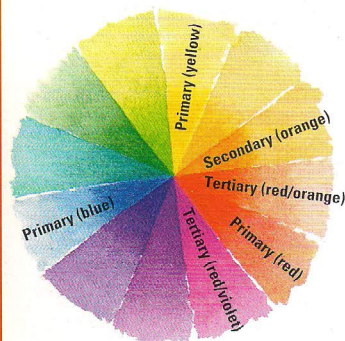


COLOUR

Knowing how to mix and use colours is crucial to the success of your painting. Yet many artists find selecting, mixing and using colours a bewildering process. Understanding the basic principles of colour theory and knowing how to apply colours in practice will help boost your confidence.

THE COLOUR WHEEL

One of the most important 'tools' for the artist is the colour wheel. This is a simplified version of the spectrum, bent into a circle. It is an arrangement of the primary colours (red, yellow and blue) and secondary colours (orange, green and violet) from which all others – including greys and browns – are mixed.



Primary colours

The primary colours are equidistant on the colour wheel. A primary colour is one that cannot be made by mixing other colours.

Secondary colours

A secondary colour is obtained by mixing two primaries. Thus, blue and yellow make green, red and yellow make orange, and red and blue make violet.

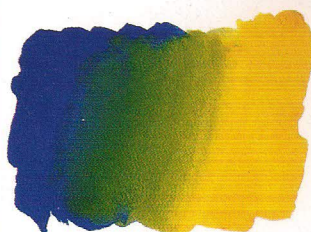
Tertiary colours

A tertiary colour is made by mixing a primary colour with the secondary next to it on the colour wheel. If you combine red with its neighbour to the right (orange), you get red-orange; if you combine red with its neighbour to the left (violet), you get red-violet.



MIXING COLOURS

In theory, by mixing the primary colours in varying proportions, you can produce every other colour known. In practice things are not that simple, because the pigments used to manufacture paints are not as pure as light.



Mixing mud

According to basic colour theory, blue and yellow make green; but mixing just any old yellow and blue could have a very different result. Ultramarine blue, for example, has a reddish undertone, and lemon yellow a greenish one; combined, they make a muddy green.



Mixing clean colours

To mix a clean green, it is important to choose the exact colours – here phthalo blue and lemon yellow – for the particular shade you want.

Solid or broken colour

You can mix the required colour on your palette, or combine two colours on the surface of your painting.



Fully mixing two colours produces a solid third colour.

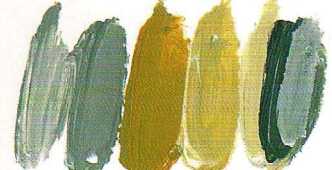


Partly mixing paint on the canvas creates interesting broken colour.



WARM AND COOL COLOURS

All colours have familiar associations. Reds and yellows conjure up sunlight and warmth; and we connect blues and greens with water, foliage and shadow. Taking advantage of these associations allows you to create a distinct atmosphere in your painting.



Neutral colours

Pure neutrals are mixtures of black and white, and are neither warm nor cool. However, most so-called neutrals are the result of mixing two or more colours, and therefore have a temperature bias depending on the proportions of the colours in the mix.

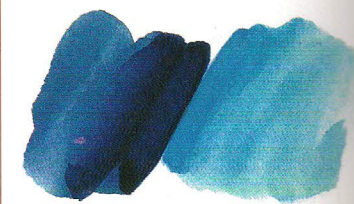


Depth and space

Because the eye perceives cool colours as being further away than warm ones, contrasts of warm and cool are used to create an illusion of receding space in landscapes.

Colour and tone

Tone refers to the relative lightness or darkness of a colour.



Comparative tones

Some colours are by nature lighter in tone than others. Cerulean blue is light in tone, while Prussian blue is darker.

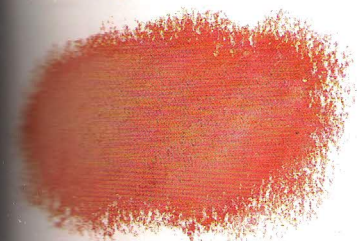


Tints and shades

When white is added to a colour to lighten it, the resulting mix is referred to as a tint of that colour. Shades are darker tones of a colour, achieved by adding black.

Intensity

Intensity (also referred to as chroma or saturation) refers to how bright or strong a colour is. Vivid, pure colours are strong in intensity; pale, greyed colours are weak.



A vibrant, intense colour, such as cadmium red, becomes less intense when white is added, turning it pink. The intensity of a colour can also be reduced by mixing it with its complementary, which shifts the colour towards grey.



Using intensity to create contrast

Juxtaposing neutrals with intense colours makes the intense saturated colours appear more brilliant.

Counterchange

Counterchange is the placing of light shapes against dark, and vice versa. It creates lively, interesting pictures, because the reversals of light and dark provide intriguing contrasts. Counterchange also gives movement and rhythm to a picture, leading the viewer from light to dark and back again.

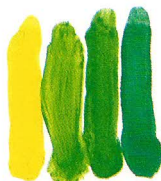


Chiaroscuro

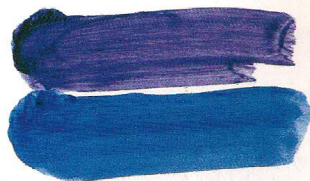
The term chiaroscuro describes the effect of light and shade in a painting or drawing, especially where strong tonal contrasts are used.

Harmonious colours

There is a harmonious relationship between colours that lie on the same section of the spectrum or colour wheel – between yellow and green, for example.



Colours with similar characteristics will harmonize when placed together in a painting.



Close harmonies

The closest relationships are between shades of one colour, or between a primary colour and a secondary which contains that primary, such as blue and blue-green or blue and blue-violet.

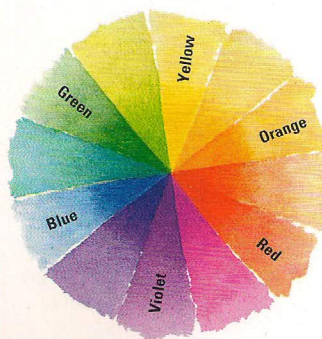


Hue

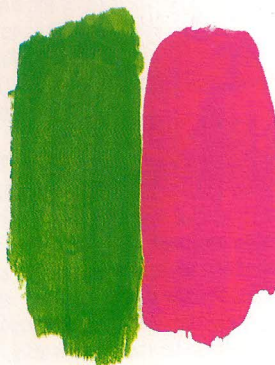
Hue is another word for colour, and refers to the generalized colour of an object. The term is used to describe close or similar colours: for example, cadmium red, alizarin crimson and alizarin scarlet are close in hue.

Complementary colours

The colours opposite one another on the wheel are contrasting partners, called complementary colours. There are three main pairs, each consisting of one primary colour and the secondary composed of the other two primaries. Thus, red is the complementary of green, blue of orange, and yellow of violet. These relationships extend to pairs of secondary colours, so that red-orange is complementary to blue-green, blue-violet to yellow-orange, and so on.



Colours directly opposite one another on the colour wheel are contrasting partners. They are known as complementary colours.



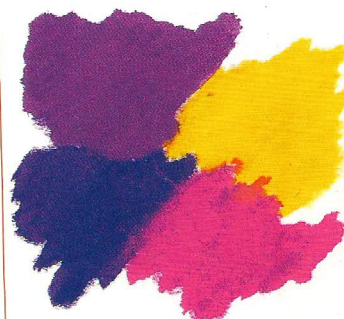
Vibrant complementaries

When complementary colours are juxtaposed, they enhance each other, producing a vibrant visual sensation; each colour seems brighter when placed against its neighbour than it would standing alone.



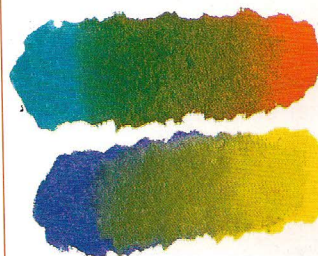
Using complementary accents

A harmonious scheme can also be enlivened by the introduction of complementary accents. Brilliant accents have a powerful effect, even when used in small amounts. A small touch of red in a green landscape, for example, can add zest to a painting.



Split complementaries

Near or 'split' complementaries are often more pleasing to the eye than true ones. Split complementaries are those which are separated by the true complementary; for example, violet is the true complementary of yellow, while blue-violet and red-violet are its split complementaries.



Mixing complementaries

When complementary colours are mixed together, they form neutral greys and browns. Depending on the colours used, and their proportions, it is possible to create a wide range of colourful neutrals.