

Easy colorblind-safe typesetting: the colorblind package

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In colorblind-safe documents, the contents are presented in a way that the same information is conveyed to readers regardless of a potential color vision deficiency. This package provides the tools necessary for color-agnostic typesetting in \LaTeX . It provides color schemes for a wide range of applications. The most commonly used schemes are qualitative schemes, providing easily distinguishable colors for use in graphics, but also for text coloring or highlighting. Additionally, diverging and sequential schemes are included which can be used for encoding quantitative information in the colors of a graphic. Therefore, colorblind-safeness is incorporated into the writing process, making it both less cumbersome and less error-prone.

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1 Introduction

Tol The **colorblind** package provides the color schemes by Paul Tol [1] and the **OkabeIto** color palette [2]. By default, no schemes are loaded. Providing one of the options **Tol** or **OkabeIto** loads all corresponding schemes.

As an example for how to use the colors, we look at the *bright qualitative* color scheme by Tol. fig. 1 shows the colors in the scheme

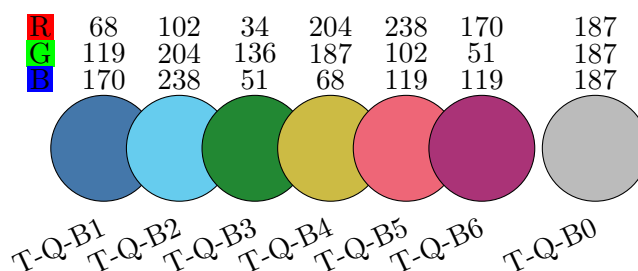


Figure 1: Bright qualitative color scheme by Tol.

All colors in this model start with T-Q-B, indicating that it is a scheme by **Tol**, that it is a **q**ualitative scheme, and that it is the **b**right scheme. The colors in the scheme are specified by a number following the scheme name, in this case ranging from T-Q-B1 to T-Q-B6 for the non-grey colors. The additional color T-Q-B0 provides a color that can be used, e.g., to indicate bad data.

There are two reasons why color names are not based on natural color names (e.g., **blue**):

1. Certain colors (**green**, **red**) are often used by people with full color vision to convey certain meanings (**good**, **bad**). This meaning is difficult for people with color-deficiencies to pick up. By not using natural color names, it is easier to write colorblind-safe documents that do not make use of said connotations.
2. Natural color names can be cumbersome, e.g., when multiple variations of a primary color are used. It is annoying having to look up if a color is called, e.g., **blue** or **cyan**.

These colors are used the same way as any other colors. To change the text color to T-Q-B1 for example, use `\color{T-Q-B1}`.

2 Guidelines

On its own, using colorblind-safe colors is not sufficient for making a document truly colorblind-safe. This section provides some general rules to follow for colorblind-safe typesetting.

These rules apply to each visual unit of a document individually. A visual unit may be a graphic, a table or a paragraph of text. It might be advisable to be consistent also between different visual units (e.g., use the same color scheme for all graphics), but this is more of an aesthetic argument and is not strictly necessary for a colorblind-safe document.

The most important rules are, in this order:

1. **Do not mix the colors in qualitative schemes!**
The colors in each scheme are defined with the purpose of being easily distinguishable. Mixing of colors, e.g., T-Q-B1!50!T-Q-B5 interferes with this. A special case of this is that qualitative colors should not be used for quantitative information. In this case, an appropriate non-qualitative color scheme (i.e. a sequential or diverging scheme) should be used.
2. **Only use colors from one color scheme for a given visual unit!**
The colors between different schemes are not tuned to be distinguishable. Using colors from multiple schemes therefore defies the point of this package.
3. **Do not use shades of colors!**
Saturation and brightness are also used for distinguishability, so mixings involving **white** and **black** should also be avoided.

The first two rules should be ensured in any visual unit. If the need for more colors arises, a different color scheme should be used altogether. While the third rule should also be followed in most scenarios, there are some situations that might allow for breaking this rule. As an example, consider fig. 2, where the error band is colored with a lighter shade of the original color. This is ok because only few colors are used in the plot and the colors are not necessary for conveying the message of the plot.

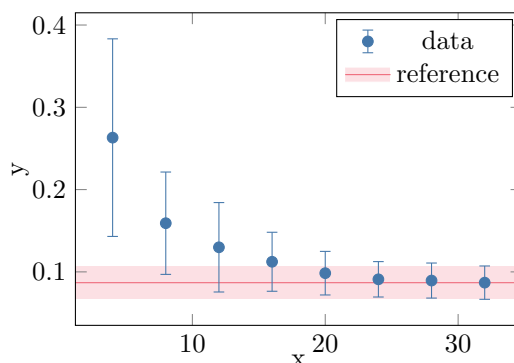


Figure 2: This plot breaks rule 3 by using the shade T-Q-B5!20 for the error band of the reference, but it is still colorblind-safe.

There are additional guidelines that should be kept in mind when typesetting colorblind-safe documents. Depending on the specific visual unit, they are usually not as vital as the rules stated above. In no particular order, they are:

- **Do not convey information only through color!**
When possible, encode the information the color provides also in a different way, e.g., through text, patterns or symbols.
- **Do not use color for information and aesthetics simultaneously!**
Color is often also used for aesthetic reasons, e.g., on a scientific poster. While this is ok in principle, do not mix information and aesthetics within the same visual unit, as this makes it more difficult to extract the encoded information.

3 Provided color schemes

3.1 Paul Tol's color schemes

3.1.1 Qualitative color schemes

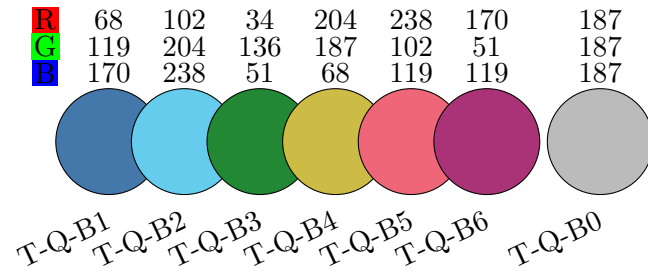


Figure 3: Bright qualitative color scheme by Paul Tol [1].

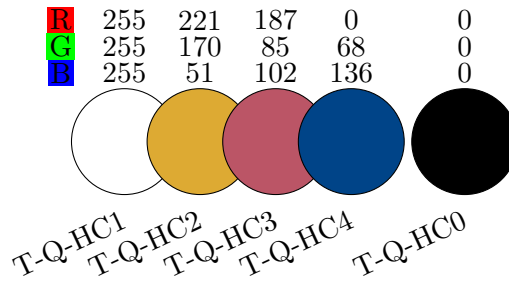


Figure 4: High-contrast qualitative color scheme by Paul Tol [1].

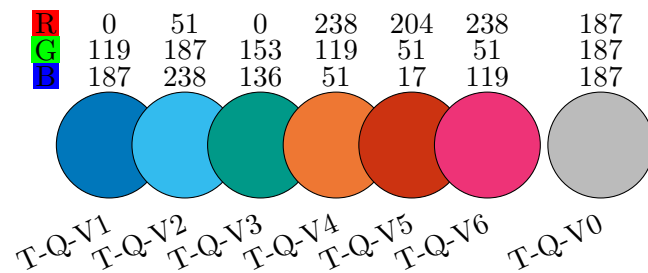


Figure 5: Vibrant qualitative color scheme by Paul Tol [1].

3.1.2 Diverging color schemes

3.1.3 Sequential color schemes

3.2 Okabe Ito qualitative color scheme

3.3 Provided commands

`\drawScheme{...}` The visualizations of color schemes given in this documentation are created with the

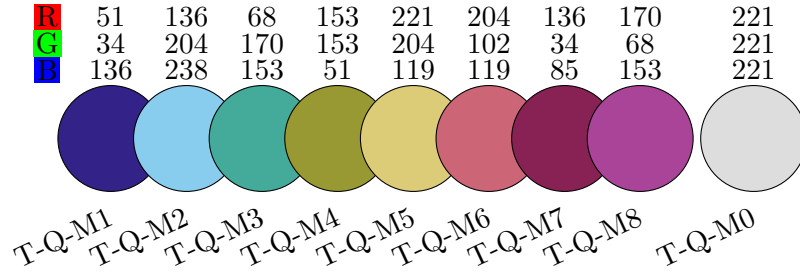


Figure 6: Muted qualitative color scheme by Paul Tol [1].

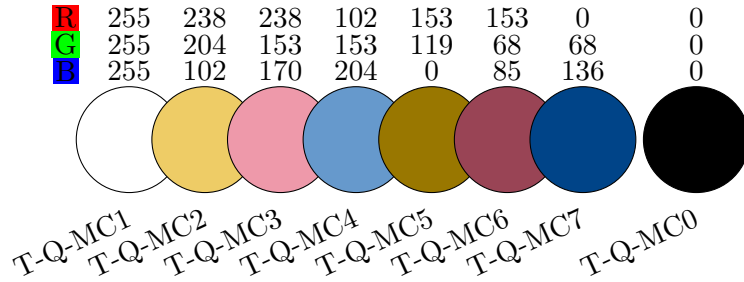


Figure 7: Medium-contrast qualitative color scheme by Paul Tol [1].

command `\drawScheme{...}`. Only the prefix of a color scheme should be provided to the command, e.g. `\drawScheme{T-Q-B}` to print the qualitative bright scheme by Tol, as can be seen in fig. 3.

4 Experimental and work in progress

References

- [1] Paul Tol. *Paul Tol's Notes: Colour schemes and templates*. 2021. URL: <https://personal.sron.nl/~pault/> (visited on 2023-12-29).
- [2] Yasuyo G. Ichihara et al. "Color universal design: the selection of four easily distinguishable colors for all color vision types". In: *Color Imaging XIII: Processing, Hardcopy, and Applications*. Ed. by Reiner Eschbach, Gabriel G. Marcu, and Shoji Tominaga. Vol. 6807. International Society for Optics and Photonics. SPIE, 2008, 68070O. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1117/12.765420>.

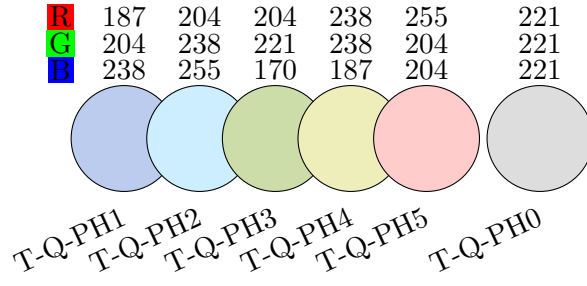


Figure 8: Pale qualitative color scheme by Paul Tol [1], for highlighting only.

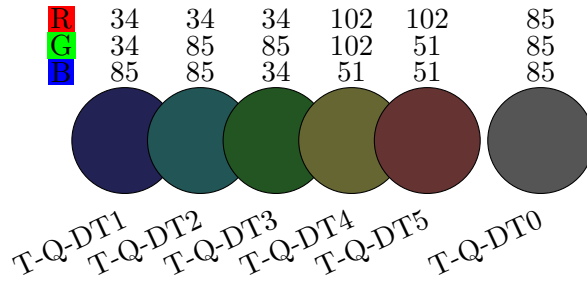


Figure 9: Dark qualitative color scheme by Paul Tol [1], for text color only.

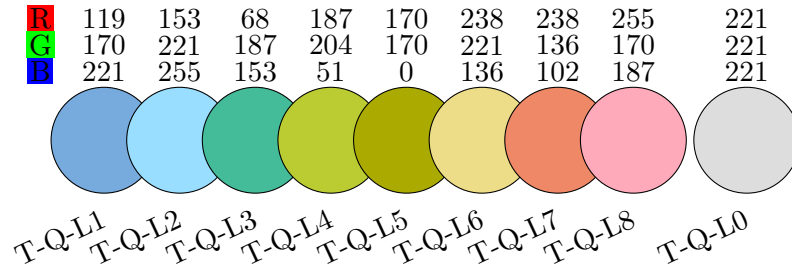


Figure 10: Light qualitative color scheme by Paul Tol [1].

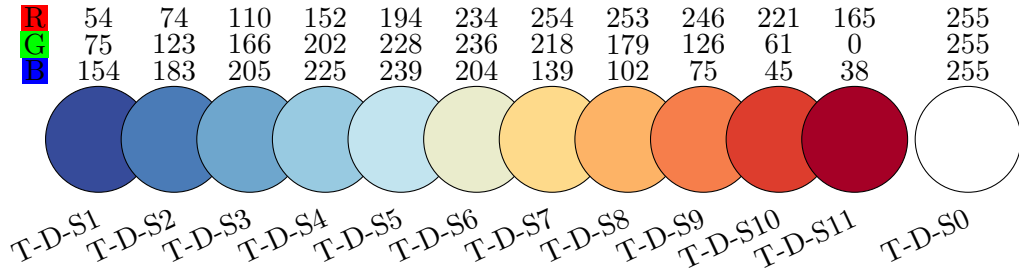


Figure 11: Sunset diverging color scheme by Paul Tol [1].

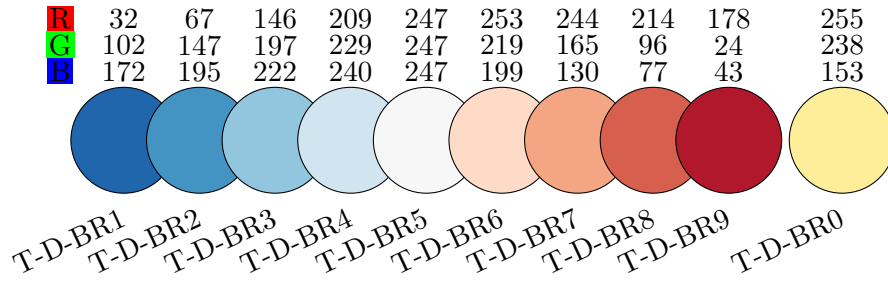


Figure 12: BuRd diverging color scheme by Paul Tol [1].

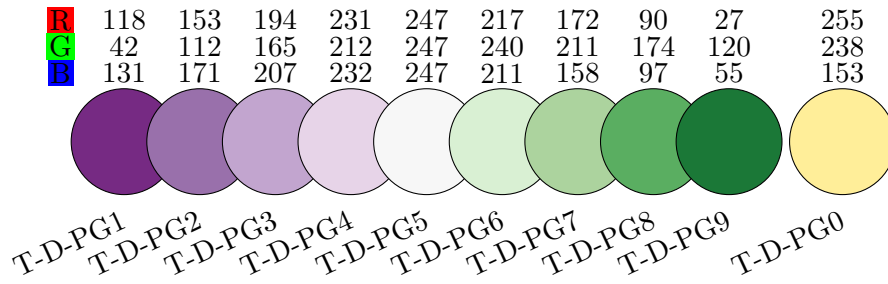


Figure 13: PRGn diverging color scheme by Paul Tol [1].

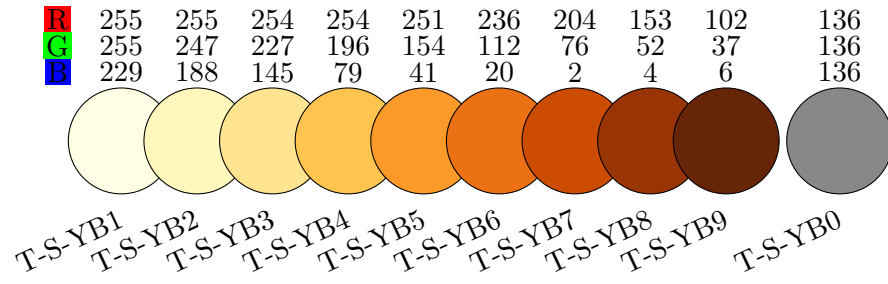


Figure 14: YlOrBr sequential color scheme by Paul Tol [1].

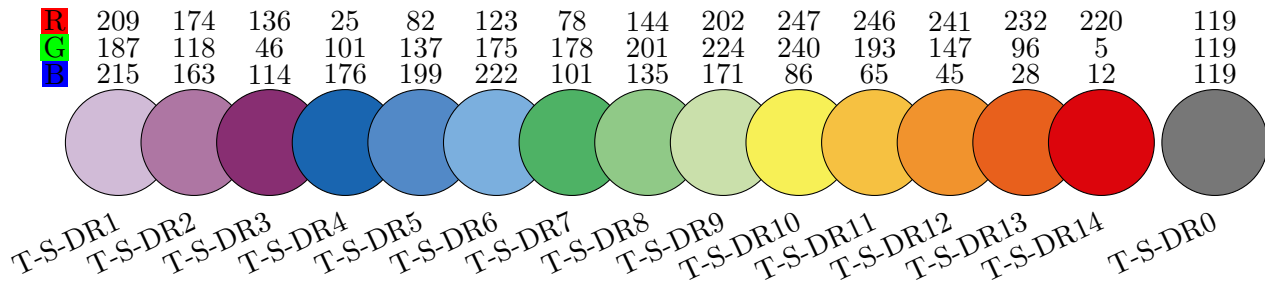


Figure 15: Discrete Rainbow sequential color scheme by Paul Tol [1].

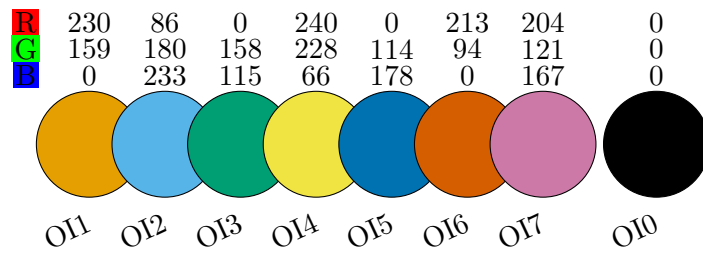


Figure 16: Okabe Ito qualitative color scheme [2].



Figure 17: Test for deuteranopia and tritanopia commands: Left shows Tol's bright qualitative scheme, with deuteranopia and tritanopia vision in the second and third row. Right shows two colors with the same numbers in rgb and hsb, where the hsb variant gets translated incorrectly to color-deficient visions.

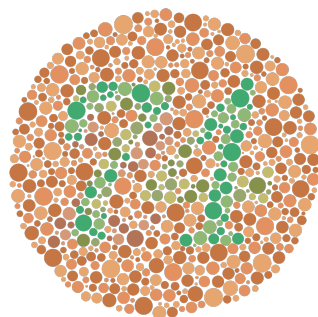


Figure 18: Ishihara colorblindness test, normal vision and without the red channel.