

# Getting to know the Colour Wheel

## PRIMARY COLOURS



In the centre of this wheel you can see the three **Primary Colours: Yellow, Red and Blue**. In traditional colour theory these are the three pigments which cannot be mixed from any other combination of other colours.

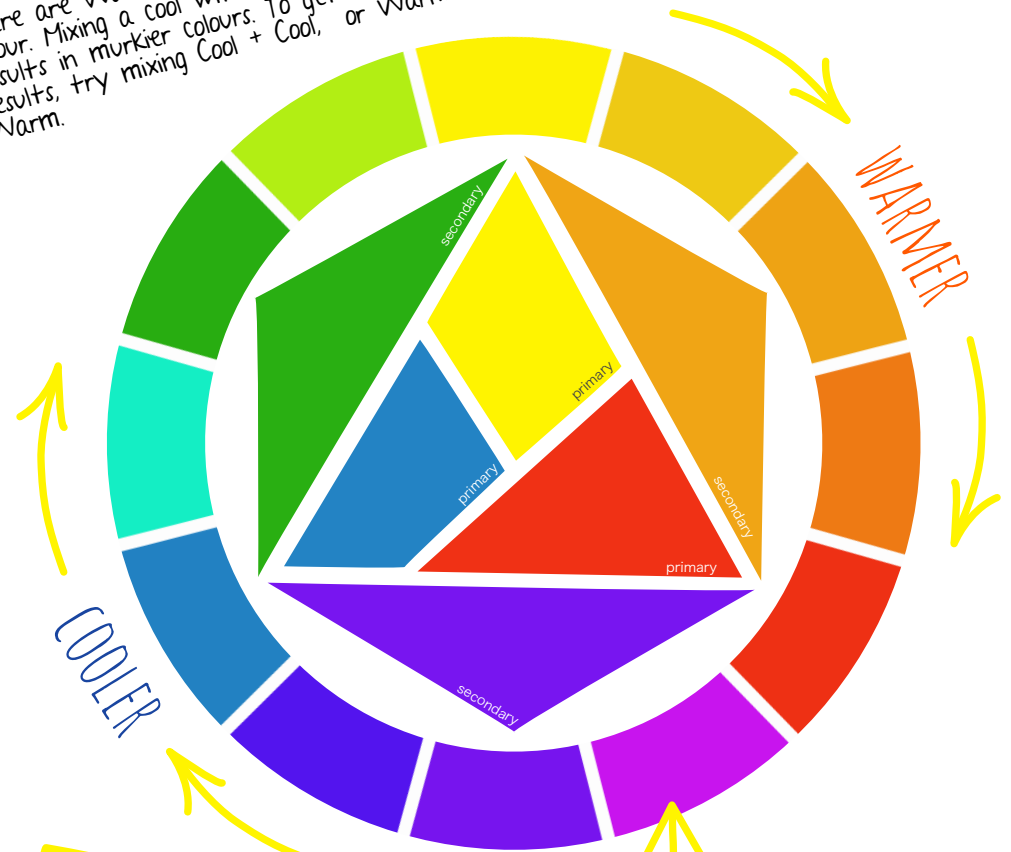
## SECONDARY COLOURS

These are the colours created from mixing two Primaries together:

Blue + Yellow = **Green**  
Yellow + Red = **Orange**  
Blue + Red = **Purple**

The shades of these colours can be changed by altering the ratios. If you add more yellow than blue you will create a lighter lime type of green. If you add more blue than yellow, you will create something nearer to teal.

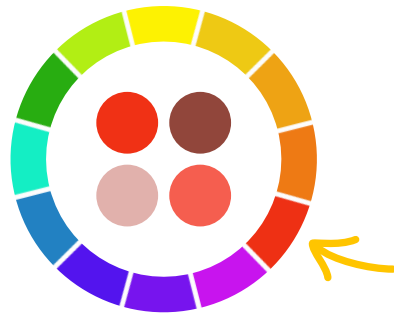
There are Warm and Cool versions of each colour. Mixing a cool with a warm often results in murkier colours. To get cleaner results, try mixing Cool + Cool, or Warm + Warm.



Tertiary colours are when you mix a primary colour with a secondary colour - so if you mix Red and Purple, you make a reddish-pinky-purple!

# Finding Harmony

Choosing colours to use in your art is often intuitive - you go with what looks good to you. After all, everyone sees colour differently! But if you're not sure what you like yet, try some of these...



## MONOCHROMATIC

This scheme is one of the simplest - just pick one hue from the colour wheel and use saturation and value to create the colour variations you need.



## ANALOGOUS

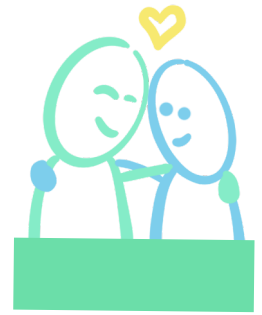
This scheme uses colours which are next to each other on the colour wheel, such as blues and greens, or reds and oranges.



## COMPLEMENTARY

Complementary colours are those which are opposite each other on the colour wheel, such as red and green, or yellow and purple.

Once you've tried these colour schemes out, don't be afraid to experiment! Mix colours up, put them side by side and essentially play. It will help you find out what colour schemes you like and respond to.



If you are stuck and are still unsure which colours to try together, widen your knowledge and seek out other colour schemes such as -

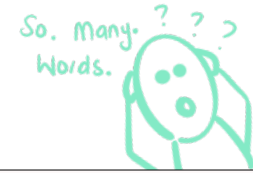
TRIADIC

TETRADIC

SPLIT COMPLEMENTARY

Have you spotted the general colour-scheme of this help-sheet is analogous? It uses lots of yellow, green and blue variations.

# Colour Theory Terms



Technical terms can sometimes be overwhelming. Here are some of the most common colour terms to get you started...

## HUE



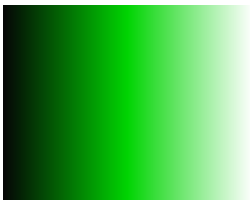
Hue is, essentially, another word for colour. This hue, as we identify it on the colour wheel, is a light green.

## SATURATION



Saturation refers to how intense a colour is. A saturated colour is full of pigment and is rich and vibrant. A desaturated colour has less pigment and is more subtle.

## VALUE



Value is about how light or dark a colour is, ranging from black to white. See how many values of green there are here, from a deep forest green, to a pale mint colour.

## SHADE

A darker version of a hue created by adding black.

## TINT

A lighter version of a hue created by adding white.

## tone

A hue with only grey added. Grey will tone down the intensity of a hue and often make them easier on the eye.

a quick note about digital colour...

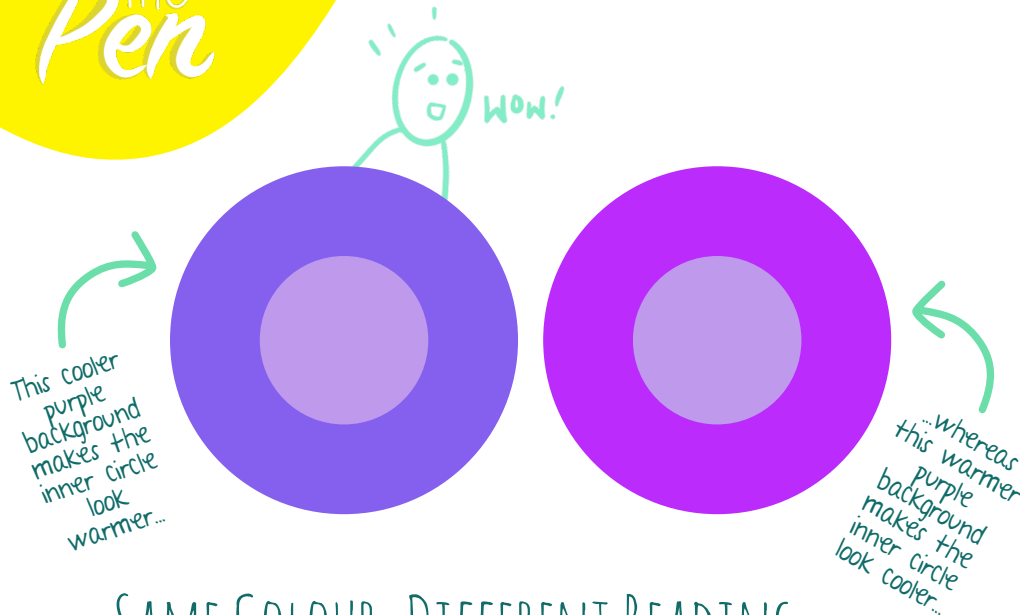
## CMYK AND RGB

These are modes for mixing colours in graphic design:  
**CMYK** = Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, Black  
**RGB** = Red, Green, Blue

As a quick reference, RGB is brighter and is best used for digital work, while CMYK is slightly duller but better for printed work. If your digital work is printing duller than it looks on screen, check to see if your setting is RGB. If so you may need to change it to CMYK and adjust your colours to their nearest equivalents.

# Reading Colour

Colour is not absolute – it behaves differently depending on how we use it....

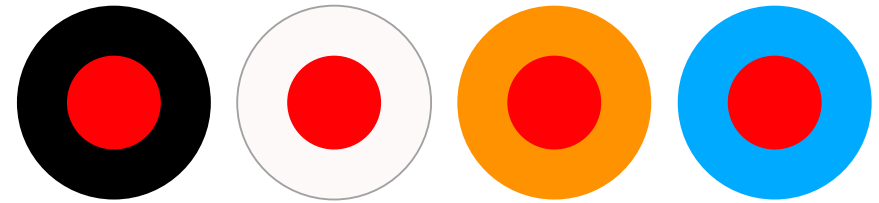


## SAME COLOUR, DIFFERENT READING

Sometimes the same colour can look different depending on the other colours around it.

The light purple dot on the above left appears to have a warmer reddish tinge when compared to the dot on the right. They are both the same hue, but the different colours behind them affect how we see them.

Observing the relationships between colours is a launchpad to understanding how relative and subjective colour can be.



## COLOUR RELATIONSHIPS

How colour behaves in relation to other colours and shapes is a complex area of colour theory. Compare the contrasting effects of different colour backgrounds for the same red dot above.

The red appears vibrant against a black background and crisper against the white background. The red appears to sink into the orange background, yet against blue it vibrates. Notice that the red dot may appear larger on the black background, because the contrast attracts our attention quicker.

The colours we choose to use in our art can create different feelings for the viewer...