

Colors of Visible Light

Visible light waves have colors that are on the order of nanometers:

Each wavelength is a little different color. To make things simpler, we differentiate them into six categories by the six most well known colors:

Color	Wavelength
Red	700 – 635 nanometers (nm)
Orange	635 – 590 nm
Yellow	590 – 560 nm
Green	560 – 500 nm
Blue	490 – 450 nm
Violet	450 – 400 nm
Ultraviolet (not visible)	Less than 400 nanometers

For each wavelength, determine what color of wave it would be:

A light wave that has a wavelength of 458 nm is what color?

A light wave with a wavelength of 389 nm is what color?

A light wave with a wavelength of 555 nm is what color?

A light wave with a wavelength of 678 nm is what color?

Part B: Wavelengths of the Full Electromagnetic Spectrum:

However, the colors we can see are only a tiny portion of all the electromagnetic waves that exist. You can repeat the same exercise above for all 7 types of electromagnetic waves. However, the math becomes more complicated, because the different wavelengths have different orders of magnitude.

For example, instead of studying the difference between 400 nm and 700 nm, we are now studying the difference between 0.1 m, 0.0003 m, and 0.0000000055 m wavelengths.

With these units, we can represent them in two different ways: SI or metric.

The SI unit for wavelength is meters. If we want to use meters to represent these structures, we will have to use scientific notation. To avoid awkward scientific notation numbers, we can also use the metric system to represent these numbers.

You need to become proficient in both systems. These numbers are typically quoted as metric, but you must use SI units whenever plugging into a formula!

Type of Wave	Range in SI (meters)	Range in Metric
Radio	> 1	Greater than 1 meter
Microwave	$1 \text{ to } 1 \times 10^{-3}$	1 m to 1 mm
Infrared	$1 \times 10^{-3} \text{ to } 8 \times 10^{-7}$	1 mm to 800 nm
Visible Light	$8 \times 10^{-7} \text{ to } 4 \times 10^{-7}$	800 nm to 400 nm
Ultraviolet	$4 \times 10^{-7} \text{ to } 1 \times 10^{-8}$	400 nm to 10 nm
X-Ray	$1 \times 10^{-8} \text{ to } 1 \times 10^{-12}$	10 nm to 1 pm
Gamma Ray	$< 1 \times 10^{-12}$	Less than on pm

Credit: <http://hubblesite.org>

Note that this table gives estimates only! In fact, different sources will give different values for the ranges of these numbers. This is understandable: the 7 types of electromagnetic waves are human constructs to help us understand them. All that really matters in the physical world is the wavelength, frequency, and energy of a particular wave and how it interacts with its environment.

For an electromagnetic wave of the wavelength given, determine what type of electromagnetic wave it is:

The left side values

$\lambda = 1 \times 10^{-2} \text{ m}$	$\lambda = 500 \text{ nanometers}$
$\lambda = 6 \times 10^{-7} \text{ m}$	$\lambda = 28 \text{ micrometers}$
$\lambda = 2 \times 10^{-7} \text{ m}$	$\lambda = 19 \text{ picometers}$
$\lambda = 4 \times 10^{-8} \text{ m}$	$\lambda = 0.8 \text{ picometers}$
$\lambda = 2 \text{ m}$	$\lambda = 0.8 \text{ meters}$
$\lambda = 3 \times 10^{-13} \text{ m}$	$\lambda = 12 \text{ centimeters}$
$\lambda = 8 \times 10^{-10} \text{ m}$	$\lambda = 300 \text{ micrometers}$
$\lambda = 5 \times 10^{-5} \text{ m}$	$\lambda = 200 \text{ nanometers}$
$\lambda = 0.2 \text{ m}$	$\lambda = 500 \text{ picometers}$

The next topics to learn:

- Learn the formulas that relate wavelength, frequency, and energy
- Learn applications and occurrences of each of the seven types of electromagnetic wave

Good resources on this topic. There are lots!

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-physics/chapter/the-electromagnetic-spectrum/>

<https://www.siyavula.com/read/science/grade-10/electromagnetic-radiation/11-electromagnetic-radiation-03>

http://hubblesite.org/reference_desk/faq/answer.php.id=70&cat=light

YouTube Videos Relevant to This topic:

kangaroos fighting on an infrared camera

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRiS4DWlga4>

infrared camera police chase

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsMMvLL0B_k