Color trends are getting wacky.

Gradients everywhere, companies rebranding with bold, bright colors at every turn…it's a lot to take in. If you've been living under a rock and have no idea what I'm talking about, take a look at our analysis of the ⏱ top graphic design trends for 2021.

How can you possibly keep up?

Well, I'd like to throw an even crazier idea out there: *creating compelling color schemes for infographics is not all about following the hottest trends*.

Yes, you should definitely consider what's trending when thinking about color. But if you're not a full-time designer, you'll probably struggle to make most of those trends work for you.

My advice: focus less on style, and more on substance.

Researchers spend a lot of time investigating the perception and cognition of color, and we can use what they learn to design better, more effective graphics.

WATCH: Everything you need to know about COLOR… in under 3 minutes!

A bit about color theory

We can't discuss color without a bit of basic color theory. I'll keep it to a bare minimum, I promise.
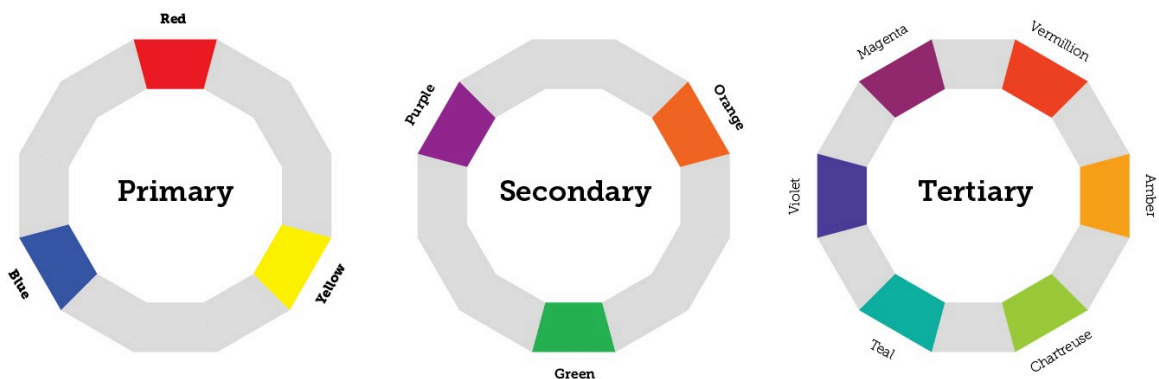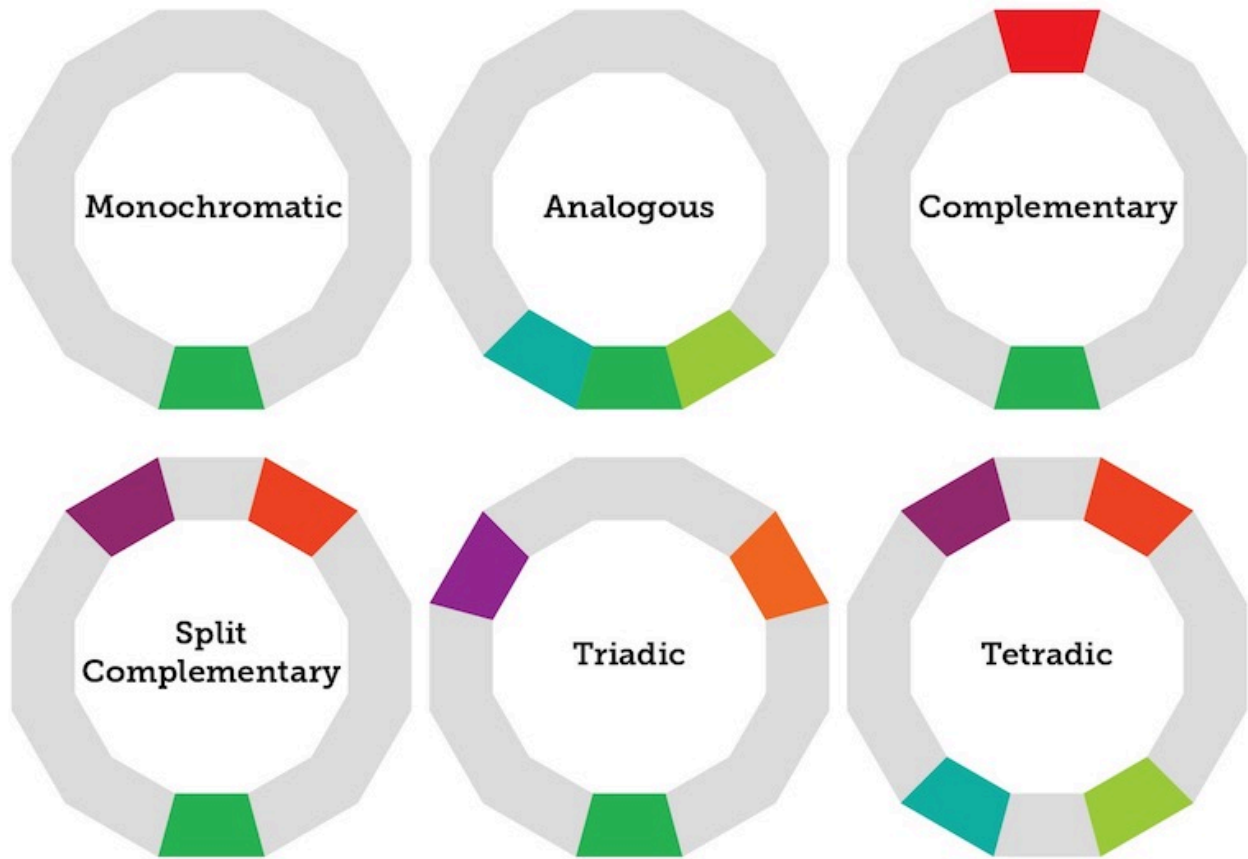
Meet the color wheel:

If you're anything like me, you're flashing back to elementary school art class right about now. Believe it or not, the color wheel is actually a very useful tool when it comes to design. It can help us understand color relationships, which are indispensable for ♡visual communication.

I'm sure you know that the primary colors (red, yellow, and blue) mix to form the secondary colors (orange, green, and purple).

Take it a step further, and you'll see that the secondary colors mix to form the tertiary colors (vermillion, amber, chartreuse, teal, violet, and magenta), rounding out the color wheel.

How can we use this color wheel to create impactful color palettes? Let's start by reviewing the classic color relationships.

- **Monochromatic:** A monochromatic color scheme consists of a single color (or multiple variants of that color).**
- **Analogous:** Analogous colors are side-by-side on the color wheel.
- **Complementary:** Complementary colors are across from each other on the color wheel.
- **Split-complementary:** A split-complementary color scheme is a variant of the complementary color scheme, with one base color and two secondary colors adjacent to its complementary color.
- **Triadic:** A triadic color scheme features three equidistant colors.
- **Tetradic:** A tetradic color scheme features two pairs of complementary colors.

That's all you need to know for now. I'll be using these terms later on, so feel free to refer back here to refresh your memory.

Harnessing the power of color for communication

Graphic designers use all sorts of tricks to enhance visual communication. When it comes to communication, color is one of the most powerful tools in the designer's toolkit.

Color is particularly useful for:

1. Creating contrast
2. Grouping elements
3. Encoding quantity

Let's take a look at each of these in turn.

1. Use color contrast to make your most relevant content visually salient

Salience is a quality that makes an object stand out against its surroundings. Like a loud phone ringing in a quiet room, or the flash of some (terrifying) creature's eyes on a dark evening, salient objects or events immediately grab our attention.

We can learn to control salience in our infographics to help our viewers pay attention to the most important elements of a composition. By playing with attributes like color, shape, size, position, and orientation we can create the contrast that our brain is hardwired to pay attention to.
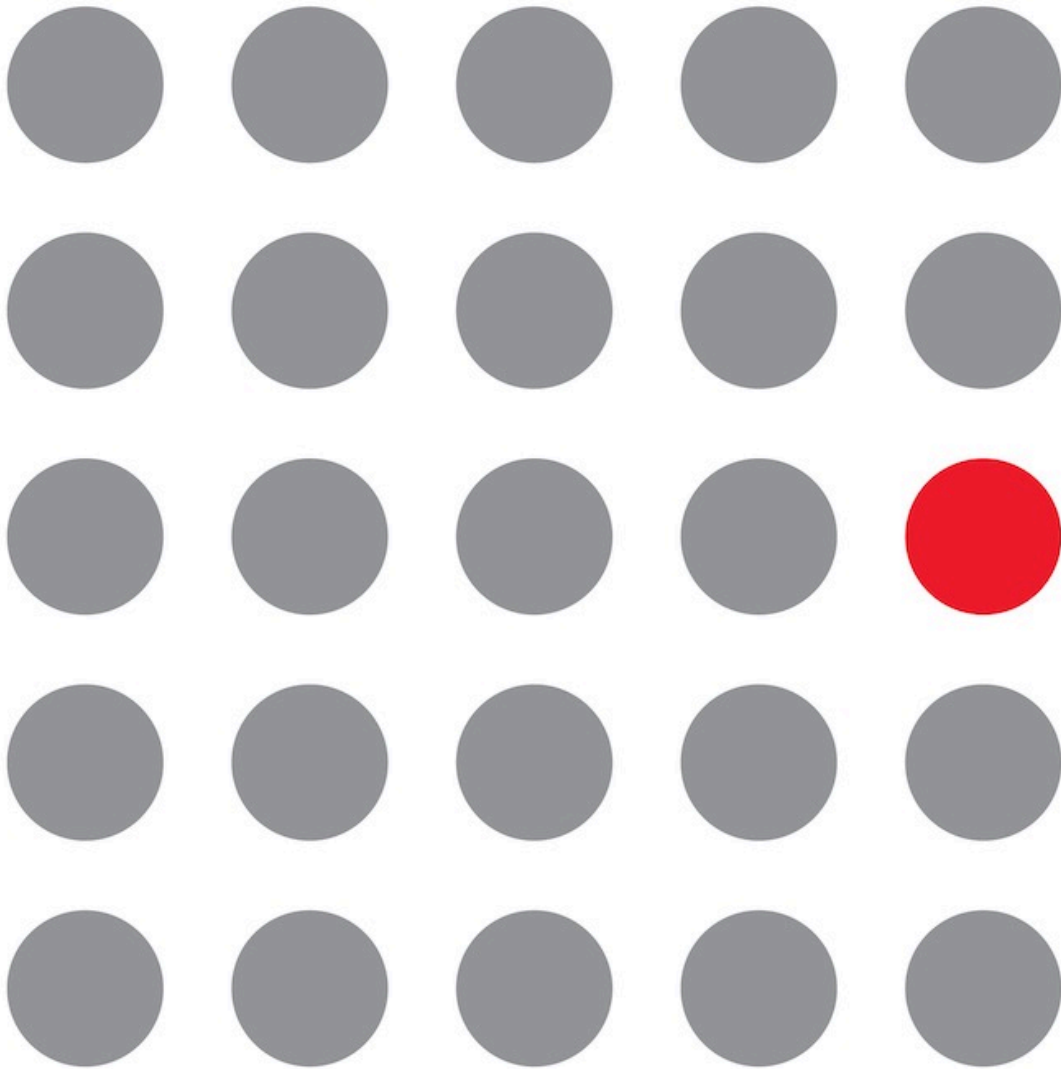
Let's do a little test.

How long does it take you to find the odd one out in this image?
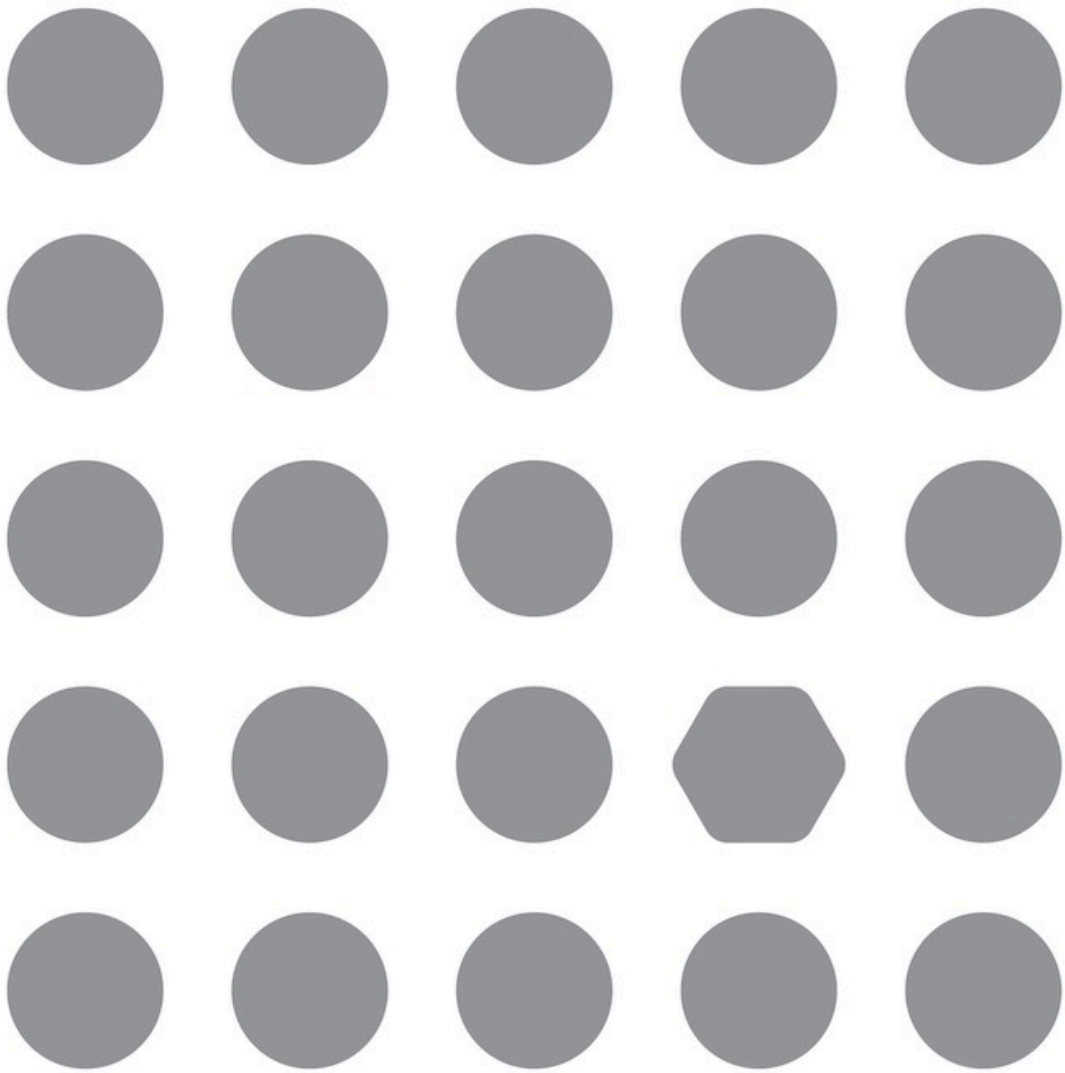
How about this one?
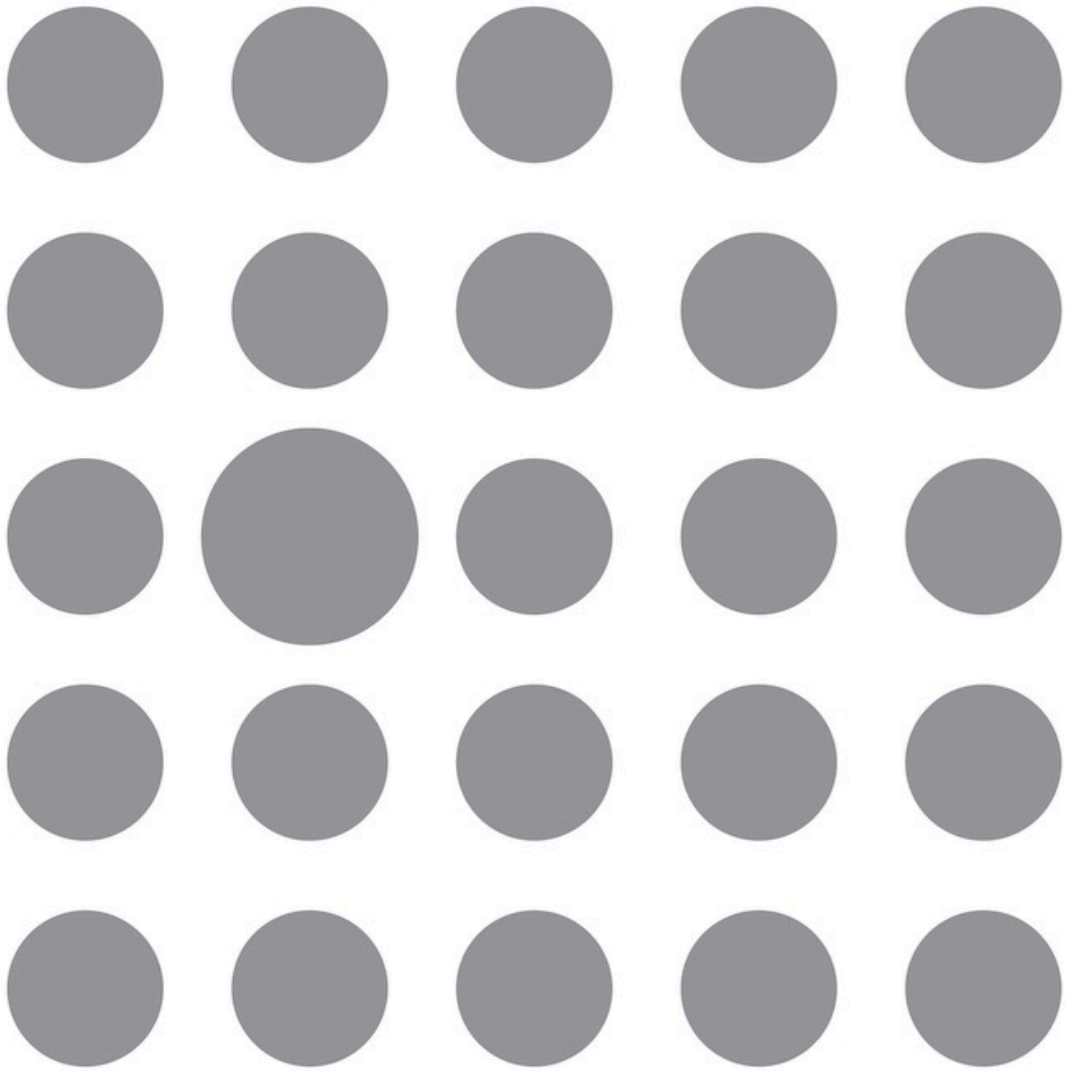
And this one?

In the first example, we have to do a bit of work to pick out the unique shape. In the second, the larger circle jumps out pretty quickly. In the last example, we barely have to glance at the image to know that the odd one out is the far-right circle in the central row.

Color is by far the most powerful visual quality when it comes to creating visual salience through contrast.

How do we can apply this to infographics?

2. Add a single highlight color to a black and white composition

Here's a Venngage email newsletter template aimed at sharing monthly revenue results with employees. I've made this first example black and white to remove any of the visual salience gained from color information:
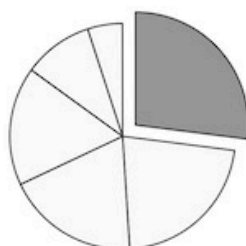
THOUGHTS FROM THE CEO
ALEX BANNISTER

"The world of coffee is changing rapidly. It seems like just yesterday we caught on that in-home coffee sells better than cafe options, whether it's slow pour, cold-press, pods whatever. Industry leaders changed their entire operations and product line ups to cash in on this growing market. But now it's about curating an aromatic and flavorful experience for the consumer, at least, that's a significant growing market. People want good coffee but in the right mug, surrounded by the right ambience, and around people. It is as much a social drink as a private one. Havmor Coffee has managed two specific coffee chains in two different large cities, faced intense competition from a multitude of competitors and has still managed to stay on top of its game. What does it all come down to? Knowing our craft. This past month has been one of consistent wins, reassuring the people at Havmor that what it does, it does better than rest."

MONTHLY REVENUE RESULTS
APRIL

$410,000 from 27,000 customers
April 2020 sales show a *1.24% growth* over previous month

Havmor current coffee market share at 27%.

● Havmor   Starbucks   Second Cup   Tim Hortons   Timothys   Other

When I glance at this, I immediately see the banner image at the top and the highlighted chunk of the pie chart at the bottom, because they're particularly dark. But the most important information here (the revenue, customer base, and market share) doesn't stand out.

Realistically, we only have a few seconds to catch our readers' attention before they send our email hurtling towards the trash. Using color to highlight the key bits of information, we can capture our readers in a fraction of that time:
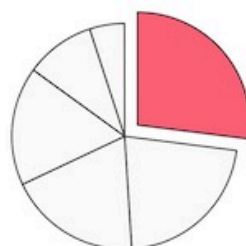
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With a single color strategically creating some visual salience, we've dramatically improved our chances of engaging with our readers.

When working with black and white compositions, adding a highlight color is fairly straightforward. Let's see if we can use what we know about color theory to apply the same principles to more complex situations.

3. Use black and white to add contrast to monochromatic compositions

Monochromatic color schemes are great because you don't have to worry about matching or balancing different colors, and they automatically inject a sense of cohesion into your piece.

But they are inherently lacking in color contrast, which is dangerous from a communication standpoint.

The workaround: use white to draw attention to the important elements, and use black to improve the readability of smaller text.

Here, the large white title captures your attention before your eye is drawn to the white highlight in the bottom right corner:

EVOLUTION OF "HOT"
MARKETING
SKILLS

2013 — Project Management, Photoshop, Copywriting, Social Media, Email Marketing & HTML

2014 — Data Analysis, Mobile Marketing, Email Marketing, Content Marketing, Social Media & SEO

2015 — Content Marketing, Data Analysis, SEO, PPC, Email Marketing, HTML & CSS
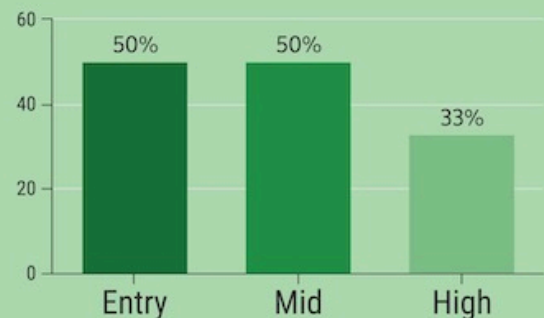
2016 — Content Marketing, Video development, Social Media, SEO, Security, HTML & CSS

2017 — Digital Advertising, Content creation and curation, Data Analysis, SEO, PCC, Web Design

Data Skills Are Demanded Across All Job Levels

	50%	50%	33%
	Entry	Mid	High

● 2017

The most popularly demanded skills by marketing directors and hiring managers include: "Data Analysis," "SEO," "SQL," "Google Analytics" and "HTML."

Shortage Of Data Skills

45% Demand   **3%** Supply

There is a MASSIVE shortage of marketers with Data analytics skills. In fact, only 3% of all marketers are competent in crunching data. The discrepancy between supply and demand is over 10x for every level!

This hammers home the main takeaway of the infographic: the imbalance between supply and demand for data skills in marketing.

The added bonus of using black and white in otherwise monochromatic palettes: it breaks up the composition, giving the eye a rest from the abundance of color.

4. Use a complementary color to highlight very small bits of important information

Complementary colors (directly across from each other on the color wheel) have the greatest possible color contrast. It can be hard to make highly contrasting colors look good together in large amounts, but in small amounts they can be really powerful.

In this infographic, complementary orange contrasts with the central blue theme, drawing attention to a key statistic:

The key to making this kind of color scheme work is to allow one color to dominate the composition, and use its complementary color judiciously.

If possible, *limit the complementary color to a very small area*. This will keep the contrast from feeling overwhelming and clownish.

Another trick that can help here is to think about color temperature. Ninety percent of the time, a complementary color scheme works because a cool color is used for the background, while the warm color is reserved for highlights.

This is because *warm colors are naturally more salient*, and tend to feel like they are "advancing" towards us, demanding our attention, while the opposite is true for cool colors.

Let's look at an example.

In this Facebook Ad template, red does its job by contrasting with the complementary green base color to highlight the key "Download Now!" call-to-action:

When the roles are reversed, the red background competes with the green CTA, demanding more attention:

It's just as important to recognize and suppress this inadvertent visual salience as it is to consciously add visual salience to important elements.

If you want a simple take-away from this whole discussion of color and visual salience: *use high contrast, warm colors to draw attention to key information.*

5. Use different colors to create visual groupings

We've established that color is one of the first things we notice when we look at a graphic. It's also particularly good at encoding categorical data.

Translation: we can use color to create visual groupings.

Consider this graphic ♡communicating a company's business strategy. It features three tiers of information (represented in three columns, each with a different visual treatment) and three categories (marketing, customer service, and productivity) which are visually identical.

We can use color to reinforce the tiers:

OUR BUSINESS STRATEGY

Once goals and objectives are developed, the next step is to determine the best strategy to achieve them. Growing the business might involve a strategy of reaching out to new market segments. Businesses must select the most appropriate strategies given their goals, objectives, mission, vision and values.

MARKETING

Long Term
- Copy writing
- Content creation
- Blogging

Advertising
- 0 to Hero clip
- Product features clip
- Target markets

Trade Shows
- Exhibition attendance
- Product demos
- Business cards
- Meet entrepreneurs

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Desired Experience
- Friendly and authentic
- Fast and effective
- Impersonal or super personal

Statistics
- Customer reviews
- Response times for inquiries
- Survey responses

Outreach Campaign
- Existing users
- New users
- Business users

PRODUCTIVITY

Project Management
- Trello
- Basecamp
- Wrike

Office Tasks
- Office supplies
- Cleaning office
- Equipment maintenance

Environment
- Collaborative
- Cubicle
- By department

Or to give each category a different visual treatment, adding a new layer of information:

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- Office supplies
- Cleaning office
- Equipment maintenance

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- Collaborative
- Cubicle
- By department

This kind of encoding facilitates visual comparison within categories, which is especially useful if you're visualizing data:

Are People Happy?
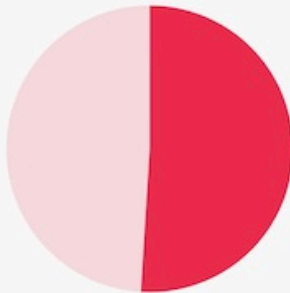
Survey administered between August 2016 to August 2017

North America

Career

● Yes   ● No

Family

● Yes   ● No

Security

● Yes   ● No

Central America

Career

● Yes   ● No

Family

● Yes   ● No

Security

● Yes   ● No

Europe

What colors should you use to create visual groupings?

Triadic and tetradic color schemes are perfect for creating visual groupings when each category is equally important. As seen below, the yellow, red, and blue sections bear equivalent visual weight:

- ABOUT ME -

Solid success directing and implementing broad range of revenue-generating design projects, from conception to launch. Readily translate business requirements into effective advertising campaigns. Partner cross-functionally to build consensus and ensure projects meet all milestones.

- EDUCATION -

Bachelor of Arts Management, Minor in Graphic Arts, 2007
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

- CONTACT -

miabriggs@email.com
miabriggs.ca

Mia Briggs
Art Director

- AREAS OF EMPHASIS -

- Full Life Cycle Project Management
- Cutting-edge Graphic Design
- Web Usability Best Practices / UX
- Targeted E-mail Campaigns
- Newsletters / Brochures / Flyers

- INTERESTS -

Biking	Travelling
Reading	Pets
Painting	Soccer
Nature	Indie Music

- EXPERIENCE -

Art Director, 5/2014 to Present
Clevinger-Orr Marine – Madison, Wisconsin
Efficiently lead and administer creative design projects in support of ongoing marketing and merchandizing programs for national manufacturer specializing in inflatable fishing and recreational boats.

Copy Director / Creative Associate, 4/2008 to 5/2014
Daneeka Medical Group – Green Bay, Wisconsin
Led user-facing graphic design / content development for physician-owned, multispecialty group delivering highest quality medical care across three states.

Graphic Designer, 7/2004 to 3/2008
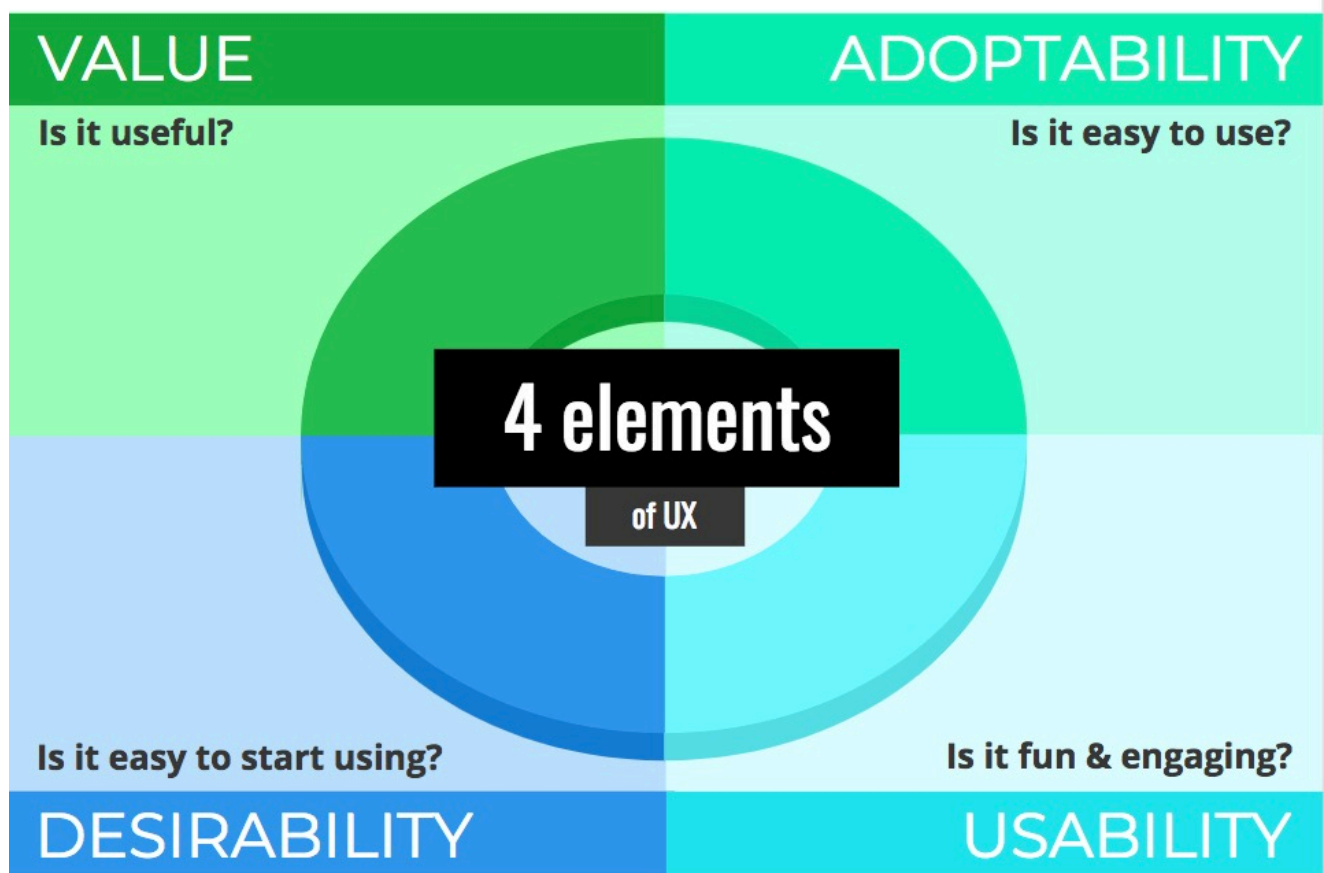Minderbinder Farms – Marshfield, Wisconsin
Developed, rendered, and expanded art concepts throughout production of advertising campaigns for region's third largest distributor of eggs and poultry.

Source

Whereas analogous color schemes can be useful when the groupings are somehow related:

USER EXPERIENCE

User experience (UX) covers a whole range of website features from ease of use to user engagement and visual appeal. UX always has four elements.

VALUE	ADOPTABILITY
Is it useful?	Is it easy to use?

4 elements of UX

DESIRABILITY	USABILITY
Is it easy to start using?	Is it fun & engaging?

In contrast, monochromatic color schemes are rarely useful for creating visual groupings because darker shades are more prominent than lighter shades.

This makes monochromatic color schemes useful for encoding quantity.

6. Use a single color to encode quantity or represent progression

It's natural to use ordered monochromatic shades to represent sequential quantities or to suggest progression:
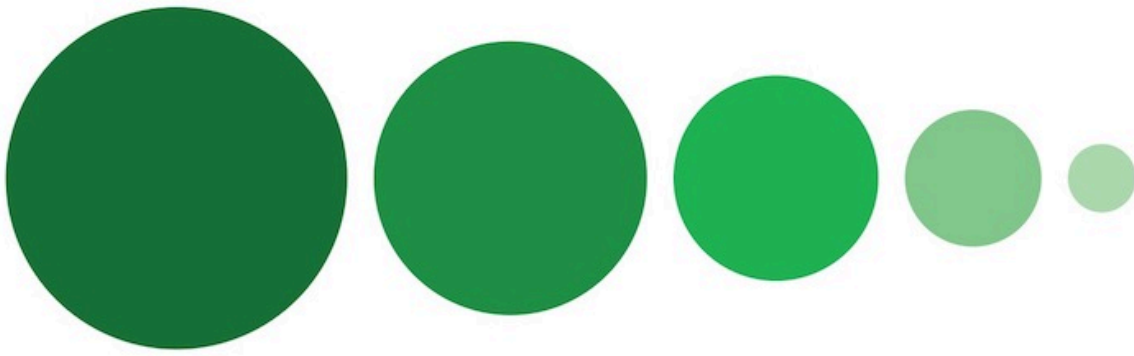
Analogous color schemes can be similarly useful for encoding quantities when you have many data points:
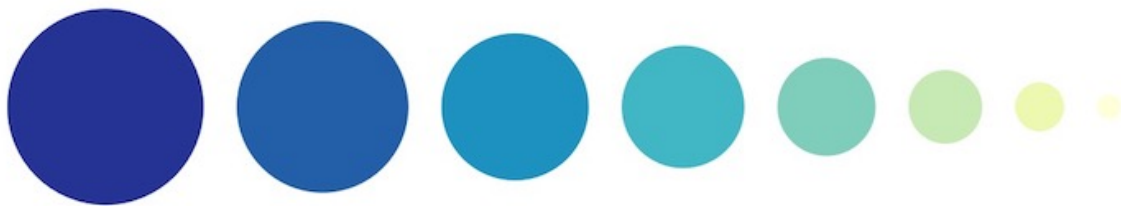
To make sure you represent quantity accurately, use ◎Color Brewer to generate monochromatic or analogous color schemes. It was initially conceived as a color tool for maps, but it's perfect for creating color schemes for data visualization.

Color meanings and what colors represent

The effects that different colors have on our mood and perception of the world around us is known as *color psychology*. Society attributes different personality traits with different colors.

The meanings of colors are deeply entrenched in our storytelling (we actually did a whole study on ⏱the color psychology of Disney characters). Color psychology also plays a big role in marketing, in ⏱brand colors and in the ⏱logo colors that companies choose. You will often see different colors of emotions represented in media and products, based on the target audience.

When creating visuals like infographics and charts, the colors you use can help tell the story behind your data.

Here is an overview of some different meanings of colors:

Color Meanings

RED
POWER | EXCITEMENT | LOVE | PASSION | STRENGTH
ENERGY | DANGER

ORANGE
PLAYFULNESS | CHEERFULNESS | FRIENDLINESS
CREATIVITY | CONFIDENCE

YELLOW
PLAYFULNESS | CHEERFULNESS | FRIENDLINESS
CREATIVITY | CONFIDENCE

GREEN
NATURE | GROWTH | FRESHNESS | WEALTH | HEALTH

BLUE
STABILITY | COMPETENCE | TRUST | LOYALTY
SECURITY

PURPLE
AUTHORITY | SOPHISTICATION | POWER | AMBITION
MYSTERY | CREATIVITY

BROWN
RUGGEDNESS | EARTHINESS | WARMTH

BLACK
POWER | SOPHISTICATION | ELEGANCE | PRESTIGE
TIMELESSNESS | VALUE

BLACK

| | HEALTH | CLEANLINESS | PURITY | SINCERITY |

WHITE

Red Color Meanings: Power, excitement, love, passion, strength, energy, danger.

Orange Color Meanings: Playfulness, cheerfulness, friendliness, creativity, confidence.

Yellow Color Meanings: Playfulness, cheerfulness, friendliness, creativity, confidence.

Green Color Meanings: Nature, growth, freshness, wealth, health.

Blue Color Meanings: Stability, competence, trust, loyalty, security.

Purple Color Meanings: Authority, sophistication, power, ambition, mystery, creativity.

Brown Color Meanings: Ruggedness, earthiness, warmth.

Black Color Meanings: Power, sophistication, elegance, prestige, timeliness, value.

White Color Meanings: Health, cleanliness, purity, sincerity.

Easy to use color schemes for every project

There you have it. Use color to enhance visual communication in infographics by creating visual salience, creating visual groupings, and representing progression.

By now, you should be ready to choose a color scheme and make it work for your project. To help you out, I've created a collection of color schemes tailored for different visual styles. ☺

colour
combinations

professional & stylish

rich & polished

#B42F32	#DF6747	#E3E3CD	#878D92	#49494D

brilliant blues

#37AFA9	#2D8E87	#0C695D	#E0F2F2	#152329
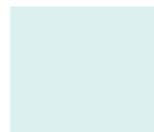
baroque luxury

#A11E22	#E8A631	#E0C098	#E5E4DA	#BFB0B3
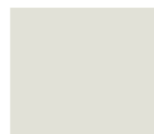
gracefully modern
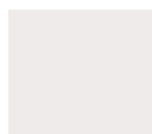
#FAAC77	#C9C9BD	#F0EFEE	#606B6F	#333C3E

sunny & warm

#DA5526	#F6893D	#FEBC38	#D8C6B4	#697F90

classic & trustworthy

#CA3542	#27647B	#849FAD	#AEC0C9	#57575F

minimal & subtle

icy morning
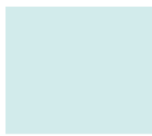
#C3D0E2	#D3EDEE	#FFFFFF	#EEEFF3	#565656
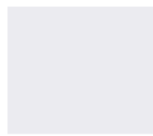
forest floor
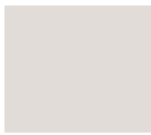
#7D7858	#C5C69B	#E2DFD9	#EFEEEF	#111812

cool sophistication

#83777A	#909AA1	#D5D5D5	#EAEAEA	#FFFFFF
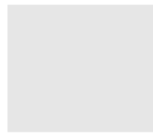
warm elegance

#A5876F	#C5AC8D	#DED1C2	#F7F8F9	#373838
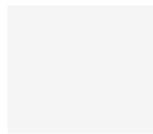
berries in the snow
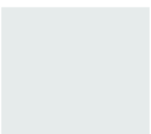
#A01E21	#FFFFFF	#E8EDEE	#D3DADD	#1C1C1E

modern & dramatic

modern luxury

#3D2030	#851B47	#EFEEEF	#0AA076	#050606

vivid & grounded

#EA463A   #D9D6D0   #FDD10C   #E2DFD9   #23211E
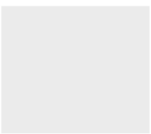
mediterranean getaway

#EE3054   #FFFFFF   #AFDDD0   #4B5EA6   #101424

powerful & rich

#F7BF2A   #417A68   #152329   #FFFFFF   #DEE0E0

bold & basic

#1E2B45   #40578F   #A9C6D9   #E55F3F   #F1A845

tropical sunset

#34BCAD   #E9C1B8   #EB7A57   #F3F2F4   #23162B

exotic warmth

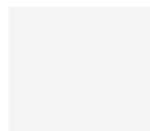#402343   #8D1F5C   #F05624   #76CCCD   #F7F8F9

vintage wedding
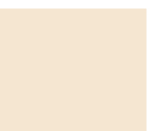
#D06869   #E2B9B2   #92AEBB   #307C82   #0C1924

ripe tangerine

#DE482C   #F68A4D   #F6E6D6   #3E6E66   #739A88

fresh romance

| #397280 | #EF908B | #8AAA9A | #EDEDED | #303834 |
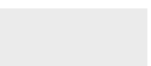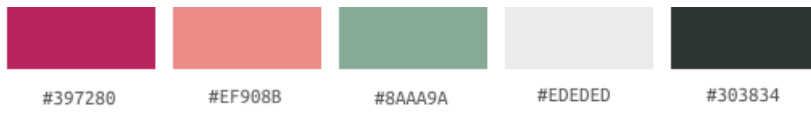
playful & cheerful

summer beachin'
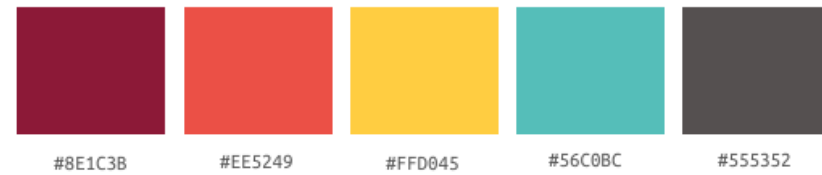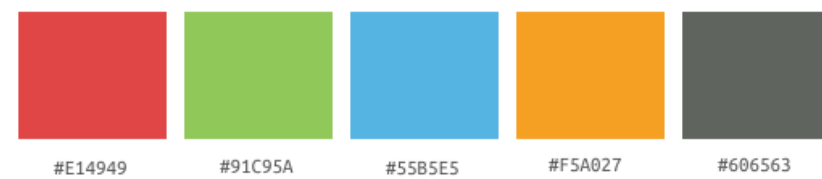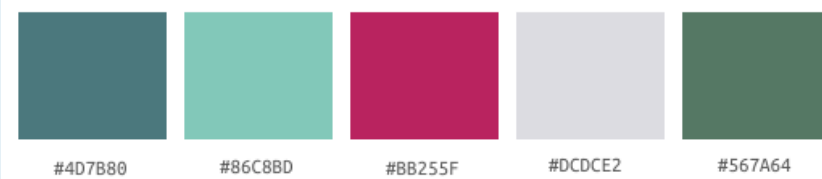
| #8E1C3B | #EE5249 | #FFD045 | #56C0BC | #555352 |

basic brights

| #E14949 | #91C95A | #55B5E5 | #F5A027 | #606563 |

icy raspberry

| #4D7B80 | #86C8BD | #BB255F | #DCDCE2 | #567A64 |

ocean harbour

| #39BCA2 | #F3BC41 | #D3E7ED | #6D97A9 | #E7452E |

late summer blossoms

| #17707B | #70A551 | #F9B859 | #F6926A | #80173A |

tropical cocktail

| #A9216B | #EE4D66 | #F7DC6A | #49BD9D | #2A9699 |

las vegas lights

#070807	#F26F62	#E6E442	#8BD1C8	#794462

strawberry lemon tart

#DF3550	#EA7C9F	#FADEC2	#F5F6FB	#FCCE4C
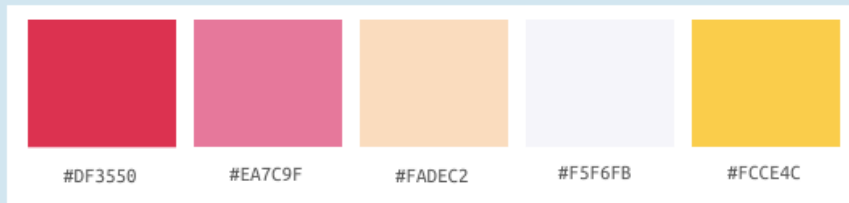
clean & bright

morning dew

#1E818F	#93C94D	#1E818F	#1E818F	#D0F2D4

field of poppies

#EF4147	#F5F6F6	#ABABAA	#6CBF55	#C8E9EF

juicy citrus

#E66925	#EF9C27	#F5D734	#F1F2F2	#CBCCCB

snapshot of summer

#46A7D1	#DAD9D9	#FBCE30	#0AA076	#F29E55

crisp contrast

#F36B2D	#69AD44	#D3E7B6	#FFFFFF	#545554

arctic expedition

#253D93	#9DD5CD	#F0EFEF	#C2C1C6	#2D2E35

nautical & preppy

#ED2027	#63B9CA	#2166B1	#FCF9F9	#D2D7E0

beeswax & clay

#CD6B49	#F7BF2A	#61A36A	#9FD2D6	#7C7D83

lush riverbed

#397280	#44979E	#64BC48	#C4CBB2	#EFF6E3

earthy & natural

northern forest

#A18A6E	#E0D7C6	#84A19B	#737932	#486136

an evening of romance

#FCCB8A	#F5C7AB	#F3F1E3	#E2E0DB	#C6C4C2

woods in winter

#BA785C	#697474	#979699	#CDDAD2	#89A5B1

back to the 50's

#5D5D5D	#7A9E62	#F9F6BF	#DEE3D2	#F1AD9C

autumn leaves

#DFA24B #DD8028 #7E8637 #BADED1 #A19388
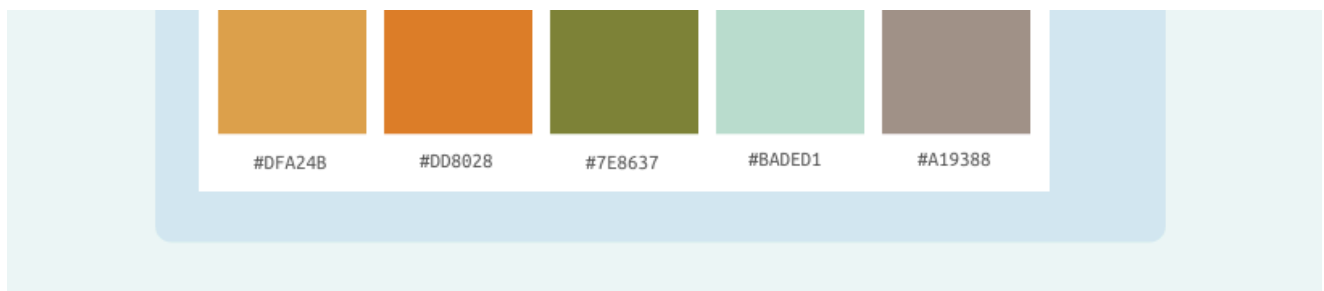
Just pick one of these, and try applying it to your next infographic. You can also consider creating your own marketing color wheel. More than a color swatch, a marketing color wheel informs you which colors contrast and which ones complement each other.

If you want to save color palettes so you can easily apply them to any design, learn more about a handy feature Venngage offers called ⏱ My Brand Kit.

Remember to identify the most salient color and use it to highlight important information. Use the remaining colors to create logical groupings which will help your readers interpret your content.

And that's it! Everything you'll ever need to know about color.

Kidding.

There's a multitude of other things designers consider when it comes to color, including ⏱ color blindness, ⏱ the psychology of color, and the cultural ﹡ significance of color. But if you focus on the things we discussed today, you're well on your way to creating beautiful, effective graphics.

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