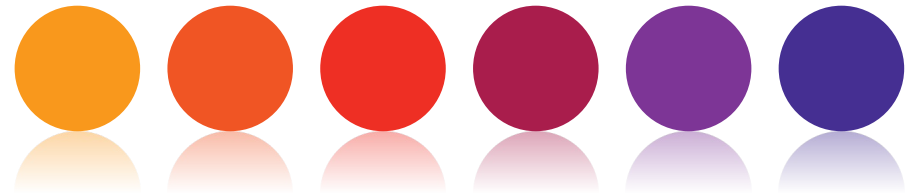


# Color Guide



Tools to help understand the meaning behind colors, how to select color schemes, define colors, and ensure accessible use of colors to meet university standards.

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# Definition of Color Theory

Color theory is a set of principles and tools that guide designers and developers on selecting colors that work well together to create a desired visual experience. It is part science, art, and psychology. In design, colors can evoke emotions, convey messages, and support branding.



# How to Build a Color Scheme



# Step 1

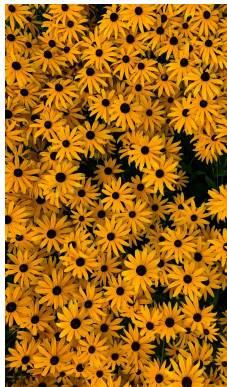
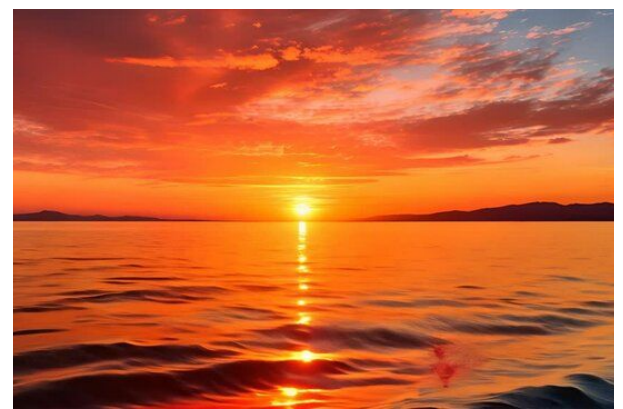
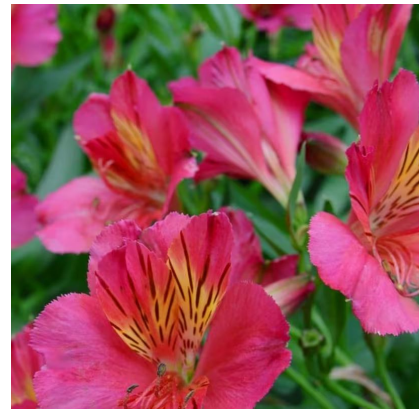
## Choose your primary color family

Color psychology studies how different colors impact our emotions. The following slides summarize the typical associations and influences of colors on their viewers. Consider the message you wish to convey with your project when selecting your colors.



# Warm Colors

Reds, oranges, yellows and combinations of each are generally considered warm colors.



# Red

|              |         |
|--------------|---------|
| Excitement   | Energy  |
| Defiance     | Pain    |
| Aggression   | Bold    |
| Power        | Urgent  |
| Passion      | Anger   |
| Fearlessness | Courage |
| Adventurous  | Warning |

## Physical Effects

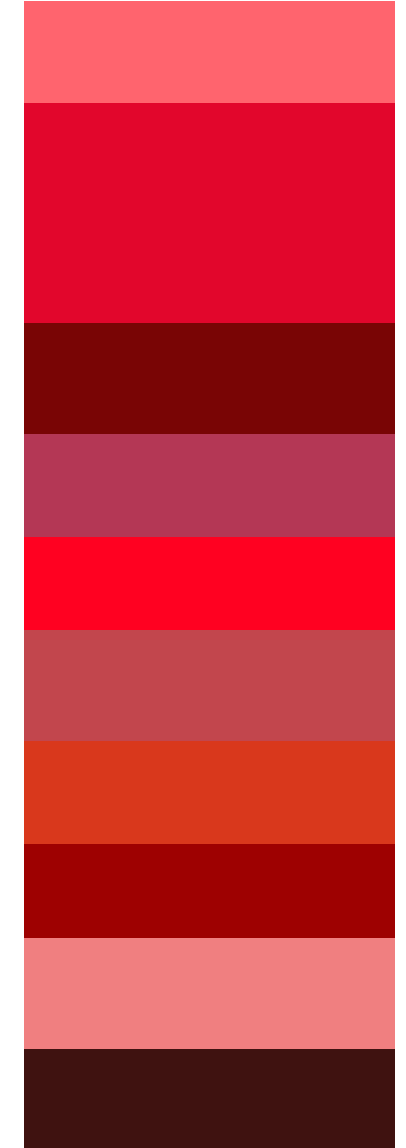
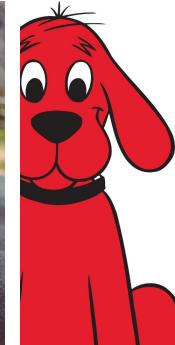
Red can raise blood pressure, respiration rates, and enhance metabolism

## Cultural Associations

Red is associated with Communism

In Chinese culture – prosperity, good luck, happiness

In South African culture – mourning



# Orange

|            |            |
|------------|------------|
| Vibrance   | Commanding |
| Energetic  | Yield      |
| Creativity | Caution    |
| Change     | Arrogance  |
| Movement   | Pride      |
| Optimism   | Bold       |
| Warmth     | Anxiety    |

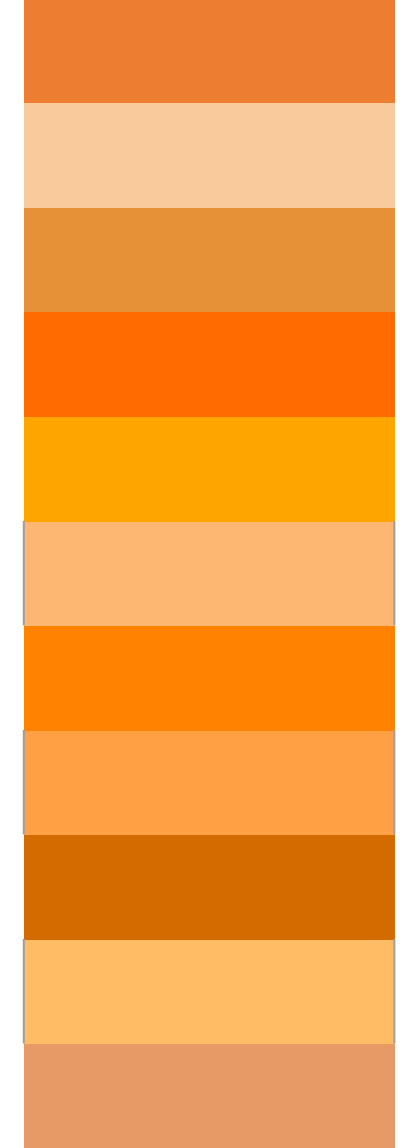
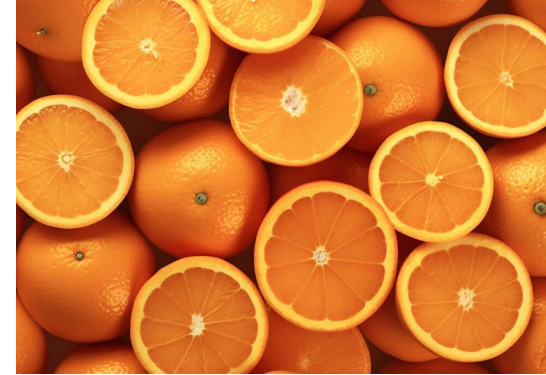
## Physical Effects

Increased energy/appetite

## Cultural Associations

Eastern countries: love, happiness, and good health

Indian Cultures: a yellow-orange hue is sacred



# Yellow

|            |            |
|------------|------------|
| Happiness  | Deceit     |
| Sunshine   | Cowardice  |
| Hope       | Caution    |
| Intellect  | Persuasion |
| Creativity | Sickness   |
| Warmth     | Energy     |

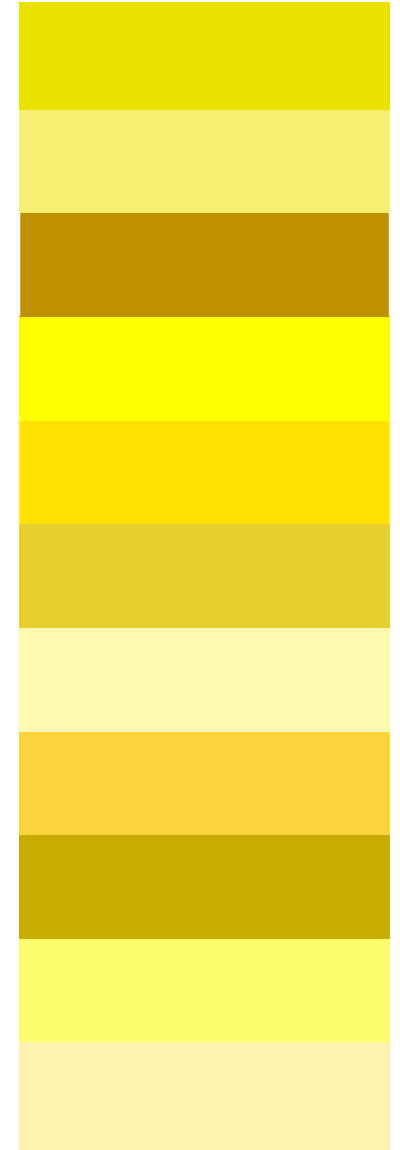
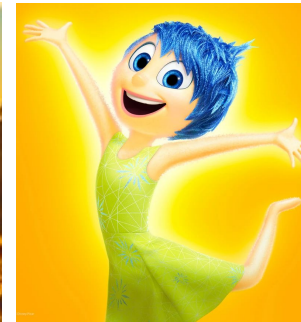
## Physical Effects

Can lend a sense of happiness

## Cultural Associations

In Egypt: the color of mourning

In Japan: represents courage



# Cool Colors

Greens, Blues, Purples and combinations of each are generally considered cool colors.



# Green

- |            |                    |
|------------|--------------------|
| Growth     | Envy               |
| New        | Lack of Experience |
| Beginnings | Disgust            |
| Renewal    | Jealousy           |
| Abundance  | Immature           |
| Luck       | Greed              |
| Harmony    |                    |

## Physical Effects

Can reduce stress

## Cultural Associations

In Western Cultures: good luck, nature, freshness

In South American cultures: symbolizes death



# Blue

|                |             |
|----------------|-------------|
| Sadness        | Refreshing  |
| Calm           | Safety      |
| Responsibility | Trust       |
| Strength       | Immortality |
| Reliable       | Advancement |
| Energizing     | Confidence  |

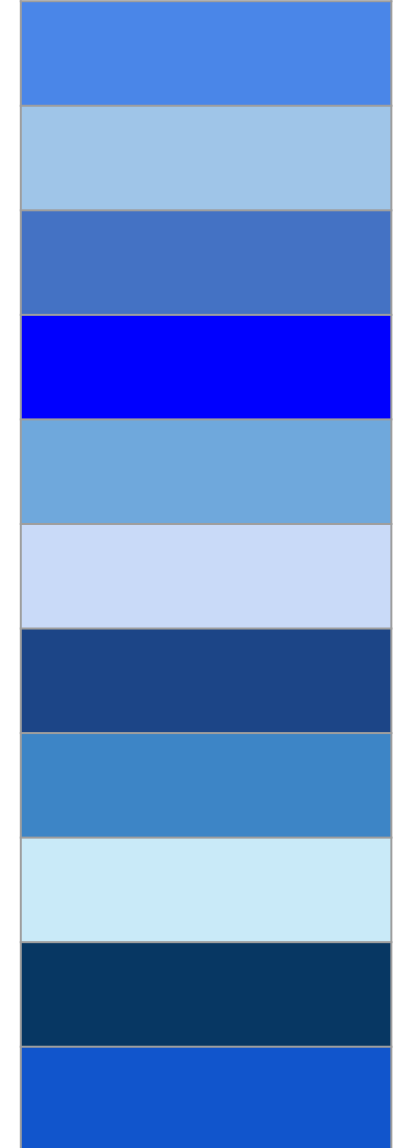
## Physical Effects

Evokes a sense of calmness and relaxation

## Cultural Associations

In Western Cultures: denotes safety and trust

In Chinese Culture: immortality and advancement



# Purple

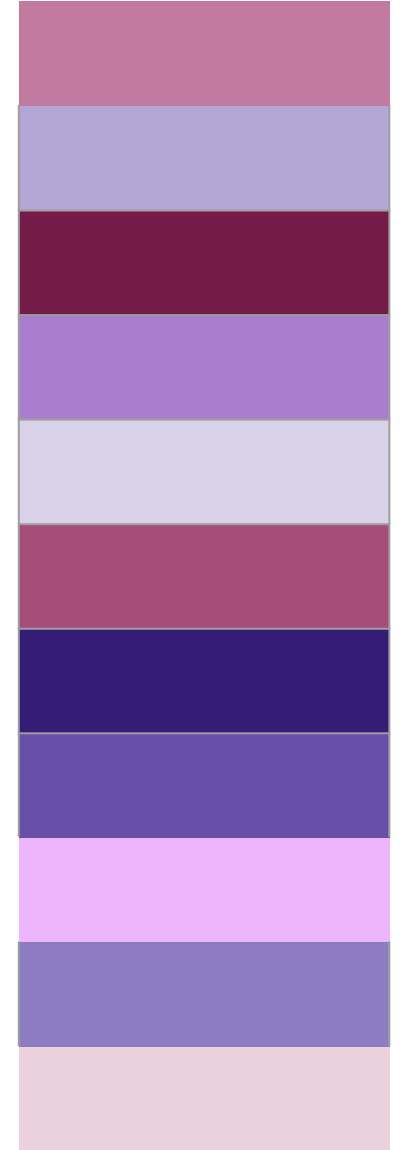
|             |           |
|-------------|-----------|
| Creativity  | Pride     |
| Wealth      | Peace     |
| Virtue      | Mystery   |
| Imagination | Malicious |
| Spring      | Ambition  |
| Romance     | Power     |
| Evil        | Luxury    |

## Physical Effects

Mental relaxation

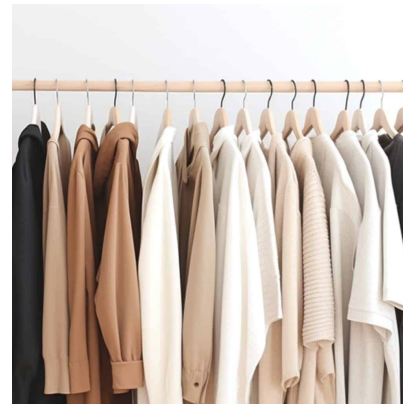
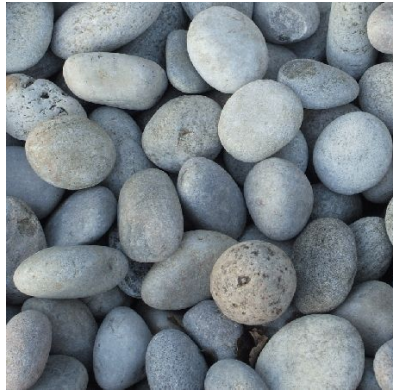
## Cultural Associations

In Thailand: the color of mourning for widows.



# Neutral Colors

White, Cream, Gray, Brown, Beige, and Black are generally considered neutral colors. Neutral colors tend to have minimal saturation, and go well with other colors.



# White

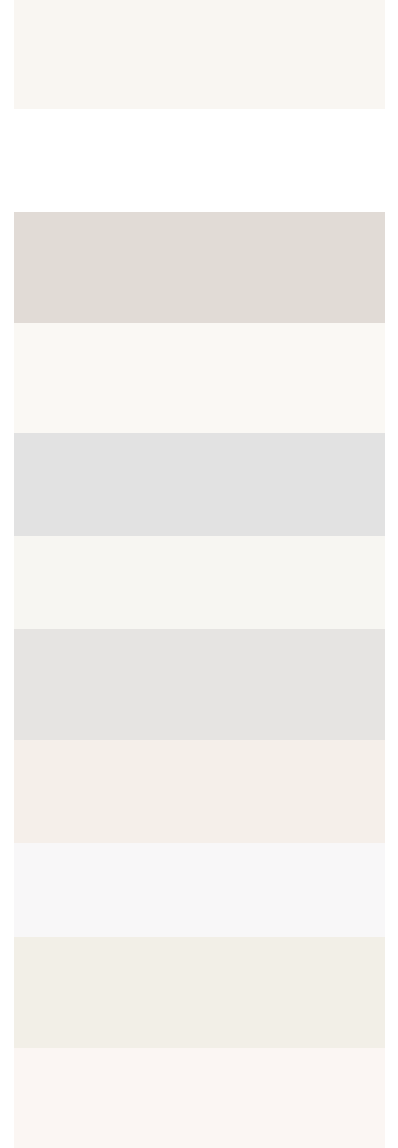
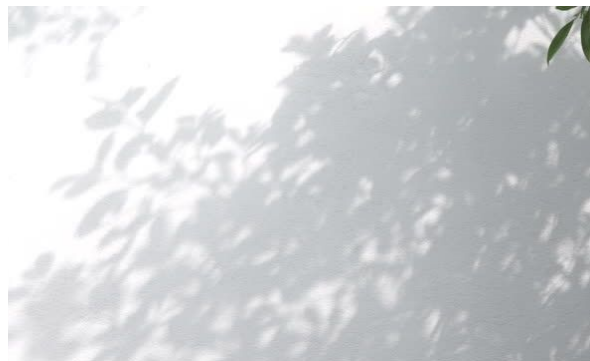
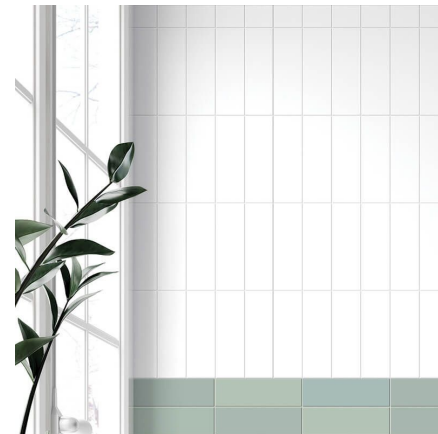
|                |           |
|----------------|-----------|
| Purity         | Innocence |
| Cleanliness    | Space     |
| Virtue         | Cold      |
| New Beginnings | Bland     |
| Perfection     | Sterile   |
| Neutrality     | Empty     |
| Honesty        | Minimal   |

## Physical Effects

Calming, Blinding

## Cultural Associations

In Eastern cultures –  
mourning



# Gray

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| Neutral        | Modern       |
| Sophistication | Conservative |
| Professional   | Compromising |
| Restraint      | Practical    |
| Balance        | Sad          |
| Wisdom         | Unemotional  |
| Stable         | Indecisive   |

## Physical Effects

Gray can dampen mood and energy, and can be calming and sometimes draining.

## Cultural Associations

In Western culture - neutrality, boredom, old age, and indifference

In Ancient China - humility and modesty

In Ancient Egypt - gray was respected, as it was linked to the guide to the underworld



# Brown

|               |              |
|---------------|--------------|
| Strength      | Comfort      |
| Reliability   | Natural      |
| Resilience    | Dullness     |
| Dependability | Groundedness |
| Security      | Decay        |
| Safety        | Honesty      |
| Warmth        | Earthy       |

## Physical Effects

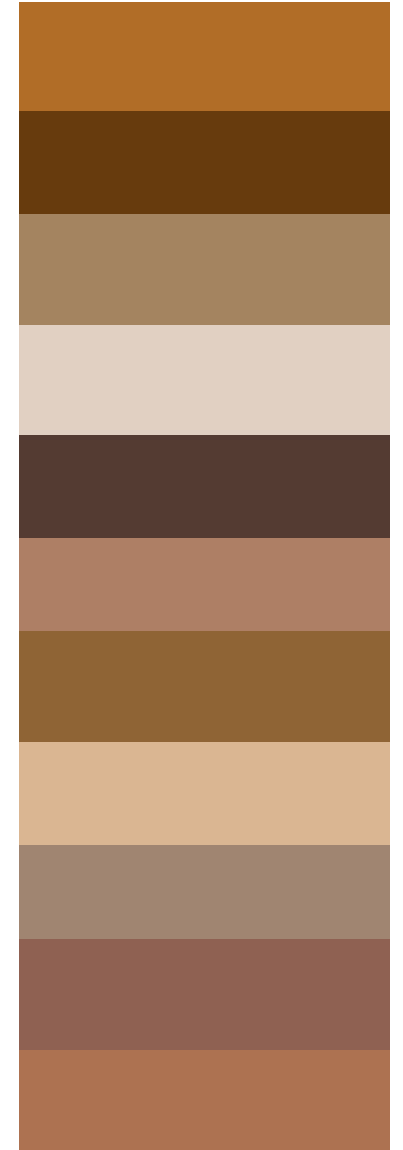
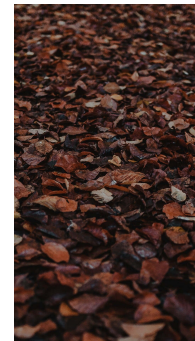
Some sources say that brown has been linked to an increase in tryptophan and serotonin.

## Cultural Associations

Many cultures link brown to nature and fertility

In the Middle Ages - humility, poverty, and monastic life

In Eastern cultures - restraint and frugality



# Black

|            |                |
|------------|----------------|
| Power      | Sophistication |
| Elegance   | Intimidating   |
| Formality  | Strength       |
| Evil       | Prestige       |
| Death      | Authority      |
| Mystery    | Depression     |
| Protection | Pessimism      |

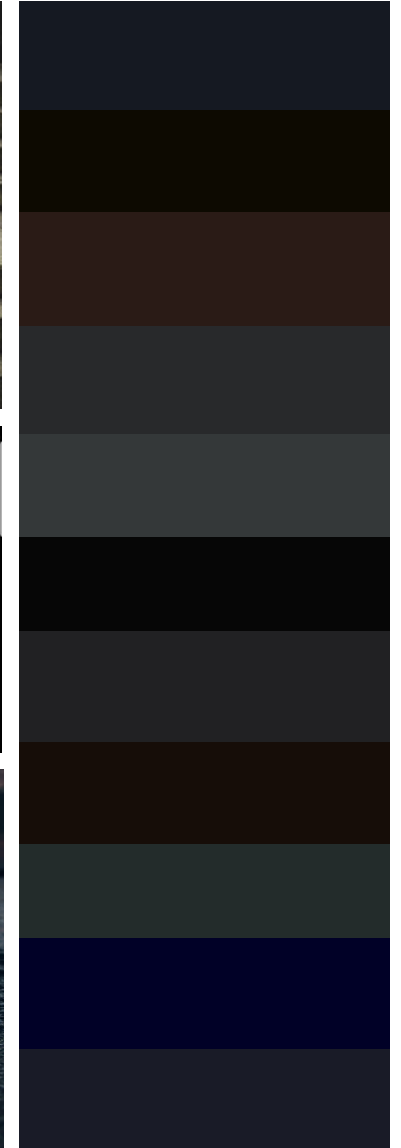
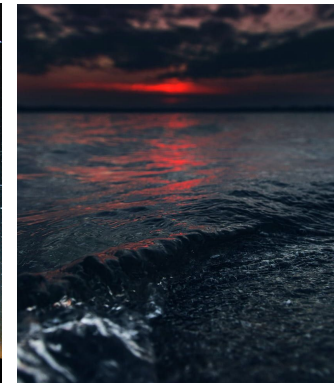
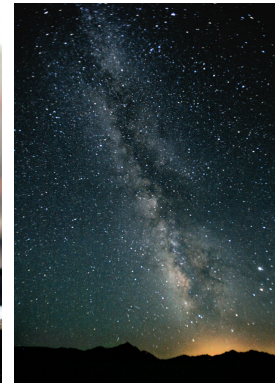
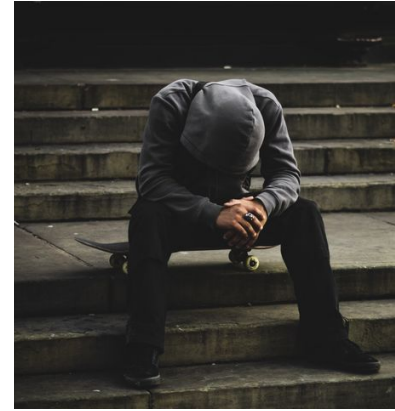
## Physical Effects

Black can absorb energy and cause feeling of heaviness

## Cultural Associations

In Western cultures - black is associated with mourning

In China - good health and prosperity



# Step 2

Choose your color scheme



When choosing a color scheme, start with a primary color or two and consider the meanings behind each color. Then it's time to select a **color scheme** .

A **color scheme** is a combination of colors that work well together.

### **Why should you use a color scheme?**

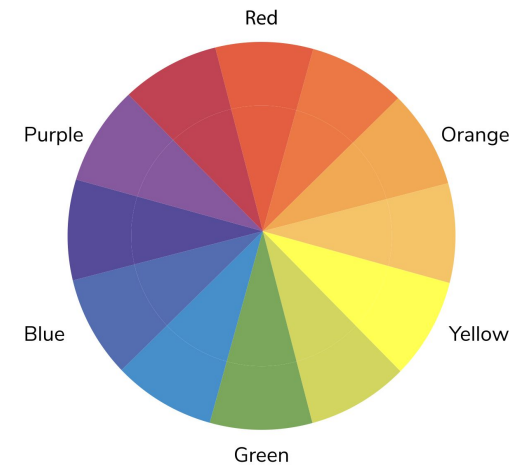
Using a scheme in your design can create visual interest, convey a mood, create design harmony, build brand identity, and enhance readability. Color schemes allow for flexibility in design, and provide a wider range of options when designing materials.

### **Examples of color scheme types:**

Monochromatic, Analogous, Complementary, Split-complementary, Triadic

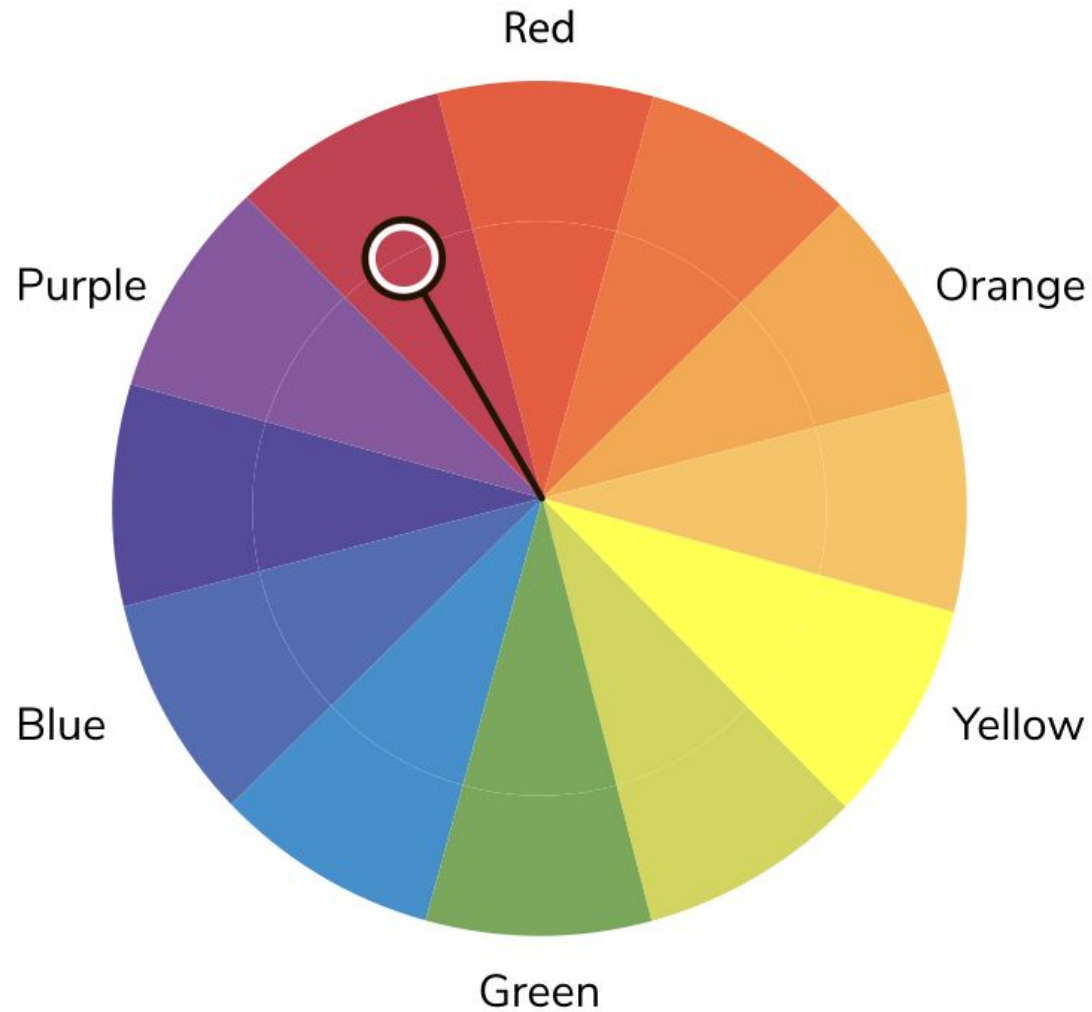
### **The color wheel:**

Using a color wheel can help you select a scheme with coordinating colors.

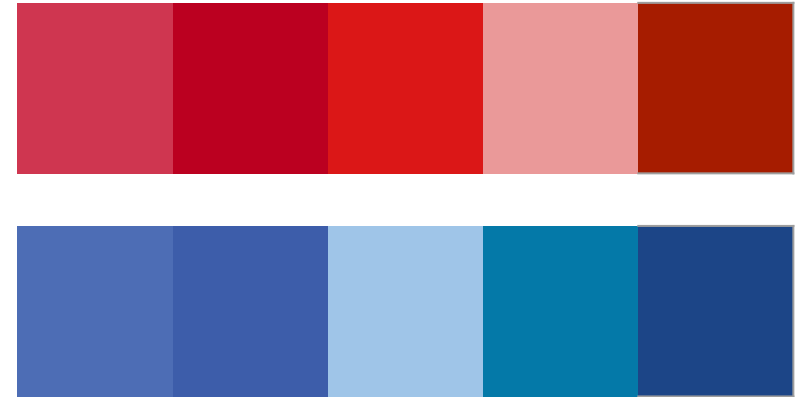


# Monochromatic

Different shades and tones of the same color

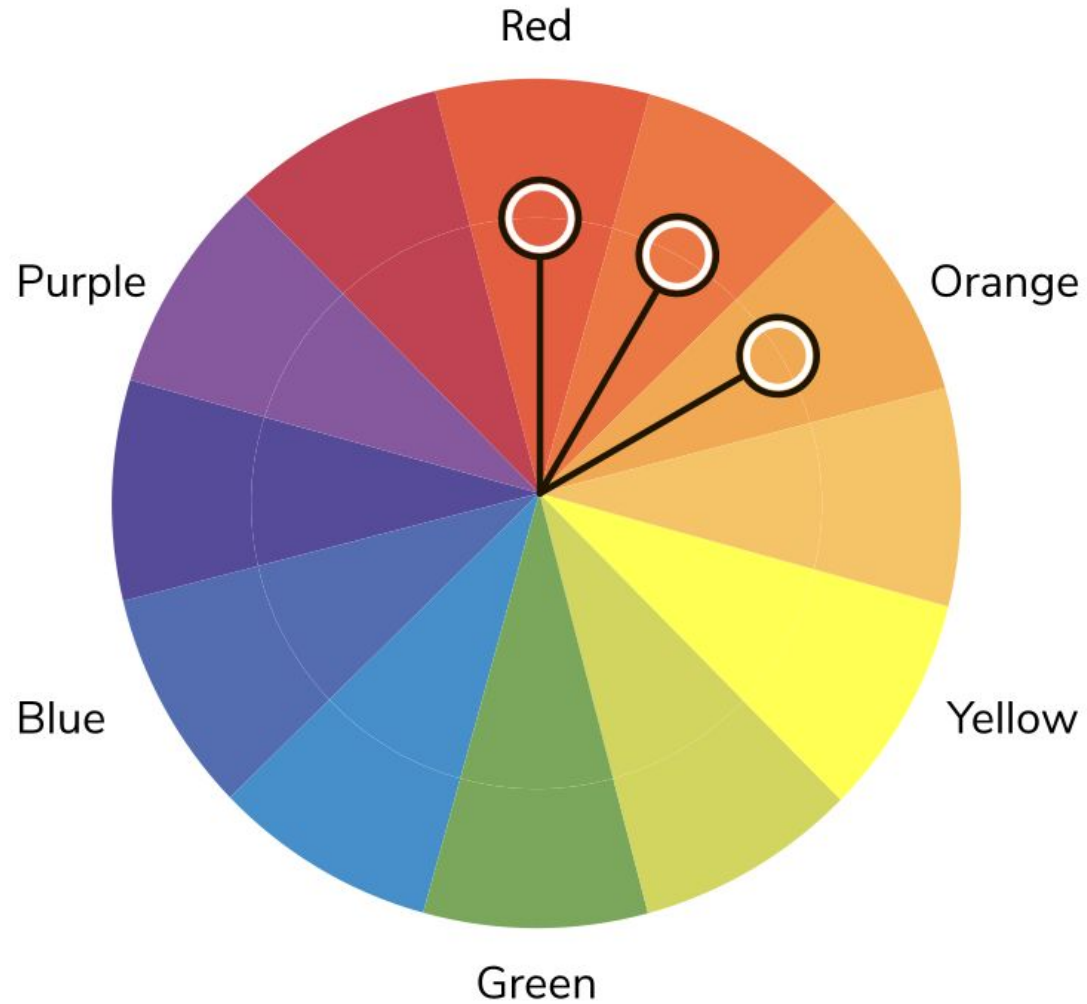


## Examples:



# Analogous

Colors that are next to each other on the color wheel

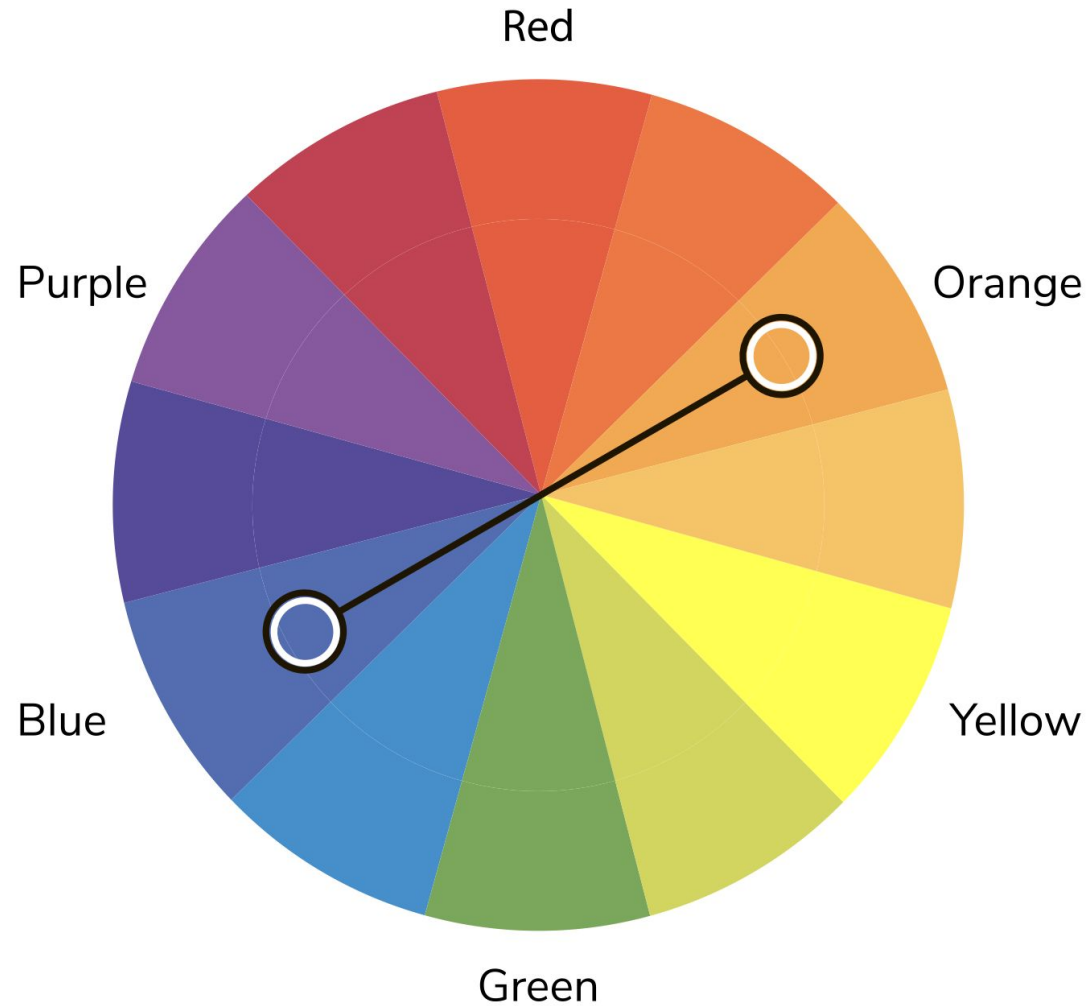


## Examples:



# Complementary

Colors directly opposite each other on the color wheel

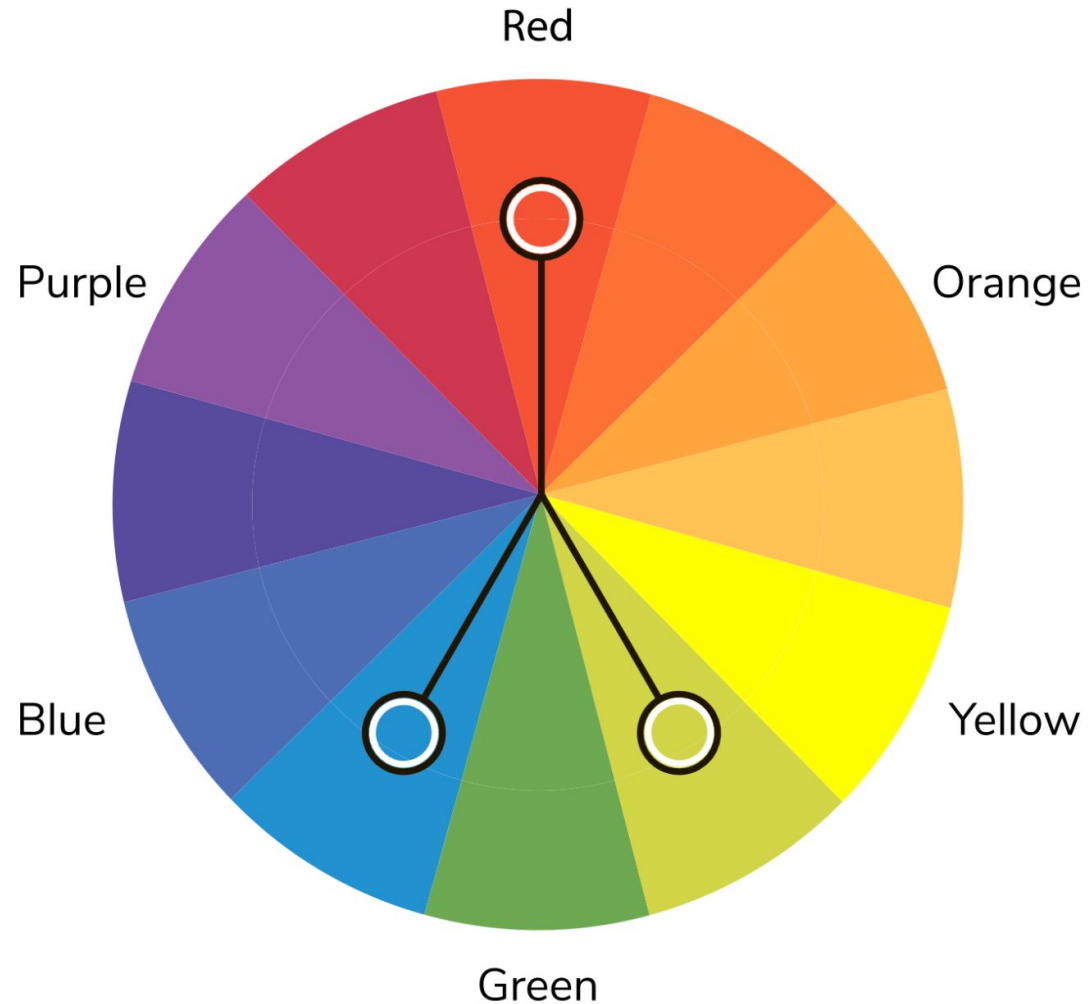


## Examples:



# Split-Complementary

A base color with the two colors adjacent to its complement on the color wheel

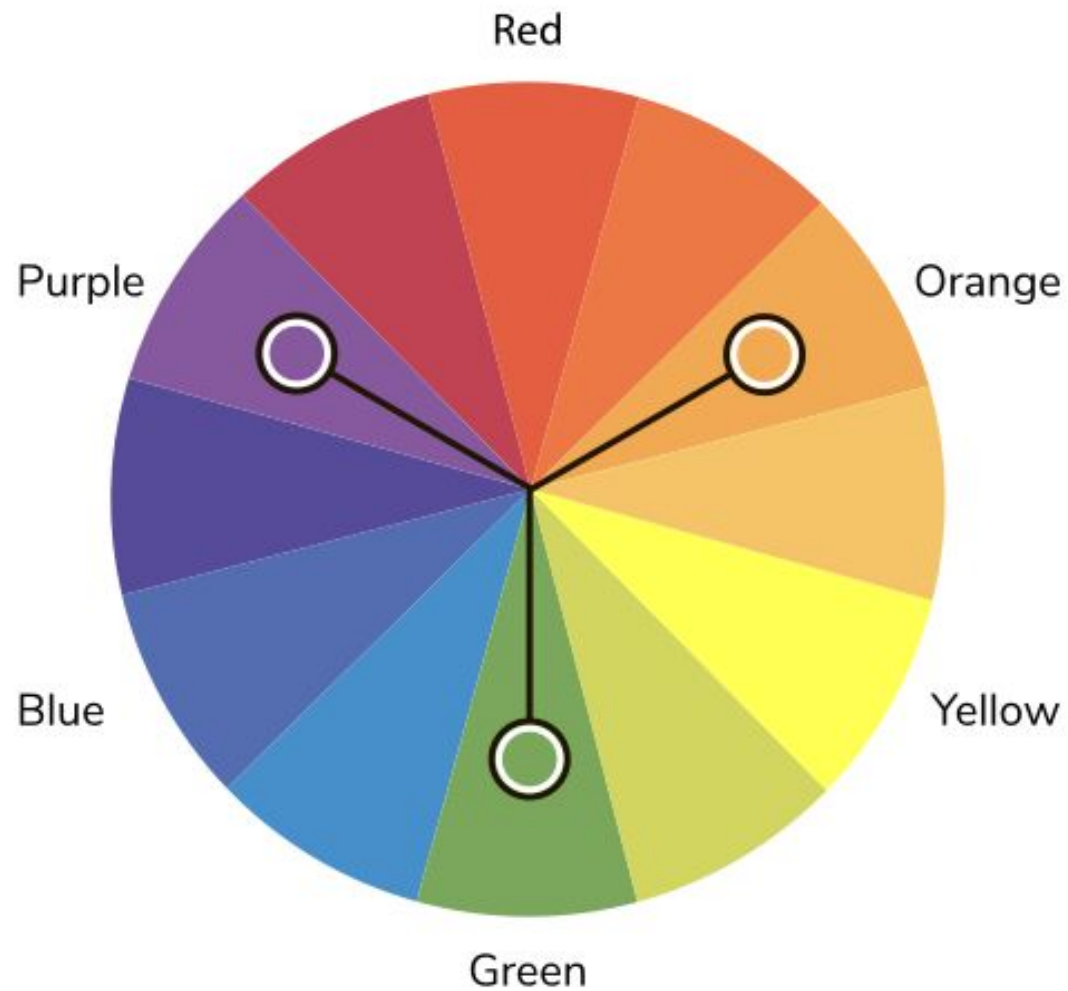


## Examples:



# Triadic

Three colors equidistant from each other on the color wheel



## Examples:



# Color Palette Generators and Tools

## **Adobe -**

*Various Color Picking Tools*

<https://color.adobe.com/>

## **Coolers -** *Palette Generator*

<https://coolers.co/c2d3cd-afbfc0-9fa4a9-847e89-56494c>

## **Coolers -** *Trending Palettes*

<https://coolers.co/palettes/trending>

## **Color Hunt -**

*Curated Palettes*

<https://colorhunt.co/palettes/>

## **Color Mind -**

*Ai Palette Generator*

<http://colormind.io/>

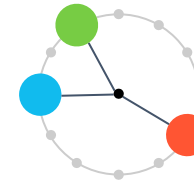
# Color Schemes in Use



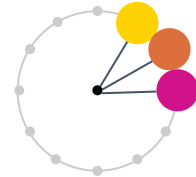
**Monochromatic**



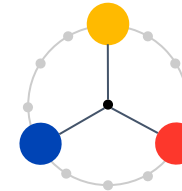
**Split-Complementary**



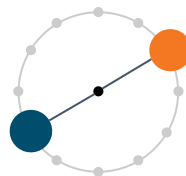
**Analogous**



**Triadic**



**Complementary**



# Step 3

## Select your hues, tints, tones, and shades

After selecting a **color scheme**, you have a few additional factors to consider.

A **hue** is the pure base color in a color family, while a **color** is the specific **tint**, **tone**, or **shade** of that **hue**. Specific **colors** must be chosen to finalize your **color scheme**. These final decisions will play a role in accessibility, legibility, visual balance, and aesthetic appeal.



# Color Terminology

Every swatch below is an individual **color**

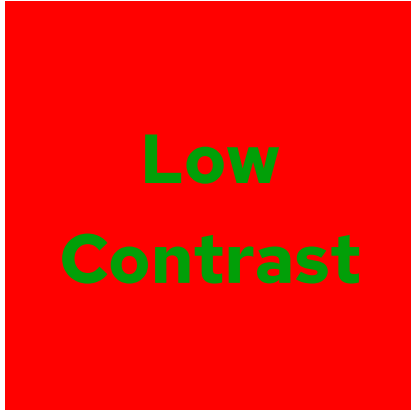
color is the specific hue, tint, tone, and shade you select



# Contrast

Contrast in color theory refers to how distinct one color appears against another.

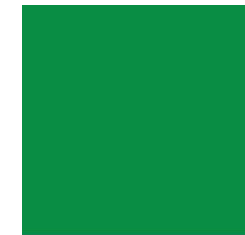
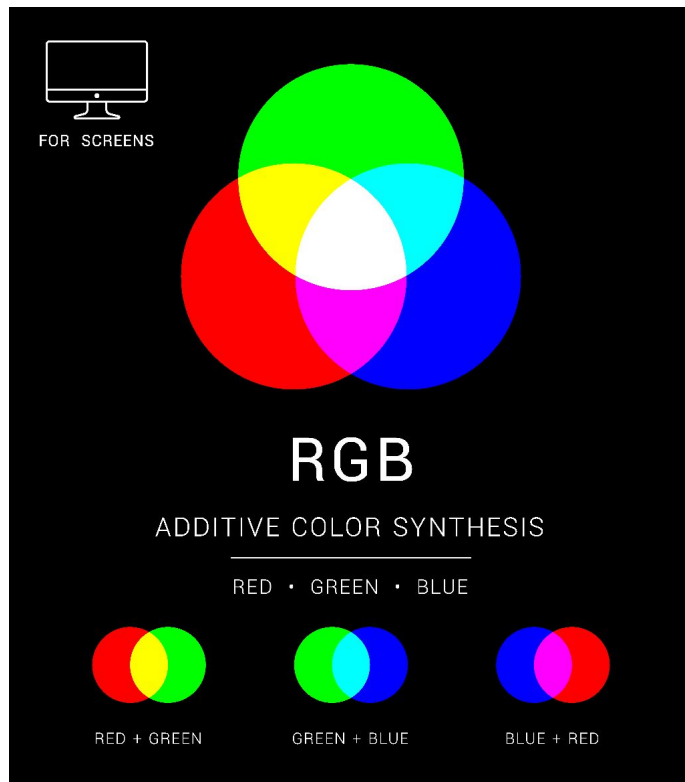
Digital text color combinations must meet a contrast ratio of at least **4.5:1** in order to comply with UW–Madison’s Digital Accessibility Policy.

|                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                                       |                                                                                       |                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |   |    |    |    |
| Contrast ratio 21:1                                                                 | Contrast ratio 5.48:1                                                               | Contrast ratio 1.33:1                                                                 | Contrast ratio 1.28:1                                                                 | Contrast ratio 1.25:1                                                                 |
|  |  |  |  |  |

**Accessibility Checker:** Visit <https://brand.wisc.edu/resource/color-contrast-checker> to check your design with UW–Madison’s Color Contrast Checker and to read more about their policies on accessibility.

# Defining Specific Colors

CMYK, RGB, and HEX codes are some of the most common codes used to represent colors. Once you have determined the specific colors you will be using, record the CMYK, RGB, and HEX codes of each color and share with all project collaborators to encourage consistent usage.



**WCWPDS Green**

HEX: #098D44

RGB: 9, 141, 68

CMYK: 86, 19, 100, 7

# Template for Recording Your Color Scheme

**Example Color Scheme:** Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

Access a blank template and directions for finding your project's color codes here: [Template](#)



Wisconsin Department of  
Children and Families



**DCF Magenta**

**HEX:** #AF3962

**R:**175 **G:**57 **B:**98

**C:**28 **M:**91 **Y:**43 **K:**7



**DCF Blue**

**HEX:** #2162AE

**R:**33 **G:**98 **B:**174

**C:**89 **M:**64 **Y:**1 **K:**0



**DCF Teal**

**HEX:** #059C95

**R:**5 **G:**156 **B:**149

**C:**81 **M:**18 **Y:**46 **K:**1



**DCF Red**

**HEX:** #EE3326

**R:**238 **G:**51 **B:**38

**C:**0 **M:**95 **Y:**98 **K:**0



**DCF Yellow**

**HEX:** #FAB01A

**R:**250 **G:**176 **B:**26

**C:**0 **M:**34 **Y:**99 **K:**0

# Color Accessibility Tools

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1okLCKr6NFiW4itQqT2rrkqCG2ddGXloM/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=102486797695260325027&rtpof=true&sd=true>



# LinkedIn Learning Training

## Color Theory Modules

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CxYgSrQz3TZc2kRqgMJKMuVWYcaalj8OXAbveUkBOJQ/edit?usp=sharing>

UW-Milwaukee Login: <https://uwm.edu/technology/linkedin-learning/>

UW-Madison Login: <https://it.wisc.edu/services/online-training-linkedin-learning/>

