

Using Color: Creating Color Harmony



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Summary

How Color Works teaches the basics of creating color harmony and color schemes for interiors, wardrobes, and wherever color matters. It is a practical “how to” program that shows how to use color to shape environments.

Viewers learn how to put colors together to create beauty and comfort. They will learn about complementary colors, tints, shades, tones, pastels, hue, value, and intensity. They learn to use a color wheel to put the power of color to work. They will learn to create the three most common color schemes.

Concepts taught in program:

- Law of unequal areas
- Advancing and receding colors
- Cool and warm colors
- Primary and secondary colors
- The value of neutrals
- The role of proportion in color choices
- The idea of “visual weight”

Use to teach about interiors, fashion, graphic design, marketing, or just to understand a bit more of the “why” of beauty.

Color Vocabulary

HUE -- The name of a color.

TINT -- A color with white added.

SHADE -- A color with black added.

tone -- A color with grey added.

VALUE -- The lightness or darkness of a color. Value is changed by the amount of light a color reflects. By gradually increasing the black in a color, less light is reflected and value is reduced. Contrasts in value stand out, while similar values tend to blend.

INTENSITY -- (also called CHROMA or SATURATION) The brightness or dullness of a color.

MONOCHROMATIC -- A color scheme based on one hue. Variations of this hue can be used. For example, a series of colors from red to pale pink can be used in a monochromatic scheme. Neutral colors can also be used to add variety.

ANALOGOUS -- (also called RELATED) A scheme based on colors next to each other on the color wheel. Analogous hues create a sense of harmony when used together.

TRIADIC COLOR SCHEME -- Three colors equidistant from one another on the color wheel. For example, red, blue, and yellow constitute a triadic color scheme.

COMPLEMENTARY -- Colors exactly opposite one another on the color wheel. Because of their wide contrast, they intensify one another when used together. For example, when red is used with green, the green appears more green than when near other colors.

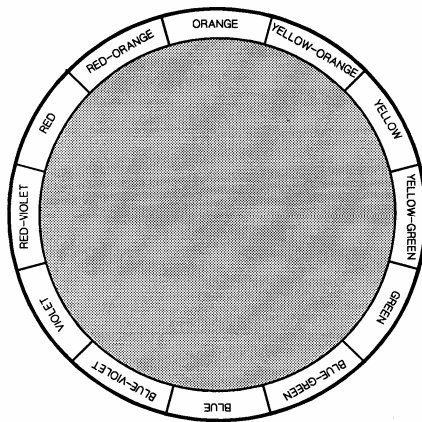
Why are colors opposite each other? You'll notice that the complement of a color is the primary color not used in the mix. For example, yellow and violet are complementary. Yellow is the one primary color NOT used in the mix that creates violet; so it is the complement.

PRIMARY COLORS -- Theoretically, cannot be produced by mixing other colors. Red, yellow, and blue are the primary colors. This applies to pigments. When mixing light, the primary colors are red, green, and blue.

SECONDARY COLORS -- Equal mixture of two primary colors. Green, violet, and orange are secondary colors. Each stands midway between two primary hues on the color wheel and is the product of them. For example, green is a mixture of blue and yellow.

TEMPERATURE -- Red, orange, and yellow are "warm hues," they remind us of fire and sun. Blue, green, and violet are cool colors, they remind us of sky and water. The warm colors are called "advancing" hues, because they seem closer than they actually are. Cool colors "recede," they appear farther away.

Color Wheel Basics



The color wheel is not merely a pleasing circle of colors. It is a circular arrangement of colors in the same order seen when light is reflected through a prism. The color wheel is a relative to the rainbow. To make a wheel the violet at the far end of the spectrum is joined back to red at the beginning.

Red, yellow and blue are the primary colors.

They cannot be created by mixing other colors.

Orange, green, and violet are secondary colors. Each is produced by an equal mix of the two primary colors on either side – red and yellow for orange, blue and yellow for green, and blue and red for violet. Each is the complementary color of the primary color not used in its creation.

The remaining (or tertiary) colors contain equal parts of a primary and its neighboring secondary. This gives you red-orange, yellow-orange, yellow-green, blue-green, and so on.

Quiz on How Color Works

1. _____ This word means simply the name of a color.
2. _____ This results when white is added to a color.
3. _____ This is the result when black is added to a color.
4. _____ What are black, white, gray, and beige called?
5. _____ What colors are opposite each other on the color wheel?
6. _____ Would a room appear to be larger if the walls were painted a dark brown or a light blue?
7. _____ The three primary colors are red, blue and....?
8. _____ Are red and green related, analogous, complementary, or receding?
9. _____ Are the colors orange and red related, complementary, pastel, or receding?
10. _____ What is the name for a color scheme based on one hue?
11. _____ What is the name for a color scheme based on yellow and violet?
12. _____ What is the name for a color scheme based on green, yellow, and yellow/green?
13. _____ An equal mix of red and yellow produces what secondary color?
14. _____ Will a red and green, placed next to each other, appear muddy, vivid, pale, or neutralized?
15. _____ A pastel is a color that has a significant amount of what color mixed in?

Key Concepts in How Color Works

We learn color basics from nature. We learn that a change in color attracts the eye, and similarities in color values serve to hide or camouflage. We learn which colors harmonize; that means they go well together.

We learn to associate red and orange with warmth and blues and greens with coolness. Creating color harmony starts by becoming more color aware.

You can experience complementary colors at work yourself. Stare at a red square on a white piece of paper for about 15 seconds. Take the paper away and replace it with a blank sheet of paper. Your eye will create a square on the blank page in red's complement – green.

Note: If you stare at a red square on a video monitor you won't see the complement afterwards. It doesn't work on a video screen because its color comes from colored light projected directly at you. The effect works only with reflected light, and that is what you deal with in most design projects. This program concerns colors in pigments, not color in light.

The color values in this room are light. So the room appears light and bright. We consider light colors cheerful and informal. Light color values make spaces seem larger.

Darker color values are more formal and serious. They convey authority. Think business suits, police uniforms, and judges robes. They draw space together, make the room seem cozy. Darker values make spaces seem smaller.

A general rule of color harmony is that similar values tend to harmonize, they work well together. In color design you want to pay close attention to color values.

Another word for your color vocabulary is intensity. Some colors are more intense than others. A hue in its purest state, unmixed, is at its highest intensity.

Intensity can be reduced by adding gray (which is black and white mixed) or a complementary color.

Adding gray makes the color less intense. The result is a "grayed down" color. Adding gray makes a tone.

Intensity can also be reduced by mixing a color with its complement. For example, orange with blue. The result is a neutralized color. Neutralized colors tend to be muddy and lack intensity.

A man's suit illustrates pleasing proportions in clothing. 60% of the color is in the jacket and slacks. About 30% of the color is in the shirt and 10% in the tie. The shirt cuffs repeat a color in order to help establish a color rhythm.

We find proportions such as one to two or one to three more interesting. For example, we find the proportion of 60/30/10 more pleasing than 50/50. It's the Greek idea of the Golden Mean. Colors work best when used in unequal areas.

A man's suit illustrates pleasing proportions in clothing. 60% of the color is in the jacket and slacks. About 30% of the color is in the shirt and 10% in the tie. The shirt cuffs repeat a color in order to help establish a color rhythm.

A monochromatic plan is often restful. It lacks surprises, yet can still show variety. The monochromatic scheme is easiest to understand. It uses a single hue or varieties of that color.

A second path to color harmony is to use colors near each other on the color wheel – “related” colors.

A related color scheme works best when the main color is a primary (red, yellow, or blue) or a secondary (orange, green, violet). For example, red with the colors on either side of it on the color wheel—red/orange and red/violet.

Yet a third way to color harmony is to use colors opposite each other -- complementary colors. In other words, harmony by contrast. Examples include blue and orange or green and red.

Nature often shows itself in complementary colors. Violet flowers are often highlighted by yellow centers. Yellow and violet are complementary colors. A rose is one of many flowers that uses the vibrant complementary colors of red and green.

Blue and orange are also complements. Birds and butterflies often mix the two. Usually, one color is dominant and the other serves as an accent.

Some colors influence us because of an association. That explains why red, orange and yellow are often called warm colors. They remind us of sun, fire, and golden warmth. Because of this association, they can actually make you feel warm.

Blue, green, and violet are cool colors. The blues, greens and violets remind us of leaves and water. People in a room decorated in cool colors might actually feel cooler than those working in a room filled with reds and orange.

Another color basic is the law of areas. In color, as in cooking, the stronger the spice the less you need. The more intense and strong a color the more useful it is in small areas. So a beige dress with a bright red belt creates an attractive combination.

Another "rule of color" is that neutrals – white, black, beige, or gray -- harmonize with almost any other color. Few people would name these colors as their favorites; yet they fit easily into many color schemes. Neutrals are "safe" since they mix with almost any color. Any color goes with either black or white.

Pleasing color combinations give the impression that the colors belong together, they are a unity. Yet, there must also be enough variety or the color plan becomes boring. A color plan means repetition with variety.

Resources

Understanding Color: An Introduction for Designers, 2nd Edition by Linda Holtzschue.

Reliable theory and practical solutions for color-related design problem. Linda Holtzschue shows how to forge an alliance between your emotional response to color and the theories that explain it. Mastering basic color concepts through straightforward, easy-to-follow instruction, you'll learn how different light sources affect color rendition, how placement changes colors, how to avoid costly color mistakes, and how to resolve the typical color problems that confront design professionals.

The Color Wheel Company offers a series of movable color wheels aimed both at designers and teachers. One of their best is the \$7 *Interior Design Color Wheel*. Find their offerings at art supply store or online at Colorwheelco.com.

Home Decorating For Dummies, 2nd edition by Katharine McMillan and Patricia McMillan (Wiley Publishing, NY, 2004). Don't be put off by the casual style and wacky writing, this is a solid book on interior design. Chapter 5, "*Eyeing Color Basics*" is a nice introduction to using color for interior design.

The Decoration of Houses by Alexandra Stoddard (William Morrow & Co., NY, 1997) is a "how to book" on interior design that includes an excellent chapter on the meaning of color.