protect the front surface against scratches since this work will be done with the plate face down.

For reverse engraved plates, spraying works well for jobs requiring only one color of paint. Two coats of acrylic based paint are recommended. Make one pass from the direction of the plate top and the other from the plate bottom to get coverage on all of the character edges. By spraying directly over the substrate, you do not get the paint on the sides of the letters. For best coverage, hold the can a few inches away from the area and at an angle to the substrate.

Another technique is to use liquid acrylic paints. These are inexpensive and easy to use. A nice selection of colors is available in hobby shops and the application can be done with an inexpensive foam brush. Again, mask any areas where you do not want the paint to penetrate. Generally, two coats will be required to get the best coverage and block any pinholes from the first application.

In both painting processes, it is recommended that you completely cover the back of the finished sign or badge with paint to avoid any shadows as seen from the front. This is not a problem if the substrate will be mounted on another surface.

Vinyl:

A unique alternative to paint for adding color is to use colored vinyl. Available in a wide variety of colors, vinyl can be a quick and easy solution for adding color to your reverse engraved project. Simply cut your vinyl to cover the engraved portion of your laminate and tape in place to secure. Depending on the detail and size of your piece, multiple colors can be used on a single project.