

Colors have meaning that help communicate a message both on a visual level and a psychological level. Read on for guidelines to help you understand color and how to use it effectively in your visual design products.

The basics of color theory help you understand color properties, harmonies and temperatures.

Color Wheel

One of the best tools for understanding color basics is the color wheel. It helps you see the relationships between individual colors in order to use them appropriately. The color wheel organizes pigment, which is used to produce color in illustration, art and printing. It includes twelve colors based on Isaac Newton's visible color spectrum, and is organized into three categories: primary colors, secondary colors and tertiary/intermediate colors. Understanding these relationships is essential to using color in your designs.

- ☐ Primary Colors (red, yellow, blue) are referred to as primary because no other colors can be mixed to create them.
- ☐ Secondary Colors (green, orange, violet) are formed from combining two primary colors.
- ☐ Tertiary Colors (red-orange, red-violet, yellow-green, yellow-orange) are created when a primary and a secondary color are mixed.

Color Properties

Color has three primary qualities, known as properties: hue, value and intensity. Each property affects the way we perceive color. Understanding these concepts will help you create and effectively apply color palettes in your designs.

- ☐ Hue refers to a color in its pure state. It also denotes a color's position on the color wheel.
- ☐ Value describes the degree of lightness or darkness in color. There are three ways to change the value of a color: tinting lightens the color by adding white, toning softens a color by adding gray and shading darkens a color by adding black.
- ☐ Intensity is the brightness or dullness of a color based on saturation. A color is most intense in its purest form (hue). Intensity is low when a color is mixed with a complementary color or a neutral color.

Color Harmony

Color harmonies are a way of using color to create visual interest. These color schemes go well together to create a sense of order and organization.

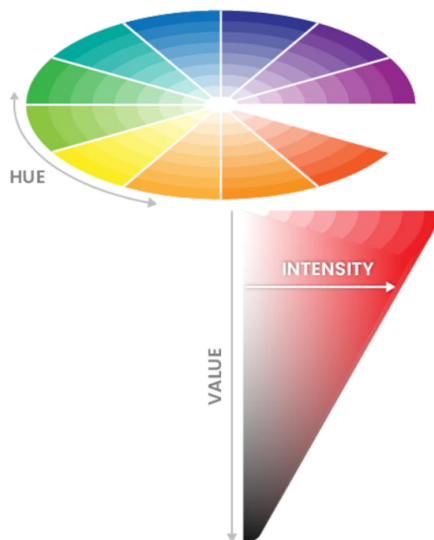
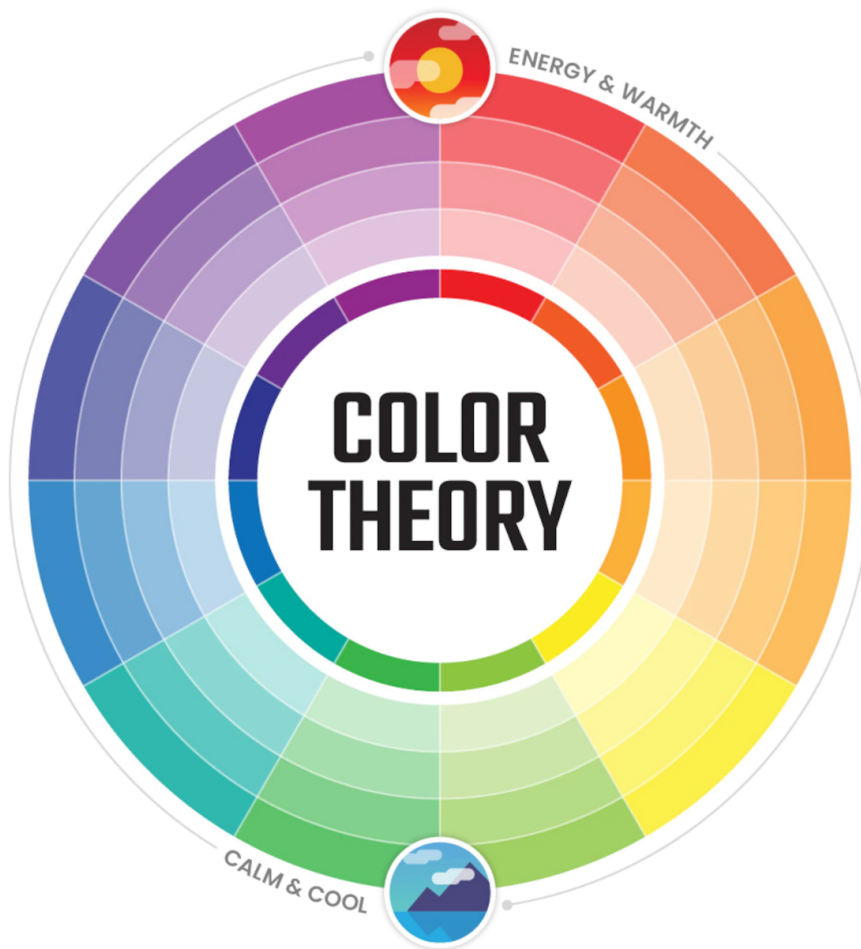
- ☐ Monochromatic uses different tones, shades and tints of one color.
- ☐ Analogous uses colors that are next to each other on the color wheel.
- ☐ Complementary uses colors that are opposite each other on the wheel.
- ☐ Split Complementary uses the colors on either side of the complement.
- ☐ Triadic uses three colors that are equally spaced on the color wheel, forming a triangle.
- ☐ Tetrad uses two complementary pairs, forming a rectangle on the wheel.

Color Temperature

Color has the power to evoke emotions. Color temperature describes the warmth or coolness of a color. Warm colors, such as red, yellow and orange, evoke energy and warmth because they are associated with things like the sun or fire. Cool colors, such as blue, green and purple, evoke a relaxed and calming feeling because they remind people of things like water or grass.

Use this infographic as a quick reference to important basic definitions for color theory concepts.

Source: [Pavilion Dinfos Online Learning](#)



HUE

This refers to a color in its pure state. It also denotes a color's position on the color wheel.



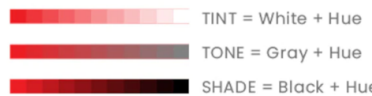
INTENSITY

The brightness or dullness of a color based on saturation.



VALUE

This describes the degree of lightness or darkness in color.



HARMONIES

Color schemes are patterns that go well together and help create a sense of order.

MONOCHROMATIC



ANALOGOUS



COMPLEMENTARY



SPLIT COMPLEMENTARY



TRIAD



TETRAD

